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FLOUR MILLERS OPPOSE WHEAT EXPORT

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter January 27, 2019

LAHORE: Flour millers have opposed the government decision of exporting wheat fearing it may cause shortage in the local market as prospects of the current crop in Sindh are not hopeful.

Flour Mills Association Chairman Naeem Butt told a press conference here on Saturday that despite their opposition the government was planning to export wheat instead of value-added products of the commodity.

They said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan were already facing wheat shortage while there were reports of poor crop in Sindh this season. These factors coupled with export could lead to scarcity of the commodity in the local market and the government would have to import wheat at the cost of precious foreign exchange.

He said wheat export refunds worth Rs2.5 billion were already outstanding creating liquidity problems for the exporters. He demanded that Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan, who was present on the occasion, play his role in resolving this and other issues of the industry. Officials of the food department and district governments were harassing the millers in the name of fortification of wheat flour, whereas results of the pre-mix being provided to the units this year have not been good for the flour.

The minister promised to help resolve 'genuine' demands of the industry.

Mr Sultan said the wheat export issue would be raised at the next meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee. Replying to a question about the miseries of potato growers, Mr Sultan said the government would start procuring the crop within a week to help stabilize its market prices.

He said the potato crop yield this year hit record 4.6 million ton while its export too would set a new record as officials concerned had had useful meetings with the ambassadors and other authorities of China and Belarus in this respect.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1460026/flour-millers-oppose-wheat-export

SALE OF DRY FRUITS REMAINS LOW DUE TO HIGH PRICES

N H ZUBERI | JAN 27TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The sale of dry fruits remains sluggish during the current winter season due to high prices which made it beyond the reach of the common man. The winter is the peak season for dry fruit sellers and around

70 percent of the annual sale happens during winter season, shopkeepers clamed. There is a continuous increase in the prices of dry fruits, said a customer.

The prices of all kinds of dry fruits remained high in the wholesale markets of the city during the ongoing winter season. Every year during the winter season, consumers flock in a large number to wholesale and retail markets to make their desired purchases of dry fruits to browbeat the cold season, but this year the buying activities at wholesale and retail markets were extremely low.

Dry fruits are mainly imported from Afghanistan, Iran, the USA and India while substantial variety is also grown locally. Traders also attribute the rise in prices to slow growth in imports and low production in the country and costlier imports.

Already overburdened by the unprecedented increase in prices of essential commodities during the last few years, customers have declined more than 30 to 40 percent as compared with previous winter seasons when the local currency was comparatively stable against the dollar, said the dealers. During a visit to some of the markets of the dry fruits it was revealed that demand of most of the dry fruits has plunged sharply during the current winter season on account of inflated their prices.

Despite sluggish sale the most favourites and popular dry fruit thus remains the peanut. Vendors serving hot peanuts roasted in sand are the charm of the winter in the city. Late night gatherings of friends and family are not complete without peanuts. The medical experts say these dry fruits contain great amount of energy.

According to the rates of dry fruits collected from different markets in the city the price of one kilogram of dry apricot (Khubani) is Rs 589; 1000 gram of ‘Ajwa khajoor’ Rs 3,000; 250 grams of American walnut without shell (Maghaz Akhrot) is Rs 475; 500 grams of ‘Kishmish/Meva’ is Rs 525; 500 grams of ‘Kaaju’ Rs 1,550; 250 grams of American almond Rs 500; 500 gram of Malka almond is Rs 999; 500 gram of ‘Anjeer’ Rs 990; one kilogram of walnuts (shells) Rs880; one kilogram of Plain Cashew is Rs 2,500 and one kilogram of Sundarkhani raisin Abjosh is Rs 875.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190127442742/

PROCUREMENT OF CONSIDERABLE QUANTITY OF POTATO UNDER STUDY

TAHIR AMIN | JAN 27TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The federal government is considering to procure considerable quantity of potato in a bid to facilitate potato growers and avoid crisis like situation, it is learnt. Official sources revealed to Business Recorder that an important meeting regarding the current situation about potato export, which is going to start formally in the first week of February, was held. Federal Minister for National Food Security & Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan, Advisor to Prime minister on Commerce and Industries Abdul Razak Dawood and Federal Secretary Food Security Hashim Popalzai were present in the meeting along with other senior officials from both the ministries.

Sources said Mehboob Sultan informed the meeting that the ministry was considering all possible options to dispel apprehensions of potato growers and basic focus was to facilitate the potato export. The potato export would start soon with potential increase that year, he added. In the meeting various options were discussed to facilitate the smooth export and address the issues of potato farmers. It was also revealed that the Ministry of National Food Security was setting up a facilitation centre in Okara (Punjab) for the farmers/exporters prior to the start of export.

Popalzai apprised the meeting that the government was negotiating with the stakeholders and different options were being considered. It was proposed in the meeting that the Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO) might procure a considerable quantity from the growers to provide relief. The purpose of this would be to facilitate the potato growers and eschew the crisis situation. Federal Minister Mehboob Sultan said the government was negotiating with the provincial agriculture department (s) and there was another option regarding the provision of cold storage facility to the potato growers/farmers by the provincial government. These options are under negotiation and after the deliberations one or both of them will be finalised.

The basic purpose for the procurement of potato by the government is to directly benefit the growers and the Federal Minister for Food Security and Research assured that there should not be any uncertainty among them as efforts were targeted towards the ultimate benefit of the farmers. The government is also negotiating for reduction of Afghan tax on potato to facilitate the potato growers. About 300,000 to 400,000 tonnes potatoes are exported every year. The export of potato to Afghanistan has already been started and around 25 trucks have reached Kabul so far. Briefing the meeting, the officials of Ministry of National Food Security said they were in liaison with provincial agriculture departments as well. The meeting was further informed that there was no tax imposed on the export of potato and for the purpose Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) had been consulted to facilitate the export of potato.

The issue of Afghan duty (as Afghanistan is the route through which it is exported to other states), which has been imposed since 2015 and is around 25 percent, was also taken into account. The negotiations for decrease in the said duty are underway through diplomatic channels, which would help the farmers and exporters.

The export of potato formally starts in the last week of January every year and a substantial increase is expected in export this year. The potato from Pakistan is exported to Russia, Malaysia, Gulf countries and Sri Lanka. China and Tajikistan are expected to get considerable share of potato export from Pakistan. China, as was told by its ambassador last week, is quite keen in buying Pakistani potato.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190127442749/

NEW SUGARCANE VARIETIES INTRODUCED

APP January 27, 2019

FAISALABAD: Ayub Agricultural Research Institute has introduced three new varieties of sugarcane, which would give 40 percent more yield, compared with the existing varieties.

This was stated by AARI Director General Dr Abid Mahmood, while talking to APP on Saturday.

Pakistan is the fifth largest sugarcane producing country in the world. However, the average yield is far less than its potential due to various reasons.

Moreover, water shortage and climatic changes were posing serious threat to the sugarcane production, he said, adding that to combat these challenges and enhancing the production, scientists of Sugarcane Research Institute of AARI have evolved three new varieties, including CPF-250, CPF-251 and CPF-253, which would give 40 percent more yield and require 30 percent less water to complete the growth cycle. To a question, he said the area under sugarcane cultivation was reducing due to water shortage, marketing issues and encouragement of other cash crops by the government.

“Only in Punjab, the area under sugarcane cultivation has decreased 27 percent during this year,” he said, adding that this situation may cause negative impact on sugarcane.

He said the newly-devolved varieties were successfully tested by the scientists of the institute under different agro-ecological zones and were expected to be approved for mass cultivation by the Punjab Seed Council next month.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/423867-new-sugarcane-varieties-introduced

FLOUR PRICES INCREASED BY RETAILERS

Aamir Shafaat Khan January 26, 2019

KARACHI: Retailers have pushed up prices of various wheat flour varieties but flour millers deny increasing any rates.

Shopkeepers are now charging Rs230 for five kg flour bag, as against Rs220, while the 10kg bag now costs Rs460-470 versus Rs430-440, saying millers are responsible for the price jump.

Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) Sindh Zone chairman Mohammad Jawed Yousuf, while refuting the claim of retailers, told Dawn that “we have not [raised] prices for the last two to three months, but I cannot comment on the price rise made by the retailers.”

The price of flour No. 2.5 has been unchanged at Rs1,900 per 50kg bag, followed by Rs2,000-2,025 of fine and maida rates, he added.

“Some millers are also selling flour at discount rate,” Jawed claimed, adding the rate of 100kg wheat bag in open market had also been pegged at old price of Rs3,460-3,465 for the last two months.

Retailers said the millers had supplied flour varieties at increased rates in the last one week without giving any reason.

However, the provincial or city administration is least bothered over price issues, leaving consumers at the mercy of market forces.

Published in Dawn, January 26th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1459765/flour-prices-increased-by-retailers

GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT INTEREST OF LOCAL TOBACCO GROWERS: NA SPEAKER

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 26TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

Speaker, National Assembly, Assad Qaisar has unequivocally said that rights of tobacco growers, small companies and associated dealers would be protected. He was chairing a meeting to discuss matters relating to tobacco growers here on Friday. The meeting among others were attended by Senator, Mushtaq Ahmad Khan, Special Assistance to Chief Minister on Industries, Abdul Karim

Khan, MNA, Usman Khan Tarakai, Member FBR, Ahmad Mushtaq, Secretary Agriculture and concerned officials and representatives of tobacco growers were also present on the occasion.

Participants of the meeting told that Rs300 tax on tobacco would benefit multinational companies, and on the contrary it would increase the burden on small companies. It was demanded that tobacco crop should be declared provincial-crop and it should be placed under the ambit of provincial government.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190126442438/

AGRARIAN ECONOMY: EXPERTS URGE INDUSTRY STATUS FOR AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Published: January 26, 2019

LAHORE: Panelists at the Express Forum said the agriculture sector should be declared an industry, in accordance with Section 5 of the Factories Act 1934. They added that the Minimum Wages Ordinance 1969 should also be extended to the sector.

Adviser to Chief Minister on Agriculture Sardar Abdul Haye Dasti, women's activist Begum Mehnaz Rafi, human rights activist Mumtaz Mughal and Abdullah Malik were the panelists. The session was moderated by Ahsan Kamray. The panelist highlighted the condition of the agriculture sector in Pakistan and said 75% of the population was linked to it. Dasti said the government was working hard to uplift the agriculture sector as it would help achieve the target of 10 million jobs.

"We are combining education, research and awareness under one umbrella so that we can make good policies," he said. "The last government spent billions of rupees on various projects, but the result was zero."

He said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) government was launching projects that would benefit the agriculture sector. "Urea prices have been reduced. Duties on the import of machinery have also been waived which will benefit farmers." "Women play a major role in agriculture production, sowing, weeding, livestock rearing and running cottage industries as well as in post-harvest operations such as threshing, winnowing, drying, grinding, husking and storage," he highlighted.

Women's activist Begum Mehnaz Rafi said the agriculture sector should be declared and notified as an industry, in accordance with Section 5 of the Factories Act 1934. The section empowers the labour and human resource department to notify the agriculture sector as an industry.

"To enhance the capacity for policymaking on relevant regulatory and legal issues, such as land tenure, water governance, food safety, seed certification, adaptation of international standards and agreements into the national systems, strengthening food safety and quality control and management system, there is a dire need to collect sex and gender disaggregated data to address the gender disparity faced by agrarian women workers in Punjab."

She said the social protection of women working in agriculture activities could be ensured through their registration with Punjab Social Protection Authority and they should gradually be covered under PESSI and EOBI.

Speaking on the occasion, Mumtaz Mughal said Minimum Wages (for unskilled workers) Ordinance, 1969 should be extended to the agriculture sector through a notification by the government.

"Collective bargaining is an important means to improve wages, working conditions, safety and health of agricultural workers," she said.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Malik said a mass awareness campaign should be conducted on laws for women empowerment and their implementation through helplines or women's police help desks.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1896824/1-agrarian-economy-experts-urge-industry-status-agriculture-sector/

GOVT CONSIDERING TO PROCURE 100,000 TONNES OF POTATOES

Amin Ahmed January 25, 2019

ISLAMABAD: In an attempt to provide relief to potato growers, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research has proposed procurement of 100,000 tonnes of potato through Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco).

The proposal, initially turned down by the Ministry of Finance, is now being forwarded to Prime Minister Imran Khan for approval.

It has been suggested that Passco will buy potato from farmers at a cost of Rs11 per kilogram, which would be sold in the market during Ramazan in May and ahead of the wheat harvest.

The situation was reviewed during a meeting here on Thursday at the food ministry, jointly chaired by Food Minister Mehboob Sultan and Adviser to PM on Commerce Razak Dawood.

Sultan said his ministry is exhausting all possible options to dispel the apprehensions of potato growers and facilitate the crop's export which will start soon.

The move is expected to ease the pressure on farmers by assuring them a reasonable price. Punjab grows about 95 per cent of the total crop in the country, and currently farmers are selling it at Rs6 per kilogram. The procurement will allow farmers to prepare for the next crop of maize and rice thereafter, a ministry official said.

Pakistan's total potato production is estimated at 4.6 million tonnes this year versus a domestic consumption of 3.1m tonnes (or 15.4kg per capita), leaving a surplus available for export and seed for next crop. The country exported 570,000 tonnes of potato last year.

According to ministry officials, the export of potato starts during the first week of February every year, but the issue started to flare up when the crop in some areas was harvested prematurely, thus creating a glut.

Meanwhile, the commerce ministry is negotiating with Afghan authorities to reduce duty on Pakistani trucks entering the country for onward export to Central Asian Republics. Presently, there is a 25pc duty on Pakistani trucks which the government is trying to bring down to 5pc, officials said.

The country also exports potato to Malaysia and is now negotiating with China as well, with their delegation expected to visit Islamabad next month.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1459655/govt-considering-to-procure-100000-tonnes-of-potatoes

COMMODITIES: COTTON MARKET BUZZES AGAIN

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter January 25, 2019

KARACHI: The cotton market on Thursday witnessed increased trading which was induced by incentives given in the mini-budget for revival of industrial activity and confidence building measures for businesses.

The lethargic spell of the past few weeks finally seems to be lifting. It took almost six months for the Teheerk-e-Insaf government to spell out policy directions.

Consequently, there was higher demand for cotton as the budget was taken positively and could work as a basis for some long-term business and industrial activity in the country. According to brokers, the period of wait and see has come to an end and the business community will start taking long-term decisions.

Cotton prices generally remained firm but increased flow of buying orders clearly indicated that the textile industry would now start performing better owing to measures and concessions given in the mini-budget.

The world leading cotton markets gave mixed trend with New York cotton losing some of the gains recorded a day earlier while Chinese and Indian cotton gave erratic behavior. The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were firm at overnight level at Rs8,700 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 400 bales, station Mirpur Mathelo, at Rs8,800; 2,000 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs8,700; 4,400 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,300-8,400; 1,000 bales, Khanpur, at Rs8,900; 200 bales, Mianwali, at Rs8,250; 404 bales, Marot, at Rs8,200; 1,000 bales, for Abbas, at Rs7,900-8,100; 600 bales, Yazman, at Rs7,900; 400 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs7,850; and 400 bales, Chishtian, at Rs7,850.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1459648/commodities-cotton-market-buzzes-again

FERTILIZER: ANOTHER MIDDLING YEAR

BR Research January 25, 2019

Another year went by and the yearly urea off-take remained under 6 million tons. The last time it went beyond the mark was way back in 2010. Ever since it has averaged 5.6 million tons. No wonder Pakistan's agriculture growth, area under cultivation, and yields have not been anything to write home about.

The urea application in CY18 went down by 1 percent year-on-year at 5.81 million tons – while that of DAP went down by 6 percent year-on-year to 2.23 million tons. The much increased awareness of the usage of phosphate fertilizer has resulted in improved balanced fertilizer ratio at 2.6:1, having remained north of 4:1 during CY10-CY15. Continuation of subsidy on DAP has played its vital role in keeping the DAP usage up.

That said, the total speeding on urea and DAP combined in CY18 was 17 percent higher at Rs305 billion. All of it is attributed to higher average product prices. Urea was dearer by an average 16 percent year-on-year, with December price almost touching Rs1800/bag – a 27 percent increase from the start of the year. DAP price averaged even higher at Rs3276/bag with a 25 percent year-on-year increase – having increased 27 percent throughout the year.

The urea and DAP spending has crossed Rs300 billion for the first time since CY15 – having amounted to Rs260 billion in previous two years. Hardly any movement in the whole equation is volume driven – apart from DAP, which goes on to show the farm income for CY18 would be poorer in terms of margin – as clearly, the product prices could not have gone up in the same proportion.

The DAP to urea spending ratio at 39 percent for CY18 is the highest ever. A rupee is being spent on DAP for every Rs1.53 spent on urea, which is an improvement from a rupee on every two rupees on urea till CY16. The government has announced removing GIDC on fertilizer feedstock consumption, which could lead to a reduction of Rs200/bag or 11 percent in urea prices.

This could prove vital to keep the demand going at current pace – if not further improve. The farm economy should do better this time around, as tube well electricity prices have also been halved. Whether or not this results in higher application in terms of volume or better yields remains to be seen – but it will surely offer better profit margins to the farmers.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/01/25/468806/fertilizer-another-middling-year/

BREED FISH TO ELIMINATE MOSQUITO POPULATION

By Our Correspondent Published: January 25, 2019

HYDERABAD: Viewing the ever-rising mosquito population as a threat to the human health, experts have suggested taking advantage of certain fish species as a method of ‘biological control’ of the insect. At a seminar, held in Sindh University’s Faculty of Natural Sciences, the speakers preferred biological control of mosquitoes over the existing rampant application of chemical ways.

“Chemical control disturbs the aquatic ecosystem and aquatic food chain,” observed Prof Dr Naeem Tarique Narejo. He considered the biological control agents as the best available to destroy mosquito larvae.

He said the very small fish like Gambosia, Gadusia, Puntius and Tilapia were best control agents which eat mosquito as well as larvae. Prof Narejo said that the insects grew in the stagnant waters where the small fish were released to exterminate their population.

“Fish isn’t only a nutritional source for humans. They can be pivotal for preventing humans becoming ill with mosquito-caused illnesses,” Prof Dr Muhammad Younis Laghari said.

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https://tribunecom.pk/story/1896059/1-breed-fish-eliminate-mosquito-population/

CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE STUDY LAUNCHED

By By News Desk Published: January 25, 2019

LAHORE: The Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) study for Punjab province was launched at a ceremony in Lahore on Thursday.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and Agriculture Delivery Unit, the government of Punjab have jointly prepared the study.

The study highlights climate-smart agriculture strategies that can help mitigate and adapt to extreme weather events in Punjab. Also, at the same time, it contributes to increased agricultural productivity and food security in the province. The study emphasises the need for agricultural diversification, reducing dependence on cash crops and switching to higher value nutritious crops. It also points out the urgent need to improve water management strategies, increase irrigation efficiency and reduce water wastage.

In addition, it provides an assessment of the provincial policy and institutional environment for CSA, identifies barriers and solutions for the province and district-level policy design and implementation.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy FAO Representative in Pakistan Farrukh Toirov said: "It is critical to take pre-emptive measures to address challenges presented by climate change to the agriculture sector, food security and economic growth of Pakistan and its provinces. The CSA study for Punjab is a step in that direction. CSA initiatives sustainably increase productivity, enhance resilience and reduce or remove greenhouse gases.

The study will be instrumental in the assessment of provincial policy and institutional environment for CSA, identification of barriers and solutions for the province and district-level policy design and implementation, and highlighting financing opportunities for CSA investments at the provincial level.

Additional Secretary Task Force Punjab Agriculture Department Beenish Fatima Sahi appreciated the collaborative effort in the preparation of the study and highlighted the importance of CSA for agriculture in Punjab.

She said agriculture is important to the Punjab economy, contributing approximately one-quarter of provincial GDP. The province also accounts for two-thirds of the total national agriculture output. The sector employs over 45% of the Punjab labour force and is the main employment source of nearly three-quarter of the female labour force.

The climate-smart agriculture (CSA) concept aims to improve integration of agriculture development and climate responsiveness. It aims to achieve food security and broader development goals under a changing climate and increasing food demand.

Pakistan is considered to be one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, with serious impacts on agriculture and food security, due to its geographical location – ranking as the 7th country most affected from natural disasters (1996 – 2005) on the Global Climate Risk Index for 2017.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1896241/1-climate-smart-agriculture-study-launched/

FARMERS CRITICISE 'MINI-BUDGET'

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 24TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The farming community denouncing the Finance Supplementary (Second Amendment) Act, 2019 asked the government to boost up agriculture sector by taking real steps instead of cosmetic measures. The finance minister Wednesday announced to cut interest rate at agricultural loans from 39 percent to 20 percent to bolster the agriculture sector. He said the agriculture loans have already witnessed 22 percent boost during the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government's first six months.

The minister also announced reduced duty on diesel from 17% to 5% for agriculture sector. Talking to Business Recorder, senior leader of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad Rao Tariq Ashfaq said that as usual the government has ignored 63 percent of Pakistani people in the budget. He said if the government was really giving any importance to the agriculture sector, it would have taken steps to reduce prices of fertilizers, end the role of middleman in agri-marketing and provide significant incentives to the farmers on input costs. He said that at present, farmers are facing serious problems and they are protesting on the roads against their exploitation by middlemen.

Another senior leader of farming community, Mohammad Ibrahim Mughal said that the government should have provided significant subsidies to the farming community on fertilizers, machinery, seeds, pesticides and other agriculture inputs, besides ensuring early handling of different crops from the farms to market. He added that no positive step has been taken to benefit 63 percent population of the country but just a few announcements have been made which are of no use.

At present, different major crops and livestock are facing many diseases and as a result farmers are running from pillar to post to deal with the issues but the government has altogether ignored their problems.

The government should have taken steps to enhance cotton production in the country and make arrangements to lift potato like crops from farms by modernising the markets. He said orange crop is also hit by virus and this year orange exports may witness massive decline, Ibrahim added.

He said that the government must have taken solid steps to promote Halal meat exports which, according to him, have the potential to generate massive foreign exchange for the country. He said that Pakistani livestock sector contributes about 56.3% of the value of agriculture and nearly 11% to the agricultural gross domestic product (AGDP), saying that a number of local industries are totally reliant on livestock and a growth in livestock would result in growth of allied industries.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190124441894/

CONCERN VOICED OVER SHRINKING OF LAND UNDER CULTIVATION

ABDUL RASHEED AZAD | JAN 24TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

A parliamentary panel expressing serious concerns over reducing agricultural land under cotton cultivation has said that it is badly damaging national economy. Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research, which met here under the chairmanship of Senator Syed Muzafar Hussain Shah on Wednesday, showed grave concern over the gradual shrinking of land under cotton cultivation during the past few years.

The panel said the government should take immediate measures to save the country from such losses, highlighting the importance of specifying some zones for the cotton cultivation over which farming of no other crop was permissible.

Briefing the committee, Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah gave details of cotton production during different fiscal years, which, he said, had declined from 13.595 million bales in 2011-12 to 11.980 million bales in 2017-18.

Abdullah said scarcity of certified seed, decreased profitability and issues of plant population were the main reasons behind decrease in cotton production. He suggested that cotton production should also be increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan to enhance its overall yield.

He said that priority to cotton districts by IRSA and reduction in electricity tariff for agriculture tube wells would also be helpful in promoting cotton production.

The committee directed the relevant officials to bring up modern seeds of various crops and reduce cost of growing of the crops to attract farmers to bring more land under cultivation. The government must provide subsidy to agriculture sector to increase cultivation and in this connection agriculture machinery, water supply, power supply, seed provision, connecting of the farms with agri markets play a critical role, the committee recommended.

The chairman of the committee also underlined the need for encouraging the production of long staple cotton crop, which was having considerable export value and could earn foreign exchange for the country. He asked the Ministry of National Food Security and other concerned officials to come up with a detailed plan in that connection by taking federation units on board on how to enhance crop cultivation in the country. The ministry was asked to have brainstorming session with the stakeholders and progressive farmers on how to enhance overall crop production and what steps should be taken to encourage cultivation of long staple cotton.

The chairman asked the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) to organise wheat seminars with proper management and invite 50 growers from each district to participate in the wheat seminar in their respective areas. The PARC was asked to brief the committee in the next meeting about the speakers who would deliver speeches in seminars and about the topics of their presentations.

Meanwhile, president of Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) informed the committee that it had disbursed loans of around Rs 3145.387 million since October 2018. He informed the committee that the bank has over 90 percent recovery rate on fresh loans. On the occasion, the chairman said the matter of increasing the paid capital of ZTBL would be taken with Finance Ministry.

The PARC informed the committee about appointments over 692 vacant posts in the council. The committee was informed that 98.3 percent of wheat sowing target has been achieved so far.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190124441909/

‘USE OF HEIS RESULTS IN 20 PERCENT INCREASE IN CROP YIELD’

ZAHID BAIG | JAN 24TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Best global agricultural practices and use of high efficiency irrigation system (HEIS) adopted by the potato growers of Kasur district under PepsiCo's Sustainable Farming Programme (SFP) have resulted in increase of 10 to 20 percent in yield besides reduced cost of production, saving water and positive impact on environment. The SFP is a global initiative launched by PepsiCo where the company engages with farmers from which it sources directly, and provides education on field agronomy, fertilizers, irrigation, plant protection techniques, environment and new technologies.

This was disclosed at an event arranged by the company on Wednesday showcasing global best practices in sustainable farming, so that PepsiCo potato growers can employ those processes and techniques at the farm level in order to become more sustainable.

The demonstrations were conducted on a grower's model farm in Kasur, where growers had the opportunity to see how sustainable practices improved both quantity as well as quality of potato crop yield. In 2017 alone, PepsiCo growers helped conserve approximately 1 billion liters of water by using HEIS on their farms.

"We are excited about imparting critical knowledge on sustainability best practices to our growers," said Zahid Saleem, Head of PepsiCo Pakistan's Agronomy function. "By putting this knowledge into action, our growers are helping the environment and also improving their own livelihoods in the process."

He said that the programme was initiated in year 2016 when large scale trainings were arranged for the growers under this programme regarding conservation of water, best agricultural practices and environment. He said year 2019 is the year for compliance. He disclosed that audit teams from different countries would come and check the practices adopted by the growers in under SFP programme in Pakistan and only those would continue who will be find following the guidelines.

CFO of Company, Omar Yousaf said that quality of the crop was improved during the last five years while company never focused on price strategy instead of long term relations. 'The price fluctuates on both sides while company believes in long term productivity', he added.

Operational Manger Yasir Ghani said that growers were earlier using double water than required for their potato crop. He said there was huge potential to reduce the cost of production and water saving. He said the company was the market leader in the salty snacks category, and procures 100 percent of the potatoes used for its products in Pakistan from local farmers.

Anees Amin, Agro Regional Manager of the programme speaking on this occasion said that the Company had set a target of achieving 15 percent of water saving on the farms of growers under SFP programme by year 2025.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190124441934/

QATAR LIFTS BAN ON IMPORT OF PAKISTANI RICE

By Our Correspondent Published: January 24, 2019

ISLAMABAD : The Qatar government has finally agreed to lift the ban on Pakistan-origin rice, during Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit on January 21-22. Pakistan's Ministry of Commerce had been taking up the issue of excluding Pakistan in the tender with the Qatar government time and again; however, it was finally resolved after PM Imran's visit.

Qatar agreed to include Pakistani rice in the tender documents of the Central Tendering Committee (CTC), which falls directly under the purview of Qatar's Ministry of Economy and Commerce. Although the private sector in Qatar continued to import rice from Pakistan, the CTC, which procures state-supplied subsidised rice for Qatari citizens, made its tender Indian-origin specific, thereby effectively banning the rice import from any other origin, including Pakistan during 2011-12.

Reportedly, the main reason for this change was the substandard and low-quality of Pakistani rice supplied by the exporters against the government tenders in 2011-12. The Indian rice exporters were the ultimate beneficiaries of this situation and Indian rice exports to Qatar reached 142,000 tonnes in 2017 from 18,774 tonnes in 2011.

As a viable solution, a third-party inspection for the supply of rice through CTC tenders and taking strict action against those involved in supplying substandard rice in future will be offered to ensure quality rice. The lifting of ban is expected to provide additional $40-50 million of rice exports to Qatar if the quality is maintained. Qatar annually imports 200,000 tonnes of rice.

Adviser on Commerce, Textile and Industries Abdul Razak Dawood stated the government is taking different measures for export enhancement, including reclaiming traditional markets, besides accessing new markets. He said one of the initiatives is to manage removal of restrictions on Pakistani products in foreign markets.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1895553/2-qatar-lifts-ban-import-pakistani-rice/

MINISTER HINTS AT INCREASE IN FARM SECTOR ALLOCATION

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent January 23, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Livestock Minister Abdul Bari Pitafi has said that in the past meagre allocations were made in the budget for the agriculture sector of Pakistan and most of those were spent in the irrigation sector. But now the Sindh government is trying to increase those allocations for the farm sector.

He was speaking at the conclusion of the two-day 4th International Conference on Agriculture, Food and Animal Sciences 2019 at Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Tandojam on Tuesday.

He said that with the increased budgetary allocations in the agriculture sector, different projects for agriculture and livestock sectors would be launched to improve their performance. Such conferences were helpful because foreign experts shared their latest research and offered solutions to different issues confronting the agriculture and livestock sectors.

He said recommendations formulated in such conferences proved to be effective in those two sectors. He said the project of artificial insemination was launched in Sindh to preserve rare breed of cattle, which would benefit their breeders and livestock holders.

He said the Sindh government was trying its level best to improve the livestock sector performance and expressed the hope that it would yield good results when compared with other provinces. He appreciated the role being played by SAU.

Speaking on the occasion, SAU Vice Chancellor Dr Mujeebuddin Sehrai said that various conferences, symposia, training programmes of international level were organised in the university for the betterment of agriculture and its related sectors. He announced to publish a research journal comprising papers and recommendations presented by international experts in this fourth conference. He said the journal would be sent to the federal and provincial governments for incorporation in their policies.

Visiting Professor Mushtaq Memon presented his recommendations. Recommendations of other experts were also presented.

One of the recommendations said that river Indus being vital source of Pakistan's water should be given due attention. It said storage capacity of the existing dams should be enhanced and lands hit by waterlogging and salinity should be recovered by taking measures based on modern technology.

It said that measures should be taken for arresting decline in the levels of groundwater on war footings in order to conserve that precious resource.

The experts in their recommendations suggested that Indus River system was the largest contiguous system in the world which was facing different issues due to climate change, inadequate flows, increased population etc.

One of the recommendations called for introduction of new methodologies of research in the agriculture sector at the government, industry and university levels in order to achieve growth in all respects.

Director general fisheries Dr Nazeer Kalhoro, Dr Abdullah Arijo and others also spoke.

Published in Dawn, January 23rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1459144/minister-hints-at-increase-in-farm-sector-allocation

FISHERMAN RECORDS WATERSPOUT IN RARE WEATHER PHENOMENON

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 23RD, 2019 | KARACHI

Boat skipper trawling a boat with his crew members for tuna fish about 57 nautical miles off the Ghora Bari coast of Sindh recorded the rare weather phenomenon of waterspout earlier this week, the WWF-Pakistan said on Tuesday.

The oceanic spectacle that shows up rarely and resembles the tornado, skipper Saeed Zaman captured through lenses last Monday, Jan 21, 2019. "This rare weather phenomenon was previously reported by fishermen on 28 February 2016 near Sakoni off Kalmat Khor, Balochistan," the WWF-Pakistan said.

Unfolding the story, Zaman said that he sighted in the morning to a massive waterspout swirling to his boat suddenly but succeeded to drift away, saying that it first looked like a huge patch of cloud. He said that the waterspout was latter seen descending. None of the other boats fishing in the same area also were unmoved to reach the waterspout.

Muhammad Moazzam Khan, Technical Advisor on Marine Fisheries at the WWF-Pakistan, the waterspouts are usually formed along the cumulus type of clouds. “This type of waterspout is generally not associated with thunderstorms which usually dissipate in short time,” he said, adding that waterspouts have long been recognized as serious marine hazards. Stronger waterspouts pose threat to small boats.

He said that fishers maintain a considerable distance from such a phenomenon. “The average spout is around 50 metres in diameter, with wind speeds of 80 kilometres per hour,” he said, adding that “the most waterspouts last for up to one hour, though the average lifetime is just 5 to 10 minutes”.

The formation of a waterspout takes place over five stages; the first stage is the formation of a disk on the surface of water, known as a dark spot; the second stage is a spiral pattern on the water surface; the third stage is a formation of a spray ring; the fourth stage is where the waterspout becomes a visible funnel; and the lifecycle ends and fifth stage where the waterspout decays.

WWF-Pakistan appreciated the alertness and vision of the fishermen who have been trained to record such rare events including release of endangered marine animals. Contrary to its name, a waterspout is not filled with water but is a column of cloud-filled wind rotating over the ocean’s surface.

It descends from a cumulus cloud and the water inside a waterspout is formed by condensation in the cloud. There are two types of waterspouts including tornado and fair-weather.

The clouds from which waterspouts descend are not fast-moving, so fair-weather waterspouts are often static. Both waterspouts require high levels of humidity and a relatively warm water temperature compared to the overlying air. Waterspouts are most common in tropical and subtropical waters but this is the second authentic record of its occurrence from Pakistan coast.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190123441624/

MODALITIES TO MAKE SAARC FOOD BANK FUNCTIONAL DISCUSSED

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 23RD, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The government of Pakistan hosted the 10th SAARC Food Bank board meeting on Tuesday. Pakistan hosted the meeting at its turn in alphabetical order amongst SAARC States after Nepal. This meeting had particular significance from the perspective of deliberations to work out recommendations for operationalizing the Bank. For this purpose international development partners working in the region may also be engaged, says a press release issued here.

Dr M Hashim Popalzai, Secretary, Ministry of National Food Security and Research during the inaugural session of the meeting on 21st January, 2019 underscore the important role this Bank can play in supply of food grains in the region to achieve the goal of regional food security as our region is home to around 1/4th of the world population. He said that all members of the SAARC Food Bank can mutually work out the modalities for operationalising the Bank with the support of SAARC Secretariat. He further said that Pakistan has surplus production of food grains that may be supplied in the region.

The board meeting deliberated on various aspects of the Food Bank and Board members from SAARC member states including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka were actively engaged during the meeting. Dr Javed Humayun, Senior Joint Secretary being Nodal Point from Pakistan for the Bank chaired the Board meeting.

Sahibzada Muhamnad Mahboob Sultan, Minister for National Food Security and Research also attended the closing ceremony of the meeting held on 22nd January, 2019 as the chief guest. He said that SAARC countries are tied in several commonalities of culture, food and environment that can lead us in making joint efforts to our fight to end hunger, poverty and malnutrition in the region. He urged upon the need to further make joint efforts to address the regional level challenges like climate change and also shifting of focus on enhancing intra-regional supply of food products.

For this purpose SAARC Food Bank provides an excellent platform to its member states to interact with each other for intra-regional supply of food grains. The minister for NFSR also announced that the government of Pakistan has doubled the quantum of wheat from 40,000MT to 80,000MT being maintained as Pakistan’s share for this Regional Food Bank, as per requirement.

At the end of the meeting, the minister for NFSR presented souvenirs to SAARC Food Bank Board Members. The other senior officials from the Ministry of National Food Security & Research, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Pakistan Agriculture Research Council also attended the event.-PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190123441635/

COTTON SPOT RATES FIRM ON LEAN BUSINESS

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 23RD, 2019 | KARACHI

Official spot rate was unchanged on the cotton market on Tuesday in the process of lacklustre business activity, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8,700, they added. In the ready session, not a single deal reported till our going to the press, they said.

Prices of seed cotton in Sindh were at Rs 3000-3700, in the Punjab seed cotton prices at Rs 3000-3700 and in Balochistan, rates of seed cotton were at Rs 3200-3700, they said.

According to the market sources main buyers and sellers were conspicuous by their absence ahead of announcement of mini-budget.

Cotton analyst Naseem Usman said that trading activity may improve after the announcement of mini-budget, due today (Wednesday).

The ginners were under pressure due to huge stock of unsold cotton stock with them, other brokers said.

Cotton prices drifted lower on the international markets, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190123441690/

FCCI SEEKS ABOLITION OF DUTY ON COTTON YARN

By Imran Rana Published: January 23, 2019

FAISALABAD: The regulatory duty on polyester and cotton yarn must be withdrawn in the upcoming mini-budget to strengthen the domestic manufacturing units, urged Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) President Syed Zia Alumdar Hussain.

Recalling the visit of Finance Minister Asad Umar to Faisalabad on October 4, 2018, Hussain pointed out that the minister had assured him of numerous corrective measures, which would be undertaken gradually, in order to step up dwindling exports of the country.

Appreciating the measures introduced by the government, the FCCI president welcomed the restoration of advance payment facility and provision of gas at 6.5 cents per million British thermal units (mmbtu) and electricity at 7.5 cents per unit.

He expressed optimism that as per the government's pledge, the issue of outstanding tax refund claims, amounting to Rs250 billion, would be resolved by February 15.

"All these efforts have yielded positive results with exports rising 2% and imports narrowing down," he said. "Similarly, foreign remittances also recorded a growth of 10%." He suggested to the government to divert its focus towards the domestic manufacturing sector, which was directly linked with job creation besides heavy contribution to the overall economic development.

Hussain lamented that cotton production had dropped by 400,000 bales. To make up for the shortfall, the government has withdrawn the duty on cotton import. "However, the duty on cotton yarn and polyester still haunts the manufacturers including the power looms."

He noted that businessmen had been assured of swift resolution of the issues confronted by the manufacturing sector. However, he regretted, a powerful mafia was hatching a conspiracy to get regulatory duty imposed for vested interests in order to sell locally made polyester yarn at higher rates.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 23rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1894483/2-fcci-seeks-abolition-duty-cotton-yarn/

CLOUD SEEDING TECHNOLOGY: GOVERNMENT TO ACQUIRE TECHNOLOGY TO COPE WITH DROUGHT LIKE SITUATION: NDMA CHIEF

ABDUL RASHEED AZAD | JAN 22ND, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The government in collaboration with stakeholders concerned has started an effective response to deal with drought like situation in Balochistan and parts of Sindh. This was stated by Chairman National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Lieutenant General Omar Mahmood Hayat while talking to Business Recorder here on Monday.

"The facts being provided to me show 420,000 families in eight districts of Sindh and 135,000 families in 18 districts of Balochistan are explicitly undergoing drought impacts where millions of livestock have perished with billions of dollars economic and social loss," he further said.

Referring to the cloud seeding technology used in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other countries to generate artificial rain, he said that NDMA should conduct a research over the technology and approach those authorities to acquire the technology to cope with the drought issue.

He said that some global reports put Pakistan as third water-scarce country of the world which is contributing more to aggravate the drought conditions prevailing in the country. He said the secretary agriculture Balochistan informed him that underground water table has receded below 800 feet to 1200 feet whereas same situation is in Sindh's districts of Tharparkur, Metiari, Dadu, Hyderabad and others, which has increased the risks for social and agricultural development in the province.

"Pakistan has the ability to overcome the drought issue but it only requires proper vision and direction to take all the stakeholders together for a better and durable strategy to handle the situation," he remarked.

"The drought in 2018 has severely affected agriculture and livestock sectors of 8 districts of Sindh and 18 of Balochistan resulting in the loss and unavailability of food for half a million families and fodder for over millions of livestock," he said.

The NDMA in collaboration with PDMAs of Sindh and Balochistan held consultative seminars to mull over the prevailing drought phenomenon in the provinces and formulated a comprehensive report submitted to the President and Prime Minister Offices for approval and also with other relevant stakeholders, the chairman NDMA said.

The NDMA chief said that recently, the authority organised a national consultative workshop on drought mitigation, which was attended by the President Arif Alvi, Deputy Chairman Senate Saleem Mandviwalla and other senior state officials.

The event eventually culminated with the drought consultative process which NDMA started in October 2018 by organising a seminar followed by meetings in Karachi on 30th and 31st October, 2018, he added. The chairman NDMA said that the workshop enabled NDMA to grasp the ground reality and know exactly the extent and dimensions of the prevailing drought condition, its impacts on different sectors, relief provided so far and future needs.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190122441333/

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT EVOLVES PLAN TO PROMOTE SUNFLOWER CULTIVATION

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 22ND, 2019 | SIALKOT

Punjab government has evolved a comprehensive plan for the promotion of Sunflower and other oil seed crops in the Province. Under the programme sunflower would be cultivate on more than 2.10 lakh acres of land in different areas of the Province.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Monday 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 compare to other oil seed crops. As many as 4700 acres of land in Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur and Sambrial tehsils of Sialkot district would be brought under sunflower crops.

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 sunflower growers had been directed that they should complete cultivate sunflower crop by mid of next month in their respective fields.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190122441373/

MINISTER INAUGURATES PAKISTAN HORTICULTURE EXPO 2019

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 22ND, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial has said that high value agriculture and horticulture production is a highly profitable enterprise which increases employment opportunities and bring increased commercialization in the agricultural sector.

He was speaking at the inauguration of a two-day event ‘Pakistan Horti Expo 2019’ being arranged by the Punjab Agriculture Department at the Expo Centre here on Monday. Secretary Agriculture Punjab Dr Wasif Khursheed and other high ups of the department also attended the opening ceremony. A large number of exporters, growers and other stakeholders of horticulture business from local and abroad are participating in the event.

Malik Nauman said that this event would give a new horizon and open new doors of opportunities for producer, exporter and companies indulging in horticultural and high values crops business in this country. He also appreciated agriculture department for organizing such a mega event.

During his visit at Horti Expo, Langrial also held meeting with delegations which came from Tajikistan, Indonesia and Malaysia and discussed matters of mutual interest.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190122441376/

WHO CARES ABOUT THE POTATO CRISIS?

Amjad Mahmood Updated January 21, 2019

BURNING the crop and taking out protest rallies in the Kasur, Pakpattan and Sahiwal districts of Punjab’s potato zone reveal the growing unrest among potato growers. Currently the market rates for potatoes are much lower than their cost of production.

To the concern of the nascent PTI-government, farmers seeking a support price mechanism for their produce as a protection against negative market forces launched a province-wide protest drive from Jan 15 by staging a sit-in outside the Punjab Assembly.

The provincial government reacted swiftly and managed to end the protest at least for the time being. It arranged a meeting of the protestors’ leaders with federal authorities this Wednesday (Jan 23) with the promise that an all-out effort would be made to resolve all issues related to exporting potatoes.

Punjab, particularly the 12-district-belt that runs from Kasur up to Khanewal district in the south, is the hub of potato production for it gives over 95 per cent of the national produce. Potato is a major staple food and has a significant contribution to the national domestic consumption and food needs.

Despite all odds, growers have reaped a bumper crop. But the commodity has not been fetching a reasonable price from the market, creating a potentially disastrous situation

Despite all odds, growers have reaped a bumper crop as potato acreage has been increasing on a year on year basis. But the commodity has not been fetching a reasonable price from the market. In Okara Mandi, the major potato market in the region, a bag of around 120kg was being sold for around Rs650-725 last week — much lower than its production cost.

Safeer Hayat, a potato trader from Okara, claims that he stored a large quantity of the crop last year in the hope of getting a good price during the off-season. But he could only get Rs1,000 per bag against his total purchase, plus storage cost, of Rs2,200 per bag.

Mr Hayat fears the bumper crop this year will result in a glut in the market and may further lower prices.

Potato Growers Society Vice President Chaudhry Maqsood Ahmad Jatt claims that the total cost of a bag of potatoes, from sowing up till it's transportation to the market, stands at over Rs2,000. Hence, growers are losing at least Rs1,300 per bag at the current rates.

Providing a breakup of the cost, he explains that at least 13 bags of potato seed are used per acre for sowing and each bag of quality imported seed costs Rs9,000. A sum of Rs60,000-70,000 per acre is spent on fertilisers, pesticides, labour and paying rent for land.

Whereas after harvesting, growers have to pay Rs100 per jute sack, Rs100 per bag for transportation, Rs10 as loading and unloading charges and Rs20 commission to the arhti (commission agent).

The difference between the cost of production and yield price is so high that it has left growers unable to sow the next crop — maize — he says.

Mr Jatt, who is also the chairman of the Potato Research and Development Board Punjab, recommends that the government take at least two steps to improve the lot of potato growers and save them from financial losses.

Firstly, it should immediately arrange and promote export through land routes to neighbouring Iran and Afghanistan up to the Central Asian States.

Then, it should announce a subsidy, like in India, for potato exporters with the condition that they will pay the growers prime rate for the produce.

Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Almas Haider seconds Mr Jatt's suggestion and urges the government to immediately provide relief to potato exporters for disposing off the surplus 1.6 million tonne potato crop in foreign markets to save the domestic market from crashing.

He argues that as the Pakistani potato is in great demand in Russia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and the Middle East, its export to these and other destinations may not only save farmers but also help earn precious foreign exchange.

The government, however, is so far oblivious to the plight of the growers. “The rulers are not even listening to our problems let alone trying to solve them,” grumbles a farmer leader who has been abortively trying to get an appointment with Punjab Governor Muhammad Sarwar for more than a month.

“The government is offering subsidies worth billions of rupees to sugar millers but ignoring potato growers despite repeated demands,” says Pakistan Kisan Ittehad Punjab President Rizwan Iqbal.

In line with the rest, he adds that as a short-term measure the government should announce a subsidy for potato exporters and support price for the crop which will save farmers from starvation.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1458825/who-cares-about-the-potato-crisis

TENANTS HAVE NO WAY OUT

Dr Abdur Rehman Cheema | Sultana Ali Updated January 21, 2019

Many of us were shocked when a man in Badin recently attempted to sell his eight-year-old daughter to an elderly landlord after failing to pay him back a Rs100,000 loan. It was shocking because we hardly ever ponder over the trade-offs that these landless and subsistence farmers have to make in their daily lives.

“We frequently acquire financial help from our landlords, hoping we’ll be able to pay them back following the harvest season,” says a landless farmer from the union council of Massoo Bozdar in Tando Allahyar.

Borrowing from landlords is a general practice among those farmers who don’t have access to financial services. According to one estimate, up to 85 per cent of farmers are still formally excluded from financial services. Agricultural loans account for only 7.6pc of total bank loans and are limited to Punjab for the most part.

As we went to different villages of Sindh and talked to landlords and landless tenants, we found that the poor live on subsistence, have little or no savings but face all exigencies of life. Keeping in view the absence of basic public services, landlords are a blessing in disguise in many ways. They help these landless tenants survive. Surely, many of them do so not out of affection for farmers but to exploit their cheap labour in the long run.

If the crop fails, the tenant remains in debt. As a result, he keeps borrowing from the landlord until the next crop

If we put ourselves in the shoes of these poor farmers, a less incriminating role of the landlord would emerge. The landlord helps farmers meet expenditures on all occasions, such as weddings, festivals, house building and harvesting. Moreover, the landlord also sometimes helps farmers meet their daily consumption needs.

In the absence of alternative livelihoods, social protection and skills, farmers cannot easily walk away from starvation. A cash economy where people can work and get paid in cash every day or every month is nearly missing in rural Sindh.

Choices are not many for farmers. We could not track some of the families we met six months ago to see any socioeconomic changes in their lives. Some poor farmers, who were unable to repay their loans, had no choice but to flee. They did it at night to minimise the risk of being chased and chained by the landlord.

“We are daily-wage labourers. But before migrating to Alamani farm, we were living a contented life as farm tenants. The 2010 flood submerged our land and damaged the crop. We went in debt of Rs100,000. We knew we could not pay it off our whole lives. The debt would only increase with the passage of time. So we decided to flee without informing anyone,” said one Ms Jasgi, a 50-year old from Tando Allahyar district.

The landlord is not altruistic. So his help comes at a cost. If the crop fails, the tenant remains in debt. As a result, the tenant keeps borrowing from the landlord until the next crop. This means he is bound to work for the same landlord as long as he is in debt.

Sometimes farmers cannot maintain a record of their borrowing due to illiteracy. “I worked as a farmer with a landlord and maintained all records of inputs like seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. We also borrowed money for household expenditures. But at the time of the settlement, there was a difference of Rs50,000 between my record and that of the landlord. When I asked him to give me my due share based on the fair calculation, the landlord used inappropriate words and expelled me from the area. Now I am helpless,” says Vishnu Kolhi, former tenant-farmer who now works as a teacher in a private school in Tando Allahyar.

While macroeconomic growth strategies are necessary to increase the size of the economy, a lot needs to be done to address this micro-dynamic of rural poverty. It will ensure that benefits of this growth reach the poor and the marginalised. It’s only through a multi-pronged poverty reduction strategy that effective linkages can be created to meet the needs of the poor and track the allocation of funds for meaningful change.

The writers work for the Rural Support Programmes Network

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1458824/tenants-have-no-way-out

AGRICULTURE NEEDS NO POLITICAL HEAT

Mohiuddin Aazim Updated January 21, 2019

Agriculture cannot perform up to its potential unless there is a smooth working relationship between federal and provincial governments.

This is not the case right now: the federal government wants the removal of the current chief minister of Sindh and treats the opposition parties — the PPP and the PML-N — with utter contempt while grievances of the PTI’s coalition partners in Balochistan refuse to go. The opposition parties as well as independent analysts have expressed serious reservations about the manner in which the anti-corruption drive is moving on. Some people call it selective and one-sided.

Under these circumstances, the PTI needs to make sincere efforts to improve the relationship with Sindh and coalition partners in Balochistan. “Without this, a strategy to promote agriculture can hardly yield the desired results,” opines a former secretary of the Sindh Agriculture Department.

“And, apart from making political environment less hostile, the issue of an acute shortage of irrigation water in Sindh and Balochistan must be addressed on an urgent basis.” The agricultural output in the two provinces continues to suffer due to the scarcity of water.

Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan is relying on a 19-point strategy for agricultural recovery and growth. He shared with agriculturalists some key elements of this strategy at a recent seminar on the cotton sector in Multan.

Under this strategy, the government intends to increase the funding for research on agriculture by 500 per cent, keep prices of agricultural implements low, reduce imports of fertilisers and agricultural inputs and promote their local production, mitigate effects of urbanisation on agriculture and provide financial and technical support for upgrading the services’ extension wings of provincial agriculture departments.

The government has projected 3.6pc agriculture growth for the current fiscal year. Whether the sector can actually grow this much with three of the four major crops — cotton, rice and sugarcane — showing signs of weakness is a million-dollar question

These and some other aspects of his agriculture promotion strategy need lots of financial resources. Given the current fiscal woes, the implementation of the strategy, at least during this fiscal year, seems just too ambitious.

Besides, the bureaucracy in Sindh, with about one-fourth share in the country’s agriculture, is frightened. Instead of doing routine jobs, many officials are busy responding to the enquiries by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and other investigation agencies. One can feel an air of bitterness in all provincial departments. Agriculture is no exception.

Perhaps it is time for the PTI to take the smaller provinces on board when it comes to designing and implementing policies of national importance. Senior officials of the Sindh Agriculture Department complain that the federal government has so far not taken them on board in the formulation of “any 19-point strategy for agricultural revival and growth”.

Regardless of whether the federal government has formulated the strategy without seeking input from all provinces, the key question is: will agriculture grow this year at 3.6pc, the yearly average that the five-year economic growth plan of the PTI has envisaged? Officials of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research are optimistic about it. But they are unwilling to share the projected growth in each sub-sector of agriculture ie major and minor crops, livestock and fisheries and forestry.

Federal ministers, including Finance Minister Asad Umar, take pride in the fact that during the six months of the PTI government, agricultural lending increased, as did the overall credit disbursement to the private sector. But higher agricultural lending alone does not indicate higher productivity.

Government officials conveniently forget the fact that a massive rupee depreciation and uptick in headline inflation have not only increased the cost of living for all Pakistanis but also made agricultural inputs costlier, requiring farmers to obtain more bank loans.

The PTI promised in its election manifesto that it would optimise the existing subsidy programmes for agriculture and introduce new ones. That has not happened so far — not at a scale to make any impact on agricultural growth in the current fiscal year, farmers’ groups point out. The PTI had also promised to share the cost of investment required to boost agricultural productivity. That, too, has not happened.

Agriculturalists across Pakistan are still waiting for Chinese investment to trickle in the agriculture sector. Minister for Planning and Development Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar says that the much-awaited meeting of the Pak-China joint working group on agriculture will be held in mid-February. Until the outcome of that meeting is shared with all provinces and the details of the memorandum of understanding signed earlier on agricultural cooperation between the two countries made public, speculating on the direction and pace of agricultural growth is just too difficult, officials of the Sindh Agriculture Department say.

In the last fiscal year when the overall economy grew 5.8pc, growth of the agriculture sector was 3.8pc. But that had come in the wake of a weaker growth of 2.1pc a year earlier. Now the government has projected 4.2pc growth for the overall economy and 3.6pc for agriculture for the current fiscal year.

Whether agriculture can actually grow this much with the base growth rate of the last year, and with three out of four major crops — cotton, rice and sugarcane — showing signs of weakness, is a million-dollar question.

Naturally, the reliance for agricultural growth in 2018-19 will be on livestock that also had recorded 3.8pc sub-sectoral growth in 2017-18 against 2.9pc in the preceding fiscal year. If the agriculture sector as a whole is going to grow at 3.6pc this year then this can happen only if the livestock sector posts a higher growth. But that's not too easy due to the base effect and also because we haven't seen any breakthrough in livestock productivity.

Two of the several points of the PTI's agricultural growth strategy are about setting up livestock productivity promotion zones and investment in supply chain of this sector. Both need to be implemented with sufficient transfer of federal funds for this purpose and financial and technical preparedness of the provinces.

In Sindh and Balochistan, nothing of the sort has happened thus far, though some progress has been made in Punjab, officials of agricultural departments of the smaller provinces say.

Fisheries, too, continue to suffer. The governments of the coastal provinces of Sindh and Balochistan could have easily taken the lead in this area, but that has not been the case.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1458823/agriculture-needs-no-political-heat

RESTRICTIVE GENDER NORMS AFFECT INNOVATION IN THE AGRI SECTOR

Amin Ahmed Updated January 21, 2019

SINCE there's a progressive trend towards diversification into the non-farm sector, farm size reduction, and loss of the ability to earn solely from agriculture, the role of women in the sector is becoming increasingly important.

"Time is overdue to start reforming gender norms that affect Pakistan's agriculture sector," says the just-released research report published by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre

(CIMMYT). Despite successful harvest seasons, feeding Pakistan's large and growing population requires continual innovation, it says.

The research report recommends that Pakistan must leverage all of its resources to meet its development challenges and goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) signed by Pakistan include a number of gender and food security indicators, such as eliminating hunger for all.

All of the SDGs aim "to leave no one behind" and deliver more equitable development outcomes. Around $100 billion could be injected into Pakistan's economy annually if women had equal opportunity of contributing.

Already about 75 per cent of women and girls in Pakistan are employed in the agriculture sector, 60pc of them unpaid. Hence, a new and inclusive approach to agricultural development is required

Already about 75 per cent of women and girls in Pakistan are employed in the agriculture sector, 60pc of whom are unpaid. Hence, a new and inclusive approach to agricultural development is required.

The research report, titled "Opportunities for strengthening gender equity in Pakistan's wheat sector," collates evidence from four research activities. The report authored by Dr Kristie Drucza, reveals "what is required to increase technology adoption and new agriculture practices that will help increase yields."

Some of the strongest forces behind persistent gender gaps are harmful social norms and stereotypes that limit expectations of what women can or should do, and this ultimately limits the country's food security and growth.

Rural women are shut out of decisions, consultations, and research at the local and national levels. Existing gender inequalities put women in a disadvantaged position in the agriculture sector and hamper their economic contributions to the household and nation, Dr Drucza says.

Women's contribution to agriculture, as identified by national statistics, is under-reported and under-valued.

Dr Drucza points out that women's contribution to the agriculture sector – home-based livestock rearing and vegetable farming – are devalued by extension workers and researchers and are not considered 'agriculture'.

This framing, along with a limited understanding of 'gender' and a male bias in agriculture, limits the support women receive when trying to innovate in agriculture and support their families.

Not enough is known about women in Pakistan's agricultural sector, especially in male-dominated crops such as wheat. Rural livelihoods are changing in Pakistan and more knowledge about how male and female farmers are coping with these changes is needed to ensure food security for new types of households.

While gender norms are frequently cited as barriers to change, they can be harnessed to deliver positive change for women, men, families and communities.

Agricultural research for development professionals, policymakers, and extension workers should consult women more, advocate for women's participation in extension activities, promote gender equality, and collect more data on women's role in agriculture.

Dr Drucza argues that women should be involved in agricultural research as principal investigators, designers, analysts, scientists and authors. Pakistan needs to leverage all its resources to create inclusive and sustainable development.

The research concludes that restrictive gender norms have a negative impact on women's ability to innovate and be productive, but can be reduced by policy initiatives that raise awareness on gender inequality and emphasise female-headed household participation and husband and wife co-participation in extension activities, among other culturally nuanced recommendations.

The report emerged from evidence collated from a four-year research for development project funded by the German government and sought to improve the gender-equality focus of wheat-related research and development.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, January 21st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1458822/restrictive-gender-norms-affect-innovation-in-the-agri-sector

UNWHOLESOME FOOD WEIGHING 35,600KG SEIZED IN LAHORE

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 21ST, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab Food Authority has unearthed two food businesses producing adulterated food products in the densely populated areas of the provincial metropolis here on Sunday. The raids were conducted under its Director General Captain Muhammad Usman(R) in the area of Badami Bagh and Taj Bagh after getting information from PFA vigilance cell. The authority has confiscated more than 35,600 kilograms unwholesome food products.

Muhammad Usman said that provincial food regulatory body shut down Abdullah Grinding Unit on account of adulteration in Badami Bagh. He said that spices were being prepared on the surface of the earth by missing bran (choker), sawdust and loose non-food grade colour in it. While substandard spices supplied in the adjacent areas of Lahore without packing foam and labeling this is a violation of Punjab Pure Food Regulations. He informed that PFA sized 19,000 kilograms red chili, 17,000 kilograms turmeric and a huge quantity of raw material from the spot. The authority also collected samples of spices and sent for laboratory test for further examination, he added.

In Taj Bagh area, PFA raided Bukhari Muraba (Jam) factory and sealed it by confiscating 350kg rotten fruits, 200kg sugar syrup, 50kg harmful chemicals, 20kg textile colours, and non-food grade drums. Muhammad Usman said that enforcement team also witnessed an abundance of mosquitoes and flies in the blue drums which were being used for storing of jam. He said that it is compulsory for food business operators to follow the law which set by PFA.

DG said that Punjab Food Authority is doing work under the zero-tolerance policy against food adulterators in Punjab on the directions of Chief Minister Punjab Usman Buzdar. He vowed that PFA will control the food-related issues and eliminate the adulteration mafia from Punjab very soon.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190121441200/

PFA SEALS TWO FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS

By Our Correspondent Published: January 21, 2019

LAHORE: PFA officials conducted raids on Sunday under the directions of Director General Captain (retd) Muhammad Usman and sealed two food businesses producing a large quantity of adulterated food items in the densely populated areas of Badami Bagh and Taj Bagh. The authority confiscated over 35,600 kilogrammes of unwholesome food products.

The director general said that the provincial food watchdog has sealed Abdullah Grinding Unit in Badami Bagh for adulteration. The unit was producing adulterated spices by mixing bran, sawdust and non-food grade colouring. The spices were being supplied without packaging and labelling to several areas adjacent to the city, the DG stated.

He added that the authority seized 19,000 kilogrammes of red chilli powder, 17,000 kilogrammes of turmeric and a huge quantity of raw material from the scene. PFA also collected the samples of the spices and sent them to the laboratory for further examination, he said.

Meanwhile, in another raid in Taj Bagh area, food safety officials raided Bukhari Muraba, a jam factory, and found less than satisfactory cleanliness and hygiene. The provincial watchdog has sealed the unit and confiscated 350 kilogrammes of rotten fruits, 200 kilogrammes of sugar syrup, 50 kilogrammes of harmful chemicals, 20 kilogrammes of textile colouring and non-food grade drums.

Enforcement teams also reported an abundance of fruit flies and mosquitoes in the drums used to store the jam. “It is compulsory for food business operators to follow the laws laid down by the authority,” Usman expressed.

As per the orders of the Punjab chief minister, the authority has adopted a zero-tolerance policy against food adulterators in Punjab, the director general said. He vowed that PFA will continue to curb food related issues and will endeavour to eliminate adulteration mafia from Punjab. He added that anybody can read the complete set of guidelines as prescribed by the authority on PFA’s website or their Facebook Page.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1893056/1-pfa-seals-two-food-business-operators/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 14st TO JANUARY 20th 2019

GUARD TO INTRODUCE DROUGHT-TOLERANT RICE VARIETY

ZAHID BAIG | JAN 20TH, 2019 | LAHORE

After successfully launching the hybrid rice varieties, the Guard Agriculture Research and Services Limited (GUARD) is soon going to introduce drought tolerant rice variety to mitigate the negative impact of water shortage on rice production. This was disclosed by the Guard Agri Chief Executive Shahzad Ali Malik while addressing the Company’s annual sales conference here on Saturday. SAARC Chamber Vice President and Chairman of the Company Iftikhar Ali Malik, Executive Seed Division Shah Rukh Malik and others also addressed on this occasion.

Malik said that their company started working in 1999 to import, acquire and develop the latest agricultural and crop technologies to produce quality seed aimed at increasing per acre yield and help the nation build grain surpluses to achieve adequate food security. 'Since then we have got approved seven different hybrid rice varieties from the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) successfully being sown across Sindh and other parts of the country while last year the company also introduced a heat tolerant variety,' he added.

He said that their heat tolerant variety was giving results even in the hottest region of Larkana. He said that their company keeping up its tradition of twenty years was still carrying out research and development to introduce such seeds of different corps which could achieve higher yields resulting in prosperity of the farmer and strengthening of agricultural economy.

SAARC Chamber of Commerce & Industry Vice President Iftikhar Ali Malik speaking on this occasion threw light on the history of his company and the efforts it started in collaboration with Chinese to introduce hybrid rice varieties which have more yielding potential and greater resistance against different diseases.

He said that SAARC Chamber's headquarter building was ready to commence operations in Islamabad. He said that a nine storey building had been constructed at a cost of Rs800 million. He vowed that his company would continue striving to bring agricultural revolution and maximizing production of different agricultural crops.

Guard Agri General Manager Rizwan Younus also announced launch of rental services of three different types of harvesters for rice crop which could help the farmers to bring down the post-harvesting losses.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190120441035/

PUNJAB COTTON CROP MISSES OUTPUT TARGET AS WEATHER TURNS PATCHY

Munawar Hasan January 20, 2019

LAHORE: Cotton yield in Punjab province has nosedived about one-sixth per hectare as a fall in the area under cultivation, unusually hot weather, stubborn pests, and substandard cotton seed took toll on the crop, The News has learnt.

Latest numbers showed the cotton production in the most populous province fell short of target by a massive 28.84 percent in 2018-19, while it is less than 11.90 percent if compared with last year's output, according to latest official estimates.

As per second provincial estimate of cotton output for the year 2018-2019, the final harvest of cotton has been assessed at 7.11 million bales in the crop year against official target of 10 million bales, showing a decline of 29 percent against the target.

This year's production is short by 11.90 percent, compared with last year's output of 8.07 million bales.

The area under cotton cultivation during Kharif 2018-19 has been 1.94 million hectares against that of 2.05 million hectares in the corresponding period a year ago, showing a dip of 5.14 percent over the previous kharif.

As far as yield is concerned, there has been 15.89 percent cut in per hectare production if compared with the target, while a drop of 7.67 percent has been witnessed against the last year's yield.

The officials blamed decrease in area under cultivation as one of the reasons of decline in cotton production in Punjab.

Climate-related incidences like prolong hot and dry weather were also stated as having adverse effect on the yield in core areas of Multan, DG Khan and Bahawalpur divisions.

Moreover, stunting of crop, attack of white fly, pink bollworm, and other pests also dealt a blow to the yield this year.

Interestingly, sources said, about 90 percent of total cotton area is presently under Bt cotton varieties that have been touted as being resistant against pest attack.

However, many Bt cotton seeds varieties were producing poor yield and quality.

Sources alleged that provincial government even provided a subsidy of Rs700/bag in South Punjab districts on substandard Bt cotton seed varieties like IUB-2013, FH-142, FH- Lalazar and MNH-886 as these are susceptible to pests and diseases like whietfly, jassid, cotton virus, bollworms, etc.

Bt cotton variety FH Lalazar, failed to deliver high yield during trials conducted on a government farm. Lalazar in 2014-15 produced 166 kilograms/acre against the expected 450 kilograms/acre. Similarly, yield from MNH886 and FH142 also remained unexpectedly low.

According to official data, a significant area in Punjab was under Bt cotton varieties MNH 886, FH-142, which were claimed to be heat-stress-tolerant and bollworm-resistant, as well as virus-tolerant, but failed to deliver desired outcomes.

Furthermore, there is no refugia and buffer zone for genetically modified (GM) cotton crops for pest management. Refugia, a fence/boundary of non Bt/GM crops of same variety around Bt/GM crop is highly recommended to delay pests from developing resistance against GMO varieties.

The efficacy of refugia depends on the extent of simultaneous flowering and fruiting of the refugia and the main Bt crop. Absence of refugia can cause serious negative impact on crop quality and production, the sources said adding the government is not paying any attention to this aspect.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/421026-punjab-cotton-crop-misses-output-target-as-weather-turns-patchy

PAKISTAN IMPORTS OVER 1.06 MILLION TONS OF MALAYSIAN PALM OIL IN 2018

Our Correspondent January 20, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan imported 1.06 million tons of Malaysian palm oil till November 2018, higher than 1.02 million tons imported in 2017, Shamsul Iskandar bin Mohd Akin, deputy minister of Primary Industries in Malaysia said on Saturday.

The deputy minister, who is heading a delegation of officials from the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) and Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC), attended the 4th Pakistan Edible Oil Conference at a local hotel.

He said over the years, the oils and fats trade between these two countries has expanded to products like oleo-chemicals, palm kernel expeller, cooking oil, confectionary fats and many other products being used by the food and non-food industries in Pakistan.

“Pakistan’s oils and fats market has grown significantly, from 2.7 million metric tons in 2000 to over 4.4 million metric tonnes in 2017,” the deputy minister said. The market has grown by almost double over this time, and palm oil alone accounted for more than 50 percent of this total.

“In 2017, Pakistan accounted for 6.1 percent of the total Malaysian palm oil exports and is the third largest single country importer of Malaysian palm oil,” Shamsul Iskandar bin Mohd Akin said.

Malaysian oil export to Pakistan stood at 1.02 million tons in 2017, showing an increase of 15 percent compared to the preceding year. In November of 2018, Malaysian palm oil exports to Pakistan exceeded the volume exported in 2017, and stood at 1.06 million tons or $650 million, he added.

Oil palm plantations currently cover 5.82 million hectares of agriculture land in Malaysia and contributed $18.2 billion to Malaysia’s export earnings in 2017.

“The palm oil industry has been an important and consistent contributor to our country’s economy, and I sincerely believe that it will continue to do so in the long term,” Akin said.

Malaysia and Pakistan have a very long-standing palm oil trade relationship, one that can be traced back more than 40 years, he said, while appreciating the recent visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan and his meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohammed.

He pointed out that one of the agreements reached at the meeting between the premiers was the partial abolition of visa for travel between the two countries.

The deputy minister said Pakistan was among the first export destinations in which Malaysia has major investments in bulking installation and refineries, with the liquid cargo jetty dedicated for the handling of palm oil.

There were other opportunities to tap, considering Pakistan’s strategic geographical location, he said, adding that Malaysian companies were encouraged to come to Pakistan and to collaborate with local companies in developing other areas in oils and fats trade, including oleo-chemicals, biomass utilisation and animal feed.

Palm oil is the leading vegetable oil in the international export trade, accounting for 56 percent of the total world’s oils and fats exports in 2017. Major Malaysian palm oil export destinations are China, India, European Union, Pakistan and the US.

The deputy minister appreciated the office bearers of Pakistan Vanaspati Manufacturers Association, All Pakistan Solvent Extractors Association, Pakistan Edible Oil Refiners Association, and Pakistan Soap Manufacturing Association for inviting him for the keynote address.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/421034-pakistan-imports-over-1-06-million-tons-of-malaysian-palm-oil-in-2018

AS DROUGHT CONTINUES IN ACHHRO THAR, HERDERS STRUGGLE TO SAVE ANIMALS

Jan Khaskheli January 20, 2019

HYDERABAD: Farmers in the drought-stricken Achhro Thar (white desert) are currently dealing with sickly and weak animals mainly due to nutrition deficiency.

Muhammad Saleh Chaneho, a herdsman from Achhro Thar, said weakness among animals was a major problem farmers faced during the drought. “The main reason is nutrition deficiency among animals, because the drought has burnt vegetation and plants, leaving animals in a helpless situation,” he added.

Only camels, goat and sheep were able to survive in the desert, as they eat all kinds of shrubs and plants, which big animals (cows) do not take.

Saled could not provide any authentic data on animal deaths; however he said herders and farmers feared high mortality because of the dryness and unavailability of fodder.

Belonging to village Tarr Verahi, Saleh claims to have around 400 goats, a dozen cows, and seven camels. Their family’s sustenance depends solely on livestock rearing. Presently, like other herdsmen, they are also afraid of losing their animals in case the dryness persists.

“Because of the drought, we do not have any option other than selling animals at cheap rates to sustain our families,” he said.

Saleh brought his animals with his sons for vaccination at sand dunes near the famous Village Haji Banko Chaneho, near Khipro town, Sanghar district on the last day of “International Training Workshop on bovine reproduction and artificial insemination”.

The workshop was organised jointly by Sindh Agriculture University, Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan, and Sindh Agriculture Growth Project (SAGP) Livestock Component at Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam.

Four teams of veterinary practitioners, 10 in each, were engaged in administering vaccinations to animals during the day long camp at sand dunes. Five other teams, representing leading pharmaceutical companies of Pakistan also contributed medicines for the animals.

A large number of men had brought their herds, including cows, goats, sheep, buffaloes, and camels for vaccination from nearby villages.

Dr Pershotam Khatri, associate professor and chairman, Department of Animal Reproduction, and coordinator of the workshop, said they had brought medicine stock for 25,000 animals in the most ignored Achhro Thar desert.

Dr Khatri, who also belongs to the desert area, said the indigenous Thari cow breed was now rare because of ignorance on part of the government to preserve this threatened indigenous specie.

“We have come here to provide access to herdsmen residing in remote areas of the desert to get their animals vaccinated,” Dr Khatri said, appreciating livestock farmers, who travelled long distances to reach the camp.

He claimed this was the first move taken by the SAU to help the most ignored white desert herdsmen.

Herder Rasool Bakhsh Chaneho said some families in the desert still had as many as 500 to 800 goats and similar numbers of cows, sheep and camels. Livestock rearing was their sole livelihood, he added.

“Presently, we have observed that underground water table has dropped further, and people have to face problems in fetching water from traditional wells,” Rasool said.

Talking about common diseases among animals, Rasool said they have traditional methods of treating animals by local herbal plants. “But animals are hungry now, and we have no fodder to feed and save them,” he lamented.

Haji Arisar from Village Haji Osman Chaneho, who brought his 60 goats and sheep at the vaccination camp, said small animals were infected by swine flu because of dryness.

Only some farmers could afford to bring fresh green grass from the canal areas on camels, the others herded their animals in the area for dried plants and vegetation, he said.

Dr Dileep Kumar, representing a pharmaceutical company and originally from the Thar desert, said there was an absence of political will to save livestock, which was the major source of income for the residents of the desert.

“These people having the largest herds of about 100-1,000 animals per family, do not like to sell their assets. But now they are compelled to do so at low rates,” Dr Dilip said.

Pointing at those who exploit the situation caused by the drought, Dr Dilip said that traders bought goats at Rs2,000 or Rs3,000 from these herders.

“The price is as much as one kilogram of mutton costs at an urban restaurant,” he said.

Milk was also sold at a mere Rs30-Rs35 by the herdsmen, which was as cheap as a small bottle of mineral water in the city, the doctor shared, while pointing out that the same milk was sold at Rs90-Rs100 in urban neighbourhoods.

“Arid zones like Thar, Achhro Thar, Kachho and Kohistan are main contributors in the supply of meat and mutton products. These people feed the country through their products, milk, meat, and dairy, but they are unable to feed their children, who are dying of hunger and malnutrition,” Dr Dilip said.

At the concluding session, Prof Mushtaq A Memon, a livestock specialist from Washington, who conducted the training sessions, said there was need to involve veterinary practitioners for advising livestock farmers. He asked veterinarians to implement what they have learned during the workshop and help livestock farmers in the fields.

He appreciated the participants, who learned a lot throughout the sessions and also in the field, while vaccinating, performing surgeries, and advising herders.

Prof Dr Gerhard Schuler, from Giessen University of Germany said he hoped this workshop helped farmers and professionals learn to deal with cattle heads and increase productivity. He was inspired by the farmers who travelled long distance from remote areas to reach the camp with animals for vaccination.

Atta Chaneho, a local influential person, who facilitated the herdsmen at the camp along with SAU organisers, said the area was experiencing the worst drought. “The community people and their animals need support at this difficult time,” he added.

The herders demanded the government to set up subsidised fodder banks in accessible areas to save the animals and livelihoods.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/421042-as-drought-continues-in-achhro-thar-herders-struggle-to-save-animals

COTTON PRODUCTION DECLINES 7.7PC

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana January 19, 2019

KARACHI: The country is likely to import 3.5-4 million bales — costing up to $1.2 billion — as the crop size for season 2018-19 is estimated at 10.8m bales, against the annual demand of around 15m bales.

According to figures issued by Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association, Pakistan’s cotton production up to Jan 15 fell by 7.74 per cent or 877,800 bales to 10.456m bales.

Punjab being the largest cotton producer suffered heavily, recording a 10.79pc decrease in output to 6.324m bales, from 7.089m bales in same period last year. In absolute terms, 764,804 fewer bales were produced in the province.

Against this, Sindh — faced with shortage of irrigation water at sowing stage — performed slightly better but also witnessed a drop of 2.66pc in output as it fell to 4.132m bales, from 4.245m bales in corresponding period of last season.

Bridging shortfall through imports to cost $1.2bn

In addition to less area coming under cultivation, factors such as poor quality seed and pesticides are hitting the cotton crop for the last 5-6 years. Switching to other crops such as sugarcane under political clouts has reduced the cotton cultivated area to 6m acres, from 9m.

Talking to Dawn, All Pakistan Textile Mills Association former chairman Yasin Siddiq said the country would require around 3.5-4m bales of imported cotton. Out of these 4m bales, the industry would need around 2.5m bales of long staple cotton used to produce fine count yarn required for high-valued textile products.

The government recently withdrew 3pc customs duty, 2pc additional customs duty and 5pc sales tax, allowing textile industry to import duty-free cotton to meet domestic demands of long and extra-long staple cotton.

A leading cotton dealer and exporter, Maqbool Saddiq, said the government should also resolve the issue of contamination and poor packing which has adversely affecting the price for Pakistani cotton in the world market.

Once this issue is resolved, it will not only help the local textile industry to have quality cotton for producing yarn and textile products but also push up Pakistani crop's price in the world market.

Around 0.1m bales have been exported in the current season, he added.

Saddiq suggested that the State Bank of Pakistan could play a major role in ensuring good packing by restricting its loan to ginners and putting a condition of six sided packing which is practiced all over the world.

Published in Dawn, January 19th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1458486/cotton-production-declines-77pc

OVER 50 EATERIES, SHOPS RAZED TO GROUND IN HILL PARK'S VICINITY

RECORDER REPORT 2019/01/19

KARACHI: Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's (KMC) anti-encroachment drive continues with full swing as on Friday the civic body razed over 50 restaurants and shops that were 'illegally' built around the Hill Park's jurisdictions.

The Illegal constructions were carried out on a 20 acre area of land over the period of time and were being used for commercial purpose.

KMC officials told that value of retrieved land is estimated to be around Rs 50 billion.

Aided by police and rangers, the officials of anti-encroachment department, reached at the site along with heavy machinery and remained busy all the day removing constructions that include Dua Restaurant, Iman Restaurant, Ashi Restaurant, Three Queen Restaurant, Oasis Restaurant, Meraj Amusement Park, Oasis Meraj Garden, Mini Golf Club, Golf Culb Meraj Hall and a boundary wall.

The Metropolitan Commissioner Dr Syed Saifur Rehman supervised the operation while senior director (coordination) Masud Alam, senior director anti-encroachment Bashir Siddiqui, director media management Bashir Sadozai, director municipal services Noman Arshad and other KMC officials were also present.

The Hill Park, covering an area of 65 acres of land was constructed back in 1965. However, some influential persons occupied a huge portion of the recreational facility with constructing restaurants and shops through fake and bogus documentations, with impunity.

In past, the officials told that KMC made several attempts to recover the area of land, but to no avail as the occupants approached the courts and acquired stay orders. However, the fresh anti-encroachment operation has been initiated on directions of the Supreme Court.

The officials said the civic organizations are implementing the top court's orders and the action against encroachments is being taken impartially which is being carried out jointly by the KMC, district administration, Rangers, police, district municipal administration, cantonment boards, Sindh Solid Waste Management Board and others.

The drive will continue till the removal of encroachments from all parks, sports complexes, playgrounds and over 108 roads in the city.

The Karachi Mayor Waseem Akhtar has vowed to remove illegal constructions around Hill Park, Jheel Park, Aziz Bhatti Park and Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim to ensure better recreational facilities to the residents.

On January 6, 2019, the civic body claimed to have caved in as many as 4000 shops and structures in the metropolis since the beginning of ongoing anti-encroachment operation.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/01/19/3-page/759131-news.html

SFA FINES RESTAURANTS, SEALS THREE FACTORIES

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 19TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Sindh Food Authority (SFA) on Friday carried out raids against sale of substandard eating items in various parts of metropolis and fined restaurants and sealed three factories. Teams of SFA raided the eating outlets in Burns Road, Saddar, North Karachi and New Karachi areas of the city, according to an announcement of the authority.

SFA teams inspected the restaurants in Saddar and Burns Road and found the unhygienic conditions there. Fining these restaurants, SFA granted two-week time to these restaurants to improve the hygienic conditions. In North Karachi and New Karachi areas of the city, SFA conducted raids at the factories manufacturing toffees, ketchup, roasted onion, mayonnaise and other eating items. During the inspection, it was found that ketchup is not being manufactured by tomato but from some other raw materials, which is injurious to human health. SFA confiscated all the products, manufactured from substandard raw materials and sealed the factory. Authority also sealed two other factories.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190119440744/

97.17PC WHEAT SOWING ACCOMPLISHED

FAZAL SHER 2019/01/19

ISLAMABAD: Sowing of 97.17 percent wheat crop for the year 2018-19 has been completed on 8.583 million hectares of land against the total target of 8.833 million hectares in the country.

A senior official of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) told this to Business Recorder. Wheat sowing in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been completed, while seven percent sowing of the crop in Sindh and around 29 percent in Balochistan is remaining, he added.

Punjab and Sindh cover around 88 percent of the total area and contribute 92 percent of the total wheat production in the country. “Out of 8.583 million hectares, Punjab has completed sowing of wheat over an area of 6.564 million hectares, Sindh 1.046 million hectares, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 0.687 million hectares, and Balochistan 0.286 million hectares,” official told.

The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) has fixed wheat crop production target at 25.572 million tonnes from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi 2018-19. Out of 25.572 million tonnes, Punjab will produce 19.5 million tonnes, Sindh 3.800 million tonnes, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 1.362 million tonnes and Balochistan will produce 0.900 million tonnes.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), cultivation of 2019 Rabi (mostly irrigated) wheat crop was completed in December 2018. Below average rains in October and November 2018 coupled with low irrigation water availabilities for the predominantly irrigated wheat crop have hampered planting operations. It said according to the Indus River System Authority (IRSA), as of October 2018, irrigation water supplies for the Rabi crops are estimated to be 40 percent below the previous 10 years average.

According to farmer advisory issued by Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), current weather is favourable for tillering of wheat crop, as cold night temperature prevails. The farmers should apply first irrigation to wheat crop after 20-25 days after sowing at tillering stage. Apply one bag of urea or one-and-a-half bag of calcium ammonium nitrate (CAN) per hectare with first irrigation. Apply second irrigation to early sown wheat crop after 65-75 days after sowing as well as apply one bag of urea or one-and-a-half bag of calcium ammonium nitrate (CAN) per hectare.

The PMD informed that a fresh westerly wave is likely to enter western parts of the country today and is likely to grip most parts of the country on Sunday. Under the influence of this weather system, widespread rains (with few moderate to isolated heavy falls) are expected in Malakand, Hazara, Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sargodha, Faisalabad and Sahiwal Divisions, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir from Sunday to Wednesday. Snowfall (moderate to heavy intensity) over hills is also expected in Malakand Division (Swat, Chitral, Kalam, Malamjabba and Upper Dir), Hazara Division, Murree and Galliyat, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan during the period.

Rain is expected at scattered places in Quetta, Zhob, Kalat, Makran, DI Khan, Bannu and DG Khan Divisions from Saturday (evening/night) to Sunday. Light rain is also expected in Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana, Bahawalpur and Multan Divisions on Sunday.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/01/19/17-page/759242-news.html

AROUND 10.4M COTTON BALES REACH GINNERIES

2019/01/19

MULTAN: As many as 10.456 million bales of seed cotton (phutti) reached ginneries across Pakistan till Jan 15, registering a shortfall of 7.74 percent compared with the corresponding period of last year.

Out of total arrivals, over 10.358 million (10,358,696) bales have undergone the ginning process, says a fortnightly report of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA), issued here on Friday.

Arrivals in Punjab were recorded at over 6.324 million (6,324,540) bales showing a 10.79 percent shortfall and over 4 million (4,132,385) bales in Sindh registering 2.66 percent shortfall compared to corresponding period of the last year.

Total sold out bales were recorded at over 8.8 million (8,810,641) bales including over 8 million (8,709,741) bales, bought by textile mills and another 100,900 bales, purchased by exporters.

Around 1.646 million (1,646,284) bales were still lying with the ginneries as unsold stock.

Sanghar district of Sindh continued to remain on top with cotton arrival figures of over 1.28 million (1,283,777) bales, while Rahimyar Khan district of Punjab secured second berth with arrival figure of 1.16 million (1,163,074) bales.—APP

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/01/19/5-page/759144-news.html

GROWERS SEEK INCREASE IN SUGARCANE PRICE

Bureau Report January 18, 2019

PESHAWAR: Sugarcane growers held a protest rally outside a sugar mill on Charsadda Road here on Thursday and demanded increase of sugarcane price up to Rs190 per 40kg. They asked the government to resolve the issue within 24 hours otherwise the farmers would again block the road on Friday (today).

The protest was led by former MPA Abdur Rehman Khan Kafordheri, Arbab Jameel Ahmed, Fazlullah Khan Daudzai and others. They were holding banners and placards inscribed with demands for solution to their demands.

The protest also caused a traffic jam on the busy thoroughfare at least for an hour, but the protesters dispersed after assurance by the local administration and MPA Jahandad Khan that the issues would be resolved at the earliest.

Speaking on the occasion the farmers' leaders said that in Sindh and Punjab provinces sugar mill owners had already implemented a decision of the Supreme Court and started payment from Rs180 to 190 per 40kg sugarcane, while in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the millers were not ready to comply with the court order.

They pointed out that the millers in Dera Ismail Khan had also agreed to pay Rs173.5 per 40kg to the farmers but in Peshawar, Mardan and Charsadda the mill owners were not paying attention to farmers' demands.

Published in Dawn, January 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1458224/growers-seek-increase-in-sugarcane-price

HUMAN DIET CAUSING GRAVE DAMAGE TO PLANET: STUDY

AFP Updated January 18, 2019

PARIS: The way humanity produces and eats food must radically change to avoid millions of deaths and "catastrophic" damage to the planet, according to a landmark study published on Thursday.

The key to both goals is a dramatic shift in the global diet — roughly half as much sugar and red meat, and twice as many vegetables, fruits and nuts, a consortium of three dozen researchers concluded in The Lancet, a medical journal.

"We are in a catastrophic situation," said co-author Tim Lang, a professor at the University of London and policy lead for the EAT-Lancet Commission that compiled the 50-page study.

One billion people are hungry while 2bn are eating too much of wrong foods, causing obesity, heart disease, diabetes

Currently, nearly a billion people are hungry and another two billion are eating too much of the wrong foods, causing epidemics of obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

Unhealthy diets account for up to 11 million avoidable premature deaths every year, according to the most recent Global Disease Burden report.

At the same time the global food system is the single largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the biggest driver of biodiversity loss, and the main cause of deadly algae blooms along coasts and inland waterways.

Agriculture — which has transformed nearly half the planet's land surface — also uses up about 70 per cent of the global fresh water supply.

"To have any chance of feeding 10bn people in 2050 within planetary boundaries" — the limits on Earth's capacity to absorb human activity — "we must adopt a healthy diet, slash food waste, and invest in technologies that reduce environmental impacts," said co-author Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Change Impact Research.

"It is doable but it will take nothing less than global agricultural revolution," Rockstrom said.

The cornerstone of "the great food transformation" called for in the study is a template human diet of about 2500 calories per day.

"We are not saying everyone has to eat in the same way," Lang said. "But broadly — especially in the rich world — it means a reduction of meat and dairy, and a major increase in plant consumption."

The diet allows for about seven grams (a quarter of an ounce) of red meat per day, and up to 14. A typical hamburger patty, by comparison, is 125 to 150 grams.

For most rich nations, and many emerging ones such as China and Brazil, this would represent a drastic five-to-ten-fold reduction.

Not only do cattle pass massive quantities of planet-warming methane, huge swathes of carbon-absorbing forests — mostly in Brazil — are cut down every year to make room for them.

"For climate, we know that coal is the low-hanging fruit, the dirtiest of fossil fuels," said Rockstrom. "On the food side, the equivalent is grain-fed beef."

It takes at least five kilograms of grain to produce a kilogram of meat.

And once that steak or lamb chop hits the plate, about 30pc will wind up in the garbage bin.

Dairy is also limited to about one cup (250grams) of whole milk — or its equivalent in cheese or yoghurt — per day, and only one or two eggs per week.

At the same time, the diet calls for a more than 100pc increase in legumes such as peas and lentils, along with vegetables, fruits and nuts.

Grains are considered to be less healthy sources of nutrients.

"We can no longer feed our population a healthy diet while balancing planetary resources," said The Lancet editor-in-chief Richard Horton.

"For the first time in 200,000 years of human history, we are severely out of sync with the planet and Nature."

The report drew heavy fire from the livestock and dairy industry, and some experts.

"It goes to the extreme to create maximum attention, but we must be more responsible when making serious dietary recommendation," said Alexander Anton, secretary general of the European Dairy Association, noting that dairy products are "packed" with nutrients and vitamins.

Christopher Snowdon of the Institute of Economic Affairs in London said the report "reveals the full agenda of nanny-state campaigners."

"We expected these attacks," said Lang. But the same food companies pushing back against these findings realise that they may not have a future if they don't adapt," he said.

"The question is: does this come by crisis, or do we start planning for it now."

Published in Dawn, January 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1458234/human-diet-causing-grave-damage-to-planet-study

POTATO EXPORT TALKS BEGINS WITH AFGHAN GOVERNMENT

FAZAL SHER | JAN 18TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has started negotiations with Afghan government to decrease 25 percent duty imposed by Afghan authorities on export of potato from Pakistan to benefit local formers and exporters. An official said that Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan during a meeting with some parliamentarian said that the government is making utmost efforts to resolve the issue of potato.

He said that Ministry of NFS&R has started coordination with provincial agriculture departments regarding the issue. The minister said that no tax is imposed on the export of potato by the government. "The issue of Afghan duty which is around 25 percent and has been imposed by Afghan authorities since 2015 also came under discussion during meeting with the parliamentarian," he said, adding that the minister said that negotiations regarding decrease in the said duty are underway with Afghan government through embassy.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190118440518/

PRE-MERGER APPLICATION OF SUGAR MILL CLEARED BY CCP

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 18TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has cleared a pre-merger application of a sugar mill for the acquisition of another sugar mill, as the transaction will not create strengthening of a dominant position in the relevant market. According to a recent order issued by the CCP, the Commission had received a pre-merger application ("Application") of a proposed acquisition pursuant to Section 11 of the Competition Act, 2010 ("Act") read with Regulation 6 of the Competition (Merger Control) Regulations, 2016 ("Merger Regulations") through which M/s AKT Sugar Mills (Private) Limited ("Acquirer") intends to acquire certain immovable and movable assets, including the mill, of M/s Gulf Sugar Mills Limited ("Seller"). All the requisite information/documents pertaining to the application was completed by the applicant on 17th December 2018.

The Commission has examined the Application as well as all the documents attached therewith, the market scenario, and its observations on the basis of independent research/investigation in the relevant market. The Phase-I competition assessment of the intended acquisition has resulted in the following findings:

The business activities of the undertakings concerned are (for the Acquirer) production and sale of sugar and by-products.

The business activities of the undertakings concerned are (For the Target) production and sale of white sugar and its by-products.

In the proposed transaction, the Acquirer intends to acquire certain immovable and movable assets, including the mill, from the seller. The mill, ie, sugar manufacturing facility/mill in Ghotki, Sindh, comprising of land and building and entire infrastructure, the sugar manufacturing plant and machinery comprised in the Mill, and some land situated in Punjab is being acquired. Currently, only the target is engaged in the relevant product market of "Manufacture & Sale of Sugar and by-products" having a geographic market identified as of "Pakistan".

At present, the seller has a market share of in Sindh. Post-transaction, the Acquirer will gain presence in the market while its sponsors will have a slight increase in their market share as they have interests in other companies involved in the relevant market.

The transaction is not likely to result in the creation or strengthening of a dominant position in the relevant market. The intended merger does not meet the presumption of dominance as determined under Section (2) (1) (e) read with Section 3 of the Competition Act 2010 ("Act"), CCP maintained.

In conclusion, the proposed transaction is not likely to substantially lessen competition through the creation or strengthening of a dominant position in the relevant market. The proposed transaction is hereby authorized under Section 31 (1) (d) (i) of the Act, the CCP added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190118440504/

MOON'S FIRST COTTON PLANT DIES A DAY LATER

By Tech Desk Published: January 17, 2019

China revealed pictures of the first cotton plant springing to life on the moon. However, the plant was short lived as it couldn't survive in freezing temperatures.

The cottonseed sprouts became the first biological matter to grow on the moon and according to the probe's biological chief designer, the plant laid the foundation for a lunar base and long-term space exploration program. The cost of taking the plant into the moon was roughly estimated at 10 million yuan (£1.15million).

The Chang'e-4 lunar probe landed on January 3 and transmitted the first-ever "close range" image of the far side of the moon. China's National Space Administration applauded the launch as a first that "lifted the mysterious veil" of the far side of the moon and claimed it as a major achievement for the country's ambitious space program.

The plant was relying on sunlight at the surface of the moon but could not make it as temperatures dropped as low as -170°C during darkness.

Night on Moon lasts for almost two weeks after which the probe would wake up again having witnessed its first lunar night since the probe landed.

"Life in the canister would not survive the lunar night," said Prof Xie Gengxin of Chongqing University who was leading the design of the experiment.

The Chang'e-4 probe's rover Yutu-2 was also put to a "midday nap" to avoid overheating when the sun was directly overhead and temperatures could be controlled.

According to The Guardian, fruit fly eggs were also placed in the canister with cottonseed. Scientists hope to create a micro-ecosystem where the plants would provide oxygen to the fruit flies which would then produce carbon dioxide required for photosynthesis. No confirmations were made by the space agency whether the eggs hatched or not.

This article originally appeared on The Guardian.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1890249/8-moons-first-cotton-plant-dies-day-later/

CHINA EXPRESSES INTEREST IN IMPORTING PAKISTANI POTATOES

By Usman Hanif Published: January 18, 2019

KARACHI: China has expressed keen interest in importing Pakistani potatoes at a time when farmers are facing a crisis due to low prices and demanding subsidy to continue to produce the crop.

"China seems to be keen to buy Pakistani potato, which is vastly encouraging," said a statement released by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research on Thursday.

The Asian superpower expressed willingness to buy the vegetable during a meeting with the Pakistani ambassador.

Recently, the potato growers staged a protest because the cost of cultivation came in at Rs9 per kg, which was over two times the price offered by middlemen. Owing to surplus production, the middlemen gave just Rs4 for one kg of potato.

In Karachi, the potato is priced close to Rs25 per kg due to the addition of the cost of transportation, fuel, labour and other expenses.

The offer from China will provide much-needed relief to the growers who are demanding subsidy.

China, which imports 1 million tons of potatoes from different countries, will begin potato import from Pakistan after sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) are complied with.

"This move will have a multidimensional impact on the growers and exporters of Pakistan," said All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) Chairman Abdul Malik. "Had this opportunity not emerged, the growers would have no other option but to bury the huge surplus quantity, thereby sustaining hefty financial losses."

The exact potato production in Pakistan could not be given but the most quoted number was 6 million tons, said Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) former vice president Waheed Ahmed.

Pakistan exports 300,000-400,000 tons annually but still it is left with a surplus quantity which causes problems for the growers.

Each year, the export of potatoes usually starts in the last week of January but this year, around 25 trucks have already gone to Kabul in the past two days, according to the Ministry of National Food Security.

The ministry, through the Department of Plant Protection (DPP), establishes a facilitation centre in Okara every year.

The purpose of this facility is to assist the exporters and streamline the cumbersome procedure.

In order to encourage the exporters, the government has lifted all the duties linked to potato exports. Pakistan exports the crop to the Central Asian countries, Russia, Malaysia, Gulf states and Sri Lanka.

Afghanistan levies around 25% duty on the Pakistani potato exported to Central Asian states via its territory. The government of Pakistan has taken up this issue with the Afghan authorities and expects to find a solution.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 18th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1890765/2-china-expresses-interest-importing-pakistani-potatoes/

GOVERNMENT VOWS TO HELP RESOLVE ISSUE OF POTATO PRICE

AAMIR SAEED | JAN 17TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government Wednesday assured potato farmers to resolve the issue of prices of their produce by consulting all stakeholders. The members of the opposition parties urged the government to buy the farmers produce through PASSCO; so that prices of the vegetable can be stabilised in the open market.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan assured the opposition members that the government was ready to address the issue of potato farmers in consultation with all stakeholders as it wanted to facilitate them.

The minister said that numerous countries including China and Belarus had shown their interest in purchasing Pakistani potato. Pakistan produces 4.4 million tonnes of potato per annum. About 3.2 million tonnes of potato is consumed in the country while 600,000 to 700,000 tonnes of potato is exported.

China had shown interest in purchasing 50,000 tonnes of Pakistani potato and Belarus wanted to buy 35,000 tonnes of potato, he informed the House.

Minister for Aviation Division Muhammad Mian Soomro informed the House that Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) was in process of finalising its strategic business plan to further improve its performance.

He said the plan would be submitted to the government in March/April 2019 that would help improve the performance of national carrier.

The minister informed the House that several profitable new routes like Sialkot-Sharjah, Lahore-Muscat, Islamabad-Doha and Lahore-Bangkok-Kuala Lumpur had been added, adding that more new routes (Sialkot-Paris-Barcelona, Peshawar-Sharjah, Peshawar-Al Ain, Multan-Sharjah and Jeddah and Medina) will commence from January and February 2019.

He said that 20-year-old and highly expensive software system had been replaced with a new one which was very cost-effective, economical and efficient. The government had terminated about 200 ghost employees, he added.

The minister said as a result of verification, 700 degrees of employees were found fake and out of which, 402 employees were terminated, adding that 35 cases were under process for disciplinary proceedings whereas 263 employees approached the court of law and sought stay orders.

Federal Minister for Communication and Postal Services, Murad Saeed informed the House that the cabinet had approved more postings of community welfare attaches in Saudi Arabia to resolve problems of overseas Pakistanis.

He said the people working abroad could approach Pakistani Embassy in Saudi Arabia round the clock to get their problems resolved. He said people who went abroad were neither getting salaries nor enjoying working conditions as agreed by their employers before their departure from Pakistan.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190117440229/

FARMERS CONTINUE PROTESTS ON MALL ROAD

By Our Correspondent Published: January 17, 2019

LAHORE: Farmers from districts across the province protested for the second day on the Mall Road on Wednesday. The protesters demanded that the government reduce the price of agriculture inputs and ensure better rates for their produce.

Farmers, primarily potato growers, staged a demonstration over the price crash of their produce. They emptied a trolley of potatoes in front of the Punjab Assembly while carrying baskets full of tubers on their heads. The farmers also shouted slogans against the government and indicated that the potatoes were a gift for the Punjab chief minister.

The protestors also set a huge stock of potatoes on fire to indicate that their commodity was of no worth in the market. They demanded that the government demand a minimum of Rs12 for a kilogramme of produce. The farmers also urged the government to reduce the prices of agriculture inputs, including fertilisers, seeds, electricity and diesel for tube wells and other raw materials. They alleged that the price of potatoes in the market is three times less than the cost price.

Speaking to the Express Tribune, farmer Allah Ditta said that the price of vegetable markets was so low that farmers were unable to cover production costs. "In some cases, the farmer cannot even recover the cost of transporting the produce to the market. The price for fresh potatoes in wholesale markets hovers between Rs600 to Rs1,100 for 100 kilogrammes while the cost of transporting the produce is usually in the thousands, depending on the distance from the farm to the market," he explained.

"Bringing our produce to the market is an additional labour and transportation cost," said Nabi Baksh, another farmer. Similarly, farmers are also not receiving a fair price for sugarcane, he claimed.

Several others maintained that the potato and sugarcane crops were rotting. As a result, we are facing financial losses amounting to hundreds of thousands of rupees. The government should provide farmers with subsidies for fertilizers and crops so that production costs can be reduced, they stated. They threatened to continue their protests for an indefinite period if their demands were not met.

Meanwhile, Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nouman Ahmad Langrial assured farmers that the government will take every possible step to prevent them from being exploited.

Langrial said that the provincial government had written a letter to the federal government for fixing the support price of potatoes at a reasonable level to prevent financial loss. He stated that it is the federal government's prerogative and the provincial government is doing its best to ensure a better price for different crops.

He added that the government also held meetings with the owners of sugar mills. Another meeting is scheduled for January 23 to ensure that all outstanding dues of sugarcane growers are paid.

He assured protestors that the government will introduce a number of schemes aimed at the welfare of farmers to bring down the input costs of different crops. He said that the Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar had constituted a committee to ensure payments to sugarcane growers. "I will take your complaint to the federal government regarding the fact that farmers are facing problems in transporting potatoes to Iran and Afghanistan", he said. The farmers called off their protest after negotiations with the government.

Official price statistics from the Punjab Agriculture Marketing Information Service reveal that the price of 100kg of potatoes at wholesale markets is Rs750 in Lahore, Rs900 in Faisalabad, Rs1,250 in Rawalpindi, Rs900 in Multan and Rs700 in Okara. All these places are major producers for potatoes in Punjab.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1890054/1-farmers-continue-protests-mall-road/

PAKISTAN'S RELIANCE ON IMPORTED COTTON ON THE RISE

By Kashif Hussain Published: January 17, 2019

KARACHI: Owing to unavailability of high quality cotton in Pakistan, the country's textile industry is becoming increasingly reliant on imported fibre.

The cotton imported from the United States has been greatly helping the textile industry cope with challenges such as high production costs and compliance requirements. Consequently, the cotton import from the US is rapidly increasing.

According to statistics released by the US cotton promoter – the Cotton Council International (CCI), the number of textile mills and garment manufacturers importing US cotton in Pakistan has greatly increased over the past six years.

In 2012, big spinning and weaving units with US licence as well as textile manufacturers including those producing yarn and fabric were limited to six or seven. The number increased to 63 by 2018. Pakistan now ranks 5th in the list of top importers of cotton from the US.

According to statistics, Pakistan's annual demand for cotton is 14 million bales while production ranges between 10 and 10.5 million bales. Pakistan is importing about 1.5 million bales from the US.

The Pakistani firms importing cotton made in the US mostly comprise spinning and weaving mills. However, the denim and garment manufacturers and knitting units are also importing American cotton. Three of the most popular retail brands in Pakistan, Gul Ahmed, Al-Karam and Nishat Chunian are also importing cotton from the US.

The US textile industry itself makes extensive use of the high-quality cotton grown at home. According to Pakistani textile industry, though the US cotton comes at a high price, the percentage of material waste is considerably low while the cost incurred on maintenance of machinery is also low, giving adequate benefits through premium prices of final products.

Speaking on sidelines of the Heimtextil fair in Frankfurt, Cotton Council International Director Supply Chain Marketing South and Southeast Asia William R Bettendrof said there were three basic qualities that distinguished the US cotton from the rest of the world – consistency in quality, strength and length of its thread.

In the US, the agriculture sector faces strict government surveillance, which is a reason for the high-standard crops. The US Agriculture Department, the agency for environmental protection, food and drug authorities and other federal state agencies monitor the sector and provide data to cotton farmers about agricultural medicines and the use of manure.

In case of non-implementation of public rules, the relevant people face civil and criminal action, which is why an effective system for long-term measures for the production of cotton is in place.

For cotton, the competition with mid-fibre is quite challenging because the artificial thread, though can be used in several ways, is a man-made invention. If dependence on the artificial thread grows, it will cause difficulty for the upcoming generations due to the rapid pollution caused by landfills, polyester fibre and synthetic fibre.

Cotton USA representative in Pakistan Mazhar Hussain Mirza told The Express Tribune that the US produced more than 20 million bales, of which 85% was exported.

Pakistan is importing 1.5 million bales from the US. Pakistan has become the fifth largest country that imports American cotton, according to a recent survey.

He said due to depreciation of the rupee, the cost of imported cotton had risen but Pakistani importers of the US cotton had been able to avoid the impact due to the premium prices.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 17th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1889868/2-pakistans-reliance-imported-cotton-rise/

ECC ALLOWS DUTY-FREE COTTON IMPORTS

Khaleeq Kiani Updated January 16, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government on Tuesday ordered immediate clearance of about Rs36 billion refund claims of exporters and allowed tax and duty-free import of cotton in addition to mandating the payment of duties and taxes on import of vehicles in foreign exchange.

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet presided over by Finance Minister Asad Umar.

In response to demands of the textile industry, the ECC approved withdrawal of customs duty, additional customs duty and sales tax on import of cotton effective Feb 1-June 30, 2019.

Mandates duties on imported vehicles to be paid in foreign exchange by overseas Pakistanis; orders settlement of Rs36bn refund claims

The step is aimed at ensuring sufficient cotton supply for textile industry – especially its export segment.

The decision was based on the plea that Pakistan had been a net cotton importer since 2001 while the domestic cotton was of short-to-medium staple length, leaving local textile manufacturers to import long and extra long staple cotton for finer yarn counts for subsequent transformation into high value-added finished products.

Import of cotton has remained duty free till the slab of 0pc was abolished in 2014-15 and custom duty of 1 per cent was imposed along with the 5pc sales tax. Later on, 1pc slab was increased to 2pc and then 3pc along with the imposition of 2pc additional duty to make it 5pc. Currently, cotton is subject to 3pc customs duty, 2pc additional customs duty and 5pc sales tax.

The prime minister’s export package was announced in Jan 2017 under which the textile sector was provided number of facilitations including withdrawal of custom duty and sales tax on imported cotton effective Jan 16, 2017.

These duties and taxes were re-imposed on July 15, 2017 to facilitate lifting of local cotton. However, these were withdrawn again effective Jan 15, 2018 and then re-imposed effective July 15, 2018.

The textile ministry had once again demanded withdrawal of these taxes and duties now saying the industry consumed around 12-15 million bales per annum while local crop this year was estimated at 10.78m bales of 170kg, showing a decrease of 9.7pc compared to last year and a decrease of 24pc against the initially fixed target of 14.37m bales.

The ECC also approved a summary of the Commerce Division seeking payment of duty and taxes on all imported vehicles in new and used condition under personal baggage or gift scheme, through foreign exchange arranged by Pakistani nationals themselves or local recipient supported by bank encashment certificate showing conversion of foreign remittance to local currency.

The government, in import policy of 2016, had allowed import of such vehicles under above schemes to facilitate overseas Pakistanis. There had, however, been complaints that the schemes were massively misused by commercial importers. As a result, the ECC on Oct 6, 2017 rationalised import schemes by ordering payment of duties taxes in foreign exchange. The abrupt policy change led to about 6,000 vehicles being stranded at seaports.

The commerce ministry proposed, as a result, that the new schemes should come into force for vehicles arriving after Feb 28, 2018 but the issue remained unsettled. Subsequent meetings between the government and various stakeholders revealed that around 5pc of cars under these schemes were imported by the bona fide overseas Pakistani.

As a result, the commerce division proposed that misuse of schemes should be prevented by introducing a change in import order 2016 that all vehicles imported under such schemes should be subjected to payment of duties in foreign exchange arranged by Pakistani nationals themselves or local recipient supported by bank encashment certificate showing conversion of foreign remittance to local currency.

The meeting also approved another summary to clear outstanding claims of drawback of local taxes and levies (DLTL) under the exports incentive scheme announced by the government under the Finance Act 2014-15. The ECC decided that cases, which were submitted in time but were pending due to want of funds, will be entertained by the government.

The meeting was told that one of the major impediments faced by export-oriented industry was the liquidity crunch due to the held up sales tax refunds and non-release of budget for the DLTL and hence, in continuation of government policy to support export sector, their liquidity should be improved by clearing the backlog of sales tax refunds and duty drawbacks as promised in the government's 100 day agenda.

The Commerce Division demanded that funds for drawback of local taxes and levies, allowed under the PM's export package, should be released by the finance ministry within one week. Verified claims worth Rs36bn were pending with the State Bank of Pakistan.

It was also suggested that going forward, sales tax refund claims and customs duty drawback may be paid by the SBP through authorised dealers immediately at the time of realisation of export proceeds.

The ECC also approved regulatory amendments in the Export Policy Order 2016 and Import Policy Order 2016 as proposed by the Commerce Division.

These will be submitted for consideration of the Federal Cabinet. The amendments are aimed at enhancing ease of doing business in the country.

Published in Dawn, January 16th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1457833/ecc-allows-duty-free-cotton-imports

CENTRE YET TO DEVOLVE LIVESTOCK AND FISHERIES DEPT TO PROVINCE, SINDH ASSEMBLY TOLD

Tahir Siddiqui Updated January 16, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly was on Tuesday informed that the livestock and fisheries department had not been completely devolved to the province under the 18th Amendment to the Constitution.

Furnishing a statement during Question Hour in the assembly, Minister for Livestock and Fisheries Abdul Bari Pitafi said that the federal government had not fully devolved all functions and assets of the department to the province.

He said that these assets included the Korangi Fish Harbour, shrimp hatchery at Hawkesbay, livestock labs and other infrastructure.

Sindh has not been given control of Korangi Fish Harbour and shrimp hatchery at Hawkesbay

The minister further said that the provincial government had taken up the matter with the inter-provincial coordination ministry for devolving the assets to the province.

“A meeting was held on December 27, 2018 in which we sought sufficient funds from the federal pool for the provincial sector,” he added.

In reply to a question, asked by Khurram Sher Zaman of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, the minister said that the provincial livestock department was engaged with the federal government for the funds to be spent on development of fisheries.

In reply to another question by Mr Zaman regarding unlawful fishing, Mr Pitafi said that the department was continuously combating against influential mafia in coastal brackish water area.

He said that more than 350 illegal nets were confiscated and cases were referred to the courts of law concerned. “About 120 illegal nets have been burnt after seeking the order from the honourable court”, he added.

The minister said that as far as the inland water was concerned regarding the illegal possession of influential people on any public water bodies, no written complaint was lodged by the bona fide fishermen in the fisheries department.

Replying to other questions, he said that the country’s first “Bio-safety Level Laboratory and Quality Enhancement Cell for Highly Virus Vaccine Development” was also being established in Karachi.

The livestock minister said that vaccines of bird flu and foot-and-mouth diseases (FMDs) of livestock would be produced in this laboratory.

He said that the scheme was initiated in 2013 with a cost of Rs 160.639 million and had to be completed by 2018. However, it suffered delays owing to “typical” way of construction of such laboratories.

“The civil work is 95 per cent completed and now just the equipment has to be installed. The laboratory would be functioning by this year,” the minister assured.

To another question asked by opposition member Nusrat Sehar Abbasi, he said that a project to control “Surra”, an infectious disease among livestock, was initiated with the cost of Rs59.883m in arid and coastal zones at Thatta, Badin, Tharparkar, Umerkot, Sanghar, Khairpur and Jamshoro.

He said that the scheme was completed in June 2018.

To a supplementary question, he said medicine sufficient for 147,000 animals was imported and as many as 25,338 camels and horses were treated.

Published in Dawn, January 16th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1457754/centre-yet-to-devolve-livestock-and-fisheries-dept-to-province-sindh-assembly-told

TCP DECIDES TO DISCARD UREA IMPORT TENDER

RIZWAN BHATTI | JAN 16TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Following the directives of the federal government, the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) has decided to scrap urea import tender as presently there is no urgency. The second urea import tender was issued by the state-run grain trader in December on the directives of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet to avoid shortage in Rabi season as domestic urea producers were unable to produce sufficient quantity of the commodity due to gas curtailment.

The state-run grain trader opened urea import tender on January 4, 2019 and received some 11 bids for urea supply. One bidder submitted a regret letter, while the remaining 10 international suppliers/bidders quoted prices ranging from $295.87 per metric ton to $309.70 per metric ton on Cost and Freight (C&F) basis.

According to bid evaluation report prepared by the TCP bid evaluation committee, out of 10 bids, some three bids, including first lowest bid were non-responsive as they were failed to fulfill the terms and conditions, sources said.

The bid evaluation committee declared first lowest bid of M/s KeyTrade non-responsive due to violation of clause 7 of the tender documents, as the validity of bank guarantee was not as per the requirement. The TCP also declared the bid of M/s MidGulf non-responsive due to non-provision of affidavit as per clause 8(b)(vi) of the urea tender.

In addition, bid of M/s Samsung C&T was also non-responsive due to non-provision of financial status report as per clause 8 (b) (vii) (ii) and NTN mismatches with authority letter.

Following the PPRA rules, the TCP displayed the bid evaluation report on its website for 10 days and accordingly, a list of the received bids was sent to federal government for consideration and subsequent views.

The bid award committee of the TCP met Tuesday and following the directives of the federal government decided to scrap the tender as presently the demand for the commodity is on decline in the domestic market and there is no urgency for import. A TCP official said that presently urea prices in the world market are unstable and witnessing a declining trend since the opening of the tender. Secondly, the import will take almost 30 to 35 days and may reach Pakistan by the end of Rabi season, therefore it was decided to scrap the tender. The validity of all received bids was some 13 days and today all the bids will also expire, he added.

The state-run grain trader had recently completed import of some 100,000 metric tons of urea to meet the domestic demand in Rabi season.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190116439876/

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE HITS MEAT EXPORT

By Our Correspondent Published: January 16, 2019

LAHORE: The export of meat has been affected by the spread of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in various districts of Punjab due to intensity of the cold weather.

The virus has become more resistant and multiplies rapidly in winter making cattle more vulnerable to the disease. Blisters appear on the hoofs and mouths of the affected cattle. Animals even die in the worst conditions. The experts said both pet and wild animals could fall prey to the virus.

The cattle traders have also revealed that animals brought to Lahore and other cattle markets across Punjab were not examined thereby spreading the virus to the other animals.

Abdul Ghaffar, a cattle dealer, shared that he and his companion had brought 30 big and small animals to the market a week ago, out of which seven got affected by the disease.

The Punjab livestock authorities said it was an epidemic and vaccines were being administered to the cattle to curb the disease. So far, 20 million animals have been vaccinated and the disease was gradually declining in the province.

Punjab Livestock and Dairy Development Minister Sardar Hasnain Darishek has said efforts were being made to eradicate the disease in the affected districts and animals have been vaccinated five times in various districts of Southern Punjab.

Ministry of National Food Security and Research has decided to commence a five-year comprehensive plan across the country to diagnose and eradicate the FMD. The veterinary experts said the disease has been affecting the cattle since the past decades. The disease did not claim any life but prevented the export of the meat of the affected animals. The annual loss caused due to the disease has exceeded $692 million.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1889238/1-foot-mouth-disease-hits-meat-export/

MINISTER INAUGURATES OSTRICH MEAT SHOP IN LAHORE

By Asif Mehmood Published: January 16, 2019

LAHORE: Minister for Livestock and Dairy Development Department Sardar Hasnain Dreshak inaugurated the University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences' ostrich meat shop located on Abdul Qadir Jilani Road on Tuesday.

University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Vice Chancellor Dr Talat Naseer Pasha and Ostrich Association of Pakistan President Raja Tahir Latif were also present on the occasion.

On Monday, the Punjab Livestock Department decided to ensure the supply of ostrich meat at butcher shops across the province, even on meatless days such as Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The department in collaboration with the University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences and Ostrich Association of Pakistan worked on the project to promote the sale of ostrich meat.

Speaking on the occasion, Dreshak said that ostrich farming is a new but profitable business. “The ostrich meat will be available on a daily basis at several departmental stores and butcher shops. Ostrich meat is more beneficial and nutritious than mutton and beef and is a good source of nutrition for people of all ages.”

The minister went on to say that the shops will carry ostrich farms names, tag numbers, number of birds and weights. Usually, 2.5-2.45 kilogrammes of meat is obtained from one ostrich. Initially, 400 farms have been registered in Punjab where 20,000 birds are kept.

The meat will be sold between Rs1,300 and Rs1,500 per kilogramme. The price of one ostrich is around Rs60,000, said the minister, adding the prices will, however, slash with the increased breeding of the birds. He further said that the government is working for the provision of standard and cheap meat to the masses. Replying to a question, the minister said that talks will be convened with the federal government regarding the export of the ostrich meat. Dreshak said the last installment of the subsidy to be given to the ostrich farms has yet to be made. The decision regarding the subsidy will be made in the next fiscal year.

Dr Pasha said that the aim of this project was to connect the consumer with the farmer and help farmers have easy access to market so that they improve their economic status.

A large number of people from civil society, officials of the livestock department and UVAS faculty members attended the event.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1889243/1-minister-inaugurates-ostrich-meat-shop-lahore/

OSTRICH FARMING ALLOWED IN SINDH, PA TOLD

Tahir Siddiqui Updated January 15, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly was informed during Question Hour on Monday that ostrich was not defined as a protected bird under the provincial wildlife laws and its farming was allowed under relevant laws.

Furnishing a statement on the floor, Forest and Wildlife Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah said that a special permission for ostrich farming was required to be obtained from the provincial authorities as for poultry farming.

He said that a private farm had been established in Thatta for ostrich farming.

In reply to a question, he said that the Rs150.97 million project of rehabilitation and improvement of wildlife sanctuaries at the Haleji Lake, Langh Lake, Thatta and Qambar could not be completed owing to paucity of funds, and added that it would be completed in June.

He said that different jobs at the Haleji Lake, including liner plantation along the inspection path, development of floating mounts, development of a pelican island, restoration of historical information centres, development of the fun area for children, restoration and repair of lavatories, restoration of the crocodile enclosure, installation of a wireless system, and construction of floating rooms, had been carried out.

In reply to another question asked by opposition member Nusrat Sehar Abbasi, the minister said that a Rs50m project for habitat restoration and development of water harvesting facilities at the KNP, Karachi, and Jamshoro was expected to be completed by June 2019.

However, he added, the project's date of completion had been extended by two years because of paucity of funds.

Answering a question by opposition member Arif Mustafa Jatoi, the minister said the Pai Forest in Shaheed Benazirabad had been declared a game reserve.

He said that hunting was not allowed in the Pai Forest, but the government was empowered to relax the rules and issue permits for hunting in special cases.

In reply to another question, Mr Shah furnished details of the year-wise allocation and utilisation of the budget for plantation and rehabilitation of forests during the past five years.

The minister said Rs612m was allocated in 2017-18.

Giving answer to a question, he said that the local fishermen were catching Indus blind dolphin as previously the Sindh fisheries department was issuing fishing permits for the catch.

He said that the population of the endangered species had remarkably increased since 2014 when the issuance of fishing licences by the SFD was finally stopped with efforts of the Sindh wildlife department.

The minister also told the house on a question by opposition member Arsalan Taj Hussain that 12 different species were declared endangered in the province. They were: Sindh ibex, Afghan urial, Indian wolf, honey badger, mugger, or marsh crocodile, gharial, or gavial, smooth-coated Indian otter, Indus blind dolphin, greater flamingo, freshwater turtles, hog deer (axis porcinus) and chinkara deer.

He said that several steps had been taken to conserve the endangered species. The steps, he said, included the establishment of a series of protected areas such as National Park, 34 wildlife sanctuaries and 13 game reserves for protection, conservation and management of endangered wildlife species.

Besides, the minister said, the Sindh Turtles and Tortoise Protection, Conservation and Compensation Rules 2014 had been enacted to ensure the conservation and protection of turtles in the province.

Published in Dawn, January 15th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1457588/ostrich-farming-allowed-in-sindh-pa-told

WORKER DIES IN CLASH NEAR PAKPATTAN FARM

Shafiq Butt Updated January 14, 2019

SAHIWAL: A farm worker was killed and 16 others were injured in a 'clash and exchange of fire' between the administration of Baiel Gunj Military Stud Farm and tenants, commonly called Mazareen, in Pakpattan district on Saturday evening.

The clash reportedly erupted over the removal of a 'dysfunctional' power transformer which fed a tube well irrigating the farmland.

Villagers in the nearby farm claimed that heavy firing was heard for 50 minutes. Sources said that 13 tenants and four security personnel of the farm were injured in the clash.

Rescue 1122 sources confirmed that they shifted the injured to the Baiel Ganj Basic Health Unit and the Pakpattan DHQ Hospital.

Pakpattan Health Authority CEO Imtiaz Rana told the media that emergency was declared in the DHQ Hospital. The sources said Mamshad Ahmed, son of Haji Manzoor, succumbed to his wounds sustained in the clash.

As police did not reportedly register the case, some 500 residents and Mazareen from Farid Nagar Colony, adjacent to the farm, marched in protest towards the Pakpattan police chief office.

Carrying the worker’s body, the protesters demanded the registration of an FIR against the culprits.

Later, the protesters assembled outside the deputy commissioner’s office where the sit-in continued for over four hours.

Sources in police confirmed that the DPO office had to call reserve police force to avoid any possible clash around the farm. They said the road connecting Pakpattan with Deepalpur and Kasur had been closed.

The sit-in ended when ¬a three-member committee comprising Deputy Com¬mis¬sioner Ahmed Kamal Maan, DPO Mariya Mah¬mood and SP Investigation Syed Abbas Shah met the protest leaders.

Mr Maan told Dawn by phone that the protesters dispersed after an assurance that FIR would be registered under the law.

DPO office spokesperson Asif said the body was taken to the DHQ Hospital for autopsy.

Rai Khizer Hayat, the station house officer of Chak Badiyain police station, told Dawn that the FIR was being registered.

He said that a murder case was being registered on the compliant of Mohammad Akbar against 13 men belonging to the security administration of the military farm.

Published in Dawn, January 14th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1457462/worker-dies-in-clash-near-pakpattan-farm

FRANCE, PAKISTAN ENJOY EXCELLENT TIES IN EDUCATION, AGRI SECTORS

RECORDER REPORT 2019/01/14

FAISALABAD: French Embassy Counsellor for Cooperation and Cultural Affairs Andre de Bussy has said that France and Pakistan are enjoying excellent educational and agricultural ties.

He called on University of Agriculture Faisalabad Vice Chancellor Dr Zafar Iqbal Randhawa at VC Chamber. Faculty of Food, Nutrition and Home Sciences Dean Dr Masood Sadiq Butt and Dr Rizwan also attended the meeting.

Andre de Bussy also stressed upon the need to further strengthening agricultural, academic, textile and cultural ties to get benefit from each other experiences that will help combat the common challenges. He said that they would help UAF promote Cheese culture. He said that French language courses being offered at UAF will help raise understandings among the people.

UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Zafar Iqbal Randhawa said that the university was having the faculty of 700 and out of which 480 faculty members are PhDs. He said the majority of the university doctors had studied abroad. He said that they were setting up different clubs of foreign qualified faculty members of Europe, America and China so that they can interact with the experts of country where they studied and contribute their effective role to address the challenges and problems. He said that UAF ties with educational and research institutions were being further boosted.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/01/14/13-page/758539-news.html

DEMAND FOR FRESH FISH SURGES WITH INTENSE WEATHER

By Our Correspondent Published: January 14, 2019

LAHORE: Citizens flocked fish selling points in the metropolis as the demand for fresh fish has surged with the intensity of cold weather.

Winter brings with it an increase in the demand for fish and fresh catch, not usually available during the rest of the year.

In Lahore, there is a market known for selling stale fish and it is easily available in the city but now the fresh fish is also available on the streets of the provincial capital. People can choose an alive fish from a water tank and buy it. The white meat can be used in many ways including making a curry of it or frying it in the oil. The vendors selling fresh fish can be seen on Lahore Ring Road, Aziz Bhatti Road, GT Road and Bedian Road.

Mohammad Javaid, a buyer, said only a person who had eaten a fresh fish before could know the real taste of it. One of the ways to check the freshness of a fish is that if the skin is slightly pushed with a finger it would return to its original shape again. There are several kinds of fish including Kala Rahu fish available on live fish selling point on Zarar Shaheed Road in Lahore. The rate hovers around Rs300 per kilogramme.

Hafiz Shahid, a fish seller, said he buys fish from a farm and keep them into a water tank. In the fish market, one can buy all types of fish caught from river or sea. However, alive and fresh fish is available at the makeshift selling points only.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1887791/1-demand-fresh-fish-surges-intense-weather/

COUNTRY NEEDS BETTER KINNOW VARIETIES TO COMPETE GLOBALLY

By DR MUHAMMAD KHURSHID Published: January 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan grows citrus fruit over an area of 206,569 hectares in all the four provinces with total production of around 2.5 million tons as per 2015-16 statistics.

Punjab produces over 98% of the fruit mainly in Sargodha district because of its favourable growing conditions and adequate canal and sub-soil water. Kinnow constitutes 80% of the citrus fruit and is a major export commodity.

Application of modern techniques and traditional practices at all stages of growth and during the post-harvest phase can not only add value to the fruit which attracts premium prices but can also increase exports which fetch foreign exchange.

Citrus Research Institute Sargodha is responsible for undertaking research and development work on kinnow and other citrus varieties, besides the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc).

Pakistan is the 12th largest producer of kinnow in the world but the fruit is losing its vigour in the country because of diseases, low yield, poor quality and lack of international compatibility with the much liked seedless kinnow. Pakistan may lose even the existing export markets if challenges are not adequately and timely addressed.

Like other crops, the citrus is also attacked by a variety of insects, pests and diseases. Some of these insects, pests and diseases not only affect quality and quantity of the produce, but also hurt the plant life. That is why Pakistani citrus orchards have a lower life cycle as compared to other citrus growing countries.

Major damage to the citrus fruit in Pakistan is caused by canker, melanose and scab. Other insects and diseases include leaf miner, peel miner, psylla, lemon butterfly, black fly, white fly, fruit fly, mealy bug, etc.

Although all these pre-harvest diseases can easily be controlled through sustainable integrated pest management in fields and post-harvest, no serious and immediate efforts have so far been made by the agriculture departments, growers and other stakeholders like the academia, scientists, donor agencies and input suppliers.

The most alarming issues faced by the growers and exporters are the loss of vigour and quality of the existing kinnow germplasm. The Mandarin variety's germplasm was introduced in Pakistan in 1950, which has now lost its vigour and quality not only in terms of production, but also in relation to immunity from diseases.

There is no dedicated citrus breeding centre in the main growing area of Sargodha and the nursery stock obtained from existing mother trees is weak, infested with diseases and is of inferior quality. Therefore, the orchards established with the help of such saplings are not good for getting higher yields and producing quality kinnow.

Owing to this, the available quantity for exports will decrease, which may lead to the loss of overseas markets and foreign exchange earnings. Three kinnow varieties namely Kinnow LS (less seed), Pumpkin and Mandarin are grown the world over, particularly in Egypt, Turkey, Spain, China and the US, but Pakistan has a very old and weak germplasm of kinnow and it needs to develop hybrid varieties.

In addition to this, Pakistani kinnow is heavily infested with canker and scab diseases, which greatly affect its quality and production. If adequate remedial measures are not taken, the kinnow production may vanish in a couple of decades.

Water shortage is another major challenge as canal water is getting scarce and underground water is mostly salty. Citrus requires water in February, May, June, November and December. From November through February, canal water is not available due to their closure for annual cleaning. In May and June, most of the available water goes to the paddy crop.

Increasing cost of inputs including the labour, coupled with a short harvest period, also affects the production and trade. The quality of exportable harvest is affected by unskilled labour, improper post-harvest handling, inadequate cold chains, poor transportation facilities and weak capacity to comply with phytosanitary and quarantine regulations.

Citrus growers in Sargodha have reported a poor outreach programme of the Agricultural Extension Department. Lack of awareness among the growers of selecting and planting quality saplings, lack of proper traditional practices like pruning, field operation, timely watering, disease control and other operations may lead to the loss of yield as well as quality output.

For harvest and post-harvest operations, trained labour is essential as their absence increases chances of disease attacks on the damaged fruit even before packaging and transportation. Mechanical pressure during harvest, transportation and improper handling of the fruit during plucking, transportation and packaging also lead to the loss of quality.

The Department of Plant Protection (DPP) is mandated to meet the quarantine and phytosanitary requirements under the International Plant Protection Convention and the World Trade Organisation. The DPP has established a kinnow export facilitation office at Bhalwal and this has greatly helped in swift inspection and issuance of export permits at the doorsteps of exporters.

The institutional issues related to the shortage of professional staff, capacity building of professionals and logistics should be adequately addressed to further improve the DPP’s efficiency.

Pakistan enjoys the best soil and ecological conditions for kinnow and citrus production. The total production of 2.5 million tons without any major outside support speaks volumes about the existing potential.

Kinnow has emerged as an important export commodity as Pakistan exported a record 370,000 tons amounting to $222 million in 2017 compared to 325,000 tons in 2016. Kinnow exports are increasing every year and they can be further raised by supporting the growers through provision of improved germplasm and seedless varieties, improved orchard management, post-harvest quality control and enhanced phytosanitary and quarantine inspection and facilitation.

There is a need to quickly initiate the development of improved varieties and for the purpose, Parc as well as the Citrus Research Institute Sargodha and provincial agriculture departments should join hands.

The introduction of seedless varieties from abroad could also enable increased and sustainable production of kinnow for enhanced trade. Agriculture departments are required to engage the farmers and develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing the priority issues in the short term and follow a long-term strategy for citrus development on a sustainable basis aimed at increasing exports. There is a need to identify the growers, prepare a database and develop a platform involving the growers, exporters and traders for listening to grievances of the growers and exporters.

Awareness campaigns should be kicked off about field practices, harvest and post-harvest handling, transportation and processing through an integrated and coordinated programme involving all the stakeholders.

The writer is a PhD in natural resource management and is a civil servant

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1887680/2-country-needs-better-kinnow-varieties-compete-globally/

FARMERS – A NEGLECTED LOT FOR DECADES

By Zafar Bhutta Published: January 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is an agriculture-based economy but farmers have been neglected for decades due to pro-industry policies of successive governments.

The 2013-18 tenure of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government proved quite damaging for the agriculture sector when it posted a negative growth and cotton production hit its lowest in recent history.

During the PML-N's five-year administration, the focus had mainly been on textile tycoons while the farmers were at the mercy of these businessmen. In 2015-16, the agriculture sector recorded a negative growth of 0.19% against growth projection of 3.9%, which indicated the lack of attention paid to the farm sector.

That government also allowed cotton import from India at zero duty, benefitting Indian farmers and domestic textile millers whereas local growers continued to suffer.

Cotton production had been virtually stagnant since 1991-92, fluctuating in a range of 10 to 12 million bales annually. The harvest fell to 9.9 million bales in 2015-16 compared to average consumption of 15 million bales, turning Pakistan a net cotton importer.

A committee listed different causes for the stagnant cotton harvest, which included the use of old first-generation rather than fourth-generation Bt technology, absence of better quality seeds, lack of measures to tackle cotton leaf curl virus, low processing quality at ginning factories and high contamination levels in the produce. These factors brought down the income of cotton farmers and led to a 20% reduction in the area planted with the crop from 2004 to 2016.

In 2016, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) urged the then government to immediately impose an agriculture emergency and address the challenges faced by the farmers. Later, when the PTI came to power in August 2018, its government decided to declare an agriculture emergency as part of its programme of first 35 initiatives under the first 100 days of administration in a bid to ensure a decent income for the farmers.

The government has formed a task force for the sector comprising Finance Minister Asad Umar, Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile and Industry Abdul Razak Dawood and Minister for Foreign Affairs Shah Mahmood Qureshi. Another task force has also been constituted to help improve the livestock sector and undertake necessary reforms. The minister for national food security will work on the livestock sector.

However, the government has so far failed to address the major challenges encountered by the farmers, who have a dominant share in the economy as they produce many key crops. Cartels and mafias have influenced power corridors as many industries are now receiving subsidies.

The fertiliser industry is getting subsidised gas but urea prices have been increased, which has raised the cost of inputs for the farmers.

Separately, the textile industry has started receiving electricity from the national grid at a subsidised tariff. The powerful lobby has also managed to get a subsidy of Rs25 billion on gas supply to their captive power plants.

However, when the Ministry of National Food Security and Research presented a case to the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) for raising the wheat support price, the rate was kept at the same level of Rs1,300 per 40 kg, which had been in place for the last four years.

The government also allowed sugar barons the export of sweetener but it was linked with clearance of outstanding bills of the farmers. However, sugar millers refused to start the crushing season unless that condition was withdrawn, forcing the PTI government to remove the condition.

This is a tale of continued suffering for the farmers. The PTI government has so far not managed to take revolutionary measures under the agriculture emergency to improve the condition of deprived farmers, particularly the small ones.

The farming community had been left at the mercy of cartels in the past and nothing significantly different is being witnessed under the current government. If the same challenges persist, the time is not far when the country will start facing food insecurity.

The writer is a staff correspondent

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1887681/2-farmers-neglected-lot-decades/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 7th TO JANUARY 13th 2019

FOOD PRICES CRAWL UP AHEAD OF MINI-BUDGET

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated January 13, 2019

KARACHI: Retailers have pushed up prices of essential food items including sugar and vegetables prices ahead of the mini-budget which will be announced on Jan 23.

Sugar now costs Rs60 per kg versus Rs55 per kg a few days ago following an increase in the wholesale price to Rs57-58 per kg from Rs55 per kg. Two months ago, the wholesale price of sugar was Rs52-53 per kg.

Retailers with old stocks of sweetener are now taking full advantage of the fresh price hike in wholesale markets and are demanding Rs5 per kg more from consumers.

Talking to Dawn, Patron-in-Chief Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association (KWGA) Anis Majeed said the issue of late cane crushing and reports of low sugarcane crop can be blamed for the recent price hike.

The price may remain under pressure as a number of mills have yet to start cane crushing over price dispute, he said. However, he ruled out any shortage of sugar in the wholesale market.

Mr Majeed feared further price shocks in case the government raises import duties on raw materials and finished items in the mini budget.

Pakistan's sugar exports plunged to 182,142 tonnes ($55.5 million) in 5MFY19 from 320,593 tonnes ($129m) in same period last year. In FY18, sugar exports swelled to $1.469m tonnes ($508m) from 307,348 tonnes ($161m) in FY17. Sugar production fell by seven per cent to 6.565m tonnes in FY18 from 7.048m tonnes in FY17.

The price of Nestle tea whitener 950 gram pack went up to Rs865 from Rs825 while 375 grams pack now costs Rs425 as against Rs400. The company did not mention any reason of price rise in a letter issued to retailers.

Despite the ongoing winter season, soft drink manufacturers have also increased the prices of beverages.

The price of one litre and 1.5 litre cola bottles produced by two main beverage makers surged by Rs5 per bottle, followed by Rs 10 increase for jumbo bottles.

Vegetables become expensive

Not to be left out, vegetable retailers are making huge windfalls by charging over 100 per cent profit from consumers on wholesale rates.

The retail price of onion is now Rs 30 per kgm from Rs 25 per kg earlier on. In Sabzi Mandi, wholesale price of onion hovers between Rs10-15 per kg.

The same situation exists for potato. The retail price of the root vegetable has been raised to Rs30 per kg from Rs20 per kg, while its wholesale price hovers between Rs10-12 per kg.

Tomato can be purchased at Rs40 per kg which was selling at Rs 20-30 per kg. Its wholesale price is Rs 20-25 per kg.

President Falahi Anjuman Wholesale Vegetable Market New Sabzi Mandi Super Highway Haji Shahjehan said retailers are depriving consumers from taking benefit of low rates of Sindh's onion and tomato crop and Punjab's potato crop.

Transportation charges have definitely increased due to Rs23 per kg hike in CNG rates coupled with diesel and LPG prices which have pushed up the cost of living for everyone, he said.

Cucumber and turrai now sell at Rs80 per kg which were priced Rs40-50 per kg. Lokki and tinday are now available at Rs60 and Rs80 per kg as against Rs40 per kg each few days back. Shimla mirch (capsicum) prices moved up to Rs80 from Rs60 per kg. Bhindi (lady finger) is available at Rs120 as against Rs80 per kg.

A retailer said tomato prices are rising as the vegetable could not ripe due to low temperatures. As a result, unripe tomatoes are being sold in the market in larger quantities.

Published in Dawn, January 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1457186/food-prices-crawl-up-ahead-of-mini-budget

SUGARCANE GROWERS CRITICISE NON-IMPLEMENTATION OF COURTS ORDER

AMJAD ALI SHAH 2019/01/13

PESHAWAR: Sugarcane growers have expressed serious concern over the government's failure to implement courts order regarding payment of the sugarcane price to the farmers and warned to agitate after three days if the mills owners did not clear their dues.

Talking to this scribe here, the leaders of Farmers' Alliance said that in Punjab province the sugar mills owners were paying from Rs 180 to 190 for per 40-kg sugarcane to the farmers while in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the growers at the disposal of millers. The millers are looting the farmers at their free will as the price fixed by the Supreme Court was also not paid to them.

The agriculture, they said was stated to be backbone of the country's economy but despite that it was the most neglected sector because the farmers were not given any kind of incentive/financial support to increase the agriculture produce.

About the growing prices of fertilizers and agriculture tools, machinery, the farmers said that this sector had never been a priority of the successive governments and thus farmers were also switching over to other professions.

"We have given three days ultimatum to the millers to clear our dues within three days as per decision of the Supreme Court which had already fixed sugarcane per maund price at Rs 180 otherwise the farmers will start observing sit-in outside Khazana Sugar Mills Peshawar," Abdur Rehman Khan, a grower said.

Another farmer Jameel Khan said that if the government was really sincere to improve agriculture sector then it should provide incentives to the farmers to encourage them.

How the farmers will improve the agriculture when they are not given fertilizer at reasonable price, irrigation water at the proper time," he said and asked the government to provide interests-free agriculture loans to the farmers on easy installments.

Another leader of growers and Pakistan Muslim League-N provincial joint secretary Israrullah Khan said that the people of different sections of society including farmers had badly suffered due to the menace of terrorism and now it was government's duty to support the affected people.

He said that most of the population in rural areas had to depend on agriculture but they could not improve it unless the government announces sufficient facilities/ incentives for them. He suggested that agriculture department should play its role effectively to encourage the farmers by providing them with facilities including quality seeds, necessary training so that they could increase agriculture produce in respective localities.

Israrullah also asked for construction of form to market roads to help the farmers transport their produce to the markets easily on minimum charges.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/01/13/1-page/758329-news.html

LOWER PRICES OF AGRO PRODUCTS COSTING HEAVILY ON FARMERS

Mehtab Haider January 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's neglected farm sector is facing a crisis-like situation as produce of different crops have witnessed lowest ever surge in prices in domestic market at a time when cost of their inputs is skyrocketing.

The prices of tomato, potato, onion and other farm produce have witnessed lowest ebb after which the urban class is getting cheaper products, but it's costing heavily to the farmers living in rural areas as they are unable to recover cost of their production.

Actually the middleman is earning money as they are getting farm produce at cheapest rates and selling in urban areas at higher rates.

The food prices have become flat exactly at zero percent increase in December 2018 compared to the same month of the previous year, making it quite difficult for the neglected agriculture sector farmers to even recover cost of their inputs as prices of diesel, fertiliser and pesticides have gone up enormously especially in last few months.

According to official data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) as well as official documents, food-based prices in December 2018 witnessed 0.05 percent increase compared to the same month of 2017.

The food prices touched almost zero percent increase, making it difficult for farmers to recover their cost.

"The crisis like situation is brewing up for agriculture sector in Pakistan where prices of their produce have witnessed lowest ebb despite the fact that the cost of production has gone up enormously," official sources told The News. The food prices witnessed negative 1.4 percent in December 2018 in compared to November 2018. The sharp decline in prices of farm sector has started impacting overall economic activities in rural areas as sale of motorcycles witnessed major decline in recent months of the current fiscal year.

In the last cabinet meeting when briefing was given on the CPI-based inflation, two federal ministers raised objections over the prices data arguing that it did not match with the ground realities.

When minister for planning showed that the inflation was impacting higher quintile group severely then it was mentioned that people having more income were affected by higher increase in prices of different commodities and services on which the PBS captured data of these products to gauge inflationary pressures.

In first six months period, from July-December 2018-19, with average CPI-based inflation of 6.2 percent, the transport prices witnessed highest surge of 17.7 percent on average against 3.7 percent in the same period of the last financial year 2017-18. Secondly, the education expenses went up by 12.1

percent in first half of the current fiscal compared to 11.1 percent in the same period of the last financial year.

Contrary to education, the health inflation decreased and witnessed surge of 7.4 percent in July-Dec period of the current fiscal year against 11.4 percent in the same period of the last year.

The CPI-based inflation on recreation and culture witnessed upward trends as its prices have gone up by 7.7 percent in July-Dec period of the current fiscal against 0.4 percent surge recorded in same period of the last financial year.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/418247-lower-prices-of-agro-products-costing-heavily-on-farmers

CHINA TO IMPORT POTATOES: ENVOY

Amin Ahmed Updated January 12, 2019

ISLAMABAD: China plans to import potatoes from Pakistan, said Ambassador Yao Jing on Friday.

The envoy in a meeting with Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan said his country will shortly send a delegation to Islamabad to finalise arrangements and fulfilling the requirements sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS).

He said that Beijing wants to import more from Pakistan, especially food items are cherries, potato, wheat, citrus, rice and mangoes. China wants to build stronger socio-economic ties with Pakistan on the basis of reciprocity, he added.

Pakistan’s annual potato yield currently stands at around 4.2 million tonnes as against domestic requirement is 3.75m tonnes – leaving a sizable surplus. About 97 per cent of the vegetable is grown in Punjab while the rest in other provinces.

The fresh crop of potato, which hit the local market in early December 2018, will be ready for export by the end of January prior to the visit of Chinese delegation.

The country has already taken steps to promote the export of cotton for which a facilitation centre for exporters is already operational in Okara.

The envoy informed Sultan that hybrid rice seed experts from Pakistan will soon be invited to see and monitor the facilities in China.

The minister told Jing that the Pakistani government will soon make a decision on the import of Chinese hybrid rice seed.

Over the recent past, 29 rice hybrids were received from the Hubei Provincial Seed Group of China by Pakistan Agriculture Research Council, and tested at the Rice Research Institute at Dokri, Larkana. Eight of them were found promising with paddy yield of more than 100 maunds per acre.

At the institute, various local varieties were being converted for the development of indigenous rice hybrids. The Rice Research Programme has so far acquired more than 22,500 lines from the International Rice Research Institute in Philippines which are high-yielding with desirable grain quality.

The establishment of foot and mouth disease (FMD) free zone in Pakistan was also discussed and Sultan invited Chinese experts to visit three districts of Punjab which have been identified as FMD-free.

The minister informed the envoy that the first meeting of the joint working group created to implement the memorandum of understanding signed during Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to China in November will take place in Islamabad next month to explore areas of cooperation between the two countries in agricultural sector.

Chinese assistance to set up the FMD vaccine plant in Pakistan will be among the agenda of the group's meeting, the minister said.

Jing informed Sultan that Chinese companies are interested to come to Pakistan and set up special economic zones with agriculture being one of the six major areas identified by Chinese government.

Sultan told the envoy that the two countries could identify and start working on areas of mutual benefit in the field of agriculture prior to the 'Belt and Road Conference' scheduled to open on April 27 in China.

Published in Dawn, January 12th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1457008/china-to-import-potatoes-envoy

WHEAT TO BE EXPORTED WITHOUT SUBSIDY

RIZWAN BHATTI /2019/01/12

KARACHI: After a gap of 10 years, Pakistani wheat will be exported without subsidy as a number of bidders have agreed to procure commodity at higher than minimum price fixed by PASSCO.

In order to offload the stocks of wheat before arrival of new crop, Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet allowed the export of some 0.1 million tons of wheat. Accordingly, Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation (PASSCO) invited bids for the sale of commodity and fixed a minimum price of Rs 32,500 per metric ton. In response to the wheat export tender some 42 bidders/ exporters submitted bids for export of commodity. Out of total participants, some 12 bidders agreed to procure commodity without subsidy and at higher than minimum price fixed by PASSCO.

The highest bid was received from M/s Abdul Wasey Floor Mills, which was agreed for procurement of 10,000 tons wheat at Rs 32,759 per metric tons compared to minimum price of Rs 32,500 per metric ton. M/s Chappal Traders and M/s LP Trading Company were the second highest bidders as both quoted Rs 32,666 per metric ton for 25,000 metric tons and 10,000 metric ton respectively.

M/s D.D Ship breaker was the third highest and offered to procure 25,000 metric tons of wheat at Rs 32,629 per metric ton. M/s M.M Commodities quoted Rs 32,627 per metric ton for 25,000 metric tons, M/s Chappal Enterprises Rs 32,556 per metric ton for 10,000 metric tons, Conwill Pakistan Limited Rs 32,529 per metric ton for a quantity of 25,000 metric tons, M/s Sindh Feed and Allied Products Rs 32,524 per metric ton for 25,000 metric tons and M/s Meskey and Femtee Trading Co. Rs 32,517 per metric ton for procurement of 25,000 metric tons.

In addition, M/s Garib Sons Pvt. offered Rs 32,513 per metric ton for 25,000 metric tons, M/s Abu Bilal Trading Rs 32,512 per metric ton for 25,000 metric tons and M/s Tahhar International quoted Rs

32,506 per metric ton for 25,000 metric tons. While, the remaining bids were less than the minimum price fixed by the PASSCO.

Sources said that previously over 2 million tons of wheat was exported at subsidies ranging from $155 per metric ton to $159 per metric ton due to lower international price. However, with increasing prices of wheat in the world market and rupee devaluation, exporters have agreed to export commodity without government subsidy.

Currently, average wheat price in the international market is about $240 per metric ton compared to $210 per metric ton previously. The export of wheat without subsidy will be initiated after a gap of ten years, sources said.

Sources said that as per tender term and condition, as bidders were required to submit bids accompanied by 2 percent Earnest Money of the total value of the bid amount in shape of Bank Draft/Pay Order/Cashier’s Cheque/Banker’s Cheque

The successful bidder will be required to sign an agreement for the demanded quantity of wheat within seven days after issuance of acceptance letter. To sign the agreement, the bidder will be required to deposit further 3 percent to complete the 5 percent Performance Money requirement.

Sources said that some bidders have deposited bids less than 2 percent of earnest money and as per tender term these bids will not be entertained.

The successful bidders (Highest Rate) will have to deposit total value of the bid stock and lift the entire contracted quantity within 30 days and minimum 40 percent of contracted wheat stock must be lifted within first 15 days of lifting period or up to extended time approved by the Competent Authority (MD PASSCO) upon request of the bidder with cogent reasons on “case to case” basis, after signing of agreement.

Successful bidders can lift the stocks from designated PASSCO Centers in packets of 1,000 metric tons by depositing full amount equivalent to 1,000 metric tons. Currently PASSCO is evaluating the bids and the tender will be awarded in the next few days, sources said.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/01/12/1-page/758163-news.html

DELEGATION VISITS KCCI MEAT EXPORTS TO MALAYSIA SUGGESTED

RECORDER REPORT 2019/01/12/

KARACHI: Malaysian Economic Adviser Haji Roslin Abdul Rehman has urged the business community of Pakistan to seriously explore the possibility of exporting meat to Malaysia which is $2 billion meat market where 76 percent of meat is being imported from numerous countries.

“Pakistan and Malaysia can also develop a joint global brand for Halal meat export,” Malaysia Terengganu Province’s economic adviser said, in a meeting with members of Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry where a Malaysian delegation visited.

The adviser informed that half of the demand for meat in Malaysia is being fulfilled by importing meat from Australia, Brazil, New Zealand, India, China and Thailand, which are all non-Muslim countries. He noted with concern that not a single container of meat is being exported from Pakistan despite the fact that both Muslim countries have been enjoying excellent brotherly relations for many years," he said.

Haji Roslin told the KCCI members it was a very good opportunity for Pakistani meat exporters and they must collaborate with Malaysian business community to effectively penetrate the Malaysian market where only 24 percent meat is supplied locally. He said after visit by his Pakistani counterpart, now Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Bin Mohamad would be visiting Pakistan in March 2019. "Malaysian Ministers for Religion and Agriculture will also be here and they may endorse any Pakistani slaughter house or any meat processing factory intending to export meat to Malaysia," he said.

KCCI president Junaid Esmail Makda assured the delegates that the Karachi Chamber would certainly encourage exporters to dispatch meat to Malaysia and would also carry out a study to examine and identify the irritants responsible for zero export of meat from Pakistan to Malaysia.

"Any irritant that the study to reveal hindering meat trade between Pakistan and Malaysia, will certainly be brought to the notice of Federal Ministry of Commerce with a request to take steps for resolving the same to facilitate the exports of meat to Malaysia," he said.

Makda further said that the meat industry of Pakistan entered the world markets long ago and its red meat is in great demand particularly in Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries.

He said that the production of quality meat is directly linked with livestock, being produced in Pakistan. With agriculture as its backbone, Pakistan is said to be the fifth largest livestock producer in the world, he said.

KCCI president said that both countries share healthy bilateral relations based on cooperation in different economic spheres particularly in trade and investment. "In 2017, goods exported to Malaysia were merely $166.48 million while the imports worth $1,167.13 million indicate huge trade imbalance in favour of Malaysia by $1 billion," he said.

Makda said that KCCI wants to strengthen trade ties and explore new bilateral trade prospects with Malaysia. "We believe Pakistan's improved relations and enhanced trade with brotherly countries such as Malaysia would ensure prosperity and create a win-win situation for both the countries," he said, adding that Malaysian companies can choose between setting-up a liaison office, branch office or incorporate a Pakistani company as either its wholly owned subsidiary or joint venture with a Pakistani/overseas partner.

He opined that there was a huge potential for joint ventures and investment in the areas of Islamic Finance, Halal food industries, energy sector, low cost housing, infrastructure development, telecommunications and education, etc.

KCCI vice president Asif Sheikh Javaid, chairman of its Diplomatic Missions and Embassies Liaison Subcommittee Shamoon Zaki, ex-VP Agha Shahab Ahmed Khan and KCCI Managing Committee members also attended the meeting.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/01/12/13-page/758247-news.html

CHINA WANTS TO BUY CHERRIES, POTATO AND WHEAT FROM PAKISTAN

By Our Correspondent Published: January 12, 2019

ISLAMABAD: China is keen on building stronger socio-economic ties with Pakistan and is interested in importing more from the country, said Chinese Ambassador Yao Jing.

In a meeting with Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, he elaborated that cherries, potato, wheat, citrus, rice and mangoes were the most desirable food items.

He said that China will formally invite Pakistani experts to monitor the hybrid rice seed expertise of China and the facility.

Also speaking on the occasion, the minister said that it is heartening that both countries have signed free trade agreement (FTA), which has facilitated expansion of bilateral trade.

Sultan said, “We are moving ahead to collaborate in achieving foot and mouth (FMD) free zone and a memorandum of requirements for the establishment of FMD free zone is currently being negotiated by both sides.” He added, “We believe in ease of doing business and if we collaborate for the elimination of FMD it will boost our meat export to China.”

Talking further on the issue, he said that they could identify areas of mutual benefit in the field of agriculture and begin work before the belt and road conference in April. He said they would welcome experts in cotton, rice, cage culture fisheries and citrus to Pakistan. “We are open to learn as our ultimate goal is to move towards food security, zero hunger and ultimately poverty alleviation.”

It is pertinent to mention that on the request of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research the Chinese side organised specialised training programmes on hybrid rice technology.

On the request of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, it was agreed that China would urgently initiate the process of potato export to China after fulfilling the SPS requirements. It was agreed that a delegation of experts would soon visit Pakistan to finalise the arrangements.

Sultan remarked that they looked forward to the implementation of the agreement signed during Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit to China and discussing matters of mutual benefits during the Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting due to be held in February this year in Pakistan.

He expressed satisfaction that bilateral relations are growing in the right direction and will be in mutual interest of both the countries.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 12th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1886323/2-china-wants-buy-cherries-potato-wheat-pakistan/

CEREAL PRODUCTION SHRANK IN 2018

The Newspaper’s Reporter January 11, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The aggregate cereal output of the country during the 2018 cropping season — including wheat, paddy rice and maize — fell by six per cent to an estimated average level of 42 million tonnes.

According to a Pakistan-specific report of the Global Information and Early Warning System released by United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, output slipped from record levels in 2017, when bumper yields were achieved due to favourable weather conditions and adequate input supplies, including irrigation water supplies and good access to fertilisers and other basic inputs.

The publication issued on Wednesday says that planting of the Rabi wheat crop completed last month, and below average rains in October and November, coupled with low irrigation water availabilities for the predominantly irrigated wheat, have hampered planting operations.

Official data from early last month indicated that 8m hectares were planted with wheat — 9pc below last year's near-average level. In December, the Pakistan Meteorological Department released a 'drought alert' indicating that parts of Sindh and Balochistan are experiencing moderate to severe drought conditions due to persistent below-average rainfall.

According to Indus River System Authority, irrigation water supplies for Rabi crops are estimated to be 40pc below the previous ten-year average. As of the second dekad of December 2018, southern parts of Punjab and Sindh and eastern of Balochistan exhibited below normal vegetation conditions, and the reduced water availability for irrigation raises concerns for yield prospects.

Published in Dawn, January 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1456862/cereal-production-shrank-in-2018

PFA TO ESTABLISH NUTRITION CLINICS IN PUNJAB

By Our Correspondent Published: January 11, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has decided to establish nutrition clinics to given citizens with diabetes guidance regarding their diet in all 36 districts in the province.

The decision was announced by PFA Director General Muhammad Usman while visiting a nutrition awareness camp at Services Hospital on Thursday. He stated that 15 dietary experts at the camp are providing the people with information regarding the importance of having a proper diet while suffering from diabetes.

Visitors are also being screened for diabetes and high blood pressure free-of-charge at the camp while their height and weight is also being checked, he added. The PFA DG, Services Hospital Medical Superintendent Dr Syed Qaiser Zia and Endocrinologist Department HOD Dr Khadija Irfan surveyed the camp and discussed various dietary issues faced by citizens. Meanwhile, awareness pamphlets were also distributed among the visitors.

On the occasion, PFA Director General Muhammad Usman directed officials to establish nutrition clinics as soon possible. According to the PFA spokesperson, more than 500 individuals were given advice on how to consume a better diet after a thorough check-up while pamphlets were distributed to more than 1,000 patients suffering from diabetes.

It is high time we spread awareness in order to control the menace of diabetes, the director general said.

Endocrinologist Department HOD Dr Khadija Irfan said that action against the adulteration mafia and other measures by the Punjab Food Authority have raised a lot of awareness among citizens. Meanwhile, Dr Syed Qaiser Zia stated that diabetes is a deadly disease which can be controlled by maintaining a proper diet.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1885706/1-pfa-establish-nutrition-clinics-punjab/

'HORTI EXPO' TO BEGING ON JANUARY 21

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 10TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) is organizing a two-day 'Pakistan Horti Expo 2019' from January 21 to 22 at the Expo Center in the provincial metropolis in order to highlight Pakistani fruits, vegetables and related products at the international level. The expo will provide an opportunity to farmers, importers, exporters and companies dealing in Horti products during this exhibition, said a spokesman of the department here on Wednesday. Organizers hope that this expo will provide an opportunity to introduce Pakistani products at international level and also help developing durable relations between stakeholders in horticulture industries.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190110438461/

PAKISTAN EAGER TO BOOST FRUIT EXPORTS

By Our Correspondent Published: January 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan has expressed the desire to boost trade between Pakistan and Tajikistan as the former produces the world's best kinnows and mangoes. In a meeting with Tajikistan Ambassador Jononov Sherali on Wednesday, he agreed to hold a meeting of the Pakistan-Tajikistan Ministerial Commission by April this year to discuss matters of mutual benefit in the agriculture sector. The federal minister said Tajikistan must consider the import of Pakistani mangoes as the Central Asian state was already importing dairy products, sugar and potato from Pakistan.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 10th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1884920/2-pakistan-eager-boost-fruit-exports/

RAMZAN SUGAR MILLS: NAB TO FILE REFERENCE AGAINST HAMZA

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated January 09, 2019

LAHORE: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Lahore, has decided to file a reference against Opposition Leader in Punjab Assembly Hamza Shahbaz in the Ramzan Sugar Mills case.

"NAB has decided to file a reference against Hamza Shahbaz for his alleged role being chief executive of the Ramzan Sugar Mills to get constructed a bridge facilitating his mills out of the public money in Chiniot," a senior official told Dawn on Tuesday.

An amount of Rs200 million was approved by then chief minister and Hamza's father Shahbaz Sharif for the construction of the bridge.

He said the reference was likely to be filed by the end of this month.

The National Accountability Bureau has already announced filing a reference against Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif in the Ramzan Sugar Mills case.

According to the NAB, Shahbaz Sharif, being chief minister of Punjab, had issued a directive for the construction of a drain in Chiniot district primarily to benefit the sugar mills owned by his sons.

The PML-N president misused his authority as Punjab chief minister to benefit factories owned by his sons, it said.

Hamza's brother Salman Shahbaz is also facing similar charges being director of the mills but the bureau has not yet decided whether to include his name in the reference or not.

Salman Shahbaz is in the United Kingdom.

According to NAB, Salman left the country to skip its hearings.

Hamza was stopped from leaving the country at Lahore airport last month as his name was on the exit control list (ECL).

Hamza is also facing an inquiry in income beyond means case.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1456362/ramzan-sugar-mills-nab-to-file-reference-against-hamza

OPP INVITED FOR DEBATE TO DEVISE FOOLPROOF WHEAT POLICY

Intikhab Hanif January 09, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government on Tuesday vowed to devise a farmer-friendly wheat procurement policy in consultation with the provincial lawmakers, and agreed to discuss threadbare grabbing of state land and who changed laws to convert residential areas into commercial zones.

The assurances came in response to two resolutions that PML-N MPAs Safdar Shakir and Sheikh Alauddin moved during the assembly session which began at 12:20pm instead of the scheduled 11am.

The opposition members pointed out quorum twice, but the session continued due to the treasury's overwhelming presence. "Pointing out short quorum on a private members day is regrettable," Law Minister Raja Basharat said.

He said while the opposition was disrupting the proceedings he had got extended the mandate of a committee formed to have the rules of business amended to allow for the production of MPA Khwaja

Salman Rafique, who is in the custody of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). “We are going to do this during this session and also constitute the Public Accounts Committee and standing committees tomorrow,” he said. Permission to allow the rules of business committee to function during the current session was also granted.

Responding to Mr Shakir’s resolution on wheat procurement, Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry said that the government was devising a farmer-friendly policy. He looked perplexed when the chair asked him whether he was opposing or supporting the resolution.

After the chair sought the House’s approval of the resolution, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf’s Saeed Nivani said the previous government’s policy was flawed and had led to exploitation of farmers. The food minister agreed and asked members to debate the issue and help the government form a better policy. “Unlike the recent past, no farmer will be humiliated now,” he claimed.

Responding to the resolution moved by Mr Alauddin about the establishment of educational institutions in a residential area of Lahore, the law minister regretted that institutions were misused and destroyed to grab state land. He said hotels, expo centres and shopping malls were allowed to be built on hundreds of kanals but the present government was retrieving the grabbed state land.

He said the government was also trying to restore cities of Punjab to their original shapes, offering the opposition a day-long debate on the issue to suggest proposals.

Earlier, PML-N’s Samiullah Khan said the House faced a crisis in the absence of the speaker or deputy speaker on Monday. And a press release issued by the office of the deputy speaker said later in the evening that he was in Rahim Yar Khan where he was called over by the UAE crown prince — who was hunting there. The deputy speaker had undermined sanctity of the House, he alleged.

Minister Chaudhry Zaheer retorted that the crown prince was on a goodwill visit. The present government would not allow any hunting, he claimed.

Responding to an adjournment motion moved by PML-N’s Chaudhry Ashraf, Health Minister Yasmin Rashid said after the death of a child at Ganga Ram Hospital, the government posted senior registrars to paediatric emergency wards of all hospitals. No junior doctor would discharge a child without consulting a senior doctor, she said, adding that the trainee doctor who had treated the child had been fired after an inquiry.

Minorities Minister Ejaz Alam assured PML-N minority member Khalil Tahir Sandhu of the resolution of the age-old issue of return of the property of Lahore’s Rang Mahal School, Sialkot’s Murray College and Rawalpindi’s Gordon College to the Christian community soon. Supporting him, the law minister said the previous government had delayed the issue.

PML-N’s Zaheer Iqbal criticised the chief minister’s recent visit to south Punjab and said the cabinet meeting in Bahawalpur was just a ploy. He continued to speak even after the chair disallowed him.

Speaking during the question hour, the law minister promised that recruitment process of 1,000 police constables in Faisalabad and promotions in all ranks would be completed.

Earlier, the House adopted a resolution condemning Indian atrocities against Kashmiri people and seeking an early resolution of the dispute. The resolution was moved by Mr Sajid Khan.

While praying for all the martyrs of Kashmir and early recovery of the injured, the House, through the federal government, asked all world bodies to demand the killings be stopped forthwith and the dispute resolved.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1456348/opp-invited-for-debate-to-devise-foolproof-wheat-policy

125,000 TONNES OF KINNO EXPORTED

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated January 09, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan exported 125,000 tonnes of kinno from December 2018 till to date at the rate of $500 per tonne.

The country fixed the export target at 350,000 tonnes for this season, which will conclude in March/April.

All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed on Tuesday stated that the kinno export target would be achieved if rains do not destroy the orchards and goods carriers movement remains smooth.

The country exported 375,000 tonnes of kinno worth $200 million last year. He said bulk exports of the citrus fruit were made mainly to Russia, the Philippines, Indonesia and the UAE.

However, Pakistan has failed to capitalise on the Iranian market for the last eight years where 80,000-100,000 tonnes could easily be shipped, he deplored.

Waheed said the association has submitted recommendations to the Federal Minister National Food Security and Research regarding enhancement in production and exports of fruits and vegetables leading to creation of ample employment opportunities for millions of people.

Published in Dawn, January 9th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1456383/125000-tonnes-of-kinno-exported

THE COTTON WOES

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 9TH, 2019 | EDITORIAL

It is unfortunate that cotton production and its acreage in the country have been declining steadily over the years. A bumper crop of 15 million bales was cultivated in 2011-12, which declined to about 14 million bales in 2014-15 and further to 9.9 million bales in 2015-16. It recovered somewhat to 11.9 million bales in 2017-18 but is again estimated to decline to little over 10 million bales during the current year, showing a steep fall of 5 million bales over the last seven years. According to the latest figures issued by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA), cotton production up to 1st January, 2019 stood at 10.273 million bales as compared to 11.108 million bales in the corresponding period of last year. During this period, Sindh produced 4.111 million bales or 2.42 percent less than the output of 4.123 million bales last year while the fall in production in Punjab was more pronounced at 10.63 percent, or 6.162 million bales as opposed to 6.895 million bales last year. It may be mentioned here that the fall in Sindh was less pronounced than Punjab despite severe shortage in water availability in the former province at the initial stages of cotton crop. The major reasons for the fall in cotton production over the years have been declining areas under cotton cultivation, pest attacks and lower water availability. About 9 million acres were cultivated during 2011-12 which have come down to 5.9 million acres in 2018-19.

An almost consistent decline in cotton output is a very bad news for the country. It is one of the major cash crops for the farmers who largely depend on its income for other necessities of life. Lower income from this crop would obviously depress the farmers' standards of living. Besides, it is very important crop for the economy as it has a share of 1.0 percent in GDP and contributes 5.5 percent to agriculture value addition. Also, it absorbs a bulk of labour force, both in the cities and rural areas, of the country and is a major foreign exchange earner and stimulates growth in other sectors. Sadly, however, the output of cotton production has been even less than domestic textile industry's needs of 13.2 million bales in most of the years, necessitating imports in large quantities and expenditure of precious amount of foreign exchange. Two key factors seem to have contributed to this poor performance. Firstly, attractive profitability of competing crops has led to shifting in area under cotton cultivation over the last several years, especially in the cotton producing districts of Punjab. Secondly, per hectare yield of cotton continues to be poor, inducing the farmers to cultivate other crops. These factors have forced the cotton industry to import cotton from abroad, especially of better varieties, for producing value-added items: raw cotton imports stood at 3.6 million bales in FY18 compared to 2.9 million bales in FY17.

In our view, the government, for a variety of reasons, needs to change the policy and chalk out a plan to increase cotton production in the country. Over the past few years, growers have clearly shifted from the production of cotton to sugarcane due to the political clout of sugar industry and vast amount of subsidies offered to sugarcane farmers. The present government needs to take a bold decision to avoid subsidies which would reduce the burden of subsidies on the budget and allow the country to utilise its land resources according to the comparative advantage and maximise the productivity of agriculture sector in accordance with the international price signals. We know that the production of sugarcane is less labour-intensive and the plant root stays for about three years but cotton is a semi-drought crop and needs far less water. Since the country is faced with water shortage, the production of cotton crop could be ideal for a country like Pakistan.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190109438165/

ARID SALINE LANDS: USE OF HALOPHYTES AS UNUSUAL CROPS URGED

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 9TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The utilization of halophytes as unconventional crops for arid saline lands holds immense potential to ensure food security in future, Prof Xiaojing Liu of Chinese Academy of Sciences expressed while speaking at the second day of the three-day long international conference on 'Sustainable Development: Halophytes for Green Revolution'.

The Institute of Sustainable Halophyte Utilization (ISHU) of Karachi University (KU), has organized second international conference at the Karachi University Business School (KUBS), which will conclude today.

Prof Xiaojing Liu informed the audience about research of his group that can improve crop productivity and minimize the salt build up following salty water irrigation. He stressed on research-based amendments in soil structure and chemical composition that can prevent degradation of soil.

Prof Todd Egan from USA highlighted that salinization of lands is one of the major impediments for conventional agriculture especially in the arid and semiarid regions of the world. Lack of rain and high temperatures can further aggravate the situation in these areas.

Most of our conventional crops are salt-sensitive and can't endure even low levels of soil salinity. Hence, there is dire need for innovative approaches to overcome aforementioned problems. He said that his team has prepared a "super absorbent" that can retain about 90 percent of the soil moisture and essential nutrients, a pre-requisite for long-term crop productivity. Use of such material can be of immense aid for high saline agriculture.

Prof Hans Werner Koyro from the Giessen University, Germany, delivered lecture about global climate changes and use of 'Biochar' as a potential remedy to minimize harmful impacts of climate change on plants. Use of Biochar can be one of the solutions for enhancing productivity of our agricultural lands, he said. Biochar can sequester sodium and heavy metals, which are toxic for plants.

Islamic University Islamabad's Environmental Sciences professor Dr Irfan Khan presented his views about the use of halophytes for the success of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly of SDG-2, which aims to eliminate hunger from the world. Halophyte cultivation as non-conventional crops is also in accordance with Pakistan's National Sustainable Development Policy, he said.

He stressed on the fact that generally there is a gap between policy-making bodies and academia, which has to be bridged in order to make these policies successful. He also praised the organizers for holding the conference and declared it the need of the time.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190109438183/

STRATEGY IN THE WORKS TO ACHIEVE COTTON OUTPUT TARGET

Amin Ahmed Updated January 08, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government is formulating a strategy to achieve the target of 15 million cotton bales by the end of 2019, with special focus on increasing the area under cultivation and decreasing inputs cost.

In this regard, the government strategy will focus on zero GST on pesticides, subsidy on fertilizers and redu¬ced rates of electricity, Min¬is¬¬ter for National Food Secu¬rity and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan said on Monday.

Addressing a seminar, titled 'Grow cotton, save economy and earn foreign exchange', the minister shared salient features of the government's upcoming strategy for the commodity.

The new strategy, to be announced in coming days, will also ensure availability of a considerable amount for loans to small farmers.

The minister said the government was well aware of the issues faced by farmers and is striving to come up with viable solutions.

"We are confident that in 2020 farmers will give us good returns on cotton," he said.

The government is considering an increase in funds for agricultural research from current 0.2 per cent to 1pc. The government will ensure low inputs cost and best quality for cotton farmers. The provincial governments will be asked to put their share in the cotton industry boom.

The government also aims to restart the Pak-Arab fertiliser plant which is closed for the past two years due to shortage of gas.

The minister said federal and provincial research centres have been able to develop disease and pest resistant cotton varieties, as well as methods where water could be saved.

The upcoming cotton strategy will focus on water conservation, training cotton farmers in modern farming techniques, and aims to do away with complicated laws and upgrade them to improve cotton mechanisation and provision of best seeds.

Published in Dawn, January 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1456205/strategy-in-the-works-to-achieve-cotton-output-target

COMMODITIES: COTTON MARKET CAUGHT IN UNCERTAINTY

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter January 08, 2019

KARACHI: The cotton market was unable to ward off uncertainty and lack of confidence as buyers stayed away and trading activity dipped down to rock bottom.

The entire cotton economy is currently faced with adverse domestic and world factors, inhibiting textile spinners to build up their stocks.

Despite short crop, the textile industry seems reluctant to replenish stocks which is worrying, observed a leading cotton broker.

The Indian cotton crop is also reported to be much short than anticipated earlier, says the Cotton Association of India (CAI).

However, it is encouraging to see that a large number of Pakistani textile producers of home and contracted textiles are participating in the four-day international trade fair, Heimtextil in Frankfurt from Jan 8-11, which is the world's biggest display of textile goods.

According to Trade Development Authority of Pakistan, around 222 leading Pakistani textile producers are participating.

Meanwhile, trading on ready counter was extremely negligible as big buyers were conspicuous by their absence and the market remained devoid of much needed activity.

The Karachi Cotton Association spot rates were firm at weekend level at Rs8,700 per maund.

The entire cotton economy cycle seems to have come to a standstill because at each stage the stakeholders are currently in a fix and unable to clear dues of each other on holding huge stocks of unsold phutti (seed-cotton), cotton and cotton yarn and this having a spillover impact up to the value-added sector.

Published in Dawn, January 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1456198/commodities-cotton-market-caught-in-uncertainty

‘SALT-TOLERANT PLANTS COULD TACKLE FOOD INSECURITY’

The Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Updated January 08, 2019

KARACHI: Experts at the inaugural session of a three-day international conference which opened at Karachi University (KU) on Monday underscored the need for exploring the potential of salt-tolerant plants to tackle increasing food insecurity.

These efforts, they emphasised, must be supported by background research aimed at bringing out solutions that are both economically and environmentally viable and sustainable.

Titled ‘Sustainable development: halophytes for green revolution’, the event began at KU’s business school. It’s the second international conference organised by KU’s Institute of Sustainable Halophyte Utilisation (ISHU) on the campus.

Speaking on the conference theme, Prof Hans-Werner Koyro, a senior plant ecologist from Germany, said that the requirement of getting good quality food was increasing day by day with the growing population.

One solution to address this challenge, he pointed out, was to explore halophytes, salt-tolerant plants that grew in waters of high salinity. These plants offered a range of benefits, including their use as food, fodder and biofuel.

These plants also contained medicinal properties and helped protect the coastline.

Prof Koyro, however, cautioned researchers on how they should work with these plants and urged them to “restructure their work”.

“You must have detailed background knowledge of the environment you choose to work in as well as information about the resistance of the plant, its benefits and disadvantages before you start work,” he said, emphasising that the research needed to be ecologically sustainable and economically feasible.

“A university like KU needs to ensure that you do not end up creating worse (environmental) conditions than before,” he added.

Dr Miguel Clusener-Godt, director of ecological and earth sciences division of Unesco, appreciated KU’s research endeavours in the field of halophyte biology.

He was of the view that food shortages could be minimised by adopting halophyte as nonconventional crops for already salt-affected land. The conference theme, he noted, was in line with the sustainable development goals and also with Unesco’s Man and the Biosphere Programme.

Dr Benno Boer, chief of natural sciences, Unesco Bangkok office, spoke about the efforts of KU’s scientists in global halophyte research and said that they made substantial contributions putting Pakistan on the world map as a country with significant achievements in this important scientific subject.

He appreciated ISHU's research initiatives and said that increasing waterlogging and salinity was a major problem in Sindh and the government would support initiatives offering solutions in this regard.

KU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Muhammad Ajmal Khan presented a global overview of population growth, water availability situation, and the status of natural resources.

"The changing climatic conditions have exacerbated the situation. We have to find new avenues to enhance our food production, make clean energy, as well as reduce pressure on limited freshwater resources for agriculture in arid regions," he said.

On how halophytes could help, Prof Khan said that cultivation of these plants thriving on saline water could help produce fodder for livestock especially in areas like Thar where livestock was directly linked to human survival and prosperity.

"We have already developed a model halophyte fodder farm in Thar. The provincial chief minister has also visited it and shown interest in taking it to the next level," he said, hoping that the farm would soon see big plantation.

He was of the opinion if the government took advantage of this important research, Tharis wouldn't have to migrate to other places in search of food.

Earlier, Dr Bilquees Gul, ISHU director, welcomed attendees and said that the aim of the conference was to discuss sustainable use of halophytes and bring together leading experts in the field of halophyte biology to develop a collaborative programme.

Published in Dawn, January 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1456075/salt-tolerant-plants-could-tackle-food-insecurity

`MILLS PRESSURISING GROWERS TO SELL SUGAR CANE AT LOW RATES`

By Our Staff Correspondent | 1/8/2019 12:00:00 AM

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) on Monday slammed sugar mills` failure to pay notified price (Rs182/40kg) of sugar cane for 2018-19 to growers and use of threats to pressurise farmers to sell their crop at lesser price.

The SAB meeting expressed concern over threats of registration of cases under `false` charges against growers in some districts. It was in spite of the fact that liabilities of even last year had not been cleared yet, the meeting added.

Participants were informed by growers from different districts that they were being paid Rs140 to Rs160 for the 2018-19 crop by millers while some were being paid their dues in the name of this year`s advance payments against the crop.

The meeting noted that Habib Sugar Mill deducted 30 per cent to 40pc crop of growers whereas Al-Noor and Habib sugar mills were not issuing cane price receipt (CPR) to farmers.

The SAB received complaints that growers were being told to submit their undertaking regarding clearance of their liabilities, although those remained pending; farmers were being `blackmailed` as well.

The meeting observed that the evidence was being brought to the notice of the Sindh cane commissioner. It urged small growers neither to succumb to millers` blackmailing tactics nor give anything in writing about their liabilities. Farmers should submit their complaints before the cane commissioner.

The SAB said Digri Sugar Mill owner was issuing threats of registration of cases to the growers who demanded last year`s dues.

The owner has submitted an application to the Hyderabad range DIG against growers for `harassing` him. A similar complaint was received about threats of registration of FIR against growers by the Ranipur Sugar Mill management.

The meeting said police were intimidating farmers in collusion with the mill owner.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=08_01_2019_117_002

MILLS, GINNERS ADOPT WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 8TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Main participant adopted wait-and-mood on the cotton market on Monday in expectations of positive developments, dealers said.

The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8,700, they added. Prices of seed cotton in Sindh were at Rs 3000-3800, in the Punjab seed cotton prices at Rs 3000-3800 and in Balochistan, rates of seed cotton were at Rs 3200-3800, they said.

In the ready session, not a single deal reported till our going to the Press, they said.

According to the market sources a kind of dullness persisted as both mills and ginners showed no interest in fresh deals.

Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that trading activity slowed down despite short crop production in the country. Traders related to the textile sector is expecting better outcome of three-day Heim Textil, starting from Tuesday in Frankfurt (Germany), nearly 222 Pak firms are participating the exhibition.

Furthermore, main participants adopted wait-and-see mood, awaiting for positive results from the US-Chine trade talks, due shortly, he added.

Besides, he said that Cotton Association of India (CAI) down sized the estimate of cotton production to 335 million bales for the current season.

Experts said that the huge stock of unsold cotton yarn is creating a financial problem. They said that in Faisalabad a large number of power looks have shut down and owners were selling their heavy machineries in scrap, in brief, it looks that cotton economy is currently under a crisis like situation.

Cotton prices went up in the international markets, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190108438006/

AGRICULTURE: FOOD TRADE DEFICIT RISING AGAIN

Mohiuddin Aazim Updated January 07, 2019

Pakistan's food trade deficit shrank to $1.4 billion in the last fiscal year from $2.43bn a year ago. But a reversal of the trend is clearly in sight during the current fiscal year.

In the first five months of 2018-19, the food trade deficit stands at $954 million. If no major initiatives are taken to boost food exports and contain imports, the full-year deficit may again end up close to $2bn. Even exports of 0.5m tonnes of wheat and wheat products, as suggested by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, cannot enhance food export earnings to a level to avert this possibility.

In the past, we have seen the food trade deficit growing even in the midst of record wheat and sugar exports.

Import volumes of pulses in July-November went up about 65pc, which shows little attention is being paid to minor crops

A delay in the acceptance of some demands of the millers for sugar exports, availability of a smaller surplus of non-basmati rice and an extended ban on deep-sea fishing during this fiscal year, which reduced fish hauling in the first quarter, have diluted the gains in food exports.

As a result, our food export earnings totalled just $1.51bn in five months to November, up only 1.27pc from the year-ago earnings of $1.49bn, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Against this, food imports totalled $2.47bn, down 9.28pc mainly due to the imposition of higher tariffs from $2.72bn in the year-ago period, leaving a gap of $954m.

If sugar exports had begun earlier, production of non-basmati rice varieties in Sindh had not been affected by water scarcity and the authorities had resolved a controversy over the ban on deep-sea fishing on time, total food exports could have been higher.

These factors have actually belittled some gains in food exports so far this fiscal year, like larger basmati shipments and an increase in export earnings of fruits and vegetables.

The main problem with Pakistan's food exports is that their growth rate is inconsistent. There are many reasons for it, but one of them relates to politics. In the absence of a peaceful political atmosphere, agriculture and food trade suffer a lot.

Take the example of sugar. Towards the end of the PML-N government, the traditional tiff between sugar cane growers and sugar mills acquired a new dimension and continued even after the installation of the new PTI government.

A proactive judiciary also entered the scene — and for quite right reasons. But the end result is that the millers' stubborn attitude across Pakistan and too much politicising of the sugar mills' affairs in Sindh led to delayed cane crushing. Then the millers' demand that they should be allowed to export sugar regardless of whether they had previously defaulted on bank loans led to an impasse

The PTI government at the centre was not in a mood to accept it. But finally it had to, and sugar exports began picking up pace quite late. As a result, sugar export earnings suffered.

Export earnings of non-basmati rice in five months of this fiscal year fell chiefly owing to fewer shipments. In most rice-growing areas of Sindh and in some areas of Punjab, paddy cultivation suffered in the previous year, reducing the exportable surplus. That Sindh continues to suffer from an acute water shortage this year too and rice growers say the output here can decline as much as 30 per cent mean that there is little scope for boosting non-basmati rice in coming months.

Seafood export volumes have declined in July-November mainly because of a controversial ban on deep-sea fishing on the issue of seaworthiness of fishing trawlers.

Government officials say that the issue has been resolved and hope that seafood exports will pick up now. But no one can say if overall seafood exports in the current year will surpass that of the last year.

Traditionally, we see a food trade deficit every year, thanks to unsustainable growth in exports and rising imports of food items, including palm and soybean oils, pulses, dry milk and tea — and a large number of finished food products ranging from formula milk and power diet to expensive brands of coffee, honey, confectionary products and whatnot.

At a time when the overall foreign trade deficit remains a big headache for foreign exchange–starved Pakistan, we can hardly afford such a large food trade deficit. Clearly, there is a need to slash it. But that is not possible if the federal and provincial authorities and the private sector involved in agriculture and agro-based food exports sit together with a single-point agenda of boosting agricultural productivity and promoting food exports.

On the import side, further revision in non-essential food items can also be considered keeping in view that the tariff hikes made so far have started making a dent in imports.

In addition, import substitution efforts must also be accelerated. Higher local output of oilseed crops has already started reducing its imports. The provincial governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been working on olive plantation for several years. There is a need to expedite those projects along with continuing regular oilseed crops. The production of dried milk can be boosted with a little effort.

The cultivation of pulses on the fringes of major crop farm fields should be promoted to meet growing domestic needs and save foreign exchange. In the first five months of this fiscal year, import volumes of pulses have gone up by about 65pc, which shows how little attention is being paid to minor crops in general and pulses in particular.

Pakistan and China will soon finalise details of a plan on how Chinese public- and private-sector companies will help us enhance our agricultural output and food exports under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Some other countries, including the United States, Germany and Japan, are already working closely with our provincial governments and helping us improve agricultural output. There is a need to integrate all these efforts, take all stakeholders on board and launch a big three-pronged strategy, officials and people associated with the food industry say.

Such a strategy should aim at improving per-hectare yields of food crops and promoting import substitutions with greater financial and knowledge investment, discouraging imports of finished food imports and encouraging more high-end, value-added food products.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, January 7th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1455876/agriculture-food-trade-deficit-rising-again

BANNED, EXPIRED FOOD ITEMS SEIZED

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 7TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority has seized different banned and expired items during raids at various outlets in Hayatabad Peshawar on Sunday. According to Spokesman of the Food Authority, Waqarullah Khan, a team led by Director Operations Khalid Khattak and Assistant Director Wasif Shah had conducted raid on different food outlets and restaurants in Hayatabad and university road areas.

He said that the team has seized different banned and expired items from Shaheen Chemist, Mr Cod and Jans daily. He further said that directives are being issued to them to visit Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority office where fine will be imposed after coordination with technical wing of the authority.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190107437757/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 31st TO JANUARY 6th 2019

AGRICULTURE SECTOR SHOWING MIXED TRENDS

Shahid Iqbal Updated January 06, 2019

KARACHI: The country’s major crops have shown significant increases in yield per hectare during the last four years.

The State Bank of Pakistan’s “Statistical Bulletin – January 2019” reported that the yield per hectare of wheat grew to 2,917kg per hectare in 2017-18, from 2,762kg — an additional 155kg per hectare over the period.

However, in FY18, the yield of wheat recorded a drop from last year, falling by 56kg per hectare.

Recently, the government allowed exporting wheat from the country — currently in surplus — but refused to offer subsidies since local prices of the crop exceed global levels. Total wheat production in 2017-18 stood at 25.507 million tonnes.

Major crops record high yields

Similarly, rice production also didn’t show any sign of water crisis (the crop requires the highest amount of water for cultivation) as the yield per hectare went up to 2,569kg in 2017-18, from 2,422kg per hectare in 2014-15 — an increase of 147kg per hectare during the last four years.

The area under production, however, only only showed a marginal growth, edging up to 7.449m tonnes in 2017-18 versus 7.003m tonnes in 2014-15.

However, the export of rice fetched significantly higher amount. The country earned $1.933 billion through the crop's export in FY18 as against $1.575bn recorded in FY15.

Sugarcane — another water-heavy crop — witnessed growth in both the area under cultivation as well as the yield per hectare over the last four years.

The yield per hectare of sugarcane jumped to 61,197kg in 2017-18 from 55,062kg in 2014-15 — representing an addition of 6,135kg per hectare.

This significant surge in area and yield created glut of sugar in the country and the exporters found it difficult to export as the sugar prices were lower in the international market. As a result, the government allowed a total of 1.1m tones of sugar export but the exporters are demanding subsidies to cover up losses expected from foreign sales.

Despite the glut, however, the area under cultivation increased by 201,000 hectares to 1.342m hectares in 2017-18. Cotton also recorded an upward trajectory over the last three years but could not touch the highest yield per hectare recorded in 2014-15. The crop's yield per hectare in 2017-18 was 752kg, falling short of 802kg in 2014-15.

The yield had dipped to 581kd per hectare in 2015-16 before recovering again in FY18.

Published in Dawn, January 6th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1455812/agriculture-sector-showing-mixed-trends

WHOLESALE TRADE: GOVERNMENT PLANS MODERN FRUIT, VEGETABLE MARKET

By Qaiser Shirazi Published: January 6, 2019

RAWALPINDI: Government will launch a mobile app to keep people updated with the officially announced prices of fruits and vegetables in Rawalpindi.

The government will set up a modern wholesale fruit and vegetable market outside the urban area to facilitate traders and wholesalers, Deputy Commissioner Dr Umar Jahangir said chairing a meeting of Market Committee representatives on Saturday.

For the first time in city, a government run vegetable and fruit market will become functional to control the prices of green grocery items, he said.

The new market will also have online presence allowing people to know prices of groceries, milk, and yogurt on single click.

The provincial government has removed Market Committee Chairman Raja Jahandar and Vice Chairman Maqbool Khan appointed during the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government. Moreover, traders' leader Qaiser Kiyani has been tipped off as the new market committee chairman and an official notification will be issued next month, the meeting was told.

It was decided to make the market committee functional, market committee's chairman, vice chairman and two MPAs Madam Farah and Wasiq Qayyum will look after the committee themselves.

The prices of all grocery items will be decided and uploaded online which the locals will be able to know on whatsapp click and will also be able to lodge complaints of excessive charging online on which the administration will on spot conduct raid and will take action against the said hawker, shopkeeper, challans will be done and sent to magistrate, shopkeepers will have to inscribe prices on the charts present within the shops, the wholesale markets, salt market, pulse markets, goods transport, grain markets will be transferred outside the city within two years after which the city's traffic jam system will improve while the district administration has also decided proper price magistrates, assistant commissioner has been handed over the authority of magistrate's summary trials.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 6th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1882451/1-wholesale-trade-government-plans-modern-fruit-vegetable-market/

GOVERNMENT URGED TO ESTABLISH LIVESTOCK FARMS IN JHELUM

RECORDER REPORT |JAN 6TH, 2019 | KARACHI

President of Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum (PBIF) Mian Zahid Hussain has emphasized that the government should establish livestock farms to facilitate benefit and attract local investors in order to revive the livestock sector in the Jhelum district.

He said there existed good scope for organised dairy farms, cattle/goats/sheep fattening farms, cattle/poultry feed mills, leather shoes and leather products' units could also be established in Jhelum. He said Jhelum was an important district of population exceeding 1.2 million with huge potential of agriculture, industry, mineral and tourism.

The agriculture products are comprised of various commodities, vegetables and fruits including ground nuts, rice, wheat and sugar cane. More than 100 industrial units are established in the city including cement, flour, chemical, tobacco, textile composite and oil mills with a small industrial zone to facilitate industrialists.

Jhelum has very rich reserves of mineral resources. Minerals like Rock Salt, Brine, Gypsum, Coal, Limestone, Marble and Silica Sand are being exploited commercially by private and public sector agencies in the district. Talking to the business community of Jhelum, he said that under the early-harvest CPEC projects Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Plant was included; first of four turbines commenced operations in April 2018.

When all four turbines will become fully operational they will add 969MW to the national grid. Several small dams have been established including Karot, Tainpura, Jammergal, Domeli, Gurha Utam Singh, Shah Habib and Fatehpur dam, which have strengthen the irrigation system in addition to development of electricity generation. He said Jhelum had several tourist attraction points which might be used to boost tourism in the country after renovation on modern lines. The tourism points include Kewra Salt Mines, Tilla Jogian, Rohtas Fort and Jhelum River. Kewra is a major tourist attraction, drawing up to 40,000 visitors a year while Tilla Jogian being the highest peak in the

Eastern Salt Range also attracts many people. Fish farms, modern restaurants, fast foods spots and shops containing locally manufactured products can be established to boost commercial activities and facilitate tourists.

MNA from Jhelum, Federal Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry has shown interest in developing and preserving ancient sites in the locality; thus expected that tourism in the area would be increased, he added. Mian Zahid Hussain said that given to the current economic situation where trade deficit was reported as $ 15 billion, current account deficit reached $ 6 billion, foreign investment is a mere $ 900 million while USD has aggressively appreciated to Rs 138 in the first five months of current fiscal year, government needs to search and explore new avenues of investment, trade and industry. Every sector of the economy should be simultaneously activated so that collective efforts can be made to strengthen the national economy.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190106437584/

$107M AGREEMENT SIGNED WITH ADB FOR FARM-RELATED WORKS IN BALOCHISTAN

By Saleem Shahid | 1/6/2019 12:00:00 AM

QUETTA:TheAsianDevelopment Bank (ADB) and the Balochistan government on Saturday signed an agreement for a $107 million project aimed at improving irrigation inf rastructure and water resource management in the province.

Additional Chief Secretary of Planning and Development Sajjad Ahmed Bhutta and ADB Country Director Xiaohong Yang signed the agreement during a ceremony which was also attended by Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani and provincial ministers Nawabzada Tariq Hussain Magsi and Zahoor Ahmed Buledi.

`Agriculture remains the backbone of Balochistan`s economy,` said Ms Yang on the occasion. `This project will introduce efficient water usage systems and practices to help farmers improve productivity and farmincomes,` she added.

Agriculture accounts for almost two-thirds of Balochistan`s economic output and employs 60 per cent of the province`s 13 million population,but the drought-like situation in many parts of the province for years and poor water management has put the agriculture sector and those who rely on it at risk. The poverty rate in the province is almost double the national average.

The Balochistan Water Resources Development Sector Project will focus on improving irrigation infrastructure and water resource management in Zhob and Mula river basins. The two rivers irrigate vast areas of farmland in Balochistan.

Among the infrastructure that will be upgraded or built for the project are a watershed protection dam and command area able to hold 36 million cubic metres of water; 276 kilometres of irrigation channels and drainage canals; and facilities that will make it easier for people, especially women, to access water for domestic use. In total, about 16,592 hectares of land will be added or improved for irrigation.

The project will protect watersheds through extensive land and water conservation efforts, including planting trees on 4,145 hectaresof barren land to combat soil erosion.

Its output includes pilot testing of technologies, like solar-powered drip irrigation systems on 130 hectares of agricultural land, improving crop yields and water usage on 160 fruit and vegetable farms, and demonstrating high-value agriculture development.

`The project will also establish a water resources information system that will use high-level technology such as satellite and remote sensing to conduct river basin modelling and identify degraded land for rehabilitation,` said Ms Yang.

The ADB will also administer two grants for the project, including $3 million from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction and $2 million from the High-Level Technology Fund. In addition, a $2 million technical assistance will help Balochistan`s provincial government improve its institutional c apacity to address the risks and potential impact of climate change in the agriculture sector, as well as build a climate-resilient and sustainable water resources management mechanism in the province.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=06_01_2019_014_006

KINNOW EXPORTERS TARGET TWO NEW MARKETS THIS YEAR

By Our Correspondent Published: January 4, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan has announced that Pakistan's fruit exporters can target two new international markets – the Philippines and China – this year for citrus shipments.

He made the announcement during a visit to a citrus export processing unit in Bhalwal, Sargodha.

The minister emphasised that Pakistan's land was blessed with immense natural resources and it was the most fertile. "We have best farmers and agriculture marketing experts but ironically we could not achieve desired results. There is a lack of administration or management for channeling those resources," he said.

He voiced hope that food experts and economists could work out a viable solution for self-reliance in food, adding that Pakistan could access lucrative international markets through quality exports.

"Punjab has an exclusive position internationally in the production of agricultural crops; kinnow is our pride and … is exported to 58 countries across the world," he said.

He expected about 20% increase in citrus exports from Pakistan in the current season. Last year, the country exported 30,000 tons of kinnow to Indonesia – the second largest market after Russia.

The minister also pointed to the many challenges Pakistan was facing internationally, particularly in dealing with the European Union and developed countries, which were erecting barriers in the way of exports of agricultural goods. The US, Australia, Japan, South Korea and even a few Central Asian countries are not importing Pakistani kinnow anymore and those who are importing are not paying attractive prices.

"The world is setting new standards for imports such as sanitary and phytosanitary standards, elimination of pesticide residue, cold treatment and pest-free area," the minister said. "These are difficult and costly conditions and hence affecting our exports to a considerable level."

He underlined the need for following the principles of integrated management and producing quality agro-products.

He said Pakistan's citrus exporters were facing two problems which included citrus canker and citrus graining as the EU, Australia and the US had stopped imports from countries where these diseases were found in the citrus fruit.

"We have to work jointly to continue to be part of the international trade and have to adopt new methods and bring our production in line with the standards defined by the World Trade Organisation (WTO)," the minister said.

He asked all stakeholders to come up with a comprehensive plan including a facility for the inspection of diseases, a disease control programme, building nurseries for disease-free saplings, meeting international standards and access to new and profitable international markets.

He pointed out that his ministry had established a facilitation centre in Bhalwal, where inspectors of the Department of Plant Protection would facilitate exporters regarding inspection and issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary certificates.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 4th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1881035/2-kinnow-exporters-target-two-new-markets-year/

TRADING ACTIVITY IMPROVES ON COTTON MARKET

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 4TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Trading activity improved on the cotton market on Thursday as mills showed fresh interest in buying to replenish their stock, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8,800, they added. Prices of seed cotton in Sindh were at Rs 3000-3800, in the Punjab seed cotton prices at Rs 3000-3800 and in Balochistan, rates of seed cotton were at Rs 3200-3800, they said.

In the ready session, about 8000 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs 7200-9000, they said.

Market sources said that shortage of quality cotton propelled mills to cover their short position. Poor off-take of cotton is creating uncertainties among the cotton traders, they observed.

The Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) issued it's fortnightly report, showing nearly 10.03 million bales of cotton reached at the country's ginneries.

Besides, according to the data issued by the PCGA, there were total 1300 ginning factories across the country out of which the ginning process was continued in 326 ginning factories including 220 in Punjab province and 106 in Sindh province.

Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that trading activity likely to improve in the coming days.

Cotton prices were almost down in the international markets, they said.

The following deals reported: 400 bales of cotton from Tando Adam at Rs 7200, 900 bales from Shahdadpur at Rs 8350, 600 bales from Khairpur Mirus at Rs 8200/8400, 400 bales from Ghotki at Rs 8650/8850, 1000 bales from Rohri at Rs 8600, 400 bales from Saleh Pat at Rs 8600, 200 bales from Mirpur Mathelo at Rs 8650, 400 bales from Sarhad at Rs 8650, 200 bales from Fazilpur at Rs 9000, 600 bales from Haroonabad at Rs 8700, 400 bales from Chistian at Rs 8500, 1000 bales from Fort Abbas at Rs 8000, 200 bales from Maroot at Rs 8100, 600 bales from Bahawal Nagar at Rs 8300/9000, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190104437167/

GOVERNMENT TENDERS TO EXPORT 100,000 TONNES WHEAT

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 4TH, 2019 | HAMBURG

A state agency in Pakistan is tendering to sell and export 100,000 tonnes of wheat under a new government programme agreed in November, European traders said on Thursday. The tender from the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO) closes on Jan. 11, traders said. Pakistan's government on Nov. 20 approved the export of up to 500,000 tonnes of subsidised wheat to reduce large local supplies.

Pakistan's export programme is being watched closely by grain traders as large additional volumes of wheat can be rapidly placed on world markets. "I anticipate that Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Indonesia will be among potential markets for the import of Pakistani wheat," one trader commented.

In early 2018, Pakistan also approved the export of wheat

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190104437049/

FOOTPRINTS: SUGAR WARS

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated January 04, 2019

ELDERLY share-cropper Khalil Ahmed Arain was stirring sugarcane juice with a five-foot ladle in a small village of lower Sindh district. He made sure that the slow heating process of the juice should not cross the boiling point. Extra material collected in the form of foam was separated from concentrated liquid, to cool. And when it solidified enough it was rolled into small lumps of gurh, as a final product ready for sale.

He didn't sell his sugarcane crop to the sugar factory, for it was offering an inadequate price of Rs120/40kg against the notified price of Rs182/40kg for the 2018-19 season. Arain had a small quantum of produce and he preferred jaggery manufacturing — though it is uncommon in this part of Sindh.

Sitting on a charpoy in a thatched straw hut in fields, Arain's bigger counterpart and my host, Umer Bughio, told me that "I have a better deal, since instead of selling my sugarcane crop to the sugar factory, I sold it to cattle traders as fodder."

This season, Bughio and his colleagues decided to sell sugarcane as fodder in an emerging trend amongst the sugarcane producers of lower Sindh — the home of sugar mills — as they find this option somewhat more profitable than selling their produce to what they say are arrogant sugar factory owners.

The growers are not only getting payment in cash but also saving on other expenditures, ranging from the cost of harvesting/cleansing grass attached with sugarcane, to transportation and offloading at the factory's gate.

"Selling crop for livestock and cattle is not at all a bad bargain under the existing conditions this year, when factories are unwilling to pay the due price," remarked Bughio, adding that he was still holding harvest on around 100 acres, anticipating that millers would go for overkill when they don't get adequate sugarcane supplies to produce sugar. "Ensuing competition amongst the millers will jack up the price." Of the 150 acres brought under sugarcane cultivation, he sold crop from 20 acres to fodder traders.

Of the country's 80-plus sugar factories, 38 are located in Sindh and close to 50 in Punjab. Wealthy mill owners are once again denying farmers the notified price and seeking judicial intervention — though there may be little chance of getting a favourable order.

From this month onwards, the growing season will slowly inch towards closure. Farmers will want to free up land for other crops. As sugarcane crushing draws closer millers will start paying more than the notified price. But by this time growers have already sold their major chunk of crop at a low rate to middlemen who act as millers' agents.

"Fodder's price remains high this year and it enables us to sell our produce," said Bughio. "Those rearing animals and livestock herds are paying Rs140/40kg for sugarcane and it is a price millers deny." Fodder traders are bringing their labourers to harvest crop and are transporting it from fields to their workplace for onward sale.

Sugarcane producers get payment on the basis of the weight of the crop, that is supplied after grass has been cleaned from each stick of sugarcane. This reduces the weight. Millers then make deductions, on flimsy grounds. In Sindh, sugarcane cultivation has become a tricky job.

The sugar industry has seen unnatural growth in Sindh over last few years, even though water shortages had serious implications of this water-intense crop. According to grower Nadeem Shah, the unavailability of water flows badly affected sugarcane's health this year. "In many water-deficient areas, the sugarcane crop didn't have the required growth," he said. He sold his sugarcane crop from his six acres in Matiari for Rs100/40kg and for Rs80/40kg in Sujawal to Karachi-based livestock breeders.

Sugarcane is almost a year-long crop, needing plenty of water flows till it matures. In the last kharif 2018 season, Sindh faced an overall 18pc water shortage. Reduced irrigation water flows are a regular phenomenon, especially in the command areas of the Sukkur and Kotri barrages, making sugarcane cultivation increasingly unviable.

Pakistan's sugar millers are mostly influential politicians. With their connections, they call the shots, while farmers end up hard done by. Despite billions of rupees worth of subsidies from the public exchequer to millers, the federal and provincial governments fail to get the price notification implemented. "Pakistan is producing more sugar than its consumption needs, which is around 5.2m tonnes to 5.5m tonnes, necessitating the export of surplus sweetener for which millers pressurise the government to provide subsidies," says another grower, Mahmood Nawaz Shah.

In the 2017-18 season, confided an officer, the Sindh government paid a provincial subsidy of Rs3.25bn (Rs9.30/1kg) to sugar mills located in Sindh as export rebate; of 1.7m tonnes of Pakistani sugar's export, 0.9m tonnes were exported from Sindh. The State Bank of Pakistan is said to have asked the Sindh government to pay its remaining share out of the federal subsidy.

"It is a classic case of the lack of governance," asserts Mahmood. "The issue is not whether the provincial or federal government pays the subsidy, but the point is that despite this unwanted financial burden on the national kitty, farmers don't get adequate price. What is the purpose of pumping billions of rupees subsidy into sugar industry, then?"

Published in Dawn, January 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1455320/footprints-sugar-wars

MINISTER CALLS FOR STRATEGY TO BOOST KINNO EXPORTS

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated January 04, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani growers must adopt the principles of integrated pest management standards for agro-based products in order to compete against the European Union and other developed countries in kinno exports.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan said this on Thursday during a meeting with exporters, growers and other stakeholders at Citrus Export Processing Unity at Bhalwal, near Sargodha.

Sultan said that United States, Australia, Japan, South Korea and some Central Asian Republics are not importing Pakistani kinno anymore, while those importing our citrus fruit are not paying good prices.

However, he informed, Philippines and China are now open to exports of Pakistani citrus fruits. Last year the country exported 30,000 tonne kinno to Indonesia; the second biggest market after Russia. The export of kinno to these two states is expected to grow by 20 per cent, he said.

The country's kinno is exported to 58 countries across the world.

New standards for importing agricultural products are being set — including sanitary and phytosanitary measures, pesticide residue elimination, cold treatment and pest-free area — which have made our products costlier for export destinations, he said.

The minister said the sector was facing problems of citrus canker and graining, which are detrimental to "kinno" exports with EU, Australia and US already have banned imports from countries where these diseases are reported in citrus fruits.

He assured growers, exporters and stakeholders of his ministry's full cooperation and urged to formulate a comprehensive plan to increase kinno exports. The blueprint should include a facility for inspection of diseases; infection control programme; building nurseries for disease-free saplings; ensuring observance of good agricultural practices and integrated pest management standards; and access to new and profitable international markets.

Published in Dawn, January 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1455333/minister-calls-for-strategy-to-boost-kinno-exports

COTTON PRODUCTION FALLING AS SOWING AREA SHRINKS SHARPLY

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana Updated January 04, 2019

KARACHI: A consistent fall in cotton cultivation area for the last seven years has eventually reduced crop production to little over 10 million bales this year from the bumper crop of 15m bales in 2011-12.

Almost 9m acres were under cotton cultivation in 2011-12. The sowing area steeply declined to 5.9m acres in 2018-19 as opposed to government estimates of 7.3m acres, but no successive governments took any action to arrest the situation, with the result that the country now relies on imported cotton to meet local demand.

Over the past few years, growers shifted from cotton to sugarcane due to various reasons — the most prominent being the political clout wielded by the sugar industry. Furthermore, growers preferred sugarcane as it is a less labour-intensive crop and the plant root stays for a minimum of three crops.

Cotton is not only a cash crop but is also ideal for a country like Pakistan which is faced with water shortage because it is a semi-drought crop and needs far less water for irrigation than any other crop, said Mian Mahmood Ahmed, a grower and ginner.

“Unfortunately cotton production has been reduced to the extent that today the country has to import a substantial quantity of cotton by spending between $1-1.5 billion to meet domestic consumption of around 15m bales,” he said.

Declining area under cotton cultivation over the years is resulting in lesser cotton production and if the trend is not arrested it will ultimately result in footing bigger bill for cotton imports and a burden on country’s depleted foreign exchange reserves.

According to the latest figures issued by Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA), cotton production up to Jan 1 stood at 10.273m bales — 7.52 per cent short crop compared to last season (2017-18) when production stood at 11.108m bales.

During the period under review, Sindh produced 4.111m bales or 2.42pc less crop over corresponding period of last year when production stood at 4.213m bales.

Interestingly, Sindh still managed to produce more cotton as compared Punjab despite facing severe irrigation water shortage at the initial stage.

Cotton production in Punjab stood at 6.162m bales or 10.63pc less than last season when production stood at 6.895m bales.

It would be in the best interest of the country if the incumbent government chalks out a plan to increase cotton production or war footings and by increasing cultivation land for the cop and restricting other crops from replacing areas.

The new agriculture policy should ensure that sugarcane and wheat production should be brought down to the level to only to meet local consumption since surplus production of these two crops has to be exported by providing subsidies. Hence cotton production should be maximised and there should be exportable surplus since it never needed subsidy on exports.

Published in Dawn, January 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1455335/cotton-production-falling-as-sowing-area-shrinks-sharply

ECC APPROVES SUPPLY OF GAS TO FERTILISER PRODUCERS

By Shahbaz Rana Published: January 2, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Tuesday allowed the diversion of gas from power plants to fertiliser units in order to ensure availability of a key agricultural input but deferred decision on giving exemption from public procurement rules for the import of petroleum products from Azerbaijan.

Headed by Finance Minister Asad Umar, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet decided to ensure continued supply of gas to the urea manufacturing plants. Owing to the shortage of gas, there were difficulties in the provision of energy to these units.

The ECC directed the Ministry of Industries to chalk out a plan for keeping urea plants fully functional throughout the year, according to the ECC's decision. The step is aimed at ensuring sufficient production of fertiliser to meet farmers' needs.

Prices of urea have been increased recently due to the hike in gas prices by the government. After that, the government in December 2018 also increased the price of imported urea by 6.3% and fixed it at Rs1,712 per 50kg bag.

Before the increase in gas prices, the local urea manufacturers were selling the 50kg bag at Rs1,610, which they have now increased to Rs1,740.

The ECC also put off decision on providing cash assistance to Pakistan Machine Tool Factory, asking the Ministry of Industries to prepare a strategy first for revitalising the sick unit. It approved allocation of up to 25 mmcfd of additional gas from the Adhi field to Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) for meeting existing demand.

The ECC deferred decision on giving exemption from Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) rules of 2004 for buying petroleum commodities from Azerbaijan.

It instructed the PPRA – an attached department of the Finance Division – to give, in writing, that it did not have objections to the proposed arrangement.

The Petroleum Division had sought exemption from PPRA rules for a petroleum product purchase deal with Azerbaijan on a government-to-government basis, initiated by the previous Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government.

The Petroleum Division, in its proposal, stated that Pakistan was currently facing a severe shortage of energy, which was not only causing hardships for the people but was also inhibiting economic growth of the country.

In November 2016, the then cabinet approved a summary for signing an inter-governmental agreement (IGA) between Azerbaijan and the government of Pakistan on cooperation in the field of energy. That included cooperation for the development of supply and trading opportunities for crude oil, oil products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), joint construction of terminals and storage of LNG, LPG and other hydrocarbons.

The signing ceremony of the IGA was held at the Prime Minister's Office in February 2017. Accordingly, Pakistan State Oil (PSO) negotiated a term sale and purchase agreement for petroleum products with Azerbaijan's Socar under the umbrella of IGA.

PSO board of directors has already approved the term sale and purchase agreement for its execution subject to approval of the ECC by invoking Rule 5 of PPRA Rules 2004.

The ECC also approved guidelines for the export of half a million tons of wheat products. In November 2018, the ECC decided to export surplus wheat/products of the public sector.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research suggested that provincial governments and Passco should process the export of wheat by placing tenders for the surplus of 500,000 tons.

The successful bidder will provide a performance guarantee of 120% of the difference between the issue price of wheat (to flour mills) and the bid price, which may be released on the submission of export documents within 90 days.

The export of wheat and wheat products should be completed before April 30, 2019 while the export process should be completed by June 30, 2019 in order to facilitate exporters in completing necessary formalities.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 2nd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1879358/2-ecc-approves-supply-gas-fertiliser-producers/

ECC ORDERS SMOOTH DELIVERY OF UREA TO FARMERS

Khaleeq Kiani Updated January 02, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Amid rising prices despite subsidised imported stocks, the Economic Coordination Com¬¬-mittee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Tuesday directed the Ministry of Industries and Production (MoIP) to chalk out a plan for continuous and smooth operation of urea plants in the country throughout the year.

The meeting presided over by Finance Minister Asad Umar also could not take a conclusive decision on two other major agenda items — signing of fuel supply agreement with Azer¬baijan and payment of dues to employees of Pakistan Machine Tool Factory — owing chiefly to lack of prior consultations.

While reviewing the fertiliser demand and supply situation, the ECC directed MoIP for easy availability of sufficient urea stocks to meet demand of the farmers' community.

Advises further consultations on fuel supply deal with Azerbaijan

Sources said the meeting was informed that while reasonable urea stocks were available in the country augmented by 100,000 tonnes of imports last month, the price did not fall below Rs1,850-1,860 per 50 kg bag in the market against a price set at Rs1,712 per bag for imported commodity.

It was observed that some fertiliser plants were not releasing their stocks to the desired level due to upcoming annual maintenance schedule. Also, the subsidies on account of imported and domestic gas blend on a long-term basis was also an issue as existing arrangements would come to an end by close of this month for two fertiliser plants — Fatima and Agritech.

The meeting was informed that the provincial government did not intervene into the matter as required. It was pointed out that a crackdown on hoarders was delayed on the request of some fertiliser companies and their distribution networks and the fertiliser review committee or the ECC had also not pressed for such a move in their respective meetings last month to avoid an impression of harassment.

Sources said some members of the committee were of the view that decision making on transaction to transaction would be an inappropriate course of action given the fact that gas suppliers, fertiliser producers and the end consumers and policy makers keep changing their positions month after the month.

While about Rs4.7 billion supplementary grant had been approved by the federal cabinet for gas supply and its subsidy mechanism until end-January for domestic production im¬¬ports, there should be clear line of action based on all the factors on a year-long basis. It was also highlighted that an early decision was required on allocation of about 66 million cubic feet per day (mmcfd) of additional gas from Mari field.

The ECC while considering the proposal regarding provision of funds for personnel related dues in the Pakistan Machine Tool Factory (PMTF), directed the Ministry of Industries and Production to come up with a strategy to revitalise the unit.

The ECC observed that the PMTF had done great service for the engineering sector and had the potential to effectively carry on this role, for which it needed to be strengthened.

The ECC approved proposal of Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) for supply of up to 25mmcfd additional gas from Adhi Gas Field to Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd. (SNGPL) to meet the existing gas demand on the system.

ECC also discussed proposal of Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) for fuel supply agreement bet-ween Pakistan State Oil (PSO) and State Oil Com¬pany of Republic of Azer¬bai¬jan (Socar). The Committee advised Ministry of Energy to carry out further consultations with stakeholders including Ministry of Com¬merce and Public Procure¬ment Regulatory Authority before a final decision in the matter.

The meeting was infor¬med that PSO and Socar had finalised a term sale and purchase agreement (TSPA) for supply of petroleum products under an inter-¬governmental agreement (IGA) signed by the two governments in February 2017.

After vetting the TSPA, the Law Division had desired its approval by the board of directors of the PSO. While approving the TSPA, the PSO board directed the company to ensure its approval from the federal cabinet as required under Rule 5 of Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Rules 2004.

The Rule 5 required that whenever PPRA rules come in conflict with an obligation or commitment of the Federal Government arising out of an International treaty or an agreement with a State or States, or any international financial institution, the provisions of such international treaty or agreement shall prevail to the extent of such conflict.

The Petroleum Division had proposed to the ECC that since the TSPA was finalised under a bilateral government agreement and the two companies were owned by the two states, the ECC and the cabinet should clear the commercial arrangement between the two companies. The ECC desired that opinion of the commerce ministry in terms of import and that of procurement authority in terms of exemption of competitive bidding should be obtained before reaching a final decision.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1455004/ecc-orders-smooth-delivery-of-urea-to-farmers

PFA ENFORCES BAN ON SALE OF UNPACKED SPICES

By Our Correspondent Published: January 1, 2019

LAHORE: To curb the menace of adulteration, Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has banned the sale of open spices in Punjab from Tuesday (today). Provincial food watchdog's director general, Captain (Retd) Muhammad Usman, highlighted that the authority has enforced a law related to the sale of unpacked spices.

The law was originally introduced in June 2017 and the authority had given an 18-month business adjustment time to the industry and dealers, he added. He indicated that the authority has imparted practical training to the industry and traders before introducing this law.

As per the new legislation, it is mandatory for the industry and traders to print the name and address of the manufacturer or supplier, ingredients, weight, manufacturing and expiry dates, he underscored. Usman said that incidents of adulteration are very common in open spices.

"These adulterated and substandard spices cause several diseases among consumers so the authority has introduced this law. It has directed all its enforcement teams to ensure effective implementation of this new law. Violators will have to face dire consequences and all their products will be confiscated," he said.

The DG added the authority is leaving no stone unturned to provide safe and health food across Punjab. Speaking to The Express Tribune, a wholesale spice dealer from Akbari Market, Muhammad Ehsan, said all traders in the biggest wholesale market of the province were selling open spices for decades. Now the authority has introduced a packaging law which will negatively impact their business.

He agreed with the rationale of the authority that adulteration was on the rise in the sale of open spices. He, however, indicated that the new law will increase prices.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1878770/1-pfa-enforces-ban-sale-unpacked-spices/

WHAT IS 'ACTUALLY' BEHIND UREA PRICE RISE?

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | JAN 1ST, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The federal government is abuzz with “inside” information that the domestic fertilizer industry is involved in urea stocking due to which price of commodity is showing a continuous upward trend, well-informed sources told Business Recorder. However another view is that the Ministry of Industries and Production has taken a few half measures to control shortage of urea and bring down its market price at a time when wheat sowing season was at its peak which proved ineffective and urea prices have shown an increase of Rs 10 per bag since fixation of imported urea at Rs 1712 per bag to Rs 1860 from 1850 per bag.

The sources said, provincial governments which are supposed to take administrative measures to control urea prices have not played their due role in ensuring sale of urea at printed rate.

“I think one plant which will shut down after a couple of months, is not offloading its entire production of urea and is involved in raising stocks,” said an official in Ministry of National Food Security and Research on condition of anonymity.

Official sources told Business Recorder that in order to improve supply of urea fertilizer, ECC in its meeting on December 4, 2018, considered proposals by Ministry of Industries & Production (MoI&P), i.e., two fertilizer plants that are on Sui Northern Gas Pipeline Company’s (SNGPL) system should continue operation till January 31, 2019 and price of gas may be capped at Rs 782/MMBTU by picking up the price differential which would be credited to SNGPL as subsidy.

ECC, while according approval, constituted a committee to review the pricing issue. The committee comprising MoI&P, Finance Division, Petroleum division, Law Division and Federal Board of Revenue was tasked to take into account possibility of offsetting GIDC demand as subsidy, viability of Rs 150/bag as variable contribution margin and mechanism of payment of subsidy to SNGPL. MoI&P was to incorporate the finding of the committee in the summary for the Cabinet and further allowed to move the summary for supplementary grant.

The committee was convened the same day and it was agreed that (a) GIDC cannot be adjusted against subsidy, (b) Variable Contribution Margin (VCM) already worked out by MoI&P in consultation with all stakeholders was appropriate and therefore rationale of capping gas price at Rs 782/MMBTU and that (c) MOI&P will initiate the summary for the Cabinet’s approval for amount and mechanism of subsidy and for the supplementary grant so required.

The sources stated that for augmenting supply of urea and its production at viable cost, MoI&P proposed that SNGPL may be given subsidy as follows: (i) Rs 167/MMBTU (weighted average) for supply of gas to Fatimafert and Agritech for the gas consumed at 62.38 blend till December 7, 2018; (ii) Rs 869/MMBTU on supply of 1005 RLNG to these plants from December 08, 2018 to January 31, 2019; (iii) the amount of Rs 0.79 billion may be paid forthwith on actual basis and Rs 3.91 billion (approx) may be paid in two monthly tranches on December 7, 2018 (or as early thereafter) and January 7, 2019; the latter is subject to final reconciliation; and (iv) in the CFY 2018-19 no budgetary allocation has been made in the demand of Ministry of Industries & Production for this scheme and Federal Cabinet may allow supplementary grant of Rs 4.70 billion in the relevant demand of MoI&P for payment of price differential as subsidy to SNGPL. The cabinet, in its previous meeting had accorded approval of this proposal, submitted by the MoI&P.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190101436367/

AFGHAN DPS CONVERT ROCKS INTO GREEN FARM IN CHAGAI VILLAGE

Saleem Shahid January 01, 2019

QUETTA: Afghan refugees in the remote district of Chagai have transformed rocks and desert into a green farm, contributing to the local economy and a better environment with the help of UNHCR and the technical support of FAO.

Posti refugee village is a self-sufficient organic farm in barren hills of a rocky desert area in Chagai district of Balochistan.

The village is situated about 65 kilometres from Dalbandin, the main city of Chagai. Farm products of the village are well known in local markets and its vegetables, especially luffa, have become very popular in Dalbandin.

"This was a desert several years ago but we turned it into a green land," said Gul Khan, who left Afghanistan due to war several years ago and came to Posti refugee village located at the border with Helmand province of Afghanistan.

Mr Khan said that when he arrived in the area with family, they used to go to far-flung areas and work as daily wage workers and after some time they were able to build mud houses, although bringing material for construction was a big task because there was no road in the middle of the mountains.

"Everybody used their own resources to build these farms. People who could not afford tractors used hand trolleys and even their shirts," Mr Khan said, adding that the journey was far from smooth, with floods being the main threat that used to destroy everything, leaving them to restart again from zero.

"Fields, we have prepared are now producing wheat, tomato, chili, cucumber and other vegetables, which are supplied to Posti refugee village and the nearby market in Dalbandin," Mr Khan said.

"We are the only source to provide fresh vegetables to the area people, but now the underground water level is decreasing, resulting in low harvest," he said.

In order to educate refugees of the village how to grow vegetables and other crops with limited water, the UNHCR, with the technical support of FAO, is piloting an agricultural project in the area.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1454763/afghan-dps-convert-rocks-into-green-farm-in-chagai-village

AGRICULTURE: FARMERS' WAIT FOR PTI TO DELIVER ON PROMISES CONTINUES

Mohammad Hussain Khan December 31, 2018

With a huge growth potential for crop diversification, Pakistan's agriculture sector is in need of modernisation.

It's not just about machinery or equipment. The sector can make great strides if the authorities adopt a scientific and modern approach under a strong regulatory framework.

Structural issues, ad hoc-ism, insufficient policy thrust, weak writ of government and increasingly unreliable water flows are major challenges. At least a dozen important research bodies remain without regular heads.

The sector recorded 3.81 per cent growth in 2017-18, 3.5pc in 2016-17 and minus-0.19pc in 2015-16.

The government has planned an investment of Rs200 billion for the next two to three years. The Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) has unveiled an Rs82bn package aimed at increasing yields and improving water efficiency.

In major crops, Sindh was unable to meet the wheat sowing target for 2018-19. Punjab met its target, but Sindh could achieve only 73pc of it by the middle of December owing to a water shortage of 35-40pc in the Rabi season.

Sindh had to face a 50-70pc water shortage in Kharif, which affected cotton and rice. Cotton acreage showed a decline in 2018-19 in Punjab and Sindh. Against the national sowing target of 2.95 million hectares, farmers could use only 2.4m ha, indicating a drop of 10.9pc from a year ago and missing the target by 18.6pc.

Sindh reported a loss of 31pc in acreage over last year while the decrease was 5.2pc in Punjab as Pakistan struggles to meet the target of 14m bales.

The Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) said the total cotton production was 9.9m bales by Dec 15. It reported this amidst a controversy about the weight of a bale that the PCGA says is 140 kilograms while the worldwide standard, including in Pakistan, is 170kg.

Nationally, rice production remained 2.7pc over and above the target of 6.931m tonnes. Again, Sindh recorded a 10.8pc decline in terms of area and production while the production in Punjab was 15.7pc higher than the target, provisional figures show.

Sugar cane farmers continue to face a perennial conflict with millers. Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recorded a decline of 16.1pc and 1.4pc, respectively, in 2018. Acreage in Sindh dropped 16.1pc, but the production in Punjab was 47.1m tonnes against the target of 44m tonnes.

Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) Chairman Dr Yusuf Zafar believes the government needs fiscal space to effectively manage agriculture through the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). It should re-appropriate funds from unproductive uses, he adds.

“The government plans to promote cadge fishing in water bodies to increase fish exports to $1bn from $40m,” Mr Zafar says.

There is a serious concern about Pakistan’s food import bill ($6.13bn in 2016-17). A major chunk of it is edible oil ($2bn). Cultivating oilseed crops and sesame can be helpful for import substitution. Sesames exports, as per one estimate, may fetch $45m from the Middle East. Sunflower farming is another option. But its area in Sindh has slumped to 60,000-80,000ha from 266,000ha in 2010-11.

The government seems to be giving great importance to the livestock sector. A scheme to promote backyard poultry to end poverty will take place nationwide. “Meetings have been held with the heads of all provincial livestock departments,” says an office of the Punjab livestock department.

Policy interventions like foot and mouth disease control through vaccination and calf fattening schemes have yielded good results in Punjab with the annual allocation of Rs6bn. “We have reduced the foot and mouth disease to 5pc from 35pc in 2013-14," he says, adding that other provinces should follow suit.

Water is arguably the most important factor for any growth in agriculture and livestock sectors. The government would initiate the second phase of the lining of watercourses at a cost of Rs68bn. Besides lining, the command area of small dams will be developed in rain-fed areas, which may save nine million acre feet (MAF). The first phase of lining under the National Programme for Improvement of Watercourses (NPIW) was executed in the Musharraf regime on a cost-sharing basis. Sindh has built recharge/storage dams in Jamshoro, Karachi, Nagarparkar and Dadu.

Surface water availability is a must for food security. Researchers believe the introduction of crop zoning can help overcome water shortages. Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCWR) former chairman Dr Mohammad Ashraf says cultivation of high-delta crops — sugarcane and rice — must stop in water-deficient areas. "Aren't foreign exchange earnings by means of rice exports useless if food imports cost billions of dollars every year?" Rice exports mean Pakistan is actually exporting water used in rice cultivation, he adds.

Crop patterns must be defined and strictly adhered to in order to save surface water through crop zoning. "We grow sugar cane in South Punjab where people don't have access to drinking water. Similarly, the cotton-growing area of Ghotki in Sindh has witnessed unprecedented growth of sugar cane," he says.

Groundwater mining continues at an alarming rate. Dr Ashraf says he is concerned about the matter: it increases the farmer's cost of inputs and harms soil productivity as the groundwater level drops alarmingly. Water mining needs a regulatory framework without any delay. Researchers believe groundwater aquifer is developed in millions of years. It is depleting fast and, according to one estimate, around 53MAF water was being pumped every year. The aquifer level in Quetta has dropped to 1,200-1,400 feet from 100 feet, according to Dr Ashraf.

Punjab government pitched in an Rs8bn subsidy in agriculture, with a Rs2.18bn allocation for 500,000 bags of DAP fertiliser, crop insurance for small farmers, Rs5,000 per acre for oilseed crop cultivation on 156,000 acres, and the provision of 100,000 bags of certified cottonseeds.

Sindh offers nothing of the sort as it seems comfortable with the two ongoing World Bank–funded programmes.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, December 31st, 2018

https://www.dawn.com/news/1454322/agriculture-farmers-wait-for-pti-to-deliver-on-promises-continues

GROWERS' BODY WANTS WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE FIXED AT RS1,500 PER 40KG

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent December 31, 2018

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) demanded on Sunday the government should fix support price of wheat at Rs1,500 per 40 kilogramme, raising it from Rs1,300 announced six year back.

The meeting presided over by president SCA Kabool Kahtian said that high rise in cost of inputs has like diesel, seed, fertilisers etc had necessitated likewise enhancement in the support price of wheat.

The meeting expressed concern over shortage of water and said that level of water in Tarbela dam was recorded at 1,402 feet, barely 16 points short of the dead level at 1386ft, which foreboded shortage of water in next Kharif season as well.

The meeting said that since sowing of summer crops in Sindh started two months before Punjab began cultivation of Kharif crops, Sindh should be provided water from Tarbela and Mangla dams ahead of Punjab. Farmers in Sindh had already borne huge losses in Rabi season because of water shortage, it said.

The meeting drew attention to falling prices of onion and tomatoes and feared farmers would not even be able to meet their production cost if the prices kept falling. The farmers, therefore, should be provided relief and their onion produce should be exported, it said.

The meeting called for withdrawal of land auction notices issued to growers who had defaulted on payment of debt to agriculture bank. Water shortage had adversely affected crops, therefore a new survey of farmers' losses should be carried out and loan should be waived, it said.

The meeting demanded that tractors should be provided to growers for which draws had been held six months ago.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1454503/growers-body-wants-wheat-support-price-fixed-at-rs1500-per-40kg

GWADAR FISHERMEN CALL OFF STRIKE AFTER SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS

Behram Baloch Updated December 31, 2018

GWADAR: The protesting fishermen of the port city of Gwadar on Sunday called off their month-long strike after successful negotiations with officials of the provincial government and the Gwadar Port Authority.

Official sources said that Gwadar Port Authority Chairman Mir Dostain Khan Jamaldini and the provincial government officials held negotiations with Fishermen Alliance leader Khuda-i-Dad Wajo in a protest camp where a large number of fishermen were present.

Mr Jamaldini and Additional Deputy Commissioner Anis Ahmed Gorgage said that demands of the fishermen were justified and informed the protesting fishermen that the government had accepted their all demands.

They said Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani had ordered the Gwadar Port Authority to construct a jetty in Gwadar.

Among the fishermen's demands included their access to the sea for fishing at the eastern side of Gwadar coast. They were of the view that with the construction of Eastbay Expressway fishermen would be denied their access up to the sea where they had been fishing for decades.

“We want protection of our centuries-old livelihood,” Mr Wajo said while announcing to call off the strike.

However, he said, if implementation on the demands was not begun within a month the fishermen would again launch a protest.

Provincial Minister for Information Zahoor Buledi, MNA from Gwadar Mohammad Aslam Bhootani, Senator Kohda Babar and MPA of the area Hamal Kalmati have played an important role in the success of negotiations.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1454571/gwadar-fishermen-call-off-strike-after-successful-negotiations

February 2019

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 18th TO FEBRUARY 24th 2019

MACRON VOWS TO PROTECT FRENCH FARMERS, SHARES SUBSIDY PLAN

AP February 24, 2019

PARIS: President Em¬¬¬¬¬¬¬ma¬¬¬nuel Macron pledged on Satur¬day to protect European farming standards and culinary traditions threatened by aggressive foreign trade practices that see food as a “product like any other.”

Macron’s speech at his country’s premier agriculture fair was aimed at assuaging French farmers’ anger at government policies seen as favouring urban elites and neglecting the heartland cherished for producing famed cheeses and wines.

Europe’s “civilisation of eating well, of gastronomy, of the art of living” is now threatened by world powers that pursue aggressive trade policies and “consider food a product like any other,” without taking into account environmental, health or culinary concerns, Macron said.

Macron proposed using blockchain technology to trace the source of food and putting Europe in the “avant-garde of agricultural technology.”

He spoke amid European Union talks on its next agricultural aid plan, a major source of funding for French farmers. He appealed for unity at those talks and argued against calls to re-nationalise French farming policy.

“In agriculture just like in many other areas, we must invent a new global deal. Yes, we must be on the offensive, carrying out a deep reform of trade policies,” said Macron, who didn’t shy from engaging in technical conversations with farmers as he walked past their stands. Around midday, Macron was offered a mini hamburger made of Cantal cheese and Salers beef, a famous breed native of central France.

He appealed to French farmers to view their livelihoods in a global context, but many are struggling under day-to-day debt and uncertainty about the future. Macron is seen by many in rural France as epitomising out-of-touch city elites, and many French farmers want more government help to face growing foreign competition.

Macron is trying to tackle the concerns head-on by spending all day Saturday at the Salon d'Agriculture in Paris, where farmers showcase their livestock, food and wines. He's meeting with dairy farmers, pork producers, vintners and others.

The yearly Salon has long been a key event of the French political calendar, with French presidents often using the event to test their popularity. Jacques Chirac used to spend whole days at the fair drinking and speaking with farmers while patting their cows. Back in 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy was involved in a spat with man who refused to shake his hand and the former president hit back with an insult.

Security was tight for Macron's visit Saturday, which came as yellow vest protesters held anti-government protests around Paris and other cities for a 15th straight weekend.

Macron, whose approval ratings have bounced back in recent weeks, was booed at last year's farm fair over plans to ban a popular pesticide and trade deals.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465703/macron-vows-to-protect-french-farmers-shares-subsidy-plan

'TOXIC FOOD' DEATH TOLL RISES TO SIX AS ANOTHER MEMBER OF FAMILY DIES

Imtiaz Ali Updated February 24, 2019

KARACHI: Another member of the same family died during treatment on Saturday, taking the death toll to six in the "poisonous food" tragedy, officials said.

Ms Bina, who was admitted to the Aga Khan University Hospital, died during treatment, confirmed South SSP Pir Mohammed Shah.

Five siblings — three brothers and two sisters — had died on Friday morning after consuming "toxic food" which they had ordered from a restaurant in Saddar while staying at Qasr-i-Naz, a federal government official residence near the State Guest House where the family had stayed after their arrival from Balochistan on Thursday.

The senior officer said that she was an aunt of the dead siblings.

The SSP said the cause of death of all six family members appeared to be the same food.

32 persons detained briefly, 33 samples collected for lab testing, two restaurants sealed

The children were aged between one-and-a-half years and nine years while their aunt was in her early 20s.

Quoting the mother of the children, the SSP said that even the one-and-a-half-year-old boy had also eaten the biryani, which they had ordered from the restaurant in Saddar.

Sharing initial findings of the case, SSP Pir Mohammed Shah told Dawn that the children's mother started vomiting and collapsed inside the bathroom at around 3.30am.

Her husband, Faisal, assumed that she had suffered a heart attack and rushed her to the AKUH, where she got first aid. When the couple returned to their room at Qasr-i-Naz at around 9am on Friday, they were shocked to see that their two children were already dead and three others were unconscious. Faisal's sister was also barely able to speak.

Then Faisal took his five children and sister to the AKUH again at around 10am where all the five children were pronounced dead.

Quoting the doctors, the South SSP said that the children had died around half an hour before their arrival at the hospital. He said the children's mother survived because of timely treatment. Since there was no more room in an air ambulance, the couple had already left for Quetta by a commercial flight on Friday evening while the bodies of their children were later on flown by the air ambulance for burial in Balochistan.

The officer said that Faisal Kakar is a local landlord in Balochistan.

The two restaurants which supplied the food to the family had been sealed for investigation.

The officer said that they had detained several employees of both restaurants with some staff of Qasr-i-Naz and they were released after getting their statements. Till late in the evening no FIR had been registered.

Pir Mohammed Shah said that he had phoned Faisal, father of the deceased children in Balochistan, and asked him for giving a statement through WhatsApp for lodging of an FIR.

"Police are now solely relying on findings of the labs to ascertain the exact cause of deaths, to determine the course of investigation," said the officer.

Post-mortem examinations of all the five children were done at Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi on Friday and the body viscera would be sent to Lahore.

The South SSP disclosed that they could not send the autopsy reports of the children to Lahore's forensic lab on Saturday as it was the weekend. Therefore, the viscera have been kept in cold storage for preservation, which would be sent to Lahore on Monday.

Police have detained at least 32 people from three different places and collected 33 samples along with a team of the Sindh Food Authority and KU's HEJ, while a famous biryani restaurant, which supplied biryani to another restaurant in Saddar, had also been sealed, said DIG South Sharjeel Kharal.

The senior officer told Dawn that 32 people had been detained from the restaurant from where the family bought biryani from, as well as the eatery which had originally supplied the biryani.

The DIG said the two restaurants and the room, store and kitchen of Qasr-i-Naz had also been sealed for investigations.

Dr Shakeel Ahmed of HEJ Research Centre of Karachi University told Dawn that they had collected 11 samples which included vomits, clothes, powder, blankets and floor from the Qasr-i-Naz room.

Director general of the Sindh Food Authority Amjad Leghari told Dawn that they had taken the samples of the food, which would be sent to the technical lab located in Korangi. Mr Leghari clarified that they also sealed the biryani restaurant because it originally supplied the foodstuff to the other eatery as the food boxes obtained from the room carried its name.

The death of five siblings and their aunt apparently caused by toxic food in the city on Friday once again highlighted the lack of an official laboratory in the province to ascertain the exact cause of the deaths, prompting the authorities to send the victims' viscera to Punjab's forensic lab for an identical purpose, it emerged on Saturday.

Sources in medico-legal section told Dawn that the samples of the five children had been collected to be sent to the Sindh government's chemical examiner's lab located on the premises of the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi, but the lab had been "closed" for the last several months as the chief chemical examiner had been removed for "unprofessionally" conducting tests of the "liquor" seized from a room of the hospital in Clifton where a politician was lodged in a sub-jail during a visit by the then chief justice of Pakistan, Mian Saqib Nisar.

The sources said that recently another official had been appointed as chief chemical examiner, but so far the lab had not issued any report of samples sent to it pertaining to poison or poisonous substance or food.

The samples were gathering dust there and bad smell was emitting from it, said the sources.

An official in the medico-legal section told Dawn on condition of anonymity that they had sent samples pertaining to poison to the KU lab recently but the officials concerned told them that the provincial government had only asked them for DNA tests, not for poison tests.

The sources said that since the provincial government's chemical examiner's lab was not "functioning properly", the viscera were being sent to Lahore for ascertaining the exact cause of deaths of the five children and their young aunt.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465652/toxic-food-death-toll-rises-to-six-as-another-member-of-family-dies

PFA DESTROYS 28,641 LITRES OF ADULTERATED MILK

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 24TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Dairy safety teams under the supervision of veterinary experts of the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) continued an operation against milk adulterators on the second consecutive day in Punjab.

DG PFA Captain Muhammad Usman (r) said that the action was being taken on the special directions of Prime Minister Imran Khan regarding control the bad practice of milk adulteration. He said that food authority overall inspected 1,723 milk vehicles by placing screening checks on the entry and exit points of 36 districts.

The screening pickets held from Lahore to Raheem Yar Khan and Rajanpur to Attock by holding crackdown in 144 Tehsils simultaneously. He said that PFA examined the 256,731 litres of milk being carried on hundreds of vehicles for supplying in different cities of Punjab from dairy farms.

While in Lahore, safety teams have taken milks samples for the screening test and checked 140 litres of milk. During the operation, 28,641 liters adulterated milk recovered from dozen of vehicles was also split on the spot.

He said the PFA had disposed of 26,536 litres of milk over proved contamination of water other chemicals which used to enhance the thickness of milk. Whereas authority found adulteration of hazardous powder in 2,105 litres milk. On the other hand, the food authority unearthed a fake milk factory in the rural area of Chicha Watni and it also got registered an FIR in Kasool Police Station besides handing the accused over to the police after the raid.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190224449760/

HINA PLANS TO EXPAND LAND USED TO GROW SOYABEANS, OTHER OILSEEDS

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 24TH, 2019 | BEIJING

China plans to expand the amount of land it uses to grow soyabeans and other oilseeds by around 330,000 hectares in 2019, its agriculture ministry said on Thursday. The ministry did not give numbers for country's oilseed acreage in 2018, but the soyabean area in the 2017/18 crop year that ended last September was 8.245 million hectares. The vast majority of China's oilseed crop is made up of soyabeans.

Thursday's announcement came after China released its first policy statement of the year earlier in the week, which highlighted a plan to boost domestic soyabean production. The pledges come as Beijing remains entangled in an on-off trade war with the United States, its second largest supplier of soyabeans.

Beijing has been seeking ways to reduce its reliance on US soyabeans, although the two sides have recently been in talks aimed at ending the trade dispute. Beijing will further raise subsidies for soyabean farmers in northern China to help expand acreage in the region, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said in the announcement on its website.

China also plans to develop and promote new varieties of soyabeans with high yields of oil and protein. The nation mainly uses soyabeans to make soyameal, an animal feed ingredient. Despite the push on domestic production, agriculture minister Han Changfu said on Wednesday that China would still rely on imports for soyabean supplies.

Beijing also plans to expand rapeseed production around the Yangtze river and peanut planting in parts of northern China, according to Thursday's announcement. China aims to keep its cotton acreage at 3.33 million hectares and sugar planting at about 1.53 million hectares in 2019, the document showed.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190224449799/

CM KAMAL ORDERS ACTIVATING PROVINCIAL FOOD AUTHORITY

By Mohammad Zafar Published: February 24, 2019

QUETTA: In the wake of the Karachi incident in which five members of a family from Quetta died after consuming ‘toxic food’, Chief Minister Jam Kamal ordered to immediately functionalise the Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) in order to take strict action against elements selling substandard food.

As per the orders issued under the Food Authority Act, 2014, CM Kamal will be the BFA chairman and concerned authorities have been directed to launch a crackdown against businesses selling unhygienic food, according to an official handout on Saturday.

Members of provincial assembly Yar Muhammad Rind, Jan Muhammad Jamali, Asghar Khan Achakzai, secretaries for food, health, Public Health Engineering, industries, livestock, local government, agriculture; director general for food; Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry president, members of local trade and hotels’ community have been included in the provincial authority.

On Friday, five children of a family died in Karachi after allegedly consuming toxic food, prompting authorities to seal a branch of a popular biryani chain for investigation.

In October, Balochistan Secretary for Food Asghar Harifal sent the proposal to the provincial government for establishment of the Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) to regulate and monitor food business in the province for provision of hygienic food items to the people.

He said the proposal also contains the appointment of a director general (DG) to head the Balochistan Food Authority for food safety and quality control.

He also said with the appointment of a DG, the authority will be able to check and monitor all the packed and unpacked food items as well as restaurants’ food standard.

Harifal said that the authority would be mandated to formulate standards, procedures and guidelines in relation to any aspect of food, including food business, food labelling and food additives, to specify appropriate enforcement systems.

The secretary said, “After the appointment of DG, the government has planned to endorse proper food laboratories enabled with methods of sampling, analysis of samples and report formation of results to take specific measures to curtail adulteration in food all over Balochistan with its headquarters in Quetta.”

He said it will specify licensing of the food outlets and prohibition orders, recall procedures, improve notices and prosecutions and will provide technical support by the government in matters related to food.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1917016/1-cm-kamal-orders-activating-provincial-food-authority/

PASSCO TO INVITE FRESH BIDS FOR WHEAT EXPORTS

By Zafar Bhutta Published: February 24, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government has allowed Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) additional export of 0.5 million tons of wheat in order to dispose of its surplus stock and fetch handsome revenue following increase in prices in the international market.

Passco has been granted permission to initiate a fresh bidding process for export of 0.5 million tons of wheat to clear the surplus stock. Earlier, the government had allowed export of one million tons of wheat and wheat products to Passco, Punjab and Sindh.

According to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Passco and food departments of Punjab and Sindh had procured 0.9 million tons of wheat with carryover stock at 5.942 million tons. Food year 2018 started with a considerable stock of 11.93 million tons.

At present, the stock level is 7.436 million tons, which depicts a considerable surplus. On the request of provincial governments of Punjab and Sindh as well as Passco, a summary was submitted to the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) on November 16, 2018 with a request to allow export of 3.1 million tons of wheat and wheat products.

Of the total, two million tons would be exported from Punjab, 0.5 million tons from Sindh and 0.6 million tons by Passco.

However, after comprehensive discussions, the ECC decided to allow export of 0.6 million tons by Passco and 0.4 million tons by Punjab and Sindh. It was also decided that freight support for the export of wheat by Passco would be provided by the federal government while Punjab and Sindh governments may bear freight support charges for export from the two provinces.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 24th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1917072/2-passco-invite-fresh-bids-wheat-exports/

TOXIC FOOD BEING BLAMED FOR DEATH OF FIVE SIBLINGS

Imtiaz Ali February 23, 2019

KARACHI: Five siblings, all less than 10 years of age and hailing from Balochis¬tan, died while their mother and aunt fell ill apparently due to food poisoning shor¬tly after arriving here at Qasr-i-Naz, a federal lodge near State Guest House, from Quetta on Thursday night.

The deaths prompted the authorities to seal the two restaurants that delivered the food as well as the guest room, kitchen and store of the official lodge on Friday when samples were collected for analysis to ascertain the possibility of food poisoning and to determine the exact cause of death. In all, 32 men were detained from the three places for questioning, according to officials.

After collection of samples and initial investigations, the bodies were flown to Quetta for burial, while their mother who was discharged from hospital after being given first aid left for the city along with her husband Faisal Kakar. The sister of Mr Kakar, Bina, was admitted to the Aga Khan University Hospital. The deceased were identified as 18-month-old Abdul Ali, Uzair, 4, Alia, 6, Tauheed, 7 and their eldest sister Salwa, 9.

DIG South Sharjeel Kharal told Dawn that the family of Mr Faisal comprising his wife, sister, two daughters and three sons had arrived from Quetta on Thursday night. On their way, he said, they had lunch at a friend’s house in Khuzdar. Later, he added, they purchased chips and packed juices from a shop in Hub.

After arriving at Qasr-i-Naz lodge where they had booked a room with the reference of a senior official of Pakistan Works Department in Quetta, they placed an order at a restaurant near the Passport Office in Saddar for biryani at 12.15am, the officer said. Hours after having biryani, Mr Faisal's wife Nida fell unconscious and she was taken to the hospital. She was discharged after being provided initial treatment. "As the couple returned, they saw their two children lying dead in the room and other children and their aunt terribly sick. The three children also died while being shifted to hospital, while their aunt was admitted," said SSP South Pir Mohammad Shah.

Talking to the media outside Qasr-i-Naz, SSP Shah was of the opinion that this was a clear case of food poisoning. However, DIG Kharal said, as investigation was under way, other aspects were also being looked into.

On Friday noon, the bodies of the five siblings were brought at Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi to complete medico-legal formalities. Additional police surgeon Dr Qarar Ahmed told Dawn that they collected viscera and samples to be sent to the chemical examiner's lab to ascertain the possibility of poison in their body to determine the exact cause of death.

Sindh Minister for Local Bodies Saeed Ghani met the victims' relatives at the AKUH after which he confirmed to the media that the food authority officials had sealed the restaurant and opened investigations.

Police also sealed a famous eatery which supplied biryani to the restaurant, and detained 32 people from the two restaurants and Qasr-i-Naz where the family had stayed, DIG Kharal said. He further said CCTV footage of all three places had been obtained to investigate any foul play in the episode.

DIG Kharal said the body viscera of the deceased siblings would be sent to a laboratory in Lahore on Saturday (today) to ascertain exact cause of death. Dr Shakeel Ahmed of the HEJ Research Centre told Dawn that they collected 11 samples,which included vomit, clothes, powder, blankets and floor from their room in Qasr-i-Naz. Sindh Food Authority DG Amjad Leghari said they would send the food samples to official technical lab in Korangi.

The DIG said the police investigators were finding out whether fumigation had been carried out at the lodge and for how long the room in Qasr-i-Naz remained closed after it. He said he had approached police officers in Khuzdar and Lasbela for investigation.

Meanwhile, Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan expressed his grief over the death of the five children belonging to the Khanozai area of Pishin district.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465526/toxic-food-being-blamed-for-death-of-five-siblings

PAKISTAN WARNED AGAINST DEADLY WHEAT PEST

Amin Ahmed Updated February 23, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Internati¬onal Maize and Wheat Impro¬vement Centre (CIMMYT) has cautioned Pakistan to take steps to protect its crops from the 'fall armyworm' (FAW), a devastating pest that has been identified for the first time on the Indian subcontinent.

Director-General, CIMMYT, Dr Martin Kropff, now visiting Pakistan, held a meeting with Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan on Thursday and offered cooperation of the Mexico-based organisation in tackling the prevalent threat of FAW in Pakistan.

“We want that our future cooperation in this regard must continue, and Pakistan may not only ensure a prompt surveillance system but also bring more disease-resistant varieties of wheat and maize,” Dr Martin said.

Native to the Americas, the pest is known to eat over 80 plant species, with a particular preference for maize, a main staple crop around the world.

The fall armyworm was first officially reported in Nigeria in West Africa in 2016, and rapidly spread across 44 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Sightings of damage to maize crops in India due to ‘fall armyworm’ mark the first report of the pest in Asia.

The pest has the potential to spread quickly not only within India, but also to other neighbouring countries in Asia, owing to suitable climatic conditions, according to a pest alert published by the National Bureau of Agricultural Research, part of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Dr Martin said that CIMMYT is amazed at the remarkable success of wheat programme in Pakistan. Director CIMMYT’s Global Wheat Programme, Hans Braun emphasised the need to be cognisant of securing the targeted yield in wheat as the global climate change might pose a great challenge and one Celsius drop in temperature during the night time may decrease seven per cent of wheat yield, hence with combination of intelligent interventions and sensible subsidies, enormous results in food security could be achieved.

Mr Mehboob Sultan appreciated the contributions of CIMMYT in Pakistan since the green revolution and said that the present government was ambitious for the revival of agriculture and breakthrough in agro-research.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465543/pakistan-warned-against-deadly-wheat-pest

GROWERS` BODY PLANS SIT-IN FOR CANE PRICE NOTIFICATION

By Our Staff Correspondent | 2/23/2019 12:00:00 AM

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAl) has announced that it will hold a sit-in outside the Mehran Sugar Mills in Tando Allahyar on Monday (Feb 25) to condemn the delay being caused in the issuance of a notification fixing the minimum sugar cane procurement price for the current season.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the organisation chaired by SAI president Nawab Zubair Talpur and attended by Mohammad Javed Riar, Abdul Raheem Dars, Saifullah Gul and Sharif Nizamani.

Speaking at the meeting, Nawab Talpur said that mill-owners had been exploiting cane growers in Sindh since 2014 but the provincial government remained silent and appeared to be helpless before the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA).

The meeting noted that the agriculture department obtained the Sindh cabinet`s approval for the notification that fixed the season`s cane procurement rate at Rs182/40kg but instead of the notification, a circular was issued by the department which was not accepted by the PSMA.

The meeting regretted that from Dec 2018 to Jan 2019, millions of maunds of cane was crushed after millers continued to insist on their offered rate of Rs140/40kg to growers.

Millers wanted to stomach over Rs400 billion on the pretext of the notification not having been issued, the meeting observed.

Following the Feb 25 protest, more sit-ins outside various sugar mills would be organised, he said.

The meeting urged the federal government to ban import of all farm commodities from India in order to promote Pakistan`s agriculture sector.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=23_02_2019_117_003

FISHING POLICY BEING REVISED, NA BODY TOLD

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 23RD, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

A parliamentary panel was informed on Friday that fishing policy is being revised to address the issues of Karachi Port Trust, Port Qasim, Fisheries and Gwadar Port Authority. Federal Minister Syed Ali Haider Zaidi while briefing to National Assembly Standing Committee on Maritime Affairs said the federal government has decided to review the deep-sea fishing policy in consultation with all the stakeholders.

Zaidi said deep-sea fishing carries the status of an important industry in the country and new policy will ensure rights of fishermen.

The committee which met here with MNA Mir Amer Ali Khan Magsi in the chair was told by the minister that foreign investors are showing keen interest to invest in the fishing industry due to business-friendly policies of the government.

He said developing the fishing industry in line with international standards will not only help increasing foreign exchange inflow into the country, but will also help in generating employment opportunities.

The minister also said contracts of Port Qasim Authority and Karachi Port Trust are also being reviewed.

“Night navigation at port Qasim has been started and it is another achievement of the incumbent government that two [liquefied natural gas] LNG ships are being accommodated at one time,” he added.

The committee lauded the efforts of the minister and assured its support in resolving the issues.

The Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the budget 2019-20 was presented.

The committee endorsed all the ongoing schemes and future schemes presented and gave its nod of approval to the sum of money required for the schemes.

The meeting was attended by MNAs Yaqoob Sahikh, Faheem Khan, Saifur Rehman, Abdul Shakoor, Mir Khan Jamali, Nuzhat Pathan, Lal Chand, Shahnaz Baloch, Aslam Bhootani, Qaiser Sheikh, Jam Karim Bijar, Abdul Qadir Patel, Kamaluddin and Syed Ali Haider Zaidi, besides senior officials of the ministry.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190223449468/

ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF WATERING CROPS

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 23RD, 2019 | EDITORIAL

One of the biggest hurdles in raising agricultural productivity in Pakistan is the shortage of irrigation water in the country. For instance, Pakistan faced considerable water shortages during monsoon, post-monsoon and winter seasons during 2017 and 2018. So far as long-term water strategy of the government is concerned, it centres around five important elements – water augmentation, water conservation, protection of infrastructure from water logging, salinity and floods, groundwater management and institutional reforms. The existing strategy, however, entails augmentation of surface resources to be done by construction of water storage dams, conservation of water to be undertaken through lining of canals and water courses and efficiency enhancement to be done by rehabilitation and better operation of existing system. An amount of Rs 36.8 billion was allocated for water sector's development during FY18 and major water sector projects under implementation were Bhasha Dam, Gomal Zam Dam, Kachhi Canal (Phase I), Darawat Dam, Nai Gaj Dam, Khurram Tangi Dam, Naulong Dam, Mohmand Dam and Right Bank Outfall Dam.

While the shortage of irrigation water is becoming acute with the passage of time, Pakistan has generally adopted a single-minded approach to tackling the problem by trying to increase the availability of water mainly by constructing more dams and conserving water through lining the canals and other water courses. Unfortunately, however, even the construction of dams has been held back due to political opposition in certain provinces and lack of funds while no attention has been paid for the optimum utilization of the existing scarce water resources by changing the methods of cultivation and use of available water supply. Poor water saving methods are obvious from the fact that while around 70 percent of water is used in agriculture sector all over the world, this percentage stands at 90 in Pakistan, with 20 percentage wastage due to deficient irrigation methods. Even the recent emphasis of Prime Minister Imran Khan and the then Chief Justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar was on construction of more dams, with only a little hint on the need for saving available water through some known methods practiced in other countries.

However, there is some silver-lining on the horizon through the courtesy of Nestle Pakistan. Inaugurating a site near Sheikhupura under Nestle Pakistan's Agricultural Efficiency Project on 5th February, 2019, its senior vice president, Peter Hofmann, said that this project has the potential to help save 54 million litres of water annually and is a part of the company's "Care for Water" initiative. The present project is possible with the collaboration of the Punjab Government which would cover 40 percent of the farmers' cost. Pakistan's Agricultural Efficiency Project was initiated in 2017 and has so far covered 109 acres of land with an estimated 280 million litres of water saved. Water saving is possible by the installation of drip irrigation as opposed to flood irrigation which was the traditional way of irrigating agricultural fields in the country. Citizens as well as the government of Pakistan need to realize the essence of being water conscious not only for their own survival but for the overall well-being of global ecosystems and economies. Drip irrigation has undoubtedly a massive potential of saving water by taking a step out of conventional methods of farming.

While we appreciate the efforts of Nestle Pakistan and the collaboration of the Punjab Government in promoting drip farming to save water, it would be better if other provincial governments are also taken on the board and such an effort is extended to other parts of the country as well. At present, a tiny portion of country's agriculture land has been covered by drip irrigation due mainly to high cost of switching to this non-traditional method but such a shift is necessary because of constantly decreasing availability of water in the country, increasing migration of population from rural to urban areas and a highly questionable attitude of Indian government towards water-sharing with Pakistan. Another method of saving water could be tunnel farming which has been adopted in certain villages bordering India on a self-help basis and without any kind of support from the agricultural department. Obviously, this method of farming is also expensive as compared to traditional one but needs to be considered for wider adoption to save water. We are of the view that while such methods could be popularised in the country, other options also need to be explored by agricultural universities and other related research institutions to economise the use of water because water resources of the country are depleting fast and Pakistan could face acute shortage of water in the not-so-distant future. According to a World Bank report, poor water management is conservatively estimated to cost dollar 12 billion or 4.0 percent of GDP per annum and improving water use efficiency is the most pressing need of the country.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190223449450/

FAO'S FIRST-EVER REPORT ON BIODIVERSITY PRESENTS WORRYING EVIDENCE

ZAHID BAIG 2019/02/23

LAHORE: The first-ever Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report on biodiversity presents mounting and worrying evidence that the biodiversity that underpins our food systems is disappearing, putting the future of our food, livelihoods, health and environment under severe threat.

Once lost, warns FAO's State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture report, biodiversity for food and agriculture – i.e. all the species that support our food systems and sustain the people who grow and/or provide our food – cannot be recovered.

Biodiversity for food and agriculture is all the plants and animals – wild and domesticated – that provide food, feed, fuel and fiber. It is also the myriad of organisms that support food production through ecosystem services – called "associated biodiversity".

The report, prepared by FAO under the guidance of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture looks at all these elements. It is based on information provided specifically for this report by 91 countries, and the analysis of the latest global data. The foundation of our food systems is under severe threat. The report points to decreasing plant diversity in farmers' fields, rising numbers of livestock breeds at risk of extinction and increases in the proportion of over fished fish stocks.

Of some 6,000 plant species cultivated for food, fewer than 200 contribute substantially to global food output, and only nine accounts for 66 percent of total crop production. The world's livestock production is based on about 40 animal species, with only a handful providing the vast majority of meat, milk and eggs. Of the 7,745 local (occurring in one country) breeds of livestock reported globally, 26 percent are at risk of extinction.

Nearly a third of fish stocks are overfished, more than half have reached their sustainable limit. Information reveals that wild food species and many species that contribute to ecosystem services that are vital to food and agriculture, including pollinators, soil organisms and natural enemies of pests are rapidly disappearing. For example, the report said, countries report that 24 percent of nearly 4,000 wild food species – mainly plants, fish and mammals – are decreasing in abundance. But the proportion of wild foods in decline is likely to be even greater as the state of more than half of the reported wild food species is unknown.

The largest number of wild food species in decline appears in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by Asia-Pacific and Africa. This could be, however, a result of wild food species being more studied and/or reported on in these countries than in others.

Many associated biodiversity species are also under severe threat. These include birds, bats and insects that help control pests and diseases, soil biodiversity, and wild pollinators – such as bees, butterflies, bats and birds. Forests, rangelands, mangroves, sea grass meadows, coral reefs and wetlands in general – key ecosystems that deliver numerous services essential to food and agriculture and are home to countless species – are also rapidly declining.

The driver of biodiversity for food and agriculture loss cited by most reporting countries is: changes in land and water use and management, followed by pollution, overexploitation and over harvesting, climate change, and population growth and urbanization. In the case of associated biodiversity, while all regions report habitat alteration and loss as major threats, other key drivers vary across regions.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/02/23/5-page/764689-news.html

OLIVE FARMING GETS BOOST WITH ARRIVAL OF 100,000 PLANTS FROM SPAIN

Amin Ahmed Updated February 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Olive farming in Pakistan has received a strong boost with the arrival of 100,000 olive plants from Spain and Turkey.

The move is part of a project to promote cultivation of olive on commercial basis in the country.

A total of 550,000 plants will be imported under the project which is being implemented by the National Agricultural Centre.

Talking to Dawn, Project Director Dr Tariq Bari said on Wednesday that 150,000 more olive plants would reach the country next week while the remaining plants will be delivered later.

The project for the promotion of cultivation of olive on commercial basis has been approved under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). A fresh PC-1 has been submitted to the Planning Commission to widen the scope of the project to include areas which are best suited for olive cultivation.

Since olive is a drought-tolerant plant, it has been decided to introduce olive farming in Waziristan, Fata agencies and various districts of Balochistan which have been affected by the drought spell over the past few years.

Dr Bari said that a survey of the potential areas had been completed and it was found that these areas were best suited for olive plantation.

The olive cultivation will not only offer an ‘olive branch’ to peace in Fata, but will also serve as a source for livelihood of farmers in the entire Waziristan belt and agencies of Fata.

It has been estimated that 45 per cent of Fata land is suitable for olive cultivation. The highest appetite for cultivation of olive has been found in Bajaur followed by Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan.

According to Dr Bari, there are tremendous benefits for promoting commercial plantation of olive in Fata which include improvement in environment, development of village entrepreneurship, employment generation, improvement in livelihood and value-addition.

In Balochistan, the potential areas found suitable for olive cultivation were Zhob, Khuzdar, Loralai, Kila Saifullah and Musa Khel.

In some of these areas, results of growing olive crop have been encouraging that prompted project officials to include Balochistan in the programme.

It has been decided to install drip irrigation to olive plants on 400 acres of land in Khyber-Pakhtu¬nkhwa and Balochistan.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465351/olive-farming-gets-boost-with-arrival-of-100000-plants-from-spain

FARMERS URGE GOVERNMENT TO INCREASE ALLOCATIONS FOR AGRICULTURE RESEARCH

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 22ND, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Farmers on Thursday urged the government to enhance allocations for agriculture research, decrease mark-up rates on agricultural loans and announce indicative prices for major crops.

“Mark-up rate on agriculture loans should not be more than 5 percent, which at present is 14 percent, while investment on agriculture research should be increased to 1 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is at the movement is 0.2 percent,” said president Pakistan Kissan Ittehad Khalid Mehmood Khokhar while addressing a consultative meeting.

He said that politics should not be played over the growing issues of farmers and the government must resolve the problems being faced by farmers. The prices of fertilizers and other input materials, especially pesticides, have gone up; therefore, these should be reduced to bring them at par with the Indian fertilizers prices, he said, adding that 30 percent subsidy should be given on import of pesticides.

Khokhar demanded the government to withdraw 5 percent sales tax on agriculture machinery and equipment. He said that agriculture export mechanism should be devised for wheat, potato, rice, mango, orange and vegetable crops. Major crops should be given support or indicative price, as India has announced it, he said.

Khokhar said that potato crisis should be resolved on immediate basis and about 500,000 tonnes mandate be given to PASSCO or food department to overcome the crisis.

Rabia Sultan, a progressive farmer said that the government has announced rebate on export of sugar but did not give the same protection to growers. She said that the government of Punjab needs to strictly implement agriculture policy announced by it recently. “Every government announces agriculture policy does not implement it,” she regretted, adding that the government needs to improve agriculture extension in provinces.

Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, said that previous government ignored agriculture sector. “No one properly raised voice in the Parliament to address the issues of agriculture sector, so we all are responsible for poor agriculture growth,” he said.

He said that the present government has special focus on agriculture sector and improving this sector is one of its top priorities. The government is taking various steps to improve agriculture research in order to increase per acre yield, he said.

The meeting was also attended by Federal Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Dr Fahmida Mirza, Federal Minister for Petroleum Ghulam Sarwar Khan and Members of National Assembly from different political parties.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190222449168/

GOVERNMENT PLANS TO FIX INDICATIVE PRICE OF COTTON

FAZAL SHER | FEB 22ND, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The government is planning to fix indicative price of cotton crop in order to encourage cotton growers and control decline in area under cultivation of the crop. “The government is planning to fix indicative price of cotton like sugarcane and wheat,” said Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research (NFS&R) Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai.

Briefing the National Assembly Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research, Popalzai said that government is taking different steps to increase cotton production and area under cultivation but there are some issues which are not even under its control. To pursue growers to cultivate more sugarcane has resulted in a sharp decline in cotton acreage, particularly in Punjab, he said, adding, “Establishment of sugar mills in cotton growing areas by influential sugar industry owners is one of the main reasons behind decrease in cotton area,” he said.

Cotton Commissioner NFS&R, Dr Khalid Abdullah while briefing the committee said that main reason behind decrease in cotton sowing was the shifting of cotton area to sugarcane, lower prices of cotton in the past few years and market fluctuation.

He said that the country produces surplus wheat and sugar due to support price of wheat and indicative price of sugarcane; therefore, it is direly need to fix indicative price of cotton to provide protection to cotton growers.

He also suggested imposing regulatory duty on import of cotton like wheat and sugar. “The imposition of regulatory duty on import of cotton would provide protection to the domestic growers,” he said.

MNA Rao Muhammad Ajmal Khan, chairmen of the committee asked the ministry to take practical steps for improvement in cotton production in the country.

The committee also expressed concern over delay in procurement of potato through Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco).

Ajmal Khan asked the government to procure potato through Passco and take step for export of the commodity on immediate basis; otherwise, farmers will start staging protest demonstrations. “If the government fails to resolve the issue till March 5, farmers would face severe loses,” he said.

Minister for NFS&R Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan told the committee that he had informed Prime Minister Imran Khan that potato crisis would not be resolved without intervention of the government through PASSCO. The Prime Minister agreed to his proposal but agriculture minister of Punjab opposed his suggestion and told the Prime Minister that export of the commodity is the only solution to the crisis, he said.

Sultan said that he would again raise the issue of procurement of potato through Passco in the cabinet meeting and would try to convince the cabinet.

Popalzai told the committee that no tax is imposed on the export of potato by the government. “The issue of Afghan duty which is around 25 percent, which has been imposed by Afghan authorities since 2015, has been raised with Afghan government but they are not ready to lift it,” he said.

He said that China and South Korea have shown interest to import potato from Pakistan. Russia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Central Asian States import potatoes from Pakistan, he said.

While briefing the committee about the NFS&R proposed project of Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for financial year 2019-20, he said that ministry will demand Rs 19,587.62 million for 52 projects. He said that out of 52 projects, 13 are under Prime Minister’s Initiatives and their worth is Rs 14,795 million.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190222449156/

SUGAR MILLS ASKED TO PAY FARMERS’ DUES OR FACE ACTION

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 22ND, 2019 | FAISALABAD

Special assistant to CM Punjab Malik Umar Farooq has stressed upon the sugar mills management for the payment of sugarcane dues to the farmers immediately otherwise, legal action would be taken against the defaulters sugar mills in case of further delay.

He was presiding over a District Monitoring Committee meeting at DC Office Committee room to review the matters of sugarcane crushing season and up to date status of payments from sugar mills. The special assistant informed that special monitoring was being carried out by the Punjab government and entire administrative machinery had been mobilized to protect the interest of the growers till the completion of crushing season. He enquired from the ACs about the current payment status of the sugar mills at their respective areas and directed that the 100 percent payment should be made to the growers of the sugarcane supplied up to 31st January. He asked the sugar mills management to pay the remaining dues of sugarcane to the farmers within stipulated period in respectable manner. He stressed upon proper traffic management to avoid road accidents due to sugarcane loaded trolleys.

The special assistant also urged upon increasing the police patrolling for the safety and security of sugarcane growers. ADCR Tariq Niazi briefed about the measures taken by the district administration for the supervision of crushing season and informed about the action taken against the middlemen and illegal weigh bridges. He informed that action taken against 142 middlemen and during the crushing season 25 persons were arrested and 114 FIRs have been registered. Among others the meeting was also attended by ACs Syed Tanvir Murtaza, Aurangzeb, Nadeem Abbas, Khurram Shehzad Bhatti, SP Admn. Zubaida Parveen, DSP Traffic Zahida Parveen, Storage and Enforcement Officer Muhammad Taufiq, representatives of farmers and sugar mills.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190222449198/

PROCUREMENT REGIME NEVER HELPED FARMERS: BAKHT

Nasir Jamal Updated February 21, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government has accumulated debt of Rs447 billion on account of its commodity operations – wheat procurement, warehousing and sale – in the last 10 years, according to provincial finance minister Makhdum Hashim Jawan Bakht.

Speaking at a leadership convention on Wednesday, the minister said the entire commodity operation in food benefitted a maximum of one out of 10 people but the government had to pay a heavy price on refinancing the debt stocks and warehousing in addition to pilferages. He said the procurement had never helped the farmers. He nevertheless said the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government had brought down the commodity-related debt by plugging the system inefficiencies.

Says commodity operation benefitted one out of 10 people but govt had to pay heavy price on refinancing debt stocks

“We believe in increasing the role of the private sector. We see government as a facilitator. So when we talk about ease of doing business it is not about a better position on the World Bank rankings; it is much more than that”, the minister said. “It is for the first time that the Punjab government is looking at each and every regulation with a view to facilitating the private business. Each provincial department has been tasked to look into each and every regulation, law and implement certain standardised measures to make them business friendly. It is necessary to simplify the laws, regulations and rules and reduce their number to support the private sector.”

Makhdum said the government was also looking at different venues for generating more resources for development. “Punjab has to unlock the potential of its cities for revenue generation.” He believed that the role of the private sector was to lead from the front to create jobs. He said Pakistan missed the early opportunity of industrialisation in which the world moved from agrarian society to industrialised society. However, now in the new age of digitisation both the government and the private sector should play their role for leapfrogging growth.

Nishat Group chairman Mian Mohammad Mansha earlier said every incumbent government heavily relied on loans instead of reviewing its assets and potential. But he appreciated the government for thinking out-of-box solution by adopting different approach to the problems facing the country.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465127/procurement-regime-never-helped-farmers-bakht

GOVERNMENT GETS OFFERS IN TENDER TO EXPORT 250,000 TONNES OF WHEAT

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 21ST, 2019 | HAMBURG

A tender to sell and export 100,000 tonnes of wheat from a state agency in Pakistan attracted purchase offers equating to around $250 a tonne FOB, European traders said on Wednesday. The tender from the Punjab regional government is part of a new programme of state-backed exports in Pakistan. The price level is relatively high which means the wheat may be exported without subsidies, traders said.

Pakistan's government in November approved the export of up to 500,000 tonnes of wheat, possibly with subsidies, to reduce large local supplies. The decision has added more supplies to global markets.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190221448943/

IMPORTED FOOD ITEMS' LABELS MUST BE IN URDU & ENGLISH

ZAHID BAIG | FEB 21ST, 2019 | LAHORE

Ministry of Commerce & Textile amending the import policy has made it compulsory on the importers that the consumer packaging of the imported food items should have label printed both in Urdu & English languages giving details of the product including nutritional fact, usage instructions etc.

According to a notification SRO 237 (1)/2019 issued by the Ministry recently, it has also been asked the importers that their imported items should have logo of the Halal certification body on the consumer packaging and the labels should not be in the form of a sticker, overprinting, stamp or scratched labeling.

Under the new order, the imported shipment shall also accompanied by a 'Halal Certificate' issued by a Halal Certification Body, accredited with an Accrediting Body which is a member of International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF) or Standards Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC).

Reacting to these new instructions, Pakistan FMCG Importers Association (PFIA) Chairman Anjum Nisar, Senior Vice Chairman Muhammad Ejaz Tanveer, Nafees Ahmad Barry, Secretary General Ali Tariq Matto and others said that they have no objection to said notification but importers must be given some reasonable and fair time allowing all importers and foreign suppliers to adapt to new requirements.

"Thousands of containers (Full Container Load FCLs) are on their way to importing countries and thousands of others are in the pipeline so it is impossible to stop this process with immediate effect and print new labels, they added.

They said that the notification also requires certain clarifications such as why to print usage method on every product as water being imported does not need to tell the consumer usage method. Similarly, they said it should also be clarified that which products should have Halal logos. PFIA leadership urged the government to always consult the stakeholders before issuing any such order and also allow ample time before its implementation. They suggested that the importers should be given time till July 31, 2019, for implementation of the fresh notification.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190221448954/

RS90.57 MILLION TO BOOST OSTRICH FARMING

By Imran Adnan Published: February 21, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) has approved a sum of Rs90.57 million for ostrich farming in Punjab. The aim is to ensure food security through sharing the load on meat and beef in the country and generate exportable and high valued surplus meat.

The PDWP approved five development schemes in various sectors at an estimated cost of over Rs14 billion. This was decided in in the 17th meeting of the PDWP on Wednesday, with Planning and Development (P&D) Chairman Habibur Rehman Gilani in the chair.

Besides SMEs and entrepreneur development schemes, the PDWP has given a go-ahead for the development of ostrich farming projects in Punjab. An amount of Rs90.57 million has been approved for the scheme.

Under the scheme, the government will provide a subsidy to livestock farmers for ostrich rearing and farming, besides building the capacity of livestock and ostrich farmers in Punjab. The government will also establish a model ostrich farm at the University of Veterinary, Animal and Sciences (UVAS), Pattoki, while doing experimentation at the university-level and on private ostrich farms. Under the scheme, avenues for ostrich meat and by-products exports will also be explored.

The official project proposal, made available to The Express Tribune, indicated ostrich farming was an emerging and innovative business. He said ostrich could provide meat 10 times faster compared to poultry and 15 times faster than traditional cattle farming.

For the moment, ostrich farming is a huge industry in the USA, Australia, Europe and some countries in the Middle East like Jordan and Lebanon. Over 30,000 ostrich farms, of different sizes, are fully functional globally. Due to the high nutritional value of its meat, as compared to other white and red meat and high Food Conversion Ratio (FCR) as compared to other animals and birds, it ensures faster and cheaper food security.

The proposal also highlighted that the basic concept of the project is to engage, educate, motivate and support local farmers for ostrich farming; an innovative livestock business, through technical assistance and subsidy in rearing of ostrich chicks. For the purpose, livestock and ostrich farmers from throughout Punjab will be selected and supported in this livestock business.

The selected farmers will purchase ostrich chicks from any source as per their convenience and rear them at their facility. Ostrich chicks at registered ostrich farms will be tagged. After three months, the registered ostrich farmers will be supported by an amount of Rs2,000 for each healthy and registered ostrich chick as first installment. The same procedure will be repeated after eight months (second installment) and after 12 months (third installment). The second and the third installments will be of Rs3,000 and Rs5,000 respectively for each registered healthy bird. In this way, registered ostrich farmers will get subsidy for rearing ostrich chicks for whole year. Initially, 5,000 birds will be supported under the proposed project.

The document showed that the government interventions under this project would lead to transformation of traditional meat sector to commercial one through development of all stakes viz, livestock owners, medicine, industry, tagging, feed ingredient industry, feed industry, meat process and meat exporters besides availability of quality meat and meat products for local consumption leading to human health safety.

The project will also ensure enhanced food security in the country, increased income of livestock farmers; utilisation of the abundant poultry farms for ostrich farming; engaging the youth from rural areas in awareness raising campaign; greater awareness of the livestock, ostrich farmers for the conversion of subsistence to more commercialised farming system; and higher social status due to improved awareness about value of ostrich, ostrich products, ostrich farming and increased income.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1915172/1-rs90-57-million-boost-ostrich-farming/

ECC ORDERS UNINTERRUPTED UREA SUPPLY

Amin Ahmed Updated February 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Tuesday directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research for continued operation of two urea plants — Fatima Fertiliser and Agritech — beyond the current month till October to ensure sufficient supply of the fertiliser.

About the demand and supply situation of urea and DAP fertilisers, a review of stocks would be taken in August for necessary course of correction, if needed, it was decided.

The meeting was presided over by Finance Minister Asad Umar.

The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development briefed the ECC about the current position of manpower export to different countries and its efforts for seeking employment opportunities in international labour market including the gulf countries.

The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training informed the ECC that it has developed a data bank of over 600,000 skilled manpower, who have graduated from the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission platform.

The ECC directed the constitution of an inter-ministerial task force with the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis in the lead, for formulating concrete proposals with clear targets on development and export of manpower.

The ECC also approved amendments in the Import Policy Order 2016 to further beef up the existing labelling requirements for import of edible, especially 'halal' products. The step would ensure clarity on ingredients of imported products in Urdu for the benefit of consumers.

The Ministry of Industries and Production presented to the committee an update on the current status of National Accountability Bureau cases regarding Pakistan Steel Mills. On this, the ECC expressed concern on the slow progress of cases and directed that the cases be actively pursued. The committee further directed that a case be initiated for placement of personnel's names on the exit control list who are under investigation in different cases.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) submitted a report to the committee, highlighting the current position of auction of abandoned containers/lots and also elaborated the procedures for clearance and disposal of consignments at ports, along with the challenges faced in the process.

The ECC, while laying emphasis on simplification of procedures and promotion of e-clearance, directed the formation of a committee headed by minister for Maritime Affairs to prepare proposals for prompt and efficient cargo clearance, both containers and vehicles, at the ports to reduce the port's congestion and improve ease of doing business. The committee would share its proposals with the ECC in two weeks.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1464855/ecc-orders-uninterrupted-urea-supply

ADB TO STEP UP FOOD SECURITY PLAN

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated February 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is preparing a new six-year operational plan for rural development and food security for 2019-24 to provide strategic guidance to its member countries on all aspects of agriculture, natural resources and rural development.

An evaluation document released by ADB on Tuesday says the refinement of the operational plan is currently underway as a broader corporate initiative.

During the 2005-17, the ADB provided $12.2 billion to its member countries in Asia and the Pacific region for sustainable agriculture.

Although, the bank is meeting its $2bn annual approval target for food security, an ADB approach is lacking, the report says.

In its recommendations, the evaluation report recommended the bank to replace the previous plan and revised corporate targets need to track both agricultural and non-agricultural contributions.

To track progress towards rural development and food security targets, the project classification system should be revisited. The current plan has 17 sub-sectors, some of which are only marginally related to agriculture. Specific operational guidance should be developed for areas of increasing importance, neglected sub-sectors and regions, the evaluation report recommends.

The ADB should promote more robust sector diagnostics, through technical assistance, to strengthen project pipelines and country partnership strategies that can deliver the ADB 'Strategy 2030' rural development and food security priority area objectives.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1464845/adb-to-step-up-food-security-plan

SIDA CHIEF CALLS FOR REFORMS IN IRRIGATION SECTOR

By Our Staff Correspondent | 2/20/2019 12:00:00 AM

HYDERABAD: Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (Sida) chairman Abdul Basit Soomro has said that reforms in the irrigation sector are need of the hour and they should be promoted through every possible means.

Speaking to a delegation of growers from different areas in the main Sida secretariat here on Tuesday, the Sida chairman said Sindh was presently confronting severe water shortage and the main reason for this was low rainfall. He appreciated working of farmers` organisations.

Efforts were under way to improve performance of farmers` groups, he said, adding that he was trying to ensure timely availability of water to growers for which meetings were under way with area water boards (AWBs). He said the AWBs` managements had been directed to make sure that there should be no mismanagement in distribution of water as he would not tolerate it. He said he was also trying to ensure provision of irrigation water in all the tail-end areas and to control water theft.

A delegation of Farmers Organisation Council Ghotki led by Abdul Haq Solangi called on the Sida chairman. Mr Solangi said growers were facing different issues as far as water was concerned. He was assured by the chairman that all genuine grievances of the growers would be redressed.

AWB Nara Canal officers, including Abdul Rasheed Mahar and Sikandar Mangrio, met the Sida chairman and briefed him about works of the board.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=20_02_2019_117_002

COTTON MARKET: PRICES UP AMID MODEST BUSINESS

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 20TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Prices moved higher on the cotton market on Tuesday as mills lay hands on fine quality amid rising concerns about imports of cotton in the near future, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8,600, they added. In the ready session, about 2000 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs 7000 and Rs 9000, they said.

Prices of seed cotton in Sindh and Balochistan were at Rs 3000-3500 and in Punjab seed cotton prices at Rs 3000-3600, they said. Commenting on the latest developments in the market, dealers said that some mills showed interest in fresh buying of cotton to replenish their stock. They said that locally falling area of cultivation, use of poor quality cotton seed and pesticides caused decline in quantity and quality of cotton. So the government has to take necessary measures to keep a balance between demand and supply.

Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that cotton market is under pressure slightly due to prevailing negative developments the world over. According to rumours, India may impose duty on Pak imports and exports raised concerns on Pak spinners as Pak spinners were depending on cotton imports from India.

Adds Reuters: ICE cotton futures were closed on Monday due to President Day holiday. Cotton prices mostly higher in other international markets. The following deals reported: 1000 bales of cotton from Dherki at Rs 9000, 400 bales from Mianwali at Rs 7950, 500 bales from Kabirwala at Rs 7000 and 400 bales from Rajanpur at Rs 8500, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190220448711/

SNGPL FAILS TO RESTORE GAS SUPPLY TO FERTILISER PLANTS

By Shahram Haq Published: February 20, 2019

LAHORE: Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) has stopped gas supply to at least two fertiliser plants despite the injection of re-gasified liquefied natural gas (RLNG) into the system from Monday.

Industry officials revealed that Fatima Fertiliser and Agritech plants had been idle since February 14 as natural gas supply to the two plants had not been restored.

The closure of the two fertiliser plants, if prolonged, could lead to urea shortage in the Kharif and Rabi sowing seasons. The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) has already said in its decision, dated January 1, that gas supply should be ensured to fertiliser plants from the SNGPL network till further orders.

The ECC also indicated that priority should be given to fertiliser plants over power producers as far as gas supply was concerned. “With a view to fulfilling this requirement (continuation of gas supply to fertiliser plants), the gas allocation for power sector may be reviewed,” the ECC remarked.

The country has faced a massive gas crisis in the current winter season primarily due to delayed LNG shipments as the government wanted to probe the LNG and terminal deals struck by the previous government. The crisis was not limited to Punjab as after many years Sindh too suffered from gas shortage.

As a result, the government allowed the transportation of LNG cargoes, so the issue of low gas pressure and volumes could be addressed.

The crisis worsened when Engro Elengy Terminal Pakistan Limited closed for annual maintenance, causing trouble for the industries, domestic and commercial consumers.

At present, gas supply to all consumer categories connected with the SNGPL network has been restored but not for the fertiliser plants. According to the Ministry of Industries, SNGPL must comply with the ECC’s decision on continued supply till further orders.

However, SNGPL argued that the company was getting a low quantity of gas, though RLNG had been injected into the system. “We at least need 1,000 million cubic feet of RLNG per day (mmcfd), but we are getting 800 mmcfd at present; we are restoring gas supply, however, it will be a gradual process,” said an SNGPL spokesman.

"Apart from the low gas volumes, we have some outstanding dues, which the fertiliser sector has to pay to SNGPL," the spokesman pointed out.

Agri experts said the closure of the two fertiliser plants may lead to urea shortage, which could create black market of the essential commodity.

Of the total urea production capacity of around six million tons per annum, the two plants manufacture around 0.8 million tons.

According to a report of the National Fertiliser Development Centre (NFDC), urea stocks at the start of 2019 stood at 180,000 tons. In January, the production was estimated at 435,000 tons and off-take was recorded at 550,000 to 560,000 tons, leaving only 60,000 to 70,000 tons as buffer stock, which is too low compared to the agreed 200,000 tons.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 20th, 2019

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1914243/2-sngpl-fails-restore-gas-supply-fertiliser-plants/

BALOCHISTAN CM WANTS PASNI FISH HARBOUR RELOCATED

Saleem Shahid Updated February 19, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani has proposed reconstruction of Pasni Fish Harbour with all modern facilities at some other place in the area to protect rights of fishermen of the area as the present harbour cannot be made functional.

Presiding over a meeting to review performance of Pasni Fish Harbour, he said the government would definitely make all those government institutions functional which were at present not functioning.

The secretary of fisheries and the managing director of Pasni Fish Harbour, Ali Gul Kurd, briefed the meeting on the harbour. The meeting reviewed to use the grant of Japan for the development of Pasni Fish Harbour.

It also reviewed a plan to construct eight new jetties in coastal areas of Makran and directed the Board of Revenue to complete the process of providing land for the purpose.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister expressed anger over non-functioning of Pasni Fish Harbour for the last 10 years, but an amount of Rs1.5 billion was spent on payment of salary to employees and staff of the harbour.

He said heads of a majority of government departments and institutions were non-serious about running their departments and institutions and he had reached that conclusion after reviewing the performance of these departments and institutions over the last five months.

Mr Alyani said that fish harbours and jetties across the world not only provided jobs to people, but also strengthened local economies. But unfortunately in Balochistan the situation was different and these institutions and departments were not playing effective role in providing jobs to people and strengthening the economy of the province, he added.

The chief minister directed authorities concerned to consider running all harbours and jetties of coastal areas of the province under an authority and through public-private partnership and advertise the plan in newspapers to attract interested investors.

Published in Dawn, February 19th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1464715/balochistan-cm-wants-pasni-fish-harbour-relocated

COTTON PRODUCTION SHORT BY 6.83PC

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana Updated February 19, 2019

KARACHI: Badly hit by falling area under cultivation, use of poor quality seed and pesticides, cotton production up to Feb 15 stood short by 6.83 per cent at 10.7 million bales over the corresponding period last year.

This is the seventh consecutive year the country is faced with a short crop of around 4.8m bales from a record production of around 15m bales achieved in 2011-12.

In order to meet the shortfall, textile spinners are likely to import up to 3.5m to 4m bales, burdening foreign exchange reserves by around $1 to $1.2 billion.

According to cotton stakeholders, there is an urgent need to rectify the situation and check falling cotton production.

“The government has to take necessary measures on war footing basis for enhancing cotton production in the country,” said Chairman Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) and a grower from South Punjab Mian Mahmood Ahmed on Monday.

While appreciating the PTI government for taking keen interest in reviving the cotton crop, he said, “Next season’s sowing would start by March in lower Sindh. The government should immediately come up with a revival plan for enhancing cotton production.” “Most of the seed being used for cotton cultivation is not certified and of poor quality, so are the pesticides” he added while urging for improvement.

Cotton production figures released by the PCGA for the fortnight Feb 1-15, 2019 show an overall decline of 6.83 per cent in cotton production. During the abovementioned period, 10.7m bales were produced as against 11.4m bales in the same period last year – a short fall of 784,745 bales.

Punjab recorded a decline of 9.41pc decline at 6.552m bales as against 7.233m bales produced in the corresponding period last year – a shortfall of 680,812 bales.

Sindh, which suffered badly due to shortage of irrigation water at sowing stage, recouped as growers went for second sowing. As a result, a 2.44pc fall was observed in cotton production. Only 4.148m bales were produced in the abovementioned period compared to 4.252m bales in the same period last year.

In Balochistan – which is the only province that produces organic cotton – cotton production was up by 0.99pc and stood at 117,852 bales.

On the consumption side, spinning mills purchased 9.276m bales as against 10.439m bales in the corresponding period last year. Exporters lifted less cotton this season at 102,330 bales as against 216,615 bales in the same period last year.

Published in Dawn, February 19th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1464739/cotton-production-short-by-683pc

POULTRY FARMING: SINDH GOVERNMENT MAY REJECT PM INITIATIVE: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 19TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Sindh cabinet might reject the PM initiative to promote poultry farming as it will not be viable for the province, said Sindh minister for livestock, fisheries & cooperative department. Speaking at an inaugural ceremony of ‘Marhaba Proteins Farms’ held at Dhabeji, Abdul Bari Pitafi, minister for livestock, fisheries & cooperative department, Sindh said that Prime Minister had announced to provide five hens and a rooster to the farmers under his initiative to promote poultry farming.

He said federal secretary during meeting with his counterparts in Sindh on the other day informed that federal government would give Rs97 subsidy while Sindh government have to pay Rs300 and rest of the Rs1100 would be collected from the farmer against each fowl. Moreover, he said that this initiative could not be materialised in Sindh as the provincial government was already providing 20 fowls free of cost to the farmers and hoped that PM initiative to promote poultry farming might also be opposed by Sindh cabinet.

Pitafi said that Sindh livestock, fisheries & cooperative department was planning to organise exhibitions at district level to take all stakeholders on board and apprised that LDFA would be held at Hyderabad this year. He said that Sindh government has set 5 percent as growth target by 2030 and for the purpose considerations were being made to streamline the affairs and added that poultry and agriculture sectors, which had been neglected for long, were now recognised as major potential sectors to achieve this growth target.

Mehboob-ul-Haq MD Sindh Enterprise Development Funds (SEDF) said that ‘Marhaba Protein Farms’, a private sector company, has invested Rs350 million for the establishment of a breeder farm and hatchery and SEDF would pay KIBOR part of interest on the loan provided by bank. He said that Sindh had a vast potential of profitable investment in poultry breeder farming and hatchery sector as the province was producing only 20 percent demand of breeding and hatchery while the rest of 80 percent demand would be fulfilled by Punjab.

He said that Frisian Eggs – Holland would start its egg processing unit by next month and added that egg processing in Pakistan was 30 percent cost effective as compared to other parts of the world. Saeed Ahmed, Joint Director, AC&M department SBP said that the central bank had set a target of agriculture credit to Rs1250 billion for current fiscal year and Rs527.3 billion were disbursed during first six months, of which Rs288.4 billion were lent from five top commercial banks. He said that agriculture credit amounting to Rs973 billion was disbursed as against the target of Rs1001 billion in FY17-18.

Azhar Ali Dahar, Dirctor General, TDAP termed poultry sector as vibrant segment of livestock sector in Pakistan, which provided over 1.5 million direct or indirect employment. He said that current investment in this was estimated to more than Rs700 billion and Pakistan was ranked at 10th in the world in poultry production; adding that poultry meat production for the year 2017-18 was to the tune of 1.39 million tonnes, which was 32.7 percent of the total meat production (4.3 million tonnes) in the country.

Furthermore, he said that the poultry sector had contributed 1.4 percent in GDP while the contribution of agriculture sector stood at 7.5 percent during 2017-18 and added that value added products of livestock created 12.7 percent impact on country's exports. He urged the investors to pour investments in this sector for Halal meat exports especially to Middle East. Dr Nazeer Hussain Kalhoro, Executive Director Sindh Poultry Vaccine Centre (SPVC) said that they had developed 64 types of poultry vaccine and four types of livestock vaccine and the centre was providing free medicine assistance to the farmers.

Aijaz Ahmed Mahesar, secretary Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperative department, Dr Muhammad Ilyas DG, Animal Quarantine department, Ghulam Khaliq, chairman Southern Zone Pakistan Poultry Association, Karachi and Kabool Muhammad Khatian President Sindh Chamber of Agriculture also spoke on the occasion. A large number of banks, investors and others attended the event.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190219448430/

PULSES IMPORT UP BY THREE PERCENT

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 19TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The country's import of pulses grew to $324.396 million in July-Jan 20181-9, up by 3 percent, official figures say. Increase in pulses import now stands at $8.948 million in July-Jan 2018-19 from $315.448 million in July-Jan 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics shows.

In term of quantity, Pakistan imported 563,035 metric tons in July-Jan 2018-19 that is greater by 38 percent or 154060 metric tons from 408,975 metric tons in July-Jan 2017-18. The country's import of pulses, however, slumped to $36.569 million in Jan 2019 from $45.545 million in Jan 2018, showing a fall of 20 percent or $8.976 million. The pulses import volume scaled down by 18 percent or 12175 metric tons to 56,356 metric tons in Jan 2019 from 68,531 metric tons in Jan 2018.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190219448402/

RICE EXPORT PRICES FALL IN TOP ASIAN HUBS

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 19TH, 2019 | HANOI

Rice export prices fell in top Asian hubs this week on slow demand and rising supply following a quiet start to the year, while limited interest from the Philippines failed to spur a Vietnamese market reeling from Chinese import restrictions. In top exporter India, 5 percent broken parboiled variety eased to $380-$385 per tonne from $383-$388 last week as supply from the winter crop poured in. Demand from Asian and African buyers was subdued, an exporter based in Kakinada in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh said.

India's rice exports between April and December dropped 10.2 percent from a year earlier to 8.46 million tonnes, a government body said last week. In Thailand, benchmark 5 percent broken rice prices fell to $382-$398 a tonne, free on board Bangkok, from $390-$402 previously. “The market has been really quiet and new supply of rice is coming out now,” a Bangkok-based trader said.

A weaker domestic currency was adding further pressure to prices, traders said. “More supply will lower prices further but exporters are still looking for buyers because it has really been quiet since the start of the year,” another trader said. Thailand is the world’s second biggest rice exporter followed by Vietnam, where rates for benchmark 5 percent broken rice fell to $340 a tonne from $350 two weeks ago before the markets closed for the Lunar New Year holiday.

“Trade has resumed and we have seen more buyers from the Philippines placing orders,” a trader based in Ho Chi Minh City said, adding that private buyers from rice-scarce Philippines purchased about 20,000 tonnes this week. However, China has been imposing stricter conditions for rice imports from Vietnam, traders said. China will likely cut rice shipments from Vietnam to 500,000-600,000 tonnes this year from around 1.5-2 million tonnes a year in the past, another trader said.

“We think the government will likely buy rice this year for stockpiling, giving a support for domestic prices.” Export prices, however, will be under pressure as the major winter-spring harvest peaks by month-end, traders said. Elsewhere, Bangladesh, which saw imports surge in 2017 after floods wreaked havoc on local crops, will procure more rice locally as output has revived a food ministry official from the country said.

“We are getting good response in our local procurement drive and will continue it,” the official said. Bangladesh has procured nearly 1.4 million tonnes of rice locally so far in the current season to build state reserves.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190219448504/

CM INAUGURATES SINO-PAK BUFFALO RESEARCH CENTRE

By Our Correspondent Published: February 19, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar has said that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government is striving for the development of the livestock sector on scientific and modern lines.

He was speaking after inaugurating the International Buffalo Congress-2019 which was organised on Monday by the University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (UVAS) Lahore. The event was held in collaboration with the Livestock and Dairy Development Department Punjab.

The chief minister said the Punjab government has taken various initiatives for the promotion of livestock and poultry with a focus on the development of the commonly neglected rural population. The government wants every individual farmer to develop, learn and adopt the latest farming techniques and achieve the maximum production of milk and meat. He said this will consequently contribute to the development of the national economy.

Buzdar called for promoting the research culture to enhance milk and meat yield. He said that the buffalo, known as black gold, is an important component of livestock in terms of its milk and meat production. It is the right time to showcase its potential in the international market through the International Buffalo Congress and buffalo fair.

He hoped that scientists, researchers, and academicians attending the buffalo congress from across the world will finalise useful recommendations for the development of the buffalo and livestock sector. Buzdar was confident that the initiative would contribute to food security and poverty reduction.

The chief minister also inaugurated the Sino-Pak Buffalo Research Centre, which will work on the promotion of research on the buffalo in China and Pakistan.

Minister for Livestock and Dairy Development Punjab Sardar Hasnain Bahadar Daresha said that the government has taken effective steps to improve livestock in the province and to ensure a better quality of meat and dairy products. “The overall livestock development strategy revolves around fostering private sector-led development with the public sector, providing an enabling environment through policy interventions.”

UVAS Vice Chancellor Dr Talat Naseer Pasha spoke about the importance of the buffalo and said its development will significantly contribute to achieving sustainable development goals of food security, nutrition, poverty alleviation, economic growth, and employment. He said that despite the buffalo’s importance, institutional efforts, resource allocation, research and development are minimal. As a consequence, its potential contribution has not been fully realised.

More than 500 delegates from Pakistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Canada, China, India, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, UAE and the United States of America are attending the congress.

The minister said the congress is spread over one plenary and 14 technical sessions and a farmer-industry forum. Twelve business meetings, seven pre-congress workshops, 100 each poster and oral presentations on 10 different aspects of buffalo will be held during the congress.

About the national livestock show, buffalo fair at Buffalo Research Institute Pattoki, Dr Pasha said that about 1,000 of the best animals from all over the country have been registered for different competitions. A trade exhibition has also been organised at BRI, Pattoki.

Talking about the Sino-Pak Joint Research Centre for Buffalo, Dr Pasha said that this center will build a scientific platform for cooperative research and long-term development in the field of buffalo science.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1913615/1-cm-inaugurates-sino-pak-buffalo-research-centre/

GWADAR FISHERMEN WARN OF PROTEST RESUMPTION

Behram Baloch February 18, 2019

GWADAR: The Gwadar Fishermen Alliance has announced that it will resume its protest from March 1 to protect centuries-old livelihood of local fishermen if the government makes no decision in this regard by then.

Speaking at a press conference, the alliance leaders Khuda-i-Dad Wajo, Khuda Bakhsh and Ali Akbar Rais said for the development of Pakistan, the local fishermen had surrendered ownership of lands in their ancestral area Mullah Band. But after the government embarked on construction of Eastbay Expressway, they expressed their concern that it would block their access to the sea before officials of the federal and provincial governments. “Even Prime Minister Imran Khan is aware of our grievances and demands,” they said.

"Then we resorted to protest but later called it off on the assurance of the district administration and Gwadar port officials," the alliance leaders said. "During the last few months we have met a federal minister, Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Alyani, Senators and the commander of Southern Command. The representatives of the federal and the provincial government told us that they would convey our concerns to the authorities concerned," they said.

"We were told that additional funds would be approved for the construction of a new jetty and we have been waiting for the final decision by the Planning and Development Commission," the representatives of the fishermen community said.

They said that they had decided to wait till February 28 and, if nothing was done to meet their demand by then, they would resume their protest from March 1.

They said that their demands included the establishment of a passage at Baloch Ward to give the fishermen access to the sea, construction of a modern auction hall and scholarships for fishermen's children as well as provision of gas, electricity and water in their areas.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1464512/gwadar-fishermen-warn-of-protest-resumption

DIR FARMERS ASKED TO GROW OLIVE TREES

A Correspondent February 18, 2019

UPPER DIR: The agriculture department organised a daylong workshop to educate farmers about importance of olive tree plantation and use of modern technology to boost yield.

Upper Dir Deputy Commissioner Irfanullah Mehsud was the chief guest at the workshop. District nazim Sahibzada Faseehullah, director olive production project Dr Fayaz, agricultural experts and farmers were in attendance.

Dr Fayaz and agricultural experts told farmers that olive was very precious and beneficial product and that the soil and climate of the district were suitable to olive plantation. They said farmers could get a handsome earning from it.

The agricultural experts said apart from olive plantation the farmers should also grow various types of vegetables and crops. They said that as farmers did use modern farming methods they got lesser yield of their crops.

On the occasion, DC Irfanullah Mehsud said that the workshop was a good opportunity for the farmers to learn about modern techniques of farming. He said the district administration would provide facilities to farmers.

Mr Mehsud said the farmers should start focusing on olive plantation. The farmers thanked the agriculture department for organising the workshop for them.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1464479/dir-farmers-asked-to-grow-olive-trees

ONLY OPTION IS TO LIMIT CANE CULTIVATION

Mohiuddin Aazim Updated February 18, 2019

Economic policymaking is all about trade-offs. A bad trade-off makes the economy suffer.

“Mushroom growth of sugar mills in the main cotton-growing areas of Southern Punjab and Sindh has placed the cotton crop in direct competition with sugar cane for area and resources,” says the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in its first quarterly report of the current fiscal year.

When a new sugar mill is set up in an area, it incentivises farmers to switch over from cotton or other crops to sugar cane.

Sugar mills are mostly owned by top politicians or their frontmen or financiers. That makes the formulation of a realistic policy on crop rationalisation more challenging

New sugar mills began springing up — and the government started focusing more on the cultivation of sugar cane — with the beginning of Asif Zardari’s era from 2008-09. The trend continued during the days of Nawaz Sharif, too. At the end of 2007-08, there were 78 sugar mills, according to the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA). The number went up to 89 in 2017-18.

Had our policymakers been mindful of the fact that the area under cotton cultivation would shrink and adequate input resources would be unavailable for cotton as a result of mushroom growth of sugar mills, they would have made a different choice.

Apparently, they went for the negative impact on cotton with all anticipated benefits of growing more sugar cane. A bad trade-off indeed as cotton is the lifeline of our textile industry, the largest foreign exchange earner and the biggest job provider.

Our cotton production routinely falls short of the needs of the textile industry. An unusual shortage could hit the textile industry’s export performance and push up the total import bill with increased imports of cotton.

Imports of raw cotton increased from 450,000 tonnes in 2012-13 to 610,000 tonnes in 2017-18 as local production failed to meet the textile industry’s demand. In the outgoing fiscal year, the cotton output totalled a little less than 12 million bales against the target of 14m bales. Imports of the commodity consumed $1 billion-plus. Can we afford this at a time when the country is facing a foreign exchange crisis?

Sugar exports somewhat compensate the cost of cotton imports. In 2017-18, we earned half a billion dollars through exports of sugar. That could not have been possible without a surplus in sugar production, sugar millers argue.

According to the SBP, the sugar cane output totalled 82.1m tonnes in 2017-18 from $73.4m tonnes a year earlier — an increase of 11.8 per cent. Just how fast the sugar cane output has been growing can be gauged from the fact that if we compare the 2017-18 output with 62.8m tonnes of 2014-15, we see about 31pc growth in just three years.

An intriguing aspect of the excessive cultivation of sugar cane is that often the surplus cannot be exported without offering the millers some sort of subsidy. This happens due to delays in finalising sugar export plans, high cost of domestic production and international market conditions.

The SBP quarterly report points out that in the last fiscal year, the monthly average price of local sugar stood at $448 per tonne compared to the global average of about $330.

The government had to give a subsidy of Rs14bn on sugar exports. What is more intriguing is the fact that larger sugar cane outputs year after year are not even helping farmers. Millers pay them less than the indicative or support price of the commodity. Particularly, small growers suffer due to this anomaly. Yet the government continues to spend billions of rupees under commodity pricing subsidies. So technically, sugar exports are costing more to the government than the accrued benefits as a significant expenditure is incurred on facilitating these exports, according to the SBP's quarterly report.

According to a WWF Pakistan chapter report of 2012, growing sugar cane also consumes more water: 0.05m cubic meters per hectare against cotton (0.02mcm per hectare) and even rice (0.03mcm per hectare).

For several years, Pakistan's water woes have been growing. The scarcity of water continues to ruin the prospects of crop outputs in large parts of Sindh, Balochistan and some areas of Punjab. Can we afford to promote sugar cane at the cost of cotton knowing that the former consumes more than double quantity of water than the latter?

The answer is obvious. But the problem is that sugar mills are mostly owned by top politicians or their frontmen or financiers. That makes the formulation of a realistic policy on the rationalisation of major crops more challenging.

Perhaps the time has come to open a debate on this subject in parliament and set up a parliamentary panel to probe the issue. The task force on agriculture set up by Prime Minister Imran Khan can hardly do this. Its recommendations would likely be opposed fiercely by the top leadership of the opposition that has vast stakes in the sugar industry. "Even the politicians of the treasury benches with a vested interest might resist," says a senior official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

"But if we don't limit sugar cane cultivation, the economy might continue to suffer due to the erratic output of cotton and rice. That, in turn, might keep net textile exports low and affect growth of rice exports."

Perhaps it's time to initiate a major crop rationalisation plan with the consent of the provinces, focusing on ensuring food adequacy, effective use of water, higher per-hectare yields and highest export value of the surplus output. But encouraging farmers to switch over from sugar cane to cotton, rice or any other crop will also require the introduction of solid provincial work plans with feedback from farmers' lobbies and local and international experts on agriculture. n

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1464538/only-option-is-to-limit-cane-cultivation

PADDY FIELDS CAN'T DO WITHOUT MECHANISED FARMING

Mohammad Hussain Khan February 18, 2019

Sindh's paddy sector has lately seen some interventions aimed at mechanising cultivation, increasing per-acre yields and improving the milling process. The provincial government's Sindh Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF) has supported several rice mills by absorbing most of the mark-up component of the loan subsidy.

In the forthcoming Kharif season starting in April-May, the SEDF plans to establish companies for the provision of laser land levellers, crop transplanters and harvesters on a rental basis. SEDF Managing Director Mahboob Kazi said the Sindh government was being approached in this regard keeping in view the encouraging trend among millers who availed the subsidy in the last two years.

A rice miller could avail a loan of Rs10m for an upgrade of their mill. The SEDF has tried to prevail upon the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to make sure that commercial bank liberalise their loan regimes for rice millers as well as farmers.

'The hybrid seed variety has increased paddy production, but the related infrastructure is still missing'

The SEDF absorbs six per cent of the mark-up while 2pc is borne by the borrower. Eight rice mill owners availed this facility between 2012 and 2016. However, 22 mills underwent the much-needed upgrade in the last two years, according to Mr Kazi. "New machinery has reduced the level of electricity consumption by the miller. It has also decreased the ratio of broken rice during milling," he said.

This trend is encouraging from the SEDF's point of view. Therefore, it aims to ensure the provision of laser land levellers, transplanters and harvesters for paddy growers through rental service-providers. Laser land levellers ensure uniformity in water distribution at the cultivation and post-cultivation stages as paddy remains a high-delta crop.

It helps save 30-40pc of water that is otherwise lost in any piece of uneven farmland. Similarly, transplanters and harvesters contribute to the overall increased farm productivity.

Manual transplantation of seedlings is labour-intensive, tedious and time-consuming. In contrast, mechanised transplantation substantially increases the plant population up to 100,000 per acre which, according to paddy grower Nabi Bux Sathio, varies around 50,000-70,000 plants per acre in the manual process. Mechanised transplantation increases productivity by 20 maunds an acre which is usually assessed at 50-60 maunds.

Harvesters substantially save grain losses at the harvesting stage. Keeping such losses within 15pc translates into revenue of half a billion dollars, according to Rice Exporters Association Pakistan (Reap) Chairman Safdar Mehkri. He said paddy growers in Pakistan produce 2.7 million tonnes of rice per hectare against 9.2m tonnes in the United States.

"We have a net potential of $5bn rice exports. But we are currently fetching $2bn because of gaps at the cultivation, harvesting, storage and milling stages," he remarked. He said Pakistan can increase its rice production to 12.5m tonnes from 7.4m tonnes by adopting mechanisation.

In 2018-19, paddy production in Sindh dropped to 2.5m tonnes against the target of 2.7m tonnes (the 2017-18 production estimate is 2.85m tonnes). The cropped area declined to 690,000 acres against the target of 770,000 acres.

The drop in the area and production was attributed to a water shortage at the peak of sowing in Kharif 2018 (April-June). Water flows, as per figures by the irrigation department, stood at 6.453MAF in April-June in 2018 against 11.22MAF in the corresponding period of 2017, showing an overall shortfall of 42.5pc in the last crop season.

Paddy is grown mainly in the right-bank areas of upper Sindh. In lower Sindh, it was cultivated in Badin, Thatta, Tando Mohammad Khan and Sujawal districts.

The quality of seeds also hampered overall growth in the paddy sector. Farmers prefer the imported hybrid variety that paddy growers like Nadeem Shah believe was hit by germination and fruit-setting issues. "It is basically weather conditions that vary between Sindh and countries like Australia, United States and China that produce these seeds," he observed.

The higher yield potential of hybrid seeds attracts growers. At the same time, this variety also demands vital inputs like zinc, magnesium, pesticides and fertiliser besides timely water flows for better productivity. This increases the overall cost of production.

According to Mr Shah, local varieties like DR-82, Shandar, Irri-6 and Irri-9 also give higher yields with better inputs. He levelled his land in the Sujawal district by laser levellers to overcome water losses and have uniform irrigation water distribution.

Post-harvest losses during milling reduce the overall production of refined rice. With outdated machinery, rice millers have to make do with losses in production. As a result, the ratio of broken rice increases. The SEDF's assessment showed upgraded machinery in a rice mill improves the production capacity, making a difference of four to five tonnes on average.

Mr Mehkri noted that the hybrid variety has indeed increased paddy production, but the related infrastructure is still missing. The crop was not dried, although driers are available. The tendency to use these driers is too little.

He added that equipment rental companies exist in Punjab, but the idea has not gained popularity here. "Commercial banks avoid offering loans to millers and farmers," he said.

He referred to rice production in Vietnam which attracted a price over and above the going rate of $110-$150 per tonne in the international market. "With upgraded mills and increased rice production, we can capture markets in the Middle East and other regions. Mechanised farming can offset the impact of the water shortage at the field level," he asserted.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1464537/paddy-fields-cant-do-without-mechanised-farming

RESOURCE CENTRE INAUGURATED AT SINDH AGRICULTURE UNIVERSITY

By Press Release Published: February 18, 2019

TANDO JAM: The FAO Resource Centre was inaugurated on Sunday at Sindh Agriculture University, Tando Jam, in collaboration with United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It aims to promote the use of latest technology through the development of a strong relationship between farmer groups and research scholars.

FAO's representative in Pakistan, Mina Dowlatchahi, said, "This centre will improve delivery to agriculture sector and help encourage combined investment and strategies for sustainable agriculture development in the province."

To ensure food security and eradication of malnutrition, FAO is working to implement a land tenure system that can sustainably improve the equitable access to, and governance of, land and natural resources, allowing for improvements in agricultural production, food security and nutrition under the project 'Improved Land Tenancy in Sindh Province (ILTS)' with the financial assistance of the European Union in eight districts of Sindh.

Another project, to help small farmers in selected districts of Indus basin build resilience and adapt to climate change, has also been finalised which will directly benefit 1.5 million people in the area.

In addition, efforts are being made to reduce the risk of emergency in drought-like situations by improving resilience of crisis-affected communities through risk assessment, planning, mitigation, preparedness measures and emergency response. These initiatives are linked and integrated into the FAO programme in Sindh to provide a holistic service to the community.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1912749/1-resource-centre-inaugurated-sindh-agriculture-university/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 11th TO FEBRUARY 17th 2019

'FRUIT FOR ALL' DRIVE COMES TO PESHAWAR

By Our Correspondent Published: February 16, 2019

PESHAWAR: Councillors of the city district government will take active part in planting fruit trees at public places as part of Fruit for All drive.

The K-P government has launched the drive to plant fruit trees at public places so that people may enjoy free fruits.

City District Nazim Mohammad Asim Khan assigned Agriculture Department officer Khalid Usman the task to contact district council members for promoting the drive. Besides, Asim assigned member district council Iftikhar Khalil as coordinator for the Fruit for All and directed for taking steps for the success of the project.

Officers of the Agriculture Department told the district nazim the soil of the concerned district would be tested to find the suitability of plants. The district nazim said that members of the district council will give signed recommendations to Fruit for All Farm which will provide fruit bearing plants to concerned union councils.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 16th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1911588/1-fruit-drive-comes-peshawar/

ARGENTINA SOYA CROP FORECAST AT 52 MILLION TONNES DESPITE LOSS DUE TO RAIN

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 15TH, 2019 | BUENOS AIRES

Argentina's soya crop is battling storms that have flooded some marginal growing regions while helping yields in prime farm areas, with one grains exchange increasing its harvest forecast while another warned it may cut its 2018/19 planting estimate.

The country's soya crop should reach 52 million tonnes this season, up from 50 million tonnes previously forecast, the Rosario Grains Exchange said late on Wednesday. The Buenos Aires Grains Exchange followed on Thursday with a report saying excessive rains may cause it to cut estimated planting area.

The Rosario exchange said the increase in its forecast for the size of the 2018/19 crop came despite the loss of 700,000 hectares of soya planting area due to excessive rainfall. The warning of a cut in estimated sowing area from the Buenos Aires exchange also cited harder than normal rain.

"The rains that accumulated during the last weekend in parts of the central and northern agricultural belt could provoke new losses of harvestable area," the Buenos Aires exchange said in its weekly crop report.

But it said most farm areas had been getting healthy levels of rain and crop conditions were mostly good to excellent. It kept its 2018/19 harvest forecast at 53 million tonnes. The harvest expected to start in March should nonetheless be 49 percent bigger than the previous season's drought-hit crop, the Rosario exchange said in a monthly report.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190215447350/

ONGOING RAINS: PM SEES BUMPER WHEAT CROP THIS YEAR

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 15TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Imran Khan Thursday said the continuing winter rains were worth billions of rupees to the national economy besides replenishing the water table and glaciers.

"We should all thank Allah Almighty for the continuing winter rains that are worth billions to the economy apart from replenishing our water table and glaciers plus countering air pollution," he said in a tweet. "Insha Allah we will have a bumper wheat crop this year," he hoped.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190215447263/

PAKISTAN DECIDES TO EXPORT 500,000 TONS OF WHEAT

By Salman Siddiqui Published: February 15, 2019

KARACHI: After producing surplus wheat in the past two years, Pakistan has decided to export 500,000 tons of the grain ahead of the arrival of new stock from March-April 2019.

The government is expected to earn Rs16.4 billion (or $117 million) from the volume set aside for export as it has offered to sell the grain at Rs32,759 per ton.

"The ECC (Economic Coordination Committee) of the cabinet has decided to sell half a million tons of wheat, including 400,000 tons by sea and 100,000 tons by land at the already received rate ie Rs32,759 per ton," Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) said in a notification on Thursday.

An agricultural expert, however, believes the government has to award subsidy on export to make it commercially viable for cross-border traders keeping in view the comparatively low prices in the global market.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), Pakistan has exported wheat at an average price of $210.5 per ton in the past six months (July-December 2018) compared to the offered price of $234 per ton (Rs32,759).

Passco – the state-owned agency responsible for maintaining stocks of wheat and other crops to avert shortage in the country and also responsible for conducting import and export operations for crops – achieved the Rs32,759 per ton price for wheat export in January through open bidding for 100,000 tons and wanted to sell another half a million tons at the same price.

"The highest rate ie Rs32,759 per ton was received through open bidding," the agency said. The price was higher than the procurement rate of Rs32,500 per ton, it was learnt.

"Parties/bidders, who participated in the tender opened on January 11, 2019 and have not withdrawn their earnest money, are required to submit their willingness for the purchase of wheat at the rate of Rs32,759 along with quantity details," it said.

"Besides, fresh applications are also invited on first-come-first-served basis from interested parties for the purchase of wheat (for export) at the already approved rate ie Rs32,759 per ton," it added.

Agri Forum Pakistan (AFP) Chairman Dr M Ibrahim Mughal estimated that Pakistan had a surplus stock of around 4.5 million tons of wheat. This included three million tons with the Punjab food department, 1.2 million tons with Passco and the remaining with the Sindh food department, he said.

The country established the surplus stock following it produced higher grains than the local requirements in the past two years.

"The country produced 25.5 million ton wheat alone in the last year (2017-18) against an estimated requirement of 24.4 million tons. This was in addition to the previous carryover stock of the grain at the beginning of the last wheat harvesting season," he said.

This year too, Pakistan is estimated to produce a total of 25.5 million tons wheat – around one million ton higher than the local requirement, he said. He said the government may have to give subsidy on export to make it commercially viable. Potential markets for Pakistan wheat include Afghanistan, UAE, Indonesia, Oman and Sri Lanka. Mughal added the other potential markets could include Iran and Malaysia.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 15th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1910719/2-pakistan-decides-export-500000-tons-wheat/

PUNJAB AGRI POLICY TO INCLUDE 'INCENTIVES' FOR FARM RESEARCHERS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter February 14, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government will announce its agriculture policy next week with a package of incentives for farm researchers and service structure for thousands of employees of research institutes.

Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Langrial says the policy will be launched by the chief minister on Feb 20.

Talking to the media along with information minister Fayyazul Hassan Chohan here on Wednesday, he said that incentives for agriculture scientists like offering them half of the amount to be received through auction of the seed they would develop, would also be announced.

Responding to a query, he said restructuring of research was also being introduced within a week in which over 25,000 employees will be given better pay scales.

Mr Chohan told a questioner that the imbalance in agricultural trade with India was resulting in heavy losses to the exchequer. "Of around Rs52 billion mutual farm trade volume, Pakistan could export only 25 per cent of it because of heavily subsidised farming in India that led to losses to the local farming community. Therefore, revival of the trade is not feasible in the present circumstances."

Earlier, Mr Langrial talked about the steps the Punjab government had so far taken in the agriculture sector and its achievements. These included allocation of Rs36bn in the 2018-19 budget for agriculture growth, increase in the limit of interest-free loans for Rabi crops from Rs25,000 to Rs30,000 with total distribution worth Rs5 billion among 101,228 registered farmers. He also mentioned crop Insurance (Takkaful) in nine districts for 30,000 growers of rice, cotton and wheat crops, extending of Rs5,000 per acre subsidy to increase oil seed crop area, Rs500 per bag subsidy on DAP fertiliser, Rs200 subsidy on Nitrophos and Rs800 per bag subsidy on SOP.

The minister said the government would also provide Rs1,000 per bag subsidy on cotton seed to the registered farmers in Multan, Vehari, Khanewal, Rahim Yar Khan, DG Khan and Rajanpur districts for an area of 100,000 acres and hoped the federal government would extend similar relief to more areas.

He also talked about revamping agriculture marketing system to minimise the role of the middle man, establishing model market at a cost of Rs5 billion at Lakhudair in Lahore, ensuring payment of Rs180 per 40kg to sugarcane growers by the mills this year, improving 2,100 water courses, and installing drip and sprinkler irrigation systems on 12,000 acres.

In Potohar region, 160 ponds were being developed for saving water and 360 schemes were being operated in non-canal areas, he added.

Published in Dawn, February 14th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1463693/punjab-agri-policy-to-include-incentives-for-farm-researchers

12 HYBRID RICE VARIETIES TO BE AVAILABLE FROM JULY

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated February 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: At least twelve new hybrid rice ¬varieties will be available to farmers for cultivation ¬during the next Kharif crop season starting in July.

The new varieties were approved by the Variety Evaluation Committee of Pakistan Agriculture Coun¬cil (Parc) in Islamabad on Wednesday after reviewing twenty-six proposals.

Research on these varieties was carried out at the rice research laboratory of National Agriculture Research Centre. A senior official of NARC told Dawn that following the approval by the committee, the new hybrids of rice can now be imported from China.

So far, 130 different varieties of rice have been developed of which at least twelve varieties are currently sown by farmers in rice growing areas of the country. Punjab is the largest in terms of the crop's production, followed by Sindh and then the remaining parts.

In addition to the 12 types, an open pollinated variety of rice for commercial cultivation was also approved by the committee. While farmers can keep seeds of pollinated rice variety, the hybrid has to be changed after every crop.

Parc chairman briefed the committee about the upcoming projects on rice under the Prime Minister's 'National Agriculture Emergency Programme'. Presiding over the variety evaluation committee meeting, Member Plant Sciences Division of PARC, Dr Abdul Ghafoor emphasised the role of quality seed for productivity and profitability of farmers.

Representatives of seed companies appreciated the role of Parc for setting new benchmarks for testing of rice varieties in Pakistan.

Published in Dawn, February 14th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1463731/12-hybrid-rice-varieties-to-be-available-from-july

SEAFOOD EXPORT CONTINUES TO FALL

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 14TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Pakistan seafood export has fallen to $183.691 million in July-Dec 2018-19, down by 8.44 percent, according to official figures. Seafood export scaled down by $16.93 million in July-Dec 2018-19 from $200.621 million in July-Dec 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics shows. In term of quantity, fisheries export went down to 80,608 metric tonnes in July-Dec 2018-19 from 83,590 metric tonnes in July-Dec 2017-18, down by 4 percent or 2,982 metric tonnes.

Although, seafood export volume increased to 19,064 metric tonnes in Dec 2018 from 17,386 metric tonnes in Dec 2017. In Dec 2018, the country earned $38.860 million from its seafood export.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190214446970/

BUZDAR TO ANNOUNCE FIRST AGRICULTURE POLICY FOR PUNJAB ON FEBRUARY 20

ZAHID BAIG | FEB 14TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar will announce first-ever agriculture policy for Punjab on February 20. Draft of the policy has already been prepared and approved by the provincial cabinet on October 2018, said Minister Agriculture Punjab Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial, Minister for Information & Culture Fayyaz-ul-Hasan Chohan and Chairman Taskforce for Pesticides and Fertilizers Malik Masood at a joint press conference on Wednesday.

They spoke at length about the government's initiatives regarding agriculture sector to boost the growth and said the agricultural policy will mainly focus on reforming agriculture sector and agro-industry to enhance its role in the national economy.

The government has allocated almost Rs 36 billion during 2018-19 for agriculture growth. It has increased the limit of Rabi interest free loans from Rs 25,000 to 30,000 and distributed interest-free loans among 1,01,228 registered farmers worth Rs 5 billion during Rabi 2018-19, they added.

The Agri minister also disclosed that the government has started crop insurance (Takkaful) for appeasement of farming community in nine districts and till date 30,000 farmers have been insured against rice, cotton and wheat crops.

The government has to import edible oil worth Rs 350 billion, so it has started campaign to increase oilseed crop area and production. A subsidy of Rs 5000 per acre will be provided on sunflower cultivation and in future Canola will also be added to this subsidy scheme so that import bills of edible oil could be lessened in future.

The minister further said that the government has decided to provide subsidy on DAP fertilizers at Rs 500 per bag, Nitrophos Rs 200 per bag and subsidy on potash fertilizers Sulphate of Potash (SOP) & Murat of Potash (MOP) at Rs 800 and Rs 500 respectively per bag.

The government will also provide subsidy of Rs 1000 per bag on cotton seed to the registered farmers in District Multan, Vehari, Khanewal, Rahim Yar Khan, DG Khan and Rajan Pur for an area of 1,00,000 acres and hopefully the federal government will also provide same subsidy for another hundred thousand acres.

The government is also revamping agriculture marketing system under Punjab Agriculture Marketing Regulatory Act (PAMRA) for betterment of farming community and to minimize the role of a middle man.

The government is also establishing model mandi at a cost of Rs 5 billion at Lakkho Derra. It also paid special heed to recovery of sugarcane farmers' pending liabilities to sugar mills. It appointed nine advisors to Chief Minister Punjab for resolving matter of sugarcane and this year the sugarcane crops of 46 million metric tons is expected. The government is swiftly handing this issue and all sugar mills are being operational during crushing season and there is no hue and cry of farming community over this issue.

The minister also briefed about water saving schemes and said this year 2100 water courses will be improved and drip and sprinkler irrigation system will be installed on 12,000 acres.

To promote horticultural crops, the Agriculture department also organized Pakistan Horti Expo 2019 on 21st and 22nd January, he added.

Minister for Information & Culture Fayyaz-ul-Hussan Chohan said the government aims to make agriculture sector a vibrant and profitable sector.

“We are fully aware that without boosting this sector, Pakistan cannot make a progressive state,” he added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190214447014/

FAO RESOURCE CENTRE OPENED AT AGRICULTURE VARSITY

The Newspaper’s Staff Correspondent February 13, 2019

HYDERABAD: Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) representative and country head Ms Mina Dowlatchahi inaugurated UNFAO Resource Centre in Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Tandojam on Tuesday.

Present on the occasion were SAU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Mujeebuddin Memon Sahrai, researchers, academia, experts and faculty members, FAO’s policy consultant Genevieve Hussain, as well as Mohsin Soomro, Waheed Jamali, Mumtaz Mangi, Sada Shah and sectional heads.

Purpose for establishment of the centre was to build cooperation and ensure collaboration with stakeholders for development of the agriculture sector. It aims at improving livelihood of the farming community. The centre would support and facilitate the SAU internship programmes, job placement, joint events and research and development programmes in the agriculture sector.

Ms Dowlatchahi briefed about efforts of SAU for knowledge-building of stakeholders in water, food security, agriculture and livestock sectors and providing support to FAO interventions in Sindh. She added that the centre would ultimately build collaboration and support stakeholders, especially in issues at the policy level, and transfer technology through extension outreach programme.

The centre would facilitate internship and job placement to SAU graduates. The SAU faculty would conduct problem-oriented research for uplift of livelihood of small and landless farmers of Sindh.

The VC highlighted the role of SAU for agricultural economic development of the country. He said SAU was the hub of agricultural activities, producing quality manpower and conducting problem-oriented research.

Prof Dr Mohammad Ismail Kumbhar briefed the UNFAO mission regarding SAU’s interventions. He highlighted the role of the business incubation centre.

Published in Dawn, February 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1463438/fao-resource-centre-opened-at-agriculture-varsity

ECC DECIDES TO REVIVE COTTON CROP

ZAHEER ABBASI | FEB 13TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

A meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) on Tue-sday approved measures to boost the cotton crop in the country and decided that Ministry of National Food Security will present a plan within 30 days for strengthening research and development services for different crops with particular focus on cotton. The ECC presided over by Finance Minister Asad Umar further decided that the ministry will also submit plan for revitalisation of federal institutions tasked with the responsibility of developing the cotton sector. The ministry was directed to expedite efforts for implementing PB Ropes technology to counter the pink bollworm which impedes cotton growth.

The meeting further directed that Ministry of Industries and Production would take measures for recovery of cotton cess from textile mills so as to give impetus to cotton promotion activities, which are to be funded through the cess.

Secretary Ministry of National food Security & Research gave a detailed presentation on issues and challenges in the cotton sector. Experts in the field of cotton growing, who were specially invited to the meeting, also gave their input for developing the cotton crop.

The ECC also decided to approve additional guarantees of Rs 5.6 billion to PIAC against the request of Rs 14.5 billion, and directed for working out medium to long term requirement of LNG before taking decision on setting up new LNG terminals.

Sources said that the Finance Minister was requested by Aviation Division for (i) additional guarantees of Rs 5.6 billion for repair and maintenance of engines and acquisition of related spare parts as explained and (ii) additional guarantees of Rs 8.4 billion for sustainable operations and cash grant of Rs 485 million. However, the ECC decided to approve Rs 5.6 billion additional guarantee and wanted details backed by data as to how much revenue would be generated if Rs 8.4 billion are provided.

The meeting was told that route rationalisation initiatives are being undertaken, however, grounded aircraft are limiting the capabilities. The airline is striving to operationalise the grounded aircraft on urgent basis. For recovery of these grounded aircraft, an additional guarantee to the extent of Rs 5.6 billion is required for the maintenance of engines and acquisition of related spare parts.

Additionally, the ECC was requested that PIACL is also faced with the challenges of accumulated liabilities, whereas on one hand, default notices are being served on by Aircraft Lessor, while on the oilier, pressure is being exerted by the vendors/service providers like General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA), Saudi Ground Services (SGS) and international fuel suppliers regarding suspension of services. Owing to cash flow crisis, it is becoming difficult to run day-to-day operations of the airline. Hence, an additional guarantee is required to the tune of Rs 8.4 billion for payment to vendors/suppliers, and repair/acquisition of ground support equipment.

The Aviation Division also stated that in order to improve the passenger travel experience, it is intended that in-flight entertainment system (IFE) be repaired for which cash grant to the tune of Rs 485 million is required.

The ECC was given a briefing by the Ministry of Maritime Affairs about location of any new LNG terminals in the country as well as the assessment of requirement for relocation of the existing terminals. Subsequently, the ECC directed the relevant ministries to work out the medium to long term requirement of LNG in the country and present the same to the committee.

The Ministry of Maritime Affairs briefed the meeting about various concessions granted to the Gwadar Port and Gwadar Free Zone. The ECC directed the Board of Investment (BoI), Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Law Division and FBR to review the proposals and revert to the committee.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190213446618/

FARMERS ADVISED TO SCHEDULE IRRIGATION PLANS

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 13TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The Met Office has asked the farmers to schedule irrigation plans for the Rabi crop keeping in view the rainy spell in the country. A rainy weather is expected across the country except Sindh in the next 10 days, so farmers should make irrigation plans for standing crops and should be cleaned from weeds that reduce agriculture output. “Measures may be taken to preserve the crops/nurseries from the damaging impacts of extreme cold conditions,” it added.

In the coming days: Weather in Punjab: Rain thunderstorm with snowfall over the hills is expected at isolated places of Lahore, Sargodha, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi Division and Islamabad. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Rain thunderstorm with snowfall over the hills is expected in Peshawar, Malakand, Mardan, Hazara and Bannu divisions. In Sindh: Mainly cold and dry weather is expected. In Baluchistan: Rainfall is expected at scattered places in Quetta, Zhob and Kalat Divisions. In Gilgit-Baltistan: Rain thunderstorm with snowfall over the hills is expected.

In Kashmir: Rain-thunder storm is expected. In the next 24 hours: A cloudy weather is expected in upper and central parts of the country.

However, scattered rain thunderstorm with snowfall over the hills is likely in Quetta, Zhob, Kalat, Malakand, Hazara, Kohat, Bannu, D I Khan and Rawalpindi divisions, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, while isolated falls in Lahore, Gujranwala, Sargodha and Faisalabad divisions and Islamabad.

In the last 24 hours: Minimum temperature was recorded in Bagrote as minus 7 degrees Celsius, Skardu and Gupis minus 5 each, Astore and Kalam minus 4 each, Malamjabba and Hunza minus 3 each, and Mirkhani minus 1. Malamjabba received 8 mm of rainfall, Parachinar 5 mm, Kalam 4 mm, Dir and Skardu and Bagrote 3 mm, each. Malamjabba also received 2 inches of snowfall.

“A westerly wave is affecting western parts of the country and likely to persist in upper parts till Friday,” the Met said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190213446688/

FOOD SAFETY ON THE TABLE AT WORLD CONFERENCE

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 13TH, 2019 | ADDIS ABABA

Food contaminated with bacteria, viruses, parasites and toxic chemicals is a mounting health hazard and a crippling economic burden, a global conference on food safety has been told.

The two-day forum is bringing together government officials and health experts from 125 countries to combat the peril of unsafe food, which kills more than 400,000 people each year, according to UN estimates.

“Today, the world produces enough food for everyone,” Jose Graziano Da Silva, director general of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), said at the opening of the conference on Monday.

But much of this food “is not safe”, he added

“We estimate that each year, nearly one person in 10 falls sick after eating contaminated food,” said Kazuaki Miyagishima, who heads the World Health Organization (WHO) food security department.

Of the 600 million people who fall sick from unsafe food, around 420,000 die, according to the UN’s estimate.

Children under five suffer most, comprising 40 percent of those who fall ill.

According to the WHO, contaminated food is to blame more than 200 diseases, ranging from diarrhoea to cancers – and the economic impact is huge but often overlooked.

The FAO estimates the cost for low and middle-income countries to be in the range of $95 billion (83.5 billion euros) per year.

The conference, attended by ministers and deputy ministers from some 20 countries, is expected to issue a call for better coordination and support.

“Food safety is a crucial issue for everyone on earth, but it is here in Africa that the impact of the scourge is felt most,” AU Commission chair Moussa Faki told the conference, adding that a third of those affected come from the continent.

Miyagishima said a multi-pronged approach was needed.

This includes stronger laws, better training and equipment and beefing up health systems to detect potential risks and swap information countries, he said.

The risks are very diverse, ranging from bacteria such as salmonella or listeria, to chemicals such as cancer-causing heavy metals and organic pollutants.

For countries facing drought or famine, the challenge is preventing the population from using water contaminated by cholera, or eating food unsuitable for consumption.

For countries trying to better respect international norms and export certain food products, Miyagishima warned of a “situation where exported food is of a better quality than products destined for the local market”.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that “food safety is linked to many sustainable development goals”.

In Europe, Miyagishima said there was a need for faster exchange of information between health authorities, recalling the 2017 contamination of eggs in the Netherlands, which were distributed to numerous countries.

The conference comes at a time of swelling controversy over the use of chemical products in agriculture, including the controversial weed-killer Roundup. The UN in December announced the creation of a World Food Safety Day on June 7.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190213446793/

FARMERS DEMAND BETTER MARGIN, EXPORT MARKETS

By Our Correspondent Published: February 13, 2019

LAHORE: Pakistan's farmer community is urging the government to devise a strategy, which could help them find better margins and export markets of the crops they produce.

They claim that the vested interest groups, sitting at high positions, made policies in a manner that favour some crops or sectors, while leaving others at the mercy of international market prices. As per Pakistan Kissan Ittehad President Khalid Mehmood Khokhar, every government, unfortunately, has given least priority to the agriculture sector and its development.

"Seed Act and Plant Breeder Right Act took almost 12 years to pass through the Parliament, whereas similar acts were enacted 16 years ago in the neighbouring country. This is the root cause of Pakistan not being able to acquire modern seed technology and, eventually, relying on Rs2 billion worth of imported seeds," Khokhar said.

He said the seed companies today are reluctant to invest due to lack of legal protection and theft of their research and development.

According to farmer lobbies, agriculture contributes over 19.5% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and earns over 70% in foreign exchange from cotton and other agri-commodities.

It is also a source of livelihood for 48% of our country's labour force. According to Khokhar, over Rs100 billion are paid annually to cotton pickers as picking charges and, similarly, over Rs30 billion are paid to families who harvest sugarcane during the crushing season and much more in rice, wheat and other crops' production and harvest.

Arshad Ghaffar, a Multan-based farmer, said current policies are favouring very few crops. "Favouritism has resulted in development of some crops at much higher rates than international markets," he said.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 13th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1909180/2-farmers-demand-better-margin-export-markets/

COTTON PRICE STEADY

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated February 12, 2019

KARACHI: Prices stayed firm amid cautious trading on the cotton market on Monday following reports that the IMF is going to lend $6 billion to Pakistan.

A fresh wave of rupee depreciation against the dollar is being anticipated along with imposition of some new taxes.

Sluggish performance of the cotton yarn market also kept spinners away from the trading ring.

Unsold stocks lying with ginners are reported to be around 1.2 to 1.3 million bales while phutti (seed cotton) arrival has almost came to a standstill.

According to market estimates, there is a daily requirement of around 15,000 to 20,000 bales. However, many leading textile spinners are now focusing on imports to meet their demand.

The world leading cotton markets gave a mixed trend. Indian cotton prices were generally steady. The Chinese cotton market would open today after spending a new Lunar year long holidays from February 4 to 10.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were firm at weekend level at Rs8,600 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,400 bales, station Hasilpur, at Rs8,000; 736 bales, Faqirwali, at Rs7,900; 200 bales, Kahror Pakka, at Rs8,100; and 400 bales, Pir Mehal, at Rs7,400.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1463367/cotton-price-steady

GORANO POND BENEFICIAL FOR REARING FARM FISH: IUCN

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 12TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The Gorano pond is a unique newly created wetland as it has attracted birds and also proved beneficial for rearing various kinds of farm fish in addition to providing ecotourism opportunities in the area, observes International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Field Survey of Gorano Pond, located near Engro Energy's Thar coal mining area, was conducted by IUCN, which is considered a global authority on the status different ecosystems and the measures needed to safeguard them. The report prepared by the ecological watchdog reviews flora and fauna of Gorano reservoir that has started rejuvenating habitat amid largely lifeless sandy desert.

Prof Z B Mirza, author of the report, shares findings of field visit to newly formed water pond close to village Gorano. The report also suggests further ecological uplifting of this artificially created wetland to attract more water birds, particularly the wintering migratory waterfowl.

Gorano water pond was artificially created with the construction of two earth bunds on 1500 acres of interdunal land on both sides after pumping of subsoil water from the Thar Block II coal mine into the pond in April 2017. The water was confined between two parallel sand dune ranges, by creating earth bunds on both sides.

Later in the year 2017, various kinds of farm fish were introduced in the pond by Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company (SECMC) – a flagship mining company of Engro Energy – which has started giving yield. The fish species were also certified as fit for human consumption by independent, competent laboratories.

The availability of small fish has also attracted several beautiful fish-eating birds like Little Grebes, Cormorants, Pelicans and White-breasted Kingfishers to the pond. The presence of these birds has been physically witnessed at Gorano Reservoir.

This area has also great potential for ecotourism, through which funds can be generated for the maintenance of the area and for the local community welfare. Ecotourism is suited to this area as such activity involves visit to such area without spoiling its ecological setup. The IUCN suggested that crowd tourism should be discouraged and limited eco-tourism should be introduced.

There are persons who would like to visit the real Thar Desert and the newly created desert wetland ecosystem with its flora and fauna. The funds generated from ecotourism will be available for the benefit of the local communities as well as for the maintenance of the area.

The IUCN in its report also recommends measures for further enriching biodiversity of the Gorano Pond. It suggests bringing bottom mud and other living creatures of a roadside similar wetland situated near Thatta to Gorano Pond. This step is likely to be successful to enrichment of the aquatic biodiversity of the newly created pond, observes the IUCN.

According to SECMC, with a vision of developing Gorano Reservoir, the company plans to develop this area for generating healthy activities for locals as well visitors. Rising of fish on a large scale in Gorano Reservoir, for instance, is aimed at providing livelihood opportunities for local Thari people whilst also focusing on the aspect of community nutrition. The successful fish farming of various species with 60 percent average breeding ratio.

In addition to taking steps for enriching wildlife at Gorano pond, the company has also taken measures for promoting eco-cultural tourism at Gorano. A MoU has been signed in this connection with Hashoo Foundation to develop Gorano and Thar as an eco-cultural tourism spot for developing this area as part of company's vision of sustainable towns and communities. Hence, SECMC is optimistic about transforming newly created desert wetland into a vibrant addition in the ecosystem having flourishing flora and fauna.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190212446404/

DRIP IRRIGATION HAS MASSIVE POTENTIAL TO SAVE WATER

By Press Release Published: February 12, 2019

LAHORE: Nestlé Waters Senior Vice President and Head of Technical Peter Hagmann inaugurated a site near Sheikhupura under "Nestlé Pakistan's Agricultural Efficiency Project". The project has the potential to help save 54 million litres of water annually. It is part of the company's "Caring for Water" initiative which undertakes a collective approach to help address the water issue. The water saving will be made possible by the installation of a drip irrigation system as opposed to flood irrigation, which is the traditional way of irrigating fields in Pakistan. All over the world, around 70% of water is used in the agriculture sector. In Pakistan, the percentage stands at 90% with 50% wastage due to poor irrigation methods. In order to save water in agriculture and improve productivity, Nestlé Pakistan has fostered partnerships with the government and farmers to promote drip irrigation.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 12th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1908420/2-drip-irrigation-massive-potential-save-water/

CORPORATE FARMING HAS LITTLE CHARM FOR MOST FARMERS

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated February 11, 2019

For Sarfaraz Ali Junejo, a progressive sugar cane grower based in Mirpurkhas, corporate farming is an entirely different ball game. He believes it is unviable for small and medium-sized farmers under the existing conventional farm practices and limited finances.

Mr Junejo is applying modern methods and has adopted good agricultural practices in corporate farming. After reducing the area under sugar cane cultivation to just 50 acres, he has started cultivating Rhodes grass — an exportable commodity to Arab states.

Corporate farming entails huge investment, expertise, qualified human resource, heavy machinery and mechanised farm practices.

The model entails huge investment, expertise, qualified human resource, heavy machinery and mechanised farm practices

Influential politician Jahangir Khan Tareen is growing sugar cane in line with the corporate farming model. Another famous political family, the Mahars of Ghotki, also owns a sugar factory and big landholdings where it cultivates sugar cane along modern lines.

However, the trend is not that widespread among farmers as 90 per cent of them are either small or medium-sized landholders. They can't benefit from corporate farming, thanks to their limited finances and expertise.

Some growers have handed over their land to the big landowners like Mr Junejo for corporate farming under different agreements. The Tareen family, which owns a few sugar mills in the upper parts of Sindh, is said to be cultivating sugar cane on 30,000 acres in Sindh's Ghotki and Punjab's Rahim Yar Khan districts.

The family has obtained land from landholders like Asad Khuhro, brother of a provincial leader of the PPP, Mir Abid Sundhrani and Ejaz Bughio on long-term contracts for this purpose.

Seasoned politician Ali Nawaz Shah was perhaps the first one to enter into a partnership with the Arabs several years back to cultivate Rhodes grass, which is used as animal feed.

"In view of limited finances, small farmers can't opt for this model of (corporate) agriculture," says Mr Khuhro from Larkana. He believes small and medium-sized growers can hardly afford machinery like a sugar cane harvester that costs them around Rs25 million. A cumbersome financing system discourages farmers from seeking bank loans even for the conventional model of agriculture.

Mr Junejo is all set to grow Rhodes grass on 1,000 acres now after obtaining additional land on a lease. He has hired a full-time, qualified manager with a master's degree in agriculture. In addition, there are labourers, including tractor drivers, from Punjab at work.

All of them are salaried and trained human resources. A manger under corporate farming is supposed to supervise every process from sowing to harvesting, assess market conditions and manage fertiliser application and watering etc.

"The tradition of share-cropping based agriculture takes a back seat in corporate farming. Technical staff handles all issues of major and minor nature," he says.

Land for hay grass production was obtained for an annual payment of Rs16,000-20,000 per acre in the lower parts of Sindh. Hay grass was a short-duration crop with its first harvest taking place within two months of sowing and subsequently after every 30 days. The crop sometimes faced issues like moisture content and quality that would affect its competitiveness in the international market.

In Mr Junejo's case, he manages a large landholding with 50 labourers who do all the work from sowing to harvest. In the traditional model where the landowner and the hari work together on a fifty-fifty basis, he would need around 100 haris along with their family members to manage 400 acres. But the manual labour has now been replaced with the lifter, baler, spreader, tractor and liner.

"The margin of profit in corporate farming is higher, although it can be less profitable in some years," he says. He believes the federal government must relax import conditions for heavy-duty tractors in view of foreign exchange earnings from Rhodes grass exports. The law bars the import of a tractor that is more than five years old. The lifting of the ban will help promote corporate agriculture, he says.

According to Mazhar Hussain, a corporate farm manager who served in Sudan until recently and now manages Hameed Dero Farms in Mirpurkhas, modernised farming has rich potential for increased profitability. "In the sugar cane crop, huge trolleys and mechanised harvesters harvest sugar cane on hundreds of acres in a day," he says.

Hameed Dero has also obtained lands of other landowners like Mir Atiqullah Talpur. Mr Talpur believes it is an opportunity for him to learn about mechanised farming.

Mr Hussain says diversifying into agriculture-dependent businesses such as milk production and livestock farming pays dividends to farm owners. If one crop doesn't perform well then the landowner has the option to offset losses in other businesses, he says.

Major crops like wheat, cotton and rice continue to be managed under the conventional model of farming. Even progressive growers have not invested much in terms of machinery or equipment, except better inputs.

According to Sindh Abadgar Board Vice President Mahmood Nawaz Shah, these crops see only a selective use of machinery. The use of heavy machinery has a limited scope considering the dynamics of small- and medium-scale farming, he added.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1463150/corporate-farming-has-little-charm-for-most-farmers

FOR SOME CROPS, RAIN SPELLS PROVIDE RELIEF

Ahmad Fraz Khan Updated February 11, 2019

FOR the shortage-stricken agriculture sector the third rain spell in the first 37 days of the New Year has come as a huge relief. According to the meteorological department officials, another substantial spell will visit Pakistan this week and February will have above normal rain and snowfall.

Riding these spells, the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) on Jan 29 revised water shortage downwards from the previously calculated 38 per cent to the current 33pc. The percentage maybe revised further down in days to come, depending on the next rain spells and improvement in river flows.

The five per cent drop in shortage, in quantified terms, means an additional availability of 1.7 million acre feet of water in the system.

The Irsa system now has additional 1.7maf water from the system. With more to come in the rest of February, savings are bound to go up

These rain spells have already benefitted the system in three ways: additional water, decrease in demand and extension in canal closure resulting in further savings.

The Irsa system now has additional 1.7maf water from the system already arrived and exhausted; with more to come in the rest of February, savings are bound to go up.

River flows became healthy as well: total river flows last Thursday were 49,000 cusecs against 35,000 cusecs on the corresponding day last year. Due to the additional availability, the storage position improved to 1.8maf — the same as it was on the corresponding day last year.

At one point, in the beginning of the year, the gap between current and the previous year's position was of 2maf, which now stands closed as a result of these spells.

Due to these happy signs, the Irsa thinks it may be able to substantially reduce early Kharif shortages, which historically run in the 40s.

Sindh will be particular beneficiary of early Kharif water.

Owing to the rains the provinces have been able to bring their water demand down: for example, Punjab had planned to run its canals at 21,000 cusecs on Feb 7, but the total demand it received for the day was 18,000 cusecs.

As far as extended canal closure is concerned, Punjab, which used to open its canals after Dec 25, now plans to start them on Feb 12. Currently, only 20pc of its irrigation system is running.

Wheat and gram crops are expected to be major beneficiaries. However potato and maize may potentially face some kind of trouble if rains turn torrential and their period extends beyond the current forecast.

For wheat, the current rains have been a boon. With water shortages running at around 40pc farmers were forced to supplement water through expensive tube well pumping, where subsoil water is sweet, and miss it where underground aquifer is brackish.

The other deficit was a shortage of application of Di-Ammonia Phosphate (DAP) due to price factor — its price has gone up by almost Rs1,400 per bag in the last two months. Rain water could meet both these critical requirements.

Gram is the next biggest crop that is totally dependent on rains owing to it being a barani (rain-fed) area crop.

Its statistics underline the importance of the crop: as far as acreage is concerned, gram is the fifth largest crop after wheat (22m acres), cotton (eight million acres), rice (six million acres) and maize (three million acres).

It is sown on 2.7m acres and constitutes 60pc of the cereal import bill. Experts think that rain is as critical for gram as it is for wheat at this stage. If wheat can take care of food security, gram can help reduce the import bill as well as provide the poor with a cheap source of protein.

The two crops, which may possibly face some kind of risk due to the rains, are maize (for sowing) and potato (for harvesting). Farmers are preparing for maize sowing but persistent rains have deterred the effort.

If, as predicted, it rains next week as well, the farmers would be forced to delay maize sowing, especially in Punjab, where the crop covers over 1.8m acres. Though its sowing can be delayed into March, doing so will reflect in the yield. Maize farmers are thus keeping their fingers crossed.

In trouble is the potato crop, which is still 60pc underground and needs to be dug now. If next week's rains cause water to remain standing in the field, it would block aeration and could damage the yield. Farmers are now de-capping the crop to keep it underground.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1463147/for-some-crops-rain-spells-provide-relief

WHY WE SHOULD INVEST IN AGRICULTURE

Iftikhar Talpur Updated February 11, 2019

Agriculture is the mainstay of Pakistan's economy. It contributes 18.9 per cent to the GDP and employs 42.3pc of the labour force. The rural economy heavily depends on this sector.

The sub-sectors of agriculture, which include minor crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry, have the potential to increase farmers' earnings by ensuring the export of surplus stocks to neighbouring markets.

The demand for food in the international market is also increasing. This means farmers have an opportunity to make the economy vibrant by seizing international markets.

The world's population is 7.7 billion. It is expected to be more than 9bn by 2050. From 207 million, Pakistan's population is expected to increase to around 300m by 2050. In addition, the growing trend of urbanisation will continue at an accelerated pace, soon reaching 70pc of the world's population.

As per the 1981 census, 28pc of Pakistan's population was urban. But its share soared to almost 37pc in 2017. For the last couple of decades, Sindh has been one of the most urbanised provinces of Pakistan. Its urban population was 52pc as per the last census while those of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan were 37pc, 19pc and 28pc, respectively.

If the pace of urbanisation remains constant, the food producer will turn into the food consumer, causing a huge decline in agricultural production and an increase in the country's dependency on imported food.

Data shows Pakistan's food imports are rising. In 2012-13, food exports were $4.76bn while food imports amounted to $4.19bn. This meant a food trade balance of $570m. But in 2016-17, food exports were $3.71bn against food imports of $6.14bn. In July-December 2018, foreign sales of food items declined to $1.93bn as opposed to the food imports of $3.24bn.

Unfortunately, many educated people believe that agriculture is old-fashioned. What they fail to understand is that agriculture-related businesses have a greater trickle-down effect and create more employment opportunities

Major imported food items are palm oil, soybean oil, tea, powdered milk, spices, dried fruits, soft drinks, flavoured water, juices, chocolate, biscuits and cheese. Pakistan now imports many food items that it once used to export, such as beef, mutton, chicken and eggs. In addition, Pakistan imports fruits and vegetables. These imported items are worth hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

It is tragic that local farmers are burning their crops because of low market rates.

Despite an abundance of agricultural and natural resources, the country is not meeting the demand for food items. This is intensifying food security challenges.

The demand for food is expected to rise in the international market. For instance, in 2016-17, 2.68bn tonnes of grain were produced worldwide. By 2050, additional 1.5bn tonnes will be required to feed the world's growing population. Simultaneously, meat production will increase from 200m tonnes to 500m tonnes.

Unfortunately, many educated young people believe that agriculture is an old-fashioned business. What they fail to understand is that agriculture-related businesses have a greater trickle-down effect and create more employment opportunities. Young people should invest their energies, knowledge and skills to achieve higher productivity in agriculture.

No well-rounded agriculture policy was devised in the last 72 years. Only short-term measures were taken without any regard for their long-term effect.

Successive governments promised agriculture reforms, but did not take any concrete action to improve the sector's performance.

Farmer organisations and alliances, which are expected to voice the concerns of growers, have been unable to do so. They are affiliated with the ruling political elites and protect the interests of a few individuals rather than the sector as a whole.

The market for cash crops is limited due to the absence of small industrial units. The government should encourage small industrial units to boost the rural agrarian economy.

The writer is a development professional

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1463148/why-we-should-invest-in-agriculture

PM'S PROGRAMME BOOST FOR PINDI'S POULTRY MARKET

By Imran Asghar Published: February 11, 2019

RAWALPINDI: Even though initial suggestions from Prime Minister Imran Khan last year had been met with bursts of dismissive laughter, the proposal of providing chickens and eggs to the poor to start their own poultry business has resulted in a boost for one market in Rawalpindi.

Three months on from that suggestion, which was made during a speech by Imran on his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-led government's 100-day progress while citing the idea initially sprouted by Microsoft founder Bill Gates, the Dengi Khoyi market in Rawalpindi has seen the number of customers and sellers increase.

The traditional chicken market is quite old and attracts people from far and wide, including from Gujranwala, Rahim Yar Khan, Mianwali, Khushabad, Mian Chunno and other parts of Punjab.

They seek to bid on different species of hens and roosters and egg consignments. The different types of chicken available include 'Desi' — homegrown, Shaver, Aseel, starter and broiler.

The market is quite impromptu in nature and features a number of sellers who arrive at the market on their motorbikes with carts in tow while others put up small, temporary stalls.

Dilpazir Khan, a chicken trader at the market, said that before PM Imran's announcement last year, people tended to avoid the market.

But now, all sorts of people of varying ages have started to show up at the market.

It was now a common sight, he said, to see people purchase high-quality cockerels and roosters from the market and then even sell them in the very market at a profit.

"The chicken market has transformed itself into a profitable earning opportunity," he said.

The market, set up in a narrow lane, sees peak rush after Friday prayers.

"There is hardly any space left to walk even," Dilpazir says.

Tanvir Butt, who was visiting the market in hopes of procuring a cockerel of the Aseel breed.

Asked why he was visiting this particular market, Butt said that good species of cockerels are sold at the market at reasonable prices.

"A cockerel, which is normally sold for Rs10,000-Rs12,000, is sold at the Dingi Khoyi market for a mere Rs4,000-Rs6,000," he said, adding that chickens are sold at the market without weighing them, rather the price of any species depends on how beautiful it looks.

Sher Niazi, who brought his cockerels from Mianwali to sell in the market, explained that while he could have sold his poultry in his hometown, but the market in Rawalpindi offers a better profit rate.

He further said that working in the chicken market was extremely profitable.

"Some people start their business with as low as Rs2,000 and tend to earn a profit of Rs2,000 to Rs10,000 by the evening," Niazi said, adding that ever since PM Imran's announcement regarding the poultry business, the demand for chickens has increased exponentially.

"Even those who previously looked down upon the business are joining the trade," he stated.

Muhammad Azhar, who was looking for cockerels of Mianwali-origin, said that market has been witnessing an extraordinary rush since the day Prime Minister Imran highlighted the importance of breeding chicken to stave off poverty.

"The market also offers a variety of chickens which can be grown at home," he said.

Even though the market has been seeing an increase in the number of visitors, it is facing an acute dearth of basic facilities such as sufficient space for sitting apart from the provision of drinking water.

Niazi suggested that the market should be rebuilt so that more citizens can get an opportunity to do business.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 11th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1907744/1-pms-programme-boost-pindis-poultry-market/

PRICES OF COTTON REMAIN STABLE

NASEEM USMAN | FEB 11TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The prices of cotton remained stable. Trading volumes are decreasing because textile mills are not taking interest. One of the main reasons behind the slowdown is the ongoing China-US dispute. The rates of cotton are not increasing despite low production of this commodity in Pakistan and India.

Due to the cautious buying of textile and spinning mills in the cotton market last week the prices of cotton remained largely stable but the business volume remained relatively low. The production of cotton this year is 8 % lower than the last year. Textile mills are not taking interest in buying. The big textile groups have signed agreements on the import of cotton. According to some reports, textile mills have signed agreements on the import of three million bales of cotton from abroad.

The reason behind low trading volume is that the government has abolished sales tax and import duty on the import of cotton during February 1, to June 30 and mills and importers are paying for the delivery of cotton from abroad.

The prices of cotton in the Punjab and Sindh remained Rs7000 per maund to Rs 8800 per maund while Seed cotton (Kapas/Phutti) is available in small quantity from Rs 3000 to Rs 3500 per 40 Kgs in both Sindh and Punjab. Cotton in Balochistan is available at the rate of Rs 8000 to 8100 per maund while the rate of seed cotton was from Rs 3000 to 3500.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KAC) spot rate committee decreased the rate by Rs 100 per maund and closed it at Rs 8600 per maund. The Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum said that there are chances of minimizing the economic conflict between the China and USA. According to experts, there are chances of improvement in the China- USA economic ties in coming days. The China-US trade conflict is disturbing the economy of the world.

There is uncertainty in the international market. The price of New York cotton is linked with dollar. Due to fluctuations in the rates of dollar the price of New York cotton is fluctuating however for the last few days the rate of cotton is 72 to 73 American cent per maund. On the other hand, due to Chinese Lunar Festival holidays there is a slowdown in economic activities while a bearish trend was also seen in Indian cotton market.

The slowdown in international cotton and textile sector also affected the local textile sector. Few days back buyers started taking interest in cotton and textile sector but trade volume is low due to the Chinese Lunar Festival holidays. Cotton production in India has declined as compared to last year. The estimated cotton production in India was 380 million bales but due to the weather conditions the Cotton Association of India (CAI) revised the target from 380 million bales to 365 million bales reducing the target by 1.5 million bales.

The CAI has again reduced the estimate by 3.5 million bales and the new estimated target of cotton bales production is 330 million bales. The Indian textile industry is also witnessing economic slowdown like Pakistani textile industry as the demand and prices of products are showing a downward trend.

According to the estimates of weekly report released by United States Department of Agriculture the sale of American Cotton dropped by 39 percent but interestingly Pakistan is the biggest importer of American cotton.

Pakistan has signed agreements for the import of 52, 800 cotton bales. The government is giving incentives to textile industry; on the other hand, the representatives of textile industry are complaining of large import of cotton, cotton yarn, textile fabrics and comber through Duty and Tax Remission For Export (DTRE) from China and India which is affecting our industry and demanded that government should stop their import.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190211446237/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 4th TO FEBRUARY 10th 2019

WORLD DAY TO ENHANCE AWARENESS OF BENEFITS OF EATING PULSES

Amin Ahmed February 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: With a rapid increase in global food needs on the horizon, the role of pulses has become even more significant particularly with regard to dietary protein and micronutrients.

To enhance awareness of the nutrient benefits of eating pulses, the first observance of 'World Pulses Day' will take place on Sunday as proclaimed by the United Nations (UN) last month.

Pulses are more than just nutritious seeds. They contribute to sustainable food systems and a 'zero-hunger' world, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Supply of meat is not keeping pace with population growth and therefore production of pulses is required, report says

Consumption of protein is essential to maintain the health and vigour of people and pulses are the most important source of protein in Pakistan. The supply of meat is not keeping pace with the population growth and therefore the production of pulses is required, according to a report on the 'Status of pulses in Pakistan' which was presented to an international forum recently.

The production of pulses in Pakistan is stagnant and disturbing the nutritional balance of the population, especially of poor and weaker sections of society which cannot afford other expensive sources of proteins.

The major supply of food legumes depend on the production of chickpeas and mung beans. Failure of these crops results in a pulse debacle in the country. One of the main reasons for stagnation in production of pulses is inadequate investment resulting in non-adoption of the full package of improved production technology by farmers.

The report said mash was the least researched crop among pulses despite its high nutritive and economic value and as a result its area and production decreased continuously.

A working paper issued by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research says that the target for mash crop production could not be achieved during the 2018-19 season. Mash is one of the important kharif pulses in Pakistan and Punjab is the major contributor to its production.

The target for areas under mash was fixed at 21.9 thousand hectares and production estimated at 11.3 thousand tons and yield at 515kg per hectare. The target could not be achieved and the decrease was attributed to unavailability of high yielding varieties, lack of weeds control and mechanisation.

Mung is another important kharif pulses crop and grown on a large scale after chickpea. In the 2018-19 season, countrywide crop production was good and due to favouable weather conditions, the production target of 120.60 thousand tons was achieved.

Gram is the largest rabi pulse crop, accounting for 71.4 per cent of the total production of pulses in the country and it occupies about 81.6pc of the major pulse cropped area.

In 2018-19, gram was grown on 935.5 thousand hectares with a total production of 357.8 thousand tons.

Punjab produces more than 80pc of overall production. Gram is grown mainly in Thal area and contributes about 80pc of overall production in the country.

The import of pulses has increased tremendously and in 2017-18 fiscal year the import was 898 thousand tons worth Rs62 billion. In 2018-19, import of pulses exceeded 433 thousand tons with Rs39 billion in the first half of the year.

The ministry paper suggests that pulses production, especially gram and lentil, can be increased in Pakistan by provision of good quality, high-yielding certified varieties of seed to the farmers through a subsidised programme at national level.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1462886/world-day-to-enhance-awareness-of-benefits-of-eating-pulses

AGRI CREDIT FALLS SHORT OF TARGET, GROWS OVER LAST YEAR

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated February 10, 2019

KARACHI: The banks' disbursement for agricultural credit during the first half of this fiscal year remained below the target but surpassed the 1HFY18 level, said the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Saturday.

In the first half of 2018-19, banks disbursed Rs527.3 billion, which is 42.2 per cent of the total target for FY19 and 22pc higher than the disbursement made during same period last year.

While presiding a review meeting of Agriculture Credit Advisory, SBP Governor Tariq Bajwa asked banks to enhance their efforts in order to reach the annual credit target. "I would urge the stakeholders including banks, federal and provincial governments to harness technology platforms for enhancing agriculture," said Bajwa on Saturday.

The outstanding portfolio of agriculture credit also increased to Rs521bn by end of December 2018, up 17.9pc, from Rs442bn last year. Meanwhile, the number of outstanding borrowers also rose to 3.9 million by end of 2018, from 3.46m last year, representing a growth of 12.8pc.

Bajwa also appreciated the efforts of microfinance banks and institutions in providing funding to small and marginalised farmers.

The governor pointed out that despite witnessing reasonable progress during FY19, the industry still faces various demand and supply-side challenges.

In particular, he highlighted the geographical disparities in provision of agriculture credit as the disbursements to KP, Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan still remain far from their respective targets.

Likewise, banks were advised to pay special focus to production loans for small farmers. Bajwa also emphasised that banks should enhance their outreach in terms of agricultural infrastructure by hiring agricultural credit officers.

He appreciated the efforts of Islamic banks in achieving 80pc growth in disbursement during the July-Dec 2018, compared to same period last year. However, they still account 3pc of the total agricultural credit disbursement.

The governor urged banks to adopt a more focused approach especially towards the underserved areas for achieving Rs1,250bn agri credit target for FY19, while bringing a qualitative shift in agri financing.

Bajwa also asked Islamic banks and Islamic windows of commercial banks to play an active role in expanding outreach in potential areas, particularly to faith-sensitive farming community.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1462935/agri-credit-falls-short-of-target-grows-over-last-year

AGRI-CREDIT INCREASES 22PC TO RS527BLN IN JULY-DECEMBER

Our Correspondent February 10, 2019

KARACHI: Banks disbursed Rs527.3 billion in agriculture credit during the first half of 2018/19, which was 42.2 percent of the annual assigned target, and 22 percent higher than the disbursement made during the same period last year, the central bank governor said.

Governor Tariq Bajwa of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), however, advised banks to enhance their outreach to underserved areas and small farmers to achieve agriculture credit target of Rs1.25 trillion for the current fiscal year.

Bajwa said there are geographical disparities in provision of agriculture credit as the disbursements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan still remain far from their respective targets. "Despite witnessing reasonable progress during FY2019, the industry still faces various demand and supply side challenges," Bajwa said, presiding the mid-term review meeting of Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) in Hyderabad.

It was the first ACAC's meeting in Hyderabad, a statement said on Saturday. SBP governor appreciated the efforts of banks in promoting agricultural finance during the July-December period. He commended the efforts of microfinance banks and institutions in providing financing to small and marginalised farmers.

The outstanding portfolio of agriculture credit also increased to Rs521 billion by December-end from Rs442 billion last year, witnessing a growth of 17.9 percent. Moreover, the number of outstanding borrowers also increased to 3.90 million from 3.46 million, with a growth of 12.8 percent.

Banks were advised to pay special focus on production loans to small farmers. They were asked to enhance their outreach in terms of agricultural infrastructure by hiring agriculture credit officers. Banks were urged to adopt a more focused approach especially towards the underserved areas to achieve Rs1.250 trillion agriculture credit target for FY2019, while bringing a qualitative shift in agriculture financing. Bajwa said harnessing technology platforms is the way forward for enhancing agricultural productivity. "I would urge the stakeholders including banks, federal and provincial governments to harness technology platforms for enhancing agricultural productivity." SBP governor also highlighted the efforts of Islamic banks in achieving a growth of 80 percent in disbursement during July-December. "However, their share in total disbursement still remains less than three percent in overall agriculture credit." Bajwa urged Islamic banks and Islamic windows of banks to play an active role in expanding outreach in potential areas particularly to faith sensitive farming community.

Agriculture professionals and representatives of banks also called for various innovative initiatives in agriculture financing including adoption of land record management information system for agriculture financing in Punjab, promotion of high-value crops, development of e-platform for provision of quality agriculture inputs, and women empowerment through value chain financing for livestock/dairy in Gilgit Baltistan.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/429898-agri-credit-increases-22pc-to-rs527bln-in-july-december

GOVT ISSUES WHEAT SOWING ADVISORY

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 02, 2018

LAHORE: The agriculture department has directed rain-fed area farmers to complete wheat sowing by Nov 15 for getting maximum yield.

A spokesperson for the department said on Thursday that wheat growers should use approved seed of the crop that include NARC-2009, Horse-2009, Dharabi-2011, Pakistan-2013, Fateh Jang-2016, Ehsan-2016, Barani-2017 and Chakwal-50, and complete the sowing by Nov 15 so that they reap a bumper crop.

Growers have also been recommended to use 40-50 kg seed per acre so that seed germination does not go below 85 percent. They have also been advised to consult local agriculture extension staff for fungicides and plowing of fields to eliminate weeds before sowing and adopting drill-sowing method.

The spokesperson says that the growers from low rainfall districts like Khushab, Mianwali, Bhakkar, Layyah, Muzaffargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur, should use one bag of DAP, three-fourth bag of urea, and 1.2 bag of SoP or two bags of nitrophos before broadcasting the seed, while those from Chakwal, Attock, Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Gujrat, and Narowal should use two bags of DAP, 1-1/4 bags of urea, and a half bag of SoP before broadcasting the seed.

Published in Dawn, November 2nd, 2018

https://www.dawn.com/news/1442956/govt-issues-wheat-sowing-advisory

SBP GOVERNOR STRESSES HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST AGRICULTURE

By Our Correspondent Published: February 10, 2019

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Tariq Bajwa has urged all the stakeholders, including banks and federal and provincial governments, to harness technology platforms in a bid enhance agricultural productivity.

He said this while presiding over the mid-term review meeting of Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) held in Hyderabad.

“Organising regular ACAC meetings at various locations displays our commitment towards promoting agricultural financing in all regions, especially the underserved areas,” reaffirmed the governor in his inaugural remarks. “While previous meetings were held in Balochistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, we are convening it for the first time in Hyderabad to provide impetus for agricultural financing in the region.”

While reviewing the progress on agricultural credit during July-December 2018, the governor appreciated the efforts of banks in promoting agricultural financing.

He shared that during the first half of FY19, banks disbursed Rs527.3 billion, which was 42.2% of total target assigned for FY19. This figure was 22% higher than the credit disbursed during the same period of the last fiscal year.

The outstanding portfolio of agriculture credit further widened to Rs521 billion at the end of December 2018 from Rs442 billion last year, a growth of 17.9%.

Moreover, the number of outstanding borrowers also rose to 3.9 million at the end of December 2018 from 3.46 million last year, with a growth of 12.8%.

The chair further acknowledged the efforts of microfinance banks and institutions in providing financing to small and marginalised farmers.

“Despite witnessing reasonable progress during FY19, the industry still faces various demand and supply side challenges,” Bajwa pointed out.

In particular, he highlighted the geographical disparities in provision of agriculture credit as the disbursements in Khyber-Paktunkhwa, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan remained far from their respective targets.

Advising the banks to focus specifically on production loans for small farmers, he emphasised enhancing their outreach in terms of agricultural infrastructure by hiring agriculture credit officers.

Moreover, the governor highlighted the efforts of Islamic banks in achieving an 80% growth in disbursement during July-December 2018 compared to the same period of preceding year.

“However, their share in total disbursement still amounts to less than 3% in overall agriculture credit,” he shared.

Bajwa was of the view that banks should adopt a highly focused approach especially towards the underserved areas to achieve the Rs1,250 billion agriculture credit target for FY19 while bringing a qualitative shift in agriculture financing.

He also urged Islamic banks and Islamic windows of commercial banks to play an active role in expanding outreach in potential areas particularly to faith sensitive farming community.

The remarks of the governor were followed by a detailed presentation wherein the performance of banks on agriculture financing during the first half of FY 2018-19 was reviewed against their targets and potential areas of concerns were also highlighted.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 10th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1907141/2-sbp-governor-stresses-harnessing-technology-boost-agriculture/

FRUIT EXPORTERS FETCH $15M ORDERS AT BERLIN FAIR

The Newspaper’s Staff Reporter February 09, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistani exporters of fruits and vegetables have received export orders worth $15 million from foreign buyers during the Fruit Logistica 2019.

Patron in Chief of All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA), Waheed Ahmed, in a statement, claimed that Pakistani

kinno, dates, value-added products of dates, fresh vegetables, mango and guava pulp and apple concentrate got overwhelming attention from the visitors.

Mr Ahmed said that Pakistan stands a bright chance to explore new international markets through this fair while the existing available markets would get further consolidated, adding that buyers from the UK, Italy, Germany, Russia, the UAE, China, Japan , Saudi Arabia, Belgium, Mauritius, Finland, African countries and other countries had expressed great interest in agri-produces of Pakistan.

Published in Dawn, February 9th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1462722/fruit-exporters-fetch-15m-orders-at-berlin-fair

‘HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS’ OF CATTLE FEARED DEAD AFTER AUSTRALIA FLOODS

AFP Updated February 09, 2019

TOWNSVILLE: Hundreds of thousands of cattle weakened from a severe drought are feared to have died in record-breaking floods in northeastern Australia, authorities said on Friday, as they stepped up efforts to feed surviving livestock.

Incessant rains over an almost two-week period have flooded swathes of Queensland state, with the full scale of the devastation on drought-hit cattle stations becoming clearer as floodwaters recede. “We are expecting hundreds of thousands in terms of stock losses,” Prime Minister Scott Morrison told reporters in Sydney.

“This will be heartbreaking to these communities that have been experiencing years of drought, only to see that turn into a torrential inundation which threatens now their very livelihoods in the complete other direction.” Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk spoke of seeing a “sea of dead cattle” when she toured one region on Thursday.

“To see the cattle spread across these yards, not moving, it made you feel sick in the stomach,” she told national broadcaster ABC.

Bales of hay and fuel have been transported into towns near the disaster zones and are being distributed to farmers so they can carry out airdrops to their stock.

Farmer Rachael Anderson and her husband, who manage Eddington cattle station near Julia Creek township, said 800 of their 1500 cattle were still unaccounted for.

“The cattle didn’t have anywhere else to go… We’ve got a railway line close to us and the whole railway line is just tangled with dead cattle,” Anderson said.

“If the floodwater wasn’t enough to kill them, then those that got to higher areas were exposed to elements that were not conducive like rain hitting them at 60 kilometres an hour. They can’t survive them long term.” Anderson — who had been hand-feeding cattle over the past few months amid the crippling drought — said there were also many dead kangaroos as well as birds that were falling dead on the ground.

About half of Australia’s 25-million strong cattle herd is bred in Queensland state, and graziers say the floods — described as a once-a-century event — could devastate their industry.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1462752/hundreds-of-thousands-of-cattle-feared-dead-after-australia-floods

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE OUTBREAKS HIT CITY’S DAIRY FARMS

Faiza Ilyas February 09, 2019

KARACHI: Foot-and-mouth disease has hit more than 100 dairy farms in the city, most of which are located in Bhains Colony and along the Superhighway, sources told Dawn on Friday.

Most infected animals severely weakened by the disease, they said, were being sold for slaughtering purposes by farmers to avoid losses.

The World Organisation for Health Animal, however, suggests humane destruction of all infected, recovered and FMD-susceptible contact animals and their safe disposal.

"We have recorded FMD outbreaks at 150 dairy farms in Karachi over the past three months. These farms were located in Bhains Colony and along the Superhighway," Dr Nasrullah Panhwar, National Field Officer of Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for Control of FMD, confirmed the report.

Explaining further, he said even if one FMD case was detected, it was considered as an outbreak since it spread very quickly.

Responding to a question, he said that while FMD was a severe, highly contagious disease and had very serious implications for animal farming, virus transmission to humans through infected animals and their derivative products was rare.

According to him, FMD outbreaks strike city's dairy farms especially those located in Bhains Colony, an area considered a reservoir of foot-and-mouth disease, every winter. But, their intensity has been successfully reduced over the years through a FAO project.

"It wasn't so serious last year, though there were cases. The FAO project carried out from 2001 till 2017 helped us a lot in containing it," he explained, adding that the FAO project had now been renewed with limited funds from the Japanese government.

On project's operation, he said it had support from the Sindh government livestock department and farmers were provided with free vaccination service for 100 animals. The rest had to be taken care of by them.

"They need to ensure that animals receive a booster dose after a month followed by a dose after every six month," he said, adding that non-compliance with vaccination regime would make animals vulnerable to disease.

According to Dr Panhwar, treatment for FMD is available in the local market which costs around Rs10,000. Once treated, the animal is able to produce milk.

Animals suffering from FMD were found in pitiable condition at some affected farms in Bhains Colony. Speaking to Dawn, farmers blamed cattle sellers in Punjab from where they brought and purchased most of their animals for the disease outbreaks.

"They should have vaccinated their animals before selling to us. We can't vaccinate animals during transport as they are in stress," Abdullah, a dairy farmer, said, adding that often animals developed disease symptoms whey they were vaccinated in Karachi, indicating either the animal was already carrying the virus or got infected at Bhains Colony.

They claimed that the disease was having crippling effect on their businesses, forcing many of them to resort to what they described as 'emergency slaughtering'.

“The affected animal suffers severe weight loss and get so weakened that it’s no longer viable for milk production. Besides, farmers have to rely on costly imported vaccines as no local vaccine is available for the disease,” said Shakir Umar Gujjar represent Dairy and Cattle Farmers Association.

Shaukat Mukhtar representing Dairy Farmers Association said that the FAO project earlier launched greatly helped farmers who shared half of the vaccination cost with the organisation.

“But, now the FAO says that the government should come forward and bear half of the cost with us. If this support is provided to us, we can successfully control this disease again,” he said.

The 2014 FAO data shows that Karachi reported 954 outbreaks of the disease out of the total 1,119 and 2,591 outbreaks occurred from across Sindh and the rest of the country, respectively.

Karachi reported to have the highest viral load of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the country.

Experts believed that this was mainly due to commercial dairy farming being practised on a large scale in unhygienic and cramped conditions in the city.

During the same year, 362 outbreaks of FMD were recorded in Punjab, while 294 and 151 outbreaks of the disease were recorded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, respectively.

According to experts, movement of animals is the primary source of transmission, but people can also transmit the virus from one place to another if they visit an infected area and do not change clothes.

It is estimated that round 30,000 to 40,000 animals are transported monthly from other parts of the country to the Landhi Cattle Colony which has the largest number of commercial dairy farms in Pakistan.

The FMD virus mutates very quickly and any change in its structure makes the vaccine ineffective. Therefore, it is very important to monitor the virus and know its exact sub-serotype.

The FMD, at times fatal, affects cloven-hoofed animals, including domestic and wild bovids. The virus causes a high fever for between two and six days, followed by blisters inside the mouth and on the feet that may rupture and cause lameness.

It can spread by infected animals comparatively easily through contact with contaminated farming equipment, vehicles, clothing, feed and by domestic and wild predators.

Published in Dawn, February 9th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1462649/foot-and-mouth-disease-outbreaks-hit-citys-dairy-farms

GRAM PRODUCTION MAY EXCEED ESTIMATES

By Our Correspondent Published: February 9, 2019

LAHORE: Considering the sufficient rains this season, stakeholders expect the production of chickpeas, known as gram, to surpass earlier estimates.

The higher harvest is likely despite cultivation over a lower area this year.

“Rain spells are considered sufficient and are likely to help harvest 0.4 to 0.5 million tons of gram, despite a one-fifth reduction in the sowing area this year, mainly due to restrictions on planting the crop on government land," said Pulses Importer and Exporter Association Punjab Secretary Danial Ahmad on Friday.

Last year, owing to scarce rainfall, only 0.3 million tons of gram was produced. The most severe drought was witnessed over the last 10 years in 2012 when no considerable amount of rain came in the gram crop area in Punjab, pushing down production to a mere 0.18 million tons.

The price outlook of gram crop looks good as far as the consumers are concerned. Restrictions imposed by India, the biggest consumer of pulses in the world, by slapping duty and taxes has led to a glut-like situation globally, so the pulses market is broadly very much depressed.

Referring to the domestic demand for gram, Ahmad said, the consumption of chickpeas in the country was estimated at 0.55 million tons in the current year. "We are hoping that the production of 0.4 to 0.5 million tons with carryover stock will be sufficient to meet local demand. Hence, no sizeable imports are being anticipated at this point in time, especially when compared with the trend of last year," he said.

In the preceding year, he recalled, nearly 8,000 containers of chickpeas had been imported since March 2018, bringing 180,000 tons of the commodity.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 9th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1906616/2-gram-production-may-exceed-estimates/

SIBI GROWERS ASSURED OF 'QUICK REVIVAL' OF FARM SECTOR

Ali Jan Mangi Updated February 08, 2019

DERA MURAD JAMALI: Provincial Minister for Agriculture Engineer Zamrak Khan Piralizai on Thursday assured members of the market committee Sibi that the issues being faced by farmers would be resolved on a priority basis.

"Sibi division has a significant importance regarding agricultural development and the government is helping in research," he said during a visit to Sibi.

Regarding effects of drought on agriculture sector, the minister said the government will utilise all available resources to provide relief to drought-stricken farmers for rehabilitation of farming sector which serves as the backbone of the provincial economy.

"The government of Balochistan has given importance to development of Agriculture Department and the establishment of Market Committee so as to help farmers sell their products," Engr Zamrak said.

"Experts are sharing their research work with the government for utilisation of provincial land for agriculture while the Water Management Department too is helping farmers in saving water," he added.

He pledged support to the staff of Agricultural Dep¬artment with an assurance to address all their problems.

Published in Dawn, February 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1462522/sibi-growers-assured-of-quick-revival-of-farm-sector

JAPAN WANTS BAN ON IMPORT OF POULTRY PRODUCTS BE LIFTED

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | FEB 8TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Japan embassy has sought help of Abdul Razak Dawood, Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Investment for lifting of ban on import of Japan's poultry/products and Ajinomoto salt. On Thursday, Charge d' Affaires Embassy of Japan called on Abdul Razak Dawood and raised both issues with him.

The Commerce Division in its Import Policy Order of April 18, 2016 had restricted poultry and poultry products from Japan on account of Avian Influenza H5N1 strain. According to the Japanese embassy in Islamabad, Japan has declared to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) that it is totally free from HJPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) on April 15, 2018.

According to Japan embassy, the issue was technically examined by the livestock department of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) which has concluded that Japan can export poultry and poultry products to Pakistan, sources added. The Japanese embassy further stated that MNFS&R has requested Commerce Division through letter No.F.8.5/2015 (Japan)/IC-II on July 2, 2018 to issue an SRO of import policy for lifting of the restriction on the importation of poultry meat and poultry products from Japan. However, Commerce Division has not yet lifted restrictions on Japanese poultry and poultry products.

In September last year, Japan had expressed serious reservations against Pakistan for imposing a ban on the import of Ajinomoto salt, which may impact on its export to other countries.

According to an official statement, the issues pertaining to bilateral trade and investment were discussed. The options of technology up-gradation fund that could be used for up-gradation of textile machinery in Pakistan also came under discussion. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Commerce emphasized the need to improve the existing infrastructure of the fisheries sector of Pakistan including improvement of fish harbor at Karachi.

Both sides explored the option of establishing technology up-gradation fund that can be important in strengthening the manufacturing base of the country. The progress on the decisions of Pak-Japan Business Dialogue held in December 2018 in Japan was also reviewed. The modalities and agenda of the upcoming session of the business dialogue also came under discussion, the statement added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190208445543/

REAP URGES GOVERNMENT TO ENCOURAGE MECHANISATION IN RICE SECTOR

ZAHID BAIG | FEB 8TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) has urged the federal government to devise a national level policy for encouraging mechanization in the rice sector especially promotion of harvesting with rice harvesters instead of wheat harvesters.

The Association also urged the government to promote rice transplanters and dryers for paddy to save the precious foreign exchange earning commodity from wastage.

The proposal was floated by the REAP Chairman Safder Hussain Mekhri and Senior Vice Chairman Ali Hussam Asghar during a meeting with the Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood and the Federal Secretary Commerce Muhammad Younus Dagha.

REAP leadership apprised the government representatives that use of wheat harvesters for rice result in increased broken percentage in the paddy.

They were of the view that if Ministry of Commerce (MinCom) facilitates promotion of rice harvesters it could save at least 2 percent broken which will have a financial impact of US 100 million dollars in saving to exporters because of enhanced quality of the end products due to the less broken percentage.

REAP Senior Vice Chairman Ali Hussam Asghar while talking to Business Recorder here on Thursday said that the Association also urged the Ministry of Commerce to facilitate usage of rice transplanters at the time of paddy sowing as it would increase the number of plants sown thus leading to more per acre yield.

Both the sides also agreed for the promotion of local industry for manufacturing of rice transplanters and harvesters in the country, Ali added.

He expressed his optimism that the proposed changes if brought in with the help of the Commerce Ministry can help the exporters to take the rice exports from the present $2 billion to $5 billion in next few years.

REAP eyes promising future for Rice Exports in the years to come thanks to a proactive Team lead by the advisor to PM on commerce, Ali Hussam said.

He termed the interactions as extremely productive with all relevant areas especially the negotiations on bilateral trade with Government focus on promoting agriculture based exports and rice as the only crop grown for export as more than 60 percent is exported to over a 100 plus countries, received all-out support.

Specific countries are being focused where potential is to capture bigger share for Pakistan rice and the operational issues in the whole value chain of rice is also being taken up to encourage exporters in investing in the much need backwards integration and farm mechanization to attend to Gaps existing in the rice value chain, Ali Hussam Asghar concluded.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190208445557/

FOOT & MOUTH DISEASE PLAN NOT YET ENDORSED BY WORLD BODY

Amin Ahmed February 07, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government's national programme for the control of foot and mouth disease (FMD) at a cost of Rs664 million covering seven-year period (2018-2024), is yet to be endorsed by the Paris-based World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

The programme is currently under consideration of the organisation, and it needs to be continuously followed up until mid of next year. The programme aims at improving food security and will increase the resilience livelihood of livestock farmers to animal disease threats.

The country's meat exports are currently limited to Gulf and to expand into markets like China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Russia, it needs an OIE endorsed FMD control programme and FMD free zone compartments. This endorsement will expand meat export market to a number of countries.

Currently, the country is not among the 68 countries which are FMD free where vaccination is not practiced. Only six countries – China, India, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia and Thailand have the endorsed official control programme for FMD, according to the organisation.

The USAID-funded Agricultural Market Development (AMD) is supporting the government in getting the FMD control programme endorsed by OIE and the federating units in establishing their notified FMR free zones in order to enhance the scope of meat export markets. In this regard, the animal husbandry commissioner will need sufficient support to follow up the process of access to new markets in order to reap benefits of the project.

These efforts are expected to increase meat exports manifold, especially through entering into new markets. It will add pliability to meat processors and producers in their businesses and will also support in linking profit with the farming activity thus adding resilience of livelihood of livestock farmers in the country.

On livestock development, the ongoing US-Pakistan Partnership is being catered through "Creating New Frontiers in Agriculture" (CNFA) under its programme on FMD, which is supporting Pakistan's commercial agriculture, particularly through improving the ability of the country's agriculture and livestock sectors to meet both international and domestic demands.

The government is seriously eng¬a¬ged in prevention and control of FMD through its own resources and technical assistance and support from its development partners.

Published in Dawn, February 7th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1462316/foot-mouth-disease-plan-not-yet-endorsed-by-world-body

'GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING LIVESTOCK SECTOR ON MODERN LINES'

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 7TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The government of Pakistan is committed to developing and promoting livestock sector on modern lines to meet local and global Halal meat demand. This was stated by Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan as a chief guest while addressing "National Workshop on Sustainable Prevention of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)" here on Wednesday.

The workshop was organised by USAID under US-Pakistan partnership programme for Agricultural Market Development (AMD) aimed at bringing concerned stakeholders and beneficiaries together to share recent development in FMD control in Pakistan and way forward for sustainable prevention for enhanced meat trade in high demand market.

The minister said Pakistan has a huge potential for livestock production and processing with national herd comprises an estimated population of 190 million large and small ruminants and 87 million rural and one billion commercial poultry.

He said that the Agriculture Market Development is supporting Pakistan's commercial agriculture through improving the ability of sector to meet both international and domestic demand in fruits, off-season vegetables and meat.

The minister said that the enormity of large livestock resource base makes Pakistan amongst the first ten nations in the world in respect of many livestock commodities and species; however, diseases causing economic losses are one of the few stumbling blocks in Pakistani rural socioeconomic development.

The minister said that the present government has placed livestock on its national development agenda. This sector is being focused as a tool for economic growth and rural development.

Sultan said that the government of Pakistan is seriously engaged in prevention and control of FMD through its own resources and technical assistance from its development partners.

He said that based on successful demonstration of development of technical framework for control of FMD, Pakistan moved to stage two of global progressive control pathway (PCP) in 2015. He said that Pakistan in 2018 has launched National FMD Control Programme titled "Risk Based Control of Foot and Mouth Disease in Pakistan 2018-2024" at a cost $6.598 million.

The programme aims at improving food security and will increase the resilience livelihood of livestock farmers to animal disease threats. This programme is countrywide and is expected to move Pakistan's FMD control efforts from stage two to stage three.

Director/ EGA USAID Pakistan, Jeff Geoble said that Pakistan is agro economy and livestock sector comprises 58% of agro sector and it produces 5% of Halal meat of the world. Through consecutive efforts and FMD control Pakistan could contribute immensely to the world's Halal meat needs which is $600 billion worth.

The workshop was informed that livestock sector is the largest sub-sector of agriculture in Pakistan which plays a vital role in the economy. Despite the enormity of animal number, animal health and production are compromised due to presence of FMD, which is a highly contagious viral disease of animals and biggest trade barrier for animals and animal products. The animal losses run into billion of rupees annually apart from stocks unable to compete in the export market.

Pakistan's meat exports are currently limited to Gulf countries and in order to expand into other markets like China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Russia, Pakistan needs to have an OIE endorsed FMD control programme and FMD free zone compartments. This endorsement will expand Pakistan's meat export market to number of countries along with new markets.

The event was attended by the representatives of the development partners, provincial governments and national meat production and processing companies, and lead technical experts to deliberate and put forth a way forward on control and prevention of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in Pakistan, leading to enhanced export of meat.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190207445241/

PFMA KP DEMANDS SUPPLY OF WHEAT TO FLOUR MILLS AS PER QUOTA

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 7TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

Pakistan Flour Mills Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PFMA-KP) has demanded of the provincial government to ensure supply of wheat to flour mills as per their quota to fulfill the requirement of commodity in the province. The demand was made by PFMA KP chairman, Hajji Mohammad Tariq while chairing an executive body meeting of the association here on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by PFMA Central chairman, Naeem Butt, along with flour millers. The meeting discussed that the current situation of wheat in the province.

Naeem Butt while addressing on the occasion criticized that the incumbent KP Minister for Food, Qalandar Lodhi in his statements, claimed that the corruption had been eliminated and the provincial food department is self-sufficient in wheat, but the situation is completely against it.

PFMA central chairman said that it doesn't make different to become self-sufficient by supplying less wheat to flour mills in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He added that many flour mills had closed down due to non-provision of wheat as per their fixed quota. He said that the subsidy money on wheat is being misused, which inflicted huge financial losses to provincial exchequer.

The meeting has urged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan to ensure supply of wheat to flour mills as per their quota. It feared that the all flour mills of KP will be shut down, if the situation was persisted. The meeting further said that flour millers are being faced huge financial losses in the current circumstances.

On the occasion, the PFMA KP chairman, Hajji Mohammad Tariq has urged the provincial food department to immediate supply wheat to flour mills as per quota. He said the flour mills in Swat and Malakand are already being faced crisis due to less supply of wheat to them. He said that flour millers were compelled to procure wheat from Punjab.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190207445254/

HIGH EFFICIENCY IRRIGATION SYSTEM LAUNCHED IN PUNJAB

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 7TH, 2019 | SIALKOT

Under the directives of the Punjab government, Agriculture department has initiated a high efficiency irrigation system for introducing new modes of irrigation among the farmer community aimed at averting the possibilities of wastage irrigation water in Punjab.

Under the programme efforts would be made for motivating farmers to adopt new techniques to save the irrigation water from wastage and to create awareness about the importance of drip sprinkler system among the growers of the Punjab.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Wednesday that the adoption of new irrigation techniques will make agriculture sector more profitable, to enhance productivity and save the irrigation water from wastage across the Punjab. The agriculture sector was facing serious treats of shortage of irrigation water that was posing threats to overall production of the crops.

The adoption of drip sprinkler system would enable the growers and cultivators to save 50 percent irrigation water from wastage, increase the standard of productivity. Sources further told that 25 percent canal water, 30 percent watercourses and 35 percent water waste in fields that reduced availability of irrigation water for agriculture.

Agriculture experts foresee that agriculture sector of Pakistan will facing serious shortage of irrigation water in future. Under the prevailing circumstances the experts had suggested that government should adopt preventive measures to cope with the wastage of irrigation water. They further suggested that government should also take effective steps for bringing revolutionary changes in agriculture sector by adopting modern irrigation system a gross roots level.

In Sialkot district, the drip sprinkler irrigation system was gaining popularity among the farmers for better and effective utilization of available irrigation water. Drip sprinkler system had been installed on 161 acres in various parts of Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur and Sambrial tehsils of Sialkot district. The provincial government was providing 60 percent subsidy to the farmers of the installation of drip sprinkler system while farmers will contribute 40 percent the installation.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190207445268/

WHEAT PROCUREMENT FROM MARCH 1 URGED

The Newspaper’s Staff Correspondent February 06, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) president Abdul Majeed Nizam¬ani has demanded of the Sindh government to set up wheat procurement centres in the province by March 1, to ensure distribution of gunny bags.

Addressing a meeting of the board here on Tuesday, the SAB president called for an inquiry regarding financial irregularity of Rs220 million of the Sindh food department. He regretted that opening of wheat procurement centres was dela¬yed every year intentionally. He said gunny bags were not distributed among growers and they were mostly given to political figures.

He said Rs220m-Rs222m were allocated for procurement and preservation of wheat crop in godowns, but the amount was misappropriated and not spent. It caused losses to the national exchequer and failure to preserve wheat crop, he said, adding that the crop was destroyed resultantly due to improper arrangements. He claimed that it also led to huge financial losses and food department officials were directly involved in it. He called for convening a meeting of the food department to announce opening of wheat procurement centres by March 1.

The meeting was attended by Mehmood Nawaz Shah, Nadeem Shah, Zulfiqar Yousfani, Aslam Mari and others.

Published in Dawn, February 6th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1462074/wheat-procurement-from-march-1-urged

PASSCO TENDERS TO SELL 0.25M TONNES OF WHEAT

Reuters Updated February 05, 2019

HAMBURG: Pakistan Agri¬cultural Storage and Services Corp (Passco) has issued a tender to export 250,000 tonnes of wheat, European traders said on Monday.

The federal government in November 2018 approved export of up to 500,000 tonnes of wheat, possibly with subsidies, to reduce hefty local supplies.

The tender is expected to close on Feb 18.

A previous tender to export 100,000 tonnes of wheat was closed in January.

"Demand was so brisk for the Passco tender that prices offered were above the level at which export subsidies were required," one Euro¬pean trader said. "I suspect this could also happen with the new tender."

The latest tender for wheat grown in Punjab offers export by sea only, which would exclude sales to neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan.

Importers such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Middle East Gulf and other Asian countries are expected to be export targets, a trader said.

Punjab is offering bagged wheat in fair to average quality, the trader added.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh government has cancelled an international tender to import 50,000 tonnes of wheat as the lowest bidder did not agree to a time extension amid rising global prices, two officials from the state-run grains procurement agency said on Monday in Dhaka.

Published in Dawn, February 5th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1461927/passco-tenders-to-sell-025m-tonnes-of-wheat

TCP INVITES BIDS FOR SALE OF 415 MTS SWEEPING CARGO OF UREA

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 5TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The Trading Corporation of Pakistan has invited fresh bids for disposal of some 415 metric tons sweeping cargo of urea. In the previous tender opened on January 16, only one bid was received and it was declared non-responsive. Therefore, the TCP has issued fresh tender for the sale of sweeping urea.

According to fresh tender, interested parties may submit their bids up to February 18, 2019 which will be opened the same day at 11:30 am in the TCP's Board Room in presence of bidders or their authorized representatives. However, the individuals/sole proprietorships/firms/companies who have defaulted with the TCP will not be eligible to participate in the tender.

Further, those individuals/sole proprietorships/firms/companies who have not fulfilled their contractual obligations with the TCP will also not be eligible to participate in the bids, unless they clear their dues along with penalties or fulfill their contractual obligations with the TCP, as the case may be, before the tender opening date.

Interest bidder will be required to submit bids with the Earnest Money equivalent to at least 5 percent of the quoted value in the form of Bank Pay Order/Demand Draft in favor of TCP. Bids not accompanied with the required Earnest Money shall not be considered.

Bids have been invited for the sale of approximately 415.240 metric tons sweeping cargo of urea presently stored at TCP's Landhi godown. The urea is laying in three lost of 387.780 metric tons, 13.180 metric tons, 14.280 metric tons. The bids will remain valid for 30 (thirty) working days from the day on which the tender is opened excluding the opening day.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190205444805/

OVER 10 MILLION COTTON BALES ISSUED TO GINNERS

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 4TH, 2019 | MULTAN

Seed cotton (Phutti) equivalent to 10.6 million bales have reached ginneries across Pakistan till February 1, registering a shortfall by 7.23 per cent compared to corresponding period of last year. Out of total arrivals, 10,546,192 bales have undergone the ginning process, says a fortnightly report of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) issued here Sunday.

Arrivals in Punjab were recorded at over 6.461 million bales showing a 10.03 per cent shortfall and over 4 million or 4,251,721 bales in Sindh registering 2.52 per cent shortfall compared to corresponding period of last year.

Total sold out bales were recorded at over 9.1 million or 9,115,798 bales, including over 9 million or 9,014,898 bales bought by textile mills and another 100,900 bales purchased by exporters.

Around 1.4 million or 1,430,394 bales were still lying with the ginneries as unsold stock.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190204444622/

FOOD GROUP TRADE DEFICIT SHRINKS BY 25.6%

04/02/2019

ISLAMABAD: The country's food group trade deficit shrank by 25.6% to $972.068 million during first half of current fiscal year compared to deficit of $1.3 billion recorded during same period of previous year.

The food group import during July-December (2018-19) recorded a decline of 8.49% as it fell to $2.967 billion as compared to the import of $3.242 billion during same period of previous year, latest data issued by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) said.

Similarly, the export of food group from the country recorded an increase of 3.09% as it rose to $1.995 billion against the export of $1.935 billion during July-December (2017-18).

The export of fruits surged to $222.164 million in the corresponding period of current fiscal year from $180.146 million during same period of last year, showing an increase of 23.32%.

Similarly export of vegetables also recorded a sharp increase of 42.55% as it rose to $90.823 million from $63.712 million in Jul-Dec (2017-18).

The wheat export also increased sharply to $97.237 million during the period under review as compared to the export of only $45,000.

The spices export increased by 10.15 percent to $40.198 million from $36.492 million, whereas export of oil, seeds, nuts, and kernels posted an increase of 157.91 percent as it increased from $22.005 million to $56.7 million in Jul-Dec (2018-19).

The export of rice however decreased by 2.43 percent to $828.968 million against the export of $849.634 million in same period of last year, while export of fish and fish preparations also fell to $183.691 million compared to export of $200.621 million, showing a decline of 8.44 percent, the data revealed. APP

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201902040036&EN_ID=11201902040009&EMID=11201902040004

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 28th TO FEBRUARY 3rd 2019

PM URGED TO WAIVE FARMERS' LOANS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter February 03, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh government has urged the federal government to waive the agriculture loans extended to farmers in the eight calamity-hit districts of the province.

Sindh Minister for Agriculture Ismail Rahu told reporters in his office on Saturday that he personally delivered a letter from the provincial government to Prime Minister Imran Khan requesting him to waive the loans. He said the letter mentioned the eight districts as Badin, Thatta, Tharparkar, Umerkot, Dadu, Jamshoro, Sanghar and Qambar-Shahdadkot.

Besides, he added, the provincial government had also requested that payment of arrears pertaining to the older loans obtained by the farmers also be deferred to the next year and the interest thereof be waived.

Published in Dawn, February 3rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1461474/pm-urged-to-waive-farmers-loans

MINISTER SLAMS CENTRE FOR ERODING SINDH'S AUTHORITY ON DEEP SEA FISHING

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent Updated February 03, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Minister for Livestock and Fisheries Abdul Bari Pitafi on Saturday expressed his reservations over federal government's act of continuing to issue licences for deep sea fishing and also tenders pertaining to Sindh's fisheries' monitoring system.

Speaking to reporters at the directorate of his department, while briefing them about the 'grand livestock exhibition' to be held next month off Hyderabad bypass, he argued that before introduction of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, fishing was restricted to a 12-nautical mile area and beyond this limit up to 20 nautical miles was a buffer zone.

According to him, under the 18th Amendment the subject of fisheries stands devolved to provinces and as such Sindh has also been able to issue deep sea fishing licences as well.

However, he said the federal government was still issuing tenders for Sindh's fisheries' monitoring system. "Eleven boats with 300 fishermen on board have been caught and sent to Balochistan prison for indulging in deep sea fishing in this area. This is great injustice with the fishing community of Sindh," he said. For the release of the boats and fishermen, the Balochistan government had been approached and a committee with representation of Sindh government formed to pursue the case, he added.

Describing the federal government's policy on fishing as "step-motherly treatment being meted out to Sindh", the minister said his department would introduce its own policing and the provincial assembly would enact the required laws in this regard.

Speaking about his department's measures for the promotion of fisheries and livestock sector as well as welfare of the local communities, Mr Pitafi said that four million livestock had been vaccinated against various diseases while fodder was being distributed among livestock owners in Tharparkar.

He pledged that 600,000 seedlings would be thrown into Keenjhar Lake and 800,000 into Manchhar Lake. Iceboxes and other goods would be distributed among fishermen. He regretted that saline water of the Right Bank Outfall Drain (RBOD) was being released into the Manchhar Lake and drain water into the Keenjhar Lake. He called for a halt to this practice and also stressed on timely completion of the drain.

The minister noted that in Tharparkar, 60pc cattle heads migrated to the barrage areas while locals did not move their goats and sheep from Thar. He said that Sindh government had already released Rs50m for fodder distribution in Tharparkar and the chief minister approved another Rs250m for the purpose.

Published in Dawn, February 3rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1461471/minister-slams-centre-for-eroding-sindhs-authority-on-deep-sea-fishing

CHINESE EAGER TO INVEST IN PUNJAB'S AGRICULTURE, HOUSING SECTORS

By APP Published: February 3, 2019

LAHORE: A 12-member delegation of China Engineering Corporation and Henan DR Construction Group in a meeting with Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar on Saturday showed interest to invest in the agriculture and housing sectors.

They said they were also interested in investing to make the barren land useful for agriculture purpose through modern technology and would also transfer the technology to Punjab for the construction of low-cost houses.

The delegates said they wanted to start the project of housing industrial park and the Chinese group would make investment for the purpose.

On the occasion, CM Buzdar said, “Pakistan and China have an everlasting friendship and this relationship has now gotten a new dimension during the PTI government under the leadership of Imran Khan.”

He said foreign investors had been given immense opportunities in Punjab and “we welcome the interest of Chinese investors in the housing and agriculture sectors”.

The Chinese investors would be given every possible facility, he assured, adding that there was huge potential in the agriculture and housing sectors.

The agriculture sector of Punjab was the backbone of economy and it could be strengthened with the use of modern technology.

The CM said the construction of low-cost houses was the part of PTI manifesto and the New Pakistan Housing Scheme was a revolutionary programme to provide houses to the common man.

He said new facilities and favours had been given to foreign investors in new Pakistan and “we want to benefit from Chinese technology in agriculture and housing sectors”.

The officials of China Engineering Corporation also briefed the CM on the progress on the 1,263 megawatts power project in Jhang.

The delegation also included China Engineering Corporation Chairman Zhang Chun and Vice President Fang Yanshui; and Henan DR Construction Group Chairman Huang Dao Yuan and Deputy Chairman Cheng Cunpan.

Senior Provincial Minister Abdul Aleem Khan, Punjab Irrigation Minister Mohsin Leghari, Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nouman Ahmed Langrial, Housing Minister Mian Mehmoodur Rasheed, Punjab chief secretary, Punjab Planning and Development Department chairman, secretaries of concerned departments and senior officials were also present.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1902665/1-chinese-eager-invest-punjabs-agriculture-housing-sectors/

PFMA CONCERNED OVER WHEAT EXPORT BY SEA

By Mohammad Zafar Published: February 3, 2019

QUETTA : The Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) on Saturday expressed concerns over the Punjab food department’s decision to invite bids for wheat export by sea, saying that such a move would destroy the related industry of Balochistan.

In a joint statement, PFMA Chairman Naeem Butt and Badruddin Kakar said the Punjab government’s move to export 250,000 tonnes of wheat had put at risk the future of flour mills in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

“The food department on Punjab has invited bids to export wheat through the sea route, which has sparked concerns among people working in the flour industry in Balochistan and K-P,” the statement said. “Thousands of jobs may end because of this decision,” it added.

The statement said that Punjab's decision was a clear violation of the Economic Coordination Committee's (ECC) directive for export of 30 percent wheat and its products through the land routes.

"For decades Pakistan has been exporting wheat to Central Asia and Afghanistan through the land routes that has boosted the country's economy. But the recent decision of Punjab food department would devastate the flour Industries in the two smaller provinces."

"The decision indicates that the Punjab government seeks to benefit a group of people. We have sent a letter to the federal secretary for national food security regarding our concerns," the association added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1902505/1-pfma-concerned-wheat-export-sea/

US-CHINA TRADE WAR: PAKISTAN GETS CHANCE TO BOOST EXPORTS OF FOOD PRODUCTS

By Salman Siddiqui Published: February 3, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan, which is struggling to achieve a dramatic turnaround by reining in excessive imports and boosting sluggish exports to fix the faltering economy, is likely to partially achieve the goal in the wake of opportunities emerging due to the US-China trade war.

The two biggest economies of the world have made 62% ($360 billion) of bilateral trade expensive by slapping additional tariffs on thousands of each other's goods since July 2018 and have caused a slowdown in the global economy, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

"For Pakistan, the imposition of these cross-tariffs offers some interesting opportunities as well as challenges. On a positive note, key food items, such as rice, seafood and soybean (both seeds and oil), have come in the crosshairs, which offer an opportunity to Pakistan to reduce its trade deficit," the SBP said in its first-quarter report on the state of economy for fiscal year 2018-19.

Among the thousands of goods on which additional tariffs have been imposed by the two countries, three product categories may provide benefit to Pakistan's exports which are seafood, rice and cotton (raw cotton, fabric and yarn). "Specifically, American seafood exports to China are now much costlier as a result of the tariffs, as are Chinese exports of rice and cotton items to the US," the central bank said.

China is a major global importer of seafood products and imported 16.3% of its overall seafood imports from the US in 2017 (worth $1.3 billion).

"It mainly imports lobsters, oysters, flatfish and sardines, all of which are now attracting additional tariffs, and all of which are also exported by Pakistan," it said.

Pakistan's global exports of these products amounted to $338.9 million in FY18 and constituted 75.1% of the country's overall seafood exports. "As the US seafood exports to China have now become much costlier, Pakistani exporters might increase their presence in the Chinese market," the SBP said.

China is the world's largest importer of soybean and the US is the second largest producer and exporter of the commodity, after Brazil. Importantly, soybean is the largest export product from the US to China.

Soybean was among the first items targeted by China when the first round of retaliatory tariffs went into effect in July 2018. China then shifted its demand for soybean to Brazil and Argentina. As a result, soybean export prices of Brazil and Argentina have spiked whereas those of the US have plunged.

“This presents an opportunity for edible oil mills in Pakistan to reduce their imports of soybean oil and seed in value terms by diverting their purchases to the US, where the prices are falling,” the SBP pointed out.

Encouragingly, there are indications that this switch is already taking place. Brazil’s share in Pakistan’s overall soybean imports (both seeds and oil) fell to 49.5% in FY18 from 58.4% in FY17 whereas the share of the US rose to 45.4% from 32.1%.

“Further enhancing soybean imports from the US will yield more FX (foreign exchange) savings for Pakistan,” it said.

On the other hand, the volatility in iron and steel prices in recent months after the imposition of tariffs by the US presents a challenge from Pakistan’s perspective.

In September 2018, with anti-trade measures in full swing, the US targeted the bulk (49.1%) of iron and steel products that it imported from China and imposed additional tariffs on them. Steel prices in China were falling during the first half of 2018 as uncertainty loomed about the extent of the protectionist measures that would be adopted by the US. Further downward pressure came from a cooling off in China’s economy this year, which has impacted its demand for steel.

However, Chinese steel prices have been rising since August 2018, partly as a result of an expected drop in steel production in winter months as the country tries to limit harmful emissions and control smog.

“All of this uncertainty has created challenges for Pakistan as the unit value of the country’s iron and steel imports (both scrap and finished products) has been rising, though with significant fluctuations. Even though Pakistan imports most of its steel from China, the unit value of its steel imports has not dipped.”

Nonetheless, a slowdown in broader economic activity, as Pakistan tries to stabilise its economy, has already stalled the demand for imported iron and steel products. “In Q1-FY19, quantum imports of these items have already dropped 10.1% on a year-on-year basis,” the SBP said.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 3rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1902642/2-us-china-trade-war-pakistan-gets-chance-boost-exports-food-products/

JAPAN LODGES PROTEST AGAINST BAN ON ITS POULTRY

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | FEB 3RD, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Japanese government has reportedly protested with the government of Pakistan for not allowing import of its poultry and poultry products, well-informed sources told Business Recorder. The Commerce Division in its Import Policy Order of April 18, 2016 had restricted poultry and poultry products from Japan on account of Avian Influenza H5N1 strain. According to the Japanese embassy in Islamabad, Japan has declared to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) that it is totally free from HJPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) on April 15, 2018.

"The issue was technically examined by the livestock department of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS& R) which has concluded that Japan can export poultry and poultry products to Pakistan," the sources added. The Japanese embassy has further stated that MNFS&R has requested Commerce Division through letter No.F.8.5/2015(Japan)/IC-II on July 2, 2018 to issue an SRO of import policy for lifting of the restriction on the importation of poultry meat and poultry products from Japan. However, Commerce Division has yet not lifted restrictions on Japanese poultry and poultry products.

The embassy of Japan has requested Commerce Division to lift the restriction on the importation of poultry meat and poultry products from Japan to Pakistan through an immediate amendment of the Import Policy by the ministry based on the fact that practical permission was already given by the competent authority of MNFSR. In September, Japan had expressed serious reservations over Pakistan for imposing a ban on the import of Ajinomoto salt, which may impact on its export to other countries. The recently transferred Japanese ambassador to Pakistan Takashi Kurai met with Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul Razzak Dawood and sought his help to resolve this issue as early as possible.

Japan maintained if Pakistan's ban is prolonged, the world may question why the ban was imposed and that may hurt export of Ajinomoto salt to other countries. On February 10, 2018, the Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered that Ajinomoto salt would neither be manufactured nor imported or distributed in Pakistan. On March 2, 2018, then Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar banned the sale of Chinese salt Ajinomoto, observing that it is hazardous for health. Hearing a suo motu case on the sale of Ajinomoto and used cooking oil, in Lahore, the Chief Justice inquired from the advocate general as to the whereabouts of Mustafa Ramday, the head of a court-appointed commission tasked to probe the issue.

On January 15, the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) banned Ajinomoto after the authority found it hazardous for health. According to the PFA, the salt contains monosodium glutamate (MSG), a flavour enhancer said to cause asthma, headaches, and even brain damage. On February 21, according to media reports, the governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh also banned the sale of Ajinomoto. The Embassy of Japan in Islamabad has also approached Ministry of Commerce expressing concerns at the ban. Simultaneously, Japanese delegation to the WTO on SPS committee in Geneva has inquired from Pakistan's Mission at WTO about recent measures taken against import of Ajinomoto salt.

In December 2018, Abdul Razzak Dawood during his visit to Japan deliberated on possibility of a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), multiple entry visas for Pakistani businessmen and cooperation in ICT (Information & Communication Technology).

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190203444403/

CHINESE HELP SOUGHT FOR EXPORTS, AGRICULTURE GROWTH: RAZZAK

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 3RD, 2019 | KARACHI

Prime Minister"s Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries, Production and Investment, Abdul Razzak Dawood Saturday said Pakistan seeks Chinese support for exports and agricultural growth instead of power and road infrastructure projects under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Addressing a gathering of businessmen and rice exporters hosted by Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP), Razzak said as the challenges of all commodities are almost the same, we are seeking support from friendly countries to improve the crop yield. Japan has already agreed to extend support for increase in crop yield, particularly rice.

"We don"t want more power plants and road infrastructure projects under the CPEC. What we need from China is support for agricultural and export sector," he added. He said Pakistan"s rice export posted a healthy growth during last few years reaching $ 2 billion up from $300 million and this is because of the visionary leadership of the REAP people. "I believe that with a visionary leadership and the government support, Pakistan"s rice export can hit $5 billion mark," he maintained.

Razzak assured REAP to incorporate rice sector in zero-rated sectors to facilitate exporters. "We will try to add rice into the basket of zero rated sectors so that exporters of rice could get more benefits," he said. He said Pakistani companies have great potential and can perform much better than international companies, but there is need for encouraging and supporting these companies. "We must introduce our brands across the world to promote Pakistani products and increase exports," he added.

He assured REAP of full support for promotion of rice exports, adding that there is need for coordinated efforts to increase the country"s exports and bring more foreign inflows into the country. Earlier, Safdar Hussain Mehkari, Chairman REAP and Arif Nadeem, Chief Executive Officer, Pakistan Agricultural Coalition (PAC) briefed Razzak about rice exports and presented recommendations for their promotion.

They said Pakistan"s rice exports posted a phenomenal growth during last many years and after achieving $2 billion exports, now we are eying $5 billion exports. Former chairmen of REAP, Rafique Suleman, Abdul Rahim Janoo and others also spoke on the occasion.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190203444429/

AGRICULTURE MARKET ON EDGE OVER RESUMPTION OF US GOVERNMENT DATA

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 3RD, 2019 | FORT COLLINS

The agriculture market data blackout has finally ended as US government workers returned to work on Monday, though it may take some time to fill in all the missing items, and it is uncertain how traders will respond to the sudden flood of information. After a record 35-day shutdown, Congress finally agreed to a three-week spending deal on Friday to reopen the government while lawmakers discuss how to address security along the US-Mexican border.

Markets have gone without major reports, as well as weekly and daily updates from the US Department of Agriculture, since Dec. 22. The timing has been especially inconvenient as traders have been trying to track US exports to China as the two countries work toward a trade deal. USDA and other government data will get back on schedule in the coming days and weeks, but the shutdown could resume on Feb. 15 if the dispute over US President Donald Trump's demand for border wall funding is unresolved. The data flow would once again be choked off, and it may happen before some previously delayed data is published.

The funding lapse forced USDA to postpone a slew of reports due on Jan. 11. USDA officials on Monday confirmed that some of those will be published on Feb. 8, the original release date for the February world supply and demand report, due at noon EST (1700 GMT). The additional Feb. 8 reports will include quarterly grain stocks, final US corn and soyabean production and winter wheat seedings, but the January world supply and demand report has been canceled.

Reuters had collected trade estimates for all the pertinent Jan. 11 items, and it is unlikely that analysts will be re-polled. However, new polls will be available in the coming days for the February world supply and demand report. Some of the key expectations from last month include reduced US corn and soyabean harvests, the fewest US winter wheat acres in over a century, a year-on-year drawdown in Dec. 1 US corn stocks, and the trimming of Brazil's soyabean crop.

Although USDA has already rescheduled the major reports, market participants have yet to hear about how some other data sets will resume and be backfilled. This includes items such as export sales and monthly US wheat conditions. The 2013 government shutdown lasted 16 days and canceled the October world supply and demand report. Offices reopened on Thursday, Oct. 17, 2013.

USDA issued export sales that Friday and the following Thursday morning at the normal time, but those two reports only covered the two weeks ended Oct. 3. It was not until Oct. 31 that export sales information caught up to the normal pace, and that release contained three weeks of data all at once. The last set of official export sales from USDA covered the week ended Dec. 13. However, the agency flashed a corn sale to South Korea on Tuesday morning, the first such announcement since the shutdown ended.

USDA's export sales office on Tuesday afternoon told Reuters that it will have a release schedule "as soon as possible." As of late Tuesday there were rumblings in the market that it will be similar to the 2013 process, and that it may not be until later in February that data is fully caught up. The US Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) has not published its Commitment of Traders report since before the year-end holidays, as the latest data covers the week ended Dec. 18. Industry participants closely watch this for information on both commercial and noncommercial traders' positions in Chicago Board of Trade futures and options.

CFTC on Tuesday announced plans to fill in missing weeks of COT data, which would have the first missing week published this Friday, and then every Tuesday and Friday until the data is current. Extrapolating that out would suggest that the COT data will not be fully updated until March 8, assuming the government does not shut down again. In 2013, CFTC spent nearly three weeks clearing the backlog. The pace did not return to normal until Nov. 8 that year.

Official November export data from the US Census Bureau was also missed at the beginning of January, and a new release date has yet to be announced. The website was restored as of early Monday, and it showed a note that the December data will be available Feb. 5. The absence of routine USDA information may have supported crop prices, especially in a relatively well-supplied market. The United States has a soyabean glut though futures prices do not reflect that.

Commodity funds likely remain firmly optimistic in corn and are flirting with bullish bets in both soyabeans and wheat. CBOT corn, wheat and soya futures have also been trading in a historically tight range for January. It has probably been helpful that the USDA has been unable to remind traders since early November just how inundated the United States is with soyabeans. The agency's latest peg for 2018-19 bean carryout is 955 million bushels, towering over the previous record of 574 million.

Industry estimates of the Brazilian soyabean crop have moved well below USDA's last target of 122 million tonnes, which has also helped bolster soyabean futures. However, expectations remain lofty for the country's second corn crop, and Argentina is poised to sharply rebound from 2018's drought-stricken corn and bean harvests. CBOT futures, particularly for soyabeans, have been supported by the idea that a permanent US-China trade deal is imminent. However, some handshakes and signatures will not immediately vaporize several million bushels of soyabeans from the US balance sheet.

The most-active 2019 soyabean spreads (March-May, May-July, July-November) are at the lowest, most negative levels in at least a decade. This suggests the current oversupply is priced in to the market, but uncertainty persists over how the scenario will play out throughout the year. New-crop November beans have risen 2.5 percent so far this year and prices are similar to those of 2015 and well above the same period in 2016.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190203444484/

FOOD MINISTRY TO AUCTION 15 AIRCRAFT ACQUIRED FOR PEST CONTROL

By Zafar Bhutta Published: February 3, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government has allowed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research the auction of 15 aircraft acquired to control pest attack on different crops.

According to ministry officials, the aerial wing of the Department of Plant Protection (DPP), which comes under the Ministry of National Food Security, had a fleet of 20 vintage aircraft. However, past governments ignored these airplanes, of which 15 became dead as their engines had expired.

The DPP's aerial wing had been set up in 1950 primarily as an emergency response agency to counter the threat of desert locust against vital crops. Apart from its primary function, the aerial wing was always on standby to cope with pest epidemic and responded to requests of provincial agricultural departments.

However, after the 18th Constitutional Amendment, the subject of agriculture went to the provincial governments, therefore, the role of the aerial wing was reduced to just locust monitoring and control.

Officials said the cabinet in its recent meeting was informed that the DPP's aerial wing had a fleet of 20 vintage aircraft which included five Beaver, eight Cessna and seven Fletcher planes parked at two bases in Karachi and Lahore.

Of these, they said, only the five Beavers were operational. The seven Fletcher and eight Cessna aircraft were beyond economical repair as their manufacturers said the life of the aircraft engines and propellers had expired.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has also cancelled the registration of all these Fletcher and Cessna aircraft.

The cabinet was informed that the DPP had consulted Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and the director general of defence purchase, seeking the procedure for the aircraft auction, but no response had been received so far. In light of the situation, the Ministry of National Food Security suggested that the entire fleet of 15 Cessna and Fletcher aircraft along with spare parts may be auctioned.

In the absence of standard operating procedures for the disposal of such aircraft, the ministry requested the cabinet to allow the sale of the airplanes through an auction.

In the cabinet meeting, its members noted that since there appeared to be a huge stock of dead capital with many ministries in the federal government, they should ensure their proper and quick disposal.

It was also pointed out that though the Privatisation Division was the relevant division for undertaking the disposal of dead capital, all ministries also had the standard official protocols which, if allowed, could be followed for the disposal of unserviceable goods.

The cabinet considered a summary submitted by the National Food Security and Research Division for disposal of the unserviceable DPP aircraft and accorded approval for their auction.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 3rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1902646/2-food-ministry-auction-15-aircraft-acquired-pest-control/

AGRICULTURE IS GOVT'S FIRST PRIORITY, SAYS PM IMRAN

By Our Correspondent Published: February 2, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has said promotion of agriculture is the first priority of his government which will provide all possible support to provincial governments in order to realise the country's potential in the sector.

Imran Khan said this on Friday while chairing a high-level meeting on agriculture and food processing. Federal minister of food security, provincial ministers of agriculture, federal and provincial secretaries and the heads of agriculture-related departments attended the meeting.

The PM also sought recommendations from the provinces to fully utilise technology and other assistances from friendly countries including China in order to strengthen the agriculture department and to promote agriculture in the country.

The provinces were also instructed to submit their recommendations within a week.

The PM said provincial governments should identify the obstacles and difficulties faced in promoting agriculture especially increasing exports. "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has immensely potential for tourism. Promoting tourism will not only benefit the province but the country's economy as well," he said.

The PTI lawmakers from Kohat and Dera Ismail Khan also met the PM. Minister for Kashmir Affairs Ali Amin Gandapur, MNA Shahid Ahmed, Noorain Farooq Ibrahim, Shandana Gulzar, Yaqoob Sheikh, Naeemul Haq, Nadeem Afzal Chan and the PTI Secretary General Arshad Dad also attended the meeting.

The MNAs informed the prime minister about the issues related to their respective constituencies. Khan said it is part of the PTI manifesto to bring a real and visible change in lives of people.

Measures taken by the previous government for betterment of the K-P people would be carried forward for further improvement so that the process of change in education, health and other departments can be continued and the living standards of people can be changed, the PM said.

He called for resolving problems of member on a priority basis and ordered to make a plan to solve the issue of drinking water in Dera Ismail Khan.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1901994/1-agriculture-govts-first-priority-says-pm-imran/

TEXTILE INDUSTRY GETS RS29B RELIEF IN DUTIES, TAXES

By Zafar Bhutta Published: February 2, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government has given another bailout package worth Rs29 billion to the textile tycoons by waiving taxes and duties on the import of cotton – a vital input in textile manufacturing.

The PTI government, like the previous Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz administration, is offering support to the industrial barons, who have got billions of rupees worth of incentive packages. They are now receiving gas and electricity at discounted tariffs.

The government has also recently approved a Rs25-billion gas subsidy for five zero-rated export-focused industries where textile giants are the major beneficiaries.

"The government has come up with another support package for the textile manufacturers by waiving 50% of the outstanding gas infrastructure development cess (GIDC), which amounts to Rs40 billion," an official said. The textile industry is to pay a total of Rs80 billion in GIDC arrears.

With the scrapping of taxes and duties on cotton import, the government would lose Rs14.6 billion in customs duty, Rs6.9 billion in additional customs duty and Rs7.7 billion in sales tax, the official projected.

"The major beneficiaries are Pakistani textile barons and farmers of cotton-exporting countries," he said.

Despite getting such incentive packages, textile exports from Pakistan to the global market have not increased significantly as Bangladesh exporters are eating into the share of their Pakistani counterparts.

According to a senior government official, the textile industry consumes around 12 to 15 million bales of cotton per year and it needs to import cotton to bridge the shortfall because domestic output was far below the demand.

Pakistan is expected to produce 10.78 million bales of cotton in the ongoing financial year, a decrease of 9.7% compared to the previous year and down 24% from the initial target of 14.37 million bales.

The textile ministry says around 10.78 million bales have already reached cotton ginning factories from farms by the beginning of January 2019.

Farmers argue the pro-industry policies of successive governments have destroyed the agriculture sector of Pakistan. The PML-N government's 2013-18 tenure also proved damaging for the agriculture sector when it posted negative growth and cotton harvest touched its lowest in recent history.

During that five-year period, the focus had mainly been on the textile tycoons while farmers were at the mercy of such businessmen.

In 2015-16, the agriculture sector recorded a negative growth of 0.19% against growth projection of 3.9%, which indicated the lack of attention paid to the farm sector.

Cotton production in Pakistan has been virtually stagnant since 1991-92, fluctuating in a range of 10 to 12 million bales annually. The harvest fell to 9.9 million bales in 2015-16 compared to average consumption of 15 million bales, turning Pakistan a net importer of cotton.

"The current PTI government also seems to be following the same line as it is doling out support packages to the industrialists whereas the farmers are at the receiving end," the official said.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 2nd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1902033/2-textile-industry-gets-rs29b-relief-duties-taxes/

SINDH TO HOLD LIVESTOCK EXPO IN MARCH TO PROMOTE INDIGENOUS BREEDS

Dawn Report February 01, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Minis¬ter for Live¬stock and Fisheries Abdul Bari Pitafi has said that the department will organise a national-level livestock expo in the first week of March to help promote indigenous breeds of cattle.

The minister said at a meeting held at Shahbaz Hall on Thursday to review arrangements for the expo that all the companies manufacturing different machineries for livestock and agriculture sectors were being invited to the expo so that farmers could learn about use of latest technology to help modernise and mechanise farming.

He said that agriculture and livestock sectors generated 23 per cent of the GDP but unfortunately both the sectors did not get the attention they deserved. He had formed a committee headed by Hyderabad divisional commissioner to oversee arrangements for the livestock expo, he said.

The minister said that the department was committed to conservation of all the local breeds as it believed the development of the livestock sector could ensure food security and fight other challenges. Breeders and livestock owners from other provinces would also attend this expo, which would hopefully serve as a linkage between people from different provinces, he said.

Sindh secretary for livestock Aijaz Mahesar said that the department would do its best to make the grand expo a success. The minister along with Hyder¬abad commissioner and Deputy Commissioner Aijaz Ali Shah visited a ground off Hyderabad byp¬ass where the expo would be held.

MITHI: With an objective to combat the persisting drought situation in Tharparkar district, the government of Sindh has announced a grant of Rs250 million for fodder distribution among deserving livestock owners.

The grant would be distributed under the Thar Fodder Distribu¬tion Project through the Thar Foundation, operating in four union councils of Islamkot taluka.

This was announced by Sindh Minister for Livestock and Fisheries Abdul Bari Pitafi at a ceremony held in Katan village near Islamkot on Wednesday evening.

The minister said the department was seriously taking care of the 7.5 million livestock of Thar in the hard times of drought.

The ceremony was held by the Thar Foundation where 229 deserving livestock owners received fodder. They were also presented the fish reared in Gorano pond of coalmine water.

Mr Pitafi said the Sindh government always came forward to support the people of Thar in difficult times and the federal government should also support them.

“We are working to make Thar a disease-free region because it produces organic meat,” he said.

“This region can provide quality meat, which can be exported and earn the country foreign exch¬ange,” he added. MPA Faqir Sher Mohammad Bilalani told the audience that the government was working on providing submersible pumps to Tharis to give a boost to farming.

“The chief minister has approved provision of 200 submersible pumps, which will be distributed among local farmers enabling them to use underground water in crop cultivation,” he added.

Published in Dawn, February 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1461039/sindh-to-hold-livestock-expo-in-march-to-promote-indigenous-breeds

FAKE PESTICIDES: GROWERS URGED TO COOPERATE WITH GOVERNMENT

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 1ST, 2019 | LAHORE

Agricultural Task Force has urged the growers to cooperate with the government in its crusade against fake and substandard pesticides and immediately report to the Pest Warning & Quality Control of Pesticides wing of the provincial Ariculture department if found any body involved in this heinous crime.

A spokesman of the department said here on Thursday that a campaign has been launched by the government under the special directives of the Chief Minister Punjab Usman Buzdar to curb the nefarious business of fake and substandard pesticides.

The spokesman concluded that the pesticide task force had taken strong action against fake pesticide mafia in Multan, Sialkot and Lodhran. Chairman Agricultural Task Force Mian Alamdar Abbas Qureshi said that zero tolerance policy has been adopted against those involved in fake pesticide business. He said those found involved in it would be given exemplary punishment according to the law.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190201443896/

FRUIT FOR ALL: K-P OFFERS FREE FRUIT THROUGH PUBLIC TREES

By Our Correspondent Published: February 1, 2019

PESHAWAR: Governor Shah Farman Thursday inaugurated Fruit For All drive here at Hayatabad by planting an orange plant at a public space.

Under the drive as many as 250 plants of orange would be planted at public places and along roads in Hayatabad while five million would be planted across the province in collaboration with National Bank of Pakistan. People could enjoy the fruits for free.

The governor after inaugurating the drive directed department of Agriculture to ensure plantation of quality seeds as per the requirement of local weather. He also directed to plants at the places which were directly accessible by the general public so that the common man could be benefited from it.

He said the project was aimed to make KP province self-sufficient in fruit production and to meet food requirements of children, adding that under the programme the masses would get free of cost fruit.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 1st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1901298/1-fruit-k-p-offers-free-fruit-public-trees/

PAKISTAN CERTIFIES FIRST ORGANIC COTTON BALE

Irfan-ul-Haq Malik Updated January 31, 2019

RAHIM YAR KHAN: Balochistan on Wednesday marked the certification of Pakistan's first organic cotton bale at a ceremony held at Kot Sabzal.

Balochistan's Minster for Agriculture Engineer Zamrak Khan said the provincial government was committed to promoting organic agriculture throughout the province.

He further said that Balochistan would be developing an organic agriculture policy soon.

WWF-Pakistan Director General Hamad Naqi Khan said, "We have made a major breakthrough in the cotton sector of the country that will benefit stakeholders and the overall economy of Pakistan."

In his remarks, Secretary Agriculture Balochistan Khaleeq Nazar Kiyani appreciated the efforts of WWF-Pakistan and the Agriculture Extension team.

"The certification is a step towards a more sustainable Pakistan. Production of organic cotton will propel the cotton sector into a new direction," he said.

Later, a consultative workshop was conducted in which representatives from ginners, spinners, textiles, brokers and brands participated and presented their concerns regarding development of a tenable supply chain of organic cotton in Pakistan.

WWF-Pakistan's Director Sustainable Agriculture and Food Programme Arif Hamid Makhdum conducted the introductory session.

In 2015, WWF-Pakistan secured financial support from the C&A Foundation, and in collaboration with Balochistan's Directorate of Agriculture Extension started work on a project titled 'Organic Cotton Cultivation Promotion with Small and Marginal Tribal Farmers in Pakistan'.

The project is helping improve livelihoods of smallholder cotton farmers by promoting organic cotton cultivation and development of its supply chain.

Organic cotton is grown without using any chemical fertilisers or pesticides and is cultivated on land that is detoxified from residues of chemical fertilisers and pesticides over a period of at least three years.

Seeds used to grow organic cotton are not genetically modified and are kept clean from chemical impurities during processing and packaging.

If the cotton crop produced adheres to the standards of organic cotton farming in its initial two years, it is called in conversion cotton. By the third year, the yield is certified as organic cotton.

Pakistan is the fifth largest producer of cotton in the world and the third largest exporter of raw cotton.

Cotton and its products contribute about 10 per cent to gross domestic product and 55pc to the foreign exchange earnings of the country.

Published in Dawn, January 31st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1460916/pakistan-certifies-first-organic-cotton-bale

VEC MEETING PUT OFF AT THE 11TH HOUR

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 31ST, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

A meeting of the Variety Evaluation Committee (VEC) of the Ministry of National Food Security & Research, which was to discuss the next generation biotech maize hybrid seeds of leading multinational companies, was cancelled at the eleventh hour here on Wednesday. The VEC, one of several such forums, reviews new seed varieties for cultivation, including maize hybrid seeds.

The meeting is a routine forum held periodically; however, a small faction of local seed and grain industry, which is threatened by the superior seed technology, apparently attempts to block approvals of much-needed new seed technology for maize hybrids.

Sources privy to the matter confirmed that the next generation biotech maize hybrid seeds of leading multinational companies under review at the said meeting had demonstrated significant yield advantage in the government-mandated National Uniformity and Yield Trials (NUYT) and had fully complied with all requirements of national seed regulations.

Industry experts are of the view that the introduction of biotech maize hybrid seeds will provide significant cost and yield advantage to the Pakistani farmers, providing the impetus for much needed gain in crop productivity necessary to meet growing demand for maize grain in the country.

The past 20 years have seen the maize crop show phenomenal growth, owing mostly to the introduction of latest high-yield hybrids by leading multinational seed companies. According to data published by the government of Pakistan, the average yields for maize crop have almost tripled and productivity has grown to nearly 6 million tonnes, as opposed to mere 1.5 million tonnes in 1995. Presently, more than 65% of maize grain seeds produced in the country are sourced by the poultry feed industry, another 10% is consumed for silage, whereas the remaining grain feeds into various other processing businesses.

However, with a growing poultry industry and advent of new demand segments, such as silage, further increase in productivity and improvement in cop economics will be a key to meet future needs. There is consensus in the industry that technology adoption is the only viable solution to address the growing demand for maize grain.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190131443627/

REAP HAILS DAWOOD FOR GETTING BAN ON RICE LIFTED BY QATAR

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 29TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) has appreciated Prime Minister’s Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul Razzak Dawood for his efforts towards lifting ban on rice imports from Pakistan by Qatar State Company. In a letter to the Advisor, Chairman REAP Safdar Hussain Mekhri said that rice exporters are indebted to Dawood and the Commerce Division’s team for their focus and commitment towards rice export sector.

During the visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan on January 21-22, the Qatari government agreed to include Pakistan origin rice in the tender documents of the Central Trading Committee which falls directly under the purview of Qatar’s Ministry of Economy and Commerce. As a viable solution, a third-party inspection for supply of rice through CTC tenders will be offered to take strict action against those found involved in supplying substandard rice and ensure that quality rice are being exported to Qatar in future.

The lifting of ban is expected to provide additional $ 40-50 million rice exports to Qatar if quality is maintained. Qatar annually imports 200,000 tonnes of rice.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190129443072/

SBP TO ASSIST PUNJAB GOVERNMENT IN DIGITIZATION OF AGRI PROJECTS

SAFDAR RASHEED | JAN 29TH, 2019 | LAHORE

State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Tariq Bajwa has said that the Bank will provide all kind of financial as well as technical support to the Punjab government for digitization of agriculture projects across the province.

The SBP Governor was talking to Chief Secretary Punjab Yousaf Naseem Khokhar on Monday at the Civil Secretariat. He said initially the digitization would be completed in two tehsils of Punjab as a pilot project and later it will be replicated in other districts.

He said the State Bank and Punjab Land Record Authority are working on availability of 'Fard' at 15 banks to facilitate people, especially those associated with agriculture sector.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Secretary assured him to prepare a comprehensive plan for the digitization in a short span of time. He said improvement of agriculture sector is priority of the government, adding that concrete steps would be taken for wellbeing of farmers. The Secretary Agriculture and the Director General of Punjab Land Records Authority were also present on the occasion.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190129443092/

FAMILY FALLS SICK AFTER CONSUMING 'TAINTED FOOD'

By Our Correspondent Published: January 29, 2019

KARACHI: A family of 15 fell sick on Monday after allegedly consuming tainted food near SITE Super Highway in Hingora Goth. Police shifted them to a private hospital near Toll Plaza where they were declared to be out of danger.

According to Malir SSP Irfan Ali Bahadur, the affected family had purchased rice and yellow food colour from a local shop on Sunday evening. The consumption of these items is believed to have caused the family's health to deteriorate. The food colour and rice samples have been sent to a laboratory for testing. Further action will be taken out based on the findings of the report. The police have arrested the shopkeeper in the meantime.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 29th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1899008/1-family-falls-sick-consuming-tainted-food/

FISHERMEN REJECT INITIAL MODEL OF GWADAR EXPRESSWAY

By Mohammad Zafar Published: January 29, 2019

QUETTA : The authorities concerned have informed Chinese officials about demands for ensuring a 200 feet passage for boats at Gwadar Eastbay Expressway and other reservations after the local community rejected the initial model of the project.

"As promised by the federal and provincial governments and Chinese officials, passage for boats at Gwadar Eastbay Expressway should have been 200 feet but the proposed model couldn't meet with our demands," local fishermen said after visiting the site of the project on Sunday.

Federal Minister for Defence Production Zubaida Jalal, Senator Kauda Babar, Chinese officials and representatives of the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) were present on the occasion.

The officials and the senator briefed the community regarding the boats' passage. But the fishermen community termed it too narrow. It was highlighted that through the designed path the fishermen cannot gain easy access to the sea.

"If the government has decided to follow the narrow passage then they have decided to destroy the jobs of local fishing community of Gwadar," they said and urged the government to build the passage proposed by them.

The federal minister, senator and GDA officials informed the Chinese officials regarding the fishermen community's reservations and stressed the need for a 200-foot passage at the expressway.

Zubaida said, "We would convince the federal government to address the reservations of local fishermen community for the sake of their profession."

She pledged to ensure the implementation of local fishermen's demands.

Babar said that being a representative of the people of Gwadar he has raised their issues in the upper house of parliament.

"We are standing shoulder to shoulder with the local population and want to assure them that we won't let anyone to exploit the rights of the people of Gwadar," said Babar.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1899088/1-fishermen-reject-initial-model-gwadar-expressway/

FISHERMEN REJECT GWADAR'S EASTBAY EXPRESSWAY MODEL

The Newspaper's Correspondent Updated January 28, 2019

GWADAR: Local fishermen have rejected the initial model of Gwadar's Eastbay Expressway project.

"As promised by the federal and provincial governments and Chinese officials, the passage for boats at Gwadar Eastbay Expressway should have been 200 feet but the proposed model couldn't meet our demands," said the fishermen after visiting the expressway's site.

Federal Minister for Defence Production Zubeda Jalal, Senator Khuda Babar, Chinese officials and members of the Gwadar Development Authority were present on the occasion.

Senator Babar and other officials briefed the fishermen regarding passage of boats from the expressway who rejected the model, saying they can't gain easy access to the sea from this narrow passage.

"If the government has decided to follow the narrow-size passage then it has decided to destroy the jobs of fishermen of Gwadar," they said and urged the government to build the passage proposed by them.

Federal Minister Zubeda Jalal, Senator Khuda Babar and officials of the Gwadar Development Authority informed the Chinese officials about fishermen community's reservation and stressed upon to build 200 feet passage at Gwadar Eastbay Expressway.

Published in Dawn, January 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1460214/fishermen-reject-gwadars-eastbay-expressway-model

GROWERS SLAM DELAY IN REISSUANCE OF SUGAR CANE RATE NOTIFICATION

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent January 28, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) has urged the provincial government to immediately reissue notification for sugar cane price for crushing season 2018-19 after approval of provincial cabinet so that small growers could get official price of Rs182 per 40kg of sugar cane.

The SAI members who met here on Sunday with its president Nawab Zubair Talpur in the chair expressed concern over undue delay in the reissuance of the notification and said that Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) had objected to the notification during a hearing in court last year and asserted that the notification had no sanctity unless it was approved by the cabinet before its issuance by the agriculture department.

The meeting deplored that in the absence of the notification the mills were paying Rs130-140 per 40kg cane to growers which was a great injustice and urged Sindh government to reissue the notification with the cabinet's approval so that small growers could get the official price of Rs182 per 40kg.

The meeting condemned registration of what it saw as false cases against the growers who were demanding Digri sugar mills pay them their last year's dues, and slammed issuance of indents to fake agriculture farms instead of genuine growers.

It claimed that Dadu, Ranipur, Digri, Khairpur mills and Omni Group's sugar factories were not ready to clear farmers' dues. Mills were issuing brokers indents of Rs170 per 40kg cane while procuring sugar cane from growers at Rs140 per 40kg to their great disadvantage, it said.

The meeting criticised the 'mini budget' announced by the federal government as it did not have anything for agriculture sector in it. In addition, prices of urea had jumped to Rs1,800 from Rs1,300 over the past six months, said the meeting and called for release of water to save wheat crop.

Meanwhile, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) rejected the economic package announced by federal finance minister in its meeting held here on Sunday and termed the cut of Rs200 in the price of a bag of urea as insufficient.

The meeting chaired by SCA president Kabool Kathian said that the economic package was not beneficial for agriculture sector. Before the installation of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government, a bag of urea was being sold at Rs1,380 and DAP at Rs2,800 which were now being sold at Rs1,850 and Rs3,800, respectively, he said.

The meeting said the Rs200 cut was in fact a joke with growers and other stakeholders in agriculture sector and urged the federal government to maintain the old prices of urea and DAP.

It said that production of wheat was affected by water shortage in Mirpurkhas, Umerkot and Badin districts and observed that price of wheat in open market was Rs1,350 to Rs1,400 per 40 kg, the government, therefore, should raise the support price to Rs1,500 per 40kg.

The meeting noted that if the government did not increase support price of wheat then it could not meet procurement target in lower Sindh region.

The meeting expressed serious concern over availability of water flows at Sukkur and Kotri barrages and expressed the fear that the situation might lead to food security issues and create problems for people linked to agriculture sector.

The meeting was attended by Zahid Bhurgari, Mir Karim Talpur, Mohammad Khan Sarejo and others.

Published in Dawn, January 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1460164/growers-slam-delay-in-reissuance-of-sugar-cane-rate-notification

DISAPPOINTED FARMERS

Amjad Mahmood January 28, 2019

THE farmers' community seems to be dissatisfied with the measures announced in the second mini-budget of the fiscal year.

In his speech, Finance Minister Asad Umar announced a few steps to help the agriculture sector. He incentivised banks to offer agricultural loans by reducing the tax rate from 39 per cent to 20pc on their interest income. The proposed measures include reducing the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) for fertiliser units by half and the duty-free import of diesel engines for irrigation purposes.

The farming community believes the mini-budget will not benefit small landholders and that the "economic reforms agenda" is bereft of measures needed for a turnaround in the sector.

"The sector needs a reduction in the cost of production and an increase in the small farmers' access to financing in the short run. The government should subsidise farm mechanisation as well as fix support prices at least for major crops in the long run," says Khalid Mahmood Khokhar, president of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, the representative body of small landholders.

The agriculture sector requires policy-level interventions, like aggressive diplomacy to find new international markets'

Quoting a document of the Punjab government, he says the cost of production for basmati rice in Pakistan is 34pc higher than India. It is 37pc, 57pc, 44pc and 34pc higher in the cases of wheat, cotton, onion and gram.

Mr Khokhar argues that the country needs to allocate at least 1pc of the agricultural GDP against the present 0.2pc for research because the sector is prone to natural disasters and requires continuous research to improve farm yield and ensure protection from pests and diseases.

He notes that the two commodities that enjoy the support price facility — wheat and sugar cane — are in surplus.

His point is endorsed by Ebadur Rehman Khan of the Farmers Associates Pakistan. He says the growers need a better price for their produce more than they need subsidies on inputs. "Reducing the farm inputs' cost is a good but temporary step. The sector requires policy-level interventions, like aggressive diplomacy to find new markets along with the revival of old ones on the external front and ensuring a fair and better price to the farmers on the internal front," he says.

He says that even a reduction of Rs500 in the price of a bag of fertiliser will bring the small farmer a relief of only Rs1,000-1,500 per acre. But if the government ensures a stable market through a support price-like mechanism, the same farmer may increase his per-acre earnings by around Rs10,000.

Despite being uncompetitive internationally because of its higher production cost, some of the local produce may still find clients in the world market because of the unavailability of alternatives, he insists.

In reference to the lifting of ban on Pakistani rice by Qatar and China agreeing to import our rice and potato, Mr Khan says the government should continue its aggressive diplomacy to open new markets and revive the lost ones. "Our produce like basmati rice, kinno and mango are unmatched in the world because of their taste," he says.

The Kissan Board Pakistan (KBP) believes a fair and just agriculture marketing system along with the timely payment of official rates to the growers is essential for the agriculture sector's development. "Eliminate the role of the middleman by allowing the growers to directly sell their produce in the market. But no such step was taken in the two mini-budgets," says KBP Punjab President Amanullah Chathha.

He says the authorities expect the farmers to turn to high-value crops like oilseeds without extending any guarantee about the procurement/marketing of the yield. At the same time, the government is allowing unchecked imports of poor-quality palm oil, he adds. "The government needs to revisit its palm oil and dry milk import policies to help the overstressed oilseed growers and livestock farmers."

Some observers challenge the veracity of the projected relief to the farmers' community.

"The tax incentive for banks won't improve the farmers' access to finance. Loans for agriculture production and agriculture processing units have been brought under one head since Dr Ishrat Husain's stint as governor of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). In the name of agriculture, loans are now being offered to feed mills, hatcheries and other processing units," says Kissan Rabita Committee Pakistan General Secretary Farooq Tariq. The duty-free import of diesel engines will likely be misused because such engines are already being manufactured locally, he adds.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, January 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1460317/disappointed-farmers

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT TO PROMOTE AND DEVELOP ROSE FARMS

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 28TH, 2019 | SIALKOT

The Punjab government is finalising necessary arrangement for lunching a well-knitted plan for the promotion and developing of rose farms for producing of top quality of grafted especially roses across the Punjab. The Punjab and other parts of the country naturally possesses a great potential for producing quality roses due to rich resource local soil provides ideal agronomic conditions for the production of flowers.

Official sources told Business Recorder on Sunday that currently low quality of roses were being cultivated and sold in domestic market as well as exported to Middle East countries from Pakistan. The concept of this proposed plan was to promote floriculture and to produce high quality grafted roses for enhancing the radius of export to European countries. Under the plan special attention would be focused on cultivating red roses keeping in view the global demand especially European countries.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190128442881/

AGP DETECTS RS 292.72 MILLION LOSSES IN KP IRRIGATION DEPARTMENT

RECORDER REPORT | JAN 28TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

The Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) has detected financial losses worth Rs 292.72 million in the accounts of KP Irrigation Department and had referred the matter for recovery to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. This has been revealed in the Audit Report on the accounts of KP Departments Year 2015-16. The report has been presented in the provincial assembly and the Speaker Mushtaq Ghani had referred it to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the house. The KP Assembly PAC is headed by the Speaker, Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani.

In first case, a loss to the tone of Rs 156.19 million was noticed during the financial year 2013-14, in the office of Executive Engineer (XEN), Flood Irrigation Division D I Khan that local office used to procure and dump huge quantity of stones every year for throwing into Indus River during flood season with the contention to protect local Abadies, spurs and guide bund from destruction. The review of the monthly accounts from June 2009 to June 2015 (only six years) shows that stones valuing Rs 156.19 million were procured through various contractors, dumped on the river banks for further use. This state of affairs clearly depicts that the quantity would be 10 times more than shown in the statement because these pertains to one month per year based information.

The recurring expenditure on yearly basis termed as recurring loss to the public exchequer on the one hand while on the other it is not the final solution during flood 2010 damages were again occurred. The audit held that the procurement and use of stone is just the wastage of public resources and cannot be termed as the only solution to protect the locals from the flood. There might be more scientific systems and procedures and by adopting the same once for all the issue cane be resolved.

The issue was pointed out in November 2015 and the management replied that final reply will be furnished after verification of the relevant record. The audit requested the department repeatedly for holding Departmental Accounts Committee (DAC) meeting however, it was not convened till finalization of the audit report. The audit has recommended that the matter needs to be looked into for amicable solution of the issue.

In second a case of the loss of Rs 80.90 million noticed due to consolidation of two items from Composite Scheduled Rates (CSR) 2012 in the office of Executive Engineer, Peshawar Canal Irrigation Division Peshawar during the financial year 2013-14. In the case it was noticed that improvement and restoration of Bara River and revamping of Budni Nullah was awarded to different contractors. In the BOQ (Bill of Quantities) of the scheme as well as TS (Technical Sanction) an item of work @ Rs 151.08 pm on the basis of combination of two items of CSR 2012 was provided and accordingly paid.

But, the inclusion of an irrelevant item 'extra for wet earth work' after dressing was neither relevant nor required at site because after carrying out the dressing in dry channel/drains the adding of extra for wet was not possible. This clearly indicated that the inclusion and combination of an irrelevant rate of Rs 45.98 pm meant extra for wet earth work in the already completed rate of Rs 105.10 pm, which was undue favour to the contractor and the government was put to sustain a loss of Rs 80.90 million. The loss occurred due to undue favour to the contractor and violation of provisions of CSR 2012. The loss was pointed out in August 2014 and the management stated detailed reply will be submitted after consulting the record.

The audit requested the department repeatedly for holding of the DAC meeting, however DAC meeting was not convened till finalization of audit report. The audit has recommended conducting inquiry, fix responsibility and recovery of loss from the persons at fault. In third case a loss of Rs 17.07 million was noticed in the office of Executive Engineer Flood Irrigation Division D.I. Khan during the financial year 2014-15.

In the case it was noticed that various contractors were paid including payments on account of Barrow pit excavation undressed lead upto 50 meter, extra for wet earth work and supply and dumping/stacking of stones at site. However, the deduction of voids was not made, despite the facts that in certain cases voids from the earth work was deducted and converted into solid. Non-deduction of voids resulted into loss of Rs 17.07 million to the public exchequer.

The audit had held that quantities of work done were required to have been measured and allowed after applying multiplication factor for converting loose measurement into solid as required under the provision of rules and standard contract agreement of the department which was not done.

The audit had attributed the occurrence of loss due to non-adherence to provision of rules and standard contract agreement of the department. However, when pointed out in November 2015, the management replied that final reply will be furnished after verification of the relevant record.

The Audit repeatedly called for holding of the DAC meeting, which was not convened till finalization of this report. The audit has recommended investigation into the matter, fixing of responsibility and recovery of from those responsible.

In another case a loss of Rs 15.26 million had been noticed during the financial year 2013-14, in the office of Executive Engineer Peshawar Canal Irrigation Division Peshawar wherein an amount of Rs 15.26 million was paid to contractors on account of silt clearance of the different RDs of Hazar Khani and Kabul River Canal in the KRC Sub-Division of the local office. The record showed that tender was floated for the said work in December 2013.

Similar nature was also carried in the same Sub Division on the basis of tender floated in the month of June 2013 for the same year 2013-14. The contractors executed agreements and started work in the same canals and they were accordingly paid @ 43% below, which indicates that KRC Sub Division on work in the same RDs was carried out twicely which resulted into a loss of Rs 15.26 million.

The record further revealed that in the first instance only excavation of silt was paid while in the second instance excavation alongwith transportation was paid. Audit held that in the first instance the lower rate of the contractor was ignored due to extending favour to him.

The loss occurred as the contractor quoted unreasonably lower rate and the local office extended undue favour to him. When pointed out in August 2014, the management stated that detailed reply will be submitted after consulting the record.

Audit repeatedly directed the convening of the DAC meeting, but it was not convened. Therefore, the audit had recommended conducting inquiry, fixing responsibility apart from recovery of the loss from the concerned persons.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/01/20190128442881/

FARMERS IN SINDH REJECT MINI-BUDGET RELIEF AS INSUFFICIENT

By Our Correspondent Published: January 28, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Finance Minister Asad Umar's announcement in Finance Supplementary Bill, 2019, of 50% reduction in the overall rate of Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) for the fertiliser sector seems to have failed to provide the desired relief to the farmers.

While the fertiliser industry has already indicated that they cannot pass on the entire impact of the concession to the farmers, the agriculturists have squarely rejected the proposed relief as insufficient.

The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), a farmers' lobbying group, said on Sunday that the bill has completely failed to provide respite to the agro economy which is reeling from water shortage, expensive inputs and low crop rates.

Qabool Muhammad Khatian, SCA's President, who chaired the chamber's meeting in Hyderabad, demanded that the federal government reduce the rates of fertiliser to what existed before Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) came to power. The farmers' representatives from Karachi, Sukkur, Sanghar and other districts attended through video link.

According to Khatian, a urea bag was being sold for Rs1,380 and a Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) fertiliser bag at Rs2,800 prior to July, 2018 elections. The prices suddenly swelled to Rs1,850 of urea and Rs3,800 of DAP fertiliser in the months following the elections, he added.

"Even if the rate is reduced by Rs200 per bag as announced by the finance minister, the farmers will still be getting fertiliser at very expensive rates," he said. Umar, while announcing the mini budget, had expressed hope that the 50% concession would enable the industry to reduce the price of fertilizer by Rs200 per bag.

The SCA also reiterated its dissatisfaction over the Rs1,300 per 40 kilogrammes wheat procurement rate as fixed by the Sindh government and demanded its revision to Rs1,500.

The farmers were also apprehensive that the persistent shortage of water at the Sukkur and Kotri barrages can entail a food crisis for the country, particularly for Sindh.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1898182/1-farmers-sindh-reject-mini-budget-relief-insufficient/

March 2019

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 25th TO MARCH 31st 2019

IGC SEES GLOBAL GRAINS STOCKS FALLING IN 2019-20

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 31ST, 2019 | LONDON

The International Grains Council (IGC) on Thursday forecast that grains stocks would fall further in the 2019/20 season with an anticipated rise in both wheat and corn production insufficient to satisfy record demand. The inter-governmental body, issuing its first full set of supply and demand projections for 2019/20, saw total stocks of grain falling by 29 million tonnes in the season to 575 million tonnes following a 44 million tonne drawdown in 2018/19.

Total grains production in 2019/20 was seen rising by 50 million tonnes to 2.175 billion tonnes while consumption was projected at a record 2.204 billion. The global corn crop in 2019/20 was seen 10 million tonnes higher at 1.124 billion tonnes, reflecting a rise in expected production in the United States, China and Brazil partially offset by declines in the European Union and Ukraine.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190331460103/

'IT IS SAFE TO CONSUME BROILER CHICKEN, CHINESE SALT'

By Our Correspondent Published: March 31, 2019

KARACHI: Medical experts at a conference 'Common Food Controversy,' organised by Pakistan Nutrition and Dietetic Society (PNDS), said that broiler chicken and monosodium glutamate (Chinese salt) is a mystery. Research shows that they can be consumed and that the broiler chicken's meat does help in meeting the nutritional needs, they should not be made a regular part of a diet, said the experts adding that the excessive use of anything was dangerous.

The panel 'For locals, the broiler chicken is a mystery,' included Dr Syed Muhammad Ghufran Saeed, Dr Zafar and Sabeen Gul.

Dr Syed said that 'desi' chickens are usually thought of as healthy, nutritional and tasty meals. When we talk about giving a patient soup it should be made using desi chicken as that is healthy. This is because the 'desi' chicken and broiler chicken are different. While desi chickens take around six months to mature, broiler chickens are ready to be consumed in six to eight weeks. There are genetic differences between the two as well, added Dr Syed.

Dr Zafar said that broiler chicken is given specific foods, unlike the desi chicken. He added that broiler chickens fulfil the protein needs of people around the world and without it, fulfilling the nutritional needs of humans was impossible. Broiler chickens are given antibiotics, some of which are filtered out through their liver and some filtered out through their stomach. Research has shown, however, that arsenic is found in broiler chickens, he added.

According to Gul, there is no truth in the rumours that broiler chicken is given steroids or hormones. She said that the chicken is bought from the market, they are tested and while preparing their feed, nutrition is a high priority. She added the information that chickens are fed antibiotics was false. If a chicken is ill only then it is given an antibiotic but otherwise a balanced diet is provided to chickens, she said.

PNDS President Rabia Anwar said that monosodium glutamate (msg), commonly known as Chinese salt, is used to heighten the taste of food. Glutamic acid is naturally found in tomato, grapes, paneer (cottage cheese), mushrooms and other food products. She said that its use, however, has become controversial, which is why food and drug administration issued directives that the products containing msg should clearly mention its use on their labels. She further said that scientifically it hasn't yet been proven that msg is injurious to health and so people can consume it.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1940747/1-safe-consume-broiler-chicken-chinese-salt-say-experts/

FARMERS REAP WHEAT AMID POOR GOVT RESPONSE ON SETTING PRICE

Jan Khaskheli March 31, 2019

HYDERABAD: Punhal Palari's migrant herder family has harvested six acres of wheat and collected around 15 maund grain for the children through their collective labour.

Punhal is now looking for more fields to reap the golden crop for scoring grain stocks against his work. The whole family, including his wife and two younger sons, works together for the harvesting.

Originally, he comes from the drought-stricken arid-zone Kohistan, Jamshoro district. Now, they live in union council Hatri in the suburbs of Hyderabad city.

They have been following this age-old sharecropping method for generations. Under this method, the cost of the wheat harvesting is received in the shape of grain, depending on the rate and situation of the particular area. Punhal, who receives 2.5 maund per acre after harvesting, said other areas had better returns. "In some areas workers can get three-four maund per acre for similar work," he added.

Hundreds of families, who migrated from the drought-hit Kohistan, harvest wheat and collect enough grain stock to feed families. This helps them avoid any food crisis during the time they stay away from their homeland.

Sachal Palari, another member of a migrant family living within the same cluster, said, "We travel long distance – three to four kilometres – to harvest wheat in the forest areas."

They move with women and children on a daily basis to work together from dawn to dusk for earning a little for their families survival.

"We cannot decide or bargain over the wages of this kind of work. It depends on landlords to fix labour wages and give us after thresher," Sachal said.

Wheat harvesting goes on for a month, starting from early March till the first week of April. All workers usually collect enough stock through their work to feed their children for the whole the year.

About their livestock, Sachal said they travel with their herds, which are tended by younger children near vacant fields.

He told that their grandparents had seen better days. They harvested the golden crop too, but on their own land, which has turned barren. Now, he said they were lucky to even feed their children after the painstaking labour.

Some of these families have a history of migrating from their rain-dependent mountainous areas for 20 years. Whenever the families feel difficulties in life and livelihoods due to delay in rainfall, they take their animals and migrate to barrage areas for animal rearing and labour.

They spend six-eight months away from their native villages and return whenever they receive news of pouring rains during monsoon. These herder families have pieces of land in their villages that they cultivate during monsoon rains. But for many years, they have been experiencing low rainfall, resulting in dryness and drought-like conditions in Kohistan.

Each family has a different story. Some of them migrate to union council Hatri, Hyderabad district that once had forest villages with thick tree cover and rich economy. These herder families live under makeshift abodes along roadsides and barren lands with animals. Women and children also work to ease difficulties.

During the wheat harvest season, each family member collects grains for the year. Otherwise, they sell milk in the local market for survival. On rare occasions, like when they are faced with expenses for some illness, they sell their animals to bear the cost. Reports gathered from different areas show that only lower parts of the province, which leads in the cultivation of all the crops, have started wheat harvest. But upper parts of the province are yet to start harvest.

Badin, Thatta, Sujawal and parts of other districts being located at tail-end areas did not receive irrigation water to produce wheat this year.

Qabool Muhammad Khatian, president, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), was optimistic for a bumper crop in all districts of the province, except Badin, Thatta, Sujawal, and parts of Mirpurkhas and Tando Muhammad Khan districts.

These areas did not receive timely water to produce wheat.

He said pleasant weather during the season has also benefited the wheat crop, and farmers were receiving 40-45 maund per acre average as compared to 30 maund per acre they used to receive during the previous years. “It is good sign because of weather phenomenon,” he added.

About the procurement process, he said the provincial government has yet not declared any procurement centres in the entire province to receive wheat. “Farmers are demanding to start the process of procurement, so they can sell their products on time,” he informed.

Qabool said the provincial government does not have a clear policy to promote agriculture sector, which benefits the people associated with farming. “The rate of Rs1,300 per maund was fixed by the government 10 years back, which still continues. Farmers are compelled to sell their product at this rate,” he lamented, urging the government to announce at least Rs200 raise in wheat prices, so the famers could recover the input cost.

He said that the government wanted to sell wheat at low rates to urban areas, mainly Karachi. “In this situation, only producers will suffer due to the low prices they receive for their valuable food product,” he added.

Reports from Dadu district show that farmers were preparing to harvest wheat. Some influential farmers preferred to hire combined harvesters and bear the machinery cost. Combined harvesters get Rs1,400 per acre of wheat harvest.

Grower leaders, keeping an eye over the situation, fear that water scarcity might create problems for agriculture and farmers in the current year, as water scarcity also meant that the farmers could not produce grass fodder. In the absence of grass fodder, people relied on wheat straw, which was also in low supply, increasing problems for herders. Currently, livestock farmers were forced to pay high prices for wheat straw in tail-end areas.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/451210-farmers-reap-wheat-amid-poor-govt-response-on-setting-price

‘LIVELIHOOD GIFTS’ DISTRIBUTED AMONG FISHERMEN

The Newspaper’s Correspondent March 30, 2019

THATTA: Over 400 fishermen having licences for fishing in the Keenjhar Lake were given free-of-cost motorboat engines, nets, iceboxes and bicycles through a lucky draw held here on Friday.

Sindh Minister for Fisheries, Livestock and Cooperative Societies Abdul Bari Pitafi gave away the livelihood articles to the winners.

The minister also released over 450,000 seedlings of various fish species in the lake.

Later, addressing the ceremony, the minister said the provincial government was making all-out efforts to promote fishing and improve the lot of fishermen. He pledged that 260,000 more seedlings of various fish species would be dropped into the lake in June.

Mr Pitafi said the government was making every possible effort to fully revive Keenjhar, Manchhar, Chotiaryoon and other wetlands of Sindh to the benefit of the fisherman community.

Fishermen and local residents among the audience complained to the minister that the police under patronage of influential figures of area and officials of the lake administration had routinely been extorting them and visitors, mainly coming from Karachi and Hyderabad. The minister assured them of appropriate action in this regard.

Published in Dawn, March 30th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1472656/livelihood-gifts-distributed-among-fishermen

GOVERNMENT URGED TO WAIVE AGRICULTURE LOANS OF FATA, PATA FARMERS

ALI HUSSAIN | MAR 30TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

A parliamentary panel on Friday recommended the government to waive off the agriculture loans of small farmers of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), as they have suffered a lot due to militancy over the past several years.

Senate Standing Committee on States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), which met here with Senator Hidayat Ullah in the chair, was given briefings by senior officials of Ministry of SAFRON, Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) and State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Member IR Policy Wing, CEO Tribal Areas Electricity Company (TESCO) and others.

The ZTBL officials told the committee that till 2009 all the outstanding loans amounting to Rs 431 million of the small farmers of the erstwhile FATA and PATA have been waived off due to the damages caused to the agriculture in the areas because of the militancy.

They told that the total amount of outstanding loans given to people from FATA between 2009 and 2012 is Rs 471 million, out of which only Rs 30 million are agricultural loans.

On this, the committee recommended that the agricultural loans should be write-off to give relief to small farmers as the area has been under civil war and no agricultural produce has been obtained.

Briefing the panel, SAFRON Secretary Mohammad Aslam said after the 25th Constitutional Amendment, the FATA and PATA were merged into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and therefore, the President or the Federation cannot make regulations for erstwhile FATA and PATA anymore. He said all the functions performed by the erstwhile FATA Secretariat, its secretaries and directorates also transferred to the concerned departments of the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

About Levies and Khasadar Force, he said after repealing the Regulation of 2012, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government promulgated two ordinances on March 12, 2019 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ORD.NO.I of 2019) and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Khasadar Force (Maintenance, Regulation and Protection of Service) (Transition) Ordinance ORD. No. II of 2019 and therefore the two forces stand provincial and the Ministry of SAFRON has no role anymore in respect of the two said forces.

The committee was also given update on the status of non-payment of salaries and pension to the Levies and Khassadar personnel working in Kurram and Orakzai districts.

The committee also directed the deputy commissioners of all seven tribal districts to complete work on proposed and recommended projects for the year and submit details to the committee with mention of the agency or parliamentarian who has recommended the project.

The committee was told that according to Planning and Development Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, law enforcement agencies, MNAs, senators and tribal elders have to be consulted before proposing any project in the area.

The committee discussed in detail the matter of tax exemption to the erstwhile FATA and it was informed that due to the economic backwardness of the former FATA and PATA, the federal government on July 23, 2018 granted income tax exemption on profits and gains derived from any source in the areas.

The officials of the FBR told the committee that exemption from income tax was conferred upon the profit and gains derived by association of persons (AOPs) and companies from existing businesses set up in the areas comprising the ex-FATA and ex-PATA.

They said exemption from all withholding taxes (except advance tax on imports) was made available in cases where both the payer and the recipient were residents of the territories constituting the erstwhile FATA and PATA. Additionally, there are exemptions of taxes on setting up new industries, supply of electricity to domestic, commercial and industrial consumers, on supply of goods by retailers located in the areas, and on the goods produced and supplied by industrial units located in the ex-FATA and ex-PATA.

The committee was told that the SROs 1212 and 1213 relating to sales tax and income tax are not in force now and the tax situation is the same as was applicable before 25th amendment. The committee decided to call chairman FBR, secretary finance and secretary law and justice in the next meeting to discuss the matter.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190330459729/

DAIRY PRODUCTS IMPORT SCALES DOWN TO $158.143M

RECORDER REPORT 2019/03/30

KARACHI: Pakistan's import of dairy products scaled down to $158.143 million in July-Feb 2018-19, down by 6 percent, official figures say.

Fall in the import bill of dairy products now stands in $9.984 million in July-Feb 2018-19 from $168.127 million in July-Feb 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics indicates.

Import volume of dairy products also fell by 6 percent or 3,408 metric tonnes to 55,384 metric tonnes in July-Feb 2018-19 from 58,792 metric tonnes in July-Feb 2017-18.

In Feb 2019, the country imported $20.436 million of dairy products, which is higher by 29.39 percent or $4.642 million from $15.794 million in Feb 2018.

In term of quantity, Pakistan's import of dairy products grew by 10 percent or 625 metric tonnes to 6,867 metric tonnes in Feb 2019 from 6,242 metric tonnes in Feb 2018.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/03/30/3-page/773557-news.html

COTTON JUMPS OVER 2 PERCENT AS 2019 CROP AREA SEEN DOWN

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 30TH, 2019 | NEW YORK

ICE cotton futures rose more than 2 percent on Friday as a report from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) showed a drop in acreage for the natural fibre in 2019. The front-month cotton contract on ICE Futures US, rose 1.78 cent, or 2.35 percent, at 77.65 cents per lb. as of 1:29 p.m. ET (1729 GMT).

The front-month contract has gained more than 1.2 percent for the week and is set to post its sixth consecutive weekly gain. "The USDA planting intentions came out less (than expected), the market is up strongly. That was certainly an unanticipated number," said Keith Brown, principal at cotton brokers Keith Brown and Co in Moultrie, Georgia.

The USDA estimates all cotton planted area for 2019 at 13.8 million acres, less than analyst's average forecast of 14.498 million acres and down 2 percent compared to last year. Meanwhile, the May contract rose above the 100-day moving average at around 76.18 cents. Speculators who trade on technical signals regard a break above the 100-day moving average as a bullish sign.

"There are fairly sizeable short positions held by the speculators, they may be soon convinced they are wrong and they could start to buy the market," Brown said. The United States and China said they made progress in trade talks that concluded on Friday in Beijing, with a Chinese delegation led by Vice Premier Liu He expected to visit Washington next week.

Total futures market volume fell by 1,668 to 28,605 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 2,011 to 228,436 contracts in the previous session. Certificated cotton stocks deliverable as of March 28 totalled 46,544 480-lb bales, unchanged from 46,544 in the previous session.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190330459667/

6,361 LITRES OF CONTAMINATED MILK DESTROYED

Our Correspondent March 30, 2019

LAHORE: Over 6,361 litres of contaminated milk was disposed of by the dairy food safety teams of the Punjab Food Authority while carrying out a province-wide crackdown to curb the sale of tainted milk.

The crackdown was initiated on the directions of PFA Director General Capt (R) Muhammad Usman. The teams have inspected 289,829 litres milk by placing screening pickets early morning at the entry and exit points of 36 districts of Punjab.

According to details, PFA's dairy teams have taken milk samples for screening test on the spot and took action against milk sellers over found results not to be up to the mark. Sharing the statistics, Usman said the PFA teams inspected 1,025 milk vehicles in Lahore zone, 591 in Rawalpindi, 357 in Multan and 82 in Muzaffargarh zone. He said the teams disposed of milk over proved contamination of harmful chemicals, powder, urea and water which used for increasing the thickness and quantity of milk. "The execution of pasteurisation law was the only solution to ensure the provision of milk free from any contamination in Punjab," he said.

The DG PFA said the authority was fully committed to getting fruitful results whereas doing work on the project to make Lahore adulteration free food city. He said we were trying hard to make strict rules as punishment against the violators especially adulterators. He said the sale of unpacked/ loose milk would be banned after enacting pasteurisation law by 2022.

Eight judicial officers appointed: The Lahore High Court on Friday posted eight district & sessions judges as presiding officers of as many banking courts of Punjab lying vacant for a considerable time.

As per a notification issued by the LHC registrar, Abid Hussain has been transferred and posted from Lahore to Banking Court-I Multan, Safdar Saleem Shahid from Lahore to Banking Court-III Multan, Abdul Ghaffar from Consumer Court Multan to Banking Court-III Lahore, Muhammad Azam (OSD) from Lahore to Banking Court-IV Lahore, Ziaul Qamar (OSD) from Lahore to Banking Court-V Lahore, Ms Shahida Saeed from Kasur to Banking Court-VI Lahore, Ali Nawaz from Ahmadpur East to Banking Court Sahiwal, and Pervez Iqbal Sipra from Consumer Court Faisalabad to Special Court (Offences in Banks) Multan.

Through another notification, the LHC promoted two Additional District & Sessions Judges, including Muhammad Iram Ayaz and Javed Iqbal Sheikh as district & sessions judges and posted them at Consumer Court Multan and Consumer Court Faisalabad respectively.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/450856-6-361-litres-of-contaminated-milk-destroyed

SENATE PANEL SEEKS WAIVER OF AGRI LOANS FOR EX-FATA FARMERS

By Our Correspondent Published: March 30, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Senate Standing Committee on States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) on Friday recommended to waive off the agricultural loans in order to provide relief to small farmers, an official statement said.

Regarding agricultural loans to small farmers from erstwhile FATA (Federal Administrated Tribal Areas), the Committee was told that the total amount of outstanding loans given to people from ex-FATA between 2009 and 2012 was Rs471 million, out of which only Rs30 million was agricultural loan.

The meeting was held under the Chairmanship of Senator Hidayatullah and was attended among others Senators Hilalur Rehman, Sajjad Hussain Turi, Shamim Afridi, Najma Hameed, Secretary SAFRON, Member IR Policy Wing, CEO TESCO and officials from State Bank and relevant ministries.

The committee was also given update on the status of non-payment of salaries and pension to the personnel of Levies and Khassadar working in Kurram and Orakzai Agencies.

The committee directed the DCs of merged districts to complete work on proposed and recommended ADP projects for the year.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 30th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1940043/1-senate-panel-seeks-waiver-agri-loans-ex-fata-farmers/

PUNJAB FOOD DEPARTMENT FACING ACUTE DEARTH OF WHEAT STORAGE SILOS

By Rizwan Asif Published: March 30, 2019

LAHORE: Owing to an acute dearth of warehouses at the food department, the Punjab government is currently undergoing a crisis in term of wheat storage. At present, the department – on average – needs to stock 320,000 tons of wheat but it only has a capacity to store 220,000 tons.

According to research conducted by international institutions, if the current situation persists, by 2025, the food department will not be able to stock around 270,000 tons of wheat. Therefore, it is necessary for the Punjab government to create a capacity for storing 200,000 tons of wheat on the state level and build silos by offering concessions to the private sector to stock 100,000 tons of wheat. A plan for constructing new silos for storing the surplus 100,000 tons of wheat was devised in 2004, however, due to a shortage of funds, management issues, and a general lack of interest among various governments, the plan could not be fully materialised.

Over a period of 15 years, silos with a capacity to store 30,000 tons of wheat had been built in Rawalpindi, but because of neglect, they have been non-functional for over a year. Although the shortage of silos has caused a lot of trouble to the department, a major segment of the food department employees and officers oppose the construction of silos owing to the belief that it will be difficult to keep them operational due to power crisis. The employees, therefore, are of the view that it will be appropriate to construct them in big cities, adding that new warehouses – similar to houses – should be built in rural areas, specifically Southern Punjab, where there is plenty of state-owned land available.

Per the details provided by the Punjab food department, it annually procures 350,000 – 400,000 tons of wheat, while each year, the department is left with 100,000 to 150,000 tons of old carry-forward stocks of wheat. In 2019, however, the department was left with 360,000 tons of wheat in carry-forward stock while an equal amount of new wheat was procured. As a result, with 720,000 tons of wheat, the department was only left with storage space for 210,000 tons of wheat. The rest was either stocked in private warehouses or in open fields as cereal grass.

Apart from the lack of storage capacity, the food department also has numerous weaknesses in terms of its operations. Owners of different flour mills complain that the department's field staff mixes sand and pebbles to wheat sacks in order to increase their weight up to three to four kilograms.

The officers and field staff of the Department told The Express Tribune that for the past 20 years, they have been hearing that silos will be built by the government but so far the plan has not been materialised. "Since there is a serious energy crisis in Pakistan, the operational cost of silos is will be very high," one of the officers said. "Per an average cost estimate, the dumping and taking out of each wheat sack in silos will cost up to Rs4-6.

Stocking wheat in the form of cereal grain or in a house-style warehouse is easy and cost-effective," he said. According to the documents and records obtained by The Express Tribune, after becoming the Chief Minister of Punjab in 2002, Chaudhry Pervez Elahi, directed the food department to construct silos to stock government wheat in Punjab.

The food department, however, showed progress on the directive for two years. In 2007, some silos were constructed in Rawalpindi but the Punjab Communication & Works Department suddenly raised objections on technical grounds. Finally, in 2010, the silos were made operational again. Within two years, however, they became non-functional.

During his tenure, former PM Nawaz Sharif also promised to construct new silos, after which the food department started work on the project again with the assistance of International Finance Corporation. In 2012, with the help of studies conducted by foreign experts, the government decided to construct silos with a capacity of 50,000 tons in Lahore, Rajanpur, Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Multan, Sahiwal and Muzzafargarh – which means silos with a total of 350,000 tons of storage capacity were planned to be constructed. Moreover, through the construction, the private sector would have been given a subsidy of Rs2,700 every year for wheat storage.

The government officials estimated the cost of silos per site at Rs1 billion. The department summoned a tender but no company came forward to with a proposal. In April 2015, the food department summoned a tender for the construction of silos once again but the effort went in vain once again.

As a result, the then-provincial government asked the World Food Programme for assistance and as a result, a Dutch company accepted the project. In its recommendations, the company wrote that the government should immediately construct storehouses with a storage capacity of one million tons, while the private sector must be directed to construct silos with a storage capacity of two million tons.

Furthermore, the Dutch company proposed to build steel silos at 200 locations in the province, each having a storage capacity of 10,000 tons at an estimated cost of Rs110 million. The company also suggested that the cost of procuring local and foreign machinery will be estimated at Rs150 million, while the price per ton of wheat storage for a year was recommended at Rs2710. In 2017, biding for the silos was carried out at 40 spots but firms only came forward in two places – Bhakkar and Layyah. Currently, these silos are under construction.

The current PTI government is also in favour of constructing these silos and, for the purpose, CM Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar has constituted a technical committee. However, the project of constructing silos is undergoing delays due to the continuous fluctuation in the value of US dollars against Pakistani Rupees, as well as the absence of stable government policies and uncertainty regarding wheat.]

Another reason for the undue delay is that the food department – which is already facing a shortage of storage houses – will have to sacrifice two houses. This is because, during his tenure, when former CM of Punjab Shehbaz Sharif toured Lahore's Gulberg and Badami Bagh, he ordered to take away the warehouse projects from the food department to initiate other projects.

At the time, the provincial government had promised the food department that for the construction of new warehouses, 205 kanals will be allotted in Lahore. The promise was, however, has not been fulfilled to date. Moreover, the department's old silos in Multan and Faisalabad have been non-functional for a long time.

When approached, the food minister of Punjab, Samiullah Chaudhry, said that it is the government's responsibility to ensure the protection of public's food and it is also important to provide quality food to people.

"The public consumes a reasonable amount of flour and, for quality flour, we require high-quality wheat," he explained. "It is true that the food department's own warehouses have a low storage capacity and we have to rent private warehouses or store wheat in open spots, but the government is working on a project for the construction of silos under Public-Private partnership and funds will be allocated for this purpose in the coming budget.

Chaudhry, however, added that it is a long-term project and will be completed in different phases.

Speaking on the matter, the central leader of the Pakistan Flour Mills Association, Asim Ahmed Raza, said that since the creation of Pakistan, the standards established at an international level for the purchase of wheat from farmers could not be implemented by our governments and the food department.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 30th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1940093/1-punjab-food-department-facing-acute-dearth-wheat-storage-silos/

DELHI DETAINS ECONOMIST FOR ATTENDING FOOD SECURITY CONFERENCE

Reuters Updated March 29, 2019

NEW DELHI: Police in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand detained Belgian-born economist and social activist Jean Dreze for participating in a public meeting on food security organised by a village self-help group, Dreze and authorities said on Thursday.

Local authorities said Dreze and two other activists were detained because they didn't have the permission to organise the meeting.

"Dreze and others were released after some initial questioning," Harsh Mangla, deputy commissioner of Jharkhand's Garhwa district, said.

Dreze, who has co-authored books on hunger with Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, said the organisers had put in a request 10 days ago but authorities neither denied nor granted permission for the meeting.

The meeting was organised to help guide the poor access subsidised food supplied by the government.

"The meetings organised by various village self-help groups and other voluntary bodies play a crucial role in ensuring food security for Jharkhand's poor people," Dreze said.

Late last year, it was reported that at least 14 people had died of starvation in Jharkhand, one of the most underdeveloped and poverty-stricken states of India.

Activists said the deaths had occurred since authorities cancelled old handwritten government ration cards and replaced them with the biometric Aadhaar card to weed out bogus beneficiaries.

Opposition parties have highlighted the issue of starvation deaths in Jharkhand, a predominantly tribal state, ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

Opposition politicians and social activists, who often accuse Modi's government of trying to muzzle free speech and cracking down on dissent, took to Twitter to criticise the detention of Dreze.

In Jharkhand, subsidised grains and old-age pensions can be the difference between life and death, said Dreze, who currently lives and teaches at a university in Ranchi, the state capital.

Published in Dawn, March 29th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1472586/delhi-detains-economist-for-attending-food-security-conference

RAMAZAN BAZAAR: 19 ITEMS TO BE PROVIDED AT SUBSIDISED RATES

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 29TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Cabinet Committee for Price Control decided to provide 19 items at subsidized rate at fare price sshops setup in Ramazan Bazar. The meeting presided over by Provincial Minister for Industries and Trade Mian Aslam Iqbal on Thursday also discussed a proposal for utilizing 20 percent utility stores as Ramazan Bazar. Mian Aslam Iqbal has said that Ramazan Package will be finalized soon with the consultation of traders association. He said former rulers wasted Rs 12 billion in the name of subsidy but we will provide real benefit of subsidies to the poor families.

The Minister directed to deal with exploiters of people with iron hand and perform their duties honestly. He said that the poorest families will be given relief during Ramazan by providing quality items at subsidized rates. He directed to activate market committees and improve it mechanism. He said that additional Ramazan Bazars will also be setup for the conveyance of consumers. Provincial Ministers Hussain Bahadur Drashak, Sami Ullah Chaudhary, Noman Akhtar Langrial, spokesman Punjab government D. Shehbaz Gil, MD Utility Stores and concerned secretaries attended the meeting.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190329459384/

SEED-COTTON: PKI URGES GOVERNMENT TO FIX SUPPORT PRICE AT RS 4000/40KG

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 29TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) has strongly urged the government to give cotton grower a confidence by announcing support price for seed-cotton at Rs 4000/- per 40 kg in order to achieve 15 million bales target well ahead of cotton sowing season. Prime Minister, Imran Khan should hold the hands of the farmers and grower will make the Pakistan prosper and green with their sweat and blood,' said PKI President Khalid Khokhar in a statement issued here on Thursday.

Higher input cost of cotton production in Pakistan comparing to other countries of the world, lenient import policy without duty and from the land routs putting lots of pressure of local cotton prices. Even International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) declared cost of production in Pakistan higher than India, Turkey, Tanzania, Argentina, Australia Brazil etc, he added.

Import from such countries without duty hurts the local prices and reduce growers profitability, which ultimately influence the growers' choice for planting other crops instead of cotton. Secondly since Textile Industry is the only buyer of cotton in Pakistan, it monopolize the market and suppress the prices far below than international prices. In these circumstances, it is very imperative to pay the support prices of cotton in order to secure grower profitability, which is widely practiced in the neighbour country for over 27 crops including cotton, very effectively.

Pro-industry policies of the past Government about cotton import, illegal import from the land route and non-provision of support price, resulted in over 30pc reduction of cotton area.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190329459391/

PAKISTAN MOVES TO RECAPTURE AFGHANISTAN'S WHEAT MARKET

By Rizwan Asif Published: March 29, 2019

LAHORE: Pakistan is making efforts to open up a potential 2-million-ton wheat export market in Afghanistan and has begun taking special measures based on demands of exporters.

The move comes after Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Jehangir Tareen met with Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) Chief Minister Mahmood Khan, senior Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) officials and representatives of security forces.

In the first phase, the duration for which goods trucks will be allowed to pass through the Torkham border has been increased to 10 hours and plans are afoot to open the border 24 hours a day for exports by August this year.

Sources said this could save exporters Rs90,000 per truck in transportation expenses. Apart from this, at the suggestion of Karachi exporters, work has begun on a project to reserve high protein and gluten wheat from Punjab and Sindh for export only.

According to exporters, the high protein and gluten wheat from Pakistan can sell for $8 to $10 more per ton in international markets. In the past, Pakistani exporters used to send 1 to 1.2 million tons of wheat to Afghanistan, but due to the government's uncertain export policies, Pakistan gradually lost the wheat market in Afghanistan and Russian wheat and grain took its place.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has handed over the task of resolution of agricultural issues and adopting measures for agricultural development to his close aide Tareen. In the past few days, Tareen has held high-level meetings with wheat exporters in Punjab, Sindh and K-P in which various suggestions to increase Pakistan's share in the 2-million-ton Afghan wheat market were considered.

Exporters sending wheat to Afghanistan informed Tareen that currently goods trucks have an eight-hour window to cross the border and in this duration around 250 trucks cross. They said if the border is opened for a longer period, all exports including wheat will increase. Similarly, Karachi exporters told Tareen that they export low protein and gluten wheat, which fetches lower prices in global markets.

Nawabshah, Mirpurkhas, Hala, Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rahim Yar Khan and other areas in Sindh and Punjab produce wheat with higher protein and gluten, which they said could be stored and exported for higher profits.

When contacted by The Express Tribune, Tareen said he had examined the suggestions in his meeting with K-P's political leadership and security services, after which in the first phase, the duration for goods carriers passing through the Torkham border has been extended from eight hours to 10 hours.

In April, this duration will be increased to 12 hours, and by August, the Torkham border will be opened for 24 hours a day for exports. "On the demand of Sindh exporters, lab tests of wheat from various Punjab districts have started, so that the percentage of protein and gluten can be determined. After this, we will select the districts producing high protein and gluten wheat and will reserve them for export purposes," Tareen added.

He said there is a huge wheat market in Afghanistan, which would not only be a source of foreign exchange, but would also benefit Pakistan farmers with higher prices and domestic flour mills due to increased wheat crushing activity.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Flour Mills Association leader and wheat exporter Hafiz Ahmed said Afghanistan had been a big market for Pakistan in the past, however, uncertain government policies let it slip out of its hands.

"Currently, there is a great demand for Pakistani wheat and grain in Afghanistan because it is much cheaper than Russian wheat, but Afghan traders don't have trust in Pakistan because they believe we cannot deliver on time."

Published in The Express Tribune, March 29th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1939326/2-pakistan-moves-recapture-afghanistans-wheat-market/

PUNJAB SETS NO WHEAT PROCUREMENT TARGET

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter March 28, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government on Wednesday approved wheat procurement policy for the harvesting season starting from April 10 but without setting any procurement target.

Chief Minister Usman Buzdar presided over a high-level meeting at Civil Secretariat here which approved the wheat procurement policy for the current year.

The [procurement] price will remain unchanged at Rs1,300 per 40 kg as the chief minister gave the 'vague' statement that each and every grain will be purchased from the growers.

The meeting decided that receiving of applications for the distribution of gunny bags will start from April 8 while April 15 will be the deadline for the purpose. Distribution of gunny bags will commence from April 21.

The chief minister pledged to protect interests of wheat growers especially the small landholders. He said provision of fixed wheat rate to farmers must be ensured and distribution of gunny bags should be transparent.

Similarly, all necessary facilities will be provided to the farmers at wheat procurement centres and complaint cells will be established at provincial, divisional, district and tehsil levels.

He directed the provincial ministers, advisers and special assistants to visit wheat procurement centres to personally campaign.

Punjab has sown wheat on around 6.35 million acres of land. Almost each year small landholders complain that only 'influential' growers obtain gunny bags as well as get their produce procured by the food department, leaving the poor farmers high and dry.

Most of the wheat, between three and four million tons, is procured by the Punjab food department, while the federal government's agency Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) also buys between 1.2 and 1.5 million tons of grains as part of maintaining strategic reserves and stabilising market prices.

Published in Dawn, March 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1472293/punjab-sets-no-wheat-procurement-target

WHAT'S GOING ON IN PUNJAB'S FERTILE CRESCENT?

BR Research March 28, 2019

Shrinking area under cotton cultivation has everyone worried, except like all things Pakistani, the concern seems to be lacking in research.

Zoom in on Punjab, province with Pakistan's over 70 percent cotton output, and one finds peculiar trends in cotton growing and yields. Over the five-year period since FY13, area under cotton cultivation has declined in 22 out of 23 cotton growing districts in south and central Punjab.

At 36 percent, the rate of decline has been more pronounced in central Punjab region; however, reduction in acreage has been more visible in southern districts due to the sheer size of the figure; almost 200 hectares.

Now that the reader has been sufficiently scared, one last peculiar nugget: Punjab's most fertile cotton growing areas (by yield in kilos per hectare) were never the largest cotton growing areas to begin with.

While the myth peddled by most analysts and agri-experts suggests that erstwhile cotton belt has been taken over by a sugarcane 'revolution' in recent years, there is little evidence to back this notion.

Take Rajanpur. The district secures top position in the province with an unparalleled cotton yield close to 800 kg per hectares (last 5-year olympic average) and is also the only district where area under cultivation has recorded a decent growth of 26 percent over last five years.

Rajanpur also has the highest yield for sugarcane, which at 93,339 kg per hectares is more than 50 percent higher than national average. Yet Rajanpur features nowhere in the top 10 sugarcane growing districts of the province, lest the country. Nevertheless, in terms of total area and output, Rajanpur remains mostly irrelevant with less than five and ten percent share in the respective provincial pies.

In contrast, Punjab's top cotton producing districts remain in Bahawalpur division (Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar and RY Khan districts), with a respectable but below national average yield of close to 720 kilos per hectare (5-year olympic average).

In contrast, while Bahawalpur division has consistently recorded highest cane yield in the province, it's the central Punjab districts that dominates sugarcane cultivation, with over 56 percent share in cultivation. These include Faisalabad, Sargodha, Jhang and Chiniot regions, which feature no where in high cane yield regions of the province.

The only exception to this story is Rahim Yar Khan, which has a modest share in both sugarcane acreage and yield. However, that exception is mostly a JDW-miracle, which has invested in heavy mechanised and corporate farming due to proximity of group's mills in the region.

With both cotton and sugarcane losing popularity in other southern districts, it remains a mystery as to what exactly is going on in Punjab's districts? Answering these questions would require a closer look at on ground developments by researchers rather than simply being swayed by hysteria.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/03/28/483856/whats-going-on-in-punjabs-fertile-crescent/

WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE FIXED AT RS 1,300 PER MAUND IN PUNJAB

RECOREDER REPORT | MAR 28TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab government has set the wheat support price at Rs 1300 per maund for procurement from farmers. Moreover, receiving of applications for the distribution of gunny bags will start from April 8 to April 15 and the distribution of gunny bags will commence from April 21. This was decided in meeting held here on Wednesday in which wheat procurement policy for the current year was approved.

While chairing the meeting, Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar told the meeting that interest of wheat growers will be protected, especially the rights of small-scale farmers at every cost. “Provision of fixed wheat rate to the farmers will be ensured and the distribution of gunny bags will be transparent. Similarly, all necessary facilities will be provided to the farmers at wheat procurement centers and complaint cells will be established at provincial, divisional, district and tehsil levels,” he added. He disclosed that the provincial ministers, advisors and special assistants will also visit wheat procurement centers and he will also personally monitor the wheat procurement campaign.

On the occasion, Punjab Food Secretary Shaukat Ali briefed the meeting about the salient features of wheat procurement policy. Provincial ministers Makhdoom Hashim Jawan Bakht, Malik Nauman Ahmad Langhrial, Samiullah Chaudhry, concerned secretaries, head of special monitoring unit and high officials attended the meeting.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190328459072/

RS 113 BILLION DUES OF PUNJAB’S SUGARCANE GROWERS PAID: CM

MUHAMMAD SALEEM | MAR 27TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab government has paid a sum of Rs113 billion to the sugarcane growers in the province while remaining dues will also be paid to the farmers soon. The Punjab chief minister Sardar Usman Buzdar in a tweet said: “About 99.7 percent dues of previous years have been paid to the farmers. Sugarcane crop worth Rs133 billion has been procured in the current season in Punjab while Sugar mills mafia ruled Punjab for many decades and sugarcane farmers were not paid their payments for many years.”

Moreover, the CM, while chairing a high-level meeting reviewed steps taken for providing better services to the people as well as ensuring good governance. Addressing the meeting, the CM maintained that setting up of new districts is being reviewed across the province on administrative grounds and in this regard, a special committee has also been constituted under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary.

He vowed that marked improvements in good governance and public service delivery mechanism will be introduced. He said that police and administration should ensure a strong liaison with the people and public representatives for providing better services, ensuring good governance and solution of problems.

He reiterated that improving the public sector hospitals is the top priority of the government and made it clear that a real change will be ensured by making police, healthcare and education sectors better than the best.

"Service delivery will start improving conspicuously with better public dealing. DCs and DPOs are part of my team and I will be standing with the officers serving the people," he added. He said that DC and DPO should be on the same page and non-cooperative attitude will never be tolerated.

He said that Punjab will be transformed as a model province with regard to good governance. He said that he will personally monitor the service delivery standards by visiting the whole of the province without prior information and latest IT system will also be utilized to understand problems of the people and to maintain a direct liaison with them.

Chief Secretary gave a detailed briefing to the CM about different steps taken for improved good governance and public service delivery. He also directed the officers to have better access to the people. He said that DCs, DPOs and departmental heads should regularly hold open-courts in the districts while Commissioners and RPOs will also attend the open-courts of their respective districts.

IG police maintained that a good civil servant always remains neutral and concerted efforts of police and administration yields positive results. Only those societies achieve success where police perform according to law.

Commissioners, RPOs, DCs and DPOs also presented various proposals for bringing improvements in good governance and public service delivery. The Chief Minister assured to implement the feasible proposals.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190327458781/

FOOD AUTHORITY RAIDS MILK SHOPS

By Our Correspondent Published: March 28, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Food Authority Director General Major (retd) Bashir Ahmed on Wednesday raided various shops in a move against the sale of substandard dry milk in the city and found substandard Chinese salt and other commodities being used.

The food authority has sent samples of these items to a laboratory for examination.

The DG said no one would be allowed to sell smuggled substandard dry milk and other illegal commodities, adding that some people indulged in the business of substandard and harmful commodities for their own benefit.

He said stern action would be taken against those found involved in selling these commodities, adding that such people would not only be jailed but their shops would also be sealed.

He encouraged the public as well as the business community to discourage such practices and report them to the authorities.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1938751/1-food-authority-raids-milk-shops/

GOVT BLAMED FOR MASSIVE WASTAGE OF WHEAT IN FLOODS

By APP Published: March 28, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Balochistan Member of Provincial Assembly Sanaullah Baloch has claimed that 900,000 sacks of wheat were wasted in the recent flash floods in the province's Naseerabad division as the commodity had not been purchased by the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Supplies Corporation (PASSCO).

Talking to APP, he said the non-purchase of wheat had also created serious problems in the disposal of the commodity. He said there was a shortage of wheat in Balochistan which depended on Sindh and Punjab to meet its annual requirement of two million tons of the commodity for its population of almost 13 million.

Sanaullah Baloch also disclosed that the provincial food department had set an annual wheat procurement target of 800,000 to 900,000 metric tons.

He lamented that this was not the first time that the essential commodity had been wasted but rather that the criminal practice had tragically been occurring for the last three years in a province where 66 percent of the population was malnourished.

Baloch bemoaned the performance of the provincial food department, saying that the procurement of wheat was the department's responsibility which it had failed to fulfill by its inability to provide the staple food item to the people.

The member of the Balochistan assembly further said that the province had been suffering from drought and the resultant food insecurity for a long time now but, despite the dire situation and the fact that billions of rupees had been spent on the provision of food to the people, the food department had not provided a single sack of wheat to them.

Provincial Minister for Food and Population Welfare Sardar Abdul Rehman, when contacted, stated that the provincial government did not have a single sack of wheat available.

He claimed that the government had already cleared most of its godowns of wheat stocks and intimation letters to that effect had already been sent to the relevant district officials.

Regional PASSCO officer Shoukat Ali Shah, however, rejected Sanaullah Baloch's claim regarding the wastage of the 900,000 sacks of wheat in Balochistan and stated that the commodity had not been wasted but sold to exporters.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1938770/1-govt-blamed-massive-wastage-wheat-floods/

PAKISTAN'S WHEAT PRODUCTION LIKELY TO HIT FIVE-YEAR LOW

By Salman Siddiqui Published: March 28, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan is anticipated to miss the wheat production target of 25.6 million tons in the current crop year as farmers have planted the staple crop over a lower area because of water scarcity amid drop in fertiliser consumption.

The country is likely to produce 24.8 million tons of wheat in the current crop year, which is a five-year low, if farmers manage to take per-acre production to the level of 2,885 kg they achieved in the previous year, according to the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) second quarterly report on the state of economy.

The chances of matching last year's per-acre production are low for the reasons that Sindh, which has the highest per-acre production in the country, has cultivated the crop over a lower area and the farmers reduced the quantity of essential di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser and other nutrients during sowing.

Accordingly, this will be the second successive year in which wheat production in the country is set to be lower than the preceding year. More importantly, the anticipated production is most likely to drop to a five-year low.

The low production is, however, not a threat to food security as the county has a notable carryover stock of wheat following surplus crops in the past two successive years, according to the central bank.

The low wheat production will, however, contribute to a slowdown in the real economic growth in the country. Apart from this, the low harvests of all three major summer crops, including cotton, rice and sugarcane, have already impacted the gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

The SBP said second estimates of major Kharif (summer) crops reinforced the earlier assessment of lower production levels for all the three major crops in FY19 compared to FY18 – cotton harvest will go down by 9.2%, rice 3.9% and sugarcane 15.9%.

"While rice and sugarcane surpassed the targets set in the Annual Plan FY19, the fall from last year's level will weigh heavily on growth of the crop sector," it said.

"After Kharif, when farmers faced water shortage, the situation became more acute in initial months of the Rabi (winter) season. In addition to water scarcity, fertiliser offtake declined and credit flow decelerated during the wheat sowing months."

Area under wheat cultivation is estimated to shrink 2.9%. "Most of this fall in area has been recorded in Sindh, which has the highest average yield among provinces," the central bank said.

Challenges regarding canal water availability persisted in the sowing months of Rabi (winter) season as irrigation flows stood at 16 million acre feet (MAF) in the second quarter of FY19, not only 6.3% lower than the previous year but also lower than the Q2 average over the last five years, it said.

"The decline in fertiliser usage is more pronounced than the reduction in area under wheat cultivation. It is mainly explained by an increase of 16.7% in fertiliser prices. Furthermore, the fall in DAP offtake, the essential imported fertiliser used during sowing, was more pronounced as its price increase (around 30% in Q2) was due to a combination of rise in international prices and rupee depreciation," the report said.

"In the presence of significant carryover stocks, the government had reduced the target for the planted area."

Published in The Express Tribune, March 28th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1938674/2-pakistans-wheat-production-likely-hit-five-year-low/

WHEAT CHALLENGE

Editorial March 27, 2019

WITH the next wheat harvest just a few weeks away, the largest cash crop in several districts of Punjab is facing quite a widespread disease attack. At least a fifth of the crop is estimated by the provincial agriculture department officials to have been infected by yellow rust disease. However, experts say, the disease is unlikely to cause a major dent in the overall yield unless weather conditions enable it to return over the next few days, with daylight temperatures dropping below 20°C. The more-than-usual humid weather accompanied by lower temperatures because of excessive rains in the province has been one of the main reasons for the emergence of yellow rust in the wheat-growing areas. Nevertheless, the disease has affected the crop mostly in areas where farmers used either unapproved wheat seed varieties — primarily to save money and cut the cost of production — or the ones approved only for Sindh's climate conditions. The reuse of the same seed variety for more than two years could also be another factor for the return of the pest infestation. The latter was first spotted in the third week of last month, but the provincial agriculture department's failure to take appropriate measures let it spread to cover 20pc of the total area under wheat cultivation. That was not all. The department also failed to educate the worried growers who had started spraying insecticides directly on the maturing grains to control infestation in a bid to avert crop losses. It is feared that this practice could have rendered the cereal from the disease-affected areas unfit for human consumption.

The attack, however undamaging it may be for the overall crop size, should be taken by the authorities as a warning from nature. Experts have been cautioning successive governments about the potential impact on agriculture of shifting weather patterns owing to climate change in the region. The situation calls for strengthening the agriculture research institutes so that they can carry out a comprehensive study on the changes in weather and their effects on crops, as well as suggest actions that are required to adjust our existing agricultural practices to new conditions. At the same time, the government should also invest in the development of new seed varieties that are strong enough to withstand the impact of changing climate for all major and minor crops, and encourage the use of new technologies to prevent pest infestation and disease attacks and increase yields. These actions will mean nothing unless farmers are also informed and educated on the changes that threaten their livelihoods and the country's food security.

Published in Dawn, March 27th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1472150/wheat-challenge

GOVT ASKED TO PROBE EXPIRED INDIAN MANGO PULP IMPORT

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated March 27, 2019

KARACHI: The Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) has been asked to take notice of illegal import of expired Indian mango pulp, which is highly dangerous for human consumption.

In a letter to the ministry, All Pakistan Fruits and Vegetables Exporters, Im¬¬por¬¬ters and Merchants Asso-ciation (PFVA) Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed stated that some officials in the Import Clearance Depart¬ment of Customs had allowed import of Indian mango pulp from Oman. “And the same is now being supplied to various cities in Punjab via trucks,” he cautioned.

Around 200-250 tonnes of Indian mango pulp packed in blue-coloured drums had expiry dates of Dec 12, 2018 and Jan 2019, he said.

Waheed said the illegal import of Indian product is also a threat to local industry which has invested heavily besides hurting the commodity exports.

He asked the ministry to conduct a thorough investigation as to how expired Indian mango pulp found its way into Pakistan and res¬ponsible must be taken to task.

Published in Dawn, March 27th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1472165/govt-asked-to-probe-expired-indian-mango-pulp-import

UREA PRICES RISE

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated March 27, 2019

LAHORE: In contrast to government's plans of providing relief to farmers, urea fertiliser prices have gone upwards thrice during the first eight months due to factors like gas price increase, withdrawal of subsidy, change in dollar-rupee parity, inflation and other related costs.

According to manufacturers, the price of urea was Rs1,790 per bag in June 2016. In the 2016-17 budget, the government, with support from local fertiliser industry, reduced urea price by Rs390 and capped it at Rs1,400 per bag. The downward adjustment in price was made through reduction in General Sales Tax by Rs184, Rs156 subsidy, and voluntary contribution of Rs50 by the industry.

However, in 2017-18 budget, the government reduced its subsidy contribution from Rs156 to Rs100 per bag, forcing the local industry to bear the additional burden of Rs56 per bag. In total, the industry's contribution stood at Rs106 per bag.

The subsidy was totally withdrawn in 2018-19 budget and the GST was adjusted from 5 per cent to 2pc, which translated into net negative impact of Rs61 per bag on urea pricing.

Industry sources said the government also increased the gas prices with effect from September 2018, which raised cost of production by Rs129 per bag and the total 'negative' impact of subsidy withdrawal, downward adjustment of GST, increase in gas price and industry contribution added up to Rs296 per bag.

They claim that the cost of production also went up as the industry was made to install compressors worth billions of rupees to maintain gas pressure, depleting at well heads.

Published in Dawn, March 27th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1472160/urea-prices-rise

PAKISTANI FISHERMAN BEATEN TO DEATH IN INDIAN JAIL

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated March 27, 2019

KARACHI: A Pakistani octogenarian fisherman languishing in an Indian jail and hailing from 100 Quarters in Ali Akbar Shah Goth of Korangi was beaten to death by the jail staff of the Indian prison, according to reports reaching here from India on Tuesday.

The Fishermen Cooperative Society (FCS), said the fisherman named Noor-ul-Amin succumbed to his injuries inflicted on him by the Indian jail staff.

The fisherman was arrested at sea by the Indian coastguard on September 30, 2017 during a fishing trip along with six other fishermen when their trawler drifted to the Indian side by mistake.

He had been languishing in the Indian jail for the past one-and-a-half years.

Leaving behind a widow and three children, the fisherman, according to the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), was an elderly person hailing from the Rohingya community settled here.

“We were approached by the FCS to let his family know about his sad demise,” said Kamal Shah, a spokesman for the PFF.

“Three different names were given to us as his father’s name and it took us a while to locate his family,” he said.

“We got word that Noor-ul-Amin, son of Amin Chowdhry, had died in an Indian jail. Then his father’s name was given as Ameer Hamza. Finally, they said that his father was named Mufajal Ahmed, which helped us locate his family,” the PFF spokesman said.

Sharing his shock and grief with the media over the passing of the elderly Pakistani fisherman, FCS chairman Abdul Berr said that while in Pakistani jails the Indian fishermen, who mistakenly entered Pakistani waters, were treated well and extended all kinds of facilities, the Pakistani fishermen caught in India were treated very badly.

“It is extremely shameful and sad that Pakistani fishermen are ill treated in Indian jails, which is a grave violation of human rights,” he said.

He raised concern over the poor Pakistani fishermen languishing in Indian jails for years without being given proper medical facilities.

Published in Dawn, March 27th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1472049/pakistani-fisherman-beaten-to-death-in-indian-jail

MINISTER JOINS DRIVE AGAINST BANNED FISHING NETS

By Our Staff Reporter | 3/27/2019 12:00:00 AM

KARACHI: The Sindh government on Tuesday said it would seek assistance from the Pakistan Coastguards and Maritime Security Agency to ensure that prohibited nets were not used in nshing in its waters, a minister said.

`We are going to seek help from the PCG and the MSA to ensure that prohibited nets such as bulo, gujo and katra, which have been banned, are not used during fishing,` said Abdul Bari Pitafi, Sindh minister for livestock and fisheries, after visiting the Korangi Fish Harbour Authority.

He said an operation against use of such nets was already ongoing, which would be further intensified through certain effective measures to ensure that such nets that irreparably harmed marine life in the waters of Sindh remained effectively banned for good.

`Our effort to get support of the PCG and the MSA is part of the same effort,` said Minister Pitafi.

He expressed his displeasure over continued use of such nets despite a ban put in place years ago and action against the violators was also being taken.

`These types of nets are designed to kill various fish species and they have harmed marine life a great deal,` said the minister.

He appealed to the fishing community that they should not use those killer nets only to reap petty profits.

Mr Pitafi said during the operation licences of boats and permits for fishing were being checked.

`Only those who abide by the law of the land would be allowed to fish, he remarked.

He asked the officials of the fisheries ministry to intensify their efforts to discourage those who were violating the law blatantly.

The minister later also joined the teams of his ministry and oversaw the initial part of the operation in which a number of boats were checked and those that were using or carrying the prohibited nets were fined in addition to the seizure of the banned stuff.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=27_03_2019_116_002

BONDED PEASANT FAMILIES SET FREE

The Newspaper's Correspondent March 27, 2019

MIRPURKHAS: The district and sessions court of Mirpurkhas on Tuesday set free 21 men, women and children rescued in a raid on a specified place in the Saeen Phatak area of Naokot town a day earlier.

The court had ordered the raid on an application filed by a peasant, Gomo Kolhi, stating that several families including his own had been held in bonded labour on the farms owned by an agriculturist, Bhagwandas.

Before setting them free, the court recorded statements of the heads of the families.

Published in Dawn, March 27th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1472034/bonded-peasant-families-set-free

COTTON FUTURES HIT 2019 HIGH

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 27TH, 2019 | NEW YORK

ICE cotton futures hit their highest level in 2019 on Tuesday due to unfavourable weather conditions in West Texas, the biggest cotton-growing region in the United States, amid hopes of progress in US-China trade talks. The front-month cotton contract on ICE Futures US, settled up 0.16 cent, or 0.21 percent, at 77.89 cents per lb. after hitting the highest price for the year, at 77.98 cents, earlier in the session.

It traded within a range of 77.42 and 77.98 cents per lb. "It has been less than favorable weather for getting planting under the way, including in West Texas where it has been cold and wet. This seems to be supporting the market," said Jack Scoville, vice president at Price Futures Group in Chicago.

Prices broke through the key 100-day moving average last week. Speculators who trade on technical signals regard a break above the 100-day moving average as a bullish sign. Investors were watching for the latest round of China-US trade negotiations, scheduled for Thursday in Beijing, after US President Donald Trump said on Friday the negotiations were progressing and a final agreement seemed probable.

Total futures market volume fell by 8,616 to 24,990 lots. Data showed total open interest fell 258 to 224,778 contracts in the previous session. Certificated cotton stocks deliverable as of March 25 totalled 50,547 480-lb bales, unchanged from 50,547 in the previous session.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190327458698/

SINDH GOVT URGED TO OPEN WHEAT PROCUREMENT CENTRES, RAISE TARGET

By Our Staff Correspondent | 3/25/2019 12:00:00 AM

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) has urged the Sindh government to immediately open wheat procurement centres and revise the procurement target because of expected bumper crop of five million tonnes this year.

SAI president Nawab Zubair Talpur told a news conference at the local press club on Sunday that Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Pakistan Agriculture and Storage Corporation (Pasco) should revise the procurement target.

He urged the Sindh government to open procurement centres to benefit poor growers. He warned that if the government did nothing to cope with theaggravating water shortage, growers would stage a big protest outside the ofhce of the Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (Sida) managing director this week.

He said growers of Naudero had been staging sit-in for the last 20 days in protest against Naudero Sugar Mill`s failure to clear their dues but their protest had not borne anyfruitsofar.

SAI general secretary Mohammad Anwer Kamboh said that wheat crop was almost ready for sale in Sindh as 90 per cent harvest had been completed in lower region of the province and the crop was ready for harvest in the upper region but the government had not opened even a single procurement centre so far.

The centres should have been setup in the first week of March, he said.

`Sindh may produce a bumper wheat crop of five million tonnes this season but it seems the Sindh government is reluctant to set up procurement centres in order to benefit brokers and middlemen instead of growers,` he said.

He said that growers were incurring huge losses by selling wheat for Rs1,100 per 40kg and demanded the government open procurement centres immediately to minimise losses.

He said the Sindh government had been retaining the wheat support price at Rs1,300 per 40kg for the past six years. Pasco must raise wheat target set for this year from 35.7 million tonnes throughout the country, he said.

Mr Kamboh said that Pascowould procure around two million tonnes of wheat from Sindh, while it should get more because of the bumper crop this year and the 800,000 tonnes carry-over stock ofthelastyear.

He said that Sindh government bought 1.4 million tonnes last year and now it must procure two million tonnes. Sindh already owed Rs90 billion to the State Bank and the World Bank which it had obtained to procure wheat last year but was unable to pay back the debt,he said.

He criticised the Sindh government for its failure to issue notification for sugar cane price and demanded the government should fix the cane price at Rs182 per 40kg immediately in compliance with clear-cut directives of the Sindh High Court.would procure around two million tonnes of wheat from Sindh, while it should get more because of the bumper crop this year and the 800,000 tonnes carry-over stock ofthelastyear.

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He criticised the Sindh government for its failure to issue notification for sugar cane price and demanded the government should fix the cane price at Rs182 per 40kg immediately in compliance with clear-cut directives of the Sindh High Court.He said that cane growers had already suf fered billions of rupees losses in this year`s crushing season, which had deliberately been delayed to benefit one particular business group. The SHC directed Sindh chief minister on March 5 to issue the notification till March 20, otherwise he would be issued a contempt notice, he said.

He said that Sindh irrigation department had already informed growers about 40 per cent water shortage in the province during this Rabi season but the province faceda44percentshortage.Badin and many other districts of lower Sindh were the worst hit, he said.

SAI finance secretary Mohammad Javed Riar, Naudero grower Syed Ghulam Qadir Shah and others were also present at the news conference.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=25_03_2019_115_009

WHEAT UNDER YELLOW RUST ATTACK

Amjad Mahmood Updated March 25, 2019

Wheat, cultivated on around 8.7 million hectares in 2017-18, remains the largest crop sown. However, the crop is currently under attack by the Yellow Rust disease in Punjab.

This year not only was the cash crop sown on time but the weather also remained favourable for most part of the season.

Unusual rain spells at reasonable intervals kept the temperature on the lower side as well as helped overcome water shortages normally faced during the Rabi season because of low river inflows. All these factors facilitated the maturing of the grain.

The use of insecticides has led to a debate among those who favour the use of agriculture poison and its opponents

However, the rare weather conditions — higher humidity with low temperatures — witnessed after decades has also created an atmosphere conducive for pest infestation. The Yellow Rust disease has been reported from almost all wheat growing districts.

First spotted in the third week of February, the disease had affected 20 per cent of the crop within a month, reveals the Punjab Pest Control directorate's latest (March 19) field survey.

Punjab's Director General Pest Warning and Quality Control of Pesticides Dr Zafar Yab Haider said most of the crop varieties affected were either unapproved, or approved for sowing in Sindh rather than Punjab.

He continued that new wheat varieties like FD-8 and Johar remained safe from the fungus attack, and hoped that the disease would not drastically impact the overall yield since the grain has been able to fully develop in time for sowing. It only needs high temperatures to harden.

Commenting on the use of old seeds, Dr Javed Ahmad, director wheat research institute at Ayub Agriculture Research Institute, stressed that wheat growers should sow a new seed variety after a couple of years. This is important as repeated sowing allows the Yellow Rust to overcome the plant's resistance to the disease.

He pointed out that as weather conditions remained unfavourable for pest infestation during the last two decades or so, farmers continued to reuse old wheat varieties (like FD-2000, Sehar, Punjab-2011 and Galaxy) contrary to the advice of agriculture experts.

Dr Ahmad opined that the loss in yield because of Yellow Rust will remain insignificant as long as the disease did not affect Flag Leaves — the leaves responsible for preparing food for the plant during the last four weeks of its lifespan.

At this stage in the crop's development the situation can only deteriorate if the daylight temperature drops more than 20 degrees Celsius for a week or so.

Nervous at the outbreak of the Yellow Rust, farmers in some areas have resorted to spraying fungicides to protect their crop from the disease. Pakistan Kisan Ittehad President Khalid Mahmood Khokhar said he had gotten his crop, in Khanewal district, sprayed as well soon after spotting the disease.

The use of insecticides has led to a debate among those who favour the use of agriculture poison and its opponents.

Experts recommend the use of fungicides at least on the patches where the disease is found. They say any of the three fungicides — Nativo, Tilt and Electis Super — is equally useful for controlling the disease.

But Dr Ahmad warned against the use of pesticides, keeping in view the fact that wheat in the country is used in its raw form and residual effects of the agriculture poison may affect human health. It will also add to the already high costs of wheat production: "Our wheat crop meets all international quality standards but because of its higher production costs we are failing to export the commodity."

He advised wheat growers to avoid further irrigating their fields and applying fertilisers as it will aggravate the situation by adding to the humidity. The present soil humidity is sufficient for the crop to mature.

Strong winds after a light rain last Wednesday in some central Punjab districts have flattened the crop which may lead to a 50pc fall in yield.

On the other hand, to the anxiety of the farming community, the government has neither framed its wheat procurement policy nor fixed the procurement target yet even though harvest time is just three weeks away.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, March 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1471613/wheat-under-yellow-rust-attack

FERTILIZER PRICES TESTING FARMERS' ECONOMY

BR Research March 25, 2019

Urea off-take refuses to break the shackles. The nitrogenous fertilizer off-take during February 2019 at 0.38 million tons, registered a 5 percent year-on-year increase. This takes the cumulative 2MCY19 urea off-take increase also to 5 percent year-on-year. Heartening numbers that at least there is positive growth, some would say. Only when reminded that the fertilizer off-take in the past six years has averaged a cumulative growth of zero percent.

The Rabi season is about to be over by the end of this month, and the numbers reflect five out of six Rabi months. The Rabi urea off-take growth is virtually zero, as the dip in urea off-take was earlier expected to be covered in the dying months of Rabi. But that has not been the case, despite continuation of subsidy on urea.

The urea price during the Rabi season thus far has averaged 27 percent higher than the previous Rabi season. The international prices have cooled down considerably from previous months, averaging almost similar to previous Rabi season. The bigger dent seems to have been caused by the sharp currency adjustment, disturbing the import parity, sending the local prices up. The 27 percent season over season increase in urea pries is the highest ever in recallable memory.

To get things in context – farmers have so far spent 28 percent more money than last year on exactly similar amount of urea as last year. The Rs93 billion spent on urea with Rabi just one month away from ending, is comfortably higher than the previous 4-year average of Rs78 billion.

The impact of considerably higher spending need on urea has fallen directly on the use of phosphate fertilizer, as the DAP off-take has come down by 12.4 percent year-on-year, versus the previous Rabi season till February. The total DAP spending at Rs78 billion is 13 percent higher year-on-year, but well within the 5-year average Rabi spend of Rs78 billion. The resultant urea: DAP application ratio at 2.4 is the highest in four years – having improved to as low as 1.7 two years ago. Farmers have time and again shown that when the going gets tough – the axe falls on DAP.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/03/25/482886/fertilizer-prices-testing-farmers-economy/

WEEKLY COTTON REVIEW: PRICES OF COTTON REMAIN STABLE

NASEEM USMAN | MAR 25TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The prices of cotton remained stable. The trading volume decreased in the local market due to the delivery of imported cotton to the big textile and spinning groups. The sowing of cotton started in lower Sindh. The concerned departments were active regarding increasing the production of cotton. Pakistani Cotton and Ginners Association were active for the recovery of billions of rupees of ginners blocked by millers.

In the local cotton market prices of cotton remained stable. Although the trading volume remained low due to the cautious buying of textile and spinning mills, ginners demanded higher prices of good quality cotton due to which millers are buying the commodity according to their needs. The delivery of imported cotton of many spinning and textile mills has started which is the reason of low trading volume.

Many ginners are facing problems due to low trading volumes. At present, traders are doing their business on borrowing while the ginners are waiting for the increase in the prices. Overall the trading volume is low. The new season will start in three to four months. Ginners have the stock of 1.05 million bales out of which only half are of good quality.

The prices of cotton in both Sindh and Punjab remained Rs 7000 to Rs 9000 per maund while the price of Seed cotton (Kapas/Phutti) is from Rs 3000 to Rs 3600 per 40Kgs in both Sindh and Punjab. Cotton in Balochistan is available at the rate of Rs 7800 to 8100 per maund while the ginning factories were almost closed in Balochistan.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rate committee decreased the spot rate by Rs 100 to Rs 8600 per maund. Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum said that a mixed trend was seen in the international market. According to experts, the US-China trade conflict has a negative impact on the world business. China is importing cotton from India due to this conflict. Due to import of cotton by China from India the prices of cotton remained stable in India which the prices of this commodity show an upward trend in the USA.

Moreover, due to the rains there is a delay in harvesting of wheat while according to the information received from Interior Sindh the sowing of cotton has partially started while the partial sowing season in Punjab is expected to begin next month.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has shown his resolve of increasing the production of cotton by 15 million bales due to which the relevant departments have started their efforts. Punjab Agriculture minister Malik Noman Ahmad Langrial while speaking at Agriculture House last Wednesday expressed his optimism about cotton output. In his statement Noman said that relevant departments should utilize all their resources to increase the cultivation land of cotton in order to increase the cotton production. He said that the federal government should announce the support price of cotton as early as possible and cotton should be bought through Trading Corporation of Pakistan so that the cotton farmers should get reasonable amount of their crop.

Advisor to Prime Minister on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood said that China will import rice, sugar and cotton yarn from Pakistan of worth 1 billion dollars under Pakistan China Free Trade Agreement. The export of rice from Pakistan has already started. The Cotton Yarn Exporters said that China is importing yarn of 10, 16 and 21 count from Pakistan. It is hoped that China will import more cotton from Pakistan under PCFTA.

Earlier, Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association chairman Mian Mahmood Ahmad said that millers are not paying the outstanding amount to ginners; due to which ginners-millers relationship came under severe strains.

The PCGA has asked ginners to send the list of millers so that association should contact the millers. Mahmood said that ginners have sent the claim of Rs 700 million to the association. More ginners are in contact. It is expected that outstanding amount may increase. Some ginners and millers are in contact and talks are underway between them so they don't approach the PCGA.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190325458327/

PRICES OF FOOD ITEMS CONTINUE TO RISE

AMJAD ALI SHAH | MAR 25TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

The prices of the essential kitchen items especially vegetables, pulses, live chicken/chicken meat, flour and sugar witnessed continuous upward trend in the retail market. A survey carried out by Business Recorder in local market on Sunday showed that prices of most of the essential kitchen items including tomatoes, onions, ginger, garlic, lemon, live chicken/chicken meat, cauliflower, cabbage and wheat flour registered increase as compared to last week.

The survey witnessed Rs2 per kilogramme increase in price of live chicken/meat. Last week live chicken was available at Rs166 per kg, which this week is being sold at Rs168 per kg. Farm eggs are being sold at Rs100 per dozen which was selling at Rs110 and Rs120 last week.

Butchers are openly defying the official price of beef in local market. The survey showed that cow meat is being sold Rs400 per kilogramme against the official rate of Rs300 per kilogramme in local market. Mutton is available at Rs800 per kilogramme.

The prices of vegetable 'sky-rocketed' in retail market, the survey noticed. Apple, round gourds are being sold at Rs80 per kilogramme against the price of Rs50 per kilogramme in local market. Capsicum is available at Rs100 and Rs120 per kilogramme against the price of Rs80 per kg, while Arvi priced at Rs80 per kilogramme and peas are being sold at Rs80 and Rs100 per kilogramme.

However, a slight decrease in the price of tomatoes is being witnessed as it is available at Rs60 and Rs70 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs100 per kilogramme last week, while the price of onion is still on the high-side as being sold at Rs40 and Rs50 per kilogramme in open market.

Similarly, price of green chili also fell in retail market as available at Rs250 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs350 per kilogramme last week. Lemon is being sold at Rs100 per kilogramme. Chinese garlic is being sold at Rs120 and Rs150 per kilogramme while locally produced garlic available at Rs80 per kilogramme. Cucumber is being sold at Rs50 per kilogramme.

The survey further noticed that ladyfinger is being sold at Rs80 and Rs100 per kilogramme, cauliflower priced at Rs50 per kilogramme, cabbage at Rs40 per kilogramme. Potatoes are being sold at Rs20 per kilogramme, turnip at Rs25 per kilogramme.

Carrots are available at Rs50 and Rs60 per kilogramme. A bundle of radish is being sold at Rs20 and Rs30. Bitter ground (Karela) is being sold at Rs80 and Rs100 per kilogramme, the survey showed.

The retailers in different parts of the provincial metropolis Peshawar were charging different prices for the same items, it has been witnessed in the survey. For instance, good quality rice (sela) is being sold at Rs150 per kilogramme, while the same quality rice available at Rs140 per kilogramme in local market. Toota rice is being sold at Rs70 and Rs80 per kilogramme.

The survey noticed that big size white channa is available at Rs140 per kilogramme, while some shopkeepers are selling the same quality white channa at Rs120 per kilogramme. Similarly, there is visible difference in prices of dal mash as some vendors charging Rs120 per kilogramme, while other Rs140 per kilogramme in local market.

It further witnessed that Dal masoor is being sold at Rs90 per kilogramme while some shopkeepers are charging Rs110 per kilogramme. Likewise, dal channa is being sold at Rs120 per kg while some charging Rs140 per kilogramme for the same item. Dal chilka (green) is being sold at Rs130 per kilogramme, while dal chilka (black) is available at Rs140-150 per kilogramme in retail market.

A visible variation in prices of white lobiya was noticed as some shopkeepers are charging Rs120 per kilogramme while other selling at Rs100 per kilogramme. Dhoti dal priced at Rs 110 per kilogramme and Rs120 per kilogramme. Moonge is being sold at Rs100 per kilogramme, while others are selling them at Rs110 and Rs120 per kilogramme.

Gram flour (baisen) is being sold at Rs120 and Rs130 per kilogramme. Sugar is being sold at Rs60 and Rs65 per kilogramme. According to the survey, prices of cooking/ghee remained unchanged in retail market as they were available within range of Rs150, Rs180 and Rs200 per kilogramme/litre.

Fruits are being sold at high rates in the provincial capital Peshawar. Apples are being sold at Rs120 and Rs150 per kilogramme. Pomegranate is being sold at Rs100 per kilogramme, orange at Rs80 per dozen, kinnow at Rs60 per kilogramme. Guava is being sold at Rs100 per kilogramme in local market.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190325458339/

PARTHENIUM – THE SILENT KILLER OF PAKISTAN'S AGRICULTURAL YIELD

By DR ABID MAHMOOD / MUHAMMAD ASHIQ

Published: March 25, 2019

FAISALABAD: Invasive species are threatening biological diversity and globally pose a huge threat to economic activities, such as agriculture, development and tourism.

More than half of the world's food comes from three crops – wheat, maize and rice. According to the Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International (CABI), it is estimated that these crops alone suffer yield losses of 16% due to invasive weeds, costing approximately $96 billion annually.

Research has revealed that there are about 480,000 invasive species in different ecosystems across the world. Each year, the damage caused by invasive species costs in excess of $1.4 trillion worldwide, representing almost 5% of the global economy.

Unfortunately, the geographic spread and impact of invasive species is growing rapidly due to climate change, tourism and trade. Africa has recently suffered the menace of one particularly damaging invasive species – the Fall Armyworm, which attacks maize and other crops.

With over 200 million people in Africa relying on maize as their staple crop, the high yield losses recorded have had a clear impact on food security.

A recent CABI evidence note stated that this year Ghana reported 26.6% and Zambia 35% yield losses. The recent arrival of Fall Armyworm in India and its predicted rapid spread across parts of Asia poses a risk to yields here too. Right now, in Pakistan we are being affected by an invasive species called Parthenium – a weed commonly known as 'Gajar Booti' and now recognised as a major threat with impact on human health, biodiversity, agriculture, livestock and food security.

Parthenium is native to South and Central America, but over decades it has spread to over 40 countries – including Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Australia, South Africa, Swaziland and Ethiopia. It has achieved major weed status in all these countries.

Parthenium is almost 1-2-metre tall, branched plant emerging as a threat weed having potential to deter the germination of native flora and ability to displace existing weeds. It causes skin rashes, watery eyes, swelling, itching of membranes of mouth and nose, constant coughing, especially at night and respiratory problems have also been reported.

It was an important weed in Lahore, Sialkot and northern Punjab in the previous decade, but now it has invaded most of the canal-irrigated districts in the command areas of Ravi and Chenab rivers. Northeastern districts are more prone to this menace. However, with the exceptions of a few, the command areas of Jhelum and Indus rivers are still mainly free of this weed.

In recent years, it has spread all over Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) with variable degree of infestation in sugarcane, cotton, gardens, vegetables and other crops, especially of spring and summer.

However, somewhat surprisingly, the general public remains oblivious to its dangers. Nestled within its small white flowers, the Parthenium plant can look quite beautiful, especially in flower bouquets and decorations (a practice that is contributing to its countrywide seed dispersal).

Parthenium is an extremely prolific seed producer as it has the capacity to produce up to 25,000 seeds per plant in isolated cases. Moreover, given suitable moisture levels, seeds can germinate at any time of the year and can remain viable for a long time, surviving even under very harsh environmental conditions. Pakistan's climate is suitable for Parthenium throughout the year – making the weed prolific.

Parthenium manipulates the ecology of fields, affects the yield of crops and invades forests through its aggressive nature and gigantic allelopathic potential. Allelopathic plants release chemical compounds from their roots into the soil, which suppress or even kill surrounding plants.

In addition, Parthenium is highly allergenic; its pollen can cause asthma, eye irritation, throat infections and eczema. In livestock, it causes mouth ulcers in animals that consume the weed, which can result in deteriorating milk quality and tainting of meat.

Invasive species disproportionately affect vulnerable communities in rural areas, especially in developing countries, which mainly depend on a healthy ecosystem, natural resources, agriculture, tourism and trade. For a country like Pakistan, with 60% of the economy dependent on agriculture, this issue is incredibly serious and requires serious action.

Presently, Parthenium is not only affecting crop fields and reducing yields, it is also invading green belts within towns and cities and outcompeting native fauna. However, for now at least, the problem is still within the bounds of control.

Organisations like CABI have been active in working with Pakistan's agriculture departments, reaching out to both rural and urban communities by organising workshops for farmers and conducting awareness campaigns. These activities provide information about the identification and management of Parthenium as well as knowledge on the dangers of this weed.

The aim is to change the perception of Parthenium and control the weed. Additionally, CABI has been researching options for the biological control of Parthenium using its natural enemies, without the need for herbicides.

The research is currently looking at a beetle, Zygogramma bicolorata, which feeds on the leaves of Parthenium as well as a range of other species. The beetle is already being used to control Parthenium in Australia, South Africa, Ethiopia and Tanzania and studies have revealed that Zygogramma is already present in northern Punjab, K-P and Kashmir.

Researchers from the University of Manchester have also collaborated with CABI using space technology to tackle Parthenium with remote sensing in Pakistan.

By monitoring Parthenium in crops using satellite imaging, the project aims to quantify the spread on a large scale, particularly in remote areas, in order to create evidence-based control strategies. The project works with local stakeholders including Comsats University, the National University of Sciences and Technology, Ayub Agricultural Research Institute, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, PMAS Arid Agriculture University, Institute of Space Technology and agriculture extension and regional crop departments of Punjab and K-P.

Bringing together key decision-makers from various sectors, creates a more universal approach, increasing the likelihood of controlling other invasive species in future.

Researchers fear that Parthenium could have a similarly devastating impact in Pakistan as that of the Fall Armyworm in Africa and stress that government bodies must take appropriate initiatives to control this weed.

Instant initiatives must be taken to educate farmers and the general public on the methods of controlling Parthenium. With support from the government, CABI's programme can facilitate better and sustainable management of invasive species, ultimately helping Pakistan prosper.

Tackling invasive species like Parthenium is critical for achieving widespread economic prosperity and combating poverty, therefore, governments must commit to reducing the economic impact of invasive species.

Abid Mahmood is the Director General Agriculture (Research), Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI), Faisalabad whereas Muhammad Ashiq is the Assistant Agronomist, Plant Physiology Section, Agronomic Research Institute, AARI

Published in The Express Tribune, March 25th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1936615/2-parthenium-silent-killer-pakistans-agricultural-yield/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 18th TO MARCH 24th 2019

ESL DEVELOPS TWO RICE HYBRIDS FOR RESISTING BLB, LB DISEASES

ZAHID BAIG | MAR 24TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Emkay Seed Limited (ESL) has developed two rice hybrids having resistance against Bacterial Leaf Blight (BLB) and Leaf Blast (LB), which are the main damaging factors in the rice production.

“We are this year all set to launch multi-location testing of hybrids with BLB resistant parental material. Initially, we have planned to sow these seeds at three sites in Punjab and two sites in Sindh. In Punjab, we will be re-evaluating these seeds at Sheikhupura and Gujranwala and at one other place while in Sindh it will be tested in Larkana districts,” said ESL CEO Sajjad Malik while talking to Business Recorder here on Saturday.

The company was conducting research to develop hybrids having resistance against diseases and development of a hybrid of ‘Super Basmati’ at its Farooqabad research centre since May 2001. Both the varieties are ready to hit the market after re-evaluation through different tests to help rice farmers fight against these diseases and get maximum per acre yield adding to more surplus production for export or domestic usage.

The company has developed 20 medium grain CMS lines, four Basmati Lines including the famous ‘Super Basmati’ having excellent eating and cooking quality have been converted into CMS lines, about 400 Restorer and Maintainer Lines. Moreover, two basmati hybrids have also been developed with yield potential of around 8 tons per hectare.

Dr Mohammad Bashir Cheema, head of the research programme, started the research programme in collaboration with Chinese counterpart but continued to develop parental lines and hybrids after Chinese left in 2005. The new hybrids developed are the result of indigenous result carried out by the Pakistani scientists, said Sajjad Malik.

Sajjad Malik and Dr Cheema in a recent visit of selected journalists to their Farooqabad Farm while talking to journalists said that a very big achievement at this research farm was the establishment of ‘Shuttle Breeding Programme’ at the research site for increasing the pace of development of rice hybrids and parental lines within the country. “This was the first rice shuttle breeding programme in Pakistan’s plant breeding history and since then two generations of breeding material are being produced each year as opposed to normal breeding programmes wherein only a single generation is produced annually. Till date Emkay Agricultural Research Center is the only organisation in the country which has the expertise of this rice shuttle breeding either in the private or public sector,” Dr Cheema proudly added.

The research programme of Emkay, also, is unique in the manner that the foreign companies working in Pakistan with local partners do not provide with the complete three-line system of hybrid rice. So, a disturbing fact is that whenever the foreign companies want, they can effectively stop their Pakistani partners from hybrid rice seed production, Sajjad Malik concluded.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190324458182/

REAP DELEGATION OFF TO SAUDI ARABIA FOR RICE PROMOTION

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 24TH, 2019 | KARACHI

A 17-member delegation of Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) left for Saudi Arabia for promotion of Pakistani rice in the Kingdom. REAP senior vice chairman Ali Hussam Asghar is leading the delegation that will hold a number of events and business-to-business meetings (B2B) with rice importers during the 5-day visit to increase the share of Pakistani rice in that country.

Saudi Arabia was one of the leading importing country of Pakistani rice; however, during the last few years, Pakistan's share in the Kingdom's rice market has drastically declined. Therefore, REAP has sent the delegation for promotion of Pakistani rice, which is much better than Indian rice.

The delegation will visit several cities of Saudi Arabia, including Dammam, Riyadh and Jeddah. A mega Biryani festival will be arranged in Jeddah where top rice importers have been invited to attend and taste some 15 different varieties of Biryani like Mutton Sindhi Biryani, Fish Bombay Biryani, Chicken Biryani, White Biryani, etc.

REAP chairman Safder Hussain Mehkri informed that Pakistan's rice share in Saudi market declined to 20 percent and now REAP want to increase share up to 80 percent. The higher rice export will also help earn more foreign exchange for the country, which is facing a balance of payment crisis and need massive foreign inflows, he said, adding that currently, Pakistan's rice export are about $2 billion annually and REAP is closely working with the federal and provincial governments to increase rice exports to $5 billion by 2023.

He said REAP has focused Research and Development (R&D) to get a better crop yield and as a part of these efforts, REAP organised a Rice Conference in Larkana, one of the major rice cultivation area, to discuss the issues being faced by farmers. Proposal and recommendation of this conference has already been sent to federal government for implementation, he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190324458185/

CBOT WHEAT FUTURES END FIRMER

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 24TH, 2019 | CHICAGO

Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) wheat futures traded lower most of the day on Thursday but closed firmer, lifted by technical buying and late-session short-covering, traders said. Futures were buoyed by spillover support from higher corn, which rose on worries about flood-delayed spring planting. CBOT May soft red winter wheat settled up 1-3/4 cents at $4.66-1/2 per bushel. The contract held chart support at its 20-day moving average.

K.C. May hard red winter wheat ended up 3 cents at $4.47 a bushel, while MGEX May spring wheat shed 1/4 cent to close at $5.71-1/4. Commodity funds hold a sizable net short position in CBOT wheat futures, leaving the market vulnerable to bouts of short-covering.

Heavy snow and the anticipation of floods in the northern Plains spring wheat belt, particularly in top producer North Dakota, have raised the risk of delays in planting the 2019 crop. Seeding normally begins in April.

The US Agriculture Department reported weekly wheat export sales of 437,300 tonnes, in line with forecasts that ranged from 300,000 to 675,000 tonnes.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190324458239/

FARMERS TO BRAVE 5-10PC WATER SHORTAGE IN SUMMER CROPS

Munawar Hasan March 24, 2019

LAHORE: Farmers are likely to brave five to 10 percent water shortage against average uses in upcoming summer crops despite an estimated 15 million acre feet (MAF) of surplus river water escaping Kotri barrage into the sea, an official assessment revealed.

Water deficiency's phenomenon and excessive flows will be observed in the kharif crop season 2019, starting from April 1, according to preliminary assessment of river water availability. The shortage will be due to lack of ample water storage at the main rivers.

Early months of summer crops may face shortage of water due to negligible carryover supplies and late snow melting in the mountains. There is, however, a strong indication of high flows in the rivers, potentially leading to catastrophic floods in the remaining part of the season, which ends as of September 30.

Agriculture sector will be inflicted with losses in either of the scenarios. Low water availability entails low production of crops whereas floods tend to damage standing crops in addition to bring about human and property losses.

Outflow of staggering 15 MAF water from Indus river system in a season means a lot, especially if this is compared with the total water storage capacity of two existing major reservoirs.

An official said the water holding volume of Mangla and Tarbela dams stands at around 13 MAF. "We should be able to expand water storage capacity by another six to seven million acres feet to impound at least half of the escaping volume of water," the official added. "In such a scenario where water storage capacity develops to 20 MAF, menace of water shortage could effectively become a thing of the past."

Nevertheless, relatively better water supplies on greater snowfall in catchment area may help in yielding good production of kharif cash crops, including cotton, rice and sugarcane. Last year, summer crops witnessed severe paucity of canal water, particularly during early months of the season.

Indus River System Authority (Irsa) revised up water shortage estimates for early kharif period to 42 percent from an earlier anticipated level of 31 percent. An Irsa Advisory Committee Emergency meeting was informed that water inflow remained 15 percent below than anticipation.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said water shortage adversely affected outputs of key kharif crops last year. Dismal performance of kharif crops was mainly due to less water availability during the July-September quarter last year, the SBP said in a report. Main crops of the season, cotton and rice, remained less productive on the back of shrinking area under cultivation. Cotton, rice, sugarcane and maize show subdued performance mainly because of considerable decline in the area under cultivation especially in Sindh.

The central bank warned that the situation would become more dangerous in the years to come due to persistent water shortages. It suggested construction of reservoirs and adaptation of water conservation measures, including imposition of higher prices of irrigation water for more consuming crops, especially, sugarcane.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/447776-farmers-to-brave-5-10pc-water-shortage-in-summer-crops

COTTON FUTURES EASE ON PROFIT-TAKING AFTER WEATHER-DRIVEN RALLY

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 23RD, 2019 | NEW YORK

ICE cotton futures slipped on Friday as investors booked profits from the previous session's rally to three-month highs, which helped prices mark their fifth straight weekly gain.

The front-month cotton contract on ICE Futures US, settled down 0.6 cent, or 0.8 percent, at 76.58 cents per lb.

"This is what normally happens with short-covering rallies, especially when specs are short," said Louis Rose, director of research and analytics at Tennessee-based Rose Commodity Group.

"May open interest has been falling like a rock as prices have moved higher, which signal that they are not being replaced by new longs." However, the contract notched a weekly gain of 1.4 percent, its fifth consecutive weekly gain, having jumped more than 2 percent in the previous session on concerns of crop damage due to adverse weather in the US Midwest.

On the technical front, resistance lay around the 82 cents level, while 72 cents offered support, said Jon Marcus, president of the Lakefront Futures and Options brokerage firm in Chicago, adding prices could climb further from current levels going forward. Market participants are continuing to keep a close eye on developments on the trade front, with a fresh round of trade talks between the United States and China scheduled next week.

Total futures market volume fell by 10,304 to 32,984 lots. Data showed total open interest fell 154 to 223,307 contracts in the previous session.

Certificated cotton stocks deliverable as of March 21 totalled 59,070 480-lb bales, down from 106,796 in the previous session.

Meanwhile, speculators trimmed their net short positions in cotton by 10,210 contracts to 11,769 contracts in the week to March 19, US Commodity Futures Trading Commission data showed.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190323458018/

ADVISORY FOR FARMERS

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 23RD, 2019 | KARACHI

The Met Office has asked the farmers to make plans to protect standing crops and nurseries from cold weather impacts, saying the irrigation plans should be in place as dry weather is expected in the next 10 days.

It said that the growers should schedule their irrigation plans for the Rabi crop during the next 10 days keeping in view the dry weather spell. It also asked them to remove weeds from their standing crops to help attain a maximum yield.

It warned that weeds cost a considerable yield loss to the farmers annually, saying that measures should be taken to preserve crops and nurseries from damaging impacts of the extreme cold weather.

In the next 10 days: mainly a cold and dry weather is expected in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir with an isolated rain-thunderstorm in Kohat, Bannu and D I Khan Division, besides parts of Kashmir on Saturday. The isolated falls may also hit Quetta, Zhob, Kalat and Makran Divisions. In the next 24 hours: widely a dry weather is expected in the most parts of the country with an isolated light rain-thunderstorm and gusty winds in Quetta, Zhob, Kalat, Bannu, D. I. Khan, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sargodha and D. G. Khan Divisions and Kashmir. “Continental air is prevailing over most parts of the country. However, a shallow westerly wave is affecting north-eastern parts of Balochistan & its adjoining areas and may persist during next 24 to 48 hours,” it said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190323457939/

PAKISTAN GETS $1BN CHINESE MARKET ACCESS FOR RICE, SUGAR, YARN

Mubarak Zeb Khan Updated March 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Chinese government has finally offered Pakistan market access for three commodities — rice, sugar and yarn — worth $1 billion for the current calendar year, an official in the Commerce Division confirmed to Dawn on Thursday.

The official said rice shipments to China have already begun as part of the deal which was agreed during Prime Minister Imran Khan’s four-day visit to Beijing and Shanghai in the first week of November last year.

Under the agreement, exporters have been allowed to ship 200,000 tonnes of rice and 300,000 tonnes of sugar — total value of $300 million — to China in the ongoing calendar year.

Moreover, the agreement also includes preferential market access for around $700m worth of yarn but it seems highly unlikely that Pakistan will have adequate surplus quantity of yarn to export to China as cotton production remains lacklustre.

The Chinese authorities were unwilling to increase the total quantity of these items despite multiple requests, the official added.

Another Commerce Division official said exporters will only have nine months to avail the facility as it will expire by Dec 31, adding that the government is working to get access for wheat and other agriculture commodities as well.

Moreover, this agreement will also be extended to calendar 2020. Pakistan's exports to China are expected to reach $2.2bn in the ongoing calendar year and $3.2bn in the next.

The official also said that a major breakthrough is expected in the stalled negotiations between Beijing and Islamabad on the second phase of Pak-China Free Trade Agreement (PCFTA) and the outcome will be announced on April 2.

He said a delegation led by the secretary commerce will leave for China later this month.

Sharing the progress made in PCFTA negotiations, he informed that Islamabad will get market access for 301 tariff lines, which will cover most of its exports and allow export of commodities which are currently negligible.

The PCFTA covers nearly 7,000 tariff lines at the eight-digit level of the HS code. Both sides reduced tariffs on almost 36 per cent of the tariff lines to zero during first three years of PCFTA's Phase-1.

Moreover, second phase was supposed to commence from the sixth year of the agreement ie 2013, but was delayed as officials from both countries failed to reach an agreement despite meeting for more than 11 times.

As per the initial agreement, at the end of PCFTA's second phase, both sides were to reduce tariffs on 90pc of the tariff lines to zero.

The negotiations on the Phase-II of PCFTA began in 2011.

Published in Dawn, March 22nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1471165/pakistan-gets-1bn-chinese-market-access-for-rice-sugar-yarn

PAKISTAN'S AGRI-COMMITTEE TO SET CROP TARGETS IN MID-APRIL

By APP Published: March 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) is set to meet on April 17 to review the production of Rabi crops and set targets for the Kharif 2020 season, revealed Deputy Food Security Commissioner Dr Wasimul Hassan.

Talking to APP on Thursday, he shared that the purpose of the meeting was to meet domestic food requirements and achieve export targets.

During the meeting, provincial ministers and other prominent stakeholders will apprise participants of the arrangements made to ensure smooth availability of all agricultural inputs including water, certified seeds and fertiliser.

"Representatives of the State Bank of Pakistan, Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited and private-sector banks will brief the committee on credit allocation and disbursement during the sowing season," Hassan revealed. "On the other hand, the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) will discuss water situation for irrigation purposes."

He added that officials of the Pakistan Meteorological Department would present weather forecast and propose measures to reap maximum benefit by sowing crops at an appropriate time. In addition to that, the Seed Certification and Registration Department will provide data of seed stock during the period.

The FCA will set the cotton sowing target as the government is determined to produce 15 million bales to meet domestic requirements as well as make exports.

“To achieve the desired production target, the federal government is taking concrete steps in close coordination with provincial governments to enhance the cultivated area for raising output,” said Ministry of National Food Security and Research Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 22nd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1934457/2-pakistans-agri-committee-set-crop-targets-mid-april/

BMP CHIEF URGES MALAYSIA TO ENHANCE RICE EXPORT QUOTA

N H ZUBERI | MAR 21ST, 2019 | KARACHI

Chairman of Businessmen Panel (BMP), Mian Anjum Nisar has urged the Malaysian government to enhance the quota of Pakistani rice export to Malaysia, at competitive prices, adding that Malaysia has also imposed 5 to 7% duties on import of mango and kinnows, which need to be reviewed.

He said Pakistan is a big supplier of IRRI and basmati rice and the Malaysian requirement is of 1,000,000 M Tons annually for domestic consumption. The share of Pakistan is not more than 200,000 Tons.

He said that throughout the six decades, Malaysia and Pakistan enjoyed very close and fraternal relations as both shared many commonalities and hoped that visit of Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Muhammad to Islamabad on march 21st will give a new trade push to Pakistan in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Nisar said although Pakistan and Malaysia have signed FTA but not much momentum in trade has been witnessed which also requires special attention and efforts from both sides.

He emphasized on regular exchange of trade delegations and participation in trade promotional activities in both countries to boost the economic relations between both countries, regardless Malaysia-Pakistan Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (MPCEPA) also signed on 8 November 2007 in Kuala Lumpur which entered into force on 1 January 2008, Malaysia and Pakistan recognised the importance of regular discussions to strengthen the trade relationship in key sectors and addressing bilateral trade imbalance which needs to be taken up as Pakistani businesses eagerly need Malaysian market and ASEAN region to diversify its exports, particularly in horticulture, sports surgical and textile sectors.

BMP Secretary General and Former President FPCCI, Senator Ghulam Ali said Malaysia and Pakistan had enjoyed warm and friendly relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1957.

Both the countries shared a similar position on regional and international issues through their membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Organisation for Islamic Conference (OIC) and G77. In addition to these, Pakistan is also a dialogue partner of the ASEAN and a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

The exchange of trade delegations is direly needed to boost the bilateral trade ties and volumes, he said and added that on the visit of Malaysian PM, we are looking forward to sign a MOU between the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia (NCCIM) and Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) in order to strengthen business to business interactions which further helps to remove the government obstacles time to time.

The BMP officials also viewed the future Pakistan will need to manage its economy in a completely different way.

"Today, Pakistan's growth story is one of boom and bust. A few years of strong growth are always followed by crisis. We are in the middle of such a crisis.

To avoid such crises in the future, both the state's revenue collection and its private sector must be strengthened. Efforts to broaden the tax net and bolster tax administration will permanently increase tax revenues without continuing to increase the burden on those already paying taxes. The country's private sector needs to be made more competitive through an improved business environment, increased openness to trade and investment, and reforms in the energy sector."

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190321457155/

PUNJAB WILL SURPASS WHEAT PRODUCTION TARGET: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 21ST, 2019 | LAHORE

Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Noman Ahmad Langrial has expressed the hope that the province will surpass wheat production target this year keeping in view the favorable weather conditions and overall health of the crop. Speaking at a meeting held at the Agriculture House here on Wednesday, the Minister said that overall crop situation is satisfactory and farmers need not to worry about it.

He also spoke to the agriculture officers of all the wheat sowing areas on video link. He stressed the need for taking steps to protect the wheat crop affected by rust in some areas. He said that rust attack had been witnessed because of heavy rains in some areas but its severity is low.

The meeting was informed that rust attack was not more than 10 percent anywhere in the crop area. The Minister said that growers need not to worry about this situation as rust attack would diminish with increase in temperature. He also directed the departmental officers to utilize all resources for bringing maximum area of land under cotton sowing and to push its production upward. He said that the federal government will announce cotton's support price and also thinking to buy it through Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) to stabilize the prices. The meeting was attended by the provincial agriculture secretary Wasif Khursheed, DG Agriculture (Extension and Adaptive Research) Dr. Anjum Ali and other high ups.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190321457174/

GWADAR FISHERMEN REFUSE TO END PROTEST

By Mohammad Zafar Published: March 22, 2019

QUETTA : The fishermen of Gwadar, who resumed their protests earlier this week, have refused to give more time to authorities for resolving their issue of redesigning of Eastbay Expressway in Gwadar, on Wednesday.

Commissioner Makran Division Captain (Retd) Tariq Zehri visited the fishermen at their protest camp for negotiations with leaders of the Fishermen Alliance Committee and asked them to give a month's time to the government for resolving the issue.

Zehri said Prime Minister Imran Khan has taken notice of their protest and demands. He has also directed the authorities concerned to resolve their issue. The commissioner asked the fishermen to call off their protest for a month during which steps would be taken to find solution to the problem.

However, the alliance chief said they cannot give more time to the government and would not call off their strike until acceptance of their demands.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1933862/1-gwadar-fishermen-refuse-end-protest/

GOVT PLANS TO PROCURE WHEAT WORTH RS100 BILLION

By Our Correspondent Published: March 21, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar has sought report pertaining to the credibility of field officers for appointing more than 800 field staffs on 382 market places of the Punjab Food Department to buy wheat worth Rs100 billion in the next month.

All 36 districts of Punjab have been divided into three categories. Reviewing the past performance and seniority, district food controllers will be deployed in these districts. Punjab chief minister lifted a ban imposed on the appointment and transfer in the food department for a specific period and in the next 72 hours and appointments and transfers on a bigger level are expected.

The Punjab Food Department established 384 market places in the province last year but this time, 382 market places will be set up. Two market centres, which were set up by the influence of an assembly member in Sahiwal in PML-N regime, are being removed. In Multan 48 market centres, 44 in DG Khan, 40 in Faisalabad, 70 in Bahawalpur Division, 43 in Sahiwal Division, 43 in Gujranwala Division, 36 in Sargodha Division and 42 market places in Lahore Division have been set up.

There is a lack of staff for deployment in market centres of South Punjab especially in Bahawalpur Division and DG Khan. The chief minister has sought immediate reports from special police branch and the Intelligence Bureau regarding the honesty of around 800 assistant food controllers (AFCs), food supervisors and food inspectors for deployment on these centres.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1933890/1-govt-plans-procure-wheat-worth-rs100-billion/

ADVICE TO WHEAT GROWERS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter March 20, 2019

LAHORE: A spokesman for the agriculture department has urged growers to approach extension staff in their respective areas for advice to control Yellow Rust disease that has attacked wheat crop because of recent rainy spells in the province.

The growers have been advised to make arrangements for draining rainwater from the fields and spray the affected plants with the poison recommended by agriculture experts.

The spokesman says, in a press release, that extension and pest warning staff have been directed to check wheat fields in their respective areas for protecting the crop from yellow rust and other diseases.

Published in Dawn, March 20th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1470765/advice-to-wheat-growers

CLEARANCE OF FOOD SHIPMENTS ORDERED

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated March 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Commerce on Tuesday announced that the shipments of food products in the pipeline will be cleared without the requirements of labelling in Urdu.

This order came in the wake of demands from many importers who were facing problems in getting their shipments cleared after issuance of SRO237 on Feb 19 making it mandatory for food products to have halal certification and labelling in Urdu.

The ministry said under paragraph 4 of the Import Policy Order (IPO) 2016 "…an amending order/SRO will not operate against the imports where bill of lading or letter of credit is issued before the issuance of such an order/SRO."

In view of this, the ministry directed the Customs authorities to facilitate the clearance of shipments which qualify under the existing import policy order.

However, all imports will be subject to new regulations as prescribed under the SRO237, it added.

Published in Dawn, March 20th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1470738/clearance-of-food-shipments-ordered

ATTA CHAKKI OWNERS SEEK WHEAT AT EXPORT RATE

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent March 20, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Atta Chakki Owners Association has urged the federal government to release wheat to chakkis (flour mills) at the rate it was being exported under approval of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC).

The association made the demand on Tuesday in a letter addressed to the prime minister, federal finance minister, provincial and federal food ministers, provincial chief ministers, governors, chief secretary and the finance secretary of Sindh.

In the letter written for the second time, it has been stated that due to "flawed" policies of past federal and provincial governments, consumers bought expensive wheat which only benefited a few thousand families.

The letter said that when 100kg bag of wheat was being sold between Rs2,000 and Rs2,200 in the international market, the government purchased wheat for Rs3,250 from their “favourite” landowners without providing them gunny bags and added that the government bore additional expenses of transport and labour.

It said the same wheat was then sold to consumers for Rs3,315 in the country in general and Sindh in particular.

On the contrary, millions of tonnes of wheat was sold to different countries in 2018 and this point vindicates association’s claim.

The letter said the national exchequer had to bear losses and then the ECC approved export of 500,000 tonnes each of wheat from Punjab and Sindh.

Association president Mohammad Hafeez Khanzada said this year a bumper wheat crop was expected in Sindh and despite the passage of half of March, wheat procurement centres were not opened.

He said this caused unrest among small- and medium-sized growers.

He said that currently 100kg of wheat was being sold between Rs2,900 and Rs2,950 in the open market, therefore, considering this price, the government should establish wheat procurement centres to procure the crop.

Procurement would help consumers, he said, fearing that the government might be planning to purchase wheat from its favourite landowners at the rate of Rs3,250 by delaying establishment of wheat procurement centres.

Published in Dawn, March 20th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1470640/atta-chakki-owners-seek-wheat-at-export-rate

COUNTRY TO HAVE BUMPER WHEAT CROP THIS YEAR: CAP CHIEF

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 20TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Cereal Association of Pakistan (CAP) has said that exports of wheat products are allowed freely without any restrictions through sea route. Muzzammil R Chappal, chairman CAP, has said that Pakistan will have a bumper wheat crop this year and Prime Minister Imran Khan has already confirmed this last month. Therefore, exports of wheat and wheat products will continue to offload carryover commodity stocks.

He informed that wheat harvesting has already begun across the country and initial estimates expecting an increase of 5-10 mounds per acre in wheat yields in Sindh supported by timely winter rains and beneficial weather.

As per ministry of commerce export policy order currently in force, export of wheat and wheat flour is allowed and already being exported without any subsidy and/or freight rebate from the government.

He informed that during the month of February 2019 alone, 53,128 metric tons wheat and 53,727 metric tons wheat flour was exported from the government and private/open market stocks. These volumes are expected to grow substantially in the next few months, he added.

In order to facilitate and encourage the private sector to play its role in enhancing exports without any undue burden on the national exchequer in the shape of subsidies or freight rebate, exports of wheat and wheat products are allowed freely without any restrictions through sea route from Karachi port and Port Qasim.

Chappal said that with International Monetary Fund (IMF) settlement and devaluation imminent and a bumper wheat crop, commercial exports of surplus wheat and wheat products will continue to become more viable and private sector wish to play its role to achieve the highest exports target end of this year.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190320456890/

COTTON PRODUCTION FALLS 7PC

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana Updated March 19, 2019

KARACHI: The overall cotton production fell 6.84 per cent to 10.762 million bales as of March 15 from 11.5m in the corresponding period last year, according to latest figures released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) on Monday.

Slow phutti arrivals is a strong indicator that the crop is unlikely to exceed the 10.8m-bale-mark when the season ends in April.

The fortnightly figures for March 1-15 showed that only 21,263 bales were produced as against 27,671 in the same period last season recording a shortfall of 6,408 bales.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has directed concerned government departments to ensure higher production at 15m bales but so far, no incentives have been announced to encourage cultivation.

Moreover, the government has failed to notify indicative price for phutti and fix quota for procurement by Trading Corporation of Pakistan.

Punjab's production, the country's largest producer, has declined to 6.613m bales down 9.39pc during the same period last year when total production stood at 7.298m. Sindh, on the other hand, produced 4.149 million bales down 2.45pc from the same period last year. Balochistan has produced 117,852 bales.

The textile spinning industry purchased 9.641m bales as against 10.954m in the corresponding period last season. Similarly, exporters booked 102,330 bales compared to 216,615 bales last season.

The ginners are still holding substantial quantity of unsold cotton at 1.019m bales compared to 597,847 held in the corresponding period last season. Currently, 24 ginning units are operating in Punjab and only one is operating in Sindh.

Published in Dawn, March 19th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1470531/cotton-production-falls-7pc

FBR REFORMS, AGRICULTURE SECTOR TOP CABINET AGENDA

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | MAR 19TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The federal cabinet, which is scheduled to meet on Tuesday (today) with Prime Minister Imran Khan in the chair, will discuss reforms in Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and progress on National Agriculture Emergency Plan.

Besides political and regional issues, the cabinet will consider the following agenda: (i) approval of charter licence -class-II (domestic) of M/s Aircraft Sales & Service (Pvt) for a further period of one year; (ii) renewal of charter licence class-II (domestic and international) of M/s Pakistan Aviators & Aviation(Pvt) Limited for a further period of one year with effective from January 1, 2019; (iii) renewal of the aerial work licence class-II (domestic and international) of VIP flights Government of Balochistan for further period of one year with effective from January 1, 2019; (iv) renewal of the aerial work licence class-II (domestic and international) of M/s Aga Khan Foundation for a further period of one year with effective from January 1, 2019; (v) renewal of the aerial work licence class-II (domestic and international) of VIP flight Government of Sindh for a further period of one year with effect from January 1 ,2019; (vi) re-issuance of regular public transport airline licence of M/s Afeef Zara Airways Limited; (vii) selection process of Chief Executives in key head public sector enterprises; (viii) abolishment of budgetary allocations under the head “entertainment and gifts”; (ix) appointment of Director General Debt (MP-1 scale), Debt Policy Coordination Office (DPCO) Finance Division; (x) nomination/ replacement of Directors on the Board of PBICL, POICL and SPIACCO; (xi) addition/ alteration in composition of the Federal Commission, constituted by the federal cabinet for review of the master plan of Islamabad; (xii) adoption of UNSCEs’s (WP-29) Regulations; (xiii) restructuring of National Information Technology Board; (xiv) roadmap for introduction of E-governance in federal government; (xiv) repatriation of Gul Rehman, an officer of Pakistan Customs Service (PCS) presently posted as member technical (BS-21) in the Customs Appellate Tribunal, Quetta; (xv) shifting of Accountability Court Rawalpindi to Islamabad as Accountability Court-III Islamabad; (xvi) provision of information about three properties; (xvii) task force on technology-driven knowledge economy – inclusion of additional member; (xviii) constitution of task force on Evacuee Trust Board; (xix) on waiver on surcharge; (xx) reappointment of two members of the Governing Council of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in terms of section 7 of the General Statistics (re-organisation) Act, 2011; (xxi) reconstitution of the Board of Directors of Karachi Garment City Company (KGCC), Karachi, and; (xxii) develop a comprehensive communication strategy to highlight Clean and Green Initiative of the government.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190319456543/

SEAFOOD EXPORT CONTINUES TO DWINDLE

ANWAR KHAN | MAR 19TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Pakistan’s seafood export continues to dwindle ‘due to the federal government’s deep sea fishing policy’ that widely caused the main trading fisheries to scale down over the past eight months of the current fiscal year.

Talking to Business Recorder on Monday, the fisheries stakeholders termed the deep sea fishing policy that "the last federal government had evolved" but put in place by the incumbent government made the ailing fisheries sector suffer more from the restrictions on the hunt in the country's seas.

The policy is thought to have rather scaled back the country seafood export by over 6 percent or $16.226 million to $247.991 million in July-Feb 2018-19, which stands lower from $264.217 million in July-Feb 2017-18, according to the fishermen. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics says: Pakistan exported less seafood by 2 percent or 1890 metric tons to 111,640 metric tons in July-Feb 2018-19 from 113,530 metric tons in July-Feb 20171-8.

"The deep sea fishing policy was too sudden for the fishermen to get acclimatized to it, which has widely proven counterproductive damaging the country's fisheries export by over 6 percent," President Sindh Trawlers Owners and Fishermen Association (Stofa), Habibullah Khan Niazi told Business Recorder, saying that "the country's fishermen suffered more from the policy over the past four months than anything else." He asked the federal authorities to revisit the policy at once to help the country earn maximum out of the business.

In Feb 2019, Pakistan managed to export $30.737 million of seafood to the world markets, which is lower by over 11 percent or $3.826 million from $34.563 million exported in Feb 2018. In term of quantity, the seafood export slumped by 9 percent or 1506 metric tons to 15,449 metric tons in Feb 2019 from 16,955 metric tons in Feb 2019. "The policy that bans the ordinary fishermen from going beyond 12 nautical miles into deep sea for fishing in fact reduced the catch in the last four months," Habibullah said.

As a result, he said, the country suffered a sudden fall in the seafood export, while the fishermen and fisheries stakeholders went into a dormant phase with no businesses at hand. "Fishermen actually suffered big unemployment over the ban period, which now on the court order has been suspended till a policy is reframed in consultations with the stakeholders," the Stofa President said, adding that a meeting between the parliamentary committee and fisheries stakeholders is going to take place on Mar 22, 2019 to end the impasse emerged from the policy.

Export to China suffered more that was a main revenue chunk from the country's exchequer, as the entire squid family fisheries are found beyond the red-marked belt of 12 nautical miles, where unlicensed fisheries is banned by the policy. Now, fishing in the deep sea belt has begun with help of the court, hoping catch of the key export fisheries will grow from the past, he said, adding that "the government should also placed a permanent ban on shrimp hunts in creeks" to help improve the country's fisheries export as well. Creeks are considered the main hatcheries for reproduction of shrimp, he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190319456628/

INDH TO HELP FARMERS 'WORM' THEIR WAY INTO ORGANIC GOODS MARKET

By Abdul Razzaq Abro Published: March 19, 2019

KARACHI: With organic food and products all the rage the world over, the Sindh government has decided to help local farmers 'worm' their way into that market.

The Sindh agriculture department is taking steps to introduce vermicomposting – the use of worms to convert organic waste into fertiliser – as a more sustainable and eco-friendly alternative to the existing practice of using chemical fertilisers to grow crops.

Fertiliser obtained using vermicomposting processes is believed to help enrich soil, increase crop yields and suppress plant disease. The Sindh agriculture department hopes the move will not only create greater business opportunities for small-scale farmers but will also benefit consumers by providing agricultural products free of chemical fertilisers.

Flagged under the Sindh Benazir Hari Programme, the new project will not only reduce the impact of chemical fertilisers on agricultural products but will also control the amount of chemical fertilisers seeping into underground water.

The project will also offer abundant quantities of herbal products to consumers, including aloe vera paste, grape vinegar, bottle-gourd juice, and bitter gourd juice, to name a few.

Talking to The Express Tribune, Director General Agriculture Extension Sindh Hidayatullah Chhajro, said that the Sindh Agriculture Department will launch the programme soon, adding that Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has also been briefed about the project.

Initially, the project will be initiated in two districts of Sindh before expanding to other districts of the province.

The government has allocated Rs500 million to the project, which will run for two years and will mainly serve two purposes. First, it will help promote agriculture-based household factories in rural Sindh, and secondly, it will offer pure agricultural products to consumers dwelling in urban areas. That apart, the project will create more job opportunities in Sindh.

Under the project, the Sindh government will also build solar-powered cold storage where farmers will be able to preserve fresh fruits and vegetables.

In addition to that, the government will also ensure the provision of machinery required by farmers for the preparation of agricultural products.

Similarly, marketing and advertising campaigns will also be launched to promote the products.

The Sindh Agriculture Department will also organise weekly markets on a district level to help farmers sell their products.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 19th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1932310/1-sindh-help-farmers-worm-way-organic-goods-market/

STEPS TO PROMOTE AGRICULTURE UNDER WAY: GOVERNOR

3/18/2019 12:00:00 AM

LAHORE: Punjab Governor Chaudhry Sarwar has said that the government is taking steps to promote agriculture in Punjab and added that all relief and needed subsidies be provided to the farmers.

`Without making farmer prosperous, no country can prosper,` he said.

Speaking at an agriculture conference here on Sunday, the governor said the federal and Punjab governments were taking steps to introduce latest technology in agriculture field to make the country prosper.

He said the government was also introducing publicprivate partnership in agriculture field. `The Punjab government is taking measures to provide cheap and advanced seeds to farmers by bearing the burden ofcost,` he said and warned that crackdown be launched against substandard replicated seeds. Referring to the Christchurch terrorism, the governor said the notion had again been reinforced that terrorism had nothing to do with any religion. `We all have to stand united against terrorism.

Mr Sarwar said Pakistan had once again exposed Indian aggression before the world by shooting down Indian drone.

He said the Pakistan`s armed forces had made tremendous sacrifices against terrorism. `The whole nation salutes and pays tribute to martyrs,` he said and added that Pakistan had always condemned terrorism and tried to play its role in uprooting terrorism across the world.-Staff Reporter

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=18_03_2019_002_007

PRICES OF VEGETABLES, PULSES CONTINUE TO SOAR

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated March 18, 2019

KARACHI: Barring potato, prices of various vegetables witnessed substantial jump followed by crawling up of some pulses and sugar rates.

The most notable increase was recorded in green chillies to Rs140 per kg in wholesale market from Rs12-15 a kilo. As a result, retailers are charging Rs240-320 per kg. Many retailers are avoiding giving free green chillies to the consumers with the purchase of various vegetables.

The price of turrai (ridge gourd) and tinda (apple gourd) soared to Rs120 per kg from Rs80 and Rs50-60 per kg while gobi (cauliflower) rate went up to Rs60-80 from Rs40-50 per kg. Lokki (bottle gourd) sells at Rs80 per kg which was earlier Rs60 per kg. Peas are now being sold at Rs70-80 per kg as compared to Rs40-50 per kg.

Tomato prices have been under pressure for the last one month, hovering between Rs 120 and 140 per kg. Good quality onion is now tagged at Rs40 per kg versus Rs30 per kg.

No more free green chillies with vegetable purchases

Abundant supplies of potato from Punjab’s cold storage resulted in a major drop in price to Rs20 per kg from Rs30 per kg while some pushcart owners are offering five to six kilos of potato at Rs100.

Gajjar (carrot) price went up to Rs40 per kg from Rs30 per kg, while baigan (brinjal) rate climbed to Rs50-60 per kg from Rs40 per kg.

President of the Falahi Anjuman Wholesale Vegetable Market Superhighway Haji Shahjehan said the recent flooding and rains in Balochistan had slowed down the arrival of vegetables to Karachi.

He said tomato rates had never gone up in February and March but this year the trend had changed, taking its wholesale price to Rs90-100 per kg.

Shahjehan said tomato growers in Sindh had faced serious problems after using fake and substandard seed provided by various companies and their dealers to the red fruit growers. As a result, the crop could not ripe fully.

Onion's wholesale rate jumped to Rs25 per kg from Rs15 per kg following end of Sindh crop and delay in arrival of Balochistan crop.

Potato's wholesale price now hovers at Rs8 to Rs10 per kg owing to bumper crop this year.

In pulses, the wholesale price of mung and maash has risen by Rs25-30 per kg and Rs15 per kg. The new wholesale price of mung hovers between Rs 135 and 140 against Rs110 a few days back while the maash rate is now tagged at Rs110-115 as compared to Rs100 per kg.

After persistent rise in sugar's wholesale rates for the last two month, the sweetener now costs Rs58 per kg as compared to Rs56 two weeks back while in January it was available at Rs54 per kg.

A wholesaler attributed price hike in maash to a slight rise in world price coupled with the rupee devaluation against the dollar, making imports costlier.

In mung, some big market players of Punjab are piling stocks as the new crop would arrive in the next two months. These traders are not releasing the stocks resulting in a shortage at Karachi's wholesale market, he said.

However, the wholesale rates of gram pulse and masoor had been intact at Rs100-105 per kg and Rs76-82 per kg.

At the retail side, consumers are paying Rs140-160 per kg for mung, up by Rs20 per kg. The retail price of maash ranges between Rs 130-140, showing a jump of Rs10-15 per kg.

Gram pulse sells at Rs115-140 per kg depending on the quality while masoor is available at Rs 100-120 per kg. Sugar price hovers between Rs60-65 per kg at retail markets.

Patron in Chief of the Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association (KWGA) Anis Majeed proposed that imported pulses could be transformed into an export sector by value addition on which the adviser to prime minister on trade, textile, industry, production and investment, Abdul Razak Dawood, had agreed to the association's proposal.

He said Pakistan consumes 1.4-1.5 million tonnes of pulses annually while local production stands at about 500,000-600,000 tonnes while 700,000 tonnes are imported from Canada, Australia, the USA, Russia, Ukraine, Myanmar and African countries to meet the local demand.

From these imported pulses, after meeting our local demand, we can value add on them and export to nearby markets. It would open a new export sector for Pakistan besides helping in earning foreign exchange, Mr Majeed said.

Published in Dawn, March 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1470286/prices-of-vegetables-pulses-continue-to-soar

GROWERS NEED SUPPORT PRICE TO SWITCH BACK TO COTTON

Amjad Mahmood Updated March 18, 2019

Following a year-on-year decline in the acreage and output of the cotton crop, the government is taking immediate measures to arrest the trend and enhance the production of the silver lint.

The cash crop is witnessing a gradual decline in production since 2005 due to a fall in the acreage, water shortage, poor-quality seed and spurious pesticides.

Last year, its output remained 11 million bales against the target of 12.6m bales. But in the ongoing season, the harvest will hardly be 10.5m bales as per the estimates of analysts. Pakistan is the fourth largest cotton producer in the world. Its cotton industry saw its “magic years” in the early 1990s when the crop output exceeded 20m bales.

The cotton plantation area has shrunk in the last couple of decades as sugar mills were set up in the cotton zone of south Punjab and Sindh. The absence of a support price has also pushed cotton farmers towards wheat and sugar cane for which the government announces support prices every year to ensure a fair return to growers.

Farmers prefer growing sugar cane and wheat only because these crops enjoy support prices, which ensure that they recover at least their cost of production

For a return to the golden era, Prime Minister Imran Khan at a recent meeting sought plans for achieving the production target of 15m bales in the 2019-20 season. Punjab has forwarded to the federal authorities a 20-point activity plan with responsibilities assigned to each relevant department/agency for funding and other necessary action, according to an official who was part the planning process.

The plan fixes the sowing target of 5.7m acres for harvesting 11m bales of cotton in the province. It also suggests the zoning of the province’s cotton belt for specific seed varieties and sowing window (period) purposes.

To obtain the required crop yield, it recommends that both the federal and Punjab governments ensure the provision of quality certified seeds at Rs4,000 per 40-kilogram bag or Rs100 per kg to cotton growers. At 8kg per acre, the province will need 45,600 tonnes of seeds for the 5.7m acre sowing target. The provincial government has already approved a subsidy of Rs700 per acre, but it is for only 100,000 acres of land in south Punjab under a World Bank-funded project.

The plan also demands a pilot project of Rs3,000-per-acre subsidy for at least four cotton-producing districts — Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Vehari — as an incentive for cultivators who are inclined towards cash crops, particularly sugar cane.

For reducing the cost of production, it seeks the launch of an integrated pest management (IPM) programme, which will include seed treatment, use of PB ropes to control pink bollworm and botanical plant extracts.

Besides recommending a ban on the cultivation of the maize crop in Bahawalpur and DG Khan divisions, it makes an important but controversial recommendation: diverting upper Punjab's water to the cotton belt, particularly during the sowing season from March 15 to May 31.

Some stakeholders argue that farmers keep two factors in mind before sowing a crop: which crop will bring them a reasonable livelihood and which one is easier to cultivate. They prefer growing sugar cane and wheat only because these crops enjoy the minimum support price and guarantee the farmers that they will at least recover their cost of production.

Cotton Research and Development Board Chairman Suhail Mehmood Harral said the government should extend cotton-specific incentives instead of relying on general proposals for the whole agriculture sector to increase the area under cotton crop.

The most important step, he says, is the announcement of a support price for cotton just like wheat and sugar cane crops. "What cotton grower needs is the restoration of his confidence that has been shattered because of an uncertain price regime in which he sometimes fails to recover even his cost of production. His confidence will be restored only through offering him a support price of at least Rs4,000 per 40kg for his produce," he says.

A few weeks ago, the federal minister of food security and research hinted at introducing a support price of Rs3,500 per 40kg phutti (raw cotton) to encourage cotton growers.

Mr Harral, who is also a former chief of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA), urged the government to come up with a package that includes a support price as well as the provision of affordable and good quality pesticides and fertilisers. Offering subsidised seeds won't work wonders that the government is looking aiming for, he adds.

Some experts underscore the importance of improving crop management for enhancing output. "Better crop management contributes 80pc in achieving higher cotton production," says Dr Zahid Mahmood, a researcher.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, March 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1470191/growers-need-support-price-to-switch-back-to-cotton

AGRI-FINANCE: ARE BANKS MISSING OUT ON A BIG OPPORTUNITY?

Younus Sandeela Updated March 18, 2019

Informal credit and the ease with which it is available are the biggest menace prevalent in the agricultural sector since it has kept farmers hostage to money lenders from pre-partition era. Referred to as aarti in domestic lingo, the phenomenon of borrowing for the middleman is common not just in the subcontinent but in many third world countries.

Subsequent to partition and migration of Hindu money lenders, informal credit in the agriculture sector is now almost fully dominated by aartis, the basis of which is usually personal relations. Normally, no interest is charged, no documents are signed (except for aarti unilaterally noting it down in a register maintained by him) and no collateral is required. Most importantly, no questions are asked regarding the purpose of the borrowed amount or the schedule for release of funds to match with crop production stages.

The only condition imposed on the borrower is that he has to bring his produce for auctioning at the lender's shop and pay commission on the value fetched. Failure to fulfill this condition makes the borrower liable to pay interest in proportion to the shortfall in the quantity the farmer was supposed to auction. In an event of complete crop failure, farmer is usually extended credit again to enable him to grow the next crop and repay the combined outstanding loan amount. However, in this case farmer pays interest on the unpaid loan.

The borrowing cost of informal credit significantly surpasses the interest charged by commercial banks

On the face of it this interest free, uncollateralised and undocumented informal running finance facility should have been a blessing for poor farmers. However, unlimited greed has turned these financial messiahs into blood sucking moneylenders. Being perpetual borrowers, poor farmers are never in a position to question their financiers about the fairness or transparency with which their produce is auctioned. It is very common for aartis to manipulate the auction process to disadvantage the farmer who is almost never present when the auction is taking place.

Similarly, aartis have a free hand with respect to weighing the shipment normally sent by farmers on shared cargo vehicle. Any quantity can be declared substandard and categorised as wastage. The cost of borrowing paid by farmers in the form of losses incurred due to these unfair practices, plus the commission paid, significantly surpasses the interest charged by commercial banks.

The main reason that farmers are unable to borrow from commercial banks is the cultural practice of keeping family assets in joint names. In many areas it is considered improper to transfer inherited property, particularly the agricultural land, into the names of individual heirs' even years after the original owner has passed away. Sometimes the property is not only in the name of siblings but also first cousins. Therefore, it is not the unavailability of collateral but the manner in which its title and possession is held that limits farmers' ability to offer agricultural land as collateral against commercial borrowing.

Secondly, farmers are highly uncomfortable dealing with banks. Bankers appear to be people different in terms of dressing, language, and environment, offering products that farmers do not fully understand. The invariably lengthy documentation process necessary to avail bank borrowing further scares away farmers as they often lack the ability to read papers that they are required to sign.

Religion also plays a huge role. One of the major reasons why farmers do not opt for formal financing is the interest factor. Many farmers do not want to pay interest and willingly prefer to be fleeced by aartis.

Lastly, the unstable and unpredictable wholesale market hugely limits farmers ability to predict revenues and hence their capacity to repay the loans. The crop insurance products that are currently available, and are made mandatory for farmers to avail if they opt for bank credit, are quite ineffective. Their protection is limited as a claim is only entertained when a farmer's entire land has been declared calamity hit by the relevant government authorities.

Banks are also reluctant to increase exposure into this highly lucrative but semi documented market. Farmers are prone to high default rates due to volatile wholesale markets that limit farmers' ability to have consistent revenue streams.

Another problem faced by banks is their limited ability to understand the farming sector. Officers dealing with agri credit are mostly business graduates who lack in-depth understanding of agriculture. It's a pity that agriculture economics or agriculture marketing is not part of any major MBA program offered by numerous business schools in the country.

In order for banks to effectively penetrate the agri credit market they must completely overhaul their strategy. Agriculture extension services have failed to provide the required support to farmers. Banks must assist farmer's earning capability by playing a role in educating them and introduce better paying crops. This in turn will help them attain a more stable revenue stream.

State Bank must step in to remove the mismatch between value of collateral and loan amount in agriculture lending. Farmers are required to place their pass books (ownership document for agricultural holding) as collateral with the bank when they borrow, which pledges their entire holding. This is especially painful when per acre value of land is more than ten times the State Bank's approved per acre credit ceiling for different crops.

Working with select group of farmers and forming them into cooperatives will slowly develop entities in the agriculture sector that could borrow from banks based on the strength of their balance sheets.

Financing viable projects in downstream agro processing will create alternate marketing channels for farmers. This will eventually stabilize wholesale prices and enable farmers to better predict their revenue cash flows. Also, a vibrant Islamic Banking arm will aid banks into exploiting lending potential in the agri sector.

However, these shifts in approach will take place only when banks genuinely want to explore new avenues for increasing their profitability. This will remain a far cry as long as government borrowing continues to crowd out the private borrower.

The writer is a banker-turned-agribusiness specialist

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LIVESTOCK LIVES MATTER!

BR Research March 18, 2019

Dairy and packaged meat industries have been getting some attention of late. Earlier this month, Commerce Minister Razak Dawood said the government is working on a plan to rationalise taxes on milk supply chain. Meanwhile, news flow relating to unhygienic milk & meat, food poisoning, as well as the controversy over UHT milk has also become quite too frequent in recent years.

The latter may be bad news for the restaurants and corporations caught in such controversy. But it seems good news for livestock sector, because these controversies have somewhat put the spotlight on livestock, which is where the roots of many of these problems emerge from. The sector has now caught the attention of Prime Minister Imran Khan who reportedly also wants to focus on its growth and development – it is another thing though that the ill-managed poultry episode left him with more criticism than support.

For many urbanites, livestock lives do not matter. They couldn't care less about livestock or the people involved as long as they are getting milk and meat at lowest possible prices. Some futuristic economists on the other hand brush off livestock as irrelevant since in 10-20 years, the world would likely move on to lab grown meat and test tube milk.

There is little doubt that at some point in the foreseeable future, Pakistan will eventually have to take a stance on futuristic trends in meat and milk industry. But that should not prevent the state or the society from recognising the importance of this sector, whether seen from the lens of contribution to GDP, employment, female empowerment, poverty, or basic human health.

The sector is nearly 60 percent of agricultural GDP (where cattle and buffalo combined have the biggest share), 28 percent of total commodity producing GDP, and about 11 percent of the total size of economy. Although there are some serious question marks over the estimation of livestock GDP, which will be covered later in this space, suffice to say the sector contributes significantly to the country's economy.

In terms of jobs, 11 percent of total employment in the country is in livestock and related sectors, where livestock and dairy producers offer the biggest chunk of that employment. For some regions, such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa it is even more important; according to KP's Livestock Policy 2018, the sector employs 46 percent of direct labour force in the province.

Even more important is the fact that the sector is arguably the biggest employer of women. According to the latest Labour Force Survey 2017-2018, nearly 34 percent of total female employment is in various livestock sectors, as against nearly 5 percent in the case of total male employment. In the 'subsistence livestock farmers' category, women are about 81 percent of total sectoral employment. These facts have serious implications for those working on women empowerment and gender issues at large.

The sector also needs attention from those working on poverty reduction. A wide majority of livestock owners are landless farmers – 80 to 90 percent of total livestock (cattle & buffaloes) is estimated to be owned by landless farmers, according to industry sources.

These animals are not only a source of their income but also a cashable asset which they sell, for example, when they have to prepare for dowry for their daughters' wedding or when they fall into debt after being sick and jobless. In Imran Basharat's words, General Secretary, Sahiwal Cattle Breeders Association, "livestock is one of the biggest reservoirs of unemployment; especially unemployed landless farmers".

Then there is of course the health and hygiene concerns for citizens at large. At the one end, there is stunting, an issue that has caught public attention since PM Khan flagged it in his speech. And at the other, there is a growing frequency of news reports about people dying or falling sick because of bad quality of meat; or about adulterated loose milk as against the UHT milk which too has not been exempt from real and perceived controversy. In great part, the solution to many of these problems lies in the fixing of livestock sector.

Industry sources say the government is keen to fix the livestock industry; they have had a couple of meetings with industry stakeholders as well. But what exactly is the nature of the problem, the trade-offs in question and potential solutions on the table. These will be the subject of discussion in this space in the ensuing weeks. Stay tuned!

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/03/18/481466/livestock-lives-matter/

COUNTRY'S PER ACRE SUGARCANE PRODUCTION LAGS BEHIND DEVELOPED NATIONS

KHALID ABBAS SAIF | MAR 18TH, 2019 | FAISALABAD

Although Pakistan is considered the 5th largest sugarcane producing country in term of area worldwide but its average per acre sugarcane production is far behind the developed nations. This concern was shown at the graduation ceremony of advanced certificate in sugarcane agronomy arranged by the Department of Agronomy, University of Agriculture Faisalabad in collaboration with Punjab Sugarcane Research and Development Board at the New Senate Hall, UAF.

Talking to participants, UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Zafar Iqbal Randhawa said that it is the need of hour to adopt mechanisations and latest agricultural practices in our field in order to increase per acre productivity. He stressed upon researchers and agricultural experts to focus on crops that will not only enhance productivity but also ensure food security.

He said that in the west researcher who started his work on a specific crop continued his working on the same crop throughout his life and his focused efforts helped brought tangible results in term of enhanced productivity. He expressed his grave concern that despite of being an agrarian country, Pakistan is importing agricultural goods.

Punjab Sugarcane Research and Development Board CEO Dr Shaid Afghan said that they were aiming at increasing cane and sugar yields per unit area, improved efficiency of inputs (water, fertilisers, agrochemicals, diesel, labour/manpower) and sustainable production system (including environment friendly approach, soil fertility & health, socio-economic aspects).

They were exploring potential of bi-products & energy production from sugarcane biomass, preparing for mechanisation in future, application of new technologies and effective technology transfer and capacity building of young researchers/technicians/farmers.

Chairman Dr Asif Tanvir said adoption of modern agri methods at par with modern world, varieties, timely sowing of crops, balanced usage of fertiliser as per agricultural experts' recommendation are prerequisite to increase agricultural yield and ensure food security. He said that the latest practices of agricultural, timely sowing and best breeds will be imperative to improve the productivity.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190318456170/

PUNJAB TO PROMOTE KITCHEN GARDENING CULTURE

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 18TH, 2019 | SIALKOT

Provincial agriculture department has formulated a comprehensive plan for the promotion of kitchen gardening culture across the Punjab. Sources in agriculture department told Business Recorder on Sunday that under the plan the department will be sold 50,000 summer (Kharif) seed kits on inexpensive rates across the province. The government was very keen to promote kitchen gardening to enable people to get fresh home grown vegetables.

The step has been taken for the promotion of kitchen gardening culture and to create awareness about the importance and utility of home grown fresh vegetables across the Province. In Sialkot district, Kitchen gardening has gained popularity among people especially the women folk belonging to urban and rural parts and obtaining guidance from agriculture department regarding kitchen gardening regularly.

The kitchen gardening is actively attaching highest importance in the wake of upsurge in prices, malnutrition, poverty alleviation and consumption of fresh and home grown vegetables sources added.

Under the programme, 1300 seed kits would be sold in Sialkot district out of which 500 in Sialkot tehsil, 300 in tehsil Daska 300, 300 Pasrur tehsil and 200 in tehsil Sambrial would be sold on subsidized rates to facilitate the people and ensure the promotion of kitchen gardening culture at gross roots level.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190318456172/

WEEKLY REVIEW: COTTON PRICES WITNESS UPWARD TREND

NASEEM USMAN | MAR 18TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The upward trend was seen in the prices of cotton. Textile mills were active and involved in buying due to which buying was increased. The market trend shows that prices of cotton may increase in the coming days. The new season is about to start and government should take immediate steps to increase the production of cotton.

During the last week textile and spinning mills increase the buying while the ginners also started selling cotton in the stock due to which trading volume increase to some extent due to which prices of cotton shows upward trend.

The prices of cotton in both Sindh and Punjab remained Rs 7000 to Rs 9000 per maund while the price of Seed cotton (Kapas/Phutti) is from Rs 2800 to Rs 3600 per 40 Kgs in both Sindh and Punjab. The cotton in Balochistan is available at the rate of Rs 7800 to 8100 per maund while the price of seed cotton which is available in very small quantity is from Rs 3200 to Rs 3600.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KAC) spot rate committee increased the spot rate price by Rs 100 and closed the rate at Rs 8700 per maund.

In the local market the demand of textile products and cotton yarn has increased but due to delay in payments there is financial crisis in the market. On the other hand the import of cotton which was stopped from India has started to some extent. The ginners have the stock of 1 million bales which will be sold in coming days.

Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum Naseem Usman said that over all bullish trend was seen in international cotton market. According to the analysis of local and international market upward trend will be seen in the prices of cotton in the coming days. The fluctuation was witnessed in New York

Cotton Rate of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) due to which the prices of cotton shows upward trend while the prices of cotton in China shows positive trend.

Naseem Usman said that during the last 10 to 15 years the production of cotton continuously increased in India. The production of cotton reached 4 crore bales three to four years ago and India has become the second largest cotton producer in the world after America but due to defect in the cotton seed Gulabi Sundi attacked the crop and as a result cotton production decreased.

Last year cotton production of India was 3 crore 65 lac bales but during the current year it is expected that that cotton production of India will be between 3 crore 25 lac to 28 lac bales which is 40 lac bales less as compared to the previous year. The Indian government has asked the international company Monsanto to provide seeds of cotton which will increase the production while the Indian government has also asked the Monsanto to pay the damages which was done due to the supply of low quality cotton seed.

The Pakistani organizations related to cotton business has asked the Pakistani government to buy good quality seeds from Monsanto. Several meetings were held in this regard but no agreement was signed yet. The government of Pakistan should take steps for the production of good quality seeds locally as well as good quality seeds should be imported.

Indian Cotton Association organized a conference on 6th and 7th March in Mumbai which was attended by 249 cotton experts of international markets, traders and importers.

President Indian Cotton Association Atul S. Ganatra told during the meeting that last year cotton production of India was 3 crore 65 lac bales but during the current year it is expected that cotton production of India will be between 3 crore 25 lac to 28 lac bales which is 40 lac bales less as compared to the previous year. The reason of low production of cotton is weather conditions and low rains. He said that expected consumptions of local mills this year wills will be 3 crore 15 lac bales. At the end of the year stock will be 17 lac bales as compared to the last year stock of 26 lac bales

Atul S. Ganatra further said that this year in June and July the rate of cotton which is Per Candi (356 kg) is from Rs 42000 to Rs 43000 is expected to be from Rs 47,500 to 48000. He said that government will increase support price from 10 % to 15 % in the next season while the government has increased the support price by 26 % during the current year.

The delegates of the conference said that New York Cotton Rate of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) which is between 75 to 76 American cent is 80 cent till July.

The reason of giving reference of international conference held in Mumbai is that India is our neighboring country the government of India is active and taking practical steps for the increase in production of cotton while in our country government only make promises while the implementation is very slow.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has shown his resolve of increasing the production of cotton by 15 million bales. The Ministry of National Food Security and Research Pakistan Central Cotton Committee has asked the government to announce the support price or Indicative Price of Cotton Seed Rs 3500 per 40 kg while the Ministry also gave the proposal to buy 5 lac bales of cotton through TCP. If practical steps like India will be taken to increase the production of cotton then there is no doubt that target of cotton production given by Prime Minister will be achieved. The country will be self sufficient in cotton and we can save our foreign exchange which is spent on import of cotton.

After the harvesting of wheat sowing season of cotton is going to start and from now on steps would be taken to increase the production of cotton then our country will be sufficient and there will be no need of importing cotton. This year water will be available in ample amount while the farmers got reasonable price of cotton seed.

There is a need to sow cotton on the land on which sugar cane was grown. Chinese agriculture experts and scientists are already helping Pakistan in order to increase the production of agriculture products.

Cotton Cooperation of India bought 11 lac bales of cotton from ginners and in coming days, 4 to 5 lac bales will be bought by CCI. The Cooperation will sell cotton bales from April. In this way CCI helps ginners and farmers. Pakistan should also work on the same grounds and departments like TCP should buy and sell cotton bales to help farmers. In our country for the last four to six years world's largest company Louis Dreyfus Company was involved in the trading of cotton and sold the cotton bales to textile mills in advance. In a way there are doing Hedge Trading but the government has imposed ban on Hedge Trading locally.

Moreover, the experts are of the view that in the coming days, prices of cotton will be increased. Up till now the ginners has limited stock of 1 million bales while the new crop will be expected to come in four to five months.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190318456191/

FARMERS DEMAND OF CENTRE TO DECREASE PRICE OF UREA

By Our Correspondent Published: March 18, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), a farmers' lobbying group, has decried that the price of urea has jacked up manifold since the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) came to power. The SCA, whose office bearers and members from different cities of Sindh met in Hyderabad on Sunday, asked the federal government to intervene by decreasing the price to what it was eight months ago.

According to SCA Vice President Nabi Bux Sathio, who chaired the meeting, a urea bag's price was Rs1,350 around eight months ago against the existing price of Rs1,850. "If it keeps increasing at this rate, the price will cross Rs2,000 per bag in a couple of months".

The SCA deplored that on the one hand, the rate is going up unchecked and on the other the dealers are black marketing the product because of lack of enforcement of anti-hoarding laws. The chamber asked the federal government to ensure that the fertiliser companies supplied the required amount of urea in the market and if the industry is unable to meet the demand it should timely convey to the government to allow import.

The farmers also expressed alarm on the sale of spurious seeds of rice and cotton crops in Sindh as the provincial government fails to take action against the sellers of unregistered and substandard seeds. The SCA demanded from the Sindh government to fix Rs5,000 per 40 kilogrammes rate for the cotton crop for the year 2019 and to double its wheat procurement target.

The provincial government has also been requested to approach the centre for opening of Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation's (PASSCO) wheat procurement centres in Sindh. The chamber called for purchase of at least 500,000 tons of wheat by PASSCO from the province.

Zahid Hussain Bhurgari, Mir Abdul Kareem Talpur, Haji Nisar Memon, Muhammad Khan Sarejo, Agha Khadim Hussain Shah, Mir Sikandar Talpur, Nawaz Ali Samejo and other office bearers and members of the SCA attended.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1931521/1-farmers-demand-centre-decrease-price-urea/

GWADAR FISHERMEN PLAN PROTEST CAMP

By Mohammad Zafar Published: March 18, 2019

QUETTA : Fishermen of the port city of Gwadar have announced their plan to re-launch their postponed protest from Monday, saying that the government has failed to resolve the issue of changing the design of the East-Bay Expressway.

The President of the Fishermen Alliance Committee, Khuda-i-Dad Wajo, announced this during a press conference on Saturday.

He said the committee had postponed the protest three months ago after assurance of provincial Minister of Information Mir Zahoor Ahmed Buledi and officials of port authorities, however, despite passage of the period no work had started for redesigning the project and protection of the rights of fishermen.

He added that fishermen of the area were happy after construction of Gwadar Port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) with hopes that people of the city would benefit from the initiatives.

"Instead of providing better facilities to the fishermen for continuing their centuries-old profession, they were deprived of their way to reach the sea in Gwadar for fishing," complained Wajo.

He further said that the fishermen would set up a protest camp at Musa Corner from Monday and hold a protest rally on March 21.

"Almost all political parties have already announced their support for our protest," he concluded.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1931572/1-gwadar-fishermen-plan-protest-camp/

STRAWBERRY CULTIVATION AT ITS PEAK

By Asif Mehmood Published: March 18, 2019

LAHORE: Strawberry cultivation has increased across province. Agricultural experts estimate that strawberry cultivation has increased by 22% in the past few years and is expected to rise in the coming years.

Strawberries are loved by citizens of all ages. Apart from tantalising taste buds, strawberries are also an excellent source of vitamin C; 100 grammes of strawberries contain 52 milligrammes of vitamin C which is higher when compared with other fruits.

Strawberries can also be used to make various jams, jellies and preserves. The increase in production will not only increase exports but will also have a positive impact on businesses selling jams, jellies and preserves. All 36 districts in the province are suitable for cultivating strawberries. However, districts such as Sialkot, Gujranwala, Lahore, Khushab, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Jhang, Sahiwal, Multan, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan and their adjoining areas are ideal for cultivating the crop.

Chaudhry Ejaz, who was the first person to start cultivating strawberries at Lahore's borders on five acres of land around four years ago, says that he started by asking his friend to bring saplings from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P). Two farmers were also brought to cultivate the crop.

During the first year, the harvest was larger than Ejaz expected. As a result, he started to expand the cultivatable land. Now, Ejaz is cultivating strawberries on around 25 acres of land.

"Following my example, many farmers have now started cultivating strawberries as opposed to traditional crops and vegetables," says Ejaz. Border areas are ideal for cultivating strawberries because wide open expanses of land are easily available and the temperature is lower compared to the main city, he reveals.

Rana Mubashir Hasan, another farmer, says that strawberries are cultivated in October but the crop starts to bear fruit around January. Currently, strawberry production is at its peak, he says.

Approximately 8,000 small packs of strawberries are obtained from a single acre while cultivation can cost up to Rs0.2 million which includes the cost of seeds, fertiliser, water and labour," he explains.

Promoting strawberry cultivation can help in developing our rural economy, he says. He reveals that a single plant provides 0.5 kilogrammes of fruit. Similarly, approximately 800 maunds of produce are obtained from one acre. However, some farmers are able to boost production and are able to harvest 1,200 maunds per acre, he says.

Punjab Agriculture Department Fruit and Vegetable Director Mohammad Sajid says that in order to cultivate strawberries, the land should not be waterlogged. When prepping the land, add five trollies of animal fertiliser per acre, explains.

Chandler strawberries are very successful in Pakistan. Some people also call them shander, he states. If an adequate amount of fertilizer is given to the plant, the harvest will be sweet, he says.

Even though strawberries have been successfully cultivated in Punjab and Singh, the saplings can only be found in specific areas in K-P province which include Swat, Dir and Gilgit.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 18th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1931710/1-strawberry-cultivation-peak

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 11th TO MARCH 17th 2019

GWADAR FISHERMEN TO RESUME PROTEST TOMORROW

Behram Baloch Updated March 17, 2019

GWADAR: Fishermen in the port city of Gwadar will resume their protest on Monday (tomorrow) as the government has failed to resolve the issue of changing the design of Eastbay Expressway.

This was announced by Fishermen Alliance Committee president Khuda-i-Dad Wajo at a press conference here on Saturday. Local leaders of different political parties were present on the occasion to show their solidarity with the fishermen.

Mr Wajo said that the committee had postponed its protest three months ago on the assurance of Balochistan Information Minister Mir Zahoor Ahmed Buledi and officials of the port authorities that Eastbay Expressway would be redesigned to protect the livelihood of the fishermen of Gwadar.

The fishermen fear that the under-construction road will block their access to the sea.

However, Mr Wajo said, despite passage of three months no work had been started for redesigning of the project and protection of the fishermen's rights.

He said that the fishermen of Gwadar were happy after construction of Gwadar Port and the launching of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor with the hope that the people of the port city would benefit from these projects which would provide job opportunities to them.

He said that local people were not being provided jobs and other facilities, adding that the fishermen of the area were being deprived of their ancestral source of livelihood as the road project would block their access to the sea.

Mr Wajo said that the fishermen would set up a protest camp at Musa Corner from March 18 and observe strike on March 21, besides organising a rally.

He said that almost all political parties of Balochistan had announced their support to the protest of the fishermen.

Published in Dawn, March 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1470141/gwadar-fishermen-to-resume-protest-tomorrow

FARMERS ASKED TO PLACE IRRIGATION PLANS FOR RABI CROPS

Anwar Khan March 16, 2019

KARACHI: The Met Office has asked the farmers to evolve irrigation plans for Rabi crops keeping in view the continuing rains in the country.

It said that the farmers should also root out weeds from their standing crops to help the yield grow. It warned that weeds cost a considerable loss to farmers in term of agriculture productions 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, asking the growers to take steps to preserve susceptible crops and nurseries from extreme cold weather.

In the next 24 hours: Mainly cold and dry weather is expected in the most parts of the country with a light rain at few places in Quetta Division. "Continental air is prevailing over most parts of the country," the Met said.

In the past 24 hours: Weather remained cold and dry in the country with a light rain in Hazara and Larkana Divisions. Temperature in Kalam was minus 6 degrees Celsius, Astore minus 4, Malamjabba minus 2, Parachinar, Hunza, Gupis and Bagrote minus 1, each.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/03/16/481309/farmers-asked-to-place-irrigation-plans-for-rabi-crops/

PRICES OF ESSENTIAL KITCHEN ITEMS CONTINUE TO RISE

ABDUL RASHEED AZAD

ISLAMABAD: Prices of essential kitchen items remained on high side during this past week as compared to preceding week, a survey conducted by Business Recorder revealed here on Saturday.

The survey observed that prices of vegetables and fruits went up, chicken and eggs prices came down and no change was witnessed in the prices of non-perishable items including ghee/cooking oil, pulses, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and rice.

Chicken price went down from Rs6,000 per 40kg to Rs5,500 per 40kg which in retail market it was being sold at Rs160 per kg against Rs180 per kg, while chicken meat was being sold at Rs280 per kg against Rs320 per kg. Egg prices witnessed a further reduction from Rs95 per dozen to Rs92 per dozen in wholesales market while in retail market eggs were being sold at Rs100 per dozen.

Tomatoes price went down from Rs530 per 5kg to Rs400 per 5kg which in retail market were being sold at Rs90-100 per kg against Rs135 per kg. Onion price went up from Rs160 per 5kg to Rs180 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs45 per kg against Rs40 per kg, and potatoes price also went up from Rs80 per 5kg to Rs90 per 5kg which in retail market were being sold at Rs25 per kg against Rs20 per kg.

Local garlic price went down from Rs600-650 per 5kg to Rs550-600 per 5kg, which in retail market was being sold at Rs140-150 per kg against Rs150-160 per kg, Chinese garlic price remained stable at Rs600 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs160 per kg. Local ginger price further went up from Rs650 per 5kg to Rs700 per 5kg, which in retail market was being sold at Rs170 per kg against Rs160 per kg.

Capsicum price went up from Rs400 per 5kg to Rs440 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs120 per kg against Rs100 per kg; yam (arvi) price went up from Rs270 per 5kg to Rs350 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs85 per kg against Rs65 per kg; carrot price remained stable at Rs150 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs35 per kg; radish price went up from Rs100 per 8kg pack to Rs180 per 8kg pack which in retail market, it was being sold at Rs35 per kg against Rs20 per kg, and peas price remained stable at Rs200 per 5kg which in retail market were being sold at Rs50-55 per kg.

Cucumber price went down from Rs150 per 5kg to Rs120 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs35 per kg against Rs40 per kg; cauliflower price went up from 160 per 5kg to Rs180 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs45 per kg against Rs40 per kg; and cabbage price went up from Rs80 to Rs100 per 5kg which in retail is being sold at Rs25 per kg against Rs20 per kg.

Okra price remained stable at Rs450 per 5kg which in retail market was still being sold at Rs120 per kg; brinjal price went up from Rs200 per 5 kg to Rs250 which in retail market was being sold at Rs65 per kg against Rs55-60 per kg; and ridge gourd (tori) price went up from Rs400 per 5kg to Rs450 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs110 per kg against Rs100 per kg. Pumpkin price went up from Rs350 per 5kg to Rs375 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs95-85 per kg against Rs85-75 per kg. Tinda price went up from Rs230 per 5kg to Rs280 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs65 per kg against Rs55-60 per kg. Beans price went up from Rs300 per 5kg to Rs400 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs110-95 per kg against Rs80 per kg. Bitter gourd (kareela) price went up from Rs600 per 5kg to Rs700 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs175 per kg against Rs160 per kg.

Prices of all the major pulses also witnessed no change as fine quality white lentil (Maash) was being sold at Rs170 per kg while its normal quality at Rs135 per kg, good quality grams at Rs170 per kg and normal quality grams at Rs130 per kg, kidney bean (Lobia) in the range of Rs130-170 per kg, green gram (Moong) at Rs120 per kg and red lentil (Masoor) was available at Rs130 per kg. Wheat flour price remained stable at Rs785 per 20kg bag.

Ghee/cooking oil prices also witnessed no change as normal quality ghee/cooking oil was being sold at Rs150 per kg/litre pack, while best quality ghee/cooking oil was being sold at Rs1,030 per 5 kg/litre tin. Likewise, prices of sugar, formula milk Nido/Everyday and packed spices also remained stable.

Fruit prices witnessed an increase as Iranian Kala Kolo apple price went up from Rs150 per kg to Rs175 per kg, golden apple from Rs110 per kg to Rs115 per kg, white apple from Rs85 per kg to Rs90 per kg, Ambri apple from Rs75 per kg to Rs90 per kg and Pakistani Kala Kolo apple price increased from Rs150 per kg to Rs160 per kg.

Good quality local banana was being sold at Rs90 per dozen and normal quality banana in the range of Rs50-60 per dozen, while Indian banana was being sold at Rs210 per dozen against Rs190-200 per dozen. Good quality guava was available at Rs75 per kg against Rs70 per kg and normal quality guava at Rs45-60 per kg against Rs40-50 per kg.

Best quality oranges (red-blood Malta) were being sold at Rs175 per dozen against Rs160 per dozen and normal kinnow in the range of Rs60-90 per dozen against Rs45-75 per dozen. Pomegranate was available at Rs225 per kg against Rs190 per kg and sapodilla (chikoo) at Rs130 per kg against Rs120 per kg. Papaya was being sold at Rs90 per kg against Rs100 per kg and best quality strawberry at Rs220 per kg against Rs250 per kg while normal quality strawberry was available at in the range of Rs130-200 per kg.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/03/17/11-page/768479-news.html

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT: ADVISER CALLS FOR IMPARTING TRAINING TO OFFICIALS

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 16TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Punjab Chief Minister's Advisor on Agriculture, Abdul Hayee Dasti has called for the training and capacity building of the new officers and officials of the provincial agriculture department as it can help improving the performance of the department and resolving the issues faced by the growers. Dasti was speaking at a ceremony arranged here on Friday to distribute certificates among the new officers of the Punjab Institute of Agriculture Marketing who passed training management course.

Special Secretary Agriculture (Marketing), Ihsan Bhutta, Liaquat Ali Raza Director (Economics & Marketing), Muhammad Ajmal and other high officers were also present on this occasion. The advisor said that new generation would play the basic role in bringing about revolutionary changes in the system as per the vision of the Prime Minister, Imran Khan. He said our new generation is our asset and its better training would help improving the working of the department and reducing the hardships being faced by the farmers.

Director Punjab Institute of Agriculture Marketing, Muhammad Ajmal briefing the advisor on this occasion said that new recruited officers have been given awareness about office management, PIDA act, Punjab Civil Services Rules and the Punjab Agriculture Marketing Regulatory Authority Act. He hoped that the training would help enhancing the working capacity of the officers.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190316455805/

PAKISTAN LAGGING BEHIND IN SUGARCANE PRODUCTIVITY

By Imran Rana Published: March 16, 2019

FAISALABAD: Although Pakistan is considered the fifth largest sugarcane producer in terms of cultivated area, the average per-acre yield of the crop is far behind developed nations.

Speaking to students at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) on Friday, Vice Chancellor Dr Zafar Iqbal Randhawa stressed the need for mechanising the agriculture sector and adopting modern agricultural practices to raise productivity.

He directed researchers and agricultural experts to implement a scheme to ensure food security besides enhancing crop productivity.

“In the West, the researchers who start work on a specific crop continue working on the same crop throughout their life,” he pointed out. “Their dedicated efforts are reflected in enhanced productivity.”

The vice chancellor lamented that despite being an agrarian economy, Pakistan imported agricultural goods worth billions of rupees.

Speaking on the occasion, Punjab Sugarcane Research and Development Board CEO Dr Shahid Afghan stressed that his organisation was working to raise sugarcane yield, improve efficiency of inputs and promote sustainable production. The board was exploring the potential of byproducts and undertaking energy production from sugarcane residue, he said.

In addition to that, it is working towards mechanisation and in this regard, effective technology transfer coupled with capacity building of young researchers, technicians and farmers is being considered.

UAF Chairman Dr Asif Tanveer pointed out that adoption of modern agricultural practices on a par with global standards, timely seed sowing and fair usage of fertiliser were prerequisites to enhancing the agricultural yield. He added that these measures were imperative to enhance the productivity.

Another UAF official Dr Ashfaq Chatha highlighted that climate change posed a serious threat to the agriculture sector and “we have to make combined efforts to address the issue.”

Dr Hassan Munir outlined that the university had imparted training covering all aspects of sugarcane production ranging from sowing to disease management and harvesting.

Stating figures, Dr Fahad Rasul revealed that average world sugarcane production stood at 70 tons per hectare whereas in Pakistan it was 56 tons per hectare.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 16th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1930258/2-pakistan-lagging-behind-sugarcane-productivity/

THOUSANDS OF CHICKENS DEAD OF RANIKHET DISEASE IN HASSANABDAL'S POULTRY FARMS

Amjad Iqbal Updated March 14, 2019

TAXILA: Thousands of chickens have died of the contagious Ranikhet (Newcastle) virus at poultry farms in Hassanabdal's Jallo locality.

Several poultry farms in different parts of Hassanabdal, Jallo in particular, have been affected by the disease in the last few weeks.

Ranikhet disease is a contagious viral disease that affects chickens and birds of all ages.

The owners of affected farms told the media that three viruses – infection bronchitis, influenza H-9 and Newcastle disease – have resulted in the deaths of thousands of chickens in just a month. They feared that the current situation would lead to a shortage of chicken in local markets, and some farmers said their stocks had disappeared overnight.

Poultry farm owner Wajid Raza told Dawn that local farm owners have halted chicken farming due to the spread of infections.

"We have to bear the loss of millions of rupees, as chickens are dying due to the spread of these viruses," he said. Mr Raza said he had vaccinated his birds, but they died anyway.

"At least 10,000 chickens died in one night. The situation is similar at other farms," he added. He said the mortality rate in many farms was more than 60pc, while some farms had lost 90pc of their birds.

"The concerned authorities have not taken any steps to stop or cure the outbreak of such disease in local poultry farms," Mr Raza said.

Another farm owner, Sajid, said farm owners have lost millions of rupees to the spread of the disease, claiming that the virus had developed immunity that made it impossible for farmers to prevent the deaths.

He also said that thousands of birds have died of the Ranikhet disease in the Jallo area, adding: "The average age of a healthy chicken is around six to eight weeks. However, with this disease, the bird dies in the third or fourth week."

Sajid also alleged that the vaccine available in the market was substandard and had failed to cure chicks, putting an additional burden on farm owners.

Newcastle or Ranikhet disease is a serious paramyxovirus disease that affects poultry and other birds, veterinarian Dr Mushtaq Ahmed told Dawn. Clinical signs include coughing, gasping, sneezing, diarrhoea, petechiae, twisted neck and paresis of legs and wings.

Dr Ahmed said while vaccines and their schedules are available from various manufacturers worldwide, the disease remains a threat to the poultry industry. Once affected, chickens and other avian species – pigeons, parakeets, backyard chickens, crows, kites, sparrows, doves and so on – act as a continuous source of infection for healthy chickens.

Dr Ahmed suggested training for farmers and the introduction of modern technology in the poultry sector.

According to Dr Asif Rafeeq, an additional director at the livestock department, Hassanabdal falls in a disease control zone where vaccinations are carried out on schedule by respective poultry farm owners, as commercial vaccinations do not fall within the government's domain.

He said farm owners have not yet contacted the livestock department for post-mortem examinations of the birds to ascertain the cause of death. He added that the department would ensure the bio-security of all farms so that the dead chickens can be buried according to standard operating procedure.

In response to a question, Dr Rafeeq said the Newcastle virus has spread across the province recently, killing thousands of chickens, and the livestock department is providing guidance and awareness to poultry farm owners.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1469474/thousands-of-chickens-dead-of-ranikhet-disease-in-hassanabdals-poultry-farms

PALIJO SAYS PPP LEFT 'NO STONE UNTURNED' TO DESTROY SINDH'S AGRARIAN ECONOMY

A Correspondent March 14, 2019

BADIN: Qaumi Awami Tehreek (QAT) chairman Ayaz Latif Palijo has said that Pakistan Peoples Party government has left "no stone unturned" to destroy the province's agrarian economy over the past 11 years of their rule instead of bringing in new technology to give a boost to farm sector.

"Sindh rulers and PPP leaders are forcing small landowners to sell their property to them by stopping supply of water to their areas or paving the way for land mafias to purchase fertile land at cheaper rates," said Mr Palijo while talking to this reporter here on Wednesday.

He said that instead of providing some relief to farmers over the years, Asif Ali Zardari and his cronies were now snatching even daily subsistence from people by turning their fertile land into wasteland.

He expressed solidarity with farmers protesting against nagging water crisis in Badin district and asked the functionaries concerned to save the district from turning into a desert. Despite continuous protest by farmers and their supporters PPP rulers were aloof to their plight even though water flow in the Indus had greatly improved now, he said.

He said that landlords affiliated with PPP were forcibly taking away water of over 90 per cent of farming community in Badin and some other districts through diversions and illegal watercourses fed by Akram Wah and Phuleli Canal near Matli town.

He demanded removal of all illegal outlets and blockages erected by officials of irrigation department and Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority to “steal water and sell it to the highest bidders”.

Mr Palijo demanded just distribution of water and deplored that people living in coastal belt in tail-end areas of canals were leading miserable lives due to callous and indifferent attitude of rulers.

He lambasted Sindh government for failing to set up centres for procurement of wheat from farmers in the areas where wheat harvest had already begun. It was height of inefficiency and callousness that rulers were doing nothing to address genuine issues of farmers, he said.

He criticised federal bodies for not ensuring provision of due share in water to federating units. Some “naive and incompetent” ministers and aides of PTI chief and Prime Minister Imran Khan were creating problems and embarrassment for the federal government, he said.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1469442/palijo-says-ppp-left-no-stone-unturned-to-destroy-sindhs-agrarian-economy

SAU TO PRODUCE CERTIFIED SEEDS TO ENHANCE YIELD, SAYS VC

The Newspaper’s Staff Correspondent March 14, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Agricul¬ture University (SAU) Tandojam Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Mujee¬buddin Memon has said the varsity is striving to produce certified and quality seeds to enhance per-acre productivity in Sindh.

Addressing a seminar on seed production and development on Wednesday, he highlighted the importance of certified seeds for productivity enhancement, saying that quality of seeds always played a vital role in production of crops.

He urged scientists, researchers, experts and scholars to develop disease-resistant, salt-tolerant and drought-resistant seed varieties to cope with challenges of climate change and food security. Calling for focusing on different zones, he said seeds should be produced as per farmers’ demand. Variety of high-quality seeds in cotton, wheat, rice and vegetables must get preference, he added.

Syed Nadeem Shah Jamote, senior vice president of the Sindh Abadgar Board, underscored the need for seed development in agriculture sector. He said that rust-resistant varieties in wheat crop should be focused on. Farmers were not getting certified seeds at their doorstep, he said, adding that results of research on seeds and crops should be shared with growers.

Mohammad Yousuf Memon said that diversification of varieties in crops was the need of the hour and farmers should adopt new varieties for quality production of crops at field level. Farmers should adopt good agriculture practices, production technology and use balanced fertiliser in crops to get benefit in per-acre yield, he added.

Manzoor Ahmed Khuhro, a senior scientist and SAU director of Seed Production and Development Centre, presented achievements and production of seeds of commercially approved varieties of wheat, cotton and rice. He added the SAU produced pre-basic seeds of various varieties.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1469440/sau-to-produce-certified-seeds-to-enhance-yield-says-vc

CHILLI, TOMATO NOT HEALTHY OPTIONS FOR CONSUMERS' POCKET

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated March 13, 2019

LAHORE: Prices of tomato and chilli have gone up manifold in the city in the last couple of months.

Tomatoes were available on an average rate of Rs24 per kg in the corresponding period in the last year but the vegetable fruit is being sold from Rs100 to Rs200 per kg now.

Similarly, the prices of green chilli hardly crossed Rs100 in the year 2018. Now, its prices have gone up in the last one month to Rs400 per kg in the local market.

The two vegetables, particularly green chilies, are seldom seen on vendors' carts.

The administration fined many vendors in Sunday Bazaars for not bringing green chilies for sale at their stalls.

Yasin, who runs a vegetable shop in a posh locality, passes the buck for skyrocketing prices of vegetables, including tomato and green chilies, on to the auction system in mandis (wholesale markets).

He said that in the absence of a price ceiling in the markets, arhtis or commission agents and middlemen were free to sell the commodities at the rates of their own choice without any let or hindrance, while poor retailers were forced by various government departments to sell the merchandize at fixed rates, even below than their purchase prices.

"How can we sell a thing bought at Rs100 per kg at Rs80 or even at the purchase price as we have to pay transportation charges, shop rent, electricity charges, etc? Don't we have families to feed by earning some profit from our day long labour?" he questions.

An official of the agriculture department, which is responsible for ensuring supplies to Sunday bazaars, says that since Punjab does not produce tomato and green chili crops at this time of the year, these are supplied from Sindh and Balochistan provinces and thus are sold at comparatively high rates here.

Rain in the last four weeks damaged crops and cut off supply routes which led to an unusual increase in the prices, he added.

He said that the prices would not go unusually higher in the past because there was the option of importing them from India through Wagah border. Since the imposition of non-tariff barriers by both sides, and tensions prevailing in the wake of India's Balakot aggression, supplies from India have become a matter of the past and the end-sufferer is the consumer.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1469301/chilli-tomato-not-healthy-options-for-consumers-pocket

NA PANEL TO DISCUSS POTATO CRISIS WITH PM

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated March 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Natio¬nal Assembly's Standing Com¬mittee on National Food and Security on Tues¬day decided to take up the issue of potato crisis with the prime minister because potato growers in central Punjab have been facing a situation that may force them to switch over to other crops in the next season.

A committee meeting held at the National Agricul¬ture Research Centre under the chairmanship of Rao Ajmal Khan was of the view that the prime minister would be briefed on the current potato crisis and proposals would be submitted for resolution of the issue.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Mehboob Sultan attended the meeting and expressed the hope that in a short meeting with the prime minister, the issue would be resolved.

He said that potato growers were not getting the cost of inputs and "we request the prime minister to give some time to committee members for the resolution of the crisis".

Secretary of National Food Security Mohammad Hashim Popalzai informed the meeting that 160,000 tons of potatoes would be exported in March for which export orders had been received.

The meeting was further informed that potato growers in central Punjab, particularly in Khanewal, Sahiwal, Pakpattan and Okara being the largest areas of potato cultivation, were badly affected and there is need to solve the issue on priority basis.

The Managing Director of Pakistan Agricultural Storages and Services Corporation, Mohammad Khan Khichi, informed the meeting that PASSCO had built 20 storage depots over the past three years while 37 others were under construction. He said that PASSCO is operating 229 purchase centres in 15 zones.

He said that at present PASSCO had 1,456,000 tons of wheat stock which was being replenished at a fast pace. The wheat procurement target set for the next season is 1.1 million tons, he said.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1469325/na-panel-to-discuss-potato-crisis-with-pm

FAO TO PREPARE REPORT ON FOOD SECURITY IN PAKISTAN

By Amin Ahmed | 3/13/2019 12:00:00 AM

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations would prepare a report on the state of food security and nutrition in Pakistan, the UN agency announced on Tuesday.

This would be the first national level report to be prepared along the lines of the annual report on global and regional situation prepared by the FAO.The Swiss Agency for Development and

Cooperation (SDC) has joined the FAO in developing the report. For this purpose, an agreement was signed here on Tuesday.

The report will provide timely and accurate data to the government to enable it to make informed and evidence-based decisions by monitoring food supply, demand and otherkeyindicatorsforassessing the overallfood security situation.

Thanking the SDC for its support,FAO representative in Pakistan Mina Dowlatchahi said the strategic partnership between FAO and SDC would strengthen national capacities for managing and utilising food security-related information.

She said that the national SOFI report was in line with the government of Pakistan`s development agenda and it would support decision and policy makers in their efforts to reduce poverty and improve food security and nutrition in Pakistan.Speaking on the occasion, Head of Cooperation of SDC Daniel Valenghi highlighted the importance of implementation of effective policies to improve food security in Pakistan.

The agriculture sector contributes 19.8 per cent of Pakistan`s GDP and employs 42 per cent of the workforce. However, the country`s growing population and adverse climatic conditions have placed an increasing pressure on national food production in the country.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=13_03_2019_005_01

NA SPEAKER FORMS SPECIAL BODY ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 13TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser has constituted a 20-member Special Committee on Agricultural Products particularly tobacco in the country. Besides NA Speaker, the committee will comprise of MNAs Syed Fakhar Imam, Riaz Fatyana, Engr Usman Khan Tarakai, Sher Akbar Khan, Imran Khattak, Muhammad Sana Ullah Khan MastiKhel, Malik Muhammad Ehsan Ullah Tiwana, Muhammad Farooq Azam Malik, FaizUllah, Mr. Mujahid Ali, Fazal Muhammad Khan, Mir Khan Muhammad Jamali, ShandanaGulzar Khan, Khalid HussainMagsi, Rao Muhammad Ajmal Khan, Sajid Mehdi, Syed Naveed Qamar, Nawab Muhammad Yousuf Talpur and Syed Javed Ali Shah Jillani.

The Speaker has constituted the committee in pursuance of Motion adopted by the National Assembly on 6th March, 2019, under Rule 244 (B) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the National Assembly, 2007.

The terms of the reference of the committee will be to examine the matters relating to Agricultural Products Particularly tobacco in the country. The committee will present its report to the House. The Speaker is authorized to make changes in the composition of the committee as and when required.

The members of the National Assembly had been drawing the attention of the Speaker towards the difficulties faced by the farmers, particularly about the timely availability of water, urea, quality seeds etc during the previous sessions of the House. It was also brought to the Chair’s notice that despite the agreed support price, the farmers were not being paid in time, which had gravely affected them.

The Speaker said that the National Assembly will pay comprehensive attention to the issues that afflicts the farmers and agricultural sector. He said that Pakistan's future in terms of food security and economic growth lies in a modern, sustainable and scientific farming that maximizes agricultural production in Pakistan.

The Speaker said that the formation of the Special Committee on Agricultural Products expresses the National Assembly's resolve to transform the agricultural landscape in Pakistan by paying particular attention to the scientific farming, agricultural exports and protection to the local farmers.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190313454917/

NEW FOOD LABELLING RULES LIKELY TO BE AMENDED

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | MAR 13TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The federal government is likely to amend its decision about new food labelling rules and making it mandatory to write "Halal" on imported edible items as international and national companies' are seeking an adjustment, well informed sources told Business Recorder. The embassies of different countries and private sector have approached the government, raising concerns on the decision taken in haste by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet aimed at discouraging imports to contain or reduce import bill.

In addition, Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) in collaboration with FMCG Importers Association have also appealed to Finance Minister Asad Umer and Advisor to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment to a make a number of amendments.

A delegation of Pakistani importers also met Prime Minister's Advisor, Abdul Razak Dawood headed by presidents of RCCI and ICCI.

The delegation apprised the Advisor about the issues importers are facing due to recent decision of the ECC about provision of Halal certification.

Australian Company, Goldman Fielder, has sent its representation on the implementation of Pakistan's new food labelling rules (SRO 237 of February 19, 2019).

Goldman Fielder has requested the following for consideration by the Government of Pakistan, in order to minimize the impact on trade: (i) Government of Pakistan introduce the changes over a period of 12-24 months so exporters have sufficient time to make the required adjustments to labeling; (ii) the Government of Pakistan allows levelling by sticker before products are presented for sale; and (iii) the requirement may be better defined so that importers can clearly understand what details must appear in Urdu.

The Australian Company maintains that its requests would allow implementation of Pakistan's requirements to occur without adverse impact on the level of trade between the two countries.

"I expect other companies from Australia as well from other countries would have similar concerns," said Margaret Adamson, High Commissioner of Australia.

The ECC in its decision on February 19, 2019 approved the addition of following conditions to the existing requirements in the Import Policy Order, for import of edible products: (i) products have at least (2/3rd of the remaining shelf life; (ii) the ingredients and details of the product (e.g. nutritional facts, usage instructions etc) of food products are required to be printed in Urdu and English languages on the consumer packaging; (iii) the logo of the Halal certification body is printed on the consumer packaging; (iv) the labelling under conditions will not be in the form of sticker, overprinting, stamp or scratched labelling; (v) the shipment is accompanied by a "Halal certificate" issued by a Halal certification body, accredited with the Accrediting Body (AB), which is a member of International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF) Standard Methodology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC); and (vi) in order to comply with WTO negotiation, similar conditions shall apply to edible products manufactured locally from July 1, 2019 for necessary instructions to be issued to PSQCA and provincial food regulatory authorities.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190313454966/

'GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE SUBSIDY TO GROWERS'

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 13TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab government will provide subsidy to the growers hailing from South Punjab on purchase of approved varieties of cotton seed under the recently announced agricultural policy for the current season.

Growers from Multan, Khanewal, Lodhran, Vehari, Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Layyah, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur will be eligible for this subsidy, said a departmental spokesman here on Tuesday.

He said subsidy of millions of rupees will be extended on approved cotton seed varieties such as UB-2013, FH Lalazar, FH-142, BS-15 and MNH-886. Growers have to buy seed bags containing subsidy vouchers from the Punjab Seed Corporation, Baba Fareed Corporation, Neelum Seeds, Jullandhar Pvt Limited and Herl Seed Corporation. The amount of subsidy will be provided same month of purchase through voucher present in the seed bag and growers have to SMS the voucher number and his CNIC on 80709 for claiming subsidy.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190313454952/

'IMPORTED PULSES CAN BE TRANSFORMED INTO EXPORT SECTOR'

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 13TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Karachi Wholesale Grocers Association (KWGA) has suggested that the imported pulses can be transformed into export sector by value addition. KWGA's Patron in Chief, Anis Majeed and Chairman, Malik Zulfiqar sent a letter to Razak Dawood, Advisor to Prime Minister on Trade, Textile, Industry, Production and Investment, inviting him to visit Karachi and hold a meeting with them and members of the association to discuss the issue of value addition.

He said that Dawood showed his interest in the proposal and assured that he will visit Karachi soon to have a detailed discussion.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190313454958/

SINDH TO HAVE LIVESTOCK BREEDING SERVICES AUTHORITY: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 13TH, 2019 | HYDERABAD

Sindh Minister for Livestock and Fisheries Abdul Bari Pitafi has said that his department was working on establishing Livestock Breeding Services Authority. He said that the aim of establishing authority was to make breeding laws and to discuss other related issues. He informed that a research laboratory would also be established under the authority where different breeds of animals would be kept and the local breeders would have the facility to get the breeds of their choice by insemination.

He was talking to the media after inaugurating Poultry Diagnostic Surveillance Sub-centre at the office of Director General Livestock Hyderabad.

Pitafi said that birds' diseases would be diagnosed in the Poultry Diagnostic Surveillance Sub-centre Hyderabad and after diagnostic procedure vaccines would be prepared as well.

He informed that a lab had already been established in Karachi while Surveillance Centres were established in Sukkur and Larkana by the Livestock Department, Sindh.

Replying to a question about wrong policies for the protection of fishermen rights, he said that Sindh government defending the rights and jobs of fishermen and due to efforts of Sindh chief minister the anti-fishermen policies of federal government had not yet implemented.

Replying another question about drought affected areas, the minister said that the funds for livestock in drought affected areas of Thar had been spent and added that with the collaboration of Thar Foundation, Livestock department was working to overcome food shortage in Thar.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190313454961/

TAXING AGRICULTURE

Pervez Tahir Updated March 12, 2019

IN the seventh NFC award, the federal government was asked to raise the tax-to-GDP ratio to 15 per cent and the provinces were expected to effectively tax agricultural incomes. This would have enlarged the divisible pie and the provincial kitty. While the centre failed to reform the tax structure, the provincial governments paid no attention to mopping up the potential of agricultural incomes. The eighth NFC failed to give an award, leaving these issues — and more — to the ninth NFC.

The Constitution limits income tax to non-agricultural incomes, a federal subject. Agricultural income falls in the provincial domain and is subjected effectively to a tax on land. This distinction is unfair as it violates the principle of taxing equal incomes equally (the so-called horizontal equity). It is also against the principle of ability to pay, as a large number of earners are not taxed at all (the so-called vertical equity).

Worse, it provides a convenient route to non-agricultural income earners to evade federal income tax by declaring vast amounts as agricultural income. All the provinces together do not collect more than Rs2 billion. According to the latest annual report of the State Bank, this is 0.03pc of the agricultural GDP.

Today's argument is that agriculture is already overtaxed.

Here's the rub. Dominated by the large landholders, the provincial governments do not make the required effort to collect what is due under the existing tax laws. The attitude goes back to colonial times. With a view to creating and protecting the loyalty of feudals, the agriculturist/non-agriculturist distinction was encouraged not only in incomes, but also with regard to jobs and admissions to educational institutions.

When first introduced in 1860, income tax included income from agriculture in the definition of income. Writing in 1920, Shankar Madhav Pagar observed: "For the first time in the history of the world it was demonstrated that India, an oriental country was ready to meet with equanimity and courage the greatest engine of Western finance — a modern income tax."

By 1886, agricultural income had been exempted, as the landed class termed it a violation of the Permanent Settlement agreement. Today's argument, that agriculture is already overtaxed, also goes back to those days. The exemption continued after Independence. In 1977, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's attempt to levy a presumptive agricultural income tax in place of land revenue was aborted by Gen Zia to appease the feudal lords.

Land reform was also declared un-Islamic. This opposition continues, although agriculture's share in total tax collection is a measly 0.6pc against its share of 19.2pc in GDP. The low share is the result of the elimination of taxation implicit in support prices and exchange rate, besides negligible explicit taxation. To confuse the issue, this is the argument sold by the large farmers to small farmers. Even today, there is little awareness among the small farmers that a vast majority of them will be exempted under any income tax formula.

The ninth NFC presents an opportunity to finally end the distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural incomes. Neither the PPP nor the PML-N had any interest in alienating the feudal support. The MQM represents middle-class opportunism more than the middle class. In 2011, one of its senators moved a private bill to include agricultural income in the definition of income. Despite being in the government, the move was to support the opposition, the PML-N, to thwart the imposition of the 'anti-urban' value-added tax.

For the first time, a nationwide party claiming the support of the middle class is in the saddle at the federal level and in three provinces. It has its share of landlords.

That is perhaps why the party manifesto is silent on the issue of agricultural income tax. But the party also has Jahangir Tareen, who has said many a time that he had to make special efforts to pay his due against whatever exists in the name of agricultural income tax. The authorities did not seem keen to collect it, as it would set a 'bad' precedent for the powerful farm lobby.

Be that as it may, championing a "shift towards direct taxation as the primary source of tax revenue" is the broader objective of the PTI manifesto. Effective taxation of agricultural income will further this objective.

Of course, this requires a constitutional amendment. Careful negotiations and a credible estimate of gains can make it happen. Back-of-the-envelope calculations place the yield between Rs150 billion to Rs200bn. The yield from plugging a hole for evasion will be in addition. All parties in the NFC will gain, in proportion to their respective shares in the divisible pool, without touching the sensitive vertical distribution.

Published in Dawn, March 12th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1469136/taxing-agriculture

WHEAT PROCUREMENT: FARMERS VOICE CONCERN OVER DELAY IN ANNOUNCEMENT

ZAHID BAIG | MAR 12TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Farmers have expressed their concern over delay in announcement of wheat procurement campaign dates for the current season and urged the provincial government to kick start it in the South of Punjab from April 15 and in Central Punjab from April 20. Though the country and the province has received good rains in this season, it has also increased moisture in the crop and the farmers have to spend more to save it from fungus or other such diseases, said founding convener Punjab Water Council (PWC) Farooq Bajwa on Monday.

Talking to Business Recorder, Bajwa expressed the fear that the provincial food department may delay the procurement drive this year on the pretext of higher moisture level in the wheat crop. He said growers had to dispose off their produce in a certain time to payback the loans taken on the current crop and to buy seed and inputs for the coming crops.

“Owing to the lethargic policies of government departments, growers already had received lower rates of their cotton crop and were also facing outstanding payments for their sugarcane produce. Sugarcane was also short this year,” he claimed.

“Wheat is our major crop and staple food for our people. Growers should be compensated accordingly so that it could be sown on more area and with more devotion in next season. The government had announced Rs 1300 per maund support price for this crop in the year 2013 when the dollar was at Rs 90. Now in the year 2019 when the dollar is hovering around Rs 139; the support price for wheat is the same,” Bajwa said and added that even then growers could not receive this amount because of delaying tactics by the food departments concerned.

He said the total production of the Punjab comes to two crores bags of wheat and if growers receive Rs 100 less in the support price; accumulative loss comes to Rs 50 billion. He said no commodity had the same price for the last seven years except wheat. He said a timely and vigorous buying campaign by the food department can help the farmers to get due price and keeps the price stable throughout the season.

Bajwa concluding his remarks urged the government to immediately announce a clear-cut procurement policy as to how much wheat it intends to buy and start this buying spree in the mid of April from South and from April 25 in Central Punjab.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190312454651/

DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEM INSTALLED ON 333 ACRES, SAYS OFFICIAL

APP Updated March 11, 2019

RAWALPINDI: The Punjab Agriculture Department installed drip irrigation system to cover 333 acres agriculture land in the Rawalpindi district during the current financial year.

According to a spokesman, the drip irrigation system had 90 to 95 per cent efficiency and sprinkler irrigation system saved 60 to 70pc water as compared to the traditional irrigation system.

He said the drip system had helped irrigate over 4,443 acres while 1,090 acres was covered through the sprinkler irrigation system installed during the last two years in the Potohar region.

The water management department was providing 80pc subsidy to the farmers for installation of the solar system which is an alternative source of energy.

It is economical, effective and environment friendly technology, he added.

He said the department was also striving to promote tunnel farming in the region and 50pc subsidy was being provided to the farmers for installing tunnels to produce off season vegetables and fruits.

At present, over 105 acres is under tunnel farming in the Potohar region and off season quality products are being produced.

The department has taken steps for promoting agriculture in the Potohar region which has a different environment and soil from other areas of the province, he said.

The Potohar region is facing severe shortage of water and the situation necessitated efficient irrigation system such as drip and sprinkler systems, he said adding the department was providing 60pc subsidy on drip and sprinkler irrigation system.

Published in Dawn, March 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1468821/drip-irrigation-system-installed-on-333-acres-says-official

DROP IN KINNO EXPORTS MAY GET STEEPER

Ahmad Fraz Khan Updated March 11, 2019

Pakistan has missed the kinno export target by 33 per cent as the four-month season draws to an early close.

The country exported around 200,000 tonnes of kinno against the target of 300,000 tonnes. The season officially ends on March 15 every year. But more than 60pc factories were closed by the end of February.

The drop in kinno exports is sharp as Pakistan sold 370,000 tonnes in the foreign market last year. Although a group of exporters has expressed some doubt about that figure, the Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association insists that it is accurate and claims to have earned $222 million. Going by that figure, the drop is just under 50pc year-on-year.

On top of it, exporters have said the downward trend will not only continue but is also expected to worsen going forward. Terming the early close of the export season a sign that the worst is yet to come, the exporters warn that kinno exports are now a matter of “a few years”.

The fruit has not only lost most of the international market but is also losing the residual demand because of multiple factors, such as diseases, lack of certification, high prices and a massive increase in the cost of business.

Pakistan exports less than 10pc of its kinno crop. Per-acre yields in Spain, Morocco and even Turkey are around 450-500 maunds as opposed to Pakistan's average of 150 maunds

"All these factors have neutralised the effect of a steep devaluation of the rupee (around 32pc) this season," says Shahid Sultan, an exporter from Sargodha who also serves as a director on the board of Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company (PHDEC), a federal body that looks after horticulture exports.

"One can imagine the true status of kinno exports and their future prospects as the massive devaluation coupled with a domestic price fall in almost equal measure failed to spur foreign sales," he says.

His views were seconded by Saadat Ejaz Qureshi, an exporter from Lahore and former chairman of PHDEC. Highlighting the root cause of the problem, Mr Qureshi says that the kinno crop is diseased, adding that no agency can certify low-quality and diseased fruit for export.

"Pakistan does not have even a single disease-free nursery. It means even the replacement trees cannot be taken as disease-free. If a tree is diseased, who can certify the nursery? If the nursery is diseased, who will certify the fruit as fit for export? This is the reason our kinno is being pushed out of the world market," he says.

Even in relatively low-end and relaxed markets, competitors like Turkey, Morocco and China are elbowing Pakistan aside on the price factor. Exporters sent around 1,500 containers to Indonesia in December alone, but the number dropped to less than 100 as China entered in January and swept the market with its low-price and better-quality kinno.

The level of exports to Russia, which is a market for small-size kinno, always depends on other markets that consume bigger-size kinno. With the Indonesian market drying out, exports to Russia also fell because exporters were left without a market for their bigger-size fruit. Morocco quickly fulfilled Russia's demand and, hence, two of the biggest markets were lost in one month, explains Mr Qureshi.

Exporters plead for immediate measures to save kinno exports, which brought home either \$170m (as per PHDEC's last year's figures) or \$222m (as per the claim of the exporters' representative body).

Both bodies agree that kinno exports have the potential to grow beyond the \$1bn mark within a few years. At present, Pakistan exports less than 10pc of its grossly under-produced crop. Per-acre yields in Spain, Morocco and even Turkey are around 450-500 maunds compared with Pakistan's average of 150 maunds.

With new and better-yielding varieties, total production of kinno can easily cross 6m tonnes from the current 2.2m tonnes while exports can reach the 1m-tonne mark.

Fortunately, Pakistan has the knowledge base to grow its kinno exports. After starting exports in the late 1980s, Pakistani writers wrote a few books on the subject in the early 1990s. Nursery rules were written in 1998. Exports standards were developed more than a decade ago. In the last three years alone, two voluminous reports were produced on the subject. One of these reports was financed by the

United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the other was by the Punjab government.

The Punjab government was warned by its market intelligence wing that the citrus business is sliding fast and may create social unrest in Sargodha. It ordered a detailed study and sought recommendations to avoid such a situation. Now these reports are gathering dust in government offices.

"Academics can only rectify knowledge deficiency — something that they have done regularly," says Dr Iqrar A Khan, former vice chancellor of the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, and co-author of the two reports. The need is to build an action plan based on those reports and execute it, Dr Khan says. "Nothing will work unless that action plan is put in place, executed, monitored and updated regularly to absorb new realities."

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, March 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1468761/drop-in-kinno-exports-may-get-steeper

WHY OUR FISHERIES ARE UNDERPERFORMING

Amin Ahmed Updated March 11, 2019

Aquaculture is one of the fastest-growing food sectors worldwide. Global demand for fish products has been growing at more than nine per cent a year. But in Pakistan, aquaculture — centred in Sindh — is dominated by low-value, low-productivity carp production while marine and coastal aquaculture, such as shrimp farming, is almost nonexistent.

Comparisons with neighbouring countries indicate the underperformance of aquaculture: it's growing at 1.5pc annually as opposed to 6.8pc and 9.5pc in India and Bangladesh, respectively.

The sector is growing slowly in Sindh because of constraints on private-sector investment, which exist despite the availability of global trade opportunities and favourable agro-climatic conditions. Slow growth is a product of private-sector uncertainty due to the lack of a sector-specific strategy, spatial planning and bio-security and value-chain constraints.

As the marine fisheries sector, centred in Sindh, is in decline due to over-fishing, a project to transform and revitalise the fisheries sector in the province is on the anvil with the support of the World Bank.

Most of Pakistan's commercial fish stocks are overfished, with nine of the 14 major species groups already depleted

The fisheries sector project is now under active consideration of the World Bank. It is expected that the bank's executive board will approve a soft loan of $150 million from the International Development Association (IDA) in April.

A comprehensive study titled The Fisheries Resources Appraisal concluded that most of Pakistan's commercial fish stocks are over-fished. Nine of the 14 major species groups are already depleted. Only two species groups show any indication that fishing mortality is at or below the limit required to maximum yields.

The large shrimp fishery, worth about $48m annually, has an estimated 40pc chance of collapse in the next 20 years. Furthermore, the marine capture sector is not as profitable as it should be due to high costs.

The fisheries sector is estimated to produce over $650m worth of fish annually. Of this, Sindh produces around two-thirds: an aquaculture and inland capture component worth around $130m and an annual marine catch worth around $280m. Sindh's fisheries directly employ an estimated 137,000 people in the marine sector and 29,000 people in the aquaculture and inland capture sectors.

The industry supports a lot more jobs indirectly in retailing, transportation and distribution. Sindh is also home to important fisheries-supporting ecosystems, including the Indus River Delta, the largest dry-land mangrove forest in the world and numerous inland water bodies.

Sindh's fishing communities are poor and vulnerable, with low incomes and inadequate nutrition. In addition to declining marine fish stocks, inland capture fisheries are also in decline due to ecological degradation, overfishing and climate change. Participation in fisheries resource management at the community level is low. More than 60pc of fishing households in communities in the Indus eco-region are living below the poverty line.

In addition, Sindh's rural communities need improved sources of nutrition. About 44pc of children under the age of five are stunted physically and cognitively. Increased fisheries production could increase incomes and fish consumption. Fish is a highly beneficial source of proteins, healthy fats and essential nutrients that are important for child development and cognition. Aquaculture has the potential to provide communities — those currently engaged in declining capture fisheries, or not involved in fisheries at all — with new livelihood opportunities.

A World Bank report related to the project says these challenges can and must be addressed to ensure that Sindh fully realises the economic and social potential of its fisheries sector. Commercial aquaculture has strong growth potential in the short to medium term, which will provide jobs and export revenues. Small-scale aquaculture techniques using indigenous fish species can support communities' nutrition and incomes.

In the longer term, improved management of marine fisheries can ensure sustainable growth in value and jobs. The benefits of investing across the sector are thus complementary: commercial aquaculture can drive growth while marine fisheries recover to provide longer-term value. Small-scale aquaculture can support the livelihoods of the poorest.

In the 1990s, Asian Development Bank financed a $15m project that constructed demonstration fish farms and hatcheries, and improved extension, training and data collection systems in three provinces. The project's estimated annual value of fish production following completion was $13m.

Sindh can harness a similar strategy of public-private partnership investment in the base of the aquaculture value chain, particularly in hatcheries and feedstock plants, to reduce impediments to private-sector investment further up the value-chain. Revitalising marine stocks requires effort reduction to enable depleted fish stocks to replenish over time. Bio-economic modelling suggests that Sindh's fisheries sector could be at least $35-70m per year more profitable by 2030 under revitalisation policies relative to business as usual.

Realising these benefits requires effective licensing, monitoring, surveillance and control operations, and the scientific capacity to set fish stock targets. It also requires coastal zone spatial planning to protect the ecosystems important for fish breeding. In turn, these require the relevant provincial and federal institutions to have clear mandates and sufficient capacity, the World Bank says.

Returns to both commercial capture and culture fisheries can be further enhanced through improved postharvest processing and value-add. Postharvest processing in Sindh is characterised by poor quality control and outdated technologies. Much of the sector's capacity is focused on lower-grade products, such as fishmeal. Limited capacity for high-quality and certified processing inhibits access to lucrative export markets.

Poor sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) conditions led the European Union to impose an import ban for several years. It still continues to partially restrict access in a range of markets. Exports, which have averaged about $350m annually in recent years, appear to have become flat. Investments to improve SPS conditions in markets and auction halls, certification standards, competitive benchmarking and market access development can help Sindh's aquaculture grow, the report says.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1468760/why-our-fisheries-are-underperforming

LAWS OF ABSURDITY: CROP ZONING

BR Research March 11, 2019

As the shift in area under cultivation from cotton to other cash crops with better returns per hectare continues to grow pace, proposals are being made in the corridors of power to restore zoning laws for major crops.

In FY05, land under cotton peaked both in terms of area at 3,193 hectares and 42 percent share in four major kharif crops. According to latest numbers from Federal Committee on Agriculture, cotton crop will record its worst year since three decades, with cultivated area 25 percent lower than the peak figure.

This has sent alarm bells ringing across MoC, which has betted big on textile export revival but has little power to influence cropping patterns across country, thanks to devolution of agriculture as a provincial subject under 18th amendment.

This has revived proposals for zoning of agricultural land for major crops, under which government is entrusted with the wisdom to identify suitable area for each major cash crop based on factors such as climatic conditions, proximity to industrial units, and crop targets.

It remains to be seen how far the federal government can push the envelope on the proposal, considering it hands are tied so far as provincial government is concerned. On surface, it may appear that the proposal may receive strong opposition from rice and sugar millers, two crops which have gained share in area on cotton's expense.

But BR Research's past conversations with sugar millers indicate that the proposal may find strong support, at least in the sugar lobby.

It may be recalled that a different kind of zoning laws existed for sugarcane until early 1990s, which mandated that growers may only sell their produce to mills set up in the area.

Abolition of these laws led to mushroom growth of mills, as 52 new units were setup in the following decade, more than the total mills setup since colonial Raj. Opening of industry allowed businesses to compete for the crop by offering premium, also contributing to increase in area under cultivation.

The abolishment of zoning is to the chagrin of old players, who previously held growers in the farmgate area beholden to their demands. As farmers could only sell to the industrial unit within the zoned area, industrial units enjoyed virtually unlimited power to procure raw material on self-determined rates.

The proposal to reintroduce zoning poses similar risks. For one, the proposal is an obvious infringement of fundamental freedom of choice and right to free enterprise. Second, it is also an infringement on property rights, by bestowing government with the power to determine what business communities may engage on their privately own lands.

More importantly, it also risks entrusting the government to decide winners and losers in agriculture, as different crops offer varying rates of return. This opens the floodgates of rent-seeking and corruption, as farming communities shall lobby their MNAs and MPAs to ensure their tehsils and districts are zoned such that they grow crops with highest returns per hectare.

The policymakers should be weary of the proposal, as they may find ostensible support from a cross-section of industrial as well as farming associations. However, the proposal will leave small farmers beholden to the most powerful industrial unit, as they will have little freedom in terms of choice of crop or buyer.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/03/11/480021/laws-of-absurdity-crop-zoning/

GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO BRINGING CHANGE IN FARMERS’ LIVES: BUZDAR

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 11TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar on Sunday said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf provincial government was committed in bringing prosperity in farmers’ lives. In a statement issued from Lahore Sunday, the Chief Minister said a long term policy is being pursued for development of agriculture sector that will produce far-reaching results.

The chief minister said approval has been given to provide certified cotton seeds to farmers that will increase yield of this crop. He said indiscriminate action will be taken against manufacturers of spurious pesticides.

Earlier on March 1, PM Imran Khan had chaired a meeting regarding National Agriculture Emergency Programme at the Chief Minister House, Punjab. The PM was briefed on steps taken by the provincial government to improve agricultural conditions and up-gradation of the sector. PM Khan was told about future planning of the Punjab government to make necessary changes in the sector.

Khan told the meeting that China’s model should be followed to make much-needed changes in the agriculture sector of Pakistan. “We need to equip peasants with modern techniques of farming,” he added. He said adulterated milk badly affect the health of children; hence put their life at risk.

He directed officials concerned to strictly punish anyone found involved in adulterating milk.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190311453610/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 4th TO MARCH 10th 2019

FALLING EXPORTS, ETHANOL PRODUCTION BOOSTS US CORN STOCKS: USDA

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 10TH, 2019 | CHICAGO

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued a surprise boost to its outlook for domestic corn supplies on Friday by trimming its estimate of how much will be used by exporters and ethanol producers. The government also lowered its outlook for domestic soyabean supplies, bumping up its estimate of the crush, and raised its wheat stocks view as export prospects worsened.

Domestic corn ending stocks for 2018-19 were forecast at 1.835 billion bushels, the USDA said in its monthly supply and demand report, up from its outlook for 1.735 billion bushels in February. Analysts in a Reuters poll had given corn ending stocks estimates that ranged from 1.680 billion bushels to 1.795 billion bushels.

The government cut its corn export view by 75 million bushels to 2.375 billion. The latest outlook also calls for ethanol producers to use 5.550 billion bushels of corn, 25 million less than the prior estimate. “It was certainly warranted that they cut the corn export forecast and the ethanol forecast, but 100 million bushels is a fairly sizable cut for one month,” said Brian Hoops, president of Midwest Market Solutions. “It was pretty unlikely that exports would meet that earlier forecast because of big South American corn production this year after the drought last year.”

Chicago Board of Trade corn futures sank to their lowest since November 27. Wheat futures dropped to a fresh 13-month low but quickly rebounded into positive territory, while soyabeans hit their lowest since February 20. Soyabean end stocks for the 2018-19 marketing year will be 900 million bushels, down from the government’s February estimate of 910 million bushels but still the biggest on record. The crush forecast was raised to 2.100 billion bushels from 2.090 billion bushels.

The soyabean export projection was left unchanged at 1.875 billion bushels despite US Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue’s announcement in late February that China had committed to buying an additional 10 million tonnes of US soyabeans.

US wheat ending stocks were pegged at 1.055 billion bushels, up from the February outlook of 1.010 billion and above the high end of market expectations. Wheat exports were cut to 965 million bushels from 1.000 billion.

USDA left its outlook for the Argentine corn and soyabean crops unchanged and also maintained its Brazil corn crop view. It cut its Brazil soya harvest outlook to 116.50 million tonnes from 117.00 million.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190310453509/

SMUGGLING OF VEGETABLES RESUMES AFTER DE-ESCALATION BETWEEN PAKISTAN, INDIA

By Asif Mehmood Published: March 9, 2019

LAHORE : Vegetable smuggling from India has resumed as tensions de-escalated between the two hostile neighbours following the release of captured Indian Air Force (IAF) pilot by Pakistan.

Smuggled garlic from India is openly available in Lahore's vegetable market. Two truckloads of garlic were sold within hours of reaching the Badami Bagh vegetable market, according to sources.

Trade between the two halves of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir was halted after hostilities led the two nuclear-tipped enemies to the brink of war late last month.

However, trade resumed between Occupied Srinagar and Azad Kashmir through Srinagar-Muzaffarabad route, trucks loaded with tomatoes and other vegetables from India reached the wholesale vegetable markets of Rawalpindi and Lahore.

The two truckloads of garlic which reached the market in Lahore on Friday morning were carrying at least 200 bags of 50 kilos each, said sources from the wholesale vegetable market.

An importer had ordered the garlic consignment, which reportedly raised concerns among local traders. As the wholesalers association has posted anti-Indian posters and banners, only a few sellers are engaged in selling the smuggled commodity.

The general secretary of the Traders Association at Badami Bagh Fruit and Vegetable Market, Chaudhry Khalid Mehmood, said the fruits and vegetables imported from IOK are smuggled to markets in Punjab after meeting the local demand as the demand in Azad Kashmir.

"Despite informing the Customs Chief Collector and several authorities in writing, the smuggling remains unhindered," he said.

Mehmood claimed that the trucks loaded with Indian vegetables are allegedly smuggled to the Punjab markets by bribing Customs authorities.

Chaudhry Akram, an assistant to the Punjab chief minister and the chief of the price control task force, said the trade of goods between Azad and IOK takes place through the barter system.

"The fruits and vegetables imported from Indian Occupied Kashmir are over and above the need of people in Azad Kashmir. Hence, the items reach Lahore and other markets."

He said that he opposes trade with India via Wagah border but since the item is supplied through a barter system via Kashmir, he does not oppose it.

He further claimed that potatoes from Pakistan are being exported to IOK through the barter system.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1926103/1-smuggling-vegetables-resumes-de-escalation-pakistan-india/

SINDH GOVT URGED TO NOTIFY SUGARCANE PRICE AT RS182/40KG

Our Correspondent March 10, 2019

HYDERABAD: Farmers in Sindh on Saturday asked the provincial government to fix sugarcane, wheat and cotton support prices to quell the ongoing unrest among the growers.

“The sugarcane price should be issued without delay so that small growers could get the official price of Rs182/40kg,” said Nawab Zubair Talpur, president Sindh Abadgar Ittehad.

Talpur said the growers were concerns over the stagnant cotton price that had resulted into import of 0.6 million metric tons of cotton worth Rs52 billion in the year 2017-2018.

“The federal government will have to spend billions of rupees more this year to import cotton in case domestic price is not fixed at the rate of Rs4000/40 kg,” Talpur added.

He said sugarmills were paying Rs130-140/40kg cane to growers in the absence of government notification, which “was a great injustice”. A statement said the growers association also expressed its concern over delay in opening of wheat procurement centres by the Sindh Food Department and delay in the fixing of wheat price.

It demanded that the wheat support price should be of Rs1500/40 kg instead of continuing the same price of Rs1300/40 kg fixed six years ago.

It was critical over silence of Sindh government on issue of acute shortage of water in the province causing billions of rupees of losses to growers and maintained the preparation of strategy of protest if the government failed to provide justice to growers.

The association, while supporting the protest of the growers staged outside Naudero Sugar Mill also demanded the government to take action against those policemen who tortured growers participating in sit-in and warned massive protests if no action was taken against the culprits.

It must be noted that last year in December the government set the sugarcane price at Rs182/40kg, while growers demanded Rs198/40kg saying that input cost has increased after rupee depreciation, and rates should be increased accordingly.

Contrary to growers, Pakistan Sugar Mills Association had suggested sugarcane price of Rs130/40kg.

The growers have also been demanding the abolition of Sugarcane Control Board over its failure to safeguard farmers’ rights and interests and rejected Sindh government’s plan to revise sugar cane price in violation of Sindh High Court’s directive.

They said the government should constitute a new board with associations of small growers on board so that the body could address farmers’ genuine issues.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/442197-sindh-govt-urged-to-notify-sugarcane-price-at-rs182-40kg

MILLS CRUSHED OVER 21.6M TONNES OF SUGAR CANE IN 2017-18, PA TOLD

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter March 09, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly was informed on Friday that the sugar mills in the province had crushed 21,625,828 tonnes sugar cane and produced 2,281,452 tonnes sugar in the crushing season 2017-2018.

Furnishing a statement and replying to the lawmakers' queries during the Question Hour in the assembly, Minister for Agriculture, Supply and Prices Ismail Rahu said the provincial government had fixed the rate of sugar cane at Rs182 per 40 kilograms.

However, he said the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) challenged the sugar cane rates in the Sindh High Court that passed an interim order and fixed the rate at Rs160 per 40kg.

In the meantime, the Supreme Court took a suo motu notice of the sugar cane price and directed the mill owners to pay cane growers at the rate of Rs160 per 40kg till the decision of the case.

To a question asked by Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) member Arif Mustafa Jatoi, he said the agriculture, supply and prices department provided a fixed subsidy/financial assistance to farmers on purchase of tractor amounting to Rs200,000 for a tractor costing less than Rs800,000 and Rs300,000 for a tractor costing more than Rs800,000. "There is no effect of imposition of holding and sales taxes."

In reply to a question by GDA's Nusrat Sehar Abbasi, the minister said the sugar mills in the province had crushed 21,625,828.030 tonnes sugar cane and produced 2,281,452.950 tonnes sugar in the crushing season 2017-2018.

He said that as per final estimate, there was total 20,611,878 tonnes produce of sugar cane during 2017-2018.

Answering another query by Ms Abbasi, he said there were 120 registered pesticide companies working in the province. "The companies are registered under Rule 9(5) of Agriculture Pesticide Ordinance 1971," he added.

Published in Dawn, March 9th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1468411/mills-crushed-over-216m-tonnes-of-sugar-cane-in-2017-18-pa-told

KBP FOR LAW TO FACILITATE FEMALE FARM WORKERS

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 9TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Kissan Board Pakistan (KBP) has urged the government to enact a law for facilitating the female farm workers like those men and also for women working in the industrial sector. KBP also demanded the status of an industry to agriculture so as all the labour working in this sector can have the same facilities and incentives which are given to their counterparts in the industrial sector.

The demand was raised by the KBP President Chaudhry Nisar while speaking at a gathering of female farm workers convened to mark the International Women's Day here on Friday.

Chaudhry Nisar said that millions of females work side by side their male counterparts in the farms but they are not even paid half of the payment as received by the male farm workers. Similarly, women are paid very low in other rural activities without any other incentive.

He urged the government to also fix minimum wages and eight hours a day duty time for female farm workers. Similarly, he said that Social Security, Employees Old Age benefit Scheme, pension and free treatment should also be given to these workers. Compensation in case of any accident should also cover the farm workers, KBP chief added. Chaudhry Nisar announced that the KBP would soon prepare a "charter of demand" and submit to the government, NGOs and international organizations to improve the situation of female farm workers.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190309452728/

FARMERS UPSET OVER NON-PROVISION OF INCENTIVES IN FINANCE BILL

FAZAL SHER | MAR 8TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Farmers have expressed dissatisfaction over the second supplementary amendment finance bill 2019 as it does not contain any incentives for the farming sector and have urged the government to take effective steps for the protection of the sector.

"Farmer associations have planned to stage protests against lack of incentives for agriculture sector in Finance Supplementary (Second Amendment) Act, 2019 but delayed it due to escalation of tension between India and Pakistan", said President PKI Khalid Mehmood Khokhar while talking to Business Recorder.

He said that the decision to slash tax on agricultural loans from 39 percent to 20 percent would not provide relief to the farmers but will benefit the banking sector. "The step to reduced regulatory duty (RD) from 17 percent to 5 percent on import of all diesel engines would also play no role in boosting farm output as farmers do not import diesel engines but purchase locally manufactured engines", he said.

He said that if the government's intent was to incentivize agriculture sector it would have taken steps to reduce price of fertilizer, end the role of middleman in agri-marketing and provide significant incentives to input costs incurred by farmers.

PKI president said the government needs to increase investment on agriculture research to 1 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which at present is 0.2 percent. The price of fertilizers and other input materials, especially pesticides, have gone up and these should be reduced to bring them at par with the Indian fertilizer prices, he said.

He said that agriculture export mechanism should be formulated for wheat, potato, rice, mangoes, oranges and vegetables. Farmer associations would stage a protest against lack of incentives for agriculture sector in the supplementary finance bill and for setting up south Punjab civil secretariat at Multan Agriculture University as soon as the security situation normalizes in the country, he said.

About impact of current rains on standing corps, Khokhar said that recent rains would have a positive impact on overall agriculture production of major Rabi crops including wheat.

As per the present condition of wheat crop, country is likely to achieve wheat production target of 25.572 million tons, he said. Nawaz Zubair Talpur, Chairman Sindh Abadkar Ittihad (SAI) while criticizing the finance bill said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PIT) during election campaign had promised to impose agriculture emergency but after coming into power the party has ignored agriculture sector as former governments did.

"Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC), Sahibzada Muhammad Mehmood Sultan announced during the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) that government is planning to fix Rs 3500 per maund cotton indicative price but so far the government has not announced the cotton indicative price to encourage cotton growers", he said, adding that government needs to take practical steps for improvement of agriculture sector.

He said that country is importing billions of dollars worth of cotton due to decline in cotton production in the past few years. A senior official of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (NFS&R) said that recent rains would bring positive impact on Rabi crops including wheat, grams and vegetables. Rains will improve the growth of wheat and grams, he said, adding that wheat crop is at the booting and trilling stage and requires a large quantity of water during this period.

He said that timely and widespread rains have compensated the stressed surface irrigation water supplies and supplemented crop water requirements. Official said that the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) has fixed wheat crop production target at 25.572 million tons from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi 2018-19. Out of 25.572 million tons, Punjab will produce 19.5 million tons, Sindh 3.8 million tons, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 1.36 million tons and Balochistan will produce 0.900 million tons.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190308452456/

NEED STRESSED TO PROMOTE TRADITIONAL FOOD

By Our Correspondent Published: March 8, 2019

FAISALABAD: The promotion of traditional food, seasonal fruits and vegetables are essential to fight the daunting issue of malnutrition as it has affected more than 45% of the people in the country, said University of Agriculture Faisalabad Vice Chancellor Dr Zafar Iqbal Randhawa.

He was addressing the inaugural session of a two-day seminar titled sensitisation seminar on nutrition for media, academia, and students at National Institute of Food Sciences and Technology (NIFST) UAF. The event was organised by the UAF in collaboration with UNICEF and the government of Punjab.

"Most of the students don't eat their breakfast before leaving home and it causes so many health issues. Parents should make sure their children eat homemade dishes, full of nutrition and energy," said Dr Randhawa.

The vice chancellor advised students to have a balanced diet and adopt physical activities in their daily lives. He said that people should wake up early in the morning, offer prayers and exercise. "Excessive eating also leads to malnutrition and causes various health issues."

Faculty of Food Nutrition and Home Sciences (NIFSAT) Dean Dr Masood Sadiq Butt said the issue of malnutrition is worsening due to poor lifestyle. Therefore, there is a need to avoid junk food. He stressed upon the need to enhance efforts to address the issue of malnutrition and suggested food fortification to deal with the problem of malnutrition and food insecurity.

NIFSAT is introducing lassi in packing at its store to foster the trend of desi food in the youth. NIFSAT Director General Dr Tahir Zahoor said that education about nutritious and balanced food at school level will help overcome the issue of malnutrition. He said that malnutrition has emerged as the biggest problem than energy crisis.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1925305/1-need-stressed-promote-traditional-food/

GOVT WORKING ON LAWS TO REVIVE DAIRY SECTOR

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated March 07, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government is working to rationalise taxes on milk supply chain to incentivise the sector in order to expand collection and processing units across the country, said Advisor to Prime Minister on Commerce and Investment Razak Dawood in a meeting with the delegation of International Finance Corporation

The meeting was held to discuss policy options to revive the growth of Pakistan's dairy sector. Dawood said the tax incentives will transform dairy farming into a formal sector.

He added that the taxation policy for dairy supply chain must be re-aligned for government's broader socio-economic objectives with the nutritional requirements of the population.

An official statement issued after the meeting said it was discussed that processed milk, being an essential commodity, remained under the zero-rated sales tax regime from 2006 till 2016. However, the incentive was withdrawn in 2016 and sales tax was reapplied.

As demand for packaged milk is highly price elastic, the imposition of sales tax led to a decline of domestic market by 30 per cent and the formal processing units registered a drastic 80pc decline in profitability. These policies forced manufacturers to cut down costs and close milk collection points across the country as farmers starting shifting back to the informal market.

The advisor informed the meeting that unprocessed milk poses a health hazard due to a high degree of adulteration and contamination and is a major cause of malnutrition and stunted growth among children.

The delegation informed that despite huge potential in the dairy sector, only 5pc of milk sold across the country is processed and packaged while 95pc of the consumed milk is unprocessed. The delegation also highlighted issues of taxation and pointed out the need to pass pasteurisation law which would reduce the health risk from unprocessed milk sold in the market.

The advisor emphasised the need to reverse this trend and bring the dairy farmer back into the formal eco-system where the farmers can work in partnership with companies to improve yield and livestock health.

He also stressed the need for holistic approach to revive the sector by focusing on reducing the regulatory and taxation burden, improving productivity and supply chain management.

Published in Dawn, March 7th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1468132/govt-working-on-laws-to-revive-dairy-sector

CHINA REVOKES CANADIAN CANOLA PERMIT AS DISPUTE ESCALATES

AP Updated March 07, 2019

BEIJING: China said on Wednesday that it is blocking some imports of the agricultural product canola from Canada because of fears of insect infestation.

The move, which comes amid heightened tensions over Canada's arrest of a Chinese tech executive, is seen by some as a new tactic to seek leverage over Ottawa.

China suspended canola imports from a Canadian company "in accordance with laws and regulations and international practise", foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said at a daily news briefing.

He cited "harmful organisms" that he did not identify further, and said China's government "needs to protect the health and safety of its own people".

"I can tell you responsibly that the Chinese government's decision is definitely well-founded," Lu said. "Upon verification, China customs has recently detected dangerous pests in canola imported from Canada many times."

One of Canada's largest grain processors, Richardson International Ltd., said on Tuesday that China had revoked its permit to export canola there.

Some saw that as retaliation for Canada's arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the CFO of Chinese tech giant Huawei.

Canada announced recently that it is going ahead with an extradition hearing for Meng, the daughter of Huawei's founder. Canada arrested her at the request of the US, where she is wanted on fraud charges for allegedly misleading banks about the company's dealings with Iran.

Canadian Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau said in a statement that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency conducted investigations after China issued notices of non-compliance on canola seed imports, including nine since January. She said the agency had not identified any pests or bacteria of concern.

China, whose rapid growth has made it an important market for many countries, has a history of using commercial retaliation against those at odds with Beijing.

The most recent high-profile target was South Korean retailer Lotte, which sold land to the Seoul government for a US anti-missile system opposed by Beijing.

Authorities closed most of the company's 99 supermarkets and other outlets often alleging safety violations and a theme park project.

China suspended a trade deal with Norway and restricted imports of Norwegian salmon after the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Chinese political prisoner Liu Xiaobo in 2010.

It stopped buying fruit from the Philippines during a dispute over territory in the South China Sea.

Britain and other countries also faced retaliation over meetings with Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, considered a dangerous separatist by Beijing.

China receives about 40 per cent of Canada's canola exports, and the revocation of Richardson's permit hurts the entire chain of industries involved in the market, the Canola Council of Canada has said.

Canola prices already have been hit by China's retaliatory tariffs on US agricultural exports. Further cutbacks on Chinese buying would deal a major blow to what is a lifeline for agriculture in western Canada.

"We are working very, very hard with the Chinese government on this issue," Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Tuesday.

China has warned of serious consequences if the Huawei executive is not released.

China arrested two Canadians on Dec 10 in what was widely seen as an attempt to pressure Canada.

After Meng's arrest, a Chinese court also sentenced a Canadian to death in a sudden retrial, overturning a 15-year prison term handed down earlier.

Published in Dawn, March 7th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1468136/china-revokes-canadian-canola-permit-as-dispute-escalates

COTTON INDICATIVE PRICE: EXERCISE CAUTION!

BR Research March 7, 2019

In public policy, unlike religion, there are no marks for trying. A policy is as good as the outcome it achieves, because economies cannot be run on good intentions alone.

The current government has identified poor domestic cotton production as the last bottleneck in its dream to kick start textile export growth. From improved and subsidized power and energy availability to devalued PKR, it appears all other pieces of the puzzle have fallen into place. The solution to conquering the last frontier, according to PTI's commerce czars, is to introduce an indicative price for cotton.

The problem with this line of thinking is that it fixates on a singular symptom: the declining area under cotton cultivation, viz. other kharif crops. More specifically, the decline in cotton cultivation and output is blamed on high support price for sugarcane. It is argued that the perverse incentives structure has led to sugarcane production in excess of domestic consumption; whereas the milling sector is unable to offload its inventory build-up without government subsidy for export.

Going by that logic, should the solution then not to remove the support price on sugarcane? While support price has acted as an added incentive, it is by no mean the only factor in driving high sugarcane cultivation. Moreover, if FY19 numbers are any guide, areas under cultivation for both cotton and cane have shown a slump of 11 and 17 percent respectively over previous year.

The Achille's heel of Pakistan's agriculture is poor yield and not cultivation; and poor yield has many causes. Cotton's yield saw stunted but progressive trend circa FY05 – FY15, when GMO cotton seeds were first introduced in the country, first through illegal, and then under governmental stewardship.

Except, when it comes to innovation in biotechnology, there are no easy answers. In a race to catch up to competition, the country cut corners and bypassed Monsanto, the patent owner for Bt cotton. Hybrids seeds were introducing by cross-breeding Bt cotton with local varieties. This, at first brought improvement in yield and production, as early generation of crop produced effective against pest attacks, reducing application of pesticides.

Soon after, the pests, specifically bollworm, soon developed resistance against the first-generation seed variety, leading to wide scale crop destruction in F16. While the other countries such as China and India moved on to second, even third-generation seed varieties, under the stewardship of patent company; when push comes to shove, Pakistan had no support system for its cotton farmers.

If farmers shifted to other crops such as sugarcane in subsequent years, they were only responding to natural forces; sugarcane after all, is a more resilient crop that can better withstand the unpredictability in weather patterns compared to cotton.

Moreover, claiming that indicative pricing alone is responsible for higher sugarcane sowing is blissful ignorance. For one, it cannot explain persistent complains by farming community that millers across the country paid less than indicative price, which was on record acknowledged by sugar miller's association in the Supreme Court hearing in January 2018.

While growers and millers may not see eye to eye, both groups agree that support price mechanism has been an abject failure as farmers received delayed payments and lower rates; whereas millers incurred losses for procuring crops at what they perceive above-market rates.

For one, in absence of an enforcement mechanism, support price is no more than a notional rate whose impact on growers' decision-making is subjective. If the government plans to remain fixated on increasing cotton output, it needs to go above and beyond the fantastical notion of setting an indicative rate that no one follows in practice.

In order to get growers' incentive structure right, the government needs to take tangible policy action on introducing latest pest-resistant seed variety, adapted to local climatic conditions. This requires taking bio-innovation companies on board. But most importantly, it needs to introduce policy measures that guarantee farmers a price at the time of sowing, whether on market-set or indicative rates.

For as long as farmers are left exposed to market rates at the time of harvest, they will place their bets on the safer crops. If that is too hard for the policymakers to swallow, there is always synthetic fibre!

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/03/07/479385/cotton-indicative-price-exercise-caution/

SEAFOOD EXPORT PLUNGES BY 5.40PC

RECORDER REPORT 2019/03/07

KARACHI: Pakistan's seafood export plunged by 5.40 percent to $217.251 million in July-Jan 2018-19, official figures say.

Seafood export fall now stands at $12.403 million in July-Jan 2018-19 from $229.654 million in July-Jan 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) says.

In term of volume, seafood export is stagnant with less than one percent or 149 metric tons fall to 96,426 metric tons in July-Jan 2018-19 comparing to the fisheries export of 96,575 metric tons in July-Jan 2017-18.

In Jan 2019, the country exported $33.606 million of seafood which is up by 16 percent or $4.573 million from $29.033 million in Jan 2018. The seafood export quantity also surged by 28 percent or 3017 metric tons to 16002 metric tons in Jan 2019 from 12,985 metric tons in Jan 2018.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/03/07/19-page/766793-news.html

BUSINESSMEN PANEL PROPOSES INDUSTRY STATUS FOR HORTICULTURE SECTOR

N H ZUBERI | MAR 7TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Businessmen Panel (Federal) secretary general Ahmad Jawad has proposed that horticulture sector should be given the status of a full-fledged industry. He said we are lobbying with the government to prepare a policy accordingly and provide incentives in its yearly budgets.

Jawad who was former chairman of FPCCI Standing Committee on Agriculture Produce also recommended that cotton production target should be set at 25 million bales by 2023. As different causes for the stagnation in cotton harvest, which included the use of old first generation rather than fourth generation BT technology, absence of better quality seeds, lack of solution to the cotton leaf curl virus, low processing quality at ginning factories and high contamination levels in the produce. These reasons brought down profits for cotton farmers and slashed by 20 percent the area planted with the crop from 2004 to 2016 which needs to be addressed now to uplift cotton industry. As previous governments allowed to import cotton on zero percent from India which hurt farmers.

He also elaborated following challenges and Industry role for the uplift of the sector which needs to be taken up in the coming budget 2019-20 and so on till 2023.

1 – Small landholding: Since the bulk of farmers have less than 10 acres of land, there is problem in getting the benefits of ‘economics of scale.’

2 – Limited access to technology and extension: Farmers still do not have access to better technology. Also, effective dissemination of information from lab to land remains a challenge.

3 – Storage: We need to come a long way in terms of availability and access of agricultural storage facilities for farmers.

4 – Price volatility: The agriculture sector faces the cobweb phenomenon, so there always a need exists to ensure farmers get remunerative prices.

5 – Market integration: Pakistani farmers need to be well connected to the end-consumer. The number of stakeholders across the value chain needs to be reduced. Industry may ask: 1 Better environment for start-ups in food and agri business 2 Greater technological investments in the field of agriculture 3 Simplified leasing norms for setting up processing infrastructure 4 Corporate farming norms to be made more acceptable and balanced for both farmers and corporate 5 Increased involvement of

private players for increasing storage infrastructure including CA stores. He said significant focus is needed on agriculture, with a view to improve rural economy and livelihoods. Policies and allocations are needed to ensure good prices for farmers' crops, food and nutritional security and minimum wastage. Risks will need to be reduced via better implementation and monitoring of risk-mitigating policies, Jawad added.

Almost every government has announced incentives and financial packages for the agriculture sector in a bid to ensure food security and win over voters. Agriculture areas remain a huge vote bank for the political parties and the elected landlords (not peasants and farmers) dominate parliamentary affairs, but in Naya Pakistan we will like see concrete measures in the coming annual budget in order to uplift the sector. Jawad said unlike the importance PTI attached to the agriculture sector in its election manifesto, despite some incentives the party largely chose to ignore the sector in the last two mini-budgets of the incumbent government. He said if the government was really giving any importance to the agriculture sector; it would have taken steps to reduce prices of fertilizers at the optimum level, end the role of middleman in agri-marketing and provide significant incentives to the farmers on input costs.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190307452235/

GROWERS PROTEST OUTSIDE SUGAR MILLS FOR PAYMENT OF DUES

The Newspaper's Correspondent March 06, 2019

LARKANA: Sugar-cane growers and small landowners on Tuesday accused management of the Naudero Sugar Mills of applying delaying tactics in clearing their outstanding dues.

They expressed their concern over the tactics aimed at depriving cane growers of their millions of rupees outstanding against the mills on account of procurement of their crop.

The growers came from Larkana, Shikarpur, Khairpur, Naudero and other areas to get their dues on Tuesday. They were led by Ghulam Rasool Buriro, Ghulam Qadir Shah, Zulfikar Kartiyo, Ali Gul Abro and others.

When they were denied entry to the mills, they held a protest demonstration outside the main entrance and raised slogans against the management. Later, they pitched tents there and held a sit-in.

They said that the management was not ready to clear their dues despite the fact that it purchased their crop for Rs130/40kg, a very low rate as against the official price.

Published in Dawn, March 6th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1467801/growers-protest-outside-sugar-mills-for-payment-of-dues

SHC ORDERS SINDH GOVERNMENT TO NOTIFY NEW PRICE OF SUGARCANE IN 15 DAYS

TANVEER AHMED | MAR 6TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Sindh High Court (SHC) on Tuesday directed provincial government to notify new price of sugarcane for current crushing season in fifteen days by de-notifying previous Rs 182 per 40 kilograms price. The SHC division bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar also ordered sugar mills to buy sugarcane from growers at Rs 182 per 40kgs for current crushing season until Sindh government notified the new prices.

The court stated that Sindh Chief Minister should convene a meeting of provincial cabinet and complete all the codalities for notification of new sugarcane price. The judge remarked that the bench would issue contempt of court notice to Chief Minister if the order for new notification of sugarcane price was not complied with.

Court issued these directives in a petition, filed by sugar mills against the sugarcane price notified by Sindh Government on December 07 last year and prayed the court to set aside this notification. The counsel for sugar mills contended that fixation of sugarcane price by Sindh Agriculture Department was illegal. They argued that it should have been fixed by Sugar Control Board, constituted on the orders of Sindh Court.

The counsel stated that notification for the sugarcane price without the approval of Sindh cabinet was illegal and provincial government fixed the price without considering stance of sugar mills. Sugar mills prayed the court to declare the notification of the sugarcane price of the current crushing season void.

Additional Advocate General Sindh submitted before the court that power of taking decisions rests with the provincial government under rules of business and argued that approval from the cabinet is just a formality. He argued that all the stakeholders were taken on board for fixation of the sugarcane price and Rs 182 per 40kg is appropriate price for all the stakeholders.

Meanwhile, Sindh High Court (SHC) approved a petition for hearing against airing Indian movies/ dramas in Pakistan. It issued notices to federal government through Foreign Ministry, Information Ministry, PEMRA and Censor Board to submit their comments on March 08.

Atam Parkash and Salim Michael moved the high court against airing of Indian movies and dramas in view of tense situation on the border with India. They stated that airing of Indian movies is tantamount to injuring the hearts of Pakistani nation in the backdrop of standoff with India. They stated minorities stand by armed forces of the country.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190306451973/

POULTRY PRODUCTS EXPORT: GOVERNMENT URGED TO ALLOW 50 PERCENT FREIGHT SUBSIDY

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 6TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Poultry sector has demanded to allow 50 percent freight subsidy on poultry products export. According to a presentation given by Azhar Ali Dahar, Director General, TDAP, on the other day, poultry sector has demanded for 50 percent freight subsidy on the export of poultry products.

“They are also seeking duty drawbacks on import duty and waiver from local taxes and levies in order to make the poultry products competitive in term of pricing,” he said and added that none of the FTAs negotiated by Pakistan have provided any leverage to the poultry industry.

Azhar said that UAE had revised the regulations for import of poultry which meant that all the companies that were previously registered with and exporting to UAE now have to get registered again of Muslims in European.

He said that Pakistan was the sixth largest producer of milk and the eighth largest producer of meat and poultry but the potential of international Halal market was still to be tapped and urged the authority concerned to develop its own Halal standards and a certification body recognized by the World Halal Council.

In addition, infrastructure facilities such as Halal Parks, Halal Export Processing Zones should also be established with tax incentive to develop it as export oriented sector, he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190306451978/

AGRICULTURE: TO DO MORE WITH LESS

M ZIAUDDIN | MAR 6TH, 2019 | ARTICLE

Pakistan is a low income developing country. Agriculture is the most important sector of the country meeting food and fibre requirements of the fast growing population. Although the rate of population increase has considerably slowed down from over 3 percent in 1980s to 2.04 percent in recent years, it is still considered high. With the current rate of population growth, the population is expected to get doubled by 2050-making Pakistan 4th largest nation by 2050 from current status of 5th most populous state of the world. The total cultivated area has increased by just 40 percent during past 60 years, while there has been more than 4 times increase in population with urban expansion of over sevenfold-resulting into mega-cities as well as rising population pressure on cultivated land. Wheat production, a major food crop, has increased five-fold during the same period-yet the country is marginal importer of wheat. Tremendous efforts are needed both advances in technology and population control to narrow the food supply-demand gap. Reducing poverty, hunger and food insecurity are essential part of MDGs3 and are pre-requisites for economic development. Food security and economic growth mutually interact and reinforce each other in the development process [Timmer (2004)]. A country unable to produce the needed food and has no resources or afford to buy food from the international market to meet demand-supply gap, is not food sovereign state [PinstrupAndersen (2009)]. Food security is thus fundamental to national security, which is generally ignored [Fullbrook (2010)]. The extraordinary rise in food prices in later part of the first decade of 21st century raised an alarm bell on food security, particularly for the developing world. Pakistan is no exception. To achieve food-secure and pro-poor agricultural growth, Pakistan needs to adopt a comprehensive approach towards increasing productivity of all foods rather than merely concentrating upon achieving just wheat-based food security. Moreover, for benefiting from adoption of new agricultural technologies, the farm households should be able to finance expensive inputs and diversify their livelihoods through optimum farm and non-farm sectors' employment-mix. Managing food security in Pakistan also requires an understanding about its dimensions; future challenges of agricultural growth and food security; and impact of agricultural policies on food supply and income, the poor vulnerable in rural and urban areas; and what are do-able options. (Extract from a paper "The State of Food Security in Pakistan: Future Challenges and Coping Strategies" by Munir Ahmad and Umar Farooq – published in (c)The Pakistan Development Review 49:4 Part II (Winter 2010) pp. 903-923).

Pakistan's latest estimated population is 207,774,520 (excluding the regions of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan). The agricultural sector sustains the livelihoods of 45 percent of Pakistan's population (FAO 2012). And today not only we are a water-stretched country but the worldwide climate change phenomenon is also affecting our agriculture sector very seriously.

It's critical, therefore, to note that growing enough food will be no small task in the years ahead, and that the kind of agriculture practised today – reliant on industrial-era concepts of land use and productivity – isn't poised, it is believed, to get us there. The reality is that we have to quickly and efficiently bring farming from the industrial age into the digital one.

With a predicted global population of 9.8 billion by 2050, the world is needed to figure out how to feed a much larger population, and fast. Studies show this could mean we need to grow as much as double the amount of food we do today, simply to avoid food security issues and mass social disruption. Already, more than 3 million children die worldwide each year because they don't get enough to eat. At the same time, climate change is making it harder to feed the world through conventional means – in fact, with world's current rate of crop yields; we'll only have enough food for half of that projected population. The way out of the looming agri-crises is said to be digitization of relevant agri-practices. And agricultural technology – from vertical farming to data science to farm drones – is the new hot thing in investor circles.

In an article Why the agtech boom isn't your typical tech disruption, published on 25 Feb 2019 in The Agenda Weekly from the World Economic Forum on March 1, 2019) Karn Manhas, Founder, Terramera has discussed these new digital technologies being increasingly used for boosting agricultural sector and improving universal food security:

The Investment Corporation of Dubai alone just dropped $203 million into agtech investments; another $200 million came from the Japanese holding behemoth SoftBank; and dedicated VC funds are zeroing in on the sector's potential.

In 2017, total investment was over $1.5 billion – a new record for the sector, and one that's setting the stage for explosive growth.

At its core, agtech – name of the new game – is about using advanced monitoring and data analysis to do more with less – to find ways to increase yields without burdening already overtaxed resources such as land and water.

Right now, a cross-section of technologies and disciplines – from sensors, artificial intelligence and big data to biotech and robotics – are being used by progressive startups to boost global food supplies. For example, Hortau systems is increasing watering efficiency through smart monitoring, which in turn increases plant yield. Phytech is optimizing crop production with its "Plant Internet of Things" – smart devices in fields that send simple colour-coded alerts to smartphones with recommendations and warnings. Meanwhile, the Israeli-based CropX uses hardware and software to measure soil moisture, conductivity and temperature, allowing farmers to save water.

The agtech market is expected to grow organically (indeed, exponentially) over time, giving early entrants an edge and access to an ever-increasing customer base.

Apart from the pressing need to keep the world properly fed, agtech addresses another crucial pain point: keeping farming viable for the next generation of people who grow our food.

Yet a yawning tech gap in farming has emerged in recent decades, with real-life consequences. In our approaches to land management, resource use, labour, transportation and more, we're firmly stuck in an outdated industrial model – emphasizing large-scale farms and massive output at all costs, while ignoring externalities from environmental impact to financial repercussions and human tolls.

Case in point: conventional farming is largely viable today because it's propped up with massive government subsidies. The US currently pays around $25 billion to farmers annually. But even with a cash infusion, it's still a tough go for today's farmers. The world's most important career has notoriously tight margins and is often a losing proposition. (Grapes, for example, bring in as little as $6 of profit per acre, and they are considered a higher-profit crop.) It's little wonder that young people aren't stepping into the industry anymore. (Britain is even facing a farmer shortage.)

For example, Cainthus, an AI facial recognition software for cows, allows small farmers to maintain larger herds and track the health of individual animals, right down to how much they've eaten each day and how much milk they've been given. Meanwhile, aWhere is a next-gen Farmers' Almanac, monitoring and forecasting the weather with pinpoint accuracy thanks to a global network of 1.4 million weather stations. Drones and robots from companies like Farmbot are helping fill the farm labour gap, with drag-and-drop interfaces that allow farmers to build sequences of actions for hardware or set repeating growing regimens. Blue River Technology, recently acquired by John Deere, uses cameras and AI to dole out herbicide more precisely as needed.

The digitization of agriculture is necessary simply to maintain the status quo. If we want to continue to go shopping – to continue filling our baskets with healthy and affordable food – we need to fundamentally rethink how we do agriculture. Behind the scenes, a radical shift is needed to retool our food systems and make the most of what we have for a growing population. Failing that, the average trip to buy food may soon be anything but.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190306451966/

INDONESIAN OFFER FOR MARKET ACCESS TO RICE NOTIFIED: SULEMAN

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 6TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Rafique Suleman, Convener, FPCCI Standing Committee on Rice Tuesday said Indonesia has offered market access to Pakistani rice and a formal notification has been issued.

Addressing the first meeting of FPCCI Standing Committee on Rice at the Federation House, Suleman said that international scenario for Pakistan rice is positive and with aggressive marketing Pakistan can enhance its rice exports.

The first meeting of the rice committee attended by S M Muneer, Abdul Rahim Janoo, former chairman, Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (Reap), Engr. Daroo Khan Achakzai, President FPCCI, Safder Mehkri, Reap, Jawed Jillani, Muhammad Raza, Members of Reap's Managing Committee along with prominent rice exporters, Muzammil Chappal, Mahesh Talreja, Faisal Anis Majeed, Fuad Garib, Salman Paracha and a large numbers of rice exporters. Various matters related to rice export trade were discussed.

Suleman informed the meeting that Reap has decided to arrange Biryani festivals at domestic as well as international level for promotion of Pakistani Basmati rice and explore new export markets.

Reap is going to organize a grand Biryani festival at Sindh Governor House this month. Second festival is being planned in South Africa by the end of this month. Another grand Biryani festival will also be arranged at FPCCI for all diplomats to promote Pakistani rice, he added.

Suleman said Reap is closely working with federal government to enhance rice export and earn more foreign exchange for the country. As part of these efforts and the consistent efforts of Reap and Ministry of Commerce, Indonesia has offered market access to Pakistani rice and in this regard a notification has already been issued, he added.

He said trade delegations of rice exporters will visit various countries for the promotion and marketing of Pakistani rice.

S M Munir said that he always gave preference to rice export trade which is the 2nd largest trade of Pakistan. He assured all rice exporters that FPCCI will continue to support and resolve all the issues related to rice export trade.

Abdul Rahim Janoo said at Johannesburg Biryani festival all the diplomats in South Africa as well as large number of rice importers will be invited to promote Pakistani rice.

He was hopeful that after this event, rice export to South Africa will take a boost as South Africa is a major market for parboiled rice – approximately one million tons, wherein Pakistan's share is negligible.

Safder Mehkri, Chairman Reap informed the participants about the recent activities of Reap. He said after the success of rice conference at Larkana, Reap is working on projects that will lead to doubling the rice production in five years.

"We are hopeful that till 2023, we will be able to increase rice exports to $ 5 billion," he added. He said support of provincial and federal governments will be instrumental in achieving the target.

Later, Rafique Suleman thanked all the participants for attending the meeting and sharing valuable suggestions for promotion of rice trade.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190306452009/

POULTRY EXPORTS TO AFGHANISTAN FALL

By Our Correspondent Published: March 6, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government and industry stakeholders have voiced concern over the slump in poultry exports to Afghanistan and have agreed to take up the matter with Afghan authorities.

The issue came up for discussion in a meeting between a delegation, led by Big Bird Group Chairman and Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA) Export Committee Convener Abdul Basit, and Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan on Tuesday.

Federal Secretary Dr Hashim Popalzai and other senior officials of the ministry were also present. "We are making efforts to enhance export of poultry and rightful demands of the industry will be considered," the minister said and assured the poultry association of support for their budget proposals. He told the association to comply with international standards, which were indispensible for poultry exports.

"Disease-free poultry is fit for exports and to achieve that we need proper surveillance. The National Veterinary Lab provides the facility to check samples," he said and sought the PPA's cooperation in poultry monitoring.

The association submitted budget proposals with the objective of enhancing export of poultry and poultry products. It pointed out that the poultry sector was demanding duty drawback facility on the export of poultry products in line with other sectors, like 6% relief on chicken hatching/ eggs and 8% on chicken meat and products.

The PPA also called for waiving cash margins on the import of raw material for value addition in poultry.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1923955/2-poultry-exports-afghanistan-fall/

BAN ON UNPACKED SPICES FROM 20TH

Bureau Report March 05, 2019

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority announced ban on loose and unpacked spices from March 20.

The authority's director general Riaz Khan Mehsud has urged spices dealers to adopt the technology and introduce packing before the crackdown starts, according to a statement issued here on Monday.

He said unpacked spices were injurious to health and might cause fatal diseases. He added that last year the authority's scientific committee had suggested the ban and proposed one-year grace period to transform existing businesses into the approved mechanism. He warned the business owners and dealers to introduce packing to improve quality of their products.

Meanwhile, the authority's director technical Dr Abdul Sattar Shah said loose spices might contain Aflatoxin which causes cancer. He said packing was the only solution to stop weather impact on the product.

Authority's director operations Khalid Khattak said the dealers had already been asked to stop sale of unpacked spices. He said food authority's teams would carry out the crackdown on expiry of the deadline.

Published in Dawn, March 5th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1467677/ban-on-unpacked-spices-from-20th

COTTON PRODUCTION DOWN 6.8PC

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana Updated March 05, 2019

KARACHI: Adversely affected by the decrease in area under cultivation coupled with the use of poor quality seed and pesticides, cotton production as of March 1 clocked in at 10.471 million bales down 6.80 per cent over the corresponding period last year.

Cotton analysts believe the cotton production during the current season (2018-19) is expected to be the second lowest in eight years.

The lowest production was recorded in 2015-16 season which fell to 9.7m bales, however, there is a stark difference between the two as the decline in cotton crop production three years ago was a result of massive pest attack including armyworm and pink bollworm which caused widespread devastation to the crop.

Whereas, the major cause for production shortage in the ongoing season is the reduced area under cotton crop cultivation and use of poor quality seed and pesticides resulting in poor yield per acre causing heavy losses to cotton growers.

According to private estimates, against 9m acres earmarked for cotton crop, only 6m acres have been cultivated in 2018-19.

For the last several years, cotton growers have gradually shifted to sugarcane crop either under the pressure of sugar mills which are mostly owned by political figures and influential landlords or due to economic factors since cotton crop needs heavy doses of pesticides which are mostly of poor quality.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has also taken notice of the falling cotton crop size and even directed concerned departments to take measures on war footing to achieve a target of 15m bales for next crop season (2019-20).

Meanwhile, Minister of Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan had suggested that the government can set support price for phutti (seed cotton) at Rs3,500 per 40kg in order to encourage growers.

Cotton Commissioner Khalid Abdullah, who also happens to be vice president Pakistan Central Cotton Committee, said that next crop would not face water shortage but certified seed and quality pesticide will have to be used in order to increase yield.

Moreover, the government is also likely to impose section 144 in order to protect cotton cultivation area A detailed examination of the total figures revealed that the largest cotton producing province — Punjab recorded a shortfall of 9.34pc at 6.592 million bales as of Mar 1, 2019 whereas Sindh registered a fall of 2.45pc at 4.149m bales.

The only organic cotton producing province of the country, Balochistan also reported 0.99pc shortfall in production at 117,852 bales.

Published in Dawn, March 5th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1467721/cotton-production-down-68pc

TDC WILL GO TO TOBACCO PRODUCING AREAS

By Our Correspondent Published: March 5, 2019

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Mahmood Khan in principle approved the utilisation of Tobacco Development Cess (TDC) Funds for the tobacco producing districts of the province, an official statement said on Monday.

However he made clear that these funds must be released by deputy commissioners concerned after scrutinising the facts and figures to insure realistic evaluation, the statement read.

Mahmood was chairing a meeting at CM Secretariat Peshawar that was attended by Provincial Ministers Taimur Salim Jhagra, Shehram Khan Tarakai, Sultan Mohammad Khan, Special Assistant for Industries Abdul Karim Khan, MPAs of the tobacco growing districts, administration secretaries of the departments concerned and other higher authorities.

The CM was briefed in respect of the utilisation of Tobacco Development Cess for the years 2016-17 and 2017-18. The meeting gave approval to the methodology for revenue collection of the Cess, its utilisation, setting up of the concerned committee and TDC revenue generation also took stock of the factual revenue collection for the years 2016-17 and 2017-18 that amounted to Rs263.415 million and Rs397.66 million respectively.

The meeting was informed that the overall ADP evaluation for the year 2017-18 was Rs100 million while for the year 2018-19 it was Rs261.928 million.

It was further told that TDC fund was allocated for the tobacco producing districts on the basis of the total tobacco produce of the area concerned wherein Pakistan Tobacco Board provided the data for the purpose.

It was further revealed that distribution of funds within the districts was undertaken on the basis of under cultivation land of tobacco crops for which data was being provided by the deputy commissioner of the district concerned. The meeting was also informed of the proposed shares in tobacco development cess funds for the district of Swabi, Mardan, Charsadda, Buner, Nowshera, Malakand and Mansehra of the years 2016-17 and 2017-18.

CM Mahmood in principle approved the proposed evaluation of TDC Funds for various constituencies. However, on the proposal of MPA of the relevant districts, he directed for release of the funds after revision of the facts and figures. He also directed for reviewing the data for the year 2018-19 in backdrop of the new delimitations of the concerned constituencies.

Mahmood said that provincial government was streamlining all the sectors so that various matters and things were made clearer and transparent and institutions worked in the right direction under its ambits of better service delivery. He said that this would also greatly contribute in safeguarding the rights of the people and ensure transparent and judicious resources.

He assured that positive progress and changes could be seen in the coming budget in this regard. The meeting was proposed that shares of the concerned districts might be provided on tobacco prices and rates instead of its produce as there was difference of rates and quality of tobacco crops in different districts.

CM Mahmood said that provincial government will set up a marble city in Buner so as to exploit the local resource for generating economic activities and creating employment opportunities.

Talking to a delegation of Buner that called on him at CM House Peshawar led by MPA Riaz Khan, the chief minister also assured of providing piped gas to the underdeveloped district.

He said that he was aware of the problems and grievances of the people of the backward districts as he belonged to a backward area.

The 200-member delegation comprised elected local government representatives, Nazmeen, Insaf Students Federation (ISF), Insaf Doctors Forum (IDF) and PTI youth officer bearers and workers. On this occasion former Tehsil Councillor from Buner Dr Abdullah announced joining PTI along with dozens of his supporters and family members. The CM welcomed the newcomers to the PTI fold and put party caps on their heads.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 5th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1923078/1-tdc-will-go-tobacco-producing-areas/

FARMERS BEGIN 21KM MARCH OVER WATER CRISIS IN BADIN

A Correspondent Updated March 04, 2019

BADIN: Charged farmers marched on roads in Tando Bago town and staged a demonstration before embarking on 21-kilometre march on foot to Badin town on Sunday to draw government's attention to nagging water crisis in the district.

Leaders of farmers' organisations and Save Badin Action Committee told journalists that their share in water was being stolen by influential landlords in connivance with officers of irrigation department and Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority.

They said that despite continuous protest in different towns of the district no responsible officer of the Sindh government had bothered even to talk to them.

They would devise future course of action on Monday in Badin where they would stage a big show with thousands of farmers participating from across the district, they said.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1467481/farmers-begin-21km-march-over-water-crisis-in-badin

SCA WORRIED OVER DELAY IN WHEAT PROCUREMENT

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent March 04, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has expressed concern over delay in establishment of wheat procurement centre in the province.

At a meeting held here on Sunday under chairmanship of Kabool Mohammad Kathian, the SCA office-bearers observed that harvesting of wheat had already started in the province, but procurement centres were not opened yet by the food department.

The meeting also demanded that wheat support price should be fixed at Rs1,500 per 40kg, complaining that new crop was reaching market in the absence of procurement centres.

It urged the Sindh government to provide gunny bags to the wheat growers who had harvested the crop. It also reminded the Sindh government that growers had paid cost of tractors under a subsidy scheme and such amount was deposited in Sindh Bank which was drawing interest on it.

But one year had passed and growers failed to get tractors, it added.

It called for provision of tractors to growers who had paid the cost. It also demanded of the Sindh government to ensure payment of Rs42 per maunds of sugar cane crop of this year to farmers. The

SCA said conditions in Sabzi Mandi of Hyderabad and Karachi should be improved where traders faced serious difficulties.

It said that wholesale vegetable markets were faced with poor civic conditions in rains and this needed to be improved.

The meeting was attended by SCA general secretary Zahid Bhurgari, vice president Nabi Bux Sathio, Mohammad Khan Sarejo and others.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1467479/sca-worried-over-delay-in-wheat-procurement

POTATO GLUT SHOWS HOW SMALL-CROP FARMERS ARE SUFFERING

From the Newspaper Updated March 04, 2019

This year's potato glut has once again exposed how vulnerable our growers of small crops are to market forces.

When a Karachi-based superstore offered potatoes for Rs2 per kilogram to lure customers in mid-February, many thought it was a typo. However, it turned out that the store was really selling potatoes at that rate. It is a separate story, though, that it doubled the rate after a few days — and began selling the same potatoes after 10 days for Rs70 per 5kg bag. The same superstore, as part of a sales promotion deal for customers, had also offered other vegetables at unbelievably low prices: 2kgs of cabbage, for example, were available at a token price of just Re1.

Apart from the dark secrets of mega marketing schemes of our superstores, the fact that stands out here is this: the potato crop has been large and, with sufficient carryover stocks of the past year, the market is witnessing a potato glut. The same is not true for all other vegetables. But generally speaking, supplies of some of other vegetables have also exceeded demand. So their prices have crashed.

Larger production of vegetables has, meanwhile, resulted in 41 per cent increase in export volumes and 9.8pc growth in foreign exchange earnings in the first seven months of this fiscal year, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

The absence of a modern system to ensure fair play in markets of perishable items creates erratic patterns of small-crop production

In July-January, Pakistan exported more than 507,000 tonnes of vegetables, up from 359,000 tonnes in the year-ago period. Export earnings, however, rose to just $115.5 million from $105.2m. But within this group, exports of potatoes have not increased, thus deepening its glut. But potato exports are yet to pick up pace as the country has exported only about 250,000 tonnes of them in the last seven months.

According to recent media reports, this year's crop size is huge — 4.5m tonnes — against the maximum projected domestic consumption of 3.75m tonnes.

However, regardless of a few sales promotion schemes being offered here and there, a vast majority of the consumers of vegetables gets little benefit of the price crash. They have got some benefit only in the case of potatoes whose market prices range between Rs15 and Rs20 per kg in most of Karachi markets, down from the last year's Rs25-Rs30 per kg.

It is difficult for consumers to realise how our potato farmers have suffered this year with the wholesale prices not even covering half of their cost of production.

The problem with our food crops is that for decades the country's political elite has pampered wheat and sugar cane crops, paying little attention to equally important two other major crops — rice and maize — and neglecting almost all minor crops, including pulses, oilseeds and vegetables. Successive governments have spent hundreds of billions of rupees in subsidies on wheat and sugar cane for cultivation and production of the crops and local and foreign sales of wheat grains or sugar.

Not a fraction of that amount has been spent on the promotion of minor food crops.

Another problem is that in the absence of a national action plan for promoting minor crops, inter-provincial coordination for the production of these crops has become difficult. Each province continues to facilitate cultivation of minor crops on its own depending upon local factors.

Every year, one or two minor crops experience a glut-like situation due to broken supply chains and lack of coordination in inter-provincial movements of these crops. Sometimes it is potato, sometimes tomato, sometimes cabbage or green or red chilli. Farmers of these crops get little or no support from the government and have to dump their produce at the rates that don't even cover the cost of output.

As a result, those farmers switch over to other crops the next year. And if the switching over takes place on a mass scale, the country's production of certain small crops falls short of its need the very next year or the year after. Unavailability of credible and timely data on the output of vegetables and other minor crops also makes the price discovery system difficult.

In addition to the factors responsible for making rationalisation of the crop size difficult and impeding the pace of diversification of our agriculture base, the absence of a modern system to ensure fair play in markets of perishable items also creates erratic patterns of production of small crops. The establishment of more and more wholesale vegetable and pulse markets in the districts where these crops are grown and the abolition of advance auctions of crops are the two things that must be done. Right now, most of the growers and small sharecroppers of minor crops sell their output to traders-cum-speculators at throwaway prices to repay loans or cover the cost of cultivation.

One reason for doing so is that there are not many wholesale markets within their own districts. In order to avoid the hassle and the cost involved in transporting their produce to faraway markets, they develop a permanent relationship with the traders. These traders lure them into selling their produce in advance at very low rates before the crops are ready. Once the crops are reaped, they transport them to main cities. Consumers in the main cities pay a lot more for vegetables not knowing that the growers sometimes get peanuts for their produce. Last year, many tomato growers in Sindh received not even a fraction of their cost of production.

Just read this paragraph from a Dawn story titled "Too many pitfalls, not enough profit" of Nov 12, 2018: "A few days ago, on a visit to the Dodo Soomro union council, we saw a small landholder flinging tomatoes in a nearby drain. When we enquired as to why he was doing so, he said that the rates were so low that he could not even afford to pay the cost of transport required to get the crop to market. He decided it would be better to just throw the produce instead." — MA

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, March 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1467380/potato-glut-shows-how-small-crop-farmers-are-suffering

NO TARGET FOR WHEAT PROCUREMENT

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated March 04, 2019

WHEAT harvesting has commenced in the lower Sindh region but the provincial government has not yet fixed a procurement target for this year's (2018-19) wheat crop.

Sindh is presently said to have a million tonne of carry-over wheat from 2017-18 which is being released to flour mills and chakki owners. Last year the Sindh government had fixed a wheat purchase target of 1.4m tonnes which was met by the food department.

The federal government has allowed the export of 0.5m tonnes of carry-over wheat from last season.

According to Sindh food officials, the province is finalising the export of around 150,000 tonnes of wheat while around 200,000 tonnes will be released to flour mills and chakki owners. This will deplete overall stocks to around 700,000 tonnes by the time the new crop's procurement starts.

Of total wheat production, Sindh usually contributes around 13 per cent in area sown and around 14.7pc in national production. The province's average yield per acre in 2017-18 was recorded at 32.9 maunds as per estimates of the provincial agriculture department.

Given the gradual rise in the flows of the river Indus, irrigation water availability has lately improved, rekindling hope among farmers of an increase in grain formation as well as per acre productivity

Punjab remains the main producer of the staple food with a 74pc contribution in total annual production. The remaining 12pc is jointly produced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

Sindh missed its wheat sowing target of 1.15m hectares by 11pc this fiscal year owing to water shortages, while last year as well only 3.6m tonnes of crop were produced against a production target of 4.2m tonnes.

Given the gradual rise in the flows of the river Indus, irrigation water availability has lately improved at the province's barrages. The improved flows, coupled with recent rainfall, have rekindled hope among farmers of an increase in grain formation as well as per acre productivity.

The lower Sindh region has an early sowing and harvesting trend for crops. Mirpurkhas has started wheat harvesting. Growers in the area are selling their produce at Rs1,150/40kg to traders against a support price of Rs1,300 in the absence of procurement which will begin around April.

Growers who cultivate early are hard-pressed to sell their crop to both traders and middlemen, and often face exploitation. They have to cash in on irrigation water flows and sell their crop to middlemen who have loaned them inputs for cultivation. One could say these farmers mortgage their crop to market players even before they have cultivated. Traders, for example, buy their crop at low rates after adjusting loans.

Every year fears of flawed wheat procurement haunt wheat producers. They end up as major losers amidst an unholy alliance between food officials and traders or middlemen which deprives genuine small- and medium-farmers of their right to avail subsidy (support price of Rs1,300/40kg) on their wheat crop.

Gunny bags are intentionally denied to such growers while the big landowners get them relatively more easily thanks to their connections. But big landowners usually don't grow wheat as they prefer either orchard farming or growing sugar cane.

"A trader purchases wheat at Rs1,150 per maund and a gunny bag at Rs100 per bag. While he may earn Rs375 on 2.5 maunds of wheat, after deducting the Rs100 of the gunny bag, his actual take home is a mere Rs275," says Nadeem Shah, a wheat grower from Matiari. He's concerned about the government's slackness in starting the tendering process for gunny bags which need at least a month's time to become available.

Further, the Sindh government has been buying plastic gunny bags which, from a farmers' point of view, don't store the produce as effectively as jute bags do.

Sindh has an official wheat storage capacity of 750,000 tonnes. The remaining quantum is kept in rented premises of flour mills. The same goes for Punjab where, according to analyst Ibrahim Mughal, around 3.6-3.8m tonnes of crop is procured every year out of a total production of around 19.6m tonnes.

Providing a subsidy on the wheat crop, according to a former director of the Sindh food authority, remains misplaced. "It reaches neither the farmer nor the consumer. A farmer by and large doesn't avail the subsidy at the time of crop procurement because food inspectors are always at a liberty to buy from the middlemen by providing bags to them instead of the actual growers. Flour mill owners purchase wheat in every season," he said.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1467378/no-target-for-wheat-procurement

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 25th TO MARCH 3rd 2019

PFA DISCARDS 10,000KG DESI GHEE

From the Newspaper March 03, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has discarded 10,000 kilo substandard organic ghee worth Rs10 million of a Sahiwal factory in the market on Saturday.

The action was taken after samples from the market, warehouse and factory failed lab test.

The representatives of the factory requested the PFA to reanalyse their failed samples. The second test also failed to meet safety and quality parameters.

Published in Dawn, March 3rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1467388/pfa-discards-10000kg-desi-ghee

IMPORTS OF PULSES, PALM OIL, TEA INCREASE DESPITE RUPEE DEVALUATION

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated March 03, 2019

KARACHI: Consumers are paying higher prices for essential food items despite a decline in rates of raw materials and finished goods in world markets during the past seven months of the current fiscal year.

Meanwhile, traders said the rupee devaluation has faded away the impact of falling world prices, thereby increasing the prices of ghee, cooking oil, tea, pulses, and spices.

Many companies and traders had enhanced their buying following drop in world prices of many commodities and raw materials. These stakeholders came out with a price hike on the basis of 15 per cent rupee fall against the dollar in the last seven months. Back in July 2018, when one dollar was equal to Rs121, the exchange rate changed drastically to Rs138/139 in January 2019.

Amid a decline of 8pc in the country's overall food import bill to $3.464 billion in 7MFY19, imports of pulses, tea and palm oil registered a positive growth in terms of quantities.

Import of pulses rose to 563,035 tonnes costing $324 million in 7MFY19 from 408,975 tonnes worth $315m in same period last fiscal. Its average unit price (AUP) fell to $576 per tonne from $771 per tonne.

Wholesalers of pulses had pushed up price by Rs5-10 per kg on falling rupee value against the dollar.

Talking to Dawn, Patron-in-Chief Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association (KWGA) Anis Majeed said, "Regardless of the prevailing global prices of essential food items, the landing cost increases due to rupee devaluation which is done according to the ratio of increase in dollar value."

"Given that the prices of pulses in world market are going down, the local market price should have fallen accordingly. However, the rupee devaluation has impacted the prices as payment is made in dollars," he added.

Tea imports climbed to 132,784 tonnes ($347n) from 110,147 tonnes ($340m) in 7MFY18, while its AUP witnessed drastic fall to $2,616 per tonne from $3,086 per tonne.

Chairman Pakistan Tea Association (PTA), Shoaib Paracha said tea prices in the wholesale markets increased by Rs50-60 per kg from July 2018 onwards owing to rupee depreciation. He said Kenya tea prices had fallen due to good crop in the last two to three months.

The most notable decline of 74pc and 70pc in quantity and volume was witnessed in dry fruits and nuts — 16,997 tonnes and $27m — owing to massive smuggling of these items via informal channels. However, the AUP climbed to $1,596 from $1,396 per tonnes.

According to the figures of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), another major fall came in soybean oil imports to 66,705 tonnes valuing $49m, down by 44pc and 53pc in quantity and value over same period 7MFY18. Soybean oil AUP plunged to $740 per tonne from $891 per tonne.

The AUP of palm oil also declined to $611 per tonne from $745 per tonne. However, its imports surged in quantity by 11pc to 1.8m tonnes but plunged in value by 9pc to $1.1bn. The local industry has expedited its imports to meet higher demand for ghee and cooking oil during Ramazan which will begin in the last week of May. Consumers had witnessed Rs10 per kg/litre jump in ghee and cooking oil prices.

Imports of milk cream and milk food for infants plunged to 48,162 tonnes ($137m) from 52,550 tonnes ($152m) in seven months of the last fiscal year. The AUP of milk products slightly fell to $2,859 per tonne from $2,898 per tonne.

Spices imports rose in quantity to 78,091 tonnes from 77,818 tonnes but its import bill remained low at $86m versus $93m. Its AUP came down to $1,105 per tonne from $1,195 per tonne.

Rice prices soared by Rs15-20 per kg in the last seven months amid a mixed trend in rice exports. Basmati exports surged to 328,374 tonnes ($305n) from 244,040 tonnes ($255m) while other varieties exports fell to 1.791m tonnes ($749m) from 2.034m tonnes ($812n) in 7MFY18.

Sugar prices swelled to Rs62-65 from Rs55 per kg while its exports plummeted to 276,393 tonnes ($82m) from 610,770 tonnes ($227m) in 7MFY18.

The price of various varieties of flour also rose by Rs2 per kg despite the availability of ample stocks from last year and the arrival of new crop in March/April. Wheat exports in 7MFY19 climbed to 468,443 tonnes ($99m) from 173 tonnes valuing $45,000.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1467350/imports-of-pulses-palm-oil-tea-increase-despite-rupee-devaluation

PUNJAB AGRICULTURE IT ACT: SC GIVES GO AHEAD FOR RECOVERY OF TAX FROM LAND OWNERS

TERENCE J SIGAMONY | MAR 3RD, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Supreme Court has held that Punjab tax authority could recover all due amounts from the owners of agriculture land within a period of two years from the time when the total agricultural income was first assessable, ie, the assessment years of 2012 and 2013. A three-judge bench, headed by former Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar, on 8th January after hearing the arguments of all the parties had reserved the verdict, which was released on Saturday.

The verdict authored by ex-CJP Mian Saqib Nisar said where an assessee has not filed his income tax return or has done so without disclosing his agricultural income, the tax authorities are obliged to levy, assess and collect agricultural income tax in terms of the provisions of the Punjab Agricultural Income Tax Act, 1997 (Act) and Punjab Agricultural Income Rules, 2001 (Rules).

The Punjab tax authority (petitioner) had issued recovery notices to the owners of agricultural land (respondents) for recovery of agricultural income tax for the assessment years 2012, 2013 and 2014 under the Act.

The respondents challenged the recovery notices by filing constitution petitions before the Lahore High Court, which were allowed. The Punjab Revenue Department then approached the Supreme Court against the LHC judgements.

The court noted that particularly tax statutes operate prospectively and not retrospectively unless clearly indicated by the legislature. Retrospectivity can only be attributed to a statute where it is made explicit or can be inferred by necessary implication; it cannot be presumed.

The court observed that Section 3B inserted in the Act through the Punjab Finance Act, 2013 by way of amendment in Punjab Agricultural Income Tax Act, 1997 was to apply prospectively. It said that Section 4(4) of the Act read with Rule 14(3) of the Rules, albeit couched in negative terms, clearly allows for the recovery of agricultural income tax for the two years (i.e. 2012 and 2013) prior to the assessment year in which the total agricultural income was first assessable, ie, the assessment year beginning on 01.07.2014.

It was further the case of the respondents that there is a mandatory process under the Act to levy, assess and collect agricultural income tax for a given assessment year which has not been so done by the petitioner, rather the latter has simply issued recovery notices demanding the recovery of agricultural income tax which it is not allowed to do under the law.

The court said that the precise wording of Sections 3 and 3B of the Act are important and need to be considered. The Section 3 provides that there shall be levied, assessed and collected each year a tax in respect of agricultural income of a tax year of an owner at the rate specified in the First Schedule.

However, according to Section 3B, notwithstanding the provisions of Section 3 of the Act, where any person has declared agricultural income for any assessment year in the return filed under the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 (the Ordinance) he shall pay tax on such income at the rate specified in the Second Schedule.

The court said where the assessee has himself filed his income tax return in which he has declared his agricultural income, by virtue of Section 3B of the Act, the tax department is not required to levy and assess agricultural income tax and can recover the same by issuing recovery notices directly. “Therefore, we find that the argument of the learned counsel for the respondents that failure to pass an assessment order has deprived the respondents of the right to challenge such order under Section 7 of the Act is unfounded.”

The application of Section 3B of the Act is based upon the agricultural income as declared by the assessee himself in his income tax return under the Ordinance.

The judgement observed that Section 3(1) of the Act which provides that subject to the other provisions of the Act, there shall be levied, assessed and collected each year a tax in respect of agricultural income of a tax year of an owner. Furthermore, according to Section 4(1) of the Act, agricultural income shall be assessed and collected by the Collector in such manner as may be prescribed. “Prescribed” has been defined in Section 2(g) of the Act to mean “prescribed by rules” and Section 11 of the Act states that “the government may frame rules to carry out the purposes of this Act.”

Pursuant to such power, the Rules were framed. Rule 14(1) whereof provides a certain procedure for the recovery of agricultural income tax under the Act. Therefore in the situation where an assessee has not filed his income tax return or has done so without disclosing his agricultural income, then the tax authorities are obliged to levy, assess and collect agricultural income tax (in spite of the presence of Section 3B of the Act) in terms of the provisions of the Act and the Rules.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190303451365/

GLOBAL SUGAR SURPLUS FORECAST FOR 2018-19 REVISED DOWN

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 3RD, 2019 | LONDON

The global sugar surplus is expected to be 641,000 tonnes in the 2018/19 season, down from a previous forecast of 2.17 million, the International Sugar Organization (ISO) said on Thursday. The inter-governmental body said the smaller surplus was mainly due to a downward revision in production forecasts for Brazil and the European Union, although the forecast for Thailand's output was revised up.

Global production in 2018/19 was seen at 178.68 million tonnes, down from a previous forecast of 180.49 million tonnes. The ISO said production forecast for Brazil had been revised down by 1.35 million tonnes and the European Union's forecast was lowered by 800,000 tonnes. Thailand's projection was raised by 800,000 tonnes.

India's forecast was unchanged at 32.0 million tonnes but the ISO said that "if our forecast proves over-optimistic, a reduction in India's actual output may have significant consequences for the global picture." Global consumption was seen at 178.04 million tonnes in 2018/19, a rise of 1.63 percent from the prior season, marginally below the 10-year average of 1.67 percent. The ISO said its assessment pointed to a well-balanced supply and demand although stocks remain high.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190303451464/

CM ORDERS MASTER PLAN FOR PESHAWAR UPLIFT

Bureau Report October 03, 2018

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan on Tuesday asked the planning and development department to come up with a master plan for the development and beautification of Peshawar and said the government would ensure the early yet effective resolution of the people's problems, especially water, sanitation and traffic's.

He also ordered the completion of mega projects on priority basis.

The orders were issue during a meeting held here to finalise the annual development programme for financial year 2018-19.

The meeting was attended by provincial ministers, advisers and special assistants to the chief minister, chief secretary, additional chief secretary, administrative secretaries and relevant officers.

A statement issued here said the projects prioritised for completion included Swat Motorway, Peshawar Bus Rapid Transit, Chashma Right Bank Lift Canal, Gomal Zam dam, development of sports grounds, and upgradation of 200 higher secondary schools in the province.

The chief minister ordered the completion of ongoing development schemes and the execution of the new demand-driven public welfare projects on need basis saying the government will provide funds for them.

He asked the heads of public sector institutions to ensure proper utilisation of resources and speedy completion of schemes. Mr Mahmood underlined the need for the capacity building of employees of the mines, minerals and tourism projects to attract investment.

He said the departments should focus on priority areas. The statement said 135 of the total 1,749 projects had been completed, while work on others was in progress.

The chief minister called for the strengthening of the province's fiscal base for the implementation of the ruling PTI's development plan.

He also asked the relevant authorities to plead the province's case for net hydel profit and other payments well with the federal government. The participants approved the opening of new government schools in rented buildings.

They also reviewed progress on the Reshakai Economic Zone and allowed the acquisition of additional 1,600 acres of land for the zone.

Published in Dawn, October 3rd, 2018

https://www.dawn.com/news/1436471/cm-orders-master-plan-for-peshawar-uplift

PUNJAB CM DIRECTS AUTHORITIES TO INTRODUCE LAW ON ANIMAL HEALTH

By Our Correspondent Published: March 2, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar has directed the authorities concerned to introduce animal health act for the promotion and development of the livestock sector in the province.

He issued the directives while presiding over an important meeting at his office on Friday in which the performance and future roadmap of livestock and transport departments were reviewed.

The meeting decided to introduce animal health act for the promotion of livestock sector. The target of registration of one million animals was fixed and the meeting was informed that the registration of animals would help produce a better breed which would enhance milk and meat production. It was also decided in the meeting that crossbreed animals would be produced to get enhanced production of milk and meat by adopting IVF technology.

The meeting directed authorities concerned to quickly complete the vaccination process for saving animals from different diseases in Bahawalpur.

Addressing the meeting, the chief minister said poultry project would be expanded to alleviate poverty and it would generate lots of employment opportunities. He said Punjab has a tremendous potential of increased production of milk and meat and the economy would also be strengthened due to the development of livestock sector on modern lines.

"There is a dire need to give attention to research and development in the livestock sector," he added.

Buzdar said livestock would be promoted to wriggle the rural folks from the quagmire of poverty as livestock plays the role of an engine for the betterment of the national economy. "We will have to adopt the latest technology to increase the production of milk and meat and the livestock farmers will be informed about the latest methods of livestock farming," he added.

The heads of Punjab Agriculture and Meat Company and Punjab Livestock and Dairy Development Board gave detailed briefings about the steps taken for the development of the livestock sector. Meanwhile, the heads of Punjab MassTransit Authority and Lahore Transport Company also gave briefings about the transport department and the latest transport system.

The chief minister said the government was working hard to provide the best transport facilities to the citizens and latest transport service would also be introduced in backward areas of the province. Provincial ministers Hashim Jawan Bakht, Sardar Hasnain Bahadur Dreshak, Jehanzeb Khichi, Provincial Advisor Faisal Jabwana, additional chief secretary, administrative secretaries and other high officials were also present on the occasion.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 2nd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1921169/1-punjab-cm-directs-authorities-introduce-law-animal-health/

SAY NO TO GM MAIZE

Zubeida Mustafa March 01, 2019

THERE is bad news and there is good news for our environmentalists, agriculturalists, healthcare givers and all those who care for the welfare of Pakistan. First, the bad news.

In January, the Prime Minister's Office announced that Cargill, the global food and agricultural producer with an annual revenue of $114.6 billion (2018), will be investing $200 million in Pakistan in the next two to five years. This announcement came after two top-ranking executives of Cargill met Prime Minister Imran Khan. It seemed innocuous, at least to people who know little about biotechnology giants.

One of them, Monsanto (now merged with Bayer), fathered the genetically modified organism (GMO) in 1983 which did terrible damage to numerous crops and farmers all over the world. As a result, we saw a spate of high-profile lawsuits in which the company admitted to having bribed officials abroad. At least 35 countries have now banned GMOs.

Obviously our political leadership is not well informed on such matters, nor is transparency its forte. Hence the Cargill heads' meeting with the prime minister and their offer to create a huge number of jobs in Pakistan raised no scepticism in government circles.

Our experience with GM cotton has been disastrous.

But mercifully the Ministry of National Food Security & Research still has men of integrity and knowledge at its helm. It appears they have resisted this move. That has now prompted the American Business Council of Pakistan (representing 64 companies), a leading foreign investors' group, to seek the prime minister's help "to allow commercial cultivation of GM maize". These American companies want the "obstacles" removed that are preventing them from implementing their controversial plans.

The good news is that the Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek has issued a press release titled 'Peasants Declare "NO TO GM MAIZE!"' The party has categorically supported the ministry's refusal to grant approval to genetically modified maize in Pakistan. The PKMT's own position on GMOs and the seed companies has been clear for over a decade: they violate farmers' collective rights to seed and will pauperise the small and landless tillers of the soil.

The Seed Association of Pakistan has also "sternly opposed" any commercialisation of GM maize in Pakistan. Civil society is also gearing up to resist any such move which will have a devastating effect on food security as well as agriculture. BT cotton should come as a lesson — that is, if we are willing to learn. Introducing BT cotton proved to be easy sailing in 2010. There was hardly any resistance from those in authority.

The Seed Law was changed by the National Assembly in 2015 to accommodate the seed multinationals. This was done at the behest of the US in spite of the fact that the 18th Amendment was in place and a courageous lawyer, Ahmad Rafay Alam, went to court on behalf of the Kissan Board to challenge its legality as well as the safety of BT cotton. The case has still to be decided.

BT cotton — Monsanto's GM pet project — has proved to be a disaster for the country. Since its debut in Pakistan — by virtue of seeds smuggled from India in 2005 and later sanctioned by the government in 2010, cotton production has been falling. The figures cited have varied from source to source. It has of late been in the range of 10.5m and 11.5m bales. In 2004, cotton production stood at a record high of 14.1m bales (of 170kg each). Contrary to the government's claim, the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association says the weight of the bales is now 160kg each.

For years cotton production has failed to meet the target set by the government. This has adversely affected the national economy as cotton is the major element in the textile sector, the mainstay of Pakistan's exports. BT cotton has also introduced new bugs in the cotton fields requiring greater use of pesticides, produced as can be expected by the biotech companies themselves. With Monsanto monopolising the seed market, nearly 88pc of the area under cotton cultivation is BT. The yield per acre has also fallen. All this adds to the cost of the inputs, causing farmers to switch to other crops.

It is horrifying to think of what the impact would be if maize, which is a thriving crop at present, is handed over to producers of GM maize. Has GM maize been thoroughly tested in our soil and climatic conditions? Without extensive research we cannot assess its impact on human health. We cannot afford to risk a rise in the prevalence of deadly diseases; the pesticide Roundup, which is required to be used, has been declared carcinogenic by WHO. This should be reason enough for the government to resist pressures from the biotech multinationals which are out to destroy our economy.

Let us learn from our own sordid experience of GMO cotton. Let sanity prevail. Besides, we cannot allow our peasantry to be destroyed. It is the backbone of our agriculture.

Published in Dawn, March 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1466871/say-no-to-gm-maize

US WINS DISPUTE OVER CHINA GRAIN SUBSIDIES BEFORE WTO

AFP Updated March 01, 2019

GENEVA: The World Trade Organisation on Thursday sided with Washington in a dispute it filed three years ago over "unfair" Chinese subsidies to producers of wheat and rice.

Back in 2016, the United States alleged that China doled out $100 billion in "market price support" for wheat and rice as well as corn production, above levels agreed at the Geneva-based WTO.

A panel established by the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body to rule on the matter found on Thursday that the grain subsidies provided by Beijing exceeded the accepted level, and that China had "acted inconsistently with its obligations" under international trade rules.

The experts said they had found that each year from 2012 to 2015, China's market price support for wheat, Indica rice and Japonica rice "exceeded its 8.5 per cent de minimis level of support for each of these products."

The WTO panel said it had not considered whether China had also exceeded the acceptable subsidies for corn producers, since it found China had removed the challenged subsidy before the US launched its complaint. Both sides have up to 60 days to appeal Thursday's ruling.

US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue hailed the ruling in a statement as a "significant victory for US agriculture that will help American farmers compete on a more level playing field".

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1466875/us-wins-dispute-over-china-grain-subsidies-before-wto

SINDH GOVERNMENT FIXES SUGARCANE PRICE AT RS 182 PER 40KG, SHC TOLD

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 1ST, 2019 | KARACHI

The sugarcane price of Rs 182 per 40kg for the current crushing season was fixed by taking into consideration the interests of all stakeholders, provincial government told Sindh High Court (SHC) on Thursday. The Sindh government presents its comments in the division bench of the SHC, headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, which is hearing a petition of sugar mills against the sugarcane price for the current crushing season.

Sugar mills challenged the provincial agriculture department's notification with regard the fixation of Rs 182 per 40 kgs prices of sugarcane on the contention it should be have been fixed Sugarcane Control Board, constituted on the orders of the court rather than agriculture department.

Additional Advocate General Sindh argued that Article 77 of constitution empowers the parliament in financial matters and in the spirit of said article, power of taking the decision rests with the government under rules of business.

Provincial attorney submitted before the court that consultation with the cabinet for fixation of sugarcane price is only a procedural formality and stated that implementation of the fixed sugarcane price is ensured.

He described the sugarcane prices fixed for the current season appropriate for all the stakeholders as they were consulted before its fixation. The court sought the comments from the counsels of other parties in the petition, filed by sugar mills with the plea to cancel the notification for fixation of sugarcane price.

Meanwhile, a division bench headed by Chief Justice SHC Ahmed Ali M Sheikh observed Voluntary Returns (VR) scheme of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has badly impacted the system when it resumed the hearing on case related to officials, who were reinstated after benefiting from plea bargain for committing corruption.

The court sought the reports about the reinstatement of Mehdi Shah, Sardar Shah, Zahid Shah and Nazir Shah as well as ordered that details of their corruption should also be submitted as how much they embezzled and deposited in national exchequer under plea bargain clause of accountability bureau.

The court stated that it would announce the order after going through various aspects of this case and said that it has reports that many officials including deputy commissioner are posted on important positions after benefiting from VR scheme.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190301450861/

DRY CONDITIONS TO CURB AUSTRALIA'S WHEAT CROP

RECORDER REPORT | MAR 1ST, 2019 | SINGAPORE

Dry conditions for up to six months in parts of Australia's east coast are set to curb wheat crop yields for a third straight year in the world's No.4 exporter of the grain, a private US-based weather forecaster said on Wednesday. Australia has been grappling with successive years of drought that have wilted crops and left some farmers struggling to stay in business.

Declines in Australian wheat production in the 2019/20 crop year could buoy global prices that on Wednesday struck their lowest in 10 months. "Over the next three to six months we expect drier-than-normal weather in parts of (the states of) Queensland and New South Wales," said Kyle Tapley, senior agricultural meteorologist at Radiant Solutions, formerly MDA Earthsat.

"This is an area of concern as it is already dry," Tapley told Reuters on the sidelines of a grains conference in Singapore. Australia's wheat production fell to an 11-year low during the 2018/19 season, according to the country's chief commodity forecaster.

Output totalled 17.3 million tonnes, down from 21.24 million tonnes a year earlier, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences said in its final tally for the crop. Australian farmers will begin sowing wheat for the 2019/20 season in April.

Top palm oil producers Indonesia and Malaysia are forecast to remain drier-than-normal over the next two to three months, said Tapley. "For Malaysia and northern parts of Indonesia, we expect drier weather which could impact palm oil output towards the later part of the year as there is a lag," he said.

India's June-September monsoon season is forecast to be normal this year, Tapley said. The four-month monsoon season delivers about 70 percent of India's annual rainfall and is key to the success of the farm sector in Asia's third-biggest economy. Meanwhile, Tapley expected weather across much of the northern hemisphere to be normal over the summer.

El Nino weather conditions associated with droughts and flooding have a 50-60 percent probability of developing by May this year, the UN World Meteorological Organization said on Tuesday, but any El

Nino was not expected to be strong. The last El Nino, a warming of ocean surface temperatures in the eastern and central Pacific every few years, occurred from around 2015 to 2016.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/03/20190301450913/

FOOD SHORTAGES THREATEN 80PC OF VENEZUELA HOMES

2019/03/01

CARACAS: Eight out of 10 Venezuelan households are at risk of food shortages in the country's economic crisis, a study has found.

The study by three Venezuelan universities indicated that 80 percent of households were "at risk of food insecurity because 90 per cent of the population do not have enough income to buy food," said one of the researchers, Anitza Freitez of Andres Bello Catholic University.

Hyperinflation and shortages of basic foods and medicine have led to a volatile political crisis in Venezuela.

Opposition leader Juan Guaido has declared himself the country's leader in a challenge to socialist President Nicolas Maduro, who has blocked foreign aid shipments from entering the country.

The study released on Wednesday by the Andres Bello, Venezuela Central and Simon Bolivar universities found that half of all households were in a state of what it called "multidimensional poverty."

It indicated that only half of all Venezuelan children were going regularly to school, due to a lack of water, food and transport, or other causes.—AFP

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/03/01/13-page/765749-news.html

PM TO ANNOUNCE RS 3,500/MAUND INDICATIVE PRICE FOR COTTON

FAZAL SHER | FEB 28TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Imran Khan will announce Rs 3,500 per maund (40kg) indicative price for cotton in the next month with an aim to control speedily declining cotton cultivation area in the country. "The Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) has proposed Rs 3,500 per maund indicative price for cotton and purchase of 500,000 tonnes of cotton from the farmers through Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) and the Prime Minister is likely to announce it in the next month," Minister for MNFS&R Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan said on Wednesday.

Speaking at the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research, Sultan said that fixing of indicative price of cotton would play a vital role in increasing the growing area for cotton crop.

The committee which met here with Senator Muzaffar Hussain Shah in the chair recommended to conduct zoning for identifying areas for different crops. In the absence of zoning and due to many other reasons, the cotton growers are shifting to sugarcane in the country.

Secretary MNFS&R Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai informed the committee that currently no law exits for crop zoning in the country. Crop specific provincial ordinances including the Sugar Factories Control Act, 1950, Cotton Control Act, 1966 and Punjab Rice Ordinance 1959 exist, he said, adding that as per 18th Amendment, agriculture is the subject of provincial governments while the MNFS&R is responsible for coordination.

About reduction in cost of production, Popalzai said that cost of production of urea is estimated at Rs 715 per bag. With the addition of Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) of Rs 405 per bag, the base price was worked out at Rs 1,120 per bag, he said, adding the price was escalated further to Rs 1,150 per bag with the addition of 2 percent GST (Rs 28 per bag) and advance tax Rs 2 per bag. “We have proposed that with the waiver of GIDC (Rs 450 per bag), the price of urea in the local market will decline.”

He said the government’s 100-Day Agenda specifically catered for lowering the cost of production by increasing per acre yield of major corps like wheat, rice, cotton, maize, and sugarcane. Improvement in the existing cold storage facilities is on the cards to hold agricultural produce if the price crashes to farmer’s disadvantage, he said, adding that steps to be taken to ensure availability of certified seeds, awareness about the use of irrigation water, balanced use of fertilizers, modern technology and agriculture financing, especially for the small farmers.

The committee also expressed annoyance when it was informed that there is no laboratory in the country for checking the quality of staple food and pesticide residue.

Shah said that due to absence of laboratories, Pakistani rice has been rejected and become non-competitive in the international market. A senior official of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) said Pakistani rice was rejected due to increase in the Aflatoxin level.

The committee discussed the budgetary proposals of the ministry for the financial year 2019-20. An amount of Rs 19,587.62 million was demanded by the ministry under Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for 52 projects, of which 18 are ongoing, 21 are new and 13 projects are under the Prime Minister’s initiative for the next financial year 2019-20.

The project under Prime Minister’s imitative includes national programme for improvement of watercourses in Pakistan, enhancing command areas of small and mini-dams in the arid (barani) areas, enhancement of productivity of wheat, rice and sugarcane, promotion of cage fish culture and cluster development, promotion of trout farming in the northern areas of Pakistan, save the buffalo calf programme, fattening of calf and backyard poultry.

Managing Director Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO) Muhammad Khan Khichi told the meeting that the PASSCO did not export 500,000 tonnes of surplus wheat allowed by the government as the provincial governments of Sindh and Punjab had allowed export of the commodity. However, he said that agreement of export of 100,000 tonnes has also been signed.

The meeting was also attended by senators including Najma Hameed, Quratulain Marri, Seemee Ezdi and Hafiz Abdul Karim, and senior officials of the PARC.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190228450533/

SINDH CABINET DECIDES TO EXPORT 5 MILLION TONS OF WHEAT THROUGH OPEN SALE

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 28TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The Sindh cabinet which met here for the second time in a week on Wednesday decided to export five million tons of wheat through open sale, established provincial grid company to construct more than 792 Kv grid stations of renewable plants, and approved the bill of Abdul Majid Bhurgri Institute for Language Engineering. However, it seemed to be reluctant to start procurement of wheat for crop 2018-19.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah here at New Secretariat. The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary Mumtaz Shah, all provincial ministers, advisers, special assistants and other concerned officers.

The chief minister presented a resolution to condemn violation of Pakistan's airspace by Indian air force. The cabinet also rejected the false and malicious propaganda of India against Pakistan and has resolved that the government and the people of Sindh stand united against any possible Indian aggression. The cabinet also appreciated the well rounded and measured response of Pakistan armed forces against claims and remains committed to defend our great country along with the Armed Forces.

Reservation on procurement: The food department requested the cabinet to set new procurement target of wheat for crop 2018-19, however it proposed a target of 500,000 tons. The department had procured 1.4 MMT wheat during the last crop at a rate of Rs 1300 per 40 kg (Rs3250 per 100 kg). To a question of the chief minister the department told the cabinet that there was net 800,000 tons of wheat surplus with food department which 360,000 tons of last year crop.

The chief minister in consultation with the cabinet members decided to export 500,000 tons of wheat through 'Open House Sale'. A committee was formed under Minister Food Hari Ram and secretary of finance and its members with the task to talk to the exporters and facilitate them for exporting 500,000 tons of wheat.

Most of the cabinet members opposed fresh procurement drive saying that it [procurement] has never given any benefit to the small growers. The purpose of the procurement was to stabilise wheat prices in the market, to encourage small growers and develop some stocks in the food department to intervene in case any emergency or shortage of wheat.

The cabinet members said as a matter of fact the small growers have never taken benefit out of government procurement drive. The government was earning bad name despite spending millions of rupees on wheat procurement and top of this the food owned Rs100 billion debt of commercial banks. Therefore, the cabinet members opposed the new procurement and said 'let the market decide the new rates.'

The cabinet decided to talk to exporters first for export of wheat and then the next cabinet meeting would decide procurement target.

Provincial Grid Company: The energy department presented an item in the cabinet with the request to approve establishment of Provincial Grid Company so that four grid stations of 792 KV of renewable energy could be constructed.

Minister Energy Imtiaz Sheikh and Secretary Energy Musadiq briefing the cabinet said Sindh has already established Sindh Transmission and Dispatch Company (STDC) for evacuation of 100 MW electricity from Sindh Nooriabad Power Company to KE with 95 km long transmission line.

The professional team of STDC has the capacity and capability to operate as provincial grid company. The Provincial Grid Company which would be a part of STDC would construct five projects. They are 220 kV Nooriabad Grid Station & Associated Transmission Lines for wind power projects, 220 Kv Jhimpir Grid Station & associated transmission for wind power projects, 220 kV Gharo Grid Station & transmission line for wind power projects.

Two 132 KV Grid Stations and 132kv transmission line of around 25 km in KWSB K-IV project for supply to pumping stations – I & II. It would provide Battery Storage System (BSS) in all the above grid stations to over the intermittency problem in Renewable Energy Systems.

AMBILE Established: Education & Culture Minister Sardar Shah told the cabinet that with a view to provide for development and advancement of Sindhi language engineering and to bring Sindhi language at par with National and international languages, it is expedient to establish Institute of Abdul Majid Bhurgri Institute for Language Engineering (AMBILE).

The chief minister said the provincial government has filed a review in the Supreme Court for taking back all the three institutions, NICVD, JPMC and NICH returned to federal government. At this stage cancellation of MoU between the NICVD and health department may affect the case. Therefore, he constituted a committee under him with minister health, Advisor law, Advocate general Sindh, secretary law and secretary health to review the legal position. In case the cancellation of MoU was necessary then it would be deemed as cancelled.

SRB: The Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) proposed to levy Sindh Sales Tax on Services Health and Life Insurance, Cable Operators and on contractors and construction services. The chief minister said that at present the overall financial position of the people of the province were not stable. Therefore, these proposals may be placed in the cabinet next time so that these levies could be imposed from the next financial year.

The cabinet also approved Sindh Public Finance Administration Act 2019 under which more financial powers have been devolved with a certain quality to the field and administrative officers.

The cabinet after necessary discussion approved recruitment rules of Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), Sindh.

The cabinet appointed Advocate Manzoor Hussian Larik as secretary Board of Governors of Law colleges affiliated with Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190228450596/

CHINA'S TECH FIRMS ARE MAPPING PIG FACES

2019/02/24

As a devastating disease afflicts the country's swine, companies are scrambling to roll out facial and voice recognition and other unproven ways to save them.

A database of every pig's face. Voice scans that detect hogs with a cough. Robots that dispense just the right amount of feed.

Chinese companies are pushing facial and voice recognition and other advanced technologies as ways to protect the country's pigs. In this Year of the Pig, many Chinese hogs are dying from a deadly swine disease, threatening the country's supply of pork, a staple of Chinese dinner tables.

So China's ebullient technology sector is applying the same techniques it has used to transform Chinese life — and, more darkly, that the Chinese government increasingly uses to spy on its own people — to make sure its pigs are in the pink of health.

"If they are not happy, and not eating well, in some cases you can predict whether the pig is sick," said Jackson He, chief executive officer of Yingzi Technology, a small firm based in the southern city of Guangzhou that has introduced its vision of a "future pig farm" with facial and voice recognition technologies.

China's biggest tech firms want to pamper pigs, too. Alibaba, the e-commerce giant, and JD.com, its rival, are using cameras to track pigs' faces. Alibaba also uses voice-recognition software to monitor their coughs.

Many in China are quick to embrace high-tech solutions to just about any problem. A digital revolution has transformed China into a place where nearly anything — financial services, spicy takeout, manicures and dog grooming, to name a few — can be summoned with a smartphone. Facial recognition has been deployed in public bathrooms to dispense toilet paper, in train stations to apprehend criminals and in housing complexes to open doors.

"I like the idea, I like the concept, but I need to be shown that it works," said Dirk Pfeiffer, a professor of veterinary epidemiology at the City University of Hong Kong. "Because if it doesn't work, it's counterproductive."

Facial recognition won't help unless China has a comprehensive database of pig faces to track their movement, he pointed out. Also, facial recognition doesn't help "once the animal is in the slaughterhouse and they chop it into bits."

"How then can you connect the head to the rest of the carcass?" Professor Pfeiffer asked.

Many of China's pig farmers are also skeptical. China is in the midst of closing and consolidating many of its small pig farms, blaming them for polluting the environment. But there are still 26 million small pig farms in the country, representing about half the number of farms, according to the agriculture ministry and experts.

"We will not choose to invest in these things," said Wang Wenjun, a 27-year-old farmer who won a modest amount of fame after he uploaded videos of himself singing to his hogs.

"Unless it's a large-scale pig farm, farms that have just over a couple hundred pigs will not find a use for it."

Broadly, the Chinese government in recent years has endorsed technology on the farm. Its most recent five-year plan, a major economic planning document, calls for increased use of robotics and network technology. In October, the State Council, or China's cabinet, said it wanted to promote "intelligent farming" and the application of information technology in agriculture. In August, Beijing city agricultural officials praised “raising pigs in a smart way” using the A-B-C-Ds: artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing and data technology.

So when African swine fever swept through China’s farms, the country’s technology companies saw an opportunity. The disease has no known vaccine or cure. It can spread through contact between animals or through infected pig products, meaning it can lurk for months in sausages or ham. It doesn’t affect humans, but they can carry it. China has culled nearly a million pigs, set up roadblocks and built fences, to no avail.

There’s a lot at stake. China is the world’s largest pig breeder, with a current population of about 400 million, and its largest pork consumer. The meat is so important that the country has its own strategic pork reserve in the event of a shortage.

The disease could also ripple across borders. It has been found in sausages transported by Chinese tourists in Australia, Taiwan, Japan and Thailand, stoking fears that it could end up in the United States. A prolonged outbreak could cause prices to rise globally.

Government rules to fight the swine fever prevent outsiders from visiting pig farms to see the technology in action, so claims by the companies couldn’t be independently verified. Local media and the companies said several big farms use the systems.

The companies backing the technology say they can help farmers isolate disease carriers, reduce the cost of feed, increase the fertility of sows and reduce unnatural deaths. JD.com’s system uses robots to feed pigs the correct amount of food depending on the animals’ stage of growth. SmartAHC, a company that uses A.I. to monitors pigs’ vital statistics that offers commercially available services, hooks up sows with wearable monitors that can predict the pigs’ ovulation time.

They pitch their technologies as an alternative to the tagging of pigs’ ears, a practice that many farmers find cruel. The tags — which are far cheaper — can be manipulated by humans or fall off if pigs get into fights, they point out.

JD.com’s facial technology can detect if a pig is sick and try to find out why, said a spokeswoman, Lu Yishan. Its system would then notify the breeder, who can then prescribe treatment. The company said that it has put the system into use at a farm in China’s northern Hebei Province that it created with China Agricultural University in Beijing, and that it is for sale to willing farmers.

Alibaba’s system monitors hog activity and allows farmers to track the swine in real time, the company said in a statement. It would then prescribe an exercise plan to improve their health. Its marketing video shows pigs running in the woods and playing with a ball. Alibaba said Tequ Group, a large pig farming company based in the southwestern province of Sichuan, uses the technology. Tequ didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Pig facial recognition works the same way as human facial recognition, the companies say. Scanners and software take in the bristles, the snout, the eyes and ears. The features are mapped. Pigs don’t all look alike when you know what to look for, they said.

“It’s just like how a human face is different from others,” said Mr. He, of Yingzi.

The pigs don’t always cooperate. Yingzi, which introduced its products commercially last year, uses video to capture them in motion.

“You can’t take a single picture of a pig,” said Mr. He, who is trying to add to his database of more than 200,000 pig images. He said his technology, which is being used in a pig farm in the southern region of Guangxi, won’t eliminate swine fever but could help farmers detect it sooner

Not everybody in the pig technology field agrees on approach.

Chen Haokai, the co-founder of SmartAHC, said farmers don’t really need facial recognition. According to Mr. Chen, the cost of trying to map a pig’s face is about $7 versus $0.30 for tagging a pig’s ear. He said his products are used by four pig breeding companies.

“We found that in trying to capture the faces of pigs, the labor cost far exceeds that of tagging,” he said.

Wang Lixian, a research fellow of animal and veterinary science at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, is optimistic that the cost of the technologies will drop.

“Right now, these applications may not have reached their desired levels,” he said, “but in the future they will become more and more extensive.”

https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/24/business/china-pig-technology-facial-recognition.html

SC REJECTS PLEAS FOR REVIEW OF SUGAR MILLS RELOCATION ORDER

Nasir Iqbal Updated February 27, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court rejected on Tuesday petitions seeking review of its Sept 13, 2018 order for relocation of three sugar mills from cotton belt districts in southern Punjab to their original sites after dismantling of their machinery.

The industrial units in question — Haseeb Waqas Sugar Mills Limited, Chaudhry Sugar Mills Limited and Ittefaq Sugar Mills — are believed to be linked with the Sharif family.

A three-judge SC bench headed by Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed had taken up the review petitions filed by Haseeb Waqas Sugar Mills and Ittefaq Sugar Mills against the apex court’s decision to uphold the March 2, 2017 Lahore High Court verdict of shifting the mills from the cotton belt area.

Malik Qayyuum, the counsel for Ittefaq Sugar Mills, argued that the high court had in its decision observed that the sugar mills could apply to the government for the shifting of the industrial units, but the apex court order had no mention of it.

Judge says unchecked cultivation of sugarcane affects water resources, destroys cotton crop

He contended that these mills had been shifted to Bahawalpur from Pakpattan, but when sugarcane was not cultivated how could they take back the mills to Pakpattan again.

At this, Justice Saeed wondered should they pass an order for growing sugarcane in Pakpattan.

When Sibtain Fazli, representing Haseeb Waqas Sugar Mills, said the mills could be set up with the permission of the government, Justice Umar Atta Bandial asked whether the apex court had in its judgment not discussed the matters relating to government policies.

Justice Bandial pointed out that the unchecked cultivation of sugarcane had adversely affected water resources and also destroyed cotton crop in the area, which was a major crop that Pakistan exported.

At a previous hearing on Sept 13 last year, Justice Bandial had stressed the need for giving some incentives to peter out sugar mills from those districts which were known as cotton belt areas but where some sugar mills had massive monopoly.

Justice Saeed observed that everything would start functioning smoothly if the sugar support price was abolished, adding that most of the sugar mill owners were those who decided the subsidy on sugar.

Justice Qazi Faez Isa observed that the owners of sugar mills did have the fundamental rights to shift their mills, adding that sugar mills should be shifted from one location to another in the interest of the country. The prime purpose of the apex court order was not to close the mills but to impose a ban on establishing sugar mills in the two districts.

In its Sept 13, 2018 order, the apex court bench headed by then chief justice Mian Saqib Nisar had held that though the machinery and other industrial equipment would have to be relocated, the buildings in which the sugar mills were installed would remain intact and the appellants could run any other lawful business other than sugar mills.

The main plea of the appellants was to set aside the high court order and allow the petitioner companies to commence function without any restraint.

In 2006, the Punjab government had issued a policy under which neither a new sugar mill could be set up in the province nor could an existing one expand its production capacity. The purpose of the policy was to discourage sugarcane crop in cotton belt areas as the former consumes 18 per cent more water than other crops. It was believed that the relocation of an existing sugar mill would not be covered under the 2006 policy.

Subsequently, petitions were filed in the high court during the hearing of which the then provincial government announced a relocation policy on Dec 4, 2015, allowing relocation of an existing sugar mill but only on the recommendations of a special committee. That policy too was challenged in the high court and was suspended on Jan 4, 2016.

While the operation of the relocation policy was suspended, one of the sugar mills decided to relocate its existing unit to Rahim Yar Khan with an impression that since the relocation policy had been suspended, there was no requirement for the mill to seek permission from the Punjab government for relocating the existing facility.

The petitioners believed that relocation was not in contravention of the 2006 policy since it applied only to setting up of new mills or expanding the production facility of the existing mills in Punjab as neither new mills were set up nor the size of the existing facilities expanded.

The appellants believed that the 2006 notification did not impose restriction on relocation of the existing sugar mills since such relocation would leave the total crushing capacity installed in the province unchanged. They believed that at the time when the mills were established in Pakpattan district, there was an average sugarcane cultivation of 50,000 acres, but with the passage of time the total cultivation reduced to 8,000 acres during 2013-14.

Due to decreasing availability of sugarcane in the area, the petitioner mills were forced to function below their available capacity which constrained their business viability. Contrary to the situation in Pakpattan, Bahawalpur has shown huge growth in sugarcane cultivation and at present approximately 400,000 acres are under sugarcane cultivation.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1466297/sc-rejects-pleas-for-review-of-sugar-mills-relocation-order

MURAD ORDERS FOOD AUTHORITY TO INTENSIFY CHECKING OF EATERIES

Habib Khan Ghori February 27, 2019

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said on Tuesday that the recent incidents of killing of people in the metropolis, including of young medical student Nimra Baig and death of five siblings, were quite painful.

The CM presided over a meeting to review the law and order situation here with specific reference to the incidents of Malir building collapse, killing of three labourers from Bajaur in Larkana, Irshad Ranjhani murder case and encroachment of forest land and properties of Hindu community.

“We have to take necessary measures to stop such incidents and need to strengthen the Sindh Food Authority,” he said referring to the death of five siblings and their aunt at a room in Qasr-i-Naz on Feb 22.

IGP given two days to complete and submit report in JST leader’s murder case

Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani briefed the CM about the incident and said that the lab reports were being awaited.

The CM ordered Chief Secretary Mumtaz Ali Shah to further strengthen the Sindh Food Authority and direct them to keep testing kitchens of restaurants and eateries.

The CM said that the killing of an innocent final-year MBBS student, Nimra, was quite painful. Mr Shah directed Inspector General of Police Dr Syed Kaleem Imam to conduct a thorough inquiry into the incident and also start necessary training of police regarding how to deal with criminals at public places.

He also asked the IGP to issue necessary instructions to all police ranges and zones to improve law and order in their respective areas.

Talking about Malir building collapse, the chief minister was told that the building was constructed without any approved plan.

All the agencies — the provincial disaster management authority (PDMA), Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, Rangers, police — rushed there for starting a rescue operation and it created some problems in the rescue work.

The chief minister directed the chief secretary to develop a system under which only one agency should carry out the rescue operation.

He also issued directive for the proper training of PDMA rescue crew.

Regarding Ranjhani's murder case, the chief minister was told that the case was under investigation from all angles, including personal enmity, robbery attempt or any other reason.

The CM asked the IGP to complete the investigation process within two days and submit a report to him.

Ranjhani was a local leader of the Jeay Sindh Tehreek (JST) who was shot dead by a union committee chairman in Malir.

The CM also directed the police authorities to support the district administration to get vacated forest lands and the lands and other properties of Hindu community members occupied by some people.

He said out of 70,000 acres of forest land some 25,000 acres had already been vacated. The forest department needed police force to get vacated the remaining land, he added.

Referring to the complaints of some members of the Hindu community about illegal occupation on their lands, the chief minister directed the district administration to get their properties vacated and hand them over to their legal owners.

Joining via a remote video link, the DIG Larkana briefed the CM about killing of three labourers.

He said that several suspects had been arrested, but the main culprits were still at large.

Also, Karachi police chief Dr Amir Shaikh gave the CM a briefing on the situation of law and order in the metropolis.

The chief minister directed him to further focus on street crime, which was still a threat to the peace of the city.

Published in Dawn, February 27th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1466186/murad-orders-food-authority-to-intensify-checking-of-eateries

IRAN BUYS INDIAN SUGAR FOR FIRST TIME IN FIVE YEARS TO OVERCOME U.S. SANCTIONS

Madiha Shakeel February 26, 2019

MUMBAI: Indian traders will export raw sugar to Iran for March and April delivery, five trade sources said, the first Indian sugar sales to Tehran in at least five years as Iran struggles to secure food supplies under sanctions imposed by the United States.

Under the sanctions, Iran is blocked from the global financial system, including using U.S. dollars to transact its oil sales. Iran agreed to sell oil to India in exchange for rupees but it can only use those rupees to buy Indian goods, mainly items it cannot produce domestically.

Trading houses have contracted to export 150,000 tonnes of raw sugar for shipments arriving in March and April at $305 to $310 per tonne on a free-on-board basis, the trade sources told Reuters this week.

"Oil payments have piled up in UCO Bank. Iran is keen to utilize the payments to buy sugar and other food items," said one of the sources, a Mumbai-based dealer with a global agricultural trading firm, who asked not to be identified as he was not authorized to speak to media.

Iran's state buyer, the Government Trading Corporation (GTC), purchased the sugar to ensure ample supplies in the coming months, said a second source, a Mumbai-based exporter. Iran usually buys sugar from Brazil, the world's biggest producer and exporter of the sweetener.

Cargill, Bunge and other global traders have halted food supply deals with Iran because the new U.S. sanctions have disrupted the banking systems used to settle payments, industry and Iranian government sources said in December.

Iran is paying a premium of as much as $7 per tonne compared to other buyers as traders are anticipating a risk of a delay in payments, said a third source, also based in Mumbai, who did not want to be identified because of the sensitive nature of the U.S. sanctions.

The exports will help reduce swelling sugar inventories in India, the world's second-biggest sugar producer, but could weigh on global prices that have risen 8.9 percent so far in 2019 to 13.1 cents per pound as of Monday.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/02/26/477104/iran-buys-indian-sugar-for-first-time-in-five-years-to-overcome-u-s-sanctions/

BUZDAR ANNOUNCES OVER RS 2 BILLION FOR DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEM

MUHAMMAD SALEEM | FEB 27TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Announcing the allocation of over Rs two billion for drip irrigation system and provision of certified cotton seeds to improve the cotton production, Punjab chief minister Sardar Usman Buzdar on Tuesday said that innovative programmes will be launched to increase agri-productivity and to help enhance the income of the farmers.

The CM chaired a four-hour long meeting at CM's office, here on Tuesday in which the performance and future roadmap of agriculture, food, revenue, forest and wildlife departments were reviewed in detail.

Sources disclosed that the CM desired to extend all-out benefits to the farming community to help improve their living standard.

He called for facilitating the farmers for promotion of agriculture sector.

The meeting also decided to devise a comprehensive programme for promoting hatchery in the province. A pilot project will also be devised for the production of shrimps.

Addressing the meeting, the CM said that subsidy will be given for certified cotton seeds while sale of unpacked seeds will be banned. He also directed that action should be initiated against the production and sale of spurious pesticides. The farmers will be facilitated for sowing sunflower, olives and canola and special measures will also be taken for increasing the production of oil-seed crops. In this regard, the farmers will be given subsidy, he added.

He said that Punjab government has launched crops insurance adding that its target should be achieved within the given timeframe. A comprehensive plan of wheat procurement should be devised for the current year, he added.

The CM directed that the Cabinet Committee should be constituted for upcoming wheat procurement campaign and this committee would prepare necessary monitoring mechanism. He said that trees plantation campaign should be made a success at every cost and directed that the detail of saplings planted under the campaign should be provided to him. He expressed the displeasure over planting less number of trees in DG Khan and sought a report from the Secretary Forests in this regard.

The CM maintained that Punjab has a tremendous potential of fish and shrimp production and added that a 'Fish Health Lab' will also be established.

The meeting also deliberated upon the proposal of giving soft loans to the farmers for promoting cage fish farming.

He said that cage fish farming will help generate new job opportunities. He also approved the pilot project of computerization of urban lands. Under the pilot project, the urban lands record will be computerized. He directed that provision of land records should be ensured to the overseas Pakistanis through their respective embassies.

Provincial Minister Agriculture Nauman Langrial, Minister for Forests & Fisheries Sabtain Khan, Special Assistant for Food Khurram Khan Leghari, Special Assistant for Forests and Fisheries Amir Muhammad Khan, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Secretaries of Agriculture, Food, Forests & Fisheries departments, Secretary (Implementation) to CM, Secretary (Coordination) to CM, DG Punjab Land Record Authority, Head of Special Monitoring Unit and senior officers attended the meeting.

Moreover, members of National and Provincial Assemblies from various districts met CM Sardar Usman Buzdar and discussed issues pertaining to their respective constituencies.

Talking to them, the CM said that PAF falcons have foiled the coward act of the enemy and evil face of India has again been exposed to the world.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190227450342/

PFA SEALS THREE FOOD UNITS ON ADULTERATION CHARGES

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 27TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) sealed fat rendering unit, maraba (jam) unit and a sweets factory during a grand operation under the supervision of its Director General Captain Muhammad Usman(R) in Lahore and Sheikhupura on Tuesday.

During the operation, the authority discarded more than 11,000 kilograms of prepared food and raw material including 4,000kg animal's filth (fat), 1600kg substandard oil, 2800kg maraba covered with the fungus layers, 1900kg daal matri, 500kg vermicelli and 280kg matri gram flour.

Muhammad Usman said that PFA raided Zulifqar Fat Rendering Unit in the area of Kot Abdulmalik, and sealed it over finding evidence regarding selling substandard oil after adding oil (extracted from animal's filth) in used oil. He said that extracted oil from animal filth could be used in bio-diesel as per PFA Law.

In another raid, PFA closed down Al-Masomiya Punjab Fruit located at Hiran Minar. DG said that unit was sealed for producing adulterated maraba by adding artificial sweetness, loose colours and chemicals in it. He further said that the team also found an abundance of flies and unavailability of a food license. Food authority also sealed a unit of Qadri Sweets and Nimko for not complying with authority instructions, preparing substandard quality nimko through poor quality spices, daal matri and colours. He told that the use of daal matri is strictly prohibited in eatables.

He has appealed the citizens to prefer homemade food instead of store-bought food items. PFA is taking concrete steps to ensure the provision of safe food as per the vision of Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, the Authority in collaboration with Kinnaird College arranged a seminar on "Stress Management and Diet" for the public awareness concerning the role of food during stress.

PFA Director General retired Captain Muhammad Usman was the chief guest. On the occasion, actor and director Sarmad Khoosat, psychology experts, nutritionists, teachers, students and people from different walks of life have participated. A group of students also presented a drama on stress management and diet which was highly appreciated by participants.

Muhammad Usman said that the excessive use of fast food, lack of exercise and smoking are big reasons behind depression.

He said that PFA is taking difficult decisions (like ban on banaspati ghee, carbonated and energy drinks) for the protection of public health. He added that consciousness has awakened among people regarding choose the best food along with awareness. DG further said that the provision of safe food is the utmost priority of PFA while good foods promote good health and help to protect against chronic disease.

Principle Kinnaird College said that we are ready to collaborate with food authority in order to promote the awareness programs in future. In the end, a yoga session was held for participants to reduce their stress level.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190227450344/

LOCAL FISHERMEN GET POSSESSION OF SEA FISHERIES IN BADIN, THATTA, PA TOLD

Tahir Siddiqui Updated February 26, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly was on Monday informed that possession of the sea fisheries at the zero points of Thatta and Badin had been handed over to the local fishermen.

Furnishing a statement and replying to the written and oral queries of the lawmakers from opposition benches during the assembly's Question Hour, Livestock and Fisheries Minister Abdul Bari Pitafi said that the provincial government got the area withdrawn from the occupants to hand it over to the local fishermen.

To a supplementary question, he said that 450 million tonnes fish was exported last year. He said that almost entire catch from the sea and other inland fisheries was exported.

He stressed upon the need of promoting inland fishing and said that the target of the department was to bring scientific and artificial ways of enhancing fishing.

Fisheries minister says 450 million tonnes fish exported in 2018

The minister also urged the need to decrease fish trawling in the sea and said that marine life should be preserved. “We want fish trawling to be decreased so as to ensure controlled fishing from the sea as well as facilitating our local fishermen,” he added.

He said that the department was taking measures to revive marine life in lakes, informing that 800,000 and 600,000 fish were released in Manchhar and Keenjhar lakes, respectively.

Replying to a question from Arif Mustafa Jatoi of the Grand Democratic Alliance, the minister said there was no contract system in vogue for freshwater fishing across the province.

“We have a licence system and only the bona fide fishermen receive the licences under the Sindh Fisheries Rules 1983 and Sindh Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2011,” he said.

Mr Pitafi said that the fisheries department earned over Rs1m against the fee for licences during the past six months.

To another question by Mr Jatoi, he said that the last livestock census was conducted in 2006, while the next census was scheduled to be held in 2016 but could not be held due to multiple reasons, including the devolution of powers under the 18th Amendment to the Constitution.

He explained that conducting the census was the responsibility of the federal government as livestock was in the federal domain before the constitutional amendment.

The minister also mentioned financial constraints in this regard and added that efforts were, however, under way to computerise the livestock data.

Livestock population stands at 22.7m in 2018

The minister said that the estimated population of livestock animals was 15,417,883 in 2008, and the number was estimated to be 22,769,419 in 2018.

He said that the estimated numbers of cows and buffaloes in 2018 were 11,703,622 and 11,065,797, respectively.

The minister also informed the assembly that Tharparkar topped in the number of livestock in the province.

To a supplementary question, he said that he did not have the number of sheep and goats in the province. However, he said that he would furnish the figures soon.

Published in Dawn, February 26th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1466041/local-fishermen-get-possession-of-sea-fisheries-in-badin-thatta-pa-told

DUTIES, TAXES ON SOYABEAN OIL IMPORT DISCUSSED

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 26TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Ministry of Commerce and local ghee and cooking oil industry on Monday discussed issues of imposition of duties and taxes on import of soyabean oil, duty and tax remission for export (DTRE) scheme and harmonization of standards under World Trade Organization (WTO) regime. A delegation from Pakistan Vanaspati Manufacturers Association called on the Prime Minister's Adviser on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood here on Monday.

Different issues regarding duty and taxes on import of soyabean oil compliance issues and DTRE facilities were discussed. The issue of harmonizing standards, licensing conformity assessment and traceability procedures adopted by federal and provincial authorities in the light of WTO's technical barriers to Trade agreements were discussed.

The delegation highlighted the different standards for the same product by provincial authorities is creating additional compliance and cost for the business community.

It was agreed that different initiatives would be adopted to divert oil seeds import to local farmers so that Pakistan can become self sufficient in oil seed crop and foreign exchange could be saved. Pakistan is having oil seed production far below its potential that allows massive import of oil seed.

Pakistan annually imports over 2.3 million M Tons of soyabean seed which is used to extract 418,700 M Tons of soyabean oil. The current government is focusing on import substitution in the oil seed sector. The delegation appreciated business reforms package of the current government and expected that it would be very helpful in uptick of exports.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190226450081/

TARGET OF 5 MILLION ACRES SET FOR COTTON CULTIVATION: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 26TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial has said that the provincial government has planned to attract farmers towards cotton growing and a target of 5 million acres has been set for cotton cultivation. Speaking at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the minister said that quality seed for one lakh acres will also be provided by the government to encourage cotton cultivation because farmers prefer to grow wheat, rice and oil seed due to high profit margins as compared to cotton. Punjab Seed Corporation's Managing Director Waheed Akhter Ansari also spoke on the occasion.

He said the Punjab government attaches priority to the development of agriculture sector to give a boost to the national economy. All possible measures including agriculture marketing, good price of crops for the farmers and facilitation are being taken in this regard, he added.

The minister further said that Punjab Agriculture Marketing Regulatory Authority is in the formation process that would ensure good price of crops for the farmers. During the current year, per acre cotton production will be increased from 18 maund to 25 maund. Farmers are also being encouraged to grow edible seeds that would help save huge foreign exchange, he added. He said the Punjab Seed Corporation is organizing motivational seminars for the farmers.

LCCI President Almas Hyder said the agriculture and economy are vital for each other. Development of the agriculture sector will bring economic issues under control besides getting rid of the IMF. Though Pakistan is an agrarian country but cotton production is not enough to meet the local demands and the country is spending billions of dollars on import of this commodity, he said.

Almas Hyder said that Pakistan has produced around 10 million bales of cotton on average for the last several years against consumption of over 14 million bales. The modern techniques and hybrid seed can help Pakistan produce 30 to 40 million bales of cotton, he said. He also highlighted the issues of sugar industry, flour mills and tractor manufacturers and said that the government must support tractor manufacturers as this sector is vital for agriculture.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190226450064/

PACKAGING MATERIALS: HORTICULTURE EXPORTERS TO GET TWO-YEAR UTILISATION PERIOD

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 26TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Exporters of horticulture products would be granted maximum utilisation period up to 24 months of packaging materials to be consumed in finished products, ie, horticulture products to be exported under the Duties and Taxes Remission for Export (DTRE) scheme. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has issued SRO 143 (1)/2019 to amend Customs Rules, 2001 here on Monday.

According to the Customs Rules 2001, provided that the utilisation period of packaging materials for horticulture products shall be 24 months. Provided further that the said period may be extended by the chief collector of respective jurisdiction in cases of exceptional circumstances and in case of extension such fresh securities as mentioned in rule 300 covering the extension period shall be obtained.

Provided further that the said period may be extended by the chief collector of respective jurisdiction in cases of exceptional circumstances and in case of extension such fresh securities as mentioned in rule 300 covering the extension period shall be obtained.

Under the DTRE rules, the input goods acquired shall be utilised in the manufacture and export of output goods within specified months from the date of approval of DTRE application. Provided that the said period may be extended by the chief collector of respective jurisdiction in cases of exceptional circumstances and in case of extension such fresh securities as mentioned covering the extension period shall be obtained.

The FBR has also decided to empower the collectors of customs to uphold the previously determined input-output ratios without sending it to IOCO. Provided that if there is no change in previously determined input and output ratio, the regulatory collector shall uphold the previously determined input-output ratios without sending it to IOCO. Provided further that the regulatory collector may grant provisional DTRE approval pending receipt of response from lOCO or, as the case may be, EDB in this behalf. Such provisional approval shall not in any case be delayed beyond three days after expiry of the due date of receipt of response from IOCO or, as the case may be, EDB. Provided also that quantity equivalent to hundred percent capacity of the producing or manufacturing unit may be approved provisionally by the regulatory collector, as applied by DTRE user, however up to fifty percent quantity may be allowed to be used by the time lOCO or Engineering Development Board (EDB) determines output and input ratios.

According to the FBR, IOCO or, as the case may be, EDB upon receipt of a reference from the regulatory collector, shall determine input-output ratios and wastages, as may be deemed appropriate, and forward their findings to the regulatory collector within a period of thirty days, or such shorter period as may be specified by the regulatory collector in any specific case: Provided that the regulatory collector may grant provisional DTRE approval pending receipt of response from IOCO or, as the case may be, EDB in this behalf. Such provisional approval shall in any case not be delayed beyond three days after expiry of the due date of receipt of response from IOCO or, as the case may be, EDB: Provided further that quantity approved provisionally by the regulatory collector shall not exceed twenty-five per cent of the quantity applied by the exporter or twenty-five per cent of the capacity of the producing or manufacturing unit, whichever is less.

In case the IOCO or, as the case may be, EDB fails to forward their findings to the regulatory collector within the prescribed period, the input-output ratios and wastages, as determined provisionally, by the regulatory collector shall be deemed to be final till such time that the regulatory collector revises them upon receipt of the aforesaid report at some later stage or for any other reason to be recorded in writing: Provided that no revision shall be made beyond the expiry of utilisation period of input goods as mentioned in rule 305.

Provided further that the regulatory collector may grant provisional DTRE approval pending receipt of response from lOCO or, as the case may be, EDB in this behalf. Such provisional approval shall not in any case be delayed beyond three days after expiry of the due date of receipt of response from lOCO or, as the case may be, EDB. Provided also that quantity equivalent to hundred percent capacity of the producing or manufacturing unit may be approved provisionally by the regulatory collector, as applied by DTRE user, however up to fifty percent quantity may be allowed to be used by the time lOCO or EDB determines output and input ratios.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190226450073/

SFA SEALS AND FINES A DOZEN EATERIES IN HYDERABAD

By Our Corresponden Published: February 26, 2019

HYDERABAD: In a rare action in Hyderabad, Sindh Food Authority (SFA) sealed and fined nearly a dozen restaurants and eateries on Sunday night in the two food streets of the district. The SFA Deputy Director Imtaiz Ali Abro told The Express Tribune that six outlets were fined and four were sealed because they did not comply with the authority’s standards of the authority.

“We sealed the restaurants because they were selling expired food items,” he informed. The sealed outlets include Rakabi restaurant, Chai Shistam, Indus Fish point and Breeze Fish Point, all of which are located on Autobahn road. The authority also noticed a lack of pest management in the hotels.

Abro, however, said the sealed outlets can be reopened within 24 hours, “Provided they submit to us in writing that they will meet the SFA’s standards and, subsequently, our team verified that the standards had been met”.

According to him, the authority imposed fines of around Rs450,000 on eateries. The leading restaurants of Hyderabad like Royal Taj and Lal Qila, besides Khan Barbecue, New Salateen Hotel and two others were fined. SFA Director General Amjad Ali Laghari headed the raiding teams during the inspection.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1918284/1-sfa-seals-fines-dozen-eateries-hyderabad/

UREA SALES FALL 21% AS SOWING SLOWS DOWN

By Our Correspondent Published: February 26, 2019

KARACHI: Urea fertiliser sales dropped 21% on a month-on-month basis in January 2019, driven down by the seasonal effect as crop cultivation slowed down in the month compared to December 2018.

On a year-on-year basis, fertiliser sales, however, rose 5% to 564,000 tons compared to January 2018.

“Demand for fertiliser for new crop plantations is always high in December as compared to January, when sowing slows down,” remarked Mahmood Nawaz Shah, an office-bearer of the Sindh Abadgar Board and CEO of Shah Agricultural Products.

Company-wise, urea sales of Fauji Fertiliser Company (FFC), Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim Limited (FFBL) and Engro Fertilisers decreased 12%, 80% and 39% respectively. “FFBL’s production dropped sharply because its plant remained shut for annual maintenance,” said Shankar Telreja, an analyst at Topline Securities.

However, sales of Fatima Fertiliser rose 100% on a yearly basis mainly on the back of resumption of production by Dawood Hercules, according to Taurus Securities.

In the case of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), domestic sales of Engro Fertilisers rose 1.12 times year-on-year whereas sales of FFC and FFBL declined 80% and 64% respectively.

On a monthly basis, the urea inventory came down 59% to 71,000 tons, which included 11,000 tons of imported urea with National Fertiliser Marketing Limited (NFML), said Taurus Securities. DAP stocks stood at 488,000 tons.

“Fertiliser demand varies according to the emerging situation in Pakistan’s agriculture sector,” said Shah. “This is the wheat harvesting season, which is being collected in isolated areas. By the second week of March, its pace will increase.”

In April and May every year, new crop sowing begins, which is expected to give a boost to fertiliser offtake in the next couple of months. However, the country is facing water shortage and in the last sowing season farmers got water supply late, which resulted in delayed cultivation of different crops.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1918249/2-urea-sales-fall-21-sowing-slows/

INDONESIA GRANTS MARKET ACCESS TO PAKISTAN’S 20 NEW PRODUCTS

By Our Correspondent Published: February 26, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Indonesia has issued a notification for the correction of Indonesia-Pakistan preferential trade agreement (PTA) by offering immediate market access for 20 new products of Pakistan's prime interest.

The priority products include mangoes, broken rice, ethanol, tobacco, yarn and fabric, home textile, terry towel, apparel and knitwear. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) to amend the agreement was signed between the two countries during the visit of Indonesian president in January 2018.

Following this, a meeting was held between the Indonesian minister for trade and Pakistan's Commerce Secretary Younus Dagha on the sidelines of Shanghai Expo in 2018.

Dagha highlighted the non-tariff barriers imposed on Pakistan's agricultural products by Indonesia. "After sustained efforts of the Ministry of Commerce, Indonesia has finally offered unilateral market access for Pakistani products," said a statement issued by the Ministry of Commerce on Monday.

The Indonesia-Pakistan Preferential Trade Agreement was signed in 2012, but it failed to help increase Pakistan's exports to the Indonesian market.

Despite the PTA, Pakistan's exports to Indonesia fell after the agreement came into force. Exports came down to $141 million in 2016-17 from $236 million in 2011-12. However, 2017-18 proved to be a good year for Pakistan's exports, when shipments jumped to $296 million, the commerce ministry said.

The balance of trade is highly tilted in favour of Indonesia. At the time of signing the PTA, the total volume of bilateral trade was $1.6 billion, which reached $2.8 billion in 2017-18.

The commerce ministry pointed out that the growth was due to increase in Indonesia's exports to Pakistan, which were at $1.72 billion in 2013-14 and rose to $2.53 billion in 2017-18.

The ministry said it took up the matter with Indonesia's Ministry of Trade during review meetings for the PTA. Three review meetings were held and Indonesia acknowledged the concern over adverse effect of the PTA on Pakistan's exports and agreed to unilaterally grant zero-duty status to 20 products of Pakistan's export interest.

A formal notification for including the additional tariff lines in the PTA has now been issued and it will be effective from March 1, 2019.

In the previous year, Pakistan exported 200,000 tons of white rice and 200,000 tons of wheat to Indonesia. The commerce ministry said it recently managed to get special permission from Indonesia for the export of mangoes as well in the upcoming season.

Traditionally, Indonesia has been one of the leading export destinations for Pakistani kinnow.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1918243/2-indonesia-grants-market-access-pakistans-20-new-products/

RECYCLING POLICIES

Ahmad Fraz Khan Updated February 25, 2019

PUNJAB is turning out to be a prolific writer of agriculture policies. In the last five years it has written three — occasional policy papers are in addition to these elaborate policy documents. None of them, however, have been followed by an implementation plan or financial commitment.

Of the series of policy writing, the first one was inked in 2014 and the second one was notified on June 13, 2018 (it is still available on the official website of the agriculture department).

In 2016, the province constituted the ‘Kissan Commission’. Its sub-committee on policy, headed by then vice-chancellor of the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan, came up with a policy paper promising further short- and long-term policy documents.

Now, barely eight months after notifying a policy, the Punjab government is at it again. Chief Minister Usman Buzdar was supposed to launch the document last Wednesday but the provincial agriculture minister chimed in at the last moment at a flashy function in a local hotel.

Interestingly, the latest policy had been completed on Nov 29, one of the writers claim, and that is why it is still called the ‘Punjab Agriculture Policy 2018’, but the government took another three months to announce it. The last two policies, thus, are only five-months apart.

Barely eight months after notifying an agriculture policy, the Punjab government is at it again. Ideally, the new government should have come up with an action plan

Explaining this policy rush one of the writers, who did not want to be named, says that the third document is just an extension of the second one with a few slight changes — some additions of PTI-manifesto points — with the rest remaining unchanged.

“In fact, the PTI, when it came to power conveyed two preferences to the writers of the document. It wanted a document with the PTI seal and prepared within its first 100 days. The authors were thus left with no choice but to use the available material and previous policy consultative documents to meet the deadline.

“This also explains the massive overlapping in goals, objectives and recommendations: the writers were mostly the same, the ground realities and the input material remained unchanged — the results thus could not be different,” he says.

The difference, however, is that this policy echoes the PTI mindset: stress on rural youth and women, commercial farming, information technology, availing opportunities created by CPEC and targeted subsidies. “It is more of a short-term implementation strategy rather a long-term policy,” claims the un-named writer.

A run through the 53-page document creates a feeling of déjà vu, especially for aware of the previous exercises and policies. The document states the three usual objectives: enhancing economic growth, raising the standard of living and maximising agriculture’s contribution to the national GDP.

In order to achieve the objectives six goals have been set: enhance competitive agriculture, increase food production, raise farmers’ income, conserve (natural) resources, enhance sustainability and induct private sector in the business of value addition.

The document also suggests 10 areas of policy thrust: increase profitability, reduce cost of inputs, introduce regenerative farming, crop diversification, targeted subsidies, farmers’ access to finance, transforming markets, storage expansion, encourage (agricultural) SME and conserve water.

In addition, it charges the government with modernising laws (most of them belong to the 1950s and 60s), improve institutional framework, train human resource, create value-chains, incentivise the private sector, strengthen research, devise mechanisms for direct subsidies to farmers and so on.

Critics, however, think that Punjab has gained enough policy wisdom in the last few decades, as reflected by successive documents both at the federal and provincial level.

Ideally, the new government should have come up with an action plan: how to achieve these goals, identifying where resources will come from, who will spend them and how, where responsibility for the results will lie and how much growth can be expected from these plans?

All policies made the right noises in the past. Where they floundered was in the implementation stage. The PTI has made its theoretical mark through this document, it should now quickly move to the next stage of improving agriculture governance and come up with an action plan, critics suggest.

Before embarking on the action plan, the Punjab government should also get involved with the federal government to ensure policy coordination, suggests a former Punjab secretary agriculture.

The federal government has recently approved the Agriculture and Food Security Policy after three years of effort.

At the draft stage, Punjab had objected to the federal preference of ‘accessible staple supplies to all, especially to the poor, at an affordable price,’ saying it was an effort at pandering to the poor and urban consumers at the cost of farmers — because ensuring affordability means keeping commodity prices artificially low.

The province went ahead and wrote its own policy (in 2016, under the Kissan Commission) to ensure better prices for farmers. With the federal government going ahead and approving its policy and Punjab still sticking to its stance of market prices of commodities, especially staple, there is a need to resolve this disconnect.

“Even if [the agriculture policy] is an extension of the previous policy, it is always good to have a document on the table which can be used to measure the performance of any government,” says Dr Iqrar A Khan, author of the previous policy paper. The need for an action plan, he says, cannot be overstressed.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465795/recycling-policies

THE CASE FOR NON-TRADITIONAL CROPS

Amjad Mahmood Updated February 25, 2019

WHILE climate change, poor storage capacity, transmission losses and inefficient irrigation methods are blamed for increasing water shortages in the country, the unabated trend of sowing water-guzzling crops like sugar cane and rice only compounds the water scarcity problem.

This coupled with the use of decades-old uncertified seed that have lost their productivity and resistance to diseases, and the improper use of fertilisers, has lead to a gradual decline in various crop yields.

The trend of sowing traditional cash crops, ie wheat, sugarcane, rice and cotton, has not withered away though the growth potential for most major crops has been exhausted to the disadvantage of the farming community and the national economy.

Experts and progressive farmers caution that the sector is set to suffer even more if remedial measures, such as introducing efficient irrigation methods and changing crop patterns, are not taken at the earliest.

‘Crop diversification is very important for the sector. We need to grow locally what we are importing to ensure our food security and protect the farmer from financial losses’

Quoting a report of the provincial government, experts say Punjab is currently reaping the lowest crop yield in the region and the world. The province needs to take urgent steps to fix the situation and turn around a sector that is the backbone of the national economy.

“We’re over-sowing sugar cane and wheat which leads to a glut in the market and of course lower prices for farmers. These crops enjoy no real value in the changing global food scenario,” says Malik Afaq Tiwana of the Farmers Association of Pakistan (FAP), a body that represents big landholders.

“Crop diversification is very important for the sector. We need to grow locally what we are importing to ensure our food security and protect farmers from financial loss,” he opines.

Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial endorses the need for crop diversification and emphasises that the government is not oblivious to the fact: “Oilseed crops are on top of our priority list, though the major traditional cash crops cannot be ignored altogether.”

He says that a five-year plan has been devised to cut wheat acreage, dedicating the land thus spared to growing oilseed crops like canola and soybean. This will help reduce the over Rs250 billion edible oil import bill.

To encourage oilseed sowing, growers of the districts being earmarked for the purpose are being offered Rs5,000 per acre subsidy which will be increased to Rs7,000 per acre in the next financial year.

Mr Tiwana believes that a subsidy alone is not a sufficient incentive to make farmers abandon the crops they had been sowing for centuries: “The growers can work wonders provided they are offered the guarantee that their entire yield will be procured at reasonable rates, either by the public or private sector. They made the wheat-scarce country self-sufficient in the crop in just one season when given such a guarantee.”

Referring to the woes of potato growers for want of a reliable market, the FAP leader said that if they earned Rs500,000 per acre in one season, in the next their earnings dropped to such an extent that they were unable to meet the charges for transporting their produce to the market.

Admitting that in the absence of official patronage farmers will remain reluctant to embrace non-traditional crops, the minister claims that oilseed crops will enjoy a steady market as the initiative has been taken only after taking farmers and solvent industry bodies on board: “Marketing of oilseed crops will be no problem as we are guaranteeing that the government will procure the entire yield if no one else comes to the fore.”

Tajammal Hussain Nisar, a progressive farmer who runs a model farm in the vicinity of the Punjab capital points out that besides a stable market, growers also require capacity building and training in post-harvest grading, packing etc, to make the initiative a success.

He also calls for levying a heavy duty on the import of palm oil, or at least ensuring that no substandard edible oil is imported by the industry to the loss of local farmers.

A senior agriculture official endorses the view saying better investment in the agro-processing and value-added sectors, including fruits and vegetables, is required for exports to high-end international markets.

"Establishment of processing units for pulp, puree, paste, concentrates, dehydration and oil extraction, both edible and essential, is needed along with suitable storage, packaging and transportation facilities to make horticulture realise its full potential," he said.

He recalls the cases of kinnow and mango exports which grew manifold with the development of these facilities.

"Punjab's agriculture will benefit from CPEC connectivity and the export of value-added agriculture products will increase through a robust processing sector," concludes the official.

The minister responds that they are also planning the promotion of value chain industry by offering it certain incentives such as matching grants: "To support and encourage business entities to set up food processing units, they will be offered 50 per cent matching grants through a competitive process so that they may implement commercial activities and ensure markets operate effectively in the province."

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465794/the-case-for-non-traditional-crops

RICE: OUR 'ORPHAN' EXPORT PRODUCT

Amin Ahmed February 25, 2019

Basmati rice is Pakistan's celebrated export. But its production and exports have slipped of late.

The absence of research and development makes it extremely difficult for the rice sector to prepare for new challenges. The high status of basmati rice as a major export commodity conceals the fact that its contribution to the economy is below its potential. Without a strong commitment to elevating basmati rice as a strategic product, it will continue to be a victim of changing economic and environmental conditions.

A report prepared with the help of technical assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) says the handling of the country's premier export product as an 'orphan' is a tragedy. In the absence of research and development–based preparedness, the subsector is exposed to multiple risks from internal as well as external sources.

While the overall revenues from rice are stable, the lack of growth of basmati revenues should be a 'red flag' for policymakers. A reform programme is urgently needed because years of under-investment have weakened the system. However, some practical measures can reverse the trend, ADB says.

The overriding requirement is for the government to commit to a strategic road map that fills the research and development gap. It should create an environment that enables the public and private sectors to engage in commercially viable research. The rice sector is already paying the bills for its development.

The missing link is the utilisation of the resources. New efforts may be needed to bypass the existing setup if it is too costly or rigid to reform. But, without a reform of research and development, the future of the production and marketing of Pakistan's basmati rice is uncertain, cautions the report.

The additional levy on exporters would not be needed if the current levy is channelled as intended. In 1999, parliament passed the Export Development Fund Act under which all exporters, including rice exporters, pay a surcharge of 0.25 per cent. This is deducted by the exporter's bank from foreign receipts and submitted to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The bank transfers the collected cess to the Ministry of Finance. Under the Act, the finance ministry must transfer all proceeds of the Export Development Fund to the commerce ministry, which is responsible for disbursing the proceeds according to the stipulations of the Act.

In reality, the finance ministry has not been transferring all the amounts to the commerce ministry. As a result, the commerce ministry has a large sum due from the finance ministry. The cess collected in 2017 from rice exporters is equal to half of all expenditures on rice research and development for the last 20 years. The Act specifies that the cess funds can be used for research and development, technical institutes, market and product development and other areas related to export enhancement.

While the export segment of the value chain benefits most from rice in terms of private profits, exporters still expect the public sector to fund core research and development. The inability to view the whole value chain means that the billions of rupees that have been collected from rice exporters in the last 20 years have not been used for basic research and development. The vision of the Export Development Fund or the exporters is not broad enough to realise that research and development across the value chain will contribute to increased export revenues.

The amount of funding required to reviving growth in basmati production and exports is not huge. Recent policy work, especially in Punjab, has recognised the need for investment in research and development. Funds are available in the government's annual development budget.

The study suggests that the Malaysian Palm Oil Board, a government body, is a good model of how the coordinated efforts of a whole value chain can improve the prospects of a particular crop. The board has made Malaysian palm oil an international benchmark product and has invested heavily in research and development and commercialisation.

Pakistan can create a basmati rice board based on the Malaysian model and funded by the rice exporters' contributions to the Export Development Fund. As is the case for all research and development in the country's agriculture, basmati research and development in rice suffers from a low quality and quantity of funding. The core issue relates to the absence of policy commitment and the recognition of the need to invest a minimum amount consistently. The irony is that the amount of research investment needed is tiny compared with its potential return, it says.

Insufficient investment in agriculture research and development in Pakistan has resulted in suboptimal yields and a lower-than-potential productivity growth curve of its basmati rice varieties. Pakistan is the globe's fourth largest rice exporter in terms of quantity and rice is the country's largest export earner after cotton. This status was achieved by liberalising the rice trade in the early 1990s and allowing the private sector to operate freely.

India is Pakistan's only competitor in the export market for basmati rice. But basmati has to compete with other varieties in the global marketplace. Although Pakistan inherited good rice varieties and managed to improve on them, the country has not made significant progress during the last 20 years.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1465789/rice-our-orphan-export-product

DONKEYS' EXPORT TO CHINA NOT YET MATERIALIZED

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 25TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

The export of donkeys to China has not yet been materialised due to delay in submitting required documents by the investors and companies. The livestock department officials told this scribe that many Chinese companies had evinced their keen interest in establishment of donkey farms and their exports but the KP government had planned to deal only with state-owned companies or state-owned investor in china.

The government would provide all legal and technical support to the investors. The MoU was terminated due to ineligibility of the investor to produce the required documentations. The officials said that Chinese companies also expressed their interest in the exports of donkeys. They were asked to present the required documents in this regard. However, they responded that they would submit the documents after Chinese New Year celebrations at the end of February.

Pakistan, which has the third largest donkey population in the world, will export the animal to China, opening the avenue to earn millions from the trade, said the officials concerned. During the first three years, the government plans to export as many as 80,000 donkeys to china.

The project titled: 'Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa-China Sustainable Donkey Development Programme' is expected to bring Rs 1 billion. It is aimed at attracting Chinese investment in Pakistan's livestock and agriculture sector. Main purpose of the plan is to prevent illegal smuggling of donkeys to foreign countries, because the donkeys are used for medicines and meat consumption in china.

The proposed project will help improve the socio-economic status of donkey-rearing communities and also improve the health and production of local donkeys. An official said that new technologies would also be introduced. Work on capacity-building of donkey breeders and services they provide would also be done. The official said they were only dealing with state-owned companies because if started on commercial basis it would be a possible threat to extinction of the donkey species.

The officials said that the government had planned to establish two donkey farms initially in DI Khan and Mansehra districts. The KP livestock department would focus on building donkey farms in order to breed donkeys to increase its population.

Around 70,000 people use donkeys as working animals in KP province. During PML-N government, Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) led by then-Finance Minister Ishaq Dar had placed a temporary ban on the export of donkey hides, after the customs in Karachi seized 35,000 skins of donkeys destined to china.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190225449886/

STRENGTHENING NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY

RECORDER REPORT | FEB 25TH, 2019 | EDITORIAL

Potatoes don't speak, but what they want to say was heard loud and clear last month when they staged a sit-in opposite the Punjab Assembly building in Lahore last month. They were protesting against their gross devaluation; their lament was their Rs 5 per kilo price. And unlike ever before, they were heard. Not only they but their farm-friends including wheat, sugarcane, cotton and rice also came under discussion in parliament and also at a semi-official consultative meeting. What has gone wrong with the agriculture sector, which employs 43 percent of labour force and accounts for 21 percent of GDP? What incentives can be afforded to revive its potential? These questions came under discussions. At Independence, its share was 53 percent of the GDP as compared to little over 21 percent at present. Although other sectors of national economy were bound to overtake it, it could still retain its supremacy had it received the needed official patronage. How ironic, however, it is that when all elected houses in the history of the country have always been characterized by the presence of legislators from agricultural background, the causes and the practices undermining its inherent potential still remain out of focus. Not that there was not enough in sight to indicate as to what ails the agriculture sector. We knew that half of rural households are landless while 5 percent of population owns almost two-thirds (64 percent) of the country's farmland. While a large majority owns less than five acres the 2 percent households own 50 acres or more, and are less productive. According to a World Bank study, the productivity of larger farms is lower than that of small farms. That disparity in ownership remains a lingering cancer, to which there is no cure in the foreseeable future – an impossibility rooted in history of failed land reforms in 1962 and 1972. But almost all other weaknesses restricting fuller play of the country's agriculture sector are curable. Quite a lot is still possible to restore the socio-economic potential of agriculture sector by way of discouraging outdated irrigation practices, increasing per-acre yield, introducing better seeds and improving the farmer's access to various announced/available facilities and resources.

Both at the forums of National Assembly parliamentary committee and the consultative meeting, a call was made for enhanced allocation for agriculture research, decrease in mark-up rates on agricultural loans and indicative prices for major crops. That the bank mark-up rate be reduced from the present 14 percent to 5 percent is something which is not likely to happen anytime soon, but some concession must be made in view of rising threats to national food security. Prices of fertilizers and pesticides too need to be rationalized, mainly by reining in the high commissions, while the quality of what the end-user gets should be kept under strict official watch. However, the issue begging immediate official intervention is the indicative price structure. As to what price would be available to the farmer for his produce greatly makes his mind to sow or not to sow cotton or any other major crop. A case in point is the cotton crop, which is losing its ground to sugarcane and thus adversely affecting the textile industry that is now left with no option but to import this commodity. The problem arose essentially from the unchecked location of sugar mills in the cotton-growing areas which forced the farmer to give up on cotton and go for sugarcane. Perhaps, relocation of concerned sugar mills may not be possible, but the framer can be incentivized to keep growing cotton by indicating him as to what price he would get for his produce. Another incentive, which is reportedly now under government consideration, is that regulatory duty should be imposed on import of cotton. Accepted, the subsidies and indicative prices would greatly help restore health of the ailing agriculture sector, but then these are merely fix-ups. The real issue is exploitation of the inbuilt strength of agriculture, mainly by improving the quality of inputs in terms of seeds and post-sowing care – the concerns that fall in the ambit of agri research. Isn't it pathetic that investment in agricultural research is just 0.2 percent of GDP, which is not more than fifth of the minimum required to see that Pakistan's extensive arable landscape is productive enough to buttress the much vulnerable national food security.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/02/20190225449866/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 22nd TO APRIL 28th 2019

INCREASE IN YIELD BOOSTS BALOCH FARMERS' INCOME

Amin Ahmed Updated April 28, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Australian government, under the first phase of its 'Australia Balochistan Agribusiness (AusABBA) programme', has increased the gross value of agricultural produce in the six districts of Balochistan by over $9.1 million and helped farmers increase their household income.

According to the project document prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations which implemented the project in cooperation with Balochistan government, the initiative has helped enhance crop yields and livestock productivity in Balochistan and introduced farmers to new technologies, better ways manage their farms and increase production in addition to improving community-based water management.

The conclusion of the first phase of the project witnessed significant improvement in food and nutrition security and income of over 30,600 poor households in 340 rural communities in the province.

The Australian-funded programme covers six districts of Chaghai, Kech, Kharan, Nushki, Punjgur and Washuk.

The programme helped farmers from several adjacent communities of the districts to form farmers' marketing collectives, strengthen their linkages to the markets, and increase their sales of surplus produce.

The programme also encouraged farmers establish small local agribusiness, and a recent study has shown that the farmers' marketing collectives approach can increase farmer profits by up to 34 per cent.

Building on the success of the first phase, the second phase of AusABBA has been launched which will run through 2023 and focus on training female and male farmers to help strengthen supply chains and eventually connect them with markets for Balochistan-specific commodities, such as onions, fruit trees, goat, sheep, meat, seeds, wood and dates.

The programme will target women's economic empowerment – at least 25pc of the beneficiaries will be women – thus ensuring the economic benefits also improve the nutritional status of families. Homestead gardens, sheep fattening, vegetables and dates grading and packaging, fruit drying and seedling production are among the culturally suitable activities that women can engage in.

The goal of the programme will be to contribute to “people in South West Balochistan [so that they can] live more prosperous in a food-secure environment”. During the second phase of the programme, households in the six districts, engaged in agricultural livelihoods will be helped adopt suitable, profitable and diversified strategies in an enabling environment that increase their incomes, food security and nutritional status.

Published in Dawn, April 24th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1478924/increase-in-yield-boosts-baloch-farmers-income

RAINS LOSSES: STEPS AFOOT TO COMPENSATE FARMERS: ASAD

RECORDER REPORT | APR 28TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

Speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaiser, said that the government was taking measures to compensate farmers over their losses in current torrential rains. He was speaking at a ceremony regarding up-gradation of Government High School to Higher Secondary School in Marghuz district, Swabi on Saturday. The upgradation project has completed at an estimated cost of Rs 20.7 million.

Member provincial assembly, Saqibullah Khan, District Education Officer district Swabi Shahi Malik and Principal Mohammad Zubair were present during the inaugural ceremony. The NA Speaker said that Pakistan has never made intervention in any country and will not tolerate interference of anyone. He said the incumbent government is following formidable foreign policy in best interest of people and the country.

Asad Qaiser said that effective measures are being taken to create job opportunities in the country. He noted that corruption and maladministration have undermined roots of the country. He admitted the government is confronting with host of challenges and issues, which were not originated during last eight month government that was inherited to PTI by the previous regimes.

The NA Speaker said that the days have gone when teachers received appointment order in MPA Hujra (guesthouse) against the merit. He said that PTI government has appointed highly-qualified and competent teaching staffs by National Testing Services to give quality education to male and female students in the province.

Asad Qaiser said that teachers had played an integral role in national building and country. However, he asked them to teach children with full dedication and hard work and fully concentrate on character-building of students.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190428467957/

CM ORDER ALL-OUT MEASURES TO CONTROL SUGAR PRICES

By APP Published: April 28, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar has decided to take all-out measures for consistency in the price of essential food items especially sugar.

The chief minister, presiding over a high level meeting, directed to make the price control mechanism effective before the start of Ramazan and said indiscriminate crackdown would be launched against hoarders and profiteers.

He said all administrative powers should be used to ensure the sale of food items according to rate list and profiteering would not be tolerated. He directed to take all-out measures to provide relief to the people saying law would come to action against those selling essential items on inflated rates.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 28th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1960898/1-cm-order-measures-control-sugar-prices/

WHEAT FORECAST

Shehryar Warraich April 28, 2019

The unexpected rains and hailstorms since February 2019 have damaged the Rabi crops, mainly wheat, particularly in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The government and farmers are not on one page on assessing the damage.

Advisor to Chief Minister Punjab, Muhammad Akram Chaudhry, tells TNS that 0.7 million metric tonne wheat crop has been destroyed which is around 40 percent of the total crop of the current season. Punjab Agriculture Minister, Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial, says that 35,000 acres of wheat and corn crops have been destroyed during the recent spell of rains and hailstorm across the province.

According to Pakistan Agriculture Research Forum (PARC) wheat, being the staple diet, is the most important crop and 80 percent farmers grow it on an area of around nine million hectares (close to 40 percent of the country’s total cultivated land) during the winter or Rabi season.

It contributes 14.4 percent to the value-added produce in agriculture and 3.0 percent to GDP. In January 2019, the government was expecting a good wheat crop and the set target of wheat production was 25.51 million tonnes.

Wheat is grown in different cropping systems, such as; cotton-wheat, rice-wheat, sugarcane-wheat, maize-wheat, fallow-wheat. The zoning is mainly based on cropping pattern, disease prevalence and climatological factors. PARC data shows that wheat productivity has increased over the last few years in all the major cropping systems representing diverse and varying agro-ecological conditions.

Coming back to the assessment and data presented by the Punjab government on wheat damage, Director Farmers’ Associates Pakistan and Member Agri Commission Punjab, Farooq Bajwa, strongly dismisses the official assessment.

“Wheat crop was cultivated on 16.5 million acres across the Punjab province where 4 million acres depend on seasonal monsoon rains and the rest on canal system that is sourced from snow and glacier. Out of such production we normally get 300 million Boris (a bag carrying 100kg weight) per year if the weather remains normal,” he says.

This year rains started after mid February which was harmful for wheat crop at the age of maturity. “That spell damaged the crop severely and we lost almost 30 million Buris. The second spell started after April 14 at the time of harvesting that cost us 20 million more Buris. Now the total number of lost Buris is 50 million (5 million tonne) that means around two million acres of crop is destroyed," he adds.

"The government is not giving real assessment and the concerned authorities don't appear serious in tackling this catastrophic situation."

Harvesting of the crop began in Sindh and South Punjab in late March and is expected to continue till mid June in North Punjab. However, torrential rains since April 14 have dashed the hopes of farmers, especially those belonging to South Punjab region which falls in the cotton-wheat cropping system. Farmers here normally manage to harvest two crops in a year.

Advisor to Chief Minister Punjab, Muhammad Akram Chaudhry, tells TNS that 0.7 million metric tonne wheat crop has been destroyed which is around 40 percent of the total crop. Punjab Agriculture Minister, Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial, says that 35,000 acres of wheat and corn crops have been destroyed during the recent spell of rains and hailstorm across the province.

Central Secretary General Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, Mian Umair, tells TNSthat farmers are facing two kinds of damages because of unexpected rain and hailstorm; first is the area where hailstorm destroyed wheat crop completely, the second one is the region where rains have turned the wheat black. "Black wheat neither carries proper weight nor attracts good price from the open market. Government centres are always unwilling to purchase such quality of wheat."

He adds that farmers, along with the destroyed crop, will have to bear the harvesting cost of the destroyed crop so that the land may be prepared for the cotton crop. This can delay the sowing of cotton, affecting the whole farming ecosystem as-well.

According to Mian Umair, the devastated farmer is looking towards the government to get some relief. Nevertheless, instead of announcing any relief package for the aggrieved farmers, the Punjab government has increased by Rs2.8 per electricity unit as fuel price adjustment on tube-wells being used for agriculture purposes. "In the current circumstances, it's a ridiculous and shameful act by the government."

Advisor to Chief Minister Punjab, Muhammad Akram Chaudhry, asserts the government will share farmers loss. "Chief Minister Usman Buzdar has principally agreed to share most of the wheat growers' loss. Therefore, a special package will be presented to the provincial cabinet soon for formal approval."

Besides, there is another concern being expressed by farmers and traders: the expected shortage of wheat in the days to come. Being a dietary staple, wheat flour currently contributes 72 percent of Pakistan's daily caloric intake with per capita wheat consumption of around 124 kg per year, one of the highest in the world. This can pose a serious challenge to the government.

However, Chaudhry doesn't take it as a point of concern for the government. Practically, he believes, there will be no crises for the common people as the government has enough in stock to fulfill the demand of flour mills and general market.

"Wheat worth Rs437 billion is already in the government's warehouses which is considered as a liability as the government has to spend Rs36 billion extra per year to maintain warehouses and keep the wheat safe. The government can lessen its liability by facilitating flour mills and overcoming expected wheat shortages in the open market."

Even if the government doesn't purchase the amount of wheat like it used to be, there would be enough in stocks to avert any troublesome situation in the future, he says.

Despite the fact that the government has not started purchasing wheat from farmers in the areas where they have already harvested their crops, farmers are getting Rs1200 per 40kg in the open market – Rs100 more than the last year.

This situation alarms people like Farooq Bajwa. He believes the government must be ready to face the catastrophe in terms of shortage of wheat in the whole country around November or December. "It would be so because wheat in Afghanistan and Iran is already short because their crop is also destroyed by the unexpected climatic disaster. Afghan buyers are already here and purchasing wheat at a very large scale and exporting it to their homeland. This would, certainly, create shortage in our market and I am afraid the government doesn't have enough supply to handle any unexpected crises."

Considering the local and international circumstances, Mian Umair and Farooq Bajwa suggest the government must keep its stocks full to avoid any problematic situation in the country. "The opportunity to sell its stocks in the international market would remain intact as Afghanistan and Iran are going to be serious buyers of wheat this year."

http://tns.thenews.com.pk/wheat-forecast-2/#.XMbIqjAzbcs

UPSURGE IN FOOD PRICES AHEAD OF RAMAZAN

Aamir Shafaat Khan | Mubarak Zeb Khan Updated April 27, 2019

ISLAMABAD/KARACHI: Despite government's commitment to implement its writ in the markets, prices of essential food items have increased significantly across the country ahead of Ramazan, which starts from first week of next month.

Sugar hit new retail peak of Rs70 per kg from Rs65 per kg few days back following persistent rise in wholesale rates at Jodia Bazaar, the country's biggest wholesale commodities market.

The demand for the sweetener goes up exponentially in summers as it is extensively used in preparation of traditional drinks, syrups, juices and confectioneries.

At the start of this year, sugar was priced Rs55 per kg and then it soared to Rs58-60 per kg in February while in March it was available at Rs63 per kg in retail markets. The country's sugar production came down by eight per cent to 3.728 million tonnes in July-February 2018-19 from four million tonnes in same period last year.

In Karachi, retailers are charging Rs68-70 per kg for sugar. However, many of them who had piled up stocks in bulk at lower wholesale rates, are now making a good profit in view of frequent increase in retail prices.

Patron in Chief Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association (KWGA), Anis Majeed said the wholesale price was Rs53-55 per kg two months back which now ranges between Rs63-64 per kg. He blamed the millers for pushing up the rates.

He said sugar millers had procured sugarcane from the growers at high price of Rs200 per 40 kg as against official rate of Rs 182, while the country also recorded low sugarcane production this season.

Anis recalled that last year, sugarcane production was high but growers got low price from the millers as against official rate of Rs182 per 40 kg.

Sugar exports in the current fiscal year had remained subdued. In 9MFY19, sweetener exports stood only at 377,677 tonnes, fetching $115 million versus one million tonnes that earned $362m in same period last year.

Pakistan earned $508m with export of 1.489mn tonnes in FY18 as compared to 307,448 tonnes valuing $161mn in FY17.

The weekly inflation, measured through the Sensitive Price Index (SPI), up by 0.37pc in the week ended on April 25 from the previous week. The hike in prices is nearly 13pc on a year-on-year basis, suggesting further increase in weeks ahead.

The increase in prices of essential food items was witnessed despite the presence of price committees and special price magistrates.

SPI monitors prices of 53 items based on a survey of 17 cities and 53 markets. Prices of 20 items increased and those of 10 items decreased during the period under review. Prices of 23 items remained unchanged.

The impact of prices on various income groups also witnessed variations during the week under review.

For the lowest income group (earning up to Rs8,000 a month), the SPI posted 0.4pc increase over the previous week, while inflation for the top income group (earning Rs35, 000 and above) was up by 0.35pc.

The food items whose prices rose over the previous week included tomatoes which rose by 9.32pc, followed by onions 8.35pc, potatoes 4.71pc, eggs 4.52pc, bananas 3.42pc, pulse moong 1.98pc, sugar 1.86pc, pulse mash 1.42pc, garlic 0.73pc, pulse gram 0.67pc, tea prepared 0.59pc, mutton 0.51pc, curd 0.28pc, break plain 0.14pc, beef with bone 0.03pc, rice Irri-6 0.03pc, cooked daal 0.02pc and gur 0.02pc.

The price of non-food items increased over the week includes cigarettes 0.02pc and shirting 0.47pc, respectively.

The prices of 10 items decreased during the week under review. These include chicken price which declined by 1.11pc, wheat 0.77pc, wheat flour 0.51pc, red chilly powder 0.25pc, cooking oil 0.23pc, vegetable ghee 0.23pc, and pulse washed 0.05pc. The non-food items price of which decline include LPG cylinder 1.06pc and firewood whole 0.45pc, respectively.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1478658/upsurge-in-food-prices-ahead-of-ramazan

SINDH IMPOSES COMPLETE BAN ON RICE CULTIVATION ALONG PERENNIAL CANALS

THE NEWSPAPER'S STAFF REPORTER Published Apr 27, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh government has decided to impose a complete ban on cultivation of rice along perennial canals such as Ghotki Feeder, Rohri Canal and Nara Canal to save their command area from waterlogging, salinity, seepage and land degradation.

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah issued directives to all divisional commissioners to ensure implementation of the ban at a high-profile meeting at Chief Minister House on Friday, said a spokesman for the provincial government.

Mr Shah said that rice was a high-delta crop which required more water than cotton and other Kharif crops and NW and Dadu canals were designed for irrigating dry crops but it was allowed later to use their water for the cultivation of rice in the wake of World War II to ensure food security.

He directed Hyderabad Comm¬is¬sioner Abbas Baloch to talk to growers whose lands were wat¬ered by Dadu Canal and convince them to switch over to low-delta crops. “This is the time we have to switch over to low-delta and high-yield crops because of water shortage and waterlogging issue,” he said.

The meeting was told that cotton sowing in Sindh started in May and rice cultivation in June, therefore, the chief minister asked the irrigation department to release water to the perennial canals in May so that farmers could start sowing cotton. If water supplies were delayed, the growers would opt for rice, he cautioned.

The chief minister constituted a committee of secretaries of irrigation, agriculture and revenue departments to work out a detailed plan for releasing irrigational water and launching a drive to convince growers to opt for low-delta crops. He also directed the agriculture department to guide and facilitate growers in swapping the high-delta crops.

The meeting was attended by MNA Syed Khursheed Shah, Minister for Agriculture Ismail Rahu, Minister for Irrigation Nasir Shah, Special Assistant to CM Ashfaq Memon, all secretaries concerned, principal secretary to CM Sajid Jamal Abro and Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani.

All the other commissioners, deputy commissioners and irrigation engineers also joined the meeting through video link.

Murad rejects governor’s remarks about Sindh govt

SEHWAN: Mr Shah said in a rejoinder to Sindh Governor Imran Ismail’s remarks that Sindh government was in a comfortable position with regard to finances and said the provincial government was facing serious difficulties completing ongoing schemes, not to speak of launching new schemes.

Mr Shah told journalists after laying wreath on the grave of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar on the concluding day of the 767th annual urs celebrations of the saint on Friday that it was not the governor’s job to comment on the financial position of the government. During the current financial year, the Sindh government had not been able to launch any new development scheme because of shortage of funds, he said.

He said the Sindh government was raising the issue of budget with Centre which had to release Rs120 billion to Sindh from NFC award but it withheld Rs8 to 9bn out of Rs15bn for development works.

He said that since the provincial government could not withhold salaries it had to reduce funds for development and non-development schemes. Last year, the Sindh government had used Rs204bn on development works but this year it would utilise less than Rs80bn, he said.

He rejected the governor's claim that Sindh government was not able to utilise funds. If it was so then how had it spent Rs204bn last year, he said.

Mr Shah criticised President Arif Alvi for talking about abrogation of 18th Amendment and presidential system and said that PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and party leadership wanted to see democracy continue to function in the country but a few people wanted to derail it.

He said that there were reasons the Sindh government had decided not to purchase wheat from growers this year. First, it had big stocks of wheat stored at food department godowns, secondly the government had no funds to start buying the grain, he said.

He said that Sindh government was working with World Bank and international agencies on its development schemes. Work on many schemes was going on in Karachi and irrigation system and Sukkur Barrage would be improved with the help of World Bank, he said.

About Prime Minister Imran Khan's use of questionable language for Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, Mr Shah said that Imran Khan had not learnt how to tender apology for his mistakes.

He said that this year heatwave was more intense during urs celebrations than last year's and about 2.5 million people had visited the shrine this year.

The chief minister was accompanied by PPP lawmakers, party leaders and officers of police and administration during the visit of the shrine.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1478593/sindh-imposes-complete-ban-on-rice-cultivation-along-perennial-canals

DILEMMA OVER WHEAT PRICE

By Editorial Published: April 27, 2019

As the annual wheat harvest draws near the government wrangles with setting a procurement price for the grain which aims to balance the cost of inputs with the final price of flour in the market to keep it affordable for the vast segments of the population. Like every year, the government is mulling its options on providing subsidy to keep the prices of wheat – the basic ingredient for bread – low or to pass on the increased cost to the public. The Punjab Food Authority has suggested keeping price locked at Rs1,300 per maund (40 kilogrammes) at the bare minimum after its earlier suggestions to raise it to Rs1,350 were rejected by the government. Only a few months ago, the government had decided to maintain for a fifth-consecutive year the wheat support price at Rs1,300 per kg where the government had conceded that farmers were earning a meagre 2% as profit.

But now, the government has locked horns with the PFA to further lower this rate. The PFA, though, is refusing to budge. The main reason for this is that there are some voices in the federal cabinet who are afraid of provoking another backlash from the public after it has raised fuel prices, power rates and allowed the exchange rate to slip to the highest it has ever been. To make matters worse, there is pressure on the government – which just saw its finance czar walk out – to decide this price quickly so that flour mills can start their procurement. The government must now decide, and quickly, whether it wants to set a lower wheat procurement price or whether it is ready for another round of expensive subsidies to keep the masses undisturbed. Or is it strong enough to embrace the backlash of hikes in wheat prices.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1960477/6-dilemma-wheat-price/

WHEAT, FLOUR PRICES RISE

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated April 26, 2019

KARACHI: Wheat has become costlier by Rs100 to Rs3,150 per 100kg bag in the open market following reports of crop damage in Punjab due to recent rains coupled with brisk exports of the commodity. As a result, millers have raised wheat flour prices ahead of Ramazan.

The price of flour no.2.5 was raised to Rs1,700 per 50kg bag from Rs1,675 followed by jump in fine and super fine flour rates to Rs1,875 from Rs1,825.

Chairman All Pakistan Flour Mills Association (Sindh Chapter) Mohammad Jawed Yousuf told Dawn on Thursday that everything was going smooth until reports of crop damage broke after heavy rains and storms. He said harvesting was due to start when rains hit the wheat-producing belt in southern Punjab.

As a result Sindh wheat, which started arriving from March, is now finding its way into Punjab. Besides, substantial increase in wheat exports had also put Sindh wheat crop under pressure. Besides, wheat exporters are also piling up stocks owing to better future export prospects.

Jawed said the Sindh government has so far not started wheat procurement from the growers for the current crop. The support price of wheat is Rs1,300 per 40 kg. When asked how much Sindh now holds last year's wheat stocks, he said on government papers, the stocks are estimated at 820,000 tonnes of last year's crop.

Pakistan's wheat exports rose to 557,587 tonnes ($122m) during the first nine moths (July-March) period of this fiscal year from 307,344 tonnes ($59.7m) in same period last year. The average unit price of wheat came to $218 per tonne as against $194 per tonne in same period last year.

According to figures of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the country earned $236m by exporting 1.189m tonnes in FY18 versus 3,937 tonnes valuing only $1m in FY17.

In the last week of March, flour millers had slashed flour No.2.5 price to Rs1,675 from Rs1,900 per 50kg bag while the rate of fine and super fine flour was reduced to Rs1,825 from Rs2,025. As a result, the price of 5kg bag of good quality flour (Bake Parlour and Ashrafi) had eased to Rs220 from Rs230 while 10kg bag was costing Rs420 as against Rs440.

Published in Dawn, April 26th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1478469/wheat-flour-prices-rise

PAKISTANI FISHERMAN DIES IN INDIAN JAIL

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated April 26, 2019

KARACHI: Another Pakistani fisherman has died in an Indian jail within a month, leaving the fisherfolk community in the grip of fear and panic as more than 100 of them are languishing in Indian prisons.

The spokesman for the Fishermen Cooperative Society (FCS) said that they received information about the death of Sohail Rasheed from authorities on Thursday afternoon. Rasheed had been in a prison in the Indian state of Gujarat since October 2016.

The cause of death, he said, had not yet been shared by the Indian authorities. However, the news caused consternation within the fishermen community as only earlier this month 80-year-old Noorul Amin succumbed to the injuries inflicted on him by the Indian jail staff.

"He [Rasheed] was in his early 20s," said Ghulam Rasool Sheikh, a welfare officer of the FCS, which looks after the legal and diplomatic processes for the release of Pakistani fishermen detained in India. "He has left a widow and a two-year-old son. The most tragic part of the story is that he hadn't met his son, who was born in 2017 while the father was in jail," he said. The officer said that they were not even informed about Rasheed's death on time and were told that the fisherman had died some three or four days ago.

He said the FCS on directives of its chairman Abdul Berr had already initiated the process to bring back the body, but it could take at least four to five days. The deceased, he said, was a resident of Mohammadi Colony in Maripur area.

"The FCS in correspondence with the Indian authorities has sought early release of our fishermen but in vain so far," said FCS chairman Berr.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1478430/pakistani-fisherman-dies-in-indian-jail

ROW BETWEEN CENTRE, PUNJAB OVER WHEAT PRICE PERSISTS

By Rizwan Asif Published: April 26, 2019

LAHORE: A dispute over the control price of wheat continues as the federal government appears to have rejected the Punjab government's price demand.

The Punjab Food Authority, however, is standing firm on its decision that the price of wheat will be set at Rs1,300 per maund (40 kg).

On the other hand, the federal government has decided to sell more than one million tons of wheat to Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) at local rates, on which the Punjab government has expressed serious reservations.

Flour mill operators have demanded that the government should announce the control price so that the private sector can move forward with confidence.

Punjab Food Secretary Shaukat Ali recently met with stakeholders and it was suggested that before the initiation of wheat purchase, the government should announce the price so that flour mills can buy wheat directly from farmers, which would not only give the farmers a set price, but would also reduce the pressure of purchasing on the PFA.

Conflicts of opinion were also seen in the provincial cabinet, where some members were of the view that the wheat price might rise sharply if the government sets a high control price, which could lead to a strong public backlash, while few were of the opinion that prices should be increased because currently the PFA purchases wheat from farmers at Rs1,300 per maund and sells it at the same price, whereas previously it was selling wheat at a loss, to reduce food price inflation.

The government was bearing a subsidy of Rs400 per maund, which translated into Rs20 to Rs30 per bag, meaning that if the government is to keep wheat prices in control, it will have to bear heavy subsidies PFA went to the federal ministry for food security with its proposed price of Rs1,330 to Rs1,350 per maund but the federal body and PASSCO authorities did not agree to the price at the time.

Sources said the federal authorities had made the principled decision of selling wheat to their sub-department Passco at the normal price.

Passco currently has 1.3 million tons of wheat stock available and in the next few weeks it will buy another 1.1 million tons. Federal authorities want Passco to sell between 1 and 1.2 million tons locally, and if possible, take permission from the federal government to export 500,000 tons of wheat.

But the Punjab and Sindh governments are strongly opposing the decision of permitting local sales to Passco, claiming that this will lead to the food authority facing difficulties in exporting wheat. The provincial governments had also observed that Passco should focus on Balochistan, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

In the past, Sindh and Punjab both sold wheat to flour mills at reduced prices to lower the final sale price, due to which an additional financial burden of billions had to be tolerated.

Punjab Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry told The Express Tribune that his government is constantly in touch with federal authorities on this issue. “One thing is clear, that the Punjab government will keep pursuing the wheat price issue.”

He said an increase of Re1 per kg in wheat is expected, which should not worry consumers.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1959527/2-row-centre-punjab-wheat-price-persists/

UREA SALES RISE 19% IN MARCH 2019

By Our Correspondent Published: April 26, 2019

KARACHI: Urea sales rose 19% to 408,000 tons in March 2019 on a year-on-year basis, according to latest data released by the National Fertiliser Development Corporation (NFDC).

Sales of urea had been recorded at 342,093 tons in the same month of previous year.

On a month-on-month basis, the sales of urea increased 5% to 408,000 tons in March compared to 388,000 tons in February 2019. “Fertiliser sales display a positive trend as the Kharif sowing season kicks in,” stated Aba Ali Habib Securities in its report. “However, the off-take of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser plunged 56% year-on-year.”

Company-wise, Engro Fertilisers recorded the largest growth in urea sales of 64% to 147,119 tons in March 2019 against 89,833 tons in the same month of previous year.

DAP sales of the company also swelled 44% to 28,500 tons compared to 19,812 tons last year. Fauji Fertiliser reported only 1% growth in urea sales during the month under review. Its sales inched up from 193,219 tons in March 2018 to 194,299 tons in March 2019.

In DAP sales, the company witnessed a drastic fall of 70% to 9,560 tons in March this year against 31,459 tons in March 2018. Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim reported a sharp decline in urea sales of 78% to 10,485 tons in March 2019 against 47,149 tons in March 2018.

Same was the case in the DAP segment of the company as sales plunged 78% to 15,245 tons against 69,864 tons last year. “Engro Fertilisers made its fortunes by selling urea at old prices as opposed to Fauji Fertiliser which increased prices by Rs70 to Rs80 per bag in March. Engro Fertilisers raised its prices in April, data for which will be released next month,” said Topline Securities’ analyst Shankar Talreja. “Dealers started hoarding urea as they were aware that if one player had increased prices, others would follow.”

Fatima Fertiliser recorded a growth of 6% in urea sales that stood at 12,495 tons against 11,802 tons last year.

“Going forward, we believe that the demand for plant nutrients is set to grow on the back of continuation of the sowing season and greater demand for agriculture exports to China as part of the free trade agreement,” said Aba Ali Habib’s report.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1959509/2-urea-sales-rise-19-march-2019/

DAWN’S FOOD AND AGRI EXPO BEGINS TODAY

From the Newspaper April 25, 2019

LAHORE: The Dawn Media Group is set to organise the eighth edition of the Dawn Pakistan Food & Agri Expo at Expo Center, Hall 1, Johar Town on April 25 & 26.

The two-day event beginning today is supported by the Punjab government and the technical working sessions related to food and agriculture sector will be held.

This year the Dawn Pakistan Food & Agri Expo will once again bring together key domestic and international players such as farmers, landowners, agriculture investors, government officials, agents, distributors and exporters on a single platform to explore new technologies and innovations in the food and agriculture sector.

It will also provide the food and agriculture sector the drive it needs in the form of exposure to new technology, machinery, food technology and general improvement in farming methods.

The exhibition will be open from 11am to 7pm and entry to the event is free.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1478201/dawns-food-and-agri-expo-begins-today

DATE EXPORTS FALL AFTER INDIAN DUTIES

Jamal Shahid Updated April 25, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The parliamentarians on Wednesday informed the National Assembly that the export of dates has declined sharply after India slapped a 200 per cent duty on Pakistan's exports.

"It is an issue. The decline in exports of dry dates is directly linked to the Pulwama attack in February," Parliamentary Secretary for Commerce Shandana Gulzar Khan said in response to a calling attention notice in the NA session.

The notice was raised by Dr Nafisa Shah along with other MNAs including Syed Javed Ali Shah Jillani, Shamim Ara Panhwar, Shagufta Jumani, and Shahida Rehmani.

Nafisa Shah said the trade barriers to export dates are a matter of concern and showed her disappointment with the incumbent government's failure to increase exports.

"Has Pakistan reciprocated or banned Indian imports into Pakistan in response to the overnight barrier erected by Delhi? As the fifth or sixth largest exporter of dates in the world, has the present government sought alternate markets to sell dates since the Pulwama incident two months ago?" asked Nafisa Shah.

She said that if Pakistan did not use trade as leverage like India, around Rs8 billion worth of goods sitting in go-downs are likely to rot.

She was also curious as to why despite surplus local production; the government is importing dates from Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Responding to questions, Shandana Khan said that since the Pulwama attack, Indian importers, who now have to pay 200pc duty on importing dates from Pakistan, have stopped importing goods from the country.

"This has caused the annual $500 million dollar trade to shrink to $6m as of March. Conditions are unlikely to change until elections in India are completed," she responded, adding that Indians consumed Pakistani dry dates as 'prasad' during their religious proceedings.

"We are currently negotiating with six different markets such as Morocco, France, Germany, the UK, USA, and Indonesia, which are the biggest buyers of dates," said the Parliamentary Secretary.

Pakistan is not in a position to retaliate against India with respect to trade after the Pulwama attack especially in the absence of industrial policy for the last 11 years, Shandana Khan maintained.

"We are a failure because we have not done our homework successively. However, Pakistan has responded to increase on duties on imports into India with similar increases on Indian imports into Pakistan, a list of which can be shared with concerned members," Shandana Khan informed the members.

In another question, the house was informed that in order to lessen trade deficit, Pakistan has reduced expenses on imports by $3.5bn after increasing duties on items purchased from abroad.

While most opposition members protested the move to reduce imports to settle trade deficit as bad for business, especially when exports have not increased, the government announced that expenses on imports will be cut by $5bn by June this year.

Published in Dawn, April 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1478246/date-exports-fall-after-indian-duties

FOOD PROCESSING POTENTIAL NEEDS TO BE OPTIMISED

Ahmed Affan April 25, 2019

FOOD processing and packaging across the world have seen a boom in recent times, and the Pakistani market is no different. The rise in the local market is undeniable but it is still not at its optimal level. Our food processing and packaging brands have even crossed borders and are very popular in international markets, but the gap between our yield from food crops and the quantity in which we produce processed and packaged food is considerable. We could achieve much better results from this industry but it has been hindered for numerous reasons one of which is our negligence towards upgrading the farming procedures and equipment.

For a country which relies massively on agriculture for foreign exchange earnings and a better part of our 200 million population is in one way or the other associated with agriculture, we are way behind in modernising the sector

According to industry experts, we are not just spending enough to introduce modern practices in the agriculture sector and we are criminally behind in terms of agricultural research and development. The new government seems focussed on increasing our export figures in an effort to make Pakistan self-sufficient financially, and, that being so, there is better way than to improve our food export figures, say the experts.

Pakistani industries, like, say, textile and its value-added products, which represent a pillar of our country's exports, are also dependent on one of our main agricultural produce; cotton. There is almost no other logical way to improve our country's cash inflow from exports without massive and meaningful improvements in our agriculture sector.

We do have agricultural research departments and even full-fledged universities focussing on agriculture alone, but are they doing enough? We haven't seen a breakthrough in any agriculture-related research in quite some time that would have given us an edge over our competitors in the international market. Other agriculture-based countries are way ahead of us in the race for modernising their farming practices and subsequently high-end value addition in food industries.

We produce surplus in numerous crops every year and after fulfilling our national requirements we just export what is left of it without any value-addition to the crop. Even what value-addition we do for the local market is at best minimal. Apart from some basic products that we have been making for decades, we do not come up with products or even concepts which encourage value-addition and processing part in the national food industry. For the very basic products that we create with value-addition, the quality is still not up to the mark in most cases when we talk of international markets.

With CPEC, we are entering a phase where a lot of international players from different industrial sectors are expected to take interest in making investments in Pakistan. There is every reason for us to particularly promote foreign investments in agriculture, food-processing and packaging domains.

Foreign investors should be offered financial and taxation incentives for setting up industrial units for food processing and packaging. If it happens alongside technology transfer, it would be the proverbial icing on the cake This seems like a very good opportunity for the new government to work upon and achieve its goals of not just increasing exports but creating the promised job opportunities.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1478148/food-processing-potential-needs-to-be-optimised

MIDDLEMAN DOMINANCE

Saleem Shahid April 25, 2019

AGRICULTURE is a commercial proposition taking care of many a livelihood. Every farmer adopts a cropping pattern where his comparative gains are higher. However, it is the middleman who has a complete stranglehold over the farmer as the former controls the payments for what the latter produces. Successive governments have failed to change the prevailing system. For decades, farmers in Pakistan have had little or no say in choosing markets or buyers for selling their produce. The government mandates marketing and selling of farm produce of essential crops only through state-owned institutions on minimum support price as announced by the government for each crop. In order to avoid delay in receiving payment by the government departments, the farmers prefer to sell their produce to the middleman or to local buyers.

“We have our own aarhtis – as the middlemen are called locally – since the time of our forefathers. We sell all our produce, primarily wheat, to them. In return, they take care of all our needs and demands in cash or kind. We do not have to face any problem in case of any tragic or happy happening in the family as the aarhtis have to meet all our demands,” said Mohsin Ali, 55, a farmer in village Jagiot, in the outskirts of Islamabad. Explaining the challenges involved in direct payment, Mohsin Ali says a majority of the farmers would not understand the basics of the system, and the government in any case cannot provide the services provided by an aarhti.

In Pakistan, farmers do not sell their produce in the open market. The middlemen purchase their produce by paying a little higher price than the prevailing price — in books alone — and fulfil farmers’ productive and non-productive needs. Middlemen continue to act as the custodian of the produce and sale proceeds because all procurement happens through them and the payment from procurement agencies reaches the farmer through them as well. This indirect system of payment puts the cash in the hands of the middlemen, which they leverage to exploit the farmers.

Giving the middlemen complete hold over farmers is actually a parallel business of money-lending. Between sowing and harvesting, any time farmers need money, the middlemen are happy to provide a loan at a high rate, which would be higher if it is for a wedding. After the harvest, the middlemen first deduct the debt and/or interest, if any, from the payment due for the produce. As the input costs of farmers increase and relative returns diminish, they often find themselves in need of loans. Here again, the middlemen are their saviours. Besides high interest, the farmers are also made to hand over blank signed cheques to the middlemen so that they could recover their loaned amount as and when a cheque is deposited in the bank.

Marketing is the weakest link in the agriculture chain, creating more and more space for the middlemen who overrule both the growers and the consumers.

“Eliminating the middlemen would enable the growers to get 35-40 per cent higher returns. The only constraint is that the local demand is limited,” says Raja Basharat, a farmer-cum-builder in village Barma in the vicinity of Islamabad.

In such a situation, it seems that setting up of private agricultural markets has become inevitable where farmers could sell their produce then and there without the influence of the middlemen. The setting up of modern private agriculture markets would facilitate proper grading, processing, packaging and marketing of quality produce. Provision of cold chains would also facilitate access to high-end domestic and international markets of perishable farm commodities. The presence of competitive private markets will have healthy effect on the existing markets in terms of prices offered and facilities provided.

The farmers do need protection. They have to face a raw deal amid market fluctuations. Every now and then, cotton does not fetch the expected price; the onion-growers have to shed tears as the prices slump, and the wheat producers feel cheated when they have to sell the commodity at below-market prices despite a bumper crop. It is common knowledge that the traders manipulate prices in connivance with officials of various procurement agencies when the farmers bring their produce to the markets. As a result, the middlemen make more profit than the growers. So it makes sense to strengthen the marketing mechanism to protect the farmers’ interests. The farmers too will have to make efforts. They can, for instance, form cooperatives and store their produce for deferred disposal.

Achieving economic sustainability is the biggest challenge for small and marginal farmers. Production and marketing of all products, industrial or agricultural, are interlinked issues. But this principle vis-a-vis agriculture has not been given due consideration and marketing of food grains has continued to be quite outdated. Marketing is considered to be the weakest link in the agriculture development chain, creating more and more space for the middlemen.

There is a need for reaching out to the farmers with a multi-disciplinary approach to develop agri-business information hubs to provide them with the latest information regarding the sale and purchase of agricultural produce.

Apart from providing information on agricultural marketing and agronomic practices, these centres may play a key role in improving the quality of agricultural produce by educating the farmers about the scientific approach to farming with the aim of making the farmers aware of the latest advances in the field and help them getting a competitive price for their produce besides providing the relevant information on agro-marketing, organic farming and improvement of crop quality.

These centres should have computers, television sets, libraries containing videos and literature on farm education for the benefit of the farmers besides guiding the farmers and organising regular training programmes, seminars, workshops, buyer-seller meetings, laboratories to test and grade farm produce, providing complete information on marketing, post-harvest management of crops and prevention from various diseases.

All in all, the move to set up centres to educate the farmers about various aspects of agricultural practices besides providing them much-needed information on marketing their produce will be a step in the right direction.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1478146/middleman-dominance

MODEL PILOT PROJECT LAUNCHED AT NARC FOR FARMERS

RECORDER REPORT | APR 25TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

A model pilot project has been launched at the National Agriculture Research Centre (NARC) to advise farmers on the efficient use of water. According to details of the project shared by Dr Munir Ahmad, Director of Climate Change, Alternate Energy and Water Resource Institute at the NARC Islamabad, only 40,000 acres in the country is under drip irrigation.

In contrast, the total irrigated area in Pakistan is estimated to be 20 million acres.

The solar-powered project spreads over seven acres and comprises three components i.e. citrus orchard on one acre, sprinkler orchard on 2.5 acres and raise bed on 2.5 acres. As part of its “Caring for water initiative”, Nestle, one of the largest multinational food companies, has made an investment of Rs 4.5 million in the project to promote the drip and sprinkler technology, said an official of the company.

The firm has already launched an agricultural efficiency project in Sheikhupura in collaboration with the Punjab government which has the potential to help save 54 million litres of water annually. Talking to media, Dr Munir Ahmad informed the institute had been mandated to develop and disseminate science-based effective technologies and innovative practical management of water, energy and resources in collaboration with provincial and national research and development organisations.

In view of the effects of climate change on agriculture, there is a need to bring high value crops under sprinkle and drip irrigation as well as solar pumping irrigation, he said.

Nestle understands the need of water conservation and to that end has been extremely supportive in modernizing the agricultural practices in Pakistan. With the drip and sprinkler technology, water wastage will be brought down drastically and a more efficient system will be set in place for the agricultural sector.

Farmers in water-stressed regions of Balochistan have taken keen interest in the drip irrigation technology and have been visiting the pilot project to gain knowledge to adapt it to promote agricultural productivity.

High cost of imported valves, pipes, tubing and emitters from China is the major hindrance in the way of promoting drip and sprinkle irrigation. Dr Ahmad suggested that the government should seriously consider encouraging the private sector to produce drip irrigation devices locally that can help introduction of drip irrigation at a massive scale, he said.

In the absence of local industry manufacturing drip irrigation devices, there is less availability of skilled manpower since the technology requires sediment-free clean water and hindrances in agronomic practices.

He said proposals had been submitted to the prime minister's task force on agriculture and the recent measures to promote agriculture such as green technology would boost introduction of drip irrigation.

Explaining advantage of drip and sprinkle irrigation, Dr Ahmad said 40 percent of irrigation water can be saved through this technology compared to flood irrigation.

The technology also helps efficient utilisation of fertilizer whereas crop yield increases by up to 40pc and water application uniformity reaches over 90pc, he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190425467175/

10-15 PERCENT RD ON COTTON IMPORT, MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE: SPECIAL BODY TO PRESENT RESOLUTION IN NA TODAY

TAHIR AMIN | APR 25TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Special Committee on Agricultural Products will present a joint resolution in the National Assembly for passage on Thursday (today), recommending minimum support price for cotton crop and imposition of 10-15 percent regulatory duty (RD) on cotton import to protect local growers and reduce import bill, which is currently around one billion dollars annually.

The was decided in a meeting of Special Committee on Agricultural Products which was chaired by Asad Qaiser, Speaker National Assembly. The committee was given a briefing by Commerce Division and Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) on exports/import of cotton as well as its stagnant production. The committee unanimously approved the TORs of the Special Committee on Agricultural Products which outline an ambitious undertaking to turn around Pakistan's agriculture sector.

Qaiser remarked that cotton is Pakistan's strategic crop and boosting productivity and export competitiveness is central to the revival of cotton in Pakistan. The committee was informed that cotton exports as well as imports have significantly declined in the last 9 months. It was highlighted that Pakistan's cotton continues to lose export competitiveness and cede space to the regional competitors.

The members remarked that the middle men extract maximum profitability on the basis of their lobbying and bargaining power while the farmers continue to be exploited.

The committee maintained that higher cost of production, price differential vis-à-vis international prices and lack of value addition have deprived Pakistan of competitive advantages in the international markets.

The members remarked that middlemen extract maximum revenue during the purchase. It was one of the reasons that area under cultivation for cotton has ceded considerable space to other crops. It was also highlighted that cotton price that farmers get, is also not in line with the international trend as they receive considerably lower prices than their counterparts in neighbouring countries. The members were informed that a short window for import, based on the limited needs of the local industry, resulted in massive imports and subsequent dumping.

The MNFSR also supported the imposition of RD on cotton import, saying it would protect and encourage local growers as the cotton sowing is about to start.

Joint Secretary Commerce Division Usman Qureshi said that Pakistan is a net importer of cotton as cotton of around one billion dollars was imported last year which contributed to trade imbalances. Furthermore, cotton exports declined by around 71 percent during the first nine months of the current fiscal year compared to the same period of last year.

Secretary MNFSR Hashim Popalzai said that India cotton production increased by 150 percent while Pakistan cotton production is stagnant, which is resulting in exports' decline. To meet local textile industry requirement, the country has to import cotton; however when regulatory duty is waived off, the industrialists import heavily and dump it which is resulting in low prices for local growers. Around 0.7 million bales of cotton are dumped in factories at present, he added.

Some parliamentarians said that All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) has become a strong cartel and succeeds in manipulating government's policies in its favour at the cost of growers' loss.

MNA Riaz Fatyana recommended for 10-15 percent RD on cotton import to give level playing field and protect local growers. The recommendation was strongly endorsed by all the committee members.

Popalzai said that duty on cotton imports was waived off by the ECC despite their opposition, adding they support that duty be imposed on cotton imports.

Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said that APTMA agreed last month on import parity prices but backed out two days ago from its commitment. Due to duty free cotton import, growers get on average Rs 34-40 billion less per annum. He further said that around 1.7 million of bales have been imported so far in the current year.

The speaker National Assembly said that it means the growers are being exploited. The MNFSR official said that even if duty is imposed on cotton import, it would not hurt industry as they could take it back in the shape of Duty and Tax Remission for Exporters (DTRE).

The committee was further informed that cotton import is not allowed through land route as per the law and can only be imported through sea, but cotton is being imported through land route in the country.

The committee decided to present a joint resolution in the National Assembly for passage on Thursday (today) while recommending for imposition of RD on cotton import as well as minimum support price.

Furthermore, all stakeholders would be invited in the next meeting to take their views. The committee also directed minister for NFSR to visit areas where crops were damaged by recent rains and storms and come up with estimated losses as the government has pledged to compensate the growers.

Qaiser further advised the Federal Minister Mehboob Sultan to personally visit the affected region and ascertain the estimated losses to the farmers. The minister assured that the government will extend maximum relief to the poor farmers. He added that the Prime Minister has also assured compensation to the farmers.

The minister expressed confidence, "Given the support and commitment of this committee, we may revitalise our agriculture and realise out true potential."

The committee was further informed that electricity prices was fixed at Rs 5.35 per unit for agriculture sector with no further taxes through the Parliament, but the government has added Rs 2 per unit fuel adjustment, which has increased the cost of production manifold.

The committee decided to summon concerned departments in the next meeting to resolve the issue.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190425467140/

TCP PLAN TO SET UP 'RICE CITY' IN KARACHI

ZAHID BAIG | APR 25TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) is planning to set up a 'Rice City' in Karachi in order to facilitate exporters and help enhance export of the commodity to strengthen national economy.

"We are going to put the plan before the TCP Board of Directors in next meeting for approval," said TCP Chairman Riaz Ahmad Memon while talking to Business Recorder at the sidelines of launching ceremony of digital process of TCP authenticity certificate for export of rice.

Senior Vice Chairman REAP Ali Hussam Asghar, former chairman Sami-ullah-Naeem, Pir Nazim Shah, REAP General Secretary Kashif-ur-Rehman and a large number of brown rice exporters were present at the event.

He said although we have sufficient storage capacity but the proposed new facility will be reserved specifically for rice exporters. He said storage will help save the consignment from aflatoxin.

Memon further said that the TCP is going to introduce a website to help exporters of different sectors to search buyers for their goods. He said it will be sort of online commodity market where exporters of surgical instruments, rice, cement or any other exportable items can place their query for buyers. He said that this online facility will have data of importers from different countries. "Idea is that exporters will place their commodity and it will be displaying full profile of the exporters and all the details about the company and the goods on sale including quantity.

The system will generate an email which will go to all the buyers registered on this system thus trying to create a B2B link between Pakistan exporters and foreign importers," he added.

Earlier, addressing the launching ceremony of digital inspection and certificate service, Riaz Ahmad Memon also threw light on this proposal and said they are at present in procurement process of this new software and local talented software engineer is in negotiation with the Corporation. He said that it will provide publicity and fast access to exporters to importers.

Responding to a demand of the rice exporters, he announced to increase the slots of rice analyzers and deputing most of them in Punjab as this province is hub of rice exports, especially brown rice. He said that at present there are two analyzers and 10 more will be added after imparting them necessary training.

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) Senior Vice Chairman Ali Hussam speaking on this occasion said that 90-95 percent of brown rice is exported from Punjab so the TCP should bring its command and control system to this province to make issuance of certificate and inspection fast and quick.

He also demanded to increase analyzers in Punjab and deputing them region wise. He also asked for speeding up the inspection process and accounts process. He lauded the launch of digital process for inspection and certification and assured to promote it.

Earlier, TCP officials briefed the participants about IT-based digital process of rice inspection and issuance of authenticity certificate launched to facilitate the rice exporters. They said the exporters have to create account on portal, file online application/request to carry out inspection and submit detail documents and bank challan fee.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190425467169/

‘IMRAN TAKING KEEN INTEREST IN ACHIEVING PRODUCTION TARGET OF 15 MILLION BALES’

HASSAN ABBAS | APR 25TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Prime Minister Imran Khan while chairing the meeting on the challenges being faced in cotton sector in the last week of December 18, has asked the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to take measures to achieve the production target of 15 million bales of cotton.

The meeting was also attended by Advisor to Prime Minister on Climate Change, Malik Amin Aslam; Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmed Langrial; Secretary National Food Security Dr M Hashim Popalzai and other officials.

In the meeting he directed the official to evolve the strategy to achieve the target of production of 15 million bales of cotton. He also directed the officials that they should ensure that farmers get certified seeds.

Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum Naseem Usman told that they had presented their recommendations for achieving the target of 15 million bales at that time.

He also said that he still remembers that 12 years back while addressing the seminar on cotton seed in Karachi Jahangir Tareen read the paper in that seminar on increasing the production of cotton. At that time he said that in 2015 we made Cotton Vision and tried to achieve the target of production of 20 million bales of cotton. But unfortunately in 2015 the production of cotton was 9.7 million which is less than 10 million.

Naseem said that the meeting of Federal Agriculture Council was held every year in the months of March and April in Islamabad in which after reviewing the estimate of production of cotton the land for cotton cultivation was allocated and estimation of cotton production in the provinces was done. But unfortunately the production of cotton was much less than the estimation which means that estimation was not done seriously.

During the last four years according to the estimates the production of cotton was 14 million, 14.3 million but 9.7 million and only one time 11 million bales were produced.

In the cotton producing countries there was a difference of 0.3 million to 0.5 million bales between the target and the production but in our country the gap between the production and estimate was huge. The plant of cotton is very sensitive and weather had an impact on it. During the last two years the cotton crop faces acute water shortage. Experts were of the view that estimates of the FAC regarding the production of cotton were not right and the huge difference exists between the production and the estimate.

This year too the FAC has the set the target of production of 15 million bales for the year 2019-20 during the meeting held in the month of April according to the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan. FAC should conduct a survey of the total cultivated area of cotton in the month of June and after that set the real target instead of setting the target on assumptions. Due to setting the target on assumptions there was an uncertainty in the whole sector. Last year the government constituted a committee to prepare the estimate of the cotton production.

According to the estimates of that committee, Pakistan can produce 25 million bales till 2025. All the estimates were based on assumptions the target should be set after conducting the survey of the cultivated land so that it should be easy for the policy makers to make policies.

Prime Minister Imran Khan is taking special interest in achieving the target of production of 15 million bales. He has directed to provide certified seeds. He also directed to give incentives to the farmers for the achievement of the target. Before that in the past, Pakistan produced 14.9 million bales in 2011-12. If serious steps should be taken production of cotton will be 15 million bales. While appreciating the statement of Prime Minister Imran Khan regarding increase in cotton production All Pakistan Textile Mills Association and Karachi Cotton Association has given fruit full suggestions.

According to the estimates of Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture 15 million cotton bales were produced in the financial year 2011-12.

Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum Naseem Usman said that at that time the farmers of cotton cultivated areas of Hyderabad, Mirpur Khas, Badin and other districts of cotton production gave priority to cotton instead of sugar cane and rice due that reason the cotton was cultivated 30 to 40 percent more as compared to 2010-11. It should be clear that in that year as compared to the allocated cultivated land of 7.8 million acres allocated land was 8.8 million to 9 million acres.

Keeping in mind, this year in 2018-19, 7.3 million acres were allocated for cotton cultivation. Per acre yield of cotton in Sindh is 30 to 32 maund per acre while per acre yield in Punjab is 18 to 20 maund per acre. It should be taken seriously. It is suggested that ban should be impose on cultivation of other crops in cotton cultivated areas in Punjab like Sindh.

It is a fact that if we focus on the development of agriculture sector we can achieve self reliance. Cotton is a cash crop of our country and by increasing its production we can fulfill our domestic cotton needs as well as earn foreign exchange by exporting it.

Moreover we can fulfil the needs of our textile industry, edible oil and fodder for animals.

The increase in production of cotton can only be possible if we provide assistance to farmer on every step from sowing to cultivation. Farmers get healthy seed on economical price and get fertilizer on time; ample amount of water and pure pesticides then there is no reason that production target of cotton and other crop should not be achieved. The administration should take care of all these things.

Our country faces a problem that when the production of one crop increases the production of other crop decreases and we have to import that crop to meet our domestic needs.

It should be kept in mind that production of cotton should be increased in such a way that the production of other crops can not suffer. In our agriculture sector there is a lot of potential our farmers are hard working and with some hard work we can turn around. If we construct some small dams and one big dam we can achieve our production target.

The target set by Prime Minister Imran Khan of the production of 15 million bales of cotton can be achieved if federal and provincial agricultural ministries allocate the cultivation land which was allocated in 2011-12.

At present sowing season partially starts in the low lying areas of Sindh while the partial sowing of cotton started in Multan division of Punjab. The relevant departments should work on war footings to increase the production of cotton.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190425467165/

NA PANEL TO SEEK 10-15% IMPORT DUTY ON COTTON

By Haseeb Hanif Published: April 25, 2019

ISLAMABAD : In order to facilitate local cotton cultivators, the Special Committee of National Assembly (NA) on Agricultural Products has decided to bring forward a resolution to consider placing import duty of 10 to 15 per cent on cotton.

NA Speaker Asad Qaiser, who chaired the meeting held in the Parliament House on Wednesday, also instructed authorities to determine the practicality of the suggested increase in import duty, which currently stands at zero.

The meeting also expressed concern over the Rs2 increase in price of per unit of electricity under the fuel price adjustment and summoned the energy minister in the next meeting in this regard.

The secretary of the Trade Ministry informed the meeting that Pakistan is a net importer of cotton, importing mainly from USA, India and Brazil. The import of cotton the previous year amounted to $1 billion. The production of cotton in India increased by 150% but did not increase in Pakistan due to which cotton cannot be exported, he said.

Minster for Food Security Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan informed the meeting that steps were taken to provide relief to cultivators whose crops were destroyed due to rain. He added that people would be compensated once losses have been estimated.

During the meeting, Riaz Fatyana said that the duty on import of cotton has been decreased from 5 per cent to zero, while calling for the levying of 10 to 15% duty on import of cotton. He said currently it was benefitting businessmen.

Khalid Khokhar, a representative of a farmers’ collective, said that the production cost in Pakistan was very high which skewed the situation in favour of the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma) while resulting in losses for the farmers.

“Pakistani cultivators stopped the plantation of cotton on not receiving profits,” he said. He added that for the improvement of economy, the support price of cotton is necessary.

The secretary for food security, Hashim Popalzai said that they had opposed the decision made by the minister of textiles to impose zero duty on import of cotton. "Cotton is imported due to zero duty on cotton," he added.

Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said that the production area of cotton has declined from 770,000 hectare to 400,000 hectare. "This year there was a difference of Rs1,500 per ton of cotton. The rates of cotton remained around the cost of production," he said.

Speaker Asad Qaiser said that to promote local cotton, a resolution would be brought to the NA in relation to imposition of duty. He directed committee member Syed Fakhar Imam to prepare the draft and discuss it with him for presentation in the NA today (Thursday).

On this occasion, Chaudhry Iftikhar Nazir said that the electricity has been hiked by Rs2 for agricultural consumers.

"The electricity has been increased by Rs2 under the fuel price adjustment but the rate for agricultural consumers is Rs5.35 paisa per unit. Now the pressure of fuel price adjustment has been put on the cultivators," he said, upon which the committee summoned the federal minister energy in the next session.

The committee also summoned the Aptma representatives in the next meeting on the issue of cotton.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1958843/1-na-panel-seek-10-15-import-duty-cotton/

PFA ACT IS ALL ENCOMPASSING, SAYS FOOD MINISTER

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter April 24, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) does not require more legislation as it is working under the PFA Act 2011, says Punjab Minister for Food Chaudhry Samiullah.

"The PFA Act-2011 was passed by the Punjab Assembly, giving authority to penalise food business operators on violations," the minister told journalists in response to PA Speaker Chaudhry Parvaiz Elahi's observation in which he questions the legality of the PFA.

The speaker questioned the minister for food what the standard operating procedure of the authority is. "Where does it draw its legal strength from? How does it decide fines; it has been fining with impunity from a few thousands to hundreds of thousands of rupees? What is its professional strength? All the questions beg answers," he asserted.

Explanation comes on the heels of Pervaiz Elahi's outburst in Punjab PA

He said food safety officers of the authority could impose fine, issue warnings and seal factory after finding violations under the law and food business operators could appeal against any action to its director general.

Mr Chaudhry said the authority was implementing the PFA Act in the province and fist it would give five warnings to the business operators and later they would take action of imposing fine or seal premises. "I am personally monitoring all the actions of the authority and it is working under the set standard operating procedure," he said.

He said the SOPs are defined for all posts in the PFA Act-2011 and work of the Food Safety Officer is clearly described in section 13 of the Act 2011. Similarly, protocols are well defined for all employees including the food safety officer as how to seal any food premises, to serve improvement notice to food business operator and to remove the substandard food material from the market.

The minister said regulations were prepared to further define the way of the authority's work whereas all regulations were passed from the forums concerned and notified from the Law Department. "A mechanism to impose fine is in the PFA Act 2011 and it's board has given power to officers to impose fine on the fourth inspection and seal it on fifth inspection," he said.

He said the 99 per cent human resource of the authority had graduated in food safety-related studies and were technically qualified and later they were also trained professionally in field.

Sources said the Speaker raised the questions after the authority penalised the food businesses he was associated with.

Published in Dawn, April 24th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1478005/pfa-act-is-all-encompassing-says-food-minister

DAMAGED BY HAILSTORM: SURVEY OF CROPS TO BE CONDUCTED: MINISTER

HASSAN ABBAS | APR 24TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Provincial Minister for Energy Dr. Akhtar Malik said on Tuesday that the government of Punjab will conduct a survey in order to know the real estimate of damage caused by hailstorm to crops. The report of the survey will be presented in the House.

He was speaking on the floor of House. He said the government will compensate farmers whose crops were destroyed due to recent hailstorms. Speaking on the adjournment motion, PML-N MPA Muhammad Arshad Malik pointed out that the potato growers are not getting proper price of their crop. He said due to decreasing prices of potato, farmers are suffering particularly belonging to districts of Sahiwal, Okara and Pakpattan. He demanded that the government should take notice of the situation and look for new international markets for the export of potatoes.

Speaking on a point of order, PML-N MPA Hina Pervez Butt asked that how many teams visited the rain-affected areas after the directions of Prime Minister Imran Khan to the Chief Minister Punjab to take steps for solving the problems of farmers who lost their crops due to hailstorm.

While responding to questions on health during the question hour, Health Minister Dr. Yasmeen Rashid said that she met the drug inspectors and directed them to have zero tolerance against sale of spurious medicines. She said the government had taken notice against 1061 medical stores for selling spurious medicines in 2018. The samples of 29 medicines were found substandard and the cases against them were pending.

PML-N MPA Malik Ahmed Khan said that instead of giving details of the health initiatives taken by Prime Minister Health program, Dr Yasmeen Rashid should brief the House about initiatives taken by the provincial government in health sector. He further said that after 18th amendment health is a provincial subject.

Speaking on the point of order, PML-N MPA Rana Mashood criticized the government for cutting the higher education budget. He said opposition will resist any such move.

PML-N MPA Tariq Gill speaking on the point of order said that a unanimous resolution should be passed in the house for showing solidarity with the innocent Christians of Sri Lanka who were killed in a terror attack on Easter.

Law Minister Raja Basharat said that Tariq Gill should move the resolution and treasury benches will support it.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190424466831/

RICE GROWERS URGED TO AVOID OVERUSE OF CHEMICALS

RECORDER REPORT | APR 24TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Speakers at a seminar called upon the rice growers to avoid over-use of chemicals especially tricyclazole and buprofezin to ensure safe and healthy basmati rice from farm to fork. The seminar was entitled as 'Khushal Kissan' organized by the Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association (PBHA). A large number of basmati growers from Narang Mandi Distt Sheikhupura and members of the Association attended the meeting. Former Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) Chairman Samiullah Naeem, Shahzad Chaudhry & Raja Arsallan attended the event. Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association (PBHA) has been formed for promotion and preservation of basmati rice heritage of Pakistan.

While moderating the seminar Imran Sheikh Coordinator PBHA highlighted the mission of PBHA and stressed the basmati rice farmers for avoiding overuse of chemicals especially tricyclazole and buprofezin in Basmati rice to ensure the safe and healthy basmati rice from farm to fork.

Shahid Tarer Convener PBHA shared the vision of Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association (PBHA) regarding working to resolve the challenges being faced in Basmati rice production and export. He said our country is lagging behind not only in productivity of Basmati rice but the rising cost of production making us less competitive from other rice-producing countries.

Sheikh Adnan Director PBHA shares the expectations of PBHA from Basmati rice farmers and assured to provide healthy and certified seed on subsidized rate during this season.

Chief Guest of the seminar Zafar Yab Haider Naqvi DG Pest Warning and Quality Control threw light on strategies of the Punjab Agriculture Department for controlling insects and pests of rice. He appreciated the mission and efforts of PBHA and assured his full cooperation on the behalf of Punjab Government. Asif Hayat Khan Niazi Zonal Manager Fuji Fertilizer Company shared his views about fertilizer application and importance of using potash, zinc and boron. Aftab Naseem Regional Manager FFC emphasized a balanced use of fertilizers especially Urea and its impact in boosting rice productivity, quality and profitability.

Dr Muhammad Sabir Director Rice research Institute KSK briefed the audience about research updates and development projects of Basmati rice. He elaborated the work on new varietals development of Basmati rice especially BLB resistant varieties. Dr Tahir Hussain Awan Rice Research Institute KSK shared his experience about Direct Seeding Rice and shared the set of new technology for weed management in DSR. Dr Riaz Deputy Director Agriculture, Pest Warning & Quality Control Sheikhupura advised the farmers for responsible use of pesticides and ensuring the quality of Basmati rice. Khalid Khan Kakar Assistant Director Agriculture Muridke District Sheikhupura discussed the key factors for boosting the rice yield and quality.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190424466833/

COTTON PRICES FIRM ON IMPROVED BUSINESS ACTIVITY

RECORDER REPORT | APR 24TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Prices maintained a firm posture on the cotton market on Tuesday in the process of low supply of best quality, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8,850, they added. In the ready session, over 15000 bales of cotton Changed hands between Rs 7500-9000, they said.

Market sources said that continued increase in demand pushed the rates firm. The mills were trying to replenish their stock. On the other hand, the ginners refrained from fresh selling due to little stock with them, they said. Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that cotton yarn is in demand and this is an encouraging factor. Sowing is on full swing because of availability of irrigation water in both Sindh and Punjab, he observed.

Achievement of better and improved cotton production will demand on weather condition and supply of irrigation water to the standing crop, he added. Reuters adds: ICE cotton futures settled higher on Monday as the dollar weakened and tumultuous weather in the US Southeast restricted progress in plantation of the natural fibre crop.

The most-active cotton contract on ICE Futures US July settled up 0.2 cent, or 0.26 percent, at 78.47 cents per lb. Total futures market volume fell by 3,638 to 20,861 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 293 to 213,138 contracts in the previous session.

The following deals reported: 2000 bales of cotton from Ghotki at Rs 9000, 1000 bales from Sadiqabad at Rs 9000, 1600 bales from Khanewal at Rs 7500/9000, 1800 bales from Rahim Yar Khan at Rs 8900/8950, 1400 bales from Dera Ghazi Khan at Rs 8900, 2600 bales from Haroonabad at Rs 8600, 1400 bales from Bahawalpur at Rs 8500, 2077 bales from Lodhran at Rs 8400 and 1000 bales from Rajanpur at Rs 9000, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190424466902/

PAKISTAN EXPORTS SUGAR, RICE TO CHINA UNDER $1B PACKAGE

By APP Published: April 24, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has so far exported 150,000 tons of sugar to China while export of 200,000 tons of rice will be completed by June under the $1-billion duty-free incentive package offered by Beijing, revealed Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile and Industry Abdul Razak Dawood.

Briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Commerce on Tuesday, the adviser said China had extended the duty-free package for the export of rice, sugar and 350,000 tons of cotton yarn.

Committee Chairman Mirza Muhammad Afridi was of the view that the domestic textile industry would be hurt by the export of yarn as its prices would surge in Pakistan's market.

However, Dawood said Pakistan produced a huge quantity of cotton yarn so no such issue would arise. He added that textile-related industries were now giving good results as even closed factories had resumed production and there were hopes that textile exports would go up in coming days.

He informed meeting participants that he would be accompanying Prime Minister Imran Khan during the upcoming visit to China, where second phase of the free trade agreement (FTA) would be signed.

Under the agreement, Pakistan will get duty-free market access equivalent to that already enjoyed by member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) from China. "Although it took a long time to finalise the second phase of FTA, I would like to appreciate the Chinese government's support in this regard."

Senator Nauman Wazir pointed out that the government should get assurance from the Chinese side that it would not impose non-tariff barriers on imports from Pakistan.

Dawood pointed out that all such matters had already been discussed with China and he would further talk to Chinese authorities to get such assurances.

Talking about the performance of textile sector, Senator Shibli Faraz said the sector had become a 'spoilt child' by getting unnecessary subsidies. The productivity, efficiency and quality of the textile sector was not up to the mark despite getting huge subsidies and average monthly textile exports never exceeded $1.2 billion in the past 20 years.

Endorsing the senator's stance, the adviser said the textile industry needed assistance around 15-20 years ago but now there was no need to offer any subsidy to the sector. However, he was of the view that the garment industry needed support owing to high prices of land, therefore, the government was mulling over extending long-term financing to garment manufacturers for the purchase of land and buildings to establish their industrial units.

Dawood told the committee that the government was engaged with Japan for the purchase of modern textile machinery and expressed hope that in the next six months an agreement would be finalised.

Senator Wazir suggested that the government should conduct a value chain analysis in the textile sector to find out the reasons behind the decrease in textile exports. He said commercial counsellors in Pakistani embassies abroad should also be bound to give feedback from their respective countries in order to find out potential markets in various parts of the world.

"If we want to boost our exports beyond $50 billion, we must have a look at areas other than textile," Dawood remarked.

He pointed out that the engineering sector had a market share of over $4 trillion across the globe and it could help increase Pakistan's exports to the desired level.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 24th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1957698/2-pakistan-exports-sugar-rice-china-1b-package/

3,753 PACKETS OF UNSAFE MEAT REMOVED FROM MARKET

RECORDER REPORT | APR 22ND, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) on Sunday removed 3,753 packets of six meat companies from the market over failure to meet the food safety standards by sharing laboratory results of frozen meat products with media for the public interest.

The authority had taken samples of 115 products of seven companies. According to details, PFA removed 544 packets of Seasons, 127 packets of Man Salwa, 164 packets of Hamza Foods, 100 packets of Neat Foods and three packets of Sabroso. Moreover, the authority has issued fine tickets and served improvement notices to food business operators of meat companies owing to fail their 16 products on quality basis. These products are not harmful for human consumption; however, improvement space is always present.

PFA Director General Captain Muhammad Usman (retd) said that PFA has sealed the supply of all failed brands at their factories in order to ensure the availability of quality meat in the market of Punjab. He said that supply of failed brands would be remained suspended until to bring reforms according to the PFA. He added that anybody can download the complete list of the sample results from the PFA website. PFA also ordered to stop the production of all those brands that failed to meet the standards in the analysis report of the laboratory test. He said that PFA will again collect samples for laboratory test after ensuring proper reforms.

Muhammad Usman told that PFA will check frozen meat products two times in a year as per annual sampling schedule. He added that PFA is taking indiscriminate action against food business operators in the light of laboratory report. He said that the purpose of the continuous checking of food points is to ensure the provision of safe and healthy food for the public.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190422466419/

‘WE WANT TO MAKE THE AGRI SUPPLY CHAIN EFFICIENT THROUGH TECH’

BR Research April 22, 2019

An interview with Jehanzeb Nasir Chaudhri, founder Mandiexpress.pk

In the age of digital disruption, the possibilities for young tech entrepreneurs are endless. Though late to the game, Pakistani entrepreneurs have not been short of ideas. Some have worked, others faltered, many going out of business as rapidly as they came in. But of all the e-commerce ideas, selling fresh grocery online may be the trickiest—it has the biggest potential given the sheer size of the agriculture industry and the demand coming from Pakistan’s burgeoning markets, but despite facing virtually no online competition, it is also the most difficult to successfully take off the ground and keep gaining market share. BR Research sat down for quick chat with the young founder and CEO of mandiexpress.pk, Jehanzeb Nasir Chaudhri to determine what the business model is, and how he is tackling this mammoth task four-year down the line since the launch.

Jehanzeb has a Bachelor in Economics and Communications from Lake Forest College with a Master in Data Science from the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. He started practicing farming in his backyard as a hobby after spending three months in the rainforest of Maui Hawaii learning permaculture and organic farming. Following are edited excerpts from the conversation.

BR Research: Tell us how you founded mandiexpress and what was your motivation behind it?

Jehanzeb Nasir Chaudhri: I was studying in Chicago when I found out about this program called the Worldwide Organization for Organic Farms (WWOOF). I had no inclination toward selling sabzi or getting into agriculture before, but I joined this program in Hawaii for three months at an organic farm and the experience completely changed me. I went on a macrobiotic diet, which is based on organically grown whole grains and vegetables. Within a month, my body started to detox itself; I had immense energy. I realized that this is what I want to do in Pakistan. I started experimenting in my backyard with organic farming and after some success, I wanted to scale it; however, after talking to some farmers, I realized that I needed to go in another direction.

My next stop was the mandi. The mandi is a chaotic marketplace. There are about nine intermediaries between the farmer and the end-user customer—a product that a farmer sells for Rs10, eventually reaches the consumer at Rs100 with the middlemen collecting most of that revenue. And that's how the idea for mandiexpress was born. I thought before I could do any organic farming myself, I should create a platform where I can connect the farmer directly to the consumer, which could be done best with an IT infrastructure and data science backing it up.

BRR: Did you raise any funds?

JNC: Initially I financed the project myself since there were no investors willing to put money in a new idea with indeterminate returns. I was running the operations from home. In August 2015, we were incubated in Nest I/O, and I found a partner, Danyaal Balkhi who could come on board with me. We rented out a small place where we were delivering 120 orders day. We were then able to get an equity investor, but even that was not enough. This is a very capital intensive business.

BRR: Explain to us how the business model works?

JNC: We use a just-in-time model, which means, if a customer places an order today, he will get the delivery the next day. We aggregate all the orders overnight, our team at the mandi and at other various procurement points, purchase the orders that get delivered to us from 5am till noon, and we subsequently deliver to our customers after an in-house quality control check. This is also the main difference between any other vendor and us. For the sabzi wala or a retail store, the produce may be laying in inventory for days. When customers buy from us, it is a much shorter chain: from farm to mandi, and from mandi to us within a day. In some cases, it is directly from the farm to us, and onto the customer.

BRR: Walk us through the agriculture supply chain. Where does mandiexpress stand or hope to stand in that line-up? Do you want to replace the sabzi wala?

JNC: The farmer is in the middle of the village who links up with an agent. That agent links him to the nearest mandi where there is an arthi who is an auctioneer. His job is to auction and sell the produce in the mandi, which is typically bought by mashakhors who are wholesalers and day traders buying in bulk. The produce they buy will have all varieties in terms of size, quality etc. He will grade this produce, which he will then sell to retailers. This is the simplified version—there are other moving parts in the distribution network, which ultimately lead to the retailer that can be a sabzi wala or a big store.

In our operations, we work as both the wholesalers and the retailers. We have confirmed orders that we provide to businesses as well as households, something which the mashakhors cannot do, and to do this, we work with the arthis and in some cases the farmers themselves.

As to your other question, no we don't want to replace the sabzi wala. Our plans in the future involve partnering with the sabzi wala and in fact, it is the same for all the other links in the value chain.

BRR: What is your pricing mechanism?

JNC: This is an industry plagued with corruption. One of the largest markets in Asia feeds Karachi, which is the 6th largest population in the world. When you walk in the mandi, no one would tell you the price because they are playing on it. They size up the buyer and then give you the rate. Even the sabzi wala does that. So our costs fluctuate on a daily basis. We have a lot of tech that is working in the background. We have a mechanism by which we collect data on prices in the market, and based on that, we price our product and collect a pre-set margin.

On a micro level, price is dependent on the quality, and on a macro level, it is dependent on the supply—for instance, the price of tomatoes would depend on how many tomatoes landed in the mandi. But it is more complicated than that because within the same mandi, the same tomatoes can be priced differently based on the different auctions that are happening simultaneously. On any given day, there is no single price for a tomato. This is a data game.

In the more developed world, the farmer himself grades the produce, runs it through a quality control, brands his product, and prices it accordingly after packaging and weighing. In the wholesale markets, the buyer can pick the produce without having to sift through it. That is what we are trying to do.

BRR: What are your margins for different produce: vegetables, fruits, etc?

JNC: Our costs as I explained earlier vary; and we fix the margins taking into account the perishability, quality and volume. Typically, higher margins for highly perishable produce like lettuce because in that equation we have to consider wastage.

BRR: What is the share of produce that goes into waste for you compared to the industry?

JNC: For us, it is less than 0.2 percent, but the industry average is around 40 percent—from farm to the table. The reason is that we are on a just-in-time model. A big retailer based on the daily footfall procures the goods and hopes to sell it. We have confirmed orders before we go into procurement.

BRR: But can you continue with the same model at scale? Wouldn't you eventually need to build inventories?

JNC: We can easily scale it. We have a hybrid model in which we purchase from the farm directly, from arthis and from the mashakhors based on the volumes. Tomatoes and onions, which are typically high volume produce, come directly from the farm. The advantage of buying from the arthis is we can get the orders in bulk and the advantage of buying from mashakhors is that it is pre-graded.

BRR: Where is your demand coming from, and what is your customer retention?

JNC: Primarily, its young working professionals between the ages of 24-40. On a daily basis with orders of 100-150 orders, we have about 80-90 percent people who keep coming back. About 40 percent are probably in the Defence/Clifton area; 25-30 percent are in the more central locations like Bahadurabad and KDA.

BRR: Your produce online is more expensive than retailers including the sabzi wala. How do you justify that to an average customer?

JNC: I'll give you a supply chain example. The mandi starts at around midnight and the auction begins at 1:00 am and between then and 3:00 am, the mashakhors grade the produce. The peak buying is being done soon after the grading where the mashakhor is selling to retailers. The best quality produce is being sold at that time. By 5:00 am, the best product has already left the mandi, bought by exporters, hotels, and us. This is where the sabzi walas come in who purchase after 5:00 am onwards. The price goes down as the produce gets older, even by a day. That makes the difference between our price and the sabzi wala's price. But yes, it is hard to explain to a consumer that we are providing the best quality produce.

BRR: How do big retailers price their produce?

JNC: They have a smart system in place. The prices of tomatoes, potatoes and onions are the price indicators. They will make sure that the prices of these goods are low. But they will hike up prices of goods that the customer wouldn't have prior knowledge about, such as turnips. Fresh produce for them is a magnet. It pulls customers in and it has a very high buy-back—-when they are coming to buy that cheap tomato on discounted prices, they end up buying other things

BRR: At 150 orders a day right now, are you ready to scale or are you happy with your current customer base?

JNC: We don't want to do what others have done and failed. I have seen nearly 20-30 e-commerce companies hoping to do the same. But they came in, put a lot of money in, tried to scale fast and failed. Our vision is to provide a quality product and educate an average customer about the quality of food they are purchasing. We want to slowly grow with the demand to stay in the game.

BRR: But your current demographics show your customer base is concentrated in the high income areas. Is that the only market you want to tap?

JNC: It depends on how you think about it. We may not be supplying the produce to the houses across the city, but we are supplying to many sabzi walas in Karachi, which ultimately reach different income households.

BRR: Some believe that a major problem in the agriculture system is the existence of arthis. Farmers are cash strapped, arthis provide them with credit at sky-high interest which can go up to 150 percent, and they also get 80 percent of the profit earned on the produce they purchase from the farmers. So if you are working with the middlemen, are you really solving a problem?

JNC: In Pakistan, people don't like change. To change something, we have to start with baby steps. My goal, as I told you was to sell organic produce. It took me 4 years to build that customer base to be able to procure organic produce and sell it. When we started, we were primarily buying from the mandi and we had 1-2 farmers. Now we have about 20 farmers. We are slowly building a database; we are surveying different markets, and creating a network across the country. As volumes go up, we can work with more and more farmers.

BRR: But can you even go to the farmer directly? They rely on arthis for credit. How can you eliminate that important step?

JNC: There are many equations to this. One is that farmer doesn't have the funds. The arthi provides credit to a farmer in the form of inputs etc. and when the output comes, deducts the amount from that. Another equation is, they lend the money to the farmer, and whatever output the farmer produces will be bought by the arthi. A good farmer will get out of this cycle. He makes enough money because of the quality of his produce. Better quality is auctioned at higher prices. We have certain sympathy for the farmers but not all of them are the same. There are some farmers that are selling their produce at three times the price I am buying that produce at the mandi. What we are trying to do is connect with the farmers and ensure a good margin for them, but we seek good quality produce from them in return. We also direct them toward where the demand is.

As we are growing, we want to facilitate the entire value chain through technology. Our way forward is where we partner with all the players and regulate the system in the long term, rather than remove any from the equation.

BRR: Would you agree that poor marketing is a greater problem for Pakistan's agri exports than pricing and availability of inputs?

JNC: It is neither. The problem is of information sharing. People don't have the basic knowledge about how to export, they don't know about certification, regulations, export requirements etc. They are mostly unbanked. Marketing will come after knowledge.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/04/22/491375/we-want-to-make-the-agri-supply-chain-efficient-through-tech/

100 INDIAN FISHERMEN RELEASED, MORE TO FOLLOW

PPI Updated April 08, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan released the first batch of 100 Indian fishermen as part of a goodwill gesture on Sunday.

The fishermen were released from a Karachi prison and they left for their home by train.

The Edhi Foundation made arrangements for their travelling from Karachi Cantonment Station and onwards to Wagah border.

The fishermen were brought to the station in police buses and Edhi ambulances amid tight security.

The Edhi Foundation gave a gift and money to each Indian fisherman to help them meet their travelling expenses to reach their homes from Wagah border.

The fishermen smiled and waved to the people at the railway station as their train left the platform.

An official of the Sindh home department said that during this month, Pakistan would release 260 more Indian fishermen.

He said these fishermen had been released after completion of legal formalities in compliance with their repatriation order issued by the the interior ministry.

Earlier, Foreign Office spokesperson Dr Mohammad Faisal said at a weekly press briefing that Pakistan would release 360 Indian prisoners, 355 fishermen and five civilians, during the month of April.

The prisoners will be released in four batches, scheduled as 100 each on April 8, April 15 and April 29 while 60 prisoners, including five civilians, will be freed on April 29.

Published in Dawn, April 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1474600/100-indian-fishermen-released-more-to-follow

WEEKLY COTTON REVIEW: PRICES REMAIN STABLE DUE TO BUYING BY TEXTILE, SPINNING MILLS

NASEEM USMAN | APR 22ND, 2019 | KARACHI

The prices of cotton remained stable. The government has set the target of production of 15 million bales according to the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan. However the premium of Rs 200 per 40 Kg on Cotton Seed will be paid.

In the local cotton market during the last week the prices of cotton remained stable due to the buying of cotton by textile and spinning mills. The ginners had the stock of 600,000 bales while many mills need cotton due to which the trading volume remains little bit reasonable.

The prices of cotton in both Sindh and Punjab remained Rs 7300 to Rs 9000 per maund. The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) Spot Rate Committee stabled the spot rate price at Rs 8800 per maund while Seed cotton (Kapas/Phutti) is not available.

Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum told that during the current season estimated crop of cotton will be 10.08 million bales as compared to the last year production of 11.6 million bales which was 7 % less. The relevant departments were active to achieve the target of production of 15 million bales set by Prime Minister Imran Khan for the year 2019-20.

In the international cotton market mixed trend was seen in the prices of cotton. The fluctuation of 2 American cents was seen in the Rate of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) of New York Cotton market due to which the rate of cotton is in between 76 and 78 American cent. According to the Cotton Association of India the production of cotton in India will be 3 crore 21 lac bales which is 44 lack bales less than the initial estimate of 3 crore 65 lac bales. More over China announced the quota of importing 800,000 ton bales of cotton which is equal to 47 lac bales of 170 kg due to which it is expected that prices of cotton in international market will increase.

Mean while cotton sector is in confusion regarding the announcement of payment of Rs 200 per 40 kg premium on the production of contamination free cotton in a meeting held in Multan last week regarding increase in the production of cotton.

Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum said that Chairman Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association Mian Muhammad Mahmood Ahmed said that it was decided in the meeting that 20 cotton factories in Punjab and Sindh will be selected which will give Rs 200 per 40 Kg premium on Contamination Free Cotton. The farmers of these will be directed that they will give clean Contamination Free Cotton to these selected factories. The ginners will make cotton bales from this cotton and the textile and spinning mills as well as private exporters of cotton will pay the premium accordingly. Mahmood said that government had given them assurance that they will give directions to the big textile and spinning groups that they will only buy cotton from these ginning mills after paying reasonable premium.

According to the information Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) set a cotton production target of 15 million bales for the year 2019-20. The cotton will be sowed on an area of 2.895 million hectares. It is hoped that sufficient amount of water will be available for the crop, while the tender for the import of fertilizer has also been issued.

According to the experts FCA has set a cotton production target of 15 million according to the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan. For this purpose an area of 2.895 million hectares has been allocated. Last year FAC has set the initial target of production of one crore 43 lac 70 thousand bales for which 2.955 hectares (73 lac acres) was allocated but due to intense shortage of water sowing process was completed on 2.406 hectares (60 lac acres) due to which only one crore 8 lac cotton bales were produced. In the year 2017-18 one crore 16 lac bales of cotton were produced for which government had allocated 2.700 hectares (67 lac acres) for cotton sowing.

For the year 2019- 20 FCA has set the target of production of 15 million bales which is difficult to achieve from the allocated land because it is not sufficient to achieve the target. According to the experts 15 million bales of cotton were produced in 2011-12 for which cotton was sowed on 3.600 hectare (88 to 90 lac acres). If the cultivated land of cotton is not increased then it is difficult to achieve the set target.

The experts were of the view that it is premature for FAC to set the target before knowing the estimated land of sowing of cotton because for the last many years the officials of FAC gave the estimates of production by sitting in rooms due to which difference of lacs of bales were seen. The process of estimation of cotton crop should be done in the month of June so that estimation should be real.

Moreover, chairman All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) Syed Ali Ahsan and Prime Minister's advisor on Commerce and Textile Razzaq Dawood and Chairman Task Force on Textile Salman Shah will try to achieve 50 billion dollar export of textile products in next five years which will give rise to investment and 15 million jobs will be created. In the local market the upward trend was witnessed in the prices of cotton, cotton yarn and textile products.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190422466411/

'SINDH GOVT'S DELAY IN WHEAT PROCUREMENT CAUSING LOSSES TO FARMERS'

By Our Correspondent Published: April 22, 2019

HYDERABAD: With delays in official wheat procurement pushing the exercise far behind schedule, the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has blamed the Sindh government for causing financial losses to the farmers. A meeting of the SCA in Hyderabad on Sunday, attended by the farmers' representatives from Karachi, Sukkur, Ghotki and Sanghar through video link, deplored that not a single wheat procurement centre has been opened in Sindh as yet.

The process was scheduled to start from April 1 but currently, a summary for the purchase of 0.5 million tonnes of wheat is pending approval of the Sindh chief minister. Once the sanction is given, the government will float the tender for purchase of the gunny bags only after which, the procurement process will start. It is expected that the province's farmers, who are harvesting a bumper crop this year, would have sold a large part of their harvest in the open market by that time.

The government had fixed Rs1,300 per 40 kilogrammes as the support price of wheat. However, SCA President Qabool Muhammad Khatian said that the open market has been exploiting the farmers by paying between Rs1,050 to Rs1,150 per 40 kg to the farmers.

The wheat support price of Rs1,300 has remained static since the fiscal year 2014-15 despite repeated demands of the farmers, who cite the rising cost of cultivation as justification for the increase. Even Sindh agriculture research department had previously suggested the government to fix the price at Rs1,448.

"Because the government's centres haven't yet opened, traders in the open market are exploiting farmers by purchasing their crop at cheaper rates," said Khatian, demanding that the government immediately open the centres. "This is happening for the first time in Sindh's history that the government hasn't opened a single centre".

Thanks to the weather and intermittent rain, the farmers are reaping a bumper crop of up to 2,000 kg per acre against Sindh's average productivity of around 1,350 kg per acre. The crop was cultivated at 1,046,845 hectares against the target of 1,150,000 hectares.

The provincial government appears averse to initiating the buying process because it is still utilising the carry-over stocks of its procurement last year. Another obstacle to the process is said to be Sindh food department's limited storage capacity which ranges between 700,000 to 750,000 tons.

Meanwhile, those attending the meeting also expressed grave concern over the shortage of water, particularly in Thatta, Sujawal and Badin districts where the people have complained that they cannot even get drinking water. The farmers denounced the imposition of 200% duty on import of dates from Pakistan to India and requested the federal government and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) to find alternative export markets.

The farmers called for providing Rs5,000 per acre subsidy to the growers of soybean crop by Sindh government, similar to the subsidy being received by their counterparts in Punjab.

The SCA's General Secretary Zahid Hussain Bhurgari, Syed Aijaz Nabi Shah, Nabi Bux Sathio, Ghulam Hassan Chachar, Ghulam Mujtaba Unar, Nisar Hussain Khaskheli and others attended.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1956035/1-sindh-govts-delay-wheat-procurement-causing-losses-farmers/

CHINA-PAKISTAN JEANS 'MARRIAGE': IS IT BEIJING'S DUTY TO HELP?

By Meng Lingjuan Published: April 22, 2019

BEIJING: The theme of Texpo Pakistan 2019 – Sharing a common thread – reminded the reporter of an old Chinese saying that an invisible red thread connects those who are meant to be together. If the first phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) starts from 'several power plants and three roads', will the second phase begin with yarns of below 20s?

From April 11 to 14, the second Texpo, hosted by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), was held in Lahore, Pakistan's third largest city. China and Pakistan are world leaders in the textile industry while Weiqiao and ChenOne are famous in the industry of the two countries.

“Pakistan has an edge in its high-quality short-staple cotton, which is suitable for producing yarns of below 20s and can be used to make denim fabric. Pakistan exports a large amount of yarn of below 20s to China,” said Sun Jingying, General Manager of China Weiqiao Textile Co Ltd.

“Xinjiang's long-staple cotton is used to produce high-count fabric very well,” he said while pointing to his shirt cuffs.

ChenOne Home Textiles is the first booth on the right side of the main aisle at the No 1 Hall of Expo Centre Lahore. “If we have to compare with China, I think Pakistan's greatest advantage is that the cotton planted here is one of the best in the world,” said Pakistan ChenOne Home Textiles General Manager Muhammad Amir Mahboob.

Sun and Mahboob both mentioned one of Pakistan's major advantages in textile – the short-staple cotton. But according to Dawn's report, as of March 1, the cotton production in Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan – the top three cotton-producing provinces in Pakistan – was down 6.8% over the corresponding period of last year, and was expected to be the second lowest in eight years.

Analysis by Dawn suggests that the major cause for production shortage in the ongoing season is that against the nine million acres earmarked for cotton crop, only six million acres have been cultivated in 2018-19 and the use of poor-quality seeds and pesticides, resulting in a low yield per acre and causing heavy losses to cotton growers.

In this regard, Muhammad Siddique Rana, an exhibitor and CEO of MHR Exports, said agricultural production was unstable. “The bumper year usually comes after an off-year for production. It is unnecessary to worry too much about what the media report says,” he said.

Among the visitors, Xi Jianlong, Deputy Director of International Business Centre of Xinjiang Xinyan Mushen Technology Co Ltd, said the key to solving current problems was to increase per-unit area yield, but there were three limiting factors in Pakistan.

First of all, Pakistan has no breeding technology, so the local farmers use inferior seeds of Monsanto and Pioneer, which are less tolerant to the muggy monsoon temperatures in Pakistan. Second, Pakistan's field management ability is weak, and the crops could not grow well because of a lack of water and fertiliser, Xi said.

Third, the low labour costs lead to insufficient mechanisation in Pakistan. Xi pointed out that the labour price is about $3 to $4 per day during a busy season in Pakistan, meaning the monthly salary is about 500 yuan ($74.5).

“They plant and harvest the cotton all by hand and use flood irrigation method. As a consequence, some cotton plant grows to 1.5 metres in height and some 50 centimetres in height. We use trickle irrigation and mechanised cotton topping technology with all the plants almost having the same height in China.

“Spending six dollars a day or 700 to 800 yuan ($119.2) a month seems like the trigger point for introducing agricultural mechanisation in Pakistan. We really hope to establish a model project in

Pakistan, using our own seeds and machines to let Pakistani people truly see the effect of mechanised operations," Xi concluded.

Gu Jie, Head of the Central Asia Comprehensive Experimental Station of the Cotton Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, has long promoted cotton farming techniques in Central Asia.

"When the output-to-input rate of cotton cultivation reaches 4 to 1, the farmers will consciously consider using machinery. Now that it is difficult to bring equipment in Pakistan, we, Chinese, can initially export the two key technologies of flood irrigation as well as soil testing and formulated fertilisation. As far as I know, these two technologies have been popularised in Kyrgyzstan and have been adopted in one-third of Tajikistan."

Gu particularly pointed out that most of the countries that responded to the Belt and Road Initiative lived on farming and herding. Agricultural cooperation must be put on the agenda, he said.

"The Belt and Road Initiative will eventually be implemented by the enterprises. Seed breeding is our core technology. If the irrigating and fertilising technologies can be properly combined and transferred with part of seed breeding technologies, the initiative will be more active. The policy is supposed to be in line with strategy. In the current international trade environment, properly and conditionally transferring agricultural production out of China will resolve core risks and reduce the probability of counter killing. China should be more proactive," Gu added.

This article originally appeared on the China Economic Net

Published in The Express Tribune, April 22nd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1956088/2-china-pakistan-jeans-marriage-beijings-duty-help-islamabad/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 15th TO APRIL 21st 2019

COMMODITIES: SLOW TRADING ON COTTON MARKET

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter April 21, 2019

KARACHI: After witnessing brisk activity throughout the week, the cotton market on Saturday turned lackluster as buyers withdrew to the sidelines. Trading resumed on a dull note, however overall undertone was steady and outlook positive.

Ginners avoided entering into deals in the hope of getting higher prices as demand peaks while the arrival of new crop is likely to be delayed.

During the week, cotton from Sindh and Punjab was quoted between Rs7,300 to Rs9000 per muand and official spot rates remained pegged at Rs8,800 per maund.

All government departments connected with cotton crop are reportedly working actively to achieve the next crop target — as wished by Prime Minister Imran Khan — at 15 million bales.

There is a hope that the country could achieve this target as federal committee for agriculture has marked out an area of 2.8 million hectors for cotton cultivation for season 2019-20. Above all, there would not be any shortage of water for the season.

However, the proposal to give Rs200 premium price to contaminated free phutti (seed cotton) per 40 kg still needs to be worked out along with a mechanism of giving this amount to growers, brokers said. The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were steady at Rs8,800 per maund.

Trading on ready counter was negligible as buyers stayed away from the trading ring and only one deal of 150 bales from station Kandiaro was done at Rs8,450 per maund.

Published in Dawn, April 21st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1477414/commodities-slow-trading-on-cotton-market

ANALYSIS: FARMERS HAVE LITTLE CAUSE FOR JOY THIS YEAR AS WHEAT PRICE REMAINS ON LOWER SIDE

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated April 21, 2019

Even though wheat crop on his two-acre land is ready for harvest, Ali Mohammad Mirjat, an elderly peasant, has little cause for being happy this year as his hard-earned produce did not fetch him the price he had expected.

He had to sell off his wheat at Rs1,150 per 40 kilogrammes in Jhando Mari taluka. Still, he considered himself lucky to get that price, which was Rs250 less than the support price of Rs1,300 per 40kg, because the market price was on the decline by each passing day.

He would, however, get only 25 per cent share in profit, for he did not share cost of input with the landowner. A peasant usually shares expenses on crop sowing as well as profit with the landowner on 50-50 share formula.

Though farmers are reaping a better harvest because of favourable weather conditions this year, peasants like Mirjat have little prospects of earning profit in current season due to falling price of wheat caused by Sindh government’s delay in procuring the crop which has already reached open market.

Extended winter season and rainfall at crucial stage of the grain formation have benefitted the crop considerably and increased wheat productivity. Farmers are reaping 2,000 to 2,200kg wheat per acre though Sindh’s average per acre yield remains 1,320 to 1,360kg as per agriculture department’s figures.

And it is in spite of the fact that Sindh has missed the wheat sowing target by 9pc as 1,046,845 hectares area could be brought under wheat cultivation in 2018-19 season against a target of 1,150,000ha (2.8m acres).

Last year, the province had missed the target by a marginal 3.9pc. Sindh had produced 4.2 million tonnes of wheat in 2009-10 and four million tonnes in 2013-14. Since then it did not cross four million mark as the production vacillated between at 3.6m tonnes to 3.9m tonnes till 2017-18.

The Sindh government is reluctant to buy the crop since it already had last year's carryover stocks to dispose of while Punjab government has decided to purchase four million tonnes of the grain from farmers despite having carryover stocks.

The government's wheat procurement system has been made so complex for farmers and it is so plagued with corruption that majority of small and medium famers do not get support price for their produce and they normally sell it in open market or to middlemen.

The procurement was supposed to start from April 1. Since the food department was said to be having 0.7m tonnes to 0.8m tonnes of carryover stocks and the new crop was again likely to be bumper some cabinet members advised the government not to procure it this year, sources said.

The food department has though sent a summary for procurement of 0.5m tonnes wheat crop to the chief minister and the provincial cabinet is to take a decision in this regard. Once the summary is approved, tenders will be floated to purchase gunny bags, which will take so long that farmers will already have sold major portion of their harvest by then.

The support price of Rs1,300 per 40kg has been unchanged since 2014-15 which farmers like Nabi Bux Sathio of Sindh Chamber of Agriculture believe must be increased in view of rising cost of inputs and withdrawal of subsides on fertilisers, increased fuel prices and miscellaneous expenses.

The Sindh Agriculture Research Department had assessed cost of production last and this year at Rs1,317 per 40kg and proposed fixation of support price at Rs1,448 per 40kg with 10pc profit margin. Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), however, has calculated it at Rs1,200 per 40kg.

"A bag of urea fertiliser was available for Rs1,380 and DAP fertiliser for Rs2,600 until 2017-18 season and this time their price has increased to Rs1,850 and Rs3,850 per bag, respectively, after withdrawal of subsidy," said Mr Sathio.

"Traders also deduct one kg on each 40kg of the crop which is again another loss to us. We are giving 40kg of wheat and getting the price for 39kg by traders on the pretext of crop wastage which is unjustified as there is no wastage," he said.

Another possible reason for the food department's reluctance to begin the procurement is its lack of storage capacity which limits its purchases to a certain quantity. The food department has a capacity to store 700,000 to 750,000 tonnes of the grain.

The department has to rent private premises to keep over one million tonnes or 1.1m tonnes of the crop. In last season, 1.4m tonnes of wheat was purchased by the department.

Hyderabad-based grain traders claimed that Sindh's wheat was also going to Punjab where the harvest started later than in Sindh. Rainfall has damaged their crop in 15 districts but Punjab has sizeable carryover stocks and there is currently no inter-provincial ban on the movement of wheat.

"To me the damage to the crop in Punjab is not much. Sindh's crop reaches Punjab which starts harvesting after some time," said Mehmood Nawaz Shah, a representative of SAB.

The government's subsidy in the shape of support price does not normally reach farmers and is mostly pocketed by middlemen in collusion with unscrupulous officials of the food department.

A genuine farmer feels discouraged when he is not issued gunny bags to enable him to bring his grain to the food procurement centres. He is hence forced to sell the crop to middlemen at much lesser rate and the latter then supply the same to the food department and earn windfall profits by pocketing the support price.

Published in Dawn, April 21st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1477381/analysis-farmers-have-little-cause-for-joy-this-year-as-wheat-price-remains-on-lower-side

SFA SEIZES 16,000 LITRES OF ADULTERATED MILK

By Our Correspondent Published: April 21, 2019

HYDERABAD: In a raid at the wholesale milk market at Badin transport stand area in Hyderabad, Sindh Food Authority (SFA) seized 16,000 litres milk after the chemical tests established use of urea and detergents besides water.

SFA Operations Deputy Director Imtiaz Ali Abro told the media that six shops in the market were fined for the adulteration.

He said that the seized milk was also drained. “Around 50% of the seized milk contained water and we also found urea and detergent in the milk,” he claimed.

Abro said he had warned milk traders that the authority will maintain a constant check on their business and that adulteration will not be tolerated. The shopkeepers were also asked to maintain hygienic condition in the shops. The milk from the wholesale market is mostly bought for commercial purpose by sweet shops, bakeries and wedding caterers. The authority also raided a factory producing salt in Matiari district and collected samples for laboratory tests.

The authority’s laboratory in Hyderabad’s government hospital Pretabad still remains non-functional. The laboratory was established over a decade ago by former Hyderabad nazim Kanwar Naveed Jamil of Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 21st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1955490/1-sfa-seizes-16000-litres-adulterated-milk/

MANGOES OUTPUT FEARED TO FALL 20-25PC ON INCLEMENT WEATHER

Munawar Hasan April 21, 2019

LAHORE: Pakistan’s mangoes harvest might reel from unfavourable weather conditions this summer, growers and exporters said on Saturday, fearing a significant 20 to 25 percent drop in production of the aromatic and juicy fruit.

They feared a shortfall of 300,000 to 400,000 tons in mango output this year compared to the last year.

“Production of mangoes is going to squeeze this year due to climate change-induced severe events,” Tariq Khan, president of Mango Growers Association Multan said. Punjab contributes around 72 percent to the annual mango production of 1.7 million tons.

Khan said drop of temperature adversely impacted the pollination process. Low night temperature causes shedding of fruit, which is a loss for the farmers. Besides, hailstorm badly hit mango trees.

Stakeholders said altered mango flowering due to prolonged winter, dust and hailstorms, rains, gusty winds and fruits are stated to be a major challenge that hit the crop size.

Onslaught of fungal disease due to moist conditions would also harm fruits in days to come if not treated properly.

Mango exporter Ahmad Jawad said the mango crop in the south Punjab is likely to be late in the market due to rains and storm. Sunlight could not properly pass on mango trees for optimum ripening, Jawad said in a statement.

Asif Ali, vice chancellor of Muhammad Nawaz Shareef University of Agriculture, Multan, said there was a massive damage to mango fruits due to the current week's hailstorm.

"Flowering was badly hit from the hails and gusty winds," Ali said. "There is also fear of loss from the powdery mildew fungus to remaining fruits. Extensive losses have been seen in patches."

Zain Shah, group leader of Sindh Mango Growers and Exporters said mango growers sustained losses due to rains in February. Powdery mildew disease triggered by moist weather in patches could not be contained by timely sprays in several belts right from Hyderabad to Shaheed Benazirabad districts. The province accounts for 28 percent of the country's total mango production.

"Owing to this onslaught, farmers have to face 10 to 20 percent loss at flowering stage," Shah said.

"However, most of the orchards remained immune to this attack due to timely remedial measures taken by the growers."

Powdery mildew is one of the worst diseases affecting almost every variety and is common threat to mango trees across the country. It appears from December to March and infects flowers in rainy condition, especially to those who fail to open and sometimes shed before being fertilised and results in a substantial reduction of fruit set. If the fruit is already set, it may drop off prematurely due to disease.

Shah said recent spell of rains and windstorm did not harm mango orchards in Sindh. "Overall mango, which is presently at fruit formation and growth stage, seems good in the province, especially in central belt of the province," he added. "I hope volume of exports, originating from Sindh, would not be hurt."

Grower Khan said the ministry of climate has not done anything to deal with the climatic effects on agriculture sector.

Khan also feels sorry over the work being done by public sector research institutes and academia for reducing negative impact of climate change.

"Farmers don't know how to deal with challenges being posed by changing weather pattern," he said. "There is complete disconnect which is regretful."

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/460636-mangoes-output-feared-to-fall-20-25pc-on-inclement-weather

NO THREAT TO FOOD SECURITY AMID RAINS, SAYS GOVT

Amin Ahmed Updated April 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The ministry of national food security and research announced on Friday that there was no threat to food security in the country or wheat shortage, adding that the damage caused to wheat, maize and gram crops owing to recent rains and stormy weather was only moderate.

"This situation does not indicate any shortage of wheat and speculations about the wheat shortage are incorrect," the food ministry said in a statement.

The ministry is in complete liaison with provincial agriculture departments for updates about affected villages and subsequent crop losses due to recent rains, particularly in Punjab, according to the statement.

It says Minister for National Food Security and Research Mehboob Sultan is personally monitoring the situation on the ground, and he is undertaking visits to affected districts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The ministry is collecting data for other crops and the Punjab agriculture department is working to reach out to all areas to gauge the losses. The ministry is also collecting data from other provinces.

The losses suffered by farmers are indeed painful news and the minister for national food security has reiterated that the government is doing its best to estimate the damage and monitor financial and human loss and relief would soon be announced for farmers affected by the calamity, according to the statement.

Mr Sultan further reiterated that in the face of the calamity the government stands by the farmers and there should not be any uncertainty among them. He held out the assurance that the government would provide every possible relief to affected farmers. He said that the prime minister had issued orders that no effort should be spared until the relief was provided to farmers affected by the rains.

The Met Office has also been asked to remain vigilant and maintain steady liaison with provincial agriculture departments so that timely weather report may be communicated to farmers.

Published in Dawn, April 20th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1477278/no-threat-to-food-security-amid-rains-says-govt

KP COMBATS POPPY CULTIVATION WITH US ASSISTANCE

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated April 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The US government on Friday donated seven new vehicles to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to help combat poppy growth in the province since Pakistan has reduced poppy cultivation by 87 per cent over the past three decades.

The vehicles delivered on Friday will be used to implement crop control and related development projects in the tribal districts of Bajaur, Mohmand and Khyber.

The donation is part of an overall $5.1 million grant to the provincial government to combat poppy cultivation in the merged areas.

The assistance underscores the American government's long history of partnership with Pakistan in its mission to combat poppy growth. Over the past 37 years, the United States has invested $60 million in Pakistani efforts to support rural communities in developing economic alternatives to narcotics production; expand legal employment opportunities, especially for women; provide training in sustainable farming techniques; construct roads that extend the writ of the government and provide farm-to-market access; and construct small water supply projects that increase the viability of growing alternative crops.

Speaking at the ceremony where the vehicles were handed over, deputy chief of the mission John Hoover said: "We are proud to continue our longstanding partnership with the KP government and former Fata secretariat, which has resulted in a significant decrease in poppy cultivation, ultimately benefitting the people of KP and the rest of Pakistan."

The US State Depart¬ment's Bureau of Inter¬national Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) — which provided the crop control assistance — works in more than 90 countries to help combat crime and corruption, counter narcotics trade, improve police institutions, and promote court systems that are fair and accountable.

Published in Dawn, April 20th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1477252/kp-combats-poppy-cultivation-with-us-assistance

THREAT TO WHEAT CROP

Editorial April 20, 2019

HEAVY rains accompanied by high winds and sporadic hailstorms in parts of Punjab earlier this week have damaged the standing wheat crop on a vast area. In a few southern districts, the crop has been flattened, and in others the harvest is delayed. The exact extent of the damage is now being assessed by the agriculture bureaucracy to quantify the losses. The food security ministry, however, seems to indicate that the damage is not significant. Hopefully, it will not affect the overall provincial output target of 19.5m tonnes for the present harvest. Yet many individual smallholders may have suffered substantial losses that will increase their indebtedness and reliance on middlemen for expensive loans for future harvests. The government has promised to compensate the affected farmers once the girdawari (crop assessment) is complete. It has always been the standard official response. This practice needs to change. Immediately, the government should not only compensate the affected farmers but also ensure that the smallholders get access to cheaper loans to buy inputs for their future crops. Microfinance banks are well placed to serve the needs of the small farmers, who form more than 80pc of the landholdings below five acres because of their presence in remote areas, if the government agrees to subsidise the loans. A workable plan needs to be designed where growers can easily get insurance for their crops against calamities that are beyond human control.

The recent unusual rains are but a sign of the changing climate of the region. The change has become more visible in recent years in the shape of unpredictable weather, new diseases, increased pest attacks, diminishing crop output, etc. If not tackled on a war footing, the changing climate could indeed affect the nation's food security and have a deep impact on the overall economy of the country, which largely depends on agriculture. This week's rains, for example, have not only damaged the wheat output but also delayed cotton sowing in the affected districts. It is time the government took the lead in educating farmers about changing weather patterns, improving extension services to train them in modern cultivation practices and new technologies, developing climate-resilient seed varieties, and bringing farmers, researchers and policymakers on to one platform so that they can develop solutions based on modern methods to mitigate the effects of climate change on crops. Otherwise, we should prepare ourselves for greater damage to the agricultural sector.

Published in Dawn, April 20th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1477299/threat-to-wheat-crop

TRACTOR SALES DROP

Aamir Shafaat Khan April 20, 2019

KARACHI: Tractor sales started recovering slightly from January but were unable to boost cumulative sales figures during the first nine months of FY19 which remained low at 37,421 units versus 52,067 units in the same period a year ago.

Data from Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association (Pama) suggests positive recovery in 2019 as Massey Ferguson sold 1,950 units in January, followed by 2,412 units in February and 3,078 units in March. Al-Ghazi's New Holland sales in January 2019 stood at 1,492 units, rising to 1,596 in February and 2,628 in March. The tractor industry suffered massive sales drop in Oct-Dec 2018, resulting in huge lay off of contract and daily wage workers in the vending sector.

Al Ghazi kept its plant closed for many weeks in the last quarter of 2018 owing to plant maintenance and unsold stocks at the plant and sales centres.

Talking to Dawn, CEO Al Ghazi Tractors Shahid Hussain said, "We have seen some movement in the market despite a 35 per cent downturn compared to January-March 2018. There is considerable slowdown," he said.

The industry is suffering from a plethora of issues including the long outstanding sales tax refunds which has led to a severe liquidity crunch.

Talking about the upcoming budget 2019-20, he said, "We proposed mobilisation of Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) to act as a catalyst offering loans to farmers at easy terms rather than announcing usual tractor schemes that favour the middlema." The amount designated for such schemes – if diverted as a mandate and pool money to ZTBL to dish out easy term loans as proposed – could bring out multifold benefits and speed farm mechanisation, he said.

Former chairman Pakistan Association of Automotive Parts and Accessories Manufacturers (Paapam) Mumshad Ali said his company has rehired 125 people who were laid off from two plants in Jan 2019 owing to suspension in parts procurement by tractor makers in Nov-Dec 2018. "We have not received good orders from assemblers for parts supplies. May and June will also remain depressed due to Ramazan and Eid holiday," he said. He added that 2018-19 will end on a negative note as the sector remains bogged down by sales tax refund and lowering sales issues.

Co-Convenor Tractor Committee Paapam, Rana Mansoor Qadir said only six workers have been rehired out of the five fired earlier on following improvement in sales from January 2019 onwards. He recalled that in previous years, tractor production was lower by 10-15pc in Ramazan and this trend is likely to continue this year too.

Published in Dawn, April 20th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1477285/tractor-sales-drop

SINDH’S FIRST-EVER AGRICULTURE POLICY NEEDS WELL-DEFINED PROCEDURE, SAYS FAO CONSULTANT

The Newspaper’s Staff Correspondent Updated December 05, 2018

HYDERABAD: Policy consultants of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) have said that implementation of first-ever agriculture policy of the Sindh government would require well-defined procedure and added that action plan for implementation of the policy needed capacity and adaptation.

They also called for investing in research and development to achieve required target of overall seven per cent growth in Sindh’s agriculture sector, which is currently three per cent. They were speaking at a strategic planning workshop on Sindh Agriculture Policy 2018-30 at a local hotel organised by the agriculture extension wing of the Sindh agriculture department here on Tuesday. The workshop was organised for agriculture officers/officials.

Genevieve Hussain, a policy consultant, talked about salient features and objectives of the agriculture policy that would be implemented from next year after it was adopted in April this year by the Sindh cabinet.

The policy was drafted as a component of World Bank-funded Sindh Agriculture Growth Project (SAGP). She said that an action plan was to be prepared by line depart¬ments for consideration of the Sindh Agriculture Policy Implementation Commission in early 2019.

She said that agriculture policy sought to raise the growth rate by four per cent to have overall seven per cent growth in Sindh to create jobs and income from agriculture.

Other objectives aim to reduce malnutrition, poverty and food insecurity by half along with managing natural resources sustainably, especially water resources and soil. She said that resilience was to be ensured and climate-responsive agriculture to adapt to climate change was another goal.

She said that between 1972 and 2000 average growth in agriculture was four per cent and from year 2000 to 2017 it dropped to three per cent due to high cost of production. It needs to be raised. She said that high-nutrient foods like pulses, milk, fish, meat and vegetables have actually become too expensive for consumers to afford.

Discussing growth in farm sector, she said that regulatory framework needed to be reviewed to create enabling environment that was conducive to private sector’s investment in agriculture.

Sometimes laws, legislation, regulatory regime and even subsidies need to be looked into to make sure incentives were there for private investment.

She said that uptake of agriculture technology, research and development and modernisation of agriculture was another way to achieve growth.

She said that agriculture policy adopted in April 2018 was to align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it should be started in order to be implemented quickly. She said steps towards its implementation required regulatory changes, capacity development for departments concerned and technological changes. She said that all these issues would be addressed in the action plan.

Ejaz Qureshi, another FAO consultant, pointed out that growth in China's agriculture sector came with some policy initiatives.

He said that this helped China overcome poverty adding that India was focussing on its farm sector as well. He said that institutional reforms and interventions were essential for achieving growth. He expressed concern over the fact that mostly Sindh's land was waterlogged.

Strategic management has to be systematic and it should also be adjustable in local context. He said that timeline must be fixed for achieving objectives.

The Sindh agriculture policy aims to ensure efficient, prosperous and resilient agriculture sector that could provide good income and decent employment to those involved in production, processing, transport and storage.

Published in Dawn, December 5th, 2018

https://www.dawn.com/news/1449442/sindhs-first-ever-agriculture-policy-needs-well-defined-procedure-says-fao-consultant

DAMAGE CAUSED TO STANDING CROPS BY RAINS TERMED 'MODERATE'

RECORDER REPORT | APR 20TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

It was officially stated from the Ministry of National Food Security and Research that the damage caused to standing crops due to heavy rains is moderate and there is no likelihood of food insecurity or emergency situation thereof.

The losses suffered by the farmers are indeed painful news and Federal Minister for National Food Security & Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan has reiterated that the government is doing its best to estimate the damage and monitor financial and human loss and relief would soon be announced for the affected farmers, says a press release issued here on Friday.

Mehboob Sultan further said that he will visit the affected areas and himself monitor the situation on ground and would meet the affected farmers/families. The Ministry of National Food Security is in complete liaison with provincial agriculture departments for updates regarding the affected villages and subsequent loss to crops due to recent rains, especially in Punjab Province.

According to the Federal Ministry National Food Security the latest report(s) received from Punjab Agriculture Department there is no threat to food security in the country or wheat shortage and the damage to wheat, maize and gram is moderate and does not indicate any shortage, moreover the speculations regarding the wheat shortage is not right, the Federal Ministry formally denies any such speculation.

The latest report regarding crop wise affected areas in Punjab shows that the loss and damage occurred in wheat, gram and maize crops is of mild to moderate nature. It is further said from the Ministry officials that data for other minor crops is also collected and Punjab agriculture department is working to reach out to all possible areas to gauge the losses. The data from other provinces is yet to be received and a letter to that affect is delivered to relative provincial departments.

Mehboob Sultan reiterated that in face of this calamity, the government stands by the farmers and there should not be any uncertainty among them. The federal minister further said that the government will provide every possible relief to the affected farmers. He added that he will visit the affected areas and it was also directed by Prime Minister that no effort must be spared until the relief is provided to affectees.

The Met department is directed to remain vigilant and maintain steady liaison with provincial agriculture departments so timely weather report may be communicated to farmers.-PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190420466039/

SUSTAINED BUYING OF FINE QUALITY ON COTTON MARKET

RECORDER REPORT | APR 20TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Prices improved slightly on the cotton market on Friday in the process of sustained buying of fine quality of lint, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8,800, they added. In the ready session, over 5,000 bales of cotton finalised between Rs 8900-9000, they said.

According to the market sources, leading mills continued buying to replenish their stock. The ginners have very little stock of cotton and quality is not so bad, this is a solid factor behind the strong demand.

Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that yarn is in demand, it's a positive development in the market.

The outlook is encouraging for the textile sector, the mills are still facing shortage problem, import will keep a balance between demand and supply, other brokers said.

Adds Reuters: ICE cotton futures fell on Thursday as the dollar strengthened, while a fall in the weekly export sales report from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) added to the downbeat sentiment.

The most-active cotton contract on ICE Futures US July settled down 0.69 cent, or 0.87 percent, at 78.27 cents per lb. It traded within a range of 77.77 and 79.04 cents per lb.

Total futures market volume fell by 20,876 to 18,654 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 336 to 212,845 contracts in the previous session.

Following deals reported: 600 bales of cotton from Rahim Yar Khan at Rs 9000, 1800 bales from Dera Ghazi Khan at Rs 8900, 1400 bales from Khanpur at Rs 8900, 800 bales from Liaquatpur at Rs 8900 and 400 bales from Feroza at Rs 8900, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190420466093/

GERMAN WHEAT CROP TO INCREASE SHARPLY AFTER DROUGHT

Madiha Shakeel April 16, 2019

HAMBURG: Germany's 2019 wheat harvest will jump 20.6 percent on the year to 24.44 million tonnes with rising expectations of a recovery after the drought-reduced harvest last year, the country's association of farm cooperatives (DRV) said on Tuesday.

The German crop in 2018 suffered enormous damaged from a drought and heatwave which hit much of western Europe.

Germany's 2019 winter rapeseed crop will fall 11.6 percent on the year to 3.24 million tonnes after reduced sowings, the association said in its second harvest forecast.

Germany is the European Union's second largest wheat producer after France and in most years the EU's largest grower of rapeseed, Europe's main oilseed for edible oil and biodiesel production.

The mild winter and warm start to spring has helped wheat crops after the sown area was expanded, the association said. However, after the weather turned cooler in April growth slowed.

Grain growth had been as much as three weeks in advance of normal in March but the lead has now generally been lost.

German grain and rapeseed plants now urgently need more rain in some areas, especially the north and northeast, the association said.

Farms are still suffering the impact of last year's drought with below-ground water supplies less plentiful than usual.

Dry autumn weather also prevented a significant volume of planned rapeseed sowings. But rapeseed has developed generally well in the warm winter and has started to bloom.

Although yield development is positive, this will not be enough to compensate for the huge 25.1 percent reduction in rapeseed planted area on the year, it said.

The winter barley crop, mostly used for animal feed, will increase 34.6 percent on last year's drought-reduced harvest to 9.92 million tonnes, the association said.

German sowings of spring grains is generally complete after the warm start to spring allowed an early start, apart from some grain maize (corn), for which sowing is expected to intensify in the second half of April.

The spring barley crop, used for malt and beer production, is expected to fall by 5.1 percent on the year to 2.09 million tonnes partly because the mild winter has reduced the need to replant other frost-damaged grains.

The grain maize crop will rise 28.0 percent from last year's heatwave-damaged crop to 4.28 million tonnes.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/04/16/489673/german-wheat-crop-to-increase-sharply-after-drought/

FARMERS ENCOURAGE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF LIVESTOCK IN BALOCHISTAN: ADVISER TO CM MITHA KHAN

Published on – April 20, 2019

QUETTA: Adviser to Chief MinisterBalochistan for Livestock Haji Mitha Khan Kakar Friday said provincial government was taking allpossible steps to ensure development of Livestock in province because 70 percent of people' economic was dependence on livestock and agriculture.

He expressed these views while talking to media persons during surprise visit at Government Dairy Farmhouse in Kalat. Director General Dr. Haji Abdul Mutalib Muhammad Shahi, Director Planning Dr, Muhammad Azam Kakar, Kalat Deputy Director Livestock Dr, Mehrullah Khan Rind were present on the occasion, said press release issued here.

Adviser Haji Mitha Khan said farmers are being encouraged for dairy farming and poultry farming in province in order to improve development of Livestock sector at district level.

"Directives are issued to doctors of livestock to take measures for ensuring treatment of animals in the areas for interest of Livestock sector", he said, adding no negligence would be tolerated in this regard and instructed to concerned official to take action those doctors would be found absent fromtheir duties for enhancing performance of the division.

He said medicines and other necessary goods are provided to veterinary hospitals for treatment of cattle in the areas for functioning of dairy farms and poultry farms in province.

Mitha Khan said efforts are being made to bring reformation in Livestock under the leader ship of Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Jam Kamal Khan to develop it according to need of hour.

Later, Adviser Haji Mitha Khan met with Deputy Commissioner Kalat Shehk Baloch at his office and discussed the matters of Livestock and other development projects of the area.

Adviser also announced Rs, one million for construction of incomplete cattle Shade in GovernmentDairy Farmhouse on which Deputy Commissioner Kalat assured the minister to complete its construction on timely for beneficial of people.

https://www.bexpress.com.pk/2019/04/farmers-encourage-for-development-of-livestock-in-balochistan-adviser-to-cm-mitha-khan/

FOOD MINISTRY DISMISSES TALK OF WHEAT SHORTAGE

By Our Correspondent Published: April 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of National Food Security and Research has emphasised that the damage caused to standing crops, especially in Punjab, due to heavy rains is moderate and there is no likelihood of food insecurity or emergency situation in the country.

"The losses suffered by farmers are indeed painful and the government is doing its best to estimate the damage and relief will soon be announced for the farmers," the ministry said in a statement on Friday.

It quoted Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan as saying that he would visit the rain-hit areas and meet the farmers and families there. He announced that the government would provide every possible relief to the farmers.

The ministry pointed out that latest reports received from the Punjab Agriculture Department suggested that there was no threat of wheat shortage and food insecurity in the country. “The damage to wheat, maize and gram crops is moderate and does not indicate any shortage. Moreover, the speculation about wheat shortage is not correct,” it said.

According to the ministry, data of minor crops is also being collected and the Punjab Agriculture Department is trying to reach out to all possible areas to gauge the actual loss. “Data from other provinces is yet to be received and a letter to this effect is being sent to related provincial departments.”

The Meteorological Department has also been directed to remain vigilant and maintain a steady liaison with the provincial agriculture departments in order to send timely weather reports to the farmers.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 20th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1954841/2-food-ministry-dismisses-talk-wheat-shortage/

GROWERS PROTEST

A CorrespondentApril 19, 2019

DADU: Activists of Sindh United Party staged a march and a demonstration before press club in Bhan Syedabad town on Thursday in protest against food department’s failure to open wheat procurement centres and purchase the crop from growers.

SUP secretary general Roshan Ali Buriro, who led the protest, warned that if the department did not open the procurement centres and buy wheat from growers, SUP and growers would expand the protest across the province.

Published in Dawn, April 19th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1476971/growers-protest

COTTON SLIPS; POSTS WORST WEEK IN 2 MONTHS

RECORDER REPORT | APR 19TH, 2019 | NEW YORK

ICE cotton futures fell on Thursday as the dollar strengthened, while a fall in the weekly export sales report from the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) added to the downbeat sentiment. The most-active cotton contract on ICE Futures US July settled down 0.69 cent, or 0.87 percent, at 78.27 cents per lb. It traded within a range of 77.77 and 79.04 cents per lb.

Prices fell 0.7% this week, its worst weekly decline in two months.

“The dollar is up and it is the end of the week. It was an opportunity for those who were long in the market this week to get out and reposition themselves for Monday,” said Jon Marcus, president of the Lakefront Futures and Options brokerage firm in Chicago.

The dollar against a basket of other currencies gained on the back of strong retail sales data. A stronger greenback makes commodities priced in dollars, such as cotton, more expensive for holders of other currencies.

The USDA reported net sales of 217,600 running bales (RB) for 2018/2019 which were down 25% from the previous week and 9% lower from the prior 4-week average, for the week ended April 11.

The slide in USDA's weekly export data was a "force pin for people making a decision to just get flat for the weekend", Marcus said. The United States won a World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling on Thursday against China's use of tariff-rate quotas for rice, wheat and corn, which it successfully argued limited market access for US grain exports. ICE Futures US soft agricultural commodity futures and options markets will be closed on Friday for Good Friday holiday.

Total futures market volume fell by 20,876 to 18,654 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 336 to 212,845 contracts in the previous session.

Certificated cotton stocks deliverable as of April 17 totalled 57,655 480-lb bales, up from 55,517 in the previous session.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190419465666/

10.77 MILLIONS COTTON BALES REACH GINNERIES ACROSS COUNTRY

RECORDER REPORT | APR 19TH, 2019 | MULTAN

Seed cotton (Phutti) equivalent to 10.775 million bales have reached ginneries across Pakistan till April 15 registering a shortfall by 6.94 percent compared to corresponding period of the last year.

Out of total arrivals, over 10.773 million bales have undergone the ginning process, says a fortnightly report of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) issued here Thursday.

Arrivals in Punjab were recorded at over 6.625 million bales showing a shortfall by 9.56 per cent and over 4 million bales in Sindh registering 2.45 per cent shortfall compared to corresponding period of the last year.

Total sold out bales were recorded at over 10.124 million bales, including over 10 million bales bought by textile mills and another 102,330 bales purchased by exporters.

Exactly 651,036 bales were still lying with the ginneries as unsold stock.

Sanghar district of Sindh continued to remain on top with cotton arrival figures of over 1.28 million bales while Rahimyar Khan district of Punjab secured second berth with arrival figure of 1.19 million bales and Bahawalnagar stood third with just over a million or precisely 1,008,021 bales. The statistics show the shortfall was witnessed in 25 cotton districts out of total 32, including 18 out of total 21 in Punjab and seven out of total 11 cotton districts in Sindh.

The report does not include cotton figures from districts of Kasur, and Sargodha. Only seven ginning factories were now operational in the country, including five in Punjab and two in Sindh. However, 16 factories were operational during corresponding period of the last year including 10 in Punjab and six in Sindh.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190419465748/

LALIKA REVIEWS WHEAT PROCUREMENT CAMPAIGN IN MULTAN

RECORDER REPORT | APR 19TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Provincial Minister for Zakat and Usher Shaukat Lalika has said that report regarding affected crops damaged in Multan due to torrential rains and hailstorm has been sent to the Punjab government. Punjab government is standing with the affected farmers in their time of trial. He said that in order to make wheat procurement campaign transparent, actual tillers should be encouraged by curbing the role of middleman. Those involved in bogus khasra girdawari will be dealt with iron hands besides ensuring judicious distribution of gunny bags.

While addressing a meeting held to review the wheat procurement campaign in Multan on Thursday, minister said that Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar is personally monitoring the wheat procurement campaign in Punjab. No one will be allowed to exploit the cultivators besides ensuring equal distribution of gunny bags, he said.

Deputy Commissioner Multan Mudasar Riaz Malik while briefing the minister said that 17 wheat procurement centers have been established in district Multan. He further stated that 164,000 tons wheat will be procured in Multan.

He said that 34,728 applications were received for the gunny bags which have been uploaded on the dashboard of Punjab Information Technology Board. Punjab Land Record Authority will scrutinize all these applications from 18th to 21st April whereas the distribution of gunny bags will be started after the cabinet committee on 21st April.

He disclosed that all the assistant commissioners have issued the certificates by completing the process of gurdawari. Legal action has been taken against those who gave applications for the gunny bag on fake account besides suspending the patwari of Jalalpur Pirwala.

Revenue officers have been asked to submit the report of the damage of affected farmers. They are bound to submit their report within two days.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190419465751/

USAID PROVIDES NEW SOFTWARE PACKAGE TO IMPROVE LIVESTOCK SECTOR

RECORDER REPORT | APR 19TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The US-Pakistan Partnership for Agricultural Market Development (AMD) announced the launch of a new software package to expand Pakistani meat exporters’ access to global markets.

The state-of-the-art software will track animals’ origins and where meat is processed, which will help prevent the spread of animal diseases and enhance bio-security. The new software package will also help farmers formulate economical feed rations with an optimal mix of nutrients, which will lower production costs.

"This software will give Pakistani meat exporters a huge advantage in accessing new global markets," said Director of USAID Pakistan's Office of Acquisition and Assistance Leslie-Ann Nwokora. "Buyers will be able to trace the origin, processing, and distribution of meat, while feed formulation and ration balancing software will help farmers reduce costs and provide animals a balanced diet to ensure they remain healthy."

This is the first time such a software package will be used in Pakistan. The USAID-funded AMD project provides integrated support to the livestock sector through grants, training, and technical assistance to upgrade equipment, introduce innovative meat cuts and packing technology, and support Pakistani producers and exporters in meeting international food standards.

"Through projects like AMD, USAID is supporting equipment upgrades and other initiatives to improve product quality, boost exports, streamline supply chains, and bolster Pakistani exporters' competitiveness and profitability," said USAID Provincial Director for Punjab Kevin Sharp.

USAID launched the AMD project in 2015 to improve the ability of Pakistan's commercial agriculture and livestock sectors to compete in international and national markets for meat, high-value and off-season vegetables, mangoes, and citrus.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190419465752/

FARMERS AVAIL 1.1% OF RS50B CREDIT FACILITY FOR FY19

By Haseeb Hanif Published: April 19, 2019

ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the Federal Committee on Agriculture on Thursday was informed that Balochistan lagged behind all other provinces in provision of agricultural credit to farmers.

The farmers of Balochistan have availed only 1.1 per cent of their share in agricultural loans from the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) and other commercial banks while those of Punjab have taken loans amounting to Rs590 billion or 66 per cent from their available share.

The committee was presented with details of the agricultural loans extended by the ADB and other banks for the current fiscal year till February.

According to the documents available with the Express, countrywide farmers have taken Rs701 billion agricultural loans against the total allocation of Rs1,250 billion for the fiscal year 2018-19.

In agricultural loans, farmers of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have availed the highest amount while those of Balochistan have availed the least.

Of the total allocation of Rs890 billion for Punjab, till February loans of around Rs590 billion were procured by farmers, which constitutes 66.3 per cent of the total amount.

In Sindh, agricultural loans amounting to Rs97.9 billion have been dispersed from the available target of Rs261.5 billion, which is 37.4 per cent of the target.

In Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Rs10.2 billion loans of the available credit of Rs43 billion have been released to farmers, which is 23.9 per cent of the total amount.

In Balochistan, Rs0.6 billion has been released to farmers against the available credit facility of Rs50 billion, which is 1.1 per cent of its target.

In AJK, Rs2.3 billion has been dispersed out of the total credit facility of Rs2.4 billion, which amounts to 98 per cent of the total target.

Similarly, the target for Gilgit-Baltistan was Rs3.2 billion of which Rs0.4 billion or 13.4 per cent has been released.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1954167/1-farmers-avail-1-1-rs50b-credit-facility-fy19/

FOOD DEPT RECEIVES 850,000 APPLICATIONS FOR GUNNY SACKS

By Rizwan Asif Published: April 19, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Department has received total 850,000 applications for gunny sacks regarding government’s wheat procurement campaign in Punjab.

The Punjab Information and Technology Board (PITB) and Punjab Land Record Authority have started testing revenue record for the verification of the applications. Due to the connivance of the local revenue staff, a large number of fake and bogus applications were received for gunny sacks. It is expected that during the record checking, more than 250,000 fake and incomplete record application would be canceled in the next three days and around 550,000 applicants would be provided government’s gunny bags.

The Punjab government started receiving applications for getting gunny sacks from April 8 across the province and the final date of submitting the applications was April 17. The food department received 859,000 applications for gunny sacks till April 17 which was 145,000 more than the previous year.

Last year, the food department received a total of 71,400 applications in which 625,000 applications were approved while in these applications, 594,000 applicants had gotten gunny sacks from the food department. The departmental source told The Express News that the farmers were given only five days to submit gunny sacks requests last year. But this time, 10 days were provided to the farmers for submitting applications. But it is also revealed that this year, the number of submitting two or more applications on one CNIC was very high.

On contacting by The Express News, Director Food Punjab Mohammad Shakir said the process of receiving the application for gunny sacks has ended on April 17 and now the process of confirmation of applications has started.

All the application data is available on the portal of Punjab Information Technology Board. After the verification process, the data of approved application would be sent to the Food Department and the applicant would be informed through SMS alerts. Responding to a question, the food director said the final decision to approve the applications would be taken by the food secretary.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1954240/1-food-dept-receives-850000-applications-gunny-sacks/

18 FISHERMEN LOST IN WIND STORM FEARED DEAD

By Our Correspondent Published: April 19, 2019

KARACHI.: After six days of being lost at sea due to the wind storm, only the belongings of 18 missing fishermen on board vessel Fazal Akbar have been recovered from Ghora Bari, Sindh. However, the fishermen are still missing.

Maritime Security Agency officials continued their search operation for the missing fisherman on Thursday.

According to sources in the fisheries department, the items recovered included National Identity Cards of fishermen, their sea permits, water bottles and eatables as well as personal belongings.

The items were found during a search carried out on a local lifeboat, they said, adding that the fishermen lost with the boat were "feared dead" and hunt for their "bodies is under way".

It is the sixth day since the sea vessel lost its signal owing to strong winds.

The crew last contacted the shore on Monday night, during which the in-charge of the boat informed that the vessel was drowning.

According to Fishermen Cooperative Society spokesperson, bodies of only two of the 22 missing fishermen have been found. Two fishermen were in Al-Azizi, 18 in Fazal Akbar and two in Mudassir boats.

The Al-Azizi and Mudassir boats have arrived ashore while Fazal Akbar sank, said the spokesperson, adding that the search for the missing fishermen would continue.

Separately, the body of a Korangi area fisherman, Noor Islam, who was lost with his Al-Ramadan boat was found on Wednesday, while the body of another fisherman Mannu Mian, who sailed the same boat, was found on Thursday morning from the Kharo Chan point.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1954162/1-18-fishermen-lost-wind-storm-feared-dead/

GOVT LIKELY TO MISS WHEAT CROP TARGET AMID RAINS

Amin Ahmed | Intikhab HanifUpdated April 18, 2019

ISLAMABAD / LAHORE: The country's economy, already walking a tightrope, faces a grim scenario as the government is unlikely to achieve the wheat production target of 25.51 million tonnes this year — mainly because of extended spells of rain in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"The westerly wave affecting upper parts of the country is likely to move eastward during the next 12 hours," said the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) in its daily forecast on Wednesday evening. "This means the spell is over," a Met official said.

The system, continuing for the past three days, produced heavy rains in many parts of the country on Wednesday, accompanied by hailstorm and severe windstorm, damaging wheat crops in the plains of Punjab, Balochistan and fruit crops over the hills.

According to officials, the system is set to move out of the country on Thursday (today).

Freak weather system to move out of country today

In Punjab alone, the initial wheat loss has been estimated to be over 200,000 tonnes, according to a senior official of the agriculture department.

Besides, the rains have left dozens of people dead and caused damage to houses and infrastructure in all the four provinces.

The Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan, who chaired a meeting of the Federal Committee on Agriculture, said provincial governments had been asked to carry out estimates of losses in their areas. The minister said he had received reports of wheat crop losses from Jhang, Khanewal, Dera Ghazi Khan and Toba Tek Singh. Similarly, KP officials informed the meeting about such losses in certain areas of their province due to excessive rains.

After the availability of estimates, the ministry would be in a position to explain the extent of wheat crop loss, the minister said.

The FCA was informed that in certain parts of southern and central Punjab, yellow rust had been reported by the agriculture extension departments due to irregular spells of rains. The minister asked the PMD representatives to improve the forecasting system so as to alert the farming community about the weather conditions. The Met department should come up with accurate forecasts by making use of advanced technology, he emphasised.

The director general of the Punjab agriculture department, Dr Anjum Buttar, said rains coupled with hail storms had affected the wheat crop in about 15 districts.

On the other hand, PMD director general Muhammad Riaz said his organisation had timely issued the forecast for rain, storms and hail storms, claiming that 90 to 100 per cent of those forecasts were correct. As for the wheat crop losses, he pointed out, it was up to the agriculture department to advise the farmers accordingly so that they could take measures for the protection of crops.

Meanwhile, the FCA held detailed deliberations over the production targets for essential Kharif crops for 2019-20.

National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser expressed sadness over the loss suffered by the farmers and said he would request the prime minister to provide compensation to the farmers.

Presiding over a meeting of the National Assembly Special Committee on Agricultural Products, he vowed to improve the lot of small farmers, protect their interests and end their exploitation.

Reports from Balochistan say that rain and subsequent flood continue to wreak havoc on different areas as four more people lost their lives in weather-related incidents and many areas have been submerged by flash floods.

According to the National Disaster Management Authority, the furious freak weather system has claimed 50 lives and damaged nearly 117 houses in different parts of the country over the past few days.

Temperatures dropped significantly in the plains of Sindh and Punjab, making weather pleasantly cold at night.

Reports from different districts in south, central and north-eastern Punjab indicated heavy-to-moderate rain which further damaged the standing wheat crop.

Quoting the KP Provincial Disaster Management Authority, a report said that one each person died in Dera Ismail Khan, Karak, Swat, Haripur, Charsadda and Bajaur. Landslides were reported in Tank, Mansehra and Dir Upper.

Swat and Kabul rivers swelled at Khiyali and at Sardaryab and Hajizai, and the authorities had asked the people living in low-lying areas to move to safer place.

Quetta's rail link with other parts of the country remained severed for 30 hours as the track linking Balochistan with Sindh and Punjab was washed away by floodwater between Bakhtiarabad and Notal area of Sibi district on Tuesday.

Traffic between Quetta and Islamabad was suspended due to landslides hitting the road between Zhob and Dera Ismail Khan areas.

Reports from diffident areas of Balochistan said it had been raining for the last four days and all seasonal rivers and nullahs had swelled.

Many villages have been cut off from Jhal Magsi as River Mola is carrying floodwater.

Published in Dawn, April 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1476827/govt-likely-to-miss-wheat-crop-target-amid-rains

RAIN CAUSES WIDESPREAD CROP DAMAGE IN SOUTHERN PUNJAB

Shakeel AhmedUpdated April 18, 2019

MULTAN: At least 14 districts across Southern Punjab — the wheat and cotton belt of the country — have seen large scale damage to standing crops due to hailstorms and gale force winds seen recently.

The district authorities are still in the process of assessing the scale of the damage, and surveys are still ongoing, but reports from farmers and officials suggest that crops including wheat, maize, mango and vegetables have either been severely affected, or in some cases even completely destroyed.

District administration officials tell Dawn that damage asse¬ssment surveys have only just begun, and whatever results they have at the moment are preliminary at best. Anecdotal and word of mouth reports from across the region speak of widespread damage.

The major cause of damage to the crops is from hailstorms in some parts, flash floods caused by hill torrents in others, and enduring low temperatures that are unseasonal, which is particularly bad for fruits in flowering stage including mangoes.

Deputy District Officer Agricu¬lture of Khanewal, Sardar Jamil said that crops, vegetables and mango have been badly damaged in about 40,000 acres of the district. "At many places the damage is up to 100 per cent," he tells Dawn. He said that raining is still ongoing which will further damage crops, particularly wheat in the district which is in harvesting phase.

He said that initial survey has been conducted, however complete survey is yet to be conducted. He said that he has attached the patwaris of other areas with the patwaris of affected areas to assist them.

"Survey will be conducted and the provincial board of revenue and Punjab Disaster Management Authority will be recommended for the compensation to the affectees," he said.

The affected districts include Mianwali, Bhakkar, Layyah, Rajanpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh, Multan, Lodhran, Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Vehari, Rahim Yar Khan Khanewal and Sahiwal. Rajanpur district has seen damage due to a flood caused by a hill torrent after heavy rains in catchment areas of Balochistan.

The wheat and maize crops were particularly vulnerable because they were close to harvest time, says Muhammad Ilyas, a progressive farmer from Chak No. 5 in Multan district. He said in his area, maize crop had been completely destroyed while 90pc of the wheat crop had also been damaged. Fields of vegetables, particularly lady finger and chili "now look like plain fields" he tells Dawn, estimating that 80pc of those crops are also heavily damaged. Loss to cattle, trees and properties is on top.

Fayyaz ul Hasan Bhutta, another progressive farmer and General Secretary Livestock Breeders Association Pakistan based out of Multan, said, "Hailstorms have caused some damage across the region, but the scale of the damage is uneven. In Multan district we have less damage, perhaps other areas have seen more." He said Multan did not see any hailstorm, though further north on the Khanewal side and Sahiwal where hailstorms took place, the damage would undoubtedly be greater. Mr Bhutta grows wheat on his own field, and says his crop is intact.

About a four hour drive southeast of Multan, across the Indus river, is Rajanpur district, also an important crop growing area that may not have seen hail but was inundated due to a hill torrent, according to Abrar Khan Dreshak, a political figure from Fazalpur in the district.

He said that a vast area of the district came under water after Kaha Sultan hill torrent flood breached Noorpur Drain from eight points. He said that the flood entered in the area at 4am and devastated the wheat crop which was near harvest time or under harvesting.

A key drain that was supposed to control such hill torrents by diverting their waters into the Indus River could not perform its task because it is still only partially constructed as the funds were not released, he tells Dawn. He listed at least five villages that he claimed were "badly affected" from the flood water.

Due to continuous rains a couple of days prior to flood the people were expecting the flood he tells Dawn, "But the weather did not allow them to harvest their crops."

Due north of Rajanpur is Jampur, another crop growing tehsil on the right bank of the Indus river that saw a flash flood. Assistant Commissioner Jampur, Saifur Rehman Bilwani said the estimated affected area from the flood is 10,591 acres with one reported dead.

Progressive mango farmer Major Tariq Khan from Multan said that the mango crop is badly damaged due to excessive rains, hailstorm and thunder storm in all the mango growing districts of south Punjab. Though estimates of crop damage are still under preparation, he tells Dawn that he has heard of an estimated loss up to 20 percent to mango crop from one group carrying out this exercise.

"This year the mango crop was already less as compared to previous years due to fluctuating weather. Flowering and fruiting on the major variety of Chaunsa was already less by 40pc as compared to previous year while hailstorm, thunder storm and rains have further devastated the crop," President Mango Growers Association Zahid Hussain Gardezi said.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1476848/rain-causes-widespread-crop-damage-in-southern-punjab

REPORT SAYS SLAVERY PERSISTS IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN ALL ITS FORMS

Shazia HasanUpdated April 18, 2019

KARACHI: The State of Peasants' Rights in Sindh in 2018, the fourth such report in a series, was launched at the Karachi Press Club on Wednesday to mark International Peasants' Rights Day.

The launch was organised by the Hari Welfare Association (HWA) and the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (Piler). Peasants, workers' leaders and activists also came together on the occasion to highlight the deplorable state of peasants in Sindh.

The report reveals that agriculture is the sector where slavery is still prevalent in all its forms; slavery in the name of debt, slavery in the name of house, slavery in the name of no other land, slavery in the name of power and exploitation.

During 2018, about 86 cases of bonded labourers' release and escape from the captivity of landlords were reported in local Sindhi and Urdu newspapers. In all cases, 1,421 bonded labourers were released and escaped, which include 485 women and 494 children. Of the total, 44 people had escaped from the captivity of landlords. Most often the cases of release of bonded labourers are not reported. It appears that the media persons or the media houses have lost interest in the bonded labour issue.

The State of Peasants' Rights in Sindh in 2018 launched to mark International Peasants' Rights Day

Introducing the report, Akram Ali Khaskheli of the HWA said that Sindh's bigger population consisted of peasants, or hari kissan, as they are called in local language. "And all these hari are treated unfairly and harshly by the feudal system," he said.

"This is so due to the non-implementation of acts such as the Land Reforms Act of 1977, the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950 and the Sindh Bonded Labour (System) Abolition Act of 2015," he said.

Zulfiqar Shah of Piler said that the situation of these landless peasants was similar to that of slaves.

Dr Ashothama from Hyderabad said that it was necessary to look at the peasant movement in a new light as they should be treated like normal workers. "The hari should be seen as a normal worker as he or she is no longer in an isolated category. They need to be brought to the mainstream," he said.

Focusing more on bonded labour, human rights activist Iqbal Detho said that it was considered a cognizable offense since 1992 after the Supreme Court's verdict by former Chief Justice Afzal Zullah in a suo motu case of a bonded labourer.

He said Article 11-A of the Constitution had already abolished slavery, but bonded labour, a form of slavery, still existed.

"The National Assembly passed the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act in 1992 but it was never implemented. After the 18th Amendment, the provincial government of Sindh has also made its own law," he said.

He suggested the establishing of a district vigilance committee under the anti-bonded labour law. “Peasants get no support from lawyers or civil society. Under the District Bar Association Rules [2005] the bars should provide legal support to poor agriculture workers. Currently no pro bono lawyers are available at the district bar associations,” he said.

Mr Detho also pointed out that according to a recent report in two districts of Sindh, over 73 per cent of the children of bonded labourers did not go to schools. They also did not get proper medical aid. “This is so because most bonded labourers do not have legal documents,” he said.

Mahnaz Rahman, resident director of the Aurat Foundation, said that looking at the plight of the peasants in rural areas here she felt as if they were travelling back in time instead of moving with the times. “There is no basic infrastructure in agriculture,” she said, while suggesting that land reforms be initiated in Pakistan. She also pointed out how hard the rural women worked along with taking care of their homes. “If five acres of government land are given to a female peasant, she will be able to earn her livelihood better,” she added.

Ishak Soomro of the Change Organisation observed that peasants’ issues remain unsolved because they are not made into political issues. “No party or politician has taken up the issues of peasants as an agenda or in the assembly. Politicians only do lip service,” he said.

Nasir Mansoor, vice president of the National Trade Unions Federation, said that despite the fact that agriculture workers were included in the definition of labour in the Sindh Industrial Relations Act 2013, the rules of business for registration of agriculture workers were not made, which had deprived these workers of forming their own unions.

Karamat Ali, executive director of Piler, said that citizens’ rights, especially peasants’ rights, were not included in the main agenda of society. “In Pakistan feudalism has increased, whereas it has declined in other countries,” he said.

He also said that the bonded labour movement had never succeeded because all elected representatives belonged to the families of landlords and underlined the need to launch a political movement for peasants’ rights.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1476767/report-says-slavery-persists-in-agriculture-sector-in-all-its-forms

MINISTRY DESCRIBES PSMA DATA AS ‘UNRELIABLE’

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | APR 18TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Ministry of Industries and Production (MoI&P) has reportedly declared stocks data of Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) “unreliable” asking the millers to sit with the officials of Ministry to reconcile it, well-informed sources in MoI&P told Business Recorder. This was the crux of a meeting of Sugar Advisory Board(SAB) presided over by Prime Minister’s Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood held on April 15, 2019.

According to the agenda, the SAB reviewed the overall availability and stock position of sugar along with remaining stocks of crushing season of 2017-18, actual production of sugar during crushing season 2018-19 and surplus stock at the end of crushing season 2018-19. The meeting also discussed increasing trend in sugar prices on the basis of a letter of Government of Punjab.

"Ministry's officials pointed out discrepancies in stocks and production figures submitted by the representatives of sugar millers which did not match the figures compiled by Provincial Cane Commissioners," the sources said, adding that the Association could not satisfy the Ministry about its figurers. This is not the first time that the government has challenged the stocks data of PSMA. During the previous administration one of the Advisors of the then Prime Minister took a stand in the ECC saying that the data shared by PSMA is not trustworthy. Sardar Asif Ahmed Ali, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission during the tenure of Pakistan People's Party had termed PSMA 'East India Company' during an ECC meeting.

The sources said Dawood also expressed concern at the increase in sugar prices which are now hovering around Rs 61 per kg and shared his concern with Punjab Government. According to the PBS, sugar prices increased by almost 20 per cent in March as compared to the corresponding period of last year. The Association maintained that since the government fixes the price of sugarcane how can it ask for a review of sugar prices given that prices are fixed by market forces.

As per Punjab-based sugar mills, stock position of sugar was recorded at 3.08 MMT as on March 27, 2019. PM's Advisor, sources said, argued that sugar mills should sell sugar in Ramazan at prices already agreed with the Government of Punjab. The Association, however, took the stance that the Punjab Government gives subsidy to the mills on sale of sugar at subsidized rates whereas this facility is not available in other provinces.

Dawood, requested the representatives of sugar millers to supply sugar at the Utility Stores at the prices agreed with the Punjab government during Ramazan, which they agreed to. PSMA also showed its willingness to reduce overall sugar prices in the country when the Advisor indicated that he would seek a higher sugar quota from China during the forthcoming visit of Prime Minister, Imran Khan to China after a request was put forward for another one billion dollar export facility. PSMA (Punjab) has already agreed to supply sugar to Ramazan Bazaars at Rs 54 per kg .

On March 28, 2019, the Punjab Government, in a letter to the Federal Government, argued that the ECC, in its meeting held on October 2, 2018, while considering a summary submitted by the Commerce Division on export of sugar, allowed one million metric tons of sugar subject to the following conditions: (i) the inter-ministerial committee will meet fortnightly to review sugar stocks, export and price situation; and (ii) in case of any abnormal increase in the domestic price of sugar, the committee would recommend to the ECC for discontinuation of further exports.

In the subsequent meeting of the ECC held on December 4, 2018 further export of 0.1 million tons of sugar was allowed. According to the Punjab Government's letter, there has been a sharp increase in ex-mill price of sugar since commencement of crushing season this year on December 9, 2018. Average ex-mill price of sugar on December 9, 2018 was Rs 50.50 per kg while the price has now touched Rs 61 per kg.

The Punjab Government requested the Federal Government to review sugar stocks, export position and price situation in the wake of increasing trend in the price of sugar.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190418465412/

RASHID-LED BODY TO IMPLEMENT RAMAZAN PACKAGE: RS 5 BILLION SOVEREIGN GUARANTEE FOR USC APPROVED BY ECC

TAHIR AMIN | APR 18TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet Wednesday approved sovereign guarantee of Rs 5 billion for the Utility Stores Corporation (USC) from National Bank of Pakistan to run its affairs. Finance Minister Asad Umar chaired the meeting of the ECC of the Cabinet here on Wednesday. The Industries and Production Division gave a presentation to update the committee about the status of Ramazan Package. The committee directed the USC to expedite the procurement of essential consumer items so as to provide timely relief to the people in the holy month of Ramazan. The ECC constituted a four-member committee to be headed by Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed to oversee the implementation of Ramazan Package. The USC management would brief the committee about the progress on a daily basis to make sure that every store has sufficient stuff available. The committee also directed the Ministry of Finance and National Bank of Pakistan to extend maximum facilitation to the USC in this regard.

Later, briefing the media, Chairman USC Zulqarnain Ali Khan said that an amount of Rs 5 billion approved by the ECC would be released within a couple of days. The amount would help clear the outstanding dues to ensure smooth supply of products to all 4,500 USC outlets across the country. He further said that the government allocated Rs 2 billion for the Ramazan Package which is not sufficient. The Ramazan Package would be effective from May 2. The USC has further sought Rs 3 billion from the government for streamlining the whole USC chain.

He was of the view that the USC needs Rs 15 billion to make sure that every USC store has all products available at subsidised rates. The operational cost of USC is around Rs 600 million which includes salaries of Rs 400 to Rs 450 million for its 14,000 employees across the country. He urged the employees of the USC not to go on strike and encouraged them to facilitate people during the holy month of Ramazan.

The Ministry of Petroleum briefed the ECC on the implementation of the committee’s decision regarding utilisation of services of the Pakistan Railways for transportation of petroleum products across the country. The Ministry of Railways informed the committee that it has the capacity to carry higher volumes and would work with the Ministry of Petroleum to explore further possibilities. The ECC in its one of the last meetings had directed state-run Pakistan State Oil (PSO) to use the Pakistan Railways for fuel transportation as it offers up to 26% lower fares compared to transportation through a pipeline and road. The cargo service of Pakistan Railways, especially oil transportation, has remained profitable over the past four decades, but previous governments, particularly the Pakistan Peoples Party’s (PPP’s) administration, shifted the entire petroleum supply business to oil tankers.

The committee reviewed proposals of various ministries/divisions. The committee also considered and approved various demands of divisions/ ministries for supplementary and technical grants. The ECC will also approve supplementary grants worth billions of rupees demanded by the Ministries of Defence, Federal Education and Professional Training and Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The ECC has approved Rs 44.3 million supplementary grants for the Ministry of Interior. Meanwhile, it has also given approval for Rs 700 million supplementary grants for the Federal Education and Professional Training and Rs 337 million for the Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The finance minister said that the budgetary needs of many organisations had not been properly assessed at the time of preparation of budget estimate last year which was leading to a large number of demands for supplementary grants. He emphasised the need for proper budgeting of the financial needs of various departments, which would obviate the need for supplementary grants during the currency of the fiscal year. He stated that the government is determined to phase out the supplementary grants in future budgets. The ECC approved, in principle, the proposal of Ministry of Information & Broadcasting for media campaign aiming to disseminate information relating to initiatives on poverty alleviation, Sehat Insaaf Scheme, PM's Naya Pakistan Housing Scheme etc.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190418465417/

'WHITE GOLD' UNDER BLACK SHADOWS

SHAHID SATTAR AND ASAD ABBAS | APR 18TH, 2019 | ARTICLE

Textile sector of Pakistan is facing many internal and external challenges including energy affordability and availability, current account deficit, shortage of raw material, credit availability, lack of institutional support, infrastructure constraints, skill development institutes, perception management, market access, GSP plus status continuation, sustainable supply chain, BCI cotton, water footprints reduction, social standards compliance and last but not least compliance linked with SDGs and the WTO rules.

On the Cotton front, it is not only an essential segment of economic strategy but has social dimensions as even the farmers' schedules of social activities which are dependent on expected cash flows from the value chain. Cotton as the basic raw material for the Pakistan textile industry accounts for almost 70% of the basic cost of production in the textile industry and any movements in price or quantity have significant impacts.

Cotton crop variety, quality and production witnessed a diminishing trend over the last few years. A decrease in cotton acreage, per hectare yield and imprudent government policies, have taken a heavy toll on cotton production. According to the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee's (PCCC's) report, cotton production target has been missed by 23 percent for the year 2019. Over the last five years, cotton production has decreased from 13.86 million bales to 10.84 million bales, witnessing a decrease of 22pc which has caused a huge loss to the economy. The shortfall requirement of the industry is 15.5 million bales and hence 5 million bales are short.

The cotton produced in Pakistan is of average quality with short fibre length (10-25 mm length) which cannot be used for producing high-end products required for exports. In Baluchistan, production of long staple length of cotton is expected and more areas are required to be exploited. Mostly, long staple length cotton is imported from Brazil, Egypt, Greece, Turkmenistan, the US, India, and Spain.

Currently, the cotton crop is suffering from the encroachment of land (sugarcane encroached best cotton growing area), poor quality seed, cotton leaf curl virus (CLCV), pest management issue, lack of plant resistant seeds, depleted technology, late sowing and the severe shortage of water. There are 24 well-known pests and diseases of the cotton crop in the world, Pakistan has 22 of them. There is no adequate pest and disease control mechanism available in Pakistan to bar impact and spread of pest attack. Reasons for low quality and production include old technology, low-quality seed, changing weather conditions, low-quality pesticides, and high prices of competing crops.

Despite the shortage of raw cotton, every year government impose Customs duty (3%), additional customs duty (2%), and sales tax (5%) on the import of cotton from July to January and lifts the ban for the rest of the year. The production shortfall forces the entire value chain to rely on imported cotton to meet the shortfall and to get export-quality cotton.

On the basis of issues, a detail way forward is suggest as follows:

There is a dire need to improve cotton quality by controlling contamination and trash content through enforcement of the standards laid down in the Cotton Control Act and Cotton Standardization Ordinance. Pakistani ginned bales contain up to 10% trash, world averages 2 to 3 percent. Encroachment of crops in cotton growing areas shall be curtailed through the adoption of appropriate policy changes in sugarcane pricing and cropping patterns. The land under sugarcane cultivation is 1,217,000 hectares while under cotton, it is 2,489,000 hectares; wheat is produced on 9,052,000 hectares. If we revert even half area (608,000 hectares) under sugarcane production with the help of corrective measures of the government which restrict its cultivation area, this area with cotton cultivation will add an additional 0.25 percent to GDP, along with minimum 1.273% of additional wheat contribution to GDP per annum. Most of the sugar mills have doubled the extension beyond the sanctioned capacity. Therefore, unsanctioned enhanced capacities should be cut back. Zoning laws for crops may be enforced strictly.

— The government of Pakistan should ensure import of best quality seed and its availability at affordable prices to farmers. A package deal should be negotiated with Monsanto to ensure better quality seed availability for farmers.

— A comprehensive training and capacity building program shall be developed to establish a system in the private sector for grading and classifying cotton. Incentives shall be provided to ensure that proper premiums are paid for increased production of contamination-free graded cotton. Labelling of cotton bales with trash content, moisture content and weight of cotton bale should be made mandatory.

— Measures shall be introduced for production of long-staple cotton for value-added products and to meet domestic demand for high-quality fabrics, including the introduction of BT cotton on priority basis. Trained staff from relevant government department should carry out training sessions, provide farmers with information about soil analysis, crop management, weather and other means to get better yield.

— On the other side, Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) has totally failed to launch new seed qualities due to lack of dedicated and sustained research. Pakistan’s average cotton yield is 17 maunds whereas progressive farmers are getting 40 maunds yield in Pakistan. PCCC is required to ensure availability of cotton to the industry at reasonable prices throughout the year and develop such varieties of cotton seeds that are resistant to diseases and enhance per acre cotton yield.

The industry requirement is increasing with each passing year but indigenous production of cotton is further decreasing. It would be difficult for the textile industry to compete with textile giants like China, India, Bangladesh and Vietnam when we have to import a larger amount of expensive cotton to meet the shortfall of our cotton requirements. Promotion of cotton means the promotion of exports while the failure of cotton crop translates into heavy damage to the country’s economy. It is mandatory to increase the cotton production to 15 million bales within the next 2 years and 20 million bales in the next 5 years.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190418465449/

KSA, IRAN, KUWAIT NOW IS TIME TO CAPTURE HALAL MARKETS: APMPEA

ZAHID BAIG | APR 18TH, 2019 | LAHORE

All Pakistan Meat Processors & Exporters Association (APMPEA) Chairman Nasib Ahmad Saifi has claimed that an opportunity has emerged for Pakistani halal meat exporters to capture Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iranian markets as Kuwait slapped a ban on some big Indian exporters due to substandard meat.

Talking to Business Recorder on Wednesday, Saifi alleged that some big companies which were supplying frozen and chilled meat and live buffaloes to Kuwait, Saudia and other countries had to face a ban due to substandard meat. He claimed that these companies were exporting some 200 tons of chilled meat per day to Saudi Arabia only and the ban has produced a big cushion for Pakistani meat processors and exporters.

According to him, Pakistan can easily enhance its halal meat exports by US2 billion dollars per annum with a little marketing push and support from the government Pakistan to the local exporters. He said this is the time that delegation of Pakistan halal meat exporters should be sent to these countries with meetings with big importers to fetch precious orders.

Saifi also said that the government has to give incentives to the exporters to materialize the opportunity. In his opinion the exporters should be given 8-10 percent rebate on export proceeds. He claimed that the Indian government was providing a rebate of 2 percent on air-fare and eight per cent on exports to Indian exporters.

The Chairman further said that prices of electricity and gas have been doubled in the present regime while taxes rates have also been enhanced. He said the government should not treat the exporting sector like this. He was of the view that utility charges and taxes should be reduced for the exporters so that they can penetrate in the international market and compete with other countries.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190418465473/

AT LEAST 32 FISHERMEN STILL MISSING AFTER STORM IN DEEP SEA

By Aftab Khan Published: April 18, 2019

KARACHI: The strong winds blowing from the Western system on Sunday caused high tides and a sea storm which in turn have left the fisher folk community devastated. At least 12 fishing boats of varying sizes remain missing while 13 large boats and four small ones have reportedly drowned. The search and rescue operation to find the missing boats continued on Wednesday. According to the Fishermen’s Cooperative Society (FCS), at least 32 fishermen are still missing.

The search and rescue operations have been under way since the past four days. The 11 fishermen on board a boat named Safina Al-Jillani which had left the shore on April 8 returned on Wednesday after being caught in the storm for four days. The body of another fisherman who was on board a small launch, Al-Ramzan, has also been recovered from the sea. Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency and helicopters of Edhi Foundation participated in the search and rescue operation.

Hundreds of boats, which had set-off for 15 to 30-day fishing excursions met with difficult circumstances due to the sea storm. The communication network between the Karachi Fish Harbour, Ibrahim Hyderi and Upper Sindh was unable to connect with dozens of boats from Badin and Thatta due to the strong winds which have prevailed since Sunday. Fishing boats, big and small, have begun arriving at different jetties either through ad hoc efforts or via help from other boats which had managed to find shelter at different places when the storm was calm. However, several large and small boats have drowned due to the stormy weather.

According to FCS and Karachi Fish Harbour's emergency centre representative Nasir Buneri, the boats were restricted from setting off in the sea since Friday, April 12, in light of the weather alert issued by the meteorological department with regards to the Western system. He said that the boats that had set off between April 1 and April 8 were, however, stranded at sea due to the extraordinary weather conditions.

Buneri said that a 24-hour emergency and response centre located at the fish harbour has been monitoring the situation while fishermen have been warned against heading out in the sea through announcements via megaphones and loud speakers.

Although 11 fishermen from launch Safina Al-Jilani have returned, many others remain lost at sea. The body of a fisherman who was among those missing has been recovered.

No traces of another launch named Fazal Akbar have been found despite a three-day search operation. There are 18 fishermen including the captain, on-board the Fazal Akbar.

Yet another launch, Bismillah, which was out at sea, has five fishermen out of 14 missing while nine have been rescued. Al-Aziz had 15 fishermen on-board, of whom 12 have returned while three remain missing. On Tuesday, 12 out of the 14 men on-board Al-Mudassir were rescued but two remain missing. Besides, eight crew members on-board the Al-Zulfiqar and six fishermen from the Al-Ramzan remain missing.

Meanwhile, a boat named Ahsan Abdul Majeed drowned in the sea but the 12 men on-board jumped off in time and fortunately managed to reach safety. Four small boats also drowned in the sea but the sixteen fishermen who were on board managed to survive.

The process of shifting the rescued fishermen and the recovered boats to Karachi is under way. Nearby coastal areas, including Ghorabari, Kharochan and Khoikhadi were searched during the rescue operation.

The Pakistan Maritime Security Agency said it had received information about 22 boats which were affected by the storm. Of these 22, eight boats have been rescued so far along with 252 fishermen while 13 are said to have drowned. Aerial surveillance is also being carried out by the Pakistan Navy and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency.

The deceased fisherman was identified as Noor Islam. He was from Korangi and had been on board the Al-Ramzan boat. Of those who had accompanied him, three have returned safely.

FCS Chairperson Hafiz Abdul Barr said that all possible sources were used to warn fishermen from Mubarak Village till Keti Bandar of the emergency situation. However, losses have been incurred due to the severity of the storm. He added that rescue operation is still under way.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 18th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1953336/1-least-32-fishermen-still-missing-storm-deep-sea/

WHEAT PRODUCTION ESTIMATED AT 25.16 MILLION TONS

By Our Correspondent Published: April 18, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government has estimated the country's wheat production at 25.16 million tons in the 2018-19 Rabi crop sowing season.

The estimate came in a meeting of the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA), chaired by Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mahboob Sultan.

The FCA, which was tasked with overseeing strategic measures to ensure food security in the country, reviewed harvests of Rabi crops and fixed targets for 2019-20 Kharif crops.

Among Rabi crops, the committee noted that wheat production in the 2018-19 season was estimated as on April 7, 2019 at 25.16 million tons from an area of 8.83 million hectares.

Coupled with last year's leftover stock of 3 million tons, the total wheat availability will be about 28.16 million tons, which is well above the annual national requirement.

The committee was informed that gram production in 2018-19 had been estimated at 439,000 tons from an area of 943,700 hectares. It also discussed the production of other essential crops like lentil, potato, onion and tomato.

The committee set the target of cotton production at 15 million bales in the Kharif season.

It held comprehensive deliberations on production targets for essential Kharif crops and decided that 2.895 million hectares would be planted with the cotton crop in 2019-20 to achieve harvest of 15 million bales. For the rice crop, the production target was set at 7.433 million tons from an area of 2.88 million hectares.

Targets for other crops such as maize, moong, mash and chilli were also fixed. It set the production target for sugarcane at 68.583 million tons by cultivating the crop over an area of 1.184 million hectares.

Discussing the supply of agricultural inputs for Kharif crops, the committee was informed that sufficient water would be available in the reservoirs. In the 2019-20 crop season, 108.67 million acre feet (maf) of water would be available in canals compared to 88.04 maf last year. At present, all the provinces are getting satisfactory water supply.

The Meteorological Department told the FCA that normal to slightly above normal rainfall was likely in May across the country. However, based on a gradual increase in temperature, an effective use of available water stock was recommended, it said.

Average temperature is likely to remain above normal throughout the country during the period. The expected rise in temperature in the next two months is approximately 1 to 2-degree Celsius.

“The rise in temperature will accelerate the melting of snow in northern areas and water flow will subsequently increase in the upper Indus region,” it said.

The committee was informed that the supply of rice and maize seeds would be higher than the country’s requirement, which was estimated at 121.28% and 112.83% respectively.

The representative of the State Bank revealed that the allocation of institutional credit for the agriculture sector had been increased substantially to Rs1,250 billion for fiscal year 2018-19 and disbursements up to February 2019 were calculated at Rs701.6 billion.

The disbursements accounted for 56.1% of the annual target and were 23.1% higher than disbursements of Rs570.9 billion in the same period of previous year.

The FCA appreciated the positive impact of fertiliser subsidy scheme, which contributed to a high yield and noted that the supply of urea and di-ammonium phosphate was satisfactory in the Rabi season.

Owing to domestic fertiliser production and available stocks, the urea supply would remain comfortable and DAP would also be at satisfactory levels, the FCA noted.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1953202/2-wheat-production-estimated-25-16-million-tons/

RAINS SEND WAVE OF FEAR AMONG WHEAT GROWERS

The Newspaper’s Staff ReporterUpdated April 17, 2019

RAWALPINDI: The rain in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad on Tuesday caused concern among farmers about possible damages to their wheat crops.

The rain brought down the maximum temperature from 29 to 26°C in the capital and from 29 to 25°C in Rawalpindi.

The Meteorological Department recorded 35mm rain in Zero Point, 43mm at Saidpur in Islamabad; 17mm in Shamsabad and 5mm at Chaklala in Rawalpindi.

An official of the Met Office said a westerly wave was affecting most upper and central parts of the country and likely to persist in the upper parts till Wednesday night.

He said widespread dust-thunderstorm/rain accompanied by gusty winds were expected in Punjab, Islamabad, Kashmir, at scattered places in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and at isolated places in Quetta, Zhob, Sibbi, Kalat, Sukkur, Larkana divisions and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Hailstorm is also expected at a few places during the period. Isolated heavy falls may occur in Malakand, Hazara divisions and Kashmir.

There are also chances of hailstorms in some parts of the areas near Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

“There was no rain in some areas of the twin cities, including Golra, Bokra and near the Islamabad International Airport. But there are chances of rain in these areas on Wednesday,” the official said.

The farmers in surrounding areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad feared that the rain may spoil their crops.

“The wheat crop is fully grown and strong winds could lay down the standup crops and heavy showers or hailstorm spoil the wheat,” said Mohammad Ramzan, a landowner in Rawat.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1476588/rains-send-wave-of-fear-among-wheat-growers

INITIATIVE FOR DEVELOPING BETTER COTTON

The Newspaper’s ReporterApril 17, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Bet¬ter Cotton Initiative (BCI) on Tuesday sought assistance of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to help growers develop better lint as a sustainable mainstream commodity of the country.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Mehboob Sultan met with a delegation of BCI led by its Director of Global Imple¬mentation Alia Malik.

With headquarters in London and Geneva, BCI is the largest cotton sustainability programme in the world.

Ms Malik said the success of the response in Pakistan regarding sustainable cotton is encouraging but more is yet to be achieved.

BCI Regional Director for Pakistan and Central Asia, Shafiq Ahmad said water management, pesticides, soil depletion, small holder poverty and habitat loss were major challenges.

Mr Sultan informed BCI officials that the government has launched the agriculture emergency programme although cotton is not its component.

However, increased cotton production is a goal of the government, he added.

“We are working with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government for potential growing of cotton in a bid to increase its cultivation area,” he further said.

In Pakistan, about 1.5 million smallholder farmers rely on cotton for a living.

Published in Dawn, April 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1476641/initiative-for-developing-better-cotton

COMMODITIES: COTTON PRICES STEADY AMID RENEWED DEMAND

The Newspaper’s Staff ReporterApril 17, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices on Tuesday stayed firm as limited unsold stocks of up to 0.6 million bales caused nervousness among leading spinners who still need a substantial quantity of raw cotton to meet their near-term requirements.

Ginners were willing sellers at the prevailing prices as their hopes of getting higher rates were dashed by the declining trend on the New York Cotton Exchange amid forecast of a bumper US crop owing to favourable weather conditions.

The New York cotton futures fell 2.59 cents.

Spinners were active in the market as imports have become costlier after a massive devaluation of the local currency.

According to preliminary reports, Pakistani traders are unwilling to import cotton from India citing quality issues whereas imports from the US are also not possible because the duty waiver allowed by the government up to June 30 could not be availed because of the long time required in shipments.

The Karachi Cotton Association left its spot rates unchanged at the overnight level of Rs8,800 per maund.

The following big-lot deals of the large size reported to have changed hands on the ready counter: 100 bales, station Dherki, at Rs9,000; 6,000 bales, Karachi (LDC to mill), at Rs8,700 to Rs8,850; 1,065 bales, Akri, at Rs7,865 and 2,800 bales, Rahimyar Khan, at Rs8,750 to Rs9,000.

Published in Dawn, April 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1476614/commodities-cotton-prices-steady-amid-renewed-demand

FISHERIES DEPT BERATED FOR ITS FAILURE TO CURB ILLEGAL FISHING ALONG COAST

Tahir SiddiquiUpdated April 17, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly was told on Monday that the Pakistan marine fisheries department, the watchdog force in the sea which functions under the federal government, had failed to control illegal fishing along the coastline.

While furnishing a statement and answering questions from lawmakers during the Question Hour session in the provincial assembly, Minister for Livestock and Fisheries Abdul Bari Pitafi said that illegal fishing in the sea was being carried out owing to weakness of the department.

He said the marine fisheries department was the policing force in the coastal areas but it had failed to do its job. “I don’t know whether it makes a deal with illegal fishermen or it is just not capable enough to keep a vigilant eye on the act of illegal fishing,” Mr Pitafi said.

When asked by the Grand Democratic Alliance’s Nusrat Seher Abbasi that what steps had been taken by the fisheries department to control illegal fishing in the sea as well as in sweet water, the minister said that there were two sections of fishing — inland fishing and marine fishing, adding that the provincial government was responsible for policing the inland fishing only as the other section was controlled by the marine fisheries department.

"We have a proper system at each district comprising directorates who maintain check and balance," he said and added that the licensed fishermen for inland fishing were also being monitored.

Referring to the action against illegal fishing, the minister said that all those fishermen and the contractors who bought fish from them were booked and charge-sheeted in the relevant courts.

Replying to a question asked by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's MPA Khurram Sher Zaman, Mr Pitafi said there was no environmental or water quality threat to aquatic animals in Manchhar Lake.

He also said that no fish in Manchhar Lake died due to poor environment.

Refuting the claim of an opposition member that a large number of fish was found dead, he said the poachers threw their undersize catch in bulk near the embankment of Manchhar Lake after the department took action against illegal fishing. "The department also keeps a vigilant eye upon catching of undersize fish," he added.

The minister said that there was a shortage of water for fish farming and added that there were around 4,500 ponds in the province but they had dried up. He said that the tail-end areas had been hit more severely in the circumstances.

Answering a question asked by MPA Nusrat Abbasi, the minister said that upgrade of a veterinary centre at Kot Mirs Landhi, Kot Ghulam Mohammad taluka, Mirpurkhas district, at a cost of Rs5.093 million was to be completed by June 2018. However, the same has not been completed within stipulated time because of less release of funds during 2017-18.

"Therefore, the execution period of the scheme has been extended for one more year," he added.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1476527/fisheries-dept-berated-for-its-failure-to-curb-illegal-fishing-along-coast

CANE COMMISSIONER RECONCILES GROWERS' DUES OUTSTANDING AGAINST SUGAR MILLS

Mohammad Hussain KhanUpdated April 17, 2019

HYDERABAD: An amount of Rs840 mil¬l¬ion is outstanding against Omni group's sugar mills out of Rs1.8 billion of 1,300 sugar cane growers against 22 sugar mills for 2017-18 sugar cane crushing season.

The dues have been reconciled by a com¬m¬ittee, led by the Sindh cane commissioner, constituted by the Sindh High Court's (SHC) principal seat in Karachi on Monday.

Representatives of the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) Sindh zone, Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), Sindh Cham¬ber of Agriculture (SCA) and Sindh Abad¬gar Ittehad were also part of the committee which met under the chairmanship of the Sindh cane commissioner.

The SHC had tasked the committee to ensure reconciliation of the dues of around 1,300 growers who had submitted applica¬tions in the cane commissioner's office. Growers had been crying against non-pay¬ment of their dues involving an amount of Rs1.8bn for 2017-18 season when a contro¬versy over sugar cane price led to a serious crisis. Under compulsion farmers had supplied their crop mostly to middlemen for getting cash payments though at an inade¬quate rate of per 40kg sugar cane.

Sugar mills had refused to comply with a price notification of Rs182/40kg issued by the Sindh government. However, in line with consensus arrangements farmers agreed to Rs160/40kg rate to be paid by sugar factories and payment of differential amount (Rs22 per 40kg) was linked with the apex court's verdict, which was already seized with identical matters of different years.

Official sources and Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) vice president Mahmood Nawaz Shah confirmed that the outstanding dues of mills owned by the Omni Group had been reconciled and the group was willing to pay it off if the apex court unfreezes their accounts in the wake of an ongoing money laundering probe into fake bank accounts.

"The Sindh High Court in its last order allowed farmers to approach the Supreme Court for payment of their dues as far as the Omni Group's mills are concerned. So, we [SAB] have decided to move the apex court in this regard in view of such a statement filed by the group in court," Shah said.

Out of Rs1.8bn liabilities, around Rs100m to Rs120m, which were outstanding against two mills, one of them is Digri sugar mills, could not be reconciled for various reasons. The committee was also said to have disagreed with the contention of two other mills — Bandhi and Sakrand — regarding lesser payments made to growers on ground of sugar cane's varieties. Such deductions were termed illegal by the committee.

A bumper sugar cane crop was reported in that season. Sugar cane was grown on 333,000 hectare (ha) against sowing target of 320,000ha — up by 13,000ha — with the result that growers were hard pressed to sell their bumper crop to middlemen after factory owners refused to abide by the notification, triggering a price controversy.

In that season growers got frustrated as even the price notification was issued in December 2017 and crushing was delayed by mills. They started selling their crop to middlemen then. In 2018-19 sugar cane sowing had dropped and led to likely decline in production as well. Such figures are to be finalised.

"Growers eventually agreed to a consen¬sual price of Rs160/40kg in the Sindh High Court," said an official. He claimed that middlemen had bought crop from farmers at Rs130/40kg before this arrangement was reached in court between millers and farmers. "In many cases of applicants, middle¬men are believed to have approached the cane commissioner to seek payment of their outstanding dues against certain mills," he claimed.

The Sindh cane commissioner's office was said to have written to various deputy commissioners seeking verification of land-related particulars from them in respect of those applications which were apparently filed by middlemen before the committee.

"We are also trying to see as to how those having smaller landholdings are claiming supplies of a quantum of sugar cane that can be obtained from no less than 400 acres," said a source. Such middlemen have supp¬lied sugar cane to around 13 to 14 mills. Their title documents were being obtained from civil administrations so that their quantum of supplies of crop could be confirmed whether they are indeed bona fide growers.

In rural areas, a middleman exploits farmers by playing with the economy of small- and medium-size farmers. Middlemen offer cash payments to growers to exploit their financial position as growers need cash flows to recover cost of inputs, earn profit and invest in the next crop. So, they sell their crop to them and the same broker or middleman supplies to sugar factory owners.

According to an official, the factory managements understand middlemen are demanding differential amount between Rs130 and Rs160/40kg from them in the wake of consensual agreement between growers and millers. “Mills believe this amount will not go to farmers now, therefore, they are reluctant to pay it and that’s why some mills’ dues are not being reconciled,” he remarked.

Published in Dawn, April 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1476519/cane-commissioner-reconciles-growers-dues-outstanding-against-sugar-mills

DPP TELLS KATI: FOLLOW INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS TO ENHANCE AGRICULTURE EXPORTS

RECORDER REPORT | APR 17TH, 2019| KARACHI

Director General Department of Plant Protection (DPP) Dr Falak Naaz has laid emphasis on following international standards to increase export of agriculture.

“It is necessary to follow international standards,” he said, speaking at a meeting of Korangi Association of Trade and Industry (KATI). He reiterated that the DPP issues certification regarding health and safety of agricultural products for import and export. He said that food security standards had become strict internationally. He said there were certain level of quantity of pesticide and heavy metal particle in fruits and food products.

“Fruits and crop exporters should follow the directions of DPP to align their quality with international standards,” he urged. KATI president Danish Khan said that Pakistan is an agricultural country and exports of this sector should be enhanced.

He said there is need to spread awareness among common people about international standards for food security; and especially producers and exporters should be well aware of those standards. The CEO of KITE Zubair Chhaya called for a proper liaison between the department (DPP) and the trading community.

Head of KATI’s standing committee on industrial pest management, Salman Ahmed Sabari said that food item importers were facing delay and other problems due to procedural hurdles which could be set aside with proper coordination.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190417465181/

SEARCH ON FOR 32 FISHERMEN LOST AFTER DEEP SEA STORM

By Our Correspondent Published: April 17, 2019

KARACHI: Of the many boats that disappeared in the sea storm that struck the coastal belt on Sunday evening, two are still missing. The maritime security agency and Pak Bahria continued the rescue operation on Tuesday in the search of the 32 missing fishermen aboard these vessels.

Before April 10, a total of 275 boats of varying sizes left the coast for fishing. Several of these boats went missing in the storm in the deep sea. The fishermen aboard these boats, who are from Badin and different islands near Karachi, contacted their families late at night that they had been caught in the storm. Later, the fishermen on some of these boats informed their families, through radios and other means, that they had taken shelter at safe islands.

A crew comprising 13 fishermen were on board a boat that disappeared returned on Monday morning. Another, comprising nine fishermen, returned on Monday evening.

According to the Fishermen Cooperative Society, a crew comprising 12 people on a boat, 'Al-Mudassir,' that had also disappeared in the storm returned on Tuesday evening. However, four fishermen on the boat are still missing.

Some of the boats could still not be contacted. Two boats, 'Qasina Akbar' and 'Al-Azizi', are still missing and search operation is under way to find them.

The Pakistan Maritime Security Agency carried out a long search and rescue operation. Pak Bahria carried out its operation in different areas of the sea including Ghorabari, Kharochan and Khaikhadi. A 24/7 monitoring centre has been established and the departure of further launches in the sea for fishing has been completely restricted.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 17th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1952489/1-search-32-fishermen-lost-storm-struck-deep-sea/

KPFSA SEIZES STOCK OF NOODLES CONTAINING BANNED SALT

By Our Correspondent Published: April 17, 2019

PESHAWAR: Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halaal Food Authority (KPFSA) on Tuesday sealed a food company's distribution outlet over noncompliance with food safety standards.

The brand was selling noodles having monosodium glutamate (MSG) popularly known as Chinese salt. Banned across Pakistan, the manufacturer had diverted its supply of MSG-containing noodles to K-P.

However, the KPFSA got information of banned noodles, raided the warehouses and seized the snack food meant for children.

KPFSA Director Operations Khalid Khan Khattak giving details said that food authority teams got information that noodles contain china salt, which has been banned by the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Khattak said he deputed Food Safety Officers Ahmad Ali Shah and Adeel Ahmad who investigated the matter and confirmed existence of MSG in the noodles.

Subsequently, KPFSA team with the help of local administration and police backup, raided and sealed the warehouse where MSG-containing noodles were stocked.

"The KPFSA picked up all 3,000 packets and sealed the premises till compliance," Khattak said.

KPFSA DG Riaz Mehsud said they have launched a crackdown against manufacturers and distributors of harmful and counterfeit food products.

KPFSA has sealed more than 15 soft drink production units in seven districts of the province in the last 15 days and discarded more than 150,000 litres of cola drinks packed in bottles having counterfeit labels of world-famous brands.

Meanwhile, KPFSA Kohat Deputy Director Kamran Yosafzai said that team led by Assistant Director Rukhsar Ali has sealed five counterfeit cold drink production units. He said that more than 15,000 litres of fake cold drink was discarded, production unit sealed and owners handed over to police for necessary action.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 17th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1952426/1-kpfsa-seizes-stock-noodles-containing-banned-salt/

HEAVY RAINS, HAIL DEVASTATE WHEAT CROP IN PUNJAB

By Rana Amir Aslam Published: April 17, 2019

LAHORE / BHAKKAR: Stormy weather prevailed in the province, claiming the life of a minor in Lahore night. Meanwhile, standing wheat and gram crops were flattened to the ground in the wake of torrential rain and hail storms.

A minor girl was killed and 10 people were injured after the wall of a marriage hall in Shadbagh collapsed on Monday night. The provincial capital was hit by a dust storm and rains. Reportedly, winds blowing at a speed of 65 kilometres per hour knocked down the wall of the hall where a marriage ceremony was under way. The victim was identified as Taania Ashfaq.

Rescue workers shifted the injured to nearby hospitals and evacuated the remaining guests who were trapped inside. Meanwhile, the roof of a house collapse in Kahna, injuring three people. The injured were identified as Muqadas, Rafia and Asif and were shifted to Jinnah Hospital.

The wind also uprooted trees and knocked over signboards and affected routine life in the city. Many commuters remained stranded on the roads while traffic jams were also reported. Similar weather conditions were also reported in the city on Tuesday.

Rains decimate crops in Bhakkar Crops in Bhakkar have been decimated due to recent rains, strong winds and hail storms. Farmers have incurred substantial losses and are demanding that the government take notice of the situation.

Standing wheat and gram crops, sown on millions of acres in the district, have been flattened to the ground by the wind and rain while in other areas, the ears of the wheat crops have broken away.

As a result, farmers are worried about the remaining crops that managed to survive the tumultuous weather. They fear that the remaining crops will also be damaged as the harvesting process has not yet begun.

Typically around this time of year, growers have harvested and packaged the crop to sell it onwards. Several landlords stated that according to their estimates, the recent rains have caused a significant financial loss while the wheat and gram crops have also suffered irreparable damage. Further, mango and date orchards were also not spared. Farmers say that the government should provide relief to growers from the affected area.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Deputy Commissioner Waqas Rasheed said that teams from the revenue department are conducting surveys in order to ascertain the losses caused by the recent rains. Further, an emergency flood control centre has also been formed for this purpose, he said. “All protection measures have been adopted and alldepartments have been set on high alert,” he said.

Meanwhile, the assistant commissioners of all four tehsils in Bhakkar district have been directed to formulate a survey report. In addition, awareness seminars are also underway to educate farmers on how to prevent further damage to the crops. In the wake of the heavy rainfall, farmers must adopt strategies to protect their animals and their crops. All municipal committees, Rescue 1122 and other departments have been directed to keep heavy machinery on hand.

Further, all municipal committees have been directed to ensure that all sewerage lines and drains are cleaned on a timely basis.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1952572/1-heavy-rains-hail-devastate-wheat-crop-punjab/

PERTURBED OVER SINDH GOVT’S ‘APATHY’, FARMERS’ BODY DEMANDS LIFTING OF BAN ON WHEAT MOVEMENT

Dawn ReportApril 16, 2019

LARKANA: The Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) has urged Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to get the interprovincial movement of wheat lifted if his government cannot afford opening of wheat procurement centres in order to save growers from huge financial losses.

In a letter he sent to the CM and later talking to Dawn here on Monday, SAB founder member Gada Hussain Mahesar said wheat crop in Sindh had shown a significant growth after it was cultivated over 4.1 million acres.

During the current year, a bumper crop estimated at 6.2m tonnes yield was being harvested as expected, he said, and wondered that the Sindh government had neither announced a procurement policy nor had it fixed the official rate as yet while the process of threshing had picked up momentum.

He said growers, under the obtaining conditions, were compelled to dispose of their produce to local traders at low rates ranging from Rs1,050 to Rs1,120/40kg. Against it, the official procurement rate in Punjab appeared to be Rs1,350/40kg and procurement centres were opened across the province, he added. He asked that the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party in Sindh had its prime slogan of owning farmers; then why this kind of injustice was being done to them? He said wheat growers, who had invested their hard-earned money in this crop and achieved best results, should not be deprived of their due returns.

‘Delay in starting wheat procurement, fixing rate devastating growers’

Quoting former president Asif Ali Zardari’s statement that “it hurts me very much when I see deprivation of poor farmers and labourers”, Mr Mahesar said unfortunately the ground reality in his party's rule appeared entirely different. "What will be [the point] of holding the meeting of Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) on April 17 amidst this situation to study the pros and cons of enhancing production of Kharif crops? At present, the government has failed to promote indigenous production of crops," he remarked.

Meanwhile, another organisation, Watan Dost Mazdoor Federal, in its meeting held here on Monday expressed its concern over Sindh government's apathy towards issues of growers and particularly the problems of wheat growers. It said the joy of the growers in the wake of a bumper wheat crop was now going to be short-lived as the government had neither fixed the rate nor started procurement in the province.

Zawar Gopang, who chaired the meeting, said under the prevailing situation traders were exploiting growers and farmers by forcing them to accept the low rates. If the practice continued, growers could hardly repay their loans, he said.

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has complained that Sindh-based banks have made procedure for credit facility too cumbersome.

Speaking at a news conference at the local press club on Monday, SCA vice president Mohammad Khan Sarejo said that banks had framed their own laws for dealing with credit and alleged that they were ignoring regulatory framework of State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

"If a borrower possesses his pass book, he does not need to produce two guarantors for obtaining a loan but commercial banks insist on this condition which is irrelevant and unlawful," he said giving an instance. Moreover, he added, two undated cheques were also obtained from borrower at the time of extending the loan and the condition of two guarantors also remained attached.

He regretted that applicants above 60 years of age were denied loans under a policy, which was not understandable. He claimed that some banks would extend agricultural loans to millers but on bank documents, they were shown as farmers which was a grave injustice.

Mr Sarejo referred to SBP guidelines which stated that "a farmer [applicant] is to be provided loan within 11 days of the submission of his papers", and said: "But practically the procedure takes three to four months and in the meantime the crop season for which the loan is sought passes".

He urged the State Bank authorities to initiate a probe into the matter as well as "corruption" which would expose everything relating to credit procedure of commercial banks in the province.

He said several letters were sent to the SBP authorities in Karachi and Hyderabad urging them to convene a meeting to look into and resolve the issues but all such requests had so far fallen on deaf ears; rather the authorities came in support of the banks.

Mr Sarejo demanded removal of corrupt officers in order to provide due relief to farmers.

Published in Dawn, April 16th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1476313/perturbed-over-sindh-govts-apathy-farmers-body-demands-lifting-of-ban-on-wheat-movement

TRENDS IN AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT

BR ResearchApril 16, 2019

Finally! Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) has released its annual compendium (for FY18) on trends in labour market, albeit with a two-year hiatus. The document, which follows ten key indicators, is touted by PBS as an "empirical prelude towards strategizing for full, productive employment", under SDG, target 8.5.

While the document's scope is limited, it does not offer data points for all key metrics across same time period, the statistics related to agriculture sector make for an interesting read.

At 37.4 percent share in total employment, the once largest sector by labour force participation rate is fast losing its primacy. For the first time possibly since independence, services sector has taken the lead, albeit by only 1.2 percentage points.

Equally interesting is the gender-wise breakdown of sectoral share. In sharp contrast to countrywide trends, sectoral share in total female employment stands at a staggering 66.1 percent, compared to just 29.6 percent for males.

Another key indicator is share of employed in the sector working 50 hours or more. Compared to industry and services sector, agri-labour participants come out at the bottom for average number of hours worked during a week, with close to 28 percent of total working excess hours. Contrast this with trade and services sector, where over 68 percent of total spend punching in the proverbial nine hours daily.

This is surprising considering that while average work week in urban and peri-urban concentrated services sectors is usually five-six days, a typical work week at farms does not necessarily follow the weekday-weekend convention. Furthermore, since the metric indicates average work week, the seasonal intensity of farmers' toil does not explain away the distinction.

Yet, of most importance to those monitoring the SDG goals is the metric least highlighted: sectoral employment with no formal education. Countrywide, close to 41 percent of labour force lacks any formal training. Compare this to 63 percent for agriculture and a little under 23 percent for wholesale and retail trade, and the stark reality of rural-urban divide in literacy becomes glaring. Sadly, no gender-wise or geographical break up is shared for the shame; making it difficult to highlight improvement if any over the years.

The document defines "own-account workers and contributing family workers" as those vulnerably employed. A certainly useful indicator of state of labour welfare, the metric appears to be a misnomer for agricultural segment. As per the document, over 88 percent of workers in the sector are vulnerably employed. Yet, in reality, it only means that a large number of farmers and herders provide for themselves, instead of having to seek employment elsewhere.

The document is a useful stepping stone for those seeking information on state of labour in the country. But more is needed in terms of historical trends across all SDG indicators in order to measure progress over time.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/04/16/489586/trends-in-agricultural-employment/

12 FISHERMEN MISSING AS WINDSTORM HITS BOATS

RECORDER REPORT | APR 16TH, 2019 | KARACHI

About 12 fishermen are reportedly missing in the wake of windstorm, which started on Sunday and capsized at least two vessels, according to the locals. Several fishing boats are also feared missing with their crewmembers mid-sea amid the storm. The gusty winds that tore into the boats that were hunting at Daba and Chaan of close to the costal Gharo area, left at least 12 fishermen missing, according to the Fishermen Cooperative Society, stating that the operations are under way to find the missing crew members of the ill-fated vessels.

However, the three of the crew members were saved from drowning by the rescue operators soon after their boats as one was identified with the name of Al-Jilani while the other with its official number 17176. “Operations are under way for the missing fishermen,” an FCS official said.

The missing crew members of the Al-Jilani includes with boat owner, Aziz Shaikh; Rafiq, son of Alam Nazir; Hussain, son of Mansoor; Iqbal, son of Muhammad Ali; Yahya, son of Haji Ahmed; Abdul Sattar, son of Qasim and Juman, son of Amin.

The other was a small boat with the four crew members sank midnight from the sandstorm, which struck all of them by surprise. Boat skipper, Muhammad Siddique, Babul and Muhammad Alam struggled to fight the gusty winds and strong sea currents amid the storm.

But, Noor-ul-Islam, according to their accounts, slipped off into the waves, which drew him away and is still missing. Surviving captain, Muhammad Siddique said that a local fisherman, hailing from the Katchi community, sailed his boat to rescue them at 9 am. “All 272 boats including big and small have been called to the moorages, which are expected to return to the coast by tomorrow morning,” Chairman FCS, Abdul Barr assured the bereaved families of missing fishermen with a full support. “Over one dozens boats are missing from windstorm as there are reports that over one dozens boats have sunk,” President Sindh Trawlers Owners and Fishermen Association, Habibullah Niazi said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190416464893/

100 INDIAN FISHERMEN RELEASED

PPIUpdated April 15, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan on Sunday released the second batch of 100 Indian fishermen as a goodwill gesture.

The 100 Indian fishermen, arrested for illegal fishing in Pakistani water territories, were released from Karachi Malir Jail.

The Edhi Foundation made arrangements for their travelling from Karachi Cantonment Station and onwards to the Wagah Border.

The fishermen were brought to the station in Edhi ambulances amid tight security by Sindh police.

They will be taken to Lahore through Business Express train and handed over to the Indian authorities at Wagah Border.

As a goodwill gesture amid tension with India, Pakistan had announced to release 360 Indian prisoners, including 355 fishermen and five civilians, during April.

Published in Dawn, April 15th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1476167/100-indian-fishermen-released

CABINET WILL APPROVE WHEAT PROCUREMENT, EXPORT POLICIES TOMORROW

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | APR 15TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Federal Cabinet, which is scheduled to meet on Tuesday (tomorrow) with Prime Minister, Imran Khan, in the chair will accord approval to wheat procurement and export policies for 2019. Though provincial governments have already announced their wheat procurement policies, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research held a meeting with the provinces, Commerce Division and Finance Division to finalise the policy at the federal level.

The sources said, a bumper wheat crop was expected this year for which proper and transparent arrangements should be made to procure wheat, so that farmers may get fair price for their crop. Food Departments of provinces and other procurement agencies should provide gunny bags to farmers in a transparent and fair manner. Other agenda items of Cabinet are as follows: (i) implementation of Cabinet decision of May 29, 2018 regarding enhancement of pay package of sitting Chairperson and Members of Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA);(ii) strategy to dispose of abandoned properties;(iii) statutory Directors by the Federal Government (Defence Production) ;(iv) presentation on existing policy governing the hiring of testing agency for recruitment in Ministries/ Divisions ;(v) ex-post facto approval of signing and ratification of the agreement between Pakistan and Bosnia Herzegovina on the establishment of a Joint Economic Commission (JEC);(vi) designation of Provincial Counter-Terrorism Departments as Investigating and Prosecuting Agency under section 2(j) of AML Act, 2010 ;(vii) extension in deputation period of Dr Ikram Ali, Chairman Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary, Education (FBISE), Islamabad;(viii) presentation on revamping of existing education system ;(ix) extradition of accused Nouman Hanif s/o Hanif Jan Muhammad to Dubai;(x) allocation of space for Kartarpur corridor for construction of " Pakistan Culture Centre";(xi) salary package for members of the Information Commission;(xii) appointment of Chairman, Federal Land Commission;(xiii) nomination of three additional members in Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) from Nankana sahib(Punjab), Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan and ;(xiv) posting of deputy director general (finance) (BS 20) on deputation basis in Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA).

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190415464671/

WEEKLY COTTON REVIEW: TREND OF INCREASE IN PRICES CONTINUES

NASEEM USMAN | APR 15TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The upward trend of increase in the prices of cotton continued. The prices of cotton may increase due to the buying of 800,000 ton of cotton by China. The trend of increase in the prices of cotton yarn and textile products continues. The government departments and government officials are active and trying to increase the production of cotton. The production of cotton in India further decreased.

In the local cotton market during the last week the increase in buying of cotton by textile and spinning mills the upward trend of increase in prices was witnessed. The prices of cotton increased from Rs 100 to 200 per maund.

The prices of cotton in both Sindh and Punjab remained Rs 7300 to Rs 9100 per maund while the price of Seed cotton (Kapas/Phutti) which is available in small quantity is from Rs 3400 to Rs 3600 per 40Kgs in both Sindh and Punjab. In Balochistan cotton for buying and selling is nearly over.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) Spot Rate Committee increased the spot rate price by Rs 100 per maund and closed it at Rs 8800 per maund. Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum told that ginners had left the stock of 600,000 bales while some mills who were unable to meet their demands were taking interest in the buying of cotton due to which the prices of cotton were increased. On the other hand there is an increase in the demand of cotton yarn and textile products. The financial crunch is increasing in the markets due to the slow process of payments.

The market is stable after fluctuation in international market. After fluctuation in New York Cotton market the news of cotton import quota by China the prices of Rate of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) increased from 1.50 American cents to 78.50 American Cent. According to National Development and Reform Commission China has announced import quota of 800,000 ton of cotton which is equal to 47 lac bales of 170 kg. The spinning mills having the capacity of 50,000 or more spindles can apply till March 29, 2019. It is obvious that this news will be helpful in increasing the prices of cotton.

The prices of cotton remained stable in China. The prices of cotton in India after increasing in the starting of the week but witnessed some down ward trend at the end of the week. According to experts the prices of cotton will increase in India because Cotton Association of India has estimated the cut of 700,000 bales in production estimate. According to the association 3 crore 21 lac bales will be produced.

The sowing of cotton in Lower Sindh and in Multan started partially for the next season. The agriculture department is actively working for increasing the production of cotton; especially in Punjab the government has given incentives to the farmers of cotton which shows that government is taking interest in increasing the production of cotton.

Few days back a three day meeting was held in Central Cotton Research Institute in Multan. While addressing the meeting Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said that government is committed for adopting scientific methods in agriculture including biotechnology as well as in the up gradation of cotton seeds for progress in industrialization.

Director Research Pakistan Central Cotton Committee Dr Tasawar Hussain told that 93 new varieties of cotton including BTO 85 and Non BTO 8 were included by National Coordinated variety trial (NCVT) for testing.

Mean while addressing the meeting held for increasing the production of cotton in Multan on April 12 organised by departments related with cotton agriculture minister Punjab Malik Noman Ahmed Langrial said that ginners had promised to pay premium price ie Rs 200 extra per maund for contamination-free or clean cotton.

The Minister, while addressing the meeting of Cotton Crop Management Group (CCMG) at Central Cotton Research Institute (CCRI) Multan further said that government will give incentives for increase in the production of Cotton Crop.

Senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Jahangir Khan Tareen spoke on the occasion and stated that the federal government would play its role in achieving the cotton production target of 15 million bales set by Prime Minister Imran Khan. On the other hand the commerce ministry and textile ministry has announced to give more incentives to the exporters of cotton yarn according to which yarn exporters don't need certification from All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) for the export of cotton yarn.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190415464719/

FERTILIZER PRICE MECHANISM TO BE REVIEWED

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | APR 15TH, 2019 | ISAMABAD

The federal government has decided to review fertilizer price mechanism after witnessing current "unjustified" increase in urea prices by the local fertilizer industry which is already making huge profits, sources close to Secretary Industries and Production told Business Recorder. The decision was taken by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of Cabinet on April 3, 2018 under the chairmanship of Finance Minister, Asad Umar. However, the local industry is unhappy with the decision and using its influence to get it scrapped.

The sources said ECC on February 19, 2019 had directed the Ministry of Industries and Production to ensure continuous operation of two fertilizer plants up to the end October 2019 and submit a formal plan along with cost comparison of subsidy required to run the plants compared to the financial impact in case the urea requirement is met through imports.

According to sources, in pursuance of the directions of the ECC, Petroleum Division and SNGPL were advised to restore gas supply to two plants (Fatimafert and Agritech) which remained non-operational from February 14 to 25, 2019 and both plants are now operational. Closing inventory for urea at the end of October 2019 has been projected at 627,000 MT. The cost of imported urea vis-à-vis local urea was analysed in a meeting of Fertilizer Review Committee (FRC) and the following observations were made: (i) the agreed feasible price of gas is Rs 782/MMBTU so that the cost may be capped at that level by subsidizing it and total subsidy for it is estimated at Rs 11.191 billion; (ii) it is calculated that GoP at current market prices shall have to provide subsidy of Rs 846/ per bag if urea is imported from Middle East. It would be Rs 1061/ bag in case of import from China. This is besides the foreign exchange expenditure. Quantum of subsidy per bag in case of local production is calculated at Rs 871/ bag which implies that in case of urea import from Middle East, it is more than the subsidy for gas price differential, however, it is offset by tax/revenue; and (iii) besides, GST on RLNG which is being charged by FBR at OGRA notified tariff, should be charged at the subsidized price of Rs 782/ MMBTU.

The sources said, Ministry of Industries and Production proposed that two SNGPL-based urea plants may be kept running on RLNG or system gas / RLNG(if available) till end of October 31,2019 and cap the price of gas being supplied to SNGPL based plants at 782/ MMBTU. The ECC may also direct FBR to levy GST at Rs 782/ MMBTU.

The sources said, during discussion on this issue, the ECC observed that the market price of fertilizers have been raised unjustifiably by the manufacturers, which hit farmers badly due to higher cost of the production which in turn would ultimately entail a price hike of crops in the country. Another argument was that fertilizer is a deregulated commodity under fertilizer policy therefore, market forces of fertilizer industry take advantage of this policy.

The ECC observed that the government is providing subsidy on urea manufacturing to fertilizer plants in the form of subsidized RLNG. Therefore, urea should have been available in the market at reasonable rate.

The ECC directed the Ministry of Industries and Production to review price mechanism of fertilizer industry and hold meeting with fertilizer manufacturers to ascertain the reason/ justification for price escalation of urea fertilizer and submit a report thereof along with recommendations to the ECC. The ECC also decided to allow import of 100,000 tons of urea to cater for Kharif crop.

The meeting was also informed that 70 MMCFD LNG is being supplied to two fertilizer plants for urea production. It was stated that power sector requirement for LNG is about 850 MMCFD which can be increased during peak summer season, therefore, this factor should be taken into account while considering the proposal supply of LNG to two fertilizer plants for urea production.

The ECC directed to run two fertilizer plants on RLNG/ system gas upto August, 2019 subject to the condition that provision of LNG/ gas to fertilizer plants should not effect the supply to power plants during peak summer seasons.

Meanwhile, urea manufacturers making huge profit have written a letter to the Secretary Industries and Production, opposing import of 100,000 tons of urea.

“The fertilizer industry is of the view that there is no possibility of shortage of urea during the year. Moreover, LNG price has also declined considerably, thus local industry can be run to the fully capacity without foreign exchange on import and paying heavy subsidy by the government to sell imported stocks,” said, Sher Shah Malik (retired) Executive Director Fertilizer Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council, in his letter.

The government has also been informed that Pak Arab fertilizer is also likely to come into operation in May, which implies that urea production will enhance.

“Your intervention is solicited to suspend the execution of ECC decision, thus saving foreign exchange and subsidy, besides helping domestic industry to keep running and contributing to the national exchequer,” Shah said in his letter.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190415464699/

WHEAT TO BE BOUGHT DIRECTLY FROM GROWERS: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT| APR 15TH, 2019 | SIALKOT

Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial has said that necessary arrangements had been finalized for purchasing wheat direct from the growers in Punjab. Addressing a meeting of Agriculture Department the other day, he said that wheat procurement centres had been set up across the Punjab to facilitate the growers, adding that the government will purchase wheat direct from growers at the rate of Rs 1300 per mound.

The minister directed the agriculture staff that they should ensure hustle free arrangements at every wheat purchase centre to facilitate the growers. The minister further stated that overall condition of wheat crop is satisfactory in Punjab and hopefully the fixed target would be achieved easily.

On this occasion, Deputy Commissioner Syed Bilal Haider informed the minister that necessary arrangements had been finalized for the purchase of over 93000 metric ton wheat in Sialkot district. He said that in order to facilitate the farmer community as many as 10 wheat purchase centres were being established across the district.

The Deputy Commissioner further said that two wheat purchase centres would be set up in tehsil Sialkot while 5 in tehsil Pasrur, two in Daska and one in tehsil Sambrial had been established for convenience of the farmers. The basic facilities like drinking water, sitting arrangement etc would be ensured at each wheat purchase centre, Bilal said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190415464726/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 8th TO APRIL 14th 2019

GOVT FOR ENHANCING KHARIF CROP PRODUCTION

Amin Ahmed Updated April 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government will promote indigenous production of agricultural crops that would substitute the import of edible oil as well as enhance production of kharif crops in the upcoming meeting of Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA).

The FCA meeting, which would be held on April 17 to set the target for sowing of kharif, is organised by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR). The biannual meeting will take stock of the previous production patterns and fix targets of all major and minor crops in consultation with provincial agriculture departments and other stakeholders.

Despite the fact that the MNFSR hosts the FCA meeting in order to enhance domestic agricultural production through increasing per yield acre, provincial representation is seen at the level of officials only. No provincial agriculture ministers attend the meeting, according to the ministry.

Sowing season for kharif crops including sugarcane, rice, cotton and pulses (maize, mung and mash) begins in April and lasts until June, while harvesting is done in October.

During the last kharif season, there was a decrease in the production of sugarcane, cotton and maize, while some improvements were made in pulses.

Sugarcane, a high-value cash crop, saw its output decreasing by 16.89 per cent to 68.25m tonnes in 2018-19, from 82.12m tonnes over the previous year. There is still a huge yield gap between average and potential yields despite continuous increase in area, yield and production over the last few years.

In 2018, rice was cultivated on an area of 2,83m acres while production decline 4.43pc year-on-year to 7.12m tonnes. The crop’s area under cultivation contracted due to lower economic returns to farmers on account of decrease in prices both domestically and globally last year.

According to estimates from provincial agricultural departments, maize production at country-level for 2018 was reported at 5.521m tonnes reflecting a decrease of 1.99pc.

For mung, the total estimated production in 2018 stood at 124,800 tonnes with average yield of 755kg per hectare while the area and production rose by 1.67pc and 2.25pc year-on-year.

Statistics from provincial bodies put cultivation area for mash at 13,400 hectares with a total output of 6,450 tonnes in 2018. The area under cultivation dipped by 12.44pc whereas production was down 10.42pc from the previous year.

Cotton crop area has also reduced due to preference for sugarcane and maize, and in Punjab alone, area under cultivation has declined by 19.7pc between 2006 and 2018. In CY18, the crop's area sown was 2.406m hectares, 81.4pc of the annual target which was set at 2.955m hectares. Against the production target of 14.04m bales in 2017, the country achieved the output of only 11.94m bales.

Published in Dawn, April 14th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1476008/govt-for-enhancing-kharif-crop-production

MERITS OF BIO-SALINE FARMING IN THAR DISCUSSED

Hanif Samoon April 14, 2019

MITHI: Stressing that bio-saline agriculture can bring about an economic revolution, elected representatives, irrigation and agriculture experts, civil society activists and coal mining firms' executives have urged the government of Sindh to introduce bio-saline agriculture scheme for farmers to eradicate poverty from the region and counter the chronic drought in Thar.

They were speaking at a two-day event titled 'Blooming Thar: transforming bio-saline agriculture in Tharparkar' jointly organised by Sindh government, Thar district administration and several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that started here on Saturday.

The event features an exhibition, seminar and a consultative session, the last one chaired by Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Mr Rahu said that the provincial government was ready to support the initiative which was aimed at combating drought in Thar by introducing bio-saline agriculture on large scale in the desert region. In order to bring about a paradigm shift in the cropping and watering pattern in Tharparkar, farmers should adopt modern irrigation and agriculture methods to produce round-the-year yields without fearing much about droughts, he added.

According to the minister, Sindh accounts for up to 24 per cent of saline land which is suitable for bio-saline agriculture.

He deplored that agriculture in Sindh was being badly affected due to the persisting "terrible water crisis", and held federal government bodies responsible for non-release of Sindh's due share of water in the Indus.

According to him, the provincial government is making all-out efforts to bring in latest machinery and introduce modern techniques to give a boost to the agriculture sector despite the fact that the Sindh government is facing a financial crunch due to "callousness" of the federal government.

Mr Rahu vowed to turn Tharparkar into a green land by adopting sustainable policies and plans.

He observed that women of this region could play very important role by laying kitchen gardens in or around their houses. He announced that the provincial government would provide 2,000 kits to Thari women by June this year for the purpose.

MNA Dr Mahesh Kumar Malani in his speech said that several leading NGOs in recent years executed their pilot projects in Thar to ascertain whether bio-saline farming here was possible and the results appeared positive.

“It’s time to act, not only for coal mining and power producing firms but for the Sindh government also; they should come forward and announce a bio-saline agriculture package for farmers of Thar which should include subsidised solar system-based tube wells,” he said.

MPA Faqeer Sher Mohammed Bilalani said that Sindh government should mobilise financial institutions for giving soft or interest-free loans to farmers on a long-term basis so that they could cultivate their lands and gain benefits of bio-saline farming. Dr Mohammad Ismail Kumbhar said it was the need of the hour that Tharis be trained and guided in utilising subsoil water for crop cultivation even in drought conditions.

He referred to a fact sheet to reveal that over the past 114 years, the Thar region had experienced 72 droughts and all of them wreaked havoc on lives and assets of Tharis, besides changing the region’s landscape.

Mohsin Babbar of the Thar Foundation said the experiments of bio-saline farming proved successful as cotton, sunflower, vegetables and different varieties of fodder grew in normal condition. He recalled that fish farming in Gorano dam’s bio-saline pond was another successful model which could be replicated in the region to avail a good source of livelihood.

Rano Mal Dodani, Dr Ghulam Rasool Mahar, Dr Imtiaz Kumbhar, Dr Attaullah, Bhawani Shan¬kar, Mustafa Ujjan and several other experts of their fields also spoke and endorsed the idea that cultivating cash crops and fodder using soil water in Thar’s climate was very much possible and useful.

During the proceedings of the event, Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu along with other lawmakers, PPP leaders and agriculture experts visited many of the 30 stalls set up at the exhibition.

Published in Dawn, April 14th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1475873/merits-of-bio-saline-farming-in-thar-discussed

GOVERNMENT TO BUY 149,000MT OF WHEAT FROM FAISALABAD

RECORDER REPORT | APR 14TH, 2019 | FAISALABAD

Punjab government has fixed the target to purchase 149,000 metric ton wheat from the district during the current wheat procurement campaign for which 11 procurement centers have been set up at different localities of the district.

Deputy Commissioner Sardar Saifullah Dogar visited the different wheat procurement centers and checked the necessary arrangements for the facilities of wheat growers. He reviewed the process of receiving the applications from the farmers regarding issuance of Bardana. He also inspected the performance of the revenue staff and directed for following the wheat procurement policy of the Punjab government in letter and spirit. He emphasized upon organized and transparent wheat procurement campaign and said that all out facilities should be provided to the wheat growers at the centers for their comfort. He interacted with the farmers and assured them that regular monitoring of the wheat procurement process would be carried out for maintaining transparency.

He also assured about the fair and transparent distribution of Bardana and said that the applications from the farmers were being received by using advanced method of information technology for maintaining good governance in this regard. Deputy Commissioner directed the centers staff for maintaining the arrangements of cold drinking water, comfortable waiting areas, availability of electric fans and other necessary facilities. He directed for transparent and speedily scrutiny of farmers' applications for seeking the Bardana. He directed the staff to perform their duty with passion and dedication and warned that any negligence and dishonesty would not be tolerated in this regard.

District Food Controller Zain Ul Abedin informed that all necessary arrangements had been at wheat procurement centers and farmers were being apprised about the policy of the government regarding wheat procurement.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190414464413/

FARMERS DIP TOES INTO GLOBAL CROP INSURANCE PLATFORM

RECORDER REPORT | APR 14TH, 2019 | LONDON

Farmers can now for the first time insure their produce against price volatility as easily as insuring their homes, with a global platform based on hundreds of niche commodity indexes, underwritten by a Lloyd's of London syndicate.

Crop insurance has existed since the 1930s in the United States but is heavily subsidised by the government to provide protection against damage to produce and price risks. There have also been government-backed schemes in Canada and India.

Supplying insurance without such state-backing has proved challenging, however, even as price risk continues to rise due to a variety of factors including commodity market liberalisation and climate change. "We talk about insurance as the oil of the wheels of the economy but there are lots of under-served areas and one of them is farming," said Parth Patel, Chief Risk Officer for Ascot

Group's Syndicate 1414 Lloyd's of London. The new products have been made possible by recent advances in data science and the reduced cost of running the trillions of computer simulations needed to calculate risks across the portfolio of commodity indexes used by the platform's developer Stable.

Stable is a British-based start-up whose investors include agrochemical company Syngenta, seed stage investor Anthemis Group and Swiss insurer Baloise Group, as well as Ascot. So far about 450 farmers have used the platform, which has been running for eight weeks, but it may take time to earn the trust of many in a sector known for its conservatism.

In Russia, the platform uses price indexes issued by SovEcon agriculture consultancy. "They (Stable) will have to prove and show the benefit from their instrument and gain the trust of farmers and processors who are used to common practice – being left unpaid or with undelivered crops in case of sharp price changes," SovEcon head Andrey Sizov said.

English farmer Jeremy Mason was among the first to use the platform, insuring his feed wheat and feed barley. “Farmers are facing enormous risks now, much more so than in years gone by,” he said, noting price volatility had increased significantly partly due to global climate change.

Mason, who farms in Norfolk in eastern England, paid about 4,000 pounds to insure 500 tonnes of feed grain which equates to 8 pounds a tonne for seven months of cover. Payments are made in a similar way to other forms of insurance. “It seems like a straightforward insurance policy. I’ve done mine on monthly direct debit,” he said.

He warned, however, that other farmers may be slower to embrace the new products. “Farmers are extremely cautious and a lot of them are not going to understand this. It is going to take a long while for this to properly take off,” he said.

The wide range of commodities which can be insured on the platform helps the manage risks from the insurer’s point of view along with geographical diversity. The platform will be available for farmers in Britain, France, Russia, South Africa, Poland, the Netherlands, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Brazil, Uruguay, Sweden, Croatia, Portugal and Spain.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190414464413/

PRICES OF ESSENTIAL KITCHEN ITEMS CONTINUE TO RISE

AMJAD ALI SHAH | APR 15TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

Prices of important kitchen items, including chicken meat, vegetable, pulses, sugar, flour and others have remained high-side in the previous week as compared to preceding week, according to survey carried out by Business Recorder here on Sunday.

The price of live chicken/meat has touched new peak in retail market as available at Rs 201 per kg, which was selling at Rs 171 per kg in the previous week, the survey notice, it added that a dozen of farm eggs are being sold at Rs 90 and Rs 100 in local market.

Due to lack of any mechanism and price fixing by local administration, it was observed that butchers have sharpened their knives to start squeezing inflation-hit masses with artificial rates of the cow meat as it had gone up at Rs 450 per kg, which was selling at Rs 300 and Rs 400 per kg in the previous week.

Similarly, the survey witnessed that price of sugar is also sky-high in retail market as available at Rs 70 per kg which was available at Rs 65 per kg. Gram flour (baisen) rate increased at Rs 130 per kg against the price of Rs 120 per kg. The upward trend in prices of almost all food grains/pulses have registered due to unchecked by the authorities concerned. Good quality rice (sela) is being sold at Rs 140 per kg against the price of Rs 130 per kg in the previous week. Toota rice is being available at Rs 70 and Rs 80 per kg in local market.

Likewise, the dal mash is being sold at Rs 140 per kg against the rate of Rs 130 per kg in the last week. Dal masoor is being sold at Rs 100 per kg against the price of Rs 90 per kg; dal channa priced at Rs 120 per kg, dhoti dal is being sold at Rs 130 and Rs 140 per kg.

Big-size white channa is being sold at Rs 140 per kg against the price of Rs 120 per kg in the previous week in retail market. Tajikistani red-bean is being sold at Rs 120 per kg while locally produced red-bean priced at Rs 180 per kg.

An increase of Rs 30 per kg was witnessed in price of moonge as it was available at Rs 150 per kg which was selling at Rs 120 per kg in the last week. Likewise, the white lobiya is being sold at Rs 120 per kg against the price of Rs 110 per kg.

Similarly, Dal chilka (green) is available at Rs 130 per kg, while dal chilka (black) priced at Rs 140 per kg. Prices of almost all brand/quality cooking oil and ghee have registered increase by Rs 5 to Rs 10 per kg/litre in retail market, as available within range of Rs 170 and Rs 180 per litre/kg and Rs 190 and Rs 200 per kg/litre.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190415464736/

'IMPROPER TAXATION HURTING THE DAIRY INDUSTRY'

Our Correspondent April 14, 2019

A dynamic individual, with a corporate experience nearing two decades, Aamir Khawas, chief operating officer, Fauji Foods Limited, and chairman, Pakistan Dairy Association, speaks about the contribution of the dairy sector in Pakistan's struggling economy. Khawas has been associated with the dairy industry for 13 years.

What are the key challenges that Pakistan's dairy industry is facing?

Milk production is the least commercialised enterprise in Pakistan's agricultural economy. One of the major challenges is the seasonality of milk production. The two seasons, namely flush season and lean season have a direct impact on milk supply. Managing too much and too little is a major challenge for the industry. Unregulated suppliers have no proper means to store the excess milk and hence a lot of it is either discarded or is sold to consumers in a substandard form (posing a cost to the system).

As the economy is going through recession, with inflation as high as nine percent and rupee depreciation by 30 percent, the price of energy is going up which impacts the input cost towards higher end, the business environment turns out to be challenging.

In addition, there is a fragile production base, financial insecurity, untrained manpower and lack of quality assurance faced by the industry. All these factors, collectively, result in an inefficient and unorganised market as 95 percent of milk industry in Pakistan is unregulated. From the government point of view, provision of quality and hygienic milk to the consumers is currently a big challenge.

What is the consumption ratio of packaged milk versus loose milk?

The milk industry in Pakistan is split. There are five percent packaged milk processors whose product prices are higher. The remaining 95 percent are loose milk sellers. There is a huge price differential between loose milk and packaged milk.

How will you explain the 'informal dairy industry' in Pakistan?

Being among top five milk producing countries in the world, Pakistan's gross production of milk was estimated to be 56,080,000 tons, according to figures published in Pakistan Economic Survey 2016-17. Out of this number, 95 percent is supplied as 'loose' and is therefore cheaper.

Pakistani consumers spend 26 percent of their food budget on milk. About 80 percent total milk production comes from rural areas, 15 percent from semi-urban and five percent from urban areas. Nearly 40 percent of the total production is marketed through informal channels.

The entire value chain, from production to consumption, suffers from poor sanitation of livestock sheds, unclean animals, milking by hand, collection in small quantities from milk producers and use of non-recommended additives and preservatives such as formalin, cane sugar, glucose, benzoic acid, and alkaline products.

Quality assurance is the most neglected aspect of the informal dairy system which creates health hazards for consumers and raises indirect system cost in terms of poor health outcomes.

Why is there a need for a Minimum Pasteurisation Law?

All around the world, milk is recognised as key source of nutrition and governments are increasing regulation to safeguard consumers' interest by introducing Minimum Pasteurisation Law to ensure baseline milk quality.

It means minimum standard of quality which all sellers have to adhere to in order for milk to be fit for human consumption. A Minimum Pasteurisation Law ensures the quality of milk.

If a Minimum Pasteurisation Law is enforced, it will help the dairy industry to produce nutritious milk products, also increasing the exports.

How important is the packaged milk industry for maximising Pakistan's dairy potential?

Packaged milk, with its five percent contribution to the overall industry, is important for the dairy sector. The country is already moving towards modernisation and even though the consumption ratio is low, processed milk industry has huge potential to grow. This chunk also ensures employment generation and poverty alleviation through training and empowerment of dairy farmers and gawalas, as well as safety of the livestock animals.

In your opinion, how can a better tax regime facilitate the formal dairy industry?

Taxation on dairy items is divided in two fronts, first is the imposition of regulatory duty on skimmed milk powder and the second is the discontinuity of sales tax zero-rated regime on dairy products. The processed industry accounts for about 33 percent of powder imports, primarily for managing the milk supply during the lean season.

Secondly high imports of skimmed milk powder are due to low quality of local milk powder required for specialised categories like infant milk etc. Presently regulatory duty is 25 percent and in addition to this customs duty is 20 percent, and additional customs duty is two percent.

Secondly, abolition of zero-rate tax policy has drastically increased the cost of the milk processing industry, which is eventually resulting in increasing trend of prices of packaged/hygienic milk and milk-based products. Both of these factors are severely affecting the packaged dairy Industry.

After the zero-rating regime, the gap between the prices of processed and loose milk is even greater, which has not only resulted in sharp decline of the packaged dairy industry, but is also making it difficult for the loose milk market to come under the formal dairy sector.

Lower profitability and decline in volumes have severely impacted the investments in the packaged dairy industry and has negatively affected the initiatives aimed to promote milk farming communities and cool chain infrastructure.

The improper taxation is hurting the dairy industry with a price hike leading to a decline in the demand of the dairy products and shifting the burden towards the consumers. In order to address this issue and provide some relief to the sector, the government should review its fiscal policy towards dairy industry; no duty or sales tax on animal feed, zero-rating on local semen production, no sales tax on local and imported semen, and zero rated tax policy on dairy products.

How is the dairy sector contributing to the country's economy?

The dairy sector comprises an important component of Pakistan's economy, which is primarily agri-based. It represents 97 percent of the informal sector (loose milk) and three percent organised sector (packaged milk).

The contribution of agriculture sector to Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP), with its declining trend, still stands at 23 percent. The livestock sector contributes 49 percent of value-addition in the agriculture sector and about 11.6 percent to Pakistan's GDP. Some 30–35 million rural population is engaged in raising livestock and it derives 30–40 percent of its income from this sector.

Dairy sector has also contributed thoroughly in terms of generating employment, as 11 percent of the total employment is coming from livestock and dairy producers. Moreover, the sector has also created opportunities for women workers. Around 34 percent of total women employment is in various livestock sectors, as against nearly five percent in the case of total employment of men.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/457464-improper-taxation-hurting-the-dairy-industry

'GROWERS FROM 15 DISTRICTS WILL HOLD PROTEST IF WHEAT PROCUREMENT NOT STARTED'

THE NEWSPAPER'S CORRESPONDENT Published Apr 13, 2019 06:24am

LARKANA: Grand Democratic Alliance MPA Moazzam Abbasi and Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) president Irfan Jatoi on Friday expressed their serious concern over the delay on the part of the Sindh government in opening wheat procurement centres and fixing the official rate of the commodity for the current year.

Speaking at a press conference at the local press club, they termed the delay being caused by the government "intentional" and apprehended that any further delay would result in colossal financial losses to wheat growers and abadgars (small landowners).

They said it looked strange that except for Sindh, all the provinces had not only announced their wheat procurement policy but also started procuring the crop at officially fixed rates. "Sindh has not even fixed the wheat procurement price for the season," they said, adding that it was no less a trauma for growers, who had injected all resources available to them in cultivating the crop.

GDA lawmaker, SAB leader slam govt for 'intentional' delay

MPA Abbasi said the joint opposition in the Sindh Assembly would move a resolution in this regard during its session starting later this month. He also hinted that a big demonstration would be organised in which growers from 15 districts of Larkana and Sukkur division would take part and press the government to take urgent and appropriate measures to address their genuine issues.

He noted that it was owing to the absence of a wheat procurement policy that the market rates had nosedived. He recalled that the Sindh government had been procuring wheat in the past for Rs1,300 per 40 kg which had stabilised prices in the market and the growers had been getting a reasonable rate for their produce.

He warned that the deliberate delay being made in fixing this season's rate and opening procurement centres would give birth to a host of problems for abadgars and also encourage corruption. He also cited the element of corruption that had already surfaced in the process.

Irfan Jatoi said Punjab government had not only announced its wheat procurement policy but also set the procurement target at four million tonnes out of the expected yield of 6.5 million tonnes. This was aimed at facilitating next crop's cultivation and providing financial relief to agriculturists and small growers, he added.

In Sindh, out of the around 4.2m tonnes of wheat produced previously in the province, the government had been setting the procurement target of 1.4m tonnes only, he pointed out, and apprehended a reduction in the procurement price in open market if delays on the part of government prolonged. "The rate may come down to Rs1,050-900 per 40kg," he warned. For 10 years we [growers' organisations] had been crying over the injustice but the government's attitude remained apathetic, he said.

Mr Jatoi noted that under the lame excuse of a financial crunch, the Sindh government appeared reluctant to procure even 800,000 tonnes of wheat this season. "And if this happens, the issue of food security in the province will crop up," he feared.

He wondered why the Sindh government had not worked out an agriculture policy. "That's why it's avoiding to face growers," he said, adding that if the situation persisted, abadgars would hold protests at all forums.

Growers' representatives from Khairpur, Shikarpur, Qambar-Shahdadkot including Arsalan Selro, Mohammed Ali Hakro, Sher Ali Jatoi and Jamal Mehmood Khuhro, as well as Jamiat Ulema-i- Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) Larkana general secretary Muhabbat Khuhro were also present at the press conference.

Published in Dawn, April 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1475695/growers-from-15-districts-will-hold-protest-if-wheat-procurement-not-started

GINNERS READY TO PAY RS 200 PER MAUND EXTRA FOR CLEAN COTTON: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT | APR 13TH, 2019 | MULTAN

Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial said Friday that ginners had promised to pay premium price i.e. Rs 200 extra per maund for contamination-free or clean cotton. He said this while presiding over a meeting of Cotton Crop Management Group (CCMG) at Central

Cotton Research Institute (CCRI) Multan. The Minister assured that all out efforts would be made for the provision of essential inputs for the cotton crop at affordable prices.

Moreover, the department would also remain vigilant for monitoring the quality and prices of inputs. Senior Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Jahangir Khan Tareen, progressive cotton growers, cotton researchers, agriculture research, extension and plant protection officials, academicians, representatives of private pesticide, seed and fertilizer associations, MEPCO, Irrigation, Pakistan Meteorological Department attended the meeting.

The meeting deliberated upon the cotton production targets for the Punjab province and measures to be adopted for achieving them. The departments presented data about the availability of essential inputs (fertilizer, pesticide) and canal water irrigation situation and electricity supply position in the coming season.

Jahangir Khan Tareen also spoke on the occasion and stated that the federal government would play its role in achieving the cotton production target of 15 million bales set by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190413464106/

FLOUR MILLERS CALL MEETING

RECORDER REPORT | APR 13TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA-Punjab) has convened an important meeting of the millers from South Punjab to discuss flour prices, Ramzaan package and wheat procurement. PFMA Punjab Chairman Habib ur Rehman Leghari, who will also chair the meeting, has asked the flour millers from Sahiwal, Bahawalpur, Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan areas to attend this meeting which will also take important decisions with regard to hardships being faced by the flour milling industry and coming wheat procurement.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190413464152/

UTILITY STORES RUNNING OUT OF FOOD ITEMS

By Haseeb Hanif Published: April 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Over 10 companies have stopped supplying their food products to the Utility Stores Corporation (USC) as it owes them over Rs8 billion.

The USC has asked the government to pay 10% to 15% of this amount to the companies and also sought a 75% advance from the Rs2 billion Ramazan package.

Sources said with the companies cutting off their supplies, there is a shortage of food items in Utility Stores across the country.

The USC is incurring losses worth Rs12 billion every year and because of the ongoing financial crisis, it is also finding it difficult to pay the salaries of its employees.

There are dues worth Rs25 billion that the government has to pay to the USC under its subsidy.

The USC wants the government to make partial payments of 10% to 15% to the companies to ensure the supply of food items to its stores during Ramazan.

The Economic Coordination Committee had approved a Rs2 billion relief package for the upcoming holy month of Ramazan.

According to a USC spokesperson, the corporation has finalised its arrangements for the Ramazan relief package.

He said deals had been finalised with companies including oil and ghee suppliers and they had agreed to provide the required stock at subsidised rates.

“The USC is committed to ensuring smooth supply of all commodities at every nook and corner of the country during Ramazan,” he added.

The USC also intends to distribute five million free ration packs under the “Sahara Programme” to help the needy during Ramazan.

The countrywide Sahara campaign is a social initiative to ensure food safety and formulate a unified platform to help people who cannot even afford subsidised food. For this purpose, the USC has asked overseas Pakistanis to donate $15 to provide ration to each needy family for a month.

To ensure transparency in the system, a web-based application will be used to distribute food coupons. Donors can nominate the beneficiary by providing the latter’s CNIC and cell phone numbers.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1949448/1-utility-stores-running-food-items/

ANSWER TO SAFE MILK LIES IN PASTEURISATION

By Shazia Asim Published: April 13, 2019

LAHORE: Milk is one of the basic commodities and important in one’s day-to-day life. Pakistan, with current estimates, is among five largest milk producing countries in the world and according to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2017-2018, the annual production of milk is 57,890 million tons.

Milk is considered nature’s single most complete food and is definitely one of the most valuable and regularly consumed foods. It plays a key role in health and development of human beings throughout their life, especially in childhood. Hence, ensuring the safety of milk is important in order to preserve and maintain its nutritional values.

Milk, being very rich in nutrients, is not only a source of nutrition for human beings, but provides an ideal growth environment for many microorganisms as well. Yeasts, moulds and a broad spectrum of bacteria can grow in milk, particularly at temperatures above 16°C.

In addition, milk can be a potentially significant source of food-borne pathogens, the presence of which is determined by the health of the dairy herd, quality of the raw milk, milking and pre-storage conditions, available storage facilities and technologies, and hygiene of the animals, environment and workers.

It is a well-known fact that milk is a basic building block of a balanced diet and an important component for normal growth of children, hence it is important that the consumers should be able to utilise it without any apprehensions in their minds, but still the most important question on every consumer's mind, rightly so, remains, "how can I be sure that the milk I am buying is wholesome in every sense of the word".

The answer to consumers' questions, relating to the purity, therein lies only in pasteurised milk. Loose milk can transmit biological and chemical hazards; but there are effective control measures that can minimise the risk to human health, key among which is pasteurisation.

Pasteurisation is a process, which is undertaken by dairy companies that sell milk in packets or tetra packs. The process involves heating milk at a particular high temperature for a required time to ensure killing of harmful bacteria that can cause severe damage to human health.

Originally designed to ensure adequate destruction of common pathogenic microorganisms (including mycobacterium bovis, commonly responsible for tuberculosis at the time), pasteurisation can extend the shelf-life of milk by destroying almost all yeasts, moulds and common spoilage bacteria.

Routine pasteurisation of milk began in the United States in the 1920s and became widespread by 1950 as a means to reduce contamination and human illnesses. According to US Centers for Disease Control, improperly handled raw milk is responsible for nearly three times more hospitalisations than any other food-borne disease source, making it one of the world's most dangerous food products.

Introduction of pasteurisation led to dramatic reductions in the number of people getting sick. Most public health professionals and healthcare providers consider pasteurisation as one of public health's most effective food safety interventions ever.

The common misconception among consumer is that pasteurisation at high temperature denatures important nutrients of milk. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), US, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "pasteurisation does not reduce milk's nutritional value".

When it comes to safe milk, promoting and adopting pasteurisation is an indispensable step for the protection of the public health. One of the measures taken in this regard is introduction of Minimum Pasteurisation Law, which was proposed by the Punjab government in May 2017, and it states that it will be employed over the course of five year.

According to the approved regulations, PFA intends to ban loose milk supply in five years across Punjab. If implemented and executed properly, this will help the country improve the safety and health of its citizens. However, steps need to be taken at quicker and faster pace, since most of the milk in the country is marketed in raw form. Governments, all over the world, are increasing regulations to safeguard consumers' interest by introducing Minimum Pasteurisation Law to ensure base-line milk quality.

Good quality milk is the milk of normal chemical composition, completely free from harmful bacteria and toxic substances, of good flavour and adequate in maintaining quality. In our part of the world, milk is produced in a non-standardised way and is usually supplied to the consumers from the urban and rural areas by milkmen. The challenge to all food-safety policymakers is to balance necessary modifications and control measures with desired human health outcomes.

The writer is an associate professor of Pharmacology at a private medical college in Lahore

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1949458/2-answer-safe-milk-lies-pasteurisation/

WORKSHOPS TO CONTROL FMD LAUNCHED IN PUNJAB

RECORDER REPORT | APR 12TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Livestock & Dairy Development Department (L&DDD) Punjab has launched workshops to train the livestock farmers on how to control and eradicate Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Pakistan. First programme of this kind was conducted by the department at Village Wandala Dayal Shah (Ferozewala-Sheikhupura) the other day. The programme was arranged in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) especially for female livestock farmers.

Farmers were imparted training on Foot and Mouth Disease Control in Pakistan, precautionary measures so as how to control & eradicate FMD from the country. Dr Aisha Anjum was the expert who while addressing farmers taught them how to adopt precautionary measures and focus on FMD vaccination. She said that ultimate objective of such trainings is to boost economic growth through export market. She said that this disease not only cause mortality among animals but also cause production loss among milk giving animals.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190412463608/

PROTESTERS DEMAND RELEASE OF FISHERMEN IN INDIAN JAILS

By Our Correspondent Published: April 12, 2019

KARACHI: A large number of fishermen belonging to Karachi, Badin and Thatta protested in front of the Karachi Press Club (KPC) on Thursday for the release of Pakistani fishermen languishing in India's jails. The protest which, was organised by Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), was held three days after Pakistani authorities released around 100 Indian fishermen.

Women, children, family members of detained fishermen and civil society members were among those who were shouting the slogans. "We have been facing enormous financial difficulties since my son, who was the sole breadwinner, was taken into custody by Indian authorities 18 years ago," said an elderly woman, who was holding a placard. The burqa-clad woman added, "Please don't forget to write about my son. His name is Usman. We belong to Rehri, Ibrahim Hyderi".Indian govt's action is pushing families of Pakistani fishermen towards starvation, says activist

According to the protesters, around 98 Pakistan fishermen are in Indian jails. A few of them have been languishing there since 2001. "There were around 360 Indian fishermen in Pakistan jails of which 100 have recently been released. It is high time for India to show some good gesture," said PFF Chairperson Mohammad Ali Shah. Referring to the death of Noorul Amin, he added, "Instead of releasing our fishermen, they are sending bodies here".

Amin was a Pakistani fisherman who was reportedly tortured to death in an Indian jail. "We demand to initiate a proper investigation about his death by forming a joint judicial commission," added Shah.

The protesters arrived in a rally at the KPC. Expressing grave concern over the frequent arrest of fishermen, they said, "India's maritime security forces detain Pakistani fishermen by violating our territorial waters and then imprison them for years".

Zulekha, a civil society activist lamenting the aggression of Indian forces said, “Such inhumane acts of the Indian government have pushed the families of the imprisoned Pakistani fishermen towards starvation”.

Pakistan and India started apprehending each other’s fishermen along with their boats in the Arabian Sea in 1987 and have continued since then. Poor fishermen of both the countries have suffered immensely due to this cruel practice.

While addressing the rally, Shah said that tensions between the two countries have always resulted in more problems for the fishermen and quite frequently increasing the period of their detention and leading to a situation where even highlighting their suffering becomes an issue. He said that the fear of getting arrested has led to increased reluctance among fishermen to go fishing in the deep sea which has an adverse impact on the life and livelihood of fishing communities. Confiscation of boats, which is the only source of livelihood for the fishermen, makes matters worse, he added.

PFF chairperson appreciated the decision of the Pakistani government to release Indian fishermen. “Both India and Pakistan must stop arresting fishermen and adopt ‘No Arrest Policy’”, he said.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 12th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1948638/1-protesters-demand-release-fishermen-indian-jails/

UNBEARABLE RISE IN MILK PRICE

By Editorial Published: April 12, 2019

Milk sellers have turned into milk snatchers. The Karachi milk sellers’ association has increased the retail price of milk to Rs121 from Rs94 a litre from April 10.

This sharp increase of Rs23 will further burden the ordinary consumers who are already groaning under the weight of ever-increasing prices of all essential commodities and basic services like electricity and gas. Never before was milk price increased by such a big margin at one go. What’s worse is that the milk sellers have announced the steep increase unilaterally.

They claimed that they had been urging the government to allow an increase in the commodity’s price in view of the increase in the prices of fodder, other inputs and transport cost. As usual, the provincial government has belatedly moved into action. It is like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. We do not know whether the government’s action has had any salutary effect on profiteers.

The increase in milk price has come at a time when Ramazan is around the corner. Considering the fact that the consumption of the commodity goes up during the fasting month, one cannot help describing the unilateral increase as an act of cruelty. Since milk will be available at an inflated price in the holy month, it will go beyond the reach of the common people.

Milk is the most balanced food. For children, it is an essential part of their diet. They need it for proper physical and mental growth. Pakistan is said to be one of the top milk-producing countries, so there should not be a shortage of the commodity. Here once again one comes to the tragedy of Third World countries.

Food is available in plenty in these countries but people do not get a sufficient quantity of food for want of money to buy food. European countries destroy their mountains of food to maintain price stability. The US stocks its surplus food.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 12th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1948522/6-unbearable-rise-milk-price/

ENVOY ASKS PAKISTANI TRADERS TO ADDRESS GRIEVANCES OF US SEED FIRMS

By Imran Rana Published: April 12, 2019

FAISALABAD: Pakistan and the US are enjoying sustained and mutually beneficial relations despite a "temporary political recession" and a visible improvement in ties is expected in coming days, said Ann Mason, Chief of Political and Economic Section, US Consulate General, Lahore.

Speaking to business community at the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI), she said America was investing in many countries including Pakistan.

Terming agriculture an integral and major part of Pakistan's economy, she emphasised that the US would continue to assist Pakistan within the given circumstances. However, she said some US seed manufacturing companies had expressed reservations and the local business community must take measures to address their grievances in order to take benefit of the latest American technology that was bringing high-yielding seeds.

The envoy called the M3 Industrial Estate an opportunity for investors to play their role in the overall development of Faisalabad and gave assurances to businessmen that she would persuade the Americans to invest in the estate. She also agreed to cooperate in human resources development in Pakistan.

FCCI President Syed Zia Alumdar Hussain said textile was the real economic strength of Faisalabad, but the city witnessed phenomenal diversification with the addition of many new sectors.

Crescent and Nishat groups are leading yarn manufacturers in the city, which also has a state-of-the-art edible oil manufacturing unit named Rafhan Maize. Similarly, Iqbal Rice, which is a member of the FCCI, is consistently winning the best exporter award.

Hussain revealed that construction of a residential colony had been kicked off in the M3 Industrial Estate and an additional 3,300 acres of land were being acquired on the other side of the motorway for its expansion in future.

He pointed out that work on a car assembly plant of Hyundai was being completed while other industrial units were at different stages of completion.

"Pakistan is an agrarian economy and its 70% population is directly or indirectly linked with it. Hence, we need high-yielding American seeds to enhance our per-acre yield, which is necessary to eliminate rural poverty," he said.

The FCCI chief stressed that America should invest in Pakistan and particularly mentioned the setting up of an oil refinery in Gwadar or Karachi, which would not only trim the overall import bill of Pakistan, but would also encourage ancillary industries.

He highlighted the manufacturing of solar panels as another area where American investment was required.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 12th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1948652/2-envoy-asks-pakistani-traders-address-grievances-us-seed-firms/

POPPY CROP DESTROYED IN PARTS OF PUNJAB

A Correspondent April 11, 2019

BAHAWALPUR: A police party claimed to have destroyed poppy crop around the area of the government rest house of the National Park Lal Sohanra, about 35 kilometres from here, on Wednesday.

On information about opium cultivation in park's rest house at 60-RD of Desert Branch canal, Abbasnagar SHO Aslam Baloch led a police team to the field and destroyed the plants around the rest house.

The SHO told Dawn over mobile phone that he brought the information to the notice of DPO Amir Taimur Buzdar who ordered that the crop be damaged for being illegal. He said he had asked the forest department's gardener posted there about the cultivation of the opium plants and he (the gardener) claimed that these were self-grown plants. He said action would be taken against the opium flowers cultivators.

National Park administrator Javed Gill, who is also conservator of forests, Bahawalpur Division, and Lal Sohanra Park DFO Ijaz Ahmed Tabbasum could not be contacted.

Our Sheikhupura correspondent adds: Poppy was destroyed at Rashter Khara village in Nankana Sahib as well. A police team demolished the crop and arrested cultivator Sedi Muhammad.

The crop is usually cultivated in Afghanistan and some parts of KP.

Published in Dawn, April 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1475279/poppy-crop-destroyed-in-parts-of-punjab

DAIRY FARMERS INCREASE MILK PRICE BY RS23 A LITRE

Dawn Report Updated April 11, 2019

KARACHI: The Karachi Dairy Farmers Association on Wednesday unilaterally increased the milk price by Rs23 a litre; now the commodity would be available at Rs120 per litre at retail outlets, triggering a wave of anger among the consumers already burdened by growing inflation.

The association said that the government had refused to increase the price despite repeated requests, which “forced” the farmers to take the decision on their own.

“We met government officials and put our case before them, but they did not pay any heed to it,” said Shakir Gujjar of the association. “The prices of fodder have increased manifold coupled with higher fuel prices, which increase the transport cost.”

The government moved in to check the price, but only after the increase in the prices was announced by the farmers. The city administration claimed to have launched a crackdown on milk retailers selling the daily use commodity at an excessive rate.

Official sources said that the price of milk was notified at Rs94 per litre by the city administration, while a large number of milk sellers sold it at prices ranging from Rs100 to Rs180.

They said that most of the milk shops had unilaterally fixed the price at Rs100 per litre, which was illegal. The officials said that the city administration teams raided several milk shops and imposed fines on shop owners for selling milk at a price higher than the notified rate.

Officials said that the deputy commissioners had been told to take strict action against those selling milk at an excessive price. They said that the city administration officers raided several shops in district East and imposed a total fine of Rs103,000 on shopkeepers for selling milk at higher prices. The officials said that one of the shopkeepers was arrested for overcharging.

The provincial government also asked the city administration to take stern action against those who had arbitrarily increased prices of milk by around 30 per cent by violating the law.

Sindh Minister for Agriculture, Supply and Prices Ismail Rahu asked the city commissioner and deputy commissioners of the six districts of the provincial capital to launch a crackdown on dairy farmers and milk sellers who were involved in fleecing the people when the month of Ramazan was approaching.

Published in Dawn, April 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1475231/dairy-farmers-increase-milk-price-by-rs23-a-litre

AGRI-NOMICS NEEDS STAKEHOLDERS NOT CONSUMERS

BR Research April 11, 2019

Official estimates put the contribution of agriculture sector at no more than one-fifth of Pakistan’s GDP. Yet, commentators have often noted that the sector’s primacy to Pakistan’s economy is grossly understated, attributed to a lack of appreciation for its strong backward linkages with industrial and services sector.

Take for example Dr. Hafiz Pasha’s latest volume on Agenda for Reforms, which notes that 59 percent of the value-added in the manufacturing sector is by agro-based industries. Further illustrating the sectoral linkages with the tertiary sector, it puts share of agri-based in wholesale and retail trade segment at 53 percent; transport and communications at 48 percent; with lowest for banking and insurance, at 15 percent.

It is no wonder then that SBP's latest State of the Economy report notes on at least different occasions that a slowdown in the commodity producing sector in the ongoing fiscal year may strongly moderate the performance of wholesale segment, the largest sector of economy at 60 percent share in GDP.

While the still semi-fresh government in Islamabad has spoken of "Agricultural Emergency" – much like many such initiatives by other regimes in the past – its finance czar had precious little to share in terms of details in an interaction with journalists last week. It is unfortunate because much was made of the ruling parties' business acumen prior to election, yet its top farm-man seems to have been kept distracted by political bickering in Punjab.

Yet, at a time of macroeconomic stabilization when the folks at Q block are fixated on shrinking fiscal footprint, it will be foolish to expect the government to make farming sector a priority. For one, the ruling party's appeal and staunch support base is strongly concentrated in the urban demographic. Second and more importantly, the agricultural segment has for too long been (wrongly) vilified for its feudal dominance to qualify for public sympathy in times of austerity.

Therefore, if the agricultural segment, which at 2.3 percent is witnessing its slowest growth in decades since independence, is to show any signs of recovery, it must come on the back of support from manufacturing sector.

While it is true that the farming economy is more closely integrated with the service sector through wholesale markets, the latter have largely remained unorganized as faceless middlemen. After all, there are no 'arthi associations' to negotiate with on the price and terms of credit received by small farmers.

In contrast, from potato chips to beverages, Pakistan's manufacturing base is just as much, and if one goes by Dr. Pasha's estimates, the largest beneficiary of farming output. Yet, it remains removed and insulated from the agricultural value chain, the exception of dairy companies notwithstanding.

The sector faces long term challenges such as poor efficiencies, low water availability, restricted access to credit, small average land size and declining cultivable land availability among myriad of others, which the poorly educated rural demographic under funded in research, is weakly equipped to address on its own.

The segment requires large scale sustained interventions by the private sector along the lines of contract farming undertaken by Pepsico, which guarantees provisions of subsidized inputs and production services; access to credit; technology and skill transfer; and most of all, guaranteed purchase of final produce at predetermined prices.

If agriculture is to sustain as economic backbone, large scale private sector will have to step up. Pakistan's farming economy needs stakeholders not buyers.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/04/11/488095/agri-nomics-needs-stakeholders-not-consumers/

KPK GROWERS DEMAND WITHDRAWAL OF TAX ON TOBACCO

RECORDER REPORT | APR 11TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The tobacco growers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and their labour unions on Wednesday urged the federal government to withdraw the recently imposed levy of Rs 300 on per kilogram of un-manufactured tobacco products as this will harm the sector that is contributing over Rs 100 billion annually to the national exchequer.

Addressing a press conference here, the growers and their unions' representatives also accused multinational companies Philip Morris (Pakistan) and Pakistan Tobacco Company (PTC) of economic exploitation and called the government for action against them.

Chairman Ittehad Workers Union Ammadul Hassan of Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited and General Secretary Sarhad Agricultural Rural Development Organisation Hussain Ahmed demanded the government to hold all the leading international tobacco multinational companies accountable for making economic exploitation of workers in Pakistan.

Terming the imposition of Rs 300 per kg new tax on the tobacco as a conspiracy, they said the new taxation measures will crush the sector in the province, besides rending thousands of people jobless.

KPK Labour Federation President Ibrarullah said that 210 permanent employees suspended from Philip Morris Pakistan Limited should be restored.

Provincial President of Sarhad Agricultural Rural Development Organisation Haji Abdul Nabi said the employees are being deprived of health facilities. Similarly, benefits in connection of Workers Welfare Board have been seized by leaving 6,300 technical workers jobless.

He also termed Rs 300 per kg tax on tobacco as planned move of multinational companies in connivance with bureaucracy to put loss to national economy and leaving thousands of workers jobless.

The tobacco is major cash-crop for thousands of growers in KPK and the growers of the province contribute Rs 100 billion annually to national exchequer, but the government's policies are damaging the sector.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190411463050/

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT TO SET UP 309 FAIR PRICE SHOPS IN PUNJAB

RECORDER REPORT | APR 11TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab Agriculture Department is going to set up 309 fair price shops throughout the province during Ramadan to facilitate masses. The department will put 17 different daily use items on sale on these fair price shops on subsidized rates for which the cabinet committee has approved a sum of Rs320 million. These daily use items include potatoes; tomatoes, okra, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, apple, banana, lentils, daal mash, basin, white grams and rice will be available on whole sale and subsidized rates. Special Secretary Agriculture Ihsan Bhutta while chairing a meeting in this connection on Wednesday said it is estimated that 8.6 million people will get benefit of the subsidy during the sacred month.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190411463053/

NEED FOR INCREASING EXPORT OF AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS TO RUSSIA STRESSED

N H ZUBERI | APR 11TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Secretary General (Federal) of the Businessmen Panel (BMP) and former Chairman Standing Committee of the FPCCI, Ahmad Jawad has said that increasing exports of agriculture products to Russia is also imperative for us after they slapped ban on food imports from US and Europe. Russia extended ban on the import of agricultural products from the countries that applied economic sanctions against Russia, including the United States and Europe.

He said there is a vacuum that needs to be filled. “As Pakistani citrus fruits have already received good response in Russian market, efforts can be made to promote awareness about other food products,” he said. The exposure of the products can be maximised by taking part in Russian international trade shows, which can further build ways for business connectivity.

Russia experiences trade deficit with Pakistan. Trade deficit was at its maximum in 2015 when Pakistan imported commodities worth $96 million from Russia and exported goods of $298 million during the same year. After 2015, trade deficit considerably reduced and fell to $19 million in 2017, and according to the Federal Customs Service of Russia, the improvement was observed in 2017 and 2018.

A preferential trade agreement between Pakistan and Eurasian Economic Union is already in discussion, which could boost the trade relations between Pakistan and Russia and also pave way for Pakistan to enter other markets including Kazakhstan and Belarus. Similarly seafood, textile and surgical instruments are potential sectors in Russia where export considerably can be enhanced but the sectors need hierarchical changes and developments.

“Marketing strategies in the trade shows need to be re-drafted according to the tastes and trends of the target audience,” he said. Similarly the coal import from Russia has increased and Citrus fruits from Pakistan are finding their way in Russian market, the trade volume between the two countries is expected to increase further in the coming years.

Jawad said e-commerce and international advertising agencies can be used to enhance presence of Pakistani products in Russian market with 105 million users. “In order to increase the competitiveness of Pakistani products, efforts can be made to reduce the heavy freight charges,” he added. He said with Russia’s growing interests in different sectors of Pakistan’s economy and tapping into the potential areas where it can either invest or capture the market for Russian goods, it seems that after Chinese adventurism of CPEC, Russia Pakistan Economic Corridor (RPEC) is also in the making.

The thought of it may be ahead of time, but if Pakistan plays balanced chess moves on the board of international and regional politics in particular, it can become hotbed of intersecting world economies. He said Pakistan is at the crossroads of economic giants. With the increasingly improving security situation, the booming economies are looking up to Pakistan for their economic interests. Pakistan can cash in its geo-economic and geostrategic location, but by playing cautiously.

For Russia to expedite the RPEC, Jawad viewed they have to show their cards to Islamabad how much they invest here for further uplift our economic boom and mutually including some transfer of technology in certain defence equipments. Though Russian company Gazprom is set to lay down a

$10 billion undersea gas pipeline not specifically for Pakistan but for the region that initially will be laid down from the Persian Gulf up to India touching Pakistani waters and Bangladesh's coastal areas.

"So the impression that building a $10 billion undersea gas pipeline is investment for Pakistan is wrong, as it is for other regional countries as well," Pakistan and India have already signed MoUs and agreements with Russia separately for the project under which both countries would get gas from the undersea pipeline through the spur pipelines. However, the three countries, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, will benefit from the $10 billion Russian investment as buyer countries.

"Since the undersea pipeline will provide gas up to 1bcfd, so it is investment for Pakistan too to some extent." And Pakistan shall get transit fee in dollar terms for the undersea pipeline that is to pass through Pakistan's sea territory which is not a surprising thing.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190411463057/

'INCREASE OF RS 5 PER 20KG FLOUR BAG INEVITABLE'

RECORDER REPORT | APR 11TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Pakistan Flour Mills Association (Punjab) Chairman Habib-ur-Rehman Leghari has said that an increase of Rs5 per 20 kilograms flour bag is inevitable because of increase in petroleum products prices and other expenses of the flour-milling industry. He also urged the provincial government to immediately announce price on which wheat will be released to the flour mills so that the millers could calculate their expenses in line with the wheat prices.

Leghari was addressing the executive body meeting of the Association here on Wednesday. Group Leader Asim Raza Ahmad, Mian Riaz, Liaquat Ali Khan and Chaudhry Iftikhar Mattoo also spoke on this occasion and tried to justify the increase in flour bag price.

Leghari said the wheat procurement is about to begin in the province but the government has yet not announced issue price. He also called for announcing a policy for private persons who intend to buy wheat besides price to be paid to the growers and prices which flour millers have to pay to the government to buy grains from its godowns.

Group leader Asim Raza Ahmad on this occasion urged the executive body members to hold meetings with flour millers of their respective region and personally monitor wheat procurement process to ensure transparency. He urged them to discourage any corruption or injustice with the growers and update PFMA leadership on any such wrong-doing.

He said procurement this year will be done during Ramadan so if grinding charges are paid to millers, they can help the government to prepare flour bags for Ramadan bazaars. Others also urged the government to immediately ensure payment of refund claims of the growers stuck for the last many years so mills can also participate in procurement drive and help stabilize the rates in favour of growers.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190411463075/

OFFICIAL ARRESTED AFTER 13,000 WHEAT BAGS FOUND MISSING

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent April 10, 2019

QUETTA: The Anti-Corruption Establishment Balochistan (ACEB) on Tuesday arrested an official of the Food Department after thousands of wheat bags were found missing from the official stock in Khuzdar.

The investigation officer of the Kalat zone, Qazi Sufyan Sanijrani, on the directive of ACEB Director Muzaffar Zeeshan Lehri initiated investigation into the disappearance of thousands of wheat bags from the godowns of the Food Department.

The initial investigation revealed that around 13,000 bags of wheat procured in 2014 were found missing. No record of the missing wheat bags was available. Around 5,500 bags of wheat were found damaged allegedly due to negligence of officials, causing a loss of about Rs70 million to exchequer.

A ACEB team led by Deputy Director Investigation Atta Munim and comprising Qazi Sufyan Sanijrani and other officers raided the godowns and arrested Assistant Food Controller Khuzdar Nazeer Ahmed.

Published in Dawn, April 10th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1475081/official-arrested-after-13000-wheat-bags-found-missing

LESSONS FROM ECONOMIC HISTORY: POLICY DRIVERS OF FOOD INFLATION

DR SAJJAD AKHTAR | APR 10TH, 2019 | ARTICLE

Overall inflation, compared to similar previous months of FY18, has been inching up from 5.1 percent in September 2018 to 9.4% in March 2019. For the ninth month period of FY19, the average inflation stands at 6.8 percent, compared to 3.8 percent in FY18.A more dramatic increase was in year-to-year increase in Food CPI which increased from 0.1 percent in March 2018 during FY18 to 8.4 percent in March 2019 during FY19. Given that food (perishable and non-perishable) still occupies 40-50 weightage in the CPI basket for low income families, from a macro policy point of view it is imperative to identify its other remaining drivers in order to possibly dilute the 'devaluation' effect and weaken its transmission to the rest of the economy. A similar situation occurred twice during 1992-2006 in the country. During 92-94 it went up from10 to 16 percent and from 2 percent to 10 percent during 2003-2005.The second spike in food inflation was due to rise in international food and energy prices. Currently, it is the pass through effect of past eight months' of devaluation and pressure on energy prices. From a policy point of view the main question of interest for managing food inflation in the short-run (i.e., 1-2 years) is the identification of policy drivers and quantification of their impact on food inflation so that policy makers can tinker around to stabilise food prices. These drivers and their impact on food inflation during 1993-2006 are documented in evidence based study, "Macroeconomics of Food Inflation" Vol.1, No.1, June 2009, NUST Journal of Business and Economics, by the present writer. The findings of the study based on the period 1993-2006 and relevant for policy makers are as follows:-

a) A 10-percent increase in growth of real per capita income (PCY) pushed the food inflation by 0.3 percent. In lay man terms if growth in PCY jumps from 4 percent to 4.4 percent, the rate of food inflation will jump hypothetically from 5 percent to 5.15 percent. One can easily call it miniscule, benign and supportive to growth dynamics. Unfortunately, as per multilateral assessments this increase in growth of PCY is not expected in the next 1-2 years. However, if growth in informal economy (believed to be equal to formal economy) is many times higher, contribution to food inflation may be significant.

b) A 10-percent increase in the index of agriculture production lowered the food inflation rate by 5.3 percent. As it is a significant driver of food inflation, policymakers need to attend to drivers such as water availability and productivity of land and labour to reduce food inflation.

c) A 10-percent increase in the growth of agriculture support prices increased food inflation rate by 5.6 percent. It more than whipped out the dis-inflationary gains of increased agriculture production. With rise of agriculture input prices blamed on devaluation, the approaching budget is likely to witness activation of agriculture lobbies in the parliament to raise support prices for wheat, basmati rice, irri and sugarcane. Unfortunately, in order to maintain its popularity, it is far easier for the government to accede to this policy measure than to increase agriculture production through structural reforms. Strong and unambiguous evidence that increased support prices lead to ‘sustainable’ increase in agriculture productivity is missing. The method of determining yearly revision of support prices need to be more scientifically based and forward looking in a longer term perspective rather than knee-jerk reaction to political lobby pressures.

d) A 10 percent increase in the growth rate of one period lagged money supply M2 increased the food inflation rate by 14.8 percent during the period. Growth in M2 is the outcome of many inter-related monetary and fiscal variables, including monetary accommodation of fiscal expansion, private credit and its end use, net foreign assets and budgetary support for commodity operations. Thus one needs to identify and assess the specific instruments of expansionary monetary policy that have the greatest impact on controlling food inflation.

e) If food inflation is the result of shortages, policymakers resort to their liberal imports. Conversely, if there is exportable surplus of food items and adverse BOT, countries also encourage exports. This also impacts the food inflation in the short-run. The model included imports index (in quantity terms) composed of edible oil, milk, pulses, spices, sugar, tea and wheat. Export index (in quantity terms) consisted of rice, fish, fruits and vegetables. In the current scenario we have exportable surplus of sugar and wheat, while fruits follow a two-way trend. Consequently, the following impacts need to be judged carefully. In the original estimation, 10 percent increase in the growth of import quantity index lowers the food inflation by 0.7 percent, while a 10 percent increase in the growth of export quantity index leads to a 0.6 percent increase in food inflation. This offsetting impact points to the ‘soft’ intervention of liberal food trade policies in these items for influencing short-term food inflation.

f) As a major export item, rice follows the law of ‘one price’. The price of broken has risen by Rs 15-20 per kg since July 2018 an increase of 21 percent, accommodating the impact of devaluation. With China agreeing to buy US $ 1 billion of rice and sugar (both in surplus at the moment), a back of the envelope calculation based on model’s estimate was conducted assuming that a) the amount would be equally divided between rice and sugar exports; b) rice exports will be of non-basmati variety; and c) rice exports to China will be in addition to the baseline rice exports of FY19. The reduced form model suggests that increased rice exports (56 percent over FY19 quantities) will add 4.3 percent to food inflation rate in the next one or two years.

Lastly, the policymakers should be aware that short-run dynamics of food inflation are far more complex. The above impacts are attributed to popular monetary and fiscal policy interventions and do not include other observable and non-observable drivers such as erratic weather conditions, including pest attacks, inaccurate crop forecasting, leakages in cross-border trade, differentials in cross-border prices, lack of storage capacity and carry-over stocks that also play into short-run dynamics of food inflation.

(The writer is a former Acting Chief Statistician of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics)

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190410462773/

DEADLINE FOR LABELLING HALAL FOOD EXTENDED TILL JULY 1

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | APR 10TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The federal government has extended the deadline of Halal food labeling on edible products till July 1, 2019 with the approval of federal cabinet after importers made representation to the Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment.

In February 2019, the federal government made it mandatory to write 'Halal' on imported edible items with immediate effect. The ECC in its decision approved the addition of following conditions to the existing requirements in the Import Policy Order, for import of edible products: (i) products have at least (2/3rd of the remaining shelf life; (ii) the ingredients and details of the product (e.g. nutritional facts, usage instructions etc) of food products are required to be printed in Urdu and English language on the consumer packaging; (iii) the logo of the Halal certification body is printed on the consumer packaging; (iv) the labelling under conditions will not be in the form of sticker, overprinting, stamp or scratched labelling; (v) the shipment is accompanied by a "Halal certificate" issued by a Halal certification body, accredited with the Accrediting Body (AB), which is a member of International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF) Standard Methodology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC); and (vi) in order to comply with WTO negotiation, similar conditions shall apply to edible products manufactured locally from July 1, 2019 for necessary instructions to be issued to PSQCA and provincial food regulatory authorities.

The embassies of different countries and private sector have approached the government, raising concerns on the decision taken in haste by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet aimed at discouraging imports to contain or reduce import bill.

Pakistani importers also met with the Advisor to Prime Minister, Abdul Razak Dawood and raised concerns on the decision of the ECC which was ratified by the federal cabinet.

On March 9, 2019, Commerce Division, issued an new SRO 438(1)/2019- in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) section 3 of the imports and exports(control) Act, 1950 (XXXIX) of 1950, the federal government has directed that following amendments shall be made in the Import Policy Order, 2016 namely in the order, in appendix B, in table under part-1, in column (1) against serial No.13, in column(4),- (a) in clause (iii) for expression " 66%(2-3rd) of the shelf life remaining from the date of manufacturing," the expression "50% (fifty percent) of the shelf life, calculated from the date of filing of Import General Manifest (IGM)" shall be substituted and shall deemed to have always so substituted ; and (b) after the clauses (iii d) the following new clause shall be inserted and shall be deemed to have always inserted, namely :- (iii e) the provision of clauses (iii b), (iii c), and (iii d) shall take the effect from July 1, 2019.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190410462797/

'GOVERNMENT UNNECESSARILY DELAYING USE OF BIOTECH SEEDS'

RECORDER REPORT | APR 10TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The government, apparently due to the pressuring tactics from local seed manufacturers, is unnecessarily delaying the use of the biotech seeds in Pakistan which can increase the crop productivity. Experts told Business Recorder here on Tuesday that the sustainable food production had an immense potential to deliver inclusive economic growth and to fight the challenge of food insecurity in future.

According to scientists working on modern agricultural technologies, it is now time that Pakistan also adopts modern agricultural technologies to increase its production not only to meet food challenges of the future but also to increase the productivity of crops and make them competitive globally.

Currently, the government is again unnecessarily delaying its nod on biotech seeds due to pressure tactics from local seed manufacturers. Scientists are of the view that decision-makers should consider the opinion of scientists when it comes to technology rather than creating useless debate around an urgent issue.

"If we take example of biotech corn seed, the government is sceptical in making decision even though all regulatory requirements laid out in seed law and rules are comprehensively complied while they have given multiple approvals of cotton biotech seed. Local manufacturers are deliberately making it an issue because of their commercial interests," they said.

The experts believed that the technological advancement in the agriculture sector would help Pakistan grow its agro economy which would directly have a positive impact on masses and the country would be able to start exporting corn at a better level.

According to an international donor agency, the agriculture industry has been valued at an estimated US $3.2 trillion worldwide and accounts for a large share of the GDP and employment in developing and underdeveloped nation. Current agricultural practices alone cannot sustain the world population and eradicate malnutrition and hunger on a global scale in the future. Indeed, the FAO also estimates that despite a significant reduction in global hunger, 653 million people will still be undernourished in 2030.

Poultry industry has emerged as the largest consumer of grain, consuming 70 percent of the total production. Demand and supply gap is about to be further widened as poultry industry continues to record eight to 10 percent annual growth and only latest technologies in agriculture, especially in the corn cultivation, can help achieve required production.

According to scientists, biotech corn will have an insect-resistant feature along with herbicide tolerance, which will enable farmers to enhance productivity, reduce input and labour cost, and improve grain quality. The experts hope that GMO corn seed does not become another example like BT cotton wherein indecisiveness of the government has reduced the productivity of cotton in the country whereas all other countries who adopted the BT cotton technology have increased their cotton productions which is contributing to their economies.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190410462798/

PAK-CHINA FOA ON AGRICULTURE TO BE FINALISED DURING PM'S VISIT: ENVOY

KHALID ABBAS SAIF | APR 10TH, 2019 | FAISALABAD

Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Yao Jing has said that framework of agreement (FoA) on agriculture will be finalised during the coming visit of Prime Minister of Pakistan to China.

He said this during his visit to University of Agriculture where he performed groundbreaking ceremony of Modern Confucius Institute and spoke at ongoing Entomological congress.

Yao Jing said that working groups for framework of agreement had also been constituted. Still, we have a lot of space to expand our agricultural ties, he said.

"Pakistan-China academia- research cooperation especially in the field of agriculture will be further strengthened for development and prosperity," he said, adding that agriculture is foundation of the nation's economy. He noted that 40 years ago, when China began introducing reforms, they started with agriculture and now they are feeding the largest population of 1.4 billion people. He said Pakistan is also providing food to 200 million people due to agricultural intervention.

Chinese ambassador said Agriculture Display Centre may be set up at the University for technological transfer and welfare of rural population. He said they would increase scholarship cooperation and students exchange for the university. He lauded the measures being taken by university for the development and prosperity of the country.

On the occasion, Memorandum of Understandings of University of Agriculture, Faisalabad with Institute of Plant Protection And Soil Science, Hubei Academy of Agricultural Sciences, China and another MoU with Zhejiang University were signed to collaborate in the area of academia and research.

UAF vice chancellor Dr Zafar Iqbal Randhawa said the university had been enjoying excellent ties with China and had inked more than 30 MoUs with Chinese universities and agriculture institutes. He said that further strengthening in ties would help us to fight common challenges in the agriculture sector. He suggested that China could establish Vocational and Skill Development Institute at the UAF that would help get polished technicians and laboratory staff. He said China is Pakistan's all-weather friend and both countries people consider each other as their brothers.

On the occasion, MNA and Parliamentary Secretary for Railways Farrukh Habib said that Pakistan and China have been enjoying the relation deeper than occasion and sweeter than honey. He said that China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and One Belt One Road were hallmarks steps that would bring about revolution in the region. He said present government of Pakistan had been putting special attention on agriculture sector. He said strengthened agriculture ties between both countries would help out to increase the poverty and fight the challenges.

UAF Dean Faculty of Agriculture Dr Muhammad Aslam said that Pakistan was exporting agricultural produces worth billions of rupees. We have to work on techniques to increase productivity and pest management techniques.

Confucius Institute vice chairman Dr Ashfaq Chattha said that university had produced hundreds of students in Chinese language under CI. He also called for joint collaborated efforts to uplift agriculture sector.

Chinese Consul General (CCG) in Lahore Long Dingbin, chairman Entomology Dr Mansoor-ul-Hassan Sahi, Dr Waseem Akram, Dr Abid Ali, Dr Waqas Wakeel and other notables also spoke.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190410462827/

SINDH, PUNJAB YET TO SUBMIT WHEAT PROCUREMENT TARGETS

Amin Ahmed Updated April 09, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Monday directed the Ministry of National Food Security to take practical measures to arrest the current spike in food inflation.

With a view to fixing the wheat procurement targets and financial requirements to this effect, the food ministry had convened a meeting of the Wheat Review Committee in February, which was attended by officials from all provincial governments, and set a procurement target of 6.90 million tonnes.

The ECC, which met under the chairmanship of Finance Minister Asad Umar, decided that the provincial governments would get an endorsement of the agreed target of procurement of wheat. Sources said that the governments of Punjab and Sindh have so far not provided their endorsement.

Sindh and Punjab governments have failed to inform the federal government about their respective wheat procurement targets for 2018-19 crop season and the financial requirements for procurement, informed sources told Dawn on Monday.

The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government has informed the ministry that it will utilise its own resources to procure 0.3m metric tonnes of wheat this year.

On the other hand, the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) has requested for approval to procure 1.1m metric tonnes with the financial limit of Rs41.519 billion, while the actual cost of wheat to be procured by Passco will be Rs35.750bn.

For the past three years, the public sectors have procured wheat on an average of 6.104m tonnes against an assigned average target of 6.733m tonnes per annum. During the previous wheat season, 5.989m tonnes of wheat was procured by the public sector against the procurement target of 6.1m tonnes. Low wheat procurement was due to leftover stock from the previous year and slow pace of exports despite the provision of freight support.

According to details, the current public sector wheat stocks as of March were at the level of 4.4725m tonnes as compared to 7.287m tonnes of the corresponding period last year. Passco maintains strategic reserves of 1m tonnes.

With a view to maintain strategic reserves, ensure food security and a fair return to the farming community, the provincial food departments and the Passco procures wheat every year at a minimum guaranteed price from the farmers. The existing support price fixed during the previous governments is Rs1,300 per 40kg.

Public sector wheat stocks serve the purpose of maintaining steady reserves and price stability, during the periods of lean supplies as well as fulfilling the food requirements of deficient provinces.

ECC asked the Ministry of Industries and Production and the Privatisation Commission to submit recommendations of the revival committee on Pakistan Steel Mills in the form of a summary for the final decision on the fate of PSM. Instead of privatising the PSM, the government is now moving towards its restructuring and may look for strategic partners in the private sector, according to official sources.

The ECC approved the proposal of Communication Division to provide Technical Supplementary Grant amounting to Rs500m for the construction of additional carriageway on Torkham-Jalalabad Road under Prime Minister's Programme for Reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The ECC decision would benefit the people and business community of the two neighbouring countries and promote trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as the Central Asian States.

ECC expressed its deep concern over the increase in prices of medicines and directed the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination to take practical measures to arrest the current trend of rising prices.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1474857/sindh-punjab-yet-to-submit-wheat-procurement-targets

WHEAT PROCUREMENT DRIVE BEGINS IN LAHORE

RECORDER REPORT | APR 9TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The District Administration Lahore on Monday kicked off wheat procurement drive in the provincial capital by receiving applications from farmers for gunny bags.

To collection application and procurement of wheat from growers, the administration has set up four Wheat Procurement Centers at Barki, Rakh Chabeal, Raiwind and Khana Kacha Mandi. Deputy Commissioner Lahore Saleha Saeed inaugurated the Kacha Mandi Wheat Procurement Center. On the occasion, she inspected the facilities, including sitting arrangements, provision of clean drinking water and establishment of information deck. She also observed the application process. She said that the administration has made all possible arrangements in the centers in order to provide maximum relief to the farmers.

Meanwhile, the DC chaired a meeting to review preparations for Ramzan Bazaars, which will be set up during the holy month of Ramzan in the various parts of the city that will be announced soon. The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner General, Assistant Commissioners, and officers from LWMC, WASA, MCL, labor, livestock, agriculture, and market committees.

"LWMC is directed for cleanliness in bazaars while civil defense is directed for deputing at least 10 civil defense volunteers in each bazaar.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190409462530/

IMRAN'S GOVT CONCERNED OVER DELAY IN MAKING HALAL AUTHORITY FUNCTIONAL

By Zafar Bhutta Published: April 9, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government has expressed concern over an inordinate delay as the Pakistan Halal Authority (PHA) is not yet fully functional and has decided to frame a viable plan to expand the country's footprint in the $4-trillion international halal market.

As part of the plan, the government is considering placing the PHA under administrative control of the Commerce Division instead of the Ministry of Science and Technology.

The Economic Coordination Committee of the cabinet, in its meeting held on March 20, directed Adviser to Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Ishrat Husain to undertake a detailed review of the current role of PHA in relation to international halal organisations and come up with a viable plan to place the authority under administrative control of the Commerce Division.

During discussions in the meeting, the economic managers noted that the PHA was still not fully functional, which prevented Pakistan from capitalising on the huge potential of international halal market.

It was pointed out that at present, the size of international market was in the range of $3 to $4 trillion, but Pakistan's share in it was quite negligible.

The PHA was established through an act of parliament in an attempt to promote foreign and inter-provincial trade and commerce in halal goods and processes. The authority is currently working under the administrative control of the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Since its inception, the authority has carried out some functions. The prime minister has approved the composition of its board of governors. Its executive committee has been constituted to carry out day-to-day functions of the authority.

PHA's recruitment regulations have been approved by the Establishment Division. The prime minister has directed that the regulations may be sent to the cabinet committee for disposal of the legislative cases.

The Establishment Division has been requested to nominate a panel of three officers of BS grade-21 for posting as the PHA director general on deputation. The Finance Division has approved an annual budget of Rs35 million for the PHA for fiscal year 2018-19.

Permission for a new office building of the PHA has been obtained from the Ministry of Housing and Works. At present, the authority is housed at the Ministry of Science and Technology. Besides these moves, the organisations concerned of the Ministry of Science have undertaken some activities to strengthen the halal food system in the country.

The Pakistan National Accreditation Council has so far accredited five halal certification bodies. Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research has also established halal authentication laboratories in Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar for the testing of different products. These laboratories will also contribute to the export of quality halal goods.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 9th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1946296/2-imrans-govt-concerned-delay-making-halal-authority-functional/

WHEAT PROCUREMENT POLICY: MILLERS FOR ‘CLEAR ROLE’ OF PRIVATE SECTOR

The Newspaper’s Staff Reporter April 08, 2019

LAHORE: Flour millers complain that by not mentioning a “clear role” for private players in the wheat procurement policy for this season the government has created problems for them and fear that it may affect the procurement drive that will start in the last week of April.

They also object to the procurement plans of federally-administered the Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation Ltd (PASSCO) for the 2019 season.

The [Punjab] government has yet to announce a clear role for the private buyers, which may affect the wheat procurement campaign for the 2019 season, Punjab chapter of the Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) chairman Habibur Rehman Leghari, Asim Raza, Liaquat Ali Khan, Iftikhar Mattoo and others said in a statement here on Sunday.

They lamented that the government also failed to announce the wheat issue price, while private buyers would be facing problems because of higher bank loan mark-up.

They said the Punjab food department and PASSCO would purchase the grains at higher rates and then subsidise the sale of the commodity, but the private sector could not do so, urging the federal government to give a unified procurement policy for the whole country.

The millers said the food department was holding 1.7 million tonnes of wheat as carryover stock, while it would procure around 3.5m tonnes more of the commodity during the current season, whereas PASSCO had 1.3m tonnes as carryover stock and planned to purchase 1.2m tonnes more “without any logic”.

They also urged the government to release their refunds that had been overdue for years on account of wheat and flour export, so that the millers could join the wheat procurement drive and the local flour industry could flourish.

Meanwhile, the PFMA executive body will meet here on Monday (today) to discuss the wheat procurement issues.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1474706/wheat-procurement-policy-millers-for-clear-role-of-private-sector

GWADAR FISHERMEN

From the Newspaper April 08, 2019

GWADAR fishermen fear losing their livelihood because of the six-lane Bay Expressway about to be built. This expressway starts from Gwadar and goes all the way to the Makran coastal highway. This restrains fishermen's access to sea.

Secondly, the people of Gwadar lack clean drinking water, education, health and infrastructure.

The recent visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan brought some hope to the people. Mr Khan pledged to address the issues pertaining to fishermen by constructing some bridges which people have demanded previously.

I hope people's demands will be considered and their issues resolved.

Published in Dawn, April 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1474677/gwadar-fishermen

100 INDIAN FISHERMEN RELEASED, MORE TO FOLLOW

PPI Updated April 08, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan released the first batch of 100 Indian fishermen as part of a goodwill gesture on Sunday.

The fishermen were released from a Karachi prison and they left for their home by train.

The Edhi Foundation made arrangements for their travelling from Karachi Cantonment Station and onwards to Wagah border.

The fishermen were brought to the station in police buses and Edhi ambulances amid tight security.

The Edhi Foundation gave a gift and money to each Indian fisherman to help them meet their travelling expenses to reach their homes from Wagah border.

The fishermen smiled and waved to the people at the railway station as their train left the platform.

An official of the Sindh home department said that during this month, Pakistan would release 260 more Indian fishermen.

He said these fishermen had been released after completion of legal formalities in compliance with their repatriation order issued by the the interior ministry.

Earlier, Foreign Office spokesperson Dr Mohammad Faisal said at a weekly press briefing that Pakistan would release 360 Indian prisoners, 355 fishermen and five civilians, during the month of April.

The prisoners will be released in four batches, scheduled as 100 each on April 8, April 15 and April 29 while 60 prisoners, including five civilians, will be freed on April 29.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1474600/100-indian-fishermen-released-more-to-follow

WHEAT PURCHASE UNDER QUESTION WHILE SCAMS CONTINUE

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated April 08, 2019

THE procurement of wheat has always been a hassle for farmers in Sindh. Successive governments have been unable to establish a system where public money, in the shape of the support price, reaches small and medium farmers so that they are not exploited by market forces.

While the Kharif season began from April 1, the government remains indecisive about wheat procurement; largely due to huge carry-over stocks from last year’s crop.

As of March 26 such stocks, according to Sindh food department officials, stood at 870,000 tonnes. This year there seems to be another bumper crop owing to good weather conditions. The official wheat price remains unchanged at Rs1,300 per 40kg.

The Sindh government procures a specific quantum of the crop at the support price. Growers, by and large, sell their grain in the open market or to middlemen to save time and get cash payments that they then use for cultivation of Kharif crops.

Ground realities indicate that the support price doesn’t reach farmers. It is pocketed instead by middlemen in collusion with officials from the food department. In addition, parliamentarians, ministers, top government functionaries and representatives of influential growers’ bodies get gunny bags, free of cost, that are meant for poor farmers.

Ground realities indicate that the support price doesn’t reach farmers. In addition, vested interests get, free of cost, gunny bags that are meant for poor farmers

Gunny bags are of particular importance as it is only after farmers get them that they are able to take their crop to the food department for sale.

Many cabinet members believe that the crop should not be procured this season in view of the carry-over stocks.

A possible reason why the Sindh food department hasn’t floated tenders for this season’s gunny bag purchase may be because it is believed to have moved a summary to the chief minister. It has requested approval for the procurement of 500,000 tonnes of wheat which is to be discussed in the forthcoming cabinet meeting.

Currently, there is no ban on the inter-provincial movement of wheat whilst exports of wheat remain open. There are reports that the Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Supplies Corporation also intends to procure 1.1m tonnes of the current crop.

But amidst reports that the Punjab government will procure 4m tonnes of wheat, anxiety among farmers is growing as the wheat crop in Sindh has been harvested and has reached the market. To quote a grower leader, Mahmood Nawaz Shah, wheat prices have declined to Rs850-900 per 40kg in the open market due to the missing crop procurement target.

Former Sindh agriculture secretary Agha Jan Akhtar contended that wheat in Shikarpur is being sold at Rs1,240 per 40kg which is an unacceptable price for farmers. Given the current rupee devaluation farmers will be at the losing end when selling their crop in the open market.

He also opposed the procurement, even 500,000 tonnes, of wheat considering the availability of stocks. He argued that since the government has statistics it must ensure equity in next season's procurement — after linking it with area under cultivation and production in each district — coupled with civil administration's oversight, to ensure transparency.

In February the Hyderabad accountability court sentenced flour mill owners for colluding with food officials in Mirpurkhas, in a wheat procurement case that had been ongoing

since 2011. The case has raised questions about over the entire procurement exercise as inquiries into past procurement practices continue.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture Vice President Nabi Bux Sathio observed that hardly 5-10pc of farmers are actually able to get the benefit of the support price, otherwise it is mainly the traders who are provided gunny bags by those with vested interests.

"Food officials mint money by providing gunny bags to those who don't own farmland or grow wheat. In connivance with officials, these people manage the paperwork in such a way that they win the support price. Ultimately, the price is shared with and amongst food officials while the government looks the other way," alleged Mr Sathio.

He proposed the formation of committees led by deputy commissioners and having farmers as members to ensure transparency in the entire exercise.

Farmers with small landholdings usually borrow money from private lenders in the shape of farm inputs for cultivating crops. They settle their accounts by providing grain to the same lenders at a lower price.

So, growers are always hard-pressed to sell their crop at an inadequate price to settle accounts. The objective of the support price is to keep the price of wheat stable since the arrival of a new crop always suppresses price.

With the government's presence felt in the market through the announced support price, traders are pressurised to offer a reasonable, if not an ideal, rate to growers.

Growers would, however be at the mercy of market players if the support price mechanism is completely done away with. This, in turn, may enable hoarders to store crops bought at low rates to be resold at higher prices in case of a shortage in the market.

Estimates from the Sindh agriculture department show that the wheat sowing target could not be met this season. Against a target of 1.15 million hectares, 1.047m hectares (91 per cent of the target) were sown in FY19 whereas 94.7pc of the target had been met the previous year. The wheat sowing target remains unchanged since FY15.

The province produced 3.64m tonnes of the crop last season against a target of 4.2m tonnes. The food department had procured 1.4m tonnes of crop with carry-over stocks of 360,000 tonnes last season.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1474526/wheat-purchase-under-question-while-scams-continue

PAKISTANI RICE: SECOND TO ALL

Ahmad Fraz Khan Updated April 08, 2019

IN Pakistan's context, rice statistics are pretty impressive. Sown on 2.89 million hectares (about 10 per cent of total cropping area), it earned $2 billion (around 8pc of export income) for the country.

Put it in the agricultural context, it is second to wheat in acreage and, in economic terms, only second to cotton (and its allied products as per Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data) in export earnings. It accounts for 3.1pc of value-addition in the agriculture sector and varyingly contributes 1.3-1.6pc to the GDP.

Last year, it assumed added significance when production hit 7.4 million tonnes placing Pakistan on the list of the 10 largest producers on the world rice chart. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2017-18), the area under rice increased by 6.4pc — 2.74 million hectares in 2016-17 to 2.89 million hectares and production swelled by 8.7 per cent — from 6.84 million tonnes to 7.44 million tonnes.

Both these factors helped Pakistan post a 28pc increase in rice export. According to data from the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (Reap), it sent out a little over four million tonnes (for $2 billion) in 2018, as compared to 3.44 million tonnes for $1.6 billion in 2017. This showed a significant growth of 27.7 per cent in terms of value and 17 per cent in terms of quantity.

As far as profiling of rice is concerned, its three board categories are: basmati (long grain and aromatic), coarse (IRRI type) and a generic term called "others." The last type comprises of hybrid, unapproved and some smuggled varieties that have crept in due to relaxed official control.

What adds to national seed confusion is the fact that the country has approved 108 varieties in the last 15 years — from 2003 to 2018. All of them are now entitled to sale. However, only 48 of them are actually released and found in the field, depending on requirements of different ecological zones. It is the Chinese hybrids which have made the difference in the last two years.

Punjab (with all kinds of basmati, super, IRRI and hybrids) leads the national production scale with a contribution of 53pc. Sindh (IRRI and hybrids) follows with 26pc, Balochistan (IRRI, hybrids) with 12pc and the remaining 9pc comes from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has many local coarse varieties for hills and plains. Punjab's contribution may increase as hybrid varieties are now getting more space while competing crops lose economic sheen.

However, this happy rice scenario has two sore points: it is still stuck in a low yield groove and failing in international retail markets. Despite a massive influx of seeds, Pakistan has not been able to break beyond 2.56 tonnes per hectares production. The world average is 4.7 tonnes per hectare production. With high yielding seeds and recommended practices, 4 tonnes per hectare is easily achievable.

The federal Ministry for Food Security and Research took an initiative in 2015 for improving yield and tradable surpluses and enlisted the Chinese for help. For the next two years, both sides made a beeline towards each others' fields and laboratories. It resulted in better hybrid seeds arriving in Pakistan and making a difference the very next year i.e. 2018.

Last year's three-pronged increase was the result of the same effort: the area increased by 6.4pc, production went up by 8.7pc and average yield jumped from 825 kilogram per acre in 2010-11 to over 1,000 kilograms.

Despite this, improvements on the supply side and corresponding initiatives on the marketing side — domestic and international — is still a distant dream. Exports are largely restricted to bulk dumping in Middle Eastern markets while brand development is encouraged for domestic markets. These brands can then go beyond national borders and claim a niche in the world market.

Agreeing to the argument that domestic brand development is necessary for claiming a share in international retail markets in the future, Shahzad Malik, one of the largest rice brand owners, is not much hopeful about the prospects. “The domestic market is overwhelmingly dominated by loose sales. There is hardly any quality consciousness for brands. Since brand development is an expensive exercise — entailing a huge and sustained media presence — traders avoid it because there is no premium on it. That is why one can count domestic rice brands on fingers.

One or two brands, which have emerged on the domestic scene in the last few years, are restricted to supplying to international chains like Metro or Hyperstar. Considering investment on brand development as expensive, they take the easy and short-term route of open sales to domestic markets, he said.

“Multiply the domestic expenses on brand development with the dollars exchange rate (140 at time of reporting) and one will know why no one has dared developing international brands,” said one member of Reap, who did not want to be named. Since no Pakistani brand has a direct share in the world retail market, almost all exports are dumped in Dubai for those who have the share and can buy it for repackaging and re-export. Translating this domestic success in foreign advantage needs policy space, planning, investment and sustained production, which is the missing link so far, he pointed out.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1474525/pakistani-rice-second-to-all

WEEKLY COTTON REVIEW: PRICES INCREASED DUE TO HIKE IN DOLLAR VALUE

NASEEM USMAN | APR 8TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The prices of cotton increased due to hike in the value of dollar. The concerned departments were active for the increase in the production of cotton. Proposals for new cotton policy are under process. The buying was low in the cloth market despite the arrival of the month of Ramadan. Several power looms were closed in Jhang Bazar due to the fraud of Rs 1.5 billion committed by cloth traders of Faisalabad.

In the local cotton market during the last week the increase in buying by textile and spinning mills the overall rate of cotton was increased. The trading volume increased. Over all the trading was done in low quality cotton due to which the prices of cotton increased by Rs 200 to 300 per maund while the prices of good quality cotton increased by Rs 100 to 200 per maund.

The prices of cotton in both Sindh and Punjab remained Rs 7200 to Rs 9000 per maund while the price of Seed cotton (Kapas/Phutti) which is available in small quantity is from Rs 3200 to Rs 3600 per 40Kgs in both Sindh and Punjab. The cotton seed was not available in Balochistan while all the seven ginning factories were closed.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) increased the spot rate price by Rs 100 per maund and closed it at Rs 8700 per maund. Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum told that due to the increase in the value of the dollar the local textile mills gave priority to the local market for cotton buying. More over according to the report released by Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) the ginners had left the stock of only 800,000 bales out of which half of the cotton is of good quality.

According to the PCGA report the production of cotton was 10.77 million bales till April 1, 2019 registering a shortfall by 6.9 percent compared to corresponding period of last year.

Over all bullish trend was witnessed in international cotton market. According to the weekly USDA report the export of cotton was increased by 47 % due to which the prices of cotton increased in New York Cotton Market while in the Indian cotton market the prices of 356 kg Candi was increased by Rs 1500. The prices of cotton remained stable in Chinese market. The news of solution of US and China trade conflict are circulating if the conflict is solved then it is hoped that there will be positive impact of this news on the American as well as world economy. The demand as well as prices of cotton and textile products will also be increased if the trade conflict between US and China is solved.

Chairman Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association Mian Muhammad Mahmood told that a meeting was held in Islamabad on Wednesday which was attended by representatives of All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA). The proposals and strategy regarding new cotton policy were discussed and presented in the meeting. Mahmood told that incentives should be given to cotton farmers. The prices of cotton seed should be fixed at Rs 3600 per 40 Kg. It was also proposed that either import duty should be abolished permanently or should be imposed permanently. The complications occurred due to imposition and abolishing duty during the season.

The APTMA members also presented their proposals regarding new cotton policy. The proposals were sent to the Prime Minister Imran Khan for approval. Moreover, there is a crisis in the Faisalabad market which is the hub of Pakistani textile market. The traders of cloth market bought cloth of worth Rs 1.5 billion on borrowing after words they refused to give back the money. One of the cloth traders had bought the cloth of Rs 1 billion from borrowed money and refused to return the money. Similarly other traders had bought the cloth of Rs 20 to 30 crores from borrowed money and they also refused to pay back the money. Moreover, power loom owners were on strike for more than two weeks. They were demanding increase in the Over Head prices.

The prices and demand of local textile products are increasing before the start of Ramadan but the industrialists were of the view that there was a slowdown in the market as compared to the previous years before the starting of Ramadan due to increase in the dearness. The finance minister Asad Umar and Governor State Bank are trying hard to control the increase in the value of dollar.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190408462358/

U.S.-CHINA TRADE OPTIMISM TO HELP YUAN OVERCOME CONCERNS OVER WEAKENING ECONOMY

Madiha Shakeel April 4, 2019

BENGALURU: The Chinese yuan will hold on to its recent gains against the dollar, and likely make a modest push forward from current levels over the coming year, as optimism about a U.S.-China trade deal offsets anxiety over weak domestic economic growth, a Reuters poll showed.

Having slumped about 6 percent versus the dollar in 2018, with analysts wagering in early January of a move towards 7 per dollar by mid-year, the yuan has defied pressure and gained around 2.5 percent this year.

That rebound was largely driven by progress in trade talks between Washington and Beijing and the People's Bank of China (PBoC) setting consistently higher mid-point reference rates.

The yuan was expected to gain 0.6 percent to 6.66 per dollar in a year, from about 6.70 on Wednesday, according to the latest poll of over 60 foreign exchange strategists taken over the past week.

That is a modest upgrade to last month's forecast.

"Trump's backing away from tariff escalation, previously implicit in our forecasts, means our USD/CNY projections have to be lower," noted Cliff Tan, East Asian head of global markets research at MUFG.

Market watchers have shifted their attention to the latest round of negotiations being held in Washington after both sides cited progress in discussions in Beijing last week.

"There will be a currency component in any ultimate U.S.-China trade deal and FX markets initially took that to mean USD/CNY has become a one-way bet – stronger yuan. But too strong a yuan may also make for awkward future currency diplomacy," Tan said.

Expectations for a stronger yuan are also partly driven by changing fortunes for the dollar.

The dollar's outlook darkened after the Federal Reserve last month abandoned projections for further interest rate hikes this year on signs of an economic slowdown.

That could help unwind last year's slide in emerging market currencies.

"The end of the Fed's tightening cycle now appears to be more clearly in sight, and indeed there is some risk it has already been reached. Overall, evolving Fed policy should become an increasing headwind for the U.S. dollar, and an increasing tailwind for the renminbi," said Erik Nelson, currency strategist at Wells Fargo.

Forecasts in the latest poll showed a complete shift from a January survey when a majority of strategists had predicted the yuan to have breached or to trade at 7 per dollar by mid-year.

In the latest poll analysts were mostly optimistic on the yuan and only four respondents still forecast it to reach 7 per dollar or weaker over the coming year, attributing that pessimism to an economic slowdown and more policy easing.

"We are extremely concerned about the ability of the Chinese economy to keep stimulating growth without a significant weakness in the value of the exchange rate," said Jane Foley, head of FX strategy at Rabobank who predicted the yuan to hit 7 per dollar rate by end-Sept.

"Trade deal might give some short-term celebration, but again in order to keep the economy growing at the sort of rate, that the government wants it to, then it is reasonable to assume that the yuan will slide below 7," said Foley, who was the most accurate foreign exchange forecaster on major currencies in Reuters polls last year.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/04/04/485998/u-s-china-trade-optimism-to-help-yuan-overcome-concerns-over-weakening-economy/

'USE OF QUALITY SEED A MUST TO INCREASE PULSE PRODUCTION'

By APP Published: April 8, 2019

MULTAN: The use of low-quality seed is a major cause of the decline in the production of pulses in the country. An amount of Rs102 billion is being spent annually to import the commodity.

Besides, selection of marginal soil (less fertile-deserts), lack of mechanisation, water shortage, and poor marketing system are also some important factors, damaging pulse sector, said Arid Zone Research Institute (AZRI) Bhakkar Director Dr Khalid Hussain.

Talking to APP on Sunday, he said pulses are grown at an area of 3.2 million hectares in the country, but the major area is less fertile. The country faced a shortage of 275,000 tons of chickpea, 66,000 tons of moung bean, 166,000 tons of mash and 160,000 tons of lentil pulse annually.

Pakistan used to import these pulses, mainly from Australia and Canada, Dr Hussain. About per acre production of pulses in the country, the expert said that Pakistan was achieving 200 kilogramme per acre while Australia was getting 1400 per kilogramme. About the reason behind extremely low production, Dr Hussain said that the country was facing the issue of low seed quality. The funding on research on pulses was meager, he said. He hinted that Pakistan was spending a huge amount of Rs102 billion on the import of pulses annually.

Replying to a question, he said that how can Pakistan promote pulses, he recommended, they have to work on the availability of quality seed, selection of fertile land and improvement in marketing system to invite farmers attention towards the production of pulses.

About marketing, another expert on pulses Dr Ammar from the Muhammad Nawaz Sharif University of Agriculture observed that they should delay pulses imports and wait for the arrival of indigenous pulses because it would offer handsome price to our farmers.

"We would be focusing on protein-rich pulses", he remarked. When asked about pulses consumption in the country, he said that the consumption of pulses is on the rise. The growing population is an important factor behind the increase in consumption of pulses.

To a query how they can improve pulses production, Dr. Ammar suggested that pulse crop zones should be fixed. Similarly, quality seeds, agricultural mechanisation, and provision of the sprinkle system especially in the Thal area could help to get bumper production and save huge amounts, being spent on import of cotton.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1945693/1-use-quality-seed-must-increase-pulse-production-azri-official/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 1st TO APRIL 7th 2019

GROWERS' BODY ASKS SINDH GOVT TO ENFORCE WHEAT PROCUREMENT POLICY

Mohammad Hussain Khan April 07, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) has lambasted provincial government for unnecessary delay in enforcing a wheat procurement policy despite the fact that farmers have already sold off almost half of the wheat crop in open market at much less rate than the grain's support price.

SAB vice president Mehmood Nawaz Shah, general secretary Dr Zulfiqar Yousfani, Irfan Jatoi and others said at a press conference at the local press club on Saturday after their monthly meeting that the government should come up with the policy as soon as possible.

Mr Shah said that Punjab government had announced its policy for procurement of wheat crop but Sindh government had not yet done it. Punjab had fixed wheat procurement target at four million tonnes and set up centres, he said.

In Sindh, he said, farmers had demanded that support price should be increased from Rs1,300 to Rs1,400 per 40kg in view of rising cost of inputs but it was not done. This year the crop had started reaching the market two months ago as Sindh was all set to harvest a bumper crop, he said.

He said that since the government was not buying the crop, its price was on the decline in open market, hitting Rs850 to Rs900 per 40kg nowadays. Cumulatively, he said, it was a direct loss of Rs25 billion to Rs30bn to farmers on the whole if they were to sell the crop at a lesser rate than the support price.

He said that in current conditions when Pakistani rupee was facing devaluation, the crop could become a profitable business for government if it started exporting it at the right time. If open market crashed, hoarders and middlemen would take advantage of it and consumers would once again not be able to have access to cheap wheat flour, he cautioned.

He disclosed that federal government had allowed export of wheat and if only 500,000 tonnes had been exported it would earn Pakistan government $120 million in foreign exchange given current rate of US dollar.

Mr Shah said that market indicators strongly suggested that the crop should be procured but the government was dithering over the issue. Nobody had stopped federal or provincial governments from exporting the crop, he said. He said that being strategic crop wheat needed to be stored as well. The crop had had healthy outlook because of perfect weather conditions which had also boosted per acre productivity, hence there would be surplus production of the crop in Sindh and Punjab.

He disagreed with the view that Sindh could not procure the crop because of huge carryover stocks from last year and said that Punjab also had carryover stocks yet the provincial government was set to procure four million tonnes.

He said that wheat crop was backbone of farm sector in the same way as agriculture was called backbone of the country's economy. It was wheat crop that had always ensured food security in the country and averted possible food crisis by bumper wheat production. That was why wheat crop had never been discussed over the past 20 to 25 years.

Dr Yousufani tried to dispel the impression that consumers would never benefit even if the crop's rate continued to drop. Hoarders and flour mill owners stocked the crop to exploit the situation when there was shortage of wheat for producing flour forcing consumers to pay heavily for wheat flour.

Published in Dawn, April 7th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1474370/growers-body-asks-sindh-govt-to-enforce-wheat-procurement-policy

OVER 1500 PACKS OF COUNTERFEIT POWDERED MILK SEIZED

RECORDER REPORT 2019/04/07

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority (PKFA) seized more than 1500 packs of counterfeit powdered milk during a crackdown, here on Saturday.

A team of KPFA led by its director operations Khalid Khan Khattak, assistant director Aneela Mahboob and Food Safety officers Ahmad Ali Shah and Wasif Shah intercepted supply of counterfeit powdered milk in Pepal Pandi of the KP's capital city.

The authority's director (technical) Dr Syed Abdul Sattar Shah urged public, especially mothers to avoid feeding their infants with this product at the moment. He said there is n alternate of mother's feed.

Shah said it was a sign of danger because no private lab exists in KP province for such product. He said it may contain chemicals that directly strike infant's kidney. He directed this product should immediately be removed and necessary steps to be taken to intercept onwards supply.

Assistant director Aneela Mahboob said that an ordinary man cannot distinguish between the original and fake product. She said more than fifteen hundred packs of the product being seized in the current market crackdown. She said Peshawar market has been supplied in bulk with this product and it is a tougher task to recall the product from every shopkeeper. She revealed that massive awareness campaign is triggered via social media platforms to inform general public not to use this product till its clearance.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/04/07/10-page/775570-news.html

CALL FOR ADOPTING CLIMATE SMART AGRI APPROACH

RECORDER REPORT 2019/04/07

KARACHI: Climate smart agriculture requires adoption of a wide array of techniques for all crops to tackle climate change threats and enhance yields, said State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in its recent report.

Pakistan is ranked among the top 10 most climate vulnerable countries according to the Long Term Climate Risk Index and the agriculture sector is affected by the short-term variability and longer-term climate changes.

Rapid population growth will lead to higher caloric demand and at the same time will be accompanied by rapid urbanization. In such situations, adaptation to climate change is needed and for agriculture it means focusing on farm management practices, proper fertilizer usage and adoption of heat/drought resistant varieties.

Climate Smart Agriculture is an approach used worldwide focusing on enhancing agriculture productivity and incomes while simultaneously building resilience to climate vulnerability and changes.

According to report, climate change has led to long term reduction in rainfall in semi-arid regions of the country and in November 2018, the Pakistan Meteorological Department issued a drought warning for Sindh and Balochistan due to below normal rainfall. This was the second warning of the year.

Irrigation water flows for Oct-Jan FY19 have been 20 percent lower than the 5-year average. Shortages and erratic nature of water has already been stressed upon in previous SBP reports.

Mean temperature of the country has increased by 0.5 degree Celsius in previous 30 years. By 2060, Pakistan's mean temperature is expected to rise by 1.4 degree Celsius to 3.7 degree Celsius, higher than the world average.

The manifestations of climate changes and variability are currently witnessed in the erratic nature of rains, higher temperature and reduced water availability.

The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) International Model for Policy Analysis of Agriculture Commodities and Trade (IMPACT) calculates the percentage difference between climate change occurring scenario with and without climate change over the period 2020-2050 on trade, yields, cultivated area and livestock in Pakistan.

The crops at risk are wheat, maize, sugarcane and gram with the most negative impact, where yields of all crop are expected to decline.

The 2050 wheat projected area is expected to decline by 2.5 percent lower under climate change as compared to no climate change. Furthermore, through crop models predictions it is concluded that yields will reduce due to high temperature in arid, semi-arid and humid zones. The temperature changes have already effected wheat-sowing season, resulting in crop sowing delays.

According to report to tackle climate change threats and enhance yields, climate smart agriculture requires adoption of a wide array of techniques for all crops, from water saving and pest management to adoption of heat/drought resistant varieties of seed.

Several practices such as alternative wet and drying (AWD) of paddies helps save up to three irrigations as compared to continuous flooding, no-till rice and wheat systems are in practice where wheat is sown without tilling the land after rice, it added.

The FAO study for Pakistan highlights the main impediments to accepting the Climate Smart Agriculture practices which need to be addressed.

This includes adoption of several climates smart and yield increasing practices is low due to lack of knowledge and awareness. Extension services by the agriculture departments are still weak as many of the farmers are unaware of modern agro-chemical, crop seed varieties and adequate fertilizer use. Only 27 percent of total households surveyed in Punjab in 2014 had interacted previously with an extension agent.

In addition, lack of financing tools and credit disbursements for smart technology such as drip irrigation and high yielding seeds are low, resulting in disappointing uptake of several techniques and adequate quality seeds even when available.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/04/07/8-page/775546-news.html

KBP THREATENS TO GIVE PROTEST CALL

RECORDER REPORT | APR 7TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Kissan Board Pakistan (KBP) Secretary General, Chaudhry Shaukat Chaddhar has warned the government that the Board will give a protest call if issues being faced by the growers are not resolved at the earliest.

Shaukat Ali while talking to a delegation of farmers here on Saturday alleged that the government was not seemed serious in resolving the problems of the growers. Increase in agricultural inputs has hit the farmers hardly and it is the responsibility of the government to tackle the issue.

He said that the government should take steps on war footing to control the increase in the prices of agricultural inputs including fertilizer, seeds and pesticides. He said that the board will give a protest call and stage sit-in at all district headquarters and government will be responsible for the situation arising after this protest.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190407462100/

SAB DEMANDS EARLY ANNOUNCEMENT OF WHEAT PROCUREMENT POLICY

RECORDER REPORT 2019/04/07

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Board has demanded to Sindh Government to announce wheat procurement policy as delay in this regard creating unrest among the growers of the province.

Addressing a press conference here at Hyderabad Press Club on Saturday, the Senior Vice President Sindh Abadgar Board Mehmood Nawaz Shah informed that the executive meeting of SAB, which held today under his chair, has expressed grave concern over the delay in announcement of wheat procurement policy from Sindh Government.

He informed that the growers of the province has already competed wheat thrashing a month back and due to delay, they are being forced to sale their wheat at Rs900 per 40 kg instead of Rs1120 per 40 kg. He said that SAB has demanded early announcement of wheat procurement police of the provincial government with fixation of wheat price as well as opening of procurement centres so that the growers could save Rs25 billion, which they invested in wheat crop.

He informed that Punjab Government had already announced it's wheat policy and set procurement target as four million tons of wheat this year. In the past, he informed that Sindh Government had announced wheat procurement policy with fixation of rate and setting target of 1.4 million tons and opening of procurement centre before start of the month of April every year, but this year, the growers are still waiting the announcement of the government policy.

He held the corrupt practices in Sindh Food Department responsible in delaying announcement of wheat policy adding that such delaying tactics cause great losses to agriculture economy of Sindh and financial victimization of wheat growers.

He demanded the provincial government to announce the wheat procurement policy with immediate effect so that the wheat growers could take sigh of relief. Among others, Aslam Mari, Irfan Jatoi,zulfiqar Yousufani, Qazi Abdul Sattar, and Abdul Rehman Khatti were also present on the occasion.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/04/07/3-page/775489-news.html

'EAT ONE ROTI': PTI LEADER GIVES NOVEL IDEA OF OVERCOMING FINANCIAL CRISIS

Web Desk April 6, 2019

PESHAWAR: Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Mushtaq Ghani stated on Saturday that with the country undergoing a financial crisis, the public should survive by eating one roti instead of two.

During Khyber Union of Journalist's program 'Meet the Press', the provincial assembly speaker stated with the colossal debt that the country is presently under and the crisis it is going through, the public should survive by eating one roti instead of two.

He further added that soon a time will come where they will get a chance to eat not one or two but 'two and a half rotis'.

"If a person who eats two rotis in a day, brings the number to one then the next day he can afford to eat two to three roties," he stated.

Soon after his statement, ample criticism made way towards the speaker as social media users were unable to comprehend the logic behind his statement while many questioned how many rotis he has given up in this time of inflation.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/454300-people-should-eat-one-roti-instead-of-two-kp-speaker-mushtaq-ghani

FARMERS FORCED TO SELL WHEAT AT THROWAWAY PRICES AS GOVT INDECISIVE ON PROCUREMENT

Munawar Hasan April 7, 2019

LAHORE: Farmers are being forced to sell wheat crop at throwaway prices as the government is dragging feet on procurement of the staple food that has been ripened earlier this season due to dry weather and rising temperature, people familiar with the matter said on Saturday.

Dry weather and rising temperature led to early maturity of wheat in Southern Punjab and farmers have no choice but to sell their produce to private buyers as provincial food department is merely acting as a silent spectator.

Farmer Rao Afsar, belonging to Rajanpur district said wheat harvesting started around a week back. “We are selling wheat at around Rs1,150 / maund against the official support price of Rs1,300,” Afsar said. “We have no choice but to sell wheat to private buyers as the food department has done nothing so far for this year’s procurement drive.”

The farmer further said wheat grains turned golden in a short span due to steep rise in temperature, leaving a little room for farmers to delay harvesting.

Wheat harvesting has already kicked in several districts of the southern Punjab, including Bahawalnagar, Multan, and Rajanpur.

“It is feared that grains would start arriving in the market in bulk quantities if weather remains the same, multiplying problems for growers,” an agriculture expert said. “The Punjab Food Department is actually not decisive as far as starting of wheat procurement is concerned.”

Though the provincial chief minister earlier announced wheat buying from April 21, the food department in a message directed district administration and officials of the food directorate to start procurement from the last week of April. Ironically, the provincial department didn’t mention any date in a relevant print media advertisement.

The provincial food department directed deputy commissioners to start arrangements for wheat procurement campaign from 8 April. Registration of farmers would continue till third week of April, according to an official letter. Applications for bardana or gunny bags would be received between 8 and 17 April. Distribution of gunny bags would start from 22 April.

An estimate showed that private sector would end up procuring two million tons of wheat in the province this year. The provincial food department, on the other hand, planned to buy as much as four million tons of wheat with bank loans of Rs130 billion under the procurement drive 2019.

The experts said farmers would be at total loss as price would certainly crash in the absence of a major public sector’s buyer on time.

The government fixed wheat production target at 25.572 million tons during winter 2018/19. Of that, Punjab is expected to produce 19.5 million tons, Sindh (3.8mt), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (1.36mt) and Balochistan (0.9mt).

Farmers also want to dispose produces as early as possible, fearing natural calamity in the form of high winds, hailstorm or rainy spells that would cause huge losses to standing crops.

Another farmer from Bahawalnagar Saifullah, who wanted to be quoted with single name, said reaping of wheat has began in the district for the last several days and about 2,000 tons of grains have already arrived in the market. “Farmers are hardly fetching Rs1,150 to Rs1,200 from the private sector,” he added.

Saifullah demanded of the government to direct the food department to immediately launch the procurement drive.

“Otherwise, wheat price would crash as hot temperature has led to maturity of crop at large scale.”

Wheat harvesting season is not less than a celebration for the farmers and that also creates temporary livelihood opportunities for labourers. "Delay in harvesting entails delayed income for them too."

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/454339-farmers-forced-to-sell-wheat-at-throwaway-prices-as-govt-indecisive-on-procurement

DAIRY PRICES LIKELY TO RISE; FARMERS EXPECT BETTER BUSINESS IN SUMMER

Jan Khaskheli April 7, 2019

HYDERABAD: Summer is a season of hope and business for the milk vendors around the newly developing settlements in Hyderabad city.

Mahmood Arain, from one such settlement believes that summer was quite an exciting season for milk producers. The demand of milk increases for making a variety of ice creams and many other sweetened frozen foods, which people eat in summer as snacks to beat the extreme heat.

"These items generally are not used at a larger scale in winter. Thus, milk producers, as well as milk vendors enjoy summer as they meet the high demand of this produce during the season," he added.

Mahmood, being a traditional milk vendor, has 16 years experience of selling milk. He travels door to door twice a day to sell around 120 kilograms (60kg each in the morning and evening). He confided that sometimes the demand was even 80-100kg twice a day.

Like other milk vendors, he remains punctual when it comes to supplying milk daily even on public holidays, to his valued customers, including local ice cream vendors, dahi and lassi (yogurt) selling shops, and those who prepare a variety of sweetened frozen food items.

He shared several stories about the emerging daily challenges he faced as a milk vendor in this business.

"Wheat straw and green grasses are in short supply," he said, adding that the fodder shortage had increased the problems for the cattle farmers, who were facing huge losses.

He predicted that the increasing cost of fodder would soon impact the prices of milk. "The price of milk may go higher very soon," he added.

Presently, though wheat harvest has started and fresh wheat straw began arriving in the fodder markets, prices were still as high as Rs500 to Rs600 per maund. "The price of wheat straw will go up to Rs1,000 or more per maund soon. It will affect the milk prices," Mahmood said.

About the problems faced by milk vendors, he said that even though they bought fresh milk from the cattle farms or commission agents, sometimes it spoiled almost instantly due to the extreme heat, which results in disputes with customers. "We (milk vendors) have to bear this loss," he lamented.

Looking back, he said 22 years ago his family had a cattle farm with 40 buffaloes, and they supplied milk to vendors of neighbouring settlements in the city.

"We migrated from Nawabshah district almost 24 years ago with animals. We built our homes and cattle farm in the open and discarded area in this flourishing city. The business continued till the area was fully developed. Then the residents started crying out against the environmental impacts of the cattle farms," he shared.

The farm was shifted in another nearby area, but sadly, could not continue due to the increasing cost of feed and maintenance of animals. "We realised that the business was shrinking, so the younger members of the family started collecting milk from other cattle farms to supply in different areas," he said, explaining that since then the family had continued the same business, which was going smoothly.

Mahmood is familiar with all the ups and downs of milk production, and also buffalo-raising. According to him, breeding of buffalo mostly starts in the months of October and November. They continue giving milk for eight months. But for business purposes they were useful for four-five months, as after this period the yield begins to fall.

Individual farmers, who have one or two cows or buffaloes in villages, produce five to 10 litres of milk daily. They take their product to nearby tea stalls and local collection points where milk coming from different areas gets accumulated. Even sometimes, milk of sheep and goats goes at similar prices. During random interviews from milk vendors, it was learned that get questioned by customers about the purity of the milk production.

About the trend of using vaccinations supposed to multiply milk production, milk vendors said that some leading farmers experimentally started using Oxytocin injections for the first time for milk production during 2000. At that time, nobody thought of the impacts of this injection on human health.

Earlier, the vendors said that traders had devices to check the transparency of milk in major markets and collection points in both rural and urban areas. It helped catch farmers who used to mix water and powder in milk. Those devices were enough to check the authenticity of milk.

However, they said that no device was being used by the traders to check for any harmful impacts of the vaccines, which farmers use to increase production.

Milk vendors admitted that they faced a lot of suspicion from customers, who felt uncertain of the quality of the dairy supply.

There are 70 cattle farms in the newly established cattle colony in Hyderabad city. Each farm has 300-1,000 cattle heads. Out of these farms, only one farm is of specifically cows, where farmers sell milk to specific consumers. Besides this, there is the older and the largest cattle colony on Tando Mohammad Khan road in the city.

There is a huge network of milk companies and sweet manufacturers, who buy milk from leading cattle farms, but they do not ask milk producers about the use of injections or authenticity of the product.

Despite strict directions by the Supreme Court against the use of Oxytocin injections, cattle farmers continuously use the illegal drug to increase milk production in buffaloes. Despite the Supreme Court ban, the drug is available in the market, though farmers have to now bear the increase in cost.

A large number of farmers in villages near Hyderabad, the second largest city of the province, supply milk by mixing the produce from all the breeds – buffalos, cow, sheep and goats. Many of these village farmers do not use vaccines and supply organic milk to the market, but they get a lower price for their product.

There is a chain of business in dairy farming where cattle farmers get new high-yielding buffaloes from village farmers at a low rent of around Rs8,000-Rs10,000 per month. These commercial farmers keep animals at their farms for five-six months for getting milk, and return the buffaloes when yield falls.

Unaware farmers fail to understand the deteriorated health of their animals and the impact they suffered from the vaccines.

Farmers associated with the dairy sector also point to the use of unhygienic and impure fodder for the cattle, which in the long-run impacts the human health.

Livestock is considered the main source of livelihood in rural areas of Pakistan. Milk and other dairy products are a major source of nutrition for rural as well as urban population.

Prof Ismail Kumbher of Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam pointed out that the government had launched a huge dairy production project in Pakistan aiming to bring white (milk) revolution. But it could not continue due to reasons the authorities know better. He proposes the government to offer incentives to rural farmers to launch small entrepreneurship, with marketing awareness.

“It is the only way out to promote this ignored sector in terms of poor check and monitoring system,” the professor added.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/454347-dairy-prices-likely-to-rise-farmers-expect-better-business-in-summer

BIO-PESTICIDE IMPORT TO HELP COTTON FARMERS

The Newspaper’s Reporter April 06, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Cabinet Committee on Legislative Cases (CCLS) on Friday approved import of bio-pesticide ‘Gossy¬plure’ to help eradicate the population of pink bollworm that attacks cotton crop.

Punjab government and cotton growers had been urging for the bio-pesticide’s import which was barred due to some legal issues.

The CCLS approved the import of Gossyplure as a generic chemical under Form-16 of the Pakistan Agriculture Pesticide Act, 1971. Consequently, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) removed its impediment in import.

However a rectification of the federal cabinet is still required for the decision to be implemented.

The economic loss inflicted by pink bollworm is heavier than the impact of any other worm. Depending on the extent of infestation and weather conditions, this pest can cause about 20 to 30 per cent crop loss. It is estimated that the yearly loss from pink bollworm in Pakistan is about one million bales.

Gossyplure, a pheromone named after its insect source, Pectinophora gossypiella (pink bollworm), attracts male pink bollworm moths. Pheromone dispensers set up in cotton fields compete with female moths for the males' attention, disrupting mating and reducing the population of this crop-damaging species.

In a statement, the MNFSR said the facilitation would help cotton farmers have access to the non-pesticide chemical for pink bollworm management.

Furthermore, allowing a generic name (Form-16) will detach it from the brand and be available in the market on competitive prices, it added.

Earlier, the bio-pesticide was registered on brand name of 'BP-Robe' and 'PB-Rope', with an average per acre price of the treatment set at around Rs2,500-3,000.

Published in Dawn, April 6th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1474257/bio-pesticide-import-to-help-cotton-farmers

GOVERNMENT TO FORMULATE 'TRANSPARENT' WHEAT POLICY

MUSHATQ GHUMMAN | APR 6TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The federal government has decided to formulate 'transparent' wheat procurement and export policy in consultation with the provincial governments next week, well-informed sources told Business Recorder. The decision has been taken at a high-level meeting presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

In Punjab, Minister for Food has already been 'sidelined' after reports of 'inappropriate' measures taken by him with respect to appointment of some District Food Controllers (DFCs) and a couple of Deputy Directors. In discussions during the meeting, it was deliberated that inconsistency of economic policies over the previous years could not improve financial inclusion, resource mobilization and ease of doing business. Concerted efforts need to be made to enhance competitiveness in the system, which will improve investment climate in the country and encourage foreign direct investment, it was acknowledged.

During discussion on the issue of wheat crop, it was highlighted that a bumper wheat crop was expected this year. It was observed that proper and transparent arrangements should be made to procure wheat, so that farmers may get fair price for their crop.

Food Departments of provinces and other procurement agencies should provide gunny bags to farmers in a transparent and fair manner. It was mentioned that a comprehensive agriculture policy is needed to increase yields of five major cash crops, increase productivity of livestock and to ensure better integration for marketing agriculture produce in domestic and global markets. It was deliberated that quality seed and latest technologies in the cultivation of all major crops must be explored.

It was also observed that such measures will encourage the private sector and all related stakeholders to boost agriculture sector of the economy.

The National Food Security & Research Division in coordination with Finance Division, Commerce Division, all provincial governments and other relevant stakeholders, will hold a meeting next week regarding transparent wheat procurement and management/export of surplus wheat after accounting for strategic reserves of the country.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190406461477/

NISHAT DAIRY, TURKISH SÜTA TO PRODUCE, SELL PRODUCTS IN PAKISTAN

ZAHID BAIG 2019/04/06

LAHORE: Nishat Dairy (Pvt) Limited in collaboration with SÜTA, one of the largest milk and dairy products producer from Turkey, is going to produce, market, distribute and sell premium dairy products in Pakistan.

With major focus on pasteurized milk products, we are in the phase of deciding our product profiles, which hopefully will be on shelves next year. It is a 50-50 investment partnership both by Turkish and Nishat Group, said General Manager Nishat Dairy Pvt) Limited Hustam Jalal while talking to a select group of journalists during visits to the farms.

Louis Lategan, Farm Manager Nishat Agriculture Farming (Pvt) Limited, and Chaudhary Shafquat, Administration Head, were also present on this occasion.

Two to three places have been identified to set up the manufacturing plants which can be near Lahore or adjacent to the Nishat dairy farm. He said that agreements have been finalized and we are now deciding about the machines and other equipment of the plant, which will also decide the total volume of investment which at present is roughly nearly two billion rupees, Hustam Jalal added.

He said that UHT products can also be added to the product profile but no decision has been taken yet in this regard.

Talking about the dairy farm, he said that at present there are 5700 cows in the plant out of which 2700 are producing milk while by the end of this year this number will reach 3000. He said at present these cows are giving 80,000 litres per day milk. All the animals at the farm are of Pure Holstein Friesian breed and have been imported directly from Australia and The Netherlands and now homebred. They are kept under the best available state-of-the-art facilities and are fed with the high quality feed, which helps in achieving good health conditions as well as high milk yield of the animals.

However, he said that imported dry milk is still the biggest challenge in growth of Pakistani dairy industry while dairy farms are also not finding it feasible to do business at the cost which buyers are offering. He said this is the right time that Nishat Dairy decided to enter into next phase – launching own premier products. He claimed that the Turkish group is bigger than Nestle Pakistan and its collaboration will help providing Pakistani consumers better milk products.

Hustam Jalal further said that now there are many cows which have born here and they are performing well in local climate. He said that the farm used to keep female cows and sell males. “Now we have also decided to sell these locally born foreign origin animals with more milk yield to the local farmers from next year,” he added.

Talking about manure management, Hustam said that solid part is separated from liquid and later on used as fertilizer in the agricultural farm of the group. “It is best organic fertilizer and we are also planning to introduce granular fertilizer made out of cow dung very soon,” he added.

Throwing light on energy conservation measures taken by the Nishat Dairy, he said that they have not yet thought of using bio-gas but had set up a solar park of 1 mw power on the land within the dairy farm.

It is sufficient to meet our 80 percent requirement during summer season and produce surplus during winter which is added to the national grid through net-metering system.

"Interestingly when we had applied for net-metering, GAPCO people were not aware of any such scheme and their officials had training on our system after getting approval and meter from Islamabad," he claimed.

Journalists were also taken around the farm and shown different parts including areas of keeping animals, milking parlors, food storages etc.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/04/06/5-page/775344-news.html

POULTRY PRICES INCREASED BY RS30-40

By Aamir Shafaat Khan | 4/5/2019 12:00:00 AM

KARACHI: Amid low demand on account of closing marriage season in summer ahead of the month of Ramazan, poultry industry stakeholders have played havoc with the prices.

Dealersin various areas haveincreased broiler meat price by Rs30-40 per kg and are selling it at Rs350-360 per kg.

Live bird price which was selling at Rs230 per kg has been jacked up by Rs1020 per kg over the past few days.

Some retailers are seen demanding Rs400-420 per kg for meat and Rs240 per kg for live bird claiming it is `high quality` as compared to other retailers.

Like past practice, many retailers have displayed the official price list to avoid fine from government officials, but the list has so far proved to be just a piece of paper providing no relief to consumers.

Surprisingly, the official rate of meat and live bird is Rs301 per kg and Rs194 per kg respectively on which neither the live bird nor the meat is available.

Consumers are surprised over substan-tial increase in chicken rates during the summer when food consumption also comes down, while marriage season is also coming to an end before Ramazan which is starting from the first week of May.

Supply & demand However, outdoor dining between Fridays and Sundays remains as usual.

General secretary of the Sindh Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association Kamal Akhtar Siddiqui defended the price hike.

He said the supply from the poultry farms had dwindled against the ongoing demand.

Quoting different rates from markets, he said live bird price had surged to Rs200 from Rs160 followed by hike in meat rate to Rs280 from Rs230-240 per kg over the past 15-20 days.

He said the rupee devaluation against dollar in the interbank/open market rate coupled with rising diesel and LPG prices had nothing to do with the poultry price hike.

`Despite increase in rates, poultry is still cheaper than beef and mutton,` he said.

Irrespective of poultry rate fluctuation, owners of barbecue shops, fried chicken and biryani outlets have pushedup food prices, which they will not bring down whenever the live bird price f alls.

Owners of biryani outlets have increased per plate biryani price to Rs130-150 from Rs110-130, while average biryani plate of Rs80 is now being sold at Rs100.

Similarly, the price of one chicken tikka or a quarter broast (leg and chest piece) now hovers at between Rs180-220as compared to Rs160-200.

Vegetables rates In vegetables, some relief came in the shape of tomato and green chillies over the past two weeks while other green vegetables showed mixed price trend.

Tomato price has plunged to Rs50-60 per kg from Rs120-140 per kg.Green chilli rate has also come down to Rs140-160 per kg from Rs240-320 per kg.

However, the current rate of green chilli is still much higher as it is used to sell at Rs120-150 per kg a month ago.

The price of tinda (apple gourd)further has swelled to Rs160 per kg from Rs120 per kg while earlier in March it was selling at Rs50-60 per kg.

Lady finger/okra and bitter gourd (karela)are selling at Rs160 per kg against the price of Rs120 per kg of 15 days ago.

The rates of turrai (ridge gourd) and lauki (bottle gourd) have remained unchanged at Rs120 per kg and Rs80 per kg, respectively.

Earlier in March, turrai and lauki were selling at Rs80 per kg and Rs60 per kg respectively.

There was no change in the rate of peas, selling at Rs70-80 per kg which was available at Rs40-50 per kg in the first week of March. Good quality onion is selling at Rs40 per kg which was Rs30 per kg in March`s first week.

The price of potato, which crashed to Rs20 per kg in the second week of March, has recovered to Rs25-30 per kg.

No price change in the past two weeks has been recorded in carrot and aubergine, selling at Rs40 per kg and Rs50-60 per kg respectively. The same were available at Rs30 per kg and Rs40 per kg in first week of March.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=05_04_2019_116_010

RICE: TIME TO ADOPT SRI

2019/04/05

Pakistan’s rice is a highly export centric commodity, with an average 60 percent of total domestic production going towards export. Over the past three decades, focus of large-scale farming in the country has shifted increasingly towards paddy crop, with output recording consistent gains at an average of 2.16 percent per annum during the period.

Yet, compared to other major rice exporting countries, Pakistan's yield per hectare has inched forward very slowly at 1.66 percent per annum, and currently stands at an average of 2,500 kilos per hectare. In contrast, yield per hectare stands at over seven thousand in China, six in Vietnam, and four thousand in India.

As a result, despite being only second to cotton in its contribution to export, country's rice exports have remained stuck below 4 million tons over the last decade. In value terms, paddy crop exports have contributed less than $2 million on average, despite marginal improvement in per unit ton price fetched.

Since early 1990s, most countries have adopted System of Rice Intensification practices (SRI) known as SRI, that help increase productivity of land and water. Compared to other nations, Pakistan continues to rely on flood irrigation for paddy farming, which has often labelled 'virtual water export' due to high water footprint of the paddy crop.

Common SRI Techniques involve six elements that distinguish it from traditional practices. First, seedlings are transplanted at very early age; second, only a single seedling, instead of a handful is planted over each hill. Third, plants are spaced much wider apart in a square fashion. Fourth, and the most significant, water is applied intermittently to create wet-and-dry conditions, instead of continuous flood irrigation. Last two include rotary weeding to avoid soil erosion and use of organic fertilizers.

As is obvious, SRI techniques are neither capital intensive nor require significant investment in modernizing farm infrastructure, including canal to farmgate infrastructure which has become the most complaint of local farming community. The techniques are however more labour intensive as single seedling plantation and other practices require much greater care during and post sowing period.

SRI techniques have helped increased yields by 50 to 100 percent, according to one World Bank report, with greatest success in South Asian countries such as China, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The practices have also become equally popular in neighbouring India. And it is the SRI experience of Pakistan's forever frenemy that carries most lessons for us.

The success of SRI in India came on the back of wide-scale marketing and public awareness campaign undertaken by public and private sector organizations. Newspapers and TVCs accorded significant and disproportionate share to awareness campaign adverts, with private sector rice milling and exporting associations picking tab for funding.

Given SRI success not only in canal irrigated but also rain-fed regions around the world, it presents an obvious opportunity for Pakistani rice farmers to increase yield at a time of water scarcity, given its significant low-cost potential. However, for this to happen, rice milling and exporting associations will have to take stewardship to create farmer awareness. At the time of this writing, Pakistan has hundreds of operating rice mills, and tens of associations. Any takers?

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/04/05/2-page/775149-news.html

70% OF LOOSE MILK IN PUNJAB POISONOUS FOR CONSUMPTION

By Rizwan Asif Published: April 5, 2019

LAHORE: As much as 70 per cent of loose milk sold in urban Punjab contains traces of harmful chemicals and bacteria, a report submitted by provincial authorities to Prime Minister Imran Khan has revealed.

Of the 601 samples of loose milk collected from Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad, Bahawalpur, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi, 422 were deemed unfit for consumption upon testing and found to contain traces of harmful chemical compounds like formaldehyde, ammonium sulphate, hydrogen peroxide, urea and others found in detergents. Formaldehyde, in particular, can cause stomach and heart problems and even blindness if ingested. The water used to increase the volume of loose milk was also found to contain traces of various germs and bacteria, including coliforms, and chemical and organic pollutants.

According to the report presented to the prime minister, the 'adulteration mafia' is also selling artificial powdered milk smuggled from Iran to meet the demand for milk in the cities, sources said. According to them, he was told that the mafia prepares milk by using a laundry washing machine to mix this powder, sold for Rs14 to Rs15, ghee and water. This artificial loose milk costs Rs18 per kg to make but is sold for Rs45 per kg to wholesalers, who in turn jack up the price to Rs75 per kg for consumers, the sources added.

Prime Minister Imran sought the report after being alerted by senior health experts and some parliamentarians of the health risks posed by adulterated loose milk being sold in the country's most populous province, sources told The Express Tribune. Upon reviewing the report, the premier directed senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Jahangir Tareen to collaborate with Punjab authorities on a pasteurisation policy inspired by the one used in Turkey.

Turkey made pasteurisation of milk mandatory in 1995 and banned sale of loose milk in 2008. To support enforcement of these laws, it made investments in public sector milk production and provide concessions to private sector milk producers. The steps resulted in a 90% increase in Turkey's milk and milk by-product exports.

The Punjab government intends to follow this model to curb adulteration of milk. A committee comprising Tareen, the Punjab food minister, the provincial food, livestock, finance, transport and industry secretaries, and the Punjab Food Authority director general will collaborate with industry stakeholders to devise a comprehensive pasteurisation policy which will eventually result in a ban on sale of loose milk in the province, sources said.

Some aspects of the policy being considered including labeling pasteurised milk in accordance with Punjab Pure Food Regulations 2018 and keeping pasteurised milk at 6 degrees Celsius till it reaches consumers. According to sources, the milk industry will be allowed a five-year business adjustment period once the new policy comes in force.

According to government research, Pakistan's milk industry produces 54 billion litres every year but only 10 per cent is sold in packaged form. Most milk is loaded into barrels with water and ice immediately after being obtained from buffaloes and supplied to cities via heavy road vehicles.

Nutrition experts warn that milk obtains from buffaloes is quick to spoil unless it is boiled to a certain temperature and allowed to cool rapidly.

Meanwhile, testing loose milk to determine whether it is made using powder or not is a costly and difficult procedure. The kit to detect whether milk has been adulterated with water costs Rs300 and can be used multiple times. But a kit for ascertaining whether milk is artificial costs Rs1,700 and can only used once. This is why the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) uses it less often and only on batches of 3,000 to 5,000 litres at a time.

Talking to The Express Tribune, PFA DG Capt (retd) Usman Younis said the Punjab livestock department is also preparing a long term policy to bridge the gap between milk supply and demand. He said PFA has also taken steps to curb adulterated milk production, inspecting 28 dairy production units of Punjab 63 times between 2017 and 2019.

"We issued 38 reform notices and penalties to 13 units, and sealed three of them. We also raided 2,241 milk shops this year, issuing reform notices to 1,755 and sealing 19. Violators were fined Rs972,600 in total," he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1943973/1-70-loose-milk-punjab-poisonous-consumption/

ECC ORDERS IMPORT OF 100,000 TONNES OF UREA

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated April 04, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordina¬tion Committee (ECC) of the cabinet on Wednesday ordered immediate import of 100,000 tonnes of urea after it was informed that its market price surged to Rs1,850 as the sowing season had just begun.

The ECC meeting, which was presided over by Finance Minister Asad Umar, was informed that urea prices had gone up by Rs150 per 50-kg bag in March despite the official rates of Rs1,700 to Rs1,720, sources said.

The committee also directed the Ministry of Industries & Production to review price mechanism of fertiliser industry and asked the relevant authorities to check market manipulation activities in the fertiliser sector.

Finance minister defends rising inflation, hike in petroleum prices and speaks about delay in jobs creation, expected discovery of oil, gas reserves

It was also informed about the status of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) cases against seven persons allegedly involved in corruption in Pakistan Steel Mills. The interior division informed the ECC that their names had been recommended for placement on the Exit Control List (ECL).

The ECC also approved a series of supplementary grants but decided to maintain their secrecy until the coming budget when it would be placed before the parliament.

The statistics division gave a presentation to the committee about reasons behind 9.41pc increase in inflation and rising prices of various food items. The ECC decided to constitute a sub-committee, to be led by minister for national food security and research, to review the demand and supply situation of essential items and ensure price stability.

The ECC also accorded approval to a proposal of Ministry of Petroleum regarding Fuel Supply Agreement between Pakistan State Oil (PSO) and State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Socar). Socar had been participating in bids invited by the government entities for LNG imports but could not compete other traders due to its higher bids.

The ECC approval to the proposed agreement had been pending for the past six months. PSO and Socar had finalised a term sale and purchase agreement (TSPA) for supply of petroleum products under an inter-¬governmental agreement (IGA) signed by the two governments in February 2017.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Asad Umar answering questions from journalists at a session defended the economic situation and the delay in the discovery of what was being dubbed as a jackpot in the form of discovering a huge reserve of oil and gas, according to Dawn.com

The session was broadcast live from social media accounts operated by the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI).

Mr Umar explained that work was under way. “The expectation is that a discovery, if made, will be significant,” he said, adding that there was deep offshore drilling being done some 250km from [the coast of] Pakistan.

“They have to drill 5,000-metre deep, of which, last I checked, they had drilled 3,500m. There was some delay due to a rocky formation due to which they had to change their approach. When they finally reach 5,000m, we will know what the find is. But we know that its potential is big. It’s a high-risk operation, and ExxonMobil invests when a potential find is massive. If oil is found, it will be a massive find,” the minister added.

Identifying several reasons why the economy is in a bad shape, the minister, however, said that there would be light at the end of the tunnel. “There are two reasons why we are in this mess. We have a budget deficit, and secondly, our external deficit,” he said.

“To resolve this you either need to increase exports or decrease imports. Our immediate action was to cut imports, which slows down the economy.”

Asked how the government will fulfil the promise of creating two millions jobs every year as growth has slowed down, Mr Umar acknowledged the criticism. “They say that if the economy does not grow at a seven per cent rate, two million jobs won’t be created. As a rule of thumb that [reasoning] is fine, but it [job creation] also depends on what our priorities are,” he explained. Tourism, small and medium enterprises, information technology, and housing were government priorities, and all these sectors had the potential of job creation, he said, while promising that there would be “growth from year three onward”.

About recent rise in petroleum prices, Mr Umar said: “I had never said that petrol should be Rs46. I had said that the tax [on petrol] should be lower than it was.” He said the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority did the petrol price calculation. “When the new prices were recommended, the only thing the government did was reduce the recommended increase by Rs5,” he added.

When asked why another amnesty scheme was being announced for non-filers of tax returns contrary to his stated position on amnesty schemes in the past, the minister conceded that the idea of amnesty schemes was controversial and said it was the need of the time due to the prevalent system.

The finance minister also defended the government's decision to not rush into an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme at the start of its tenure. However, he said, an agreement would be reached soon.

About rising inflation, the finance minister said the issue would be taken up in an upcoming meeting of the ECC. Mr Umar said: "When one attempts to move out of a balance of payment crisis, inflation rises. Ours [inflation in the PTI tenure] has increased but increased lower than theirs [in the first months of the PML-N tenure]. Moreover, in their government, inflation was borne mostly by the lowest income class. This time, the opposite has happened; the rich have suffered."

Published in Dawn, April 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1473787/ecc-orders-import-of-100000-tonnes-of-urea

COTTON PRODUCTION FALLS

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana April 04, 2019

KARACHI: The country produced 10.772 million bales up to April 1 recording a shortfall of 6.90 per cent over the corresponding period last year, according to the figures released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) on Wednesday.

Punjab recorded a fall of 9.50pc to 6.622m bales as against 7.317m bales produced in the same period last year. Sindh too witnessed a fall of 2.45pc to 4.149m bales compared to 4.263m bales. Ginners are currently holding 809,195 unsold cotton stocks compared to 486,963 bales held in the same period last year.

The textile spinning industry purchased less cotton during the period under review at 9.963m bales as against 11.084m bales last year while exporters also booked smaller quantity of cotton at 102,330 bales as against 216,615 bales in the last season.

Stakeholders say the government needs to come up with an incentives package urgently for motivating growers to shift back to cotton crop by fixing indicative price for phutti (seed cotton).

For the last six years cotton crop has been a victim of neglect on part of successive governments particularly when cultivation area of the crop rapidly shifted to sugarcane farming.

Cotton growers have been using uncertified seed and poor quality pesticides which eventually led to reduced per acre yield. The huge import bill which has swelled over $1.2 billion could only be reduced once domestic cotton production has increased, cotton analyst Naseem Usman said.

Published in Dawn, April 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1473836/cotton-production-falls

UNLOCKING THE FARMING LAND POTENTIAL

BR Research April 4, 2019

It is said that real estate development in urban areas has converted the cities into "Plot-istan", as property has become the guaranteed form of investment where returns only point north. Plotting of prime land has no doubt become a bane; however, is nothing compared to the fragmentation of land seen in rural areas during past three decades.

According to figures based on last Agriculture Census of 2010, more than 80 percent of Pakistan's farmers own land size under 10 hectares (or 25 acres). In terms of aggregate land area, this represents more than 60 percent of country's farm lands.

Over the years, average farm size in the country has come down to less than 1 hectare, from 1960, when the number stood at barely over 2.6 hectares. Compare this to average farm size of 63 hectares in Brazil, and 179 hectares in USA.

While Pakistan's agriculture has long been dominated by small farmers, increasing population and large family sizes has led to splitting of land over multiple generations which has exacerbated the situation. Today, at 25 percent of total, farmers owning less than 0.5 hectares of land has become the largest group, barely enough land to even provide for an average family size of 6.5 persons.

With these statistics, it is no wonder that about two-thirds of Pakistan's agricultural community is classified as subsistence farmers, defined as "farmers who grow food crops to feed themselves and their families; the output is targeted for survival, with little or no surplus trade".

While agriculture's share in employment may stand at 42 percent, using the most conservative estimate of farmers with less than 0.5 hectares as the absolute level of subsistence, at least 11 percent of farmers make no contribution to agricultural value chain.

Thus, while "agri as the largest employer" has become a popular mantra for continued governmental support to the sector in the form of subsidized credit, a meagre canal water charge, subsidized electricity on tube well, and support price among others, only a marginal percentage of official support actually makes its way to the weakest segment of rural community.

Moreover, given the obvious correlation between farm holding size and productivity due to scale, it is no surprise that these subsistence farmers are unable to invest in yield improving tools to grow cash crops that contribute most to the agri-value add, such as cotton, rice or cane.

While the new government has hinted at imposing an "Agricultural Emergency" to arrest falling yields, nothing short of a radical rethink can usher in a revolution in a sector, which by the way, also consumes more than 90 percent of country's water sources.

Pakistan needs a consolidation of farming land to incentivize private sector investment in productivity tools such as mechanized agriculture, high-yield seeds, and water conserving infrastructure. Whether that may come in the form of cooperative, corporate or any other form is of course an open question. But the debate must begin, and now.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/04/04/485916/unlocking-the-farming-land-potential/

15 PERCENT OF MILK GO WASTED DUE TO LACK OF FACILITIES: DR MUMTAZ

RECORDER REPORT | APR 4TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Some 15 percent of total production of milk in Pakistan is wasted due to lack of storage, transport and proper cooling facilities, said President Pediatrics Association Dr Mumtaz Lakhani on Wednesday.

Talking to Business Recorder, Dr Lakhani quoted the statistics of Economic Survey of Pakistan (2015-16), that the annual milk production in Pakistan is more than 50billion litres, out of which only 45 percent of the milk is actually available for sale. “This automatically makes us lose roughly 50-60 percent of our potential income generation from the dairy industry,” she added.

Moreover, she said, 50 percent of the milk left after this is made available to the processing industry which is then processed into UHT, 40 percent into powdered milk and the remaining 10 percent into other by-products.

She said Milk is one of the main constituents of a balanced diet. It is a rich source of calcium and its regular intake is essential to have healthy bones and teeth.

“Milk provides essential vitamins such as vitamin D and phosphorous, which are also necessary for stronger bones. It is a great source of B vitamins that are known for supporting energy metabolism and growth. A vital component of a healthy diet, milk, contains vitamin A, which is essential for healthy skin and for a stronger immune system,” Dr Lakhani said.

She said milk is usually available in two formats – loose and packaged. Collected from dairy farms, the loose milk is delivered by the milkman to the doorstep as well as sold in milk shops. Contrary to the widespread belief, she said, the loose milk is natural and fresher in terms of taste, it tends to be highly unhealthy.

According to a survey by the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Sciences, University of Agriculture, Peshawar, loose milk is a source of various diseases owing to the filthy housing system at dairy farms, unhygienic milking practices, dirty utensils, transportation and water adulteration. In addition to that, no scientific procedures are followed during milk collection, storage and transportation.

While highlighting the importance of nutrition, Dr Lakhani said, “The purity of loose milk is always doubtful owing to the fact that dairy farmers and milkmen dilute milk with water and add other substances in an attempt to increase the milk quantity.”

They resort to adding different harmful adulterants and chemicals to milk to increase its viscosity as well as to preserve its appearance, texture and odour to make it smell and taste like pure, natural milk.” Considering the fact that adulteration in loose milk has been going on without any check, milk has also emerged as the most unsafe drink with the least nutritional value and is considered simply harmful to health.

“There is a significant need to educate the common men about the risks associated with having unhygienic milk that can cause various diseases to the human body,” she concluded.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190404460952/

10.77 MILLION COTTON BALES REACH GINNERIES

RECORDER REPORT | APR 4TH, 2019 | MULTAN

Seed cotton (Phutti) equivalent to 10.77 or 10,772,306 bales have reached ginneries across Pakistan till April 1, 2019, registering a shortfall by 6.9 per cent compared to corresponding period of last year.

Out of total arrivals, over 10.76 million or 10,769,139 bales have undergone the ginning process, says a fortnightly report of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) issued here Wednesday.

Arrivals in Punjab were recorded at over 6.622 million or 6,622,913 bales showing a 9.50 per cent shortfall and over 4 million or 4,149,393 bales in Sindh registering 2.45 per cent shortfall compared to corresponding period of last year.

Total sold out bales were recorded at over 9.9 million or 9,963,111 bales including over 9.8 million or 9,860,781 bales bought by textile mills and another 102,330 bales purchased by exporters.

As many as 809,195 bales were still lying with the ginneries as unsold stock. Sanghar district of Sindh continued to remain on top with cotton arrival figures of over 1.28 million or 1,289,369 bales while Rahimyar Khan district of Punjab secured second berth with arrival figure of 1.19 million or 1,193,298 bales and Bahawalnagar stood third with just over a million or precisely 1,007,221 bales. The statistics show the shortfall was witnessed in 25 cotton districts out of total 32 including 18 out of total 21 in Punjab and seven out of total eleven cotton districts in Sindh.

The report does not include cotton figures from districts of Kasur, and Sargodha. Only eight (8) ginning factories were now operational in the country including seven (7) in Punjab and one in Sindh. However, 28 factories were operational during corresponding period of last year including 22 in Punjab and six in Sindh.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190404460962/

RS290BN TO BE SPENT ON AGRI SECTOR

Amin Ahmed Updated April 03, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government is planning to launch various projects in five key agriculture sectors — water, crops, markets, fisheries and livestock — amounting to Rs290 billion in five years, Secretary National Food Security and Research, Muhammad Hashim Popalzai said on Tuesday.

An important component of the projects to be launched in July is to increase yield of major crops — sugarcane, rice and wheat — and boost adoption of oilseeds.

The National Agriculture Emergency Programme aims to conserve and increase productivity of water; dramatically increase yields of major crops and boost adoption of oilseeds; harness untapped potential of fisheries; livestock initiatives for small and medium farmers; transform agriculture product markets; and increase access to finance.

Mr Popalzai said performance of the agriculture sector declined by 60pc in terms of budgeting and priority in development budget since devolution.

Federal and provincial allocations used to be around Rs40bn but post-devolution these have been reduced to Rs20-22bn, the secretary said.

During the fiscal year ending June 30 this year, the allocation is expected to remain at Rs20bn, he said, adding, “This amount should have been between Rs60-70bn if translated in dollar term.”

Though agricultural development and research has stagnated over the past several years, the decline in agriculture can be reversed in the short term, and to sustain agriculture growth, work on the long term strategy could be started without any delay, he stressed.

For the first time since devolution, the federal government’s share in eighteen projects of five key sectors of agriculture during the next five years will be Rs92.5bn.

The share of federal government in development of water sector will be Rs71bn; crops Rs1.65bn; fisheries Rs3.51bn; and livestock Rs1.32bn. The development of markets would be fully funded by Punjab since these would be developed in the province.

In water sector, the investment will be Rs218.5bn; in crops Rs44.82bn; development of markets Rs11.50bn, fisheries Rs Rs9.28bn, and livestock Rs5.60bn.

Published in Dawn, April 3rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1473592/rs290bn-to-be-spent-on-agri-sector

EXPORT OF WHEAT ALLOWED

ZAHEER ABBASI | APR 3RD, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The federal cabinet Tuesday allowed export of one million tonnes of wheat and decided to rename Statistics Division as Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation Division and placed it under the administrative control of Ministry of Planning, Develop-ment and Reform.

This was stated by Minister for Information and Broadca-sting Chaudhry Fawad here on Tuesday while briefing the media persons about the decisions taken by the cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The information minister, however, stated that federal cabinet gave formal approval for renaming Statistics Division as Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation Division and placing it under the administrative control of Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform instead of Finance Ministry.

The minister said that the name of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is not being changed and various initiatives launched by the present government including Sehat Card, Kafalat Programme and Sasta Ghar Scheme will be added to the BISP.

The minister said that Dr Sania Nishtar will be heading the new division and it will coordinate functions of different organisations under the newly launched Ehsaas Programme. The minister stated that financial aid is provided to the poor people through BISP, Zakat, and Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal, whereas under the new social welfare programme, new initiatives will be taken.

However, Minister of State for Revenue Hammad Azhar while speaking at a function stated that federal cabinet has decided that Statistic Division will no longer remain under the administrative control of Ministry of Finance because of its alleged involvement in manipulation of economic data and showing higher growth on the instructions of previous finance ministers.

The minister said that although the issue of difference between Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Jehangir Tareen was not discussed in the federal cabinet, the Prime Minister has expressed his displeasure on bringing the internal party differences in public.

The Prime Minister directed the concerned ministries to prepare a complete roadmap on wheat, cotton and rice and stated that after a long time sugarcane growers got full payment of their crops. The minister further stated that Prime Minister Khan directed to evolve a policy on premium money charged (own money) on vehicles.

The minister said that Finance Minister Asad Umar would unveil Economic Roadmap for development of industries and other sectors and Power Minister Umar Ayub Khan will brief about steps with regard to energy sector. He said that efforts would be made to ensure that no load-shedding takes place in the next summer. The minister said that there are some very good things about the 18th amendment but at the same time some issues are required to be resolved regarding higher education and health as well as fiscal decentralisation to district level from the provinces.

He said that duration of military courts would be extended if a consensus is evolved with opposition; otherwise, it would not be extended, adding it is not necessary that the Prime Minister should meet the opposition leader for consultation with regard to appointment of members of Election Commission of Pakistan. The minister said this consultation could be held over telephone or by involving a third person.

The minister said that the federal cabinet allowed ban on showing Indian Premier League (IPL) matches as the Indian government’s policies against PSL and artists in the post-Pulwama incident compelled Pakistan to take the decision.

He said that so far 33 cabinet meetings were held and 607 decisions were taken and out of them 375 decisions were implemented while remaining are in the implementation process.

He said that the federal cabinet has approved appointment of Air Marshal Asad Malik as Chief Executive of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), and boards of Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation, Oil and Gas Development Authority, Sui Southern Gas Company, and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd were reconstituted. Shamsuddin Sheikh has been appointed as Chairman PMDC and Qamar Javed Sharif as chief of OGDCL. Dr Shamshad Akhtar has been appointed as new head of SSGC and Syed Dilawar Abbas as the chief of SNGPL. The cabinet also approved extension in the licence of Vision Air International for one year and appointment of judges of various banking courts.

The minister stated that the federal cabinet approved Rs 57.3 billion for Khassadar of erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), apart from approval of Economic Coordination Council (ECC) decisions.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190403460601/

FARMERS ADVISED TO MAKE PLANS FOR RABI CROPS

RECORDER REPORT | APR 3RD, 2019 | KARACHI

The Met Office has asked the farmers to make irrigation plans for the Rabi crops as the dry weather is expected in the next 10 days. Weeds should be uprooted to help attain a maximum yield. It warned the farmers about an output loss if such unneeded plants continued to grow out in the standing crops. The Met said growers should also take steps to preserve their crops and nurseries from damaging impacts of the extreme cold weather.

In the next 10 days: Punjab may witness mainly a dry weather with an isolated rain-thunderstorm in Sargodha and Rawalpindi Divisions between April 5 and 10. Dry weather is also expected to prevail over Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with rain-thunderstorm in Malakand, Hazara, Peshawar and Kohat Divisions between April 5 and 10.

Sindh is likely to undergo mainly dry and hot weather till April 10. Baluchistan may also see widely a dry weather with chances of rain-thunderstorm between April 5 and 10. Weather in Gilgit-Baltistan is also expected to remain largely dry with rain-thunderstorm between April 5 and 10. However, Kashmir may witness mainly a cloudy but dry weather with rain-thunderstorm between April 5 and 10.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190403460634/

GOVT TO SPENT RS290BN ON 18 AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Fawad Maqsood April 2, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government in collaboration with the provincial governments would spent Rs 290 billion on the development and uplift of agriculture, livestock sectors across the country under National Agriculture Emergency Program during next five years.

The amount would be spent on 18 different projects across 5 areas including increasing of per acre crop yield, water resources conservation, harnessing the potential of fisheries, livestock and increase access to finance, Secretary of Ministry of National Food Security and Research Dr Hashim Popalzai said while briefing to media here on Tuesday.

He said the projects were designed on cost sharing between provinces, federal and farmers, adding that out of the total allocated amount the federal government would provide Rs92.5 billion where as the rest would be managed by the provinces with their own resources. In order to design the projects, 23 working groups were formed with representation of federal, provincial governments and progressive farmers as well as other stakeholders which had held more them 50 meetings so far, he added.

He said the PC-I of these projects is being finalizing and it would be executed by the first month of next financial year, adding Galgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir would be accommodate by the federal government for promoting the agriculture sector in respective areas.

He said Rs 218 billion would be spent on water resource conservation, Rs 44.8 billion on the improvement of major crops per acre output including wheat, rice and sugarcane, where as Rs19.5 billion would be spent harnessing the true potential of fisheries. Dr Hashim said an amount of Rs5.3 billion would also be spent on the development of livestock and dairy development, adding that federal government would share Rs 71 million in water sector, Rs16.6 million in crop and Rs 3.5 million and Rs1.3 million in fisheries and livestock sectors respectively.

He said the federal government had established implementation units for these projects in order to create close coordination with the provincial governments and appointed coordinator, adding that a special unit for crops were also established in NARC.

He further informed that other units for water sector, fisheries development were also established for the swift implementation of these projects and getting the optimal results.

He said excessive wheat output was expected during this year, adding that there were about four million tons of carry forward stocks and the respective provinces were asked to export the stocks as the commodity was competitive as compared the international markets. He said about 200,000 tons of potatoes were also exported during this season, adding that it would help the farmers to compensate the losses.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/04/02/485302/govt-to-spent-rs290bn-on-18-agriculture-development-projects/

MODEL DRIP IRRIGATION PROJECT LAUNCHED AT NARC

By Amin Ahmed | 4/2/2019 12:00:00 AM

ISLAMABAD: Though drip irrigation has gradually been braced by progressive farmers at some scale, the adaptation of this water-saving technology in the waterstressed regions of the country has been hampered by its high costs and lack of awareness.

According to Dr Munir Ahmad, Director of Climate Change, Alternate Energy and Water Resource Institute at the National Agriculture Research Centre (NARC) Islamabad, only 40,000 acres in the country is under drip irrigation.

In contrast, the total irrigated area in Pakistan is estimated to be 20 million acres.

A model pilot project has been launched at NARC to advise farmers on the efficient use of water.The solar-powered project spreads over seven acres and comprises three components: citrus orchard on one acre, sprinkler orchard on 2.5 acres and raise bed on 2.5 acres.

As part of its `Caring for water initiative` Nestle, one of the largest multinational food companies, has made an investment of Rs4.5 million in the project to promote the drip and sprinkler technology, said an official of the company.

The firm has already launched an agricultural efficiency project in Sheikhupura in collaboration with the Punjab government which has the potential to help save 54 million litres of water annually.

Talking to a group of newsmen during a visit to the pilot project, Dr Munir Ahmad said the institute had been mandated to develop and disseminate science-based effective technologies and innovative practi-cal management of water, energy and resources in collaboration with provincial and national research and development organisations.

In view of the ef fects of climate change on agriculture, there is a need to bring high value crops under sprinkle and drip irrigation as well as solar pumping irrigation, he said.

Farmers in water-stressed regions of Balochistan have taken keen interest in the drip irrigation technology and have been visiting the pilot project to gain knowledge to adapt it to promote agricultural productivity.

High cost of imported valves, pipes, tubing and emitters from China is the major hindrance in the way of promoting drip and sprinkle irrigation.

Dr Ahmad suggested that the government should seriously consider encouraging the private sector to produce drip irrigationdevices locally that can help introduction of drip irrigation at a massive scale, he said.

In the absence of local industry manufacturing drip irrigation devices, there is less availability of skilled manpower since the technology requires sediment-free clean water and hindrances in agronomic practices.

He said proposals had been submitted to the prime minister`s task force on agriculture and the recent measures to promote agriculture such as green technology would boost introduction of drip irrigation.

Explaining advantage of drip and sprinkle irrigation, Dr Ahmad said 40 per cent of irrigation water can be saved through this technology compared to flood irrigation.

The technology also helps ef ficient utilisation of fertilizer whereas crop yield increases by up to 40pc and water application uniformity reaches over 90pc, he said.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=02_04_2019_004_008

RURAL AREAS IN SOUTH ASIA CAN BECOME HUBS OF INNOVATION, SAYS REPORT

Amin Ahmed Updated April 01, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Despite political instability, several recent policies have created a framework for agricultural reform and rural revitalisation in Pakistan, according to a global food policy report.

The ‘2019 Global Food Policy Report’ — released by the Washing¬¬ton-based Inter¬national Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) — says that rural transformation in South Asia is at a crossroads but in just under a decade rural areas could become premier hubs of innovation.

It recommends revitalising rural areas with a focus on five building blocks: creating farm and non-farm rural employment opportunities, achieving gender equality, addressing environmental challenges, improving access to energy and investing in good governance.

Rural areas remain underserved compared to urban areas and face a wide array of challenges across the globe: environmental crisis in China, severe agrarian crisis in India and acute shortage of jobs for the growing youth populations in Africa.

Recent policies have created a framework for agricultural reform and rural revitalisation in Pakistan

To overcome these challenges, the report calls for rural revitalisation, highlighting policies, institutions, and investments that can transform rural areas into vibrant and healthy places to live, work and raise families.

The report says agricultural livelihoods still provide more than 43 per cent of employment, meaning that most jobs in the region are in the informal sector.

It emphasised that implementing a “decent employment agenda” will require improving rural livelihoods. The predominance of smallholder farming communities, their increasing political voice and national commitments to SDGs are prompting governments in the region to emphasise inclusive rural development strategies.

Marked by the deepening cycle of hunger and malnutrition, persistent poverty, limited economic opportunities, and environmental degradation, rural areas continue to be in a state of crisis in many parts of the world, threatening to slow the progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, global climate targets, and improved food and nutrition security, the report says.

A majority of the world's poor live in rural areas: rural populations account for 45.3pc of the world's total population, but 70pc of the world's extremely poor. The global poverty rate in rural areas is currently 17pc, more than double the urban poverty rate of 7pc.

Looking forward to 2019, the report says the prospects for rural development are encouraging. Across Asia, inclusive employment growth, continued agricultural productivity growth, and strengthening of the agriculture-based rural non-farm economy will be essential to ensure inclusive rural transformation. However, the region remains poorly integrated and is not taking advantage of its cultural affinities, common geography or the advantages of proximity, the report points out.

In Pakistan, despite political instability, several recent policies have created a framework for agricultural reform and rural revitalisation. These include the 2018 National Food Security Policy and National Water Policy, the 2012 National Climate Policy and enabling legislation of 2017, the 2018 Provincial Agriculture and Water Policies, and the National Drinking Water Policy.

Despite an acceleration of urbanisation in recent years, South Asia's demographic transition has been slow and the region remains predominately rural — 67pc of the population lives in rural areas. Although rural poverty has declined sharply, one-fifth of South Asia's rural population remains poor.

The structure of South Asia's national economies has changed dramatically in recent decades, marked by a sharp decline in the share of the agriculture sector. Agriculture now accounts for less than 16pc of regional gross domestic product (GDP) in South Asia.

Published in Dawn, April 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1473169/rural-areas-in-south-asia-can-become-hubs-of-innovation-says-report

LUCRATIVE PACKAGE FOR FARMERS IN NEXT BUDGET: QAISER

The Newspaper's Correspondent Updated April 01, 2019

SWABI: National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser said on Sunday that a lucrative package would be announced by the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government for the country's farmers in the upcoming federal budget.

Talking to mediapersons here, he said that the government had been giving great importance to the farmers as they could enhance production if their genuine demands were fulfilled. He said that due status would be given to the farmers and package would be only for the true peasants.

Answering a question, he said that the previous governments had failed to give due importance to the agriculture sector.

NA speaker says govt giving importance to agriculture sector

The NA speaker said that a package would also be announced for the youth who were the future builders of the country.

He added that Prime Minister Imran Khan had already announcedestablishment of a separate ministry for poverty alleviation.

"The ministry would give special importance to the females to free them from the clutches of poverty," he said.

Mr Qaiser said that the government had presently focused its attention on strengthening the country's economy which was a prerequisite for prosperity. He said that the government had already taken steps for boosting the country's economy.

YASIR'S FATHER OVERJOYED: Syed Khaki Shah, father of spin wizard Yasir Shah, has said that his son is the first personality of Swabi district to get Sitara-i-Imtiaz.

Talking to Dawn on Sunday, Khaki Shah said as Yasir was in the UAE in connection with five-match One Day International Series against Australia, he received the award conferred on him by Governor Shah Farman, on behalf of President Arif Alvi.

"There was no limit of my joy when I was receiving the award on behalf of my son. It was really great honour for me and my family and the credit goes to Yasir Shah who enabled us to have such dignity and honour," said Khaki Shah.

He added that his son had worked very hard, built up his cricket career with unabated struggle and practice and finally got the award. Yasir Shah, a resident of Sairi village of Swabi, was awarded Sitara-i-Imtiaz in acknowledgment of his extraordinary performance in the field of cricket in a short span of time. Yasir is the second bowler in the cricket world to take fastest 100 wickets and the fastest to complete 200 wickets haul.

PEACE WALK: Speakers at the end of a peace walk said that people from all walks of life should play their role in eradication of drugs from the society.

The walk against drug menace was held in Yar Hussain by members of the civil society and local jirga.

They said that if society made joint efforts the sale and use of drugs could be easily controlled.

Published in Dawn, April 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1473097/lucrative-package-for-farmers-in-next-budget-qaiser

THOUSANDS MARCH IN SPAIN TO SEEK MORE HELP FOR RURAL AREAS

Agencies April 01, 2019

MADRID: Thousands of Spaniards gathered in Madrid on Sunday to demand that the government take steps to curb the depopulation of rural areas.

Sunday's march under the slogan "The Revolt of the Emptied Spain" was organised by grassroots groups from rural areas in the southern European Union nation.

In Spain, 90 percent of the population is now concentrated in 30 percent of the country's territory, namely in Madrid and the coastal areas. That leaves 10 percent of its people spread over large swaths of the interior.

On Friday, the government announced measures to improve internet networks in the countryside.

The march comes before Spain's April 28 general election, when rural areas could play a key role in deciding if the Socialists stay in power. Spanish election law gives more weight to underpopulated areas.Of the 350 parliamentary seats at stake, 101 represent sparsely populated provinces.

The main parties in the April 28 vote, aware of rural voters' anger, were all represented at the march dubbed the "Revolt of an Emptied Spain".

Ministers from the ruling Socialist party included economy chief Nadia Calvino, Environment Minister Teresa Ribera and Agriculture Minister Luis Planas.

The Socialist party has pledged to support professional training and internet access in rural areas.

The centre-right Ciudadanos party has proposed sharp tax cuts for the residents of towns with fewer than 5,000 residents. Its leader Albert Rivera also took part in Sunday's march.

Police counted around 50,000 along the main march route, while organisers estimated turnout at nearly twice that.

"This Spain, the emptied Spain, wants its voice heard," the organisers' manifesto said.

The Economic and Social Council of Spain, a body that advises the government on economic and labour issues, said in a report in early 2018 that the country counts around 3,900 villages with fewer than 500 residents.

Of those, nearly one-third have fewer than 100 inhabitants and face "maximum risk of extinction", it said.

Two of the provinces most hit by urban drift are Teruel in the east and Soria, north of Madrid.

In Teruel, "bank branches have disappeared," said Josefina Soriano of the advocacy group "Teruel Exists".

"There are elderly people who have to ask a neighbour to go to the (nearest town) to withdraw money for them," Soriano said.

Angel Fernandez, a Soria farmer, said: "The province is dying. Despite its great potential, they're leaving us without trains, without highways."

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1473192/thousands-march-in-spain-to-seek-more-help-for-rural-areas

INTEREST RATE TIGHTENING AND RUPEE'S HEALTH

Mohiuddin Aazim Updated April 01, 2019

The recent tightening of the interest rate should help rein in galloping inflation in coming months. However, the rupee may continue to remain under pressure as external-sector fundamentals will take more time to improve even after we enter a loan programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In March alone, the rupee lost 1.4 per cent value to the dollar as end-quarter external debt servicing peaked, bringing its total loss against the greenback to 15.9pc in the first nine months of 2018-19.

Despite the tightening of the policy rate by 375 basis points so far — from 7pc at the close of the last fiscal year to 10.75pc now — not only the rupee has lost 15.9pc value against the dollar in the first nine months of 2018-19 but also its stability remains uncertain. The reason is that the improvement in fundamentals of the external sector has remained limited. Merchandise exports in July-February totalled $15.1 billion after a year-on -year increase of 1.85pc.

But despite a 6pc decline, the import bill is still at $36.6bn. So we have a trade deficit of $21.5bn. It is down 11pc from a year ago. But in terms of volume, it is still too large — and even home remittances of $14.3bn received in July-February fall too short in fixing this deficit, notwithstanding the fact that at this level remittances show about 12pc year-on-year increase.

The problem is with the volumes of foreign exchange inflows, not of the growth trend. Prime Minister Imran Khan and Finance Minister Asad Umar keep telling us that brighter times are ahead and lots of foreign investment is in the pipeline. Unless that investment actually starts flowing in, the foreign exchange crunch will likely persist not only during this fiscal year but also perhaps in the next few years.

The rupee lost 1.4pc value to the dollar as external debt servicing peaked, bringing its total loss against the greenback to 15.9pc in the first nine months of 2018-19

That's the view the IMF has also taken. Once we enter into the Fund programme, the government will have to take politically tough measures, like taxing the big and the powerful that are still out of the tax net and containing its development and non-development spending to keep the fiscal deficit in check. Besides, the central bank will have to discontinue the old practice of providing cushion to the rupee through interventions in the foreign exchange market. Meanwhile, the cost of external debt servicing can only be expected to grow further after borrowings of $9.2bn from friendly countries in the first three quarters of this fiscal year. In the first half of the year, Pakistan spent $5.36bn on the servicing of external debt. External debt servicing had consumed $7.49bn in 2017-18, according to the latest data released by the central bank.

When this write-up is published on April 1, prices of petrol and other fuel oils will have gone up. Energy prices have been on the rise because international oil rates have remained higher than last year's. Besides, even our populist government could not dare reduce the amount of taxes and duties.

The government could not do this to avoid taking a hit on revenue generation. Tax collection is already low.

"In view of the shortfalls in revenue collection and escalating security-related expenditures, it is most likely that the target for the fiscal deficit would be breached," said the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on March 29 when it raised its policy rate by 50 basis points to 10.75pc.

The interest rate hike comes amidst continuing underlying inflationary pressure, a larger fiscal deficit (2.7pc of GDP in the first half of 2018-19 against 2.3pc a year ago) and a high current account deficit despite some improvement. The current account deficit narrowed to $8.8bn in July-February from $11.4bn in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal year. But it still poses a challenge as the improvement has come in the backdrop of $9.2bn foreign funds from friendly countries — China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

We had to resort to this foreign exchange funding, which carries both economic and political costs, in our quest to avoid a free fall of the rupee. Despite that, the rupee has lost 15.9pc to the dollar so far in this fiscal year. On March 25, SBP's foreign exchange reserves stood at just $10.7bn.

Pakistan is likely to sign a balance-of-payments support deal with the IMF in mid-April. Hopefully, the first IMF loan tranche will come in before June. That will help reduce external debt servicing problems in the April-June quarter besides setting the country on the course of prudent fiscal and monetary management for stabilising the faltering economy.

During his visit to Pakistan in the last week of March, IMF Mission Chief Ernesto Ramirez Rigo met several federal ministers and senior officials. In fact, he met SBP Governor Tariq Bajwa and other senior central bankers ahead of the monetary policy committee meeting.

Whenever the IMF agrees to a bailout package, its demands include the tightening of interest rates. This time, too, the Fund is pushing for the continuation of a tight monetary regime.

The Fund also wants to see our central bank more autonomous and foreign exchange regime freer. It is pressing the SBP to even make inflation targeting a core objective of monetary policy. The SBP decision to raise the policy rate by 50bps from April 1 shows it prefers inflation-fighting to facilitating economic growth.

The central bank has projected 3.5-4pc economic growth in the current fiscal year, far lower than the last year's revised growth of 5.22pc. Lower economic growth means a loss of jobs and a fall in disposable incomes. Both things are going to erode political capital of the PTI.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1473024/interest-rate-tightening-and-rupees-health

AQUACULTURE CAN UPLIFT THE ECONOMY OF COASTAL BELT

Younus Sandeela Updated April 01, 2019

Pakistan's coastal belt that stretches over a thousand kilometres has a lot more to offer than scenic beauty and deep ports. Climatic conditions in the area are extremely suitable for modern aquaculture. Exploiting its potential will not only revolutionise the local economy but also contribute towards GDP growth.

Currently, aquaculture in the region is restricted to conventional farming of carp. Due to its very high bone-to-flesh ratio, carp is not a preferred fish and has almost no demand in high-paying markets. The Indian subcontinent and certain parts in Eastern Europe are the only regions where people still consume carp. Another disadvantage of carp is that it is one of the slowest-growing commercially farmed fish species.

Almost all warm water fish grow in hot weather conditions. The moderate climate of Pakistan's coastal region characterised by short and mild winters means better weight gain for longer-duration production cycles of catfish, tilapia and sole. It also means a higher number of harvests in a given year for shrimp and lobster that require a shorter duration.

A good part of this coastal stretch falls within the famous Keti Bandar-Gharo-Hyderabad wind corridor. Even the areas that do not directly fall within the corridor receive significant breeze throughout the year. This means natural oxygenation in ponds that, in turn, means lower dependency on artificial aeration and a reduced risk of mortality because of the sudden drop in the oxygen level in ponds.

Setting up hatcheries and feed mills will have to be a key part of the development plan

Many regional countries with similar climatic conditions have successfully built their aquaculture along modern lines and are earning huge volumes of foreign exchange through exports. Policymakers should study the models of Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Iran to capitalise on this natural advantage.

A well-thought-out strategy is needed to build this sector. In the first phase, some basic steps should be taken without changing the existing model to enable fish farmers to move from low-paying and slow-growing carp towards better-paying and fast-growing catfish, sole and tilapia. This can be achieved by imparting basic training to farmers. They can earn substantially more than they currently do without investing heavily in altering the basic infrastructure. However, the government will have to take some measures urgently to build hatcheries and feed mills for the targeted species.

Many high-value fish like sole (channa marulius), Indus catfish and wallago (Jarka in local language) are found in Indus waters. Farmers get happy if a few of them somehow manage to sneak into their ponds — except for wallago because it is extremely aggressive in nature — as they fetch at least three times the price of the most-prized carp, Roho.

Many farmers intentionally mix a small number of these carnivorous fish with carp. They do it once the carp grows big enough so that smaller carnivorous fish cannot harm it. However, as there are no hatcheries or feed mills for these fish, exclusive farming of these varieties is not possible at present. Setting up hatcheries and feed mills for such kinds of fish will, therefore, have to be a part of the development plan in the first phase.

Another factor that favours a move towards the farming of these high-value carnivorous fish is that the Indus water particularly close to the delta region is infested with wild tilapia. Carp farmers have a tough time trying to control wild tilapia from finding its way into ponds. It aggressively competes with carp for feed. This further slows down the growth rate of carp.

Unlike carp, tilapia breeds extremely well in still waters. Hence, it easily outnumbers the former in ponds. This problem can turn into a huge advantage once carp is replaced with carnivorous fish like sole and catfish. Wild tilapia entering ponds becomes natural feed for carnivorous fish, which keeps the cost of artificial feeding in check.

Once farmers shift towards farming high-value fish, they will also be able to increase fish density in ponds. Unlike extensive farming which depends entirely on natural feed available in ponds, fish is provided with artificial feed in semi-intensive or intensive farming. Hence, a higher number of fish can be farmed as long as it is properly fed. The problem with increasing the number of carp and feeding it artificially is that the wild tilapia present in ponds eats away a good part of this expensive feed. Shifting from carp to catfish and sole farming increases the farmers' revenue in two ways. One, fish fetches a higher price; and two, a higher number of fish can be kept in a given pond, which leads to a higher per kilogram value for farmers.

In the second phase, farmers in the coastal belt can be encouraged to farm species like shrimp, lobster and crabs. The climate along the coastal belt is extremely conducive for this kind of high-value aquaculture. Barring efforts by a few investors who experimented with shrimp farming, no concerted efforts have been put in by the government to develop this extremely lucrative sector. A lack of locally available seed and feed was the main cause for the limited success of these investors. This increased not only their production cost but also the operational risk because the seed airlifted from places as far away as Thailand was prone to high mortality in transit.

The need for moving towards high-value aquaculture emanates from depleting water resources. We must be conscious about the value derived from each litre of water consumed. Per-litre returns in extensive carp farming simply do not justify its continuation. We should soon move towards the intensive farming of high-value aquaculture. Otherwise, we may be forced to abandon aquaculture in the already water-deprived coastal belt.

The government will have to play a proactive role to fully exploit the aquaculture potential. Ensuring seed and feed availability for new high-value species through developing hatcheries and feed mills as independent businesses in the private sector may require an incentive package to attract investors. Many well-established processing units are present in the marine fisheries segment in Karachi. The same can be used to cater to the needs of inland fisheries as well. Building these support businesses will be critical for the overall success of the aquaculture sector.

The writer is a banker-turned-agribusiness specialist

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AGRICULTURE IS IN TROUBLE

From the Newspaper Updated April 01, 2019

The agriculture sector is in trouble. The government admits that the sector cannot grow more than 1.9 per cent in the current fiscal year.

We know that because the government shared this number with the media after the recent approval of the 12th five-year plan. It also envisages 4pc economic growth for this year. Towards the end of the PML-N’s five-year term, policymakers had set targets of 3.8pc and 6.2pc for agriculture and economic growth.

So either policymakers were too optimistic at that time or the political transition has proved to be too depressing for agriculture.

The recently released second quarterly report of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) does not project a growth rate for agriculture. But it says that overall economic growth will remain in the range of 3.5pc and 4pc. The SBP report says outputs of three key crops — cotton, rice and sugar cane — have been in decline. It casts doubt on the likelihood of achieving the wheat target of 25.6 million tonnes as well. The report informs us that all minor crops, minus gram and sunflower, have shown a declining trend in output.

The sector is facing problems because of a number of reasons, such as a water shortage, shrinking of the area under cultivation and higher costs of inputs

We know that it is in trouble due to a shortage of water and the resultant shrinkage of the area under cultivation. Other reasons include higher costs of inputs after the rupee depreciation, an uptick in headline inflation, little inter-provincial coordination and strained relations between Sindh and the federation.

The central bank report does not shed light on the performance of livestock, fisheries and poultry sub-sectors that are also a part of agriculture. But it is hard to assume that the livestock sector can grow at a time when there is not enough water for crops and slower economic growth has reduced people's disposable income.

The performance of the livestock sector will become known after the release of the Economic Survey of Pakistan before the close of the fiscal year in June. The same is true for poultry. But seafood exports always give us a clue about the output of the fisheries sector. In the first eight months of this fiscal year, export volumes of seafood have declined about 2pc to 111,000 tonnes. By the way, meat exports increased 10pc to 39,500 tonnes during this period, but that alone does not indicate output growth in the livestock sector.

After stating that agriculture will grow just 1.9pc in 2018-19, policymakers have set agricultural growth targets of 3.2pc for 2019-20, 3.7pc for 2020-21, 3.9pc for 2021-22 and 4pc for 2022-23.

The way the federal government has strained its relations with Sindh, the country's second largest agricultural hub, should be a cause for concern. We need more transparency on agricultural cooperation between Pakistan and China under the CPEC to achieve these growth rates. It is necessary so that the provinces can develop their annual agriculture development plans accordingly.

Politically sensitive topics, like the new National Finance Commission (NFC) award, judicious distribution of irrigation water among the provinces and speculations about a possible repeal of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, will continue to affect the performance of agriculture in years to come. Under the 18th Amendment, agriculture is a provincial subject, although there is a genuine need and scope for better coordination between the provinces and the federation.

On March 18, Prime Minister Imran Khan approved a national agricultural emergency programme of Rs290bn to fulfil his pre-poll promise of revolutionising the sector. Next day, the National Assembly's special committee on agriculture held its maiden meeting and elected the speaker of the assembly, Asad Qaiser, as its chairman.

This emergency programme is to be implemented over a five-year period. It is aimed at boosting agricultural research and overcoming the shortage of certified seeds and lack of proper storage facilities besides promoting technological advancement, economisation in the use of water for agriculture and import substitution in the edible oil sector.

Since all the four provinces are represented on the parliamentary committee, one can expect that it can come up with an implementable road map for agriculture growth.

All sub-sectors of our agriculture continue to suffer from low productivity. In the crops sector, per-hectare yields are far less than those in other countries. One of its reasons, according to a recently released World Bank report, is a consistent disparity between the crop yields of rich farmers and poor farmers in Pakistan.

"An increasingly unequal distribution of landholding and failure to reform a land tenure and agriculture system that significantly favours large landlords" has given rise to a politically influential landholding class, according to the report titled Pakistan@100: Shaping the Future.

Agriculture may not grow at a sustainable high rate unless this problem is addressed. Can the government do this? Will it be able to garner support from the provinces in so doing? Only time will tell.

In the current environment of political confrontation and uncertainty, it seems too difficult.

With energy prices shooting up every month as old subsidies go and oil prices rise, prices of agricultural inputs, including seeds and fertilisers, will likely continue to increase. Currently, this is a major concern for farmers.

Water shortages may become more acute as no initiative has been taken in the past eight months for building small dams and rainwater reservoirs.

If the country faces a super flood due to the faster melting of glaciers and increased mercury level, as the Federal Flood Commission fears, agriculture will suffer more. —MA

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1473022/agriculture-is-in-trouble

'PAKISTAN RANKS FIFTH IN GLOBAL MILK PRODUCTION'

RECORDER REPORT | APR 1ST, 2019 | SIALKOT

Dairy and livestock sector has great potential to accelerate the pace of economic development of Pakistan. The Cheese production is an emerging sector for domestic and international investment. Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) has prepared and published "cheese" value added dairy product-prospects for Pakistan.

Official sources told Business Recorder on Sunday that rank of Pakistan is fifth in global milk production with over 50 billion litres annually. It is estimated that annual demand of cheese is more than 5,000 tonnes in the country whereas local production remains at around 3049 tonnes and cheese production is emerging as an important potential sector investment. SMEDA in this regard has prepared and published Cheese Value Added Dairy Product-Prospects for Pakistan with the objective to evaluate investment potential of this sector and disseminate information for local and international investors to make future investment decisions.

The report has been prepared in consultation with stakeholders and development experts and has been reviewed by technical experts. The study conducted by SMEDA will be helpful for the domestic and international investors to come forward and take initiative for investing in this emerging potential sector, sources added.

Meanwhile, Ch Altaf Ahmed and Muhammad Bashir, progressive stakeholders engaged with dairy and livestock sector, while expressing their views said that it is high time for the government to take drastic steps for the promotion of cheese sector at gross roots level and announce special incentives for the purpose.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190401460208/

PFA TO CRACK DOWN ON SALE OF OPEN MILK ACROSS PROVINCE

By Asif Mehmood Published: April 1, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has initiated work on a project in order to ensure that people across the province are provided pure and safe milk.

During the first phase, the provincial capital will serve as a model city, free of contaminated and adulterated milk. The sale of open milk will be banned and only pasteurised milk will be available. However, the deadline for the ban has not yet been announced.

A meeting was also chaired in this regard a few days ago. The Punjab Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry, Punjab Livestock Minister Sardar Hasnain Bahadur Dreshak, and PFA Director General Muhammad Usman were present during the meeting.

Several decisions regarding the ban on the sale of open milk were taken during the meeting while responsibilities were also assigned to the departments concerned. Further, plans for setting up pasteurisation units were also discussed.

The Punjab food minister stated that after making Lahore a model for banning the sale of open milk, the crackdown will also be extended to other parts of the province.

Punjab Livestock Minister Sardar Hasnain Bahadur Dreshak said that banning the sale of open milk is the only way to stop the adulteration mafia. “Eliminating adulterated milk will directly benefit farms which produce pure milk,” he said.

PFA Director General Muhammad Usman revealed that pasteurisation units will be set up in Lahore. The pasteurised milk will be packed after a laboratory reviews. In this manner, the business of selling adulterated and contaminated will slowly be eliminated while the sale of open milk will be eradicated in Punjab by 2020, he said.

Work on the project will begin after consultation with all the departments concerned as soon as the plans are completed.

In addition to this, a public awareness campaign will also be initiated across the province. The decision to ban the sale of open milk in Punjab was taken by the previous government in 2017 and 2020 was set as the deadline for this initiative. The current government is forwarding the initiative.

Experts say that pasteurisation is a process whereby milk is heated to a certain temperature for a short amount of time which kills off all the germs and impurities which can be harmful for human health. The milk is then cooked down, packaged and supplied to the market.

Experts add that pasteurisation also protects us from food and water borne disease. However, those selling milk argue that boiling the liquid affects the taste and the freshness.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1941359/1-pfa-crack-sale-open-milk-across-province/

May 2019

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 20th TO MAY 26th 2019

UN TO LAUNCH DECADE OF FAMILY FARMING NEXT WEEK

Amin Ahmed Updated May 26, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The United Nations is launching next week a Decade of Family Farming (2019-28) which provides a unique opportunity to ensure food security, improve livelihoods, better manage natural resources, protect the environment and achieve sustainable development, particularly in rural areas.

Data compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) says family farms produce more than 80 per cent of the food in the world and they occupy around 70 to 80pc of farmland worldwide. Women hold only 15pc of farmland, while they provide almost 50pc of farm labour. More than 90pc of farms are run by an individual or a family who rely primarily on family labour. There are more than 600 million farms in the world today.

A 'Global Action Plan' fuelled a robust process of political dialogue among the 197 member states of the FAO, involving all relevant actors, which resulted in the formulation of national and regional policies, programmes, activities and institutional arrangements in support of family farming. The official ceremony for launch of the decade is taking place at FAO headquarters in Rome on Monday.

The purpose of action plan is to mobilise concrete, coordinated actions to overcome challenges family farmers face, strengthen their investment capacity, and thereby attain the potential benefits of their contributions to transform societies and put in place long-term and sustainable solutions.

The Global Action Plan aims at accelerating actions undertaken in a collective, coherent and comprehensive manner to support family farmers, who are key agents of sustainable development.

Family farmers hold unique potential to become key agents of development strategies. Family farming is the predominant form of food and agricultural production in both developed and developing countries, producing over 80pc of the world's food in value terms. Given the multidimensional nature of family farming, the farm and family, food production and life at home, farm ownership and work, traditional knowledge and innovative farming solutions, the past, present and future are all deeply intertwined.

To feed the world and do it sustainably, an urgent and radical shift in our food systems is necessary. To be effective, transformative actions must add-ress a complex set of interconnected objectives encompassing economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Family farmers — including pastoralists, fishers, foresters, indigenous people and other groups of food producers — are at the heart of this issue. They provide the majority of the world's food, are the major investors in agriculture and the backbone of the rural economic structure.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1484686/un-to-launch-decade-of-family-farming-next-week

SINDH FOOD DEPT EMBROILED IN MEGA CORRUPTION SCAM INVOLVING WHEAT PROCUREMENT

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated May 26, 2019

HYDERABAD: A multi-billion-rupee scam involving procurement of wheat and misappropriation of jute bags, also called bardana, has hit the Sindh food department after hundreds of thousands of such bags are either simply missing/ misappropriated or stuffed with chaff, it emerged on Saturday.

The scam invited the attention of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which first sealed and then unsealed several warehouses in upper Sindh's Larkana and Sukkur regions after counting.

Inquiries by Dawn revealed that apart from the apex anti-graft watchdog, the Sindh Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) also lodged FIRs in Dadu, Sanghar and Karachi against flour mill owners, food officials and other private persons, including middlemen or other beneficiaries.

The food department is yet to come on record to share official figures regarding this massive financial bungling.

NAB's inquiries are likely to culminate into a reference against unscrupulous elements including private persons and food department officials.

Around 2-2.5m jute bags are either missing or misappropriated from warehouses

NAB initiated action in Sukkur, Ghotki, Naushahro Feroze, Khairpur, Jacobabad, Qambar-Shahdadkot and Kashmore.

Sources in the Sindh food department told to Dawn that NAB had not shared anything with them, but it appeared that between two million to 2.5m bags were either missing from warehouses or misappropriated.

They said that the only figure available was of 194,000 bags, which according to the ACE's findings were misappropriated in Dadu district.

NAB had investigated the position of 2017-18 wheat crop's stocks in godowns of Sukkur and Larkana regions. This year, the Sindh government has not yet decided to procure wheat considering the commodity's large carryover stocks.

NAB intervened to look into available wheat stocks of Sindh for 2017-18 crop season following receipt of a complaint before Ramazan that wheat bags had been missing in warehouses.

"We checked warehouses first in Sukkur in the presence of magistrates following the complaint," said a NAB source. Then, he added, similar surprise visits were paid to warehouses in other districts as well and this led to a proper investigation.

NAB completed counting of bags and the difference of missing bags was brought on record to thwart any attempt by food officials to purchase wheat from market and meet the difference. It also found out wheat bags were placed in columns and rows.

Adulterated wheat (mixed with chaff and husk) was kept in midst of bags to dodge investigators. The probe by and large involves wheat season of 2017-18 but in Larkana region's procurement centres like Nairabad, Warah and Kambar crops of 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons were not found.

"Only in Sukkur Rs2bn losses were assessed in terms of missing bags", disclosed the NAB source. "There are reports food officials were trying to buy wheat to meet deficit of bags in official record but it is not possible. A reference is quite likely relating to financial malpractices," he said.

Around 25 mills in Ghotki and 18 in Sukkur were also sealed off and then unsealed following verification of stocks.

Food department preserves wheat on private premises like flour mills also. It is often released to same mills on a credit basis for wheat flour production. During the last crop season, the food department had procured 1.4 million tonnes of the crop when it had around 300,000 tonnes of carryover stocks.

NAB, for instance, has estimated the value of wheat at Rs966.044m towards difference/shortage of 125,940 jute bags of 100kg and 342,609 50kg bags in Khairpur district.

A shortage of 2,059.099 metric tons of wheat of five crop seasons was missing in 6,888 jute bags of 100 kgs and 14,318 polypropylene (PP) bags of 50 kgs in procurement centre Qambar as well.

The ACE also completed an inquiry regarding Sanghar's six talukas where FIRs were lodged for each taluka, involving Rs1.46bn misappropriation.

The ACE lodged the cases following completion of its findings in which it determined a loss of Rs461.125m in Shahdadpur taluka; Rs455.78m in Sinjhoro, Rs460.2m in Tando Adam; Rs150m in Khipro; Rs105.25m in Jam Nawaz Ali and Rs121.69m in Sanghar taluka in Dec 2018.

"Around 1.7m wheat bags were procured officially in Sanghar. But most of the bardana went to middlemen and those who don't own land or were traders. Some traders were based in Punjab as per banking transactions," said ACE official Zamir Abbasi.

The Rs1.46bn misappropriation includes cost in the heads of support price, incidental charges, cost of jute bags, transportation.

These cases were lodged against deputy director-food, Hyderabad, district food controller (DFC) Sanghar, godown in charges and middlemen.

"Fictitious forms-VII [a piece of revenue document] were produced to supply wheat and get support price of Rs1,300. This document is mandatory to get the support price," Mr Abbasi said.

Likewise, 194,000 wheat bags were missing, which involved the misappropriation of Rs660m.

Resultantly, two flour mill owners (whose pre-arrest bail rejected recently), nine godowns in charges, Dadu deputy commissioner and deputy director, Jamshoro were nominated in the case.

Mr Abbasi said around Rs5bn was returned to the food department by millers, who got wheat on a credit basis. "These millers were provided wheat on a credit basis although there was no government policy to this effect," he remarked.

Now, 45 mill owners, the DFC concerned and others face charges.

The DFC-Malir, in his May 6 letter, informed the ACE that Rs4.971bn was recovered and a balance of Rs502.099m was pending for which cheques were given and being deposited.

The letter said 1.682m bags were issued in one month on credit in Malir and East districts for wheat worth Rs5.473bn.

The ongoing NAB investigation and registration of cases by the ACE clearly show how skewed and tainted the wheat procurement process in Sindh is. The procurement is all about support price of wheat, which has been Rs1,300/40kg for the past several years.

This subsidy is given from taxpayers' money by the government and it is primarily meant for farmers but it hardly reaches to them due to institutional leakages and lapses in process.

Gunny bags are doled out only among political, non-political, influential landowners and government functionaries, who own land. Small farmers with 16 and 25 acres or lesser landholdings end up running from pillar to post to get bags in anticipation of the official support price.

A farmer provides his land's document to show cultivation of wheat and to pay challan for bardana so that wheat could be supplied to the procurement centre. An amount of Rs125 is charged towards 100 kg jute bag and Rs60 for polypropylene bag. A farmer is bound to supply wheat to the procurement centre but they are forced to transport it to warehouses on their own.

"The cost towards transportation of wheat from procurement centres to godown by us is stomached by officials," said Nadeem Shah, an old wheat grower.

He complained that a deduction of around 2.5kg was made by officials on 100kg bag in addition to the weight of the jute bag.

"It is good that the Sindh government is not procuring wheat this year. Quantitative ratio of farmers getting support price is always negligible because bardana is not supplied to them," he said.

He claimed that offloading of wheat was to be done by food department workers but the cost was borne by farmers.

"We indeed require putting things on a right track so such lapses would not occur and a transparent procurement of wheat is ensured. To achieve the goal, this exercise should begin from at the time of cultivation of the wheat crop so that documents' verification can easily be done and when procurement season starts genuine farmers are facilitated in terms of supply of bardana," said a Karachi-based source.

Until recently, growers had been holding protests to press the government to procure their crop. But the government remained indecisive amid reports that the food department had moved a summary asking it to allow the procurement. The wheat crop season had almost been completed.

An illegal economy is in fact thriving behind the process of wheat procurement. As the season begins, food officials provide bardana to middlemen or traders, who purchase wheat at Rs1,050 to Rs1,110 per 40kg from growers and then sell it to the food department at the official price of Rs1,300/40kg.

The differential amount, which is pocketed by a nexus of officials and traders, is in addition to offloading and transportation charges that are to be paid by the department but practically borne by growers.

Published in Dawn, May 26th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1484567/sindh-food-dept-embroiled-in-mega-corruption-scam-involving-wheat-procurement

NUTRITIONAL CHALLENGE: UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF FOOD FORTIFICATION PROGRAMME

By Rizwan Asif Published: May 26, 2019

LAHORE: Pakistan is known for its mouth-watering, traditional food that comes in a wide variety of vegetarian and non-vegetarian choices. However, owing to poverty and lack of access to healthy food, the country is ranked the second most malnourished in Asia, as per the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

In order to overcome the major public health challenge of micronutrient malnutrition, the previous governments of Pakistan, together with the funding of international institutions, initiated the ongoing Food Fortification Programme (FFP). Under the initiative, the concept of 'fortified flour' was introduced.

However, the incorrect policies of authorities, lack of research and strong reservations of public departments and industries at large, made it very difficult for the programme to achieve its goals.

The Pakistan Flour Mills Association and the Punjab Food Department termed the flour fortification process 'unsatisfactory' and suggested that a nutrition survey be carried out in Punjab's urban and rural areas. The objective was to determine which nutrients are lacking among consumers.

According to details obtained by The Express Tribune, the Food Fortification Programme was initiated in 1998 and popularly known as the Foladi Aata (iron-containing flour) plan. An international nongovernmental organisation started working with the Pakistan flour mills association and factory owners were made an offer to install micro feeders on their plants to get the pre-mix free of cost.

From 2000 to 2003, more than 300 flour-mill owners installed micro feeders in their mills on a self-help basis and started preparing fortified flour. However, during the tenure of former president Pervaiz Musharraf, the project became stagnant after the introduction of the district system.

In later years, different governments and NGOs tried to continue the project, but remained unsuccessful. A few years ago, the previous government, through the British government's programme UK Aid, stepped up their efforts to eliminate the food crisis in Pakistan. As a result, a national fortification alliance, under the federal health department, was formed and the Food Fortification Programme started anew.

As per the project requirement, a decision was taken to install free-of-cost micro-feeders in flour, oil, and ghee mills across all the provinces of Pakistan. The micro feeders, which were originally worth Rs700,000, were bought with the funding of the British government and are currently being provided to mill owners to include the pre-mix in flour.

Even though the provision of fortified flour would have considerably helped to alleviate the nutrition deficiency among the population, various hindrances, together with criticism from certain bodies, slowed down the project.

According to the data published by the FFP, out of more than 1,000 mills in the country, 477 started flour fortification. The report further said that in Pakistan, only 12% of the overall flour is fortified.

The FFP's website's data states that 386 flour mills in Punjab are producing fortified flour, while there are 34 such mills in Sindh, 24 in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and 33 in Islamabad. In Balochistan, none of the flour mills has started producing fortified flour.

It is worth noting that the current food fortification programme relies on data obtained through the national nutrition survey conducted in 2011.According to the country's industrial organisations, the survey was "incomplete and unrealistic."

According to the mentioned nutrition survey, five million children below the age of five die in Pakistan every year and 250,000 of them are lost to food shortages. The survey report said that 44% of children in Pakistan have iron deficiency, while 54% suffer from a lack of the Vitamin A. Another 40% are Vitamin D deficient.

Similarly, half of the female population in the country is anaemic, while 37% of pregnant women suffer from iron deficiency. Also, 46% and 69% of the country's women are Vitamin A and Vitamin D deficient, respectively. Consequently, newborn babies birthed by nutrition-deprived mothers have weaker brains and are prone to other diseases.

Under Vision 2025, the current government intends to make the country 'hunger-free' and to that end, claims were made to eliminate food shortage, together with the introduction of new laws on federal and provincial levels to tackle the issue.

However, except for Punjab, there has been no progress in other provinces at all. The Pakistan standards and quality control department has set criteria for flour fortification according to which, in one ton of flour, 250 grams of pre-mix is added. The premix comprises folic acid, iron, and vitamin B-12.

International institutions involved in the project, however, have differences with local industries in Pakistan. A few days ago, the Pakistan flour mills association protested against Tauseef Janjua, the Pakistan representative of international institutions involved in the project. According to the flour mills association, Janjua has been harassing flour mill owners and has been compelling them to fortify flour even though the pre-mix provided by international institutions has expired. As a result, flour mills have now purchased their own pre-mix for the process of fortification.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Pakistan flour mills association group leader Asim Raza said that women and children do face an acute lack of nutrition, but using a uniform approach to tackle the issue across the board is not the solution.

"In many of the areas of Punjab, residents don't face deficiencies," he said. "The government should, therefore, conduct an implementable and authentic national nutrition survey on the basis of which it should be decided which area lacks which nutrient and how fortification should be carried out."

Asim Raza added that efforts were made to exert governmental pressure on flour mill owners, but it was resisted.

"We want to improve the health of the Pakistani nation, but it is important that governmental and international authorities take measures based on authentic facts and figures."

When contacted, secretary food Punjab, Naseem Sadiq said that in order to reap maximum benefits of the FFP, a mapping must be carried out on the district level because the wheat/grains of each area are different.

"People belonging to different areas lack different nutrients in their bodies," Sadiq said. "The current fortification programme has been designed by keeping the urban population in mind, whereas more than 60% of the population lives in rural areas. Therefore, a new survey must be conducted in rural areas to find out about deficiencies prevalent among people over there."

He said that the desired objectives of the programme will not be achieved by implementing a Europe-tailored programme in Pakistan, especially in Punjab.

"People in every area have different eating habits and things are changing. Fifteen years ago, one person used to consume 1.25 kg flour per month, while nowadays, they consume seven kg flour in the form of rotis.

When contacted for a comment, Janjua – the focal person for international institutions — said that he doesn't have anything to say at the moment, however, he added that his communications department will get back to The Express Tribune later.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1980355/1-nutritional-challenge-uncertain-future-food-fortification-programme/

POULTRY SECTOR DEMANDS TAX REMOVAL ON FEED CONTENTS

By Our Correspondent Published: May 26, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The national and international compliance standards of chicken products are giving a tough time to Pakistan in the standard-conscious world, stated the Poultry Association of Pakistan.

A delegation of the association, in a meeting with Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile and Industry Abdul Razak Dawood, discussed the performance of the poultry sector, its potential and how it could be made more efficient and competitive. Locally-produced feed contents should be free from sales tax, the association suggested. It will reduce feed cost, turning the sector more competitive. They highlighted the need for chicken vaccines, important for the sector's growth, to be allowed at zero import duty.

Appreciating the performance of the poultry sector, the adviser emphasised that poultry producers should be more aggressive while making inroads into the regional market. "Pakistan needs to capitalise on the global Halal market," he said. He assured the association that their proposals, related to tariff, taxation and facilitation, would be analysed and considered for implementation in order to help the sector grow.

"Major food players like Cargill are enhancing their presence in the Pakistani market and our poultry players need to capitalise on it," Dawood said.

Cargill, the global agro-giant, has pledged to invest more than $200 million in Pakistan over the next three to five years. Commercial poultry in Pakistan, which was established in 1962, is one of the largest agro-based segments having an investment of more than Rs750 billion.

There are over 15,000 poultry farms spread in rural areas across the country. The capacity of farms ranges from 5,000 to 500,000 broilers.

Annually, Pakistan produces around 18,000 million eggs and over 2,250 million kilogrammes of chicken meat. It shows that there is a huge potential for the poultry sector to cater to domestic and export sectors.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1980384/2-poultry-sector-demands-tax-removal-feed-contents/

UNHYGIENIC MILK WASTED, ADULTERATORS HELD

Our Correspondent May 26, 2019

MANSEHRA: The district administration and food department, in a joint operation on Saturday, have arrested over a dozen adulterators and wasted a large quantity of unhygienic milk.

A joint team led by Assistant Commissioner Ali Sher and Assistant Food Controller Shaukat Sultan, intercepted vehicles through which milk was being supplied to commercial and domestic consumers in the city and its suburbs.

Sultan told reporters that milk weighing hundreds of kilograms was thrown in drain after it was proven injurious to health through a mobile milk laboratory that had arrived in Mansehra from Peshawar.

“The food department has zero-tolerance for adulterators and vendors who mix chemicals in milk and thus play with the lives of people,” said Sultan.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/476516-unhygienic-milk-wasted-adulterators-held

SINDH WHEAT GROWERS COUNT RS20 BILLION LOSSES

Shahid Shah May 26, 2019

KARACHI: Sindh’s wheat growers have suffered losses of more than Rs20 billion, as market prices fell in the province after Sindh government failed to provide support price to farmers, growers have said.

Majeed Nizamani, president, Sindh Abadgar Board, told The News that growers faced a loss of around Rs300/40kg. “The province is having a bumper crop of around 4.2 million tons this year,” he informed.

Sindh cabinet had decided not to purchase wheat from growers and export 0.5 million tons of wheat this year out of 0.8 million tons.

The Sindh Food Department had cited the reason that it took loan from different banks of Rs135 billion for the purchase of wheat in the province, of which Rs100 billion were not paid so far.

Agriculture Policy Institute (API), formerly known as Agriculture Prices Commission of Pakistan, notifies the indicative prices of commodities, while the provincial governments provide support to the growers by controlling the prices in the market, called support price.

They do it by procuring certain quantity when prices fall below that price.

Besides, food departments procure wheat to maintain food security.

Growers said that support price of the government controlled the price in the open market, and traders purchased the commodity on no more than a difference of Rs25/40kg, but due to unavailability of support price, average selling price of wheat was Rs1,000 in the province against support price of Rs1,300/40kg.

“It is not wrong if I say we lost more than Rs20 billion this year,” Nizamani said.

It was a privilege of the Sindh government to procure or not to procure wheat from the growers, but maintaining the support price secures the farmer.

“Whatever quantity it procured, we never objected, as it controlled the market prices and traders were unable to exploit the growers,” he said.

The provincial government had procured only 1.4 million tons last year out of 3.6 million tons at a support price of Rs1,300/40kg.

This year, Punjab is procuring 4.0 million tons. Pakistan Storages and Supplies Corporation (Passco) will also purchase wheat in Punjab.

They will give additional Rs100 per bag to farmers to take wheat to the procurement centre.

Earlier this week, Sindh Food Department banned the inter-district movement of wheat in the province. Growers said it would not benefit the growers, as harvesting was almost over and very little quantity of wheat was left with the growers. However, they suspected shortage of wheat with the government alleging theft of more than 100,000 tons from the government warehouses.

“Either mud is filled in the bags or they are empty,” Nizamani said.

Mehmood Nawaz Shah, a grower leader, said Sindh government could have exported the wheat, as international prices had gone up and rupee had devalued in the country.

Government never stopped procurement in last 20 years, it did stop during the government of Pervez Musharraf, which created the issue of food security, as fewer growers sowed wheat next year, Shah said.

The country had to import wheat from Russia and Ukraine.

Despite of decrease in wheat prices in the province, prices of wheat flour have increased in the retail market.

Farid Qureshi, secretary general, Karachi Retail Grocers Association said flour price increased by Rs2 per kg before Ramazan. “They (mills) say they will further increase the prices in coming days,” he informed.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/476410-sindh-wheat-growers-count-rs20-billion-losses

PUNJAB CABINET ENDS REBATE ON SUGAR EXPORT

THE NEWSPAPER'S STAFF REPORTER Published May 25, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab cabinet on Friday abolished subsidy as well as rebate on export of sugar in a bid to stabilise sugar prices in the province.

The cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Usman Buzdar also decided to give two kilo sugar per individual consumer in Ramazan bazaars across the province. The Ramazan bazaars will be converted into Eid bazaars from 21st of Ramazan. For Eid bazaars, the Punjab government has provided a subsidy of Rs20 million.

In the light of the directions of the Supreme Court, the cabinet meeting approved fixing levy of Re1 per litre as aquifer tariff (water charges) on water bottling and beverage companies extracting groundwater. Wasa, local government and the irrigation department will issue notifications in this regard.

The cabinet decided opening a separate account for the money collected under this head besides devising a comprehensive mechanism for receiving and utilisation of water charges.

The cabinet meeting approved extending jurisdiction of the Fort Munro Development Authority to include whole Tribal Area of Dera Ghazi Khan and renaming it as "Koh-i-Suleman Development Authority".

The School Education Department apprised the cabinet members of amendments to the transfer policy of teachers. A detailed briefing will also be given to the parliamentary party about the e-Transfer Policy 2013.

The cabinet decided amending the LDA laws with regard to utilisation of land for marquees, marriage and banquet halls. The meeting expressed its satisfaction over the achievement of wheat procurement target.

The cabinet also discussed audit reports of C&W, housing and urban development and public health engineering, irrigation, LG&CD departments and Infrastructure Development Authority Punjab for the audit year 2018-19; reports on biannual monitoring on the implementation of seventh National Finance Commission Award for the periods from July to December 2016, January to June 2017 and July to December 2017; regularisation of support staff of the Punjab Revenue Authority; resource mobilisation proposals for financial year 2019-20; and appointment of the Punjab Pension Fund general manager.

Published in Dawn, May 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1484387/punjab-cabinet-ends-rebate-on-sugar-export

COTTON, CONSTRUCTION DRIVE DOWN GDP GROWTH

Khaleeq Kiani Updated May 25, 2019

ISLAMABAD: At least three important factors caused a crucial setback to the country's dismal economic growth rate this year even though major contributors to GDP missed their targets.

Informed sources told Dawn that during a presentation on the performance of macroeconomic indicators, the Annual Plan Coordination Committee (APCC) was informed on Thursday that the most crucial setback was about 17.5 per cent fall in the production of cotton crop this year owing to two consecutive years of water scarcity.

Major crops including wheat and construction sector were the two other key factors pulling down the growth rate. Pakistan GDP growth rate is estimated to have stood at 3.28pc during current fiscal year, missing a 6.2pc target by a wide margin. One area that extended a crucial helping hand to industry, on the other hand, was almost 41pc growth in electricity generation and gas distribution against its targeted growth of just 7.5pc.

The sources said the meeting was informed that agriculture sector posted a growth rate of just 0.8pc against a target of 3.8pc. Important crops were estimated to grow by 3pc but these actually posted a fall of 6.5pc.

Cotton ginning was targeted to go up by 8.9pc by its output actually fell down by 12.7pc when compared to last year. That meant the combined impact was negative 21.5pc. It was reported that there was massive decline in cotton out as total cotton output stood at 8.98m bales against a target of 14.37 million bales set for the current fiscal year.

The decline in cotton production was attributed to shortage of irrigation water, use of lower inputs – inferior quality of seeds, fertiliser at early stage of crop and reduction of 12pc in sown area.

Wheat crop production increased minimally by 0.5pc compared to the last year but fell significantly behind target due to wheat diseases such as rust and smut affecting the overall yield as per acre of the crop and then a last phase adverse weather conditions.

It was reported that initial estimates put the total wheat output at 24.268m tonnes during the just concluded crop season against a target of 25.56m tonnes. About 1.213m tonnes were reported to have lost due to recent adverse thunderstorms and rains in Punjab and the arid zones.

Some participants were of the view that losses in Punjab appeared to be on the higher side and would be known after a couple of weeks because crops in many parts were still in the open fields.

The meeting was informed that production of rice registered a decline of 3.3pc, whereas production of sugarcane also reduced by 19.4pc over the last year's production. The area sown for rice and sugarcane also decreased by 3.1pc and 17.9pc respectively. All these factors contributed to the decline in projected growth target of agriculture sector.

The APCC was reported that 'other crops' output also fell short of targets as they posted a growth of 1.9pc against 3.5pc. The growth in fishery was recorded at 0.8pc against the target of 1.8pc for the current fiscal year and growth in forestry stood at 6.5pc against a target of 8.5pc.

The details presented to the APCC also showed a poor performance in other sectors. The overall industry grew a paltry 1.4pc against a target of 7.6pc and perhaps major contribution came from construction sector that is believed to be supporting about 40 allied industries.

The construction sector posted a reduction of 7.6pc compared to a target of 10pc increase. The mining and quarrying sector also showed a negative growth of 1.9pc against its growth target of 3.6pc.

Large-scale manufacturing provisional growth was estimated at negative 2pc against the target of 8.1pc while provisional growth in services sector was estimated at 4.7pc from 6.5pc target.

Published in Dawn, May 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1484426/cotton-construction-drive-down-gdp-growth

COTTON CROP PRODUCTION REGISTERS 17.4 PERCENT FALL

ZAHEER ABBASI | MAY 25TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Cotton crop has registered a fall of 17.4 percent in its production and consequently it contributed in decline of agriculture sector's growth to 0.8 percent against the target of 3.8 percent for the current fiscal year. Sources said that a meeting of the Annual Plan Coordination Committee (APCC) was informed on Thursday that there has been a massive decline which led to downward revision in production to 9.86 million bales from 14.37 million bales target set for the current fiscal year.

The decline in cotton production was attributed to shortage of irrigation water, use of low inputs, interior quality of seeds, fertilizer at early stage of crop and reduction of 12 percent in sown area. Wheat crop production increased minimally by 0.5 percent compared to the last year due to wheat diseases such as rust and smut affecting the overall yield as per acre of the crop.

The meeting was informed that production of rice registered a decline of 3.3 percent, whereas production of sugarcane also came down by 19.4 percent over the last year's production. The area sown for rice and sugarcane also decreased by 3.1 percent and 17.9 percent respectively.

The APCC was told that all these factors were responsible for decline in projected growth target of agriculture sector. The government has revised downward agriculture sector's growth target to 0.8 percent for the current fiscal year from 3.8 percent growth target set in the budget, following important crops registered a negative growth of 6.5 percent against the target of 3 percent.

The APCC was further informed that growth of other crops has also been revised downward to 1.9 percent against 3.5 percent target, cotton ginned negative 12.7 percent against 8.9 percent target, growth in fishery was recorded at 0.8 percent against the target of 1.8 percent for the current fiscal year and growth in forestry was registered at 6.5 percent against the target of 8.5 percent for fiscal year 2017-18.

The details presented to the APCC also revealed dismal performance by other sectors as well during the current fiscal year as growth in mining and quarrying was revised downward to negative 1.9 percent from 3.6 percent target.

Large scale manufacturing provisional growth was estimated negative 2 percent against the target of 7.8 percent while provisional growth in services sector was revised downward to 4.7 from 6.5 percent target.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190525479821/

PUNJAB CABINET TO TAKE UP SUBSIDY ON SUGAR EXPORT, LEVY ON WATER

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter May 24, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government is holding its 11th cabinet meeting on Friday (today) and taking up the crucial 'subsidy on export of sugar' as well as levy of Re1 per litre as aquifer tariff on water bottling and beverages companies across the province – on account of extraction of ground water in compliance with the orders of the Supreme Court.

The cabinet meeting, to be presided over by Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, is also scheduled considering extending jurisdiction of Fort Munro Development Authority to include whole tribal area of Dera Ghazi Khan and renaming it as "Koh-i-Suleman Development Authority".

The school education department will present amendments to Transfer Policy of 2013 for consideration and approval.

The finance department has five-point agenda for the consideration of the cabinet – audit report on the accounts of the C&W, HUD & PHE, Irrigation, LG&CD departments and the Infrastructure Development Authority Punjab for the audit year 2018-19; reports on biannual monitoring on the implementation of seventh National Finance Commission Award for the periods from July to December 2016, January to June 2017 and July to December 2017; regularisation of support staff of Punjab Revenue Authority; resource mobilization proposals for financial year 2019-20; and appointment of general manager Punjab Pension Fund.

Published in Dawn, May 24th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1484243/punjab-cabinet-to-take-up-subsidy-on-sugar-export-levy-on-water

TWO FOOD OFFICIALS, 15 OTHERS FLEE COURT AFTER REJECTION OF BAIL PLEAS

THE NEWSPAPER'S STAFF CORRESPONDENT Published May 24, 2019

HYDERABAD: An inspector was arrested and two senior food officials as well as all other accused in a Rs1.46bn bardana (gunny bags) fled the court of the special anti-corruption judge (provincial) on Thursday when their pleas for pre-arrest bail were rejected.

Fifteen applicants, including an acting deputy director and the district food controller of Sanghar, Ali Asghar Naich and Munawar Hussain Arain, respectively, had sought pre-arrest bail in the 2018 scam through Advocate Farhad Ali Abro. The lawyer also represented another six private persons.

All the accused were booked for allegedly misappropriating bardana meant for distribution among wheat growers.

According to the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE), the accused were involved in the Rs1.46bn bardana. It had registered six cases pertaining to the stocks provided for distribution among growers in six talukas of Sanghar district.

A number of private persons, including some landowners who were also booked in the FIRs had filed applications for bail applications which were rejected by the court.

Earlier, Advocate Abro contended that gunny bags were available in Sanghar and the required accounts-related sheets were made available to the ACE. He said that payments were made and counting of gunny bags was also done accordingly.

ACE officials present on the court premises tried to arrest the accused soon after rejection of the bail applications. However, only one food inspector, whose name could not be ascertained, could be arrested. ACE sources said that they wanted to arrest Ali Asghar Naich, Munawar Arain and an assistant food director.

Published in Dawn, May 24th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1484175/two-food-officials-15-others-flee-court-after-rejection-of-bail-pleas

SLUMP IN SEAFOOD EXPORT CONTINUES IN JULY-APRIL

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 24TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Slump in Pakistan's seafood export continues to $348.484 million in July-Apr 2018-19, down by 6.21 percent, official figures said. The continuing fall in the seafood export now comes to the tune $23.064 million in July-Apr 2018-19 from $371.548 million in July-Apr 2017-18, Pakistan bureau of Statistics shows.

Seafood export volume also scaled down to 153,061 metric tons in July-Apr 2018-19 from 163,632 metric tons in July-Apr 2017-18, indicating a fall of 6.46 percent or 10571metric tons.

In Apr 2019, Pakistan suffered 2.40 percent or $1.345 million fall in the seafood export to $54.589 million from $55.934 million in Apr 2018.

In term of quantity, Pakistan witnessed a fall of 6.16 percent or 1589 metric tons to 24,224 metric tons in Apr 2019 from 25,813 metric tons in Apr 2018.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190524478788/

AVANT-GARDE BUDGET PROPOSALS-III: TAPPING THE REAL POTENTIAL

HUZAIMA BUKHARI AND DR IKRAMUL HAQ | MAY 24TH, 2019 | ARTICLE

A country's tax gap is measured by the amount of tax that remains uncollected due to non-compliance with tax laws. 'Pakistan Tax Gaps: Estimates by Tax Calculation and Methodology' (http://aysps.gsu.edu/isp/files/ispwp0811(1).pdf), a joint study of Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University and World Bank, provides in detail, tax gaps by type of tax and describes the methodologies and data used for such estimates. The report released in December 2008 under the name of Rubina Ather Ahmad (FBR) and Mark Rider (Andrew School) warns that views expressed "are of the authors and not of the Government of

Pakistan." It is shocking that FBR on the dictates of World Bank initiated this study and when final report was released it disassociated itself-this is typical of our government-always non-committal and hesitant to take any responsibility. After disowning this report, in 2019, FBR is still struggling to bridge the large tax gaps which are the direct result of its persistent inefficiency, incompetence and rampant corruption.

For fiscal year 2004-2005, according to this report, Pakistan's federal tax gap was Rs. 409.5 billion or approximately 69% of actual tax receipts of Rs. 590.4 billion. Terming this as "conservative estimate", the report claims direct tax gap at Rs. 262.8 billion (around 143% of actual collection of Rs. 183.1 billion) and indirect tax gap at 146.7 billion (36% of actual tax collection of Rs. 407 billion). In 2008, the data selected was for fiscal year 2004-2005 and tax gap was estimated at 45%. Since then tax gap has increased significantly and it can safely be concluded that it is not less than 80% of actual tax collection. This report and many others do not take into account the real tax potential of Pakistan and therefore estimates of tax gaps are under-assessed.

The real tax potential of Pakistan, by a very conservative estimate, is Rs. 8000 billion. However, the target for the current fiscal year at the time of budget announcement was fixed at Rs. 4435 billion. It was later reduced to Rs. 4398 billion but yet FBR is finding it difficult to meet-the shortfall for first ten months is Rs. 357 billion! From July 2018 through April 2019, FBR provisionally collected Rs. 2993 billion in taxes as against Rs. 3350 billion ten-month target

Who is responsible for the prevailing pathetic state of affairs? Our debt burden is increasing monstrously, fiscal deficit is getting beyond control, inflation is crushing the poor, taxes are being evaded and avoided by the rich and whatsoever little is collected, is mercilessly wasted by those who matter in the land. Debt burden under the previous regime witnessed a rising trend and reached a new high of 75% of GDP due to a widening budget deficit and fall in tax receipts. The financing of fiscal deficit through domestic channels by the present government of PTI is also alarming as highlighted by the State Bank of Pakistan in its report that has raised concerns regarding debt sustainability of the economy. A heavy reliance on expensive short-term debt has increased the debt servicing burden of the country. Pakistan has been reeling under a revenue deficit for the past many years, implying that a larger part of public borrowings, which financed the government's current expenditures, did not add to the repayment capacity of the economy.

In view of the size and magnitude of public debt, a high fiscal deficit for 2018-19 is inevitable. Fiscal deficit even in 2012-13 reached 8.5% of GDP, against the original budget target of 4%, reflecting both revenue and expenditure slippages, including higher subsidies mainly to clear arrears in the power sector-the situation since then has been worsening. Collection by FBR in the past included substantial amounts not due (obtained as advance) and withholding of genuine refunds of billions of rupees. Ex-Finance Minister, Ishaq Dar, now a fugitive, while addressing Chief Commissioners' Conference on April 15, 2014 praised Chairman and his team for growth of 17% in revenue, but never bothered to investigate the allegations of highhandedness in showing "higher" (sic) collection. Dar, an experienced chartered accountant, knew fully well how fudging of figures was being done under his nose. During his previous tenure as Finance Minister as well, Pakistan was found guilty of figure fudging and Shaukat Aziz admitted that Pakistan had to pay a fine to IMF for such lapses-A history of figure fudging by Dr Pervez Tahir, The Express Tribune, July 28, 2011.

It is a great tragedy that while the country is caught in a debt trap, the rich and the mighty are not only refusing to pay due taxes, but are also living an emperor-like life at the taxpayers' expense and on borrowed funds. They are the de facto beneficiaries of the State's resources-generated mainly by the landless tillers, industrial workers, professionals and white-collared employees. Unfortunately, like their predecessors, PTI Government is also giving them more tax incentives, immunities and amnesties.

Pakistan is not a poor country-the State's kitty is empty because of the unwillingness of the rich to pay taxes, colossal wastage of taxpayers' money on unproductive expenses and non-exploitation of vital natural resources. Absentee landlords (they include mighty generals who have been allotted State lands under one pretext or the other during the last many decades) have been resisting proper personal taxation on their enormous income and wealth. An unholy anti-people alliance of the trio of indomitable militro-judicial-civil complex, corrupt and inefficient politicians and greedy businessmen-controlling and enjoying at least 90% of the State resources-contribute lower than 2% towards the national revenue collection. This tax gap has not at all been discussed in 'Pakistan Tax Gaps: Estimates by Tax Calculation and Methodology', a study which is nothing but an eye wash.

The gigantic and useless government apparatus-doing nothing for public welfare-is also busy wasting whatever taxes are collected. The army of ministers, state ministers, advisers, consultants, high-ranking government servants (sic) is not willing to cut down their perquisites and privileges. They are not ready to live like the common man by surrendering unprecedented perks and privileges they are enjoying at the cost of taxpayers' money. For their luxurious life they are burdening the poor, property-less masses with more and more taxes. Time and again we have made a case for monetizing all perks and perquisites and right-sizing of government departments and corporations, but civil-military complex and their cronies in politics are not ready for such reforms.

The existing exploitative, rotten, regressive, ill-directed and unfair tax system is widening the existing gulf between the rich and the poor-leading to gang wars, crimes, commotions and break down of the entire society. The sole emphasis on regressive indirect taxes [even under the garb of income taxation through presumptive and minimum tax regimes on goods and services] without evaluating their impact on the economy and lives of the poor masses and lack of political will to tax the rich and mighty, is the real dilemma of our State-not scarcity of resources or narrow tax base (nearly 95 million active mobile users are paying exorbitant sales tax at 19.5% and 12.5% income tax). Equity demands higher taxes from those who have higher incomes and wealth, but in Pakistan since 1991 all tax policies have been aimed at decreasing tax burden on the rich but increasing its incidence on the poor.

The realistic and correct working of tax gaps in Pakistan is not possible unless the quantum of loss of revenue of trillions of rupees caused by all governments since the first military era of Ayub Khan is not taken into account. Successive governments-civil and military alike-have extended unprecedented exemptions and concessions to the rich and mighty, some of which are mentioned below:

* Ayub Khan, Ziaul Haq and Musharraf abolished all the progressive taxes, e.g., Estate Duty, Gift Tax, Capital Gain Tax on immovable property and Wealth tax etc.

* The historic decision of taxing "agricultural income", passed by the Federal Parliament in the shape of Finance Act, 1977, was thwarted by the military regime of Ziaul Haq. Through this law, the Parliament amended the definition of "agricultural income" as contained in section 2(1) of the Income Tax Act, 1922 then in existence, to tax big absentee landlords. This was a revolutionary step to impose tax on agricultural income for the first time in Pakistan, but foiled by a military dictator, supported by Mullahs, who were funded by big landlords and businessmen. It is now well-established

that pro-people economic policies of the Bhutto regime posed a great threat to neo-imperialists and their gumashtas in Pakistan.

* Zia's rule continued for 11 long years and that of General Musharraf for nearly 9 years, but absentee land owners (including mighty generals who received state lands as gallantry awards or otherwise!) did not pay a single penny as agricultural income tax.

* Taxation of "agricultural income" is the sole prerogative of provincial governments under the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan ("the Constitution"). All the four provinces have enacted laws to this effect, but total collection in 2013 was less than Rs 2 billion (share of agriculture in GDP in 2013 was about 22%).

* Non-taxation of long-term capital gains at stock market-exemption is meant for the rich and mighty and not for the small investors who lose more money than they make due to manoeuvrings of big players-caused annual loss of billions of rupees to the national exchequer [loss from 2007 to 2013 alone was more than Rs. 512 billion as admitted by the government in Economic Surveys of Pakistan]. Full and proper taxation of the big sharks is still a distant dream due to influence of the mighty whose benami accounts are managed by big brokerage houses. Annual tax gap under this one head alone is Rs 125-200 billion.

* Tax losses for exempting (in fact not taxing) speculative transactions in real estate are to the extent of billions of rupees per annum. According to Economic Survey of Pakistan 2012-13, the loss for fiscal year 2011-12 was Rs 700 billion.

* Multi-National Companies (MNCs) through abusive transfer pricing mechanism allegedly deprive Pakistan of tax loss of over Rs. 200 billion every year.

* The Wealth Tax Act, 1963 was abolished through the Finance Act 2003 on specific demand of Shaukat Aziz before taking charge as Finance Minister of Pakistan. He was fully aware of the fact that by virtue of his status as resident in Pakistan, his world assets would attract provisions of the Wealth Tax Act culminating into substantial tax liability annually. Repeal of this progressive law, especially suitable to Pakistan where enormous assets are created without showing income, was shown to be justified despite tremendous revenue losses, distortion in the social set-up and the resultant misery inflicted on the majority of the people of Pakistan. From 2010, the right to levy wealth tax, to the extent of immovable property, is devolved to the provinces and they are least pushed to tax the rich landowners as they dominate the Parliaments.

* In 2002 before its abolition, wealth tax was the only progressive tax left in Pakistan with tremendous potential for growth, if exemption given to the rich absentee landlords were scrapped. This became obvious immediately after its repeal when billions of rupees (estimated at US$ 60 billion) started pouring in from all over the world, remitted by all and sundry without any fear of being investigated, courtesy amnesty given under section 111(4) of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001. Influx of enormous wealth was directed to the stock exchanges and real estate markets where hungry sharks continued to devour the small investors through unholy manoeuvrings; or was used to artificially enhance prices of immovable property. With no wealth tax to pay, both these avenues helped to increase individual wealth but dreadfully stripped the entire nation of its right to live in peace and economic prosperity.

* From 2003 to 2018, according to a conservative estimate, we have lost Rs 400 to Rs 500 billion worth of wealth tax that could have been imposed on unaccounted/untaxed wealth amassed by those already enjoying the privileges of a luxurious life.

* Section 111(4) of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 protects tax evaders as they can whiten untaxed income through an extremely simple and easily available procedure by going to a money exchanger and getting fictitious foreign remittance in his account after paying a nominal premium of 1% to 2% of the entire proceeds! The loss caused due to this provision alone in the last five years is nearly Rs 275 billion.

The above are just a few areas showing how much tax loss we have been incurring perpetually. In 'Pakistan Tax Gaps: Estimates by Tax Calculation and Methodology', no effort was made to take into account all these factors to correctly determine total federal tax gap.

(The writers, lawyers and partners in HUZAIMA, IKRAM & IJAZ, are Adjunct Faculty at Lahore University of Management Sciences)

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190524478783/

'MINIMUM PASTEURIZATION LAW COMING INTO FORCE BY JULY 2022'

BR Research May 24, 2019

An interview with Sulaiman Sadiq Monnoo, Senior Vice Chairman PDA

Mr. Sulaiman Sadiq Monnoo is the Senior Vice Chairman at Punjab Diary Association, which aims to empower and develop the small dairy farmers based on "one herd concept". Mr. Sulaiman Monnoo is a business graduate with over 18 years of work experience and extensive knowledge of all current economic, social and regulatory issues. Possessing vast managing directorship and CEO experience, Mr. Sulaiman Monnoo is also the CEO of Dairyland (Pvt) Limited.

Following are the edited excerpts of a quick conversation with Mr. Sulaiman Monnoo regarding the dairy sector of Pakistan:

BR Research: Since dairy and livestock is a provincial subject, what is your assessment of the capacity of relevant provincial departments and the progress each province has made towards dairy and livestock development?

Sulaiman Sadiq Monnoo: The dairy sector is an important player in Pakistan's economy that is primarily agriculture based. It represents 95 percent of the informal sector i.e. loose milk, and 5 percent of the organized sector i.e. packaged milk. The contribution of agriculture sector to Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with its declining trend, still stands at 23 percent. Some 30–35 million of the rural population is engaged in raising livestock and it derives 30–40 percent of its income from this sector.

The provincial dairy and livestock departments are important in this regard with each department facing different challenges and varying capacity to address them. However, there is a need to ensure policy alignment among the federal and provincial Dairy and Livestock Development Departments to help the dairy industry meet its full potential.

BRR: What does market research say – what kind of milk do Pakistanis prefer – high fat or low fat – and are the trends changing?

SSM: If we look at the market share for a proxy of preference, full cream is more than 99 percent of the packaged UHT category whereas low fat continues to be a niche offering (2.8 percent value share of all branded milk) with not an impressive growth. Though as per modern and changing health preferences, the trend is moving towards the consumption of low-fat milk in some sections of the population in the urban areas only. Health-conscious urban citizens are changing their milk consumption habits. However, the overall trend of milk used in tea is for high-fat milk in urban and rural areas equally.

BRR: Which model works best for Pakistan? UHT or pasteurized? And why?

SSM: The answer to your question lies with the processed milk whether pasteurized or Ultra High Temperature (UHT) treated. Being very rich in nutrients, milk is not only a source of health for human beings but provides an ideal growth environment for many micro-organisms.

There are effective control measures that can minimize the risk to human health, key among then is pasteurization and/or UHT. Pasteurization is a process that involves heating milk at a particular high temperature for a required time to ensure killing of harmful bacteria that can cause severe damage to human health. Originally designed to ensure adequate destruction of common pathogenic micro-organisms, pasteurization can extend the shelf-life of milk by destroying almost all yeasts, molds and common spoilage bacteria.

However, keeping Pakistan's climatic conditions and prolonged summers in mind with the consumer base widely spread across the country while the milk collection is mostly centered in Punjab, UHT is considered to be more suitable. As pasteurized milk requires very robust supply chain to maintain the temperature at around 40C, it becomes less feasible to market it to the masses. UHT is same as pasteurization; the only difference lies in the degree of temperature and the duration at which the milk is heated. UHT milk with aseptic packaging proves to be an optimum option for us as it can allow for the milk to be transported over long distances at ambient temperatures. The shelf-life of pasteurized milk is 7 days compared to 3 months of UHT Milk. UHT is also a better proposition for countries with similar climate conditions such as Turkey, Mexico, Spain etc.

BRR: Whose interest does your association represent; is it only UHT or pasteurized as well?

SSM: The Pakistan Dairy Association represents the organized milk sector. Despite being the fourth largest milk producing nation, only 5 percent of milk is processed and packed, rest of the 95 percent is unprocessed, unregulated and untaxed. PDA is an association that aims to promote and advocate the interests of the processed milk industry, whether UHT or pasteurized. PDA also represents the corporate farms and other dairy processors who are equally important in the overall growth of dairy sector.

BRR: Why is the UHT dairy milk industry not comfortable with the label on the pack that UHT is produced from powdered milk – there are many countries where this is being practiced – KSA & UAE being the nearest regional example.

SSM: The processed industry follows the national regulations, which suggest milk to have 8.5 percent Solid Non Fats (SNF) and 3.5 percent fats. However, most of the industry players collect milk from small and medium farmers who have their own set of challenges like unable to provide quality feed to animals; SNF ratio in milk lower than the required minimum level, etc. Also, due to the variance during flush and lean seasons, sometimes milk processors have to add skim milk powder to meet minimum SNF requirement in finished product.

In comparison, most of the loose milk available in the market is unregulated and does not comply with the minimum required criteria. The loose milk sellers add substandard substances to make up for the milk compositional requirements.

In GCC/Middle East, there are two sets of requirement. One is made from fresh milk while the other one is re-constituted. The reconstituted milk is completely produced from powder by adding water in it, which makes it binding on them to use the labeling accordingly. While the finished product milk produced from fresh milk has no binding to declare “re-constituted milk” on the label.

BRR: Even if loose milk pricing is de-regularized, the fact of the matter is that Pakistani livestock has very low yields which makes it difficult to invest in corporate farms (for UHT or pasteurized milk). This then means we have to improve our livestock. But that is a long-term process. Yet if we import cows on a large scale it would inflate our import bill – so what is the solution – insemination or embryo transfer?

SSM: Dairy industry is in the favour of de-regularizing and de-capping of milk prices as this will incentivize investments in the sector. To answer the other half of your question; it is important to understand that we have three distinct segments of milk farming in Pakistan. It is difficult to club it together as the economic and commercial rational of each segment differs widely.

Small hold farmers (having 2-3 animals) use traditional farming practices. Training and education related to animal husbandry, feed and nutrition would be essential for them to improve the yield. We have case studies suggesting over 25 percent improvement in less than 6 months by just giving basic education.

The mid-size or progressive farmers (having 20 milking animals) have understanding of breed and feed of the animal. For them, education and support related to artificial insemination, modern milking methods, feed, animal comfort etc. will be instrumental in improving the yield. The potential of improved yield per animal is again over 25 percent here.

The mega farms, which are mostly mechanized for imported pedigree and are owned by big industrialists, are generally competitive in terms of milk production but they are at daggers drawn with the regulatory and taxation regime. They will grow if there is enabling environment and support available to them. Plus, it is still a better option to import animals gradually than importing milk every year in terms of its impact on our exchequer.

BRR: Why Harmonization of Food Standards is required in Pakistan?

SSM: We believe that there should be one food standard i.e. National Food Standard, formulated after due consultation and consensus of all the provincial authorities, and notified by the federal government. However, the implementation (registration, licensing, and enforcement) of the same standard should remain a provincial subject. From industrial point of view, this will help in ‘ease of doing business’.

Given due importance to the subject, the issue of Harmonization of Food Standards has been taken up to the Council of Common Interest (CCI) where all chief ministers agreed to have one food standard across the country. Same has been discussed in the recent cabinet meeting. We're hoping that this will soon be converted into a legal framework by the Ministry of Law and Justice.

BRR: We are told that the government has met twice with dairy and livestock industry stakeholders in Islamabad. What is the expected policy direction the government is thinking about?

SSM: As referred by the Prime Minister is his recent speech, about 75 percent of the loose milk is not safe for human consumption in Pakistan with one city identified as selling a milk like substance having no ingredients of milk but detergent and chemicals. The government also realizes that there is a serious need to bring the dairy farmers into the formal eco-system where they can work in partnership with companies to improve milk yield and health of the livestock in order to ensure quality milk supply.

In this regard, we have had positive meetings with Abdul Razak Dawood, where we proposed the revival of dairy sector by highlighting importance of zero rated taxing, harmonization of food standards etc. I think in the coming budget, we will be able to see some major changes in terms of fiscal policy and food policy towards the dairy industry.

We also meet with the relevant federal and provincial food authorities periodically to share our concerns and bring alignment to serve our consumers.

BRR: Tell us about the Punjab pasteurization law – when is it being enforced?

SSM: It is very important to set up a legal framework through introduction of a minimum pasteurization law for milk sales (even in the open market) to ensure consumer protection. Since the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) is very active in introducing legislation to protect the health of citizens, a pasteurization law could make a big difference. As per PFA regulations 2018, the implementation of Minimum Pasteurization Law is coming into force by July 2022. But I think now they want to expedite it based on government's priority of improving the overall public health.

BRR: How critical is it to develop the packaged meat industry to develop the packaged milk industry?

SSM: Pakistan's livestock sector has a lot of untapped potential and its efficiency should be expanded to fulfill a growing demand for milk and meat to improve the public health indicators. Despite being among the largest milk producing countries and having the largest number of milk producing animals, Pakistan faces severe malnutrition followed by shortage and poor quality of milk. It is estimated that only 45 percent of the milk produced is actually available for sale.

The packaged milk industry faces many problems that restrain its growth but the packaged meat industry is still very small and if serious steps are taken to develop it, it could really boost the packaged milk industry.

BRR: What tax reforms do you propose to strengthen the dairy industry?

SSM: Improper taxation is hurting the dairy industry with high prices of final products leading to a decline in the demand of the dairy items. It is obvious that the burden of price hike is shifted towards the consumers. In order to address this issue and provide some relief to the sector, the government should review its fiscal policy towards dairy industry; no duty or sales tax on animal feed, zero rating on local semen production, no sales tax on local and imported semen, and zero rated tax policy on dairy products.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/24/498946/minimum-pasteurization-law-coming-into-force-by-july-2022/

NO BAN IMPOSED ON INTER-PROVINCIAL MOVEMENT OF WHEAT: PUNJAB GOVERNMENT TELLS KPK

FAZAL SHER | MAY 24TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Punjab government has informed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) government that it has not imposed any ban on inter-provincial movement of wheat following a decline in wheat output due to recent rains. A senior official of KPK agriculture department said that food department of Punjab has written a letter to KPK food department stating that it has not blocked supply of wheat to KPK and the media reports regarding the ban are false.

“Private trade of wheat is continuing between the two provinces and food department of KPK will also purchase wheat from the Punjab government,” he told Business Recorder. He said that under Article 151 of the constitution, provinces cannot impose a ban on movement of edible commodities throughout Pakistan.

Article 151 of the constitution pertaining to inter-provincial trade stipulates: “Subject to clause (2) trade, commerce and intercourse throughout Pakistan shall be free. (2) 1[Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament)] may by law impose such restrictions on the freedom of trade, commerce or intercourse between one province and another or within any part of Pakistan as may be required in the Public interest.(3) A provincial assembly or a provincial government shall not have power to-(a) make any law, or take any executive action, prohibiting or restricting the entry into, or the export from, the province of goods of any class or description”.

Another official of Ministry of National Food Security and Research said that recent rains damaged 1.2 million tons of wheat across the country; and added that there is no provision in the constitution to block supply of wheat but in the past Punjab government had stopped supply of grain to KPK with the objective of stopping its smuggling to Afghanistan.

He said that Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation (PASSCO) and provincial food of KPK will procure wheat. Wheat review committee in its meeting on February 13, 2019 agreed that PASSCO and provincial food departments will procure 6.90 million of tons of wheat, he said.

Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) crop situation report notes that rain spell/hailstorm during 15 to 17 April, affected wheat crop to varying extent from lodging to post-harvest losses particularly in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces. Rain spell/hailstorm damages were significant enough to reduce size of the crop from last year.

Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) during its previous meeting held in April fixed wheat crop production target at 25.51 million tons from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi 2018-19. Out of 25.51 million tons, Punjab was projected to produce 19.5 million tons, Sindh, 3.800 million tons, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 1.362 million tons, and Balochistan will produce 0.900 million tons. The national requirement of wheat is 25.8 million tons including 1 million tons strategic reserves and 0.5 million tons for seed and feed purposes.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190524478820/

US UNVEILS $16BN AID FOR FARMERS HURT BY CHINA TRADE WAR

Parvez Jabri May 24, 2019

WASHINGTON: The United States on Thursday unveiled a new $16 billion aid package to help farmers caught in the crossfire of President Donald Trump's trade war with China.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said the bulk of the funds will go to direct payments to farmers, while a small portion will be used to purchase food to use in US aid programs like food banks and school lunch programs.

"The plan we are announcing today ensures farmers do not bear the brunt of unfair retaliatory tariffs imposed by China and other trading partners," Perdue told reporters in a conference call.

"Farmers would rather have trade than aid but without the trade they are going to need some support."

Trump's aggressive tariff strategy, especially against China, has drawn stiff retaliation from Beijing and others designed to hit the US where it hurts: farm country.

Soybeans and pork have been primary targets, but many other crops have suffered directly or indirectly.

Soybean exports to China fell 75 percent in 2018, according to Commerce Department figures.

The Trump administration ramped up the aid from the $12 billion provided last year.

There were high hopes early this month that a resolution with China was within striking distance, but that optimism largely evaporated when Trump said Beijing had backed away from commitments considered already settled.

He more than doubled existing punitive tariffs on $200 billion in Chinese goods, and threatened to hit all the goods that had been spared so far.

"China hasn't played by the rules for a long time and President Trump is standing up to them, sending the clear message that the United States will no longer tolerate their unfair trade practices," Perdue said.

The tariffs collected by the US Treasury will indirectly support the farm aid, he said.

The US Department of Agriculture will calculate damage done by the retaliation, and officials said the first of three payments is expected to go out in July or August.

Perdue said the size of the aid will be "heavily skewed" towards the first payment, while the others will depend on the market and the status of the trade talks.

But reaching an agreement now "depends on China.

USDA officials said the amount each farmer receives will be based on the damage calculated to each US county, with equal payments made to all farmers based on the acreage planted, regardless of crop, to prevent distorting planting decisions.

Crops covered include alfalfa, barley, canola, corn, lentils, rice, peanuts, chickpeas, sorghum, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

Dairy and pork producers, as well as growers of cherries, cranberries and nuts, also will receive support, officials said.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/24/498881/us-unveils-16bn-aid-for-farmers-hurt-by-china-trade-war/

AGI, PAD SIGN CONTRACT

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 24TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Askari General Insurance (AGI) and Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) on Thursday signed a contract to extend insurance coverage to growers of 18 districts of the province for Kharif crops under ‘Crop Insurance Programme’ of the provincial government.

Under this agreement grower having up to five acres of land will be given 100 per cent subsidy on the premium while growers having five acres to 25 acres of land will be given 50 per cent subsidy on the premium of their crop insurance.

The project was launched two seasons back from four districts on pilot project has been extended to 18 districts this season and in the fourth phase will cover the growers of the whole of the province.

Speaking on this occasion, Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial regretted that the agriculture which was the mainstay of Pakistan’s economy had been neglected during the last ten years. He said that the present government by signing this agreement was materializing its promise of giving protection to the farmers especially small growers.

He said that crops of the growers will be protected against any untoward and it will also help the farmers in meeting the negative challenges being inflicted by the climate change on their crops.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190524478833/

BUYING WHEAT FROM OPEN MARKET: PFMA ACCUSES FOOD DEPARTMENT OF FLOUTING AGREEMENT

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 24TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA-Punjab) has accused the provincial food department of flouting the agreement reached between the Chief Secretary Punjab and the millers for allowing the industry to buy wheat from the open market.

It alleged that over 100 vehicles loaded with grains have been impounded by the food department near Mianwali due to which respective mill owners are facing heavy expenses under the head of vehicles’ fare.

PFMA Punjab Chairman Habib ur Rehman Leghari, Group leader Asim Raza Ahmad and others in a joint statement issued here on Thursday claimed that they had informed the Chief Secretary Punjab, Secretary Food and Director Food Punjab about the development in writing. They said that they have made it clear that flour supply under Ramazan package can get disturbed if the department officials continue impounding vehicles of the mills.

Habib Leghari said that the millers had held a meeting with the Chief Secretary Punjab some days back and the Chief Secretary had assured that mills can buy wheat from the open market and department will not impound mills' vehicles. He said that Director Food Punjab and PSO to Chief Secretary were nominated as focal person to resolve the issues being faced by the mills. However, he alleged that situation still persists as DFC Mianwali and DD Sargodha is still impounding the vehicles going towards Rawalpindi. He claimed that a crisis like situation may occur in twin cities if wheat is not allowed to be transported. He also claimed that food department officials were also not responding to their phone calls.

Leghari said that flour mills were buying wheat at Rs1350 per maund while after adding transportation charges it is costing them at Rs1400 per maund. He claimed that food department officials after impounding mills' vehicle make a bill at the rate of Rs1300 per maund and that too in the name of the driver thus causing loss of millions to the mills. They claimed that they had informed the officials in writing and responsibility of any crisis would lie on the food department.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190524478843/

HYDERABAD COURT REJECTS BAIL PLEAS OF FOOD OFFICIALS BOOKED IN CORRUPTION CASE

By Our Correspondent Published: May 24, 2019

HYDERABAD: In the Rs1.78 billion wheat scam, the Hyderabad Special Anti-Corruption Court rejected on Thursday the bail applications of food officials and private persons after which the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) arrested two persons from outside the court, including one of the 17 food officials charged in the FIRs.

Sanghar district ACE lodged six separate FIRs against food officials and 100 private persons last week. Food Department Deputy Director Ali Asghar Naich, Sanghar District Food Controller (DFC) Muhammad Munawar Arain, Assistant Food Controller Jam Abid Ali and several in-charges and food inspectors deputed at some 40 food centres in Sanghar have been booked.

DFC Arain confirmed while talking to The Express Tribune that their bails have been rejected. He told that they have not still filed bail plea in Sindh High Court because they could not get copy of the Anti-Corruption Court's order. Still the ACE failed to arrest the accused.

The food officials allegedly sold wheat bags to agents and traders illegally last year. The provincial government through the food department distributes the bags, which are also called gunny bags or gunny sacks, among wheat farmers for official wheat procurement. Sanghar was reportedly allocated 1.7 million wheat bags of 100 kilogramme each in the previous year.

Sindh government bought wheat in 2018 at the rate of Rs1,300 per 40kg from the farmers. However, taking advantage of the government's procurement delay, traders and agents bought wheat at around Rs1,000 to Rs1,100 per 40 kg rate from the farmers and later sold the same wheat to the government at Rs1,300 rate.

Under the law, the food department cannot distribute or sell empty wheat bags to traders because the bags are meant for distribution among genuine wheat growers.

ACE Sanghar Circle Officer Yar Muhammad Rind when asked, did not disclose the names of the two arrested persons. He avoided to explain why the food officials have not been arrested.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 24th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1979284/1-hyderabad-court-rejects-bail-pleas-food-officials-booked-corruption-case/

GST ON SUGAR MAY BE INCREASED

By Our Correspondent Published: May 24, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has permitted an increase in the general sales tax (GST) on sugar in the budget for fiscal year 2019-20.

Additionally, it has also agreed on imposing federal excise duty on gas besides levying sales tax on the electronics and print industry and hiking additional customs duty in the next fiscal year.

In this regard, a high-level meeting took place at the FBR in which the proposal for imposing new taxes, amounting to Rs334 billion, was discussed. The breakdown suggests the imposition of Rs150 billion in sales tax, Rs95 billion in customs duty and Rs150 billion in federal excise duty in the upcoming budget.

After approval from parliament, there will be a hike in prices of sugar, gas and other commodities. During the meeting, it was also decided to raise the federal excise duty on cigarettes and beverages.

Furthermore, it was agreed to impose 5% customs duty on imported LNG, which presently enjoys 3% relaxation. Hence, the relaxation will be withdrawn and gas, electricity and industrial commodities will become costly. However, the relaxation in customs duty on the import of plant and machinery by exporting industries will continue. Final decision will be taken after approval of the finance adviser.

Special preference will be given in the federal budget to measures which will help raise revenues. To achieve this, the relaxation in the GST on sugar will be withdrawn and sales tax will be imposed at the market rate. The retail price tax system will be introduced for the electronics and print industry and sales tax will be imposed according to wholesale prices of commodities in related industries.

A proposal was also discussed to introduce the Unified Value Added Tax (VAT) along with the suggestion of imposing federal excise duty on gas due to which the revenue could rise up to Rs60 billion. Similarly, the hike in taxes on cigarettes and beverages will add Rs37 billion to the revenues. Apart from this, there was also a recommendation to end the withholding tax relaxation for the cottage industry, which would fetch Rs10 billion in sales tax.

Furthermore, the introduction of Point of Sales system for the wholesale market was also discussed. Following its implementation, it is expected to bring Rs10 billion in sales tax.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 24th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1979245/2-gst-sugar-may-increased/

RESTORATION OF RD ON COTTON IMPORT RECOMMENDED

NAVEED BUTT | MAY 23RD, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

A meeting regarding budget proposals for agriculture development has recommended that the regulatory duty on cotton import may be restored to prevent the massive import and dumping of cotton, and enable the farmers to receive international parity price.

The panel also expressed serious reservations over the hike in price of fertilizers during the last two years and the subsequent profitability of fertilizer companies. The members strongly recommended the need for a stringent price regulation mechanism to control the price of agricultural inputs.

Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser presided over the second meeting of a series of pre-budget discussions on budget proposals for agriculture development on Wednesday. The matters of minimum support price for major crops, access to credit, regulatory duties on import, production and distribution of biotechnology seeds, taxation on agriculture machinery, import duties on fertilizers and pesticides, and allocation for agriculture research came under discussion.

The speaker highlighted that Pakistan’s economic turnaround was contingent upon revitalisation of agriculture and that incentives, concessions, reduced cost of production and enhanced farmers profitability should guide the budgetary decisions. He instructed the ministries concerned to extend maximum relief to the farmers. He was chairing a meeting regarding budget proposals for agriculture development here at the Parliament House.

The meeting held was a continuation of a series of discussions on the recommendations of the Special Committee on Agricultural Products. The panel was comprehensively briefed by the officials from the Ministry of Finance, Commerce and National Food Security & Research respectively.

Advisor on Commerce Abdul Razzak Dawood submitted that the main reasons for failure to fetch international parity price is the quality of seeds, excessive use of pesticides, and contamination. Endorsing the committee’s recommendation, Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan remarked that revival of cotton as Pakistan’s strategic crop is not possible without an assured indicative price in line with the international parity price. The advisor on commerce assured the committee that he will come out with a viable plan after consultation with the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Syed Fakhar Imam argued that given the lack of any meaningful incentives particularly the indicative price, not only has Pakistan’s cotton production and land under cultivation being shrunken but also the country continues to cede space to regional competitors.

The speaker National Assembly questioned as to how Pakistani farmers would compete with the regional competitors when the input cost continue to rise unabatedly in Pakistan and the competitors continue to dole out massive subsidies to the farmers.

The Ministry of Finance opposed the proposal of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to tax the supply of imported and locally manufactured tractors as doing so would jeopardise the thriving localisation of tractors in Pakistan. On the matter of allocation of fund for agriculture research, Hammad Azhar remarked that the proposed recommendation should be integrated in the potential agriculture policy of the new government and further added that the multilateral donors and lending agencies would provide sufficient grants for uplifting agriculture research in Pakistan.

On the questions of subsidies and mark-up rate on agricultural loans, Hammad Azhar remarked that given the limited fiscal space, the provincial government should share responsibility and make concessional allocations to banks for agricultural loans.

The committee also opposed the recommendation of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to revise taxes on the import of skimmed milk powder (SMP) and whey powder on the grounds that this would raise the price of milk for the poor people in the country.

The meeting was attended by Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan, State Minister for Revenue Hammad Azhar, Advisor to PM for Commerce, Industries Production & Investment Abdul Razzak Dawood, Asad Umar, Syed Fakhar Imam, Shandana Gulzar Khan, Sana Ullah Masti Khel, Malik Muhammad Ehsan Ullah Tiwana, Riaz Fatyana, and Faizullah Kamoka.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190523478522/

FARMERS` BODY SEEKS SPECIAL PACKAGE, SUBSIDY IN BUDGET

By Our Staff Correspondent | 5/22/2019

HYDERABAD: Representatives of the Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) have demanded of the federal government to announce a special package for the agriculture sector, subsidy on farm inputs and withdrawal of general sales tax (GST) on agriculture sector in the forthcoming budget.

Speaking at a press conference here onTuesday at the local press club, SAI president Nawaz Zubair Talpur and Mohammad Javed Rear said that in his address to the nation, Prime Minister Imran Khan had promised that he would announce subsidy on fertilizer but he did not fulfil it.

They said the Punjab government had announced subsidy for its farmers, but the Sindh government did not of fer such facility.

Last year urea fertilizer bag had been sold at Rs1360 and now it was being sold for Rs1800, he added.

They said the cost of a tractor had increased from Rs1.7 million to Rs2.1 million and added that situation would aggravate after announcement of budget.

They said Pakistan used to be the fourthlargest exporter of cotton in 2004, but now it was the fifth largest importer of cotton due to failed policy of the federal government after 2010 onwards.

They threatened to stage a historic sit-in in Islamabad in collaboration with other Pakistan-level farmers` bodies if their demands were not met.

They said they were coordinating with the Punjab-based Pakistan Kissan Ittehad and other organisations.

They said that wrong and anti-agriculture policies of the Sindh government had made lives of people associated with agriculture miserable.

They said that by not procuring wheat crop the Sindh government had causedbillions of rupees losses to farmers. They said that similar situation was seen in the sugar cane sector and their organisation had moved the Sindh High Court for payment of quality premium over and above the actual cost of sugar cane by factory owners.

They said factory owners were not paying quality premium since 1999 and liabilities of quality premium now run into billions, adding that the government was apparently not interested in implementing the Supreme Court judgement concerning payment of quality premium.

They said they would organise farmers and haris in Sindh for payment of liabilities to sugar cane growers by factory owners.

https://epaper.dawn.com/print-textview.php?StoryImage=22_05_2019_117_003

PFMA SINDH SEEKS REMOVAL OF 67 PERCENT IMPORT TARIFF ON WHEAT

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | MAY 22ND, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) Sindh has sought removal of 67 percent import tariff on wheat, saying that the current trends can lead to a crisis in the country. The Association has put forward its demand to the federal government at a time when both the governments of Punjab and Sindh have imposed inter-provincial ban on movement of wheat. The Punjab government has even informally imposed ban on inter-district movement of wheat due to which wheat of flour mils coming from other districts is being disrupted by the district administration causing panic in the market and increase in the price of the commodity.

District management which is in a panic due to the current situation is flouting the instructions of Chief Secretary Punjab and Secretary Food of Punjab. Recently, the Deputy Commissioner, Attock registered an FIR against an officer of Food Department on the plea that he ordered release of detained wheat trucks of flour mills while the officer had merely implemented the instructions of Secretary Food.

The representatives of PFMA Punjab met Chief Secretary Punjab, Yousuf Naseem Khokhar a couple of days ago and apprised him of current situation of wheat supply in the province and blockade of flour mills wheat by the district administration especially in Rawalpindi Division.

According to Chairman PFMA, Sindh, Javed Yousuf, Pakistan’s wheat crop has been partly affected by weather conditions this year on the one hand while on the other due to depreciation of Pak Rupee there has been an increase in wheat flour value added product exports which is a good thing as flour mills idle capacity is being utilized.

However, this is impacting on local prices to an extent that current wheat price is at Rs 1350 per 40 kg which is above the support price. “We suspect wheat prices will go up further as export grows with more depreciation,” said the Association, adding that since wheat flour is a sensitive commodity, its high price will create social issues.

There are apprehensions that hoarders will take advantage of the situation and local consumers, flour industry and exports will suffer in the process. “To ensure food safety and to maximize the flour and value added exports, we recommend that the government should remove 67 per cent tariff on wheat imports. The current landed cost of imported wheat is the same as wheat support price so there is no risk to farmers' community," the Association added.

Javed Yousuf further stated that import tariff had been imposed when Pak Rupee was under Rs 100 to a dollar with the recent depreciation there is no reason to continue with import tariff on wheat import.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190522477741/

SINDH GOVERNMENT URGED TO ANNOUNCE SPECIAL AGRICULTURE PACKAGE

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 22ND, 2019 | HYDERABAD

Sindh Abadgar Itehad (SAI) president Nawab Zubair Talpur has demanded Sindh Government to announce special agriculture package in the annual budget order to facilitate the growers and agriculture of the province. Addressing the press conference here at Hyderabad Press Club on Tuesday, he said ineffective policy adopted by the Sindh Government is destroying the agriculture sector as well as causing numerous issues for growers of the province.

Under special agriculture package, he demanded that the provincial government should grant subsidy on fertilizers and agriculture equipments and also withdraw the general sales tax on agriculture. If the government avoids announcing special agriculture package, the SAI would stage sit in and protest for the acceptance.

He said the Prime Minister Imran Khan had announced subsidy on fertilizer but the same was not granted in Sindh as a result of which the price of urea fertilizers has reached to Rs 1800 per bag as compared to rate of Rs 1360 per bag which fixed in last year. Similarly, he said the price of tractor had reached to Rs 2.1 million as compared to last year price of Rs 1.7 million.

If the provincial government failed to take sincere measures for strengthening of agriculture sector, he informed that Sindh Abadgar Itehad would launch massive campaign after Eidul Fitr for acceptance of genuine demands of the growers.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190522477775/

CHINESE TEAM HANDS OVER HYBRID RICE SEED TO PU

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 22ND, 2019 | LAHORE

A team of China's Wuhan University has handed over hybrid rice seed to Punjab University for hybrid rice breeding in Pakistan, which would bring revolution in agriculture sector. In this regard, a ceremony was held at PU Vice Chancellor's office here on Tuesday.

PU VC Prof Niaz Ahmad Akhter, Zhiyong XU and Airu Zhu from Wuhan University, China, External Linkages Director Prof Dr Kanwal Ameen, Institute of Agricultural Sciences Director Prof Dr Muhammad Saleem Haider, Assistant Professor Dr Muhammad Ali and others were present.

PU VC Prof Niaz Ahmad said that Punjab University would play its role for betterment of society as well country.

He said that PU was promoting such research projects which would leave positive impact on society and country. IAGS Prof Dr Saleem Haider said that PU would experiment the hybrid breeding of rice at local level and its adaptation.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190522477709/

FRENCH COMPANY SEEKS PARTNERSHIP IN AGRICULTURE, I-TECH SECTORS

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 22ND, 2019 | LAHORE

CEO of French I-tech Company Xona Blue Riadh Boukhris in his meeting with the Punjab Minister for Trade and Industry, Mian Aslam Iqbal, here on Tuesday said that Punjab is an attractive place for investment and his organisation is desirous of partnership in agriculture and I-tech sectors.

Both discussed various matters including opportunities of investment in the province of Punjab.

CEO of Dawn Bread, Anwar Hussain Khan also met Mian Aslam Iqbal and discussed matters of mutual interest. Anwar Hussain Khan informed the minister about the establishment of a new unit in Muridke and showed interest for setting up another industrial unit in M-III industrial estate Faisalabad for which land has been acquired.

Mian Aslam Iqbal said on the occasion that vast opportunities of investment exist in agriculture, IT and other sectors. He said that trained human resource is being prepared to meet the needs of the industry as more than 400 technical education institutions along with two technical universities are engaged in imparting technical education to the students.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190522477721/

MILLS ALLOWED TO BUY WHEAT FROM MARKET

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter May 21, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government has allowed flour mills to procure wheat from the open market with the condition that they will pay the officially fixed price of the produce to the farmers.

The permission was granted in a meeting between Chief Secretary Yousaf Naseem Khokhar and a delegation of the Punjab chapter of Pakistan Flour Mills Association on Monday.

The millers, led by Asim Raza, Mian Riaz and Iftikhar Mattoo, informed Mr Khokhar of the problems being faced by the flour milling industry. This included the restrictions on directly purchasing wheat from farmers by the millers.

They also expressed concern at the reported permission to animal feed mills for procuring wheat from the open market and impounding of vehicles carrying wheat consignments of the flour mills.

The chief secretary was quoted as telling the delegation that the government would resolve genuine problems of flour millers however, it had to regulate prices of flour in the market as well.

He said the official wheat procurement target would be achieved in any case, adding that the flour mills could purchase wheat from market at the price fixed by the government.

He said that rights of farmers would be protected and purchase of wheat from farmers would be ensured at the price fixed by the government.

On millers' complaint against food department staff, the chief secretary directed the food secretary to set up a special cell at the department to address complaints of the millers as well as of farmers.

An official told Dawn that no vehicle of the millers was being confiscated as was claimed by them.

According to him, only those vehicles, suspected of carrying the flour for smuggling the commodity out of the country, were being impounded.

He said that feed mills were not allowed to purchase wheat and they would be allowed to enter the procurement arena after the government complete its official target of procuring the grain that is four million tonnes.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the cabinet committee on wheat procurement was held at the Chief Minister's Secretariat here which reviewed the ongoing wheat procurement campaign.

Chaired by Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry the meeting was informed by Chief Secretary Yousaf Naseem Khokhar that the wheat procurement target was being successfully achieved.

Published in Dawn, May 21st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1483587/mills-allowed-to-buy-wheat-from-market

BULGARIA TO IMPORT RICE, COTTON

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated May 21, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Bulgarian Minister for Economy Liliya Ivanove on Monday expressed her country's keen desire to import rice and cotton from Pakistan.

During the second meeting of Pakistan-Bulgaria Inter-Ministerial Commission, Ivanove stated that Bulgaria is looking forward to extensive cooperation in the field of agriculture including sustainable imports of cotton and rice from Pakistan.

Bulgarian ambassador to Pakistan, who accompanied the minister for economy, offered cooperation in the field animal's medicines of which Bulgaria is quite famous for.

Islamabad exports cotton fabrics, synthetic fabric, chemical materials and products, sports goods and toys to Bulgaria.

Pakistan-Bulgaria cooperation in the areas of agriculture covers livestock and buffalo breeding, food processing, food safety and phytosanitary measures, and this is included in the agenda of the inter-ministerial commission meeting which will conclude on Tuesday.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Mehboob Sultan said that the two sides will follow up cooperation in the areas being identified.

The minister said that Pakistan is world's 5th largest milk producing country and since Bulgaria has developed its strength in various areas of agriculture including livestock and animal breeding and both countries could mutually benefit in this sector.

Published in Dawn, May 21st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1483545/bulgaria-to-import-rice-cotton

SINDH IMPOSES BAN ON INTERPROVINCIAL MOVEMENT OF WHEAT

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated May 21, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh government has decided to impose ban on interprovincial movement of wheat in anticipation of the grain's shortage and resultant price hike of flour in the province.

Sindh Minister for Food Hari Ram Kishori Lal said on Monday that the decision was taken over apprehensions expressed by Pakistan Flour Mills Association South Zone about depletion of wheat stocks in Sindh and its proposal for banning wheat purchase by feed mills.

"In order to stop flow of wheat stocks from Sindh to other provinces, the home department as well as commissioners and district administrations have been directed to ensure restriction on movement of wheat from Sindh," said the minister.

Mr Lal pointed out that current wheat crop in Punjab had suffered widespread damage in rains, which frustrated the provincial government's plans to achieve its procurement target of the grain.

Besides, he said, there were reports that 10,000 metric tonnes of wheat was being transported from Sindh to Punjab daily, hence the Sindh government decided to ban its interprovincial movement.

The Punjab government, too, had banned movement of wheat to stop its transportation from the Punjab to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Afghanistan, he said.

Meanwhile, Sindh Abadgar Board member Gada Hussain Mahesar said in a statement that a bumper crop was being expected to yield 6.2 million tonnes of wheat during the current season but surprisingly the Sindh government had neither announced a procurement policy nor fixed official rate of the grain as yet while the process of threshing had already picked up momentum.

He appealed to the government to lift ban on interprovincial movement of wheat and said that if the government could not afford to open procurement centres it should allow the grain's movement to save growers from further financial losses.

He said that growers, under the obtaining conditions, were forced to dispose of their produce to local traders at much lower rates ranging from Rs1,050 to 1,120 per 40 kilogramme while the official procurement rate in Punjab was Rs1,350 per 40kg and the Punjab government had opened procure-ment centres across the province to buy wheat.

He pointed out that growers, who had invested their hard-earned money in the cultivation of the crop in hope of having a rich harvest should not be deprived of legitimate benefit.

Published in Dawn, May 21st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1483499/sindh-imposes-ban-on-interprovincial-movement-of-wheat

WEEKLY COTTON REVIEW: PRICES SHOW DOWNWARD TREND

NASEEM USMAN | MAY 21ST, 2019 | KARACHI

Dollar is on all time high but the prices of cotton shows down ward trend. Satisfactory increases in sowing of cotton. Rains will be beneficial for the crop. Waiting for government's cotton policy.

In the local cotton market during last week the bearish trend was seen in the market. Big textile groups had bought cotton from local and international markets according to their needs. Similarly other mills are buying cotton according to their needs. The ginners had left the stock of 4lac bales while it is expected that new cotton season will start from June. A ginner of Sanghar had done a deal of buying of 5 trollers of Banolla at the rate of Rs 1675 per maund on the condition of its delivery in June. The prices of cotton in Sindh and Punjab are Rs 7000 to 8900 per maund.

The Spot Rate committee of Karachi Cotton Association had decreased the rate by Rs 150 and closed it at Rs 8600 per maund. During the last week price of Dollar increased because of the speculations that increasing the price of dollar is a condition of IMF deal. It is expected that price of Dollar will reach Rs 160 to Rs 165 till the end of this fiscal year. On Friday the interbank rate of dollar reach at Rs 149 which is all time high while market sources are claiming that price of dollar will increase in coming days. Due to increase in the price of dollar the prices of all goods will be increased. The ginners had decreased the selling of cotton on the hope that prices of cotton will also increase because of increase of the price of dollar. While the textile and spinning mills owners are expecting that exports will increase but experts were of the view that importers don't give full benefit to the exporter and they demand discount.

On the other hand due to the increase in the price of dollar the prices of commodities are increasing especially due to increase in the prices of energy and increase in inter bank rate the cost of doing business has increased which resulted in a negative impact on exports. As a result of which exporters can not take full benefit of increase in the prices of dollar. Although the rate of dollar has an impact on the prices of cotton, cotton yarn and textile products due to which fluctuation was seen in their prices.

Moreover, trade war between China and America intensifies which is negativity effecting the world wide trade and crisis like situation arises in the world economy which has a negative impact on the cotton and textile products also.

Due to bearish trend in international cotton market the Rate of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) of New York Cotton Market decreased and reached at 65 American Cent which is lowest in three years.

In the same way rates of cotton decreased in India although the initial estimate of cotton production in India is 3 crore 65 lac bales but it is expected that it will be 50 lac bales less and the production is expected to be 3 crore 15 lac bales. Despite of estimates of decrease in cotton production the prices of cotton are decreasing instead of increasing. The rates of cotton in China also decreased.

Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum told that according to the information received from the cotton production areas of lower Sindh the sowing of cotton is increasing and the position of crop is satisfactory. While sowing was effected in different areas of Punjab due to rains but there is a plenty of time for sowing and the rains will have positive impact on the crop. The government departments are also trying to increase the production of cotton. Up till now it is hoped that sowing area will be increased in the new season.

The government up till now has not announced the cotton policy while Prime Minister Imran Khan had announced his resolve of achieving production of 1 core 50 lac bales. At that time the department of Agriculture and Food Research has announced to fix the price of cotton seed at Rs 3500 per 40 kg and hinted of buying 5 lac bales through TCP. It is expected that sowing of cotton will be completed till the end of May and still the Cotton policy is not announced. The sowing can be extended till June in Punjab due to rains.

Moreover, Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association has released the statistics of the production of cotton till May 15 according to which 1 crore 7 lac and 78 thousand bales were produced in the country which is seven percent less as compared to last year.

The government has announced to give subsidy on fertilizer and seed in order to increase the production of cotton because it is considered as a back bone for the economy of the country.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190521477382/

AGRICULTURE: A SAD STORY OF AGRICULTURAL INPUT PRICING

From the Newspaper Updated May 20, 2019

The rupee lost 16 per cent value against the dollar last fiscal year. It has lost another 16.4pc so far in 2018-19.

In the last fiscal year, domestic prices of petrol and high-speed diesel increased 26pc and 29pc, respectively. Their prices have surged 18pc and 17pc, respectively, since the beginning of 2018-19.

The rupee depreciation and the increase in oil prices resulted in a sharp rise in the rates of agricultural inputs in both 2017-18 and 2018-19. Since the rupee's value began falling and oil prices started rising in the second half of 2017-18, the agriculture sector's growth remained subdued and grew only 3.8pc last year, according to provisional estimates.

Governments love to incentivise the crop output, but seldom introduce and implement plans for promoting local industries engaged in the production of seeds, insecticides and pesticides

Now 2018-19 is the first fiscal year in which we are witnessing a fuller impact of the rupee depreciation as well as the increase in oil prices. Their lagged impact will be felt by the agricultural sector in the next fiscal year too even if the rupee's value and oil prices remain intact until June.

Initial estimates put agricultural growth during this fiscal year at about 1pc, according to a Dawn report. Doubling or tripling this growth rate in 2019-20 will require extraordinary measures regardless of the low-base effect.

It is true that the PML-N government kept the rupee overvalued throughout its term. This necessitated heavy doses of correction in the final days of its government, under the interim government and during the first year of the PTI government. It is also true that the uptrend in international oil prices is a recent phenomenon — and this is one reason for escalated local prices.

But the problem in revenue generation that the government is facing is unprecedented. This is one reason for higher fuel prices. It is forcing the government to levy higher taxes on fuel. May 5 onwards, the government increased sales tax on different kinds of fuel by 4-10pc.

Keeping this backdrop in mind, let’s see how the prices of agricultural inputs have behaved in the past one and a half years, making the lives of millions of poor farmers miserable.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), average monthly prices of two widely used fertilisers — nitro phosphate and diammonium phosphate (DAP) — shot up to Rs2,832 and Rs3,547 per 50kg in April, which shows an annual increase of 11.8pc and 10.2pc, respectively.

Similarly, prices of Kisan and Sona Urea also increased to Rs1,788 and Rs1,820 per 50kg, respectively, in April. This reflects an annual increase of 25.6pc and 23.8pc.

Farmer lobbies allege that the actual increase is much higher than the one shown in PBS data. Official statistics rely on the prices mentioned by manufacturers and seldom reflect the gap between official and actual prices.

Farmers kept protesting against higher fertiliser prices during the last fiscal year as well. Their representatives claimed that fertiliser prices registered a 10-20pc increase in 2017-18. But the manufacturers rejected those claims, saying the price hike was 5-10pc. Verifying the two claims is difficult since the PBS had not started reporting fertiliser prices at that time.

Prices of seeds and pesticides for food and non-food crops, electricity and gas costs, abiyana or water charges, hourly charges of rented tube-wells, tractors and harvesters and wages paid to hired hands make up the overall cost of agricultural inputs.

Due to the rupee depreciation, the cost of imported seeds and pesticides has gone up. Elevated headline inflation has pushed up the prices of locally produced seeds and pesticides. Electricity and gas charges are much higher than a year ago as the government revamps and cuts subsidies. Utilisation charges for rented tube-wells, tractors and agricultural machinery have been on the rise.

The cost of transportation is also up. The average price of CNG, which is widely used in rural and urban transportation, has gone up about 23pc in a year. It rose from 75.18per kilogram in May 2018 to Rs92.33 last month, according to PBS data.

To add insult to injury, there is no system in place to track exclusively the change in the prices of agricultural inputs. The authorities concerned continue to rely on some relevant items included in the shallow baskets of inflation indices. Farmers’ lobbies don’t usually present details of how a weaker rupee and higher inflation are playing havoc with the agricultural inputs.

Rising input prices of food crops coupled with a weaker and less-transparent system for intervening in agricultural markets push up the rates of food items. Just look at the prices of wheat flour and its by-products. From the last week of April to mid-May, flour millers in Sindh raised their prices by Rs3-Rs3.5 per kilogram, according to a Dawn report.

One of the reasons why agricultural input prices rise too sharply whenever the rupee gets weaker is that domestic industries have not been developed adequately. Governments love to incentivise the crop output but seldom introduce and implement plans for promoting local industries engaged in the production of seeds, insecticides and pesticides or even simple farming tools and implements like threshers and sprinklers.

As all eyes are set on an IMF-dictated federal budget next month, the government may not find it easy to announce farmer-friendly measures. Provincial governments, too, will have a chance to do so only if they get more serious about keeping their financial houses in order.—MA

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 20th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1483419/agriculture-a-sad-story-of-agricultural-input-pricing

TCP UREA IMPORT CONTRACT MAY GO TO LOWEST BIDDER

RIZWAN BHATTI | MAY 20TH, 2019 | KARACHI

In response to the Trading Corporation of Pakistan's urea import tender, some seven international suppliers have evinced interest to supply the commodity at a price ranging from $ 301.70 to $ 309.91 per metric tons. Sources told Business Recorder on Friday that so far no decision has been made on the urea import tender as bids validity is for 13-day and the price evaluation committee is evaluating the received bids.

Following the directives of the cabinet's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC), on April 17, 2019, state-run grain trader invites bids for supply of 100,000 metric tons (10 percent more or less at seller's option) urea fertiliser granular (prilled or both) in bulk through import from worldwide sources on Cost and Freight (C&F) basis to avoid shortage in the country.

According to TCP, an international urea import tender for the supply of 100,000 metric ton was opened on Friday. Nine international bidders/suppliers participated in the tender and quoted prices ranging from $ 301.70 to $309.91 per metric ton. Out of nine bidders, two participants i.e. M/s Quantum and M/s Keytrade submitted regret letters.

The lowest bid was submitted by M/s Ameropa Asia, which offered to supply 100,000 tons of urea at $ 301.70 per metric tons. The lowest bid is responsive and according to the tender's prescribed terms and conditions; therefore, it seems most likely the price evaluation committee would finalise the deal with the first lowest bidder.

According to the tender's details made available to Business Recorder, M/s Sumsung was the second lowest bidder, which offered to supply at $ 303.56 per metric ton.

M/s Agrifert Liven quoted a price of $ 303.75 per metric ton, M/s Midgulf $ 304.95 per metric ton, M/s Aries $ 304.97 per metric tons, M/s Megabills $ 308 per metric ton and M/s Dreymoor agreed to supply the required quantity at $309.91 per metric tons.

As per new tender terms and conditions, urea to be supplied strictly in accordance with the standards and specifications prescribed by Pakistan Standards & Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) and Import Policy Order. Unloading and transportation of imported urea will be handled by National Fertiliser Marketing Limited.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190520477244/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 13th TO MAY 19th 2019

IMPORTED FOOD ITEMS TO GET MORE COSTLY

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated May 19, 2019

KARACHI: Perturbed by soaring dollar prices, many importers of food items have put on hold sales of foreign goods in the market while others continue business as usual under a long-term commitment with foreign buyers.

Talking to Dawn Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association (KWGA) Patron-in-Chief Anis Majeed said the uncertain rupee-dollar parity would hit masses badly due to rising cost of imports.

“We are clearing our goods from the port and moving these to godowns. However, we are not bringing any of these items in the wholesale market due to unfeasible cost,” he said.

“If the landed cost of imported goods is higher as compared to low prevailing market rates then traders cannot afford to suffer any losses,” he added.

The KWGA chief said imports of items including pulses are continuing. “However, our members have slightly slowed down on fresh commitments from foreign suppliers for pulses and other items hoping for some stability in rupee-dollar parity,” he said.

Chairman Pakistan Vanaspati Manufacturers Association (PVMA) Tariq Ullah Sufi said imports of palm oil are going on. “We have maintained our pace of entering fresh commitments of palm oil. If rupee continues to lose its strength against the dollar then it may cause some fall in the volume of palm oil imports.”

While pointing out one negative impact under volatile exchange rate, he said, “We are considering taking back Rs5 per kg/litre discount of ghee and cooking oil in the next week due to cost escalation in palm oil imports.” The ghee and cooking oil industries had announced the said discount ahead of Ramazan.

The PVMA chairman said he had cleared palm oil at Rs146 to a dollar on Friday which is now at Rs151.

Falling rupee value against the greenback may pose serious challenges for unbranded manufacturers as price hike in ghee and cooking oil would intensify market competition, thus creating problems for many manufacturers, Mr Sufi added.

Nasir Arain, marketing manager at a fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) importing company said, “We have no option. We are bound to clear goods from the port as per commitment with foreign buyers otherwise holding goods’ clearance means soaring demurrages.”

He said many importers have been working with foreign suppliers under six months or one year agreement of import and at this stage we cannot take an adverse decision.

The price of imported FMCGs had surged by 15-20 per cent despite the fact that one dollar is now equal to Rs151 which was Rs110 in January 2018, said Arain.

"We cannot pass on full impact of rupee devaluation as buying power of people has shrunk by 40-50 per cent in the last 14 months," he said.

Chairman Pakistan Tea Association (PTA), Mohammad Shoaib Paracha said "Our members are clearing their stocks from the port. New orders are also being placed. Being an essential item, import of tea will continue."

On impact in value of one dollar surge to Rs151 from Rs141 in the last few days, he estimated increase in landed cost of imported tea by Rs35-40 per kg.

He feared decline in tea imports in case dollar continues to overwhelm rupee in future, adding "Much would also depend on international tea prices."

Published in Dawn, May 19th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1483169/imported-food-items-to-get-more-costly

UK-PAK SCIENTISTS RESOLVE TO PRODUCE BIOPESTICIDES IN PAKISTAN

RECORDER REPORT 2019/05/19

LAHORE: Scientists and researchers from Pakistan and UK resolved to develop bio-control strategies and produce biopesticides in Pakistan besides developing smart surveillance system for crop pests, disease monitoring and forecast in order to face the food challenges.

The resolve came after discussion at a two-day workshop which was hosted by Swansea University (UK) to address the growing issues of food safety and security. Workshop was organised together with UK-Pakistan Science and Innovation Global Network (UPSIGN).

In Pakistan, University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (UVAS), Lahore hosted the workshop. Over 30 senior scientists from top UK universities, research institutes and industry partners took part in the discussions. Similar number of scientists and academic colleagues from various Pakistani universities and research institutes joined the discussions through a video link.

Prof Dr Tariq Butt who leads natural products group at Swansea University was the host of the workshop in UK Dr Mamoona Chaudhry from UVAS is leading the Animal Health group and Dr Waqas Wakil from University of Agriculture (Faisalabad) is leading Biopesticides group in Pakistan.

Pakistan has a growing population reaching 220 million and its quarter of GDP is driven from agriculture including livestock. Agriculture and livestock are the main pillars of food security, major source of employment for rural population and provide huge opportunities for women engagement. More than 60% of the rural population is facing serious threats to its food security due to climate change, which is putting huge impact on transmission dynamics of diseases and habitat expansion of new insect pests.

The country is losing more than 40% of its agriculture produce due to both pre- and post-harvest losses. Traditionally, the farmers in Pakistan heavily rely on pesticides to avert the losses mainly due to their quick knockdown effect but due to societal concerns of these chemicals and phase out of old chemistry insecticides, biopesticides are gaining importance in organic agriculture by replacing these noxious chemicals.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan not a single registered biopesticide is available compared with India where almost 957 registered microbial formulations available contributing ~5% of the Indian pesticide market.

Livestock diseases are also causing huge economic losses due to reduced productivity and mortality. Mycotoxins in food products are a major safety concern both for local and international markets, limiting the country's export.

Through series of discussions with Pakistani partners, the group agreed to find solutions to highlighted food challenges.

The group decided to collaborate to deliver following solutions through bringing appropriate organisation on board from the UK and Pakistan; Smart surveillance system for crop pests and disease monitoring and forecast. Using on ground and remote sensing technologies including UAVs, and satellites, Developing Biocontrol strategies and produce biopesticides in Pakistan (growing demand), IPM solutions to reduce the over use of chemicals for pests and disease for reducing MRLs and impact on the environment, Reducing post-harvest losses and addressing the issue of food safety due to mycotoxins, smart monitoring of livestock diseases communicable to humans (zoonotic diseases), and addressing the issue of Anti-microbial resistance Prof Dr Muhammad Ashraf, Vice Chancellor, University of Agriculture (Faisalabad) congratulated the core team of UPSIGN scholars and innovators forum on holding this meeting simultaneously at Swansea and Lahore. He also admired the initiative of Pakistani diaspora in UK to establish consortiums with Pakistani scientists/academia which will bring their cutting-edge research back for Pakistani people to meet the challenges of food security in the country.

The UPSIGN Chairman Prof Dr Jawwad Darr appreciated the efforts from both countries and offered all kind of support to develop consortiums going forward to address the UN Sustainable goals of addressing hunger, poverty, women development and education.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/05/19/5-page/782359-news.html

PRICES OF VEGETABLES, FRUITS WITNESS DECLINE

ABDUL RASHEED AZAD | MAY 19TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Prices of perishable kitchen items including vegetables, fruits and chicken witnessed a decline, while prices of pulses, sugar, wheat flour witnessed an increase during this week past as compared to preceding week, a survey conducted by Business Recorder revealed here on Saturday.

During the week under review, vegetable prices witnessed a declining trend as onion price came down from Rs 220 to Rs 200 per 5kg which were being sold at Rs 45-50 against Rs 60-55 per kg in the retail market, tomatoes price went down from Rs 230 to Rs 180 per 5kg which were being sold at Rs 45 per kg against Rs 50-55 per kg in the retail market while potatoes price remained unchanged at Rs 120 per 5kg which were being sold at Rs 25-30 per kg in the retail market.

Local garlic price remained stable at Rs 450 per 5kg in the wholesale market which was being sold at Rs 130 per kg in the retail market, Chinese garlic price went down from Rs 800 to Rs 650 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 180 against Rs 210 per kg in the retail market, ginger price remained stable at Rs 800 per 5kg in the wholesale market which was being sold at Rs 210 per kg in the retail market.

Capsicum price went down from Rs 150 to Rs 130 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 35 against Rs 40 per kg in the retail market; yam (arvi) price went down from Rs 400 to Rs 275 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 65-70 against Rs 90 per kg in the retail market; China carrot price went up from Rs 120 to Rs 150 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 40 against Rs 35 per kg in the retail market.

Cucumber price went down from Rs 100 to Rs 80 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 20 against Rs 25 per kg in the retail market, cauliflower price went down from Rs 250 to Rs 200 per 5kg which is being sold at Rs 55 per kg against Rs 65 per kg in the retail market, cabbage price went down from Rs 250 per 5kg to Rs 200 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs 50 per kg against Rs 60 per kg, lemon price reduced from Rs 1,300 per 5kg to Rs 1,100 per 5kg in wholesales market which in retail market was being sold at s 250 per kg against Rs 330-350 per kg.

Pumpkin price went down from Rs 250 per 5kg to Rs 225 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs 55 per kg against Rs 60 per kg, Brinjal price went up from Rs 125 per 5kg to Rs 150 per 5 kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs 40 per kg against Rs 35 per kg, and tinda price went down from Rs 150 per 5kg to Rs 120 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs 40 per kg against Rs 45 per kg. Okra price went down from Rs 450 per 5kg to Rs 300 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs 75 per kg against Rs 120 per kg, bitter guard price went down from Rs 250 per 5kg to Rs 200 per 5kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs 55 per kg against Rs 65 per kg, peas price went down from Rs 450 per 5kg to Rs 400 per 5kg which in retail market were being sold at Rs 90-100 per kg against Rs 120 per kg.

Chicken price witnessed a reduction as chicken was available at Rs 5,700 per 40kg against Rs 6,000 per 40kg which in retail market was being sold at Rs 160 per kg against Rs 170 per kg, while chicken meat was being sold at Rs 250 per kg against Rs 260-300 per kg. Eggs price remained stable at Rs 72 per dozen in wholesales market which in retail market were being sold at Rs 84 per dozen.

Prices of pulses witnessed another increase during this week as fine quality white lentil (Maash) was available at Rs 200 per kg against Rs 190 per kg while its normal quality was being sold at Rs 160-170 per kg against Rs 150-160 per kg, good quality grams at Rs 200 per kg and normal quality grams at Rs 160 per kg, kidney bean (Lobia) was available in the range of Rs 130-170 per kg, green gram (Moong) at Rs 155 per kg against Rs 140 per kg and red lentil (Masoor) was being sold at Rs 160 per kg against Rs 150 per kg.

The survey observed no changes in the prices of cooking oil, tea, spices and milk as good quality cooking oil was available at Rs 1,050 per 5 litres, Lipton Yellow Label tea 200 grams pack was available at Rs 210 per pack and fresh milk was available at Rs 110 per liter while yogurt price jumped up from Rs 120 per kg to Rs 140 per kg.

Wheat flour was available at Rs 785 per 20kg bag, 50kg sugar bag at Rs 3,300 against Rs 3,250 per bag, best quality basmati rice at Rs 160 per kg, while normal quality rice was available in the range of Rs 135-145 per kg.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190519476541/

GROWERS MOVE SHC AGAINST NON-PAYMENT OF LAST 20 YEARS' QUALITY PREMIUM

Jamal Khurshid May 19, 2019

A body of growers on Saturday filed a petition with the Sindh High Court (SHC) seeking action against sugar mills' owners for not paying quality premium to the growers for the crushing seasons of the last 20 years between 1998-99 and 2018-19, and the minimum procurement price of sugar cane at Rs182 per 40 kilogrammes (kg) to the growers for the 2018-19 crushing season.

The Sindh Growers Alliance submitted in the petition that the sugar mills' owners were liable to pay the growers the quality premium at the end of the crushing season at such rates as may be determined by the government in proportion of the sucrose recovery of such factory in excess of the base level sucrose contents, viz. 8.7 per 40 kg.

Petitioner's counsel Syed Mureed Ali Shah submitted that the sugar mills had gone in litigation against the raise of 32 paisa per 40 kg to 50 paisa per 40 kg and obtained stay from the higher judiciary.

The counsel submitted that the Supreme Court had dismissed the petitions of the sugar mills on March 5, 2018 and observed that the grant of quality premium was just and fair based on statutory provisions.

He argued that the apex court held that the impugned notification was validly issued and observed that in the future, a notification as per the past practice for payment of quality premium should be issued along with the notification of fixation of the minimum procurement price of sugar cane and the same should be paid to the growers not later than two months after the crushing season was over.

He submitted that the Sindh government had issued a notification in compliance with the Supreme Court order and directed the sugar factories in the province to pay quality premium to the cane growers at the end of the crushing season 2018-19 at the rate of fifty paisa per 40 kg cane for each 0.1 per cent of excess sucrose recovery above 8.7 per cent determined on the overall sucrose recovery basis of each mill.

The lawyer said despite the SC judgment, the sugar mills had miserably failed to pay quality premium to the sugar cane growers for the crushing seasons from 1998-1999 to 2018-19 and it was clearly proved beyond any doubt that 37 sugar mills were actively involved in continuously violating, disobeying, obstructing and making mockery of the judgment of the SC and they were liable to be punished for violating the court orders.

The SHC was requested to punish the sugar mills' owners for not paying quality premium to the growers for the crushing seasons between 1998-99 and 2018-19 in violation of the court orders and direct the government to implement its notification and take coercive action against the respondents.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/473052-growers-move-shc-against-non-payment-of-last-20-years-quality-premium

FOUR FISHERMEN RELEASED BY INDIA REUNITE WITH FAMILIES

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated May 18, 2019

KARACHI: In reply to Pakistan's goodwill gesture of releasing 360 Indian fishermen last month, India has reciprocated by releasing six Pakistani prisoners, who reached Karachi on Friday.

Four of the returning men are fishermen belonging to Jati, Sujawal district, while two are civilians who got into trouble in India after their visas expired.

All crossed over to Pakistan recently via the Wagah border. The fishermen reached the Edhi Foundation head office near Tower in the morning, where their families were already waiting impatiently to be reunited with them.

Over 100 Pakistani fishermen are still languishing in Indian prisons

The fishermen — Ghulam Mustafa, Ali Mohammad, Sher Ali and Saddam Hussain — had unknowingly drifted over to Indian waters during a fishing expedition in the monsoon months of June and July last year.

On the occasion, Fishermen's Cooperative Society chairman Abdul Berr said that India's reply to Pakistan's releasing so many fishermen earlier showed their lack of compassion. "It is like a drop in the ocean," he said.

There are currently 102 Pakistani fishermen locked up in Indian jails, and there are 24 more, who have been lost at sea during a recent storm.

"We fear that the 24 fishermen, who have been missing since the storm, may also have been picked up by the Indian forces and it could be that they are also languishing in Indian jails now though there has been no word from India about them so far," Mr Berr added.

Edhi Foundation chairman Faisal Edhi said that the fishermen in Indian jails should also be released by India and brought back.

He added that it was a terrible practice by both India as well as Pakistan to confiscate fishing boats after arresting the fishermen.

"And the boats on which their bread and butter depends are never returned even after the fishermen are released," he said.

It was mentioned that there are some 132 Pakistani fishing trawlers rotting away in India currently.

Published in Dawn, May 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1482912/four-fishermen-released-by-india-reunite-with-families

HIKE IN UREA PRICES TERMED 'UNJUSTIFIED'

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | MAY 18TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Secretary Industries and Production Aamir Ashraf Khawaja said on Friday that some portion of the recent increase in urea prices is unjustified as prices have touched Rs 1900 per bag in some parts of the country. He was responding to the questions of parliamentarians at a meeting held in Parliament lodges. Parliamentarians were in an uproar at the fertilizer industry increasing prices of urea and DAP without any justification.

Secretary Industries informed the committee that the Ministry held at least three meetings with the representatives of fertilizer industry as it has to submit a report to the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet. "We have witnessed an increase in urea prices by Rs 230 per bag in two phases ie Rs 140 per bag in the first go and Rs 90 in the second go. Urea prices have increased to Rs 1850-1900 per bag in far flung areas," he added.

According to the Secretary Industries, technical people of the Ministry and fertilizer industry held meetings to jointly work out the price. He said, the working done by both the teams indicate that some increase in urea prices is defensible but some increase is unjustified, adding that the Ministry is not satisfied with the justification given by the fertilizer industry. Secretary stated that the Ministry will submit the report before the cabinet and take action accordingly.

He argued that since privatisation and deregulation of fertilizer sector, the issue of price exists. Government imports urea and sells it to farmers at subsidized rates. Rana Ishaq Khan, Member National Assembly proposed that those fertilizer factories involved in overcharging farmers should be identified and blacklisted.

Recently, Abdul Razak Dawood, Prime Minister Advisor on Industries and Production also expressed annoyance at the local fertilizer industry for increasing urea prices by Rs 90 per bag to Rs 1,830 per bag in April 2019 from Rs 1,740 in October 2018.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190518476295/

PFMA PUNJAB THREATENS TO STOP FLOUR SUPPLY TO MARKET

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 18TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) Punjab while demanding for changing the sitting Provincial Secretary Food has threatened to stop supply of flour in the market after three days if their demand is not accepted. The demand was raised by PFMA Punjab Chairman Habib ur Rehman Leghari, Group leader PFMA Asim Raza Ahmad and others after an emergent meeting of the Association held here on Friday.

The meeting reviewed the situation arising out of what it claimed impounding of vehicles carrying wheat bought by the flour mills. PFMA Punjab Chairman also claimed that wheat price had reached Rs 1450 per maund in the open market because of the tactics being adopted by the provincial food department. He also hinted at a possible flour crisis in the province and said if mills stopped supplies then there would also be no availability of flour in Ramzaan bazaars.

Members of the Association also presented keys of their mills to the PFMA Chairman on this occasion symbolizing their solidarity with the call of the Association. PFMA members also demanded that the feed mills should be stopped from procurement of wheat and only flour mills should be allowed to buy wheat from the open market. It may be added here that the PFMA Punjab was protesting over stopping their wheat-carrying vehicles by the officials of the food department saying the department had resorted to those immoral tactics to meet its procurement target assigned by the provincial government.

They were of the view that wheat with mills can also be considered as the stock of the food department as the department had to release wheat to mills from its stocks when mills exhaust their buying and government start issuing wheat from the government stocks for smooth supplies of flour in the market.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190518476221/

COTTON MARKET: BINOLA NEW CROP AVAILABLE AT RS 1675 PER MAUND

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 18TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Trading activity improved further on the cotton market on Friday as mills indulged in panic buying owing to soaring dollar's rate versus the rupee, dealers said. The official spot rate was unmoved at Rs 8650, they added. In the ready session, over 8000 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs 8750-8800, they said.

Market sources said that dollar's higher rate forcing mills to make fresh buying of cotton at the present levels. Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that Sanghar ginning factory sold Binola new crop for June 2019 delivery at Rs 1675 per maund. Other brokers said that cotton prices likely to go up in the coming days. Cotton sowing is on full swing in both Sindh and Punjab, they added.

Adds Reuters: Cotton prices inched up on Thursday as investors covered short positions as rally in global equities and grains market improved market sentiment, while US-China trade war worries limited gains. The most-active cotton contract on ICE Futures US July settled up 0.45 cent, or 0.7 %, at 66.80 cents per lb.

Total futures market volume fell by 9,498 to 22,739 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 1,129 to 215,831 contracts in the previous session. Following deals were reported: nearly 2200 bales of cotton from Dherki sold at Rs 8750-8800 and 6000 bales of cotton from Rahim Yar Khan at Rs 8750, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190518476351/

NA BODY DIRECTS BETTER CROP INSURANCE

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated May 17, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Expressing serious concerns over ineffective crop insurance schemes offered to famers in the country, the National Assembly Standing Committee on Commerce and Textile on Thursday asked the commerce ministry and National Insurance Company Limited (NICL) to come up with better packages.

The committee, led by its chairman MNA Naveed Qamar, was reviewing crop insurance schemes to suggest measures for helping farmers.

The committee was informed that although standing wheat crop had been damaged due to hailstorms in April, sufficient stocks are available from the previous harvest for consumption in the country.

Mr Qamar opined that wheat should be deregulated and grading of the crop is necessary. He stressed the need to change the policy regarding sugarcane, adding that it is high time to invest in other crops.

For date crop, the standing committee asked the ministry to resolve the issue of running finance and remittance by taking farmers into confidence. The committee also recommended that more crops covered by Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited.

Adviser on Commerce to Prime Minister Razak Dawood briefed the committee on Strategic Trade Policy Framework (STPF) 2019-24. He said the policy objectives of STPF are to make the exports a driver of economic growth, transition from factor-driven to efficiency-driven exports in the short to medium term.

He said the policy will also ensure innovation driven exports in the long-term, improve competitiveness and efficiency of industry especially export-oriented sector by reducing input costs and increasing productivity, attract efficiency-seeking investment into export-oriented production.

Mr Dawood said the proposed policy will reduce relative “disincentive” for exporting activities by reducing structural anomalies, and to improve the trade ecosystem by increasing institutional efficiencies and reducing cost of doing business.

The meeting was attended by parliamentarians including Ali Khan Jadoon, Muhammad Yaqoob Sheikh, Muhammad Asim Nazir, Ahmed Hussain Dehar, Mian Muhammad Shafiq, Wajhia Akram, Sajida Begum, Tahira Aurangzeb, Shaista Pervaiz and Syed Javed Ali Shah Jillani.

Published in Dawn, May 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1482788/na-body-directs-better-crop-insurance

13 FOOD OFFICIALS, TRADERS BOOKED IN WHEAT SCAM

A Correspondent May 17, 2019

DADU: Eleven officials of food department posted at district food controller’s office and two well-known traders of the area were nominated in seven FIRs lodged by Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) on Thursday on charges of embezzling 194,000 wheat bags whose total worth came to around Rs431 million.

The suspects, who included deputy director of the Hyderabad range of food department Salimullah Siddiqi, Dadu district food controller Ali Mohammad Mugheri, food inspectors Ali Asghar Panhwar, Ghulam Mohammad Kakepoto, Ghulam Murtaza Butt, Allah Bachayo Panhwar, Farooq Ahmed Khoso, Munawwar Ali Virk, Inaam Hussain Abro, Muzaffar Jesar, head clerk at Dadu district controller’s office Gulshan Solangi and wheat traders Moharam Pechuho and Mohammad Hussain Khokhar, were accused of embezzling the wheat bags stored at the department’s godowns in Pat Sharif, Jhaloo, Sita Road, Khairpur Nathan Shah, Radhan, Johi, Dadu and Phakka towns.

ACE Jamshoro range deputy director Noorullah Shaikh said that inquiries found that the suspect officials had purchased wheat from different areas of Dadu district in last procurement season and misappropriated 194,000 wheat bags. He had formed two teams to arrest the 11 officials and the two traders, he said.

Published in Dawn, May 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1482695/13-food-officials-traders-booked-in-wheat-scam

FOUR MILLION TONS OF WHEAT TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED EASILY: MALIK ANWAR

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 17TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Punjab Revenue Minister Malik Muhammad Anwar has said that the PTI-led government will achieve wheat procurement target of 4 million metric tonnes for the 2019-20 crop with financial limit of Rs130 billion, adding that the wheat procurement process is being conducted smoothly in the province.

The Provincial Revenue Minister said that wheat crop has suffered a setback due to recent rains followed by thunderstorm and about 5 percent losses were caused to overall production. He informed that losses in Punjab appeared to be on higher side and would be known after two to three weeks because crops in many parts are still in the open fields. Malik Anwar said that all the district revenue officers were directed to complete assessment of losses caused to wheat crops in the province and submit their reports to the govt so that the farmers suffering from damage of crops can be compensated to the optimal level. He asked them to address the complaints of farmers promptly. Commenting on tax amnesty scheme introduced by the present govt, the revenue minister said that this scheme which was finalized after consultation with stakeholders would help in raising billions of rupees, besides promoting documentation of the economy.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190517475943/

GOVT APPROVES 5.15M TONNES WHEAT PROCUREMENT, SUPPLY OF ANOTHER 150MW TO KE

Khaleeq Kiani Updated May 16, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet on Wednesday approved Rs158 billion wheat procurement plan and 150MW additional power supply to K-Electric from the national grid.

Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh presided over the meeting that did not approve about Rs118bn electricity subsidy to industrial consumers for want of further deliberations.

Sources told Dawn that the meeting was informed that wheat crop had suffered a setback due to recent rains and thunderstorms and about 5 per cent losses are initially estimated to have been caused to the overall production.

ECC gives Rs1.8bn additional subsidy to ex-Fata tribal agencies for Ramazan

In his presentation, the secretary, ministry of national food security and research updated the meeting about the availability of wheat in the country saying total stocks stood at 5.328 million tonnes as of May 13. It was reported that initial estimates put the total wheat output at 24.268m tonnes during the just concluded crop season against a target of 25.56m tonnes. About 1.213m tonnes were lost due to recent adverse weather conditions.

Some participants were of the view that losses in Punjab appeared to be on the higher side and would be known after 2-3 weeks because crops in many parts were still in the open fields. The meeting was informed that the wheat procurement process was being conducted smoothly by the provincial government (Punjab) and Passco. The committee approved the proposed wheat procurement target of 5.15m tonnes for the 2018-19 crop with financial limit of Rs158.5bn.

The ECC approved additional power supply of 150MW from the national grid to the KE so as to address power shortage in Karachi. An official said the KE would get additional power supply of 150MW for two years at the average basket price at which the Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) was supplying electricity to other distribution companies. The average basket currently stands at about Rs9.89.

Responding to a question, an official said the KE should have been given additional supply from the national grid at marginal cost – significantly higher – but a 2007-08 decision of the federal cabinet became the stumbling block that ordered treatment of KE at par with distribution companies of ex-Wapda. The relevant authorities did not want to follow a lengthy process for amending the old cabinet decision. With this, the KE's intake from national grid would now stand at about 800MW.

The Karachi-based private power utility is facing about 500-600MW shortfall in peak summer months and had been pursuing the federal government for additional supply from the national grid including from Karachi-based nuclear power plants to meet peak demand and minimise public sufferings. It has been trying to secure about 500MW from the national grid in view of its inability to overcome capacity constraints on its own. The KE would be provided with additional supply through 132kv existing transmission line from three wind power plants in the Gharo area namely Dawood Hydro China, Zephyr and Tenaga (50MW each).

A fresh power purchase agreement (PPA) for two years would be signed by KE with CPPA/NTDC. The initial 2-year PPA would be extendable.

The government has not yet issued national security certificate for the transfer of KE's 66pc share to Shanghai Electric of China because of over Rs100bn claims of the Sui Southern Gas Company and NTDC/CPPA against the KE while the Karachi-based private utility also had huge claims against various entities of the Sindh government. As a result, Shanghai's $1.77bn takeover plan of the KE continued to face roadblocks.

An official said the ECC did not formally approve Rs3 per unit subsidy in power tariff to industrial consumers under the prime minister's package and ordered the power division to have further deliberations with the ministry of finance and the industrial sector before seeking budgetary allocations. The industrial consumers had been enjoying the cheaper rates but the finance division had been reluctant to disburse these funds to power companies because initial allocations lapsed almost a year ago.

In order to provide additional power supply to the seven tribal agencies of ex-Fata, the committee approved additional subsidy amounting to Rs1.8bn to the Tribal Electric Supply Company for Ramazan. The power division informed the meeting that the government had been paying the electricity bills of the domestic consumers of former tribal agencies through subsidy of Rs1.3bn per month.

The ECC also acceded to the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority's proposal by granting tax exemption to the projects being constructed under the Saudi Fund for Development Grant.

On the proposal of the ministry of maritime affairs, the committee waived off demurrage (KPT storage charges) on the consignments of rice to be distributed among the needy people by a non-profit welfare organisations working for the poor and the needy people of the country.

The meeting approved technical supplementary and supplementary grants for different ministries/divisions.

Published in Dawn, May 16th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1482570/govt-approves-515m-tonnes-wheat-procurement-supply-of-another-150mw-to-ke

NA SPEAKER FOR SPECIAL PACKAGE FOR AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN BUDGET

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 16TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The government will be requested to announce a special package for agriculture sector in budget for the next fiscal year to help small farmers and improve the agriculture output, speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser stated on Wednesday.

The speaker National Assembly and MNA Fakhar Imam jointly chaired the sub-committee of the Special Committee on Agriculture products as well as formed sectoral groups and tasked them to come up with the proposals in the next meeting for moving forward.

The meeting was held with agenda to promote collaborative linkages between the special committee on agricultural products and agriculture universities faculties as well as to promote the agriculture sector.

Asad Qaiser stated that for the first time, members across party lines and from all provinces have been brought at one platform to develop a strategy to bring about improvement in the sector and, if required, some legal changes would be done.

Some members of the committee including the convener regretted that the country is importing pulses despite being an agrarian economy and this is largely because of absence of research and adoption of new technology. They added that agriculture is the only sector that could help improve the balance of payment position and reduce debt burden in a very short time through increase in exportable surplus.

The purpose of the meeting was to devise a strategy to increase productivity, especially exportable surplus, and protect the farmers against the interests of multilaterals.

Fakhar Imam said, “For the first time this kind of discussion has taken place from the Parliament, and farming should be the focus of the country now.”

A presentation was also made to the committee highlighting the factors responsible for taking the agriculture sector to collapse after 60s and led to deterioration of food quality.

Chairman Pedaver Private Limited, Asif Sharif in a presentation stated that the current pattern in farm sector is against natural system. He added that higher cost of production and lower quality led to decline in output of the sector and poverty for the farmers. He said that challenges in the sector are poverty alleviation, stunted growth for the people attached to the sector in particular and other in general, and to make available production of industrial raw material at competitive prices and quality.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190516474624/

MET OFFICE ISSUES ADVISORY FOR FISHERMEN

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 16TH, 2019 | KARACHI

With windstorm looming large, the Fishermen Cooperative Society (FCS) on Wednesday alerted the weather dangers and barred all the boats from leaving harbors. The Met Office on Wednesday forecast windstorm for Karachi Division as well that prompted the FCS to take precautionary steps, barring boats from leaving Karachi and Korangi Fish Harbors.

"Weather emergency to the local fishermen communities has been issued," the FCS spokesman said, adding that the boats engaged in fishing on the seas have also been asked to drift to safe places. The restriction on boats from leaving the harbors will stay until May 18, he said.

In the next 24 hours: A scattered dust-thunderstorm with rain is expected in Malakand, Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Mardan, Bannu, D I Khan, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Sahiwal, Multan, D G Khan, Bahawalpur, Quetta, Zhob, Kalat, Makran, Sibbi, Nasirabad, Sukkur, Larkana, Shaheed Benazirabad and Karachi divisions, besides Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir and Islamabad.

Bahawalnager received 25 mm of rain, Malamjabba 13 mm, Bahawalpur City 12 mm, Sahiwal 9 mm, D G Khan and Jaccobabad 8 mm, each, Bahawalpur Airport 6 mm and Upper Dir 5 mm in the last 24 hours. Maximum temperatures were recorded in Dadu as 47 degrees Celsius, Shaheed Benazirabad 46, Padidan and Mohenjo-Daro 44 mm each.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190516474681/

CONSTRUCTION OF EASTBAY EXPRESSWAY IN GWADAR: BREAKWATER, ALLIED FACILITIES TO BE DEVELOPED FOR DISPLACED FISHERMEN

TANVEER AHMED | MAY 16TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Federal and Balochistan Governments will share the cost of over rupees one billion "Construction of Groyne Wall, Breakwater and allied works at Eastbay (Demizer), Gwadar" project equally to facilitate the local fishermen, to be displaced due to construction of Eastbay Expressway.

The main purpose of the project is to provide a Breakwater at Eastbay (Demizer), Gwadar to facilitate the fishermen which are going to be displaced from the existing fish harbor cum mini port for undertaking the other development works by the Chinese Operator of the Port and Construction of Eastbay Expressway, according to official documents of Planning Commission available with Business Recorder.

The existing Gwadar Fish Harbor is to be closed from the operational premises of Gwadar Port to enable deepening of the Port's Shipping Channel as well as undertaking of other development works by the Chinese Operator of the port.

The Chinese team started work on Eastbay Expressway at Demizer. The fishermen recorded their reservations on the construction of Eastbay Expressway and the area representatives also raised this issue on different forums including National Assembly, Provincial Assembly and Senate.

The local Fishermen approached Chief Minister Balochistan with the demand to develop a boat parking yard including breakwater and allied facilities at Demizer. The Chief Minister Balochistan directed Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) to take this issue on immediate knots and prepare PC-I for further processing.

The GDA surveyed the site on the directions of the Chief Minister Balochistan and it was decided to construct a breakwater so that fishermen can park their vessels inside the barricaded area as there would be no space available due to construction of Gwadar Eastbay Expressway at Eastbay (Demizer).

The project envisages construction of 1775 meters long and six meters wide stone groyne wall, training wall, auction hall, boats repair area and boat basin as parking yard with allied facilities at Eastbay Gwadar.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190516474715/

WHEAT SUPPLY TO KP: FLOUR MILLERS VOICE CONCERN OVER RESTRICTION

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 16TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

Flour mills' owners have expressed serious concern over the restriction of wheat supply to local mills and warned to start protest demonstrations against Punjab government for suspending the supply to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Pakistan All Pakistan Flour Mills Association chairman Naeem Butt and provincial chairman Haji Mohammad Tariq in a joint statement here said that the ban had been imposed by the Punjab food department due to its drive for storage of wheat which led to crisis in other provinces.

The association leaders said that the wheat supply from Punjab to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been suspended for the past some days which had forced the millers in KP to shut the mills. It was stated that if the government did not intervene to resolve the issue then the millers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would have the right to agitate against the government.

Besides, the association leaders said that Punjab government had started checking wheat supply at different checkpoints/check posts. It was stated that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf was in power both in the Punjab and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in case the wheat supply was not restored then the people of the affected province would have the right to take part in the proposed protest rallies against the ban on wheat supply.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190516474740/

GOVERNMENT URGED TO REDUCE AGRICULTURE SECTOR'S INPUT COST

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 16TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Kisan Board Pakistan (KBP) Central President Chaudhry Nisar Ahmad has urged the government to pay special attention to issues being faced by the agricultural sector in the budget for the year 2019-20. While talking to a delegation of farmers in his office here on Wednesday, Chaudhry Nisar said that the government should take steps to reduce the input cost of this sector. For this, he proposed that subsidy should be given on seeds and fertilizers and special subsidy packages for pesticides and agricultural machinery.

He was of the view that agriculture should top in our priority list to improve the national economy. He said that markup on agricultural loans should also be brought down and an indiscriminate and ruthless crackdown should be launched against those involved in the heinous crime of fake pesticides.

Regarding cotton, he proposed that emergency should be imposed for resolving the problems being faced by the cotton growers and to meet the target of cotton production. KBP Chief said that the government was talking about withdrawing subsidies as a result of a recent deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

He said that if subsidies given to agricultural sectors are withdrawn it would lead to a disaster in agriculture. He claimed that even developed countries extend support and subsidies to their farmers. He reiterated that subsidy being given to growers on electricity, fertilizers, pesticides, marketing, machinery and other heads should not be withdrawn.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190516474760/

SINDH FOOD DEPT OFFICIALS BOOKED IN RS1.78B SCAM

By Our Correspondent Published: May 16, 2019

HYDERABAD: In a Rs1.78 billion scam involving the illicit sale of wheat bags, Sindh Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) has booked 25 officials of Sindh food department besides private persons in Sanghar district. The circle officer of ACE, Yar Muhammad Rind, informed on Tuesday that multiple FIRs have been registered against the officials and others after approval of the inquiry by the Sindh chief secretary.

The officials sold the wheat bags, which the food department distributes among the wheat farmers for the provincial government’s wheat procurement, illegally to the agents and traders last year. The district was reportedly allocated 1.7 million wheat bags of 100 kilogrammes each.

The Sindh government bought wheat at Rs1,300 per 40kg from the farmers. But as the provincial government delays the wheat procurement, the traders and agents buy wheat at around Rs1,000 to Rs1,100 per 40 kg rate from the farmers and later sell the same wheat to the government at Rs1,300 rate. Under the law, the food department is under obligation to distribute the wheat bags, which are also referred to as gunny bags or gunny sacks, to the wheat farmers only.

Deputy director Ali Asghar Naich, Sanghar District Food Controller Muhammad Munawar Arain, assistant food controller Jam Abid Ali and several in-charges and food inspectors deputed at some 40 food centres in Sanghar have been booked. However, Rind informed that none of the accused could be arrested so far during the initial raids at the food offices.

A similar inquiry by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) is underway in Ghotki district where food officials illegally shifted wheat worth billions of rupees to flour mills under the pretext of temporary storage. The NAB team, which raided several flour mills, found that the mills had utilised and sold that wheat.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 16th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1973843/1-sindh-food-dept-officials-booked-rs1-78b-scam/

CLIMATE CHANGE MAY PUSH DOWN PAKISTAN'S MANGO OUTPUT

By Usman Hanif Published: May 16, 2019

KARACHI: With constant changes in climate, Pakistan needs to adopt new techniques of farming as currently, it is not capable of dealing with the change due to obsolete agricultural practices. Considering this, the mango harvest is feared to drop 30% this season.

"Global warming is the major reason behind this fall in production," said Waheed Ahmad, Patron-in-Chief of the All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA). "Heavy rains and hailstorms caused the decrease in output."

In 2019, mango production was expected to stand at 1.2 million tons compared with 1.8 million tons in the previous year, he said.

"This year, mango production is feared to go down 30% compared to last year," he said, adding that Punjab was going to record a 35% decrease in production whereas Sindh was going to witness a 10% decline.

"The climate is showing a paradoxical situation as it remains hot during the day while at night it becomes very mild or cold; this fluctuation in temperature is not suitable for the mango crop," he said.

Pakistan had the seventh position in the list of countries most affected by global warming, Ahmad recalled, adding, unfortunately, farmers were using the same 70-year-old techniques to deal with the change in weather.

Owing to global warming, the weather calendar was also changing, therefore, Pakistan needed to act accordingly, he said. For instance, there are techniques to save the crop from a hailstorm, but Pakistani farmers are not aware of these.

Agricultural practices were changing around the world, but there was nobody to educate the farmers in Pakistan about them, Waheed said. "We need to spread awareness among our growers to protect their crops from rains, storm, etc. This situation can lead to the food security challenge, which subsequently can turn into a national security issue," he said.

Moreover, Pakistan is a water-stressed nation. The country's 80% of water is used in the agriculture sector. Farmers rely on the flood irrigation system, which is ineffective, which is why Pakistan needs to introduce the drip irrigation system, which will help save 50% water.

The old technique is not only ineffective in dealing with climate change, but it also increases the cost of doing business, according to the PFVA chief. This turns Pakistan's exporters uncompetitive in the international market.

“If we don’t wake up to deal with this situation, food security concerns will emerge by 2022,” he cautioned, adding “we need intense research and development in the agriculture sector to increase productivity and reduce the cost of doing business.”

“We see tomatoes being sold for Rs40 per kg one day and for Rs200 the other day; this happens due to the inefficient supply chain.”

Mango is one of the cash crops, which earns foreign exchange for the country. This year’s mango export is going to commence on May 20.

“The target is to export 100,000 tons of mangoes (this year), which will fetch foreign exchange worth $80 million,” Waheed said.

This season, the production may go down, but exports were going to increase by 25,000 tons, he said. “Last year, the exporters of mangoes sold 75,000 tons to foreign markets and for this purpose, we are going to hold roadshows in Europe, the US, and China,” he revealed.

“We are ambitious that we will be able to meet the target, however, we will need help from relevant departments like the ANF, Customs, quarantine and shipping companies to meet our target,” Waheed said.

“We sincerely hope that the law and order situation of the country will stay stable; there will not be any strike or other political instability, which can hinder exports of any crop.”

The depreciation of the rupee against the dollar has also had its impact on the export business, he said. The lower value of the rupee has resulted in higher prices of petroleum products, which subsequently have become a reason for the higher prices of domestic transport and logistics.

The rupee’s free fall has caused an increase in sea and air transport fares, which further affects Pakistan’s exports. Pakistan ships 15% of its mango through the air and 15% through the land, while the rest, 70%, goes through the sea.

The official was of the view that a reduction in the number of Emirates airline’s flights to Pakistan would have an additional impact on exports.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 16th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1973795/2-climate-change-may-push-mango-output/

TWO MONTHS BAN ON FISHING LIKELY BY MONTH-END

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 15TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The Sindh government is set to place a two-month ban on hunt of fish and shrimp during June and July to help improve fisheries stocks in the country’s seas, official said on Tuesday. Talking to Business Recorder, officials said that a notification to execute the ban will come out mostly likely by the end of this month. “It is must,” the officials talked about the ban that will help keep the seas calm from fishing during the high-tide season, which is also believed to be a breeding period for shrimps.

The officials said that ban is needed to continue to help improve the existing stocks of fisheries since the country’s seafood export is falling. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the country’s seafood export has declined to $293.887 million in July-Mar 2018-19, which down by 7 percent.

Fall in seafood export now stands at $21.727 million in July-Mar 2018-19 from $315.614 million in July-Mar 2017-18. In term of quantity, seafood export plunged by 5.07 percent or 6989 metric tons to 130,830 metric tons in July-Mar 2018-19 from 137,819 metric tons in July-Mar 2017-18. In Mar 2019, Pakistan faced a fall in seafood export by 11 percent or $5.502 million to $45.895 million from $51.397 million in Mar 2018. Export volume of seafood slumped by 16 percent or 3876 metric tons to 20,412 metric tons in Mar 2019 from 24,288 metric tons in Mar 2018.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190515473582/

MINISTRY PROPOSES WHEAT PROCUREMENT TARGET OF 5.150 MILLION TONS

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | MAY 15TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research has proposed wheat procurement target of 5.150 million tons for 2019, despite damage to crop in South Punjab due to thunderstorms, well informed sources told Business Recorder.Punjab Government, sources said, which is now revising down its procurement target, has imposed inter-provincial ban on movement of wheat, fearing crisis in the coming days.

According to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research financial requirement to procure 5.150 million tons of wheat has been calculated at Rs 158.522 billion. The sources said, in order to ensure food security of the country and to provide a fair return to the farming community, the respective Food Departments and Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation Limited (PASSCO) procure wheat every year at a Minimum Guaranteed Price (MGP) from the farmers.

The ECC, in its meeting held on November 11, 2018 formally approved to maintain the MPG of wheat @ Rs 1300 per 40 kg, for the wheat crop 2018-19. Public sector enters into the local market as an alternate buyer and their wheat stocks serve the purpose of maintaining steady releases and price stability during the lean periods of wheat supplies as well as fulfilling the food requirements of the country.

During the preceding three years, the public sector had procured 6.104 million tons wheat, on average, against the assigned average target of 6.733 million tons per annum. Last year a quantity of 5.989 million tons of wheat was procured by the public sector against the procurement target of 6.100 million tons. Low wheat procurement was made due to leftover stock of the previous year to the tune of 5.942 million tons.

The current public sector wheat stocks as on April 24, 2019 were at the level of 3.785 million as compared to 6.30 million tons in the corresponding period of last year. In the meeting of wheat review committee held on February 13, 2019, a procurement target of 6.90 million tons was fixed, in consultation with all stakeholders. The target consisted of 4 million tons in Punjab, 1.40 million tons for Sindh, 0.30 million tons for KP and 0.10 million tons for Balochistan and 1.10 million tons for PASSCO.

It was decided that provincial cabinets will give concurrence and endorsement. Provincial Governments have submitted their wheat procurement targets and financial requirements on the requisites format. However, Government of Sindh decreased its procurement target from 1.40 million tons and forwarded a tentative target of 0.750 million tons subject to approval of their cabinet committee whereas the ECC on April 8, 2019 had already approved the wheat procurement target of 1.10 million tons for PASSCO.

After examining the entire situation, Ministry of National Food Security and Research has recommended the government to fix the target of wheat procurement for wheat crop 2018-19 at the tune of 5.150 million tons with the financial limits of Rs 41.787 billion as per for follows details: (i) Punjab 4 million tons, Rs 130.360 billion;(ii) Sindh 0.750 million tons- Rs 24.375 billion ;(iii) KP 0.300 million tons – Rs 0.00(KP government will utilize its own resources for wheat procurement) and Balochistan 0.100 million tons – 3.787 billion. The total financial requirement for 5.150 million tons of wheat has been calculated at Rs 158.522 billion.

The Finance Division stated that from data procurement target and financing needs and carry forward stocks in last five years in respect of PASSCO, it is ascertained that over the years, procurement quantum by PASSCO is increasing resulting in increase in carry forward stocks at the time of fresh procurement. This phenomenon has resulted in enhancement in financing requirements of PASSCO. The other aspect of this additional procurement is that PASSCO/Ministry of National Food Security and Research starts initiating offloading of wheat stocks either through exports or through private parties with subsidy to be picked up by the Federal Government.

Finance Division has supported procurement of 1.1 million tons of wheat by PASSCO for crop 2019 subject to the condition that PASSCO will manage offloading of procured wheat without subsidy from the government of Pakistan. Finance Division has further stated that the proposed incidentals of Rs 5.769 billion should be agreed at provisional basis at this stage, subject to final adjustment as per actual and past practice.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190515473613/

TETRA PAK HANDS OVER SIX MILK TESTING UNITS TO PUNJAB GOVERNMENT

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 15TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Tetra Pak Pakistan handed over six milk-testing units to the government of the Punjab on Tuesday to assist it in the objective of provision of safe milk to the masses.

Milk-testing units were handed over to the Punjab Minister for Food Sami Ullah Chaudhary who visited Tetra Pak Pakistan’s state-of-the-art packaging material manufacturing factory in Sundar Industrial Estate today. The Minister was briefed on the company’s world class manufacturing processes and plant features.

The Minister was also given a tour of the factory, which included factory operations and an overview of food processing packaging and the dairy value chain in the Innovation Room. The Minster experienced first-hand the enforcement of world class occupational health and safety standards and manufacturing processes practiced by Tetra Pak. As per the company’s slogan of committing to make food safe and available everywhere, Tetra Pak is deeply appreciative of the Prime Minister’s stance on providing pure milk to the masses and as such took this opportunity to present the provincial food department with 6 milk testing units to further their efforts in proving safe and healthy milk.

Upon visiting the factory, the minister showed satisfaction and appreciated the efforts made by Tetra Pak to maintain quality of production and increase customer awareness about packaged milk.

Commenting on his visit Chaudhary said, “It is great to see Tetra Pak contributing in the food sector of Pakistan as a leading processing and packaging provider. Their environment-friendly techniques are very important for sustainable development and Tetra Pak is living according to these principles. We are also thankful to the company for the milk testing units, which will benefit us in the fight against adulterated milk.” Towards the end of the visit, the food minister also took part in Tetra Pak’s plantation drive and planted a tree in the factory to advocate for a greener country. Tetra Pak is a socially responsible organization and has undertaken many community improvement initiatives while working with different NGOs, media and academic institutions.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190515473622/

THIRD HIKE IN FLOUR PRICES

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated May 14, 2019

KARACHI: Having jacked up prices of various varieties for the third time before the advent of Ramazan, the flour millers on Monday warned Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah of looming food crisis.

After failing to get any response from the provincial food minister and secretary food despite repeated attempts, Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) Sindh Chapter chairman Mohammad Jawed Yusuf wrote a letter to the chief minister informing him that bad weather had damaged a major portion of Punjab wheat crop which is not suitable for milling.

About 75 per cent of the country’s wheat requirement is met by Punjab wheat crop.

“About 20,000 tonnes of wheat is being shifted from Sindh to other provinces daily, thus putting pressure on available stocks in the open market,” he stated in the letter.

The association claimed that last year’s wheat stocks were not properly stored, while no fumigation was done. Stock figures were incorrect as about 50 per cent stocks were not available physically. On papers, Sindh has 800,000 tonnes of last year’s wheat stocks.

The PFMA chief pointed out another alarming aspect as this year the Sindh Food Department has decided not to procure wheat stocks.

Yusuf said it is high time to decide about the wheat crop situation of Sindh and ways to tackle the legal complication and hindrance to seal Sindh-Punjab borders immediately.

He asked the chief minister to convene an urgent meeting to discuss facts about wheat season 2019-20, non-procurement of wheat by Sindh Food Department, position of previous wheat stocks and transfer of 20,000 tonnes of wheat daily to other provinces.

Millers had raised the rate of flour No.2.5 to Rs36.50 from Rs35 per kg followed by price hike in fine and super fine flour to Rs40 from Rs38.50 per kg.

From last week of April till to date, the price of flour no.2.5 has risen by Rs3 per kg followed by Rs3.50 per kg in fine and super fine flours respectively.

Millers attributed price hike to rising price trend of wheat, which now stood at Rs3,350 per 100 kg bag in the open market versus Rs3,000 some three weeks back.

Published in Dawn, May 14th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1482190/third-hike-in-flour-prices

GROWERS ADVISED TO PROTECT STANDING CROPS

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 14TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Growers should step up protection to their standing crops, livestock and other agriculture productions from the expected windstorm with hails in the next 10 days, the Met Office said on Monday. It said that the farmers should initiate measures to aim at preserving standing crops and orchids from damaging effects of the extreme weather conditions including thunder-dust storm, gusty winds, hails etc.

Wheat crop is at its heading-maturity stages in the northern half of the country, it said that the farmers should schedule their harvesting plans keeping in view the weather conditions. It also urged the farmers to remove weeds from their standing crops to help increase yield, warning that a considerable production loss the growers suffer from the outgrowth of unwanted plants.

Punjab: A light to moderate rainfall is expected in the most parts of the province with an isolated rain-hailstorm-thunderstorm in Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Lahore, Multan, DG Khan, Sahiwal and Bahawalpur Divisions and Islamabad until May 20.

Sindh: Mainly hot and dry weather is expected over the period. Balochistan: Mainly dry weather is expected in the province with an isolated rain-thunderstorm in Quetta, Kalat, Zhob, Nasirabad and Sibbi Divisions.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190514473300/

GROWERS DEMAND RS100BN PACKAGE TO RESCUE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent May 13, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) on Sunday called for a Rs100bn package in the 2019-20 budget to save the agriculture sector in view of currency devaluation and the rising cost of inputs.

Speaking at a press conference at the local press club SCA president Qabool Mohammad Khatiyan, vice president Nabi Bux Sathio, general secretary Zahid Bhurgari, Haji Nisar Memon and others said that recent devaluation of rupee against US dollar had increased per acre cost of produce. They said the increased dollar rate had made costlier the prices of agricultural inputs, like imported hybrid seeds and pesticides. The agriculture sector would suffer a heavy loss if IMF (International Monetary Fund) conditions were accepted, they added.

The SCA leaders pointed out that farmers always demanded procurement of wheat by government to ensure stability in the commodity's market price but this year they were left at the mercy of open market forces. Wheat growers had to sell their produce to traders at inadequate rates and were incurring losses, they said, adding that the collective loss could sagely be estimated at Rs20bn.

They regretted that the federal government had withdrawn subsidy on fertilizer, diesel, tractor and other farm equipment. They argued that due to rising cost of these items, farmers' buying capacity had been badly hit. The agriculture sector was faced with an economic crisis affecting landowners and farmers equally and the conditions had forced them to hold protests, they said.

The SCA leaders rejected Sindh government's decision not to procure wheat from farmers. They urged the Sindh government to fix the wheat support price at Rs1,500/40kg.

They said that cost of diesel be reduced with a subsidy of Rs50 per litre. The subsidy should be announced for DAP fertilizer (Rs1,500 per bag), NPP fertilizer (Rs1,200 per bag) and urea fertilizer (Rs800 per bag).

They also demanded 40pc subsidy on pesticides, hybrid seed and paddy crop seed. They called for withdrawal of excise and custom duties on agriculture machinery including tractors. They pointed out that the prices of diesel, fertilizer, hybrid seed and farm mach-inery had increased by 30pc when compared with the last year's prices whereas the prices of agriculture produce had remained uncha-nged over the last 10 years. They demanded adequate rates to be offered for crops.

The SCA leaders called for holding an inquiry into alleged embezzlement of Rs3bn in the Right Bank Outfall Drain-II (RBOD) project. They said that a new saline water drain should be built in Kashmore and Jacobabad.

They warned that the prevailing poor economic conditions in the agriculture sector could lead to migration of people from rural areas to urban centres which in no way would benefit cities, which were already facing pressure of increasing population.

They said that on an average, Rs10,000 to Rs15,000 per acre losses were being incurred by farmers, adding that transport fares were also sky rocketing due to the constant rise in fuel prices. The SCA leaders said that Rs60,000 per acre expenses were being borne by growers even in producing a small crop.

The SCA leaders also led a rally of growers which was taken out from the Old Campus Chowk and culminated outside the local press club.

Published in Dawn, May 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1481870/growers-demand-rs100bn-package-to-rescue-agriculture-sector

AGRICULTURE: CHAOS IN THE WHEAT MARKET

Ahmad Fraz Khan May 13, 2019

Punjab is in the middle of a panicky wheat procurement drive. Barely one week into the campaign, it is resorting to restricting movement and storage of wheat by the private sector. Punjab's district management machinery is nudging farmers towards procurement centres and edging the middleman out.

The Punjab Food Department has itself to blame for the chaos as it failed to read the market dynamics specific to this year. Farmers and millers think that the transfer of the secretary food only a week before the start of the drive caused the chaos.

The new secretary landed in the middle of an enervating exercise of wheat procurement. As things started spinning out of hand, he restored to administrative actions sending the entire market into a tail spin.

The Punjab Food Department has no idea how much wheat to procure to ensure national food security next year

In the first week, two departmental letters — restricting procurement to only licensed purchasers (millers alone) and then limiting them to only 48-hour grinding stocks — have been doing the rounds in the market. This is unprecedented.

To make things worse for the government, there were a number of factors unique to this year. To begin with, the department had no specific target. Thus there were no fixed targets for field formation and no one knew how many gunny bags had to be distributed and how many had to be taken back.

All this made the field staff unsure of the whole exercise. Since the crop was late by two to three weeks, everyone expected a sudden glut and a resultant price crash once harvesting picked up pace.

But here another factor intervened — the price of wheat hay that had hit Rs1,200 per maund last year due to the expanding dairy sector. Thus, farmers opted for manual harvesting and use of thrashers instead of harvesters that lay hay waste. Thus, the arrival of wheat was slowed down by about 50pc.

This, along with rumours about the exceptionally small crop size, sent the price shooting beyond the official limit of Rs1,300 per maund. Hence, official procurement became irrelevant compared to ground realities. On May 9, open market price in Lahore was Rs1,300 per maund and Rs1,340 per maund in Rawalpindi.

The slowdown and price rise came amid widespread rumours that bad weather — high speed winds accompanied by hail and thunder storms all over the country in late April — has reduced the crop size anywhere between 30 to 40pc in Punjab.

Meanwhile, the federal government also revised its production figures in early May from 25.60 to 24.20 million tonnes. Punjab conceded a loss of 3pc when it said that it would be harvesting 18.58m tonnes instead of 19.18m tonnes.

However, these official figures do not matter in the market where rumours rule. Farmers guestimate loss of 30 to 40pc, which comes to 23-24 maund yield against last year's 36-37 maund yield. It is these figures that are determining market sentiment.

Another factor that the Punjab Food Department failed to account for was export potential this year. With rupee losing around 35pc value within few months, export potential suddenly brightened.

Since there is no export ban on wheat, exporters who hit the market first (especially in South Punjab) were able to obtain huge orders and set sentiment on the higher side.

Since there is no export ban on wheat, exporters who hit the market first were able to obtain huge orders and set sentiment on the higher side

Two additional factors that made export more lucrative were Russian crop failure by 30pc, leaving Central Asian states dry, and Afghanistan dropping duty on wheat imports by Rs200 per maund to encourage its local flour milling industry.

Both these factors multiplied Afghan demand and traders from Afghanistan were early to arrive in Pakistani markets — right down to central Punjab — with ready cash.

Further complicating these circumstances is the poultry feed industry. Last year, poultry farmers had to purchase corn at a higher rate of Rs1,200 per maund. This year, fearing a further hike in corn prices, poultry farmers replaced corn with wheat for feed.

The poultry feed industry says it can use up to a million tonnes of wheat for feed manufacturing this year — an increase of 30pc from what has been traditionally purchased.

These factors were bound to hit official procurement and they have. The absence of an official target only added to panic as it shifted the responsibility of building up safety stocks till the next harvest to the Punjab Food Department. On its part, the department does not know what to do to ensure national food security next year.

It started the season with a carryover of 1.5m tonnes this year. It normally releases wheat from late September to March — for around six months. Last year, the departmental release touched 800,000 tonnes a month, which traditionally has not been more than 500,000 tonnes.

By this calculation, it needs 4.8m tonnes of stocks to see it through next year, requiring additional purchase of almost 3.3m tonnes this year.

Since Sindh has not been officially procuring wheat this year, how will the additional demand of around 2.2m tonnes impact Punjab's supplies next year?

How much of wheat has already slipped to Afghanistan from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? And how much will Punjab have to chip in to ensure adequate supply in KP?

With so many variables in play, the Punjab Food Department has no idea how much wheat to procure for next year to keep the country food secure.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, March 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1482004/agriculture-chaos-in-the-wheat-market

COTTON WEEKLY REVIEW: LOCAL MARKET REMAINS STABLE

NASEEM USMAN | MAY 13TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The prices of cotton remained stable. Due to escalating trade war between America and China there is a slump in international cotton market. Cotton policy should be announced immediately to increase the production of cotton. In the local cotton market the prices of cotton remained stable. Textile and spinning mills continued conscious buying while ginners were also showing their interest in buying due to the end of the season and the arrival of cotton seed is expected from Lower Sindh at end of the June. The ginners had left the stock of 4 lac bales out of which good quality cotton is available in very small amount.

On the other hand textile spinners were of the view that due to the recession in demand and price of cotton yarn the rate comes down while the financial crisis is also increasing. The pressure in the market increases due to the decrease in export of cotton and backing out from the deals by the importers while importers of cotton yarn delaying in opening of Letter of Credit. The cotton in Sindh and Punjab is available from Rs 7000 to Rs 9100 per maund while good quality cotton is sold at Rs 9400 per maund.

The Spot Rate Committee of Karachi Cotton Association has decreased the rate by Rs 50 per maund and closed the rate at Rs 8750 per maund. Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum said that international cotton market is witnessing bearish trend because of escalating trade war between America and China. The rate of New York Cotton came down at the level of 68 American Cent per pound which is the lowest in the season. The prices of cotton in China remained under pressure while the recession in Indian cotton market remained continued.

Chairman Cotton Association of India Atul S Ganatra while addressing the conference in last November said that this year due to the decrease in production of cotton from the early estimate of 3 crore 65 lac bales the price of cotton in India is expected to increase from Rs 48000 per candy (356 Kg). Although after that the price of per candy cotton increased and reached at Rs 47000 but due to the China and America trade conflict the prices of cotton decreased and reached at the lower level of Rs 45000.

The majority of the international delegates of that cotton conference were of the view that New York Cotton Rate of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) was 80 American Cent. Few days back New York Rate of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) reached 77 American Cent but due to America and China trade conflict the rate reached at the lower level of 68 American Cent which proved all estimates wrong.

Atul S Ganatra also told that it is expected that cotton production in India may decrease by 6 lac bales. It is expected that after the reduction of 6 lac bales the expected production of cotton will be 3 crore 15 lac bales while the export of cotton is expected to be 46 lac bales.

Moreover, Federal Minster National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan while chairing the meeting of Pakistan Central Cotton Committee in Multan last week said that production of cotton will be increased this year and government will try to achieve the target of production of one crore 50 lac bales of cotton according to the resolve of Prime Minister Imran Khan. He said Imran Khan has said that National Agriculture Emergency Program should be implemented to increase the production. He also said that government is trying to make cotton policy in which the reasonable rate of cotton seed should be fixed and certified seeds and medicines should be provided.

While addressing the meeting Federal Secretary National Food Security and Research Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai said that department is trying to increase the production of cotton. He also said that Pakistan Central Cotton Committee should be more activated. The meeting was also addressed by Cotton Commissioner Khalid Abdullah.

While Few days back WWF conducted meeting with the farmers belonging to the Lasbela, Rakhni and Barkhan for cultivation of organic cotton in Balochistan. Moreover when Prime Minister Imran Khan announced his resolve to increase the production of cotton and achieve the target of one crore 50 lac bales at that time department of National Food Security and Research announced to fix the rate of cotton seed at Rs 3500 per 40 kg and also announced to buy 5 lac bales through TCP.

The sowing season has started in the areas of Punjab and Sindh but up till now and several meetings were held regarding fixing the price of cotton seed but up till no announcement has been made by the government regarding cotton policy. The sowing season will be completed till May 31. It is necessary that cotton policy should be announced before the completion of the sowing season any delay will affect the sowing of cotton.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190513472860/

GOVT FAILS TO CONTROL SOARING PRICES AT RAMAZAN BAZAARS

By Our Correspondent Published: May 13, 2019

LAHORE: Despite the instructions issued by the prime minister, the provincial and district administrations have failed to rein in the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities at Ramazan bazaars and the open market.

In order to facilitate the people, the government established Ramazan bazars in different areas of the city to provide citizens with essential commodities at subsidised rates.

However, reports of overcharging and the unavailability of different commodities are still on the rise. Further, many vendors have displayed inflated prices at their stalls, a gross violation of the official price list.

Several citizens have complained about the absurdly high prices of essential commodities which are continuously being jacked up by traders.

"Traders had started increasing the prices of items weeks before Ramazan. However, the government failed to take action against such individuals, giving them an opportunity to fleece citizens," said Hanif Khan, a local.

He acknowledges that a few items are being sold at subsidized rates at stalls set up by the agriculture department. "However, the prices of all other items are equal to those in the open market," he expressed. If a product is inexpensive, then its quality is most likely subpar, he said.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, a citizen, Muhammad Ilyas stated that the state has failed to control the prices and the quality of items at Ramazan bazars, where all arrangements are under the government's control.

The situation at the open market is worse as the government has little to no control over the rates and quality. "There is no system of price control, otherwise the situation would be different in both Ramazan bazars and the open market," he said.

A survey of the market by The Express Tribune revealed that the price of a 50-kilogramme sack of sugar has increased to Rs450 at a wholesale level. As a result, traders have increased the prices by five to seven rupees per kilogramme meaning that sugar is being sold for between Rs65 to Rs67 per kilogramme in the open market. A similar trend is also being witnessed in the rates of pulses, seasonal fruit and vegetables.

Further, the Utility Stores Corporation has failed to ensure the availability of wheat flour, pulses and sugar under the Ramazan package. Buying beverages, dates, rice, pulses, cooking oil and other essentials remains a distant dream for most citizens.

Meanwhile, the sale of adulterated and substandard food products is also on the rise. On Saturday, the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) discarded over 27,000 kilogrammes of frozen chicken from different brands.

An official from the authority said that the first phase of the campaign targeting frozen foods has completed. He said the authority took indiscriminate action against frozen meat companies in light of the laboratory report.

He added that the authority collected samples of frozen foods in April under the sampling schedule for 2019. However, several companies failed to meet the standards of the authority. He said that some companies have handed over their stock to the authority under a 'sense of responsibility'.

PFA Director General Muhammad Usman said that the next laboratory analysis of frozen foods will be made in June. He added that PFA would check frozen meat products two times a year as per the annual sampling schedule. The authority is taking all possible measures and steps to ensure the provision of standard food, said Usman.

Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar directed the provincial administration to strictly monitor the prices of essential commodities in the open market. Issuing instructions to the administration and price control committees on Sunday, the CM said that the rates at Ramazan bazaars and in the open market should be regularly monitored to ensure the availability of essential commodities at government notified rates.

Along with the quality, the availability of items should also be ensured. An undue increase in rates will not be tolerated at any cost, he stated.

He directed officials concerned to take strict legal action against hoarders and those overcharging consumers and warned that those involved in profiteering will be dealt with strictly.

The administration and the departments concerned should continue their operation against such elements without discrimination, he said.

"It is the responsibility of the administration to ensure the availability of essential commodities at government notified rates," the chief minister maintained. In order to provide people with relief, we have to work hard and take legal action against profiteers, he said.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 13th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1971604/1-govt-fails-control-soaring-prices-ramazan-bazaars/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 6th TO MAY 12th 2019

BALOCHISTAN CM PROMISES SPECIAL ATTENTION TO FISHERIES SECTOR

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent May 12, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani has said that his government will pay special attention to the fisheries sector.

Presiding over a meeting held to review the performance of fisheries and other departments on Friday, the chief minister said that revenue from the fisheries sector could be increased by modernising the department concerned.

He ordered review of the Fishermen Cooperative Society for the welfare of the community and said a plan be prepared for recruitment of life guards and sea ambulances.

Briefing the meeting, the fisheries secretary said four landing jetties had been proposed for provincial coastal areas in the next Public Sector Development Programme, while the VHF (Very High Frequency) system would be installed in 1,000 boats for better tracking of fishermen at the seas.

He said the VHF system would be helpful in timely rescue of stranded fishermen and it would also be beneficial to prevent illegal fishing through trawlers on the provincial coastal strip.

Chief Secretary Dr Akhtar Nazeer, the additional chief secretary for planning and development, senior member of the Board of Revenue, home and finance secretaries and other government officials attended the meeting.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1481739/balochistan-cm-promises-special-attention-to-fisheries-sector

PESHAWAR'S 'SASTA BAZAAR' FAILS TO ATTRACT BUYERS

AMJAD ALI SHAH | MAY 12TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

The 'Sasta Bazaar' in Peshawar, set up by district government has presented deserted look on Saturday as most of the stalls in the bazaar are empty and without food items. The district government has established a 'Sasta Bazaar' at interior city nearby historic Chowk Yadgar, with a capacity of more than 20 to 25 stalls, but there were two stall open including beverage and fruits, being set up at the bazaar.

As five-day past, the efforts to attract customers to its Sasta Bazaar have flopped to achieve the desired result as the market wore a deserted look on Saturday. Stall owners were mandated to sell items at prices fixed by the administration. Since the beginning of holy month, the Ramazan Sasta bazaars have attracted not many buyers, primarily due to the poor quality of items being sold.

Talking to this scribe, the buyers said that most of the daily-use items are missing in the Sasta Bazaar besides there is no difference between the prices at Sasta Bazaar and open market.

People would have thronged the Sasta Bazaar if the prices were reasonable. There is only one beverage stall. There is no stall of dates, vegetable, chicken besides sugar and juices are not available in the bazaar. There are a number of stalls set up in the bazaar but only two are open. Chicken, vegetable, pulses and meat is also not available in the Sasta Bazaar," they said.

"Even though people visit the bazaar regularly, they return disappointed as it has little variety of food items to offer," said Awal Khan, a local who lives adjacent to the bazaar. "There is nothing worth buying here," he said.

The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had announced to set up more than 107 Sasta Bazaar in the province, wherein commodities of daily use and edibles will be available to consumers at lower rates. Fifteen of such Sasta Bazars have been established in Peshawar, 13 in Mardan, 27 in Malakand, 24 in Hazara, 11 in Kohat, 9 in Bannu and 8 in D I Khan.

In spite of provision of food items on subsidised rate, the commodities were selling at 10 to 15 percent increase rate at the Ramazan Sasta Bazaars. The buyers have complained the sky-high prices of essential food commodities in the open market. According to them, the essential commodities such as pulses, sugar, rice, chicken, beef, mutton, vegetables and fruit have registered staggering increase, making purchase difficult for the common man. They also believe that certain elements are trying to thwart the business of the bazaar, as it goes against their vested interest.

With the advent of the holy month of Ramazan, the buyers said that the unprecedented increase have made by shopkeepers in all kind essentials, which are completely out from purchasing power of common man.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190512472569/

WATER EFFICIENCY MUST FOR RICE YIELD

Our Correspondent May 12, 2019

LAHORE: Enhancing water efficiency is vital for increasing rice production on sustainable basis with a view to improving exports from $2 billion to $5 billion in the next 10 to 15 years, said Sheikh Adnan Aslam, director of the Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association (PBHA).

Speaking at “Khushhal Kissan” seminar, organised by the association for the promotion and preservation of basmati heritage of Pakistan, Adnan highlighted the mission and objectives of Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association for mitigating challenges of basmati production and action plan for the promotion and preservation of basmati in production and exports.

“Our country is facing a looming water crisis and improving water productivity in rice ecosystem is inevitable,” he added.

Malik Imtiaz, director of Punjab Seed Corporation, advised the farmers that the use of certified seed every year will serve as a foundation for increasing yield and quality of basmati.

He appreciated the initiative of PBHA for providing healthy and certified seed on subsidised rates to the farmers.

Chaudhry Masood Iqbal, former chairman of the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) emphasised that the government should introduce new basmati varieties for ensuring rice productivity and pest resistance. Praising PBHA mission, he termed it a ray of hope for the rice sector.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/469966-water-efficiency-must-for-rice-yield

USDA SAYS GRAIN SUPPLIES TO REMAIN MASSIVE IN NEW CROP YEAR

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 12TH, 2019 | CHICAGO

The US Department of Agriculture on Friday forecast bigger-than-expected domestic supplies of corn, soyabeans and wheat, with outlooks for big harvests and export concerns underpinning the bearish stocks view. The report added fuel to the market's ongoing worries about the US-China trade fight, which came to a head on Friday as President Donald Trump raised tariffs on Chinese goods and the latest negotiations ended without a deal.

Soyabean futures fell to their lowest in more than a decade after the government data was released and wheat sank to its lowest since January 2018. Corn hit a 7-1/2- month low. "We're reacting negatively to a negative report," said Jack Scoville, analyst with the Price Futures Group. "We'll be done with this report in a few minutes and then we'll worry what's going on in Washington and how much corn and soyabeans and wheat the government's going to have to buy to keep the farmer placated as we march forward into the 1970s and 1980s."

The government pegged US corn ending stocks for the 2019-20 crop year at 2.485 billion bushels, which would be the biggest since 1987-88. It estimated corn production at 15.030 billion bushels, the second biggest ever, based on an average yield of 176.0 bushels per acre. Corn ending stocks for 2018-19 were seen at 2.095 billion bushels, up from the April estimate of 2.035 billion bushels.

"We're swimming in grain." said Don Roose, president of US Commodities. "Now it's a matter of, as we're going into planting season, do we get some weather issues that change this. And we definitely need something positive to develop in exports." Soyabean ending stocks in 2019-20 were seen at 970 million bushels, down slightly from the record 985 million bushels expected in the 2018-19 crop year that ends on Aug. 31.

The outlook for the 2018-19 soyabean ending stocks was 100 million bushels bigger than the government's April estimate and stemmed from a cut of 100 million bushels to its export outlook. The government's May report was the first one to provide an outlook for the 2019-20 crop year, which starts on Sept. 1.

Analysts had been expecting 2019-20 ending stocks of 910 million bushels for soyabeans and 2.131 billion bushels for corn, according to the average of estimates in a Reuters poll. For 2018-19, analysts had predicted soyabean ending stocks of 920 million bushels and corn stocks of 2.055 billion bushels.

USDA estimated wheat ending stocks of 1.127 billion bushels in 2018-19, topping market expectations of 1.097 billion bushels, and 1.141 billion bushels in 2019-20, topping market expectations for 1.060 billion bushels.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190512472632/

PAKISTAN'S DATE PRODUCTION FALLS DUE TO LACK OF INNOVATION

By Usman Hanif Published: May 12, 2019

KARACHI: Owing to a lack of innovation, the dates industry of Pakistan, which is the fifth largest producer in the world, is on a downward trajectory.

In 1999, Pakistan produced 540,000 tonnes of dates annually. Instead of growing, this number went down to 467,000 tonnes in 2015-16, according to data collected by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP).

Balochistan is the major producer of dates in Pakistan as it produces 45% of the total production. Sindh stands at the second place with 43% share, followed by Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) with 2% and Punjab with 1%.

Balochistan's Turbat district produces 100,000 tonnes of dates, almost one-fourth of the total production of Pakistan, while Panjgur produces 83,000 tonnes. On the other hand, Sindh's Khairpur district produces 237,000 tonnes, which is 42% of the total production of the country. "This makes Khairpur a densely palm populated area," said a source at the Sindh Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF). In 2016, Pakistan exported dates worth $102 million, which could go up to $200 million, said Mir Mohsin Bullo, Assistant Manager TDAP Sub-Regional Office, Sukkur.

"The government needs to pay urgent attention to production, processing and quality enhancement, preservation, research and marketing to save and ensure growth of this potent source of foreign exchange," he wrote in his report in October 2017. Yet, these issues still persist to date.

There are myriad of problems, resulting in a decline in Pakistan's date production, according to the SEDF source. A palm tree, which is the source of date production, grows in seven to eight years and produces the fruit at its optimal level for 25 years, after which its production starts declining, therefore, the tree needs to be replaced.

The 300 varieties of dates, which Pakistan produces, are also 50 years old and are not in great demand internationally, he said, adding due to that prices of Pakistani dates range between Rs100 and Rs250 per kg in the international market whereas other date varieties are sold for up to Rs700.

Due to the lack of innovation, Pakistan is losing potential revenue. Pakistan exports fresh dates to the US, Canada, France, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and the UAE, but these comprise only 10% of total production, while most of the dates are dried and exported to India, which is a great loss.

The scope of value addition and profitability is immense. With a little value addition, dates can be used to make syrup, juice, paste, vinegar and so on, the source said.

"Instead of value addition, Pakistani traders push down the value of their dates by drying them," he said. Pakistan mainly exports dates to India, which itself is a big producer, but due to immense consumption of dates and coconut in religious activities, India also imports dates from Pakistan. "These days due to tensions between the two countries, India has slapped 200% duty on Pakistani products, which is badly impacting the export of Pakistani dates," said Sukkur Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vice President Gurdas Wadhwani.

"Dried dates cause a 60% weight and value loss," said the SEDF source. Pakistan does not have processing units or cold storages, especially for dates, so drying them remains the only option. Dates contain more heat, so they need special cold storages, but Pakistan does not have even one such facility.

Pakistan does not have a storage system due to which date growers cannot save their crop and go for the second best option, which is to dry the dates, and that too is carried out in a very unhygienic way, and not through mechanised dryers. "If you travel to Khairpur, you will see dates lying at the roadside. Due to this unhygienic way of drying, dates carry about 21% aflatoxin, a family of toxins produced by certain fungi on agricultural crops, while internationally only 2.3-7.15% is acceptable," stated the source.

Mechanised dryers are not difficult to build, he said, adding students of Karachi University and IBA have often presented their prototypes, which can dehydrate 1,000 to 2,000 dates. This can be taken to a massive level if the government or private sector supports these students. Pakistan's dates varieties are over 50 years old, which do not look or taste good, unlike the juicy Middle Eastern dates. Even Pakistanis themselves do not prefer local dates, due to which the country, despite being the fifth largest producer, imports dates in Ramazan, the source added.

Pakistan's first dates dehydration plant and cold storage is going to be built soon by a private firm in the Khairpur Special Economic Zone (SEZ). The Sindh government is offering opportunities to the businessmen who want to set up the processing and storage facilities. Date processing plants can ideally be established at the Khairpur SEZ, developed by the district administration of Khairpur under the supervision of Sindh investment department.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 12th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1970995/2-pakistans-date-production-falls-due-lack-innovation/

SUGARCOATED BITTER FACTS

Shehryar Warraich May 12, 2019

Sugarcane is one of the most important cash crops of Pakistan; it is a key input for sugar production and forms essential item for other industries like chipboard, paper, barrages, confectionery, chemicals, plastics, paints, synthetics, fiber, insecticides and detergents. Pakistan is the 6th largest sugarcane producer, 9th largest sugar producer and 8th largest sugar-consuming country in the world. However, sugarcane producers and buyers of sugar are always unhappy because of the sugar mill owners' methods of purchasing sugarcane and payments to growers and sugar prices respectively.

Over the years, domestic sugar consumption has grown from 0.5 million (m) metric tonne (MeT) in 1975 to 5.1m MeT in 2017 due to population growth. Per capita consumption of refined sugar in Pakistan was estimated at 25.7kg in FY17 (fiscal year). Processed food sector, which includes candy, ice cream and soft drink manufactures, accounts for almost 60 percent of total domestic sugar consumption. Furthermore, absence of major substitutes for sugar makes its demand inelastic.

A total of 89 sugar mills are presently operating in the country and are pre-dominantly owned by the private sector. Out of 89 sugar mills, 45 are located in Punjab, 38 in Sindh and remaining mills are located in KP. About 40 percent (36 sugar mills) in Pakistan are listed on Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX).

According to Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, sugarcane occupies nearly 1.7 million hectares of the cultivated land out of the available 22.0 million hectares. Its share in value added agriculture and GDP are 3.4 percent and 0.7 percent, respectively. The annual sugarcane production fluctuates between 45 million and 65 million tonnes depending on irrigation water supplies and rains.

The government actively controls the support prices of sugarcane, the retail average price per 40 kg stands at Rs180.6 (FY17: Rs180.6) in FY18 and FY19. Over the past four years, sugarcane prices have remained stable and increased slightly by Cumulative Average Growth Rate (CAGR) of 1.4 percent whereas, according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics retail price of sugar in the month of April

2019 is Rs70.39 with 7.33 percent increase in one month which was Rs64.86 in March. The statistic shows continuous rise in sugar prices since January 2019.

Spokesperson for All Pakistan Sugar Mills Owners Association Chaudhry Waheed is not happy with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data; according to him price is no more than Rs65. “It’s true that price is increased but the cause must not be ignored; mill owners purchased sugarcane at the price of Rs210 to 230 this year, therefore the price will be set on the basis of production cost.”

In Ramzan, sugar price per kg is fluctuating between Rs70 to 80 depending upon the market. The Punjab government has issued a notice stating that the retail price of sugar cannot be more than Rs60 per kg.

Chaudhry Waheed rejects the government’s step to set the price at Rs60 and calls it a policy that will increase the price because no mill owner can afford to sell its product at such a miserable price. “The government has sealed five sugar mills in Faisalabad on the issue of sugar price; some mills are fined and some are threatened to be sealed. Such policies will create panic amongst mill owners and undoubtedly the supply of sugar would be halted; encouraging the black market.”

One of the high officials in the Punjab government tells TNS on condition of anonymity that sugar price hike is artificial because mill owners are not supplying sugar according to demand which is obviously facilitating them to create shortage in the market and increase prices ultimately. “On papers sugar mill owners are supplying sugar in the market but it is unavailable on ground that means the whole process from supplying to receiving is just paper transaction and a fraud.”

Waheed denies such allegations while putting all blames on the government and bureaucracy. “Bureaucracy is absolute corrupt and the government mismanages the issue on the misguidance of bureaucracy.”

Advisor to Chief Minister Punjab, Muhammad Akram Chaudhry, tells TNS the government is committed to keep the sugar price at Rs60 per kg come what may. “The government has started taking action against the mills indulging in price hike and creating artificial shortage in the market.”

On the other hand, mill owners have reportedly got permission from the federal government to export 1.1 million metric tonne sugar. Member Agri Forum Punjab and Director Farmers Association Pakistan, Farooq Bajwa, claims the federal government has approved Rs10 billion subsidy for the mill owners. Conversely, Chaudhry Waheed accepts that without subsidy sugar cannot be sold in the international market.

On the other hand, the industry is currently protected by a 40 percent import tariff designed to boost domestic sugar sector and protect the local industry from imports. The government intervenes in imposing trade controls over import and export of sugar by buying and selling sugar. Moreover, in order to support the export market of sugar, the government extends the export rebates to the mill owners every year.

“All the policies are to facilitate the mills mafia. Three families are sucking the blood of poor cane growers. I am certain in saying that most of the current Rs10 billion subsidy would go in the pockets of this cartel,” Bajwa states. “Instead of protecting the sugar mafia, the government must allow people to import sugar that can abolish the sugar mills’ monopoly. Nonetheless, we surely understand that it would not happen.”

According to Chaudhry Waheed the number of cane growers is increasing because of their trust in sugar mills. Moreover, mills have paid more to purchase sugarcane than the government's set price just to encourage cane growers.

Farooq Bajwa has a different perspective on sugarcane price. According to him there are two aspects behind this statement of paying more to growers; first is that mill owners accept 44 or 45kg per mann (40 kg) against the support price the government announces every year, secondly mill owners add all charges in per mann support price to present the case that they have paid more to growers – merely a deception."

He adds, "Mill owners have purchased sugarcane at the price of Rs75 to 90 per mann in the last two years and almost Rs14 billions of farmers are still to be paid. Because of mill owners' worst attitude many farmers did not grow sugarcane. In fact, annual sugarcane production is reduced from 1.7 million acres to 0.9 million acres this year."

The standing committee of Punjab Cabinet on Legislative Business, chaired by Provincial Minister for Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Local Government Raja Basharat, has empowered the Cane Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners across the province to ensure recovery of arrears of the growers from sugar mills owners.

Muhammad Akram Chaudhry states that Cane Commissioners have been advised to take serious actions against those mill owners who have not cleared the arrears yet. He asserts the Punjab government is committed to not surrender on the price hike and will take all measures to retain per kg price at Rs60.

http://tns.thenews.com.pk/sugarcoated-bitter-facts/#.XNktLxQzbcs

LHC SUSPENDS NOTICES FOR AGRICULTURE TAX

Our Correspondent May 11, 2019

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court on Friday suspended notices for the recovery of agriculture income tax issued to hundreds of individuals for the period prior to promulgation of Finance Act 2013.

Justice Ayesha A Malik issued the stay order on petitions challenging the tax recovery notices for the year of 2012 by district collector of the Punjab government.

The judge also directed the district collector, Federal Board of Revenue, federal and Punjab governments to submit their replies.

The petitioners' counsel argued that the district collector of the provincial government had no powers to collect the agriculture income tax for the period prior to promulgation of Finance Act, 2013.

He said the government inserted a Section 3-B in Punjab Agricultural Income Tax Act 1997 giving retrospectively effect, which was a violation of settled tax laws and statutes. He pointed out that all the tax laws envisaged that any amendment to the law would have prospective effect, but not retrospective. However, he said, the government had been issuing notices for the tax recovery to the petitioners while relaying and misinterpreting a Supreme Court judgment.

The counsel argued that the Section 3-B of Punjab Agricultural Act, 1997 was promulgated through Finance Act, 2013; however, the recovery was being sought in respect of period prior to promulgation of that section. He argued that the agricultural income was exempted under the provisions of Income Tax Ordinance, 2001. After hearing the arguments, the judge suspended that tax recovery notices and directed the district collector, FBR and other respondents to submit their replies until June 26.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/469896-lhc-suspends-notices-for-agriculture-tax

CHANGES TO LAW TO HELP SUGARCANE FARMERS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter May 11, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Cabinet's Standing Committee on Legislative Business has accorded approval to amend laws regulating sugar mills of Punjab that will enable early start of crushing season and ensure recovery of arrears of the farmers from the mills owners by empowering the cane commissioner and deputy commissioners.

The approval for a number of amendments suggested by different departments was accorded in the 10th meeting of the committee held at the Civil Secretariat. Law minister Basharat Raja chaired the meeting.

Punjab Excise, Taxation and Anti-Narcotics Minister Hafiz Mumtaz Ahmad, Higher Education Minister Raja Yasir Humayun and officers of other departments attended the meeting.

The committee, while approving minutes of the last meeting, decided to accede to the amendments to the anti-narcotics laws in order to penalise the culprits preparing, selling and importing or exporting the drugs and narcotics in society. The amended law suggested enhanced imprisonment and penalties for such elements.

The excise, taxation and anti-narcotics department suggested strict measures to be taken by the public and private schools to keep a close check on the students as well as on drug traffickers.

The senior member Board of Revenue introduced 14 amendments to the existing policies regulating lease and sale of state land and the House accepted all these amendments.

The committee recommended names for the new Board of Directors of the Punjab Economics Research Institute and also gave a go-ahead to the amended draft of the Punjab Partnership Act 2019.

GOVERNOR: Law minister Basharat Raja and IG Police Arif Nawaz on Friday met Governor Chaudhry Sarwar and briefed him on law and order, suicide attack outside Data Darbar and the new local government system in the province.

The governor said the provision of basic facilities to people at their doorstep, peaceful living environment and empowerment of public were priorities of the PTI government. It had decided to strengthen institutions and empower people, he said.

"The new local government system of Punjab represents the national aspirations. It will strengthen both people and democracy," Mr Sarwar said.

The IGP briefed the governor on the investigation being carried out to trace the handlers of the terrorist attack. He informed the governor about the situation of security and Punjab police's efforts.

Mr Sarwar paid tribute to the policemen who laid down their lives in Wednesday's tragedy. He emphasised on intensifying security arrangements during Ramazan to ensure peace and security.

"We shall never rest until the menace of terrorism is eliminated," the governor said and added that the sacrifices of martyrs would not go in vain. He said people who were martyred in the suicide attack were heroes for all of us and their sacrifices would be remembered. He said the government would fully support their families in this hour of grief.

DONATION: Nishtar Medical University, Multan Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Mustafa Kamal Pasha called on Chief Minister Usman Buzdar and presented him a cheque of Rs2 million for the dam fund.

The VC said the staff of the university had donated their one-day salary for the dam fund.

The chief minister said the construction of dam was necessary for the future of Pakistan. He said the PTI government had moved forward the construction of the dam for electricity generation and storage of water as it was a national obligation. He said the credit for laying the foundation stone of the Mohmand Dam went to Prime Minister Imran Khan and everyone should enthusiastically take part in the national cause.

Published in Dawn, May 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1481566/changes-to-law-to-help-sugarcane-farmers

DAWOOD IRKED BY INCREASE IN UREA PRICES

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | MAY 11TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce, Textile and Industries and Production, Abdul Razak Dawood has reportedly expressed annoyance at the local fertilizer industry for increasing urea prices by Rs 90 per bag to Rs 1,830 per bag in April 2019 from Rs 1,740 in October 2018, well-informed sources told Business Recorder. The Advisor conveyed his anger at a meeting of Fertilizer Review Committee (FRC) which met on May 6, 2019 and was convened to review demand, production and supply and price hike of urea fertilizer.

The sources said Advisor was also furious at the fertilizer industry for sending its second tier for an important meeting, adding that Fauji Fertilizer had requested to reschedule the meeting on the plea that its Managing Director was out of Pakistan but the request was not entertained. M/s Fauji has increased urea prices which the government thinks unjustified at a time when new sowing season is in the offing.

According to sources, fertilizer sector is also collecting Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) from consumers but is not depositing it in the national exchequer due to existing litigation. "Advisor has indicated that government is under political pressure due to price increase," the sources said, adding that the fertilizer industry identified the following factors that led to the increase:(i) transportation cost; (ii) packaging; (iii) inflation;(iv) devaluation; and (v) mark up rates (cost of financing).

"Fertilizer industry did not pass on the inflationary impact due to price capping which is calculated at Rs 360 per bag," said Brig. Sher Shah Malik (Retd) Executive Director Fertilizer Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC). There is an impression in the government as well as in the agriculture sector that the country's fertilizer industry is making about Rs 40-50 billion profit per annum by getting cheap feed gas and selling fertilizer at higher prices.

However, fertilizer industry maintains that it received Rs 132 billion in gas subsidy (ie, difference between feed gas price and fuel gas price) over the past 8 years whereas it passed on Rs 527 billion (difference between international and local price) benefit to farmers. However, the industry has not revealed to the government as to how much financial benefits it reaped as per the Fertilizer Policy 2001.

Fertilizer industry also brought to the notice of Advisor to Prime Minister that Government of Punjab has directed security seals be affixed on all fertilizer product containers in pursuance of article 24 inserted through amendment in Punjab Fertilizer Control Order 1973 to verify its quality and traceability.

Earlier, on PSQCA SRO(1) 2015 issued by the Ministry of Science and Technology on May 5, 2015 under section 14 of Pakistan Standard & Quality Control Act VI of 1996 had wanted to affix a similar seal however, it was challenged in the court and stayed to avoid the cost burden on the farmers. Recently, FBR, through SRO 250(1)/2019 of February 26, 2019 directed importers and manufacturers to affix electronic monitoring "tax stamp" with similar features.

Fertilizer industry, however, argues that urea is a certified product as per international standards and there have never been any reports of counterfeit products like pesticides.

The fertilizer industry further argued that multiple government agencies are issuing similar directions on this matter which reflects the dire need for coordinated action towards attainment of common objective at national level, and avoiding additional burden on farmers through sale of stickers of various origins/venders. The industry has urged the Advisor to intervene and advise PSQCA, FBR and Punjab Agriculture Department to avoid such unwarranted costs and additional financial burden on the farmers.

Fertilizer industry submitted the following recommendation during the FRC meeting: (i) gas price may be reduced for fertilizer sector to effect any change; (ii)revision of GIDC may be processed expeditiously; (iii) outstanding subsidy and tax refunds may be released to reduce cost of borrowing to the manufacturers ;(iv) mismatch of input and output GST may be addressed;(v) decision of import of 100,000 tons urea without deliberation by FRC may be reconsidered in view of adequate supply situation in the coming months; and (vi) continuity of operation of SNGPL based plants may be ensured through payment of subsidy to SNGPL to avert any possibility of shortage of urea supply.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190511472272/

EARLY CRUSHING: AMENDMENTS TO LAWS FOR REGULATING PUNJAB'S SUGAR MILLS APPROVED

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 11TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Standing Committee of Punjab Cabinet on Legislative Business nods to amend the laws regulating sugar mills of Punjab enabling early start of crushing season and ensuring recovery of arrears of the farmers from the sugar mills owners by empowering the Cane Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners across province.

The approval for numerous amendments suggested by different departments was accorded in 10th meeting of the Committee held at the Civil Secretariat chaired by the Provincial Minister for Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Local Government, Raja Basharat the other day.

The meeting was also attended by the Provincial Minister for Excise, Taxation and Anti-Narcotics, Hafiz Mumtaz Ahmad, Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Raja Yasir Hamyun and officers of concerned departments among others. he Committee approving minutes of last meeting, also decided to accede the amendments in the Anti-Narcotics laws in order to crush the culprits preparing, selling and importing or exporting the drugs and narcotics in society.

The amended law suggested enhanced imprisonment and penalties for such elements. The Excise, Taxation & Anti-narcotics department suggested strict measurements to be taken by the public and private schools authorities to keep a close check on the students as well as on the drug traffickers. The Senior Member Board of Revenue introduced fourteen amendments in the existing policies regulating lease and sale of state lands all accepted by the house.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190511472299/

VEHICLES SEIZURE: PFMA TO CHALK OUT STRATEGY ON MAY 16

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 11TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Pakistan Flour Mills Association will hold its meeting on May 16 to decide its future strategy in the wake of Punjab Food Department's action of impounding flour mills' vehicles carrying wheat from open market. Association Group Leader Asim Raza Ahmad disclosed this while addressing a press conference here on Friday. The Department is discouraging the flour mills owners from buying wheat from the open market. Moreover, the Association is also irked by the increase in price of wheat from Rs 1200 to Rs 1400 in open market. "This increase is very alarming," he added.

He pointed out that for feed mills there is no restriction of buying wheat from open market while there is a 48-hour restriction on the flour mills. He said the Punjab Food Secretary will retire from his position and it will be the Punjab government that will face the repercussion of this unreasonable action.

"The government should act prudently," he added. He observed that a number of feed mills and their consumption of wheat is increasing fast, so the Punjab Chief Minister should take an immediate action to reverse the situation otherwise the province could face a food crisis. He warned that the department's imprudent step will compel them (mill owners) to shut down their flour mill.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190511472303/

DEMAND OF PAKISTANI COTTON INCREASING IN INTERNATIONAL MARKET

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 11TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Cotton crop's indicators are very positive this year and demand of Pakistani cotton in the international market is increasing, said Additional Secretary Agriculture (Task Force) Punjab, Rana Ali Arshad. He also claimed that advance bargain of cotton is being done at Rs4200 per maund in Sindh province. He disclosed that the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) has agreed to pay additional Rs200 per maund as premium to cleanly picked cotton.

These views were expressed by him while addressing different growers' gatherings held at Harrappa, Chichawatni, Arif Wala, Pakpattan and others. Director General Agriculture (Pest Warning) Zafar Yab Haider, Director Agriculture (Extension) Farooq Javed, Rao Ashfaq and other officers were also present on this occasion.

Rana Ali Arshad further hoped that canal water supply would remain better during whole cotton season and government is extending subsidy on Pottassium based and DAP fertilizers to bring down the input cost and promote balanced use of fertilizers. He also claimed that possibilities of pink bollworm on cotton crop this year would remain low because of better off season pest management.

Speaking on this occasion Director General Pest Warning and Quality Control of Pesticides Syed Muhammad Zafaryab Haider advised the growers to complete their cotton sowing till May 31, 2019. He also threw light on different measures to get better per acre yield.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190511472304/

BASMATI BODY CALLS FOR BOOSTING RICE EXPORTS TO $5B

By Our Correspondent Published: May 11, 2019

LAHORE: Improving water productivity in the rice ecosystem is inevitable for sustainable rice production and boosting rice exports of Pakistan from the current $2 billion to $5 billion, said Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association (PBHA) Director Sheikh Adnan Aslam.

He was speaking at the Khushal Kissan seminar arranged by the association for the promotion and preservation of basmati rice heritage of Pakistan.

Citing that PBHA was aimed at mitigating challenges to Basmati rice production, he lamented that Pakistan faced a looming water crisis and stressed the need for improving water productivity in rice fields. He shared the PBHA's action plan for the promotion and preservation of Basmati rice for export.

Punjab Seed Corporation Director Malik Imtiaz, who was present in the seminar, advised farmers to use certified seeds every year which would served as a foundation for increasing the yield and quality of Basmati rice. He appreciated the initiative of PBHA for providing healthy and certified seeds at subsidised rates to the farmers.

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan former chairman Chaudhry Masood Iqbal emphasised that the government should introduce new basmati varieties for ensuring rice productivity and pest resistance. Praising PBHA's mission, he termed it the 'ray of light' for the rice sector in Pakistan.

PBHA Coordinator Imran Sheikh elaborated the PBHA's mission and advised Basmati rice farmers to adopt global rice standards of the Sustainable Rice Platform convened by the International Rice Research Institute for promoting resource efficiency and sustainability by ensuring food safety.

Fauji Fertiliser Senior Manager and Head of Advisory Services Rao Muhammad Tariq shared his views about balanced use of fertilisers and the importance of potash and micronutrients in boosting rice productivity, quality and profitability.

Engro Fertilisers Manager North Naeem Farukh emphasied the balanced use of fertilisers through 4R Principles (right type, right dose, right place and right time).

On-Farm Water Management Deputy Director Tariq Maqbool briefed the participants regarding dwindling water resources of Pakistan and underlined the importance of precision land levelling for improving water efficiency, yield and income.

Rice Research Institute Kala Shah Kaku Research Officer and Weed Scientist Dr Tahir Hussain Awan shared his experience of direct seeding and introduced a set of new technology for weed management.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 11th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1970226/2-basmati-body-calls-boosting-rice-exports-5b/

GOVT FAILURE TO GET PAKISTANI FISHERMEN RELEASED FROM INDIAN JAILS SLAMMED

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated May 10, 2019

KARACHI: Fishermen's Cooperative Society (FCS) chairman Abdul Bar on Thursday said the federal government had failed to get Pakistani fishermen released from Indian prisons despite the fact that it had freed 360 Indian fishermen who were detained for violating Pakistan's territorial waters.

"The federal government sends off 360 Indian fishermen to their country as a goodwill gesture, yet it has failed to get a single Pakistani fisherman from the Indian jails," said Mr Bar while speaking at a press conference at his office. He said it was nothing but "our government's bad diplomacy and utter failure".

"The Indian government's hands are stained with the blood of our fishermen. The jail authorities there are doing everything inhuman directed towards our innocent people incarcerated in cells. They are killing them," claimed the FCS chief.

"They are sending us gifts in the shape of the bodies of our innocent people."

FCS warns of agitation if its demands are not met

He said Pakistani fishermen were not fed well and there was no medical facility in the Indian jails.

He said Mohammad Sohail, a young fisherman, had been detained by the Indian authorities three months after his marriage, who was subjected to brutal torture until he died.

"He has left a baby who was born weeks after he was arrested by the Indians."

He said Noorul Amin, a resident of Korangi, was another fisherman who succumbed to the worst torture before Sohail's murder.

He said that instead of getting 108 Pakistani fishermen languishing in Indian jails released in return of 360 Indian fishermen, the Pakistani government had not yet taken up the issue of the killing of its citizens by Indian jailers.

He said the government should take concrete measures to get 108 Pakistani fishermen released or, "it should be ready for the agitation by the community that will not end until their demands are met".

Published in Dawn, May 10th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1481357/govt-failure-to-get-pakistani-fishermen-released-from-indian-jails-slammed

BAD WEATHER HITS MANGO PRODUCTION

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated May 10, 2019

KARACHI: Country's overall mango production is feared to have come down to 1.2 million tonnes this year from 1.8m tonnes last year owing to heavy rains and hailstorms that damaged mango crop in Sindh by 10 per cent and 35pc in Punjab.

Amid a bad crop, stakeholders have fixed a export target of 100,000 tonnes for this year which is the same as 2018.

Mango exports will kick off from May 20, 2019. Last year, Pakistan exported 75,000 tonnes against the target of 100,000 tonnes.

Patron-in-Chief of All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable, Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) Waheed Ahmed said, "We are expecting to fetch $80m foreign exchange this year with an anticipated export of 100,000 tonnes."

To achieve the export target, it's imperative that besides favourable season, exporters are extended support and co-operation from shipping and airline companies, quarantine department, Anti-Narcotic Force, Customs and other related departments.

With increase in prices of petroleum products, the cost of domestic transportation and logistics have also been revised upward, while freight charges have also been raised by airlines and shipping companies making it further difficult for the exporters to remain competitive in the international markets, he said.

China and the USA, in particular, would be focus of attention for an additional export volume during this year while special mango promotions campaigns have been planned in EU countries, he added.

Export of mango by sea route holds 70pc share in total exports while land and air routes enjoy 15pc share each.

The PVFA chief says climate changes have emerged as the biggest challenge for agriculture products and horticulture. Around 30pc reduction in mango production in current season reinforces our concern about serious potential threat of the climatic changes. "So far no clear and well defined policy has been developed by the government to safeguard agriculture and horticulture sectors from this severe threat."

Published in Dawn, May 10th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1481371/bad-weather-hits-mango-production

WHEAT, GUNNY BAGS WORTH OVER RS2BN FOUND MISSING

A Correspondent May 10, 2019

SUKKUR: A team of National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Sukkur, has reported that over 1.02 million sacks of wheat and more than 11,300 gunny bags have been found missing in the raids carried out on government warehouses and flour mills in this district over the current week.

A statement issued here on Thursday, said that value of the misappropriated wheat stocks and gunny bags was estimated at more than Rs2 billion.

The team along with Judicial Magistrate Abdul Aziz Shar has been active since Monday last following reports of misappropriation of wheat and gunny bags from the food department's warehouses. Flour mills are also being raided to locate the missing commodities. It appeared that husk or sand was filled in sacks to show wheat stocks at many warehouses.

Published in Dawn, May 10th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1481260/wheat-gunny-bags-worth-over-rs2bn-found-missing

COTTON FALLS TO NEAR THREE-MONTH LOW ON US-CHINA TRADE WORRIES

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 10TH, 2019 | NEW YORK

ICE cotton futures on Thursday slipped more than 3 percent to their lowest level in nearly three months on concerns over the prolonged China-US trade spat, while investors awaited for key monthly crop supply and demand report. The most-active cotton contract on ICE Futures US July settled down 2.08 cent, or 2.9 percent, at 70.23 cents per lb.

Earlier in the session, the front-month contract fell over 3 percent to 69.64 cents, its lowest level since Feb. 14. "Prices are going down because of the trade war. There is very less optimism on that (a trade deal) in the market," said John Bondurant, a trader in Memphis, Tennessee.

The US Trade Representative's office announced that tariffs on $200 billion worth of Chinese goods would increase to 25 percent from 10 percent at 12:01 a.m. (0401) GMT on Friday, right in the middle of two days of meetings with a Chinese delegation. However, President Donald Trump said he believed it was possible to reach a deal this week. "There's a very negative sentiment now. People are getting exhausted by the whole (speculation of) are we going to get a deal or not," said Jordan Lea, senior trader at DECA Global.

The United States is one of the world's biggest exporter of cotton, while China is the largest consumer. Meanwhile, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported that net sales of 235,800 running bales (RB) for marketing year 2018/19 were up 63 percent from the previous week. Exports of 387,100 RB were up 32 percent from the previous week.

Investors also awaited the USDA's monthly World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report due on Friday. Total futures market volume rose by 8,608 to 52,453 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 1,533 to 221,587 contracts in the previous session. Certificated cotton stocks deliverable as of May 8 totalled 87,251 480-lb bales, up from 81,588 in the previous session.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190510471225/

'PAKISTAN NEEDS TO MOVE AWAY FROM ITS NATIONAL FIXATION WITH FOUR CROPS'

BR Research May 10, 2019

An interview with Dr Sohail Jehangir Malik, Chairman Innovative Development Strategies, USA

Dr. Sohail Jehangir Malik is a reputed name in developmental policy circles, both in Pakistan and internationally. A prolific researcher, his career spans over 44 years and covers themes as wide as agricultural policy; public sector resource mobilisation; budget development for provincial PRSPs; technology choice and employment; biodiversity and conservation; poverty analysis; rural finance; food security and nutrition; and social safety nets.

An econometrician by training, he has extensive experience contributing to Pakistan's pro-poor developmental policy design in non-official capacity. However, his later engagements have primarily been with multi-lateral agencies in various capacities. These include leading multi-country research teams for IFPRI, USAID, WWF, World Bank, WTO, among others. He also has over fifty research publications to his name.

He is currently based out of Washington DC as the Chairman of Innovative Development Strategies, a private-sector consultancy organisation, which studies development strategies focused specifically on agricultural and rural development.

Dr. Sohail is known for his frank, no hold barred views, which have the unique exception of being rooted in evidence. BR Research was able to catch up with this prolific author on his recent visit to Pakistan last week for a short but crisp conversation.

BR Research: Let's start with the most valuable agricultural economic resource: land. You have written extensively about land fragmentation. Depending on the definition, over 80 percent of farmers are classified as small hold, with average land-owning size in this segment of less than one hectare. Do you believe Pakistan needs an exercise in land consolidation in order to achieve scale in farming?

Dr. Sohail Jehangir Malik: During the colonial times, land consolidation was a regular exercise; just the same way as agricultural census is nowadays. Contiguous lands were often consolidated into one parcel, as the administration at the time believed that the holding size needs to be able to sustain subsistence. That has not happened since the 1960s.

So, we are facing a real challenge today. Within the private sector, we see examples of entrepreneurial minded farmers coming with innovative strategies to address the gap; albeit on local level. For example, Jehangir K. Tareen has reversed the fragmentation by contracting lots of small plots, laser leveled them and then utilised the land for cultivation specific to his industrial needs. But since land consolidation has a bad rap due to feudal connotations, one may also consider the alternatives. Land holdings as small as one or two acres can be very productive if used to cultivate high value crops such as vegetables and fruits; for which growers do not necessarily require scale.

Therefore, we need to move away from the national fixation with four crops. These are not only very low return, but also require very low level of skill and technology intensity. Growers do not grow higher value crops because they lack requisite skills.

BRR: But surely growers in rural economy also have an institutional appreciation of this distortion. We must consider their incentive structure: smaller the landholding size, the greater the propensity to grow grains. Due to commoditisation, the four crops have a thickly traded market (liquidity factor), but also do not perish as easily as vegetables.

SJM: That's true. Because smaller farmers are highly risk averse, and understandably so. Like you said, vegetables are perishable and lack homogenous markets; there is no aggregating function. For example, Bangladesh has Thana markets, which are basically platforms where farmers from one village bring their produce; it is sorted and then aggregated by quality grades.

Similarly, cooperatives are another example. In India, Amul dairy has been a classic case study in aggregation of a commodity good, which has proven to be extremely successful. Sadly, in Pakistan, we view agriculture with a tunnel vision – yes, large holding sizes offer scale; but they are not the only way to add value.

BRR: Let's focus on cooperatives for a moment. There has been extensive study on the lack of success the model has received in Pakistan. One such study pointed out that behaviourally, growers have a low-trust mind-set, which explains why farmers have been less receptive to the principle. Do you agree?

SJM: That's possible. But more than that, cooperatives were abused as a vehicle for rent seeking. Cooperative members were unable to benefit from the model, whereas the leaders made money on their expense. For example, back in the 1980s, one powerful political family from Gujarat extracted billions of rupees from rural Pakistan through the cooperative societies' movement.

Cooperatives were basically used as means to disburse government's favour. A true cooperative is one formed on the basis of common commercial interests, with equal participation, backed by full force of law. Unfortunately, as a society we are inimical to the idea of rule of law. It is the same reason why we see market failure in effective price discovery and commensurate compensation to the growers for the level of risk they take. Farmers receive no security of contract, nor any mechanism exists for contract enforcement. As a result, they have no choice but to remain localised, and small in scale, largely following sole proprietorship structure.

Moreover, factors such as baradari become more powerful than economic self-interests of individuals, especially in rural economy. We find instances of growers choosing to sell produce within baradari at a discount from market, often at exploitative rates – but refusing to collaborate with those outside their circle. Thus, there is also the added factor of attitudes and literacy.

BRR: Let's talk about major crops now. Declining cotton production and yield over the past ten years has become a generic cry raised ad nauseam. Often, it is attributed to shift of cotton belt to alternate cash crops such as sugarcane. But farmers' incentives in shifting to alternate crop is not analysed. Cotton production and yield declined after repeated crop failures, which some attribute to low quality Bt. cotton seeds. Do you agree?

SJM: I agree with the assertion that Bt. cotton seeds were introduced without stewardship. The biggest problem facing cotton growers is that the only seeds available on the market are low quality choices lacking proper certifications.

Bt. seeds were brought from India through unofficial channels. Some even allege that the seeds were brought from Australia; however, I think that the latter would at least maintain some quality controls. In any case, local seed companies applied pressures to have the seeds registered as their own variants. Even though new varieties require up to eight years of testing and trial run, we saw instances where varieties were registered in less than two years' time. But seed quality is only one factor in declining cotton production. The other problem is in the value chain, as the cotton textile industry is highly monopolistic and rent seeking in its approach. It forces a price regime onto producers, which the latter must comply with. Low-value addition in garments is also another factor.

BRR: Does that mean that in order to improve returns for cotton growers, indicative price mechanism for cotton should be introduced along the lines of wheat and sugarcane?

SJM: An effort was made to introduce support price for cotton during Musharraf era, but it was scrapped by the same people who are running the show today at the centre. At that time, the federal secretary had had London spot prices for cotton uploaded on the web. In response, textile players rebelled, nearly costing the poor fellow his job.

Having said that, the debate about indicative price mechanism applies not just to cotton but to all crops. Therefore, the answer should be based on cogent analysis and not on ulterior motives to curry favour with one support group or the other.

BRR: In case of sugarcane, we saw double digit increase in cultivation due to introduction of support price. On the other hand, farmers persistently complain that they not only have to face delays but also fail to receive government set minimum rates. Despite these challenges, growers do not feel deterred from increasing area under cane cultivation, often at the expense of cotton. How do you explain the apparent contradiction?

SJM: I agree with farmers' position on both accounts: it is no contradiction. Only influential farmers with large land holdings manage to extract government set rates, as is the case with wheat as well. Others, especially small farmers, lack the bargaining power to get even the minimum price.

BRR: You drew comparison with wheat; but don't the dynamics differ from sugarcane? By most estimates, over 60 percent of wheat stays on-farm, because traded wheat is only procured by PASSCO which has historically not procured more than 10 million tons in one year, compared to average 25 million tons domestic production.

SJM: That impression is incorrect. What you are referring to as on-farm consumption eventually makes it way to the marketplace. After all, farmers do not grind the flour themselves. Except obviously once PASSCO furnishes its targeted stock, private buyers refuse to pay the government set rate. Because the producers lack bargaining power, only choices available to them is to either buy at traders' offer rate or risk letting their grain stock go to waste.

This is not to say that traders are across the board exploitative. The problem is that the support price is prohibitively unrealistic and is meant to benefit large producers only. In contrast, smaller producers usually grow wheat more or less equal to their personal demand level.

When the government increases support price levels, it is usually to benefit the 26 percent of growers that I define as ‘net sellers’ of agricultural produce. The rest fulfill their needs from the marketplace anyway.

BRR: Returning to the abysmal levels of cotton production. Do you agree that crop zoning could be one way of addressing this problem?

SJM: I fully agree. Although in principle, I am against zoning because it inhibits free movement of prices. But in Pakistan, various geographical regions have land and soil of highly variable quality, often not suitable for most crops. Thus, until we address the basic problems, crop zoning may be the way to go.

BRR: One reason why sugarcane cultivation is fast taking over traditionally cotton growing areas may be that the buyer, namely sugar mills are often large-sized and claim to incentivise and provide farmers with high quality seed-variants and encourage best agronomic practices. For example, compared to over thousand cotton gins, there are only ninety sugar mills.

SJM: The fragmentation of ginning segment into large number of players is not deniable. However, one must look at the issue holistically. More than consolidation, the cotton ginning segment needs up gradation of technology for cleaning of fibre etc.

Having said that, cotton ginners faces a monopolistic buyer, namely yarn manufacturers. The spinners set the price, and squeeze ginners off the entire margin. Sugar producer on the other hand owns the entire value chain beyond plantation, and in turn squeeze the farmer, and often the government as well in the form of subsidy on exports.

BRR: But is it possible to explain the phenomenal growth in cane cultivation if farmer is being squeezed?

SJM: Yes, because one needs to look at the opportunity cost. What alternatives does the farmer have? It is either a crop that as heavily exposed to volatility in weather; or one which with a higher chance of payment fulfillment, even if with a delay or discount.

One must also appreciate that farmers lack the access to the type of analyses we are discussing here. Whether a certain cash crop may be better suited to a given geographic region due to its favourable climatic conditions or proximity to an industrial unit is subject to broad based comparative analysis. Farmer on the other hand is only able to make decisions based on past experience. Once the sowing period is past, farmer lacks the capacity to change crop midcycle, even if there is a change in market fundamentals, such as price, demand or supply glut.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/10/495942/pakistan-needs-to-move-away-from-its-national-fixation-with-four-crops/

PFA SEALS 71 FACTORIES IN APRIL

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 10TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) sealed 71 factories in different areas of Punjab and discarded harmful eatables having worth of more than Rs40 million in April. Under the supervision of PFA Director General, vigilance and operation teams traced the adulteration mafia. DG Muhammad Usman said that adulterators were involved in selling cola drinks, tainted milk, and spurious juices.

He further said that these sealed factories were producing adulterated spices, pickles, preserved fruits, and ketchup. He added that the sale of fake cola drinks and re-use of burnt oil remained top of the list. Factories have been rooted out completely as well as confiscating their products, he added.

He said that public complaints played an important role in exposing adulteration mafia and thus he requested them to contact PFA against this mafia if they find anything unusual with food-related issues and save the others.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190510471169/

VEHICLES SEIZURE: PFMA PUNJAB CHIEF WARNS AGAINST FLOUR CRISIS

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 10TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) Punjab reiterated its allegation that the food department teams are impounding vehicles of their mills carrying wheat grain while feed mills are at liberty which is sheer injustice with the flour millers.

“The government will be responsible for the flour crisis in the province, if the impounding of mills’ vehicles is not stopped within next three days,” warned PFMA Punjab Chairman Habib ur Rehman Leghari while talking to journalists here on Thursday.

PFMA claimed that price of wheat has reached to Rs1450 per maund due to this impounding of vehicles. He urged the Chief Minister Punjab, Usman Buzdar and Food Minister Sami Ullah Chaudhry to sit across the table with the Association and sort out a solution.

PFMA Group Leader Asim Raza Ahmad, Liaquat Ali Khan, Mian Riaz and others also warned that flour prices would also go upward as mills would be unable to continue grinding and supply flour in the market. They said that the provincial food secretary had assured two days back not to impound those vehicles which have food grain license. But unfortunately, now food inspectors were tearing apart the licenses of such vehicles and impounding them.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190510471197/

PSMA PUNJAB TERMS GOVT’S SUGAR PRICE ‘UNREALISTIC’

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 10TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) Punjab has strongly criticized the government for, what they said, negative steps being taken by the government to ensure an unrealistic price of sugar in the market. PSMA Punjab Zone Chairman, Nauman Ahmad Khan claimed that the government interventions in the way of supplies to the local and export market may hinder the availability of the sugar in the local market.

He claimed that some of the shopkeepers prefer not to sell sugar to avoid action of the administration. He alleged that the administration in some districts was also forcibly stopping supplies to local and export market.

PSMA Punjab Chairman appealed to the government of the Punjab to avoid such unjustifiable steps as neither the price of the commodity is increasing in the local market nor there is any issue of its availability.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190510471206/

PAK-TAJIK MINISTERIAL COMMISSION LIKELY TO MEET IN JULY

By Our Correspondent Published: May 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Pak-Tajik Joint Ministerial Commission is likely to meet on July 2 this year to review cooperation between the two countries in different areas of the economy, particularly agriculture.

During a meeting with Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan on Thursday, Tajikistan Ambassador Ismatullo Naserdin said a meeting of the joint working group was likely to be held on July 2 as part of the Joint Ministerial Commission huddle between the two countries.

During the deliberations, it was highlighted that Pakistan enjoyed good brotherly relations with Tajikistan. Then prime minister of Pakistan paid an official visit to Tajikistan on June 9 and 10, 2015. An agreement on cooperation in the field of agriculture had also been signed between the two countries on March 8, 2011.

Fifth session of the Pak-Tajik Joint Ministerial Commission was held in Pakistan on June 15 and 16, 2016 where it was agreed that the two sides would collaborate in the agreed areas and a joint working group would be formed.

The federal minister for national food security pointed out that Pakistan government accorded high priority to the agriculture sector and was focusing on enhancing cooperation in the field – particularly expanding the country's trade in agricultural commodities. "Pakistan is self-sufficient in wheat and enjoys surpluses in sugar and rice," the minister pointed out. "We are also producing citrus fruit and mangoes of high quality, which Tajikistan can import from us."

The minister added that cooperation in the field of agriculture would also provide an opportunity to strengthen overall economic relations by facilitating the adoption of sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures, which would benefit both the sides.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 10th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1969589/2-pak-tajik-ministerial-commission-likely-meet-july/

SUBSIDISED LOAN SCHEME FOR FARMERS, SMES PLANNED

Khaleeq Kiani Updated May 09, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government will push forward in the upcoming budget about Rs20 billion credit guarantee scheme for financial inclusion of the poor farmers and small enterprises through a subsidised loan scheme through the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and National Savings.

The scheme is part of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) supported by the World Bank to contribute to financial inclusion and development of market infrastructure. The scheme aims at creating an ecosystem that could increase access and usage of digital payments and financial services by low-income households and SMEs.

The Budget 2019-20 will envisage about Rs5.2bn needed for financial inclusion and infrastructure project (FIIP) based on feedback from both executing agencies for the project — SBP and Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS). The scheme should have been in place last fiscal year but was delayed due to requirements of the procurement rules and some activities planned for 2018-19.

For example, consultant for payment gateway will be selected and hired in 2019-20 before bidding and procurement of hardware and software for payment gateway in 2020-21. Likewise, the activity of upgraded IT platform for CDNS will now be materialised in 2020-21 after IT consultant is hired in 2019-20.

The FIIP is a fully foreign funded project with zero local components. The World Bank has warned the Ministry of Finance that it will release only funds which are allocated in the public sector development programme (PSDP) budget.

A similar scheme is also being finalised to support small farmers in at least 100 districts across the country. Officials said the scheme to be launched through the central bank would entail training to the beneficiaries including farmers, SMEs, disabled persons and the poor who would be extended credit on fixed 5pc mark up for five years and the borrowers/beneficiaries would have six years grace period to repay their loans.

Under the scheme, the central bank would extend credit to all the banks and financial institutions loans on zero interest for providing Rs500,000 to Rs1.5m loan to the lower income groups – farmers, small businessmen, women and special persons. The state bank of Pakistan will be taking 100pc refinancing risk of the scheme.

The project is aimed to further strengthen SBP’s payment systems through its national payment gateway that have evolved over the years through microfinance banks, telecommunication companies and retail software networks. The key objective is to increase in number of digital transaction accounts to at least 60 million by 2022 with disbursements targeted to 125,000 loans to unique borrowers, micro enterprises and SMEs of which at least 60pc loans should be to female borrowers.

The scheme would also enhance the capacity of the CDNS to offer additional access points for digital transactions through upgrading its core systems and increase electronic payments per capita to at least 2.0 by 2022.

The ministry of finance and the World Bank had signed the loan agreement in January 2018 and the project had already been declared effective by the bank on March 20, 2018.

Published in Dawn, May 9th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1481165/subsidised-loan-scheme-for-farmers-smes-planned

‘SINDH GOVT’S DELAY IN WHEAT PROCUREMENT CAUSING LOSSES TO FARMERS’

By Our Correspondent Published: April 22, 2019

HYDERABAD: With delays in official wheat procurement pushing the exercise far behind schedule, the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has blamed the Sindh government for causing financial losses to the farmers. A meeting of the SCA in Hyderabad on Sunday, attended by the farmers’ representatives from Karachi, Sukkur, Ghotki and Sanghar through video link, deplored that not a single wheat procurement centre has been opened in Sindh as yet.

The process was scheduled to start from April 1 but currently, a summary for the purchase of 0.5 million tonnes of wheat is pending approval of the Sindh chief minister. Once the sanction is given, the government will float the tender for purchase of the gunny bags only after which, the procurement process will start. It is expected that the province’s farmers, who are harvesting a bumper crop this year, would have sold a large part of their harvest in the open market by that time.

The government had fixed Rs1,300 per 40 kilogrammes as the support price of wheat. However, SCA President Qabool Muhammad Khatian said that the open market has been exploiting the farmers by paying between Rs1,050 to Rs1,150 per 40 kg to the farmers.

The wheat support price of Rs1,300 has remained static since the fiscal year 2014-15 despite repeated demands of the farmers, who cite the rising cost of cultivation as justification for the increase. Even Sindh agriculture research department had previously suggested the government to fix the price at Rs1,448.

“Because the government’s centres haven’t yet opened, traders in the open market are exploiting farmers by purchasing their crop at cheaper rates,” said Khatian, demanding that the government immediately open the centres. “This is happening for the first time in Sindh’s history that the government hasn’t opened a single centre”.

Thanks to the weather and intermittent rain, the farmers are reaping a bumper crop of up to 2,000 kg per acre against Sindh’s average productivity of around 1,350 kg per acre. The crop was cultivated at 1,046,845 hectares against the target of 1,150,000 hectares.

The provincial government appears averse to initiating the buying process because it is still utilising the carry-over stocks of its procurement last year. Another obstacle to the process is said to be Sindh food department’s limited storage capacity which ranges between 700,000 to 750,000 tons.

Meanwhile, those attending the meeting also expressed grave concern over the shortage of water, particularly in Thatta, Sujawal and Badin districts where the people have complained that they cannot even get drinking water. The farmers denounced the imposition of 200% duty on import of dates from Pakistan to India and requested the federal government and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) to find alternative export markets.

The farmers called for providing Rs5,000 per acre subsidy to the growers of soybean crop by Sindh government, similar to the subsidy being received by their counterparts in Punjab.

The SCA’s General Secretary Zahid Hussain Bhurgari, Syed Aijaz Nabi Shah, Nabi Bux Sathio, Ghulam Hassan Chachar, Ghulam Mujtaba Unar, Nisar Hussain Khaskheli and others attended.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1956035/1-sindh-govts-delay-wheat-procurement-causing-losses-farmers/

BENEFICIARIES OF SUBSIDY IN SUGAR

BR Research May 9, 2019

Last week, BR Research published an attempt to map the footprint of politically influential families in the sugar industry (published in this section on May 02, 2019). Since then, two more mills owned by a PI have come to note.

Altogether, 16 distinct sponsor families/groups, owning 40 out of 90 sugar milling units installed across the country have been identified. Put together, these units command close to 50 percent share in total domestic production, based on figures published by industry association for marketing year 2017-18.

But does that speak to the influence of these sponsor groups on sector-specific policymaking? After all, it is arguable that due to factors specific to Pakistan's political economy, it is mostly rich families that make inroads into corridors of powers.

One metric to capture the intersection of policymakers and sugar mill owners is to map the beneficiaries of subsidy extended by the government to the industry on exports. Because sugar trade is regulated under strict quota due to an intermittent history of shortages in the local market, SBP publishes daily bulletin of export orders approved.

During the last fiscal year, GoP announced an export quota of two million tons of sugar, with a subsidy of Rs10.7 per kilo. This subsidy was further supplemented by an additional Rs9.3 per kilo support by the Sindh government, but with an upper cap of 20,000 tons per sugar mill (those situated in the province only). When asked if the federal government announced the subsidy at a time of ballooning fiscal deficit to curry favour with mill owners, PSMA representatives retort that the surplus has persisted in the market for over three years.

According to Mr. Iskandar M. Khan, the best time to allow export was MY16, when sugar price in the international market was at a premium to domestic cost of production. Instead, the outgoing government chose to wait until the election year. By that time, global prices had slumped, and the federal kitty had to bear a steep cost of Rs20 billion.

But did the outgoing government announce export subsidy to the benefit of patriarchs of ruling party, who are also well-known mill owners? The answer may come as a surprise to readers.

Turns out, of the export orders of two million tons approved, one-third came from three mills owned by three political families. At the top, come three mills owned by Late Makhdum Ruknuddin family of South Punjab with export of 249,532 tons of sugar. These are closely trailed by five mills owned by JKT group, with mills concentrated both in southern Rahim Yar Khan Districts and Ghotki region of upper Sindh.

The story of Sindh is even more interesting, where the largest beneficiary is the Omni group, which incidentally also has the largest regional market share of 5 percent in total domestic output. Omni's gains from the subsidy are also the highest in the country, considering it recorded additional gains of R 9.3 per kg support per mill for up to 20,000 tons export. No surprises there that the average export by nine Omni units stood at 20,128 tons, with no unit exporting higher than 21,948 tons and lowest at

18,066 tons. No wonder, the market share is so fragmented. Put together, mills owned by 11 distinct sponsor families had a share of 75 percent in total domestic export, of which only four have distinct political ties (the fourth being Humayun Akhtar). Seven other non-PI family units all belonged to Sindh province, who appear to be unintended beneficiaries of benevolence showered at Omni group.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/09/495620/beneficiaries-of-subsidy-in-sugar/

IMPORT OF PULSES DROPS BY 4 PERCENT

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 9TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Pakistan's seafood import dipped to $393.357 million in July-Mar 2018-19, down by 4 percent, official figures say. Fall in pulses import now comes to the tune of $14.573 million in July-Mar 2018-19 from $407.930 million in July-Mar 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics shows. In term of quantity, 712,540 metric tons of pulses were imported in July-Mar 2018-19 higher by 28 percent or 153, 972 metric tons from 558,568 metric tons imported in July-Mar 2017-18.

In Mar 2019, Pakistan's pulses import slumped by 33 percent or $17.755 million to $36.740 million from $54.495 million in Mar 2018.

Pulses import volume also plunged by 22.09 percent or 18587 metric tons to 65,551 metric tons in Mar 2019 from 84,138 metric tons in Mar 2018

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190509470928/

HIGH-PRICED VEGETABLES, FRUITS GO BEYOND COMMON MAN'S REACH

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 9TH, 2019 | KARACHI

People have complained about soaring prices of vegetables, fruits and other essentials as Ramadan began, a holy month in which Muslims worldwide abstain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk. In different retail markets in the city, prices of the ingredients used particularly for preparing Iftar meals such as tomatoes, potatoes, beans, and onions showed an upward trend. During the first two days of Ramadan, many consumers from fixed and low-income groups said that the skyrocketing food prices deprived them of enjoying the joy and spirituality of their religious month. "Traders are using this month as an opportunity to multiply prices much more than before Ramadan. We are tired of the soaring vegetables and fruits prices," said customers.

Despite the claims of the provincial government and city administration, profiteering continues unchecked in markets in almost all the localities of the city. Vegetables and fruits are being sold at rates much higher than those fixed by the Commissioner Office. In the open market, vendors are selling goods at prices about 40% to 50% higher than the notified rates.

Many consumers, especially of the limited income group, expressed their resentments over yet another hike in prices of essentials. They held the government responsible for failing to ensure market monitoring.

Servants working in houses (as Massies) told Business Recorder that many low-income families decided to cancel buying fruits and vegetables for their Iftar meals during Ramadan due to the soaring prices and it become unaffordable for them. They said that "fruits and vegetables are absent in the Iftar meals of Ramadan this year for the first time in PTI government."

The rate of low-quality khajla has been fixed at Rs200 per kg but it is being sold at Rs260 per kg. Bananas, which are a popular fruit during Ramadan, were being sold at a makeshift market at Rs160 a dozen if they are of high-quality and Rs140 a dozen if they were of regular quality. The commissioner's list priced bananas at Rs110 a dozen for good quality and Rs88 for average quality. Garlic was sold for Rs200 to Rs220 per kg, earlier it was sold for Rs160 to Rs180 per kg. Ginger was available for Rs170 to Rs180 per kg while earlier it was sold for Rs145 to Rs150 per kg. Apples sold for Rs300 to Rs330 per kg, lemon Rs 300 to Rs 340 per kg, cantaloupe (Kharbooza) Rs 150 per kg, watermelon Rs 50 to Rs 60 per kg, peach Rs 250 to Rs 270 per kg, blueberries (Falsa) Rs 200 to Rs 250 per kg, Mulberry (Shah Toot) Rs 200 per kg, Spinach (Palak) Rs 60 per kg, potato Rs 45 per kg, green chili Rs 100 per kg, cauliflower (Phool Gobhi) Rs 70 to Rs 90 per kg, Arvi Rs 80 to Rs 100 per kg, okra (Bhindi) Rs 100 per kg, tomato Rs 60 to Rs 80 per kg.

The government initiatives have almost failed to make any impact on the local markets as prices of essential commodities have gone up significantly all over the city. The country is already in the grip of exuberant high prices of daily used commodities, while the advent of Ramadan has further aggravated the situation taking the prices of fruits and vegetable sky-high and much beyond the purchasing power of the common man.

However regardless of high prices sale has been witness in dates, Bason, Dal Chana, chat masala and coking oil, sugar, cold drinks, Sharbats, banana, watermelon, green chili, lemon.

On first day sale of dates has reached on its peak as every one needs to break fasting with dates in line with the saying of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Higher income group people buy extra food to fill their tables full with food for the Iftar and Sahri time, shopkeepers said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190509470929/

ETHIOPIA SEEKS TO BUY 1 MILLION TONNES OF WHEAT

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 9TH, 2019 | HAMBURG

The lowest offer in the tender from the Ethiopian government to buy 600,000 tonnes of wheat which closed on April 30 was $225.40 a tonne c&f, traders said on Monday.

The lowest offer in a separate tender for 400,000 tonnes which closed on April 19 was $244.34 a tonne c&f submitted by trading company Gem Crop.

No purchase has yet been reported in either tender and offers are still being considered.

Ethiopia continues to feel the impact of a drought which has devastated farms in some regions.

The country has a large wheat import programme to cool domestic prices, but has struggled to get some purchases completed because of contractual disagreements.

The lowest offer in the 600,000 tonne tender was submitted by trading house Agrocorp International for 100,000 tonnes of optional origin wheat.

The offer includes extra financial costs for a 180 day payment delay and equates to $186.95 a tonne FOB, traders said.

But the lowest offer apparently did not include liner out terms, which involve extra costs for ship unloading.

The lowest offer in the 600,000 tonne tender including liner out costs and extra financial charges was $239.27 a tonne for 100,000 tonnes from trading house Ameropa, traders said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190509470956/

COTTON PRICES UP ON SHORT SUPPLY

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 9TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Official spot rates gained modestly on the cotton market on Wednesday in the process of trading activity, dealers said. The official spot rate was higher by Rs 50 to Rs 8850, they added. In the ready session, over 4000 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs 6800-9100, they said.

Market sources said that buyers showed interest in fresh buying of best quality but the ginners were not ready to oblige them as prices were not matching with their psychological levels.

Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that short supply of fine quality is causing increase in rates. He said that new cotton arrivals are expected by the end of June and it most likely that country may achieve desired cotton production due to expected favourable weather.

Adds Reuters: ICE cotton futures extended losses on Tuesday as the United States and China appeared far from reaching a truce on their trade dispute.

The most-active cotton contract on ICE Futures US July dipped 0.38 cent, or 0.52%, to 73.17 cents per lb

Total futures market volume fell by 18,788 to 29,118 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 1,808 to 221,696 contracts in the previous session.

The following deals reported: 800 bales from Ghotki at Rs 9100, 1090 bales from Dherki at Rs 8900, 200 bales from Haroonbadad at Rs 9000, 200 bales from Rahim Yar Khan at Rs 6800, 2200 bales from Sadiqabad at Rs 8900 and 400 bales from Ahmedpur East at Rs 8800, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190509470958/

FIVE MORE POPULAR JUICE FACTORIES SEALED IN PUNJAB

ZAHID BAIG | MAY 9TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Food safety teams of the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) on Wednesday in the province-wide crackdown sealed five factories illegally producing juices of the different popular brands. The provincial food regulatory body recovered 1,344 litres hazardous juice, 525 litres fake soft drinks and 5,300 empty boxes during the raids. Five gas cylinders, three filling machines, storage tank, fake labels and other raw material were confiscated by PFA while it also discarded a huge quantity of loose colours and chemicals.

PFA Director General Muhammad Usman said that authority has shut down a factory in Muridke, on charges of refilling bottles in the different brands of carbonated drinks and making spurious bottles with chemicals and contaminated water. He said that PFA has registered a case against the factory owner in the nearest police station.

Moreover, PFA's officials have sealed Aftab Juice, Nadeem Juice and Kashif Juice in Sahiwal as well as Nadeem Ice Drink in Okara. He said that PFA closed down all juice factories for preparing juices with artificial flavours, loose colours and chemicals. He said that chemically contaminated juices were selling to different shops in the market in the name of juices after giving them attractive packaging. Muhammad Usman has appealed citizens to use homemade juices because homemade food is best for consumer health. The PFA is eagerly working to ensure the availability of safe and wholesome food to masses in the market. People can inform PFA about adulteration mafia and food-related issues on its Facebook Page, mobile application and Toll-Free number 0800-80500, he added.

DG PFA, meanwhile, has directed food safety teams to be more active and continuous inspections of fruits, vegetables, pulses and other essential commodities in the Ramazan Bazaars.

He also directed to depute food safety teams round the clock in markets to ensure the provision of healthy and safe food for mass.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190509470919/

USC OUTLETS FACING SHORTAGE OF ESSENTIAL GOODS

Khalid Iqbal May 9, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile and Industrial Production Abdul Razak Dawood has cancelled his visit to an outlet of Utility Stores Corporation (USC) at Karachi Company (G-9 Markaz) due to strong protest of public and employees where they were complaining of shortage of essential items on Wednesday.

All Pakistan Utility Stores Corporation Welfare Association Chairman Arif Shah who was also present in protest demonstration said that 90 per cent outlets are empty without essential items throughout the country. The store employees were bringing necessary items from open market shops to store here at Karachi Company to make happy Adviser to Prime Minister Abdul Razaq Dawood who was expected to visit here, he said.

He said that Adviser to Prime Minister wanted to visit here the store but due to abashment he did not come. All Pakistan Utility Stores Corporation Welfare Association Senior Vice President Malik Muhammad Ameer said that all outlets throughout the country were facing worst shortage of pulses, ghee/cooking oil, atta, sugar, jams, surf, syrups, dry milk, basin etc. Subsidy announced by PTI government is a big fraud with public. In fact, all stores are empty without essential items, he said.

People belong to all walks of life have strongly protested lack of essential items in stores. The people of low income group benefitted from the utility stores by buying essential items at lower prices, particularly during Ramazan. But, they are deprived of all items, he denounced.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/468927-usc-outlets-facing-shortage-of-essential-goods

PUNJAB FOOD AUTHORITY TO IMPOSE BAN ON LOOSE MILK

By Asif Mehmood Published: May 9, 2019

LAHORE: In a bid to provide healthy, pure and uncontaminated milk to consumers, the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has decided to ban the sale of loose milk across Lahore, making it the model city for the pilot project. Instead, only pasteurised milk will be available for sale in the near future.

The ban on the sale of loose milk is expected to be imposed after Eid. In relations to the ban, the Punjab Food Authority officials said that Prime Minister Khan is very serious when it comes to ensuring the provision of safe and pure milk to locals and, per his directives, the ban will be swiftly implemented.

In April, the provincial food minister, provincial livestock minister and director general Punjab Food Authority, together with experts, held a meeting in which a decision was taken to rid Lahore of impure, tampered with, and chemically-prepared milk. As a result, a pilot project was initiated to implement the decision.

According to PFA authorities, prior to the implementation of the decision after Ramazan, awareness regarding pasteurised milk will be raised in Lahore and all over Punjab. In this regard, provincial minister food Samiullah Chaudhry said that PM Imran Khan's vision to provide pure and uncontaminated milk to consumers is their mission.

"After making Lahore the model city, the project will be initiated across the province," Chaudhry said.

Similarly, Provincial minister livestock Sardar Hasnain Bahadur Dareshak said that the milk-tampering mafia can only be stopped through the imposition of a ban on loose milk, adding that the ban will benefit farms that produce pure milk.

According to PFA officials, pasteurisation units will be set up in the model city of Lahore to ensure the provision of pasteurised milk, adding that the discussions related to the selection of a place for the installation of plants and their construction have already been carried out.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1968888/1-punjab-food-authority-impose-ban-loose-milk/

DAIRY INDUSTRY DEMANDS SALES TAX RELIEF IN BUDGET

By Shahram Haq Published: May 9, 2019

LAHORE: The Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA) has once again contacted the country's policymakers, seeking some relief in the sales tax regime in the upcoming budget.

Talking to Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile and Industry Abdul Razak Dawood, the association stated that growth of the dairy industry had been going down since 2016 as that was the year when the industry touched a record high of around 1,400 million litres of consumption. After that, the growth took a turn for the negative.

“The industry suffers a 7-8% price hit due to the end of the zero-rated regime, which further increases the price difference between packaged and loose milk,” said PDA Senior Vice President Sulaiman Monoo while talking to The Express Tribune.

However, even if the zero-rated regime was restored, prices of dairy products, especially milk, were unlikely to reverse as the ongoing scenario including rupee depreciation and petrol price hike may have their impact, said Monoo.

“In the last five years, FDI (foreign direct investment) in the dairy industry was recorded at $1 billion whereas in the next five years, investments of around $1.5 billion are due in allied industries, expansions and new FDI,” he added. Pakistan’s dairy sector enjoyed the zero-rated regime from 2006 to 2016, when the sector saw a massive growth of around 130%, from around 600 million litres to around 1.4 billion litres.

However, the previous government through Finance Act 2015 and 2016 once again imposed 10% sales tax on the concentrated milk powder and allied products like cream, yogurt, cheese, butter, whey, UHT and fat-filled milk.

According to the PDA senior vice president, such a confusing situation is the reason why the share of packaged milk in Pakistan is stagnant at 5%, despite the fact that Punjab has announced that it will implement the pasteurisation law by 2022.

“Look at Indonesia, Turkey and Thailand, which managed to increase their processed milk share to 95%, 80% and 95% respectively. Even India has managed to increase its processed milk ratio to 20% and is now exporting skim milk and other value-added dairy products,” he said.

He called for ending inter-provincial laws and instead framing one national law as dealing with multiple authorities and laws was widening the gap.

Nevertheless, Punjab Food Authority Director Qaiser Abbas termed these reservations inconsequential, saying as per the 18th Amendment, food and other such regulations fell within provincial domains.

“Even before the independence of the country, food and its regulation were a provincial matter and the federal govt always followed provinces in this domain as defined by our constitution,” Abbas told The Express Tribune.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 9th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1968779/2-dairy-industry-demands-sales-tax-relief-budget/

JULY-MARCH SEAFOOD EXPORT PLUNGES BY 5.07 PERCENT

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 8TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Pakistan's seafood export continues to decline to $293.887 million in July-Mar 2018-19, down by 7 percent, official figures say. Fall in seafood export now stands at $21.727 million in July-Mar 2018-19 from $315.614 million in July-Mar 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics shows.

In term of quantity, seafood export plunged by 5.07 percent or 6989 metric tons to 130,830 metric tons in July-Mar 2018-19 from 137,819 metric tons in July-Mar 2017-18.

In Mar 2019, Pakistan faced a fall in seafood export by 11 percent or $5.502 million to $45.895 million from $51.397 million in Mar 2018.

Export volume of seafood slumped by 16 percent or 3876 metric tons to 20,412 metric tons in Mar 2019 from 24,288 metric tons in Mar 2018.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190508470648/

IN K-P, FOOD PRICES SKYROCKET WITH ADVENT OF RAMAZAN

By Our Correspondent Published: May 8, 2019

PESHAWAR: All claims of the provincial government to control price hike in Ramazan fell to the ground as rates tested new records in a month known for the high demand for fruit and culinary delights.

The food department teams, in particular, failed to check prices. The advent of the fasting month of Ramazan has opened the floodgates of inflation in prices of fruits and many kitchen items.

According to a field survey of The Express Tribune, food department teams were seen limited their activities to the wholesale markets of the province while the hoarders and profiteers are looting the people in retail bazaars unchecked.

Market prices in provincial capital were seen above the official rates. Lemons were selling out at Rs480 per kg against an official rate of Rs200, mango for Rs500 per kg, watermelon Rs42 per kg as against the official rate of Rs25 per kg and banana Rs120 a dozen instead of Rs80.

According to market sources prices have escalated by 200 per cent with the advent of the holy month of Ramazan.

Traders have flouted the order of the deputy commissioner and the district Nazim to follow the official price list. Shopkeepers and vendors were charging extra against the fixed prices of the government. The city administration has fixed the price of boned beef at Rs350 per kg, however, butchers were openly skinning the people charging Rs450 per kg. Milk rates also boiled up by another Rs10 to Rs120.

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Food Department Director Saadat Hasan and Peshwar DC Muhammad Ali Asghar had directed Rationing Controller Aftab Umer and Assistant Food Controller Tasbeeh Ullah to visit Peshawar's vegetable market. The food department team checked in at the Subzi Mandi when the auction was going on.

The food department officials and The Express Tribune team saw agents of vegetable commission agents standing in the crowd. The auction of lemon started from Rs200 per kg, however, the agents of traders kept raising the bid to the desired level.

Assistant Food Controller Tasbeeh Ullah taking action filed a complaint against five vegetable commission agents and Subzi Mandi Retail Sellers Association President Amanullah and four other retailers at Chamkani police station.

Meanwhile, Cantonment Magistrate Quratulain Wazir has asked people to demand price-list from shopkeepers before purchasing vegetables or other edible items to curb profiteering.

During her visit to different bazaars and markets, she asked the customers to report profiteering in case of complaints so that timely action could be taken against the accused involved and they could be sent to jail.

She assured to visit the markets and bazaars in cantonment areas on daily basis but urged the masses to also cooperation with the administration to curb profiteering and hoarding during the holy month of Ramadan.

Earlier, she visited Saddar road, Bach Khan Chowk, Warsak Road, and other areas and checked price list. She directed the shopkeepers to clearly display price-list otherwise strict action would be taken.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 8th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1967928/1-k-p-food-prices-skyrocket-advent-ramazan/

SKY-HIGH: WHEAT PRICES IN PUNJAB HIT RECORD HIGHS

By Rizwan Asif Published: May 8, 2019

LAHORE: As a result of the duty-free export allowance on wheat granted by the government, over 100,000 bags of the grain are being exported to Afghanistan every day.

The impact on domestic consumers has not been pretty, as the price of wheat in many Punjab markets has hit 10-year highs. In Rawalpindi, the price of wheat has gone past Rs1,370 per maund (40kg) while in Lahore, Gujranwala, and other districts the open market price per maund is hovering between Rs1,305 and Rs1,335, with further increases expected.

This additional inflationary hit comes just as the month of Ramazan begins.

Flour prices have also seen steep increases at the consumer level, as in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, a 20kg bag is being sold for Rs800, while in Lahore and other nearby areas, 20kg of wheat is being sold for between Rs755 and Rs760, up from Rs720 to Rs740 a few weeks ago.

The increased demand from Afghanistan is being met through the Torkham, Chaman, Wana and Kalawchi border crossings. According to Afghan traders, buying will shift to wheat from Russia and other Central Asian states after around three months, but in the meantime, more wheat is being demanded from Pakistan. The commodity is selling for as much as $280 (Rs39,614) per ton in the Afghan market or roughly Rs1,584 per maund.

The Pakistani government has not imposed any export duties on flour or wheat being exported to Afghanistan, although the Afghan government is charging import taxes.

There has also been a significant decrease in wheat production in Punjab, which has coupled with exports to significantly increase the prices at mills, leading to unannounced price increases for flour.

Meanwhile, the Punjab Food Department is also struggling to meet its wheat purchase target.

According to sources, unsteady decisionmaking and implementation have become commonplace at the food department. Senior food officials had gotten permission from the Punjab chief minister to enact strict measures to nip the issue in the bud, but they failed to gain the support of the district and local administrations in implementing these measures.

Sources said department officials are directing assistant commissioner on what to do, which is not being taken nicely by commissioners and deputy commissioners, due to which the assistant commissioners are reluctant to implement the directives of the food department. The sources said that food officials should convey their directives through the commissioners and deputy commissioner.

The Punjab Food Department is already understaffed and currently, more than 90 per cent of the staff is deployed on wheat selling centres, and the food authority is also trying to send its staff to inspect open market sale locations, which is stretching them too thin.

In a meeting held on Monday, Food Secretary Naseem Sadiq failed to convince the federal government to ban wheat exports and was instead faced with strong criticism over supply management in the province. The Federal Ministry for Food Security told that due to rains, Punjab has reduced its wheat production target to 18.58 million tons, while the nationwide wheat production target has been reduced from 25.51 to 24.26 million tons.

In public warehouses nationwide 3.71 million tons of wheat are currently being stored, of which Punjab has 1.563 million tons. After including the freshly wheat stock, the country it was noted that the country still has ample wheat reserves to fulfil domestic demand.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 8th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1967980/1-sky-high-wheat-prices-punjab-hit-record-highs/

EU ‘BAN’ ON FISH IMPORT

By Editorial Published: May 8, 2019

The revelation that the European Union (EU) has not been importing fish and its related products from Pakistan for the last three years is another bad news about the country’s dwindling economy. In a country already caught up in a menace of circular debt and external debt servicing, any trade deficit due to imbalance in its imports and exports is always a bad omen.

A Senate panel was informed on Monday that EU member countries while not allowing any fish import from Pakistan in the last three years, are insisting to visit Karachi’s Fishery and other related facilities before deciding to allow import from Pakistan. The Minister for Maritime Affairs, Ali Haider Zaidi, informed the Senate Standing Committee that “The EU insists on visiting Karachi’s Fishery whose hall is not in proper condition at the moment. An inspection right now can even result in complete ban on Pakistan’s fish products.”

In fact these are the poor conditions of the fishing boats, unhygienic conditions at the Karachi Fish Harbour, use of substandard nets and the alleged lack of international standards at the fish processing units that has since long been a major source of concern for not only member countries of the EU but also the United States of America.

Earlier in April 2007, the EU had placed a complete ban on the import of raw fish and any of its processed products to its member states from Pakistan. The ban continued for six years and was lifted in March 2013 after Pakistan had agreed to and implemented the conditions of EU.

Why Pakistan cannot improve the facilities for its own economic benefits? According to Zaidi, part of the problem lies in lack of coordination between the Centre and the province. But it doesn't sound a convincing explanation. What the government must realise is that implementing the demands of EU will not only improve the imports but can help bring about a positive change in the lives of coastal communities, especially in Sindh.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1967816/6-eu-ban-fish-import/

REINVENTING THE TOMATO FOR SURVIVAL IN A CHANGING WORLD

By Tejal Rao April 30, 2019

NAPA, Calif. — In a borrowed van, Brad Gates of Wild Boar Farmssped south on Interstate 680 with hundreds of fuzzy tomato seedlings bumping around in the back, their trembling leaves, warmed by the sun, filling the cab with the smell of summer. It was one of a half-dozen deliveries on his to-do list.

Born and raised in Northern California, Mr. Gates has been organically farming tomatoes in the region for 25 years, working on small leased plots and introducing new varieties with cult followings, like the dark, meaty Black Beauty and the striped, rosy-pink Dragon's Eye.

For most of that time, he sold his tomatoes to top restaurants, including Chez Panisse in Berkeley. But a few years ago he completely rethought his work. Galvanized by climate change, he joined a growing number of farmers who are trying to find a future for their threatened crops — in his case, the queen of the farmers' market.

Mr. Gates now grows thousands of tomato plants each year, selling the young ones to local shops and the seeds all over the country through his website and catalogs, encouraging people to grow their own at home. He believes that the tomato's survival and continued deliciousness depend on the plant's diversity, and he considers breeding hardy, cold-tolerant and heat-tolerant varieties an essential part of his work — not just to provide food, but also to expand the number of places where the plant can flourish.

Many of the supermarket tomatoes that Americans buy are grown in Florida and California, and some arrive throughout the year from Mexico and Canada. Barry Estabrook chronicled the real cost of cheap, year-round, industrially farmed tomatoes in his 2012 book, "Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit," which detailed the use of chemicals and the exploitation of workers in Florida.

Since then, Mr. Estabrook said in an interview, conditions have been improved in Florida through the Fair Food Program, a coalition that protects workers and educates them on the effects of dangerous chemicals. “These tomato companies that used to treat workers like they were totally disposable are getting serious about competing with each other, because there aren’t enough migrant workers in this country,” he said. “It’s a huge crisis.”

Mr. Gates, who usually works alone, is small-time, and has no interest in scaling up. He leases a greenhouse to start his seedlings and runs the seed business out of a closet in his living room. His dream is to open a nursery in nearby Sacramento and run it with the help of his family.

“I could never compete with somebody in the Central Valley using subsidized water, underpaid labor and pumped fertilizer, getting paid by the ton,” he said. “They stomp the market.”

Mr. Gates, 51, tends to speak in an outdoor voice and to gesture broadly with thick, cracked hands. He refers to shiny, red, out-of-season tomatoes, which he considers boggy and tasteless, as “water dogs.” He thinks the best tomatoes, both for the planet and for the palate, are homegrown or grown on small farms in summer.

He left landscaping and got his start in the tomato business in the early 1990s, when gnarly, bumpy, weird-looking heirloom tomatoes were becoming a hot seller at farmers’ markets. Mr. Gates grew a few hundred varieties, and sold the tomatoes in Oakland. Back then, his business was all about outrageous aesthetics.

Tomatoes self-pollinate, but occasionally, Mr. Gates would come across a one-of-a-kind plant that had cross-pollinated naturally in his garden. The tomatoes they produced were colorful and lumpy, and some tasted very good. So he studied the breeding of tomatoes, searching for what he called the “holy grail.”

“That’s when someone grows it and someone bites it, and they’re satisfied,” he said. “They get the all-around ride.”

Like many tomato growers, he was scrutinizing his plants each year, selecting for sweetness, tang and savoriness, as well as productivity. He bred stripes and color into the tomatoes, bringing out any odd, unforgettable characteristics that would grab attention at market.

A quick glance at any commercial seed catalog will show that the tomato competition is fierce, with many hundreds of varieties. “In the last 10 years, tomatoes have changed more than in their entire existence,” Mr. Gates said.

About six years ago, he began to notice that the Northern California climate was becoming more intense and unpredictable. “A little struggle builds a tomato’s character, just like a person’s,” he said. “But it’s become a real roller-coaster ride out there.” Harvests weren’t just reduced; they were lost.

So Mr. Gates turned to selling young plants and about 60 varieties of seeds, alongside fully grown tomatoes, to help offset the uncertainties of farming. He quickly realized that he was no longer breeding tomatoes just for looks and taste, but for extreme tolerance in a rapidly changing, increasingly inhospitable planet.

The ancestor of the tomato plant we know is a hardy species that still grows as a bush in Peru and Ecuador, producing small red fruit about the size of a fresh pea. But there are about 15 other wild tomato species, each with its own potentially useful traits as researchers look to ways the tomato can adapt to drought, heat and more.

Roger T. Chetelat, a geneticist, oversees the tomato genetics resource center at the University of California, Davis — a public resource for plant breeders and researchers all over the world looking to tap into the plant's wild genetics. For decades, he has studied the genetics of a tomato species native to the Atacama Desert in Chile.

"It grows in an extremely arid environment, and up until now breeders have not been successful with it, because it's so different and so difficult to cross," he said.

Mr. Chetelat recently planted tomatoes that have just a little piece of a chromosome derived from the Atacama species. He will study the plant's response to drought this summer.

Mr. Gates, the California farmer, also tapped into the tomato's wild genetics, in a less strategic way. "It was kind of inadvertent," he said, "but I was always selecting the seeds that did the best under harsh weather conditions."

He has produced the Lucid Gem, a marbled, beefsteak-like tomato that ripens from yellow to deep orange; it is unusually heat-tolerant, a trait he noticed among many of the orange-colored tomatoes he was breeding. And it thrives in what he called "the new summers from hell."

Brad's Atomic Grape is a sweet, almost creamy, psychedelic-looking cherry tomato that is robust in the way of its ancestors. It can flourish "in a sidewalk crack," Mr. Gates said.

He has noticed patterns: The darker purple tomatoes tend to produce a lot of fruit, and withstand some disease. Some of the purple and pink fruit arrive early, which is ideal for growers in places with a short season, like Arizona or Nevada, where temperatures can rise too high for growing in the late summer.

And he has found that tomatoes rich with anthocyanin, the antioxidant that gives blueberries and blackberries their color, are protected from some fungus and disease that hit his other varieties.

Despite the tomato plant's general preference for warm, dry summers, farmers around the world have developed clever, environmentally friendly hacks for growing excellent tomatoes in a variety of climates and soils. In Santa Cruz, Calif., Dirty Girl Produce uses the technique of dry-farming on Early Girl tomatoes, which, as their name suggests, bear fruit early in the season.

Dry farming isn't entirely dry; it relies on fields soaked by rain, and cooler summers that lead to slow evaporation, along with plenty of work from the farmer to maintain its moisture, particularly in drought years. "It's all about cultivating the soil," said Joe Schirmer, Dirty Girl's owner.

Under the right conditions, the Early Girl sends a strong taproot deep into the ground. And as the plant is stressed by lack of water, it puts all its energy into producing sweet, sharp, rich-tasting tomatoes with tough skins.

Despite all the challenges, Mr. Gates believes there's never been a better time to grow tomatoes. Unlike decades ago, there are now passionate online gardening communities sharing notes with one another each season, allowing a beginner to learn quickly.

Mr. Gates has his own following online — small farmers and avid gardeners who grow his plants in the varied climates of Alaska, Idaho, Texas and Uzbekistan — and they share their experiences with him on Facebook and Instagram.

As abnormal weather becomes more normal, Mr. Gates wants to teach more gardeners how to confidently adapt, like the plants themselves, and manipulate changing environments with cheap, D.I.Y. frames and covers, which can provide shade and warmth for outdoor plants, as well as protection from freak hailstorms and rain.

“If you can, the best option for tomatoes has always been, and it still is, to grow some yourself,” he said, “whether it’s in a raised bed, a container or in the ground.”

As Mr. Gates pulled his van up to the curb to deliver hundreds of young tomato plants to Cotton Works in Los Gatos, the shop owner, Sara Fung, came out in a hurry to help carry them in. She has been selling his plants for about six years, and more than half of this year’s were already sold in a pre-order.

“Can you believe it, I already got a call this morning,” Ms. Fung said, pushing two flats of Husky Reds across the courtyard. “A lady wanted to know, are the tomatoes here yet? Where are the tomatoes?”

https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/dining/tomatoes-climate-change.html

17 PROJECTS WORTH RS18BN GET CDWP NOD

Amin Ahmed Updated May 07, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Central Development Working Party (CDWP) on Monday approved 17 development projects worth Rs18.8 billion and recommended nine projects worth Rs594.5bn to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec) for approval.

The approved projects related to energy, transport and communication, science and technology, health, population planning, industries and commerce, food and agriculture and education.

The water resources ministry presented the position paper of the Dasu hydel power project due to increased land and compensation cost from Rs19 billion to Rs36 billion with the total cost of Rs510 billion which was approved and referred to Ecnec for consideration.

Chaired by Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms Makhdum Khusro Bakhtyar, the meeting was attended by Secretary of Planning Zafar Hasan and senior officials from the federal and provincial governments.

Plans relate to energy, transport, communication, and science and technology sectors

The national food, security and research ministry presented five projects — ‘productivity enhancement of wheat’ worth Rs31987.4 million; ‘productivity enhancement of rice’ worth Rs15809.620 million; ‘productivity en-hance-ment of sugarcane’ worth Rs5019.589 million, ‘national oilseeds enhancement programme (NOEP)’ worth Rs10167.25 million and ‘cage culture cluster development project’ worth Rs6582 million — which were referred to Ecnec for consideration.

Three projects and a position paper related to the energy sector were presented during the meeting. The first project — ‘upgrade of POL testing facilities of HDIP at Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar and Quetta and ISO Certification of Petroleum Testing Laboratory at Islamabad' worth Rs293.614 million — was presented and approved.

The second energy project to be executed in Awaran district is construction of 132kV grid station at Mashkay and 132kV STD Nal-Mashkay transmission line (120km) worth Rs1193.39 million. Both were approved.

The third project — 500kV Moro Grid Station worth Rs5404.19 million to be executed in Naushahro Feroze district — was presented and recommended to Ecnec for consideration.

The project related to transport and communication sector — 'construction of Groyne Wall/Break Water and allied works at East Bay (Demi Zer) Gwadar' worth Rs1019.519 million — was also approved.

In the science and technology sector, four projects were presented before the CDWP. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) presented two projects — 'strengthening and development of physical and technological infrastructure at the University of Haripur' worth Rs1546.960 million and 'livestock sector development through capacity building, applied research and technology transfer, University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences' worth Rs1905 million. The meeting approved both projects.

The science and technology ministry presented two projects — 'establishment of Pak-Korea Testing Laboratory for PV Modules and Allied Equipment' worth Rs1385.429 million and 'upgrade of Polymers and Plastics Laboratory at PCSIR Labora-tories Complex, Lahore' worth Rs140.249 million — which were also approved.

Three health-related projects were presented by the national health, services, regulation and coordination ministry relating to the 'Treatment of Cancer Patients of ICT, AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan' worth Rs4772.150 million which were recommended to Ecnec for consideration.

The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission presented two projects — 'upgrade of Atomic Energy Cancer Hospital-KIRAN' worth Rs2342.790 million and 'upgrade of diagnostic and therapeutic facilities at BINO, Bahawalpur' worth Rs1377.176 million — which were also approved.

Three projects related to population planning were presented by the national health, services, regulation and coordination ministry. Projects — 'population welfare programme, Gilgit-Baltistan' worth Rs422.621 million, 'population welfare programme, AJ&K' worth Rs355.512 million and 'population welfare programme, Fata (erstwhile)' worth Rs184.317 — were approved till June 2019.

Four projects related to industries and commerce were presented to the CDWP. The commerce division presented 'remodelling and expansion of Karachi Expo Centre (Component-II)' worth Rs2677.42 million which was given approval. The industries and production ministry presented three projects — 'handicraft export development project' worth Rs385.226 million, 'industrial designing and automation centres (IDAC)' worth Rs1470.88 million and 'footwear cluster development worth Rs78.7 million — and were approved in the meeting.

The education ministry requested extension of 'establishment and operation of basic education community schools in the country' till June 2019 worth Rs4629.742 million which was referred to Ecnec for consideration.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480739/17-projects-worth-rs18bn-get-cdwp-nod

DEEP-SEA FISHING LICENCES TO BE ISSUED IN TWO WEEKS: MINISTER

Kalbe Ali Updated May 07, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Maritime Affairs Ali Haider Zaidi has said that new deep-sea fishing licences will be issued in two weeks.

During a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Maritime Affairs on Monday, he said the capacity building of fishermen was imperative with a focus on sustainable fishery in the Arabian Sea for uplifting of the fisheries sector in Pakistan.

“We have been suspended by the European Union for two years, but nobody can do anything because there is a need for up-gradation of fisheries,” he added.

The minister criticised the Sindh government for not maintaining the Karachi Fish Harbour as per the international standards.

The officials of the ministry of maritime affairs informed the committee that the EU team wanted to visit the Karachi Fish Harbour and “we have asked the Sindh government to at least clean the auction hall which is like a garbage place”.

Additional Secretary Maritime Affairs Mohammad Asad said the exporters wanted conditions to be improved, but the subject was under the provincial government.

“Besides we have a six acre plot with facilities to breed shrimps at Hawkesbay, but it can only be made operational with collaboration of the Sindh government,” he said.

Senator Usman Khan Kakar suggested that officials of fisheries departments of Sindh and Balochistan should be called by the committee to develop coordination between the provinces and the federal government.

The committee discussed the issue of non-payment to the dockworkers at Port Qasim Authority. Mr Kakar had raised the issue.

The meeting was informed that the workers employed by a Chinese company that operates Sahiwal coal power project wharf 3 & 4 at Port Qasim were managed by the company to handle imported coal.

The committee was told that the Chinese company wanted that all workforce had to be streamlined, besides they needed only 100 workers but the dockworkers had a strength of 18,000.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480735/deep-sea-fishing-licences-to-be-issued-in-two-weeks-minister

RS2BN SUBSIDY GIVEN UNDER RAMAZAN PACKAGE ON UTILITY STORES: FIRDOUS

Imaduddin May 6, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Information Firdous Ashiq Awan on Monday said that Prime Minister Imran Khan had announced Rs 2 billion Ramadan package under which essential items were being provided to the people at cheaper rates at the Utility Stores Corporation (USC).

Addressing a joint press conference along with Managing Director USC, Umar Lodhi she said it was unfortunate that during the holy month of Ramadan prices of daily use items were increased due to demand and supply gap. She said keeping in mind the problems of the masses Prime Minister Imran Khan had issued directives for issuance of Rs 2 billion to the USC so that the common man could be provided relief.

She said that subsidy was being given on 19 items including flour, ghee, cooking oil, pulses, chickpea flour (baison), dates, rice, milk, soft drinks and spices.

Elaborating the subsidy, she said that on a 20 kg bag of flour Rs 59 subsidy was being given, whereas Rs 5 subsidy was being given on per kilogram of sugar, Rs 15 on ghee, Rs 10 on cooking oil. Similarly, Rs 30 subsidy was being given on dates, Rs 10 on spices, and Rs 15 on milk.

She said that PM had issued directive to MD USC to ensure availability of all daily use items at the utility stores. She said that the previous government gave Rs 1.6 billion Ramadan package, but only Rs 760 million could be utilized, while the remaining amount lapsed due to lack of capacity of the USC.

Replying to the questions of the media, she said that opposition not only had the right to raise public interest issues in the House, but they also needed to accept who ruined the country’s economy.

She said that the present government of Prime Minister Imran Khan would restore the economy and bring about positive change in the lives of the people, but it would need some time as only eight months had passed since PTI took over.

About the so-called distribution of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz posts among the family members, she said that it appeared the PML-N was not a political party, but a private limited company. She said that no parliamentary party or central executive committee meeting was called to take such important decisions.

She said the changes made by PML-N leaders groomed under the shadow of dictatorship were a big joke with the democratic institutions. She said that Election Commission of Pakistan had already announced that a convicted person could not keep any party’s office bearer. She said that appointment of Mariam Nawaz as Vice President of the PML-N was against the law of the land.

She appealed to the nation to offer special prayers for solidarity and progress of the country during the holy month of Ramadan.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/06/494942/rs2bn-subsidy-given-under-ramazan-package-on-utility-stores-firdous/

EU NOT BUYING PAKISTAN’S FISH FOR LAST 3 YEARS, SENATE TOLD

By Our Correspondent Published: May 7, 2019

ISLAMABAD.: The European Union (EU) has not purchased fish from Pakistan for the last three years, a Senate panel was informed.

"The EU insists on visiting Karachi's fishery whose auction hall is not in proper condition at the moment. An inspection right now can even result in complete ban on Pakistan's fish products," Minister for Maritime Affairs Ali Haider Zaidi told the Senate Standing Committee on Maritime Affairs, chaired by Senator Nuzhat Sadiq on Monday.

The minister said capacity building of fishermen with a special focus on sustainable fishery in the Arabian Sea was imperative for uplifting of the fisheries sector in Pakistan.

"This initiative will not only raise the living standard of coastal inhabitants but will also contribute a huge amount to the national exchequer," he said during the briefing.

The minister said fishery, which was considered a source of livelihood for locals of the coastal areas was suffering due to lack of coordination between provincial and federal authorities.

He asked the senators to suggest ideas for achieving the objectives.

Senator Usman Khan Kakar raised the issue of non-payment of salaries to Port Qasim Authority (PQA) dockworkers.

The committee was informed that the workers employed by the respective cargo handling companies (CHCs) were never registered by the PQA.

"The dispute of salary/compensation is purely between a Chinese company and the employees at the requisite marginal wharf 3&4 at Port Qasim Authority.

"The matter is also sub judice as the labour union has filed a case against its employers at the Labour Court Karachi and the court has granted stay to the labour union," the minister said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1967348/1-eu-not-buying-pakistans-fish-last-3-years-senate-told/

COTTON FARMERS SUFFER RS52B LOSS AS MILLS PAY LOWER PRICES

By Zafar Bhutta Published: May 7, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Textile barons, being sole buyers of cotton produced in the country, have caused an annual loss of Rs52 billion to farmers by offering lower prices for the commodity and monoplising the market, reveal documents prepared by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Owing to that reason, the farmers were compelled to grow other crops like sugarcane instead of cotton. Resultantly, the area planted with cotton had been continuously shrinking, the ministry said.

Besides this, according to the ministry, the quality of cotton has dropped considerably because of a lack of compliance with the Cotton Control Act 1996, non-implementation of the quality-based seed pricing system and no capacity-building of cotton pickers.

The ministry, in a report submitted to high-ups of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, said the farmers were not getting proper prices for their crop, adding that no assurance was given by the government in that regard at the time of cotton harvest.

The cotton crop has a share of 1-1.7% in the overall gross domestic product (GDP) – total size of the economy – of the country. It caters to 74% of the domestic cotton requirement and provides key raw material for the textile industry. It also engages a large workforce in various activities.

However, the cotton crop has been encountering many challenges and issues. Its production and yield have decreased substantially over the past many years. There are multiple reasons for these issues which include climate change, lack of research and development, absence of a proper policy, high input costs, lack of latest seed technology, no price and profit assurance, marketing issues, unavailability of quality seeds and no support price for the crop.

The Ministry of National Food Security recalled that the 1984-92 period was a golden era for cotton production. After that, the harvest has been continuously declining, especially in Punjab.

Past governments were least interested in overcoming the challenges faced by the cotton growers. Farmers were confused in the selection of good-quality cotton seeds and pesticides as a large number of varieties were available in the country, the ministry said.

According to officials, the 2013-18 period – when the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was running the government, was the worst as cotton harvest faced a historic decline. The PML-N government provided incentives for powerful industrial lobbies like textile manufacturers, who were allowed duty-free import of cotton, and paid little attention to shielding the interest of farmers. A report presented to the cabinet revealed that cotton production had been virtually stagnant since 1991-92 and fluctuated in a range of 10 to 12 million bales. The output fell to 9.9 million bales in 2015-16 compared to average consumption of 15 million bales, making Pakistan a net cotton importer.

These reasons brought down profits for the cotton farmers and led to 20% reduction in the area planted with the crop from 2004 to 2016.

The past governments, especially the PML-N, had been pro-industrialists and farmers were left at the mercy of textile millers. Even, the cotton commissioner had been placed under the control of textile ministry to safeguard the interest of textile barons.

The present government has also so far been pro-industrialists as it has given Rs25 billion in subsidy to the textile millers on gas supply. It also gave a relief of Rs29 billion by waiving duties on cotton import.

In addition to these, the government waived Rs40 billion in gas infrastructure development cess out of the Rs80 billion due to be paid by the textile millers.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1967135/2-cotton-farmers-suffer-rs52b-loss-mills-pay-lower-prices/

FLOUR CRISIS LOOMS LARGE, SAY MILLERS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter May 06, 2019

LAHORE: Flour millers say the recent oil prices' increase will make the wheat flour prices surge and also fear flour crisis during Ramazan as the Punjab Food Department has begun impounding trucks laden with wheat.

Pakistan Flour Mills Association Punjab chapter chairman Habib Leghari, Asim Raza, Liaquat Ali Khan and others said in a joint statement here on Sunday that the government kept the masses in the dark by enhancing oil tariff while the economic conditions of the country were already dismal.

They said the oil price hike would lead to an increase of at least Rs2 per 20kg bag of flour at a time when the sacred month of Ramazan is setting in. They lamented that instead of offering relief to the masses, the government threw petrol bomb on the people.

The PFMA leaders also feared that the Ramazan package would be hit leading to flour crisis in the province as the food department officials had begun checking and impounding the vehicles of flour millers carrying wheat consignments from Gujranwala and Gujrat to Rawalpindi notwithstanding the fact that the vehicle crew carried all required legal documents for transportation of the commodity.

They said if wheat won't reach the flour mills it would cause flour shortage during Ramazan.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the PFMA has been convened to discuss the situation.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480553/flour-crisis-looms-large-say-millers

HARVESTING ON PEAKS

Sajid Hussain Updated May 06, 2019

Around 55 per cent of the geographical area of Pakistan is hilly or mountainous, accommodating 51.47 million people. The population of these areas is projected to rise to 72.64m by 2030.

In mountainous areas, more than half of the population is food insecure, with the highest food insecurity (60pc), prevalence of severe stunting (36pc) and underweight (42pc) in children (below 5 years age) in Balochistan.

Food security and livelihoods of mountain communities still depend heavily on agriculture and livestock. These rely on the local resource base available at all elevations, although the specific agro-ecological and livelihood potentials vary considerably.

Agriculture and livestock are highly vulnerable to climate-induced risks and hazards. These include changes in patterns of temperature and precipitation, frequent floods and droughts, and severity of changes in timings of seasons.

Climate change demands collective action at the regional level because glaciers, rivers and landscapes are trans-boundary

During hazards, the supply of food items from downstream areas is likely to be limited, particularly after landslides block roads and floods damage bridges and roads. Moreover, transportation cost of food from plain areas to mountains is also very high.

Thus, it is very important to strengthen the local agriculture in mountain areas to reduce the dependency on production systems in plain areas. Mountain agriculture has huge potential for production of nutritious traditional crops (eg millet, barley, buckwheat, seas buckthorn, native beans etc), vegetables, fruits, and nuts.

Strengthening of mountain agriculture will result in improvements of dietary diversity as well as agro-biodiversity. In 2017, Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) regional initiative on Zero Hunger Challenge in Asia and Pacific, in consultation with national and international partners relabeled traditional crops (also known as neglected and underutilised species) as 'future smart foods'.

This was in view of their emerging importance for climate change resilience, agro-biodiversity, agriculture sustainability, and food and nutrition security. Overall, mountain agriculture can contribute significantly to achieving overarching goals of the government on reducing food insecurity in the country.

Pakistan is making progress towards framing instruments for better adaptation to climate change. However, the strategies for adaptations specific to mountain agriculture need to be further strengthened.

There are several steps which can be taken to mainstream mountains in national adaptation policies for agriculture in the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) countries. According to research, local institutions are not well aware of findings of scientific studies on climate change. More focus on simple communication methods from scientists and media professionals is required.

Climate change adaptation needs to be considered a national and regional priority in all sectors, especially agriculture. However, because its impact and adaptation outcomes are long term, it is not treated as a matter of utmost importance while development goals are set based on short-term consequences.

Climate change demands collective action at regional level because glaciers, rivers and landscapes are trans-boundary and highly affected by climate change. All these have direct impact on water availability, agricultural productivity, hydropower development and disaster risk management in both mountains and downstream areas.

There is a need to invest more on mountain specific research and technology. The key challenge faced by policy makers is how to increase agricultural productivity and reduce poverty without degradation of natural resources on which mountain farmers largely depend.

The research and development interventions in Pakistan for agriculture have not been very effective because they are focused on agricultural technologies and services for plain areas. For example, agriculture research institutions rarely do research on production technology of mountain specific traditional crops.

There is urgent need for mountain specific data in Pakistan for transparent decision making in all sectors. Mostly, national databases do not reveal reliable statistics for mountains because they follow a common framework to assess vulnerability of people and systems, across both mountains and plains. Mountain areas have different climatic and socio-economic characteristics and agro-ecological potential, therefore need special attention.

Despite several constraints, the mountain areas have high potential for production of traditional crops (i.e. millets, buckwheat and beans), fruits, vegetables, and nuts. There is need to tap this potential though mountain specific research, technology and institutional services.

The writer is a doctoral candidate at the University of Central Punjab and a climate change activist

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480488/harvesting-on-peaks

GROWING RICE WITH LESS WATER

Muhammad Abbas Zia Updated May 06, 2019

After wheat, rice is the second most important staple of Pakistan. Through exports, it contributes significantly to the country's exchequer. This is especially true for basmati rice which is known for its aroma and quality, and is a specialty of the country. Rice is grown in all provinces on an area of 7,164 thousand acres. However, it is a water guzzler.

Transplanted puddled rice (TPR) is the preferred mode for growing the crop in Pakistan. A puddled field is one where the soil is ploughed under 10-12 inches of standing water. In TPR, rice seedlings are raised in nurseries till they are 4-6 weeks old, before being transplanted to puddled fields.

Rice is a water loving cereal. It takes about 3,000 to 5,000 litres of water to produce one kilogram of rice. 93.6 per cent of fresh water in Pakistan is consumed by agriculture of which rice accounts for 35pc.

Due to declining water resources and high water requirement of TPR, it is the need of the hour to enhance water-use efficiency and water productivity. Among various technologies, dry direct seeded rice (DSR) is the best option for water conservation.

It takes about 3,000 to 5,000 litres of water to produce one kilogram of rice

In the DSR sowing method, paddy seed is sown directly in well prepared fields through DSR drill, removing the need for seedlings to be raised in a nursery. Through this method, 25-30pc of the water consumed can be saved while using 30pc less fuel. Furthermore, less labour and time is required and optimum plant population can be obtained easily.

In Pakistan, especially in Punjab, DSR sowing method in rice crop is getting popular day by day, with area under DSR gradually increasing. Last year, estimated area under DSR was 114 thousand acres, out of which 104 thousand acres were in Punjab alone.

Factors such as severe water shortage and expensive labour due to industrialisation and urbanisation, has led the rice farming community of Pakistan to want to shift from TPR to DSR sowing technology. But they are unable to do so effectively because of the menace of weeds infestation in DSR.

Weeds are undesirable plants whose removal is essential because they compete with the crop for sunlight, water and nutrients. Weed infestation adversely impacts rice by 15-20pc and can go up to 50pc.

A DSR crop badly infested with weeds can fail entirely. Weeds in rice crop can be categorised into three classes: broad leaved, sedges and grasses weeds.

In the TPR sowing system, weed control is easy as the puddled soil inhibits weeds germination. Whereas, in DSR sowing technology, weed control is very difficult. Since weeds germinate at the same time as rice seedlings, they compete for light and nutrients. Weed competition in DSR is at its peak during the first three weeks.

No doubt, DSR technology is the future of rice in Pakistan. But this future depends on proper weed management, especially from noxious weeds like ghora, madhanas and kallar or bansi grass.

Integrated weed management is a systematic approach in which the control of weeds is achieved by keeps its infestation below economic injury level. This can be done by combining any two or more preventive, cultural and herbicidal weeds management methods.

Crop rotation, mulching of sesbania (jantar) and stale seed bed or double rouni (creating a seedbed weeks before it is due to be sown) are the best methods of cultural control of weeds in DSR system.

However, use of herbicide, such as application of glyphosate, is indispensable. Without herbicidal weed management, appropriate control can't be achieved.

The writer is an agri services officer at Fauji Fertiliser Company

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480483/growing-rice-with-less-water

UNLEASHING SHARED ECONOMY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

From the Newspaper Updated May 06, 2019

Laughter would have been the response had someone told you, a decade back, that the world's largest hospitality service provider will not own any rooms, or that the world's leading taxi provider will not own any cars, or that the world's leading media company will hardly own any video contents.

But as you read this, it is likely that you have stayed in one of those sparkling clean Airbnb rooms, and have ridden with that Uber driver known for great conversations, and have watched a viral video of that cute child on YouTube.

Sharing economy is defined as a socioeconomic system enabling an intermediated set of exchanges of goods and services between individuals and organisations, which aim to increase efficiency and optimisation of underutilised resources in society. It has redefined businesses since the beginning of this decade and unlocked value for millions of service providers and customers alike.

Yet, sharing economy's most significant contribution to the world will be felt in rural development as much in business, especially in smallholder agriculture development.

In the industries that are disrupted by the rise of sharing economy, customers had cost-efficient access to resources without the burden of ownership; service providers derived income from the use of idle capacities. This has generated economic gains for both.

Close to one in two living in rural areas of Indonesia already has access to the internet, mainly through mobile. Mobile-based GPS technologies can help build platforms that can make location-based access to service providers and customers

However, the businesses that pioneered sharing economy have hitherto targeted urban centres, and thus the flow of welfare gains. Nonetheless, the possibilities of the sharing economy to smallholder and rural development cannot be overstated. Take food waste.

About 40pc of all the food grown in the developing countries are lost during the post-harvest and processing stages.

Research shows that a majority of the losses happen due to the lack of infrastructures such as well-maintained milling machines or warehouses.

Many smallholder farmers don't have the wherewithal to own these infrastructures.

Also, among the farmers who own the facilities, the utilisation rates are low. Sharing economy can provide new economic opportunities to the facility owners while providing much-needed infrastructure access to smallholder farmers.

Advancements in technology and increasing rural penetration of smartphones can further accentuate the progress.

Close to one in two living in rural areas of Indonesia already has access to the internet, mainly through mobile.

Mobile-based GPS technologies can help build platforms that can make location-based access to service providers and customers.

Say, a coffee farmer who owns a de-pulping machine can list the equipment on the platform that connects service providers and customers.

Another coffee farmer who needs a de-pulping machine could rent it through the platform and return it as soon the work is completed; products such as e-wallets can let them settle the payments with much ease.

Thanks to sharing economy, the farmer who lends the machine earns extra income which she might not have received had the machine remained idle.

The consuming farmer paid only for the duration he used the machine, thus significantly reducing the cost of ownership yet getting the much-needed access to infrastructure.

They both could leave reviews which will help others in the community to overcome information asymmetries and to decide whom the best lenders and the buyers are, incentivising the best market behaviour. This is just one example, and the opportunities are limitless ranging from inputs to capital.

The idea of sharing economy is also compatible with rural sociology. In a typical rural setup, occupations mostly involve a totality of cultivators — a few who own farm equipment and many who don't — and in a community are usually a few in several non-agricultural pursuits.

With this right ratio of providers, users, and actors who could be intermediaries, the rural setup provides a favourable natural setting for the development of sharing economy.

One of the other essential criteria required for building a thriving sharing economy platform is a phenomenon called network effect, whereby increased numbers of people or participants improve the value of a good or service.

The development of the network effort will be aided by the homogeneity in the psychological traits of the rural population, but only if the value proposition is well-communicated and the users believe that the system is credible, reliable, and ethical. Policymakers can play an important role in supporting the development of such systems.

The less density of population and remoteness of villages can pose challenges to the growth of the sharing economy.

However, if the country's leading e-commerce player can deliver to 93pc of Indonesia's 7,000 or so regencies, sharing economy can thrive, too.

In his book "The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid," CK Prahalad argued: "If we stop thinking of the poor as victims or as a burden and start recognising them as resilient and creative entrepreneurs and value-conscious consumers, a whole new world of opportunity will open up."

The arguments I made above are the lineal descendants of that view.

Unleashing the sharing economy in the rural areas, where the majority of the world's poor live, is a compelling need. The encouraging thing is that it doesn't need vast mobilisation of investments or infrastructure.

In its bare form, sharing economy is all about reallocating resources from where it is idle to where it is needed, thus creating value at both ends — in the rural context, that value flows to the most neediest segment of the population.

The Jakarta Post/ANN

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480452/unleashing-shared-economy-for-rural-development

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 29th TO MAY 5th 2019

19 SUBSIDISED ITEMS TO BE AVAILABLE AT UTILITY STORES FROM TODAY

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated May 05, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Utility Stores Corporation (USC) announced on Saturday that 19 edible items — including rice, pulses, cooking oil, grams, gram flour (besan), sugar, dates and juices — will be available at its outlets from Sunday (today) at discounted rates.

The Economic Coordination Committee of the cabinet had approved the Rs2 billion Ramazan relief package on Friday.

The government will provide a subsidy of Rs4 per kg on wheat flour, Rs5 on sugar, Rs15 on ghee, Rs10 on cooking oil, Rs20 on gram pulse, Rs15 on moong, Rs10 on mash pulse, Rs10 on masoor, Rs25 on white gram, Rs20 on gram flour, Rs30 on dates, Rs15 on basmati rice, Rs15 on sela rice and Rs15 on broken rice, Rs15 on squashes and syrups (1,500 ml), Rs10 on squashes and syrups (800 ml), Rs50 on black tea, Rs15 per litre on Milk Pack and 10 per cent relief on spices.

Relief being provided under a Rs2bn Ramazan package

A spokesman of the USC said that some items had been delivered at the utility stores and the remaining would be supplied very soon.

Smooth supply of all commodities across the country would be ensured during Ramazan, he added.

Meanwhile, employees of the USC, who had set up a protest camp outside its head office in Blue Area, had been assured by its management that their demands would be met.

Addressing the employees, senior USC officers said that the management was committed to providing relief to the general public during Ramazan by playing its role as a price moderator and deterrent to profiteering, hoarding and black-marketing.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480376/19-subsidised-items-to-be-available-at-utility-stores-from-today

COMMERCIAL FISH FARMS DEPRIVE GROWERS OF RIGHTFUL SHARE IN WATER

Jan Khaskheli May 5, 2019

HYDERABAD: Coastal farmers of Keti Bunder, Sindh blame the increasing trend to establish large fish ponds on fertile lands for depriving them of their rightful share in water.

The fish growers, who the coastal agricultural farmers believe have political backing, establish ponds with water from the watercourses.

Gulab Shah, one of the leading growers of Keti Bunder, Thatta district called it a priority shift of the provincial government, which has allowed water user from the irrigation system for private fish ponds, depriving agriculture farmers of their share.

“We being farmers have the first right to get irrigation water through watercourses for food production. If there is surplus water, the authorities may provide it to private fish farms,” he said.

He called the shortage of water “artificial”, as canals were flowing at full capacity. He has cultivated cotton on 80 acres after two years in the hope of recovering previous losses; however, he was not getting water from the irrigational tributaries and watercourses.

“The standing cotton crop needs weekly water, but unfortunately farmers are not getting the essential input,” Gulab Shah said.

Coastal zone farmers used to lead in crop sowing and harvesting due to Sindh’s favourable climate, but for the last two consecutive years they could not sow cotton and other major crops due to water scarcity and various climatic phenomenon.

This year farmers were able to cultivate the crops on initial availability of water. But that has changed now and they were crying out loud for their rightful share in water to save crops. There are a number of big fish ponds, covering around 35,000 acres of land. These ponds need water up to five-six feet to produce fish.

Calculating water consumption, Shah said a five-acre fish pond consumes water equal to 50 acres of an agriculture crop. “It is not difficult to guess that the agriculture sector has been put in the hands of ignorant fish farmers and irrigation department officials,” he lamented.

Mustafa Nangraj, researcher and trainer from Sindh Agriculture Extension Department said the government's agriculture policy was clear, but it did not have micro details of procedure and planning.

He said the need was to adopt an integral approach in which agriculture, dairy, and fish were produced at a small scale to ensure nutrition for the community without a heavy cost.

"There should be small home-based fish ponds from where poor people may get their required nutrition. In fact larger fish ponds consume more water and poor community people do not have access to buy fish at low prices to overcome nutrition deficiencies," he added.

Information gathered from farmers in coastal area shows they were preparing lands to cultivate a variety of seasonal vegetables, mostly ridged gourd (tori), bitter gourd (karela), cluster bean (guar), and bottle gourd (kado).

However, water shortage disrupted their move and pushed them to wait for their turn to receive water from the watercourses.

Years ago, coastal areas were rich in producing seasonal vegetables, fruits, rice, and dairy products. Preference for cultivating vegetables existed because the coastal areas had better access to Karachi's market, where they received better rates for their produce. But now, the farmers are vulnerable to unemployment and poverty due to water scarcity and lack of support from government in case of any untoward natural phenomenon as well as manmade issues.

Also, there is no policy cover to compensate these tail end farmers, who were vulnerable to unpredictable prices.

Farmers in the two other coastal districts – Sujawal and Badin – have different crops pattern. Presently, they were preparing to develop rice nurseries, which they would plant at the end of the current month (May) and June. They usually cultivate vegetables and off season crops in rice fields after its harvest.

Despite ups and downs of water and weather pattern change, farmers from Sakro, Ghorabari, Garho and Keti Bunder of Thatta districts cultivate around 100,000 acres of land with mostly vegetables. At present, they either have cultivated cotton crops at their family lands or were preparing to cultivate seasonal vegetables.

But the private fish farmers have created trouble for them, as the authorities provide irrigation water to them ignoring the agricultural crops. Water scarcity, increasing cultivation cost and instability of market for agriculture products has also pushed many small-scale farmers to develop fish farms.

Community farmers urged the government to formulate a policy to stop the use of arable land for fish farming and other commercial purposes.

They pointed out that diverting water from water courses and canals to fish farms was not only affecting agricultural practices and food production, but also depriving natural fresh water lakes from getting replenished with this essential resource.

Fish farms consume more water. Each fish farm reservoir has capacity to store water at five to six feet level, which was enough to cultivate a 50-acre piece of land for food crops.

There are merely eight to ten landlords on each watercourse who get their share to cultivate their piece of family land in coastal areas. But in recent years, where agriculture has become a low priority area for the provincial government, more and more fish farms have been getting water from the irrigation system which was meant to supply it to the cultivators.

Leading researchers in agriculture and water fields urged the government prepare proper guidelines and rules for developing fish farms, and to preserve the share in water for agriculture, which was the backbone of the country's economy.

The farmers in Keti Bunder produce vegetables and major crops in the months of March, April and May. They mainly cultivate chilli, tomato and cucumber in August and September. Monsoon for these farmers is a blessing as it not only enables them to cultivate more, but it also recharges the underground water sources, and increases marine fish catch.

Presently, the entire coastline of the province, including Thatta, Sujawal and Badin districts, was experiencing the worst kind of water shortage. Those living in these areas have to spend a large chunk of their income to buy drinking water.

Sadly, all government-built water supply schemes are also in doldrums as they are disconnected from the canals and watercourses. In this situation, even keeping livestock has become quite difficult for the farmers; despite the fact that livestock itself has been a major source of livelihood for coastal communities.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/467093-commercial-fish-farms-deprive-growers-of-rightful-share-in-water

WHEAT FLOUR FORTIFICATION PROJECT LAUNCHED

Amin Ahmed May 04, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The National Fortification Alliance of Pakistan has launched a project in collaboration with World Food Programme (WFP) and the Australian government to fight malnutrition by fortifying wheat flour in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The project launched on Friday will support chakkis (small-scale grinders) to mill flour that is rich in micronutrients.

"Given the extent of the consumption of wheat from chakkis, this project will provide a firm basis to reach nutritionally vulnerable populations and provide them with essential nutrients, which is another step WFP is taking to curb malnutrition in Pakistan," said WFP Country Representative, Finbarr Curran at the launch of the programme.

Almost half of Pakistan's population suffers from micronutrient deficiencies which can lead to poor child growth, anaemia and many other health issues.

Reducing these deficiencies is a high priority for the government of Pakistan. To improve families' nutrition, the country has already embarked upon the systematic fortification of wheat flour produced by large-scale mills.

Over the next five years, it is expected that the output of all industrial wheat flour mills will be fortified with essential nutrients. However, fortification goals cannot be fully achieved without addressing the output of chakkis.

These mills produce wheat flour for nearly 70pc of the population, and most of these families are the poorest of the poor. This project targets the most vulnerable populations and fulfills the urgent need to assimilate chakkis within a broader national fortification effort.

Mr Curran noted the importance of using an evidence-based approach in designing and implementing an effective fortification model for chakkis, with a view to future expansion. The pilot project will provide the government with evidence about the potential for the chakki fortification programme to prevent micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition, particularly among the poorest populations.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480056/wheat-flour-fortification-project-launched

GROWERS DEMAND WITHDRAWAL OF RS300 FED ON SALE OF RAW TOBACCO

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter May 04, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Tobacco growers on Friday demanded withdrawal of Rs300 federal excise duty (FED) on sale of raw tobacco.

Addressing a press conference at the National Press Club, President Labour Federation Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Abrarullah said tobacco sector of KPK was contributing Rs135 billion annually to national exchequer.

“But the excise duty of Rs300 per kg on fresh tobacco in the budget of 2018-19 has placed the growers at the mercy of multinational companies,” he said.

He added: “Tobacco like other agricultural products was under the domain of provincial government but the federal government had introduced the federal excise duty on sale of tobacco to all the buyers except for green leaf threshing GLT unit.

He added as a result only the multinational companies could purchase the tobacco because only they possessed the GLTs.

A GLT is a processing plant where tobacco is prepared after curing mainly for cigarette manufacturing. However, there are several other usages of tobacco apart from the cigarette sector.

“Now we are at the mercy of only two companies and they have started to exploit the situation by reducing the price of tobacco,” Abrarullah said.

He also said that multinational cigarette makers were damaging the local agro based economy and the government should withdraw the FED on sale of fresh leaves.

When asked why are they raising the issue after almost a year after the imposition of FED, Mr Abrarullah said: “At the start of the fiscal year we did not even know what was Rs300 FED on sale of fresh tobacco to non GLTs.”

He said that the price of raw tobacco was between Rs200 and Rs250 per kg but now the buyers were even offering as low as Rs150 to the growers and it was after the authorities started to raid and fine non-registered GLTs.

They demanded that the government should withdraw SRO 1149(1)2018 which raised the FED on unprocessed tobacco from Rs10 to Rs300, but allowed relaxations only to GLT units.

Representatives of Sarhad Agricultural Rural Development Organisation Haji Abdul Nabi pointed out that the Rs300 FED on fresh tobacco will have a negative impact on a large number of small and medium enterprises affiliated with tobacco products.

“This will not only expose the labourers and growers but also give enormous loss to national economy as cigarette manufacturers are the only consumers of raw tobacco,” he added.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1480062/growers-demand-withdrawal-of-rs300-fed-on-sale-of-raw-tobacco

COTTON PRODUCTION FALLS TO 10.7M BALES

APP May 04, 2019

MULTAN: Cotton production dipped 6.94 per cent to 10.77 million bales up to May 1 this season over the corresponding period last year.

According to fortnightly report of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) on Friday, Punjab recorded a 9.55pc fall at 6.628 million bales and Sindh witnessed 2.45pc shortfall at 4.149m bales.

Of the total production over 10.25 million bales had been sold out as textile mills purchased 10m bales and exporters bought 103,540 bales, leaving an unsold stock of 522,626 bales.

Sanghar district of Sindh remained top producer with 1.28m bales, Rahimyar Khan district of Punjab stood second with 1.19m bales followed by Bahawalnagar with just over a million bales.

Only three ginning factories were now operational including two in Punjab and one in Sindh.

Published in Dawn, May 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1480211/cotton-production-falls-to-107m-bales

FLOUR MILLERS RAISE PRICES

Aamir Shafaat Khan May 03, 2019

KARACHI: With Ramazan just few days away, flour millers have hiked flour prices for the second time in anticipation of the wheat shortage due to heavy rains in Punjab.

The price of flour no.2.5 has been increased to Rs1,750 per 50kg bag against Rs1,700. Meanwhile, the 50kg bag was selling for Rs1,675 in the last week of April.

Prices of fine and super fine flour have also been raised to Rs 1,925 per 50 kg bag from Rs 1,875 while it was available at Rs 1,825 in the last week of April.

Wheat prices have been under pressure following reports of slight wheat crop damage in Punjab coupled with quality damage owing to rains. Flour millers said that wheat in open market now costs Rs3,275 per 100 kg whereas last week, the price rose by Rs100 to Rs3,150 per 100 kg bag.

Millers said that wheat from Sindh —which was harvested in March — has found its way in to Punjab while a number of commodity traders have also begun lifting the crop in huge quantities from the open market.

In a meeting held to discuss the crop situation in the province, flour millers from Sindh said the wheat prices did not pick up during last season; however, the situation has changed this time around as rains in wheat producing areas of Punjab severely affected the quantity and quality of the crop.

Published in Dawn, May 3rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1479958/flour-millers-raise-prices

‘FOOD INFLATION MAY PROVE TO MAKE OR BREAK FOR INCUMBENTS’

BR Research May 3, 2019

An interview with Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director SDPI

Abid Qaiyum Suleri is the Executive Director of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute since 2007. He is a public policy advisor and development practitioner, who serve on various policy & advisory forums at international, national & regional platforms.

Currently, he is serving his third stint at Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council. In the past, he has served on National Advisory Committee of Planning Commission of Pakistan; and Trade Policy Advisory Committee, GoP. He has served across a wide array of platforms ranging from the board of key universities and on audit & finance committees of public sector enterprises.

In his role as policy advisor, he regularly reflects on the political economy of Pakistan in prominent research publications. Given the recent flurry of activity on IMF program, BR Research sat down with him to seek his perspective on recent news coming out of Q-Block, and what the latest round of fiscal stabilisation might entail for economy. Below are the edited excerpts

BR Research: Let’s start with a performance review. How do you grade the nine-month performance of the incumbents?

Abid Qaiyum Suleri: I believe this government behaved in a similar way any other government would have. Given the fiscal and current account mess at the time PTI took office, it had few other choices except reaching out to friendly countries and IMF for support.

However, it could have managed things better on two fronts. First, the decisions to approach IMF were unnecessarily delayed. And second, the government failed to manage public perceptions.

A party elected on a narrative of change should have been able to build a narrative centered on reform agenda.

BRR: How do you see economic challenges panning out over the next two quarters?

AQS: As we speak, IMF mission is on a visit and has already met with the bosses at Q-block. Over the next six months, the focus of fiscal administration perhaps needs to ensure that the macroeconomic inflationary pressures are kept separate from the micro-level inflation caused due to administrative failures.

Let me illustrate. Abnormal increases in prices of commodities in food basket witnessed prior to and during Ramazan have nothing to do with IMF or currency devaluation.

Second, the government needs to take political stakeholders along with general public into confidence over why it was necessary to undertake measures for macroeconomic stabilisation at this stage.

While the fiscal and current account reasons are just as important, it was critical to approach IMF to maintain country's credibility in the global financial community. IMF's Letter of Intent is crucial to ensure that credit rating is not downgraded by rating agencies such as Moody's and Fitch. Over the past year, how often have you heard this angle being highlighted by the treasury benches, let alone the media?

Yesterday, the new finance minister interacted with financial journalists covering developments at Q-block. We need to see much more of such discussions between the press and government's economic team. Otherwise, whispers and rumours will continue to dictate market sentiment.

Third, yes, it is a foregone conclusion that the IMF package will determine the contours of fiscal contraction in the upcoming budget. But that in no way means that the ruling party will have no room to offer relief to the lowest income tier.

The PM holds agenda for social sector development very dear. PTI can still deliver on this front because it holds power in two and a half federating units. It can undertake measures to improve services such as potable water, sanitation, education, healthcare and agriculture. These are all provincial subjects anyway. Unlike at the centre, provinces have the fiscal room to invest in public sector development. Moreover, they retain unexplored avenues to raise revenues.

While it is satisfying to see that discussions on the NFC award are already underway, PTI should take the baton to push for provincial finance award as well. After all, encouraging democratic institutions at grassroots levels was a salient feature of their election manifesto.

Remember, if we are to ever see an end to inequity in public spending between Karachi and Kashmore or Rajanpur and Rawalpindi, fiscal devolution to tertiary governments is essential. It will enable a more equitable distribution of resources based on metrics such as population and poverty. This will have a ripple down effect even if austerity curtails PSDP at the centre.

BRR: Let's stay at IMF for a moment. Do you believe entering an IMF program early on would have reduced the uncertainty that we see in markets today?

AQS: The delay had its positives too. Unlike past governments, the incumbents proved their credibility by succeeding in raising support from friendly countries to meet balance of payment requirements for the first three quarters.

Except, the government should have clearly communicated from day one that it will not enter an IMF program in its first fiscal year. That would have set the inflationary expectations and investment climate accordingly.

During the past nine months, the limbo and indecision on IMF program led to a dollarisation of economy, where every other person tried to convert his savings to cash in on exchange rate speculation.

BRR: You mentioned that administrative measures are needed to curtail inflation in food prices. Stringent measures to reign in speculation in commodity mandis' were common during the PML-N rule. Do you think the incumbents have the will and competence to take similar actions in their freshman year?

AQS: It doesn't matter whether they lack the willingness; inflation in food prices may prove to be the make or break for this government.

Granted, it is in a catch-22 situation, specially since Brent prices are touching $72 per barrel. I believe the recent decision to not pass on the effect of oil prices right before Ramazan is a temporary but much needed step.

This is especially significant considering government will need to pass on additional taxes close to Rs500 billion in the upcoming budget right after Ramazan. In order to make those unpopular decisions more palatable, keeping food prices under check around Eid will be a litmus test. If they fail, you will see both opposition and media driving the government into the corner, and it may find it hard to fight its way out of it.

BRR: You are also a part of Economic Advisory Council (EAC). Do you believe that the outgoing finance minister was unable to make full use of the members' expertise?

AQS: No. Sub-groups were formed to prepare strategies on issues such as export competitiveness; macro-economic stability; poverty & social safety nets. Reports were submitted and a lot of the recommendations contained therein were incorporated into the second amendment to the finance bill presented by this government.

The macroeconomic framework was handed over by EAC back in November 2018. Yes, because of the other urgent priorities at the time, government was unable to pace its synthesis, which resulted in a delay in its announcement.

I was a member of two EACs during the previous government as well, and I can tell you that the current EAC has held meetings far more frequently than its previous incarnations. It is easy for experts like us to peddle policies sitting on the outside; decision makers on the other hand must take into account the political economy of those policies.

BRR: What approach has the fresh finance minister taken to EAC?

AQS: Please remember that it is Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, not finance minister's. The new FM has been preoccupied first with IMF and now BRI, but I am sure once things settle, he shall call a meeting of EAC members and apprise us with details of discussions with IMF. At the same time, most members have continued their policy advocacy through op-eds and media. As policy advisors, we continue to raise our voices from both within and without official forums.

BRR: Another economic advisory board has been formed which consists of practitioners from the industry. What is your opinion of the efficacy of forming two councils at the same time?

AQS: The efficacy depends on how well such taskforces are utilised; whether their recommendations are incorporated into policymaking. After all, governments are under no obligation to follow advisor's counsel.

BRR: A commonly held view is that outgoing FM failed to timely change the Finance Secretary, who was well reputed as an administrator but was not a subject specialist. The position of DG DMO also remained vacant. No advisors were inducted in executive capacity, even though the FM lacked experience in public finance. Do you agree that this contributed to the performance gap on fiscal front?

AQS: Asad will be better able to answer this. However, naturally a question arises whether subject specialists are better suited for these positions or technocrats who have served in the ministry under several regimes and have a better appreciation of how to keep the administrative machinery running. Both have their merits and demerits. Having a powerful finance secretary who overshadows the minister is also not a great idea. It is always a balancing act.

BRR: Another criticism on the outgoing FM is that soft negotiations with IMF did not make any headway. Is that impression correct?

AQS: No. Not only Asad Umar and his team, even the SBP governor met with the IMF team. Formal negotiations with the staff mission may have seen delay. But even informal interactions with IMF revolved around identifying targets; revenue gaps; expenditure cuts and social safety nets.

BRR: Agreed. But given that government will have to impose additional taxes equivalent to 1.2 percent of GDP to meet the revenue gap, yet no details have been figured out with the IMF to this effect?

AQS: Both FBR and FinMin are looking in avenues of revenue collection. Appreciate that the unsustainable tax breaks offered in PML-N's sixth budget created provisions for revenue gap. It will come as no surprise to most readers that those measures may be reversed in the upcoming budget. Some respite has come from the superior judiciary, as taxes in telcos have been restored.

Given the current fiscal circumstances, unrealistic reliefs must go, even if people like me were the beneficiary of reduced tax slabs.

BRR: Which new areas do you think will see new or increased taxes?

AQS: The past two IMF programs saw GST increase by one percentage point in both instances. We may hear about GST harmonization again, and it may rise by one or two percentage points. As I have already pointed out, income tax reliefs announced in the last fiscal year will have to go. Petroleum levy may also see an increase considering the collection stays with the centre and is not shared with the federal divisible pool.

On the expenditure side, you may see cuts in planned large scale infrastructure projects. Those may be shelved for the time being.

I want to point out that these are assumptions; but there are few other avenues available to centre to collect taxes from. Final figures will depend on level of fiscal deficit negotiated. That will then be used as a benchmark to reverse engineer revenue targets and expenditure cuts. This has always been the case.

BRR: During the last two IMF programs, tax exemptions were removed to a large degree. It may prove hard to remove the remaining exemptions. Do you agree?

AQS: IMF needs to appreciate that the current government has taken almost all the much-needed unpopular decisions. If we intend to keep this economy from sinking into chaos, then we may agree on a destination, but the incumbents need to be afforded the flexibility of pacing and sequencing.

In the last IMF program, 16 waivers were granted to the PML-N government, most of which pertained to the same structural reforms that the PTI government now faces. Therefore, IMF will have to be realistic. Agree on fiscal targets for next three years, but with flexibility for the government to devise its own strategy to handle the political economic repercussions of those cuts.

The pressure issue from PM’s recent interaction with IMF chief in Beijing also spoke of a comprehensive reform package; any such package will have to include social safety net and poverty alleviation measures. If the IMF is too stubborn, it will be a lose-lose for both sides. Given Pakistan’s track record, the last thing the Fund would wish for is to initiate a tough program that fails to reach completion.

It has to be a realistic program which is politically sell-able.

BRR: Can you highlight important reforms needed urgently for the power sector?

AQS: First, the government needs to figure out how to continue targeted subsidies in the energy sector, given the current levels of circular debt. We may review East Asian and Latin American models to identify with surgical accuracy consumers in most need of subsidy. I must add that this is no easy job.

But price levels are only one side of the picture. Thirty percent of losses in T&D constitute in an equal opportunity injury to the national kitty. Similarly, unaccounted for losses in gas, if reduced, can also offer some relief to the consumer.

Third, we need to pivot towards renewables, especially in CPEC Phase II. We cannot continue to depend on fossil fuels for our electricity generation. We need to bring a three-year framework which sets annual stepped-up targets for introduction of renewables in national grid.

Incidentally, PTI’s mantra of ‘clean and green growth’ has been adopted by President Xi, who spoke of a ‘clean and green’ BRI along with sustainable development goals in the latest summit. Eventually we will need to move towards future technology with our international partners. Otherwise, dependence on fossil fuel can prove ruinous for Pakistan due to their inherent volatility and peg with foreign currency.

BRR: But as fresh power plants continue to come online, capacity charge continues to grow. How should those be passed on?

AQS: The obvious way to take advantage of excess capacity is to export energy through regional corridors. Since we have closed that option for the foreseeable future, the country needs to develop indigenous demand; otherwise, in the long run, capacity charges will kill the economy.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/03/494372/food-inflation-may-prove-to-make-or-break-for-incumbents/

ENGRO FOODS & FRIESLANDCAMPINA TEAM MEETS ISMAIL

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 3RD, 2019 | KARACHI

The senior management of Engro Foods and FrieslandCampina held a meeting with the Governor of Sindh, Imran Ismail at Governor House Karachi.

The agenda of the meeting was to discuss the need for public private collaboration to create sustainable livelihoods for small dairy farmers while also providing safe dairy products to the people of Pakistan.

Currently dairy comprises up to 50 percent of the agriculture sector and contributes 11 percent to the GDP of Pakistan. Engro Foods and FrieslandCampina, with the assistance of the Government of Pakistan are determined to build the capacity of small dairy farmers to improve the overall quality and quantity of milk and create sustainable livelihoods.

In the meeting, the Governor of Sindh stated that Government of Pakistan and Prime Minister Imran Khan is determined to work on empowerment of small farmers to increase their income and improve their standard of living. Also discussed was the need to harmonize food standards through regulatory authorities across the country for one main vision – safer dairy products. On the occasion Ali Ahmed Khan, Managing Director Engro Foods said,

“The vision of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to provide safe milk to consumers and to strengthen farmers is embedded in the core purpose of Engro Foods and FrieslandCampina as the company is owned by 19,000 dairy farmers globally. We believe in providing better nutrition through safe dairy products to our consumers, we are committed to empowering the small dairy farm holders to increase their livelihoods and revolutionize the dairy sector with best farming practices to build the economy of Pakistan.”-PRs

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190503469230/

MANGO GROWERS: MRI MULTAN TO INTRODUCE ICM

ZAHID BAIG | MAY 2ND, 2019 | MULTAN

In order to achieve yield and quality enhancement and increasing Pakistan’s share in the global mango market, Mango Research Institute (MRI) Multan is introducing Integrated Crop Management (ICM) to mango growers, which include drip irrigation, nutrition, canopy management and integrated pest management.

Pakistan stands at 6th spot in production of mangoes out of over 70 countries but it is exporting only 3.2 per cent of the total global mango export owing to several issues including poor shelf-life, inadequate infrastructure (processing facilities) and quarantine issues which are different for different importing countries. Interestingly Pakistan is at 9th place in top 10 mango exporting countries while the Netherlands, which does not produce mango, is in the second position. They import mangoes from different countries and then export.

The institute is also working to increase the area under Chaunsa (Samar Bahisht) besides ensuring sustainable improved quality by inducting new innovations in mango production technology. Besides this two new varieties are also being introduced which will enhance the period of mango export from Pakistan thus pushing the exports up.

Punjab has world's largest mango producing cluster spreading over 377 kilometers from Rahim Yar Khan to beyond Khanewal, said Entomologist MRI Abid Hameed Khan while talking to a select group of journalists here on Wednesday.

In irrigation, the institute with the funding of Rs One million from Nestle Pakistan is introducing drip irrigation system which can irrigate one acre of an orchard in 7-8 minutes supplying 14 liters of water to a plant which is sufficient for its whole day need, thus saving around 90 percent of water as compared to old irrigation methods.

Another intervention is canopy management, in which distance between two plants are decreased. He said that in conventional spacing method one acre of land hosts 36-42 plants. However, in High Density and Ultra High-Density farms, the numbers of plants sown are 1300 to 2000 per acre. Two demonstration plants shown to journalists at MRI have plants in the range of 1600 plants to 2000 plants per acre.

Using the pruning technique, the height of these plants are also kept at 7-8 so as management of these trees become easy. This is called Small Tree System (STS), by adopting canopy management and STS, production can be enhanced three times per acre as compared to the traditional system, said Allah Bakhsh, Sustainable Agriculture Specialist, Nestle Pakistan.

MRI Official Abid Hameed Khan said that the mango research institute is working to propagate the commercially attractive varieties of mango through the modern nursery. In this, seeds are grown in plastic pots and then supplied for plantation. He claimed that in traditional nurseries plants are produced in 2.5 to 3 years for sale while in modern nurseries these plants are ready for sale in 12-15 months, free of diseases at a low cost. Nestle Pakistan has also provided financial assistance to MRI for development of five such tunnel nurseries.

He said that liaison of research institutes with all stakeholders and academia and estate developers. He disclosed that DHA Multan was developed on land occupied by mango orchards. He said that now DHA administration was working on a plan to create orchards at different patches in that area.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190502469064/

USAID-FUNDED E-BEAM IRRADIATION FACILITY OPENS

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 1ST, 2019 | LAHORE

On Tuesday, Consul General JoAnne Wagner inaugurated the Electronic Beam (E-Beam) irradiation facility established through support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded US-Pakistan Partnerships for Agricultural Market Development (AMD) programme.

The E-Beam irradiation facility benefits the agriculture sector by decreasing post-harvest food losses due to spoilage and deterioration in quality. The technology also extends the shelf life of foods, and has the potential to increase market access as well as open up new export opportunities.

"We are pleased that the US government's efforts are helping transform Pakistan's agriculture sector by introducing innovative technologies," said Consul General JoAnne Wagner. "I'm confident that this technology will prove to be a game changer for Pakistan's agricultural exports."

E-Beam irradiation technology allows for fast and efficient sanitization of food and non-food products through an electron beam passed through packaged commodities. For fruits and vegetables this means longer shelf life and cleaner products as compared to any other sanitization methods available in the country.-PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190501468829/

23 'MISSING' FISHERMEN MAY BE IN INDIAN CUSTODY

By Aftab Khan Published: May 1, 2019

KARACHI: The 23 fishermen who remain missing since the storm at sea 15 days ago are suspected to be in Indian custody. It is possible that the pressure of the wind blowing towards the East might have strayed the fishermen towards Indian territory. The Fishermen Cooperative Society's (FCS) suspicions were further aroused after confirmation from Indian Port authorities of the recent arrest of three other Pakistani fishermen who had lost their way at sea due to the unusually strong winds and entered Indian territory. FCS has written a letter to the provincial home department in this regard.

After persistent efforts in the past 15 days, the search operation in various areas of the sea, and the mangrove forests near Keti Bandar, has now been scaled back. All ad hoc efforts made by different organisations including the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency(PMSA), the Edhi Foundation and the FCS came to no avail. Neither the fishermen nor their bodies have been found at sea so far. However, the equipment believed to be in their use and locally-made life boats were recovered from the sea eight days after the fishermen went missing.

Fisheries sources say that the families of the missing fishermen come to the harbour every day in hopes of receiving good news about their loved ones.

The FCS claims that it was in touch with their counterparts in Gujrat, India, where the chairperson of a fishermen association, Vilji Bhai, had informed them of the arrest of three Pakistani fishermen, who had strayed into Indian territorial waters. Vilji Bhai was also being harrassed by the Indian authorities for relaying the information to the FCS, it claimed.

The tides were dangerously high while the coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan were experiencing extraordinarily strong winds, reads the letter. It further explains that as the pressure of the wind was blowing towards the East, it is possible that the missing fishermen entered Indian territory. As no trace of them has been found as yet, and neither have any dead bodies surfaced, the missing fishermen might be in Indian custody, it states.

The families of the affected fishermen should be assisted in this regard and the matter should be highlighted so that the status of the missing fishermen can be ascertained, reads the letter.

The recent arrest of three Pakistani fishermen, who had set out for a short fishing excursion in a small launch, has further strengthened suspicions as those fishermen were also led astray due to the stormy winds.

The letter has also been sent to the federal ministry of home affairs, ministry of foreign affairs, Sindh chief minister, ministry of livestock, Sindh fisheries, PMSA director-general and fisheries director-general.

The 23 missing fishermen are believed to have been on the launches of Fazal Akbar, Al-Azizi and Al-Mudasir. They include the pilot of Fazal Akbar, Saifur Rehman who was from But Khalifa Malakand Agency, driver Ishaq Ghaman from Goth Misri Ghora Bari while Waqar Ahmed, Abdul Majeed Ghaman, Urs Rathore, Wazir Ali, Yar Muhammad, Alhorayo, Ayub, Muhammad Urs, Nasrullah Ghaman, Diyar Khan, Hazratullah, Rasheed, Saieen Dino, Wazir Ghaman and others hail from Thatta, Ghora Bari, Sajwal and Mirpur Sakro. Most of the missing are believed to have been aboard the Fazal Akbar Launch.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 1st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1963074/1-23-missing-fishermen-may-indian-custody/

‘SMALL FARMERS MUST USE SMART MACHINERY’

By Imran Rana Published: May 1, 2019

FAISALABAD: Infected seeds and a lack of mechanisation, especially by small farmers, are hampering efforts to realise the true potential of agriculture sector, said University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ashraf.

Speaking at an event titled Zaraee Baithak, arranged by the Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics, Ashraf termed the use of smart agriculture machinery vital at the national level for small farmers.

“The university has taken up the issue of development of climate-resilient seeds for food security and enhancing per-acre production,” he said. “Amid the ever-increasing population, decreasing fertility and agricultural land, we need to adopt modern trends in agriculture to tackle the situation effectively.”

Speaking on the occasion, UAF Faculty of Animal Husbandry Dean Dr Sajjad Ahmad Khan said better feeding techniques should be adopted for improved animal milk production. He said UAF was making all-out efforts to address problems of the farming community and to turn around the agriculture sector.

UAF’s former dean agriculture Iftikhar Ahmad said, “we must keep the nutrition value of fodder in view”. He pointed out that amid the increasing population, agricultural land was depleting and was being used for residential and other purposes. “Retaining the agricultural land in present times is a challenge,” he remarked.

Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics Chairman Dr Tanwir Malik said with better fodder usage, animal milk production could be enhanced. He was of the view that with high temperature, the production of fodder decreased and the issue needed to be addressed.

Progressive farmer Basharat Jaspal said the adoption of modern agricultural methods in line with international standards, using climate-resilient seed varieties and timely sowing of crops were the prerequisites to raising agricultural yield and ensuring food security.

Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics Assistant Professor Dr Amir said UAF was coming up with new climate-resilient varieties of fodder, adding that Baithak was aimed at providing an opportunity to all stakeholders to addresses the challenges facing the agriculture sector.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 1st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1963008/2-small-farmers-must-use-smart-machinery/

SENATE BODY ASKS GOVT TO FIX COTTON SUPPORT PRICE

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated April 30, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research has asked the government to set minimum support price for cotton to ensure growers can earn reasonable profit on their crop.

If cotton price falls below support price levels, the government should intervene to safeguard and protect interests of growers, Senator Muzaffar Shah said while presiding over the committee meeting on Monday.

The committee asked the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to calculate the entire cost of production and fix the minimum support price based on that calculation. The committee also asked the ministry to undertake measures to ensure the cost of production is covered and growers get reasonable profit for their crop.

The committee expressed grave concerns regarding the fact that abadgars and growers were switching production from cotton to other crops. In Punjab, growers have been switching to maize, while in Sindh growers are now switching to sugarcane.

The committee recommended the ministry to take up the issue of cotton growers with the federal government.

Senator Shah said that cotton is the country's cash crop and growers would like the government to fix a minimum support price above the cost of production.

The committee directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to maintain a liaison with the Ministry of Commerce as well as the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) to purchase cotton from farmers at reasonable prices.

Ministry of National Food Security and Research Secretary Muhammad Hashim Popalzai also informed the committee that a dialogue is currently in progress with the PCCC however no positive development has emerged so far.

The committee discussed the damage to wheat crop in the wake of heavy rains and hailstorms in parts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and recommended the federal and provincial government to notice the damage and come up with a comprehensive compensation package for growers. Khanewal is stated to be the worst hit city during the recent rains and hailstorms.

The committee was informed that Government of Punjab has started lifting wheat crop at the fixed support price of Rs1,300 while Government of Sindh is yet to take a decision on lifting the wheat crop, probably due to financial difficulties. At the same time Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Supplies Corporation — federal government entity — has already started lifting wheat from farmers.

On the availability of fertiliser and water for the Kharif season, the committee was informed that the ministry had access to total availability of fertilisers and the committee was also briefed on the current water inflow situation for agriculture in the country, and was informed that surplus water was available to cater to both Kharif and Rabi seasons.

In relation to the production of vegetable oil, the committee recommended formulation of an oil policy to protect both growers and millers from losses. The committee expressed concern over the rising cost of production due to the declining sunflower and cotton production.

Published in Dawn, April 30th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1479355/senate-body-asks-govt-to-fix-cotton-support-price

GREEN TEA IMPORT REDUCED DUE TO 100 PERCENT L/C MARGIN: PTA

MOHAMMAD BILAL TAHIR | APR 30TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Pakistan Tea Association (PTA) chairman on Monday asked the federal government to reduce 100 percent cash margin on imports of green commodity. “The importers running business on small scale cannot afford to import green tea due to 100 percent Letter of Credit (L/C) margin that makes it difficult for traders to run their business,” said Chairman Pakistan Tea Association (PTA) Shoaib Paracha, talking to Business Recorder.

He said green tea is mostly consumed by lower class of the country. Common man, poor people of remote areas across Pakistan especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan provinces consume this product much. Paracha requested the federal commerce ministry to look into the matter sympathetically. He demanded relief for traders in this regard so that they may sell it to poor consumers at fair price.

According to the statistics released by PTA, the total imports of green tea during past six months had been around 2.25 percent of the total such imports.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190430468528/

CHAKKI OWNERS REJECT OFFICIAL RATE OF WHEAT FLOUR

The Newspaper’s Staff Correspondent April 29, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Atta Chakki Owners Social Welfare Association has rejected wholesale price of flour fixed by district price control committee at Rs38 per kg and said it had been done without taking into consideration rate of wheat in open market.

The association which met here on Sunday with its head Mohammad Hafiz Khanzada in the chair said the improper price was being thrust over chakki owners. If the committee did not realise ground realities then the association would challenge the commodities’ price list in court, said a press release.

It said the committee had in fact issued a certificate for adulteration by lowering the price to unrealistic levels and added that the association had written letters to deputy commissioner on April 2 and 19, informing him that price of 100kg wheat in open market was between Rs2,950 to 2,970 whereas flour of different qualities was being sold at varying prices and flour of 'A' quality was being sold for Rs42 per kilo.

It said the DC was urged to keep wheat price intact at least till Ramazan but the administration failed to control the price and on April 25 the committee fixed wholesale price of flour at Rs39 per kg in a meeting with traders. But instead of Rs39, last year's price of Rs38 per kg was notified in the list of commodities which was condemnable, it said.

The meeting observed that the committee had in fact encouraged adulteration by fixing various rates of commodities. Wholesale price of gram of No-1 quality was fixed at Rs102 per kg and that of gram flour of No1 quality at Rs100 per kg. Price of gram flour of No2 quality was fixed at Rs70 per kg and that of No3 quality at Rs60 per kg.

It said that overhead cost of wheat flour had increased manifold, still chakki owners were selling wheat flour inclusive of all vital ingredients to 90pc population near their homes in streets and localities of Hyderabad.

It said that and appeared as if some vested interests were influencing the committee to keep consumers in trouble during Ramazan to protect their own interests.

The meeting made it clear that if the committee did not fix flour price after determining price of wheat in open market then the association would challenge price list of commodities in court. Price of 100kg wheat bag in open market was Rs3,000 as of April 25.

It said the committee had fixed wholesale price of flour at Rs39 per kg but then profiteers had raised price of 100kg bag of wheat by Rs50 to Rs80 and now the same wheat bag was being sold at Rs3,080 in market. Given these conditions chakki owners were hard pressed to adjust price of flour, it said.

Published in Dawn, April 29th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1479006/chakki-owners-reject-official-rate-of-wheat-flour

DEALING WITH THE NEW WHEAT CROP

From the Newspaper April 29, 2019

The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) expects the output to be 25.16 million tonnes against the target of 25.51m tonnes. But the FCA estimate is old (April 7). The actual production could be less than that.

Rains and floods in Punjab continued after that day and their impact on the crop is yet to be decisively accounted for. The wide-scale damage to some varieties of wheat due to the windstorm and hailstorm in parts of the province, including Chakwal, Mianwali, Attock and Bhakkar, will also cause additional loss to the crop, media reports suggest.

Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan says the government is assessing and re-assessing the losses to the crop. By the time this write-up is published, the government will hopefully be able to quantify the total loss.

Instant causes for a crop failure immediately come to light. They are debated intensely in the media and policymaking circles. But the root causes are often ignored. When they draw enough attention, we hear promises of addressing them once and for all. If the government is new, the promises are louder. But things return to normal as promises are broken. That is how the country's agriculture has been treated, by and large, for decades.

Environmental and climatic changes are causing abrupt rains and floods. They are bound to impact our agriculture. What has Pakistan done so far to fully grasp the nature of these changes and their impact? Have we sensitised our farmers on a vast scale?

Crop failure in Punjab, mismanagement in wheat procurement in Sindh and damages to carryover stocks stored at dilapidated facilities paint an unenviable picture of how our agriculture sector is operating

Do we have today effective and greater liaison between the federal and provincial agencies and departments dealing with environmental issues and agriculture? What percentage of our farmers uses smart phones? What phone applications do we have to enable them to get quicker access to weather forecasts?

Have we equipped our weather forecasters well enough to improve the quality of their predictions? The list of such questions goes on and on. But the answers to them leave a lot to be desired. Some of these issues, however, came up at a mid-April meeting in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, but in casual reference or in exchange of blames.

The sowing of wheat is often delayed due to the late harvesting of sugar cane. Losses to the wheat crop due to heavy rains and floods in April are sure to remain high in such areas. That brings to the fore the issues related to the cane crop. The late reaping of this crop could be to ensure the highest sucrose contents. Or it could also be due to the delayed sowing in the wake of a late decision on support price.

More often, we see delays when a traditional tiff between sugar millers and cane growers turns uglier. Who doesn't know that wheat and sugar cane crops are under immense influence of our politicians, some of whom are regularly accused manipulating things to their end? Problems are complex; solutions have to be wholesome.

The quality of wheat seed varieties is also important in determining the extent of crop losses — in the case of rains, not floods. Developing rain-resistant seed varieties and promoting their use among farmers can minimise the damage. That opens up a painful debate on whether we allocate enough funds for research and development? Do we actually use the bulk of those funds to meet core objectives? Obviously, the answer is no or very little.

Rains and floods also damage a large part of the wheat stocks of the previous crop stored improperly by farmers and even at the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) warehouses that lack modern facilities. At least those stocks could be saved from heavy rains and, to some extent, floods as well. That can ensure the availability of enough wheat. The FCA's meeting on April 7 had estimated 3m tonnes of carryover stocks. Authorities may soon get a reality check once they get the final estimate of damages caused by rains and floods.

In our case, the availability of wheat for domestic consumption is not an issue. Even after accounting for the possible damage to the standing crop as well as to the carryover stocks, we will still be able to continue exports. The problem is: we will have smaller wheat stocks for exports next year. That means smaller foreign exchange earnings amidst a foreign exchange crisis.

In the first nine months of this fiscal year, Pakistan has exported about 558,000 tonnes of wheat, up more than 80 per cent from 307,000 tonnes a year ago. Export earnings, too, have risen to $122m from around $60m. To sustain this rising trend in the next fiscal year, it is not just enough to maintain the exportable surplus volumes. Equally important is maintaining the health of wheat grains. When rains and floods dampen the wheat stored at storage centres lacking fumigation and temperature maintenance facilities, large stocks go to waste or are dumped into markets for the use of the animal feed industry. We have seen that happening in the recent past.

In Sindh, the wheat crop has reportedly done well despite water shortages. But the problem is that the provincial food department is delaying wheat purchases for a paucity of funds to buy gunny bags for the purpose. Lack of storage facilities — limited to 700,000-750,000 tonnes, according to the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture — and a delay in official procurement are forcing farmers to sell the produce at less than market rates to cover expenses. Such experiences lead to crop switching in the next year.

Crop failure in Punjab, mismanagement in wheat procurement in Sindh and damages to carryover stocks maintained at dilapidated facilities paint an unenviable picture of how our agriculture sector is operating.

Major crops constitute an important part of agriculture, but issues persist in production, procurement, storage and management of the exportable surplus, affecting the entire economy. The resolution of all issues pertaining to major crops — or, for that matter, the entire agriculture sector — not only requires better policymaking but also effective implementation. Their resolution requires a strong political will at the federal as well as provincial levels. Sadly, that seems missing under the current politically charged environment. —MA

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, April 29th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1479116/dealing-with-the-new-wheat-crop

IGNORED HORTICULTURE

Amjad Mahmood April 29, 2019

THE country is unlikely to achieve a competitive cost of production and fruit yield as it lacks certified nurseries for fruit saplings. Such places help provide good quality true-to-type trees for healthy orchards, leading to better output.

According to the Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company, the horticulture sector contributes about 12 per cent to the national agriculture GDP, but its volume of exports remains relatively low.

Multiple factors mar export potential. These include lack of international certification, grading, labelling, value-addition, packaging, market access, and huge pre- and post-harvest losses that run between 20-40 per cent. Want of appropriate farm-to-market roads, shortage of skilled labour and absence of institutional credit further worsen the situation.

The horticulture sector contributes about 12 per cent to the national agriculture GDP, but its volume of exports remains relatively low

Due to these issues the local per hectare output in citrus is around 11 tonnes against the world per hectare average of 35 to 40 tonnes. Ironically, local production is almost half of what is being harvested in neighbouring India, which has similar soil and weather conditions.

Experts caution that despite resolving the above-mentioned issues the country cannot conquer international markets for its fruit exports until it doesn't catch up with the world average yield. This will make local agriculture products competitive. They say a farmer will benefit from their orchards only when they are able to export at least 50pc of their production.

An official of the Horticulture Research Institute, Faisalabad, counts the unavailability of true-to-type plants and low-grade nursery plants as the primary reason behind poor fruit yields.

The official who wishes not to be named, also refers to the use of low organic matter, saline soils, uncertain weather, unfit tube well water, faulty intercropping and inadequate and unbalanced fertiliser application, as other negative factors.

Endorsing this view, Director (technical, fruit and vegetable development) at Punjab Agriculture Department, Sajid Ahmad, says "Our fruit growers don't get true-to-type trees or say the saplings provided by the nurseries are not genetically pure and thus lack the ability to achieve their optimal production level to the disadvantage of the farmer. That's the major issue behind our low fruit yields. This leads to a higher cost of production that makes exports uncompetitive in world markets."

The reason behind this genetic impurity is a lack of certified nurseries with decent capacity. "There are only a few nurseries in the country that supply fruit saplings and, unfortunately, it is rare for them to have developed technical, scientific and financial capacity needed to maintain health and purity of the germ-plasm," he says.

The situation will continue to worsen as at least 10,000 acres per annum are being added to citrus orchards while old trees are also being uprooted to plant new ones in the hope of reaping a better return from new plantations.

Sharing his experience about the capacity and standards of nurseries internationally, Mr Ahmad says that there are nurseries in Australia each one of which may provide two million healthy, certified saplings per year to farmers with not a single complaint about genetic impurity or disease.

Meanwhile, minimum Fruit Plant Certification Standards for citrus, mango and guava have been drafted and are awaiting approval from the National Seed Council, while the standards for grapes, olive and palm are still being drafted. Arrangements to carry out sampling and virus indexing of the fruit plant germ-plasm units (GPUs) are also in the pipeline.

Some public sector institutions are making an effort to meet the need for certified rootstock and budding. The Pakistan Agriculture Research Council recently announced the provision of 20,000 certified hybrid fruit plants to promote orchard farming in different ecologies of the country.

Plant nurseries have been developed at the National Tea and High Value Crop Research Institution (NTHRI), Mansehra, where 60 types of fruit plants, including apple, peach, apricot, cherry, almond, fig, pomegranate and walnut have been developed.

But these efforts are inadequate keeping in mind the volume required for export and the fact that the government cannot do business as efficiently as the private sector can, says the agriculture official.

Mr Ahmad says that plant spacing is another issue because of deficient labour technologies and machinery. The world has successfully experimented with high density cropping by growing citrus and mango trees at close distances. The result is that the lower branches of the trees become deadwood and bear less fruit under the shade of the upper branches.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1479115/ignored-horticulture

PRICES OF ESSENTIAL FOOD ITEMS SKYROCKET AHEAD OF RAMAZAN

AMJAD ALI SHAH | APR 29TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

Prices of essential commodities, including vegetable, pulses, sugar, dates, beverages, except chicken meat, eggs, have increased manifold in provincial capital ahead the holy month of Ramazan, said in a survey carried out by Business Recorder here on Sunday.

According to the survey, the prices of almost all edibles have touched new heights as just a week left in commencement of the Ramazan. It was noticed that price of gram flour (baisen) has been raised at Rs 140 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs 120 per kilogramme in the previous week. Sugar is being sold at Rs72 per kilogramme against the rate of Rs68 per kilogramme in last week.

Dates are being available within range of Rs 200 and Rs 300. A visible increase in prices of different quality/brands beverages was also witnessed in retail market. Butchers have also sharpened their knives as charging the consumers with artificial rates. One kilogramme cow meat is being sold at Rs 400 and Rs 450 per kilogramme in local market, while mutton beef priced at Rs 800 and Rs 900 per kilogramme.

One-kilogramme chicken live/meat were being sold at Rs 191 per kilgoramme which was selling at Rs 197 per kilogramme in the last week. Farm eggs are being sold at Rs 80 and Rs 90 per dozen.

Good quality rice (sela) is being sold at Rs 150 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs 140 per kilogramme, while toota rice priced at Rs 80 per kilogramme. Big size white channa is being sold at Rs 140 against the price of Rs 130 per kilogramme.

Dal mash is available at Rs 140 per kilogramme, dal masoor at Rs 100 per kilogramme against the price of Rs 90 per kilogramme, the survey noticed, and added that dhoti dal priced at Rs 130 per kilogramme, red bean is being sold at Rs 140 and Rs 180 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs 120 and Rs 160 per kilogramme respectively. Moonge is being sold at Rs 150 per kilogramme.

The survey further said that white lobiya is being sold at Rs 120 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs 110 per kilogramme. Dal chilka (black) was available at Rs 140 per kilogramme while dal chilka (green) priced at Rs 130 per kilogramme. Dal channa is being sold at Rs 120 per kilogramme.

According to the survey, the prices of cooking oil/ghee of different brands and quality was remained unchanged in the retail market as available within range of Rs 170, Rs 180 and Rs 200 per litre/kg.

Price of tomato has increased at Rs 80 and Rs 100 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs60 per kilogramme in last week, while rate of onion also touched new peak as available at Rs50 and Rs 60 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs 30 and Rs40 per kilogrmame in the last week.

Price of green chili has decreased at Rs 150 per kilogram which was selling at Rs 200 per kilogramme in last week. Carrots are being sold at Rs50 per kilogramme, while lemon priced at Rs 120 and Rs 140 per kilogramme in open market.

The survey further witnessed that ginger is being sold at Rs 280 and Rs 300 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs 240 per kilogramme in the local market. Garlic is being sold at Rs 140 per kilogramm and 160 per kilgoramme

Ladyfinger is being sold at Rs 100 per kilogramme against the rate of Rs80 per kilogramme. Peas are being sold at Rs80 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs 60 per kilogramme. Apple, round and long gourds are being available at Rs 60 per kg, Rs 80 per kg, and Rs 100 per kilogramme. Capsicum is being sold at Rs80 per kilogramme. Red potato is being sold at Rs 20 and Rs 30 per kg.

Bitter ground (Kerala) is being sold at Rs 100 per kilogramme which was selling at 80 per kg.

As the holy month of Ramazan is approaching fast, the price of fruits is dearer in the local market as banana is being sold at Rs 120 per dozen, showing an increase of Rs 60 per dozen.

Melon is being sold at Rs70 per kg against the price of Rs40 per kg in the previous week. Apples are being sold at Rs 120 and Rs 140 per kg. Strawberry is being sold at Rs 100 and Rs 120 per kg.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/04/20190429468114/

KEEPING PACE: CAN TURKISH METHODS REVOLUTIONISE FISH FARMING IN K-P?

By Ehtisham Khan Published: April 29, 2019

PESHAWAR: Following the Turkish model of fish farming, the provincial government has decided to increase the production of trout fish by using underwater cages as part of fish farming ships.

For this purpose, the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) government has finalised a three-year pilot project to install cages in dams and lakes across the province.

While fish farming is an old practice in K-P, the fisheries department has for the first time decided to initiate trout production through cages in the cold waters of Diamer with the help of large farming ships, The Express Tribune has learned.

This cage system – often referred to as “off-shore cultivation” – is a method wherein fish are locked in cages where they are bred and are harvested when they reach a certain marketable size.

The government has allocated Rs26 million for the project, work on which has already commenced on an experimental basis.

As a starting point, the tendering process to purchase two purpose-built cages and a large ship for Diamer-Bhasha Dam has been completed. The process of establishing a shelter office, installing the cages, and construction of a store for fish feed is expected to be completed by the end of 2019.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, the director of appointment for trout fish farming Taj Muhammad said that they are likely to outsource the project of installing the ship and the cages to a private firm after inviting tenders, while the department will look after the production of fish, food, and other affairs.

"The first phase of the project is being carried out on an experimental basis," Muhammad explained. "If it turns out to be successful, then it will be expanded to other dams of the province as well."

Explaining the advantages of cage farming, Muhammad said that the method will not only increase the production of trout fish in the province but will also create awareness about the new fish farming method among the people of the province.

"The idea of the project came from Turkey," Muhammad conceded, adding, "A few months ago, a K-P delegation, which included the K-P Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Mohibullah Khan had toured Turkey, where they got a chance to get a closer look at some modern methods of cage farming and how it plays an important role in the Turkish economy."

At present, Turkey is at the top of its game in fish farming and is rapidly expanding the industry. The country exports different types of fish to many countries of the world and utilises about 91% of its marine water resource for the purpose.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, Turkey produces more than 172,492 tonnes of fish annually through cage farming and other farming methods. A chunk of this production is related to trout harvesting in cold water.

In 2016, Turkey was the largest fish-producing country in the world and is currently the largest exporter of fish to Europe, the United States and Central Asia.

Speaking on the matter, the deputy director planning and development at K-P's fisheries department Muhammad Zubair told The Express Tribune that K-P is well-known for the quality of its trout and it annually produces 300 metric tonnes of the fish.

"Currently, there are eight trout hatcheries in the province out of which seven are functional where 1.53 million trout fish are produced each year," Zubair said.

"Young trout fish are produced in the hatcheries and then sold to around 208 different private fish farms," he said, adding, "One young trout fish, which is about an inch long, is sold for six rupees, while a two-inch trout is sold for Rs18 to fish farms in accordance with government rates."

He elaborated that the government is taking steps to increase the production of fish other than trout as well. Every year, thousands of fish species are released into rivers, lakes and dams, per the department of fisheries.

"About 200,000 small fish have been released into Tarbela Dam with the assistance of the government, while another 50,000 were released into the river in Azakhel Bala, in Nowshera, so as to increase the number of fish in there," he said.

Zubair also said that if the government facilitates the production of more trout fish then it will not only be beneficial from a business perspective but will also boost tourism in K-P.

At the moment, trout fish is available at Rs1,000 to 1,500 per kilogramme in Swat, Dir, Kalam, Peshawar and other northern areas, while it is sold for Rs3,000 in most upscale hotels and restaurants. However, if the cage farming project proves successful, then an increase in the production of trout will also lower its prices.

Published in The Express Tribune, April 29th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1961554/1-keeping-pace-can-turkish-methods-revolutionise-fish-farming-k-p/

SURPLUS RICE SEED AVAILABLE FOR 2019-20 SOWING SEASON

By APP Published: April 29, 2019

ISLAMABAD: For the 2019-20 Kharif sowing season, the total amount of available paddy seed is 50,192 metric tons (mt), including 2,757 metric tons of imported seeds, which is 121.28 per cent of the requirement of 41,385 metric tons.

According to official data, the total availability of paddy seed had been 74,485 metric tons, 135 per cent of the total demand, for the 2018-19 sowing season.

The data also revealed that Punjab has 41,975 metric tons of paddy seed available which is 174.83 per cent of its demand, Sindh has 5,290 metric tons, 39.74 per cent of the provincial demand, while Balochistan has 170 metric tons of seed available which is just 5.62 per cent of its demand.

For the sowing of the maize crop in 2019-20, public and private sector seed agencies procured about 32,599 metric tons of seed, including 7,799 metric tons of imported seed, which is around 112.83 per cent of the total requirement of 28,892 metric tons.

The maize seed availability during the year 2018-19 had been 32,599 metric tons which was 98 perc ent of the total demand for that year.

The provincial breakdown for the availability of maize seed indicated that it is 24,567 metric tons in Punjab, 144.77 per cent of its demand, whereas, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it is 234 metric tons which is just 1.99 per cent of its provincial demand.

The data also tells us that, for the sowing of the 2019-20 Kharif crop of the ‘mung’ bean, the total seed availability is 1,401 metric tons which is only 32 per cent of the total requirement.

In Punjab, public and private sector seed agencies have procured 1,261metric tons of the seed, just 32.35 per cent of its requirement, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has 140 metric tons which is 62.25 per cent of its required amount. APP

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1961775/1-surplus-rice-seed-available-2019-20-sowing-season/\

JUNE 2019

AGRICULTURE

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUN 24th TO JUN 30th 2019

FOOD PROCESSING AND VALUE ADDITION – A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

By DR MUHAMMAD KHURSHID Published: June 24, 2019

ISLAMABAD: As Pakistan is primarily an agricultural economy, its food industry is the second largest with more than 1,000 large-scale processing plants including those for fast food.

Most reputable food units include both multinational and national brands. The food industry accounts for 3-5% of value addition, which can be easily enhanced up to 10% through research-based capacity building of farmers, service providers, processors, entrepreneurs and traders.

Pakistan is among world's top 15 countries in the production of major food-related crops. A variety of food crops, fruits, vegetables and animal breeds are produced in the country, which are sufficient for domestic needs besides contributing to exports.

With over 200 million consumers, Pakistan holds the status of world's eighth largest market. Consumers spend an average 42% of income on food. Food processing provides 16% of total employment in the manufacturing sector.

Over 75% of rural-based food manufacturers are running in the informal sector, which may find it difficult to have quality raw material, proper skills, knowledge and management.

Pakistan's food sector is changing significantly with a rapid shift in lifestyles and traditional eating habits. Retail sales of processed food are expanding 10% per annum with current estimated size of about $1.4 billion (including $325 million worth of imported products).

Supermarkets are gaining more popularity as a shopping venue and account for about 10% of all retail food sales. In addition to these, Pakistan now hosts numerous western-style fast-food chains, reflecting a rising popularity for such food.

Despite tremendous potential and opportunities, the food processing industry in Pakistan faces numerous challenges. The ability of food processors at the industrial level depends absolutely on the availability of raw material but they mostly lack value addition.

Pakistan is a major producer of commodities and industrial crops such as wheat, rice, sugarcane and oilseeds. Livestock and horticultural products are also important elements in agriculture and provide additional raw material for processing and export.

A significant portion – 30-40% – of the total fruit and vegetable produce is wasted and degraded due to the lack of proper harvesting tools, insufficient on-farm storage, processing and packaging facilities, difficulties in cool chain management and storage, absence of international standards for quality and safety, and lack of adoption of global Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).

Other areas of concern include lack of vertical and horizontal integration in public and private sectors, lack of awareness, low capacity and skills including market intelligence, policy issues and insufficient data on food processing and value addition.

Consequently, Pakistan's economy is incurring losses of over $10 billion per annum due to these challenges.

Despite the obstacles, the industry comprises thousands of food processing units, generating millions of job opportunities in the country.

The size of the global processed food industry is estimated at around $3.5 trillion and it accounts for three-fourths of the global food sales. Employment in the US food industry is around 12 million and in Europe it is 2.5 million.

Most of the growth is taking place in developing countries in Eastern Europe, Asia and the Pacific, which are recording an increase in population, though major units are owned by American and European companies.

Japan is the largest food processing market in the Asian region followed by India and China. The huge market in Asean countries alone, with over 550 million people, provides a vast potential that needs to be tapped.

Despite its large size, only 6% of processed food is traded across borders compared to 16% of major bulk agricultural commodities. Fortune 500 indicates the food sector has been growing 15.9% annually over the past five years. Convenience products such as dried and instant food, reconstituted fruit juices, fruit juice concentrate like freshly squeezed juices and shelf cooking are becoming popular the world over.

Though Pakistan's food processing and value-addition industry faces many challenges, there is a great potential that can easily be exploited by tapping the available opportunities. Therefore, there is a need to devise a realistic and achievable national policy and strategic framework for enhancing the quality and volume of food processing and value addition in Pakistan.

Encourage and facilitate small-scale food processing units at household and village levels.

Ensure capacity building and credit facilities for small and medium enterprises in food processing and value addition.

Ensure adequate marketing facilities at the village level.

Increase awareness and disseminate information for promoting food processing, value addition and marketing.

The writer is a PhD in natural resources management and is a civil servant

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1998840/2-food-processing-value-addition-missed-opportunity/

DCS' NEGLIGENCE REASON FOR FLOUR PRICE HIKE

By Rizwan Asif Published: June 25, 2019

LAHORE: Negligence by Punjab deputy commissioners (DCs) and their lack of coordination with the provincial food department has exacerbated an already tense situation with regards to the price of flour in the province it seems.

The DCs, in addition to other tasks, are responsible for procuring wheat for flour mills on state-approved prices. According to sources, however, the DCs have not even issued a notification in this regard as of yet, opting instead to pin the blame for the hike on the food department.

Now, the Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) is demanding authorities immediately determine new prices for wheat and flour supplied by the government, which is currently being sold at rates set a year and a half ago despite the drastic increase inflation, electricity and fuel prices and the dollar rate.

Taking note of the issue, the food department has agreed to meet PFMA representatives to resolve the matter peacefully through consensus and a meeting is expected today, sources said.

Punjab's flour mills currently procure between 4.5 million and 6.5 million tonnes of wheat from the food department and between one million and 1.2 million tonnes from the private sector. As per prices set by the food department in 2018, a 20kg bag of wheat costs wholesalers Rs738 and retailers Rs760. Flour mills, meanwhile, could pick up a 40kg bag of wheat for Rs1,300 under the state-approved rate. Rising inflation, however, has resulted in the price for a 40kg bag of wheat soaring to between Rs1,420 and Rs1,460.

Under the government's formula, the price of a 20kg bag of flour is arrived at by halving the open market price of a 40kg wheat bag and adding a Rs100 grinding charge. The food secretary is responsible for calculating this price only when the wheat is sold by the government. In all other cases, the price must be determined by the relevant DC and announced through a notification. As the food department is not currently providing wheat to flour mills, the DCs are supposed to notify revised wheat prices in their respective districts.

According to PFMA sources, the association wants the Rs100 grinding charge increased by Rs10 due to the hike in electricity, fuel and other costs. The rise in dollar rates means that the cost of imported machinery and spare parts has also shot up.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1999477/1-dcs-negligence-reason-flour-price-hike/

CRACKDOWN TO BE LAUNCHED AGAINST HOARDERS OF SUGAR

RECORDER REPORT JUN 25TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The government has decided that a crackdown in collaboration with provincial governments would be launched against sugar mills involved in hoarding of sugar for profiteering which led to a considerable increase in the price of sugar in the domestic market. This was stated by Minister of States for Revenue Hammad Azhar on Monday while briefing the Special Committee on Agriculture, chaired by Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser.

"The federal government in collaboration with provinces and their minister will launch a crackdown against hoarding of sugar in sugar mills immediately after the budget," he said. The prices of sugar in the local market have increased considerably due to the impact of GST increase in sugar because of hoarding. The impact of GST increase on sugar from 8 percent to 17 percent would increase the price of sugar by Rs 3.64 per kg; however, increase in price is much more than this.

The minister said that the government has decided to review proposed powers to Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Commissioner Inland Revenue to enter and search residential premises and houses on the basis of information of undeclared gold, bearer security or foreign currency.

A new sub-section 6-A was included which reads that "the Commissioner shall, subject to the condition as may be prescribed, raid any premises where there is reliable information of undeclared gold, bearer security or foreign currency and confiscate the same in order to enforce any provision of this Ordinance."

The proposed powers to FBR commissioners were opposed by the Senate Standing Committee on Finance as well. "We are reviewing this proposal," he added. The minister of state for revenue also stated that the government has agreed to withdraw green leaf thrashing (GLT) tax on tobacco because it was a burden on the grower. However, he stated that this would not have any impact on the price of cigarettes. "We are ready to review all those things in the budget that could hurt the growers," he added. The minister said that withdrawal of this tax does not mean there would be any reduction in duty or revenue loss to the government.

The government, he said, is following the latest studies with regard to tobacco sector and "those days have gone when mutilators" and powerful lobbies" interest was considered important in policy making." He said this on some members" complaint with regard to influence of powerful lobbies on the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and wanted the minister to stop their influence. Azhar said that the government has estimated between Rs 114 and Rs 115 billion tax collection from tobacco sector in the next fiscal year and Rs 135 to Rs 140 billion for the subsequent fiscal year. The minister said that cigarette manufactures are not in favour of removal of GLT tax for farmers.

The meeting also decided to adopt a holistic policy with regard to revival of agriculture sector and especially arresting the declining trend witnessed during the last few years in cotton areas where sugar production is replacing cotton. The speakers assured the representatives of farmers that all their legitimate issues would be addressed and their meeting with the Prime Minister would be arranged as well. The farmers stated that it is extremely difficult for them to afford even existing rate after the inclusion of FPA and other taxes. The committee also proposed for increased allocation for agriculture research, particularly seeds certification and developing verities of new seeds.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190625490663/

GOVERNMENT URGED TO FIX RS 500 PER MAUND WAGE FOR COTTON PICKERS

RECORDER REPORT JUN 25TH, 2019 HYDERABAD

Government has been urged to fix Rs 500/maund wage for cotton pickers in upcoming picking season as inflation is going up day by day. This was demanded by the representatives of the 10 registered trade unions of women cotton pickers from Matiari district in a meeting held at SCF office Hyderabad. The meeting was organized by Sindh Community Foundation, a non-profit organization working for the protection of the rights of the women cotton pickers.

The meeting was aimed to discuss the issues of the wages, poor working conditions and social safety nets for the cotton workers. Javed Hussain of the SCF presided over the meeting and said that the picking season of cotton will start soon but no such framework of fixing the wages yet started for the informal agriculture workers. He said that only giving the right to association do not address the issues of cotton pickers under the SIRA but it should be coupled with inclusion of these workers in Worker Welfare Fund, social security and other social and health safety nets.

He said that these women workers also face miss-calculated wage as they are unable to calculate the wage per day as per picked cotton. He said that the SCF will soon launch literacy program for these workers so that they would be able to read and write and calculate wage properly.

Aisha Agha, Program Officer SCF, said that as these workers living below poverty line and work hard in the fields. She added that there should be legislative cover to provide these workers with better working environment providing drinking water, mask and gloves.

Sadori, President of a trade union of cotton pickers in Village, Yameen Ahpan said that growers are only bound with the cotton and government is only concern about the clean cotton but the women cotton pickers work in very worst working environment.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190625490707/

LOCUST ATTACK ON CROPS: GOVERNMENT URGED TO INITIATE SPRAY

RECORDER REPORT JUN 25TH, 2019 HYDERABAD

Deputy Commissioner Jamshoro Capt Fareed den Mustafa (retd) while taking a notice of locust attack on standing crops in different areas of district Jamshoro has announced to take drastic measures to control locust outbreak through insecticide aerial spray and adopting other means. This he said in a statement issued on Monday after reports of possible damages to crops in Thano Bula, Manjhand, Aamri, Sun and other adjoining areas.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190625490709/

FLOUR ‘CRISIS BREWING’ DUE TO VOLATILE WHEAT PRICE

The Newspaper’s Staff Reporter June 26, 2019

LAHORE: Wheat flour crisis may hit the market in a week because of the raids district administrations in the province are conducting on the shops selling the commodity at higher rates.

Flour millers claim that shopkeepers have begun refusing to accept new supplies after raids by administrations in various districts in the name of price control.

Leaders of Punjab chapter of the Pakistan Flour Mills Association Liaqat Ali Khan and Asim Raza say flour supply to the market will last only for a couple of days as most of the units could not procure wheat during the season and those having the stocks will consume in the ongoing week.

They say that the government wants to maintain flour prices at a rate when wheat was available at Rs1,300 per 40kg.

Wheat price in the open market has now crossed Rs1,400 per 40kg and the millers have no option but to pass the raise on to the consumers, they say, adding the government is adamant on forcing them and shopkeepers to maintain the flour rates.

Explaining the factors behind the wheat price hike, they say for the first time the government allowed poultry feed mills to purchase wheat from the market during the season, while flour mills were kept out of the race for the most part of the procurement drive and a major portion of whatever quantity of the commodity they could pick was again unloaded at official godowns as the government was failing to meet its procurement target, they allege.

According to them, the food department is also not announcing the issue price of wheat (the rate at which the government will supply the grain to millers later in the year) as the step can control the rising prices of the commodity in the open market.

They say the government fears that the issue price, if set at the prevailing market rate, will provide the millers legal reasons for increasing rates of their value-added wheat products.

The millers say flour price can be maintained only if food authorities begin supplying them wheat at Rs1,300 per kg, including the bag charges.

Meanwhile, Punjab Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry says the government will soon start checking stock of the flour mills and won't allow anyone to create 'artificial' shortage of the commodity.

He says, "The government knows how to establish its writ."

https://www.dawn.com/news/1490386

NO NEW TAX IMPOSED ON GHEE, FLOUR: HAMMAD AZHAR

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterUpdated June 26, 2019

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Revenue Hammad Azhar has defended his government's decision to increase tax on sugar, but denied imposing any new tax on cooking oil, ghee, flour and raw meat.

While the opposition in the National Assembly has been asking the government to take back its tax-heavy budget, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf stalwart and former finance minister Asad Umar has also asked his government to reconsider the decision to increase tax on sugar, ghee and cooking oil.

Mr Umar has also called for an investigation as to why sugar prices are on the rise. But it appears that nobody in the government now listens to him.

On Tuesday evening, Mr Azhar, while winding up the discussion on the budget for 2019-20, acknowledged having increased the tax on sugar from 11 per cent to 17pc and claimed the move would result in a mere increase of up to Rs3.5 per kilogram.

He said his government did not impose any tax on ghee, flour, fruits, vegetables and raw meat. He said taxes had been imposed only on “branded corn flour”, “imported fruits and vegetables” and “processed meat”.

About ghee, he said the government had revised a tax on per kilogram price of ghee but this would not result in any substantial increase in its rate.

He said the price of sugar had been on the rise in the market for the past two months because of the government’s action against sugar mills to stop them from evading tax.

Mr Azhar lashed out at the opposition for what he called spreading false information regarding imposition of taxes, unemployment, etc.

He also took to task the governments of the Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and said the PTI government was trying its best to clear the economic mess left by them.

He said the PTI government had taken serious measures to remove the structural flaws in the economy which were not addressed by the previous governments.

Referring to the last year of the PML-N government, he said the stability of economy was put at risk during the last two years due to political reasons.

He said the gas sector was facing a loss of Rs150 billion and the circular debt had reached Rs453bn.

The minister said the previous government increased the current account deficit and crippled the economy. It decreased the foreign exchange reserves to $9bn and left a deficit of Rs2.3 trillion in its last budget.

“When we assumed power, Pakistan had reserves of only $6bn. Today, foreign exchange reserves as well as the balance of payment (situation) have been stabilised,” he said, announcing that the federal government would not take loans from the State Bank of Pakistan.

He said that during the eight months of the PTI government the exports of readymade garments, fruits and vegetables had increased.

He said the government had allocated Rs217bn for electricity subsidy. He said that 75pc of power consumers used 300 or less units per month and this subsidy would be given to them.

About the revenue target of Rs5.5 trillion for the next fiscal year, he conceded that it was an ambitious target. “We should collect Rs8,000bn every year but we are collecting Rs4,000bn. Where has the remaining Rs4,000bn gone? We have to improve our tax-to-GDP ratio and this will not be achieved without reforms at the FBR and provincial tax bodies.”

The minister said the government had extended the stay overseas for a Pakistani to be called a non-resident from 90 to 120 days.

He took credit for the legislation to end benami and said the PTI government had linked the data of around 53 million Pakistanis and put it online.

Mr Azhar said the government had also taken back powers of income tax commissioners to raid houses in search of dollars and gold.

He said that with the cooperation of the provincial governments, the PTI government would spend Rs280bn on the agriculture sector.

"It would be our top priority to cross the phase of stability to take the national economy towards high growth," he said, adding that in the new Pakistan sustainable economic growth would not be based on the [fiscal] deficit."

About Leader of the Opposition Shahbaz Sharif's offer regarding a 'charter of economy', the minister said the government was ready to discuss the matter if the PML-N leader was serious in his offer.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1490480/no-new-tax-imposed-on-ghee-flour-minister

HYDERABAD MANGO FESTIVAL BEGINS ON SATURDAY

The Newspaper's Staff CorrespondentJune 26, 2019

HYDERABAD: Divisional Commissioner Mohammad Abbas Baloch has said that the two-day Hyderabad Mango Festival-2019 would be held on June 29 and 30 at Expo Centre in order to make it an annual feature like Mirpurkhas's mango festival.

Briefing journalists on the festival at Shahbaz Hall on Tuesday, he said 30 different varieties of mangoes would be exhibited there. Hyderabad was blessed with moderate weather conditions geographically and it was rich in agriculture productivity while simultaneously having a large vegetable and fruit market, he added.

He said Hyderabad's mangoes were liked across the world and purpose of holding this festival was to invite attention of foreign investors towards the fruit. It might help resolve problems of growers, he said, adding that other seasonal fruits would also be displayed besides mangoes.

He said the civil administration would try its level best to hold this festival every year in mango season. He added that this would benefit growers and local fruit market. He maintained the Sindh government's Board of Investment was collaborating with the civil administration which was providing logistical support. He said mangoes from Tando Mohammad Khan, Matiari, Tando Allahyar and other parts of Hyderabad division would be displayed.

A seminar would also be held on the sidelines of the festival to highlight growers' problems, he said, pointing out that a concert was also part of the festival.

About locusts' attack, the commissioner said Jamshoro district had been completely cleared of locusts and over 70 per cent areas of Matiari district were now cleared of the pests. He said that now insects were moving towards Shikarpur and Sanghar. He said teams were formed at the taluka and district levels to monitor locusts and control rooms had been set up for the purpose.

Sindh Enterprise Development Fund managing director Mehboobul Haq told journalists that the festival would begin at 11am on June 29 and over 30 stalls would be established by growers. He said that various varieties, including modified ones, would be displayed.

Later, the commissioner chaired a meeting of officers and representatives of growers' bodies to finalise arrangements for the festival. The meeting decided to ensure uninterrupted supply of electricity to the event. It said that proper sanitation and close coordination should be ensured among the stakeholders.

Traders want amnesty scheme date extended

Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industry president Mohammad Farooq Shaikhani has urged the federal government to extend the deadline of the amnesty scheme to Sept 30.

In a statement issued here Tuesday, he said that the relief could lead to fruitful results of the scheme. He said that Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) should encourage taxpayers and people, instead of harassing them so that they could benefit from the offer.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1490412/hyderabad-mango-festival-begins-on-saturday

WHITHER COTTON EMERGENCY?

BR ResearchJune 26, 2019

For months, PTI's economy team hinted at revolutionary steps for cotton revival on national forums including ECC and federal cabinet meetings. However, like most things in agriculture, PTI's talk has proven seasonal, as action on the front appears to be wanting in budget proposals by both federal and provincial governments.

Let's scan the official documents piecemeal. The federal government announced a Rs280 billion PM Agriculture Emergency Program for uplift of agriculture. Cotton as Pakistan's largest cash crop must be the biggest beneficiary; one might hope (or argue, if you are an Imran-bakht). Except, that the program is spread over next five years, of which no more than 30 percent is budgeted to be spent in PTI's second year in power.

While the budget speech mentioned that Rs45 billion will go towards improving yields of four major crops, look to Economic Survey for detail. Turns out, close to half of the budgeted amount shall go towards enhancement of wheat productivity, an off-season crop when farmers prefer to sow little else, and with a very poor output-input ratio of less than 0.25x.

This is followed by Rs11.4 billion for paddy, Rs10 billion for oilseeds, and nearly Rs4 billion for sugarcane. If the reader insists on searching for a silver lining, he/she may point out that oilseeds is another way of saying cottonseed – after all, cottonseed is the source of nearly three-fourths of domestically produced edible oil.

Except, fifty percent of the amount has been earmarked as subsidy for purchase of oilseed extraction machinery. While remainder will go towards making higher yield variety hybrid seeds available through local and MNC crop seed firms. Not much of a plan for staging a productivity revolution in lint-based fibre.

Maybe the provincial proposals carry more hope, considering crop incentivization is now mostly a provincial subject since devolution. Unlike federal documents, Punjab doesn't disappoint by censoring mention of cotton altogether. The crop comes up thrice in the White Paper published alongside provincial budget. Once, for its poor performance last year, and twice in the context of fiscal receipts: namely, cotton fee, and cotton export duty.

So, what turned cotton from PTI's favourite crop back in February to Lord Voldemort of budget proposals (he who must not be named). The public loves dichotomies and may wish to blame behind-the-scenes sugarcane kings in PTI for cotton's conspicuous absence. But to caution fanboys of populist media, both cotton and cane have suffered equally during the ongoing year due to shortage of water, each witnessing contraction in output by nearly twenty percent. Moreover, cane cultivation is set to suffer again in the upcoming season due to lukewarm farmer interest due to payment delays.

Nevertheless, this is not to downplay the strength of cane growers as a pressure group. In sharp contrast, average cotton farmer usually has a smaller landholding and is much more exposed to vagaries of weather and pest attacks.

Pakistan last recorded a quantum jump in cotton yield back in 2000s, when GMO seeds were first introduced albeit through illegitimate channels. Policymakers are acutely aware that the second round of yield growth – one that brings Pakistani cotton at par with region – can only come once second-generation GM seeds are made available, adapted to local conditions. These, they hope, shall provide cotton crop immunity against ever-evolving pests that have long developed resistance against first generation seeds. Except, that is a long road (Read: "GMO: separating fact from fiction", published on June 14, 2019; and "GMO Redux", published on June 03, 2019)

Until that happens, allocating funds to cotton productivity may be putting more money into a black hole. Meanwhile, support infrastructure can be strengthened by investing in agronomics such as introducing water productivity techniques. To that end, the government has set aside Rs179 billion over next five years. Cotton's conspicuous absence thus may not be such a bad idea after all.

Whither cotton emergency?

GOVERNMENT URGED TO RESTORE RD ON IMPORT OF COTTON

ZAHEER ABBASI JUN 26TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

A special committee on agriculture has recommended the government to restore regulatory duty on import of cotton to prevent its massive import and dumping and protect the local farmers. A set of pre-budget recommendations made to the government was also circulated among the members of the committee during the meeting presided over by Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser.

The committee also recommended that the Ministry of Commerce should explore the prospects of an indicative price mechanism and devise a viable plan for implementation after consultation with stakeholders.

The committee's recommendations included: (i) Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) should be abolished and no additional taxes should be imposed on pesticides and fertilizers; (ii) impose regulatory duties on competing agricultural products of Pakistan; (iii) reduce taxes on the import of skimmed milk powder and whey powders; (iv) ensure stringent price regulation mechanism to control the price of agriculture inputs; (v) and ministries of commerce, industries and production should seek and facilitate Chinese investors to set up fertilizers' active ingredient manufacturing and pesticides formulations facility in Pakistan in the next phase of CPEC.

The committee also recommended that the ministries of finance and commerce should explore feasibility of reducing customs duty and sales tax on supply of imported hand tool and small-scale agriculture machinery.

The committee seconded the proposal to extend incentives given under the green field and brown field investment to tractor industry as provided to auto industry under ADP 2015-21 to attract foreign investment.

The committee recommended that the funding for agriculture research should be integrated in the National Agriculture Emergency programme, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of National Food, Security and Research should jointly approach the multilateral banks and donor agencies to secure assistance for agriculture research and taxes should not be imposed on the supply of imported and locally manufactured tractors.

The committee was also of the view that exemptions should be granted on equipment and machinery supplied to agriculture research institution for research purposes.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190626491261/

PHUTTI PRICES MOVE UP

The Newspaper's Staff CorrespondentJune 27, 2019

MULTAN: Phutti (seed-cotton) prices on Wednesday jumped by Rs200 and ranged between Rs3,550-4,200 per 40 kilograms.

Meanwhile, the Karachi Cotton Association lowered down its spot rate by Rs100 to Rs8,400.

Cotton expert Syed Muddabir Shah said cotton arrivals in Sindh was down by 60 per cent on Wednesday as growers — disappointed by declining prices — have halted picking. However, ginners who had advanced orders ended up making deliveries after procuring phutti at higher rates.

Shah said that if the situation of declining trend in prices continued, the farmers are likely to ignore standing crop and not invest in pesticides. This will eventually affect the government's target of 15 million bales

Major deals on the ready counter were as follows: 1,200 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs8,650; 2,000 bales, Alipur, at Rs8,600; 200 bales, Khipro, at Rs7,775; 400 bales, Tando Adam, at Rs7,700-7,750; and 400 bales, Sanghar, at Rs7,700-7,800.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1490655/phutti-prices-move-up

FARMING OUR FUTURE

BR ResearchJune 27, 2019

Who will be the farmer of the future? The globally renowned agricultural and food expert Prof. Louise Fresco raised this question in her talk on the 'future of farming' at the recent biennial Global Entrepreneurship Summit held in the Hague. Louise, who has previously held the position of Assistant Director-General of the UN's FAO, laid out many possibilities.

She said the farmer of the future will be a little robot that cuts the bell peppers, with a very intricate 3-D system and knows exactly what the bell peppers are. The farmer of the future will also be a person who manages a vertical farm in a city inside a building with LED lights or alongside city's sewerage system; he will probably have no farming background but will know how to make use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI). Yet the farmer of the future will also be someone who still has to bend over and plant seeds and harvest manually without fancy technologies of drone, self-driven tractors, AI-based pesticide control and what not.

Her reasoning: “Farming by definition is location specific; it’s the art of diversity; it’s the art of managing exact resources of land or climate or animal.” And while there are some scientific principles and some values to be followed, “there is no blue-print to farming”. Farming of the future is not just about producing or extracting more from the land or using fancy technology instead of manual labour. It’s really about a balanced way in which we will deal with the environment.

There are some classical challenges to farming, such as climate change, water shortages, crop adaptation, food quality, animal welfare. In addition to these, there are a host of new challenges of which we as humans are only starting to see the contours of. How to bring farming in balance with the carrying capacity of the planet and biodiversity? How can we move away from a fossil-based energy system to a bio-based energy system – a kind of a bio-based circular economy? And how to detox earth’s bio-mass once fossil fuel addiction comes to an end?

“The most important sector of the future will be farming, because farming, forestry and aquatic environment are going to be the only way in which we can manage the biological resources of this earth. It’s through managing the bio-mass that we will have to meet all our needs,” says Louise. Others in the field, to whom BR Research spoke to at GES-2019, agree – adding that the management of earth’s biomass may not necessarily be through mobile apps, something touched upon yesterday. (See BR Research’s Want entrepreneurship? Change mindset! Jun 26, 2019)

Elsewhere in Europe as well as in the US and in Australia, strategic thinkers at government and private sector think tanks are trying to come up with ways to arrest urbanization. Some are curating countryside museums or otherwise organising educational field trips to youth to involve them with farming. Others are creating incentive systems to keep rural or countryside youth from migration, whereas some are retraining urban youth to kickstart a wave of crop and dairy farming in the cities. The argument being that while two out of five people in the world will live in cities, food that is natural and sustainable will still come from the farms.

These are some of the fundamental questions and ideas that the developed west is thinking about. It is up to Pakistanis whether they want the developed world to think about these questions, and be fed by them in terms of the products, policy and solutions they develop; or do they want to join them on this intellectual journey to ensure that they also have their say in the future.

Pakistan is not a complete stranger to private sector’s investments in affordable quality education. There were a lot of them prior to 70s’ nationalisation, which burned that field. But green shoots have begun to emerge. LUMS by Babar Ali, and Habib University by Habib group; these are some goof examples of private sector’s initiative to set up good quality relatively affordable educational institutes; the former started off as top business management school, and the latter as liberal arts school.

It’s about time that someone from Pakistan’s private sector invests in a state-of-the-art agriculture university focusing both on crop and livestock; but one that has a futuristic mindset instead of training young minds for ways of the yester centuries. Meanwhile, the country’s start-up and incubator community would do well to retune their focus to include modern notions of farming while keeping in mind that innovation is not just doing things through a chip; it’s a state of mind and in the case of farming it will have to be problem and location specific.

SUGAR INDUSTRY PERTURBED OVER CRACKDOWN REPORTS

RECORDER REPORT JUN 27TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

Sugar industry is reportedly perturbed over the speculations of a crackdown being launched by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) soon after the passage of the federal budget.

Talking to Business Recorder, one of the sugar industry players said there was a harrowing fall in the price of sugar due to a glut-like situation in the country during the past several years and the industry was not in a position to recover its cost of production that is why a number of mills were sold. As a consequence, the crushing season 2018-19 also started late in December due to carryover stocks and in the absence of any mechanism to dispose of the surplus stocks of sugar.

He said the industry remained engaged with the government as it was not possible to buy sugarcane from the growers at the support of Rs 180/40 kg at that time when sugar price was at a level of Rs 50/51 per kg.

The government having realised the gravity of situation and to mitigate the plight of the growers allowed export for the disposal of surplus sugar from the country and to facilitate this approval, province of Punjab also allowed export subsidy of Rs 5.35 per kg on the cascading mechanism basis so that price of sugar which had fallen below the break-even level could get stabilised in the interest of the growers and their payments in view of the international sugar prices.

Replying to a question, he said sugar industry has time and again reiterated that its cost of production based on the support price of Rs 180/40kg comes closer to 63/kg with the previously notified rate of sales tax. With the disposal of surplus, the domestic sugar market stabilised and industry was able to pay up to Rs 225-230/40 kg to the growers during the crushing season and the industry average was around 190-195/40kg and resultantly the average break-even with other cost push factors and interest/financial costs has considerably increased for this season. The Chief Minister of Punjab has also acknowledged the fact that almost all payments to sugarcane growers have been made for the current crushing season which was became only possible because of the stability in sugar price.

With the increase in sales tax rate, price will escalate further. However, ever since the budget has been announced on June 11, 2019 there is a downward trend in the market by almost two/three rupees per kg as the dealers have started taking delivery of the sold unlifted stocks and the availability in the market is in abundance. Sugar millers are obliged to deliver according to the demand and delivery instructions of the buyers/dealers, he added.

Answering another question, he said sugar is produced in 100-120 days crushing season and sold throughout the year therefore at any given point of time there will be stock in the godowns of sold/unsold quantity. Therefore, assuming that the sugar mills are hoarding stocks is a sheer fallacy. The industry is and remains tax compliant and in general all assumptions against the industry are based on hearsay, he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190627492076/

SINDH, CENTRE LOOK TO EACH OTHER FOR LOCUST CONTROL AS FARMERS FEAR FOR CROPS

By Our Correspondent Published: June 27, 2019

HYDERABAD: As the locust swarms continue to cut a swathe through the agricultural fields in parts of Sindh, the federal and provincial governments appear to be shifting responsibility on each other for terminating the harmful insects. The Sindh government has asked the Centre to depute more insect control teams to actively engage in both aerial and field spray.

“The first generation of locusts has already caused around Rs500 million to Rs600 million loss to the crops. The second generation, if it manages to grow in far larger number over the next week, will wreak havoc on the crops,” warned Zahid Hussain Bhurgari, general secretary of Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) while talking to The Express Tribune. “If the provincial government can provide Rs4 billion subsidy on sugar, it can spend Rs100 to Rs200 million on paying for the spray and other equipment required for aerial and ground sprays.”

While the provincial government seems to be relying on the federal government-led aerial and field operations, the farmers want the province to utilise its own resources and manpower instead of wasting time waiting for the Centre. “The provincial government will also have to play a critical role in quickly identifying and devising control measures,” said Sindh Abadgar Board Vice President Mehmood Nawaz Shah, pointing out that the infestation has also entered the populated areas where only ground sprays can be carried out instead of aerial one.

The locusts have attacked crops in Khairpur, Jamshoro, Matiari, Sanghar, Nawabshah, Noshehro Feroze and Sukkur districts so far. The farmers claim that the insects are more active in Khairpur, Jamshoro, Nawabshah and Sukkur.

The director-general (DG)of Sindh Agriculture Extension wing, Hidayatullah Chajro, informed The Express Tribune that the Centre’s Department of Plant Protection (DPP), which is primarily responsible for fighting the insects, has been requested to increase its manpower in Sindh. “We have asked them to depute at least one team in each division of Sindh,” he said, adding that currently one aerial team and one field team are operating in the province.

“The provincial government has set up emergency centres in each district to monitor and report the presence of locusts. We need a team in each division which can be immediately moved to conduct field spray”. An official source said that Sindh’s chief secretary assured the Centre at a meeting on Tuesday that the province will also contribute its resources besides providing monitoring services.

Chajro said that the Centre has also been requested to carry out satellite imaging of the areas under attack by the locusts. Hyderabad division Commissioner Muhammad Abbass Baloch claimed that Jamshoro has been cleared of locusts but the operation is underway in Matiari district. He acknowledged that the division is rich in agriculture and a further spread of locusts can endanger the crops. On Wednesday new videos emerged on the movement of locusts in Khairpur. The DG, however, denied that the insects have crossed Noshehro Feroze district.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2000948/1-sindh-centre-look-locust-control-farmers-fear-crops/

SHC GIVES FLOUR MILL OWNERS TWO MONTHS TO PAY ALL ARREARS

By Our Correspondent Published: June 27, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) directed flour mill owners on Wednesday to pay the mark-up money and arrears while hearing the reference against them of Rs400m corruption committed by getting wheat from the Sindh food department. A two-member bench comprising Justice KK Agha and Justice Omar Sial heard the corruption reference.

The food department presented the details of the meeting before the court. An official of the food department informed the court that his department, National Accountability Bureau (NAB) officials and flour mill owners collectively found a solution to the issue. All flour mill owners returned the money for the wheat but the mark-up money was not paid. The flour mill owners have been informed of the markup details.

The court directed flour mill owners to pay the mark-up money and all remaining arrears immediately. The court remarked that all dues should be paid by August 23 or the bail pleas of the accused would be rejected and adjourned the hearing.

According to the counsel for the accused, the money for the wheat taken from the food department was paid within 180 days according to the policy. The counsel argued that NAB was demanding mark-up money which was higher than the price of wheat. Khairpur, Ranipur and Sachal Flour Mills owners borrowed wheat from the Sindh food department.

According to NAB, the accused allegedly misplaced the wheat after borrowing it from the government.

Another two-member bench, comprising Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Saleem Jessar, directed police officials to take immediate action on a plea filed for the recovery of Sindh education and literacy department's missing employee, Aslam Kamal.

Aslam's wife informed the court that is has been five years since her husband went missing. She said that their daughter's wedding is coming up and the department has also stopped paying Aslam's salary now.

The court expressed annoyance with police officials for not making any headway in the case.'

"Does anyone realise what the family of a missing person goes through?" asked Justice Rizvi. He remarked that the police and other law enforcement agencies were not doing anything. The departments take around three months to complete just the paper work, said Justice Rizvi, adding that the police was simply playing the role of a postman.

The court asked if it would take another six months to find out where the missing person was?

The court directed police officials to take immediate steps for Aslam's recovery and find his whereabouts.

Meanwhile, the bench comprising Justice KK Agha and Justice Omar Sial gave NAB officials an extension to file the reference against the accused in the inquiry against Sindh chief minister's inspection team chairperson, Abdul Subhan Memon, and others.

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NAB officials presented a previous verdict passed by the high court in a land allotment case.

The court directed NAB officials to submit a copy of that verdict in the court and provide another copy to the accused.

The court inquired from the NAB prosecutor when the inquiry against the accused would be completed and the reference would be filed.

NAB prosecutor said that a month's time was needed to file the reference. He informed the court that after completing the inquiry, the reference has been sent to the NAB chairperson for approval.

The court gave NAB the extension and adjourned hearing till August 22.

According to NAB, the accused gave seven acres of land in Jamshoro to Qadir Bakhsh Shoro while he was still on the run. A total of 49 acres of land was allotted and Rajputana Hospital filed a plea claiming that the land belongs to them. To whom was the land was allotted, the hospital had asked. Around 42 acres of land was returned to the hospital following orders by the Supreme Court. Abdul Subhan and others are accused of allotting an amenity plot in Hyderabad illegally.

The same bench granted interim bail to former minister Sharjeel Memon till August 6 and issued notices to NAB Sindh director-general and NAB prosecutor. A two-member bench comprising Justice KK Agha and Justice Omar Sial was hearing the pre-arrest bail plea filed by Memon in the inquiry against him pertaining to illegal assets.

Memon's counsel, Khalid Javed, maintained that NAB's inquiry is based on mala fide intent and his client fears arrest. He asked for NAB officials to be restricted from arresting his client and said that the court cancelled NAB's arrest warrant for Memon in this case as NAB's mala fide intent was exposed.

The court accepted Memon's interim pre-arrest bail plea till August 6 and sought replies from the NAB Sindh DG and NAB prosecutor. The bench directed Memon to submit Rs1 million as surety amount against the bail.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2000955/1-shc-gives-flour-mill-owners-two-months-pay-arrears/

UREA SALES JUMP 103% AS KHARIF SEASON IN FULL SWING

By Our Correspondent Published: June 27, 2019

KARACHI: As the Kharif sowing season is in full swing, urea sales jumped 103% to 593,000 tons in May 2019 against 292,000 in April 2019, according to data released by the National Fertiliser Development Corporation (NFDC).

"Fertiliser sales displayed a positive trend due to the Kharif season (April to September), which will also remain high in coming months," said Aba Ali Habib Securities' research analyst Zubair Jatoi.

On a year-on-year basis, the fertiliser sales recorded a 20% increase over May 2018. In first five months of the current calendar year 2019, urea sales grew 6%.

Diammonium phosphate (DAP) registered the highest-ever sales growth of 147% at 213,000 tons in May 2019 against 86,000 tons in April 2019. Year-on-year, DAP sales rose 263% in May 2019 against the same month of previous year. However, in the first five months, DAP sales inched down 1%. Company-wise, Fauji Fertiliser Company (FFC) achieved the highest monthly growth of 206% in urea sales, followed by Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim Limited (FFBL) posting month-on-month growth of 178% and Fatima Fertiliser with 143% rise.

On the contrary, urea sales of Engro Fertilisers stood static at 141,000 tons in May 2019 over the previous month.

“Benefiting from seasonality, the overall fertiliser sector posted a positive growth in DAP sales,” Jatoi said.

The largest month-on-month surge in DAP sales of 638% was enjoyed by FFC, followed by 316% for Engro Fertilisers, 202% for FFBL and 55% for Fatima Fertiliser.

In the urea segment, FFC remained the market leader, contributing 46% of industry sales in the month under review, followed by Engro Fertilisers at 24%, FFBL at 13% and Fatima Fertiliser 6%.

In the DAP segment, FFBL emerged as the market leader, having 36% share in industry sales, followed by Engro Fertilisers at 28%, FFC 16% and Fatima Fertiliser 2%.

“The sector shows signs of growth in the near future, but demand may weaken if fertiliser producers decide to pass the impact of gas tariff hike on to consumers,” said the analyst.

The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) has proposed 31% and 20% across-the-board increase in gas sale prices for all categories of consumers of Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) and Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) respectively, except for the domestic sector.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2000919/2-urea-sales-jump-103-kharif-season-full-swing/

GROWERS OPPOSE MASSIVE CUT IN TOBACCO DUTY

Bureau ReportJune 28, 2019

PESHAWAR: The growers have opposed massive cut to the advance tax on tobacco insisting the government’s move will encourage the black marketing of the cash crop and harm economy.

They demanded immediate withdrawal of the decision to prevent their ‘economic murder’.

The government has announced the reverting of the Rs300 per kg advance Federal Excise Duty on tobacco imposed to check the illegal tobacco trade to Rs10 per kg.

Addressing a news conference at the Peshawar Press Club on Thursday, local tobacco farmer Abdul Qayyum said massive cut to the advance tax on tobacco would promote the illicit tobacco trade and hurt poor growers.

Accompanied by farmers Ali Ahmad and Gulzar Khan, he criticised the government for yielding to tax evaders. He said the tobacco sector could earn huge revenue through the Rs300 advance tax.

Abdul Qayyum said some growers claimed that the collection of advance tax on tobacco was exploitation and the demand for tobacco would decrease due to the imposition of the adjustable excise duty.

He said the Pakistan Tobacco Board Ordinance, 1968, protected tobacco growers and made it binding for tobacco manufacturing companies to purchase additional tobacco yield from growers.

Ali Ahmad said the farmers' associations were being used to pressure the government for withdrawing steps meant to curtail illegal trade to help the growth of tobacco crop.

He said growers were being exploited by the local illegal cigarette manufactures since the levy not only forced them to pay the adjustable tax on processed leaf but also provided the FBR with leaf purchase data for all manufacturers.

"This tax is advance and adjustable and is applicable to manufacturers and does not hurt farmers at all, whereas local illegal cigarette manufacturers continue to misguide farmers of KP for own benefits," he said.

The grower said the commerce ministry had fixed the minimum indicative price of tobacco every year after proper consultation with the representatives of tobacco growers.

Another farmer, Gulzar Ahmad, said local companies avoided tobacco purchase in the open market just to evade tax and that they also pestered farmers by delaying payments and rejecting tobacco on the pretext of low-quality leaves.

He said the local companies met their demand by using backdoors for purchases and not providing loans, fertilisers and other facilities to farmers, while noted taxpaying companies supported growers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1490836/growers-oppose-massive-cut-in-tobacco-duty

CROP-BASED EXPORTS: ADAPT OR DIE?

BR ResearchJune 28, 2019

Pakistan's status as a low-value commodity exporter is at best a misnomer. Over the past decade, consolidated share of crop-based exports has remained fairly stable at 17 of total commodity exports. Yet, that stability has come about due to a concomitant contraction in value-added exports, and not due to a growth in agri-exports. In fact, since FY13 when crop-based exports peaked at $4.4 billion, the sector has witnessed a secular decline with a CAGR of negative 0.8 percent over past eight years – touching a new bottom of $3.9 billion in FY19 on annualized basis.

While it is correct that prices of major grains and cereals have ebbed over the past decade, the purported "backbone" of the economy failed to usher in a volume growth in quantities exported. Just to showcase volume of basmati rice export, pride of Pakistan's cereals, has declined to almost half since FY11.

The fate of raw cotton has during this period has been just as abysmal. Once a net exporter, the country became a net importer during the 2000s with the textile boom of Musharraf-era – an acceptable trade-off considering the re-exports were hoped to offset the exchange loss.

Ever since, not only have textile exports remained stuck at average $12 billion throughout past decade, raw cotton exports have climbed down from $0.4 billion in FY11 to almost barely twelve thousand dollars. Given how cotton production has been performing, readers should not be surprised if the country records nil cotton exports in the coming fiscal year.

Which brings us to the why part. The fact is, just as industrial and services sectors of the economy, Pakistan's crop-based out equally consumption centric. Of the four major crops – wheat, cotton, cane and paddy, only rice has a significant export share out of total domestic production. Whereas, the state of wheat and sugarcane is not even worth a comment, with erratic years of exports largely function of government subsidy in years of extreme supply glut.

Moreover, if the decline in demand for Pakistani grains a function of international commodity prices that further cements the argument that local crop's lack of competitiveness is becoming increasingly unsustainable. Afterall, total global demand continues to expand, only to be fulfilled by economies such as China and India with higher yield and improved returns per dollar invested.

A sector that employs nearly forty percent of labour force and directly & indirectly sustains two-thirds of households in the country can survive on government protection only for so long. If Pakistan's economy is to break through the cycle of subpar growth, Pakistan's crop sector needs to usher in a revolution, and fast.

Crop-based exports: adapt or die?

THE CHALLENGE OF SUGAR HOARDING

RECORDER REPORT JUN 28TH, 2019 EDITORIAL

Sugar industry of Pakistan is generally in the news for one reason or the other. The latest tiding is the unusual increase in the price of sugar in the domestic market due to hoarding of this commodity because of the increase in GST on sugar from 8 percent to 17 percent announced in the Federal Budget for FY20 and its anticipated impact on prices. Taking a serious notice of this unsavoury development, Hammad Azhar, Minister of State for Revenue, while briefing the Special Committee on Agriculture chaired by the Speaker, National Assembly, Asad Qaiser, warned hoarders that the government had decided to launch a crackdown, in collaboration with the provincial governments against sugar mills involved in hoarding of sugar for profiteering which had led to a considerable increase in the prices of this commodity in the domestic market. The impact of GST increase was expected to raise the price of sugar by about Rs 3.64 per kg but the actual increment in the local market has been found to much more than this. "Gone are the days when powerful lobbies and interest groups were considered important for policymaking," the Minister asserted and vowed to bring to an end their influence. The meeting also decided to adopt a holistic policy for revival of agriculture sector and especially to arrest the declining trend witnessed during the last few years in cotton areas where sugar production is replacing cotton. Representatives of farmers were also assured that all their legitimate grievances would be addressed and their meeting with the Prime Minister would be arranged as well.

In our view, the recent surge in sugar prices in the local market is of course unwarranted and unjustifiable given the fact that there is no shortage of the commodity in the local market and the increase in GST could only result in raising the price of sugar by about Rs 3 to 4 per kilo. The actual price increase has, however, been much more than what was anticipated by the government. Average refined sugar prices have galloped by about 18 percent since April, 2019 which is nearly 36 percent increase compared to the corresponding period of last year. The price could go up further when the higher GST is actually imposed with the beginning of the next fiscal year. The concern of the government with this abnormal and unjustifiable increase in price is very much understandable since sugar is an essential commodity, particularly for the poor and average households who spend a good part of their disposable incomes on sugar and could raise a hue and cry to make the government unpopular if the price of sugar is no longer within their reach. While the availability of sugar at a reasonable price is politically expedient in the domestic market, there is no reason for the suppliers of this commodity to increase prices. It is quite true that the sugarcane production in the country had dropped from 83.3 million tonnes last year to 67.2 million tonnes during the current year but the sugar industry with its added stocks from previous years' production could easily meet the domestic demand of this commodity. To take notice of the unfolding situation by the government is also important for other reasons. Sugarcane crop is a high value cash crop and its production accounts for 2.9 percent in agriculture's value addition and 0.5 percent of overall GDP.

While the crackdown on sugar hoarders may be justified on the basis of larger interest of the economy and consumers, it needs to be analysed whether such an action could yield the desired results. It is the common experience that whenever the government takes administrative measures like a crackdown on the hoarders or arbitrary fixation of prices of certain commodities, these commodities generally disappear from the market and the consumers end up paying more in the black market. Besides, hoarders are known to perform a useful function to even out excessive fluctuations in prices by buying a commodity when it is in surplus and selling at a time when it is scarce in the market. The government, we are sure, is aware of these facts before a crackdown is actually launched, especially when the machinery of the government is not very famous for its efficiency and integrity to do the job assigned to it.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190628492273/

ANTI-LOCUST SPRAY NOT CONDUCTED: FARMERS

Dawn Report | 6/29/2019 12:00:00 AM

DADU: Menacing swarms of locust have spread across agricultural land on thousands of acres and damaged standing crops in several parts of the district but no functionary of federal or provincial government or a team of experts have reached the insectinfested areas to assess scale of damage and protect crops, farmers complain.

Farmers in Mehar, Gozo, Khairpur Nathan Shah and adjoining areas told Dawn that thanks to negligence of federal and provincial governments spray had not yet been carried out in the affected areas to exterminate swarms of locusts.

They said that locust swarms had spread across thousands ofacres and had already destroyed standing crops on many acres. After having eaten up standing crops and vegetables, the swarms were now moving to Katchho area along the Indus, they said.

They said that swarms of locusts had spread in Radhan, Nau Goth, Fareedabad, Gozo, Kakar, Khanpur, Wahl Pandhi, Tando Rahim, Sawaro, Chhinni, Moundar, Khudabad, Phakl(a, Jhaloo and Phulji Station.

A grower of sugar cane and cotton from Mehar, Mohammad Aslam Kandhro, said that since past four days, swarms of locusts were attacking crops in Fareedabad, Radhan, Nau Goth and Thariri Mohabbat areas of Mehar taluka. Locusts were now was moving towards Katchho area along the river, he said.

Ali Gul Gadehi, a grower of vegetables in Gozo, complained that no one from the federal and provincial governments or teams of experts and officials of the district administration had reached the insect-infested areas to launch spray to exterminate locusts and protect standing crops.

He said that spray had not yet been conducted due to negligence of federal and provincial governments.

Deputy director of Dadu agriculture department Ali Nawaz Kalhoro said that swarms of locusts had entered the district from hilly terrain of Jamshoro.

Locusts were spreading in different areas of the district but sprays could not be carried out through helicopters on helds near dense population, he said.

He advised people to try to shoo the insects away if they attacked their crop.

Experts had advised that the locusts would move to Thar region within a few days.

Control room set up in Thar MITHI: Thar Deputy Commissioner Dr Shahzad Tahir Thaheem on Friday set up a control room on the directives of Sindh Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah to combat locust attacks in certain areas of the desert region.

The DC appointed Syed Kabir Shah, additional deputy commissioner, as focal person to keep in touch with the area people and officials, and issued directives to all functionaries concerned to stay alert in case insects` attack became severe.

Dr Thaheem told reporters in his office that they were all prepared to take precautionary measures to cope with the situation within available resources.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?

IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL FARMING HIGHLIGHTED

The Newspaper's Staff CorrespondentJune 30, 2019

HYDERABAD: Calling for a ban on chemical fertiliser and pesticides, speakers at a training course highlighted the importance of natural farming for the economic prosperity of rural population.

They were speaking at a two-day training course on 'Natural Farming and Kissan Cooperative for Small Farmers' held by the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) in collaboration with the Crofter Foundation and Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Tandojam, at the SAU on Friday.

Participants from various districts participated in the training and highlighted issues of water scarcity, support price of crops, high prices of fertiliser, and lack of facilities for marketing, storage, value addition and developing seed varieties.

A civil society activist, Punhal Sario, said Sindh's peasant movement had started for the rights of farmers, but still they and landless farmers remained deprived of basic rights. The government should protect their rights, he added.

Highlighting the importance of natural farming, Mustafa Mirani, senior vice chairman of the PFF, said organic agriculture was need of the hour and farmers were facing problems in adopting natural farming at the field level. He added the government needed to encourage natural farming at the field level.

Calling for a ban on corporate farming in Sindh, he said there was a need for food safety and security priorities in the agriculture policy to feed the nation with safe and nutritious food and the government should implement food safety rules and regulations at the gross-root level.

Ali Palh, chairman of the Sindh Agriculture Research Council, said that the use of fertiliser and pesticides and other chemicals should be banned in Sindh. He said the youth should be trained in agriculture enterprise development for the economic prosperity of the nation.

He said indigenous varieties in agriculture, livestock and fisheries should be promoted, which was part of agriculture, and there was a need to ensure proper irrigation, support price and high-yielding varieties to peasants of Sindh.

Published in Dawn, June 30th, 2019

RAHU PLAYS DOWN DAMAGE CAUSED TO STANDING CROPS BY LOCUST INVASION

The Newspaper’s Staff CorrespondentUpdated June 30, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Minister for Agriculture Ismail Rahu tried to belittle the damage caused so far by locust attack on standing crops but admitted the threat still lurked as the insect’s breeding season was nearing fast when it could multiply and spell disaster for Sindh’s agriculture if it was not exterminated in time.

He told journalists after inaugurating two-day mango show at Expo Centre here on Saturday that when locusts’ presence was reported in the desert area of Nara taluka in Khairpur district around end of May Sindh government intimated the Department of Plant Protection (DPP) and kept updating it on the insect’s movements from time to time between May and June.

Visitors mill around stalls at the Expo Centre mango festival on Saturday.—Dawn

Since the insect was not stopped in Balochistan where it first arrived from Iran, it flew into Sindh and now the provincial government was trying to control it to save crops, he said.

He said that he along with Sindh chief minister visited affected areas in three districts and found “… no major damage to crops yet the threat still lurked”.

However, the insect’s breeding season was approaching fast and desert was its final destination where it would lay eggs. Its number would multiply then and the situation might become serious, he cautioned.

Mr Rahu said that Sindh government had formed field monitoring teams in 22 districts, approached Food and Agriculture Organisation and requested Suparco to conduct survey to pinpoint where locusts could be present.

He said that aerial spray could be carried out in desert but they had only one plane at their disposal to spray insecticides. Even this plane had developed faults. He termed it a serious problem and said the government would not leave growers in the lurch.

He said that Sindh government had not received required funds for development schemes and admitted that work on some projects was hampered for lack of funds. Some projects did not receive funds but still tenders had been floated for various works including some subsidy-oriented programmes for farmers.

He regretted that provincial government had to cut funds for farm sector because of financial constraints. The federal government had shown a tendency that it would neither work itself nor allow provincial governments to work, he said.

Asked why DPP was not devolved to the province, he said that how could it have been when people were concerned even on this devolution which had been achieved after great struggle by smaller provinces.

He appreciated holding of mango show in Hyderabad after Mirpurkhas and described it as a good initiative for the promotion of agriculture sector considering substantial contribution of mango farming to farm sector.

Sindh government was committed to facilitate farmers in controlling post-harvest losses and increasing productivity besides improving mango export to Middle East to earn foreign exchange, he said.

Hyderabad Commis-sioner Mohammad Abbas Baloch, managing director of Sindh Enterprise Development Fund Mehboobul Haq, representatives of growers' bodies and other officials concerned were also present at the inauguration ceremony.

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FIRST-EVER 'MANGO FESTIVAL' HELD AT HYDERABAD EXPO CENTRE

RECORDER REPORT JUN 30TH, 2019 HYDERABAD

First ever 2-day mango festival in Hyderabad was organised to get the access to national and international markets here at Expo Centre, Hyderabad Saturday. The festival was inaugurated by Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahoo. Agriculture University Tando Jam Vice Chancellor Dr Mujeeb Sahrai, divisional commissioner Hyderabad Muhammad Abbas Baloch, Additional IG Police Hyderabad Ghulam Sarwar Jamali, Director General Agriculture Sindh Hidayatullah Chajro, Deputy Commissioner Hyderabad Syed Sajjad Hyder Shah, ADC Hyd Muhammad Yousuf Shaikh and concerned officers were also present.

The Sindh Minister inspected different stalls of more than 30 kinds including collector, Lal Ram Poori, Patasho, Neelam, Desi, Chausa, Langro, Kali Saroli, While Saroli, Sonaro and Sonari, Hafiz, Bombay Green, Bottel, Sindh Pahlwan, Totta Pari, Samad Mango, Kala Pahar, Bewafa Jamal Poori, Infaso, Bhoori Sindhri, White Sindhri, Bharcho and others.

Talking to media the Sindh Agriculture Minister said that Sindh had rich agricultural land and during four seasons it produced different fruits and vegetables.

He said Sindh was keen to provide modern facilities to growers so that quality and production of mangoes and other crops could be increased. Replying a question regarding 18th amendment, he said those who were against 18th amendment were actually against country's progress and solidarity.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190630493101/

MANGOES QUENCH PAKISTAN'S SUMMER BRUNT

By Anadolu Agency Published: June 29, 2019

KARACHI: In Pakistan, where people are exploring ways to beat the searing summer heat, delicious mangoes keep them cool and fresh.

The rising summer temperatures coincide with the harvest of mango crop as well. Extolled as king of fruits, India and Pakistan recognise it as their national fruit. Both often unleash its power in diplomacy and political outreach. The fruit has also been used by writers and poets in the region, over centuries to represent unspoken thoughts and feelings.

Summer in both countries is defined by the sights and sounds of vendors hawking piles of soft, sweet-smelling mangoes or pureeing them to create refreshing drinks to cut through the scorching heat.

"Summer in Pakistan is getting unbearable with every passing year, but mangoes only make it bearable," Tasneem Hussein, a lawyer said while bargaining with a mango-seller, at the entrance of Karachi's main fruit market.

Karachi was once known for its modest weather even in the hottest months of June and July. Global warming, associated with rising pollution levels, have upset weather clock, with the city getting warmer in recent years.

"The cold and slushy (mango) shake or the frosty mango slices beat the fatigue, caused by the heat," said Hussein with a winsome smile on his bearded face.

Tariq Ali, a resident of southern Mirpur Khas district, where temperatures touched 50 degrees Celsius earlier this month, says mangoes were the only thing he liked about summers. "It (summer) is stifling and disturbing, but I like the season because it brings with it mangoes, that make me tidy at the end," he said.

Mirpur Khas is one of the largely mango-producing regions and famous for its huge Sindhri variety of mangoes.

Pakistan produces 1.9 million tonnes of mangoes annually, thus ranking sixth in the world, followed by India, China, Thailand, Indonesia and Mexico. There are two dozens of mango varieties, notably, Anwar Ratual, Dasheri, Langra, Saroli, Sindhri, Totapari, and others. But the taste of the country is prized Chaunsa.

Last year, Pakistan exported 82,000 metric tonnes of mangoes to the Middle East, Europe, the US, Japan, Australia and other countries. The juicy Chaunsa accounted to 60% of mango exports.

"Chaunsa is a favourite in the Middle East, Europe, America and other countries because of its special taste", said Waheed Ahmed, a Karachi-based mango exporter. In terms of sweetness, Pakistani mangoes edge out their Indian and Indonesian counterparts in the international market.

Till 2011, when the US had put a ban on the entry of Pakistani mangoes, the fruit lovers would go all the way driving to Toronto, Canada, to taste Chaunsa mangoes.

Despite its aroma and taste that makes Pakistani mangoes a hot favourite; little attention is being paid to adopt the latest harvest practices to improve their quality further.

Ahmed stressed that adoption to the new technology was necessary to sustain and also to explore new markets. “Even China- the second largest mango producer- wants our mangoes, as their production does not match huge demand they have, because of a large population,” he said.

Past four years, the country’s mango production had slightly declined. “This year, production has shot up, because growers are getting better prices. But still, there is a 30% shortage compared to actual capacity and demand, mainly because of changing weather patterns,” he said.

The exporter added that the trend will definitely improve mango exports. But the impact will be seen on the ground, only by 2021-22. Pakistan plans to export 100,000 metric tonnes of mangoes this year, according to Ahmed.

Using mangoes to mend strained relations is an old tradition in the region. The competing tribes over centuries used the fruit, to defuse tensions.

In 2010, then US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced to open the US markets for Pakistani mangoes, in a bid to dampen anti-American sentiment, marking the latest chapter in the fruit’s curious history of diplomacy.

“I have personally vouched for Pakistani mangoes, which are delicious, and I’m looking forward to seeing Americans be able to enjoy those in the coming months,” Clinton said during her visit to Islamabad.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gifted crates of mangoes to the visiting US President George Bush in 2006, when they were discussing the Indo-US nuclear deal. Whether President Bush gave India waivers due to mangoes is not known, but a favourable climate helped India to clinch the access to nuclear technology.

Pir of Pagaro, famous spiritual leader and head of his faction of Pakistan Muslim League – the second largest party in rural Sindh province – has continued the tradition to gift mango crates to his friends and foes. Another politician from southern Punjab, Nawabzada Nasarullah Khan had also earned fame for sending mangoes of his orchards, to his political opponents every year till his death in 2003.

Almost every year Pakistan’s government sends a box of mangoes to the Indian prime minister and other top functionaries in the Indian capital New Delhi.

The most famous Pakistani mango is known as Anwar Ratol, which has its roots in a village two hours from New Delhi, in the Baghpat district of western Uttar Pradesh province. Many years before Partition in 1947, a mango grower from Ratol had migrated to Pakistani part of Punjab and named a sprig he had transplanted there after his father, Anwar.

Former military ruler General Ziaul Haq was killed along with several senior military officers and the then US ambassador in a plane crash in August 1988. Minutes before the plane took off; several boxes of Bahawalpur mangoes were loaded in the plane. The conspiracy theory is that mango crates had bombs. Noted Pakistani writer Mohammed Hanif has used this episode in his award-winning comic novel titled, ‘A Case of Exploding Mangoes’, to expose cynical layers of corruption.

Who killed Zia? The bomb in the mango box or a technical error. No one knows, despite several inquiries. The jury is still out on whether to hold mangoes guilty or not. Till then enjoy mangoes and stay fresh.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2002934/1-mangoes-quench-pakistans-summer-brunt/

PUNJAB MULLS WHEAT PRICE HIKE AS STOCKS DWINDLE

By Rizwan Asif Published: June 30, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab food department has prepared five recommendations to present to the government for the determination of sale prices of wheat and flour in the open market. Options presented vary from Rs1,300 per maund (40kg) to Rs1,750 per maund for wheat, with the final amount depending on the subsidy burden the government is willing to take on.

The final decision will be taken by Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, but there is a strong chance that the price of wheat in the open market will also account for the rise in the prices of electricity and diesel, with prices being set between Rs1,325 and Rs1,350 per maund, while the price of flour in the open market will not be allowed to exceed Rs800 for a 20kg bag.

It is noteworthy that the government appears ready to set the price points for wheat and flour separately. In the past, the price of a bag of flour was directly related to the price of wheat.

According to details, on the directives of the Punjab CM, the department of food has prepared different recommendations for determining the price of wheat and flour. A summary of these recommendations will first be sent to the cabinet committee, and then to the CM, who will take the final decision.

Last year, the food department, on account of a surplus of wheat, has sold the grain to flour mills at Rs1,300 per maund, which also included the price of jute sacks. This time, apart from raising the price of wheat, the government will also charge for bags separately.

Sources said that the recommendations prepared by the food department include four recommendations from Rs1,300 to Rs1,400 without bags. In the fifth recommendation, which the sources admitted was not politically feasible, the food department has recommended the government that the price of wheat be fixed at Rs1,787 with zero incidental charges. Currently, the food department is bearing incidental charges of almost Rs500 per maund.

Sources said that the Punjab government is facing another headache, as the food department has 4.8 million tons of wheat in storage and it cannot reduce its stock to zero. At least 500,000 to 800,000 tons must be stocked as its strategic reserve.

Of the wheat available with Pakistan Agriculture and Storage Services Corporation (Pasco), 350,000 tons of wheat has to be provided to the Air Force, Azad Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan, while 300,000 tons will be given to the Pakistan Army. After setting aside another 500,000 tons as food security stock, Pasco will only have about 800,000 tons of wheat that can be sold. At this time, there is a shortage of wheat in Sindh, KP and Balochistan.

Sources said that the PTI's Core Committee Member Jahangir Tareen will preside over an important meeting in this regard in the next few days after which final decisions will be taken.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 30th, 2019.

HIGH TAXES, COST OF PRODUCTION FORCE BREEDERS TO CULL CHICKS

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterUpdated June 30, 2019

Breeders have started culling day-old chicks for want of buyers after poultry farmers refused to further prepare flocks of chicken owing to massively high cost of production as well as imposition of 17 per cent tax on import of raw material and declining price of chicken meat. — Reuters/File

LAHORE: Breeders have started culling day-old chicks for want of buyers after poultry farmers refused to further prepare flocks of chicken owing to massively high cost of production as well as imposition of 17 per cent tax on import of raw material and declining price of chicken meat.

"A day-old chick, which used to cost around Rs40, is now available in the market for Rs1 or Rs2. In certain circumstances, it is even available for free at the hatcheries since there is no demand in the market," Chaudhry Muhammad Nusrat Tahir, the Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA) vice chairman (Northern region), told journalists at a press conference on Saturday. "The situation has worsened big time. It has even forced them to cull 50 per cent of the unsold chicks."

Poultry contributes 40 per cent to the total meat consumption and generates employment and income for thousands. Even in the current scenario, it is the cheapest source of protein available.

Tahir said that while the prices of all the commodities were rising fast, the PPA managed to supply chicken meat and eggs on affordable rates.

"Prices of chicken and eggs always fluctuate as per demand and supply, while more than 40pc ingredients of poultry feed are imported. Due to the hike in rate of dollar and imposition of 17pc tax on import of raw material, these ingredients have got out of the reach of feed millers, adversely impacting the cost of production of poultry feed as well as chicken meat and eggs," Mr Tahir, who was flanked by association Secretary retired Maj Javaid Hussain Bukhari, explained.

He further said that poultry farmers were reluctant to keep chicks on their farms because of costly feed and low market rate for their product. Similarly, the cost of production of day-old chicks has also increased massively. These problems are compounding by the day and will soon lead to an acute shortage of poultry meat and eggs, he predicted.

"This shortage cannot be bridged in a short time. It will end up in chicken meat price skyrocketing, taking it out of the reach of the poor," he warned.

The association sought immediate government support for the poultry industry by reducing the heavy taxes on import duty of all kinds of ingredients and poultry medicine. "If the government does not hear us, the poultry farmers will have no option but to close down their production units. It will also deprive the country of cheap source of protein," he further warned.

Published in Dawn, June 30th, 2019

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUN 17th TO JUN 23th 2019

FEAR GRIPS FARMERS AS LOCUSTS ADVANCE TOWARDS COTTON CROP

Faiza Ilyas Updated June 17, 2019

KARACHI: Desert locusts are advancing towards the cotton crop in Khairpur where in recent days they have taken over parts of the district in Sindh province and are now threatening thousands of hectares of the plant, it emerged on Sunday.

The day also saw a visit to locust-infested areas by the federal minister for national food security who claimed the government was making all-out efforts to contain the pests but farmers voiced their reservations.

Speaking to Dawn, farmers in Khairpur expressed grave concern over the looming danger to estimated 30,000 to 40,000 hectares of the cotton crop and said if effective measures were not taken, the insects in their millions could infest the agricultural fields located a few kilometers away from the locust infested area in Nara and Mirwah talukas in Khairpur district.

“The greenbelt is located just seven kilometres from the infested area where these insects are feeding on wild bushes. We fear they could fly away and cause widespread havoc to our crops,” said Nisar Khaskheli, president of the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture, Khairpur.

He regretted no local help was available in case of such an emergency and the subject was the exclusive domain of the federal government. “The provincial government doesn’t offer any assistance since it doesn’t deal with this subject while most landlords don’t have four-wheel drive vehicles that could go into the desert area and initiate some action to fight pests,” he said.

This period, he pointed out, was critical for the crop sown last month and already very vulnerable to any kind of pest attacks.

About past locust attacks, Mr Khaskheli said it last occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. Locals said they heard of the locust outbreak in the Nara desert and Mirwah area a week before Eidul Fitr following rain in the area.

The desert locust is potentially the most dangerous of the locust pests because of the ability of swarms to fly rapidly across great distances, according to experts. The locusts first affected Yemen from where they migrated early this year to Saudi Arabia and then to Iran.

Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mohammad Mehboob Sultan visited the locust-affected areas of Nara and Thari Mirwah in Khairpur on Sunday, according to a press release. “The government is doing all possible efforts to control the menace,” he stated.

Moreover, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research through its Department of Plant Protection (DPP) and in collaboration with UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation had activated all resources to meet the “General Operating Expenditures” survey-and-control operations in a very vast locust affected area of the country stated the press release.

An aircraft of DPP had conducted aerial surveillance of the locust-affected area of Thari Mirwah in Khairpur and also carried out aerial spraying in Sarai Mardan area. The ministry, in a statement on Sunday, said an aircraft was deployed at Sukkur airport for possible emergency aerial spraying in Nara desert.

The ministry, in a statement on Sunday also said so far 2,000 hectares had been treated in Thari Mirwah and a ground team was still working in the area.

“The outbreak was first reported two months ago and gradually it has taken over 99 per cent of our vegetation,” said Khuda Aziz Baloch heading a local farmers’ organisation in the Dasht area of Kech district.

He had informed the deputy commissioner Turbat of the situation but there was hardly any action. “Last night, a team of federal government’s DPP came with only one vehicle and sprayed pesticide on a small area. This is gravely insufficient,” he said, adding that Dasht was dependent on agriculture spread over 32,200 acres.

The team, he said, told him that aerial pesticide spraying couldn’t be carried out in the area because it didn’t have security clearance.

Rafique, a resident of Kallag, part of Turbat tehsil, narrated similar conditions prevailing in his area as well as Jusak and Ginnah, expressing dissatisfaction over government measures.

Explaining why aerial spraying has not been conducted in Balochistan so far, director technical DPP Tariq Khan said aerial fleet would only be applied when “locust hoppers were spread over hundreds of hectares”. “We believe ground operation is more effective in the present situation. There should be a scientific justification for an aerial operation,” he added.

Commissioner Makran Division Tariq Zehri rejected reports of widespread damage to crops and said damage to agricultural fields was only 15 to 20 per cent as “young locusts were only feeding on leaves and not damaging other parts of plants”.

“Over the last 60 days, we have been able to contain these pests in 80 to 90 per cent of the infested areas including parts of Turbat, Pasni and Gwadar. Now, only 15 to 20 per cent areas are left,” he said, adding that federal government’s DPP was providing full support.

According to him, three subsequent showers of rain in the Makran division provided conducive conditions to locusts which migrated from Iran. “They multiply fast so it’s a continuous challenge to contain these pests,” he said, that the situation would improve by end June as locusts were now moving towards Sindh and India.

Responding to a question by Dawn, he said there needed to be a trained staff with necessary supplies at least in those districts bordering Iran to respond to such emergencies promptly.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1488674/fear-grips-farmers-as-locusts-advance-towards-cotton-

POLITICAL HARMONY KEY TO BOOSTING AGRICULTURE

From the NewspaperUpdated June 17, 2019

As growth in agriculture sector tanked to 0.85pc in the current fiscal year against the target of 3.8pc, the PTI government plans to spend Rs280bn on this sector during its five-year term. The purpose is to help recover growth in agriculture with the help of provinces in whose administrative domain it falls.

In the outgoing fiscal year, a paltry sum of Rs21bn was spent on agriculture against the original allocation of Rs63bn under the federal Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). For FY20, an amount of Rs78.6bn has been set aside for this sector, budget documents reveal.

But higher allocation does not mean actual utilisation. So, the relevant question here is whether agriculture sector would actually receive Rs78.6bn in FY20 as promised? Given the fact that the PTI government has set a very ambitious revenue collection target of Rs5.5 trillion for FY20, a slippage in the target would naturally bring the PSDP under axe. And, as political confrontation is growing with every passing day, a more important question is: whether federal and provincial governments would be able to work together for promotion of agriculture—or for that matter any worthy cause—in the next fiscal year and beyond?

Agriculture sector's growth slumped below 1pc in FY19 for a host of reasons. But the Economic Survey 2018-19 cites shortage of irrigation water and lower off-take of fertiliser as two main factors. The third most important reason was an obvious lack of working relationship between PTI that is in power in the federation and in Punjab—and Sindh where PPP is in the government.

After Punjab, Sindh has the largest share in the country's agricultural output and for agriculture to grow there has to be a productive working relationship between the federal and Sindh governments. That seemed missing in FY19.

Now PPP and PML-N are up against "selective accountability" of their leaders under the PTI government and PM Imran Khan consistently holds the leadership of these two parties responsible for all conceivable ills in Pakistan economy and politics. In this environment, can PTI, PPP and PML-N work jointly for promotion of agriculture in Sindh where PPP is in power or in Punjab where PML-N is potentially a pain in the neck of PTI's government? The key to agricultural growth prospects lies in the answer to this question.

Since agriculture is a provincial subject, what FY20 holds for it in store would become obvious only after the presentation of provincial budgets. But the federal budget envisages many measures that may have a telling impact on this sector.

Unfortunately, a number of the budgetary steps may negatively impact on agriculture. And, only a few can benefit farmers or boost the sector's growth even if the much-required political harmony between the federal and provincial governments is achieved magically.

Higher PSDP allocation for agriculture and for construction of dams, if not subjected to as deep cuts and in FY19 budget, should help accelerate growth in agriculture. State Minister for Revenue Hammad Azhar mentioned in his budget speech that in addition to constructing dams out of federal expenses, the federal government would help provinces build water conservation projects and provide research and technical assistance funds for increasing yields of wheat, rice, sugarcane and cotton.

He said that federal funds would also be available for harnessing untapped potential in fisheries and for undertaking development initiatives in livestock sector. He assured the nation that the federal government would continuesubsidising agricultural tube wells and financially facilitate crop loan insurance scheme.

Apparently all these measures, if undertaken with sincerity of purpose and with active involvement of provincial governments, can help boost agricultural productivity across the country. He, however, did not reveal any details of how Pak-China cooperation in agriculture under the umbrella of CPEC would contribute to agricultural growth in future. In fact, he touched upon CPEC quite briefly and named agriculture as one of the areas added to the scope of CPEC along with socioeconomic and industrial development.

The federal budget is inflationary in nature. If the parliament approves the budgetary measures, prices of fuel including the most commonly used CNG will increase. That will add to the cost of production and transportation of agricultural produce and ultimately impact negatively on agriculture.

Proposed phasing out of direct and indirect subsidies and concessions will also affect agriculture and will make agricultural inputs costlier. With consumer inflation already above 9pc and the rupee's depreciation is continuing, the cost of output in all sub-sectors of agriculture including livestock and fisheries would go up.

This seems a real possibility also because a slippage in ambitiously projected revenue target and further fall in the rupee value cannot be ruled out, due to an obvious lack of political consensus on revenue collection measures and structural imbalance in external sector.

In FY19 (up to June 12) the rupee has already lost about 25pc value against the US dollar fuelling inflation and adding to the cost of production of everything including farm produce. (On June 12 this year it closed at 151.57 per dollar against 121.50 at the end of June last year).

The budget FY20 is silent on what PTI's federal government would be doing to help provinces in fixing structural problems that affect growth in agricultural sector. Water distribution has remained a thorny issue and Sindh complains that it receives lesser irrigation water than its due share that affects its agricultural growth. Sea intrusion is eating away thousands of acres of arable land in coastal areas of Sindh.

And, rapid environmental changes have made the entire Pakistan vulnerable to abrupt flooding. The state minister did not touch upon such important issues from the federal government's perspective and promised nothing to address them.

One should hope that PTI would soon come up with details of federal initiatives designed to help smaller provinces tackle these and other challenges that affect agricultural growth. — MA

https://www.dawn.com/news/1488696

SWEET ALTERNATIVE TO TRANSFORM ENERGY SECTOR

By Faraz Ahmed Published: June 17, 2019

KARACHI: The whole nation was eagerly waiting for the outcome of ultra-deep water drilling exercise by ExxonMobil and Eni in Kekra-1 around 280 km off Karachi shore.

Since the stakes were high, the disappointment from the unfavourable outcome is understandable. While it is necessary to keep exploring conventional fossil fuels and even non-conventional ones like shale deep under the surface, policymakers should not be shy away from utilising what is available on surface and in abundance ie biofuel.

It is high time that the policymakers explore all the available alternative and indigenous resources to meet growing energy needs and at the same time curb trade deficit. However, the good news is that it will not be the first time that we will revolutionise the fuel space of the country.

In fact, the introduction of compressed natural gas (CNG) for vehicles during the early 1980s and subsequent commercialisation of CNG as an alternative motor fuel in 1992 is a prime example of what can be achieved with perseverance. In addition to the economical advantages of using CNG, we also managed to reduce the carbon footprint by using a more environment-friendly fuel mix.

Let’s look at the global trend for biofuel and the distinct model adopted by the two top biofuel producers in the world ie the US (16 billion gallons) and Brazil (8 billion gallons). They both use different biomass ie corn and sugarcane respectively.

The Brazilian model to produce ethanol from sugarcane is very close to what can be easily adopted in Pakistan on a national scale and is more economical than the one used in the US. In this Brazilian model, there is an option to either produce ethanol directly from sugarcane juice or convert it into sugar and molasses and then further distillate molasses into ethanol.

However, the success of the Brazilian model is not just based on government incentives to farmers and better ethanol yield but also on the establishment of a whole ecosystem of efficient supply chain that brings sustainable growth.

Let’s carry out a cursory SWOT analysis to establish a sustainable biofuel ecosystem in Pakistan, which is the fifth largest sugarcane producer in the world with production levels of around 70-80 million tons. Sugarcane is mostly utilised by 90 sugar mills spread across the country to produce sugar as the main product while selling molasses and bagasse as byproducts.

Few of the mills have installed distillation facility either integrated with the main plant or associated with it with the added advantage to convert molasses into ethanol and industrial alcohol.

As far as the raw material to produce biofuel is concerned, the government has already set the sugarcane support price at Rs180 per 40kg, which incentivises the farmers to grow the crop. However, there are some issues of lower yield due to loss of sucrose content as a result of delay in the start of crushing season.

The main reason for this delay is usually the tussle between the politically influential mill owners and the farmers to get a better deal. These issues must be resolved to ensure timely commencement of crushing season to optimise the recovery of ethanol.

Currently, the ethanol is mostly exported but the government can roll out a favourable policy to bring a green revolution by introducing the hybrid fuel. At first, a minimum of 10% ethanol blending (normally referred to as E10 globally) can be introduced at the filling station.

Although most cars on road these days can handle E10 easily, strict quality control is needed to minimise water content as ethanol is prone to absorb water, which may lead to internal corrosion.

The establishment of a sustainable blended fuel ecosystem requires all stakeholders from distilleries, to refineries to oil marketing companies to be on board and the Petroleum Division has to take the lead to re-create the success story of CNG revolution.

The writer is a financial market enthusiast and attached to Pakistan stocks, commodities and emerging technology

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1993931/2-sweet-alternative-transform-energy-sector/

FALLING LIVESTOCK GDP

BR Research June 17, 2019

Last week BR Research flagged how livestock sector, which has 60 percent share in agriculture GDP has been growing at a seemingly flat pace for year, and yet no one questions those numbers. (See Facts, fiction & poor press engagement, June 11, 2019)

The reason why livestock GDP, where cow and buffalo combined have the biggest share, grows at a flat pace every year is because the statistics department simply assumes that livestock growth rate between the last two livestock census (1996 and 2006) holds true today as well. That assumption is wrong and would have been proven such, had the statistics wing been conducting livestock census at least every ten years, and intermediate surveys at every three years.

In 2016, Punjab livestock department did their own livestock census and their numbers challenged the federal government’s estimates used for livestock GDP. Punjab’s 2016 livestock census revealed that total livestock in the province was about 25 percent lower than the provincial number for 2016 estimated by federal government for that year, which as mentioned earlier is simply based on inter-census growth.

In some Punjab districts it was 30 percent lower, in others, it was 40 percent. Only in two districts, one being Dera Ghazi Khan, the number from provincial census was higher than the federal government estimate for that district. In all other districts it was lower than the federal estimate. These results are very alarming, and sources in Sindh livestock department say that the size of Sindh’s livestock has also dwindled noticeably, albeit, they haven’t done their own survey as yet.

There are a host of reasons behind weak or negative growth in livestock across various districts in Sindh and Punjab. At the one end, livestock industry does not get sufficient credit from the banking sector, and at the other, public sector investment in the sector had fallen between 2010 and 2015 – the years after devolution.

Prior to devolution, federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Minfal) used to spend some money on livestock. After devolution, developmental spending on this sector fell sharply, though in Punjab it did pick up after 2016 but by then, the damage had been done.

Meanwhile private sector investment remained poor as regulation of milk prices by DMG officials doesn’t create enough incentives across the milk and meat value chain. The rise of corporate sector – packaged milk – triggered some investments in the sector ten years ago, but not enough to move the needle since packaged milk industry is still no more than 10 percent of the total milk market. The rest of the milk is mostly supplied by farmers who have no more than 3-5 animals.

Moreover, there is a problem of pre-mature culling of the animals before they complete their calving cycle. This is somewhat limited to Karachi and some urban areas of Punjab and KP, but still a major problem nevertheless that is hurting local livestock growth.

Pakistan's indigenous breeds have a useful life of about 10-years during which they are supposed to yield about 7 calves or crops during their lifetime. But when local pregnant animals from rural areas are brought to milking parlours in urban or peri-urban areas, their offspring is slaughtered soon after it reaches the slaughtering age, (sometimes even earlier which is done illegally). This is because the calf whether male or female has a cost; it drinks the milk of its mother cow, which the owners of milking parlours in urban-peri-urban areas would rather sell. Remember these are milking parlours and not cattle or dairy farms per se.

By the end of the milking period of the cow, these milking parlours sell those cows to the slaughtering houses instead of sending them back to the rural areas where they could graze, become healthy and become pregnant again and come back to urban areas for milking. This means that a cow does not complete its crop cycle of seven cows.

In other words, the herd size catering to Karachi and some urban centres in Punjab and KP, that should have grown at the multiple of 7 and would give milk 7 times has not been happening for the last 18 years. And that's not all. Many farmers give toxin laden food to their animals – such as cottonseed cake – to increase the milk yield of the animals. But because of the toxins, the animal's calving frequency goes down, leading to lesser births per cow/buffalo. Both these factors in turn are also reducing the gene pool of good high-quality cows and buffalos, whatever little is left of them.

Add to these factors the underlying trend of urbanisation; young people from rural areas are either migrating to the cities or migrating to semi-manufacturing or service sector jobs closer to rural areas. As a result, if the grandfather had 15-20 animals; the grandson now has 3-4 animals.

The system of modern governance is such you can't fix what you don't measure. By extension if the measurement is flawed and makes everything look hunky dory, as is the case with Pakistan's livestock GDP, then there is no reason to fix anything, is there?

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/06/17/503272/falling-livestock-gdp/

TOBACCO GROWERS SEEK TAX WITHDRAWAL

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterJune 18, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Tobacco growers from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) on Monday demanded withdrawal of Rs300 tax on tobacco, saying the tax will bring severe financial problems for growers and labourers.

Representatives of Sarhad Agricultural and Rural Development Organisation (SARDO), Kissan Board and Labour Federation while addressing a press conference here at the National Press Club said the government had reneged on its promise not to impose the tax on tobacco.

The participants of the press conference claimed that last month, the government had assured them that this tax would not be made part of the budget.

They sought the tax on cigarette companies instead of tobacco growers.

Haji Abdul Nabi of SARDO said the tax would be financially harmful for growers as well as labourers.

“The decision will affect 1,134,000 tobacco growers and 15,000 industrial workers only in KP,” he said.

He alleged that the multinational tobacco companies provided loan for the raw material to growers on 36pc interest rate and compelled them to sell the tobacco to the companies at less rate.

He said in the current economic situation the agricultural side needed to be strengthened, but the government was imposing more tax on it.

President KP Labour Federation Ibrarullah said the tax would prove economic death for the working class.

“The tobacco production has decreased to seven million kg from 140 million kg in the last four years due to discriminatory policy of the government,” he claimed.

He said the tobacco production has decreased by 50pc which was alarming.

Mr Ibrarullah said the tobacco growers were already paying billions of rupees in the form of taxes and an additional Rs300 tax would be financial burden on them.

“Government needs to shift its tax policy to multinational companies which are earning billions of revenue from tobacco manufacturing,” he said.

Rizwanullah of Kissan Board also urged the government to withdraw the tax otherwise they would launch a series of protests, during which no multinational company would be allowed to purchase tobacco from the market.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1488821

K-P FOOD AUTHORITY SEALS ‘SYNTHETIC’ JAGGERY FACTORY

By Our Correspondent Published: June 18, 2019

PESHAWAR: The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Food Authority (K-PFA) along with excise officials conducted a joint operation early on Monday and sealed a synthetic gur (jaggery) factory set up inside a house in the Hazar Khwani area of the provincial capital.

K-PFA Director General Riaz Khan Mahsud in a statement appreciated the efforts of the excise officials and announced an Rs10,000 cash prize for them.K-PFA Director General Riaz Khan Mahsud in a statement appreciated the efforts of the excise officials and announced an Rs10,000 cash prize for them. Mahsud added that making synthetic jaggery from glucose and sugar consisted a crime under the K-P Food Safety Act and that no one is authorized to do so.

K-PFA DO Khalid Khan Khattak said provincial excise officials had information about synthetic gur production.

“We deputed a team led by Food Safety Officers Ahmad Ali Shah and Wasif Shah to inspect the venue along with a technical squad. They found people were making gur with the help of glucose, sugar and non-food colours,” Khattak revealed.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1994632/1-k-p-food-authority-seals-synthetic-jaggery-factory/

PUNJAB PIVOTS TO AGRICULTURE 2.0

By Rizwan Asif Published: June 18, 2019

LAHORE: Those of us living in urban areas take for granted how pervasive rapidly advancing technologies have become in our lives. But Pakistan’s rural areas still represent a frontier yet to be fully explored in terms of technological solutions.

For reasons as varied as prohibitive cost and lack of necessary education and training, many of the latest technologies used the world over to revolutionise agriculture are still beyond the reach of most of Pakistan’s 8.3 million farmers.

Still, Punjab, which accounts for 60% of the country’s agricultural output, appears to have a leg up on other provinces in this regard. With assistance from the provincial government in the form of various new schemes, farmers in Punjab are increasingly turning to the latest technological solutions to enhance their yield.

“The demand for progressive farming solutions and practices is growing,” said Punjab Agriculture Department Director Muhammad Anjum. “The use of latest technology in agriculture is resulting in lower costs and increased productivity.”

In collaboration with the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB), the Punjab Agriculture Department has launched the AgriSmart application to create a digital database of agricultural data, such as crop reporting, soil sampling, pest scouting and fertiliser monitoring. The department has also registered as many as three million farmers who are offered advice pertaining to cultivation, weather and prevention of crop diseases through SMS.

“We have provided over 2,000 of our field officers with Android devices to receive timely information about crops,” Anjum said.

The department has also introduced a software application aimed at training farmers and is seeking PITB assistance to monitor agriculture revenue and the condition of farmers’ land.

“An application to give loans to small farmers under an agriculture e-credit scheme is also being used while the prices of goods in the agricultural markets of Punjab under agriculture marketing information system are uploaded and their comparison with the prices of the international market is also presented,” said a senior PITB officer.

A web portal to avail fertiliser subsidies has also been introduced. Sacks of fertilisers now come with scratch codes, which can be used at the portal to obtain the subsidy.

Another web portal has been set up to issue the Kisan card and special online accounts have been set up for fertiliser and pesticide manufacturers so that the prices of their products can be monitored. The manufacturers are asked to continuously update product prices and other details on the portal, which is then accessed by agriculture department officers for fact checking.

The department has also introduced a portal and GPS tracking application to rent bulldozers to farmers who need them. The farmers can rent a bulldozer after booking it through the online portal and authorities can monitor the vehicle in real time through the GPS tracking application.

PITB has also created software to convey essential information regarding the wheat procurement drive and provision of bags and containers to registered farmers.

"PITB has done a terrific job in developing innovative new solutions for agriculture. The applications they have come up with have proven to be extremely beneficial," remarked Anjum.

Farmers in Punjab have also started installing small-scale weather stations in their fields, according to Hussain Ata who works for a private company that sells them and other latest agricultural tools. "These stations carry nearly 300 sensors and can inform farmers of weather conditions seven days in advance," he said. "The stations, which range in cost from Rs150,000 to Rs3 million, also provide hourly weather updates and can be used for pest control."

Agriculture department director Anjum, meanwhile, said his wing also issued a policy for using drones in agriculture last year as well. "However, we stopped short of allowing their usage due to concerns by defence institutions regarding border security."

He emphasised, however, that the usage of drones in agriculture is inevitable in Pakistan at some point. "Drones can be used to spray pesticides, conduct surveys and carry out research. In these latter two respects, the technology is much more economical than satellites," Anjum pointed out.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1994556/2-punjab-pivots-agriculture-2-0/

COTTON PRICES FIRM ON MODEST TRADE

RECORDER REPORT JUN 18TH, 2019

KARACHI. A kind of stability prevailed on cotton market on Monday in the process of modest trading, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8800, they added. Seed cotton per 40kg from Lower Sindh was available at Rs 3800-4000, they said. Binola per maund was available at Rs 1700-1750, they said. Approximately, 2300 bales of cotton finalised between at Rs 8750-8850, they said.

According to the market sources, sowing of seed cotton in the Punjab has almost completed and seed cotton production target for the current season is estimated at 80,000 lacs of bales.

Cotton Analyst, Naseen Usman said that several participants were on the sideline due to hovering confusions following the budgetary measurement.

They still failed to find any outcome of budget announcements, uncertainties are rising with the passage of time, other brokers said.

Besides, dollar's unprecedented rise versus the rupee also kept both buyers and sellers in a state of confusions, some analysts said.

Cotton prices moved both ways in the international markets, they said. Following deals were reported: 1200 bales of cotton from Meilsi sold at Rs 8750, 900 bales from Rahim Yar Khan at Rs 8850 and 200 bales from Sanghar (new crop) at Rs 8500, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190618488067/

60PC CUT IN PUNJAB SUBSIDY BILL LIKELY

NASIR JAMAL Published Jun 19, 2019 07:09am

LAHORE: The Punjab government proposes to slash its subsidy bill by a hefty 60 per cent during next financial year through a massive reduction of Rs27 billion in its wheat price support to Rs1bn and a cut of Rs5.5bn in allocations for the Ramazan package to Rs2bn.

Overall, the Usman Buzdar government has set aside Rs21.6bn to provide food, transport and agriculture subsidies next fiscal year against the revised estimate of Rs53.3bn for the outgoing financial year, according to the budget documents. It is to be noted that originally the government had allocated Rs50.6bn for food, transport, Ramazan package and other subsidies this year. But the diversion of a substantial amount of Rs5.9bn in the middle of the year to support sugar manufacturers spiked its subsidy expense by 5.3pc. It has not made any allocation for sugar subsidy in the next year's budget though.

Rs21.6bn set aside to provide food, transport and agri support against revised Rs53.3bn for outgoing year

The bulk of subsidy expense proposed for the next year or equal to almost 58pc of the total budgeted amount has been set aside for providing cheaper public transport, say the documents. Another Rs6bn – up by more than 70pc from the present fiscal year – will be used to support the farmers through agriculture. The estimates for the transport subsidy appear on the higher side as the government has revised down its expenditure on this count to Rs8.4bn from original allocation of Rs14.6bn during the current year.

The proposed reduction in wheat support price budget indicates the shift in the government policy to move towards a market-based [price] mechanism and let the private sector play a more active role in procurement of the crop during the next harvest with a view to reducing its expenditure and focusing on targeted subsidies.

Some finance officials, however, consider the reduced wheat subsidy allocations as unrealistic as it was more a political matter than financial management issue. "At the end of the year, the government is more likely to end up increasing the subsidy amount on wheat to avoid any political backlash," one official said on condition of anonymity.

https://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1489053

OVER 12,000 TONS OF HONEY PRODUCED ANNUALLY, SAYS MINISTER

Staff ReporterUpdated June 19, 2019

RAWALPINDI: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mohammad Mehboob Sultan on Tuesday said Pakistan produced more than 12,000 tons honey annually.

Addressing as a chief guest at a ceremony held in connection with honey festival at Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University the minister called for enhancing the capacity of the professionals and beekeepers to produce good quality honey.

The arid university's dean of the Faculty of Crop and Food Sciences Dr Fayyazul Hassan, dean Faculty of Forestry & Range Management and chairman Department of Entomology Dr Attaul Mohsin, faculty members, bee keepers and students were also present at the inaugural session.

The festival was organised by the Department of Entomology in collaboration with Agri Tourism Development Corporation of Pakistan (ATDCP) with an aim to promote honey, honey bees, their products and beekeeping through this unique educational platform to the public.

The event had provided a platform to the scientists, beekeepers, bee product marketing companies, growers, potential stakeholders in government, NGOs and students to share their views and ideas regarding uplift of beekeeping sector in Pakistan.

The minister said honey production was a very useful business and Pakistan had great potential to produce prime quality of honey by establishing standards and new habitats.

"Integrated efforts through capacity building for hygienic and up to mark production not only flourish beekeeping industry in Pakistan but also lead country towards economic progress through foreign earnings," he said.

He highlighted the major issues such as deforestation, indiscriminate use of pesticides, climate change effects as well as bee colony problems.

He recommended that to identify the favorable situations and suitable areas, regional survey must be conducted within country to help the beekeepers.

He asked the private sector to come forward and develop joint initiatives for promotion of bees in the agricultural system. He appreciated that the university was playing a vital role in boosting beekeeping sector in Pakistan.

The chief guest, other dignitaries and participants also visited the stalls displayed outside the main auditorium.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1489003/over-12000-tons-of-honey-produced-annually-says-

TOWNSHIP SELECTED AS TESTING GROUND FOR PASTEURISED MILK

By Our Correspondent Published: June 19, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has selected the township area as the initial testing ground to conduct a survey to learn about the consumption of milk and make people aware of the pasteurisation process.

This was revealed by PFA Director General Captain (retd) Muhammad Usman during a press briefing on Tuesday. Talking to the media, Usman said PFA would start providing pasteurised milk at the doorstep of consumers in light of the survey results.

He said a comprehensive plan for the availability of healthy and pure milk has entered its final stages under a pilot project of pasteurisation. The DG further said PFA would spread this project across the city after executing it successfully in one area. He said that the sale of loose milk would be completely banned by 2022.

Usman said the packaging standards of pasteurised milk have been predetermined, while PFA was working to complete legislation related to milk supply vehicles before the end of December 2019. He said it was easier to keep an eye on a few hundred pasteurised units as compared to thousands of milk selling points.

"Pasteurisation is the only solution to the elimination of milk adulteration in Punjab." He appreciated the role of the media to spread the message of the PFA. The teams will go for a door-to-door for a survey and remain in the field from 9am to 3pm. He briefed the media about the pasteurisation law and its execution plan.

Meanwhile, joint teams of the PFA and Livestock Department have kicked off the survey campaign. Earlier, the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) approved the preparation and sale of pasteurised milk in the provincial capital on an experimental basis.

During the experimental period, there will be no ban on the sale of open milk. Following the instructions of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the food authority approved the sale of pasteurised milk to ensure the provision of pure, unadulterated and healthy milk in the provincial capital.

PFA Director General (DG) Captain (retd) Muhammad Usman said that in order to examine the demand of pasteurised milk, surveys will be conducted from different areas of the city. "The operation teams will survey for the demand and quality of milk in each household."

In light of the result of this survey, arrangements will be made for supplying pasteurised milk. The DG added that in areas where there is pasteurised milk, the loose variety will also be available there. "The public is aware of the problems of loose milk and the benefits of pasteurised milk." Content has also been finalised for public awareness on pasteurization.

PFA officials said that all appropriate media will be used for public awareness. The team will also give awareness lectures during the door to door survey free of charge. The provision of pure milk will be ensured with the support and consultation of all departments concerned, including livestock.

The food authority has given a deadline of 2022 to impose a ban on the sale of loose milk. The unit will be installed in different areas of the provincial capital for the pasteurisation of milk where dairy farms and milkmen will be registered.

The quality of milk brought to the pasteurisation unit will be checked on the spot and records will be kept. Details such as unit name, packing and expiry date will be written on the packaging of the pasteurised milk.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1995342/1-township-selected-testing-ground-pasteurised-milk/

DAIRY INDUSTRY IRKED OVER 10% TAX

By Our Correspondent Published: June 19, 2019

LAHORE: Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA) has approached Prime Minister Imran Khan and Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance Abdul Hafeez Shaikh to request withdrawal of 10% sales tax imposed on fat filled milk products classified under eighth schedule of the Sales Tax Act, 1990. In a letter written to the government, PDA Chairman Zulfiqar Khalid Shaikh highlighted that the policy would not only damage dairy industry but also force consumers to buy adulterated and unhygienic loose milk. Major products categorised under fat filled milk category in Pakistan include tea whiteners and fortified milk based formula for children to address malnutrition. He added that milk is part of an integrated and closely interlinked food economy requiring a unified approach and board socio-economic policy, infrastructure and investment. “There is ample opportunity in this sector for growth and to improve the livelihoods of millions of small farmers associated with it,” he said. “The surge in animal feed prices will hurt small farmers the most.”

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1995403/dairy-industry-irked-10-tax/

ECC LIKELY TO IMPOSE BAN ON WHEAT EXPORT

MUSHTAQ GHUMMA JUN 19TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet, which is scheduled to meet today (Wednesday), is likely to impose ban on export of wheat on the recommendations of Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

To be presided over by Advisor to Prime Minister on Finance, Economic Affairs and Revenue, Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, the committee will accord approval to billions of rupees supplementary grants for different ministries, days after deciding not to give any supplementary grant from the next fiscal year.

The committee will consider the following items agenda: additional funds of Rs 610.527 million for office of Controller General of Accounts during CFY 2018-19 for payment of dues to the families of government servants who die during service, on account of Prime Minister’s assistance package; supplementary grant to demand number 38- superannuation allowance and pensions for financial year 2018-19; supplementary grant of Rs 139.678 million for the department of Auditor General of Pakistan during CFY 2018-19; supplementary grant of Rs 218 million for the Department of Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) during CFY 2018-19; supplementary grant of Rs 82.776 million for the Department of Auditor General of Pakistan during CFY 2018-19; supplementary grant of Rs 282.992 million for office of Controller General Accounts during CFY 2018-19; technical supplementary grant of Rs 3.232 billion in favour of Communication Division/ National Highways Authority Project titled “dualisation of Kuchalak-Zhob section; supplementary grant amounting to Rs 469.499 million for FY 2018-19 under demand number 24 of Defence Division; supplementary grant of Rs 477 million equivalent to $ 3.37 million under demand No 27; supplementary grant under demand number 11 in respect of Akhtar Hameed Khan National Centre for Rural Development (AHKNCRD), Establishment Division; approval of supplementary grant in favour of Higher Education Commission for “Prime Minister’s fee reimbursement scheme for students of less developed areas; supplementary grant of Rs 200 million for media campaign; supplementary grant amounting to Rs 77.569 million for payment of rent of hired commercial buildings at F-8 Markaz up to June 30, 2019; supplementary grant amounting to Rs 206.41 million for the financial year 2018-19; supplementary grant for Pakistan Army amounting to Rs 25,277,416; supplementary grant of Rs 7.1 million for Pakistan Rangers for clearance of outstanding bills of electricity FY 2018-19; supplementary grant amounting to Rs 18 million under the head of A 13001- transport CFY 2018-19; provision of funds for hiring of vehicles/double cabin/Vigo for security of JIT members & co-opted members and three judges of Supreme Court of Pakistan (supplementary grant of Rs 10.285 million); technical supplementary grant of Rs 1.924,933 for operational cost of Anti-Narcotics Force; supplementary grant of Rs 527 million for CFY 2018-19 of PAEC; supplementary grant to meet the expenses of Commission constituted by Supreme Court of Pakistan; supplementary grant of Rs 38,479,000 for the office of the chief engineering advisor/chairman Federal Flood Commission (CEA/CFFC) Islamabad to meet the obligatory expenditure during the current FY 2018-19; supplementary grant of Rs 83.812 million for the office of Pakistan Commissioner for Indus Waters (PCIW), Lahore; technical supplementary grant of Rs 522 million to SUPARCO; release of funds for temporarily displaced persons from North Waziristan in wake of operations Zarb-e-Azb (technical supplementary grant of Rs 1.2 billion) and; (xxvii) report of wheat situation in the country.

Pakistan has missed wheat production target as the country produced 24.12 million tonnes of wheat against the set target of 25.5 million tonnes from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi season 2018-19.

Recently, Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai hinted that the government may ban the export of wheat following a significant decrease in production of the commodity in the country during Rabi season 2018-19 due to heavy rains.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190619488187/

PDA SEEKS WITHDRAWAL OF 10PC TAX ON FAT FILLED MILK PRODUCTS

RECORDER REPORT JUN 19TH, 2019 LAHORE

Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA) approached the Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Pakistan through a letter to request the withdrawal of 10 percent sales taxes on fat filled milk products classified under Eighth Schedule of the Sales Tax Act, 1990. Major products categorized under Fat Filled Milk category in Pakistan encompasses tea whiteners and fortified milk based formulae for growing children to address malnutrition.

“This policy will not only damage the dairy industry but will also force consumers to go back to adulterated and unhygienic loose milk due to increase in the price of tea whiteners and other fat filled milk products of basic nutrition for growing children,” Zulfiqar Khalid Shaikh, Chairman, PDA said while elaborating on the consequences of proposed sales tax on fat filled milk products.

He further added, “Tea whitener is predominantly used by poorer segment of the society as an alternative to unhygienic and adulterated loose milk which is available within their affordability”. He emphasized that fortified milk based formulae were manufactured keeping in view the micronutrient deficiency (Iron, Vitamins and Minerals) among children that are indispensable for growth and development. Higher taxes on these products will only result in shifting the burden upon the common man.

Despite milk being such an essential commodity, formal sector providing safe and hygienic milk has been only limited to 5% of the total milk consumption in Pakistan. Milk is part of an integrated, closely interlinked food economy requiring a unified approach to broad socio-economic policy, infrastructure and investment. There is ample opportunity in this sector for growth, and to improve the livelihoods of millions of small farmers associated with it.

Shaikh further added, “The surge in animal feed prices will hurt the small farmers the most. The government needs to abolish the duty and taxes imposed on animal feed to help uplift this lot. But in order for the industry to expand and be competitive, the dairy sector has to come under the right regulatory and taxation regime.” Therefore, it’s being urged by the PDA to remove the proposed 10 percent sales tax on fat filled milk products and restore exempt sales tax regime. As any restricted policies would not only penalize the industry but also hinder further investments in the sector.-PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190619488253/

GOVT TO OFFLOAD WHEAT STOCKS IN OPEN MARKET TO STABILISE PRICES

Amin AhmedJune 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government is likely to offload wheat stocks in the open market to stabilise the commodity’s price and discourage hoarding and profiteering.

The Wheat Review Committee in its meeting on Wednesday, chaired by Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan, assessed the per 40kg price of the commodity, its procurement by the government, market situation, exports and crop losses due to unfavourable weather conditions.

Currently, provinces are holding 24.279 million tonnes of wheat stocks along with additional left-over of 3.721m tonnes. This takes the total availability of wheat to 28m tonnes, well above the national and domestic requirement of about 25.84m tonnes.

Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) has procured wheat for the 2018-19 and is expected to release it in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa next month, according to sources privy to the committee meeting. Passco mediates in the market for national and export purposes.

Addressing the meeting, Mr Sultan emphasised the need to determine the causes of price variation and upward trend of wheat and put forward concrete solution to arrest the upward trend of wheat price. One of the measures could be regulation on the export and import of wheat, he suggested.

The federal minister asked the provincial governments to apprise the ministry about the current stock situation in their respective provinces and price and quality assessment mechanism of the wheat.

The meeting was attended by Punjab Food Minister Sami Ullah Chaudhry, secretaries, representative of State Bank, flour mills association, wheat exporters, provincial food departments, Passco and experts of the ministry.

The committee noticed that the increase in wheat price in the market was also due to the use of the commodity by the feed industry. Price of maize in the market is higher than wheat, and for this reason feed industry is using latter.

The federal minister hoped that releasing of wheat from the public stocks would help correct the situation. He directed that private sector procurement of wheat must also be assessed and price monitoring system should also be devised and the provincial governments must release wheat from local stock keeping in view the price hike and gravity of the situation.

He strongly recommended a crackdown against hoarders who are responsible not only for price hike but also uncertainty in the market.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1489294/govt-to-offload-wheat-stocks-in-open-market-to-stabilise-prices

DVANCE TAX DIVIDES TOBACCO GROWERS

Amin AhmedUpdated June 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's growers are divided over the imposition of Rs300 per kg advance tax on green tobacco as one of the groups representing the growers has claimed that the additional tax will increase farmer's burden whereas the other pointed out that the tax has not been imposed on the growers.

The division amongst growers was seen during the press conference held on Wednesday where the two groups were seen arguing with each other over the interpretation of the recently imposed tax.

Tobacco — a kharif crop — is grown in Mardan, Swabi, Buner, Charsadda, Mansehra and some parts of Malakand and is grown on over 46,000 hectares in the country.

Tobacco Growers Association of Pakistan Chairman Liaquat Yousafzai said that there are around 65,000 growers in the province and the sector's regulator Pakistan Tobacco Board (PTB) has issued 14,500 permits to growers enabling them to sell their product to the tobacco companies. However, the remaining 50,500 farmers have been completely ignored putting their livelihoods at risk as they cannot sell their crop at the price below the minimum indicative price and are unable to even recover costs of production, Yousafzai added.

Criticising the imposition of advance tax, he requested the government to impose the tax on manufacturing instead.

On the other hand, the diverging group led by Mushfiq Ali Khan has alleged that some influenced farmers are incorrectly claiming that the tax on green tobacco is putting burden on them.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1489289/advance-tax-divides-tobacco-growers

WHEAT COMMITTEE DISCUSSES PRICES

By Our Correspondent Published: June 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The wheat review committee meeting was held Wednesday, which was chaired by Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan. For the year 2018-19, all provinces have accumulated quantity of 24.279 million tons and with the addition of leftover stock of 3.721 million tons, the total availability would be 28 million tons, which is above the national/domestic requirement of 25.84 million tons. The meeting was held to review the procurement of wheat (up till now), price of per 40kg across the country, market situation, loss during the rain, export and future strategy. The federal minister asked the representatives of the provinces to apprise about the current stock situation in their respective provinces and price and quality assessment mechanism of the wheat. PASSCO as per ascribed targets procured almost 100% of its targets and can provide wheat for national and export purposes. He stressed the need to determine the cause of price variation and upward trend of wheat and put forward concrete solution.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1996063/2-wheat-committee-discusses-prices/

WORLD FOOD SAFETY DAY CELEBRATED

RECORDER REPORT JUN 20TH, 2019 LAHORE

The Punjab Food Authority has arranged an awareness walk and a seminar at the University of Central Punjab (UCP) on Wednesday. The event was held in connection with to celebrate the World Food Safety Day 2019.

The event was attended by PFA Director General Captain Muhammad Usman (retd) as a chief guest. On the occasion, UCP Acting Pro-Rector Dr Faisal Mustafa, Shifa Ali and Dr Shanawar Hayyat were also present.

A large number of students, faculty members from various departments, nutrition experts and people from different walk of life have participated in the awareness walk which carried out inside the academic premises. They were carrying banners and placards in their hands on which inscribed different slogans for public awareness. The basic purpose of the walk was to alert the common people from the adulterated mafia and to create awareness the use of safe food.

Later, a seminar was held at UCP's Auditorium. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Shanawar Hayyat and Nutritionist Sheefa Ali educated participants about to consumer safe quality food. Another speaker, Dr Faisal Mustafa praised the efforts of Punjab Food authority and its teams who working day and night and taking steps for public awareness.

Chief Guest, Captain Muhammad Usman (retd) said that Punjab Food Authority is fully committed to providing safe and healthy food as well as pasteurized milk across Punjab.

He said that supply of pasteurized milk in the province is the top priority of the PFA in order to protect masses from the use of toxic

milk. He further said that PFA is vigorously working to control the supply of adulterated milk as milk is a blessing for the whole generation.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190620488504/

KCA OPPOSES PROPOSAL OF IMPOSING 10 PERCENT GST ON RAW COTTON

RECORDER REPORTJUN 20TH, 2019 KARACHI

The Karachi Cotton Association strongly opposes the proposal of the Government to impose 10 percent sales tax on raw cotton at local stage in the Federal Budget 2019-20 with a view to generate its revenue.

The KCA has always strongly opposed the proposal to impose Sales Tax on raw cotton, as it discourages production and inhibits the smooth flow of exports and runs counter to the laid down Government policy of encouraging cotton trade in the country.

The KCA is of the view that any hindrance in the smooth exports of cotton will also prevent the growers from getting a fair price for their produce, which is a key objective of the Government.

It may be realized by the government that nearly 80 percent-85 percent of the Cotton Crop is exported in the form of Raw Cotton, Cotton Yarn, Cotton Fabrics, Garments and Cotton made-ups and Sales Tax, if levied on Raw Cotton, would be refundable thereon at the export stage.

Taking into consideration, substantial expenses involved in Tax collection, administration and in the refund process, the balance available amount to the Government would be comparatively insignificant.

It may also be realized that Exporters of Raw Cotton usually operate on narrow margins. Hence, they cannot afford to keep substantial borrowed amounts struck-up by way of payment and refund of Sales Tax for a 6-7 months, or even longer, as was the case in the past.

Due to delay in refund of Sales Tax, serious liquidity problems would be created for the cotton exporters resulting in exports of cotton would adversely suffer and compromise the interests of the cotton Growers and Ginners.

The KCA, therefore, strongly urges the government not to impose Sales Tax on Raw Cotton in the Federal Budget 2019-20 and keep Raw Cotton exempted from the Sales Tax in order to avoid adverse repercussions for all stakeholders and the general public.

The KCA also urges upon the Government not to re-enforce duties and taxes on import of Raw Cotton w.e.f. 01-07-2019 so that the local textile industry can continue meet its requirement of Raw Cotton and export optimum quantity of value added products of Raw Cotton in the international market to earn much needed foreign exchange for the country.-PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190620488522/

GOVERNMENT TO WORK OUT SUGAR POLICY FOR COMPETITIVE SECTOR GROWTH

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterUpdated June 21, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Finance Adviser Razak Dawood has sought proposals from the stakeholders to devise a long-term policy for the sugar industry to ensure the sector grows more competitive, stable and consistent.

Chairing a meeting of the Sugar Advisory Board on Thursday, Dawood said the government intends to ensure consistency and stability amongst all stakeholders of the industry – producers, manufacturers and the general public.

An official statement issued after the meeting said the adviser assured all participants that he will be willing to take input from all stakeholders in formulating the proposed policy.

The meeting also discussed various issues including availability and pricing of sugar. It was apprised regarding the current stock of the crop by representatives of Cane Commissioner's Offices.

Federal and provincial representatives of the tax body stated they have also initiated proceedings for physically taking stock of the sugar available at respective mills.

The adviser desired that the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) concluded this exercise in a week's time so that the figures of two departments (Cane commissioner's office and FBR) can be compared for better clarity and decision-making.

Dawood expressed satisfaction over the current figures of sugar availability and said the upcoming season will hopefully not cause any stress to the consumers. He stressed upon the importance of providing relief to general public by not increasing the prices unreasonably as it is an everyday household commodity.

A State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) official informed the participants that export quota of 500,000 tonnes has been approved.

The adviser encouraged the prospect of exporting sugar and was hopeful that the balance quota for export of sugar to China would also be utilised to narrow trade gap with China.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1489488/government-to-work-out-sugar-policy-for-competitive-

TRADERS OPPOSE SALES TAX ON RAW COTTON

By Usman HanifPublished: June 21, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton traders are opposing the government's proposal of imposing 10% sales tax on raw cotton at the local stage in the federal budget for 2019-20 in a bid to generate revenues.

In a statement, the Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) rejected the proposal of imposing sales tax on raw cotton, saying it would discourage production, prevent a smooth flow of exports and counter the government's policy of promoting cotton trade in the country.

It was of the view that any hurdle in the way of smooth cotton exports would also prevent growers from getting a fair price for their produce, which was a key objective of the government.

In the 2018 season, Pakistan produced 10.8 million bales of cotton against the target of 14.3 million bales. This time, the government has set the target at 15 million bales.

"According to the Punjab minister for agriculture, the province will produce eight million bales in fiscal year 2019-20. Sindh produces four million bales, therefore, this adds up to 12.2 million and the government can expect 12.25 million bales in the best case scenario," remarked Naseem Usman, a KCA member, while talking to The Express Tribune.

"I don't understand how the government has set the target of 15 million bales," wondered Usman. "The Senate standing committee has gone further, projecting production of 15.2 million bales. It seems they come up with estimates without taking ground realities into account."

"The textile sector is misusing the zero-rated status as more than 50% of its sales are domestic, which is why the government has announced that it will refund the tax to those who export and withdraw the exemption from those who do not export," said Syed Mahmood Nawaz Shah, a member of the Sindh Abadgar Board.

"The government, businessmen and farmers need to work together to improve cotton production as the country imports four million bales," he said.

The government should approach the growers to help increase crop yield and crop quality in order to save foreign exchange, which was being spent on cotton import, said the KCA member.

Compared to the maximum production of 14 million bales that Pakistan once touched, the country fell short of the target by 30-35% last year and the situation did not look promising in coming years, said Shah.

“So far, the condition of new crop is good, but the crop is attacked by pests as our cotton varieties are old and not immune to insects,” he said.

In the decade of 2001-10, Pakistan brought in Bt cotton, which is a genetically-modified pest-resistant cotton variety. However, now the pests have become powerful against the new variety as well and this kind of cotton also gets harmed by pink bollworm.

Initially, this form of cotton was pest-resistant and more productive, due to which Pakistan saw a revolution, taking cotton production from 8-9 million bales to 14.8 million bales, said Shah. “In less than 10 years, we touched 14.8 million bales but the output has now declined to 10-11 million bales,” he said.

Being one of the largest cotton growers in the world, Pakistan exported the crop as well but it had to import long staple cotton, which was demanded by the value-added textile sector, said the Sindh Abadgar Board member.

“Pakistan can get higher production with the same cultivated area if the government provides incentives and pesticide-resistant seed varieties,” he said. “We do not have any research and development work in seed production due to which Pakistan does not have any new seed varieties.”

For the high value-added textile industry, he said, Pakistan needed long staple cotton, which could be produced if the growers were provided new seed varieties.

Cotton consumes three times less water compared to rice and sugarcane crops, so Pakistan, which is a water-scarce country, can take benefit of it. “Pakistan should try to replace high water-consuming crops with low water-consuming crops,” he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1996822/2-traders-oppose-sales-tax-raw-cotton/

GOVERNMENT DECIDES NOT TO IMPOSE BAN ON SUGAR EXPORT

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN JUN 21ST, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The federal government has decided not to impose ban on export of sugar despite 30 per cent increase in prices in domestic market and “unreliable “stocks data shared with Cane Commissioners, well-informed sources told Business Recorder. This was the crux of a meeting of Sugar Advisory Board (SAB) held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Prime Minister’s Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood. There are apprehensions in some quarters of government and market that sugar prices will further increase in panic in the coming months due to insufficient stocks to meet domestic consumption in November 2019.

The reports circulating in the market indicate sugar stocks were around 3.1 or 3.2 million tons as of June 2, 2019 including carryover stocks (on paper) and with consumption pattern of 0.45 million tons per month, 2.7 million will be consumed by November, a time when crushing starts but is always delayed. The sources said, the proposal of ban on export was discussed in the meeting but the Advisor rejected it and urged the representatives of sugar industry to continue exports including to China.

However, the Advisor inquired from the senior officials of Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) if they have sugar stock position, and was informed that FBR has directed field formations to collect stocks data available at the sugar mills and report to headquarters. The officials stated that the stock position available in mills will be available within a week's time. The issue of sugar prices also came under discussion. The representatives of sugar industry informed the meeting that recent increase in price is due to hike in GST from 8 per cent to 17 per cent and the procurement of sugarcane at rates higher than the rates fixed by the government.

The stocks figures provided to the Ministry of Industries and Production indicate that total production was 5.203 million tons upto June 18, 2019, of which production in Punjab was recorded at 3.103 million tons, Sindh 1.669 million tons and KPK 0.430 million tons. The carryover stocks (mostly in papers) from the previous season were reported at 1.524 million (Punjab 1.099 million tons, Sindh 0.327 million tons and KP 0.097 million tons) which makes the total available supply at 6.857 million tons. The total export was 0.464 million tons against approved quantity of 1.1 million tons as of June 15, 2019. Consumption upto June 18, 2019 was recorded at 2.787 million tons (Punjab, 2.031 million tons, Sindh, 0.516 million tons and KP 0.239 million tons).

The meeting was informed that 3.606 million tons stocks at mills as of June 17, 2019 were meant for domestic consumption and exports. The figures presented to the SAB indicate that at the start of new crushing season, the net stocks will be around -0.061 million tons after reserving two months strategic reserves of 0.866 million tons.

However, the government estimates monthly domestic consumption of sugar at 0.433 million tons but in fact it is not less than 0.45 million tons. The Provincial Cane Commissioners collect data from sugar mills but one Special Assistant of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi had accused sugar mills of not sharing accurate data with the government.

However, seven sugar mills did not provide production figures for current season. The role of SAB after 18th Constitutional amendment is limited to working out domestic requirements of sugar with the help of provincial governments and analyzing demand and supply situation in the country and giving advice to the government for import or export of sugar.

On the recommendations of SAB, inter-ministerial committee of Ministry of Commerce, headed by the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment decides on export or import of sugar. The crushing season starts from November and continues till April every year. Presently, there are 87 sugar mills in the country of which 78 are in working condition. In Punjab total mills are 42, of which 40 are in working condition, followed by Sindh with 38 where 32 are in working condition and 7 mills in KPK where 6 are in working condition.

According to a press release the Advisor stated that incumbent government intends to devise a long-term sugar policy to ensure consistency and stability amongst the sugar producers/manufacturers and the general public," said Adviser to the PM Abdul Razak Dawood here in Islamabad.

The Adviser was apprised regarding the current stock of sugar by the representatives of Cane Commissioner's Offices federal and provincial Representatives of Federal Board of Revenue stated that they have also initiated the proceedings for physically taking stock of the sugar available at respective mills. The Adviser desired that FBR may conclude this exercise in a week's time so that the figures of two departments (Cane commissioner's office and FBR) can be compared for better clarity and decision making.

The Adviser expressed satisfaction over the current figures of sugar availability and said that the upcoming season will hopefully not incur any stress on the consumers. He stressed upon the importance of providing relief to the general public by not increasing prices of sugar unreasonably as it is an everyday household commodity. The representative of State Bank of Pakistan informed the participants that export quota of 500,000 MT has been approved by State Bank of Pakistan.

Dawood encouraged the prospect of exporting sugar and was hopeful that the balance quota for export of sugar to China around would also be utilized to improve the balance of trade with China. The Adviser asked the participants to turn up with their proposals to devise a Long-term Sugar Policy to ensure that this sector grows more competitive, stable and consistent. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks and the Adviser assured all participants that he will be willing to take input on the proposed policy making by involved stakeholders.

Representatives of sugar industry (PSMA), Ministry of Industries & Production, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of National Food Security & Research, State Bank of Pakistan, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Cane Commissioners' offices of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Punjab and Industries Department Punjab attended the meeting.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190621488936/

REVIVAL OF BASMATI BRAND: RICE EXPORTERS SEEK GOVERNMENT'S HELP TO DEVELOP KALAR BELT

RECORDER REPORT JUN 21ST, 2019 KARACHI

Rice exporters sought the government's assistance to develop Kalar Belt to produce more of the crop to help the country grow the commodity export to $5 billion annually, as Federal Economic Adviser, Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, has affirmed his support to the sector.

A meeting on Thursday with Hafeez Shaikh, convener FPCCI Standing Committee on Rice, Rafique Suleman sought a certain help from the government to develop Kalar Belt in a bid to revive the basmati brand. Rafiq Suleman, who is also the former Chairman of Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (Reap), said that the basmati has the potential to fetch alone $2 billion, as its existing export stands at $750 million.

He told the adviser that the export of rice is over $2 billion a year, which makes it second largest sector following hosiery sector's export, saying that it, however, showed restrained while reacting on fiscal budget 2019-20. Advising to the exporting sectors, he said that business community should act responsibly and shun escalating the negativity on the country's already ailing economy.

"While we have our reservations the rice export sector represented by Reap continues to work on possible solutions which should come out as a win-win solution for rice sector and the government," the convener of the FPCCI Standing Committee on Rice said, showing a full trust and faith in the

PTI's government and its Mincom Team and Finance Team. He hoped the government's endeavor will help it succeed against all the economic challenges.

Showing satisfaction, Rafiq Suleman said that the Mincom and Hafiz Shaikh with his team are making headways to stabilize the economy through multiple PTAs and FTAs with different nations. "PTAs and FTAs with Indonesia and China have immediately starting bearing results," he said, adding that in the long-run, the efforts of Mincom will start yielding results in a span of three years.

However, he asked the Mincom to set up a stage for fair-play for all private sectors through correct policy decisions in consultation with the Federal Finance Ministry. He also demanded of the government to set up technical institutes on a full time basis to equip manpower with skills through professionals. He said that the private sectors should remain only as consultative bodies to extend their feedback and advisories to the government in this connection.

The former Reap head also highlighted the energy crisis in the meeting that the rice producing sector is faced with, saying that "this remains the most neglected area by all governments including the incumbent PTI one". He said that from a small rice miller in Gujranwala to those endeavoring in Shadadkot and Larkana are faced with extremely poor supplies of utilities and this continues to grip the entire agriculture value chain of the country.

He said that the agriculture value chain continues to face the pre-and-post harvest losses between 3 times and 10 times. He demanded of the government to step up working on a war footing to revive the basmati heritage, saying that the development of Kalar Belt is expected to grow the country's export of this variety of rice to $2 billion from $750 million at present. "We are glad both Federal and Provincial Departments have given positive response and implementation has already started," he added.

Showing disappointment, he said that the 80 percent of the KPT and PQA infrastructure is focused on import oriented as the exports suffer from lack of a priority. He said that the Ports and Shipping Ministry needs to work close with the Mincom to ensure the priority for exports in every planning that it undertakes.

He said that all the country's container terminals operating with the world class infrastructure has brought excessive costs to trade in general and exports in particular. The Federal Finance Ministry, Mincom and Ports and Shipping should review all the existing agreements with the container terminals since the exorbitant tariffs they charge to have been hurting trade and the economy, Rafique Suleman said.

He also recommended to Hafeez Shaikh to have the federal government to work with the provincial governments to promote agri-clusters to ensure developing plug and play facility for the stakeholders.

He also pleaded to the associations protesting against the budget announcements, saying that such an act is self-destructive to the businesses and exports besides to the country's economy. "I request all our business association brothers to please stop publicly issuing statements against the government or budget 2019-20 as it only causes more uncertainties and damage the market, which brings more loss to the business and economy as well," Rafique Suleman added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190621489042/

PUNJAB AGRICULTURE EXPO FROM TOMORROW

RECORDER REPORT JUN 21ST, 2019 LAHORE

Punjab Agriculture department is organizing Punjab Agri Expo 2019 from June 22 to 23, to highlight the importance of fruits, vegetables and high value agriculture crops of country at international level.

Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar will inaugurate opening ceremony of expo. Whereas Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial, Minister for Agriculture Punjab and Wasif Khurshid, Secretary Agriculture Punjab along with other high ups of the department will attend the event. As many as 3000 farmers/stakeholders and 46 exhibitors of more than nine countries (Bahrain, Malaysia, Qatar, Russia, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, China, Iran and Indonesia) will also participate in it. PAD spokesman said that this event will give a new horizon and open new doors of opportunities for producer, exporter and companies indulging in agriculture business in this country.

He further pointed out that about 80% of the country's foreign exchange originates from agriculture and Punjab contributes over 60% to this amount. Pakistan is ranked at 4th in the world for mango production and Punjab Agri Expo 2019 would be helpful to highlight vision of Agriculture department to enhancing country's exports.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190621489080/

'LATEST AGRICULTURE TECHNOLOGY VITAL FOR YIELDS' GROWTH'

RECORDER REPORT JUN 21ST, 2019 LAHORE

Adoption of latest agriculture technology is imperative and a key to driving future growth in yields and overall productivity of different crops especially maize. The poultry industry in Pakistan which accounts for over 70 percent of all maize grain produced continues to grow at 10-12 percent per annum. At the existing rate, the poultry industry's demand alone is expected to exceed 7 million tons by 2023. Given that the total maize grain output of Pakistan stands at just over 6 million tons, it is imperative to adopt latest agricultural technology to meet the demand.

This was disclosed at a 'Farmer Learning Center' organized by the Bayer Pakistan's Crop Science division to promote the adoption of modern farming practices and to showcase Bayer's latest technologies and high-performing seed varieties.

The one-day event offered over 350 farmers an opportunity to visit high-yielding maize fields under trial and receive detailed briefings and practical demonstrations on the latest agriculture products and technologies. In addition to the field trials and demonstrations, the technical experts emphasized the importance of stewardship in promoting the responsible use of innovative crop technology and modern agriculture practices.

Speaking on the occasion, Managing Director and CEO Bayer Pakistan, Dr. Imran Ahmad Khan, reinforced Bayer's commitment to delivering innovative products and solutions that benefit farmers.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190621489088/

THE SUGAR DILEMMA

EditorialJune 22, 2019

FOR a brief moment, it looked like former finance minister Asad Umar had carved for himself an important new role in the ruling party. In his speech in parliament, he surprised many by taking a contrary line to the one presented by the government in its budget. And then, in a few remarks, he spoke of the sugar industry and how the beneficiaries of its rising prices needed to be investigated. The context was the tax on sugar that the budget has brought in, and how it would fuel further price increases.

Each time the sugar industry is mentioned in such a context, it is time to pause. The sugar industry is to Pakistan what Wall Street is to American capitalism. That might not come across as an appropriate comparison, but it becomes clearer when one considers the clout that Wall Street wields in American politics, and the number of people who have served in high positions in Washington D.C., particularly in the Treasury department, and its influence on Capitol Hill. In Pakistan, it is worth bearing in mind that the leadership of the three large political parties — the PML-N, PPP and PTI — have all heavily invested in sugar mills. From Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif to Jehangir Khan Tareen, to name only a few, there are many who derive their strength and clout from sugar. This is the one sector that no government can reform, to the point where in some places its interests can lead to a ban on the use of unrefined sugar, or gur. Mr Umar is right when he says the sugar sector needs to be investigated. But who will carry out the investigation? Its interests know no party, and have a special place in the power politics of Pakistan. Sugar is where state and capital are fused so tightly that no investigation by any arm of the state is likely to be able to advance.

Mr Asad also spoke on some of the conditions the IMF had originally asked for when he was leader of the negotiating team. According to him, the IMF had conditions that were far harsher than what we see in the budget, such as a near-doubling of gas prices and a sharper increase in taxes than what the present budget brings. All this may be true, but the required adjustment cannot be postponed indefinitely. Beyond firefighting, which is what is being planned at the moment, the government will have to make progress on badly needed and long-delayed structural reforms. If that does not happen, the same harsh conditions will return without the option of postponement.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1489730

WIDOWS OF SUICIDE FARMERS TO GET LAND TITLES IN INDIAN STATE

Rina Chandran JUNE 21, 2019 / 3:03 PM / UPDATED A DAY AGO

BANGKOK (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – Land titles of farmers who kill themselves in an Indian state will be given to their widows, according to a government order, granting inheritance equality in a nation where their property rights are often denied.

A Maharashtra state government order issued this week said the widows would also receive assistance with their children’s education, and access to welfare benefits such as the rural jobs scheme.

“This will allow women to get their rights and resolve problems they face,” said the order, which human rights activists said was the first of its kind in the country.

More than 300,000 farmers killed themselves in India in the two decades to 2015, government data said. The western state of Maharashtra accounted for more than a third of the deaths in 2015, with a common cause being debt from crop failure.

Widows often face difficulty in claiming their husband’s property and in receiving government compensation and other benefits, human rights activists said.

“The land does not get automatically transferred to the widow. It is often the husband’s male relatives who will take it,” said Nirja Bhatnagar, a regional head at advocacy group ActionAid India.

“Woman are not even recognized as farmers. So having the land title in their name is crucial to enable them to take bank loans and avail of government subsidies like crop insurance,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on Friday.

With more than 46 million widows, India has the highest number in the world, according to the Loomba Foundation which advocates for their rights.

Widows generally face prejudice, particularly in rural areas, where they are considered inauspicious and a financial burden to the husband’s family, with whom they typically live.

Widows of farmers who have killed themselves in Maharashtra often face abuse, eviction and threats to their children’s safety when they demand their inheritance, a 2017 study by advocacy group Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN).

“The Maharashtra government move is a positive step toward ensuring greater equality, and the physical and economic security for these widows,” said Shivani Chaudhry, HLRN’s executive director.

“But the government also needs education campaigns to spread awareness about the order, and steps to ensure its implementation. Policy changes are also required to recognize women as farmers so they can access credit and other resources.”

India’s constitution gives women equal rights but custom dictates that land is inherited by male sons. Although the law states that a widow is the legal heir to her husband’s property, in practice she is seldom allowed to stake her claim.

Nearly three-quarters of rural women in India depend on land for a livelihood, yet only about 13 percent own land.

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-landrights-women/widows-of-suicide-farmers-to-get-land-titles-in-indian-state-id

GOVT WORKING ON CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE

By Our Correspondent Published: June 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Assistant to Prime Minister On Climate Change Amin Aslam said that climate-smart agricultural policy would soon be presented in the cabinet for approval.

While meeting a delegation of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) , he said that agricultural methods needed to be revised with rising temperatures and changing climate.

Aslam said that it was inevitable to modernize agricultural methods for a country like Pakistan of which almost half of population relied on agriculture to make their living.

However, he said that it was hard for the government to do that single-handedly.

FAO Ambassador Meena Daulat assured that the organization would provide help in this regard and hailed the billion tree tsunami project.

The delegation said that FAO's proposed program would be equipped with high technology while it would provide basic and important information to policy makers and farmers.

They said that the program would strengthen agricultural system along Indus river while it would train farmers regarding resistive agriculture techniques and better management of irrigation system.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1997660/1-govt-working-climate-smart-agriculture/

WORLD BANK APPROVES $171M FOR K-P AGRICULTURE

By APP Published: June 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The World Bank approved $171 million for the support of agricultural productivity in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) by improving irrigation, strengthening small farmers' skills and supporting farmers in adding value to their products.

According to a World Bank statement, the farmers in K-P face challenges of low water-use efficiency and lack of modern technology, skills and knowledge for engaging in high-value agriculture value chains. This results in an underdeveloped rural economy with high vulnerability to climate changes.

The K-P Irrigated Agriculture Improvement Project will help address these challenges by rehabilitating community watercourses, establishing water users' associations, introducing high-efficiency irrigation systems and laser land levelling, strengthening farmers' technical skills and filling knowledge gaps on agricultural market opportunities and constraints.

"Agriculture accounts for a fifth of Pakistan's economy and employs nearly half the labour force in the country," said World Bank Country Director for Pakistan Illango Patchamuthu.

"This project will boost the rural economy in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa by benefiting millions of small farmers to diversify crops, improve productivity and increase household incomes."

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1997529/2-world-bank-approves-171m-k-p-agriculture/

INVESTMENT: 'OPPORTUNITIES EMERGING IN AGRICULTURE'

By Our Correspondent Published: June 22, 2019

LAHORE: Agriculture is a major contributor to the national economy, which accounts for over 21% of GDP, said Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial. Speaking at an event organised by the Punjab Board of Investment and Trade (PBIT), he said about 80% of the country's foreign exchange originated from agriculture and Punjab contributed over 60% to this amount. "Pakistan is the third largest producer of dates and citrus," he said. "The country ranks fourth in the world's mango production." Pakistan was a preferred country due to its agricultural resources where lots of investment opportunities were emerging to support the sustainability of quality food production, Langrial stated. Speaking on the occasion, PBIT Chairman Sardar Tanvir Ilyas Khan said the expo would open new doors of opportunities for producers, exporters and companies indulging in agriculture business in Pakistan.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1997543/2-investment-opportunities-emerging-agriculture/

CENTRAL AFRICA IS WORST COUNTRY FOR FOOD INSECURITY: WFP

RECORDER REPORT JUN 22ND, 2019BANGUI

About 40 percent of the population of the perennially unstable Central African Republic faces acute food insecurity, the World Food Programme said Friday. One of the world's poorest and most unstable countries, CAR spiralled into bloodshed after longtime leader Francois Bozize was overthrown in 2013 by a rebel alliance. Since then, much of the country has been at the mercy of armed groups that seek to control gold, diamond and oil deposits, posing a formidable obstacle to peace and national reconciliation.

"More than 1.8 million people in the Central African Republic find themselves in a situation of acute food insecurity," the report said. It said the Central African Republic was the country worst hit by food shortages, adding that overall security remained "precarious." The worst affected region was the east, home to the largest number of displaced people.

The lawlessness was adding to the WFP's woes, spokesman Herve Verhoosel told AFP because it made "access to food difficult" for people who needed it most. On Thursday, United Nations envoy Mankeur Ndiaye told the Security Council that armed groups were committing daily violations in the country. Some "2.9 million people, half of whom are children, need humanitarian assistance and protection, while 2.1 million people are facing food insecurity," the envoy said. About 622,000 people are registered as internally displaced and 590,000 refugees from the country are registered in neighbouring states, according to the UN.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190622489389/

THARIS WARNED AGAINST VIOLATING CULTIVATION BAN

A CorrespondentJune 23, 2019

MITHI: The people of Tharparkar have been warned against using the lands meant for producing fodder.

Tharparkar Deputy Commissioner Dr Shahzad Tahir Thaheem, speaking to the media here on Saturday, said punitive action would be taken against anyone found cultivating traditional crops using the lands atop the sandy dunes, state land and pastures — locally called gauncher lands — during monsoon season.

He said the district administration would effectively discourage the trend of bringing these lands under cultivation for producing traditional crops.

He said the specified lands were meant for producing fodder for livestock — the mainstay of Tharparkar economy — to ensure production of sufficient food for animals in this rain-dependent arid zone.

He said that in case of any violation of the ban, not only the crops over the lands would be bulldozed, but action would also be taken against growers and the revenue officials concerned. The DC appealed to all stakeholders to support the efforts in this direction.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1489774/tharis-warned-against-violating-cultivation-ban

FREE WHEAT DISTRIBUTION IN DROUGHT-HIT AREAS

RECORDER REPORT JUN 23RD, 2019 HYDERABAD

Deputy Commissioner Tharparkar, Dr Shehzad Tahir Thaheem while issuing daily progress on distribution of free wheat said that the fourth phase of free wheat distribution which started from May 31 is still continue on daily basis with the help of 387 sentinel points and till date 17171 per 50 kilogram free wheat distributed among drought-hit affected families.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190623489764/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUN 10th TO JUN 16th 2019

SUGAR MILL OWNERS ASKED TO PAY OUTSTANDING DUES

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter June 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed sugar mill owners to deposit cheques for outstanding dues of the farmers with the cane commissioner by June 14 (tomorrow). An apex court bench headed by Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed issued the directive while hearing a petition filed by sugarcane farmers.

The sugarcane farmers in their petition contended that they were not being paid by the mill owners for their crops.

Justice Saeed remarked that an investigation would be launched in case a cheque bounced or was not deposited. He said that the Advocate General's Office would submit a petition against the sugar mills owners if the cheques were not submitted.

As per the court directive, the cane commissioner would hand over these cheques to the relevant deputy commissioner.

Published in Dawn, June 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1487902/sugar-mill-owners-asked-to-pay-outstanding-dues

FIFTH HIKE IN WHEAT FLOUR PRICES

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated June 13, 2019

KARACHI: Amid a good wheat crop, consumers continue to take a costly ride as millers in less than three months made 5th price hike in flour No. 2.5 rate to Rs39 per kg from Rs37.50 prevailing ahead of Eid.

Similarly, the rates of fine and super fine flour have been jacked up to Rs43 per kg from Rs41.

From April till to date, millers in Sindh had raised flour no. 2.5 rate by Rs5 per kg followed by Rs5.50 per kg in fine and super fine flours.

Attributing flour price hike to rising wheat prices in open market, a miller said the 100kg wheat bag is now available at Rs3,700 which was Rs3,400 prior to Eid, while it was selling at Rs3,000 in April.

The 5kg branded flour bag now sells at Rs240 against Rs230 ahead of Eid while the 10kg bag sells at Rs460-470 from Rs440-450.

Flour millers earlier last month had warned Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah of looming wheat and flour crisis besides seeking a ban on inter-provincial movement of 20,000 tonnes of wheat on a daily basis with bulk to Punjab.

In response, the Sindh government on May 21 imposed a ban on inter-provincial movement of wheat in anticipation of the grain's shortage and resultant price hike of flour in the province.

The Sindh government was of the view that current wheat crop in Punjab had suffered widespread damage in rains, which frustrated the provincial government's plans to achieve its procurement target of the grain.

According to millers, the Sindh government had neither announced a procurement policy nor fixed official rate of the grain. On papers, Sindh has 800,000 tonnes of last year's wheat stocks but it actually had 400,000 tonnes.

They said that despite ban on inter-provincial movement, Sindh wheat is still finding into Punjab through border thus creating shortage of grain in the open market. They added the Sindh chief minister seems least interested in resolving wheat and flour crisis.

On Wednesday, Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah has asked the Divisional and Deputy Commissioners to ensure eradication and prevention of hoarding and profiteering of wheat flour, by keeping vigilance on provincial boarders, with a view to control the prices, throughout the province.

He issued these directives, during a meeting held in his office regarding food security measures, which also attended and addressed by Food Minister Hari Ram, commissioners and the secretary food also attended the meeting.

The chief secretary maintained that the godowns of the wheat flour shops must be checked and ensure action against the hoarders under the Sindh Food Stuff Act, according to which no traders is allowed to have a stock of 10,000 bags in their godowns and 25,000 in the PRCs (provincial reservoir centres) established by the Sindh Food Department.

As the Finance Bill 2019 is yet to approve, the wholesale sugar prices on Wednesday crawled up by Rs2 to Rs3 to Rs68-69 per kg after the government unveiled a budgetary proposal to increase the sales tax to 17 per cent from 8pc on the commodity from next fiscal year. A wholesaler said that sugar millers had promptly raised the prices and consumers would see its impact at retail level shortly.

The government had already anticipated a price jump of Rs3.65 per kg as impact of this hike in sales tax.

Cane production was lower by 19.4pc to 67.174 million tonnes compared to 83.333m tonnes achieved last year due to a 17.9pc shrinkage in cultivated area. Similarly, sugar production fell by 13.35pc to 4.898 million tonnes in July-March 2018-19 from 5.653m tonnes in the corresponding period last year.

The government was of the view that tax collection of Rs18bn from sugar sector is much lower than its actual potential and to minimise this tax gap the sales tax rate was being enhanced from next fiscal year.

Published in Dawn, June 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1487931/fifth-hike-in-wheat-flour-prices

LOCUSTS DESCEND ON PARTS OF SINDH AFTER ATTACKING BALOCHISTAN

Faiza Ilyas Updated June 13, 2019

KARACHI: After a swarm of locusts affected Balochistan, they have now taken over parts of Khairpur district in Sindh, it emerged on Wednesday, as the federal food security ministry's department of plant protection initiated measures in both provinces to contain the locust outbreak.

Farmers, however, expressed their dissatisfaction with governmental efforts.

According to sources, parts of Khairpur district infested with locusts include Thari Mirwah, Bair Waro and Khabbar Waro. And at least 25 towns and villages in Gwadar, Lasbela, Chagai and Kech districts of Balochistan province have been severely affected by locusts, which have destroyed large-scale vegetation in these

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research's Department of Plant Protection (DPP) asserted that it had carried out "treatment" operation in all affected areas but said it was a challenge to contain the locusts since the current environmental conditions were such that it was conducive for its reproduction.

"So far, an area of 5,020 hectares has been successfully treated in Balochistan," said Mohammad Tariq Khan, director (technical) at DPP.

Farmers unhappy over governmental efforts to contain the threat

The process is continuing since "it's a migratory species", he added.

The department would be carrying out aerial insecticide spraying soon for which test flights had been carried out in Karachi from where aircraft would now be moved to Quetta and then to affected areas, Mr Khan told Dawn.

However, sources say security threats, bureaucratic hurdles including delays in getting permission from security agencies are hampering treatment operations.

Farmers in Dasht, part of Balochistan's Kharan district, expressed their dissatisfaction over governmental efforts given the large-scale devastation caused by locusts known as 'Madag' in local parlance. They said the locust-infested areas required aerial insecticide spray.

"It's an agricultural area now ruined by locusts, causing huge losses to farmers," Jameel Ahmed, a farmer in Dasht, said while speaking to Dawn over the phone.

Only a small area was treated by insecticide by government officials sometime back, he claimed.

Frustration levels are high in the town given the fact that the locust attack has followed two spells of rainfall which had ended the drought period of seven years in the area.

According to farmers, most of whom grow dates, cotton, lentils and fodder crops, the locust invasion occurred in their area two months back and the infestation has continued.

No one had ever observed such a phenomenon in recent decades, they said, though some elders of the area said that such a locust attack last occurred in the 1960s or 1970s.

The farmers opined the government was using "security threat" as an excuse for their lack of performance in remote areas.

"Their [locusts] number has multiplied enormously destroying all big and small orchards and agricultural fields. But, the government seems least bothered," said Nazimuddin, another farmer.

The desert locust is potentially the most dangerous of the locust pests because of the ability of swarms to fly rapidly across great distances, according to experts.

The locusts first affected Yemen from where they migrated early this year to Saudi Arabia and onwards to Iran.

"In Iran, ecological conditions were favourable for locust breeding. Vegetation was green and the soil was moist due to heavy rainfall. Mature locusts laid eggs and their numbers rapidly grew due to which the Iranian government immediately launched a campaign and has so far treated approximately 350,000 hectares area," explained Mr Khan of the DPP.

He hoped the pest would vanish in Balochistan by end of June as their winter-spring breeding season would end and vegetation and soil moisture would dry out. But then they would move on to another new area where they would breed again, he warned.

Published in Dawn, June 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1487889/locusts-descend-on-parts-of-sindh-after-attacking-balochistan

THE CASE OF MISSING GST ON SUGAR

BR Research June 13, 2019

It was inevitable. White sugar has long been censured as a non-essential food commodity; and those in the policymaking circles already sick of the concessions enjoyed by the industry often pointed to the distortion enjoyed by the mill owners, namely: collection of GST on white sugar at the reduced slab of 8 percent instead of the regular 17 percent.

The lowered bracket enjoyed by sugar was not a result of an SRO stealthily issued in the dark of the night; rather, the 'distortion' has been in place ever since the Sales Tax Act, 1990 came into place. It now appears that the days of white sugar comfortably ensconced with other reduced rate items such as seeds and agricultural inputs are numbered.

Expect battle cry raised by industry stakeholders in the upcoming days, at least until the passing of finance bill, lest the legislators may interpret 'lack of complaints' to mean that the measures are not harsh enough. However, it is worth recalling here that GST rate by itself is not the primary tax policy challenge facing the sector, rather, its successful collection at prescribed rates.

Back in 2016, FBR vide SRO 812(I)/2016 set taxable price of sugar at Rs60 per kg, even though ex-factory and retail price of sugar are unregulated. According to monthly CPI, retail price of sugar in the domestic market averaged at Rs61.43 in the following year; yet collection remained considerably below potential.

After all, for most industry players, since the selling price of a commodity may be set freely, it is rarely 'their' negotiated price that is set above or at market (average) rate. Especially in a goods market facing a surplus supply, most producers are 'forced' to sell at a discount. Never mind that many players sell the commodity to related parties/group companies in the value-adding sectors such as confectionaries and beverages, etc.

At average reported domestic consumption of 5 million tons per annum during the last three years and taxable price of Rs60 per kg, annual sales tax potential from white sugar comes out at Rs24 billion. FBR estimates put the potential much higher, given the presumptive further tax of 3 percent on sale to unregistered person.

The budget document reports last year collection from the sector at Rs18 billion, three-fourths of the conservative target. Government's claim that domestic household shall bear additional cost of Rs3.6 per kg is also based on the presumption that all retail sale is through unregistered person. That would put last year's target at Rs33 billion.

Now that the three percent further tax penalty is removed as well, sales tax potential (volume constant at last year levels) comes out at Rs51 billion. That means the government expects the sector to contribute three times its current levels, a tall order indeed!

Thankfully for the government, it appears that the retail price of sugar has bottomed-out in the domestic market and shall point nowhere except north in the upcoming fiscal year. That means millers' narrative of selling price averaging below Rs60 per kg will find few buyers – at least until sugarcane crop shows signs of recovery.

However, industry players privately note that actual volume off take from the industry is much higher, and sales suppression has gone rampant ever since the setting of taxable price at Rs60 per kg. Arguably, now that the GST rate has been jacked up, collecting sales tax at a lower selling price is better than missing sales altogether.

Given the industry's political footprint, the government has shown courage by increasing the GST rate. It is time to show reason and let the distortion go as well – remove fixed valuation of sugar for tax collection.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/06/13/502521/the-case-of-missing-gst-on-sugar/

COTTON PRICES UP ON THIN TRADE

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 13TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Prices were higher on the cotton market on Wednesday in the process of thin trading activity, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8800, they added. Seed cotton per 40kg from Lower Sindh was available at Rs 4150-4200, they said. Binola was available at Rs 1800, they said. Only a deal of 1200 bales of cotton from Sadiqabad finalised at Rs 8950, they said. According to market sources, most of participants were busy in exchange of budget announcements, traders were looking disturbed due to imposition of heavy duties and sales taxes on several products, particularly, 17 percent sales tax on cotton yarn 10 percent sales tax on ginned cotton.

Cotton Analyst, Naseen Usman said that business community is not happy, the middle class, who is already suffering because of unprecedented rise in essentials, now will face more difficulties after increase in basic food items, such as sugar and cooking oil. NY cotton futures were down while rates of cotton moved both ways in other parts of the world.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190613485720/

PFMA PUNJAB FEARS HIKE IN FLOUR PRICES

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 13TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA-Punjab) while reacting to the proposed federal budget 2019-20 has claimed there are apprehensions that prices of flour besides other daily use items will also increase as a result of the taxation proposals. PFMA Punjab Chairman Habibur Rehman Leghari, Group Leader Asim Raza Ahmad, Liaqat Ali Khan and others said that the government instead of bringing new taxpayers in the net has enhanced burden on the existing taxpayers. They said incentives to the taxpayers had been decreased to enhance revenue collection.

Flour millers said that the government should had announced more incentives and bringing down the tax rates to an appropriate level so as to encourage new taxpayers. They said that the budget is not balanced and financial burden on lower strata of society has been increased. They said that wheat prices in Southern Punjab had crossed Rs 1420 per maund so the government should immediately announce release price for mills to compel hoarders to bring down their grain in the open market.

They also demanded the government had imposed a ban on the loader vehicles to carry load as per axel-load as a result of which a vehicle which was earlier carrying 150 bags could now only lift 100 bags per vehicle. It would increase transportation charges. Following this, truck owners had announced a strike call thus again leading to increase in transportation charges and ultimately increasing price of the flour bag.

They appealed the government to review its decision, fix load on a vehicle at an appropriate level so as to keep transportation charges within limit. It will help not putting extra burden on the masses, they concluded.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190613485683/

SC ORDERS SUGAR MILLS TO PAY DUES TO GROWERS

By Our Correspondent Published: June 12, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered the owners of sugar mills to pay their dues to sugarcane farmers by June 14.

A three-member bench of the apex court headed by Justice Azmat Saeed also warned the sugar mill owners that they would face strict action if they failed to hand over their cheques to the sugarcane commissioner. The commissioner will then hand over the cheques to the deputy commissioners of the districts concerned.

The Punjab advocate general informed the court that the Brothers Sugar Mills had to pay Rs678.9 million the growers.

The Darya Khan Sugar Mills and the Pattoki Sugar Mills have to clear Rs57 million and Rs591 million respectively.

Justice Saeed warned the owners of the sugar mills that the court would take stern action against them if they failed to fulfill their commitment.

The hearing of the case was later adjourned for an indefinite period.

Earlier this year, Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar had observed that the sugar mills mafia had ruled the province for decades and sugarcane farmers were not paid their dues for many years.

In December, he directed all senior officers, including cabinet members to protect the rights of sugarcane growers. Provincial minister Colonel (retd) Hashim Dogar said a crackdown was being carried out against middlemen across the province and cases were being registered against the exploiters of sugarcane growers.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1991142/1-sc-orders-sugar-mills-pay-dues-growers/

FISHERMEN PROTEST OCCUPATION OF JETTIES IN KARACHI

By Our Correspondent June 13th, 2019

KARACHI: Fishermen from Ibrahim Hyderi staged a protest against forceful occupation of jetties by influential people on Wednesday outside the office of Karachi Police.

A large number of women and children participated in the protest. They were holding placards and banners inscribed with messages like ‘Extortion Mafia Murdabad’, ‘End the Occupation’, and ‘Why doesn’t Ibrahim Hyderi SHO register an FIR’. The protesters shouted slogans against the influential people and demanded an immediate end to the occupation of jetties.

The fishermen said that the Ibrahim Hyderi Police were reluctant to take action against these elements and said that the area SHO was uncooperative.

Karachi Police Chief Dr Ameer Sheikh came out to meet the protesters. The fishermen apprised the chief of their grievances and complained of the lack of action by Ibrahim Hyderi Police. Dr Sheikh talked to Malir SSP and assured the protesters that their FIR against the occupants would be registered.

Later, Ibrahim Hyderi SHO also reached the scene and assured the fishermen that the FIR would be registered.

Following this, the protesters peacefully dispersed.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 13th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1991279/1-fishermen-protest-occupation-jetties-karachi/

HAS ISLAMABAD REALLY IGNORED HEALTH & EDUCATION?

BR Research June 13, 2019

'Federal budget ignores education and health', wrote the Islamabad-based Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) yesterday, while highlighting the fall in budget allocations for these items over last year.

The CPDI is not unique in its criticism. Some Twitteratis also thought they had a field day yesterday by flagging the same, whereas various farmers' organisations, including Kissan Board Pakistan, said the federal budget has neglected the agriculture sector. Perhaps, all these organisations never got the memo of the 18th constitutional amendment.

The only role that the centre now has in education, health, farming, and others is that of coordination; the responsibility of service delivery rests with the provinces. For this, Islamabad has a few options. Strengthen the Council of Common Interest and the Ministry of Interprovincial Coordination; create new platforms for coordination; or efficiently use the leftover machinery of the now-devolved subjects for coordination in their respective domains.

Many have been criticising this government and its predecessor to be still maintaining about 41 to 60 divisions (depending on whose soundbite you want to believe). This is seen as "federal encroachment of provincial functions", which supposedly eats into Islamabad's tight fiscal space.

News flash: there is no publicly available study which shows that these "extra divisions" should be completely disbanded by the centre for want for utility. Nor there are studies which show that holding these "extra divisions" in the centre is indeed a material expenditure responsible for Islamabad's tight budget constraints. This research gap needs to be addressed; so need be the research gap in our collective understanding of an efficient means of inter-governmental coordination.

The federal government would do well to fix the cogs of inter-governmental coordination, and also create awareness so the public starts knocking on provincial doors for the provision of most public services. Media's role in bridging this gap is equally paramount.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/06/13/502527/has-islamabad-really-ignored-health-education/

RS 12.5 BILLION ALLOCATED FOR MINISTRY OF NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY & RESEARCH

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 12TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The government has allocated Rs 12.5 billion for Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) in the annual budget for the fiscal year 2019-20 under Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) compared to Rs 1.8 billion in the fiscal year 2018-19.

The budget document shows an increase of 594 percent in funds allocated for 40 new and ongoing projects compared to outgoing fiscal year. According to the budget documents, the MNFS&R would execute 24 new and 16 ongoing projects during next financial year, 2019-20.

Under the PSDP 2019-20, an amount of Rs 1,100 million has been allocated for enhancing command area of small and mini dams in Barani areas while Rs 600 million have been earmarked for national oilseed enhancement programme.

Out of the total amount allocated for MNFS&R, Rs 650 million are approved for productivity enhancement of wheat and Rs 550 million have been set aside for national programme for improvement of watercourses in Pakistan, phase-II.

In the budget 2019-20, Rs 450 million have been allocated for productivity enhancement of rice and another Rs 400 million are earmarked for pilot project of development of shrimp farming cluster.

According to the budget documents, Rs 400 have been allocated for conservation and efficient use of water in under-process barani areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Rs 400 million have been earmarked for promotion of olive cultivation on commercial scale in Pakistan. Under the PSDP, Rs 300 million are earmarked for national pesticides residues monitoring system in Pakistan and Rs 200 million have been allocated for Prime Minister’s initiative for Save the Calf.

The government allocated Rs 200 million for promotion of trout cage farming in northern areas of Pakistan and earmarked Rs 200 for productivity enhancement of sugarcane.

In the budget, Rs 113.863 million are allocated for risk-based control of foot and mouth disease, besides setting aside Rs 100 million for establishment of plant breeders’ rights.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190612485311/

FPCCI BODY VOICES CONCERN OVER NEGLECTING AGRICULTURE SECTOR

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 12TH, 2019 | KARACHI

FPCCI Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports’ former chairman Ahmad Jawad said agriculture sector was largely ignored in the proposed budget speech of FY 2019-20. No subsidy was announced on fertiliser and pesticides, a main component of the farming sector, which means there is no relief to the farmers’ community. We expect some concrete measures in the budget which may help to reduce the cost of farming in the light of drastic figures of the agriculture sector in the economic survey. However, there was only one incentive measured which was given to the agriculture sector on tariff subsidy of agriculture tube wells @ 6.83 per unit may be appreciated. Similarly proposed Rs 12 billion for the National Food Security is a joke, once again Pakistan Horticulture Sector was ignored and no incentives for Horticulture exporters announced. “I failed to understand with these peanuts how agriculture sector could perform well in the proposed GDP growth”.

The performance of agriculture during 2018-19 remained subdued. On the aggregate the sector grew by 0.85 percent, much lower than the target of 3.8 percent set at the beginning of the year,” according to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2018-19.

The crops sector experienced a negative growth of 4.43 percent against the growth target of 3.6 percent on the back of decline in growth of important crops i.e. sugarcane, cotton, rice, maize and wheat, he said.

Jawad said agriculture contributes 18.5 percent to the country’s GDP and provides 38.5 percent employment to the national labour force but it remains a backward sector of the economy while high-performing agriculture is the key to economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Over the last decade, the performance of agriculture sector has fallen short of the desirable level, mainly because of stagnant productivity of all important crops.

“Crop area of the five traditional crops has largely remained unchanged. Climate change also poses a serious challenge to Pakistan’s agriculture and threatens country’s water availability and food security and still in 2019-20 there will be no out of the box indicators may be witnessed in this sector in the wake of budget speech, Jawad added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190612485362/

DONKEYS POPULATION INCREASED

Israr Khan June 11, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Donkeys’ population during the PTI-government has increased by one hundred thousands, while horses, camels and mules remained stagnant, the Pakistan’s Economic Survey 2018-19 revealed.

Interestingly, during their five-year tenures, there was increase of 0.4 million each in the PML-N and PPP governments. President General (Rted) Pervez Musharraf took a decade to add six-hundred thousand donkeys, while Nawaz Sharif took only two-year to add the same number to its total population in 1999. Number of horses, camels and mules remained stagnant at 0.4 million, 1.1 million and 0.2 million respectively.

Donkeys’ population increased from 4.5 million in 2008-09 to 5.4 million in 2018-19. In 1997-98, donkeys’ population in country was 3.2 million and 3.8 million in 1999-00. The number of horses in previous two governments of Asif Ali Zardari and Nawaz Sharif remained stagnant at 0.4 million, while in Musharraf tenure it was stagnant 0.3 million. During the tenure of incumbent government, buffalos population increased by 1.2 million to 40 million. During PML-N government its population increased by 5.1 million and inPPP government it increased by 4.7 million. During last one year, goats’ population increased by 2 million to 76.1 million, sheep by 400,000 to 30.9 million.

According to media reports, in February 2019, China came up with a loan of Rs42.5 billion to help Pakistan in donkeys farming as it has third largest donkey population in the world. It can then export donkeys to China, which is highly praised there, especially for their hide which is used to manufacture traditional Chinese medicines. Gelatin made from donkey skin has been long considered to have medicinal properties in China, traditionally being thought to nourish the blood and enhance the immune system.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/482965-donkeys-population-increased

NETHERLANDS VEGETABLE SEED DEVELOPER WINS WORLD FOOD PRIZE

AP Updated June 11, 2019

DES MOINES: A seed developer from the Nether-lands credited with introducing high quality disease-resistant vegetable seeds to more than 60 countries including the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia was awarded the 2019 World Food Prize on Monday.

Simon Groot, a sixth generation seedsman, began his search to create better vegetable seeds to help farmers in Southeast Asia in 1981 at age 47 after his family's company was taken over by a larger corporation.

He had learned 16 years earlier on his first trip to Indonesia that vegetable seeds developed for the temperate climate of Europe did poorly when planted in the tropics. He thought there was a huge opportunity to introduce hybrid vegetables to the region, which lacked vegetable seed developers working to adapt hybrids to the local climate.

"It was neither charity nor business. It was a passion for good seeds," said Groot, now 85. "It had always bothered me that I noticed the seed quality in that part of world was so much below our standards and below achievable standards and as a seedsman I couldn't stand that the farmers there were just deprived of decent seeds."

At the time, farmers in Southeast Asia typically saved seeds from season to season to plant because seeds available for purchase were often expired lots from Europe and North America and poorly adap-ted to their climate. They were stuck with low yields, quality that varied greatly from season to season, and plants susceptible to a wide variety of diseases.

Groot partnered with seed trader Benito Domingo of the Philippines and put tog-e-ther a team of seed researchers and breeders from Wa--geningen University in the Netherlands and the Uni-versity of the Philip-pi-nes. With a few years, they developed a hybrid bitter gourd that was commercially successful. They then adapted a tomato variety, followed by eggplants, pumpkins and leafy vegetables.

The early successes led to the creation of the East-West Seed Company, which now has more than 970 improved seed varieties of 60 vegetable crops.

Over the past four decades, the innovations led to the creation of a tropical vegetable seed industry geared toward small-holder farmers now spreading into Asia, Africa and Latin America.

It's estimated that the company's seeds benefit 20 million farmers a year in more than 60 countries, said Kenneth Quinn, the former US ambassador to Vietnam who has been the president of the Des Moines, Iowa-based World Food Prize Foundation since 2000.

"Farmers' daily lives were uplifted and consumers benefited from greater access to nutritious vegetables," Quinn said. "You put all those together and he's a truly remarkable individual with worthy accomplishments that should be recognised." Groot's award was announced during a ceremony at the US Department of State hosted by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

"The remarkable impro-vements made in these tropical vegetable seeds helped small farmers in developing nations produce more food and importantly get more income for themselves and their families curbing hunger and stimulating economic growth wherever these seeds went," Pompeo said.

Groot will receive the $250,000 World Food Prize during an Oct 17 award ceremony at the Iowa Capitol.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Norman Borlaug created the prize in 1986 to recognise scientists and others who have improved the quality and availability of food.

Published in Dawn, June 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1487460/netherlands-vegetable-seed-developer-wins-world-food-prize

'PRICE OF SUGAR TO GO UP IF ST INCREASES'

RECORDER REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The sugar industry said on Monday that sugar prices will further increase if sales tax is increased in the budget.

Talking to Business Recorder, one of sugar industry's stakeholders said that the consumers are already groaning under the price hike of all commodities and the government should rationalise taxation on food items. They said the rate of sales tax on sugar in India is 5 percent whereas there is no policy to support the essential kitchen items in Pakistan.

The sugar industry has strongly reacted to the statement of Sheikh Rashid Ahmad and has clarified that sugar industry operates in a completely regulated environment wherein price of sugarcane is fixed by the provincial governments, under the Cane Act, which remains on the increase by the political governments for their own interest to appease the farmers community to secure the rural vote bank irrespective of the cost of production of sugarcane or sugar price prevalent in the market.

Consequently, there was a bumper crop and the resultant surplus of sugar which is not made by choice as the mills cannot close without first crushing the entire available sugarcane in their areas under the laws. The growers' payments are contingent with sale of sugar so the industry has to seek intervention of the government to allow export of sugar and if it is not in a position to recover the cost of production in export sales, it is also justified to ask for subsidy to clear the payments of the growers. Sugar industry does not ask for charity from the government.

"If on the one hand we have to convert and process the entire sugarcane crop under the laws then the industry also has the right to ask for government's support for disposal of surplus sugar which cannot be sold in the domestic market. At the beginning of season 2015/2016 when sugar price was higher in the international market, industry was only seeking for export permission and not the subsidy but industry lost that window of opportunity in the absence of a timely decision from the government."

The sugar industry has time and again been requesting at all forums to deregulate the sugar sector so that industry may operate according to market mechanism. "We do not ask for any favour from the government but in a regulated regime, issues like subsidy etc, will continue to arise and governments are duty-bound to lend support in the interest of making payment to sugarcane growers. The ministers must first understand the dynamics of the industry," they said.

It was further clarified that sugar industry is tax compliant in general and all allegations of tax evasion are baseless. If the government devised a mechanism to pay additional tax of 3 percent on all sales made to unregistered persons then it is immaterial in whose name the invoice is issued as long as the government is getting the entire revenue on sales. The unregistered person can also not claim the input tax so the amount thus collected remains with government treasury, they said. It is the duty of the government to ensure bringing the dealers and wholesalers in the tax net. The sugar industry only follows the guidelines given by FBR from time to time.

Currently the assessable value of sugar is at Rs 60 per kg and the industry pays tax at 8 percent to registered persons, which is Rs4.80/kg and for unregistered person it is calculated at 11 percent which comes to Rs6.60 per kg. However, the market is hovering above Rs60/kg so the incidence of sales tax is to be worked out at market basis according to SRO 812(1)/2016, dated 02/09/2016, which is being paid every month against sales.

During the season FBR teams remain vigilant to supervise and monitor the production activity under 40-B and once the stock staking is done after the close of season, the industry continues to pay on every single bag it produces. It is very sad that the sugar industry remains under unnecessary criticism despite its significant contribution in the national economy.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/06/11/3-page/785653-news.html

UREA OFFTAKE WITNESSES INCREASE OF 22 PERCENT ON YOY

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 11TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Urea offtake witnessed sharp increase of 22 percent on year-on-year to 600,000 tons during May 2019. The dealers/farmers have started early buying of fertilizer products amidst possible hike in GST to normalized rate of 17 percent from current 2 percent, which will increase urea prices by Rs 270 per bag, an analyst said.

Urea production during the month is expected to post record growth of 34 percent as last year in May 2018 EFERT's plant was closed for maintenance, Shankar Talreja, an analyst at Topline Securities, said, adding that closing inventory for May 2019 would be around 260,000 tons.

Similarly, DAP sales during May 2019 is likely to shoot up by 275 percent to 220,000 tons due to the aforementioned reason. Among companies, Fatima Group (including DH plant) is likely to record highest growth of 111 percent in its offtake to 82,000 tons, followed by FFBL up 31 percent. Agritech is expected to record offtakes of 30,000 tons in May 2019.

The government has also sealed urea import of 100,000 tons, which will be delivered in next 2-4 weeks. Key risks to fertilizer sector include any unfavorable settlement of GIDC, poor crop season and increase in gas prices, he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190611485023/

RISING GRAIN PRICES HIT ASIAN WHEAT IMPORTERS

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 11TH, 2019 | SINGAPORE

Flour millers in Asia have been caught on the wrong side of a rally in wheat prices as they waited for the market to decline, a stark contrast to animal feed producers who booked cargoes of corn several months before prices for that grain jumped.

Benchmark Chicago corn futures climbed by almost a fifth in May as heavy rain and flooding across the US Midwest delayed planting. Wheat gained by a similar amount, largely following the corn market higher. “Some flour millers are scrambling to get hold of supplies now (after earlier holding off on purchases),” said a wheat trader who sells Black Sea cargoes in Southeast Asia. “The rally in prices has caught them off guard.”

Most Asian wheat importers, including millers in Indonesia, the world’s second-largest buyer of the grain, are covered for supplies until July, but purchases of cargoes for August arrival are less than 50-percent complete, three trade sources said. That compares with corn importers, who have locked in supplies for arrival up to October, they said.

All traders were unwilling to be named as they were not authorised to speak to media. Asia is by far the biggest importer and consumer of both corn and wheat. Black Sea wheat with 11.5 percent protein is currently being quoted at $225 a tonne, including cost and freight (C&F), compared with deals done at $210 a tonne before the rally in May.

“Wheat buyers were looking at prices to fall at least $5 to $7 a tonne from $210,” said one Singapore-based trader. Meanwhile, corn buyers in South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Vietnam bought the bulk of their supplies at around $180-$190 a tonne, C&F, in February and March, for shipment from May to October. Corn prices were quoted at $215 a tonne, C&F, this week.

“Corn buyers felt the price of $180 to $190 was good for them and the market was unlikely to go much lower than that,” said another of the traders in Singapore. Several years of bumper production of corn and wheat across the world have turned most grain processors in Asia into hand-to-month buyers, taking cargoes just a few months in advance. But flooding and excessive wet weather sparked the rally in grain prices, which had been trading near multi-month lows. The US Department of Agriculture earlier this week reported US corn planting was 67% complete as of Sunday, behind market estimates and well below the average pace of 96% at this time of year. Wheat prices are likely to be supported by dryness in Russia and as Australia faces its third year of drought.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190611485098/

AGRICULTURE SECTOR POSTS NEGATIVE GROWTH

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 11TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

The agriculture sector in the country witnessed a negative growth of 0.85 percent against the target of 3.8 percent set for the fiscal year 2018-19. According to the Economic Survey 2018-19, the country missed agriculture growth target because of insufficient availability of water, which led to a drop in cultivated area, and a drop in fertilizer off-take.

Crop sector experienced negative growth (-4.43 percent) against the target of 3.6 percent due to decline in growth of important crops (-6.55 percent). Sugarcane production declined by -19.4 percent to 67.174 million tonnes, cotton by -17.5 percent to 9.86 million bales and rice by -3.3 percent to 7.2 million tonnes while production of maize crop increased by 6.9 percent to 6.309 million tonnes and wheat growth was marginally higher by 0.5 percent to reach 25.195 million tonnes.

The cotton crop has a share of 0.8 percent in GDP and contributes 4.5 percent in agriculture value addition. Cotton crop faces significant challenges as compared to other corps, especially sugarcane. During 2018-19, cotton production remained moderate at 9.861 million bales with a decrease of 17.5 percent against the last year's production of 11.96 million bales and 31.5 percent against the target of 14.4 million bales. The production was also affected by unfavourable weather conditions; particularly prolonged hot and dry weather that prevailed in the country as well as attack of whitefly, pink bollworm and other pests.

Sugarcane production accounts for 2.9 percent in agriculture's value addition and 0.5 percent in overall GDP. During 2018-19, sugarcane production was lower by 19.4 percent to 67.174 million tonnes compared to 83.333 million tonnes achieved last year.

According to the survey, just like cotton the decline in sugarcane output is due to shrinking of cultivated area by 17.9 percent from 1,343,000 hectares last year to 1,102,000 hectares on account of water shortage.

Rice is an important food and cash crop and accounts for 3 percent in the value addition in agriculture and 0.6 percent of the GDP. During 2018-19, rice crop area decreased by 3.1 percent to 2,810,000 hectares compared to 2,901,000 hectares last year. Its production stood at 7.2 million tons against the target of 7.0 million tons and remained short of 3.3 percent to 7.4 million tons when compared to last year. The decline in production as compared to last year was due to decrease in area cultivated, dry weather and shortage of water.

Wheat is the leading food grain of Pakistan occupying the largest area under single crop. Wheat accounts for 8.9 percent of the value addition in agriculture and 1.6 percent of GDP in Pakistan. Wheat crop showed marginal increase of 0.5 cent to 25.195 million tons over last year's production of 25.075 million tons but fell short of the target by 4.9 percent.

The area under wheat cultivation declined by 0.6 percent to 8,740,000 hectares over last year's 8,797,000 hectares. This nominal decrease in area against the area cultivated during the previous year was due to shifting of area farmers to oilseeds and other competitive crops.

Maize contributes 2.6 percent to the value addition in agriculture and 0.5 percent to the GDP. During 2018-19, maize was cultivated on 1,318,000 hectares and witnessed an increase of 5.4 percent over the last year's 1,251,000 hectares. The production increased as farmers shifted from cotton and sugarcane to maize due to availability of improved variety of seeds as well as better economic returns.

Other crops having a share of 11.21 percent in agriculture value addition and 2.08 percent in GDP, showed growth of 1.95 percent mainly due to increase in production of pulses and oilseeds.

Livestock sector, having share of 60.54 percent in agriculture and 11.22 percent in GDP, registered a 4 percent growth against the target of 3.8 percent. The fishing sector having share of 2.1 percent in agriculture value addition and 0.39 percent in GDP, grew by 0.79 percent.

Forestry sector having share of 2.1 percent in agriculture and 0.39 percent in the GDP grew by 6.47 percent due to increase in timber production in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (by 26.7 percent to 36,100 cubic meters).

According to the survey, the normal average rainfall during monsoon season (July-September) 2018 was 140.9 mm, while the actual rainfall recorded was 96.1 mm, showing a decline of 31.8 percent. During the post-monsoon season (October-December) 2018, the normal average rainfall was 26.4 mm while the actual rainfall recorded was 15.6 mm showing decline of 40.9 percent. During winter season (January-March) 2019, the normal average rainfall was 74.3 mm while the actual rainfall recorded was 107.2 mm, showing an increase of 44.3 percent. During Kharif (April-September) 2018, canal head withdrawals declined to 59.62 million acre feet (MAF) showing a decrease of 15 percent as compared to 69.97 MAF during the same period last year. During Rabi (October-March) 2018-19, the canal head withdrawals recorded an increase of 3 percent and remained 24.76 MAF compared to 24.15 MAF during the same period last year.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190611485048/

AGRICULTURE SECTOR FALLS WAY SHORT OF GROWTH TARGET

By Salman Siddiqui Published: June 11, 2019

KARACHI: The agriculture sector – the backbone of national economy and a major source of food security and employment – recorded a dismal growth during the outgoing fiscal year 2018-19 primarily due to water scarcity.

"The performance of agriculture during 2018-19 remained subdued. On the aggregate, the sector grew by 0.85%, much lower than the target of 3.8% set at the beginning of the year," according to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2018-19 released on Monday.

"This under-performance of the agriculture sector was mainly due to insufficient availability of water, which led to a decrease in cultivated area and a drop in fertiliser offtake," the survey added. The crops sector experienced a negative growth of 4.43% against the growth target of 3.6% on the back of decline in growth of important crops ie sugarcane, cotton, rice, maize and wheat, it said.

Sugarcane production dropped by 19.4% to 67.174 million tons, cotton harvest fell by 17.5% to 9.861 million bales and rice crop contracted by 3.3% to 7.202 million tons.

However, two other major crops – maize and wheat – managed to give comparatively higher production.

"Maize crop increased by 6.9% to 6.309 million tons and wheat harvest grew marginally by 0.5% to reach 25.195 million tons," it said.

Other crops, having a share of 11.21% in agriculture value addition and 2.08% in gross domestic product (GDP), showed a growth of 1.95% mainly due to increase in production of pulses and oilseeds. Cotton ginning, however, declined by 12.74% due to decrease in production of cotton crop.

According to the survey, agriculture contributes 18.5% to the country's GDP and provides 38.5% employment to the national labour force but it remains a backward sector of the economy while high-performing agriculture is the key to economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Over the last decade, the performance of agriculture sector has fallen short of the desirable level, mainly because of stagnant productivity of all important crops. "Crop area of the five traditional crops has largely remained unchanged. Climate change also poses a serious challenge to Pakistan's agriculture and threatens country's water availability and food security," the survey said.

Livestock, having a share of 60.54% in agriculture and 11.22% in GDP, notched up 4% growth in FY19 against the target of 3.8%. The fishing sector, having a share of 2.10% in agriculture value addition and 0.39% in GDP, grew by 0.79% while the forestry sector, having a share of 2.10% in agriculture and 0.39% in GDP, grew by 6.47% due to increase in timber production in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa by 26.7% to 36.1 thousand cubic metres.

In 2018-19, the production of onion and chillies increased 2% to 2.12 million tons and 0.4% to 148.7 thousand tonnes respectively compared to last year.

However, the production of mash pulse (lentil), moong and potato decreased by 5.5%, 3.4% and 0.3% respectively compared to last year's production. The production of masoor, however, remained the same as in the last year.

In 2018-19, the total availability of water for Kharif (summer) crops (rice, sugarcane, cotton, maize, moong, mash, bajra and jowar) 2018 was recorded at 59.6 million acre feet (maf) and remained short by 11.2% against average system usage of 67.1maf and 14.9% over Kharif 2017.

In the Rabi season 2018-19, the total water availability was recorded at 24.8maf, showing an increase of 2.5% over Rabi 2017-18 and 31.9% less than the normal availability of 36.4maf.

Rabi (winter) crops include wheat, gram, lentil (masoor), tobacco, rapeseed, barley and mustard.

Fertiliser is the most important – and an expensive – input contributing 30% to 50% to a crop yield. Its share in the cost of production of major crops is around 10% to 15%. Domestic production of fertilisers during 2018-19 (Jul-Mar) increased by 2.6% over the same period of previous year.

This increase was due to the functioning of two urea manufacturing plants – Agritech and Fatima Fertiliser – as supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) was made available at subsidised rates.

The supply of imported fertiliser increased by 4.8%. Therefore, the total availability of fertiliser rose by 3.2% in the current fiscal year.

Total offtake of fertiliser nutrients, however, decreased by 7.3%. Nitrogen offtake decreased by 2.89% and phosphate by 18.2%. Potash offtake recorded an increase of 4.55% during 2018-19 (Jul-Mar).

"The reduction in fertiliser offtake was mainly due to its high prices, despite receiving subsidy from the government," the survey said.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1989639/2-agriculture-sector-falls-way-short-growth-target/

FOOD-BORNE ILLNESSES KILL 225,000 IN ASIA-PACIFIC EVERY YEAR

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated June 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations says that the Asia-Pacific region has a poor track record when it comes to preventing food-borne illnesses, resulting in deaths of 225,000 people every year.

Observing the first 'World Food Safety Day' on Friday, FAO says worldwide every year, unsafe food or water kill more than HIV, AIDS, malaria and measles combined, and it is now time that everyone takes this issue more seriously.

In so many cases the deaths and illnesses associated with consuming unsafe food were needless and could have been prevented, says FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific, Kundhavi Kadiresan.

While there are various ways that food can become contaminated, in the Asia-Pacific region poor hygiene and mishandling are among the main culprits.

Improving hygiene practices in the food and agricultural sectors helps to reduce the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance along the food chain and in the environment. Investment in consumer food safety education has the potential to reduce food borne disease and return savings of up to ten-fold for each dollar invested.

Globally, some 600 million cases of food-borne illnesses occur annually and 420,000 people, 30 per cent of them children below the age of five, die every year as a result of these illnesses. In the Asia-Pacific region, more than 275m people fall ill due to food-borne causes every year.

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LOCUSTS PLAGUE DALBANDIN, HARASS LOCALS

Muhammad Akbar Notezai Updated June 10, 2019

ON the first day of Eid in Dalbandin, the headquarters of district Chagai, residents of the dusty town are alarmed: an army of locusts has arrived in its surrounding areas and in the southern part of the town. Since then, the sandy areas of southern parts of Dalbandin are kind of moving with lumps of locusts. And the locals are afraid to go there. Their fears doubled up following the pouring of locusts into the populated areas of Dalbandin city in Killi Khan Jan, Killi Kohi Khan and Killi Khuda Raheem.

One of the residents is Abdur Rehman Baloch, a well-known artist. The locusts have been pestering him for over the last two days. Neatly combed and dressed in his traditional Balochi shalwar-kameez, Rehman asks us to follow his motorbike, in the tortuous streets of Killi Khan Jan, to reach his house. The streets are replete with locusts. Stopping in every corner of his street, he points towards them, climbing up the walls and entering houses.

We stand in the middle of a Killi Khan Jan street. Locusts freak out Dalbandin-based journalist Ali Raza Rind, accompanying me, by falling on him one by one from the walls. Rehman says, laughing, “That’s what happened to me the first time I encountered them. But now I am used to them. With locusts in my room, I now sleep without being disturbed.”

Situated in the heart of the city, Killi Khan Jan has hundreds of houses. Former minister Sardar Atif Sanjrani hails from here, elected in 1997 for a National Assembly seat. There are several katcha houses made up of mud. One of them belongs to Rehman. “The locusts have left no greenery and the few plants I had planted,” says Rehman, showing us dead locusts under his partially damaged date palm tree. “If these locusts continue to wreak havoc in our town, no plant or tree would be left. They are now trying to reach the main bazaar of Dalbandin.”

In front of his house, there is an open, plain area. Other than two big trees, there is sand all around. Ahmad Mohammad Hassani is sitting under the shade of one of the trees. A friend told him in the morning that in ancient past there used to be a village in Kharan. When an army of locusts entered the village, the locusts destroyed it in toto. Still, locusts are eating up a pomegranate tree in his small courtyard. “It used to be thick,” he recalls. “But it is now reduced to the ground.”

Zaheem Baloch used to have a wonderful but small garden filled with pomegranate and date palm trees. Here, in the evenings, he would have tea with his children. But since the arrival of locusts, the insects have been eating up his garden and the trees. Today, he was angry to the extent that he chopped down the trees eaten up by the locusts. “They had destroyed the trees, and the trees looked ugly,” a frustrated Zaheem tells Dawn. “I chopped them down.”

Locals assert this is the first time that locusts have arrived in such large numbers. But elderly and turbaned Hafiz Nasrullah disagrees. According to him, this is the second time. “In 1990, locusts arrived in Dalbandin, in lumps after lumps,” he tells Dawn in Faisal Colony, agreeing, “this time, though, their number is more than what one can imagine”.

Locals claim that the locusts have come from Panjgur, Washuk and Kharan districts. At the same time, they are also reproducing and increasing in number, they add. In the words of farmer Yaqoob, “the locusts leave nothing in cultivated lands, including the stems of thick trees. They can eat up a tree in an hour, like termites.”

Understandably, the local administration of district Chagai is not capable of exterminating the swarm of locusts. After two days, with the help of local administration, Aftab Baloch, the local head of Food and Agriculture Organisation in Dalbandin, and Zahoor Ahmad Shah of the Agriculture Department surveyed the areas on Saturday. And on Sunday, they began spraying.

“Although we have sprayed, they are still present in large numbers in Siah jungle, a semi-agricultural area. They are moving towards agricultural areas of Chagai, Padag and Ameenabad. They can destroy the crops over there if remain unchecked,” says Aftab. “Without help from the top and spraying by helicopters, they are unlikely to be exterminated.”

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SCIENTISTS EDIT CHICKEN GENES TO MAKE THEM RESISTANT TO BIRD FLU

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 10TH, 2019 | LONDON

Scientists in Britain have used gene-editing techniques to stop bird flu spreading in chicken cells grown in a lab – a key step towards making genetically-altered chickens that could halt a human flu pandemic. Bird flu viruses currently spread swiftly in wild birds and poultry, and can at times jump into humans. Global health and infectious disease specialists cite as one of their greatest concerns the threat of a human flu pandemic caused by a bird flu strain that makes such a jump and mutates into a deadly and airborne form that can pass easily between people.

In the latest study, by editing out a section of chicken DNA inside the lab-grown cells, researchers from Imperial College London and the University of Edinburgh's Roslin Institute prevented the bird flu virus from taking hold in the cells and replicating. The next step will be to try to produce chickens with the same genetic change, said Mike McGrew of the Roslin Institute, who co-led the research. The findings were due to be published in the scientific journal eLife on June 4.

"This is an important advance that suggests we may be able to use gene-editing techniques to produce chickens that are resistant to bird flu," McGrew said in a statement. "We haven't produced any birds yet and we need to check if the DNA change has any other effects on the bird cells before we can take this next step."

In the further work, the team hopes to use the gene editing technology, known as CRISPR, to remove a section of the birds' DNA responsible for producing a protein called ANP32, on which all flu viruses depend to infect a host. Lab tests of cells engineered to lack the gene showed they resist the flu virus – blocking its entry and halting its replication and spread.

The death toll in the last flu pandemic in 2009/10 – caused by the H1N1 strain and considered to be relatively mild – was around half a million people worldwide. The historic 1918 Spanish flu killed around 50 million people. Wendy Barclay, professor and chair in influenza virology at Imperial who worked with McGrew, says the idea behind developing gene-edited flu-resistant chickens is to be able "to stop the next flu pandemic at its source

And she said work so far was showing promise: "We have identified the smallest possible genetic change we can make to chickens that can help to stop the virus taking hold."

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190610484417/

MILK YIELDS: WEIGHING THE OPTIONS

BR Research June 10, 2019

To get the most from something by investing least amount of resources is a concept at least as old as industrial revolution and the birth of modern economics. Livestock is no different. But while average milking yield of Australian, Dutch or American cows range between 25 to 40 litres per day, that of Pakistani cows and buffalos is 6-8 litres per day. Without fixing the milking yield of Pakistan's cattle the quantity of good quality milk will not rise to a level where it can be made affordable to all – a subject discussed late last week (See: Milk pricing problem, May 30, 2019).

There are two broad set of solutions to Pakistan's low milk yield problem. The quicker way, which is improvements in the provision of food, water, and clean animal husbandry practices. And the long-haul process of improving the breed of the animal itself.

In an interview with BR Research, Sulaiman Monnoo, Senior Vice Chairman of Pakistan Dairy Association, said that milk yield of Pakistani breeds can be improved by 25 percent in less than 6 months by just giving basic education to livestock farmers. These include education and support related to artificial insemination, modern milking methods, feed, animal comfort, etc. "Just by improving the quality and quantity of water that is fed to cattle, average yield could rise by 1 litre."

The long-term solution lies in breed improvement, where there are three possible options. For big corporate farms there is no option but to import foreign breeds since it does not make business sense for them to have rely on low yield local breeds. The supply of good standardised quality of local breeds that may yield 15-20 litres daily average is so low that to purchase only 500 good local breeds takes a year, whereas they can directly import even 3000 animals whenever they want.

But not everyone is a big corporate farmer, nor does Pakistan's forex reserves allow adding heaps of cow imports to its annual import bill, whereas small farmers who constitute the bulk of cattle population cannot afford to buy and keep imported cattle. Therefore, using artificial insemination or embryo transfer for cattle is a potential middle of the road solution.

In case of the former farmers get one-sided genetics from a foreign proven bull whose semen is used to artificially impregnate a local breed cow to improve the milking yield of the new heifers. In the case of the latter, both the semen and the egg of high milking yields breeds are used, and the embryo is transferred to local cows acting as surrogate mothers. The former is less costly and less complex than the latter. But while the former brings noticeable results in 7-8 generations on sustainable basis, the latter shows good results in 2-3 generations.

The third option is of course is improving those handful of local breeds through those handful of local bulls, who are registered and proven for their good gene. But this process takes at least 10-15 years to get to a basic level and about 60-70 years to get to the level of dairy specialist countries, who have taken as much time to develop their breeds.

For any of these options to succeed, the role provincial livestock departments is critical, as is inter-governmental coordination for food standards at one end, feed, semen type & quality, etc and their import regulations at the other.

For instance, in the case of breed improvement livestock departments will have to ensure that animal pedigree records are registered, and that insemination only happens through registered bulls or imported/local semen, whatever the case may be. In the case of farmer training for clean practices, good feed and water, the livestock and breeding services departments will have use their machinery to train, educate and monitor the farmers. And these efforts will have to be consistent.

In 1960s when the US started developing its dairy breeds their average milk production per cow was about 2000 litres for 305 days, and they had about 28 million animals. Today, they have reduced their dairy cows to nearly one-third of the 60s, while their dairy production level has increased to 10,000 litres per 305 days. But it has taken 60 years of consistent efforts for them to achieve these results. And here in Pakistan, both yields and the number of cattle has been going down – the latter more so over the last fifteen years, which will be discussed later in this space.

Pegged to all this, however, is the need for deregulation of milk prices, since at current prices farmer has little or no incentive to ensure good feed, water and -clean husbandry practises; nor does she have any incentive for breed improvements. Hopefully good sense will prevail soon.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/06/10/501455/milk-yields-weighing-the-options/

IMMENSE OPPORTUNITIES IN GLOBAL HALAL MARKETPLACE

By Muhammad Ashraf Published: June 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: In a highly competitive global marketplace where many traditional market segments have reached saturation point and are resistant to penetration, the halal segment, estimated to be more than 10% of the entire global merchandise trade, offers immense business opportunities.

Traditionally referring to meat and poultry only, halal has grown to include non-meat products like processed food, dairy produce, beverages, pharmaceutical products and more recently non-food products like cosmetics, leather goods, etc.

Determining the precise size of the halal market has been challenging so far due to the absence of separate harmonised system (HS) codes, and non-segmentation of natural products eg grains, fruits and vegetables being intrinsically halal. The global halal market is estimated at $1.5 trillion, growing from $635 billion in 2010, and is forecast to reach $2 trillion by 2023.

In its sub-categories, the halal food market is estimated to increase from $1.3 trillion in 2017 to $1.8 trillion by 2023, halal pharmaceuticals from $87 billion to $131 billion and halal cosmetics from $61 billion to $90 billion.

The core consumer base of halal products comprises around 1.8 billion Muslim population of the world, growing at twice the rate of non-Muslim population. The 57 Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries, many of them being net food importers, have a collective GDP (PPP) of $29 trillion.

The halal market, however, is not limited to the OIC countries as it includes other countries with significant Muslim populations.

Halal meat products are gaining popularity even with non-Muslim consumers due to food safety and humane treatment of animals associated with halal. The halal products are increasingly made available in mainstream supermarkets, hypermarkets and convenience stores in Europe eg Tesco, Carrefour, Aldi, Lidl, etc.

Owing to the growth potential, halal is no more viewed by the economic operators as an exclusive niche market but a new commercial paradigm. Interestingly, amongst the top five halal meat exporting countries (Brazil, Australia, India, France and China), none is a Muslim country.

In view of the high growth potential in the halal market, the countries, regardless of the religious beliefs of their majority population, are leveraging their production strength to capture the market share.

Australia and New Zealand are capitalising on their perception as safe and high-quality food suppliers to penetrate the halal segment. Thailand is developing a robust halal regulatory system with state-of-the-art Halal Research Centre.

The Philippines has developed the Asia Halal Centre and promulgated the Halal Export Development and Promotion Act to develop and apply halal standards and practices. China, through the Belt and Road Initiative, is positioning to be a leading halal food exporter and has invested substantially in domestic halal food companies and around $350 billion in the Dubai Halal Food Park.

The compelling business opportunities have attracted multinational enterprises (MNEs) and global suppliers, regardless of the religious affiliations, to seize market share with aggressive production and marketing strategies. For instance, the Nestle Group has 150 halal facilities out of the total of 477 factories across the globe, exporting products to 51 countries.

There are three critical success factors for tapping the potential in the halal marketplace. First, the halal certification is the basic market access requirement so that the consumer has confidence in the product's halal status. Also, in order to forestall false claims, the reliability of the certificate itself is essential through the recognition of halal certification bodies in the export market.

Second, a reliable traceability mechanism is the sine qua non for establishing the halal integrity of the product by conforming to the halal standards and guidelines. Halal is a farm-to-fork process with compliance at all stages of the supply chain – halal purchasing, production, packaging, labelling, warehousing, transportation and consumption.

Third and the most important factor is the competitiveness of production, ensuring food safety and quality. The fact that leading halal exporting countries and corporations are non-Muslim, indicates that market dominance is driven primarily by the competitive cost of production and reputation for safe and high-quality food production – the halal certification becomes a mere add on.

Pakistan's participation in the fast growing halal market has been insignificant. In the country, the effort at capitalising on the halal potential has remained limited to developing the halal certification system, that too with limited success. There has been little focus, even acknowledgment, of a competitive production environment and food safety as the most critical success factor.

Despite being an agricultural country, Pakistan remains a net food importer with $6.2 billion in imports and $4.8 billion worth of exports.

In order to effectively penetrate the fast-growing global halal market, a multi-dimensional export development strategy is required. First, the halal certification and robust traceability mechanism needs to be put in place without any further delay.

Second, it is to be acknowledged that halal certification is a necessary but not sufficient condition for entry into the halal export market. The real driver is the competitive production environment, which largely depends on farm and industrial productivity.

Third, deeper penetration into the halal market in the short term would come from MNEs using Pakistan as a production base for exports to the global market. Through policy readjustment, the MNEs are to be coaxed into a major shift from viewing Pakistan as a consumer market for their products to a production base for exports to the global halal marketplace.

As a spinoff, the local SMEs will benefit through sub-contracting, indirect exports and learning through imitation.

Fourth, the capacity of SMEs should be built on halal import regulations of importing countries, packaging and labelling requirements of import markets and customising product offerings to suit local tastes.

On the market side, Pakistan's geographical proximity can be leveraged to make the country a production base for supply to regional markets, especially the Middle East, which is a major halal food importing market, with high incomes and per capita rates of consumption.

To conclude, the potential in the fast growing global halal marketplace is huge, but making large strides in the halal export market depends critically on the competitively produced exportable surplus.

The writer is the Director General (Trade Policy), Ministry of Commerce

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PROVINCES TO ALLOCATE MORE FOR AGRICULTURE

Amin Ahmed Updated June 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The provinces have decided to enhance their share towards the development of agriculture for the first time since devolution, with the combined allocation during fiscal year 2019-20 expected to be at Rs50 billion.

Announcing this development at a news conference on Thursday, Minister for National Food Security and Research Mahboob Sultan said that in the post-devolution period, provinces did not give importance to the agriculture sector and allocation in the development budget was reduced by 60 per cent.

Despite the fact that agriculture is a provincial subject, during the next fiscal year the federal government will provide Rs12bn to provinces for the agriculture sector, he said.

The minister said the government is launching a five-year programme worth Rs280bn to improve the agricultural sector in consultations with the provinces.

An amount of Rs218bn will be spent during the next fiscal year on the improvement of water productivity through building water infrastructure including small water conservation projects. An allocation of Rs44.8bn will be spent for increase in yields of wheat, rice, sugarcane and cotton.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1488134/provinces-to-allocate-more-for-agriculture

COTTON TARGET FIXED AT 15.02M BALES

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter June 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research was informed on Thursday that the government has fixed cotton production target of 15.02m bales on an area of 3.28m hectares this year.Sowing has so far been completed on 2.44m hectares to achieve 2.785m bales, the committee was informed.

Senator Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah chaired the meeting which was attended by senators Seemee Zaidi, Mir Kabeer Shahi, Najma Hameed, Minister for National Food Security and Research Mahboob Sultan, Secretary National Food Security and Research Hashim Popalzai, MD Passco and member Irsa.

Regarding the proposal of the special committee on agriculture which had proposed to impose duty on cotton imports, the committee was informed that summaries has been moved for support price. The summaries have been sent to bodies concerned and views are awaited from Ministry of Commerce and the Federal Board of Revenue.

Managing Director Passco informed the meeting that torrential rains and hailstorms at the critical time of harvesting not only damaged the standing crop but per acre yield was also affected.

Regarding availability of water, the Irsa official informed the committee that total reservoir position as of Thursday was 2.512 million acre feet (MAF) against 1.818MAF in last year and no shortage is being observed as of today. The anticipated water availability this year is 47.77MAF against 39.40MAF in last year, he said.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1488130/cotton-target-fixed-at-1502m-bales

SINDH GOVT URGED TO TAKE STEPS FOR LIVESTOCK NUTRITION POLICY

Gohar Ali Khan June 14, 2019

HYDERABAD: Researchers, academia and nutrition specialists urged Sindh government to conduct census of livestock and hammer out a nutrition policy to bolster food security.

They were speaking at the concluding session of a two-day workshop on ‘Mineral-Molasses Blocks (MMBs)’ jointly organised by the EU-funded Programme for Impro-ved Nutrition in Sindh-1 (PINS-1), Sindh government, Sindh Rural Partners Organisation (SRPO) and Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) on the university campus in Tandojam on Thursday.

“Pakistan is a nuclear country and major player on the world stage, but it is shameful that children, women and people are not better nourished,” nutrition specialist associated with the PINS-1 John Ashley said.

He said that if the MMBs technology was adopted and promoted, people would obtain good quality meat, milk and food.

If undernourishment of livestock was addressed, malnutrition of people could be reduced to a great extent in Sindh.

He said that Pakistan, especially Sindh, lagged behind the world, where livestock fell prey to serious undernourishment.

Adviser to Sindh chief minister on irrigation Ashfaq Ahmed Memon asked the community people to practice this technology at their villages and houses and if it was suitable, it must be promoted and spread throughout the province for better nourishment of livestock.

SAU's Prof Dr Mohammad Ismail and SRPO executive director Zahida Detho presented recommendations to government to address malnutrition of people and undernourishment of livestock for prosperity of the nation.

They called for conducing livestock census at the district level to assess correct figure of animals; launching livestock female workers programme like lady health workers programme to train rural women to look after animals.

It includes livestock nutrition in syllabus, starting women livestock extension programme and adopting MMBs technology.

During the opening-day deliberations, Mr Ashley told the participants that "almost all ruminant livestock in Sindh are likely to be undernourished because of deficiencies in micronutrients (minerals and vitamins) and protein in their food intake".

He said that mineral-molasses (multi-nutrient) blocks (MMBs or MNB) offered a means to augment the normal ruminant diet to partly correct nutritional deficiencies.

He said that micronutrient (minerals and vitamins) deficiencies in ruminants led to sub-optimal metabolism or physiology and hence low growth rate, slow development/time to reach marketable size, low resistance to infectious disease, slow sexual maturation, poor milk yield, sub-optimal fertility rates and pregnancy outcomes and others.

SAU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Mujeebuddin Memon Sehrai said that the MMB must be researched to conduct economic and nutrition analyses under various ecosystems.

He urged SAU's animal nutrition department and institute of food sciences and technology to include the MMB in components of their masters programme research.

Speaking as chief guest of the programme, forest and wildlife secretary Abdul Rahim Soomro admitted that there were several policies but they could not be implemented so far. He said that policies were designed to help community.

Livestock master trainer Dr Mumtaz Ali and animal dairy expert Dr Aijaz Ahmed Kumbhar jointly briefed the audience saying that MMBs which were supplementary diet could fulfil mineral deficiency and maintain balance ration of livestock including protein, energy and minerals.

Meanwhile, a documentary was shown about importance of the MMBs and technical sessions were held to train local community, while focusing on Tharparkar.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1488021/sindh-govt-urged-to-take-steps-for-livestock-nutrition-policy

THE REVENGE OF AGRI-FREE MARKET?

2019/06/14/

“Rice leads cotton in major kharif crops”, reads the headlines from 2009, when acreage under white gold trailed paddy by five percent. That wasn’t the first time, though. Since 1960s (or at least since the statistical supplements of Economic Survey are available online), rice and cotton closely battled for leading share in kharif acreage, with average variance of no more than 100 hectares per annum during that period. Share of rice even overtook cotton in 1979 by no less than seven percent.

That was then. As the fruits of green revolution, enhanced command system under Indus irrigation network, and reversal of nationalisation policies took their full effect starting mid-80s, cotton became country’s leading cash crop, with area under its cultivation recording fastest growth of all major kharif crops. By 1997, difference between cotton and rice acreage peaked at 900 hectares, with average gap during 1986-97 at 640 hectares per annum.

Late 90s is also the first time when acreage under four major kharif crops (cotton, rice, cane and maize), crossed seven thousand hectares for the first time after sustained growth of nearly two decades. Acreage has comfortably stayed above that floor ever since, bottoming out once in FY11 – in the kharif season following monsoon floods of 2010 – and finally peaking in FY18 at 8,195 hectares.

Provisional numbers from statistical division suggest that FY19 has been another abysmal year for kharif crops, as total acreage has declined by 7 percent for the gang of four, blamed primarily on poor water availability. Afterall it is the lowest since FY13, back when cotton crop was still enjoying its last boom in recent memory.

But the tug and pull of the last couple of years masks another significant trend – that of the beating kharif cash crops (cotton and cane) have received at the hands of rice and maize, consistently for the past three years.

While the policymakers continue to obsess over the ‘chicken and egg problem’ – namely, whether cotton has suffered at the hands of incentivisation of cane or cane became farmers’ crop of choice because cotton was underperforming – both rice and maize have quietly beaten the Cotton-Cane-Complex for the top and third positions, respectively.

The outgoing year also record two surprises. First, the combined acreage under rice and maize exceeds acreage under cash crops by almost one-fifths. Although this is third year in a row, the quantum of difference is finally large enough this year that it can no longer be interpreted as a fluke.

Second, maize has finally beaten cane to third place, that too by no less than 20 percent. Although rice has two-thirds share within major cereal kharif crops, the growth has no doubt came on the back of maize – and a concurrent decline in both cotton and cane.

This space will aim to highlight the possible causes of the changing trends within kharif crops in a series of columns over next week – but one parting thought for policymakers: compared to cotton and cane, both rice and maize are virtually free market commodities with virtually no support or intervention by regulators. This year when myriad federal and provincial committees on agriculture put their heads together to stage an agriculture revival, maybe that’s one thought they might wish to keep with them.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/06/14/502829/the-revenge-of-agri-free-market/

BAN ON WHEAT EXPORT LIKELY IN WAKE OF LESS PRODUCTION

RECORDER REPORT JUN 14TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The government may impose ban on export of wheat following significant decrease in production of the commodity in the country during Rabi seasoon 2018-19 due to heavy rains "Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNS&R) has reservation over wheat export and it will raise the matter in next meeting of Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) to put a ban on wheat export," said Secretary MNS&R Dr Muhammad Hashm Popalzai.

He said that according to provincial government reports, the country has produced 24.12 million tons of wheat against the set target of 25.5 million tons from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi season 2018-19.

Heavy rains coupled with hailstorms had affected wheat crop in the country and reduced the size of the crop by 1.28 million tons, Poplazi said.

The secretary while briefing Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research said that country produced 24.12 million tons of wheat against the set target of 25.5 million tons.

He said that with the addition of leftover wheat stock of 3.7 million tons, the total availability of the grain will be 27.9 million tons while total national requirement of the commodity is 25.8 million tons.

"We can meet easily our national requirement through our strategic reserves", he said.

Muhammad Khan Khichi, Managing Director (MD) Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Cooperation (PASSCO) told the committee that ECC of the cabinet on November 11, 2018 allowed the organization to offload 100,000 metric tons of its surplus wheat through export via sea route only.

Through open bidding, PASSCO received good rate of Rs 32,759 per metric tons, he said, adding that agreements were singed with four exporters and entire 100,000 metric tons of wheat lifted on April 24,2019.

He said that PASSCO was further allowed to export 0.5 million tons of its surplus wheat by ECC on January 29, 2019. Only one party participated and offered the previous rates of Rs 32,759 per metric tons, he said, adding that agreement was executed for 50,000 metric tons and lifting is in progress. So far a quantity of 40,336 metric tons of wheat has been lifted till June 11, 2019, he said.

Khichi said that decrease in wheat prices in international market from $239 to $196 has discouraged exporters since export of PASSCO wheat had become non-viable. However, international wheat markets are experiencing a renewed surge in prices due to which we expect a positive response in near future.

About wheat procurement, he said PASSCO has so far distributed bardana for 740,153 metric tons amongst the growers while 674,316 metric tons wheat has been received back against the distributed bardana.

Out of 1,100,000 metric tons procurement target, 479,998 metric tons wheat procured in Punjab against set target of 881,500 metric tons, 143,574 metric tons procured in Sindh against set target of 167,500, 48,798 procured in Balochistan against set target of 51,000 metric tons.

He said that the main reason behind less achievement of target is torrential rains and hailstorm in Punjab province. The rains at the time of harvesting not only affected standing crop but also affect per acre yield.

The feedback puts the estimate of damage to crop up to 20 percent and yield reduction up to 10 mounds per acre, he said, adding that the quality of the harvested wheat was also affected resulting in small and shrivelled grain which being below fair average quality was not acceptable to PASSCO.

MD PASSCO said that following losses through natural calamity, flour and feed mills as well as stockiest started buying wheat, escalating the opening wheat prices beyond the support price of Rs 1300 per 40kg making the procurement for the public sector difficult. Open export of wheat of through private exporters also escalate prices in open market, he said.

Dr Khalikd Abdullah, Cotton Commissioner MNFS&R told the committee that government has fixed 15.02 million bail cotton production target for the year 2019-20 from an area of 3.28 million hectares. Sowing target was of 2.785 million bales with 2.44 million hectares area sown as of now, he said.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Senator Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah also attended by Senators Seemee Zaidi Kabeer Shahi, Najma Hameed, Minister for National Food Security and Research, Secretary National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Sultan.

Regarding special committee on agriculture proposal to impose duty on cotton import and move a summary for support price, the committee was told that summaries have been sent to bodies concerned and views are awaited from ministry of commerce and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

The committee also recommended having meetings of the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee more frequently preferably on quarterly basis.

About availability of water, a senior official of ISRA informed the committee that total reservoir position as of today is 2.512 million acre feet against 1.818 million acre feet in last year and no shortage is being observed as of today. The anticipated water availability this year is 47.77 million acre feet against 39.40 in last year

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190614486184/

MANGO FESTIVAL OPENS IN MIRPURKHAS TODAY

RECORDER REPORT JUN 14TH, 2019 KARACHI

The annual three-day National Mango and Summer Fruit Festival is all set to open today (Friday) here in Mirpurkhas.The festival, to be organised at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Mango Exhibition Hall, Mirpurkhas, is expected to display mangos from more than 400 orchards of Sindh. Mirpurkhas district known for its mangos in the world has been organising mango festival for the past 54 years.

The focal person of the Mango Organising Committee, Ghoram Baloch, told APP that Member National Assembly Mir Munawar Talpur will inaugurate the festival on Friday at 5.30p.m

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190614486199/

NA SPEAKER FOR PROTECTING INTEREST OF TOBACCO FARMERS

RECORDER REPORT JUN 14TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser stressed the need for protecting the interest of the tobacco farmers and ending their exploitation.

He urged the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) that the burden of tobacco taxation should not be passed on to growers and that the tobacco farmers should be provided maximum relief as they constitute the most vulnerable segment in the entire tobacco value chain. He was chairing a meeting at Parliament House, Islamabad to discuss the budget proposals for giving relief to the tobacco growers, says a press release issued here on Thursday.

A working group on tobacco growers concerns constituted by the Speaker National Assembly and headed by the Parliamentary Secretary for Commerce Shandana Gulzar Khan, briefed the panel about the concerns of tobacco growers with reference to the current tax regime. Shandana Gulzar Khan underlined the need for striking a balance between revenue collections, health concerns and interests of the farmers.

Comprising the Members of the Special Committee on Agricultural Products, Members from tobacco growing districts, and provincial ministers, the panel maintained that the entire economy of tobacco growing districts revolve around single crop, tobacco, which serves as their sole source of livelihood. The Members remarked the FBR should not ignore the political economy and political dynamics of the tobacco growing regions. Qaiser highlighted that millions of households are affiliated with the tobacco value chain and emphatically stressed that the revenue authorities should pay heed to unintended effects of tobacco taxation on the growers.

The panel expressed reservations over the Federal Excise Duty on tobacco on the grounds that despite being an adjustable excise duty, it has negatively affected the farmers who are left with lesser avenues to sells their crop. KP provincial minister for sports, tourism, archeology and youth affairs outlined that levying FED at GLT stage has precluded the tobacco dealers, middlemen and mandiwalas to effectively engage in tobacco trade and has shrunken the bargaining power of the farmers.

The chairman FBR apprised the participants that the currently finance bill clearly states that the effect of Federal Excise Duty (FED) should not be passed on to growers and the burden should be entirely borne by the cigarette manufacturers. It was also highlighted that the FED was intended for tracking and tracing of tobacco purchases in order to prevent tax evasion. The FBR officials maintained that the local industry continue to evade taxes and cause a loss to the national exchequer. They remarked that the taxation regime never intended to press the tobacco farmers. The Chairman FBR and State Minister for Revenue sought recommendations of the panel and assured that such recommendations pertaining to preventing the burden of taxation being passed to growers will be incorporated in the finance bill.

Qaiser formed a taskforce to find viable solutions to protect the tobacco growers and present policy recommendations to the FBR by Tuesday, June 18, 2019.-PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190614486236/

GROWERS NEED SUPPORT PRICE TO SWITCH BACK TO COTTON

Amjad Mahmood Updated March 18, 2019

Following a year-on-year decline in the acreage and output of the cotton crop, the government is taking immediate measures to arrest the trend and enhance the production of the silver lint.

The cash crop is witnessing a gradual decline in production since 2005 due to a fall in the acreage, water shortage, poor-quality seed and spurious pesticides.

Last year, its output remained 11 million bales against the target of 12.6m bales. But in the ongoing season, the harvest will hardly be 10.5m bales as per the estimates of analysts. Pakistan is the fourth largest cotton producer in the world. Its cotton industry saw its “magic years” in the early 1990s when the crop output exceeded 20m bales.

The cotton plantation area has shrunk in the last couple of decades as sugar mills were set up in the cotton zone of south Punjab and Sindh. The absence of a support price has also pushed cotton farmers towards wheat and sugar cane for which the government announces support prices every year to ensure a fair return to growers.

Farmers prefer growing sugar cane and wheat only because these crops enjoy support prices, which ensure that they recover at least their cost of production

For a return to the golden era, Prime Minister Imran Khan at a recent meeting sought plans for achieving the production target of 15m bales in the 2019-20 season. Punjab has forwarded to the federal authorities a 20-point activity plan with responsibilities assigned to each relevant department/agency for funding and other necessary action, according to an official who was part the planning process.

The plan fixes the sowing target of 5.7m acres for harvesting 11m bales of cotton in the province. It also suggests the zoning of the province’s cotton belt for specific seed varieties and sowing window (period) purposes.

To obtain the required crop yield, it recommends that both the federal and Punjab governments ensure the provision of quality certified seeds at Rs4,000 per 40-kilogram bag or Rs100 per kg to cotton growers. At 8kg per acre, the province will need 45,600 tonnes of seeds for the 5.7m acre sowing target. The provincial government has already approved a subsidy of Rs700 per acre, but it is for only 100,000 acres of land in south Punjab under a World Bank-funded project.

The plan also demands a pilot project of Rs3,000-per-acre subsidy for at least four cotton-producing districts — Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Vehari — as an incentive for cultivators who are inclined towards cash crops, particularly sugar cane.

For reducing the cost of production, it seeks the launch of an integrated pest management (IPM) programme, which will include seed treatment, use of PB ropes to control pink bollworm and botanical plant extracts.

Besides recommending a ban on the cultivation of the maize crop in Bahawalpur and DG Khan divisions, it makes an important but controversial recommendation: diverting upper Punjab's water to the cotton belt, particularly during the sowing season from March 15 to May 31.

Some stakeholders argue that farmers keep two factors in mind before sowing a crop: which crop will bring them a reasonable livelihood and which one is easier to cultivate. They prefer growing sugar cane and wheat only because these crops enjoy the minimum support price and guarantee the farmers that they will at least recover their cost of production.

Cotton Research and Development Board Chairman Suhail Mehmood Harral said the government should extend cotton-specific incentives instead of relying on general proposals for the whole agriculture sector to increase the area under cotton crop.

The most important step, he says, is the announcement of a support price for cotton just like wheat and sugar cane crops. "What cotton grower needs is the restoration of his confidence that has been shattered because of an uncertain price regime in which he sometimes fails to recover even his cost of production. His confidence will be restored only through offering him a support price of at least Rs4,000 per 40kg for his produce," he says.

A few weeks ago, the federal minister of food security and research hinted at introducing a support price of Rs3,500 per 40kg phutti (raw cotton) to encourage cotton growers.

Mr Harral, who is also a former chief of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA), urged the government to come up with a package that includes a support price as well as the provision of affordable and good quality pesticides and fertilisers. Offering subsidised seeds won't work wonders that the government is looking aiming for, he adds.

Some experts underscore the importance of improving crop management for enhancing output. "Better crop management contributes 80pc in achieving higher cotton production," says Dr Zahid Mahmood, a researcher.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, March 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1470191/growers-need-support-price-to-switch-back-to-cotton

ALLOCATION FOR AGRICULTURE ENHANCED BY 1,200%

June 14th, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government has enhanced allocation for the development of agriculture sector by 1,200% and has earmarked Rs12.5 billion in the federal budget for fiscal year 2019-20 compared to just Rs1 billion in the previous budget, said Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan.

Speaking at a press conference on Thursday, the minister said provincial allocations would also be enhanced to Rs50 billion for fiscal year 2019-20.

"In addition to this, no new tax or duty is being imposed on any agricultural input in the budget for FY20 as the government is determined to provide maximum relief to farmers for the uplift of agriculture and development of national economy," he said.

"All previous governments neglected the agriculture sector, which is the backbone of national economy and a major source of industrial raw material and employment."

However, the minister emphasised, the current government gave priority to the agriculture sector and enhanced spending for the development of agriculture and livestock sectors on modern lines in addition to identifying the areas to make the two sectors profit-oriented.

He disclosed that the government was going to launch 13 new development projects in these sectors in collaboration with provincial governments for increasing per-acre crop yield and alleviating poverty in rural areas.

"After the 18th Constitutional Amendment, agriculture has become a provincial subject and now it is the prime responsibility of these governments to take measures for uplift of the sector," he pointed out.

"Out of the total allocation for these 13 projects, the federal government will provide Rs92.5 billion for enhancement of crop productivity, livestock development, aquaculture, seed supply, water lining and mechanisation of farms."

The food security minister said projects would be initiated by the start of next fiscal year as they had been approved by the government. The projects would mainly focus on crop yield enhancement, oilseed supply, pulses production and fattening of calves as well as fish farming.

He pointed out that special measures would also be introduced to harness the potential of international halal meat market.

Sultan highlighted that a ban was imposed on the export of live animals and a memorandum of understanding was also signed with China to capture the market as it was importing meat worth $15 billion annually from across the globe.

He said steps had been initiated to exploit the aquaculture potential along about 1,120km-long coastal line by promoting the fish caging culture as well as trout farming.

"About 90% of the total available water is used for agriculture production, of which about 47% is wasted due to inefficiencies in irrigation," he expressed concern. "Such inefficiencies will be removed by farm mechanisation, water course lining and management."

Small and medium dams would be constructed and command areas under these dams would also be enhanced, he revealed.

He reiterated the government's determination to ensure proper prices for all major crops, claiming that under the current government, farmers of wheat, rice, sugarcane and cotton received proper fixed prices for their produce.

"Electricity charges for tube wells, which were enhanced from Rs5.35 per unit to Rs6.85 per unit, will be reduced and general sales tax on other agriculture inputs will also be slashed by taking provincial governments on board," he said.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 14th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1991985/allocation-agriculture-enhanced-1200/

PUNJAB'S NEW TAX MEASURES TO YIELD EXTRA RS11BN

Nasir Jamal Updated June 15, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government has proposed significant changes through the budget for the next fiscal year in its agriculture income tax (AIT) and urban immovable property tax (UIPT) regimes besides increasing the rate of professional tax and expanding the scope of sales tax on services to five more services and enhancing professional tax rates to mobilise additional revenues.

New tax measures are expected to yield Rs11 billion in additional revenue in 2019-20.

The government has increased its tax collection target to Rs294.9bn for next year from original estimate of Rs275.8bn for the outgoing year. Bulk of the tax revenues will be collected through sales tax on services (Rs166bn) and UIPT (Rs14.3bn).

The budget proposes to amend the provincial Sales Tax on Services Act 2012 to strengthen penal provisions of the law. The suggested amendments provide for minimum tax liability, improve recovery of tax and introduce modern electronic invoicing system at points of sale (POS) to plug revenue leakages. The amendments also modify description of some services to remove gaps and misapplication, and update for clearer understanding of tax obligations as part of effort to move towards negative tariff list.

The government proposes to increase agriculture income tax twofold to Rs2.1bn by doubling the rates of land-based AIT and raising the exemption limit of income-based AIT from existing Rs80,000 to Rs400,000 a year. The increase in the AIT rates has been proposed for the first time since 2001 in spite of a massive spike in prices of major and minor crops. The step is projected to improve the equity between tax on agriculture and non-agriculture incomes, according to the budget proposals.

In order to raise higher revenues from urban property, the finance bill 2019-20 proposes to extend the property tax rating areas to bring commercial and residential properties along highways and main roads, align rating areas with actual city boundaries and carry out fresh survey of properties as well as update valuation tables.

The suggested changes in the UIPT are in line with the federal budgetary proposals to deter speculative investment in the real estate and property to discourage parking of illegal and tax-unpaid cash in the property market.

The professional tax rates have been raised for factory-owners, commercial establishment, developers, exporters, importers, contractors, builders, and property developers. The 11 new professions proposed to be taxed include medical consultants or special dental surgeons, audit firms, tax consultants, architects, and engineering, technical and scientific consultants. Lawyers, stock exchange members, money changers, motorcycle/scooter dealers, motorcar dealers and real estate agents, recruiting agents will also pay professional tax in addition to several other professions.

A 5pc tax, without input adjustment tax, has been slapped on domestic and international travel. Similarly, the dress designers and stitching services will pay 16pc services tax.

Published in Dawn, June 15th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1488345/punjabs-new-tax-measures-to-yield-extra-rs11bn

54TH MANGO AND SUMMER FRUITS FESTIVAL GETS UNDER WAY IN MIRPURKHAS

By Qamaruddin Shaikh | 6/15/2019 12:00:00 AM

MIRPURKHAS: The 54th annual Mango and Summer Fruits Festival got under way in the Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto exhibition hall in Mirpur1(has on Friday.

The three-day festival was inaugurated by Mirpurkhas Commissioner Abdul Waheed Shaikh.

Deputy Commissioner Syed Mehdi Ali Shah as well as assistant commissioners, officials of the agriculture and police departments, agriculturists and a number of leading growers of Mirpurkhas district attended the inaugural ceremony.

Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Shaikh expressed his pleasure over the keen interest being taken by allstakeholders in the holding of the festival.

He noted that several mango varieties of Sindh were in great demand across the country and abroad.

He observed that growers ofvariousfruits producedin Mirpurkhas district had deep interest in their crops and they were constantly making efforts to increase per-acre yield so as to earn the country foreign exchange and also support the agriculture sector of the country.

A leading mango grower Tanveer Randhawa pointed out that a fewer number of growers turned up to participate in the competition at the festival.

He attributed the trend to an acute shortage of water that persisted across the provincethisyearandbadly affected cultivation of mangoes and fruits, besides other crops.

The commissioner said that the government was making all possible efforts to facilitate exporters of mangoes and other fruits ofSindh. He appreciated owners of Nawazabad Farm, Anwer Gondal Farm, Mohammad Umer Bughio Farm, Bhurgari Farm and other major growers for their participation despite a bad crop resulting from a crisis-like situation caused by water shortage in Mirpurkhas district like otherparts ofthe province.

Chairman of the festival management committee Mohammad Umer Bughio told the guests that over 200 mango varieties had been put on display at as many as 50 stalls set up at the venue.

He expressed his confidence that like the first day, the other two days of the festival would attract visitorsin large numbers.

He said that the aim of holding the festival was to update growers` knowledge about modern farming technologies and encourage them to opt of export-specific varieties enabling the country to earn maximum possible foreign exchange.

Several hundred men, women and children turned up to visit the stalls at the festival on Friday.

They took keen interest in all varieties of mango and other fruits.

Later, the commissioner along with other senior officials went round different stalls and apprised himself of issues being faced by growers and mango exporters

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=15_06_2019_117_006

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT PROPOSES RS 15,500 MILLION FOR AGRICULTURE SECTOR

ZAHID BAIG JUN 15TH, 2019 LAHORE

The Punjab government has proposed to allocate a sum of Rs 15,500 million for the agriculture sector for work on 19 ongoing and 27 new schemes in the budget for the year 2019-20 with an aim to transform Punjab's agriculture into a market-driven, diversified and sustainable sector through integrated technologies, transparency and value-for-money.

Discussing allocation objectives, the budget document said the government wanted to increase food production to improve food quantity, quality and nutrition, introduce diversity through higher yields and better crop mix, increase farmer's profitability to raise living standards of the farming families with increased participation of rural women and youth and conserve agricultural resources with efficient use of land, water and labour deployed for agriculture, enhance sustainability and resilience in the wake of climate changes and implications thereof, enable private sector participation in agriculture value chains with increased investment, technology infusion and management resources, enhance competitive position of agriculture sector in line with global and domestic market demands, including getting benefit from China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) opportunities, paradigm shift from traditional to precision agriculture, increasing diversification and value addition through investment in high value agriculture.

The department intends to achieve targets such as expansion in agriculture produce markets, improve access and quality of agriculture inputs and encourage change in crop mix. Another target set for the next year is to move towards climate smart and regenerative agriculture with emphasis on horticulture, cotton and high value agriculture.

These targets will be achieved through improvement of unimproved watercourses up to 50 percent, additional lining of already improved watercourses up to 50 percent, and installation of high efficiency irrigation systems (HEIS) (acres) 10,000, plantation of olive plants on farmer fields 2,500 acres, award of small matching grants on farmer fields spreading over 75,000 acres and provision of implements for enhancement of wheat, rice, sugarcane productivity. The government also intends to increase area under oil seed by 80,636 acres at a cost of Rs 3,069 million.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190615486525/

COTTON MILLS SHOW INTEREST IN FRESH BUYING

RECORDER REPORT JUN 15TH, 2019 KARACHI

Trading activity improved on the cotton market on Friday on fresh buying by small mills, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8800, they added. Seed cotton per 40kg from Lower Sindh was available at Rs 3900-4000, they said. Binola per maund was available at Rs 1750, they said. About 3600 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs 8150-8950, they said.

Some brokers said that a few mills were in the market to make new deals. Cotton Analyst, Naseen Usman said that leading participants were still confused on imposition of sales taxes and duties. Other experts said that the budget speech was lack of incentives to the textile sector, just devaluation of the rupee cannot give a boost to the country's export, traders want solid measures to get the purpose.

Besides, Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research was informed that the government has fixed cotton production target of 15.02 million bales on an area of 3.28 million hectares this year.

According to a statement on its website on Thursday, the China Cotton Association will submit an application on behalf of its members for a waiver on import duties on uncombed cotton from the United States.

Adds Reuters: Cotton prices rose for a second straight session on Thursday, following a rise in the grains market, while rain in the cotton-planting belt continued to support the natural fibre.

The most active cotton contract on ICE Futures US, the third-month December contract rose 0.62 cent, or 0.94%, at 66.50 cents per lb.

Total futures market volume fell by 8,124 to 46,235 lots. Data showed total open interest fell 351 to 206,044 contracts in the previous session.

Following deals were reported: 1600 bales of cotton from Sadiqabad at Rs 8950, 1000 bales from Fazilpur at Rs 8900 and 1000 bales from Kabirwala at Rs 8150, 200 bales from Kotri at Rs 8750 (new crop) and 600 bales from Mirpurkhas at Rs 8750-8800 (new crop), they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190615486599/

EXPERTS PROPOSE FOOD SUPPLEMENTS TO MEET LIVESTOCK'S NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

By Z.Ali Published: June 15, 2019

HYDERABAD: Emphasising on the kernel that human nutrition is interlinked with livestock animals' nutrition, the experts at a workshop proposed the use of a particular food supplement to address malnourishment. Mineral-Molasses Blocks (MMBs), which consist of molasses, wheat bran, mineral mixture, salt, urea and cement offering proteins, vitamins and minerals, increase growth and productivity of the livestock, the experts said.

The two-day workshop, organised by European Union funded Programme for Improved Nutrition in Sindh (PINS) and Sindh Rural Partners Organisation (SRPO), began at Sindh Agriculture University on Wednesday. "There is a very strong link between livestock and human nutrition," underlined John Ashley, the nutrition expert working for PINS which started in January, 2018. According to him, the deficiency affects growth of the livestock and reduces nutrition value of their milk and meat.

Dr Aijaz Kumbhar, who is training the farmers about preparation of MMBs, said that the food supplement has also been tested to have improved reproduction of animals. According to him, a standard mineral-molasses block, which is shaped like a cake, weighs around 2.5 kilogrammes and the smaller one around 1 kg. "The animals lick the block after eating fodder." He said that the farmers can themselves prepare the blocks at the cost of around Rs50 per kg.

The SRPO's Zahida Detho said that the livestock sector contributes 11.3% to the gross domestic product (GDP). She pointed out that though Pakistan is the third largest milk producing country, the production is not sufficient enough to meet the local demand.

Prof Ismail Kumbhar said that the application of harmful vaccines like oxytocin is widespread for enhancing milk production. He suggested that the farmers switch to the cheaper and harmless practice of feeding their animals the MMBs instead.

The chief conservator of forests, Aijaz Nizamani, lamented that though the livestock amounted to over 11% of the GDP, the bank financing for the sector is even less than 1% of the total financing. "The issue remains how to connect the policy with ground realities," he underscored.

Forest and Wildlife Secretary Abdul Raheem Soomro found the MMBs a wonderful food supplement and asked the academics and other stakeholders to spread information about the supplement, its benefits and preparation method among the farmers. Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Vice-Chancellor Dr Mujeeb Sehrai also spoke.

During the two-day workshop, technical sessions were held in which the experts shared their researches on different aspects of livestock feed and nutrition and their connection with the human nutrition. The recommendation passed at the concluding session on Thursday underscored the need of the government's initiative for forming a comprehensive strategy to address malnutrition among people and livestock. The experts called for conducting census of livestock at the district level, launching a lady health workers type programme to address the health needs of livestock and providing training about breeding, especially to rural women.

In his budget speech in the Sindh Assembly on Friday, Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah highlighted the importance of the livestock sector, saying that it promoted socio-economic development in the rural areas. "It is highly labour intensive and involves a large segment of rural workforce. It is a source of cash income, providing a vital and often the only source of income for the rural households, playing an important role in poverty alleviation". He also noted that the sector fetched foreign exchange earnings as well.

Under the Annual Development Project (ADP) 2018-19, 46 schemes including two new initiatives were taken-up. The government had earmarked Rs652.5 million for development projects but less than half of the allocated Rs310.8 million were utilised. The allocation for livestock and fisheries department in ADP 2019-20 is Rs2 billion.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 15th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1992842/1-experts-propose-food-supplements-meet-livestocks-nutritional-needs/

SINDH ALLOCATES RS8.4B FOR AGRICULTURE SECTOR

By Usman Hanif Published: June 15, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh government has proposed an allocation of Rs8.4 billion for the agriculture sector, which includes Rs4.7 billion in foreign assistance, in the provincial budget for fiscal year 2019-20.

"Agriculture plays a significant role in the country's economy and generates employment opportunities for more than 42.3% of the total workforce besides contributing 18.9% to the country's GDP," said Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah while presenting the budget in the provincial assembly on Friday.

"Sindh's contribution to national rice production is 36%, sugarcane 29%, cotton 34% and wheat 15%," he said.

In fiscal year 2018-19, the agriculture department made an expenditure of Rs893.4 million against the release of Rs1.74 billion.

The department's allocation in the ADP 2019-20 is Rs8.4 billion, which includes Rs4.7 billion in foreign assistance, according to the budget documents.

In the coming year, the provincial government is considering lining 1,850 watercourses through the Sindh Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Project (SIAPEP).

It has proposed subsidy on the provision of 400 thrashers, 400 rotavators, 400 zero tillage, 500 auto loaders, 20,000 power sprayers and 500 tractor trollies to farmers.

Moreover, it will help build 200,000 metres of on-farm drainage structures and help in levelling 125,000 hectares of land through precision land levelling equipment.

It will also help in drip irrigation, high-tunnel farming by 870 farmers over 150 acres of land.

"The budget is not in line with the provincial agriculture policy approved by the Sindh cabinet in March 2018 and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) manifesto," commented Sindh Abadgar Board member Mehmood Nawaz Shah.

He was of the opinion that budget resources should have been allocated as per the policy and manifesto. Unfortunately, he regretted, the government did not consider the important point in the budget on how it was planning to press ahead with its goal.

For example, he said, the policy envisaged that the government would focus on growth of the agriculture sector, however, the CM failed to talk about advancement in the sector in his speech, he said.

He pointed out that the PPP's manifesto said the government would fix commodity prices by buying from the farmers so that they could receive a fair price for their produce. However, the government did not talk about it at all in the budget, he highlighted.

Shah lamented that small dams in Dadu, lakes like Keenjhar and all other water reservoirs had been contaminated due to which people were not getting safe drinking water and crop yields were decreasing day by day.

"The government needs to do something to clean the water reservoirs. In fact, the chief minister himself announced one and a half month ago that the government would work on it," Shah said. "However, he did not allocate any resources to mitigate water pollution in the province."

"Horticulture is an important area but it was also missed in the budget speech," he said. "Due to inefficiency, the government could not utilise last year's allocated fund for the sector, which eventually lapsed," he said.

The World Bank gave $76 million under the Sindh Agriculture Growth Project for four commodities, citing that if the province showed some growth in the given commodities, it would provide more assistance.

“In fact, this grant was more than the total budget allocated for agriculture by the provincial government,” he said. “Regrettably, the authorities could not utilise more than 35% of the grant and that too on subsidies and not on productivity.”

Published in The Express Tribune, June 15th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1992853/2-rs8-4b-allocated-agriculture-sector/

LIVESTOCK VACCINATION DRIVE BEGINS IN THARPARKAR

May 5, 2019

KARACHI: Livestock and Fisheries department of the government of Sindh launched the PPR vaccination drive in district Tharparkar today. Abdul Bari Pitafi, the provincial minister for livestock and fisheries launched the campaign in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The vaccination will prevent livestock against Peste des petits ruminants (PPR) disease also known as ‘goat plague’. It is a viral disease of goats and sheep characterized by fever, sores in the mouth, diarrhoea, pneumonia, and sometimes death.

Emphasizing the importance of animal health for Tharparkar, Mina` Dowlatchahi FAO Representative in Pakistan said the vaccination will help ensure healthy livestock which will be instrumental in ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods for the already drought stressed communities in the area.

She also said that a report of Sindh Drought Need Assessment (SDNA October 2018) conducted by FAO in collaboration with Natural Disaster Consortium (NDC) reveals that of the surveyed household, 25% of them reported death of their cattle; 21% in buffaloes, 53% in goats, 45% in sheep, 20% in camels 18% in donkeys, and 57% in poultry during past six months.

Tharparkar district hosts more than 20% small ruminant of province Sindh. The small ruminants are predisposed to multi-stress in the district which make them susceptible to lethal diseases like PPR. The disease can be eradicate through vaccination.

Speaking on the occasion, Farrukh Toirov, Deputy FAO Representative in Pakistan said target groups for proposed action includes subsistence livestock farmers, small-scale agriculture farmers and women headed households. The project will vaccinate 3 million small ruminants in Tharparkar and 1.2 million in Umerkot.

Drought in district Tharparkar directly affects the growth of vegetation as well as water resource for livestock, which in turn results in loss of animal production, and high mortality, which is a direct threat to food security and livelihoods.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/467390-livestock-vaccination-drive-begins-in-tharparkar

PRICES OF ESSENTIAL KITCHEN ITEMS GO UP

RECORDER REPORT JUN 16TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

Except a slight decline in prices of some vegetables and fruits, the entire range of essential kitchen items witnessed an increase during this week past as compared to the preceding week, a survey conducted by Business Recorder revealed here on Saturday.

The wholesalers and traders in the markets of the twin cities of Rawalpindi /Islamabad said that prices of sugar, pulses, ghee, cooking oil, wheat flour, and entire number of spices registered an increase during the week past as compared to the preceding week.

They said that after the budget announcement, the prices of many essential kitchen items went up. Moreover, increased transportation cost after the increase in petroleum products also resulted in increasing food items prices. The traders feared further increase in food items, saying that increase in gas, electricity and oil prices would add to production as well as transportation costs.

A visit to different markets in the twin cities revealed that sugar price increased from Rs70 to Rs75 per kg during this week. The increase in sugar price is attributed to the government's announcement of increasing sales tax on sugar from 8 percent to 17 percent. Further edible oils, ghee and cooking oil will be charged 17 percent FED after the passage of budget from the Parliament. However, the wholesalers and retailers have already increased ghee/cooking oil prices by Rs5-10 per kg/litre of different brands.

However, chicken price registered a decline during the week past as compared to the preceding week, as it was being sold at Rs 160-170 per kg in different markets compared to previous prices of Rs 200-220 per kg. Eggs were being sold at Rs75-85 against Rs90-100 per dozen in the retail market.

Furthermore, pulses prices also witnessed an increase as fine quality white lentil (Maash) was available up to Rs 220 per kg while its normal quality was being sold at Rs 170-180 per kg; good quality grams at Rs 210 per kg and normal quality grams at Rs 170 per kg; kidney bean (Lobia) in the range of Rs 130-170 per kg; and green gram (Moong) at Rs 155 per kg and red lentil (Masoor) was being sold at Rs 170 per kg.

Wheat flour was available at Rs790-795 per 20kg bag, best quality basmati rice at Rs 165 per kg and normal quality basmati rice was available in the range of Rs 140-150 per kg against the previous prices of Rs 135-145.

During the week under review, onion was available at Rs 250-270 per 5kg which in the retail market was being sold at Rs55-60 per kg, tomato price went up from Rs 150 to Rs 200 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs55-60 against Rs40 per kg in the retail market and potato price went up from Rs 120 to Rs 150 per 5 kg which was being sold at Rs 35 against Rs 25-30 per kg in the retail market.

Local garlic was available at Rs400-500 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 150 per kg in the retail market, Chinese garlic at Rs700-750 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 180-200 per kg in the retail market, and ginger was available at Rs 1,050 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 260 per kg in the retail market. Capsicum price remained Rs 130-150 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 35-40 per kg in the retail market and yam (arvi) was available at Rs 200 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs45-50 per kg in the retail market. Lemon price decreased to Rs600-650 per 5kg which was being sold at Rs 120-150 per kg in the retail market.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190616486788/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUN 3rd TO JUN 9th 2019

WORLD FOOD PRICES RISE

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 9TH, 2019 | ROME

World food prices rose for a fifth consecutive month in May after bad weather pushed up the prices of cheese and maize, the United Nations food agency said on Thursday. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also warned that a sharp fall in the expected maize crop in the flood-hit United States had dampened its previous forecast of bumper global cereal production in 2019. FAO's food price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar, averaged 172.4. points last month against 170.3 points in April – its highest level since last June.

The FAO dairy price index jumped 5.2% from April's value, nearing a five-year high, with cheese helping to drive up the index thanks to strong global demand for the product as drought in Oceania limited that region's export prospects.

The FAO cereal price index rose 1.4% because of a sudden surge in maize price quotations after planting of the crop got off to the slowest pace ever recorded in the United States due to widespread flooding and rain.

By contrast, the sugar index fell 3.2% for the month, and the vegetable price index dropped 1.1%. In its second forecast for 2019, FAO predicted world cereal production would come in at 2.685 billion tonnes, down from its previous forecast of 2.722 billion tonnes but still up 1.2% on 2018 levels, when output declined.\

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190609484225/

INCENTIVES TO RAMP UP LOCAL SEEDS PRODUCTION ON THE CARDS

Munawar Hasan June 9, 2019

LAHORE: Government is expected to announce incentives to promote local production of seeds for various crops in the country as rupee devaluation is likely to push prices of the imported substitutes up by 15 to 20 percent, people familiar with the matter said on Saturday.

Industry people said the government might slap customs duty on seed imports to encourage local seeds production and promote research and development to give advantage to local seed companies.

The industry people said the dependence on imported seeds have undermined food security. Rising trend of seeds import is not a good omen for the agriculture sector. Imports of seeds for planting crops like potatoes, maize, vegetables and fodders have multiplied over the last decade, they added.

An official estimate showed that almost 100 percent of seeds for the important vegetables were imported in the last 2017/18 fiscal year. Share of imported seeds in vegetable segment (minus potato) was 93.12 percent, while for maize share of imported seeds stood at 71.13 percent. For fodder cultivation, dependence on imported seed was calculated at 86.33 percent during the last fiscal year.

Shahzad Ali Malik, founding chairman of Seed Association of Pakistan hoped that the government would announce some reliefs to agriculture sector in the coming budget.

“Customs duty on imported hybrid rice seeds is to promote local production and transfer of technology,” said Malik who attended a meeting with the Prime Minister Imran Khan last week. “Import of hybrid rice seed in India is also banned to promote local production and technology transfer.”

Malik, who also runs a seeds making company, said the country is currently producing hybrid rice seeds to meet 45 percent of local demand.

“We are planning to increase it to 80 percent next year and subsequently in the ensuing year to 100 percent,” he added. Locally-produced seeds are cheap as well as perform better in local harsh weather conditions in various ecological zones, including coastal belt.

Malik hoped that the ministries of commerce and national food security and research would support incentives to local production of seeds. “It is unfortunate that private seed companies including multinationals do not invest in local production of seeds and research and development for seed production.”

Industry people said trading approach of these companies proves counterproductive to competitiveness of the farming sector as well as food security of the country. A number of companies just import seeds and sell them to farmers, while contributing nothing tangible to the agriculture sector of the country.

Ibrahim Mughal, chairman of Agri Forum Pakistan agreed that urgent steps are needed to make seed prices cheaper in the country. “Prices of imported seeds are getting costlier day by day.”

Mughal said there is lack of resources, professional strength and incentives to encourage researchers in public as well as private sectors. “We cannot yield better results without encouraging researchers and breeders.”

Agri Forum Pakistan’s chief said there is also a need to enforce regulatory framework for seeds industry. Establishment of a single and independent seeds body would effectively control quality of seeds and promote business of certified seeds, he added.

The government has taken steps to ensure availability of 50,192 tons of rice seeds as well as 2,757, metric tons of imported seeds in the current sowing season. Overall, 7,799 tons of imported seeds compared to local demands of 28,892 tons would be available this year.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/481703-incentives-to-ramp-up-local-seeds-production-on-the-cards

SIX IRANIAN FISHERMEN RELEASED BY PAKISTAN

The Newspaper’s Staff Reporter Updated June 08, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan has released six Iranian fishermen who were detained by the Maritime Security Agency (MSA) for fishing in Pakistani waters, Iranian media and local sources said on Friday.

Radio Farda while quoting Mehr News Agency said that all the six men released on Thursday reached their homes the same day. “The sailors were arrested on the charges of illegal entry into Pakistan’s waters.”

It said this was the fourth group of Iranian fishermen jailed in Pakistan over the past two years. Pakistan had so far released 41 other Iranian fishermen on three occasions, reported the agency.

A security source said that like Indians, Iranian fishermen were often caught by the marine authorities while fishing in Pakistani waters and booked by the police under Sections 3/4 of the Foreign Act and 3/9 of the Fishery Act.

Published in Dawn, June 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1486803/six-iranian-fishermen-released-by-pakistan

EIGHT JETTIES TO BE BUILT IN COASTAL AREAS, SAYS ALYANI

The Newspaper’s Staff Correspondent Updated June 08, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani on Friday announced that the government would build eight jetties in coastal areas of the province next year to boost fisheries sector.

Talking to journalists in Hub, the chief minister also announced some other measures for benefit of fishermen. The steps include introduction of a green boats scheme, establishment of a trust and a cooperative society.

He said that such steps would not only benefit fishermen of Lasbela and Gwadar and increase their income, but would also generate badly-need revenue for the provincial government, which had been facing shortage of funds.

He also said that RCD Highway from Quetta to Hub would be made double carriage road for better flow of traffic and for avoiding road accidents.

He said the federal government had approved construction of Winder dam and making Quetta-Karachi National Highway a double carriage road and work would soon begin on the project.

He said the construction of Winder dam would bring thousands of acres of land under cultivation and would benefit people of the area.

He said the government would also introduce a new law to protect rights of workers.

He said the government would soon set up an industrial zone in Hub with a capacity of 100 industrial units.

In reply to a question about possibility of a no-confidence motion being moved against him by the opposition, Mr Alyani said he was not afraid of such threats of the opposition as it had been trying to do so since he was made the chief minister.

Mr Alyani said that all partners of the coalition government were united and they all were pursuing the one-point agenda and that was development of the province.

Meanwhile, the chief minister celebrated Eidul Fitr in the provincial capital and offered Eid prayers at the Governor House.

He also visited Quetta Police Lines and laid floral wreaths at the memorial of martyred policemen and offered fateha.

He also met families of the martyred policemen and pledged that the government would never leave them alone.

Inspector General of Police Mohsin Hassan Butt and DIG Abdul Razzaq Cheema accompanied the chief minister during the visit.

On Eid day the chief minister also met ordinary people as doors of the Chief Minister House were open for the public.

The chief minister also visited Quetta Civil Hospital and took rounds of different wards, met patients and distributed flowers and cash among them as Eid gifts.

Published in Dawn, June 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1486798/eight-jetties-to-be-built-in-coastal-areas-says-alyani

FALL IN WHEAT PRODUCTION

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 8TH, 2019 | EDITORIAL

“Misfortunes never come alone” is a well-known proverb. As if problems of large twin deficits and growing indebtedness were not enough for the country, the wheat output has also declined during FY19 to drag down the agriculture sector, affecting adversely the growth rate of the economy. Speaking to a news conference in Islamabad on 28th May, 2019, Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sahibzada Muhammad Sultan revealed that Pakistan could not achieve the wheat production target this year due to unfavourable weather conditions that damaged ripe and ready-to-harvest crop, causing a loss of 1.5 million tonnes of wheat against the target of 25.5 million tonnes from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi season of 2018-19. However, as the country had a leftover wheat stock of 3.7 million tonnes, the total availability of the grain would be 27.9 million tonnes as against the national requirement of 25.8 million tonnes.

Sahibzada Sultan blamed the previous government for slashing the budget for agriculture from Rs 38 billion to Rs 16 billion and added that they “could not find kickbacks in this sector and for that reason agriculture remained out of focus during their government”. The PTI government led by Imran Khan had a vision and maximum focus to revive agriculture sector for being the backbone of the national economy. An agreement was signed with China entitled “Framework Agreement on Agricultural Cooperation” by the present government which will cover all aspects of agriculture sector and would share modern technology with Pakistan in addition to mechanisation skills that will benefit small farmers.

Missing wheat production target by about 1.5 million tonnes during the current fiscal year is of course a negative development as it would affect the economy in a number of ways. First of all, it would decelerate the growth rate of the economy as wheat accounts for 9.1 percent of the value-added in the agriculture sector and 1.7 percent of GDP in Pakistan. Secondly, wheat crop is grown in almost all parts of the country and as such a lower wheat production would decrease the disposable income of rich and average farmers and impact the subsistence farmers very badly who do not usually have any surplus to sell in the market and cultivate wheat for their own consumption. The lower disposable income of the households could also have a negative impact on the demand for goods manufactured in various industries and create further unemployment in the country. Thirdly, a familiar pattern of a steady increase or stability in wheat production over the years has been interrupted. For instance, wheat production, which was slightly over 24 million tonnes this year, has always been above 25 million tonnes since 2013-14. And finally, Pakistan may not be able to export wheat and earn the needed foreign exchange due to a shortfall in wheat production this year. It is sad to note, however, that the production of various crops remains dependent on the availability of water. There is no doubt that water shortages remain a risk to the sustainability of agricultural growth and the situation is unlikely to improve since temperatures continue to rise as global warming is impacting precipitation patterns.

It is, nonetheless, satisfying, that Pakistan, despite a shortfall in production this year remains self-sufficient in wheat, with the wheat output and carry-over stocks exceeding domestic consumption requirements. It could, however, be argued that Pakistan should shift to other crops like pulses, horticultural products and fruits if the comparative advantage in wheat production and price signals in the international market dictate such a shift to maximize gains for the economy. Sahibzada Sultan has also accused the previous government of not allocating sufficient funds for the agricultural sector because there were no kickbacks in this sector but such an allegation is difficult to prove. The real position was that the PML (N) government spent a large part of the budgetary resources on the uplift of central Punjab and bricks and mortar projects which naturally decreased the resources for other areas and sectors of the economy. So far as the vision of the incumbent Prime Minister is concerned, Sahibzada Sultan may be right in appreciating its quality in the new PM but it could only be known if the available budgetary resources are allocated in an optimal fashion and in accordance with the economic and social priorities of the nation in the coming budget.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190608483984/

TCP SEALS UREA IMPORT DEAL

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 8TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Following the directives of the federal government, the state-run grain trader has finalized the deal for the import of 100,000 tons of urea to avoid shortage in the domestic market. Some nine international suppliers participated in the tender of the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) for supply of 100,000 tons (10 percent more or less at seller"s option) urea fertilizer in bulk through import from worldwide sources on Cost and Freight (C&F) opened on May 17, 2019. Out of nine bidders, two submitted regret letters, while the remaining seven quoted prices ranging from $ 301.70 to $ 309.91 per ton.

The lowest bid was submitted by M/s Ameropa Asia, which offered to supply 100,000 tons of urea at $ 301.70 per metric ton. The TCP"s bid evaluation committee after detailed analysis declared the first lowest bid responsive and accordingly, tender was awarded to M/s Ameropa Asia for supply of urea. As per tender term and conditions, successful bidder will be required to furnish a Performance Guarantee, for due and satisfactory performance of the contract, equal to Five (5) percent of the value of the contracted goods in favour of TC within the stipulated period ie. 05 (Five) working days.

Shipment of 100,000 metric tons (10% +/-) will be made within 4 weeks (excluding voyage time) from the date of opening of L/C. Shipment of a minimum of 50,000 metric (or two shipments 25,000 MTs each will be made within two weeks (excluding voyage time), from the date of opening of L/C. The shipment of balance quantities will follow every week, with each shipment carrying not less than 25,000 tons beginning from the due date of first shipment.

Upon receipt of award letter from TCP for supply of commodity, the seller will be required to coordinate immediately with TCP"s nominated PSIA and offer/tender the cargo to PSIA for inspection well before arrival of the vessel. The cargo to be tested by PSIA under method as prescribed in the PSQCA standards or as prescribed in the TCP"s relevant import contract.

The sampling and testing of cargo/commodity should be done in accordance with the international standard, from internationally recognized foreign laboratory also approved from the respective Government. Samples should be drawn in the presence of supplier/exporter and samples should be sealed by the supplier/exporter. The port of arrival/discharge will be any port in Pakistan as designated by TCP and it has reserves the right to divert the Vessel to any specific port in Pakistan.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190608483981/

PUNJAB GROWTH STRATEGY 2023: GOVERNMENT TO FOCUS ON INCREASING AGRI GROWTH RATE UP TO 4 PERCENT

ZAHID BAIG & ITRAT BASHIR | JUN 5TH, 2019 | LAHORE

The Punjab government will focus to accelerate growth rate of agriculture from about 2 percent (in the last five years) to between 3.5 percent and 4 percent in the next five years by improving productivity, enhancing agri-credit and expanding scope of smart agriculture.

“One percent growth in the agriculture sector leads directly and indirectly to over 0.4 percent growth in the overall economy of the province,” reveal the recently released ‘Punjab Growth Strategy 2023’ (PGS). It further revealed that if the project growth rate is achieved during the next five years it alone will add to 0.6 to 0.8 percentage points to the overall growth rate of the economy of the Punjab.

According to the office paper, the agriculture sector features large in Punjab’s economy; in 2017-18 it accounted for about 20 percent of the GPP and provided jobs to 40 percent of the labour force. The efficient development of the agriculture sector is therefore of prime importance and takes a central part in the government’s Growth Strategy for increasing incomes, increasing value-added exports, creating employment and reducing poverty.

“The performance of the agriculture sector has been lacklustre in the province. The co-efficient of variation in the agriculture sector is close to 90 percent, suggesting a variable pattern of growth in the sector. In terms of its contribution to Punjab’s GPP, the share of agriculture has dropped from 25 percent in 2008-09 to 20 percent in 2017-18. This decline in share has mostly been absorbed by the services sector. However, the sector’s share in agriculture has not dropped anywhere close to this number, suggesting that per capita incomes have declined in the sector over the years, the Punjab growth strategy claims,” it added.

The paper revealed that the government would double the investment in agriculture research and development to 0.4 percent of the GPP. “The agriculture research will be made more in line with the demands of the farmers. Moreover, the Punjab Agriculture Research Board (PARB) will be strengthened to provide significant coordination of research work by the government and other private institutes,” it added.

“The government is focusing on enhancing the specialization and knowledge of devolution agents, introducing greater use of information and communication technology ICT, and is involved with private partners and civil society. To extend the efficiency of the extension services, the government will focus on developing its human resource and will implement speedily the projects such as ‘Extension Services 2.0’ and ‘Agri-SMART’, which will enable ICT-based interaction and information transfer to the farmers,” it added.

According to the report, the government will support the growth challenges of small commercial farmers, especially women and youth, to bring about inclusive growth and increase in productivity in the agriculture sector, particularly in areas such as HVA farming and cottage level processing. The government will address disparities in productivity and prices along the agro-climatic zones, thus empowering the SCFs and women to induce agriculture productivity growth and poverty reduction at the same time.

The government also intends to take steps to ensure female education and awareness through female extension agents who can provide educational opportunities to the rural women. Also, the government will revamp its cropping patterns; agri-cropping zones will be moved towards more value added and high yielding crops given Punjab’s climate change, water availability and soil suitability. The government will bring the focus on diversifying horticulture.

The report found that substandard sanitation coupled with scant market infrastructure accounts for 30 percent to 40 percent post-harvest losses. Furthermore, it is the middleman who benefits the most in the long supply chain by grabbing 60 percent to 70 percent of the value of the produce at the expense of growers. “The development of agriculture products’ value chain is crucial for agriculture sector’s sustainable growth. Well-functioning agriculture value chain ensures a fair price to farmers and adds value to production for local and export markets. Moreover, well-established value chains develop market infrastructure; promote research, improvement in management techniques and shelf life of the produce; and ultimately facilitate the connection between producers and final consumers. Market committees, private sector investment, ad-valorem fee, farmer credit, enhanced competition among brokers, direct farming and storing facilities are the key areas of the proposed market reforms by the Punjab government. In terms of the development of agriculture value chains, the government will focus on enhancing the connectivity of farms to the markets by developing the required infrastructure,” it added.

The government has shown intention to shift the central markets to a modern, private sector and profit-oriented infrastructure. In this regard, the government will design systems to monitor the quality of daily price and quantity reports, increase the efficiency of traditional assemblers and wholesalers, improve the credit services to the farmers, and connect farms and markets cohesively by employing ICT based reforms. In addition to this, the food outlook programme will be further developed to provide information to the farmers.

Furthermore, the agriculture department is moving towards strategic crop cultivation and SMEs for technology and value addition. The agriculture department has recently started a horticulture value chain development programme with component of matching grants for SME processors. Several other programmes are also being planned for 2018-19 to assist processing sector SMEs in technology transfer, capacity development and provision of technical and marketing support. Value added sectors, including pack houses, diced frozen fruits and vegetables; jams, pickles and other preserves; edible and essential oil extraction; drying and dehydration; and pulp and concentrate extraction units, will be supported to increase demand for farm produce and enable export of horticulture.

The government will invest in research for the development of weather resistant varieties of seeds and crops. In this regard, the Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) techniques will be further developed and implemented. The main thrust of the policy to tackle climate change will be to establish an Institute for Climate Smart Agriculture (ICSA). Adaptation and building resilience in events of extreme weather, reducing the effects of underlying cross-cutting issues, mitigation of emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) and the formation of an enabling policy along with the suitable institutional and legal framework for implementation of CSA are the four broad areas of focus for the CSA. Similarly, research and extension will be further improved for the management of high delta crops such as sugarcane, rice and maize. Along with this, water resource conservation and precise irrigation techniques will be encouraged as part of on-farm water management along with the expansion of small-scale water storage capacity and rainwater harvesting at the farm level. Moreover, the quality of soil needs will be kept under check by focusing on improving application of fertilizer and by developing an evidence-based analytical structure to help the farmers.

The Strengthening Markets for Agriculture and Rural Transformation (SMART) programme aims to make the sector resilient to climate change. To protect the small farmers from yield losses due to natural calamities, the Crop Yield Insurance Index (CYII) stands as a safety net scheme that connects the insurance with the average yield at the tehsil level. The government will consider effective use of e-voucher subsidy, in which the vouchers are placed in packets of certified seeds and bags of fertilizers, etc. This will aid the farmers, as it allows a direct transfer of cash to the mobile banking account of farmer within 6 seconds of him sending the scratch code to a digitalized system.

The Kissan Cards will serve as a useful tool in the implementation of e-voucher subsidy, as the subsidy money transferred in the digital bank is linked with Kissan Cards, which operate like an ATM or debit card at the point of purchase.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190605483859/

WORLD’S 15 HOTTEST PLACES ARE IN INDIA, PAKISTAN AS PRE-MONSOON HEAT BUILDS

Reuters | Dawn.com Updated June 03, 2019

Of the 15 hottest places in the world in the past 24 hours, eight were in India with the others in neighbouring Pakistan, according to weather monitoring website El Dorado.

In Pakistan, Jacobabad continued to be the hottest place with 51 degrees Celsius maximum temperature for the second day running. The highest ever maximum temperature of the Sindh city, which is closer to Balochistan in the north, is 53C that was recorded in 1919.

Padidan, Dadu, Bahawalnagar, Sibbi, Rahim Yar Khan, Rohri, Moenjodero, Larkana, Shaheed Benazirabad, Lahore and Multan also experienced high temperatures from 45 to 50 degrees Celsius.

Roads wore a deserted look throughout the day as it was too hot to brave in the open. A number of people including women and children were seen beating the heat at the Lahore canal. Disruption of power and water supply in many localities like in Samanabad added to the hardships of people.

Churu, a city in the west of the northern state of Rajasthan, recorded the country's highest temperature of 48.9C on Monday, according to the Meteorological Department.

Churu has issued a heat wave advisory and government hospitals have prepared emergency wards with extra air conditioners, coolers and medicines, said Ramratan Sonkariya, the city's additional district magistrate.

Water is also being poured on the roads of Churu, known as the gateway to the Thar desert, to keep the temperature down and prevent them from melting, Sonkariya added.

A farmer from Sikar district in Rajasthan died on Sunday due to heatstroke, state government officials said. Media reported on Friday that 17 had died over the past three weeks due to a heatwave in the southern state of Telangana. A state official said it would confirm the number of deaths only after the causes had been ascertained.

The temperature in New Delhi touched 44.6C on Sunday. One food delivery app, Zomato, asked its customers to greet delivery staff with a glass of cold water.

Heat wave warnings were issued on Monday for some places in western Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh state.

The monsoon, which brings down the heat, is likely to begin on the southern coast on June 6, the weather office said last month.

The three-month, pre-monsoon season, which ended on May 31, was the second driest in the last 65 years, India's only private forecaster, Skymet, said, with a national average of 99 mm of rain against the normal average of 131.5 mm for the season.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1486309/worlds-15-hottest-places-are-in-india-pakistan-as-pre-monsoon-heat-builds

MET ISSUES 10-DAY WEATHER OUTLOOK FOR GROWERS

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 4TH, 2019 | KARACHI

The Met Office on Monday asked the farmers to take steps to help protect their standing crops and orchards from extreme weather impacts. In a 10-day weather outlook for growers, it also said that the farmers of lower half the country should irrigate regularly their Kharif crops keeping in view the continuing weather conditions. Besides, rice growers should sow the crop's sampling in accordance with the agricultural experts' recommendations.

"Measures may be taken to preserve the standing crops/orchids from the damaging impacts of extreme weather conditions like thunder/dust storm, gusty winds, hails etc in particular areas," it said, adding that fields got fallow after the harvesting of wheat may be deeply ploughed and leave empty for a few weeks for the next crops.

Day and nighttime temperature are likely to remain above normal in the agriculture plains in the next 10 days. Strong winds are expected in Balochistan, Sindh and southern Punjab during the start of June. Punjab: Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in central/southern Punjab. However, dust-thunderstorm-rain is expected at isolated places in Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Gujranwala, Lahore divisions and Islamabad during the first half of the current decade.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Dust-thunderstorm-rain is expected at isolated places of Malakand, Hazara, Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat divisions during the first half of the current decade. Very hot and dry weather is expected in Sindh and Balochistan. Dust-thunderstorm/rain is expected at scattered places in Gilgit-Balochistan and Kashmir until June 10.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190604483566/

PTI GOVT REJECTS PROPOSAL OF BANNING WHEAT EXPORT

By Zafar Bhutta Published: June 4, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has turned down a proposal for an immediate ban on the export of wheat despite damage to 5% of the staple crop in recent rains.

Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) had approached the government, seeking an immediate ban on the export of wheat. However, the government dismissed the proposal keeping in view current wheat stocks in the country, a senior government official told The Express Tribune.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research emphasised that Pakistan had been self-sufficient in wheat production over the past decade. In the last few years, the wheat harvest has beaten the national requirement, thus, providing surplus produce.

The available stocks of wheat, as reported by provinces on May 13, 2019, stand at 3.7 million tons.

The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) held a meeting on November 10, 2018, and estimated wheat production in the crop year 2018-19 at 25.51 million tons. However, due to recent rains, hail, and windstorms, the wheat production is expected to go down to 24.26 million tons because of a 5% loss.

In order to create physical and fiscal space, the federal government had allowed the export of wheat in the last three consecutive years. On January 29, 2019, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) permitted the export of 0.5 million tons of wheat from the stocks held by Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Supplies Corporation (Passco). Later on March 20, it allowed extension in the export time frame from April 30 to June 30, 2019.

The export of wheat and wheat products such as flour, fine flour (maida) and semolina (Suji) was recorded at 213,000 tons from January to May 13, 2019.

Taking into account the recent damage to the wheat crop, especially in Punjab, the PFMA had requested the imposition of a ban on the export of wheat. The Punjab government suggested a review of the domestic and international markets before taking any decision on wheat movement.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research said while considering the request of the PFMA and Punjab government, the ministry examined the situation and presented its views on wheat availability in the country.

The ministry argued that available wheat, as reported by the provinces and Passco, was well above annual national requirement of around 25.84 million tons. It also stressed that the Punjab government and Passco were engaged in a smooth wheat procurement process.

“There is no need to put immediate ban on wheat export rather the situation should be monitored every week,” it said.

The ministry called for keeping a close watch on wheat availability, local and international wheat prices, monitoring the rupee-dollar parity and reporting to the ECC every week.

The ECC decided that due to sufficient availability of wheat in the country, there was no need to impose a ban on exports and directed the Ministry of National Food Security to strictly monitor wheat availability in the country, its prices locally and internationally and also review the rupee-dollar parity.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 4th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1986393/2-pti-govt-rejects-proposal-banning-wheat-export/

BELIEVING IN MIRACLES

Ahmad Fraz Khan June 03, 2019

Ignoring past patterns, Punjab came up with a growth strategy last week that aims high. As far as agricultural is concerned, the strategy aims to increase the current 1.7 per cent growth rate to 5.5pc in the next four years.

According to the roadmap outlined, growth rate will double to 3.6pc in the next fiscal year before climbing up to 4.8pc in 2020-21 and 4.9pc in 2021-22. In 2022-23, the province will finally reach the growth rate of 5.5pc.

To achieve this tremendous growth, the strategy aims for structural reforms, modernisation of farm management and increase in water and fertiliser availability. These changes are expected to bring twin benefits: increase in total factor productivity by 300pc and creation of 1.26 million jobs by 2023.

Punjab’s agricultural growth strategy envisages increase in total factor productivity by 300pc and creation of 1.26 million jobs by 2023

In the last 10 years, two years (2009-10 and 2015-16) saw a negative growth rate of 0.4pc. There was a year (2013-2014) when the agricultural sector in Punjab grew by 0.4pc. For four years (2010-11, 2012-13, 2014-15 and 2017-18) the province witnessed a paltry rate of above 2pc but less than 3pc. Only three years (2008-09, 2011-12 and 2016-17) saw respectable rates of 3.3pc, 4pc and 5.6pc respectively.

Putting the agricultural sector at a decisively positive trajectory for the next five years will take a miraculous effort on the part of planners. How would they realise these plans?

They have drawn up a roadmap that claims that ensuring efficient use of water, reducing volatility of input prices (especially fertiliser) and developing mechanisms to ensure farm upgradation will bring about desired results.

Other measures include promotion of public-private investment through easy access to farm credit. The government will also work towards strengthening commercial agriculture, making marketing more efficient, rewriting old laws and enlisting help from information technology.

Increase in investment on research to 0.4pc of the gross provincial product is also intended. Part of this investment will be diverted to developing techniques of climate-smart agriculture for which an institution — Institute of Climate Smart Agriculture (ICSA) — will be established.

Additionally, the strategy took note of substandard sanitation which coupled with scant market infrastructure costs 30 to 40pc in post-harvest losses.

Punjab’s agricultural growth rate will double to 3.6pc in the next fiscal year before climbing up to 4.8pc in 2020-21

Furthermore, middlemen grab 60-70pc share of the value addition chain. The document observes that the development of value addition chains is crucial for sustained growth and promises to build them for the benefit of farmers.

Speaking of plans for maximising usage of information technology for devolution of knowledge, improving efficiency of extension services and involving private partners and civil society in the effort, the strategy mentioned e-vouchers for transferring subsidies directly to farmers’ accounts.

By taking these steps the Punjab government hopes to overcome challenges listed in the strategy document quickly and put the sector on a positive growth launching pad. Six major challenges have been identified.

Firstly, the possibilities of input-driven growth have become exhausted while water and land constraints have become tighter. The approach for the future thus has to be different from the past.

Secondly, water is now the key determinant for growth as its productivity has been declining over the last three decades. The only viable strategy going forward is ‘more crop per drop’, which calls for investments in the efficient use of water.

Thirdly, the cropping pattern in the province does not conform to comparative advantage and realities of the world market. Five major crops account for half of the cropped area. Cotton, where the province has a clear comparative advantage, is losing out to sugar cane. These factors need correction.

Fourthly, Punjab suffers from a considerable yield gap. The gap between an average farmer and a progressive farmer is 50pc. This gap is higher for cotton (up to 62pc) and maize (up to 80pc). This indicates that farmers have not been fully able to exploit the input mix. This gap needs to be closed in the next few years to unleash production potential.

Fifthly, over the last 50 years the distribution pattern of landholdings has changed to the detriment of the sector. Of the total cultivable land (6.2 million acres) around 14pc farmers have less than one acre of land. Over 77pc of farmers own up to 12.5 acres of land with only 9pc owning more than 12.5 acres. Small landholdings make it difficult and costly to upgrade farm practices and modernise production techniques.

Finally, the strategy document says that pricing policy of wheat works as a disincentive for storage building. The government fixes price at the pre-harvest stage that deters the private sector from building storage.

The document also touches on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor as product processing, storage and transportation will be developed along the corridor. Furthermore, the plan envisages developing disease prevention centres along the road along with promotion of drip irrigation and other new initiatives.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, June 3rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1486269/believing-in-miracles

CALL FOR INITIATING STRICT ACTION AGAINST WHEAT HOARDERS

RECORDER REPORT | JUN 3RD, 2019 | KARACHI

A serious wheat crisis is looming in the country as massive hoarding of the essential commodity has started owing to lower crop output. Leading commodity exporter and Advisor to Ministry of Maritime Affairs Mahmood Moulvi has warned that wheat prices are also likely to surge in coming months as massive stocks of wheat have been hoarded by market movers.

Moulvi said that there is need to take a strict action against the hoarders to avoid any shortage in the domestic market and keep the commodity prices stable, otherwise the people should ready for a wheat crisis. He said that continued wheat shortage may compel the country to import commodity from international market to meet the domestic demand. The import will put more burdens on the national exchequer, while the imported commodity will be more expansive than domestic wheat, he added. Wheat flour price are likely to increase Rs 2-5 per kilogram in coming days due to hoarding and artificial shortage of the commodity, he said.

Moulvi said that the country is already facing a higher inflation due to increasing oil prices in the world market and the expansive import of wheat will further fuel the rising inflation trend. He said that as per estimates wheat crop has badly hit by rains in Punjab, of which production is likely to decease by 10-20 percent this year. He also appreciated the government policy for not exporting more wheat stocks and said that this move will help to ensure sufficient wheat stocks in the country.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/06/20190603483382/

LOCUSTS THREATEN TO DESTROY CROPS IN KHAIRPUR

By Our Correspondent Published: June 3, 2019

HYDERABAD: Agricultural fields in Khairpur face imminent damage as a swarm of locusts appeared in the fields in the district. The district president of Sindh Agriculture Chamber, Serai Nisar Hussain Khaskhely, said on Sunday that over 100,000 acres of cotton crop are likely to be affected if the federal and provincial governments do not immediately step in to control the locusts.

"Five teams of the federal government are working in Balochistan to control the locusts. We demand that the Centre send one of these teams to Khairpur". He said that the team will analyse the situation followed which it will carry out aerial spray.

The locusts consume green vegetation wherever the swarm settles. The conventional means of control are use of insecticides from the ground or the air, preferably the latter.

"An emergency situation should be declared in Khaipur," said Khaskhely. He expressed fear that the sugarcane and wheat crops would also come under attack. The chamber appealed to the Sindh government as well to immediately initiate locust control measures.

The additional director of Sindh Agriculture Extension department on Saturday wrote to the federal plant protection department that locusts and nymphs have appeared in Nara and Thari Mirwah areas of Khairpur. "… requested for necessary arrangements to control the pest at the primary level in order to avoid heavy losses to the growers," he wrote, asking the federal department for prompt action.

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 27th TO JUN 2nd 2019

DULL TRADING ON COTTON MARKET

A Correspondent June 02, 2019

MULTAN: Slow trading was witnessed on the cotton market on Saturday as sellers stayed on the sidelines. The Karachi Cotton Association kept its spot rate unchanged on Rs8,800.

Experts said that though millers wanted to purchase the commodity but ginners were reluctant to enter into any deal since cotton prices are expected to rise after Eidul Fitr. Also, as Eid holidays near, it is difficult to find transport to deliver cotton.

Meanwhile, the Punjab government has yet to announce how much area the cotton crop has been cultivated at. However it is being estimated that the cultivated area is about 20 per cent less as compared to the estimates made by the provincial government.

The Punjab agriculture department has suggested that farmers complete cotton cultivation till May 31. It is worth noting that high inputs for cotton are forcing farmers to shift to other crops. According to cotton experts, per acre input cost of the crop in Pakistan is about 50 per cent extra as compared to the per acre cost in India.

The following deals materialised on the ready counter: 800 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs8,900; 400 bales, Khanpur, at Rs8,925; and 200 bales; Khanewal, at Rs8,700.

Published in Dawn, June 2nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1485988/dull-trading-on-cotton-market

'MANGO FESTIVAL BE HELD IN BEFITTING MANNER'

THE NEWSPAPER'S STAFF CORRESPONDENT Published Jun 01, 2019

HYDERABAD: A three-day mango festival-2019 would be held in the Expo Centre of Hyderabad in a “befitting” manner. This was announced at a meeting held on Friday in Shahbaz Hall, presided over by Hyderabad Commissioner Mohammad Abbas Baloch.

The meeting was attended by Additional Commissioner-I Sajjad Hyder, agriculture director general Hidayatullah Chhajro and others.

Baloch urged participants of the meeting that all stakeholders should give their full input for holding the mango festival so that it could be organised in a befitting manner. He said that a committee should be formed to prepare a detailed plan also and fix date for the festival.

He regretted that no programme was held in the Expo Centre in the past seven to eight years with the result that it needed maintenance work of sanitation and air-conditioning system etc. He said that those problems needed to be resolved at once.

He directed officers concerned of Tando Allahyar, Tando Mohammad Khan, Matiari and Hyderabad to prepare a list of mango growers whereas the agriculture department should hold an awareness seminar and civil administration should finalise arrangements for cultural programmes. He said the Sindh Board of Investment and other departments’ officers should take responsibility for making arrangements to put other fruits on display.

Published in Dawn, June 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1485872/mango-festival-be-held-in-befitting-manner

ORDER TO DEPOSIT MONEY IN EXCHEQUER RECOVERED FROM FLOUR MILLS

The Newspaper’s Staff Reporter May 31, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) on Wednesday ordered the authorities concerned to deposit in the national exchequer the amount recovered from flour mills involved in the wheat scam.

A two-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Ahmed Ali M. Shaikh also dismissed a bail petition filed by flour mill owner Sikandar Ali Mahar over his absence from the court during the hearing.

The petitions were filed by two millers seeking pre-arrest bail in connection with an inquiry launched by the National Accountability Bureau in the wheat sale scam.

The petitioners submitted through their counsel that the federal anti-graft watchdog had initiated an inquiry into the owners of the flour mills and the food department officers/officials allegedly for selling the essential commodity to different mills, which defaulted on payments pledged in return.

At the outset, provincial food secretary Haroon Akhtar and director food Hasan Zaidi appeared before the court.

The chief justice came down heavily on the secretary and the director for failing to perform their duties and saving the wheat meant for the general public.

The secretary filed a report submitting that the flour millers had borrowed the wheat worth of Rs20 billion from the food department and promised to make payment after 180 days.

It further stated that Rs19 billion had been recovered from the flour millers and Rs1 billion was still lying outstanding against them.

The bench members expressed their concerns over the manner in which the food department authorities had sold the wheat to the flour mills and failed to make recoveries of the amount.

The secretary's report further stated that petitioner Waheed Gopang had paid Rs530 million to the food department.

The bench directed the food department and the NAB authorities concerned to ensure that the amount recovered from the flour mills in respect of the essential commodity sold to them was deposited in the national exchequer along with the mark up.

The court also directed them to submit their compliance reports respectively on the next date of hearing and fixed the matter on June 25.

Published in Dawn, May 31st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1485549/order-to-deposit-money-in-exchequer-recovered-from-flour-mills

13 FOOD OFFICIALS GET BAIL IN WHEAT SCAM CASE

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent May 31, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Hyderabad circuit bench of the Sindh High Court on Wednesday granted pre-arrest bail for a sum of Rs50,000 each to 13 employees of food department, including two officers, in a wheat procurement scam case.

The applicants were booked in six different FIRs lodged by the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) in respect of wheat scam in Sanghar district. The ACE detected misappropriation of Rs455.78 million after the high court ordered an inquiry into the wheat procurement 2017-18 season.

Farhad Ali Abro advocate, who represented Ali Asghar Naich, acting deputy director of the food department, district food controller Munawar Arain, Ali Dost Zardari, Abid Ali Rind, Sarkar Magsi, Khadim Hussain, Ghulam Qadir and six others, contended that no loss was caused to the government exchequer by applicants.

He said the food department had claimed a loss of Rs455.78m in the wheat procurement. He said that gunny bags were issued to growers for procurement of wheat and the same bags were received by the food department.

Meanwhile, a special judge of anti-corruption (provincial) rejected the bail application of food inspector Saeeduddin of Sanghar on Wednesday who was involved in the same scam. He was also represented by Mr Abro.

The court granted bail to three accused in a case of examination paper's leak of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Hyderabad on Thursday for a sum of Rs100,000 each.

Mr Abro represented three applicants, including high school teacher Asim Mirza, Farhan and Chaman who were booked by B-section police station on the complaint of Javed Shaikh, a BISE official, under sections 406, 409, 34 PPC and 25 Telegraph Act.

The accused were employees of a government boys school. But Farhan was working as contractual worker for printing examination papers in BISE offices at the time of annual examinations.

Chaman used to serve him food with the permission of concerned BISE officials while Asim Mirza was friend of Farhan who was a privately hired employee of BISE's contractor for printing of the papers within BISE premises. Chaman was a physically challenged man.

Papers of Physics-II, Zoology-II, Chemistry-II, English-II and Botany-II were leaked through a USB allegedly by Farhan to his friend Asim Mirza, whose daughter was appearing in the intermediate examination. Farhan had confessed that he had done it for his friend Asim.

Mr Abro contended that no paper or data was stored in the USB device and added that a secret branch official had himself become complainant in the case although he should have been booked. He said he had to check everything. He said he had allowed cell phone and USB inside the branch.

He said that no data was recovered to show that any communication was established between Farhan and anyone else. He said that only printing of his name on paper was taken as evidence for implicating him in the case.

Published in Dawn, May 31st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1485540/13-food-officials-get-bail-in-wheat-scam-case

RUSSIA IMPOSES BAN ON GRAIN: APCEA CHIEF

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN | MAY 31ST, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Russia has reportedly imposed a ban on Pakistani grain after finding Kepra Beetle in a consignment of rice with phyto sanitary certificate of national organization of quarantine duly issued by Pakistan's official agency. This was disclosed by Manzoor Ellahi, Chairman All Pakistan Commercial Exporters Association (APCEA) while talking to Business Recorder.

"We have contracted 10-15 containers of rice with Russian importers per month of processed par boiled 1121 rice. One of our consignments is lying at Karachi Port and two consignments are on the way to Karachi, against which advance payment is already received," he added.

In reply to a question, he said that his buyer has intimated that Russia has imposed temporary ban on import of grain from Pakistan, on the plea that in a batch of rice Kepra Beetle was found despite the fact that the consignment was duly cleared by the Department of Plant Protection, which issues sanitary and phyto sanitary certificates for each grain consignment.

"This will be a big loss to the rice market if immediate action is not taken on our part through Pakistan embassy in Moscow (Russia)," he said, adding that Pakistan will lose huge Russian market of rice," he said, adding that Pakistan exports approximately 35000 tons per annum or rice and other grains to Russia worth $40-50 million. In reply to a question, he said that his company M.M. Ellahi Traders has already received advance from the buyer. He has offered his Russian buyer his money back but he is insisting on supply of rice.

"I have requested the federal government to intervene in the matter and take serious action at the government level because negligence of one exporter should not hurt the business of all other genuine exporters. I have also demanded of the government to take strict action against the official who earned a bad name for the country by issuing certificate for the infested consignment," he added. Meanwhile, Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry has also sent a letter to the federal government seeking help to resolve this issue immediately so that exports should restart.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190531482538/

NGO ALLEGEDLY DEFRAUDS FARMERS OF MILLIONS OF RUPEES IN SINDH

By Our Correspondent Published: May 31, 2019

HYDERABAD: A non-governmental organisation has allegedly defrauded farmers of millions of rupees by offering to sell them solar tube wells. In a petition filed by a mechanic of the solar system, who claimed to have been used by the NGO to hunt prospective buyers, the Sindh High Court (SHC) has put the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the NGO and other respondents on notice.

According to the petitioner, Saleemuddin, a resident of Tando Allahyar district, Muhammad Saad Farooqui of Dera Ismail Khan, affiliated with Ikhlas Welfare Society approached him with the proposal to find buyers for solar systems in Sindh. He told him that the solar tube wells for the agriculture sector will be partially funded under a Turkish government's project.

Saleemuddin was also offered Rs30,000 monthly salary if he brought buyers for Farooqui. The petitioner arranged meetings of Farooqui with many farmers, of whom 21 paid Rs560,000 each as security deposit for the solar tube wells. A sum of Rs12.6 million was deposited in Farooqui's account by the buyers on behalf of Saleemuddin in July and August 2018.

Once the amount was deposited, Farooqui began to dawdle in the installation of the systems and later vanished, according to the petitioner. Following his disappearance, Saleemuddin was left to deal with the enraged buyers who felt cheated by the petitioner. He claimed that he has since been facing threats and that he has also survived a kidnapping bid as well.

Subsequently, the petitioner complained to the FIA to investigate the fraud and recover the amount. But he complained before the court that the agency has made no headway in the probe and prayed the SHC to order the FIA to investigate the case.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 31st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1983812/1-ngo-allegedly-defrauds-farmers-millions-rupees-sindh/

HEALTH TAX TO CUT TOBACCO, SUGAR CONSUMPTION

By Our Correspondent Published: May 31, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Each day at least 1,200 children aged 15 and above start smoking in Pakistan, The Special Assistant to PM (SAPM) on National Health Dr Zafar Mirza said welcoming tax on tobacco.

In order to cut rising tobacco consumption and increase the revenue, the federal cabinet approved health tax on cigarette and sugary beverages. The measure was recommended by the Ministry of National Health Services Regulation and Coordination.

Mirza called the tax on cigarettes it a triumph for the government in difficult financial period.

He hailed the Prime Minister Imran Khan and said that it reflected the concerns of PM regarding public health.

He added that the health tax also signified how much the nation prioritised its health.

Mirza said that excessive use of sugary drinks was increasing risks of diseases. He added that Re1 tax would be imposed on a 250ml beverage bottle while the revenue collected from it would be allocated to the health sector for treating the poor and needy people through different programmes.

Reports have revealed that around Rs143.208 billion are spent every year on treatment of tobacco-caused diseases.

Mirza termed the decision of federal cabinet of levying health tax on tobacco products and sugary drinks as unprecedented and historic.

In a statement, he said that in order to discourage cigarette smoking, increasing revenues and saving money by reducing tobacco-related health care costs, health levy on cigarettes at the rate of Rs10 per pack of 20 cigarette sticks had been proposed by Ministry of National Health Services, along with increase in Federal Excise Duty on cigarettes.

Terming the introduction of health tax as a big win for the people he said: “the measure would have far reaching impact on their health and wellbeing and is reflective of our resolve as a nation to take a bold step forward and accord high priority to health over any other consideration.”

Mirza said that tobacco was the biggest killer causing death of around 160,189 persons in Pakistan every year. Almost 15.6 million adults currently smoke tobacco in the country whereas around 1,200 Pakistani children between age of six and 15 start smoking every day.

SAPM on health added the economic cost of smoking amounts to Rs143.208 billion. This included direct costs related to healthcare expenditures and indirect costs related to lost productivity due to early mortality and morbidity.

He said that the levy of health tax on sugary drinks aims to discourage their excessive use to control the burden and complications of Non Communicable Diseases specifically diabetes.

He added the revenue collected through levy of health tax is proposed to be earmarked for federal health budget including Prime Minister Health Program and Health Promotion.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 31st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1983879/1-health-tax-cut-tobacco-sugar-consumption/

GRAPE HARVEST FESTIVAL PLANNED

By Our Correspondent Published: May 31, 2019

FAISALABAD: The National Grape Harvest Festival will be held across orchards near Shahkot, disclosed Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s (FCCI) Standing Committee on Agriculture, Tourism and Civic Problems Chairman Syed Khalid Mehmood Shah.

Chairing a meeting of the standing committee, he directed the participants to reorganise the agriculture marketing system in order to strengthen the agriculture sector on a modern, scientific and sustainable basis.

He was of the view that in the current system, the main beneficiary was the middle man while in the case of any national calamity, the growers had to face a serious financial crisis.

Over the past 10 years, he said, the agriculture sector had remained in trouble and most of the farmers were forced to sell off their precious and fertile land to the land mafia.

He revealed that the standing committee was taking measures to revive profits of the agriculture sector through the introduction of modern technologies.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 31st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1983774/2-grape-harvest-festival-planned/

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAMME WINS UN AWARD

Amin Ahmed May 30, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The ministry of national food security and research has been awarded the Edouard Saouma Award by the Food and Agriculture Organisa-tion (FAO) of the United Nations in recognition of its efforts under the National Control Programme for Foot and Mouth Disease.

This year, the award has been awarded jointly to Pakistan and Rwanda. The award ceremony will take place in Rome on June 26 during the annual FAO conference.

The Edouard Saouma Award is presented to a national or regional institution, which has implemented a particular project funded by FAO’s technical cooperation programme. The biennial award pays tri-butes to Edouard Saouma, who served as FAO director-general from 1976 to 1993.

Under the memorandum on the requirements of foot and mouth disease (FMD) signed between Pakistan and China early this week, China will provide technical assistance to Pakistan to establish FMD-free zones where vaccination will be administered to livestock.

An important element of the memorandum explains that all the differences and disputes arising from or concerning with the application or interpretation of the memorandum will be amicably settled through mutual consultations and negotiations between the two countries.

By developing FMD-free zones, Pakistan would move from stage-2 to stage-3 leading towards the control and eradication of FMD, Minister for National Food Security and Research, Mehboob Sultan said.

This will pave the way to open export of animals and their products to China. The ministry of national food security hoped that Pakis-tan would soon enter the billion- dollar meat market of China, thereby increasing the share in world meat market.

According to estimates, China’s annual meat requi-rement is worth around $15 billion. Currently, Pakistan exports meat to Gulf countries, Vietnam and Malaysia.

China, which has imposed a ban on the import of Pakistani rapeseed meal three years ago due to SPS issues, is now willing to lift the ban, and a protocol has been proposed by China. Once the protocol is signed, the ban will be lifted on several products.

Minister Sultan said that the government was focusing on expanding the Pakistan's meat market and the five-year agreement with China would help achieve the desired results not only in the meat market but in agriculture sector and would be mutually beneficial.

The 'Framework agreement on Agricultural Cooperation' between Pakistan and China will be executed and implemented through the ministry of national food security and research and the Chinese ministry of agricultural and rural affairs.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1485445/foot-and-mouth-disease-control-programme-wins-un-award

FARMERS REJECT MINISTER'S CLAIM OF AMPLE SUPPLY OF WATER TO BADIN

A Correspondent May 30, 2019

BADIN: Leaders of the Save Badin Action Committee as well as common farmers have rejected Sindh Minister of Irrigation Syed Nasir Hussain Shah's claim that all tail-end areas of Badin are getting ample supply of water.

Framers leaders Mir Noor Hassan Talpur, Khail Bhurgari, Khuda Dino Shah and others told this reporter on Wednesday that irrigation minister and high officials of both irrigation department and Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (Sida) were just rubbing salt into the wounds of thousands of people living in tail-end areas who were thirsting for water for months.

"Instead of issuing press statements Mr Shah should himself visit the tail-end areas of the district to see for himself the worst conditions caused by prolonged and acute shortage of water," they said.

They accused local irrigation officials, including executive engineer of Phuleli Canal Yawar Memon of corrupt practices. "Mr Memon is directly involved in tampering with watercourses and depriving small and hapless farmers of water in several areas along the canal," said.

They demanded the government should remove the officer at the earliest and said that water was being sold by irrigation officials through tampered modules and illegal watercourses to the highest bidders.

They urged the minister and other officials concerned to talk to the farmers who had peacefully struggled for water for the past five months instead of meeting with a few leaders of the so-called farmers' organisations, which just water to curry favour with the government.

They said that as long as there were incompetent officials and blockages in Phuleli Canal that diverted water to the lands of influential persons, tail-end areas would never get their due share of water.

"We have already challenged the issue of release of water into flood canals, blockages and other issues in the Sindh High Court," they said and warned they would issue a call for shutdown strike in the district after Eid to register protest against the unending water crisis.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1485333/farmers-reject-ministers-claim-of-ample-supply-of-water-to-badin

MILK PRICING PROBLEM

BR Research May 30, 2019

That Pakistan's milk price control is hurting both its livestock animals and milk consumers was discussed earlier in this space. Few are aware that despite those price controls, milk in Pakistan is one of the most expensive in the world. (See Dairy trade-offs: price vs. milk qualityMay 29, 2019)

Prior to recent depreciation spree that PKR witnessed, the price of milk at farm gate prices in Pakistan was higher by about 35 to 50 percent compared to the likes of US and Brazil (post-depreciation analyses is not available). This is largely because feed cost in Pakistan is about 30-45 percent higher compared to peer economies. (See footnote)

Feed aka fodder is about 70 percent cost of milk. Consistent rupee depreciation and rise in crop support prices drives up the cost of milk, for both loose and packaged milk players. A rise in support of a crop raises the cost of feed directly if that crop or its by-products is used as fodder, and indirectly if it is not used as fodder because farmers switch to crops yielding higher returns rather than those used for feed.

Moreover, when global oil prices rise, the price of imported feed also increases because farmers shift their crops toward bio-diesel production, which by the way also jacks up the prices of skimmed or dry milk prices. Add to these the cost of medicines to treat and to prevent, and rising land rentals (in case of cattle farms near or in major urban centres), and other farm inputs required for breeding, clean-in-place and so forth.

Another reason why milk prices for urban consumers may be high is because farming centres are in the urban or peri-urban areas instead of rural areas. According Dr. Nazeer Kalhoro, a veterinarian, who holds an MBA and a Phd in virology, dairy farm centres should be in rural areas. His argument: raw material for dairy farm – the feed which is about 70 percent of the cost of milk – is produced in rural areas.

It appears that it is cheaper to transport milk from rural to urban areas instead of transporting animals and their feed from rural to urban. "If the cost of fodder at production level is Rs10 per kilogram, when it arrives in Karachi, its cost becomes Rs12 to Rs3 per kilogram (kg), Rs2-3 per kg being the cost of transport, freight, toll, loading unloading etc. On average a cow eats 8 kg of fodder to produce one litre of milk, which means the freight cost of fodder to produce 1 milk is at least about Rs16 (Two times eight)."

"In contrast, the cost of transportation of milk from rural to urban area under cold storage is about Rs1.5 to Rs2 rupees per litre," says Kalhoro, who currently works at Sindh livestock department. He adds that the cost of labour, water and land needed for dairy farming is also cheap in rural areas compare to urban centres. If his calculations are correct, then by having dairy farms in urban/peri-urban areas, consumers are being provided costlier milk, while the rural economy is being hurt.

To be able to control milk prices without distorting the quality and quantity of milk and the incentives of players across the chain requires a DMG official to have detailed knowledge about crops, weather changes, medicine for treatment and prevention, feed types and their supply, quality of animals and animal breeding, farm management and the ever-changing trends in costs, prices and management practises thereof. And these are just the broad contours of dairy farming.

Ramadan is a time when many try to come closer to faith. One important part of faith that government officials and the public at large ought to reflect deeply on is that only God is all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-hearing. A government official or any other mortal is not, and therefore they should resist the temptation of fixing prices, which are function of so many factors beyond the knowledge and control of any single person or government body.

As humans, we can only hope that the laws of demand and supply work, in light of which there is a need to let market forces determine the supply of quality milk, where to encourage lower milk prices, it is paramount for the government, inter alia, facilitate the increase in milking yield of Pakistan's dairy farms. What are some of the options to improve milking yields of farms? Stay tuned!

Note: These are consensus range of estimates according to various industry sources, such as Pakistan Business Council, USAID project reports, some academic studies, and channel checks with local loose and packaged milk industry. In the absence of detailed academic research (dairy is a largely ignored subject in academia & think tanks) relying on consensus range is a better approach instead of relying on a single source. Actual percentage difference varies from region to region within Pakistan, and fluctuates with seasonal swings as well, but on average milk in Pakistan is costlier than most countries in the world.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/30/500151/milk-pricing-problem/

BENEFICIARIES OF SUGAR SUBSIDY (2)

BR Research May 30, 2019

Declining exports by sugar milling sector in the ongoing fiscal year has raised the spectre of a severe downturn in the industry. After all, exports last year were highest in recent memory. Whereas, as per 10MFY19 export figures reported by PBS, sweetener exports have fallen short by two-thirds in dollar terms compared to same period last year.

Does that mean the sector is in for a serious shock in financial performance for MY19? Not necessarily. Out of 83 operational milling units in MY18 (total installed units – 91), 55 units belonging to 40 distinct groups contributed to fulfill the exports quota of two million tons announced by federal government during the previous year. While on absolute basis, single largest beneficiary of subsidy (single company) was JDW due to its sheer size. Although share of exports in its total output/sales for the year was marginal, at barely one-fifth of total sales. In contrast, 24 milling units, belonging to 11 distinct groups, showed substantial dependence on exports in terms of total off take during the year.

These groups include represent a variety of sponsor families, with Omni group of Sindh owning highest number of exporting units – nine. Most export-centric units after all did belong to Sindh province – 17 out of 24 – as the provincial government announced subsidy of Rs9.7 per kilo, in addition to what had already been announced by federal government – Rs10.3 per kg.

In contrast, the group with largest export dependence in percentage terms (of top-line) belonged to Punjab. Hunza group, a private limited concern which has two units in the largest province, exported

112 percent of its output for the year, denoting that the units even offloaded inventory from last year to avail export subsidy.

Sponsor group which availed the highest benefit on cumulative volume basis for its four distinct companies turned out to be Late Makhdum Ruknuddin's family, father of incumbent federal minister of planning.

It is of note that that of the 11 sponsor groups, only six units – all belonging to Sindh province – are listed entities, namely, Al-Noor and Shahmurad; Mehran; Faran (Amin Bawany); Al-Abbas (Ghani Usman); and Mirpurkhas (Ghulam Farooque). While financial performance of these listed groups is set to take a hit on account of poor exports in MY19, the sector by and large is expected to remain insulated owing to persistent domestic demand.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/30/500148/beneficiaries-of-sugar-subsidy-2/

PUTTING A DOLLAR VALUE ON ETHANOL POTENTIAL

BR Research May 30, 2019

Last week, BR Research published an attempt to quantify the output of Pakistan's distillery industry, in absence of verifiable numbers available from the sector (Read: Sizing Pakistan's ethanol market, published on May 24, 2019).

As useful as it may be to measure industrial output, the attempt is of little relevance unless it assigns a dollar value to market size. And dollar value it is, considering industry representative's claim that most of country's ethanol output is geared toward export markets.

That makes sense, as a sifting exercise through PBS 8-digit export data reveals an interesting nugget. Pakistan's ethanol export volumes – as reported by PSMA – tally not with country's total ethanol exports, but only with exports of beverage-grade indentured ethanol (HS code 2207.10).

Five years ago, industrial ethanol exports (HS code 2207.20) contributed close to one-third of total ethanol export value; however, this in recent years has declined to a paltry share – just four percent of total as of FY18.

In absence of clarity from the industry association (explained in previous column) and taking beverage-grade ethanol export figures published by PSMA as proxy for ethanol manufactured from cane-based molasses, an attempt may be made to place a dollar value on country's ethanol export potential.

For starters, Pakistan has a long history of molasses export and the raw material has fetched a stable average per ton price over the last decade. Since late 1990s, distilleries have mushroomed, as millers diversified into ethanol production business to seek more value out of this dark sticky substance, which in 1960s used to be dumped into craters.

A glaring conclusion jumps out from the rudimentary analysis: even working with worst-case yield rates for molasses-conversion into ethanol, Pakistan's ethanol potential appears significantly untapped. This conclusion is further cemented from the realisation that if none of the un-exported molasses were converted and instead exported directly, this by-production would probably fetch greater value on cumulative basis (over last six years), as has beverage-grade ethanol export as reported by PBS and PSMA.

Where really is all the remaining molasses disappearing, if not being converted into ethanol? What is the size of domestic ethanol consumption? The math does not add up. For its own sake, the industry association has some reckoning to do.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/05/30/500145/putting-a-dollar-value-on-ethanol-potential/

LOVE OF MANGOES

By Editorial Published: May 30, 2019

The setting sun, dying music and the sweet served last after dinner are the sweetest. We can safely add mango to this list. Pakistan is among the top producers of this fruit and it also brings in precious foreign exchange for the country.

In two years, 2014-15 and 2015-16, Pakistan earned $94.059 million through the export of mangoes. Like almost every sphere of life, climate change is having its toll on mangoes too. According to growers and horticulture experts, this year a substantial decline in mango production in Sindh is expected.

It is being attributed to weather patterns induced by climate change. An extended winter, unusual summer rains, winds and hailstorms are factors that have adversely affected the crop. There is good news as well.

Mangoes are gaining lost ground in the province as farmers who had converted their mango orchards into agricultural fields are now replanting mango orchards. An important reason for this is that farmers were not getting good returns on cotton and sugar cane.

The Sindh Horticulture Research Institute has assessed around 25-30 per cent decline in crop production in its 2019 survey. The most affected is to be the Sindhri variety. This year the arrival of this variety has been delayed.

It is usually available in the market by the third week of May; now it is expected to be available by the first week of June. Water shortage is one of the important issues affecting mango orchards. Where a sufficient quantity of water is available, growers are getting a good crop.

People from all strata of society love mangoes. Zahid Ali Khan, a cousin of Maulana Mohammed Ali Jauhar's, would ask people from the beginning of April whether the Alphonso mango had arrived in the market. This variety hits the market sometimes in April. Zahid Ali Khan was a diabetic.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/1982961/6-love-of-mangoes/

GOVT LIKELY TO WITHDRAW SUBSIDY ON AGRI INPUTS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated May 29, 2019

KARACHI: The government is planning to withdraw certain exemptions given to farm sector including reduced rates of general sales tax on seeds, fertilisers and pesticides.

An official from the fertiliser industry, who asked not to be named, said the move would be contrary to the pledge made by PTI during the elections to woo rural voters while recognising the need to maintain sustainable farm economics.

PTI, under its manifesto had promised to increase farmers' profitability and boost growth rate primarily by enabling cheaper inputs.

Moreover, after coming into power, the government even indicated providing smart subsidies to the subsistence farmers.

The industry official said that in contrast to earlier claims, the government is weighing different options to withdraw exemptions and reduce sales tax rates on agriculture inputs including seeds, fertilisers and pesticides.

The move would lead to significant increase in farmers' input costs and will adversely impact the agriculture sector besides fuelling food-related inflation.

According to some estimates, around 60pc of the Pakistan's farmers are small scale — up to five acres — who operate on subsistence level.

Any change in farm economics will significantly impact their standard of living, the official claimed.

Total urea offtake jumped by seven per cent to 4.735 million tonnes in the first ten months of 2018-19, from 4.411m tonnes in same period last year, according to data from National Fertilisers Development Centre.

However, the urea sales for April witnessed a sharp fall of 22pc year-on-year as they dipped to 292,000 tonnes, from 375,000 tonnes in corresponding month last year. "The decline in offtakes primarily came on the back of dealers and farmers acquiring inventory in the previous months as a price was expected," stated Shajar Capital. Compared to March this year, urea sales were lower by 28pc.

Meanwhile, DAP sales clocked in at 1.83m tonnes in 10MFY19, down 15pc, from 2.154m tonnes whereas their April offtake soared by 25pc year-on-year to 86,000 tonnes, from 69,000 tonnes.

Company-wise, Fauji Fertiliser noticed the largest decline in urea sales during April as they tumbled by 51pc whereas Engro Fertiliser outperformed the sector with 23pc increase in offtake and a 48pc market share.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1485228/govt-likely-to-withdraw-subsidy-on-agri-inputs

MINISTER BLAMES UNFAVOURABLE WEATHER FOR UNMET WHEAT PRODUCTION TARGET

Amin Ahmed Updated May 29, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan could not achieve the wheat production target this year largely due to unfavourable weather conditions that damaged the ready-to-harvest crop mainly in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, causing a loss of about 1.5 million tonnes of wheat.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan told a news conference here on Tuesday that wheat production this year had been estimated to be 24.12 million tonnes. The government already had 3.7 million tonnes in reserves, and all together the country had 27.19 million tonnes of wheat in stock, he said, adding that the country's population had complete food security. Responding to a question about the compensation to farmers who lost the wheat crop due to natural calamity, the minister said that revenue board in Punjab was estimating the cost of loss. However, he was not clear as to when the government would announce a compensation package.

He said that the federal budget for agriculture prior to devolution was Rs38 billion. However, he added, after the devolution this was slashed to about Rs16 billion. How could the country progress when 70 per cent budget for agriculture was reduced, he regretted, blaming the previous governments for curtailing the budget for agriculture while commenting that "they could not find kickbacks in this sector and for that reason agriculture remained out of focus during their governments".

Says country still enjoys complete food security

Mr Sultan said the PTI government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan had a vision and the maximum focus was on agriculture, and to revive agriculture being the backbone of the national economy, 13 projects costing Rs286 billion were being launched during the next fiscal year. These projects will be implemented in next five years. Out of this amount, the federal share was Rs86 billion, which shows the seriousness of the government towards agriculture, he said.

He told a questioner that the government had no plans to increase sales tax on fertiliser from 2pc to 17pc.

Mr Sultan explained to the journalists the two agreements which were signed with China during the current visit of Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan. The first memorandum of understanding relates to the 'Framework Agree-ment on Agricultural Cooperation' while the second memorandum relates to 'Requirements of Food and Mouth Disease' (FMD).

Under the memorandum on FMD, Chinese General Adminis-tration of Customs will provide technical assistance to the ministry of national food security and research for establishment of FMD Free Zones in the country where vaccination will be practised.

About agreement of FMD, Mr Sultan said that while world export of meat was increasing, the share of Pakistan in meat export was less than 200 million tonnes. The Chinese assistance would lead us to increase the export of meat, he said.

Under the 'Framework Agree-ment on Agricultural Cooperation' that covers all aspects of agriculture sector, China will share modern technology being applied in agriculture with Pakistan in addition to mechanisation skills that will benefit small farmers.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has already developed a strong base for mutual cooperation between the two governments in a variety of fields which include agricultural development and poverty alleviation as one of the long-term key areas of cooperation.

The agreement identified areas of cooperation such as inputs and agricultural technology extension service; remote sensing and geographical information system; food processing and pre-and-post-harvest handling and storage of agricultural produce; genetic resources of crops, livestock and poultry; selection and breeding of new breeds of animals and new varieties of plants; feed; fisheries and aquaculture; research and development of new high-yield varieties; precision agriculture; and pest and disease control.

The agreement provides for jointly establishing agricultural technology demonstration parks to showcase technologies and agribusiness's development models, and strengthen links and collaboration between businesses in the two countries.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1485266/minister-blames-unfavourable-weather-for-unmet-wheat-production-target

WHEAT PRODUCTION TARGET OF 25.5 MILLION TONNES MISSED

FAZAL SHER | MAY 29TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has missed wheat production target as the country produced 24.12 million tonnes of wheat against the set target of 25.5 million tonnes from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi season 2018-19. Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muham-mad Sultan said the heavy rains coupled with hailstorms had affected wheat crop in the country and reduced the size of the crop by 1.28 million tonnes as compared to the last year.

"According to provincial government reports, the country produced 24.12 million tonnes of wheat against the set target of 25.5 million tonnes," he said, adding that with the addition of leftover wheat stock of 3.7 million tonnes, the total availability of the grain will be 27.9 million tonnes while total national requirement of the commodity is 25.8 million tonnes. The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) during its previous meeting held in April fixed wheat crop production target at 25.51 million tonnes from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi 2018-19.

To a question if the government has proposed to increase sales tax on fertilizers from 2 percent to 17 percent, the minister said no such proposal is under consideration. He said Pakistan and China have signed five memorandum of understanding (MoUs) during the visit of Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan, of which two are related to agriculture. The MoUs include Framework Agreement on Agricultural Cooperation and Requirements for Foot and Mouth Diseases (FMD) Free Zone, he said, adding these will play a significant role in improvement of agriculture and meat exports.

The minister said currently there is a huge export of meat in the world but unfortunately Pakistan lags far behind. "Pakistan exports meat to Gulf states, Malaysia and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but it cannot expert meat to European countries. Currently Pakistan is on step-II of FMD and country will move to third step after establishment of FMD free zones," he said, adding that government of China will help Pakistan set up FMD free zone in four provinces which will definitely increase meat export. He said framework agreement on agricultural cooperation covers most sectors of agriculture including provision of modern technology, skill development of small farmers, improvement of research departments, introduction of new breeds in livestock and poultry, improvement in fishery sector, value added unit and setting up of processing units in the country.

The minister said previous government has completely ignored the country's agriculture sector and its only focus was on Orange Line Train and Metro Bus projects.

He said the present government in collaboration with the provincial government will spend Rs 286 billion on 13 different projects in the next five years. "Out of the total amount, the federal government will provide Rs 86 billion and the rest of the amount would be managed by provinces with their own resources," he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190529481926/

COTTON RATES FIRM ON SUBDUED TRADE

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 29TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Official spot rate was higher on the cotton market on Tuesday in the process of slow trading activity, dealers said. The official spot rate was up by Rs 50 to Rs 8750, they added. Little quantity of the seed-cotton per 40kg from Lower Sindh was available at Rs 3900-4000, they said. In the ready session, nearly 2000 bales of cotton from Sadiqabad sold at Rs 9850, they said.

According to the market sources, mills were under pressure due to rising dollar rate, covering their forward position as prices were matching with their psychological levels. Cotton analyst, Naseen Usman said that one truck of seed cotton of new crop has arrived at Mirpurkhas ginning factory. Arrivals of seed cotton started from Lower Sindh but in very little number, arrivals will improve in the month of June, other brokers said. Cotton prices were mixed in the international market, dealers said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190529482054/

PADDY CROP PLANNED ON 4.6 MILLION ACRES OF LAND IN PUNJAB

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 29TH, 2019 | SIALKOT

The paddy crop will be cultivated on more than 4.648 million acres of land in various rice growing areas of Punjab province during Kharif crop season. Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Tuesday that Agriculture department has chalked out a well-knitted plan to attain the fixed target of the crop across the province.

In this regard, department has deputed special training teams for providing proper guidance and assistance during village-to-village visits regarding the use of inputs, nursery sowing and transfer of plants into fields to the rice growers. The programme is aimed at creating awareness among the growers on the use of recommended seed and proper use of fertiliser to attain better yield of the crop.

In Gujranwala division, paddy will be cultivated over 1.618 million acres of land whereas 3.17 lakh acres land will be brought under paddy crop in Sialkot district. The Agriculture department has also initiated a well-knitted training programme for the paddy growers for preparing nurseries and cultivation of paddy crop that is aimed at attaining the fixed target in Sialkot district as well.

The local agriculture department has also initiated farmers' training programme in 1,442 villages of Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur and Sambrial tehsils of Sialkot district. Special training teams are busy in imparting training to the rice growers for enhancing per-acre yield, sowing of paddy nurseries, utilisation of irrigation water, pesticides and fertiliser and also regarding different varieties of paddy in Sialkot district.

Some progressive farmers are adopting modern technology for raising rice nursery by automatic machine in plastic trays at local agriculture farm. They are ready for transplanting through rice transplanter in Bajwat area of Sialkot. It may be added that farmers community had been demonstrating reluctance and unwillingness to cultivate paddy crop in different areas of Sialkot district. The decline in paddy cultivation was due to middleman's role and fast changing climatic conditions. However, Agriculture department is making adequate efforts to motivate them.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190529482015/

PAKISTAN PLANS TO ADOPT CHINA AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT MODEL: SUMSAM

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 29TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Provincial Minister for Information and Culture Syed Sumsam Ali Bukhari has said that new chapter of Pakistan and China's friendship is about to begin. He said the PTI government has played due role in improving image of Pakistan besides presenting it a graceful country among the comity of nations. He said confidence of international community in Pakistan's leadership has been restored. Prime Minister Pakistan Imran khan is being appreciated in every country of the world, he added.

Bukhari said Pakistan-China cooperation will bring improvement in important national sectors of the country. He said the agri sector with the cooperation of China will touch the new heights of development. China is the only country which made its population its power instead of burden and left the rest of world for behind in the race of prosperity, economic and agri development.

The Minister said Pakistan is also planning to adopt the agri development model of China. He said the CPEC projects will be completed at every cost. He further maintained that completion of these projects will provide vast opportunities of investment in the private sector. He said the country is moving towards stability under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190529482023/

4,000 SMALL FARMERS TRAINED ON USE OF QUALITY CERTIFIED SEED

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 29TH, 2019 | LAHORE

Engro Fertilizers Limited, Engro Foundation and the Department of Foreign Aid and Trade (DFAT), Government of Australia have successfully trained more than 4,000 smallholder farmers so far, including 600 women, on quality certified seed use over two years. Additionally, the project has developed approximately 290 enterprising smallholder farmers, 124 among whom are women, to produce their own quality farm-saved seed for further exchange, distribution and selling among the fellow farmers in nearby villages.

Co-funded by Engro Fertilizers Limited and the Department of Foreign Aid and Trade (DFAT), Government of Australia, Partnerships and Value Expansion in Seeds Value Chain (PAVE) project aims to build capacities of smallholder farmers to become high-skilled seed multipliers and become part of seed supply chain, as well as using certified seed in their regular cropping to earn higher incomes.

For this successful project, Engro Fertilizers Limited and Engro Foundation have also received an international award at the Asia Responsible Enterprise Awards (AREA) 2019 in Taipei, Taiwan. Sharing his thoughts on this achievement, Nadir Salar Qureshi, CEO of Engro Fertilizers, said, “At Engro Fertilizers, our goal is to promote food security in Pakistan by empowering smallholder farmers to implement sound agricultural practices, and to equip them to overcome barriers of entry in the marketplace.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190529482024/

FERTILIZER SPENDING SOARS – OFF-TAKE DROPS

BR Research April 30, 2019

Urea off-take for Rabi 2019 was not particularly thrilling – despite having crossed the 3 million tons mark for the first time in five years. The cumulative Rabi urea off-take is up just 3 percent year-on-year. Urea’s gain has proven to be DAP’s loss – as the application of the vital but often sacrificed phosphate fertilizer is down by 17 percent year-on-year to 1.1 million tons.

The drop in DAP off-take has been rather more pronounced in the last three months, showing a slide in double digits, capping a five month consecutive period of year-on-year drop. Something tells that farmers’ economy has not really improved to the extent to absorb the entire price hike. Urea prices soared by 27 percent year-on-year during Rabi 2019, while that of DAP increased by 25 percent in the same period.

The nitrogen deficient soil would mean farmers would generally sacrifice DAP application in favour of urea. The total spending on urea and DAP combined in Rabi 2019 amounts to Rs191 billion – higher by 18 percent from Rabi last year. This is also the highest year-on-year increase in combined urea and Dap spending in at least eight years.

The spending on urea alone constitutes 57 percent of total spending at Rs108 billion – higher by a massive 31 percent. Recall the urea prices have soared by 27 percent during the period. The axe invariably falls on DAP spending – as evident by a massive drop in off-take, despite a year-on-year increase in DAP spending by 6 percent. The NP ratio has worsened to a four year low at 2.6.

Farmers have time and again demonstrated that urea remains fertilizer of choice. And farmers will not go beyond a certain threshold to buy more DAP – especially when prices of both commodities are on the rise. Assessment on the monetary loss of the wheat crops is yet to be precisely made. But what can be said with certainty is that farmers’ economy will not have improved from the havoc that the recent rains caused. This could lead to a Kharif season with dull off-take as the farmers walk the tight rope.

The government may have to come up with a special subsidy program beyond the current one, to help keep the fertilizer application afloat.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/04/30/493591/fertilizer-spending-soars-off-take-drops/

ZTBL PROGRESSING, DIVERSIFYING ITS OPERATIONS

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 28TH, 2019 | ISLAMABAD

Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) is the only specialized financial institution for agriculture sector of Pakistan. The bank plays its designated role is harnessing envisaged agriculture sector growth and development by catering credit requirements of agriculture sector. ZTBL alone is serving approximately 0.350 million farm families annually.

Under the leadership of Sheikh Aman Ullah Acting President ZTBL, the bank is constantly maintaining its AAA/A-1+ rating which is a proof enough of the bank's active positive growth and maintenance of its financial position. Sheikh Aman Ullah, Acting President ZTBL has brought in a number of innovations in the workings of ZTBL during his short tenure of eight months.

Bank took different steps as per Federal Government Policy on National Financial Inclusion Strategy. ZTBL's model of business payments has been changed after 57 years in January 2019 and it has been digitalized and ZTBL has installed 40 ATMs during Jan-May 2019. With the membership of Link-1 and collaboration with Pay PAK, now ZTBL extend facility of online banking 24/7.

That mechanism will ensure easy and timely access of loan payments to farmers and will also provide banking facilities 24/7 to the rural community. Due to continuous efforts of Acting President ZTBL, Bank's business model has been changed and ZTBL has commenced Islamic Banking Operations in December 2018 after getting License of Islamic Banking from State Bank of Pakistan.

The Bank established a call centre to facilitate its customers through help line. This helpline is supporting the complete value chain of agro economy by settling the queries raised by clients with regard to Bank's Agri. Operations, production & cultivation techniques, diseases & insect information.

In addition, the Bank is facilitating farming community through Agri. E. Credit Scheme, which is unique in nature in terms of cost free registration at Sahulat Centers that are established by Punjab Government. Under the scheme ZTBL has given loans amounting to Rs11 billion to 91,000 small borrowers where mark up on loans in respect of regular borrowers is reimbursed to ZTBL by the Punjab Government. The loans are interest free for borrowers. It has created self employment opportunities for 91,000 small farmers.

In the light of Federal Government policies on agriculture, Rural Development (poverty reduction) Scheme of ZTBL with joint venture with AJK Government has become operational in March 2019. Under this scheme ZTBL will finance 300 small dairy units at AJK with the maximum lending limit of Rs1 million. Loan duration will be for five years.

AJK Government will bear cost of mark-up of these loans provided borrowers repay loans on due dates. Consequent upon default, mark-up will also be borne by the borrowers themselves. The areas of Agri. Credit of ZTBL are expanding and Joint venture schemes on similar lines for agricultural credit are under process with rest of provincial governments i.e., KPK, Balochistan, Sindh and Gilgit/Baltistan.

ZTBL is also proceeding towards diversification of loan portfolio and is going to introduce new value added products/schemes of financing like Milk Chilling Units, Small Oil Expeller Units for Canola, Soyabean, Sunflower, Mustard & Olive Oil, three Wheeler Loader Rickshaw, Floriculture including Green House, Tunnel Farming, Silo, Silage making/Fruit Processing (Grading, Polishing & Packing etc.).

Besides this, align with SBP's guidelines on Green Banking and to implement the climate change awareness, mitigation, resilience and adaptation and mitigation strategies in the agriculture sector of

Pakistan to ensure food security, the bank has launched Green Banking Operations under the guidelines of State Bank of Pakistan.

In order to facilitate & support faster, cheaper, convenient, and efficient flow of overseas Pakistani remittances through formal channels, the Bank is providing home remittance services in collaboration with Western Union and Bank of Punjab to facilitate its customers and other walk-in customers for receiving their home remittances through ZTBL. Recently ZTBL has also obtained permission from State Bank of Pakistan in 2019 to establish its own set-up of foreign exchange remittances under PRI programme of SBP.-PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190528481142/

COTTON MARKET: SEED COTTON ARRIVALS FROM LOWER SINDH BEGINS

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 28TH, 2019 | KARACHI

Not a single deal reported on the cotton market on Monday due to lack of buying interest by mill, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 8700, they added. The seed-cotton per 40kg from Lower Sindh was available at Rs 3800-4000, they said. In the ready session, no deal reported till our going to the press, they said.

Market sources said that mills were on the sidelines due to lack of buying interest. Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that initially phutti arrivals have started from lower Sindh due to hot weather. It is expected that trading activity may not pick up ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr holidays, other brokers said and adding that buyers were on the sidelines because of the government may impose sales tax on purchase of cotton.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190528481229/

TWO MILLERS HELD IN RS430M WHEAT SCAM

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent May 27, 2019

HYDERABAD: National Accountability Bureau (NAB) officials arrested two flour mills owners for allegedly misappropriating wheat worth Rs430m in Khairpur district.

They had arrested one of them in Karachi on Saturday and obtained his transit remand from the city's accountability court to produced him in Sukkur's accountability court.

The other miller was arrested in Gambat town of Khairpur district on Sunday. He would also be produced in the Sukkur accountability court on Monday.

According to NAB sources, the unaccounted for wheat was present in their mills in Khairpur district before the stocks were misappropriated.

NAB possesses record of the wheat stocks issued to the mills and when it was tallied with the mills' record, the entries were not present.

Published in Dawn, May 27th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1484743/two-millers-held-in-rs430m-wheat-scam

MANGOES MISSING FROM THE MARKET

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated May 27, 2019

A mature crop of mangoes is yet to be fully available in the market amidst reports of substantial decline in production — mainly in sindhri variety — apparently due to climate change-driven variations in weather. Extended winter, unusual summer rains, winds and hailstorms are factors that adversely affected the crop.

But there is good news as well. Mangoes have started gaining lost ground in lower Sindh as growers who had done away with orchards have taken interest in farming the ‘king of fruit’ again.

Up until five to six years ago, growers had switched to other crops. Although the trend of re-cultivation is slow, it is constant. This will eventually contribute to higher mango production in the long run.

In the short to medium term, the mango crop is facing a host of challenges. A team of the Mirpurkhas-based Sindh Horticulture Research Institute assessed around 25-30 per cent drop in crop production in its 2019’s annual survey.

Agriculture department figures show that a loss of 30-40pc in sindhri variety is to be seen on account of an extended winter, powdery mildew and back to back windstorms.

Mangoes have started gaining lost ground in lower Sindh as growers who had done away with orchards have taken interest in farming the ‘king of fruit’ again

Drop in production was seen last year as well but it was attributable to water shortage. While water flows this year remained better as compared to same period last year, variations in temperature impacted the crop negatively.

Progressive mango growers like Umer Bughio, Sarwar Abro, Imdad Nizamani and Nadeem Shah agree with these assessments.

Mr Nizamani is a veteran mango grower managing a 120-acre farm in Tando Allahyar. “Winter’s effect on banana leaves is a major indicator of mango crop performance. If banana leaves are not burnt due an extended winder, it means the mango crop will not do well,” he said.

An extended winter, with mercury dropping below 3-4 Celsius for a fortnight, benefits mangoes. Such conditions stimulate the carbohydrates process in trees which tends to have a positive bearing on the fruit.

Mr Nizamani said that the sindhri variety will face a decline this season as evident from the impact of weather on the crop grown in his farm.

“Those who have fresh groundwater reserves like me are better off in terms of water supply for orchards”, said Mr Abro, who owns a 300-acre mango farm in Thatta. However, he conceded that temperature had left an impact but hoped that better management would pay him dividends.

Mr Abro’s friend and a progressive grower-cum-exporter, Mahmood Nawaz Shah, differed with the estimates of a 30pc drop in production. He said that the decline is more likely to be around 10pc or so.

Although climatic conditions didn't support mangoes, water flows remained available, barring tail-end areas of barrages which have become a perennial problem.

During February-April, trees come out of dormancy and are poised for water flows. Luckily, this year orchards got sufficient water supplies during this crucial phase, unlike last year.

Delayed crop: Several weather patterns resulted in a delayed crop. Variations in temperature led to unwanted flushing (growth of new leaves) and flowering. This resulted in fruit settings twice, said some growers.

Furthermore, back to back windstorms, hailstorms and unusual summer rains caused shedding of unripe mangoes.

Orchard owners usually pick mangoes by late April or early May. By May's third week sindhri becomes available in retail markets. However, it is a missing phenomenon these days. It is expected that sindhri will reach markets by June's first week, at the tail-end of Ramazan.

Referring to initial business transactions, Mahmood Shah said that an 8-9kg bag of sindhri is sold for Rs700-800 and a 13-14kg bag for Rs1,100.

Similarly, a 13-14kg bag of saroli and daseri was sold for Rs500-600 which was Rs800-900 last year due to lesser production. This indicates that prices are stable because the crop's size is satisfactory this year, he said.

New orchards: Earlier, declining profitability, damages to farms after 2011's devastating rains, better prospects in other crops and water-logging in lands had compelled growers to switch away from mangoes. But growers are opting for mango crops again.

This is in part because other crops did not yield the expected higher benefits. Price row of sugar cane and inadequate rate for cotton by ginners persuaded growers to turn back towards mango production.

"Yes, mango growers have shown a tendency over the last few years to grow orchards again. With better quality standards, mango's export prospects have improved as well," said Mr Bughio.

Of his 300-acres land, he had cleared away 200 acres of mango trees after the 2011 rains in Mirphurkhas — home of mango production. Mr Bughio re-planted 100 acres of his land with mango trees over the last couple of years.

"Lining of Jamrao and other minor channels has overcome water-logging in Mirpurkhas which has encouraged me to switch over to mango production again," he said.

Nadeem Shah has diverted his attention to mangoes also. His two new mango farms stretch over 13 acres and 40 acres. He had put an end to mango farming on 60-acres in Tando Allahyar after damages by 2011 rains.

His 13-acre orchard, grown in 2012, is bearing fruits while the 40-acres farm will take some time to start production.

However, figures by Sindh's agriculture department paint a different picture. Mango orchards in production phase stood at 146,163 acres in 2018 compared to 153,359 acres in 2017. Similarly, production declined from 400,483 in 2017 to 387,884 metric tonnes in 2018.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1484734/mangoes-missing-from-the-market

AGRICULTURE SURVIVES ON SUBSIDIES

Amjad Mahmood Updated May 27, 2019

Newspaper reports that the government is set to withdraw agricultural subsidies ahead of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) package have shocked stakeholders.

They fear that it may further choke the sector, which is already under stress for want of subsidies.

“The local farming sector receives just 20 per cent of subsidies that are available to the agriculture sector elsewhere in the world, including neighbouring countries like India and China,” says Jawaid Saleem Qureshi, convener of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s standing committee on agriculture, seeds and pesticides.

Farming is not highly profitable in Pakistan because of a lack of sufficient subsidies, analysts say. Their withdrawal to meet the IMF conditions will weaken the sector’s growth and hurt financial interests of the rural population.

The higher cost of production will render the local produce uncompetitive in the international market, he says.

‘The budget should provide a 40pc subsidy on pesticides to offset the impact of the price hike caused by the rupee depreciation’

“Some landowners have already left the business by contracting out their land while exploring employment opportunities in urban centres. Now the government seems to be scaring away the contractors (lessees).”

Statistics available with the provincial government make an interesting comparison between the costs of production in the two Punjabs — our province and the one across the Indian border.

Data reveals that the per-hectare cost of production for the wheat crop here is 48pc higher than that in Indian Punjab — Rs76,248 versus Rs51,260. Likewise, the difference for the cotton crop is 45pc — Rs127,526 per hectare here against Rs87,646 in India.

This difference increase further in the case of rice, sugar cane and maize crops (Rs124,429, Rs222,436 and Rs119,511 in Pakistan versus Rs67,580, Rs142,000 and Rs53,029 in India, respectively).

The Indian government pays subsidies for fertilisers. It offers a subsidy of Rs1,100 per bag of urea, Rs1,050 per bag for diammonium phosphate (DAP) and Rs765 per bag for muriate of potash. Islamabad has subsidised fertiliser by reducing the general sales tax from 17pc to 2pc.

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad President Khalid Mahmood Khokhar says farmers receive the latest farm technology, certified seeds and well-funded agriculture research institutions in the rest of the world. But the government’s priorities in Pakistan are different, he says.

"We are lagging far behind in the use of the latest farm tools and machinery. Certified seeds and adulteration-free pesticides are but a dream.

"Research takes a back seat here as the institutions supposed to conduct farm research are not being funded. Rather, their properties are being handed over to other departments for setting up offices and residential colonies.

"Other countries are doling out agricultural subsidies while our rulers allow the duty-free import of cotton from these heavily subsidised producers," he says.

That's the reason, he adds, India has grown its cotton production manyfold. In contrast, our cotton yield is in decline. Pakistan continues to foot the bill, which runs into billions of dollars, for the import of edible oil despite being an agrarian country.

Threatening to stage a demonstration outside parliament if the government increases sales tax on fertilisers from 2pc to 17pc, Mr Khokhar demands that the government should instead do away entirely with the levy.

Furthermore, he believes that the budget should provide a 40pc subsidy on pesticides to offset the impact of the price hike caused by the rupee depreciation as well as the closure of many chemical plants in China.

However, there are some analysts who think that the government is following the right strategy by withdrawing subsidies.

Malik Sajjad Sulaiman, who manages a rice seed development business, says the government is struggling to steer the country into the right direction. "It has to accept harsh conditions put forward by the IMF," he says.

He admits that the cost of production will go up as consumers will suffer because of the withdrawal of 'artificial' or subsidised support prices. But he believes that the process won't slow down the sector's growth because people "cannot give up eating and drinking".

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1484733/agriculture-survives-on-subsidies

KPFS&HFA UNVEILS RULES, STANDARDS FOR FOOD, DRINKS

RECORDER REPORT | MAY 27TH, 2019 | PESHAWAR

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority (KPFS&HFA) has announced rules and standards for food product manufacturers in the province. The authority has decided that the word 'Pure' would only be used if there is 100% fruit contents in a product, whereas the pictorial presentation on label will only be allowed where the fruit juices/natural fruit extracts are not less than 7%, whereas in other case the use of pictures on product label will be banned.

It has been decided by the authority that a period of one year should be granted as business adjustment time for the change in labeling and taking away food pictures where it was deceiving. It has also been unanimously decided that all ingredients that may cause allergic reactions should be mentioned on the label with a written statement in English and Urdu that ‘The Ingredients may cause allergy to sensitive persons,”.

In the hiring of the food technologist for food industry, the authority has decided that food industries located at industrial areas should hire at least one food technologist having minimum qualification of B.Sc (16 years of education). Every SME would be required to hire at least one person having minimum qualification of three years’ postsecondary diploma (13 years of education) in area of Food Science/technology.

In case of category A hotels and restaurants the requirement of diploma/degree holders in food science and technology may be replaced with degree holders in home economics (specialization in nutrition) and/or human nutritionist and/or food technologist. The cottage and very small industries should consult to the food technologist of any recognized organization at least once in a month regarding their food products. The authority has further decided to grant a grace period of six months for hiring the required technical staff.

In case of energy drinks replaced by stimulated drink, the amount of caffeine should not exceed 200 ppm in all types of them. It should have warning added at label in Urdu that it is not suitable for children under 12 years and for pregnant women.

It was also decided unanimously that energy drinks word be removed and replaced by stimulant drink and the product must be halal certified with having halal logo. A grace period of three months has been provided as a business adjustment time.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/05/20190527480959/

WHEAT BAGS WORTH MILLIONS GO MISSING IN BENAZIRABAD

By Our Correspondent Published: May 27, 2019

HYDERABAD: As stories about Sindh Food Department’s wheat scam continue to unfold, hundreds of thousands of wheat bags have been reported missing from the department’s storage facility in Shaheed Benazirabad district.

A team of Sukkur National Accountability Bureau raided a warehouse on Nawabshah-Sanghar road, on Saturday, and found only 61,000 out of a million bags which were procured last year.

An official of NAB told the media that food officials could not satisfy NAB as to why such a large quantity of the wheat bags worth hundreds of millions of rupees were missing. The official said that they have seized the record of the storage facility and further investigation is underway.

Food officials are often accused of illegally selling wheat to flour mills.

An investigation is already underway in Ghtoki district, where NAB is investigating the shifting of wheat worth billions of rupees to flour mills, under the pretext of temporary storage, by food officials. The NAB team, earlier this month, raided several flour mills in Ghotki and found that the mills had utilised and sold the wheat they got from food officials.

The NAB is also conducting enquiries into similar scams that surfaced in Sukkur, Khairpur, Jacohabad, Naushahro Feroze, Qambar Shahdadkot and Kashmore Kandhkot districts. The Sindh Anti-Corruption Establishment is also investigating wheat scams in Karachi, Sanghar and Dadu.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1980864/1-wheat-bags-worth-millions-go-missing-benazirabad/

AGRICULTURE HAS POTENTIAL TO GIVE BOOST TO ECONOMY

By Shakeel Ahmad Ramay Published: May 27, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Since its inception, Pakistan has been struggling to realise the dream of economic growth, development, and prosperity. Experiments accompanied by the self-interest of powerful groups have brought the economy to its knees. Self-interest groups are not limited to politicians, they also include all segments of society.

The government is searching for a feasible and affordable way to combat the economic slowdown. It is looking to revive the economy in the shortest possible time. However, it needs to acknowledge that there is no short-cut.

An economic turnaround is only possible through consistent interventions and a policy of sustainable development. The most plausible way for economic revival is to develop domestic policies, models and plans, tailored according to needs and ground realities of the country.

Unfortunately, Pakistan has been the victim of “fancy models”, which do not correspond to the needs and ground realities. Therefore, the country must concentrate on two types of “what” before devising any future policy or an implementation framework.

First, what is required to lift the standard of living and ensure prosperity for everyone? Second, what resources Pakistan has in its kitty to invest to realise the first goal?

To cater to the first case, the government will have to invest in poverty reduction, combating food insecurity, promoting education and providing health care. These are the most urgent needs of people.

However, the government needs financial resources to pour into these areas and for that purpose, it will have to look into its pocket to meet the requirements of the second case.

The problem is that the government has very limited financial resources and people’s expectations and needs are very high. The government will have to prepare a plan which can cater to urgent needs of the economy and people, and which also provides support in achieving the long-term goal of economic development and prosperity.

Most importantly, the plan should be devised in a step-wise manner and every step should be given a certain time frame.

The government should formulate a vision titled “Agenda 2047” and plan strategic interventions for low-hanging fruits for a period of two years, for the short term (eight years), medium term (15 years) and long term (28 years).

There are two sectors which can be extensively explored and exploited in the first phase, which are agriculture and livestock and tourism. They can provide immediate relief to the economy as well as people.

The agriculture and livestock sector has a multiplier effect on the economy and society. Although its contribution to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is declining (18.9% for 2018), it is still the largest contributor to employment (42.3% in 2018) followed by services (34.25%) and the industrial sector (23.74%).

Agriculture is the main source of employment for the unskilled and uneducated labour force. Investment in agriculture will help to cope with challenges of food insecurity, poverty, unskilled and uneducated workforce and lack of raw material for industries, especially for textile and leather industries.

Owing to these factors, agriculture has the potential to give a fresh impetus to the economy in a very short period of time on a sustainable basis.

In a bid to capitalise on the potential of the agriculture and livestock sector, the government will have to take a few immediate steps. The most urgent and serious issues facing the farming community are lack of interest-free credit, poor marketing and market structure, very weak or absence of supply chain management, lack of land reforms and ability to combat climate change.

A majority of the farmers are small landholders – 89% of them have less than 5 hectares of land – and poor. They cannot go for surplus production without a substantial credit facility from the government.

Governments in the past offered different credit schemes but these could not produce the desired outcome. The main reason was the interest rate. Most of the farmers follow Islamic teachings and do not want to take credit on interest.

Therefore, the current government will have to come up with a credit scheme which does not require interest payments. It is exactly in line with the concept of "Riyasat-e-Madina" being promoted by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The second major area which requires attention is marketing and market structure, both in terms of policy and implementation. Agriculture and livestock marketing have been one of the weakest links. Small farmers cannot afford to invest in marketing, therefore, the government will have to introduce tools to assist the farmers.

The proposed interventions can be restructuring (merger) of agricultural extension and marketing departments and the inclusion of civil society organisations and chambers of commerce. The merger will result in two-way communications and timely availability of information. It will help the farmers and consumers to get the right information at the right time. Simultaneously, the government should also work on refining the market structure.

The existing market structure is in a very bad condition and is biased against farmers, especially small farmers. Interventions should be of two types – farmers should be included in policymaking, decision-making, and implementation, and market facilities should be upgraded and modernised.

The markets lack cold storage facilities, which are a prerequisite for agricultural products. Most of the agricultural and livestock products like vegetables, fruits and milk are perishable, which require proper storage facilities. Therefore, the government should invest in storages for improving the shelf life of farm commodities.

Supply chain management and transportation are the other key areas, which have been neglected in the country. Pakistan is still using obsolete means of transportation and supply chain management. As we have already discussed, most of the agricultural and livestock products are perishable, which require a sophisticated transport system.

The transport system must be equipped with modern standards of hygiene and proper cold storage facilities. A modern transport system can help to increase the shelf life and demand for products. It can also contribute to enhancing exports of the country and can be a good source of foreign exchange earnings.

The government needs to invest in road infrastructure and quality transport system. It can also seek the help of the private sector, which can assist in setting up the food and fruit processing industry on a wider scale.

However, to attract the private sector, the government will have to offer some incentives like tax exemption on import of transport vehicles with cold storage facility.

Last, the most important and critical area of intervention is land reform. It is the key to a meaningful revival of ariculture sector and the overall economy. We can learn from China which started the reform process with the introduction of land reform. It helps to reduce poverty and increase food security, especially in rural areas.

In Pakistan, there had never been any serious effort to undertake land reform. To realise the real potential of the sector, the government will have to introduce land reform with a true spirit and without any ifs and buts.

THE WRITER IS THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER AT ZALMI FOUNDATION

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July 2019

AGRICULTURE

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 29th TO AUGUST 04th 2019

SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH OUR FOOD EXPORTS

Mohiuddin Aazim Updated July 29, 2019

Seven years later, food exports fetched about $4.61bn — an increase of only $360 million or 8.5 per cent.

Food exports came down 4pc to $4.61bn in 2018-19 from $4.8pc in 2017-18.

What is more worrying is that food exports have oscillated between $3.7bn and $4.8bn during the past seven years. We never reached the magical mark of $5bn. In food exports, rice is the top earner. Rice export earnings reached the magical mark of $2bn back in 2011-12, but have remained close to that level since then. Something is wrong somewhere.

Taking food exports to $6bn and sustaining that level should not be as difficult as years of misaligned priorities and a lack of pragmatic thinking have made it. Similarly, boosting rice export earnings to $2.5bn-$3bn is not too difficult. All our federal and provincial governments need to do is establish a lasting working relationship and take some much-needed practical and inclusive measures. Both things are missing.

Under the PTI government, the working relationship between the federal and provincial governments has rather deteriorated. As a result, economic decision-making as a whole is suffering. Agriculture and food exports are no exception. Our resources-starved economy is passing through a crucial phase even otherwise. It would be too naïve to hope that things would improve dramatically in the near future.

But one must hope better sense would prevail, the government would align economic decision-making with ground realities and do whatever is needed to boost exports i.e. pushing up food exports would become a priority and measures to ensure sustainable growth in food exports would be initiated.

The first thing to boost food exports is ensuring that it is done while keeping the domestic food security in mind. The second thing is about expanding food export items and moving towards more value addition. The third thing is about increasing our outreach to global markets. With a population growth rate of about 2pc, our domestic food requirements are growing fast. Our inability to expand the cultivable landmass and a perennial shortage of water limit our capacity to grow rice.

That means we will have to increase the per-hectare yield of rice quickly if we want rice exports to grow every year at a decent rate. Besides, we also need to move speedily towards exportable branded rice and rice-based products. On both counts, improvements are taking place but at a snail's pace.

One proof of this assessment is the fact that whenever we see rice export earnings growing, the rise is more because of an increase in export volumes and less because of a higher per-unit price. That will have to change. Back in 2011-12 when rice exports first hit the $2bn mark, the export volume totalled 3.63m tonnes.

Seven years later, we fetched the same amount after shipping abroad 4.1m tonnes of the commodity. The argument that a massive rupee depreciation during the last fiscal year squeezed dollar earnings cannot conceal our inefficiencies. Haven't we witnessed this phenomenon of big volumes of shipment fetching high dollar earnings during the years when the rupee was stable?

Wheat and sugar exports also suffer because of this phenomenon, bringing to the fore the need for producing high-yielding food crops and value addition in raw food exports.

Earning more dollars by exporting larger volumes of rice, wheat and sugar also stokes domestic inflation, sometimes making these items too expensive for the poorer sections of the population. From the point of view of inflation management, there is a need to go for constant food export brandings and production of more value-added food products.

Despite the introduction of modern ways of vegetable and fruit farming in some parts of Punjab and in Sindh, their combined export earnings remain below $700m. We earned less than $700m in 2018-19 by exporting no less than 768,000 tonnes of fruits and about 1.03m tonnes of vegetables.

Exporting larger volumes can, of course, push export earnings to $1bn in a year or two, but that would make already pricy fruits and vegetables even pricier. Exporting value-added by-products of fruits and vegetables with higher per-unit prices and exporting more of them to the neighbouring countries and Central Asian states are important. That will cut the cost of trade and help us keep local prices from skyrocketing.

Our annual export earnings of seafood and meat also remain below $700m. And the same is true for them. Despite repeated claims, our exports to China are not growing and a strained relationship with India continues to mar the prospects of exporting more to that country.

Currently, exports of oilseeds, nuts and spices fetch less than $100m each every year. And, despite enough production (6.3m tonnes in 2018-19), exports of maize and maize-based products remain negligible. With some efforts, export earnings in these categories can be increased substantially. Whereas oilseeds and nuts are exported to many countries, main markets of spices are the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom where millions of overseas Pakistanis live.

There is enough demand for Pakistani spices in Afghanistan. We export sizable volumes there during the years when Pak-Afghan relations are normal. Pakistan can increase its food exports, particularly those of livestock, meat, maize, nuts and spices, to the Central Asian states as well once the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor becomes fully operational, accelerating trading with these states.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1496834

WEEKLY COTTON REVIEW: TRADE VOLUME INCREASES DUE TO FORECAST OF RAINS, EIDUL AZHA HOLIDAYS

NASEEM USMAN JULY 29TH, 2019

KARACHI: The rate of cotton increased by Rs 200 to Rs 300 per maund. The trading volume increased due to the forecast of rains and long Eidul Azha holidays. The increasing trend in the rate of New York Cotton was seen after the news of reducing economic conflict between China and America. Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has assured the business community to evolve an automatic system for the transfer of refund amount in 72 hours.

In the local cotton market during the last week due to increase in the buying of cotton by textile and spinning mills the increasing trend was seen in the price of cotton while the trading volume was also increased. The rate of cotton increased by Rs 200 to Rs 300 per maund due to increase of buying by the needy mills; forecast of rains; Eidul Azha holidays; and the increasing rate of dollar. The rate of Banola and Phutti were also increased.

The rate of cotton in Sindh was in between Rs 8650 to 8700 while the rate of Phutti was in between Rs 3800 to Rs 4100 per 40 kg while the rate of Banola is in between Rs 1550 to Rs 1600. The rate of cotton in Punjab was in between Rs 8700 to Rs 8750 while the rate of Phutti is in between Rs 3700 to Rs 4200 per 40 Kg and the rate of Banola is in between Rs 1550 to Rs 1600. The rate of cotton in

Balochistan is in between Rs 8700 to Rs 8750 while the rate of Phutti is in between Rs 4100 to Rs 4150 per 40 Kg. Mean while only three ginning factories were partially operational in Balochistan.

Spot Rate Committee of Karachi Cotton Association has increased the rate of cotton by Rs 200 per maund and closed it at Rs 8600 per maund. Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum Naseem Usman told that in the coming days other than long Eidul Azha holidays the transporters will give priority to the transportation of sacrificial animals rather than transportation of cotton because they will get good fare of transportation of animals.

Moreover, due to the forecast of rains there are chances that quality of cotton will be affected as well as chances of decrease in the supply of Phutti the needy textile mills can increase buying and there are chances that rate of cotton may increase. On the other hand the ginning factory owners are complaining that due to the extreme hot weather there is a decrease in ginning yield and flower shading is the second reason of low ginning yield.

Experts were of the view that trading volume will increase. The arrival of Phutti is increasing in Punjab and new factories are starting their operations day by day. Over all the situation of cotton crop in both the provinces are satisfactory. Due to the increasing trend in the prices of new crop of cotton many mills had increased the buying of old cotton due to which a large quantity of old stock of cotton has been sold. However up till now only sixty to seventy thousand bales have been sold.

Mixed trend was seen in international market. Due to the news of talks from next week for the solution of America and China trade conflict bullish trend was seen in New York Cotton Market. According to the weekly report of USDA the export of cotton has increased but the biggest consumer of cotton in the world China is not talking interest in importing cotton from America due to which the rate of American cotton are not increasing.

The mixed trend was seen in rate of cotton in China while the rate of cotton is decreasing in India despite the low production of cotton. Due to the imposition of 10 percent sales tax on cotton and 17 percent sales tax on textile products by government the business is effecting at local level. Despite the fact that FBR has assured that there will be no delay in the refund of sales tax, the business community is not satisfied because the FBR had not refunded the sales tax of the last three to four years. The government is issuing Promissory Bonds instead of giving cash. The business community has reservations on the condition of buyers CNIC on the transaction of Rs 50,000 is also the reason of low business activity.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190729501181/

CASH COW: SAHIWAL CATTLE BREED NOT BEING UTILISED TO FULL POTENTIAL

By Chaudhry Rizwan Tahir Published: July 29, 2019

SAHIWAL: The Sahiwal breed cow has long been recognised as a genetic resource. In 2014, the government issued a commemorative postage stamp worth Rs8 to mark 100 years of Sahiwal cattle breed conservation.

Known for being able to withstand less than favourable climates and for their high milk yield, the Sahiwal cattle breed was also reared by the inhabitants of the Indus Valley civilisation approximately seven to eight thousand years ago.

Many famous breeds of cows, buffaloes, sheep and goats have been present in Punjab since the ancient civilisations of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa; the area between River Ravi and River Sutlej was discovered to be an excellent breeding ground with favourable climatic conditions.

Additional Director Livestock Dr Samreen Kousar stated that although the Sahiwal cattle breed is considered to be native to the Sahiwal district, it can be found in many cities of Punjab province including Pakpattan, Okara and Khanewal.

They are also found in remote area of Peshawar and Karachi, she added. In addition, the reddish brown cows have also been exported to more than 20 countries around the world. For example, in 1950 the breed was exported to Australia.

Now, Australia rears the Sahiwal cattle breed for both its meat and its milk. According to Dr Samreen, the Sahiwal cattle breed reared in Australia produces at least 50 litres of milk. She maintained that the cows can now also be found in Brazil and a selected few African countries.

“The Sahiwal cattle breed also has a higher immunity and is able to withstand harsh weather conditions,” she highlighted. She added that this year, the Sahiwal cattle breed achieved first position in the Jashn-e-Bahra milk competition by producing around 24 to 39 kilogrammes of milk. On an average, the fat content in the mils is around 4.8%.

“Only 44 farms in the country are registered as official breeders,” she said. She said that continuous research on the Sahiwal cattle breed’s immunity against diseases and their ability to bear harsh climates is underway. In this manner, similar characteristics may also be isolated in other animals.

In Pakistan, the population of humans is increasing at a faster rate than that of livestock. In comparison, in developed countries the growth rate of livestock is three to four times higher than that of the human population.

There is an urgent need to work along modern and scientific lines on animal breeding and all that is associated with it on an emergency basis so that the country can get better animal resources. In addition to addressing the shortage of field staff, the government of Punjab should also increase funding for the livestock department.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2023583/1-cash-cow-sahiwal-cattle-breed-not-utilised-full-potential/

KING OF FRUITS: ADDING SWEETNESS TO PAKISTAN’S SOUR ECONOMY

By Maidah Haris Published: July 29, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan’s economy is in turmoil. Economic managers have long been engaged in efforts to pull the country out of this crisis, by foreign borrowing and assistance from global agencies.

But what if the answer to all the troubles was not this complicated. What if all we had to do to put the country on the right path was to look to the ‘King of Fruits’ rather than ‘friendly allies’. We are after all said to be an agriculture-based economy.

According to experts, Pakistan’s horticulture sector has so much potential that if it is tapped, the country can be rid of international lenders.

In this context, The Express Tribune takes a look at mango, which is not just the national fruit of Pakistan, but also the second-most exported fruit grown in the country. Currently, the country's mango production stands at 1.8 million tonnes, of which around 6% is exported.

However, not only is there a need to enhance the current level of exports but attention should also be paid to the production of the fruit.

Widely cultivated in Sindh and Punjab provinces, the popular varieties of mangoes – Sindhri and Chaunsa – come from Tando Muhammad Khan and Badin, and Multan and Rahim Yar Khan respectively. Apart from these, other varieties available in the market include Langra, Dussehri and Anwar Ratole.

This pulpy summer fruit is not just a season favourite in Pakistan, in fact it is hailed as the 'King of Fruits' in the entire sub-continent. About three-fourth of the world's mangoes are produced in Asia and are much in demand due to their exceptional taste and versatility.

Rich in flavour, aroma and colour, mangoes have an interesting history that dates back centuries.

From Alexander to the Mughal emperors of the sub-continent, mango was the fruit of the royals. It is said that the obsessive love for mangoes was the only legacy that flowed from one generation to the next in the Mughal dynasty. In fact, during his rule, Akbar had planted over 100,000 mango trees.

This tradition of growing mangoes continued and as things stand Pakistan is the world's fourth largest producer. Heralding the arrival of summer, mangoes become available in the market from early May and remain till September.

Despite this, the country seems to have hit a roadblock because neither are we able to boost exports nor the area under cultivation, which is the need of the hour.

An official of the Ministry of Commerce told The Express Tribune that Pakistan produces around 1.75 million tons of mangoes each year. In the past, the country was able to export over 100,000 tons of mangoes during 2005-06 and 2012-13, which was around 6% of production.

However, the export capacity is a lot more than this, he stressed, adding that Pakistan has ample capacity but lacks capability to export mangoes in greater volumes.

Responding to a question as to why the country has been unable to boost exports, the official said over the past couple of years Pakistan has entered many new markets but unfortunately it has not been able to boost export of mangoes.

"Poor quality and lack of will/commitment on the part of exporters to deliver the quality demanded by the international market are some of the factors hindering the growth in mango exports," he said.

"Another factor responsible for lower exports has been low per-hectare yield ie higher per unit cost."

In its annual work plan for 2019-20, Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company (PHDEC) has included orchard management, cool chain and provision of heavy scanners at airports to cope with the above-mentioned issues, he added.

The ministry official also cited higher cost of Hot Water Treatment (HWT), poor packaging and higher air freight for different destinations as other factors.

He said whenever the international market tastes Pakistani mangoes, it loves the taste, aroma and sweetness but due to the look and appearance of Pakistani mangoes and low-quality packaging, the mangoes are considered B and even C quality.

“PHDEC recently organised a tasting event in China and while Chinese people liked the taste, they were not satisfied with the look, appearance and corresponding price of our mangoes versus others available from Thailand and from within the country.”

The official said in order to improve mango export, besides change in the mindset of exporters, the growers and exporters will have to work together to make quality product available in the market.

Talking about this issue, Javed Iqbal, who is an entomologist at the Plant Protection Department, told The Express Tribune that there is vast potential to increase mango exports as there is a lot of demand for the fruit. However, there is not much focus on this, he added.

He was of the view that since more time, effort and research is required in this endeavour, the growers are unwilling to increase production area. Also, due to the slow growth of the product, people prefer cash crops for quicker returns.

Elaborating on the current system, Iqbal said that Pakistan exports Sindhri and Chaunsa mangoes, which are preferred varieties in the international market. “There is a higher appeal for these two varieties as the flavour has not been developed for other types in the global market,” Iqbal said.

Citing other reasons for the export of just two varieties, he said the production of Anwar Ratole and Dussehri is very low, which hinders export of the commodity. Moreover, Chaunsa’s longer shelf-life allows it to lord it over other varieties as this trait increases the preference for the commodity.

Pakistan exports mangoes to approximately 57 countries, which include Middle Eastern countries, Europe, UK, US and Japan. However, the bulk of demand for Pakistani mangoes comes from the UAE, UK, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In 2017, Pakistan exported nearly 61,000 tonnes of mangoes, which contributed Rs5.95 billion to the exchequer. This number increased significantly the following year as exports grew to over 77,000 tonnes, even though it widely fell short of the 100,000-tonne target.

This year too, the exporters are hoping to boost earnings to $80 million through export of 100,000 tonnes. But bad weather in Punjab has already damaged the yield and whether they are able to achieve this target remains to be seen.

Echoing the remarks of Iqbal, All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed said that there is potential to increase exports but Pakistan does not have quality products.

He said that despite gaining access to new markets and exporting to big countries like Australia, China and Japan, the exporters have not been able to reach the true potential.

“Although we export less in quantity, the focus of these markets is on quality. Mango should look good,” he added.

But Pakistani mangoes do not look good and a major reason behind this is poor agricultural practices.

"We have mango trees that have a height of 40 feet. Nowhere in the world are trees this tall. At most, they are of 8 to 10 feet so the fruit can be easily reached."

When the trees are this tall, farmers have to use tools to get the fruit and due to this sometimes the fruit gets damaged during harvest. When the fruit becomes blemished, it doesn't compare well with other fruits in the international market, he added.

Ahmed said that another issue is that the productivity is low. "From one acre of land, the production is lower compared to India, which has a larger yield from the same area."

The official lamented "we have been using practices that have been in place since the country came into being", and have failed to adopt new techniques.

"We have not adapted to the changing technology," he remarked, adding that until these changes are made, export of no product can be boosted.

Fruit orchard owner Muzafar Khakwa blamed lack of awareness for the poor quality of mangoes.

Elaborating, he said that there are different types of care for the pre-harvest and post-harvest phase of the commodity.

"Mangoes need to be harvested with hand with the stem. If the stem is removed directly, then the mango sap comes out, which ruins the fruit," said Khakwa.

He added that the stem should be removed after detaching it from the tree, after which the mango should be kept upside down so the sap can dry up.

Talking about the importance of appearance, he said that when Pakistani mangoes are compared with the South American ones, the latter are much better. "The reason for this is that we don't clean the mangoes properly."

The mango grower urged exporters to properly wash and pack the fruit so that it has a clean and smooth surface. "We don't pack our mangoes properly. They are not clean and have a poor presentation."

Pakistani mangoes are unable to compete at the global level, which is why they fetch a lower price.

"Our mangoes are too sweet and they cannot stay on shelves for long without refrigeration. So, we have to send them by air. This means that the price increases due to the added transportation cost."

The grower pointed out that other countries send their products to Europe by sea so it is cheaper for them, which means they have greater profitability. "Now, our cost of production has gone up more due to rupee depreciation," he added.

There have been numerous cases in past years when Pakistan faced the threat of a ban on mangoes due to poor handling of the product.

In 2014, Australia had banned Pakistani mangoes after it found flies and bugs in the consignment. Later, it was also on the verge of a ban by the EU after cases of interceptions were reported. Similar warnings have also been issued by Iran, when Pakistani authorities failed to follow sanitary standards.

These threats hang over Pakistan, highlighting yet another constraint on enhancing mango exports.

“We have an issue of fruit fly, which has limited our mango exports,” said Khakwa.

In order to avoid restrictions, Pakistan has to follow the conditions imposed by various countries. “There is a national plant protection department for every country. Two countries have an agreement regarding safety measures for the fruit, which is then followed accordingly,” said Iqbal.

There are four popular treatments that have to be followed before mango can be exported.

For European countries, mangoes have to be put through the hot water treatment. According to the process, before packing the fruit, it is dipped in water at a temperature of about 48°C for 10 minutes to disinfect from fruit flies.

The second is vapour treatment, which is a requirement for exports to Japan and South Korea. As per the process, the fruit is heated through air saturated with water vapour high temperature to kill insect eggs before the shipment is made.

The third quarantine treatment is irradiation, which is a mandatory requirement for mango exports to the US. This new technique uses ionizing radiation to modify pests’ DNA, thus, rendering them sterile. The fourth treatment is e-beam, which is similar to irradiation.

Samad Raza, who works at the Multan Mango Research Institute, said, “We are unable to meet protocols of the UK and Japan.”

He added that US demands irradiation treatment of the fruit, however, “we don’t have the facility so we have minimal exports to the US”.

Commenting on measures needed to improve Pakistan’s standing in global markets, Iqbal said that to improve competitiveness, it needs to control the pests.

He said that there is a need to boost commercial varieties and introduce new ones. The entomologist stressed the need for increasing the area of cultivation and giving benefits to farmers.

“Right now, the middleman takes everything, hence, farmers should be made part of the export process.”

Raza said that there is a gap between production of Sindhri and Chaunsa varieties. Due to this, there is a break in export of the two varieties, which is filled by India’s Alphonso mango.

“We are working on new varieties that can cover this gap and maintain market share for Pakistan,” he added.

Acknowledging the need for embracing new technology to boost production, Raza said that they were working on an Australian project in this regard.

“Progressive growers embraced this change but small growers resist these changes,” he said.

Elaborating on some of the efforts being made, he added that the institute held an awareness seminar to encourage more people to take advantage of the technology.

The PFVA official echoed similar sentiments, saying, “Farmers need to be trained to utilise new techniques.” He added that there is a need to improve the flood irrigation system in mango orchards and switch to drip irrigation.

He was of the view that this would not only save water but would also improve the yield and quality of the fruit. He urged the government to encourage farmers and provide them a direction.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2023557/2-king-fruits-adding-sweetness-pakistans-sour-economy/

UNRESOLVED DIFFERENCES: FOOD SECRETARY, PFA CHIEF CLASH ON APPELLATE POWERS

By Rizwan Asif Published: July 30, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab's top food officials are unable to agree on who should be empowered to hear appeals against the decisions of Punjab Food Authority (PFA) food safety officers, The Express Tribune has learnt.

PFA food safety officers have the authority to impose fines on food venders and food services providers, or to seal any food establishments they find lacking in terms of food safety. While the Punjab food secretary prefers empowering commissioners to hear appeals against the officers' decisions, the authority's director general is in favour of a centralised appellate structure, sources said.

For the food secretary, allowing commissioners to hear appeals can ensure that issues faced by residents of the province's remote areas, particularly in southern Punjab, are resolved quickly. However, the PFA DG fears such a move could negatively affect the authority's performance. The issue will now be decided by the chief minister and chief secretary, the sources added.

The PFA board had, some years back, agreed to empower the food secretary to hear appeals against decisions made by the PFA DG. Later, food secretary Shaukat Ali stopped hearing such appeals upon learning from legal experts that the authority to grant appellate powers rested with the provincial government, not the PFA board.

A few days ago, PFA DG Mohammad Usman Younas requested Food Secretary Zafar Nasrullah Khan to send a formal summary to the provincial government to confirm appellate status to the authority, sources said. According to them, Younas proposed empowering the PFA DG to hear appeals against food safety officers' decisions. The food secretary, in turn, should be empowered to hear appeals against the PFA DG's decisions, he recommended.

Zafar, however, told the PFA head that his suggestion ran counter to the provincial government's vision to end the inconvenience Punjab residents face by being compelled to travel to Lahore for official matters, sources said. The provincial government has already started work on establishing a separate secretariat for southern Punjab, he pointed out. The food secretary stressed that concentrating appellate powers solely with the PFA DG would complicate matters for the residents of remote areas and as such, a better alternative would be to empower commissioners to hear appeals against food safety officers' decisions. Any appeals against commissioners' decisions could be heard by the PFA DG and food secretary, he suggested. Senior PFA officials, however, disagreed with Zafar's suggestion and maintained that the current centralised appellate system was a major factor in the authority's seamless performance, according to sources. The officials also expressed apprehension that granting appellate powers to commissioners could make the system vulnerable to political pressure and interference, they said. Both the PFA DG and food secretary have presented their positions to the chief secretary, the sources added.Meanwhile, sources revealed that the Punjab government has decided to appoint Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf MPA from PP-15 Rawalpindi as the

PFA chairman. The summary for the appointment has been submitted to the chief minister and a formal notification to this effect is expected to be issued in the coming days.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2024109/1-unresolved-differences-food-secretary-pfa-chief-clash-appellate-powers/

IMRAN ORDERS RESTORATION OF PREVIOUS NAAN, ROTI PRICES

Syed Irfan Raza July 31, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet decided on Tuesday to bring down prices of naan and roti to their previous rates throughout the country.

“Prime Minister Imran Khan has taken a stern notice of increasing prices of naan and roti and decided to take immediate steps to revert them to their original rates,” said Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan at a press conference after the cabinet meeting.

She said besides the cabinet meeting the prime minister also presided over a meeting on gas tariff and rates of naan and roti. She said the prime minister also called a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet on Wednesday (today) aimed at reducing the gas tariff, especially for Tandoorwalas, and cutting the price of Atta (wheat flour) and duties on it.

At present naan is selling at Rs12 to Rs15 in different cities of the country. However, before an increase in the gas tariff and rates of wheat flour, naan price ranged between Rs8 and Rs10. Similarly, roti is available at Rs10 to Rs12 while its previous rate was Rs7 to Rs8.

In a separate decision, the cabinet approved bifurcation of the services and operations wings of the Civil Aviation Authority to provide better facilities to the people, especially foreign tourists. “Special counters will be established at all airports of the country to facilitate foreign and local tourists and other passengers,” she added.

Dr Awan said Prime Minister Khan had also directed all the ministers to present their ministries’ performance report on a monthly basis before the cabinet.

In order to improve governance and service delivery of certain divisions/ministries, the Prime Minister’s Performance Delivery Unit (PMDU) after detailed deliberations has devised a composite tasking document containing proposed interventions; with timelines, in the shape of targeted institutional interventions. By implementing these interventions, it is hoped that the federal ministries/divisions and their attached departments will be able to improve service delivery across their domains.

Specialised tasks will be given to the ministries which have to be achieved on the basis of time-based deliverables (three to six months). The ministries will be at liberty to incorporate their own in-house initiatives, which they can complete within three to six months and share those with the PMDU within one week.

The tasking document has been sent to the ministries of foreign affairs, interior, planning, power, petroleum, aviation, IT & telecom, federal education and professional training, national health services & coordination and overseas Pakistanis & human resource development.

The meeting rejected a demand of President Dr Arif Alvi who sought allocation of budget for "entertainment and gifts" and decided that he will be provided a special grant on a case to case basis. "President Alvi has to meet heads of states and under diplomatic norms he has to present gifts to the state guests on a reciprocal basis. However, the prime minister rejected the demand and said the president will get special funds on a case to case basis," she added.

The meeting approved giving status of an authority to the Federal Government Employees Housing Foundation. Now it will be called Federal Government Employees Housing Authority. The sole purpose of turning the foundation into an authority is removal of hurdles in acquisition of land.

The basic mandate of the authority is to provide shelter to the federal government employees. It has a target of building and carving out 250,000 housing units/plots mainly for those who had already applied and had been registered with the foundation.

The authority is not only reviving its stalled housing projects in the federal capital but also signed memorandums of understanding with the governments of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the Capital Development Authority.

Dr Awan said the prime minister had directed all provincial authorities and inspectors general of jails to improve condition of jails and facilitate prisoners held in petty crimes to obtain services of lawyers and come out of jails.

The cabinet also directed the authorities concerned to complete poverty survey this year which is underway.

In reply to a question, the special assistant said Irfan Siddiqui, adviser to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, was not arrested but released on the orders of the prime minister.

Talking about the call of agitation given by chief of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Maulana Fazlur Rehman, she said the Maulana was ruing withdrawal of his official accommodation in the Ministers' Enclave he was enjoying for last 15 years. "Maulana Sahib was misguiding children of seminaries to meet his own agenda," she added.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1497185

PHC STAYS ISSUANCE OF CATTLE EXPORT PERMITS UNTIL EID

Bureau Report Updated July 31, 2019

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court bench on Tuesday issued a stay order stopping the federal government from issuing new permits for the export of cattle to Afghanistan until the end of the three-day Eidul Azha festival.

However, the existing cattle export permits will remain valid, ruled a bench consisting of Justice Lal Jan Khattak and Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan.

The bench directed the federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governments to check the smuggling of sacrificial animals to Afghanistan.

It issued the order during a hearing into a petition jointly filed by lawyers Ashfaq Ahmad Khalil and Mohammad Yasir Khattak against the ‘unchecked’ smuggling and transportation of sacrificial animals to Afghanistan and their massive export, which, they said, caused shortages on the local market.

The respondents in the petition are the KP government through chief secretary, secretary of the agriculture and livestock department, inspector general of police, Peshawar capital city police officer, commissioner of Peshawar division, and deputy commissioners of Peshawar and Khyber districts.

Lawyer Yasir Khattak said Muslims in Pakistan and other parts of the world would celebrate Eidul Azha next month.

He said in the past, the government had banned the export of cattle to Afghanistan from the province ahead of Eidul Azha as both lawful and unlawful transportation caused a serious animal shortage and price escalation troubling the residents.

The lawyer said the cattle prices had surged across the country, especially KP.

He said a shortage of sacrificial animals had increased prices manifold ahead of last Eidul Azha.

The lawyer said animal prices would go up in the province as the government hadn’t stopped their export to Afghanistan.

He claimed that the smuggling of cattle to Afghanistan continued through different routes as the authorities concerned had turned a blind eye to it.

The bench wondered how it could suspend the cattle export to Afghanistan as the permits were issued by the federal government in a lawful manner.

It asked the lawyer whether the court could order the suspension of trade between two countries.

Mr Khattak said the petitioners had not sought a permanent ban on the export of cattle and instead, they wanted that restriction until the third day of coming Eidul Azha.

He said the Afghan government had already banned the export of sheep and goats to Pakistan.

The bench observed that the cattle exporters whom the government had issued permits for Afghanistan would have purchased cattle, so it couldn’t suspend those permits.

The petitioner requested the bench to issue a stay order against the issuance of new permits by the federal government for the export of sacrificial animals to Afghanistan.

He said it was a religious obligation for all resourceful Muslim to sacrifice cattle on the occasion of Eidul Azha to please the Almighty Allah.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1497138/phc-stays-issuance-of-cattle-export-permits-until-eid

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT TO RELEASE SOME WHEAT IN MARKET TO STABILIZE PRICES

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN JULY 31ST, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab government has shown a willingness to release some quantity of wheat in the local market to control price of wheat and flour.

This was disclosed by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research in a report to be discussed by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet which is scheduled to meet on Wednesday (today) with Finance Adviser in the chair.

Giving the details, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, stated that on May 15, 2019 the ECC considered the summary of Ministry of National Food Security and Research and directed that a comprehensive report on wheat situation be submitted.

On July 3, 2019, the ECC directed the Ministry of Finance to convene a meeting of National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) with all stakeholders, including provincial governments and make recommendations to decrease the hike in the wheat/flour price in the local market. The recommendations of NPMC would have been discussed during the next meeting of the ECC and the next meeting of NPMC was scheduled for July 17, 2019 but it was then postponed.

Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) and Provincial Food Departments have reported wheat stocks at the level of 7.635 million tons against 11.377 million tons in the corresponding period of last year.

In a consultative meeting of wheat review committee held in Ministry of National Food Security and Research on June 19, 2019, it was decided that public sector including Passco, will look at the possibility of releasing wheat onto the local market to stabilize local prices, discourage hoarding and ensure food security in the country. In this connection, the Punjab government has now shown its willingness to release some wheat in the local market.

Wheat procurement by the public sector has almost ended and it has been reported that 4.034 million tons of wheat was procured from the farming community at the announced price of Rs 1300 per 40 kg. The procured quantity is 35 per cent less than the procurement target of 6.250 million tons, fixed by the ECC. However, Sindh Food Department has made no procurement for this season.

International Grains Council (IGC), London in its report published on July 17, 2019 has reported international price of soft red winter wheat at $ 219 per ton which is equal to Rs 34,839 per ton as compared to export parity price @ procurement price of Rs 35,860 per ton (1 US dollar= 159.08 as on June 19, 2019). Pakistan Bureau of Statistics has reported local prices of wheat and wheat flour in the weekly sensitive index of July 11, 2019 at the level of Rs 36, 051 per ton for wheat and Rs 42,214 per ton for wheat flour.

Department of Plant Protection (DPP), an attached organization of Ministry of National Food Security and Research has reported that from July 1,2018 to July 17, 2019, around 0.363 million tons of wheat and 0.192 million tons of wheat flour was exported through sea and land route.

In view of current wheat situation, Ministry of National Food Security and Research while examining the current situation of wheat at the national level has submitted the following recommendations: (i) the meeting of NPMC may be conveyed by the Finance Division and decisions taken therein should be conveyed to the ECC; (ii) NPMC may also suggest measures to mitigate the price hike trend in the local market, such as enforcement of Provincial Price Control Act and mobilization of administrative machinery in the provinces/ districts; and (iii) Ministry of National Food Security and Research will be continuously monitoring wheat availability and pricing.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190731501672/

HOPES HIGH FOR BUMPER CATCH: NEW FISHING SEASON BEGINS TODAY

ANWAR KHAN AUG 1ST, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan is starting its new fishing season from Aug 1, as fishermen hope for a 'bumper crop' to haul all shrimp species with the high-priced export quality fish in the wake of heavy monsoon downpour.

Authorities have also started issuing credentials to fishermen for hunt in the new fishing season, which is kick-starting from Thursday, Aug 1, 2019 after a two-month fishing ban at a ceremony at the Karachi Fish Harbor. Sailing of boats will begin following prayer sessions at different fishing communities across the coastal belt of Sindh from Karachi to Korangi and Sir Creek.

"Nearly 800 small boats are expected to voyage to the seas with a hope to haul bumper crop of shrimps," President Native Islanders Fishermen Association, Asif Bhatti told Business Recorder on Wednesday, saying that the two-month ban on fishing is widely appreciated since it will help fishermen earn more catch than normal. Fishermen are 'jubilant' to voyage, he said, however, feared the fisheries market may manipulate the shrimp prices and maintain at the last year's valuation between Rs600 per kg to Rs 1200 kg.

The pre-fishing season monsoon rains will greatly help the crops flourish entire year, he said, hoping another spell until Aug 15 may add to the seas fertility to make the catch more valuable for the fishermen on the local market. "We still hope the another rainy spell will prolong the season with better catch this year," he said, adding that shrimp species like Kiddi, Jeyra and Tiger with fish species like Maya, Chind, Dother, etc, are the expensive products which catch will financially foster the fishermen at the end of the season".

The main areas wherefrom fishermen will sail for hunt are Karachi Fish Harbor, Baba and Bhit islands, besides Korangi – Ibrahim Haideri and localities around Sir Creeks, he said adding that the fishing may be unfeasible within the 12 nautical miles of the country's maritime belt because of the polluted water. "Fishermen will have to sail deep beyond 12 nautical miles as seas inside is polluted," Asif said, adding that the illegal netting in creeks for hunt of shrimps has also endangered many vertebrates and invertebrates across the coastal areas.

An official of Karachi Fish Harbor Authority told Business Recorder that the authority has started issuing documents to the fishermen a week earlier from the start of fishing season to help them avoid hustle. He confirmed the fishing season is starting today (Thursday) Aug 1 and boat may start their trips to the season. "Main operation of fishing hunt will start after Eid-ul-Azha," he said.

The country's seafood export reduced to $438.021 million in fiscal year 2018-19, falling short by $12.286 million or 3 percent to keep up with the seafood export of $451.021 million fiscal year 2017-18. In term of volume, Pakistan's seafood export declined to 195,523 metric tons in July-June 2018-19 from 196,927 metric tons in July-June 2017-18, showing a fall of one percent or 1404 metric tons. In June 2019, Pakistan exported $32.168 million of seafood, which is higher by 19 percent or $5.125 million from $27.043 million in June 2018. Seafood export quantity also grew by 19 percent or 2392 metric tons to 15,213 metric tons in June 2019 from 12,821 metric tons in June 2018, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics say.

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MINISTER FOR PROVISION OF QUALITY SEED FOR WHEAT CROP

RECORDER REPORT AUG 1ST, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial has directed the Managing Director Punjab Seed Corporation to consult the Provincial Food Department and the Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation (PASSCO) for evolving a complete strategy to ensure provision of quality seed for the coming wheat crop.

He said that it should be ensured that only approved certified and high quality seeds should be provided to the growers.

The Minister was presiding over a meeting regarding wheat procurement policy 2019 at Civil Secretariat here on Wednesday. The meeting was also attended by the Punjab Secretary Agriculture Wasif Khursheed, Managing Director Punjab Seed Corporation (PSC) and other high ups of the food department and the Punjab Seed Corporation.

The Minister stressed the need for encouraging agricultural scientists at every level so as the growers can have high quality wheat seed on cheaper rates.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190801501965/

GOVERNMENT GIVING RS42 BILLION SUBSIDY ON WHEAT: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT AUG 2ND, 2019

LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Industries, Trade, Information & Culture Mian Aslam Iqbal has said that previous rates of gas tariff have been restored for tandoors and federal government is giving subsidy of Rs 1.5 billion for providing gas on cheaper rates to tandoors. Price of 100 gram Roti would remain Rs 6, he added.

While presiding over a meeting with different delegation here on Thursday, the Minister said the government was giving subsidy of Rs 42 billion on wheat; therefore the government would not allow increase in Atta price.

The minister said that availably of Roti and Naan on previous rates would be ensured

He said Sasti Roti scheme was not launched for providing relief to the common man but to corrupt element. He said that former corrupt rulers would be held accountable for wasting national resources on the projects like Sasti Roti, Ashiyana housing scheme, laptop and other self-projected and exhibitory projects.

He said PTI government was determined for making new Pakistan under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan. Equal opportunities for progress would be made available in new Pakistan and there will be supremacy of merit and justice in new Pakistan. Interest of common man is very much important for PTI government therefore schemes of public welfare like housing projects; health card were started.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190802503720/

‘AVERAGE YIELD OF PADDY TO REMAIN 35 MAUNDS PER ACRE’

RECORDER REPORT AUG 2ND, 2019

LAHORE: Paddy has been grown over 4.7 million acres of land in the Punjab province during the current season and it is expected that average yield will remain around 35 maunds per acre. It is hoped that more yield will help take the rice exports to US$2 billion, said Dr Muhammad Sabir, Director Rice Research Institute (RRI) Kala Shah Kaku, while briefing Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial.

Langrial on Thursday visited growers and provincial agricultural institutes of Lahore Division to get the first-hand knowledge of issues of the growers. The Minister said that welfare of the farmers is top priority of the government and the department will soon issue agri-smart card aimed at reducing the problems of growers’ community. Director General Agriculture (Extension) Dr Anjum Ali and other officers of the extension wing accompanied the Minister. He met a delegation of farmers at Dayal village and listened to their problems and assured earliest solution. During his visit to the Rice Research Institute Kala Shah Kaku, the Minister directed the staff to properly guide rice growers in saving their crop from pests and achieving the rice production target. The Minister also planted a sapling in the institute and also visited Soil Testing Lab and Adaptive Research Farm Sheikhupura. He directed the officers to provide technical assistance to growers of different crops.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190802503715/

RAIN DEPENDENT AREAS: GROWERS ADVISED TO COMPLETE SOWING GRAIN CROPS

RECORDER REPORT AUG 2ND, 2019

KARACHI: The Met Office on Thursday asked the growers of rain dependent areas to complete sowing grain crops like millet.

It said that the farmers should take steps following the recent rainfalls to pump out excessive water from their cotton and vegetable crops. It warned that the high-temperature warm attack is expected at cotton crops, asking the farmers to step up with measures in this connection.

Day and nighttimes temperature is likely to remain above normal in the most of the agricultural plans of the country, it said, adding that normal wind may blow in the next 10 days.

Punjab is expected to receive a widespread rains and wind-thunderstorm with isolated heavy falls in Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Multan and Bahawalpur divisions, while scattered falls in DG Khan and Sahiwal divisions in the next 10 days.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa widespread rains and wind-thunderstorm with isolated heavy falls are expected in Hazara and Peshawar while scattered falls in Malakand, Mardan, Kohat, Bannu and DI Khan divisions until Aug 5.

Weather in Sindh is expected to remain mainly hot and humid. Baluchistan is likely to witness largely hot and humid weather with isolated rains and wind-thunderstorm in Zhob and Kalat divisions until Aug 5. In Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir, scattered rains and wind-thunderstorm are expected until Aug 5.

In the next 24 hours rains and wind-thunderstorm with isolated heavy falls are expected in Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sargodha, Faisalabad and Hazara Divisions, Islamabad and Kashmir. Isolated falls may occur in Zhob, Kalat, Sukkur, Mirpurkhas, DG Khan, Multan, Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, DI Khan, Bannu, Peshawar, Kohat and Malakand divisions besides Gilgit-Baltistan. Karachi is expected to receive drizzle with cloudy weather as temperature may range up to 28 degrees Celsius and humidity 85 percent.

Over the past 24 hours widespread rains and wind-thunderstorm with isolated heavy falls happened in Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sargodha, Malakand, Hazara and DI Khan divisions, Islamabad and Kashmir, while isolated falls in Multan, DG Khan, Bahawalpur, Kalat and Zhob divisions. Weather remained hot and humid elsewhere in the country.

Maximum rainfall was recorded in Islamabad Saidpur 155 mm and Islamabad Zero Point 81 mm, Rawalpindi Shamsabad 76 mm, Sialkot Airport 74 mm, Chaklala 68 mm, Golra and Mangla 64 mm, each, Bokra 57 mm, Bhakkar 56 mm, Islamabad Airport 53 mm, Balakot 49 mm, Jhelum 48 mm, Lahore City 46 mm, Lahore Airport 45 mm, Kalat 44 mm, DI Khan 40 mm, Chakwal 36, Murree 32 mm, Kotli 28 mm, Attock 26 mm, Hafizabad and Gujranwala 24 mm, each, Kakul 22 mm, M B Din 17 mm, Narowal 16 mm, Multan 15 mm, Sialkot Cantonment and Layyah 14 mm, each, Muzaffarabad 11 mm, Kasur and Gujrat 10 mm, each.

Nokkundi and Dalbandin were the hottest places in the country with a maximum temperature of 46 degrees Celsius, Sibbi 44, Chillas and Sukkur 43, each, Quetta 40, Gilgit 39, Karachi, Multan and Hyd 35, each, Faisalabad 34, Peshawar, Muzaffarabad and Lahore 32, each and Islamabad 29.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190802503729/

CM REVIEWS MEASURES AGAINST LOCUSTS

By Our Correspondent Published: August 2, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar presided over a meeting to review measures taken against locusts in Bahawalpur division. While giving directions for taking preventive measures, he said that the departments concerned should remain alert in Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar and Rahim Yar Khan districts to save crops. He said that aerial sprays should be done to control locust attacks and added that helicopters should be hired to expand the scope of the aerial spray.

Surveillance should be conducted on a daily basis and a campaign should be carried out against the attack on crops. He said that more pesticides should be imported according to the need.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2026173/1-cm-reviews-measures-locusts/

RULES FOR COLLATERAL MANAGEMENT FIRMS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated August 03, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Companies of Pakistan (SECP) on Friday notified Collateral Management Companies (CMC) Regulations, 2019 to promote warehouse receipt financing and electronic trading of agricultural commodities.

Under the regulations, any public limited company with a minimum paid-up capital of Rs200 million will be eligible to get registered as a CMC with the SECP.

A CMC, through its accredited warehouses, will provide storage and preservation services for a range of agricultural commodities. In doing so, a CMC, through its electronic warehouse receipt system, will issue warehouse receipts which can be used by farmers/depositors of agricultural commodity for financing from financial institutions and trading of electronic warehouse receipts at the exchange.

The CMCs will play an effective role in the agriculture value chain by ensuring security of collateral stored in the accredited warehouse through its robust oversight mechanism.

Earlier, the SECP through a notification on July 2 issued draft regulations for public consultation. During the consultative process, comprehensive deliberations were carried out with key stakeholders including the State Bank of Pakistan, Pakistan Banks Association, Pakistan Agricultural Coalition, Pakistan Mercantile Association and commercial banks.

The regulations were subsequently amended to incorporate comments suggested by stakeholders.

Salient amendments include reduction in the CMC registration fee, removal of requirement for periodic accreditation, easing of documentary requirements for sponsors of a CMC, allowing electronic warehouse receipt to be traded on the exchange and according enforcement powers to the CMC for cancelling accreditation of warehouse upon occurrence of certain events.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1497843

COTTON MARKET UNDER PRESSURE

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter August 03, 2019

KARACHI: The cotton market was under pressure on Friday as buyers remained on the sidelines. Globally, the news of US slapping new tariffs on imports from China sent shock waves in world markets and affected cotton trade.

Textile spinners on their part also avoided to enter into big deals showing concern over lint quality that may had been affected by recent heavy rains in Sindh and Punjab.

Moreover, spinners are also reluctant to hold 'long position' by building up stocks in order to avoid payment of high mark up against bank loans, brokers.

The non-availability of vehicles – which are presently engaged in the haulage of sacrificial animals from rural areas to urban cities ahead of Eidul Azha – has also forced textile mills not to enter into big deals, brokers added.

The world leading cotton markets closed easy under the lead of New York cotton which recorded steep fall for all future contracts.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were static at overnight level at Rs8,400 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,200 bales, Shahdadpur, at Rs8,400; 800 bales, Tando Adam, at Rs8,400; 400bales, Sanghar, at Rs8,400; 400 bales, Hasilpur, at Rs8,500; and 400bales, Vehari, at Rs8,400-8,475.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1497837/cotton-market-under-pressure

FERTILIZER INDUSTRY IRKED BY SLOW PROGRESS ON GIDC LAW

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN AUG 3RD, 2019

ISLAMABAD:The domestic fertilizer industry is reportedly disturbed at the slow movement on legislation on Gas Infrast-ructure Development Cess (GIDC). In a letter to Prime Minister’s Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment, Razzak Dawood the fertilizer industry stated that it is indebted to the Ministry of Industries and Production for the interest in settlement of the long-awaited GIDC issue. The proposal framework for GIDC settlement was submitted on January 15, 2019 but since then there has been no official intimation on this issue.

In the recent past, after the announcement of gas price increase effective July 1, 2019 and resultant impact on cost of production (Rs. 210 per bag of urea), the industry had agreed to Razzak Dawood’s recommendation to adjust the prices by absorbing Rs 200 per bag in anticipation of GIDC settlement as agreed by the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Finance on 10 January 2019.

The legislation to this effect was expected by July 31, 2019 and it was submitted that in the absence of requisite legislative measures by this date, the industry may be constrained to abide by the above commitment.

According to the industry, it may not be able to continue taking a hit of Rs. 200 per bag in anticipation of GIDC reduction by 50 percent, which is nowhere in sight; and has indicated that it may revise prices by the coming weekend, if no firm commitment on the issue is received from the government. The industry claims that Fauji Fertilizer Company alone is incurring Rs 35 million per day.

The industry has requested the concerned Ministries to expedite legislation, to enable it to continue with the agreed Urea prices, while avoiding losses to the manufacturers as well as farmers.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190803503931/

GOVT PLANS FIELD SURVEY TO ASCERTAIN WHEAT STOCK

By Zafar Bhutta Published: August 3, 2019

ISLAMABAD: As the country's economic managers have suspected the fudging of wheat stock data, the government has decided to initiate investigation and conduct an extensive field research and survey in a bid to calculate actual stockpile of the staple commodity.

Sources told The Express Tribune that the cabinet, in a recent meeting, took notice of the undue increase in prices of flour and bread apparently because of wheat shortage.

It expressed the desire that the National Food Security and Research Division, in collaboration with provincial agriculture departments, should conduct an extensive field research and survey to ascertain the factual stock position both in urban and rural areas.

Earlier, in a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC), the economic managers noted that the data provided for wheat stock did not appear to be realistic. According to the data, there was no shortage of wheat in the country and sufficient stock was available.

However, a continued increase in prices of wheat and wheat flour indicated a different situation. The wheat stock data was based on the information provided by provincial government departments.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research recalled that the ECC, in its meeting held on July 3, directed the Ministry of Finance to call a meeting of the National Price Monitoring Committee with all stakeholders including provincial governments. It would give recommendations on wheat prices and the measures needed to address the hike in wheat and flour prices in the domestic market.

The Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) and provincial food departments had reported wheat stocks of 7.813 million tons as on July 5, 2019 as compared to 11.315 million tons at the same time last year.

In a consultative meeting of the wheat review committee held at the Ministry of National Food Security on June 19, 2019, it was decided that the public sector including Passco would assess the possibility of releasing wheat into the domestic market in order to stabilise prices, discourage hoarding and ensure food security in the country.

Now, the Punjab government has expressed its willingness to release some wheat stock in the domestic market.

Wheat procurement by the public sector has almost come to an end this season and estimates suggest that only 4.032 million tons have been purchased from farmers at the set price of Rs1,300 per 40 kg.

The procured quantity was 33% less than the procurement of 5.989 million tons in the corresponding period of last year. The Sindh Food Department has not made any procurement this season.

The Ministry of National Food Security pointed out that the International Grains Council (IGC) in London, in its report published on July 3, 2019, put the international price of soft Red Winter Wheat at $226 per tonne, which was equal to Rs35,731 per tonne.

However, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported local prices of wheat and wheat flour in the weekly Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) of June 27 at a higher level at Rs36,051 per tonne and Rs42,214 per tonne respectively.

The Department of Plant Protection, which works under the Ministry of National Food Security, reported that from July 1, 2018 to June 27, 2019, around 0.327 million tons of wheat flour had been exported via sea and land route.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2026912/2-govt-plans-field-survey-ascertain-wheat-stock/

WHEAT, FLOUR PRICES TO GO UP IN PUNJAB

By Rizwan Asif Published: August 4, 2019

LAHORE: A high-level meeting at the Prime Minister House on Saturday agreed to increase the official rates for wheat in Punjab to Rs1,375 per 40kg bag of wheat and Rs808 per 20kg of flour.

The Punjab cabinet is expected to formally approve the new prices next week, while the government will resume releasing wheat to flour mills at the new price after the Eid holidays.

Sources said that during the meeting, the Punjab industries secretary was providing unreliable data to back a proposal to keep the support price of wheat at Rs1,300 per maund (40kg), as he was unable to support his claim that the prices of roti and nan would rise by Rs1 and Rs2 if the rates were raised.

The other officials in attendance made it clear that as the government has to factor in the needs of farmers and the public, they have to adjust the price of wheat.

In the meeting, Punjab Chief Secretary Yousuf Naseem Khokhar said Rs1,300 is an artificial and unrealistic price for wheat, as it would require granting even heavier subsidies and could encourage smuggling, so Rs1,375 was a more appropriate price.

PTI Core Committee Member Jahangir Tareen, Punjab Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhary, Punjab Agriculture Minister Nauman Langrial, the Punjab agriculture and food secretaries, the food department director, and leaders of the Flour Mills Association also participated in the two-hour meeting.

The participants were also informed that the price of wheat in the open market if fluctuating between Rs1,390 per maund and Rs1,430 per maund, while the average price of flour is about Rs790. It was also noted that the public is facing no shortages of flour.

Tareen, Chaudhary, Langrial, and Khokhar agreed that there is no public issue with regard to purchasing flour and the market is looking stable, so there is no need to artificially lower prices as it would also create an opening for smugglers to exploit.

The participants were told that the food department currently has 4.8 million tons of wheat in its reserve which was procured from the farmers at a rate of Rs1,300 per maund.

The various overheads run to about Rs487 per maund, so the average cost to the government is estimated at Rs1,787 per maund.

In this scenario, the government has to bear a total subsidy of Rs42.61 billion against the sale of 3.5 million tons wheat, and by selling it at Rs1,375 the total subsidy provided would fall to Rs36 billion.

Leaders of flour mills association have already called for the immediate lifting of the ban on the export of wheat. The government had told them that it would mull over it in December.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2027789/1-wheat-flour-prices-go-punjab/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 22nd TO JULY 28th 2019

BREACH IN ROHRI CANAL DYKE PLAYS HAVOC WITH 30 VILLAGES, FARMLAND

Dawn Report July 22, 2019

DADU: More than 30 villages and standing crops on thousands of acres were inundated after Main Rohri Canal developed a 120-foot wide breach near Yousuf Dahri regulator, about 50 kilometres from Moro in Naushahro Feroze district on Sunday.

Officials said that standing crops of cotton, sugar cane and vegetables on about 2,500 to 3,000 acres came under water. The villages of Yousuf Dahri, Jangal Dahri, Rasool Bux Dahri, Mureed Dahri, Tufail Punjabi, Sarif Birohi, Gujar Panjabi, Aziz Gujjar, Adam Lashari, Mureed Dahri, Jawan Dahri, Bachal Dahri, Sher Mohammad Dahri, Qaim Bhatti, Imdad Lashari and other settlements faced flooding.

An affected villager Ali Muradan Dahri complained to journalists that residents of Yousuf Dahri village had time and again informed irrigation department officials about the weakening canal embankments near their village but they did not pay any attention to their warnings nor took any steps to reinforce the dykes.

He said that as soon as the breach occurred, water rushed into the village giving him and his family members and other co-villagers little time to salvage their valuables and stocked grain. They just ran for their lives till they reached a safe place, he said.

Later, officials of irrigation department reached the breached spot along with heavy machinery and started work to plug it. Shaheed Benazirabad Commissioner Syed Mohsin Ali Shah, DC Abrar Ahmed Jafar and Indus Rangers commandant also reached there and supervised the work.

Adviser to Sindh chief minister on irrigation Ishfaq Ahmed Memon told Dawn on phone that the breach occurred at 5 am and then water flow in the canal was closed at 6 am to help the plugging work complete at the earliest.

Sukkur Barrage Engineer Irshad Ahmed Memon said that an inquiry team had been formed to probe the cause of the breach. Initial reports suggested the breach had occurred because of holes dug by mice through the dyke.

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) and Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) have demanded removal of Sukkur barrage chief engineer, superintending engineer of Rohri Canal and other officials concerned over a large breach in Rohri Canal.

SAI president Nawab Zubair Talpur said in a statement that the cause of breach was blocking Rohri Canal’s water to release it into Nusrat Canal that irrigated lands of influential landowners of Benazirabad district alone. It was done when the canal was getting 14,000 cusecs water flows, he said.

He said the traditional incompetence and lethargy by the irrigation personnel led to the breach further widening to 200-foot, causing displacement of a large number of families from the area.

He said the breach had caused billions of rupees losses to growers because the canal which irrigated 2.6 million acres would now remain closed for at least a month till its repairs were complete.

The SCA demanded at a meeting chaired by Kabool Mohammad Kathian Sindh that Rohri Canal SE Mukhtiar Abro and officers concerned be removed for the breach, said a press release.

It said that corrupt irrigation officials sold water to upper riparian landowners at the cost of tail-end farmers' share and destroyed tail-end reaches of the canal.

The meeting believed the breach was a result of blocking water flows at upstream Rohri Canal and said that the damage caused by the manmade disaster destroyed crops and inundated villages.

The meeting demanded immediate removal of SE of Rohri Canal and called for assessing scale of damage caused in the tail-end areas and recovering it from SE of Rohri Canal.

Growers complained to SCA that despite adequate water flows in canals water shortage in the tail-end areas persisted which were a matter of deep concern for the farming community. They said that tail-end areas of Kotri and Sukkur barrages were facing acute shortage of water despite availability of water flows in the system, they said.

They held corrupt officials of the irrigation department responsible for the situation and said these officers were selling water to upper riparian of the canal by blocking flows upstream, which was the main reason behind the breach.

Growers reject withdrawal of subsidised tractor scheme

The meeting rejected withdrawal of subsidised tractor scheme by Sindh government and said that farmers had paid millions of rupees for tractors to Sindh Bank which had received markup on this amount for two years and had now announced refunding the money to farmers.

The meeting called for disbursing the markup that had been earned on the farmers' money by the bank over the past two years.

The meeting was attended by SCA general secretary Zahid Bhurgri, vice president Ejaz Nabi Shah, senior vice president Nabi Bux Sathio and others.

SUKKUR: Standing cotton crop on 250 acres land was inundated after Bambly Wah (canal) developed a 40-foot wide breach at RD-39 near Khanpur Mahar in Ghotki district on Sunday.

Affected growers who held protest against irrigation department told media persons that despite being informed by growers about the breach no one from the irrigation department arrived to plug the breach.

They that they sowed cotton after taking loans and sustained heavy financial losses due to negligence of irrigation department officials.

They demanded authorities concerned take stern action against the officials responsible for the damage and pay compensation for their losses, otherwise, they would stage strong protests.

The villagers plugged the breach after hectic efforts of seven hour on self-help basis.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1495416/breach-in-rohri-canal-dyke-plays-havoc-with-30-villages-farmland

HYDROPONICS TECHNOLOGY TO ENSURE FOOD SECURITY

By DR AHMED KIANI Published: July 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Water, energy and food systems are inter-linked via a nexus. In the basic sense, one joule of energy produced, inputs into one drop of water distributed, which grows one calorie of food.

Similarly, a single drop of water inputs into a single joule of energy needed for one calorie of grain grown. Therefore, action on one system impacts the others.

This complexity is compounded by the fact that climatic conditions are deteriorating with time and a significant increase in global population is a major factor. Constant escalation in urbanisation will require more water, energy and food resources in the future.

Water resources in Pakistan (30% above and 70% under-ground) are either scarce due to the declining fresh water reservoir table because of excess usage (50-55 million acre feet is pumped out and only 40-45 million acre feet is recharged and the aquifer is drained faster than it can be replenished) or disputed with bordering countries (such as Indus Waters Treaty 1960) or natural/man-made reserves are unavailable.

The country has the lowest productivity per unit of water ie 0.13 kg/m3 in the region compared to India at 0.39 kg/m3 and China at 0.82 kg/m3. Consequently, Pakistan is fast closing in on per capita water availability of less than 1,000 cubic meters, which indicates the country is already water scarce and will be bone-dry by 2025.

Energy, on the other hand, is claimed to have reached the demand-supply parity at this point in time, but Pakistan's growth projections (with 403 million projected inhabitants by 2050) indicate an exponential upsurge in demand (600% rise by 2030), requiring complementary expansions in energy generation, transmission and distribution networks. This means more fossil fuel or renewable energy-based additions to the national grid and more greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Pakistan's agriculture sector plays a central role in the economy as it contributes 19% to the gross domestic product (GDP) and absorbs 42% of the labour force. Food imports caused capital flight of $6.2 billion in fiscal year 2017-18, weighing on the fragile external account in the agriculture-based country.

With the financial woes such as increasing monetary borrowing, high taxation rates, lower net income, currency devaluation, high import bill, etc and resource mismanagement including shortage of cultivated land due to the real estate boom, water scarcity, etc, Pakistan needs to shift focus to home-grown crops in order to substitute imports and achieve self-sustenance.

Therefore, it is food security of the nexus equation which is under imminent threat as a result of the two variables in most developing countries such as Pakistan. Food security, by UN definition, means all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

Recent restrictions on fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) imports through statutory regulatory orders (SROs) for the promotion of self-sustenance in agriculture, efficient use of resources, promotion of local produce and less reliance on global market commodity price fluctuations, are action points which should be converted successfully to ensure food security and sustainability in the country.

This can either be achieved through an increased yield of the current landscape (72% cultivated area of the total agricultural land) available for cultivation through government incentives, modern technology and financial assistance to the farming community or by diversifying the agri-potential with new emerging techniques such as aquaponics, hydroponics, vertical farming, monoculture, tissue culture, drones and genetically modified (GM) crops, are just a few examples.

These practices come at a high price tag or at a high health risk due to chemical formulation injections for rapid mass production.

Agriculture in arid/semi-arid lands and deserts is the realisation of Nostradamus' postulation that can be achieved through hydroponics. Hydroponics is a soil-less type of farming because it requires no soil for the plants to grow. Instead, it uses water as a growing medium.

It essentially involves growing healthy plants by using nutrients like a mineral rich water solution with its roots in water than conventional soil. Advantages of hydroponics are:

(a) By providing constant nutrients, hydroponics allows plants to grow 50% faster than they would in soil.

(b) It is ecologically and environmentally friendly as hydroponic gardening virtually eliminates the need for herbicides and pesticides.

(c) Any water used in hydroponic farm gardening stays within the system and can be reused, reducing the constant need for fresh water supply.

(d) Hydroponics is not limited by special dimensions or location and can scale to any size in an area with ample sunlight or artificial ambient environment. Geographical platforms or mediums such as deserts, cities, underground and even on water work.

(e) The technique is not labour-intensive or time-consuming and can work in conjunction with photovoltaic solar energy solutions for water pumping the hydroponic system.

Examples of hydroponics and its variants can be found across the globe. Global Farm, the UAE, hydroponic farm produced more than 70 tons of vegetables and fruits in the September-June season, including cucumber, different types of leafy vegetables, eggplant and tomato.

Saudi Arabia has taken several major steps to build a more sustainable system in its challenging desert region. One such move is the rethinking of many traditional farming practices, especially focused on reducing water usage.

A farm in Jeddah uses neither water nor soil, rooting plants in mid-air while providing their nutrients through a mist. If a desert farm chooses to go hydroponic, there are ways to grow without draining freshwater supplies.

In arid South Australia, Sun Drops Farms grows 15% of the country's tomato crop through a solar-powered hydroponic system. To eliminate the use of precious freshwater, Sun Drops sources its water from the nearby saltwater gulf, desalinated through the reflected heat of the sun.

In Japan, 160 farms are producing high-yield, high-profit crops, including tomato, cucumber, melon, strawberry, capsicum, lettuce and herbs, through soil-less technology.

Pakistan needs to immediately design a long-term conservationist road map, aggressively inject investment, tailour government policies, institutionalise governance and regulate agri-economics to accommodate emerging technologies in the agriculture sector for ensuring food security. At this explosive rate of population growth, every infinitesimal portion of land plantation is required with the minimalistic need of water and energy.

The dynamics of agriculture development in an arid/semi-arid environment, such as that of Sindh and Balochistan especially, are bound by climatic challenges, water availability, quality of natural resources and scientific limitations. Therefore, it is an absolute must that new and improved advancements in technologies such as hydroponics be introduced in these areas as a first for food sustainability, sustenance and security.

The writer is a PhD in Engineering from the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom and is an expert in emerging technologies

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2018358/2-hydroponics-technology-ensure-food-security/

TACKLING EMERGING THREAT TO RICE IN PAKISTAN

By Javed Iqbal Published: July 22, 2019

LAHORE: Exports of Pakistan are mainly based on agriculture and rice (Oryza sativa) is our main export, contributing about 0.7% to the country's GDP.

Being the third largest exporter of Basmati and Irri varieties (Ministry of Commerce 2016), Pakistan exports more than 50% of its produce.

Fine varieties are exported to the US, Australia, the UK and other sensitive countries while Irri varieties are exported to China and some other countries. In recent years, the export share of Pakistan has declined, going down from $2.2 billion in 2014 to $2.1 billion in 2018.

Among a number of factors contributing to the decline is the notorious stored grain pest 'Khapra beetle'. Khapra has been known to be a pest of stored wheat, however, now it has been observed feeding rice. The pest is also found in consignments of rice exported to other countries and can cause losses of up to 30%.

This has opened a new area for researchers to monitor the activity of this pest in stored rice. The larvae of this pest were detected twice in rice shipments to the US and later in 2014 it was once again detected at the US entry point. As a result, 43,000 pounds of rice was shipped back.

In 2013, Mexico rejected a rice consignment from Pakistan weighing 3,000 tons due to infestation of this pest and imposed a ban on Pakistani rice, which exists to date.

Continued rejection by trading partners from 2011 to 2014 led to an estimated loss of $1 billion. Now, recently in 2019, the same pest has been detected in rice exported to Russia despite the fact that it was treated with Methyl Bromide (CH_3Br). Due to this, the Russian authority imposed a temporary ban not only on rice but on all food grain commodities shipped from Pakistan.

The eradication of this pest is difficult due to the resistance developed against synthetic insecticides. It has been ranked among top 100 most-invasive species worldwide.

Trogoderma granarium may have originated from the Indian subcontinent and is still present in some areas of Asia, the Middle East, Africa and a few countries in Europe. It is one of the very few stored product pests with limited distribution. T granarium has very limited ability to spread without human aid because it is unable to fly, so international movement of host commodities appears to be the only means of spreading the pest.

It is very important to distinguish between records that relate to interception of the pest in imported commodities (ie its finding in the commodity during the border phytosanitary control without further spread) and those of established infestation.

The pest can be found in areas outside its known geographical range as long as good climatic conditions prevail. T granarium is established within an area broadly limited north by the 35° parallel, south by the Equator, west by West Africa and east by Myanmar.

It is reported in some countries of Africa, however, others are still free of the pest and require protection as well to limit the spread of the pest.

The pest could be associated with maize or wheat grain (as pathway) moving in international trade or food aid and once imported, it could establish owing to the following:

Ability to survive lengthy periods of cold, drought or starvation of up to 13 months as resting larvae, ability to reduce pesticide uptake and translocation due to its low metabolic rate, therefore very difficult to kill, short life span for adults making them less vulnerable target of fumigation, and low respiration rate of facultative diapausing larval stage also leading to tolerance of fumigation.

Adults are oblong-oval beetles, approximately 1.6 to 3mm long and 0.9 to 1.7mm wide. Males are brown to black with indistinct reddish brown markings on their elytra.

Females are slightly larger than males and are lighter in colour. The head is small and deflexed with short 11-segmented antennae. The antennae have a club of three to five segments, which fit into a groove in the side of the pronotum. The adults are covered with hairs.

Adult Khapra beetles have wings, but apparently do not fly and feed very little. Mated females live from four to seven days, unmated females from 20 to 30 days, and males from seven to 12 days.

Established infestations are difficult to control because of the beetle’s ability to live without food for long periods of time and to survive on foods of low moisture content.

These beetles tend to crawl into tiny cracks and crevices and remain there for long periods, making them relatively tolerant to many surface insecticides and fumigants. Therefore, it is important to prevent Khapra beetle’s introduction in uninfected areas.

Detection methods include examination of cracks and crevices and inspecting behind panelling on walls and under timbers, tanks, shelves, etc. Larvae are most likely to be seen just before dusk, since they tend to be more active at that time.

Some fumigants give control at high dosages, even though this beetle is more resistant to fumigants than most stored product pests. High concentrations of fumigants must be maintained over the fumigation period to allow penetration into all cracks and crevices.

In an eradication programme, both fumigants and surface sprays are used in combination with preventive measures, eg good sanitation practices and exclusion.

Keeping in view the above constraints, there is a dire need to develop Khapra beetle-free rice supply chain in Pakistan by adopting system approaches and natural factors.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2018360/2-tackling-emerging-threat-rice-pakistan/

CHINA KEEN TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN BALOCHISTAN

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent Updated July 23, 2019

QUETTA: Deputy Chief of Mission of Chinese Embassy in Islamabad Lijian Zhao said on Monday that his country wanted to help improve the agriculture sector in Balochistan by imparting training to the farmers about latest technology, proper usage of seeds, irrigation and capacity building.

During a meeting with Agriculture Minister Zamarak Khan Piralizai, the Chinese diplomat said that under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor the second phase of investment would be in several sectors, including agriculture.

He assured the minister that China would assist the Balochistan government in durable development of its agriculture sector. He said that Chinese investors would also invest in the agriculture sector of Balochistan.

The two sides discussed the importance of the agriculture sector, Chinese cooperation in capacity building of farmers, awareness about better use of latest technology, augmentation of production and investment in this sector.

The minister thanked the Chinese diplomat for showing interest in the development of agriculture sector and assured him that the Balochistan government would fully cooperate with Chinese investors and provide them all necessary facilities.

He said the agriculture played a crucial role in the economy of Balochistan as approximately 80 per cent people were linked with this sector.

Mr Piralizai said the provincial government was taking steps for the promotion of agriculture, providing training to farmers, spending on researches despite lack of resources.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1495647

ICT, PFVA INK MOU FOR HORTICULTURE, LIVESTOCK SECTORS' GROWTH

RECORDER REPORT JUL 23RD, 2019 KARACHI

International Trade Centre (ICT), a subsidiary of the World Bank, has joined hands with All Pakistan Fruit & Vegetable Exporters, Importers & Merchants Association (PFVA) to boost horticulture and livestock sectors in Sindh & Balochistan.

ICT, in collaboration with the PFVA would make the recently launched project “Growth for Rural Advancement & Sustainable Progress (GRASP) a real success” and PFVA will assist ICT for supporting small & medium enterprises in development of the Horticulture & livestock sectors in Sindh & Balochistan provinces.

A delegation of the ICT led by Robert Skidmore, Chief of Section & Enterprise Competitive Section met the Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed & former Chairman Aslam Pakhali of the PFVA during its recent visit to the Association office.

Waheed Ahmed and senior members of the Association apprised the delegation of ICT about a six year “GRASP” Project under financial assistance would be extended to small farmers of Agribusiness & livestock sector in Sindh & Balochistan for promotion of their small scale businesses.

The project is funded by the delegation of the European Union to Pakistan with a budget of Euro 48,000,000. This Project would ensure provision of congenial business environment to small farmers besides providing grants and technical assistance for improving value chain, yield, quality, access to market Information and improvement in standards.

Waheed said that the growers of Sindh & Balochistan are getting badly affected due to Global Warming, scarcity of water and issues of supply chain due to which the rate of poverty is relatively higher in these provinces. The “GRASP” project of the ICT is a need of hour to improve businesses of the small farmers and it is a true replica of the “Pakistan Horticulture Vision -2030,” he added.

According to the PFVA vision 2030, if food security is not improved in Pakistan, national security would be in jeopardy, however if the policies are formulated and implemented in accordance with the vision 2030 , the agriculture production would be substantially enhanced leading to increase in GDP volume, multiplication in export and poverty alleviation. The current deplorable state of supply chain needs a definite improvement to uplift the local market, Waheed emphasized.

For getting amazing results from the “GRASP” project in Sindh & Balochistan, it was imperative to start pilot project at the district level so that after analyzing outcome of the pilot project on experimental basis, it should be further extend, he suggested.

For success of the project, he said that, it’s imperative that the international experts being part of this project must keep in view ground realities, culture, local customs & traditions of Sindh & Balochistan provinces.

The farmers may have their limited vision and views about a particular issue and the PFVA having its root in all the provinces of the country is not only well versed with problems of the small farmers but also has through knowledge and adequate experience about supply chain, local & International markets. Hence, PFVA would extend assistance, support and cooptation to the ICT in this context.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190723499447/

RICE SOWN OVER AREA OF 4.618M ACRES IN PUNJAB

RECORDER REPORT July 23, 2019

LAHORE: Rice crop is not only important to meet domestic nutritional requirement but also vital source of earning precious foreign exchange. This year it has been sown over an area of 4.618 million acres in Punjab and every effort will be made to achieve the production target of 3,870 million metric tons.

This was disclosed by Secretary Agriculture Punjab Wasif Khursheed while chairing a meeting to review the rice crop situation here on Monday. Special Secretary Agriculture (Marketing) Zahid Saleem Gondal, Director General (Extension) Dr Anjum Ali Buttar and other high ups of the department attended the meeting.

Dr Anjum Ali Buttar told the meeting that the department was making effort to promote mechanized farming to get better per acre yield instead of toeing the old farming methods.

He said climate smart technology would be introduced to promote sowing of paddy, irrigation and use of input in a balanced manner.

The meeting was also informed that the federal government is launching a ‘national programme for increased rice production and profit’ on national level at a cost of Rs9.98 billion out of which Punjab’s share is Rs4.632 billion. Under this project, paddy growers will be given agricultural implements like transplanters, drill machines, straw chopper, power sprayers etc on fifty per cent subsidy. The department will also help farmers to develop 3,625 demonstration plots and arrange field days to guide the growers.

The Secretary Agriculture on this occasion called upon the agricultural officers to visit the paddy growing areas and guide the growers in resolving the issues they are facing.

He also asked them to create awareness among rice farmers not to set the residue of their crops on fire after harvesting to bring down the environment pollution.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/07/23/8-page/792689-news.html

SEAFOOD EXPORT FALLS TO $438.021M

ANWAR KHAN July 23, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan’s seafood export fell to $438.021 million during the just ended fiscal year 2018-19 because of hasty enforcement of the federal government’s deep sea policy that kept fishing suspended for about three months, industry said on Monday.

The country fell short by $12.286 million or 3 percent to keep up with the seafood export of $451.021 million fiscal year 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics said. “We could have grown export by 30 percent, at least, but the clampdown on the hunting boats after the sudden implementation of fisheries policy without consultation with stakeholders,” Syed Akhlaq Hussain Abidi, Chairman Pakistan Fisheries Exporters Association, told Business Recorder.

He widely held the deep sea fishing policy that the PTI government without consulting with the stakeholders concerned implemented that resulted in a break of about three months of fishing, which brought down the country’s seafood export to $438.021 million in fiscal year 2018-19. He said that the country was progressing with seafood export growth by about 30 percent annually, which the industry missed unfortunately this time.

In term of volume, Pakistan’s seafood export declined to 195,523 metric tons in July-June 2018-19 from 196,927 metric tons in July-June 2017-18, showing a fall of one percent or 1404 metric tons. In

June 2019, Pakistan exported $32.168 million of seafood, which is higher by 19 percent or $5.125 million from $27.043 million in June 2018. Seafood export quantity also grew by 19 percent or 2392 metric tons to 15,213 metric tons in June 2019 from 12,821 metric tons in June 2018.

Abidi said that the clampdown on boats, which just had entered into the new fishing season, not only reduced the catch volume but also resulted in low processing of the seafood and export. The chaos that took several months to end, primarily, struck the fisheries export, he said, adding that “appeal and demand of Pakistan seafood is growing in the world but we have a very little catch to feed the world consumers”. He said that the government should focus on aquaculture development to augment the country’s seafood export phenomenally.

“We greatly depend on the sea crop to meet the world demand for seafood, which is very short,” he said that other countries including India have shifted their burden to aquaculture from marine fisheries to increase their global share. “We could then beat textile sector export alone if aquaculture is promoted,” he said, adding that the dollar value increase against the rupee may help the exporters and fishermen but not the seafood processing industry. The government is not interested in $400 million export sector, he was of the view, which is the reason the seafood industry’s growth shows little progress than its regression.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/07/23/19-page/792792-news.html

FBR WITHDRAWS 1% WHT ON YARN TRADERS

By Our Correspondent Published: July 23, 2019

KARACHI: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has withdrawn 1% withholding tax on yarn business and manufacturers will instead pay 0.1% turnover tax.

The FBR used to confuse 0.1% turnover tax with 1% withholding tax. However, the government has now clarified that both are different taxes and yarn manufacturers would not pay 1% withholding tax, said Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) President Junaid Esmail Makda while talking to The Express Tribune.

Yarn is a basic raw material for almost every textile product as it is used in sewing, crocheting, knitting, weaving, embroidery, etc.

In a statement, Makda pointed out that under Section 45A of Part IV of the Income Tax Ordinance, sales, supplies and services made by traders of yarn would not be subject to deduction of withholding tax.

He praised the FBR for holding numerous meetings with the KCCI and taking into consideration the chamber’s suggestion pertaining to exemption from withholding tax. Makda said traders of yarn would pay a minimum tax of 0.1% on their annual turnover on a monthly basis on the 30th day of each month and monthly withholding tax statement would be e-filed under Section 165 of the Income Tax Ordinance, which was widely demanded by the stakeholders.

He voiced hope that misinterpretation and incorrect application of Section 113 of the Income Tax Ordinance, which was against the spirit of SRO 333 (I) 2011, would not be done again.

The FBR should continue to take more such steps as loyal taxpayers from different sectors of the economy were facing immense hardships and were finding it difficult to continue their business due to exorbitantly high cost of doing business, the KCCI president remarked.

The business cost must be brought down to provide a level playing field and make Pakistani goods competitive in the global market, he said.

FBR officials were in a quest to charge 1% to 1.5% on different pretexts. The original tax was 0.1%, he said, adding that commissioners were abusing their powers to enforce the additional tax on businessmen.

With the misinterpretation, tax officials sent notices of up to Rs40 million to yarn traders, which was sheer harassment, he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2019080/2-fbr-withdraws-1-wht-yarn-traders/

FOOD INSECURITY

By Editorial Published: July 23, 2019

In its third quarterly report on the state of the economy, the SBP has revealed that 36.9% of the country's households are 'food insecure', and about half of them i.e. 18.3% are facing 'severe' food insecurity. The figures are indeed alarming, but they are also astonishing as our country is self-sufficient in all major food staples and ranks 8th in the world in the production of wheat, 10th in rice, 5th in sugarcane and 4th in milk production.

What, then, prevents public access to foodstuffs in our country? A major problem lies in ours being a largely undocumented economy which has failed to ensure fair competition among suppliers to keep prices down. About 93% of Pakistan's farmers are smallholders who own less than four hectares of land. Most of these farmers lack the funds to cultivate crops and are forced to accept money for the purpose from unscrupulous middlemen who subsequently buy the produce from them at low prices and then sell it at markets at high mark-ups.

The SBP report cites the country's population growth rate as a threat to food security. It is, therefore, essential for us to take immediate steps to increase our agricultural productivity and curb population growth. A major problem hampering our agricultural output is our per hectare crop yield which lags behind both global and regional competitors. This problem can only be effectively addressed if we emphasise the production of high-quality seeds through a strong partnership between agricultural biotechnology research institutes and private sector seed producing firms.

It is also important that we increase water use efficiency for crop cultivation by improving our irrigation management and irrigation water quality and, in addition to wheat, also consider producing crops such as sorghum and millet which require less water and are more nutritious than wheat. There is also a dire need to expand the amount of land under agricultural production and to encourage farmers to use modern technology to increase crop yields.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2019022/1-food-insecurity-2/

MCI RECEIVES LOW BID OF RS45M ON FIRST DAY OF CATTLE MARKET AUCTION

Kashif Abbasi July 24, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) on Tuesday received a bid of just Rs45 million for the auction of the I-12 cattle market for Eidul Azha, on the first day of a two-day action.

According to financial rules, the MCI cannot award a contract lower than the previous year's bid.

The city's largest market for sacrificial animals is set up every year in I-12. It received more than 100,000 animals from various areas, especially Punjab.

An MCI official who asked not to be named said: "There is something fishy about this auction. It seems the contractor has made a cartel."

He said the site for the cattle market was auctioned for Rs71.2m last year, and for Rs72m in 2017.

"I cannot understand what's wrong this year. It seems the contractors held pole bidding today," the official said.

The Directorate of Municipal Administration (DMA) generates significant revenue every year by auctioning this market, but this year's bids were surprisingly low. The auction will continue today (Wednesday).

DMA Director Shafi Marwat said: "Today we received Rs45m asthe highest bid. We are hopeful that we will receive a good response on Wednesday. Rs71m is the benchmark."

Mayor Sheikh Anser Aziz said he would monitor the auction on Wednesday. He added that he would look into why the contractors did not show an interest on the first day.

"I cannot rule out pole bidding. But let me make it clear: we will make a decision in the best interests of the MCI," he said.

Some DMA officials said that if contractors do not make appropriate bids on the second day either, the directorate could run the market itself.

However, sources said the DMA could not even generate a revenue of Rs7m, and this would open a new Pandora's Box.

"The best possible option is for the DMA to facilitate animal sellers voluntarily and money should not be involved in the entire process," an MCI official said.

He added that the DMA auctions the cattle markets for the highest rate every year, and the market's operator – in violation of the agreement – charges higher rates to animal sellers to bring animals to market. Ultimately, it is the buyers of sacrificial animals that have to pay high prices.

"Let's see. We have one more day, so we are hopeful we will receive the required bid," he said.

Animal sellers complain almost every year that they are forced to pay high rates to the contract. Last year, whenDawnvisited the cattle market, animal sellers said they paid Rs2,500 for the entry of large animals when the DMA's approved rate was Rs1,000.

The DMA will also auction five smaller cattle markets to be set up in Bhara Kahu, Rawat, Taramri, Sara-i-Kharboza and

https://www.dawn.com/news/1495771/mci-receives Saidpur.-low-bid-of-rs45m-on-first-day-of-cattle-market-auction

PACKERS TO RAISE TEA PRICES NEXT MONTH

KARACHI: Despite dec¬lining trend on the international markets, leading packers have decided to raise tea prices from first week of next month, retailers in various areas told Dawnon Tuesday.

Sharing some examples, they said leading distributors have informed them of revised rates for the 1kg and 385 gram tea packs at Rs950 and Rs425 compared to Rs860 and Rs385 while price of 190 gram pack has been increased to Rs210 from Rs190.

The mixture pack of 950 gram and 475 gram will be available at Rs930 and Rs490 as against Rs850 and Rs440 respectively, while 190 gram pack will cost Rs200 as compared to Rs185.

Tea imports swelled by 23 per cent to 223,054 tonnes followed by 4pc jump in terms of value to $571 million during the last fiscal year. However, consumers would pay higher despite drop in average per tonne tea prices in FY19 to $2,563 from $3,034.

A tea importer, on condition of anonymity, said persistent rupee devaluation against the dollar has offset the impact of falling prices in international market. He said whenever leading packers raise prices, the loose tea traders also follow suit but the price hike is slightly minimal from the big packers' rates.

The country's total tea demand hovers between 255,000-260,000 tonnes per annum. Keeping in view the import figures the rest of the demand is met by products entering local markets through informal channels.

He said cumulative taxes and duties on tea imports come to 44pc which also encourage tea smuggling. However, arrival of tea from illegal channels usually drops on falling international tea prices and strict curbs at the border.

Prior to this, leading makers of powdered and tetra milk came out with price jerk from the start of this month. For instance, a leading tetra milk producer raised price of one quarter pack to Rs35 from Rs30 while the one litre pack rate had been raised up to Rs135 from Rs130 per litre. Everyday tea whitener 950 gram pack now sells at Rs890 as against Rs865.

Nido milk also became costlier as 910 gram packet now sells at Rs930 while 650 gram and 390 gram packs are being sold at Rs700 and Rs440 respectively. Retailers said Nido product maker had surged prices by up to Rs50 without attributing any reason in the circular issued to retailers.

An official in Nestle Pakistan, who asked not to be named, said the main reason of price surge in Nido and Everyday was 10pc sales tax imposed in the budget 2019-20 in addition to rising interest rates and soaring fuel prices.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1495905

PARLIAMENTARY BODY FOR PROBE INTO DECLINE IN PINE NUTS' EXPORTS

ABDUL RASHEED AZAD JUL 24TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

While showing serious concern over the massive decline in the exports of pine nut from Rs 84 billion in 2013-14 to Rs 30 billion in 2018-19, a parliamentary panel has directed the relevant officials to conduct an inquiry and submit details.

These directions were given by the Senate Functional Committee on Problems of Less Developed Areas, which met with Senator Muhammad Usman Khan Kakar in the chair, here on Tuesday.

The committee discussed the developmental projects under the Ministry of Commerce in the less-developed areas of the country with focus on Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata).

While discussing the issue of construction of expo centres in Peshawar and Quetta, the panel was informed that construction work on Peshawar Expo Centre has almost 45 percent been completed. The construction of expo centres in Peshawar and Quetta is a federal subject. The former government allocated Rs 2.5 billion for the construction of Peshawar Expo Centre while PC-1 of the Quetta Expo Centre has been completed; however, feasibility study of the project has not been done so far, the officials further said.

The construction of expo centres in the two provincial capitals is aimed at providing ease to the traders and facilitating the business communities of the area.

The committee directed the ministry to expedite construction work on two expo centres, especially on Quetta Expo Centre which will be a hub for future trade of Pakistan as it is the main route of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The establishment of expo centres in Peshawar and Quetta is designed to attain following goals; enhancement of trade with Afghanistan and the Central Asian States, promotion of business activities, creation of job opportunities in the provinces, economic boost in the provinces, promoting progress and development and sharing innovation and fostering cooperation among the traders of federating units as well as neighbouring countries.

The senior officials of Ministry of Commerce briefed the committee on the production and export of pine nuts as well as on overall performance of pine nuts during the last five years in the country, particularly in less-developed areas of Balochistan and erstwhile Fata.

The committee was informed that in 2018-19, pine nuts worth Rs 30 billion were exported. While showing serious concern over the three times decline in the export of pine nuts, the panel asked the officials give the reasons as to why and how such a decline in export of pine nuts occurred as it was Rs 86 billion in The secretary commerce informed the committee that a study would be conducted to know the causes of decrease in export and other issues related to pine nuts cultivation.

The committee also recommended the approval of registration for the chambers of commerce in the less-developed areas of Balochistan, particularly Muslim Bagh, Gwadar and Musakhel. The committee was briefed on the overall performance of ministry and its attached departments, including funds utilised and surrendered for each project for the people of the less-developed areas of all provinces and erstwhile FATA during the last five years.

The chairman of the committee said that Balochistan has the best livestock and fruits such as pine nuts and others; therefore, the government must provide more facilities to the people in the less-developed areas to increase the exports.

The committee was also briefed about the employees of the ministry and its attached departments working on regular, contractual, ad hoc and deputation bases as well as vacant posts related to the people of less-developed areas.

The meeting was also attended by senators, including Rahila Magsi, Molvi Faiz Muhammad, Gianchand, Senator Fida Muhammad, Haji Momin Khan Afridi, Sarfaraz Ahmed Bugti, Nighat Mirza, and Samina Saeed.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190724499770/

TENURE FOR FARM FINANCING ENHANCED TO 10 YEARS

Shahid Iqbal Updated July 25, 2019

KARACHI: The tenure of repayment on financing for development loans in crop and non-crop sectors has been doubled to 10 years, the State Bank announced on Wednesday.

In a circular to banks with amendments in Prudential Regulations for Agriculture Financing, the SBP said that the maximum repayment tenure of development loans has been increased from five years to 10 years in order to encourage banks and development finance institutions (DFIs) to enhance financing for development loans in crop and non-crop sectors.

The amendments are applicable to all banks and DFIs with immediate effect, the circular added.

The revised Prudential Regulations for Agricultural Financing covers General Regulations related to comprehensive agri-financing policy, exposure limits, secured or unsecured financing limits, guarantees, classification of loans, and other general requirements.

It also covers Specific Regulations for farm credit for input, farm development finance, loans for purchase of machinery and equipment, livestock financing, and corporate farming.

Since such loans are self-liquidating at the end of the growing cycle from the proceeds of the product sale, therefore, the maturities of these loans will coincide with the production cycle for the product being financed. The tenure of this sort of financing will generally be less than one year.

However, for certain crops requiring longer periods (from sowing to sale of the produce), banks and DFIs at their own discretion may extend financing for periods longer than one year. Further, banks and DFIs, at their own discretion, may sanction running finance limits to the borrowers, automatically renewable on annual basis.

The Farm Development Finance is a medium- to long-term loan extended by the banks and DFIs for making different types of improvements and developmental work at the farm including construction of godown, and development of orchards, nurseries, etc.

The Machinery and Equipment loan is the financing by the banks and DFIs for purchase of machinery and equipment to be used for agricultural purposes; like tractors, threshers, reapers or harvesters, tube wells, etc.

“All above loans ie for farm development and mechanisation tools are of medium- to long-term in nature ie 1 to 10 years,” said the SBP note.

Loans for farm development can be extended for one to 10 years, the State Bank said, adding the tenure of financing for machinery and equipment should not be allowed for more than the useful life of machinery or tool. “However, all such loans should be allowed for a maximum period of 10 years.”

The loans extended for goat and sheep farming, breeding of animals, dairy farming, fishing farms, poultry farms, etc. by banks and DFIs would fall under the category of financing for livestock. Livestock financing can be made for working capital as well as for development purposes.

“The maximum tenure for livestock financing would be ten years (including grace period),” the SBP added.

The SBP said the banks and DFIs are allowed to grant relaxation up to one year in repayment schedule, to their borrowers who have been adversely affected due to certain unforeseen and unexpected factors like weather, availability of water, etc. which are not under the control of the farmers.

“Banks are encouraged to immediately stop recovery, suspend or defer mark-up accruals, and may issue instructions for waiving off outstanding markup or principal where the chances of recovery are not possible due to heavy natural calamities like earthquake, floods, heavy rains, epidemic diseases, etc., said the SBP.

Banks may also formulate internal policies for creation of general reserves to cover any losses in the calamity hit areas, the SBP added.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1496082/tenure-for-farm-financing-enhanced-to-10-years

REPAYMENT TENURE OF AGRICULTURE LOANS RAISED TO 10 YEARS

RIZWAN BHATTI JULY 25TH, 2019 KARACHI

The maximum repayment tenure of development loans under the agriculture financing has been increased from 5 years to 10 years. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has made some necessary amendments to “Loans for Farm Development and Machinery/Equipment,” Regulation R-13 (Tenure, Classification and Provisioning) and Regulation R-15 (Tenure) of Prudential Regulations for Agriculture Financing. These amendments are applicable to all banks/DFIs with immediate effect. In order to encourage banks/DFIs to enhance financing for development loans in crop and non-crop sectors, the State Bank has enhanced maximum repayment tenure of loans by 5 years. The maximum repayment tenure of development loans in crop and non-crop sectors has been increased from 5 years to 10 years in revised Prudential Regulations (PRs) for agriculture financing.

However, the SBP said that banks may decide the actual tenure of a product, duly approved by the Board of Directors (BoD), based on the nature of financed product, useful life of machinery/tool and repayment capacity of borrowers.

According to revised Regulation, R-13 for Tenure, Classification and Provisioning, loans for farm development can be extended for 1 to 10 years. Whereas, the tenure of financing for machinery/equipment should not be allowed for more than the useful life of machinery/tool.

However, all such loans should be allowed for a maximum period of 10 years. These loans, ie, for farm development and for purchase of machinery/equipment would be classified as per previous directives. However, any relaxations given under Regulation R-5 of agriculture financing would be applicable.

The revised Regulation, R-15 on tenure said that the maximum tenure for livestock financing would be 10 years including grace period.

Banks/DFIs have been advised to ensure dissemination of these regulations among their branches/field offices. All other instructions for agriculture financing will remain unchanged, the central bank said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190725499958/

COTTON MARKET: MILLS INDULGE IN CAUTIOUS BUYING OF FINE QUALITY

RECORDER REPORT JULY 25TH, 2019 KARACHI

Mills indulged in cautious buying of fine quality on the cotton market on Wednesday in the process of trading activity, dealers said. Since the week started, the official spot rate picked up Rs 200 to Rs 8650 due to slight fall in better quality cotton, they added. In ready session, over 7,000 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs 8625-8750, they said. Rates of seed cotton per 40kg from Sindh and Punjab were at Rs 3700-4100, they said.

In Sindh and Punjab, Binola prices per maund were at Rs 1500-1550, they said and adding that polyester fibre per kg rates were at Rs 203 due to lack of buying interest, they said. Market sources said that mills and spinners showed renewed interest in buying of better quality cotton.

They observed that arrivals of seed cotton in both Sindh and Punjab are on full swing, but despite that they are trying to replenish their stock to meet future requirements. Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that dollars' surge is continue, it's a solid factor, which pushing up rates of all essentials, so that the mills indulged in cautious buying of fine type.

Present trend in the market, indicating that prices may move further higher in days to come, he observed.

Adds Reuters: ICE cotton futures on Tuesday was mostly steady in light trading as markets awaited progress in US-China trade talks, while improved conditions for the US crop added to worries of higher output with the natural fibre battling demand woes.

The most-active cotton contract on ICE Futures US, the second-month December contract, was mostly unchanged at 63.32 cents per lb. It traded within a tight range of 62.9 and 63.64 cents a lb.

Total futures market volume fell by 10,619 to 9,277 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 717 to 197,976 contracts in the previous session.

The following deals reported: 1600 bales of cotton from Sanghar at Rs 8675, 1600 bales from Tando Adam at Rs 8625/8650, 400 bales from Shahdadpur at Rs 8650, 400 bales from Kotri at Rs 8650, 1000 bales from Mirpurkhas at Rs 8650-8700, 600 bales from Hyderabad at Rs 8625/8650, 200 bales from Jam Sahab at Rs 8700, 400 bales from Noabad at Rs 8650, 200 bales from Gojra at Rs 8750, 200 bales from Hasilpur, 100 bales from Smandari, same fiture from Vehari, 200 bales from Vehari, 200 bales from Pakpattan, 100 bales from Pir Mehal all done at the same rate and 200 bales from Taminwali at Rs 8700, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190725500041/

DEEP-SEA FISHING POLICY: EXPORTERS APPREHEND SEAFOOD EXPORT MAY DECLINE

ANWAR KHAN JULY 25TH, 2019 KARACHI

Clampdown threats on unlicensed fishing in the deep sea is looming large to start haunting trawling boats, as exporters fear the hunting restrictions will further pull down the country's seafood export.

The federal deep sea fishing policy is expected to take place from Aug 1, which is starting day of new fishing season, to only permit the licensed trawlers for hunting fish and shrimp beyond the country's maritime belt has widely created discount in the seafood export industry. If the controversial fishing policy is invoked to crack down on fishing boats going deep sea, the exporters say it will damage the seafood export in the new fiscal year.

Pakistan Fisheries Exporters Association on Wednesday provided a copy of a letter that the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency has circulated among the fisheries stakeholders underlining several points to restrict the unlicensed fishing in the country's seas. The worrying point of the letter for exporters and fishermen is that the Sindh bound trawlers cannot hunt in Balochistan waters.

"The MSA has again started campaigning like last year which shall be damaging to export just before opening of new season," Pakistan Fisheries Exporters Association chairman Akhlaq Hussain Abidi told Business Recorder, saying that the letter shows a possible crackdown on the deep sea fishing. If the clampdown starts, he feared the move will disturb fishing, demanding of the federal ports and Shipping Ministry to stop the much anticipated action by the MSA ahead.

He supported clampdowns on use of illegal nets being applied in hunts, smugglings through seas but not the capturing of Sindh bound boats in Balochistan waters, saying that "fishing beyond 12 nautical miles cannot be stopped till all stakeholders come to an agreement," on the deep sea fishing policy. Abidi recommended the federal government to put the 'defunct' deep sea fishing policy on hold until a decision all fisheries stakeholders including seafood processing units, fishermen, boats owners and others related to the very sector and the ports and shipping ministry agree upon.

"The MSA has circulated this letter which is not in line with the findings of last meeting of all stakeholders at KPT," he said, seeking the deep sea fishing policy should not be executed until a consensus is reached. He said that Pakistan suffered 3 percent fall in seafood export only because of the restriction on hunts in the wake of fishing policy, which should not happen again.

The policy marks three zones including: Zone-I stands up to 12 nautical miles, Zone-II from 12 nautical miles to 20 nautical miles and Zone-III up to 200 nautical miles for licensed fishing. Zone-I is under Sindh government's authority, while Zone-II and Zone-III under the federal government's jurisdiction. The fishermen are asked to comply with the rules. Fishermen belonging to Sindh and Balochistan have been provided with fishing in Zone-I and Zone-II but will have to take a license from their respective governments to hunt fish and shrimp on the sea legally. For deep sea fishing, fishermen and boat owners will have to obtain license from the federal government.

The foreign trawlers have been allotted licenses to hunt fish and shrimp in Zone-III, as they will not be permitted trawling into Zone-I and Zone-II. If any local fishermen or boat owners intend to hunt in deep sea should follow the policy conditions that primarily include: A boat must be registered with Mercantile Marine Department, should have a fishing license from Marine Fisheries Department, all basic credential of fishermen should be made available before sailing deep sea, all the vessels should have vessel monitoring system (VMS) installed, all fishermen going for hunt should be Pakistani nationals.

According to the letter, "utilization of illegal fishing gears is causing great loss to fish stock as well as to economy, which has resulted into sanction on Pakistan due to which Pakistani products cannot be exported directly to the US and European countries," pointing out that smuggling of fish catch to evade taxation is also one of the reasons for slow economic progress. "Under such circumstances regulation of fishery remains vital to stop further delay/downfall of the economic growth," it says.

The country's seafood export reduced to $438.021 million in fiscal year 2018-19, falling short by $12.286 million or 3 percent to keep up with the seafood export of $451.021 million fiscal year 2017-18. In term of volume, Pakistan's seafood export declined to 195,523 metric tons in July-June 2018-19 from 196,927 metric tons in July-June 2017-18, showing a fall of one percent or 1404 metric tons. In June 2019, Pakistan exported $32.168 million of seafood, which is higher by 19 percent or $5.125 million from $27.043 million in June 2018. Seafood export quantity also grew by 19 percent or 2392 metric tons to 15,213 metric tons in June 2019 from 12,821 metric tons in June 2018, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics say.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190725500048/

COTTON PRICES EDGE UP

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter July 26, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices increased for the fifth straight day on Thursday due to short supply of new crop lint against high demand.

Official spot rates remained firm at overnight level though on ready counter deals transpired at higher rates.

According to market sources there is a wide gap between demand and supply which is leading to increase in prices. However, cotton stocks of last season helped avert a major price hike. Brokers estimate that around 70,000 bales of previous season are still held by ginners.

The underlying sentiment is still hurt by the 17 per cent sales tax on zero-rated textile exports and 10pc sales tax imposed on ginners. There is a strong demand that the government should have imposed sales tax on the textile industry rather than on ginners.

The world leading cotton market also maintained rising trend with New York cotton closing higher for all future contracts. Chinese cotton also closed firm. However, some profit selling in Indian cotton resulted in correction.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were closed firm at overnight level.

The following deals were reported to have transpired on ready counter: 2,400 bales, station Tando Adam, at Rs8,700; 1,200 bales, Shahdadpur, at Rs8,700; 1,400 bales, Sanghar, at Rs8,700; 800 bales, Mirpurkhas, at Rs8,700; 800 bales, Hyderabad, at Rs8,700; 1,600 bales, Chichawatni, at Rs8,775-8,800; 600 bales, Vehari, at Rs8,800; 400 bales, Hasilpur, at Rs8,750-8,800; and 400 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs8,750.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1496273/cotton-prices-edge-up

SUGAR EXPORT: WINNERS & LOSERS

BR Research July 26, 2019

Sugar subsidy is a funny thing. Last year, when Sindh government announced a cumulative subsidy of Rs20 per kg, notorious Omni group came out as top beneficiary in the province. This year, now-enfeebled province masters had to restrain their generosity; Omni group is now where to be

In fact, aggregate share of Sindh & KP based mills has been a puny 1.6 percent since ECC announced export quota in December last year. This is against Sindh's provincial share of 47 percent in exports last year, followed by KP at two percent.

It appears that despite substantial depreciation of rupee since last year, sugar exporters are still finding it hard to sustain exports without government intervention. Thus, 16 firms belonging to 12 sponsor groups were responsible for more than 98 percent of all sugar exported during 1HCY19, after the Punjab government announced per kg subsidy of Rs5.35.

Little surprise here then that the lion's share in the exported volume was contributed by JDW Sugar, at one-fourth of total, in line with group's total share in annual domestic output. However, while the provincial government has announced subsidy only for export by mills located in Punjab, three out of five units owned by the group are located in Sindh.

However, since SBP disclosures only identify exporting company name and not location of mill, it raises an interesting question whether the company will claim subsidy against all exports or draw distinction between sugar produced in various locations. Of course, since all sugar produced looks the same, this appears to be less of a legal and more of an ethical dilemma for the company management.

One other loosely connected cluster of mills from south Punjab had a cumulative share of more than twenty percent of total exports. At one point or another during past 10 years, these four units featured a director and/or significant shareholder belonging to the same political group.

It may be of interest to readers that the ministry responsible for issuance of subsidy notification is headed by a prodigy of the same family; the minister in question was also a shareholding director in at least one of these mills as per returns submitted to SECP. Conservatively defined, mills owned by politically influential families of Punjab are responsible for at least fifty percent of total exports this year. And by virtue of being located in the province, of at 53 percent of Rs3 billion subsidies announced, which lapsed as of June 30, 2019. It will be unfair to claim that has witnessed no change under the fresh political setup at both federal and provincial level. Not only is the subsidy announced almost half of what was approved under previous government, the export quota is also nearly half.

The key question, however, is whether the beneficiaries have changed? At least not in Punjab.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/07/26/512964/sugar-export-winners-losers/

UREA SALES INCREASE 5% TO 2.87M TONS IN H1

By Our Correspondent Published: July 26, 2019

KARACHI: Sales of urea increased 5% to 2.87 million tons in six months ended June 30, 2019 as farmers purchased the fertiliser in advance ahead of likely increase in prices.

"Urea offtake depicted growth on the back of pre-buying by dealers/farmers amid expected hike in prices as the government was set to increase gas tariffs with effect from July 2019," Topline Securities' analyst Sunny Kumar said in a report on Thursday.

Furthermore, timely rainfall across the country – which is beneficial for crops – also pushed up volumetric sales of urea, he said.

Among domestic producers, sales of Engro Fertilisers, however, dropped 10% to 897,000 tons in Jan-June 2019 compared to 994,000 tons in the corresponding period of last year.

Overall, urea production increased 13% during the half year under review "due to resumption of production by Fatima Fertiliser and Agritech, cumulatively contributing 393,000 tons in 1H2019 compared to zero output in 1H2018," he said.

"The industry's urea inventory for 1H2019 closed at 178,000 tons," he said.

Sales of urea by companies listed at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), however, declined.

Engro Fertilisers recorded a drop of around 10% in urea sales in Jan-Jun 2019. The drop may be attributed to decrease in its inventory at the start of 2019. "The company carried (urea) inventory of 10,000 tons at the start of 2019 compared to 184,000 in January 2018," he said.

Similarly, sales of Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim Limited (FFBL) and Fauji Fertiliser Company (FFC) decreased 16% and 4% respectively.

Other companies, which were not listed at the PSX, saw 79% rise in urea sales from 248,000 tons last year to 443,000 tons this year.

Total sales of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser declined 16% to 572,000 tons in 1H2019 "due to increase in DAP prices by over 20%", he said.

"The largest fall of 55% was seen in sales of Fauji Fertiliser which dropped to 83,000 tons. It was followed by Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim, down 3% to 202,000 tons. Engro, however, recorded an increase of 6% in DAP volumes to 185,000 tons," he added.

"Key risks for the fertiliser sector include unfavourable settlement of gas infrastructure development cess (GIDC) issue, poor crop season and increase in gas prices above…expectations," the analyst added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2021455/2-urea-sales-increase-5-2-87m-tons-h1/

QUALITY COMPLIANCE: PROVINCE-WIDE FOOD AUDIT UNDER WAY

By Rizwan Asif Published: July 27, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has commenced a 'food audit' of the entire food services industry in the province, including all restaurants, cafes and other food vendors.

PFA Director General Capt (retd) Usman Younis has prepared a complete food law compliance checklist with the help of legal and technical experts for this purpose, officials from the authority told The Express Tribune.

But while all food manufacturing and preparation facilities will be inspected for the quality of food, in the initial phase no punitive action will be carried out against establishments found lacking, they said. Instead, the owners of such facilities will be given time to address any shortcomings.

According to PFA officials, the audit is initially focusing on factories and will gradually extend to food vendors. The audit is being carried out according to international standards and eight to 10 hours are being spent on the inspection of a single establishment, they added.

"The purpose of the food audit is to apprise those in the food business of food laws and standard operating procedures for quality assurance," said Younis. "The compliance checklist we have prepared takes into account even minor considerations."

"Whenever a PFA audit team carries out a visit, the establishment's owner is informed that there will be no fine if any violation is discovered and no facilities will be sealed. Instead, the owner is given time to address the issue," he said. "For now, the audit is being conducted without any charge but a fee may be defined for the service at a later stage."

The PFA head added that facilities will be rated according to their audit results and that the authority is considering announcing some form of reward for the establishment that scores highest. "We will make this rating visible on our website so that consumers know what to expect from a particular food facility."

Capt Younis pointed out that bigger vendors like restaurants have already been made compliant with food laws and the PFA is now focusing on street food vendors. "We want to ensure everyone gets quality food," he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2022202/1-quality-compliance-province-wide-food-audit-way/

'UNFAIR COMPETITION THRIVING IN INFORMAL WHEAT FLOUR SECTOR'

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated July 28, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Despite being an essential sector, the wheat flour trade remains largely un-documented and informal while promoting unfair competition, a draft study by the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) highlights.

The wheat flour sector further restricts competition based on investment, innovative branding, quality improvement and social protection, the CCP noted while soliciting public feedback on the draft study.

According to the CCP document, 'roti /chapati' are traditional flatbreads made with wheat flour and are a major part of Pakistani diet. The average monthly consumption expenditure on wheat and wheat flour is 13 per cent out of 17pc on cereals.

"Wheat has a high weight in the average household budget. This makes wheat flour a sensitive commodity, price changes and availability has positive or negative impact on consumers, especially on the poor sections of the community," the CCP study notes.

At the same time the demand was growing for food items, which have some form of wheat flour such as baked breads, cereals, cookies, cakes, crackers, pasta, macaroni, etc.

It added that Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority has not devised a standard for wheat flour.

The CCP said that though wheat flour chain apparently seems to be a heavily competitive industry, but market activities indicate possible anti-competitive conduct that a trade association must avoid.

"In a competitive market-based economy, the trade associations are an important stakeholder –the members of associations suffer due to price-fixing of intermediate inputs or face predatory pricing, boycott, etc," the CCP said.

Therefore, the trade associations can provide useful information about anti-competitive activities to the competition agency.

"At associations meetings and gatherings, a conscious attempt should be made to refrain from discussion of sensitive issues which eventually lead to cartel formation," the CCP said.

The CCP said the government should not involve in price negotiation with Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA), and should fix price of this essential commodity based on independent analysis of market situation.

The PFMA is a registered representative trade body of flour milling industry in Pakistan. It has grown substantially over a period of five years from 915 mills in 2013, to 1,171 in 2019.

The study said that a review of the regulatory framework indicates that the present system of wheat procurement and quota has generated excess production capacity and 'ghost mills' have propped – which are actually not in production but sell their allocated government wheat quota to other mills.

The CCP noted that the system is expensive and has inefficiencies, as a result its positive impact for both farmers and consumers — for whom the whole system was designed — is questionable in present day circumstances.

The CCP suggested that the outdated laws and rules made to control production and distribution do not facilitate and encourage establishment of modern mills, branding and marketing nor can optimise the role of the private sector engaged in flour milling.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1496649

UKRAINE TO HARVEST 70 MILLION TONS OF GRAIN

RECORDER REPORT JULY 28TH, 2019 KIEV

Ukraine, which expects its 2019 grain crop to be in line with last year's level of around 70 million tonnes, had harvested 27 million tonnes of early grains by July 25, the agriculture ministry said on Thursday.

Farmers have threshed 7.4 million hectares of grains or 76% of the early grains sown area, the ministry said in a statement. The harvested volume includes 19.7 million tonnes of wheat and around 6.7 million tonnes of barley. Ukraine plans to thresh 9.76 million hectares of early grains this year, including 6.6 million hectares of wheat and 2.5 million of barley.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190728501071/

ARGENTINA WHEAT FARMERS EYE RECORD HARVEST AS BAD CROP WEATHER HITS RIVALS

RECORDER REPORT JULY 28th,2019

BUENOS AIRES/CHICAGO (Reuters) – Argentine wheat farmers are preparing for a record harvest, even as global rivals see crop yield prospects cut amid floods in the United States, searing heat in Europe and drought in Australia.

The grain bounty in the world's No. 6 wheat exporter will boost the South American country in global markets, while wheat incomes that will start to flow at the turn of the year will boost whoever wins presidential elections in October.

"Wheat is going to be money in our pocket in December," said Francisco Santillan, a grower in the bread basket farming town of Pergamino who is expecting a bumper harvest.

The country's grains exchanges and analysts predict a wheat harvest of around 21-22 million tonnes, beating the previous season's record 19 million tonnes of the crop. Planting is almost complete and has been helped by good weather.

The International Grains Council (IGC) on Thursday cut its world wheat production forecast for the 2019/2020 season by 6 million tonnes, reflecting diminished crop outlooks in key production areas such as Russia, Europe and Canada.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has also cut back its view of wheat output in Australia, Ukraine, the EU and top supplier Russia. A crop tour this week in the No. 2 U.S. wheat state North Dakota, the top producer of export-dependent spring wheat, found below average yield prospects.

"The global market situation should, for the second year running, bolster Argentina, with early-planted U.S. wheat suffering weather problems and Europe in the grip of a heat wave," said Gustavo Lopez, head of the Agritrend consultancy.

"This season's exportable surplus destined for North Africa, Southeast Asia, Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America should be as high if not higher than Australia's, where production is suffering from drought," Lopez said.

As global wheat woes have worsened, benchmark futures on the Chicago Board of Trade Wv1 surged nearly 23% in May and June, the strongest two-month gain in four years, before easing back in July.

Argentina's share of global wheat exports is forecast to grow to 7.7% in the 2019/20 season, an eight-year high, USDA data shows. Russia, meanwhile, will see its share hit a three-year low and Australia will post its second lowest in 12 years.

Argentina – which consumes around 6 million tonnes of its own wheat domestically – appears to be the stand-out winner, and it could get better still with a favorable weather outlook.

"Current crop expectations should be met or exceeded," said Buenos Aires-based climatologist Eduardo Sierra.

Farmers should also be able to demand a good price.

The 2018/19 Argentine crop saw record wheat yields and commanded a healthy $200 per tonne, the most profitable in the last decade, said Pablo Adreani, head of Argentine consultancy AgriPac. The price is now at around $215 per tonne.

"With this background, 2019/20 sowings will increase by at least 500,000 hectares versus 2018/19, and could reach total production of 23 million tonnes," Adreani said.

Argentine growers have already planted 96.4% of the 6.6 million hectares expected to be sown with wheat this year, the Buenos Aires Grains Exchange said, compared to the 6.2 million hectares planted the season before.

The Rosario grain exchange expects an even bigger 2019/20 wheat planting area of around 6.9 million hectares.

"And we expect better yields, which should result in a record crop of about 21 million tonnes," said Emilce Terre, head analyst at the Rosario exchange.

"Argentine wheat is entering markets beyond Brazil, which remains our historic strategic partner. We hope to get access to other Latin American markets, Africa and Southeast Asia."

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-argentina-wheat-analysis/argentina-wheat-farmers-eye-record-harvest-as-bad-crop-weather-hits-rivals-idUSKCN1UO21H

MILLERS RAISE FLOUR PRICE BY 25PC; NAAN/ROTI BY RS2

JULY 28th, 2019 FAZAL SHER & WASIM IQBAL

ISLAMABAD: Millers across the country have raised the price of flour by up to 25 percent per 80 kg bag as a result of a surge in electricity tariff, interest rate as well as increase in import price of packing material.

Subsequent to the passage of the budget 2019-2020, price of fine Atta (flour) increased by 25 percent – from Rs 3350 to Rs 4200 per 80 kg and price of normal quality wheat flour increased by 19.64 percent – from Rs 2,800 to 3,350 per 80 kg during the last few days.

As a result of increase in flour prices, naanbais associations increased prices of naan /roti. While talking to Business Recorder a naanbai maintained that the surge in flour, gas and electricity tariff is the main reason for jacking up naan/roti price.

The price of naan/roti has been increased by Rs 2. Roti is now selling at Rs10 while earlier it was sold at Rs 8 and naan price has been raised from Rs 10 to Rs12 in the market. He added that the price of kulcha has been raised from Rs 12 to Rs 15, while the price of Roghni naan, special roghni naan and Paratha has remained unchanged.

Talking to Business Recorder, a mill owner said that all the mill owners increased flour prices due to: (i) withdrawal of subsidy of Rs 3 per unit of electricity from mill owners; (ii) hike in interest rate on loans for procurement of wheat from 6.5 percent to 14 percent; and (iii) price of imported material utilized in packing of flour bags has also increased.

The mill owner said that another reason for the increase in price of flour is the non allocation of wheat quota to various flourmills by provincial food departments/storage facilities. “We have to procure wheat from the open market at Rs 1500 per maund as government is not providing us wheat,” he added. Around 1,300 flour mills including 850 in Punjab are working at a daily milling capacity of 77,275 metric tons daily.

A senior official of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) said that flour prices have increased as wheat has become costlier in the open market following reports of crop damage in Punjab due to rains coupled with exports of the commodity. “Rains coupled with hailstorms have affected wheat crop in the country and reduced the size of the wheat crop by 1.28 million tons” he said. He said that according to provincial government reports, the country has produced 24.12 million tons of wheat against the set target of 25.5 million tons from an area of 8.833 million hectares during Rabi season 2018-19. Official said that with the addition of leftover wheat stock of 3.7 million tons, the total availability of the grain will be 27.9 million tons while total national requirement of the commodity is 25.8 million tons. “We can easily meet our national requirement through our strategic reserves”, he said, adding that government imposed a ban on export of wheat and flour on July 18, 2019 following the recommendation of MNFS&R.

President Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) Khalid Khokhar said that Rs 1,300 support price of wheat per 40 kg was fixed five years ago but there has been a massive rise in input costs over the past few years which is hurting farmers. “The price of urea has increased from Rs 1,200 to Rs 2,000 per bag, and DAP has increased from Rs 2,200 to Rs 3,500 per bag”, he said, adding that the price of pesticides has also increased manifold. He said that government needs to take steps to reduce input costs or raise the support price.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/07/28/11-page/793632-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 15th TO JULY 21st 2019

BALOCHISTAN GOVT TO REVAMP LIVESTOCK SECTOR

7/15/2019 12:00:00 AM

ISLAMABAD: The Balochistan government will announce the Livestock and Dairy Policy 2019 soon to cater to the needs of cattle-owners as well as to boost the livestock sector in the province.

It will be the first livestock policy since Prime Minister Imran Khan announced his vision to revive the livestock sector for improving the living standard of people settled in rural areas besides reducing poverty.

According to an official in the livestock department, a livestock expo would be organised soon and incentive packages would be announced to attract private parties for making investment in the sector.He said the government has also allocated Rs52 million to revamp and modernise cattle farming in seven districts

To overcome unemployment among veterinary doctors and provide best treatment facilities for animals, he said, the department would generate 150 new jobs.

Moreover, he said the government was planning to establish 23 civil veterinary dispensaries in the province.

A sum of Rs10 million had been allocated to operationalise wool and research centre at Mastung and Rs52m had been allocated for the upgrading of seven dairy and poultry farms in the province,he maintained.

Similarly, Rs250m had been allocated for setting up ring centres for animals in Qilla Abdullah, Zhob, Tuftan and Gwadar for the current fiscal year. An amount of Rs100m had been earmarked for renovation of the slaughter house situated on eastern bypass of Quetta.

The Balochistan government had allocated Rs722m for the development of livestock sector under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), he.

The provincial government had also released a grant of Rs4.027 billion for the annual expenditures of livestock and dairy development department, he said.-APP

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=15_07_2019_005_005

ANTI-POLIO CAMPAIGN TO FOCUS ON REFUSAL CASES IN KP

Bureau Report Updated July 15, 2019

PESHAWAR: The health authorities are launching a four-day vaccination campaign in the areas, which have recorded poliomyelitis cases recently with main focus on the families defying immunisation to safeguard their children from being crippled.

The drive will be kicked off on Monday during which some 614,590 children will be inoculated in Torghar and Shangla, the surrounding districts of Hazara and Malakand divisions. The vaccinators will also cover the missed children on the fourth day of the drive, says a press release.

The campaign will be conducted under the supervision of commissioners, deputy commissioners and district health officers with support of police and members of the law enforcement agencies.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is in spotlight because several polio cases have been reported from Bannu division. The number of polio cases has soared to 33 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and to 41 in the country during 2019, so far. Main reasons of increase in polio cases have been routine-immunisation-zero-dosed children and refusal cases.

First case response campaign was successfully carried out in June, whereas, to completely put an end to this outbreak, three case response campaigns have been decided including the one, which will be conducted in the days to come.

Kamran Ahmed Afridi, the coordinator of Emergency Operations Centre Khyber Pakhtunkhwa said that the case response campaign successfully conducted in June 2019 put a hold to polio cases as no case was reported with onset date after the completion of the campaign.

“This case response campaign is also crucial for stopping the outbreak and transmission of poliovirus as well as saving children from paralysis in the upcoming days,” he said.

Mr Afridi said that it was witnessed that parents, believing in propaganda and lies against vaccination, refused anti-polio drops or left their children zero dosed.

“Oral polio vaccines are the safest and most effective. It is the way to secure our children against polio disease and eradicate poliovirus,” he added.

He advised the teams to reach and vaccinate every child during the campaign as wild poliovirus was still circulating in the region that could attack any unimmunised child.

Age appropriate vaccination maximises the benefits of immunisation if the parents follow the essential immunisation schedule offered in all of their nearby health facilities against 10 vaccine-preventable diseases including tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis and measles.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494165

AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE NEEDS JOINT OWNERSHIP

Mohiuddin Aazim Updated July 15, 2019

The agriculture sector suffered heavily in 2018-19 because of insufficient supply of water: just 84.4 million cubic feet against the average annual requirement of 103.5m cubic feet.

The output of the crop sector slumped owing to this 18.5 per cent water deficiency, highest in a decade.

The total seed requirement for major and minor food crops plus cotton was estimated at 1.74m tonnes. But the actual supplies were just one-third of that (0.578m tonnes), according to the Economic Survey of Pakistan.

The output of the entire crop sector declined by 4.43pc — and the production of major crops saw an even steeper decline of 6.55pc. The agriculture sector as a whole grew by 0.85pc in 2018-19 against 3.8pc in 2017-18.

A million-dollar question is: will the recently announced agriculture package of Rs309 billion spread over next four years help reverse these trends? No one knows. It depends on lots of ifs and buts. But first of all, one must know that out of this Rs309bn, the federal government has promised to allocate Rs84bn only — the provinces are supposed to spend the remaining Rs225bn. Will the federal government live up to its promise and pump in Rs84bn? Will the provinces be able to pool in Rs225bn? No one knows.

But consider these two facts: one, the agriculture revival programme was unveiled by Jahangir Tareen who was flanked by Minister of National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan. The four provincial chief ministers or their ministers in charge of agriculture were not present at the presser.

And two, despite the fact that the provinces will contribute 73pc of the promised sum, the initiative is called the “Prime Minister’s Agricultural Emergency Programme”.

Will Sindh and Balochistan — being governed by the PPP and a multi-party coalition, respectively — own this so-called emergency programme as much as they should to make it a success? Will Punjab, the agricultural heartland ruled by a PTI-led coalition, be able to implement this emergency programme smoothly?

Agriculture is the lifeline of our economy, though it is a provincial subject administratively. It is wiser to let all the provinces take equal ownership and pride in making any collective agricultural initiative a success. That is not possible unless there is a decent working relationship between federal and provincial governments. Does such working relationship exist? Do we see such proud participation from all the provinces in the programme? Your guess is as good as mine.

Confrontation between the opposition and the federal government has now reached a stage where it has started weakening the democratic order. In this environment, making any jointly owned development initiative work has become too difficult.

In this environment, how the agriculture emergency programme will pan out over the next four years should not be difficult to assume.

Apart from this, there are issues regarding resource distribution between federal and Sindh governments with the latter claiming that it continues to receive less-than-promised federal funds under the National Finance Commission (NFC) award. That too can have a telling impact on the package unless these issues are sorted out amicably. But that seems to be a tall order because of the ongoing fiscal belt-tightening by the federal government under the latest IMF programme.

The provinces have also remained lethargic in pushing agricultural progress to next levels under the 18th Amendment that declared agriculture a fully provincial subject. From 2010-11 when this amendment became effective to 2018-19, Punjab made some visible progress in agriculture, but the smaller provinces lagged behind. Poor coordination between federal and provincial governments and among the provinces themselves, politically motivated and inefficient decision-making, mismanagement of resources, misaligned priorities and corruption played a part in blocking true progress in agriculture. No wonder then that overall agricultural growth during these nine years averaged around just 2.4pc based on officially reported sectoral growth rates.

Even after the devolution of agriculture as a provincial subject, successive federal governments have been presenting medium- to long-term agricultural recovery plans. The PTI is no exception. But the problem is that they never bothered to explain why these plans failed to deliver the desired results. The federal government would do a great service to the nation if it explained to people why it failed to boost the agriculture sector in its first year in power.

Provincial governments, too, must do some soul searching and tell the nation why agriculture suffered as much as it did in the last fiscal year in their respective jurisdictions.

The federal government will have to take the responsibility for a couple of things that led to less than 1pc growth in the agriculture sector. One of them is the phenomenal rise in the prices of agricultural inputs during the last fiscal year. In the absence of a proper agricultural input prices index, it is quite difficult to assess the exact inflationary impact on the agricultural output.

But farmers' lobbies across Pakistan identify the higher input cost as one of the factors that brought agricultural growth down to 0.85pc in 2018-19 from 3.3pc a year ago. Prices of inputs may continue to rise further due to inflation-stoking conditions of the IMF lending programme that includes quarterly adjustments in energy prices, phased withdrawal of subsidies and market-determined exchange rates.

In order to make its five-year agricultural emergency programme a success, Pakistan will have to keep the prices of inputs from rising too fast. Is this possible under the IMF programme? Besides, can we expect that the government will develop the much-needed agricultural input prices index? If this index is developed by the end of this fiscal year, calculating the impact of inflation on agricultural activity — and devising a mechanism to ensure that farmers get fair prices for their agricultural produce — will become easier.

The agricultural emergency programme promises some initiatives for modernising practices and enriching human capital in this sector. But the government has yet to tell the nation how many of such initiatives were started in 2018-19, the first year of the five-year programme, and how they helped in boosting agricultural growth. Making honest promises is good. But fulfilling the past promises is equally important.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494057

MAKING FARMERS' COOPERATIVES WORK

Younus Sandeela Updated July 15, 2019

In Pakistan the model of famers' cooperatives has failed repeatedly. It is now assumed that cooperatives are not suitable for the local environment as we do not have the required temperament or mindset to work in associations. The lack of understanding amongst farmers results in a fear of losing ownership of their land if they become part of a cooperative.

However, the reality is that successive governments never made the effort to properly educate farmers on the structure and working of the model. Furthermore, the private sector is disengaged with agriculture and does not play a role in this regard.

Farmers, the most important component in the food supply chain, are generally the weakest link. As long as they remain fragmented they are subjected to exploitation of the worst kind, especially in countries like Pakistan where the average farm size is small and further shrinking with every passing generation due to the natural process of inheritance.

Land O' Lakes and Amul Dairy are two glaring examples from two very different cultures that display the power of cooperatives in agriculture. These, and many other cooperatives, have grown to become large international entities offering diversified product ranges and operating in multiple geographies. Unfortunately, Pakistan has so far failed to produce even a single farmer cooperative of national standing, let alone of international stature and size.

The failure of farmers' cooperatives is due to the inability of the concerned government departments to educate the farming community on the benefits of this cooperative model and to use it for sustainable development in agriculture. Small farmers in particular require education and capacity building.

A project done for the Sindh Government Agriculture Department about seven years back provides evidence that the concept of farmers' cooperatives is not only applicable in Pakistani society but also hugely welcomed by small farmers once its structure and benefits are explained to them in simple terms.

Extraordinarily heavy rains during the summer of 2011 had a devastating effect on agriculture in Sindh, leaving the left bank of Indus severely damaged. A year earlier almost the entire right bank of Indus had been destroyed by heavy floods. In response, a cooperative was formed comprising of three hundred subsistence farmers in remote areas of Khairpur district.

The biggest challenge for the farmers' cooperative project was to have 50 per cent female participation which was considered nearly an impossible task. However, as team members came in contact with the communities, and the objectives of the project were explained, huge numbers of women came forward and were enrolled.

This came as a surprise as the project was operating in an extremely conservative area in rural Sindh and fairly strict criteria was defined and followed for enrollment. However, the female members were not only more ambitious but also far more active than their male counterparts.

One possible reason for this was believed to be that women were more severely hit by poverty than men as they were mostly confined to their homes. Also, it seemed that women were more motivated to go the extra mile for improving lives of their children.

The cooperative members were trained for vegetable farming using modern techniques. In addition to routine vegetable crops produced for domestic markets, high value crops like iceberg lettuce, broccoli and cherry tomatoes were grown keeping in mind their export potential.

Members of the cooperative were connected with vegetable exporters as well as with superstores in Karachi and Lahore. The results were successful because of the efforts put in to explain to the participants the concept and benefits of working under a cooperative model right from the beginning.

If the government is genuinely interested in revolutionising agriculture then it must make efforts to remove bottlenecks at the grass root level by thinking out of the box. Areas like access to finance, training, alternate marketing channels and efficient procurement of inputs could be smoothened out for farming communities by encouraging them to organise themselves as cooperatives.

Successful cooperatives can also improve agriculture credit disbursement through the formal channel as in the long run banks may find them worth lending to on the strength of their balance sheets.

A few successful models need to be created for them to serve as examples for others. Here, the private sector with interests on the farming side may be able to provide assistance. Food processing companies involved in producing and selling packaged milk, spices, pickles, potato chips, juices etc. must be encouraged to play their role, along with the government, in inculcating the cooperative culture within the farming communities across the country.

In turn, this process will improve the supply chain of raw material for companies using agricultural inputs. If done effectively this could play a big role in overall economic development of the country in general and agriculture sector in particular.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494056

ANATOMY OF COTTON BELT

BR Research July 15, 2019

Pakistan's largest cash crop is grown in over half of the districts of the country, from Awaran in hinterlands of Balochistan to the high altitudes of Mardan valley. Yet close to 70 percent of its production is sourced from Punjab on average, of which almost 95 percent is contributed by just 14 districts of the province.

Identified as Punjab's cotton belt, this contiguous region is defined as districts where cotton is the largest kharif crop by acreage, ahead of competing crops such as rice and sugarcane. Geographically, the region constitutes the heart of Indus basin, starting from Mianwali and Bhakkar near western border of the province, to Sahiwal and Bahawalnagar in south-east, and Rajanpur near southern border. (For a visualized map, look at "Cropping Patterns in Punjab, published July 10, 2019 in this section).

But look closely at annual figures coming out of Central Cotton Committee, and it is hard not to notice that the so-called cotton heartland encapsulates all the ailments faced by Pakistan's cotton today. While the region may contribute highest acres to fibre crop cultivation, not one of these districts even come close to the average yield in Sindh.

Consider that Punjab's highest yield in past five years was recorded in district Bahawalnagar at 896 kg per hectares, which is lower than Sindh's average yield during same period by more than 100 kg per hectares. For other districts such as Bhakkar, five-year average is still lower than KP which has negligible share in terms of overall acreage.

Cotton's other persistent woe – declining area under cultivation – is often seen independently of its poor and falling yield in Punjab's cotton belt. However, it should be noted that not only Sindh's share in total acreage has remained consistent over past five years at more than 20 percent; it has also been inching upwards in recent years.

In contrast, the correlation between falling yield and contraction of acreage in Punjab is very obvious. For the period under review, a fall in yield in one season was followed by a decline in cultivated area in the following year – indicating a lag relationship. That has resulted in cotton been replaced by other cash crops such as rice, cane and maize is only logical. Except most opinion makers appear to muddy the issue, by confusing cause and effect and arguing that better renumerative returns on other crops is forcing growers to switch away from cotton.

The trends coming out of Punjab's cotton belt need a hard look by sector experts if Pakistan's policymakers are serious about staging a revival of textile on the back of indigenously grown cotton. That needs identifying causes for decline in cotton yield in this region through research, and not just parroting sound bites reverberated by media anchors.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/07/15/509819/anatomy-of-cotton-belt/

BFA DG VOWS TO ENSURE FOOD QUAQLITY ACROSS PROVINCE

15 July, 2019

QUETTA. The Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) has been taking strict action against shopkeepers, factories and restaurant owners selling unhygienic food, said the authority's Director General Major (retd) Bashir Ahmed.

The BFA director general said hes teams have been visiting markets on a regular basis to revew quality of food items being sold to generalpublic in the province.

"Food safety teams are in the field to thoroughly check the quality of vegetables and meat," he added.

The director general lauded consecutive monitoring of food and edibles for revamping quality standards in Balochistan, but said there was still a long way to go.

Meanwhile, the BFA teams launched a crackdown against mutton, beef and poultry shops selling unhealthy meat in the provincial capital.

During the raid many shops were fined Fs10,000 each, while dozens of shop owners were warned to refrain from selling unhygienic food items. The BFA team also visited milk shops at Almo Chowk and tested the quality to ensure standards were being met.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201907150111&EN_ID=11201907150031&EMID=11201907150015

OVER 2BN PEOPLE LACK ACCESS TO SAFE FOOD: UN

Reuters Updated July 16, 2019

ROME: More than two billion people lack access to healthy food, putting them at risk of health problems — and many of them live in North America or Europe, the United Nations said on Monday, urging governments to "look beyond hunger".

More than a quarter of the world's population now struggles to eat "safe, nutritious and sufficient food", according to the UN's State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 report.

That includes about 8 percent of people in Europe and North America, according to the annual study, which for the first time includes people affected by "moderate food insecurity" as well as outright hunger.

“We need to look beyond hunger,” said Cindy Holleman, senior economist at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the report’s editor.

“If we just focus on hunger, we’re going to be missing a lot of the growing problems we’re seeing.” Moderate food insecurity affects people who have had to reduce the quality or quantity of what they eat due to lack of money or other resources. It can lead to obesity as well as stunting — a condition that permanently affects children’s mental and physical development.

The findings show governments need to pay more attention to different aspects of food availability instead of just focusing on producing more, said the director-general of the FAO, which compiled the report with four other UN agencies.

“Governments are very much oriented to the production side. They believe that if there is food available, people will eat. In a way, that’s not true,” Jose Graziano da Silva said.

“We are not looking at the distribution, the markets, the behaviour of the people, the culture of the people.” The new data reflects the fact that there are now more obese people in the world than hungry ones — although it also shows that the number of hungry people increased in 2018 for the third year running.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494327/over-2bn-people-lack-access-to-safe-food-un

EXPLAINING FALLING FARMING GROWTH

BR Research July 16, 2019

The sectoral share of agriculture sector in GDP has consistently been falling since independence. From over half of GDP in early fifties, sector’s share has averaged at a little under one-fifth (with a downward trend) during last five years.

For developing countries, this is usually a positive sign as greater share of population shift towards manufacturing and services sectors which have higher returns to scale. Except, in Pakistan this shift has been unaccompanied by a decline of rural share in labour force, which has averaged close to 40 percent of total for nearly two decades.

Recall that that decade-wise average growth rate of agriculture sector has been falling sharply since early 80s, when the sectoral GDP growth rate averaged over 5.4 percent, to just 2.2 percent for decade ending FY19 (For more, read: “Facts, fiction, and poor press management”, published on June 11, 2019).

Combined with a population growth rate of over two percent, the obvious implication is that the per capita income of the rural demographic segment may soon begin to fall in real terms unless the slowdown in agriculture growth rate is quickly arrested.

But what is the driving force behind slowdown in agriculture? While the livestock sector contributes up to three-fifths of agricultural GDP, given the doubts raised on the reliability of these estimates, this column will restrict its review to farming sector (For more, read: “Falling livestock GDP”, published on June 17, 2019).

Four out of five major crops – which include cereal grains (wheat, rice, and maize) and sugarcane – have witnessed slow but positive change in productivity (or yield) over past thirty years. Yet, together these account for no more than half of net sown area. The largest contributor to the other half is cotton – once Pakistan's largest kharif crop – which has recorded a sharp decline in both yield and acreage over past decade.

To fully appreciate cotton's contribution to farming GDP, it is important to understand why, at 5.4 percent, 1980s saw the best growth spurt in sector's history. Consider that for cereal grains such as wheat and maize, yield improvement during that decade was under 1 percent, and negative for rice. Yield improvement for sugarcane was just as abysmal, at close to half percent. In contrast, cotton's productivity during the same period rose by the highest magnitude of 1.15 percent, which by decade-end had resulted in addition over half a million to cotton acres, a growth over 25 percent in acreage.

The great leap forward in cotton acreage during the period accounted for more than two-thirds of increase in net sown area. Wheat acreage also followed suit, as it is the primary off-season/rabi crop in cotton sowing areas.

Factors that drove farming productivity and acreage during this period include rise in irrigated area; greater mechanization; and completion of large dams. However, if these factors alone were responsible for cotton's improved acreage, why did acreage for other kharif crops such as rice and sugarcane not grow by a similar margin?

The answer is introduction of high-yielding seed varieties for cotton first introduced during 1980s, which made cotton farmer's preferred crop during kharif season for the better part of next 30 years. The country touched a peak of 16.5 million hectares of net sowing area by end of millennium, which coincided with a peak in area under cotton at 3.2 million hectares. Both have fallen sharply since: while net sown area has declined by 1.1 million hectares by FY19(E), cotton acreage has plummeted by 0.8 million hectares.

The last two decades have seen cotton's most tumultuous years: introduction (albeit illegal) of Bt. cotton during mid-2000s led to promising rise in productivity, before reaching an inflection point when subsequent crop failures occurred as pests gained resistance against Bt. variety due to lack of stewardship.

The long spell of poor cotton productivity during last ten years has thus pushed brakes on farming GDP growth. While competing crops such as maize and sugarcane have noted impressive jumps in productivity during this period, higher yield can push acreage only so far in absence of concurrent rise in domestic consumption or demand by export-led sectors.

Pakistan's farming sector policymakers thus face a duality of choice: either invest in improving cotton productivity or increase demand for competing crops by incentivizing commercial consumption. While the former may seem to be the obvious choice given cotton's crucial role in textile value chain, the absence of cotton from Agricultural Emergency document points which way the tailwinds are blowing. (For more, read "Whither cotton emergency?" published in this section on June 26, 2019).

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/07/16/510171/explaining-falling-farming-growth/

PERFORMANCE OF AGRICULTURE SECTOR REMAINS SUBDUED IN FY19: REPORT

RECORDER REPORT JUL 16TH, 2019 KARACHI

The performance of the agriculture sector remained subdued during FY19. It grows marginally by 0.8 percent in FY19, significantly lower than the 3.9 percent growth in FY18 and the target of 3.8 percent for the year. According to the State Bank of Pakistan quarterly report issued on Monday, weaken agricultural growth was due a considerable contraction in the crop sector, which declined by 4.4 percent compared to a growth of 4.7 percent in FY18.

There was a marked decline in production of a number of major crops, largely attributable to reduction in area under cultivation, mainly caused by sowing period water shortages, and hike in prices of basic inputs such as fertilizer, seeds and pesticides. Meanwhile, livestock, the dominant sub-sector within agriculture, managed to grow by 4.0 percent. Its contribution not only compensated for the loss in crop sector, but also helped the overall agriculture sector to post marginal growth.

According to the SBP, during Kharif season in particular, there was a considerable decline in the area under cultivation, especially in Sindh where water shortages were more pronounced. The total area was sown under Kharif crops for FY19 declined by 7.2 percent over FY18. Moreover, water shortages and lower fertilizer off take also had an adverse impact on crop yields. Thus, in overall terms, the contribution of Kharif crops in the gross value addition (GVA) of the agriculture sector fell significantly below the FY18 level.

In rabi season, relatively improved water availability provided some relief. However, delayed sowing, lower fertilizer off take and unfavorable weather conditions resulted in lower yields for wheat crop, the report said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190716497771/

NEW PRICE OF UREA: RAZAK CONVENES MEETING TODAY

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN JULY 16TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister’s Adviser on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood has convened another meeting on urea prices on Tuesday (today) to evolve consensus on new price of urea as Prime Minister is unwilling to allow increase of Rs 100 per bag, well-informed sources told Business Recorder.

On July 12, 2019, the Adviser gave his consent to an increase of Rs 100 per bag subject to approval of the prime minister as Minister in-Charge Industries and Production. However, it appears that the prime minister has refused to approve the increase as demanded by the fertilizer industry.

An official told this scribe that fertilizer industry has been given financial benefit of Rs 202.5 per MMTBU, the impact of lower GIDC, which should be taken into account while calculating new price of urea fertilizer.

The urea price which is Rs 1830 per bag, should only be increased to Rs 1838 i.e. Rs 8 per bag, he added.

On the other hand, fertilizer industry maintains that urea sales are on hold for the last 15 days, a peak consumption time of Kharif crops, because of no firm decision from GoP with respect to passing on the impact of recent increase in gas price and 50 percent reduction in GIDC.

GIDC Act was passed in 2011; at that time urea price was at the level of Rs 1,580 per bag. The imposition of GIDC had per bag impact of Rs 400 on urea price. Other major factor that impacted on urea price from the year 2011 till July 2019 were: (i) increase of 194 percent in feed gas price translating into Rs 240 per bag increase in urea price; (ii) 135 percent increase in fuel gas price for fertilizer industry causing incremental effect in urea price by Rs 153 per bag; and (c) GST on urea was reduced from 16 percent to 2 percent, causing decrease in urea price by Rs 191 per bag.

“If all costs were passed on by the industry, urea price would have been Rs 2,182 per bag without accounting for the cost of inflation, financing cost of outstanding subsidy and increase in distribution cost due to implementation of axle load management,” said a representative of fertilizer industry.

The hike of 62 percent in feed gas and 31% in fuel gas price to fertilizer industry was made effective from July 1, 2019 by GoP. This substantial increase in gas price has had a 12 percent incremental effect on urea prices as gas is the main raw material of urea. In rupees, the increase in urea price is Rs 210 per bag. To keep urea prices at affordable level, the fertilizer companies agreed to absorb Rs 100 per bag on account of envisaged impact of GIDC settlement of 50 percent, but kept waiting for the formal announcement from GoP. This delay has caused sales hold up for more than 15 days now during the peak consumption time of major kharif crops (Cotton, Rice & Maize). Any further delay could cause serious negative effect on crops output.

Fertilizer industry further argues that we are in the middle of Kharif season and our focus must be on our major export oriented Agri commodities like cotton and rice. This year, about 18 percent increase in the area under cotton has been witnessed due to combined efforts of all stakeholders towards the set target of 15 million bales. The second important kharif crop after cotton is rice, and it is in the process of being planted and is most likely to be covering an area of around 2.88 million hectares. Both Cotton and rice contribute about 69 percent to foreign reserves on account of exports.

Sowing of autumn maize that covers about 60% area under maize in the country (around

790 thousands hectares) is under progress. Sugarcane is growing on 1.1 million hectares. Fertilizer with 50 percent contribution to overall crop production plays a vital role towards having healthy and vigorous crops which translates into higher economic yield. Up till now, apart from basal fertilizer dose (Phosphates & Potash) application to cotton, about one bag urea application has also been carried at farmers’ level.

On an average, two bags of urea per acre are yet to be applied to complete fertilizer application to the cotton crop, requiring over 14 million urea bags (715 kt urea). Further, urea application to entire acreage of rice is yet to be done which is again over 14 million urea bags (711 kt urea) while implies that more than 1,425 kt urea will be required only for the existing two major Kharif crops i.e. cotton and rice having 0.8 percent and 0.6 percent contribution towards GDP. Autumn maize requires around 4.9 million urea bags (244 kt urea) and the remaining urea application in about 30 percent sugarcane area @ one bag per acre is estimated at 490 thousands urea bags (25 kt).

Further, urea application to mango and banana fruit trees in Sindh and citrus in Punjab is yet to be carried out during the current season translating the overall 1,700 kt requirement for the remaining period of Kharif crops.

Keeping in view the ongoing fertilizer application operations in kharif crops, fruits & vegetables, the regular and smooth availability of urea fertilizer in the market is important for national food security and to avoid negative effects on agriculture sector, which is the major contributor to GDP. However the hold up of urea sales in GIDC context application and its parity to end-selling price has become a serious issue. Despite the fact that the fertilizer companies have agreed to absorb Rs 100 per bag against the anticipated 50 percent adjustment of GIDC in the future, GOP is still not coming up with any firm decision.

The crops sector has already experienced a negative 4.43 percent growth against the target of 3.6 percent during 2018-19 owing to subdued performance of major Kharif crops like cotton, rice and sugarcane.

“The GoP must resolve the issue to save farmers from a huge loss of 15- 20 percent in yield owing to delayed urea fertilizer application. If the issues are not addressed in a timely fashion, it would have a spillover effect on upcoming rabi season as well,” he added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190716497796/

RESEARCH TO RAISE PRODUCTIVITY STRESSED

By our correspondent July.16, 2019

ISLAMABAD: There is a need to undertake robust research to improve quality and productivity of cotton in order to maximise profits of cotton producers and minimise import of cotton, said Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood. Speaking during Inter-Ministerial Meeting (IMM) on cotton, held in the Commerce Division on Monday, he said this goal could only be achieved by introducing new varieties of seeds and other inputs including pesticides. The meeting deliberated on the issues pertaining to demand and supply of cotton in the market in order to devise a viable policy to ensure availability of cotton to the textile sector on competitive rates. On the other hand, it was also emphasised to ensure

reasonable profit on production of cotton by announcing a minimum indicative price of cotton to producers. Representative of Textile Division informed that in fiscal year 2018-19 the production target was set at 14.37 million bales, which was revised to 10.78 million bales and then to be 9.98 million bales due to low yield.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2014083/2-research-raise-productivity-stressed/?amp=1

FARMERS THREATEN TO LAUNCH PROTEST AGAINST HIGH COST

By our correspondent July.16, 2019

LAHORE: Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) has threatened to launch a march to Islamabad with thousands of farmers and paralyse the capital city if economic managers do not include measures in budget 2019-20 which reduce cost of production of growers.

“We will protest against lack of supremacy of parliament and allowing advisers to dictate terms to parliament,” PKI President Khalid Mehmood Khokhar said on Monday. “Where will the farmers and country go, if directives of parliament are not followed,” he questioned.

Khokhar argued whether parliament was supreme or some unelected advisers such as Adviser on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood. “We need a level playing field with India regarding costs of agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, electricity, diesel and agricultural machinery," he stressed.

He pointed out that the budget did not include any steps to curb cost of production for the farmers. "We, the PKI, record this protest, especially for the development of cotton and improvement of agriculture in general," he said.

Khokhar was of the view that some groups with vested interests, present in the government, were proposing anti-farmer policies and their families were benefitting and making fortunes from such policies at the cost of growers and Pakistan's agriculture.

He highlighted that Pakistan's sovereignty and existence was closely linked to the development of agriculture and even national security depended on the

production and supply of nutritious food to the troops.

Around 70% exports of the country are agriculture-based, of which 67% comprises textile and cotton. Agriculture contributes 18% to the national gross domestic product (GDP).

"Any decline in cotton production from the present one million bales will result in reduction of 1% of GDP, which shows how important agriculture is for Pakistan's economy," he stressed.

The groups with vested interests were active in budget preparation and were able to discard every demand or budget proposal, he remarked. Even recommendations of the Special Committee on Agriculture, headed by the speaker, were rejected, he claimed.

The special committee had recommended abolition of fuel adjustment charges on electricity and waiving 2% general sales tax on fertiliser. Instead, 3% value addition levy on imported fertiliser was imposed.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2014066/2-farmers-threaten-launch-protest-high-cost/?amp=1

FLOUR MILLERS TO GO ON THREE-DAY STRIKE TODAY

Bureau Report July 17, 2019

PESHAWAR: The owners of flour millers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have announced to shut their mills for three days on July 17 to protest imposition of 17 per cent general sale tax on wheat products.

"The government has imposed 17 per cent GST on wheat products including bran (Chokar) against its promise that taxes will not be imposed on the food commodities like flour, ghee, cooking oil. It has forced us to observe strike for acceptance of our demands," Naeem Butt, the president of All Pakistan Flour Mills Association, told journalists here on Tuesday.

He said that there was no precedent of imposing GST on wheat or bran in the country but the present government imposed tax on these products through Finance

Act, 2019. He said that it would directly hit all flour products and their prices would automatically rise enormously. Mr Butt said that the chairman of Federal Board of Revenue had promised many times to exempt wheat flour and cooking oil from taxes but he was yet to materialise his commitment.

He said that the tax on wheat bran would increase the price of 20-kilogram bag of flour by Rs30 to Rs50 that would subsequently affect the poor consumers.

He said that of the total 240 flour mills in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, only 100 were operational.

Mr Butt said that the owners were compelled to close down mills due to wrong economic policies of the government. He urged Prime Minister Imran Khan to withdraw 17 per cent GST on wheat bran.

He said that the flour millers were united to protest imposition of GST on wheat bran and decided to shut their mills for three days from July 17 to July 19. It would definitely create shortage of flour in the market.

Mr Butt said that APFMA had convened its general body meeting on July 20 in Lahore to decide future course of action.

Earlier, an emergency meeting of the provincial chapter of All Pakistan Flour Mills Association was held in Peshawar with its chairman Mohammad Tariq in the chair that endorsed the decision of strike.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494511/flour-millers-to-go-on-three-day-strike-today

GOVT USING ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES AGAINST LOCUST ATTACK, SAYS DC

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent July 17, 2019

HYDERABAD: The government has taken steps to counter threat of locusts and all available resources are being utilised in this respect.

This was stated by Divisional Comm¬is¬sioner Mohammad Abbas Baloch at a seminar on 'Elimination of locusts' organised by Sindh Agricul¬ture University (SAU) Tandojam on Tuesday.

Vice Chancellor (VC) Dr Mujee¬buddin Sehrai, Agriculture Research Institute Sindh director Noor Moham-mad Baloch, Sindh Abadgar Board representative Nadeem Shah and deans of different faculties of the SAU also spoke on the occasion.

Mr Baloch said the government had initiated timely action to cope with the threat. The Sindh chief minister visited different areas to monitor situation, he said, adding that the Sindh government released funds as well.

He said that such seminars and exhibitions should be organised for awareness of growers so that locust threat could be averted. The government would implement recommendations of agricultural experts, he added.

The VC said that locusts had again attacked crops after 22 years and urged that experts should conduct research and present recommendations to fight the menace.

He said research theses of students in this regard would be approved after they submitted them in Urdu and Sindhi translations.

Prof Dr Imran Khatri of the plant protection faculty briefed the seminar on locust threat.

Dr Shehzad Nahioon, who returned from China after completing his PhD, said that drone technology could be used to eliminate locusts.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494461/govt-using-all-available-resources-against-locust-attack-says-dc

SEMINAR TO PROMOTE, PRESERVE BASMATI RICE HERITAGE HELD

RECORDER REPORT JULY 17TH, 2019 LAHORE

Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association (PBHA) in collaboration of the Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) recently arranged an awareness seminar “Khushal Kissan” for promotion and preservation of basmati rice heritage of the country.

Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial speaking on this occasion appreciated the efforts of PBHA and assured that the government will continue its efforts for the improvement of rice sector and welfare of the farmers.

Throwing light on various steps being taken by the government for the development of the agricultural sector, the minister said that the rice is not only needed for our food requirement but also help the country to fetch precious foreign exchange through exports.

He said that various schemes have been introduced for bringing down the cost of production and increasing profit of the growers.

Arif Nadeem CEO Pakistan Agriculture Coalition addressing the farmers spoke about farm mechanization through service provider model in Sindh and roadmap for taking rice exports from $2B-$5B. Naveed Anwar Bhindar Chairman Pakistan Agriculture Marketing & Regulatory Authority (PAMRA) shared the benefits and future impact of PAMRA.

Hundreds of rice farmers and key members of PBHA participated in the seminar. While moderating the Seminar Imran Sheikh National Coordinator PBHA deliberated the challenges of rice sector especially basmati rice in Punjab.

Shahid Hussain Tarer, Convener PBHA shared the mission & objectives of Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association (PBHA) and agreed action plan for promotion and preservation of basmati rice in production and export. He advised the farmers to adopt global rice standard of Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) of UNE & IRRI for promoting resource efficiency and sustainability by ensuring food safety.

Dr Abid Mahmood, DG Research advised the farmers to use certified seed because it will serve as foundation for increasing yield and quality of basmati rice. Dr Anjum Ali Buttar DG Agri Extension shared Prime Minister’s agriculture emergency program and appreciated the initiative of PBHA for providing healthy and certified seed on subsidized rate to the farmers.

Rana Nazir Ahmed, former MNA and progressive farmer shared his experience on mechanical rice transplanting and direct seeding of rice.

He advised the farmers to adopt farm mechanization for improving their yield and reducing cost of production.

Shehla Raza, MPA Gujranwala also shared her experience and thoughts for betterment of rice sector.

Professor Dr Ahfaq Ahmad Chattha University of Agri Faisalabad highlighted the impact of climate change on basmati rice and advised the farmers to adjust date of sowing for adapting climate change scenario. Dr Afzal, Country Director CropLife advised the farmers for responsible use of pesticides and its importance for boosting rice export of Pakistan.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190717498152/

ADVISORY FOR FARMERS ISSUED

RECORDER REPORT JULY 17TH, 2019 LAHORE

Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) has advised the farmers to pay special heed to their standing crops during the ongoing monsoon season and keep an eye on Radio, TV weather forecast broadcast/telecast to make their irrigation plans for standing crop accordingly.

Spokesman of the department said here on Tuesday that MET department has issued warning that during this year monsoon system will be prolonged and heavy rains are expected in coming days so farmers are advised to prepare themselves accordingly. During monsoon harmful insect particularly sucking insects remained more active. So, farmers are advised to keep in contact with Extension or Pest Warning field staff to mitigate their attack threshold level.

Spokesman further said here that rice, sugarcane and fodder crops should be grown on one side of the cotton and vegetable fields so that excess water from cotton and vegetable crop could be drained to water loving crops.

Farmers should improve drainage system at farm level. Excessive water may be drained with the help of drainage pump. Small water reservoirs should be constructed at farm level. Removal of weeds after rain is very important in standing crop as weeds utilize moisture and food, which are to be used by crop and also serve as debris for harmful insects & pests.

Spokesman advised that farmers should consult field staff of Extension department for use of weedicide spray to remove weeds. Farmers are advised to drain water from cotton and vegetables as these crops are very sensitive to water.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190717498153/

CABINET APPROVES CUT IN ADDITIONAL DUTY ON EDIBLE OIL

SOHAIL SARFRAZ JULY 17TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The Cabinet Tuesday approved reduction in the additional customs duty from seven to two percent on the import of edible oil, reflecting a decrease of 5 percent. According to the Cabinet decision, in order to reduce prices of cooking oil and provide relief to the lower income groups, the government has decided to reduce the said duty up to 2 percent at the import stage. From July 1, 2019, the FBR had increased additional customs duty from 2 to 4 percent on 500 items covered under 16 percent customs tariff slab and raised additional customs duty from 2 to 7 percent on 2,400 tariff lines covered under 20 percent and above customs tariff slab.

The increase in additional customs duty from 2 to 4 percent and from 2 to 7 percent would generate revenue to the tune of Rs 25 billion to Rs 30 billion. The FBR has also created a new customs duty slab of zero percent.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190717497994/

ECC BANS WHEAT EXPORT AMID ROTI PRICE HIKE

Mubarak Zeb Khan Updated July 18, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Wednesday decided to impose a ban on export of wheat and wheat flour amid rising concern over the price hike trend of roti and other wheat products in the wake of low wheat production in the country.

The cabinet's Economic Coordina¬tion Committee (ECC), headed by Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Dr Hafeez Shaikh, took the decision at a meeting.

During the Rabi season 2018-19, the ministry of national food security and research recorded 24.12 million tonnes of wheat production against the projected target of 25.5m tonnes for the year. The procured quantity of wheat during this year was also 33pc less than the procured quantities of wheat during the last year's corresponding period.

To control the price of roti and other wheat products in the local market, the ECC suggested that a meeting of National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) be convened with the cooperation of provincial governments.

The meeting was briefed that adequate stocks of wheat were available in the country. As per official statistics, the country has 28m tonne wheat in stock against the total requirement of 25.84m tonnes of wheat.

The ECC allowed National Fertiliser Marketing Limited (NFML) dealers to fix the dealer-transfer price of 50kg imported urea bag at Rs1, 800 that is Rs166 less than the prevailing average market price of Sona Urea.

The difference in urea import price and approved dealer-transfer price for NFML dealers has been estimated at Rs937.92 million. The NFML has also been directed to ensure enforcement of this price through coordination with provincial governments.

The ECC allowed PIA Corporation Limited to make a re-appropriation in its already approved budget of Rs24 billion to upgrade in-flight entertainment (IFE) system of its fleet for eight Boeing-777 aircraft. The project will cost Rs700 million. The measures will improve the occupancy of the airline to 80 per cent from the current level of 70pc.

The ECC also permitted import of scrap slag, ash and residues containing metals, arsenic or their compounds (containing mainly aluminium) after fulfilment of certain conditions. As per approved conditions, it can only be imported by industrial consumers having recycling facilities, subject to an NOC from the Ministry of Climate Change and duly certified by the provincial Environmental Protection Agency etc.

The ECC approved the notification of Minimum Indicative Prices (MIP) of tobacco for the year 2019-20. As per the MIP for different grades of various types of tobacco are Rs190.63 for FCV Tobacco (plain) per kilogram for 2019-20; Rs218.77 for FCV Tobacco (sub-mountainous); Rs82.85 for WP Tobacco; Rs150.54 for Burley Tobacco and Rs94.76 for DAC Tobacco, respectively.

The report on the national poverty graduation programme of 82.60 million dollars was also submitted for ECC compliance by the secretary of economic affairs division.

The ECC allowed that new PCT codes, as created in the Pakistan Customs Tariff through the Finance Act, 2019, may be incorporated in SRO 693(I)/2006 allowing collection of additional customs duty on parts of sport utility vehicles.

The ECC endorsed the decision of the Governing Council of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics to change the base of price statistics from 2007-08 to 2015-16. The new base 2015-16 of price statistics has the features mainly inclusion of rural market; introduction of population weight based on the 2017 population censes; computation of indices based on weighted geometric mean; introduction of consumption quintiles instead of income quintiles; introduction of consumer-weighted approach to compute gas prices for combined income group; introduction of GST, other taxes fuel price adjustment to compute electricity tariffs using consumer-weighted approach.

However, it was decided that for the purpose of comparative analysis, the old series of 2007-08 would continue to be published for another year along with the new series of 2015-16.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mohammad Mehboob Sultan, Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar, Minister for Privatisation Mohammedmian Soomro, Minister for Railways Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, Adviser to PM on Commerce, Textile, Industry and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood, Adviser on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Dr Ishrat Hussain, Special Assistant to PM on Petroleum Nadeem Babar, State Bank Governor Reza Baqir, chairman of the Board of Investment Zubair Gilani and others attended the meeting.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494733/ecc-bans-wheat-export-amid-roti-price-hike

PCJCCI FOR ADOPTING CHINESE ROOF-TOP FARMING TECHNOLOGY

RECORDER REPORT JULY 18TH, 2019 LAHORE

Pakistan China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry has stressed the need for following the Chinese roof-top farming technology named “Aquaponics” to overcome food shortage, water crisis, excessive use of pesticides and expensive fertilizers.

PCJCCI President Shah Faisal Afridi while speaking at the think-tank meeting here Wednesday said Aquaponics is a technique that harvest both fish and vegetables, using the waste from the fish to feed the plants and the plants to clean the water for the fish. By combining the fish, water and plants, Aquaponics system is being used for an integrated environment to produce vegetables and fish in a very small space, with very little water he said adding that Aquaponics was being explored by China for several decades as a possible solution to the foregoing environmental energy, and food shortage problems.

The technique is capable to produce around 5000 kg of vegetables and 500 kg of fish per year by utilizing limited space; he said and added that Aquaponics systems were much more productive by using up to 90 percent less water than conventional gardens. Other advantages include no weeds, fewer pests, and no watering, fertilizing, bending, digging, or heavy lifting, he added.

The Chamber's Vice President Ahmed Hasnain said the Chinese model of latest soil-free and rooftop farming technology of "Aquaponics" can facilitate Pakistan with an opportunity not only to return a level of personal or household food production to cities but also create a viable commercial urban farming sector.

PCJCCI General Secretary Salahuddin Hanif said that rapid rise in seafood demand in developed countries gives Pakistan an opportunity to expand and improve fish farming techniques and aquaculture practices in order to earn more foreign exchange. Modernizing fish farming techniques would be very beneficial for Pakistan along with net trade income from other agricultural commodities like coffee, rubber, corn, soya bean, he said and informed that currently nearly 500,000 people are directly engaged in fishing in Pakistan and another 600,000 in the ancillary industries.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190718498422/

FERTILISER PRICES INCREASED

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated July 19, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government on Thursday increased fertiliser prices by Rs20 per bag.

Adviser to PM on Industry and Production Abdul Razak Dawood said the decision is a win-win for both fertiliser manufacturers and the growers.

"The rise in prices of fertiliser due to the increase in the price of gas was Rs210 per bag, but the impact of reduction in the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) was Rs200 per bag, therefore the net increase would be Rs10 per bag," he explained.

He said the price of 20kg fertiliser bag would be Rs1,890 which includes the dealer margin of Rs50.

"We have allowed increase in price of urea by Rs10 per bag only," he added.

"The dealers were not in the control of the government, however, there were some measures in place to take action following unjustified price hikes," Dawood said.

Responding to questions regarding the arguments presented by the fertiliser manufactures, he said that they claimed that devaluation of rupee against the dollar, increase in minimum salaries by the government had resulted in higher costs of production.

"We listened to them, but we made our calculations too and did not allow them to increase the prices on account of these heads only, and presented our part of the story of GIDC which led to the increase of Rs10 only," he added.

Dawood said the government had allowed import of one tonne of urea 4-5 months ago to maintain supply and demand equilibrium.

The first batch of imported urea is expected to dock on Sunday and there seems no possibility of fertiliser shortage in Kharif season he claimed.

He said the Economic Coordination Committee had set imported urea price at Rs1,800 per bag and the government would have to bear a burden of Rs1 billion for providing subsidies over it.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494893/fertiliser-prices-increased

JAPAN TO PROVIDE $5.2M FOR AGRI PROJECT

A Reporter Updated July 19, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Japan will provide $5.2 million for the execution of a UN agro-food and industrial development project in Pakistan.

In this regard, country representative United Nations Industrial Development Organisation on Thursday had a meeting with the federal minister to discuss the different features of the project.

The project aims to strengthen cattle meat and fruit production through the introduction of new techniques. This, the UN agency believes, will improve livelihoods of farmers and reduce rural poverty in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan will inaugurate the project during the first week of next month. In his comments, the minister said that the government had launched PM's agriculture emergency programme, and livestock is one of the major projects.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1494886

CM VOWS TO FACILITATE FARMERS, AGRICULTURE SECTOR

RECORDER REPORT JULY 19TH, 2019 LAHORE

Terming agriculture credit cards scheme as an innovative step of the PTI government, Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar Thursday said that farmers will be directly paid the price of wheat, sugarcane and other crops. "The farmers will also be provided agriculture services on subsidized rates while high-value crop culture will be introduced in villages," the CM said while chairing a meeting regarding the agriculture department at his office today.

The CM said that cultivation of olive trees will be encouraged in hilly areas of D G Khan. "Farmers will be educated about the latest innovations in the agriculture sector so that they can get good earnings through floriculture and foreign exchange can also be earned by increasing the production of honey," he said.

The CM said that medicinal crops will not only promote local pharmaceutical industry but the foreign exchange will be earned as well. The farmers are given necessary protection through the launch of insurance policy and the steps taken by the PTI government are proving meaningful, he added.

Principal Secretary to CM, secretaries of information and agriculture departments along-with concerned officials attended the meeting.

Moreover, the Punjab CM said that decision of International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Kulbushan Jadhav case is the victory of truth and justice as truth has prevailed while lies and deceit have been defeated.

In a statement, the CM congratulated the nation on the victory of truth and said that Pakistan has emerged victorious by the grace of Almighty Allah. "Pakistan is a peace-loving country. The deceitful Indian narrative has been defeated and India has eaten humble pie," he said, adding: "The decision in the Kulbushan case has caused shame and humiliation for India and whether India will continue to follow the policy of stubbornness."

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190719498724/

COTTON MARKET SLUGGISH

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter July 20, 2019

KARACHI: The recent heavy rains have adversely affected phutti (seed cotton) arrival from Punjab cotton fields and restricted trading in new crop on Friday.

There was strong demand for quality cotton from spinners but short supply of quality cotton hindered proceedings. However, it was encouraging to note that cotton and phutti prices were steady for both Sindh and Punjab varieties. The Punjab quality cotton remained pegged at around Rs8,550 and Sindh at Rs8,450 per maund.

According to reports new crop phutti arrival also started in Balochistan and was being quoted in the range of Rs4,000-4,100 per 40 kg.

Cotton analysts were critical about the government's attitude towards the cash crop. They said that cotton sowing has almost ended in both Sindh and Punjab but the promised indicative price for phutti has not been announced so far. The purposed of indicative price, they said, was to encourage growers to cultivate more cotton than other crops.

Contrary to this India has already increased indicative price for phutti by Rs105 per 100kg where cotton output is feared to be lowest in the last one decade at around 30.12 million bales.

On global front New York cotton remained under pressure following lower export figures. The trade war between US-China — with former biggest cotton exporter in the world and latter biggest consumer — continued to depressed cotton prices.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were raised by Rs50 to Rs8,350 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 2,000 bales, station Tando Adam, at Rs8,450; 1,000 bales, Sanghar, at Rs8,425-8,460; 800 bales, Shahdadpur, at Rs8,450-8,475; 400 bales, Burewala, at Rs8,550; 200 bales, Chichawatni, at Rs8,550; and 200bales, Taminwali, at Rs8,550.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1495154/cotton-market-sluggish

FERTILISER INDUSTRY EXTENDS SUPPORT TO FARMERS

RECORDER REPORT JULY 20TH, 2019 LAHORE

The fertilizer industry has voluntarily held back the impact of recent gas price increase to prevent backlash of it to farmers. This was agreed on request of Advisor Industries, Razzaq Dawood. The

Advisor has assured the industry about settlement of GIDC effective 01 July to mitigate the loss to industry due to increased cost of production. The industry is optimistic regarding the GIDC settlement as agreed by Asad Umar in January this year to reduce the rates by 50% since inception and prospectively as well.

The fertilizer industry has already paid Rs 127 Billion on account of GIDC up to 2015, unlike other sectors withholding the bulk of GIDC payment. The industry expected settlement of outstanding Rs 20 Billion on account of subsidy as well as GST refund to the tune of 24 Billions in the process.

The industry expected redressal of cash flow challenge through GIDC settlement. The fertilizer industry has shown its full confidence in the leadership of Razzaq Dawood, who fully appreciated the contribution of industry to national economy and food security and expressed his appreciation for the gesture, said Fertilizer Manufacturers Advisory Council of Pakistan (FMPAC).

The industry has been making major contribution towards the national exchequer. Last year the fertilizer industry contributed in the economic growth of the country being one of the highest tax-payers. It paid Rs 45 billion in taxes which are virtually equal to the net profit the industry had earned. The industry has passed on Rs 527 Billion benefit to the farmers in terms of lower prices against gas subsidy of Rs 127 Billion during past 9 years. Furthermore, the industry has been offering its extensive support in uplifting the masses through different CSR related projects.

Understanding the Government’s current situation witnessing protests against economic measures that it can’t afford to open another front, the fertilizer industry has decided to give its maximum support to the government on the prevalent price issue.

The rise in Feed Gas (62%) and in Fuel Gas (31%) prices which, as a result, impacted the cost of production by Rs 210 per bag. However, the industry has decided to increase the price by only token of Rs 10 per bag, in anticipation of GIDC settlement. The industry expected the Government to help it by providing sustained supply of gas at affordable prices to enable it play a significant role in the development of the economy and national food security.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190720498876/

WORLD BANK’S SMART PROGRAMME TO ENHANCE CROP PRODUCTIVITY

By Our Correspondent Published: July 20, 2019

LAHORE: The objective of the World Bank Strengthening Markets for Agriculture and Rural Transformation in Punjab (SMART) programme is to enhance productivity of crop and livestock farmers in the province, said a delegation of the World Bank.

A four-member World Bank team, headed by Senior Agriculture Economist Johannes Jansen, made the remarks while meeting Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) President Almas Hyder on Friday.

Speaking on the occasion, Hyder emphasised that agriculture was a vital sector of Pakistan’s economy as it contributed 18.5% to the gross domestic product (GDP) and provided employment to 38.5% of the total labour force.

"Yet the growth rate of agriculture sector in 2018-19 was just 0.85%," he said while voicing concern. "If Pakistan wants to achieve a growth rate of 6-7% and become a competitive economy in the region, the growth of agriculture sector needs to be enhanced."

Regretting that there was no genetic modification programme for developing the livestock sector, he stressed that genetic improvement was required in livestock breeds in order to improve productivity of the dairy sector.

He suggested that agricultural marketing laws should be amended so that large companies could procure agricultural commodities directly from the farmers rather than middlemen.

The LCCI president was of the view that the agriculture sector should be governed by free market mechanism.

"The role of government should be restricted to being a regulator, which ensures food security, and it should not be a buyer and seller of agricultural commodities," he said. "Similarly, export laws for agricultural commodities need to be relaxed."

He was of the view that there should be freedom to export the surplus agricultural products after catering to domestic demand. Following that, global buyers would consider Pakistan as an important agricultural market, he remarked.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2017220/2-world-banks-smart-programme-enhance-crop-productivity/

WHEAT CONFERENCE TO BEGIN TODAY

Amin Ahmed July 21, 2019

SASKATOON (Canada): Amid global efforts to intensify the nutritional value and scale of wheat production, scientists from all major wheat growing regions in the world are gathering in Saskatoon for the first International Wheat Congress starting here from July 21 (Sunday).

More than 800 global experts will gather in Saskatoon, the city at the heart of Canada's western wheat growing province, Saskatchewan, to strategise on ways to meet projected nutritional needs of 60 per cent more people by 2050

The six-day congress is the first major gathering of the wheat community since the 2015 International Wheat Conference in Sydney. The CGIAR Research Programme on Wheat (WHEAT), led by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT), is a founding member of the G20 Wheat Initiative, a co-host of the conference.

"We must solve a complex puzzle," said CIMMYT Director-General, Martin Kropff. "Wheat must feed more people while growing sustainably on less land. Wheat demand is predicted to increase 60pc in the next three decades, while climate change is putting an unprecedented strain on production," he said.

"The scientific community is tackling this challenge head-on, through global collaboration, germplasm exchange and innovative approaches. Researchers are looking at wheat's temperature response mechanisms and using remote sensing, genomics, bio-informatics and other technologies to make wheat more tolerant to heat and drought," Kropff said.

Research shows that about 70pc of spring bread and durum wheat varieties released in developing countries between 1994 and 2014 were bred or derive from wheat lines developed by scientists working for the CGIAR. Worldwide, more than 60pc of released varieties are related to CIMMYT or ICARDA germ-plasm.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1495341/wheat-conference-to-begin-today

WHEAT STOCKS SUFFICIENT TO MEET DOMESTIC NEEDS: SBP

RIZWAN BHATTI JULY 21ST, 2019 KARACHI

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has said that despite lower than the target wheat crop output in FY19, carryover stocks are sufficient to cover the domestic consumptive requirements of 25.8 million tons. According to a recent SBP report, there is some discrepancy in the production statistics of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) and Pakistan Economic Survey.

Data from Pakistan Economic Survey shows that the wheat production rose marginally by 0.5 percent to 25.2 million tons in FY19 as the government revised FY18 wheat output downwards by 0.4 million tons. However, according to the latest estimates by MNFSR, wheat production for FY19 had been recorded at 24.3 million tons which instead shows a contraction of 3.2 percent compared to revised production of 25.1 million tons in FY18.

The discrepancy between the estimates provided by PBS and MNFSR may be attributed to the PBS as it not counts the untimely rains and hailstorms at peak harvest time, the report said. THE SBP mentioned that the yield for wheat declined by 2.9 percent, while the area under wheat contracted by 0.4 percent. Second consecutive seasonal decline in wheat production was mainly due to three developments including delayed cane crushing, insufficient nutrient offtake and untimely and intermittent rains and hailstorm in the harvest period led to a portion of the crop being damaged, particularly in Southern Punjab.

Another reason for low yield is the usage of non-certified seeds in certain areas. Largely, losses in yield have been reported in districts such as Chakwal where desi varieties were planted. The varieties were inadequate resistance to weather changes, as opposed to new weather- and pest-resistant varieties.

In a climate-changing scenario, adoption of certified and climate resistant seeds is crucial in mitigating losses from unpredictable and erratic seasonal patterns. Furthermore, resilience of small farmers through climate smart adoption and insurance practices is also needed.

Initial yield of Punjab according to Federal Committee on Agriculture meeting in start of April was 2,951 kg per hectare while the latest loss adjusted yields are 2832 kg per hectare. Latest estimates were reported by MNFSR.

Recognizing this fact, the latest Punjab Crop Insurance Program aims to indemnify small landholders for yields losses, enhance productivity, and promote the adoption of climate smart practices such as new varieties of seeds. Under this program, Rabi 2018-19 wheat yield losses will be compensated for farmers covered under the program.

The position of wheat stocks held by provincial food authorities and PASSCO at end-March 2019 were 4.5 million tons, compared to 7.3 million tons in March 2018.

The SBP estimated that despite lower than target wheat output during the FY19, domestic carryover stocks are still sufficient to cover the domestic consumptive requirements of 25.8 million tons. This estimate is based on the 120-kg per person per annum requirement.

This year, the government had announced the target of 6.3 million tons for procurement, which was comparably higher than last year's target of 6.1 million tons and actual procurement of 5.9 million tons in FY18. However, the actual procurement was still not confirmed by majority of provincial authorities as of end-March 2019. Federal government has recently imposed a ban on export of wheat due to some increase in price of "Roti".

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190721499088/

APTMA OPPOSES IMPOSITION OF ST ON LOCAL COTTON

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN JULY 21ST, 2019 ISLAMABAD

All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) has opposed imposition of sales tax on local cotton, saying that it will encourage import of cotton under Duty and Tax Remission (DTRE) scheme mainly from India.

The Association conveyed its concerns to secretary Textile Division, Syed Iftikhar Babar, who is engaged in post-budget talks with the textile sector. The Association wants a uniform policy in place on imports-through DTRE or otherwise.

According to a letter written to secretary Textile Division, the additional sales tax on local production of cotton is 10 percent whereas the sales tax on yarn is 17 percent. In this scenario, no one will buy cotton and yarn because their sales tax amount will get stuck in export cycle and this will only be beneficial to imports under DTRE and bonds.

According to APTMA, if sales tax has to be imposed then local imported cotton under bond or Export Oriented Units (EOUs) has to be treated at par otherwise this will create loopholes detrimental to local supply chain and as a consequence Indian raw materials will be used if Pakistan government allows zero rating for them. This could be counterproductive.

In order to save the local industry and farmers, a uniform policy is needed which must specify the imposition of sales tax on all imports of cotton, whether through DTRE, bonds or EOU. In the absence of this, textile sector is quite certain that 50 percent of the Phutti in the market will not be picked up to great consternation of the farmers and all ideas about support price and minimum price will fall by the way side.

APTMA which is holding meetings with the authorities to get maximum relief has submitted the following proposals: (i) import parity which works out to Rs 4500/maund without any differential for quality; and (ii) export parity which works out to Rs 3500/maund which effectively accounts for quality differential.

APTMA says that its stance on cotton pricing is based on the following logic: (i) 75 percent cotton gets exported and if the pricing is pitched higher than the price available to the export market then Pakistan will further lose its competitive edge; and (ii) quality differential is a very difficult parameter to establish for administered price. The only true measure can and should be market force. The export parity-cents for transportation is a robust and true parameter for determining a competitive and fair price.

The farmer's true income can only be increased if his yield per acre is increased and the price of oil seed is set right. The yield increase per acre is a very lengthy topic.

The use of cost per maund as a measure of determining price has a fatal flaw. Suppose, the yield drops by another 25 percent in the next year, would the price have to be increased by 25 per cent to cover the costs?

APTMA maintains that the cost plus argument only works in a situation where there is captive internal market, ie, that of sugar, wheat etc where consumers can be charged exorbitant prices while protecting the farmers from cheaper imports through unjustified import duties.

Furthermore, with the sales tax on cotton exporters have stated that they will not buy from domestic market and import cotton, yarn or grieg cloth through tax free bonds. Under these circumstances, a crisis situation has been created as local cotton will not be lifted.

"APTMA has suggested this matter should be addressed post-haste before any such farmers' schemes are established,' said APTMA's Advisor Shahid Sattar.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190721499130/

FOOD SECURITY

July 21, 2019

How food secure is Pakistan? Many of us know the answer intuitively to be a negative one. This has been confirmed by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). As part of its third quarterly report on the state of the economy, the central bank has noted that only 63 percent of Pakistan's households are food secure. This is despite the fact that Pakistan is self-sufficient in major stable foods. The fact that one-third of all households in the country are not food secure in a country which produces almost all of its food means that the problems lie in the mechanisms for distribution as well as the low rate of compensating rural labour. What would come as a surprise to most policymakers is that Gilgit-Baltistan, a region of mostly subsistence cultivation, is the most food secure in the country at almost 80 percent. This is followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at 70 percent. This leads one to wonder if there is an adverse relationship between the production of commercial crops for the market and the level of food security in a region. It is even more ironic that GB is a region that does not produce Pakistan's staple grain of wheat.

The worst position is occupied by Balochistan where almost half of the households face mild to severe food insecurity. Out of one-third households that are food insecure, half face severe food insecurity. The situation explains why Pakistan occupies a position in the seven countries responsible for two-thirds of the world's under-nourished population. On the other hand, Pakistan is the world's eighth largest wheat producer, the 10th largest rice producer, the fifth largest sugarcane producer and the fourth largest milk producer. It is clear that the problem lies in how the market mechanism works to take away food from those who need it most. While around a quarter of Pakistan's population lives below the poverty line, poverty is the worst in rural areas where it has hit around 31 percent. This should be a joke. How are the areas that produce food the ones most affected by food insecurity?

The situation is so poor that almost half of the children under five years of age suffer stunted growth which puts Pakistan in the bottom 15 countries in the Global Hunger Index. The SBP fears that the situation is likely to get worst due to high population growth, growing water stress and climate change in the next two decades. The cost of this comes to around $10 billion in lost economic resources every year, which the government can easily recover by investing in reforming the agricultural sector. The poor situation in Punjab and Balochistan is also explained by the low level of support received by the poorest populations in the provinces. While one must remember that PM Imran Khan used his first speech to highlight the issue of malnutrition, there is little that has been concretely done to address the issue of chronic food insecurity in Pakistan.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/501849-food-security

SEAFOOD EXPORTS DECLINE 2.72PC IN FY19 ON CATCH CURBS IN BALOCHISTAN

Shahid Shah July 21, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan's seafood exports have recorded a decline both in quantity and value during FY19 due to a slowdown in fishing activities on the coast of Balochistan from November to January, exporters said.

According to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, during FY19 (July 2018-June 2019), exports dropped 2.72 percent to $438.735 million against $451.021 million during FY18.

In quantity terms, exports were recorded 0.71 percent down at 195,523 tons from 196.927 tons exported during the same period last year.

Pakistan's fish and fish preparations' exports increased by 18.66 percent to 15,213 tons in June 2019 against 12,821 tons exported in June last year. On value terms, exports remained 18.95 percent up in June 2019 to $32.168 million against $27.043 million in June 2018. Compared to May 2019, seafood exports remained down by 44.62 percent from $58.081 million in May 2019. "This happened because seafood fishing season remained closed in June on account of breeding season," said one stakeholder.

"Pakistan was posting 20 percent increase every year till FY18," said Captain Akhlaque Hussain, an exporter. "But, this year it decreased 2.72 percent, which is actually a decline of 23 percent looking at our past record."

He said the federal government had announced deep sea fishing policy in October 18, which invited protests from the people of Balochistan. "Marine Fisheries Agency had started seizing fishing boats near Balochistan coast and fishing remained down for around three months till January 2019. Exports could reach $540 million if the catch had not been curbed," Hussain added.

Pakistan's fish and fish preparations buyers include China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Egypt, Middle East, UK, Thailand, South Korea, Bangladesh etc. Of which, China is one of the largest buyers.

One stakeholder said that quality seafood stocks were depleted in Pakistani waters because of overfishing and use of destructive and unlawful nets.

Pakistan exports mostly lower rates to China, whereas the ban from European Union was lifted from two factories only after political pressure, as the EU had not inspected the factories. “Thus, revival of exports to EU had no significant impact over Pakistan’s total seafood exports,” he said.

Pakistan’s fish and fish preparations fetch one of the lowest prices in the region. “Our prices show that we export more fish meal and our prices are lower than quality fish meal price. We are going behind low quality exports,” said one exporter.

Pakistan’s seafood export has been resumed to EU, but only one factory, out of the approved two factories, was exporting to EU. Only two factories were approved by the authority. However, prices of those exports to the EU remain low.

According to Marine Fisheries Department, there are around 150 fish and seafood exporting firms in Pakistan, of which 35 operate in the premises of Karachi Fisheries Harbour.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/501244-seafood-exports-decline-2-72pc-in-fy19-on-catch-curbs-in-balochistan

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 8th TO JULY 14th 2019

SCA WORRIED OVER SCARCE WATER FOR RICE CULTIVATION

The Newspaper’s Staff Correspondent July 08, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has expressed grave concern over water shortage in the command areas of Kotri barrage, which was affecting rice crop cultivation.

Held here on Sunday chaired by SCA senior vice president Syed AijazNabi Shah, the meeting noted that Kotri barrage’s canals were facing 50 per cent (pc) shortage and their distributaries 70pc currently while water supplies to the tail-end areas remained closed. It said that under such conditions, standing crops were getting no water, facing destruction.

The SCA also expressed serious concern over increase in the prices of diesel, fertilizer, seed, machinery and pesticides. It said that since no relief was provided to the agriculture sector in the federal budget announced for fiscal 2019-2020, the agriculture sector was being seriously affected.

The meeting urged the federal government to announce subsidy for implements and farm inputs to save the agriculture sector. It said that cotton crop was being harvested in the lower Sindh, but cotton ginning factory owners had formed a cartel in order to deny adequate price to cotton growers.

It said that cotton’s price had dropped to Rs3, 700 per 40kg from Rs 5,000, causing losses to farmers.

The SCA said that cotton was exported in the international market and with appreciation in dollar’s rate, cotton’s price should also have been increased.

The meeting said that water should be provided in Kotri barrage’s canals and their distributaries and subsidy should also be announced on farm machinery. It said that cotton’s price should be fixed at Rs5,000 per 40kg and sugar mills be ask to clear dues of growers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1492680

SINDH'S AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AND ANOMALIES

Mohammad Hussain Khan July 08, 2019

The Sindh government has slashed its agriculture development portfolio by almost 25 per cent for 2019-20 while schemes launched in the last fiscal year remain unfinished owing to belated or non-release of federal funds.

This year, the provincial government has earmarked Rs3.75 billion for development schemes compared to Rs5bn last year. While the 21 on-going schemes have been allocated Rs1.785bn in 2019-20, 13 new schemes for agriculture research, extension, planning and monitoring, mechanisation, water management and training and research are reflected in the budget with an allocation of Rs1.965bn.

The water management wing has two new schemes — integrated water resource management (IWRM) and transformation of the Indus basin with climate resilient agriculture — at a total cost of Rs650 million.

An officer of the water management wing said climate resilient agriculture was a donor funded scheme, based on an information technology programme for farmers where they would be trained for smart agriculture. The scheme will be run in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and would help farmers adapt to seasonal variations triggered by climate change.

Furthermore, the Sindh government has also approached the Green Climate Fund to make the agriculture sector climate resilient to overcome vulnerabilities.

Rs150m have been allocated for this scheme as Sindh's share of its total cost. The project will be executed in Mirpurkhas, Badin and Umerkot districts on a trial basis. Growers are going to be connected with an IT-based system to aid in the improvement of their agricultural practices.

As a matter of policy, water conservation has been stressed by the government. This is why 70pc of the Rs500m allocated to IWRM have been earmarked for putting in additional linings in around 500-600 watercourses in Sindh.

Furthermore, pipelines will be laid in non-command areas where farmers normally lift groundwater for cultivation purposes. Another component of IWRM is the construction of storage tanks on a first-come-first-serve basis for famers who would bear 20pc of the cost. The remaining 80pc will be borne by the government.

The agriculture extension department of Sindh aims to promote ultra-high density organic plantation of mangos, lemons and guavas in production catchment areas of Hyderabad, NaushahroFeroze, Benazirabad, Sanghar, TandoAllahyar, Larkana and Mirpurkhas for which Rs12.5m have been allocated in the budget. This measure will increase per acre productivity of organic farming.

The way agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, the research wing is the backbone of the farming sector. The research wing has proposed three new schemes at a cost of Rs410m, including a Rs100m scheme for bio-saline agriculture research and development and a Rs150m scheme for the establishment of a dry land farming research institute at Mithi.

Though farm mechanisation is an avowed priority, the government has discontinued the subsidised tractor scheme this year. Tractors were not provided last year as well because of the probe by the federal anti-graft body although Rs500m were earmarked for it.

“Land development is a must for achieving growth in the farm sector as it contributes heavily to agriculture’s GDP. A developed piece of land is quite expensive when compared with undeveloped land. Developed land ensures uniformity in distribution of water which increases per acre productivity”, commented an agriculture engineering officer, Mohammad Farrukh. He informed that the engineering department would complete its five unfinished schemes of FY2018-19.

In the last fiscal year most schemes remained incomplete, which the Sindh government attributes to withheld or belated transfers of funds by the federal government. Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has gone hoarse ranting against it. He recently harshly criticised the federal government for releasing Rs140bn less than promised.

While it is true that the federal government has not come up to the Sindh government’s expectations as far as fund transfers are concerned, the bottlenecks caused by delays from the provincial government also hinder growth of the farm sector.

A look at the Sindh finance department’s 2018-19 figures shows that it had released Rs1.742bn. Of these releases, Rs1.430bn had been utilised till the last week of June, indicating that only 82pc was spent against the amount released. Officials believe that inadequate quarterly releases of funds remain a stumbling block for machinery procurement.

Agriculture engineering officials said releases under the annual development programme 2018-19 remained slow with allocations made in the budget not actualised. While orders were placed for import of machinery with due process, full payments were not released thus deliveries could not be made.

“25pc of the amount was released for machinery procurement with the direction that this has to be utilised before seeking remaining amount,” said an officer. However, vendors insist on full payment before delivery so piecemeal releases don’t serve their purpose.

Another anomaly identified while analysing 2018-19 figures was the pace of release of funds. Until June 14, the agriculture department had spent around 52pc of the funds but pace of releases accelerated in the last few weeks with expenditures shooting up to 82pc in the second half of June.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1492819

USING HERMETIC BAGS CAN LIMIT GRAIN LOSSES

Irfan A fzal July 08, 2019

About 80 per cent of Pakistani farmers grow wheat every year. A majority of them have landholdings of up to five hectares. The crop covers about 40pc of the total cultivated area in the country.

Unfortunately, torrential rains hurt the crop at harvest time. According to press reports, 150,000 tonnes of the crop were lost owing to the recent hailstorms across Punjab. It will reduce the agricultural GDP. Furthermore, the meteorological department has forecast another spell of torrential rains in coming days.

Farmers are also going to face postharvest grain storage problems throughout the country because of traditional methods used for seed storage.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) says 16 million tonnes of wheat need proper storage facilities. Assuming an overall 15pc loss in cereals, it is estimated that Pakistan is annually losing as much as 5.6m tonnes of cereals worth $1.7 billion and 2.1m hectares of cultivated land resources.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, our economy loses Rs6-7bn ($76-90m) every year because of inadequate wheat storage facilities. Improper storage along with erratic rainfall and the upcoming monsoon cause additional losses in grains.

Media reports indicate that wheat stocks in the warehouses of the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) and provincial food departments were partly damaged by heavy rains last year. This occurs at the cost of the farmers' poor-quality carryover seed and expensive production as 65-75pc of produced wheat is stored at farms. Farmers should avoid the storage of moist bulk seeds and never expose grain to humid air.

High humidity is the main reason for the loss of quality in wheat during production and storage stages. Another upset was the decline in the crop's yield because of the yellow rust attack. Late sowing owning to the prolonged humid weather did not help either.

The quality of produce was compromised because of high seed moisture contents at harvest time. Wheat is harvested at 10pc seed moisture contents every year and remains safe from insects and fungus if stored properly. But the existing weather conditions, such as a high relative humidity (RH), will raise seed moisture contents, making the produce more vulnerable to insect and fungal infestation during storage.

Wheat requires about 12pc moisture content and 65pc RH for safe storage. The seed moisture content of greater than 14pc will promote mold attack that results in aflatoxin contamination of stored products. The presence of aflatoxin in grain poses a major risk for humans, especially children, as it can have immunosuppressive, mutagenic and carcinogenic effects.

This necessitates appropriate safe storage conditions to reduce the burden on the economy by avoiding wheat imports.

Reducing the moisture content and temperature during storage increases the longevity of seeds. Cold storage seems impractical because of expensive and inconsistent electricity supplies. The most viable approach can be the dry-chain technology, which means the drying of seeds and grains at appropriate moisture contents through either natural or artificial means after the harvest, followed by hermetic packaging to keep the product dry until its use in the value chain.

This relatively simple procedure largely prevents or mitigates post-harvest losses in dry commodities. In dry areas and seasons, seeds of staple crops can be dried in the field and packaged in hermetic bags to prevent moisture absorption during high humidity periods, particularly in the monsoon season.

Different international companies market hermetic bags. These bags are made from multilayer, recyclable polyethylene plastic with a proprietary barrier layer and sufficiently low permeability to prevent the exchange of air and the absorption of moisture. The use of modern hermetic storage technologies is limited in Pakistan. These storage methods preserve grain in a flexible system and create unfavourable conditions for pests and fungus development.

The University of Agriculture in Faisalabad has developed cost-effective hermetic Anaaji bags and drums that are useful for the storage of cereals, oilseeds and pulses and do not affect seed and grain qualities.

An Anaaji drum is a hermetically sealed plastic drum having a capacity of 160 litres. It can prevent both moisture and oxygen and thus reduces storage losses. A hygrometer is attached with it to monitor moisture contents of seeds indirectly by measuring equilibrium RH inside the drum.

An Anaaji bag is an improved multilayer hermetic grain storage technology, which requires no fumigation or chemical application. It preserves the quality and germination capacity of stored seeds. A humidicator strip is kept inside the bag to monitor the RH of the product. It can store grains and pulses for over a year without any gain or loss in moisture, insect pest infestation and fungal growth.

This pesticide-free organic storage monitors seed moisture contents and does not require any equipment or energy input. It preserves the quality and germination capacity of stored grains, oilseeds and pulses.

Last year, hermetic bags and drums were distributed among farmers in Sindh and southern Punjab. By adopting such technologies, formal and informal seed sectors can contribute to the country's agriculture sector and ensure more quality seeds for the next growing season.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1492818

RICE EXPORTS STAGNANT AS TRADERS UNABLE TO MEET SPS CONDITIONS

By DR MUHAMMAD KHURSHID Published: July 8, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Agriculture serves as the backbone of Pakistan's economy as it contributes 19.5% of gross domestic product (GDP), provides employment to 42.3% of the labour force and provide raw material for several value-added industrial goods.

Therefore, agriculture plays a major role in strengthening the national economy, ensuring food security and poverty reduction. Increase in population and rapid urbanisation have further pushed up the demand for high-value perishable and packed products such as fruits, vegetables, poultry, fish, dairy, meat and other processed food items.

Major crops like wheat, rice, sugarcane, maize and cotton account for 23.85% of value addition in the overall agriculture and 4.66% of GDP. Other crops (also called minor crops) account for 11.03% of value addition and 2.15% of GDP.

Livestock contributes 58.33% to agricultural value addition and 11.39% to GDP. Forestry contributes 2.33% to agricultural value addition and 0.46% to GDP. Fishing contributes 2.12% to agricultural value addition and 0.41% to GDP. Pakistan is self-sufficient in primary food security needs but still it imports agricultural commodities as well as processed foodstuff. Oilseeds, mostly soybean, are at the top of the import list, which are primarily imported for oil extraction but the meal is also used for poultry feed.

Previously, Pakistan tried to produce its own oilseeds such as mustard, canola, sunflower and even soybean but lack of interest and support from the quarters concerned, and an unfavourable market mechanism never attracted growers' interest.

Consequently, Pakistan is spending not only a huge amount of foreign exchange but local production is also discouraged.

In addition to oil extraction, Pakistan is also increasing reliance on imported oilseed meal for poultry and livestock, thereby discouraging the use of locally produced oilseeds like cottonseed, mustard and canola seeds as a cheap alternative.

Major imports of other foodstuff can easily be curtailed through coordinated efforts by national and provincial government agencies and devising smart policies besides involving the business community.

The promotion of domestic agriculture will require smart policies which favour farmers, traders and satisfy the needs of citizens by providing essential food items at affordable prices. This is a major challenge now as agriculture has been devolved to provinces, therefore, the federal government and all the four provinces as well as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) must be on the same page.

Provinces are empowered to make their own policies for the promotion of agriculture as per their socio-economic and ecological conditions. Exports, imports and national food security research are handled by the federal government, making it very difficult for the central and provincial governments to frame harmonised policies. Post-devolution institutional re-organisation has mostly left behind a very weak institutional structure at the federal level whereas at the provincial level the capacity is low which is insufficient to cater for increased professional and technical demand.

The Department of Plant Protection (DPP), an attached department of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, is responsible for managing the export and import of all agricultural commodities. This is the most important organisation for monitoring and controlling the import and export by applying international Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) regulations, which have already been ratified by Pakistan under the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).

Rice is a major export commodity of Pakistan, besides cotton, citrus, mango, dates, vegetables, potato and other raw and processed foodstuff. Rice export has been stagnant not because Pakistan's paddy production has decreased but because the country has failed to gear up and increase its technical capacity in line with the SPS requirements.

Rice export could be enhanced immediately but the DPP is facing a host of institutional capacity issues, which can be managed through aggressive capacity development.

The DPP is working with the lowest professional strength and is struggling to hire permanent quarantine professionals through a lengthy recruitment process. Similarly, other issues like legal reforms, state-of-the-art laboratory tools and techniques, and information and communication technologies (ICT) including online registration for import and export are badly affecting the performance of this important organisation responsible for enhancing Pakistan's exports.

Rice is a major export commodity not only in terms of quantity but also quality. Data of the past five years shows total exports of 16.34 million tons and in the just ended fiscal year 2018-19 exports were the highest at 4.89 million tons in 11 months, followed by 2015-16 when exports reached 4.54 million tons.

Pakistan's rice export potential is much higher provided adequate facilities are given and SPS conditions are met.

Traditionally, Pakistan's rice export was meant for the Middle East and Africa, where most of the countries still have very low SPS requirements and thus most exports do not face any SPS-related problems. Therefore, Pakistan takes it for granted in rice export to other markets in Europe, America, Russia, China, Canada, Australia and Japan and faced hardships in meeting their SPS conditions.

Consequently, Pakistan lost the Mexico market due to infestation of the crop by Khapra beetle, also called cabinet beetle. The Rice Export Association of Pakistan (REAP) has identified four major issues in terms of SPS requirements.

First, farmers reuse the wheat gunny bags for transporting and storing rice, which are mostly infested with beetle and thus rice quality is also affected. Second, farmers tend to mix unripe or inferior quality rice with the superior quality paddy for maximising profit. Third, there is no effort on the part of provincial agriculture departments to educate and encourage farmers for the production and processing of quality rice for export. Fourth, there is a lack of rice processing units, technological support and awareness among farmers and exporters of promoting quality rice for export.

All these issues can be tackled through well-coordinated efforts by the stakeholders including national and provincial agricultural departments. There appear to be no serious effort so far by the stakeholders for improving the post-harvest processing and value addition to ensure export of quality rice as per SPS requirements.

Relevant national and provincial agricultural departments, farmer associations and REAP must join hands for devising a strategy aimed at bridging the existing gaps that hamper the export of quality rice to the world. This will involve capacity-building of farmers, traders and the DPP staff, besides awareness-raising, enhanced coordination and support from relevant national and provincial departments.

This will greatly help in not only increasing rice export from Pakistan but will also help enforce relevant SPS-related provisions of the IPPC and ensure Pakistan comply with the international convention.

Like in the case of rice, similar measures may also be taken for other agricultural commodities to increase Pakistan's exports. Pakistan has the potential to produce quality products for export as per SPS requirements, which can improve the trade parity in favour of Pakistan and bring more foreign exchange.

The writer is a PhD in natural resources management and is a civil servant

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2008371/2-rice-exports-stagnant-traders-unable-meet-sps-conditions/

PAKISTAN, US FOR ENHANCED AGRI COOPERATION

Amin Ahmed Updated July 09, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Ahead of Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to the United States of America, the two sides on Monday discussed measures for enhancing cooperation in the agriculture sector.

In a meeting, Minister for National Food Security and Research, Muhammad Mehboob Sultan and US Ambassador Paul Jones agreed that the forthcoming visit would be very important to highlight the preferred areas of cooperation especially in the field of agriculture.

Mr Sultan highlighted that the scope of Pakistani mangoes to the US market could be enhanced since the product meets all the international standards and is exported to almost 48 countries after vapour treatment.

This will give a great boost to mango exports and US could also work in collaboration for value-addition of mangoes in Pakistan which will be mutually beneficial. Mr Sultan further said that dates from Pakistan may also be granted market access in US. In view of the visit of the prime minister, dates and other products may also be granted market access on reciprocity.

US ambassador was of the view that Pakistan could import meat from the United States to which the federal minister explained that it could be explored after mutual consultation.

The agriculture minister said the two countries must explore venues for mutual cooperation especially when the prime minister’s agriculture emergency programme has already been launched.

He said the present government is making every effort to strengthen the agriculture sector, especially after the devolution. The government has identified few areas to be developed on priority and important of those areas are agriculture mechanisation, to augment the yield of cotton, development of oil seed and decrease the import bill.

He said the government as well as the agriculture ministry is open for cooperation from all provinces and friendly countries for mutually beneficial work in the agriculture sector.

Ambassador Jones said the United States is well aware that Pakistan is an important agricultural country, and exchange of technologies in the field of agriculture including cooperation in value-addition, and public-private partnership would be welcomed by both the sides.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1492976/pakistan-us-for-enhanced-agri-cooperation

SINDH GOVERNMENT SLAMMED FOR SLASHING AGRI FUNDS IN FY20

RECORDER REPORT JUL 9TH, 2019 KARACHI

Economy of Sindh is going to brave a big jolt as crucial agriculture sector of the province is also nose-diving as it is not on the priority of the rulers, said Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor , demanding the government to take immediate remedial measures to stop speedy downslide of the economic lifeline of the province.

Expressing serious concern over reports that the Sindh government has cut down its development funds for agriculture sector by almost 25 percent for 2019-20 fiscal year, he said. It is very strange that the rulers of Sindh are slashing the agriculture budget at the time when this agro-based province actually needs a huge boost in uplift funds. He regretted that the Government of Sindh even did not release full budgetary funds of agriculture sector last year due to sheer negligence and lethargy, making many ongoing schemes unfinished. He said that as per reports, this year, the Sindh government has tagged Rs 3.75 billion for development schemes compared to Rs 5 billion last year.

21 ongoing schemes have been allocated Rs 1.785bn in 2019-20, 13 new schemes for agriculture research, extension, planning and monitoring, mechanisation, water management and training and research are reflected in the budget with an allocation of Rs 1.965bn.

He said the main crop-growing province of Pakistan, Sindh, surely needs much more funds for its crucial agriculture sector.

Shakoor said the whole world is opting for water-saving techniques like drip irrigation, saline crops, solar tube-wells, laser-based land leveling and small check-dams to conserve water, but the government of Sindh is not giving a serious focus to these important sectors.

He said huge arid and semi-arid regions in Sindh could be easily made green if the government gives them a serious attention, adequate funding and subsidies in purchased of water-saving agricultural machinery.

There is a huge potential of agriculture, farming and fisheries on sweet-water lakes of Sindh, but successive governments in Sindh have allowed these sweet-water lakes to die by not checking their contamination.

He said, “Today the people of Sindh are facing a worse poverty, hunger, diseases and stunt growth of children, despite being the residents of a province situated over the River Indus. This is only because the rulers of Sindh are not ready to develop the agricultural-based economy of this province and bring its people out of poverty, hunger and deprivation.

He said if the government of Sindh gives its agriculture portfolio to some able and honest minister who is ready to make serious efforts to revolutionize this sector, it could easily create hundreds of thousands of new jobs and give a much needed push to the sagging economy of the province.

He said without investment in agriculture education, training and research this sector could not be given the needed boost. For this purpose, the government should open agriculture and livestock colleges in every district of the province, he suggested.

He said the disbanded institution of Sindh Arid Zone Development Authority (SAZDA) should be revived on top priority basis to wipe out poverty and hunger from the arid areas of the province.

He said his party, Pasban Democratic Party, would launch a drive for the rights of the people living in rural areas of Sindh, as Wadera culture is not ready to see development and uplift in these areas.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190709495478/

FERTILISER TO COST MORE, SAYS RAZAK

Kalbe Ali July 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Commerce, Industries and Production Adviser Abdul RazakDawood on Tuesday hinted that the prices of fertiliser could rise by Rs100 per bag due to increase in the gas rates.

Addressing a press conference, the adviser said the fertiliser sector had demanded an increase of Rs200 per bag but this was not acceptable to the government.

“We had a meeting with the fertiliser manufacturers before the budget and it was decided that they will not unilaterally increase the prices, since the gas prices have been increased in the budget while the cabinet on Tuesday decreased the Gas Infrastructure Development Charges (GIDC)," Dawood said, adding we will work over the prices on Wednesday and the meeting with fertiliser industry is scheduled on Thursday."

He said that the gas rates for feedstock and for the fuel have been increased and the industry has demanded an increase of Rs200 per bag, "but the final decision will be made in the meeting with them."

The adviser said that the government was compelled to maintain the fertiliser prices at reasonable rates as higher rates could lead to a negative impact on the agriculture sector.

At the same time he turned down the idea of giving subsidy to the fertiliser sector, as it was part of the deal with IMF.

"We cannot take fertiliser as a stand-alone case and if subsidy was given to one sector others will demand the same," he added.

The adviser said that there were adequate stocks in the country and he informed that during the past six months 3.2 million tonnesfertiliser was produced in the country and the demand was 2.9m tonnes.

"Besides the government is set to import 100,000 tonne urea due to some pervious decision," MrDawood added, "There is no shortage of stock in the market chain."

Responding to a query over resentments against harsh measures by the government, he added, that the government was taking the business community into confidence.

"The prime minister is going to Karachi tomorrow (Wednesday) and hold meeting with them, but the issue is that nobody in Pakistan including the manufactures, traders, retailers anybody want to pay taxes," the advisor said.

He added that the condition has deteriorated very much, adding, "We all agree that there is need to collect taxes from all relevant quarters as the tax to GDP ratio is too low in the country, however we may differ over the speed of reforms we are initiating."

https://www.dawn.com/news/1493202/fertiliser-to-cost-more-says-razak

PAKISTAN FINALLY GETS ACCESS TO QATAR'S RICE MARKET

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated July 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will export 100,000 bags of rice to Qatar as part of the government initiative to enhance overall rice exports from the country.

With the continuous efforts of the government, Qatar has now opened its market for Pakistani rice. Previously, Pakistan rice was not being procured by the state procurement agency of Qatar.

An official statement issued here said that Central Tendering Committee (CTC), Qatar advertised a tender for the procurement of 100,000 bags from Pakistan, which provides an enormous opportunity for the export of Pakistani rice to Qatar.

Previously, the private sector in Qatar continued to import rice from Pakistan, the CTC, government of Qatar, which procures for state-supplied subsidized rice for Qatari citizens made its tender Indian-origin specific thereby effectively banning the import of any other origin rice including Pakistani rice into Qatar in the year 2011-12.

The CTC issues tenders after every two months for supply of more than 5,000 tonnes of high-quality rice to the government of Qatar and the Pakistani origin rice has been excluded from these tenders. Therefore, Pakistani exporters/suppliers have been deprived of supplying about 30000 to 40000 MT good quality rice to Qatar per annum.

This initiative will open a new avenue for market access of Pakistani products which will significantly contribute in enhancing the country's overall exports. Removal of restriction by Qatar on Pakistani rice export is a step in this direction that will reclaim Pakistan's share in the global rice market.

Rice is the largest agro-export commodity in the export basket of the country with a total export of over $2 billion. The government has the vision to take rice exports to $5bn in next 5 years.

The Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce, Abdul Razzaq Dawood has hailed it as an important milestone for the export of agro products. He mentioned that rice exports are on an upward trajectory in China and Indonesia due to additional market access secured by the current government.

Rice Exports Association of Pakistan (REAP) has appreciated government efforts in successfully helping REAP open up the Premium Basmati Market in Qatar, for supply of Pakistani Rice to Qatar Market.

It is encouraging with Basmati Rice exports which have seen an upward trend fetching $637.99m FY19 compared to $581.85m for the same period last year, the upward trend in Basmati exports have complimented in achieving the $2.1bn mark.

The government has also secured duty free market access on export of rice into Indonesia while getting unprecedented preference over (ASEAN); and also secured additional market access into the Chinese Market.

Moreover, during the recent visit of Iranian Commerce Minister to Pakistan, Iran has offered a market access to Pakistan by resolving to import 500,000 tonnes of rice from Pakistan which provides an opportunity for rice exporters. The Iranian delegation also extended its full support to work on removal of potential bottlenecks to increase trade and jointly develop a way forward. It is pertinent to mention that China has also opened its market for Pakistani rice.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1493200

HUNDREDS OF GROWERS SUFFER AS OFFICIALS WRANGLE OVER SIDA DIRECTOR'S REMOVAL ISSUE

Mohammad Hussain Khan July 10, 2019

HYDERABAD: The superintending eng-i-neer (SE) of the Sindh irrigation department — who is also director of the Left Bank Canals Area Water Board (AWB) — has become a bone of contention between the board and hundreds of tail-end growers of water scarcity-hit Badin district that has been bearing the brunt of water shortage for a few months.

The row continued as Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (Sida) Managing Director Wali Mohammad Naich in a July 5 communication approached the Sindh irrigation secretary while referring to secretary's June 28 letter over director's transfer. The irrigation secretary had informed the Left Bank Canals AWB that the department was going to withdraw the posting order of the director, Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur.

The AWB in its 105th board meeting on July 4 did not approve such withdrawal of the posting order.

It said that the posting of some other officer would aggravate crisis and cause embarrassment for the government, adding that he (Talpur) had worked day and night to control the situation despite extreme negative political pressure.

The Sida MD has questioned the July 4 meeting and described it as invalid on some grounds. His letter said that as per provisions of the Sindh Water Management Ordinance (SWMO) 2002, attendance of 40 per cent board members, including two farmers, was required to meet the quorum, but 38pc members were present out of total 13. "Participation of Director [Mir Ghulam Ali] himself may not be considered as he himself is beneficiary", it said and added "decisions of the 105th meeting were not valid and legitimate".

The MD contended that 105th AWB meeting was scheduled for July 8 as per AWB's July 3 letter. But it was held on July 4 without intimating the board members about the change of schedule. "The AWB is not authorised to continue services of the SE as AWB director in case the irrigation department has withdrawn services of that officer," it said.

The AWB is a corporate body which was formed in line with SWMO 2002 to promote participatory form of the irrigation system in Sindh through Sida.

Three AWBs exist for running their canals' systems of three barrages. The irrigation department runs its canals under its domain at these barrages.

A director of the AWB has to be appointed/hired from market through competitive process and Talpur being irrigation employee was posted by the department. He has been at the centre of controversy of water shortage in Badin for a long time. Protesting farmers believe that water flows' availability to tail-end reaches was directly linked with his transfer.

Growers in left bank Badin district have been resenting water shortage in the areas fed by two canals – Phulelli and AkramWah. Both canals emanate from Kotri Barrage's left side and have 1.518m acres of command area cumulatively. Farmers have been on the warpath for a few months, questioning change in sill levels of Phulelli Canal under recent development works executed under donor-funded Water Sector Improvement Project (WSIP).

Talpur, meanwhile, remained unmoved despite demands of his transfer and recent irrigation department's letter for withdrawal of his posting order. He hails from a political family and has been serving in the AWB for around two-and-a-half years. "I am holding a three-year tenure posting and around one year or so is yet to go," he confidently said while talking to Dawn over phone. "[Water] shortage is there in the system and the AWB didn't approve posting of a new officer as he won't be able to handle it," he said. He stated that the AWB was an independent body to take any decision. "If adequate flows are available, everything will be resolved," he said.

But the Save Badin Committee leaders strongly disagree. "As long as the director is there, we won't get water even if Kotri Barrage gets one million cusecs of water," remarked one of the committee leaders, Khuda Dino Shah. He alleged that water of Badin was being sold or diverted purposely by the AWB director.

Farmers grow paddy crop in the command area of non-perennial Phulelli Canal which has 971,923 acres of command area with 14,350 cusecs designed discharge capacity. Growers who were able to prepare paddy nurseries initially were deprived of water to transplant crops; thus they ended up bearing losses. AkramWah is a perennial canal and despite a ban, paddy was cultivated by growers, which was illegal under law.

"Why rotation is being introduced when the required gauges are there at two canals is anybody's guess. Rotation must end if a canal gets 55pc water flows of its designed capacity. AkramWah and Phuleli are getting over 60pc flows," Khalil Bhurgri, another committee leader, added.

He said Phulelli Canal was having flows of 10,000 cusecs against its designed capacity of 14,000 cusecs, but complaints of water shortage were unending. "The reason is that our water share is diverted to somewhere else and even to brick kilns. We have evidence of it," said Bhurgri.

The committee leaders have given an eight-day ultimatum to the government for transfer of the AWB director and ending the rotation programme.

Farmers having land at Phulelli Canal mainly grow paddy crop, but this year such cultivation was badly affected because of this internal mismanagement of water at Kotri Barrage. In early summer water flows remained satisfactory, according to one barrage official.

"Who we should turn to in such case?" asked a retired bureaucrat and a native of Badin, Mir Mohammad Parhiar, while discussing water crisis in Badin. He stated that water flows meant for Kotri Barrage were diverted to other canals in initial summer season quite unjustifiably under government's decision.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1493063

GST EXEMPTION ON ABOVE 20KG FLOUR BAG WITHDRAWN

By Rizwan Asif Published: July 9, 2019

LAHORE: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has withdrawn General Sales Tax (GST) exemption on flour bags weighing more than 20 kilograms as a result of which a GST of 17 percent will now be imposed on the 80kg flour bag sold to tandoors reflecting an increase of Rs600 per bag.

The tandoor owners are likely to pass on the tax burden to the consumers by increasing the price of roti and naan.

As per FBR notification, GST exemption on fine flour and maida has also been withdrawn after which they have been classified in the list of products under schedule 17. Consequently, the price of maida and fine flour is also expected to rise by 10 per cent.

Flour bags weighing up to 20 kilograms will remain exempted from GST. However, the citizens of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will see a remarkable increase after imposition of 17 percent GST in flour prices, since they are generally supplied flour in 40kg sacks.

Taking notice of the probable hike in flour prices, Central Chairman of Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) Naeem Butt has called up an emergency meeting of mill owners from all four provinces in Lahore.

According to president of Lahore Tax Bar Association Khurram Butt, FBR has already imposed the 17 percent GST on flour bags and sacks weighing above 20kg.

“The officials of FBR, particularly member sales tax, should comprehensively review the measure and brief the industry stakeholders in this regard,” he said.

Until the end of last fiscal year, flour, maida and fine atta have always remained under the list of products exempted from GST under schedule 6 of Sales Tax Act.

However, the current government in its fiscal budget 2019-20 has shifted maida and fine flour from schedule 6 to schedule 17 of the Sales Tax Act after which a 10 per cent GST will be imposed on them.

In Pakistan, especially in Punjab, tandoors are supplied with 79kg flour bags. With the 17 per cent GST, the price of these bags, currently at Rs3,150 may see a hike in excess of Rs600.

In KPK, people consume flour in high amounts which is why flour bags supplied for household consumption come in 40kg packing. After GST imposition, the price of these bags is expected to rise in excess of Rs300.

The price of 84kg sack of maida and fine flour currently stands at Rs3,900 and after the imposition of 10 per cent GST on these products, their prices may see a surge of Rs400.

Talking to The Express Tribune, PFMA Central Chairman Naeem Butt maintained that the governments in the past had kept flour, maida and fine atta under the list of GST-exempted products in order to ensure relief for the common man, but the current government’s measure to impose GST on flour bags weighing above 20kg amounts to economic exploitation as majority of the people who buy roti from tandoors comprise daily wagers and labourers.

“If GST is imposed on commercially supplied flour, the tandoor owners will also be forced to pass on the price increase to their consumers,” he said, adding that “KPK still largely has a joint family system where flour is procured in large bags. The common man is also likely to come under the tyrannical radar of the general sales tax. Keeping the alarming bells in view, we have called mill owners from all four provinces to show up at an emergency meeting in Lahore to discuss the strategy for future”.

He said that the tax experts have confirmed the association that the government has imposed GST on flour bags weighing above 20kg.

Meanwhile, Lahore Tax Bar Association president Khurram Butt has also confirmed the development and said that the budget for the new fiscal year clarifies that tax exemption on maida and fine flour has been withdrawn after which 10 per cent tax will be levied on these products, while exemption on flour bags up to 20kg remains intact.

“However, flour bags in excess of 20kg weight will see imposition of 17 percent GST. The officials of FBR must present their clarification in this regard to avoid market instability,” he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2009755/1-gst-exemption-20kg-flour-bag-withdrawn/

FERTILISER PRICES TO RISE BY RS100 PER BAG AFTER HIKE IN GAS TARIFF

By Our Correspondent Published: July 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government has hinted at increasing fertiliser prices by Rs100 per bag following a hike in gas prices.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production Abdul RazakDawood said the production cost of fertiliser had gone up due to a recent hike in gas prices. However, he said, final decision would be taken on Thursday, following a meeting with representatives of the fertiliser industry.

The industry had demanded an increase of Rs200 per bag in fertiliser prices due to the hike in gas prices, the adviser said, adding that the industry had not yet increased the prices.

He claimed that there was a smooth supply of fertiliser in line with demand and the government was making efforts to prevent undue hike in fertiliser prices. The government would safeguard the interest of farmers, however, subsidy could not be given following a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as it would affect the revenue collection, he added.

Regarding the country's trade, Dawood said there had been no change in the volume of exports and imports during 2018-19. Exports stood at $23 billion against the target of $24 billion.

There had been no increase in exports in dollars terms, he said. However, a decline of $6 billion was witnessed in the trade deficit, he said, adding that the deficit stood at $31 billion in 2018-19.

In a statement, the Ministry of Commerce said Qatar had lifted the ban on rice export from Pakistan while Iran would also import 500,000 tons of paddy. It would lead to an increase in exports from Pakistan. "Pakistani is set to export rice to Qatar as the latter has advertised a tender to import 100,000 bags of the commodity," it said.

The Ministry of Commerce said the current government had been working to boost exports of traditional and non-traditional products. Rice is the largest agro- commodity in the export basket of the country with exports of over $2 billion.

The government wants to take rice exports to $5 billion in the next five years. To achieve this target, the Ministry of Commerce said it was recapturing traditional markets as well as entering new markets. With continuous effort of the government of Pakistan, Qatar has now opened its market for Pakistani rice, the statement added. Previously, Pakistan's rice was not being purchased by the state procurement agency of Qatar.

Dawood said rice exports to China and Indonesia were going up due to the additional market access secured by the government. Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) said it was encouraging that basmati rice exports had been on an upward trend, fetching $637.99 million in FY19 compared to $581.85 million in the previous year.

Previously, the private sector in Qatar continued to import rice from Pakistan, however, the Central Tendering Committee (CTC), which procures for state-supplied subsidised rice for Qatari citizens, made its tender Indian-origin specific, thereby effectively banning the import of any other origin rice including Pakistani rice into Qatar in 2011-12.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2009796/fertiliser-prices-rise-rs100-per-bag-hike-gas-tariff/

RISING FOOD PRICES

By Editorial Published: July 10, 2019

Food price increases have always been a hot topic for discussion in our country, but perhaps never as much as now. The cost of food in Pakistan increased 7.52% in June 2019 over the same month in the previous year whereas it had averaged 4.67% from 2011 to 2019. The downward slide of the rupee against the dollar is being popularly blamed for the food price hikes. However, contrary to the popular belief, the rupee's depreciation is only a minor factor in the food price increases. There are many other factors at play here that must be addressed if we are to permanently resolve the problem in our country.

The basic, all-important question is: Why do we pay exorbitant amounts of money for food in a country that produces all essential foodstuffs? Firstly, in our present market mechanism, only a small percentage (usually 15-20%) of what we pay the grocer for our food purchases goes to the farmer or producer. The rest is pocketed by middlemen who pay farmers in advance for the crops they grow. These middlemen, then, set the high prices we pay at the market in a wholly undocumented practice. The need, therefore, is to eliminate middlemen and ensure fair competition in a properly documented economy with reasonable profit margins.

Secondly, it is essential to increase our farmers' per hectare crop yield to adequately bring down prices. Currently, Pakistan lags behind other South Asian countries in that respect. According to experts, problems of water shortage, the absence of high yield varieties of seeds and lack of research and development must be addressed if we are to increase our agricultural output and bring down prices. Thirdly, the government must facilitate farmers by extending loans to them, introducing modern technology, improving infrastructure and the land ownership system, providing them marketing and storage facilities, and restricting food imports rendered expensive by the rupee's depreciation.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2009694/6-rising-food-prices/

MILLERS REJECT 17PC SALES TAX ON FLOUR

Bureau Report July 11, 2019

PESHAWAR: All Pakistan Flour Mills Association (APFMA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter, has rejected the imposition of 17 per cent sales tax on flour and demanded of the government to withdraw the decision as it will directly affect the poor people.

According to a statement, the apprehension was shown during the executive body meeting of APFMA, KP chapter, held with the association chairman Mohammad Tariq in the chair here on Wednesday. APFMA central chairman Mohammad Naeem Butt and owners of all flour mills were present on the occasion.

Through a unanimously adopted resolution the meeting rejected the sales tax and feared that the increasing number of additional taxes would make the lives of people miserable due to the price hike.

The millers decided to convene another such meeting on Friday (tomorrow) to decide their future course of action after the government's decision to impose the levy on flour. The new taxes, the participants said, would add to the problems of both the millers and consumers.

Mr Butt voiced his concern over the imposition of 17 per cent sales tax on flour, saying it would lead to unprecedented increase in the price of flour and bread and the people would be unable to afford their routine expenditures.

He said that the increasing price hike had already disturbed the poverty-stricken masses and the government's decision would multiply their miseries. He said that the government's policies had failed to provide any relief to the masses.

Mr Butt said that a meeting of APFMA would be held in Lahore on Friday in which the millers from across the country would discuss the prevailing situation and take a firm stand against the new taxes.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1493322/millers-reject-17pc-sales-tax-on-flour

ANATOMY OF PUNJAB'S SUGARCANE BELT

BR Research July 11, 2019

A mapping exercise identifying largest kharif crop by region published in this space noted that the cane acres in Punjab overlap with southern Jech and Rechna doab regions, along the confluence of Chenab, Jhelum and Ravi rivers. The so-called sugarcane belt begins in district Sargodha in the north and goes on to capture all four districts of Faisalabad division in the central region.

While the crop has become increasingly popular in southern Punjab in recent years, these five contiguous districts represent a microcosm of sugarcane value chain, and all that is wrong with it. Despite contributing forty percent to provincial acreage, it barely adds up to one-third of total output, indicating below-average yield. In fact, at 58 tons per hectares, it is just two-thirds of target yield achieved in district Rajanpur in the south.

Still, more acreage means crushing units have mushroomed to ensure proximity to farmgate. Of the 20 mills in the region, five were established in 1960s, with rest put up between 1988 and 2011 following deregulation of the sector. Earlier, the law stipulated that no new mill could be established within 70-miles of an existing unit.

Thus, for a crop with limited value-add potential, the market is highly fragmented. Several medium-scale units compete for finite supply of raw material, often shutting down operations for entire season when asking price is too high. Despite highest-ever output in the region (and country's) history achieved in MY17, three units decided against beginning crushing cycle due to high raw material prices.

Despite ostensible competition, firms in the region have made little investment in introduction of high-yielding varieties or agronomy techniques such as precision application of water and fertilizer. This is in sharp contrast to southern region in the province where additional crushing capacity has resulted in improved crop yield, as firms incentivize growers to plant latest varieties to maintain stable supply.

As a result, region's sucrose yield – which measures conversion factor of sugarcane into white sugar – is not only below provincial average but is at least 2 percentage points below target rate recorded by few mills in Sindh.

Ownership of the twenty units operating in the region is marred in opacity, but it can be safely concluded that they belong to no more than 13 unique sponsor families, most of which own additional units beyond the region as well. Nine are in the ownership of politically connected families, including ones owned by families of incumbent federal minister for planning; of former three-time prime minister; and of a deceased ISI chief.

Only five firms are listed, four of which took to the trading board at the time of incorporation in 60s. Fifth belongs to a politically-connected family and has not announced its financials even after nine-months into close of marketing year.

What explains the lack of interest in R&D? It appears that most of these units were established to channel production of white sugar into manufacture of other value-added goods. For example, at least four out of twenty units are owned by separate and independent operators of Pepsi Cola bottling franchise for Lahore, Faisalabad, and Gujranwala regions, respectively.

Three others are owned by manufacturers of fruit juices and syrups. Owner of Punjab's largest chain of confectionary, bakery &mithai items also owns one of these units. In addition, at least seven out of 18 ethanol manufacturing units in the country also belong to the thirteen unique sponsors.

The region is also home to three units with highest government subsidy dependence as percentage of total sales during last marketing year. Although, 55 firms from all over the country took advantage of government subsidy on export, the three units in question recorded export volume at 75 percent (or higher) of total annual production. The pattern has continued into the ongoing year, as firms from the region have been beneficiaries of up to fifty percent of total subsidy on exports.

The province may boast of a sugarcane belt, but it acts more like a noose. Little to no innovation has been witnessed in seed varieties, whereas growers from the region are also most vocal about delayed payments by mills.

Add to this the opacity surrounding allied-business operations and inter-segment/inter-group transfer pricing by private limited entities, allowing them to perpetually show sugar milling as a loss-making business even as they mint higher profits down the value chain.

In sharp contrast, milling units with large capacities installed in Rahim Yar Khan and adjoining districts during last decade or so have invested in modern farming practices such as laser-levelling of land and consolidation of acreage through contracting of private farms.

Not only has this guaranteed better financial return for growers, it has also helped them be introduced to higher quality inputs, bringing phased change in planting practices for other major crops as well.

Is it fair then to insist that cash crops be zoned according to their traditionally growing areas, without paying attention to absence of innovation and support infrastructure in these so-called belts? It would be wise for agenda-setters to review district level data before peddling innocent-sounding proposals that may cause more harm than good.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/07/11/509079/anatomy-of-punjabs-sugarcane-belt/

COTTON SPOT RATES RISE ON IMPROVED TRADE

RECORDER REPORT JUL 11TH, 2019 KARACHI

Official spot rates moved up on the cotton market on Wednesday in the process of improved trading activity, dealers said. The official spot rate rose by Rs 100 to Rs 8400, they added. In ready session, around 9000 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs 8400-8550, they said. Rates of seed cotton per 40kg from Lower Sindh and Punjab were inert at Rs 3700-4100, they said.

Binola per maund prices were at Rs 1550-1575 in Sindh and in Punjab rates were at Rs 1500-1700, they said and adding that polyester fibre per kg rates were at Rs 204 amid better demand, they said.

They observed that phutti arrivals started in Balochistan and were available at Rs 4100.

According to the market sources, mills indulged in fresh buying of lint cotton. The leading mills were afraid of high rise in rates because dollar has started going up again in both the inter-bank and open market.

Commenting on the latest trend in the global market, cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that in New York cotton prices not lifting from bottom, but it looks that rates may show improvement in the coming days.

Locally, the ginners are worried about the increase in sales tax on cotton-seed oil, he said.

Most of the buyers of cotton-seed oil will not purchase at present rates and other important factor is that the ginners cannot stock for a long-time, he said.

Cotton traders were hoping that some issues related to the General Sales Tax (GST) may be settled down with the government as it promised to do what it can, other experts said.

Cotton prices were mixed in the international markets, they said.

The following deals reported: 1400 bales of cotton from Shahdadpur at Rs 8450/8500, 2400 bales from Tando Adam at Rs 8450/8500, 2000 bales from Sanghar at Rs 8400/8500, 1000 bales from Mirpurkhas at Rs 8450, 600 bales from Hyderabad at Rs 8450, 400 bales from Kotri at Rs 8450, 200 bales from Burewala at Rs 8550, 200 bales from Mureedwala at Rs 8550 and 200 bales from Chichawatni at Rs 8550, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190711496340/

ICE FACTORY, SLAUGHTERHOUSE SEALED

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter July 12, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority on Thursday sealed a slaughterhouse and an ice factory and discarded 2,400kg meat.

Meat safety and vigilance teams carried out a joint operation against butchers involved in the unlawful business and confiscated 2,400kg rotten and hazardous meat in Bakar Mandi.

PFA Director General Muhammad Usman said the meat was stamped with special ink and marking it legal. The meat was of sick animals.

He said the team sealed an ice factory and a slaughterhouse.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1493524

PESHAWAR ADMIN INCREASES ROTI PRICE TO RS15 AFTER NANBAIS STRIKE

Ali Hazrat Bacha Updated July 12, 2019

PESHAWAR: Following the daylong shutter down strike by nanbais (bakers), the district administration on Thursday agreed to increase roti price from Rs10 to Rs15.

The agreement came during a meeting between the officials of the administration and representatives of the nanbai association.

Nanbai association president Haji Mohammad Iqbal told Dawn that the strike had been called off after the association’s successful negotiations with the district administration over roti price.

He said both the roti weight and price had been increased.

“The roti, whose weight has been increased from 150gm to 190gm, will sell at Rs15,” he said.

Earlier in the day, nanbais observed a shutter down strike to demand increase in the official roti price citing higher rates of flour, fuel and power as the reason.The office-bearers of the Nanbais Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa monitored nanbais in the city to ensure the strike’s success.

The residents suffered due to the shutter down strike. As most naibai shops were closed, some roti sellers charged people Rs20-Rs30 each in Saddar area.

Association president Haji Mohammad Iqbal told Dawn that his organisation had demanded increase in roti price in proportion to hike in flour, electricity and gas rates.

He said the nanbais had demanded Rs15 for 150 grammes dough (roti) but the administration was unwilling to meet the demand.

“We will continue the strike until the acceptance of our demands,” he said.

Haji Iqbal said though the government had increased the rates of flour, natural gas, electricity and petroleum products, it didn’t allow nanbais to revise roti price.

Association general secretary Rahim Safi told reporters that nanbais didn’t want to create problems for people but they couldn’t do business under the current circumstances, especially at the current unreasonably low official roti rate.

He asked the district administration to revise roti price in light of hike in flour, gas and power rates and warned if the demand wasn’t met, the strike would continue.

Mr Rafi said the natural gas was not available in some areas, so nanbais had to use gas cylinders but the administration had begun conducting raids and arresting nanbais for using liquefied petroleum gas. Some nanbais said the rate of a 80kg flour bag had gone up from Rs2200 to Rs3400, so they couldn’t afford to follow the official roti price list.

They also held a demonstration at Rampura Gate and shouted slogans.

The protesters complained about higher firewood price. The wholesalers of Rampura Gate flour market said there was no ‘consistency’ in flour price.

They said new taxes and increase in transportation charges and power and gas tariff had led to increase in flour price.

Our correspondent from KOHAT adds: Naibais observed a complete shutter down strike in Kohat district as well.

President of the association Laal Mohammad said naibais could not sell roti for Rs10 due to higher production costs.

He said the government should either withdraw new taxes otherwise nanbais would sell roti for Rs20.

Meanwhile, the office-bearer of Mushtarika markets association and president of Jinnah Plaza, QariFateh Mohammad announced that the traders would observe a complete shutter down strike on July 13 against the imposition of new taxes.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1493569

MILK SHORTAGE IN KARACHI AVERTED AS TRADER ASSOCIATIONS PUT OFF STRIKE TILL 17TH

Tahir Siddiqui Updated July 12, 2019

KARACHI: A severe shortage of fresh milk was averted in the city on Thursday for the time being as the wholesalers and retailers’ associations put off their strike till July 17 after the city administration assured their representatives that the milk price would be increased in accordance with the inflation rate to be determined by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

Two major associations of milk wholesalers and retailers — the All Karachi Milk Wholesalers Association and the Karachi Dairy and Cattle Farmers Association — on Tuesday jointly announced their decision of going on strike after their meeting with the city administration did not produce the desired results.

Two other associations of dairy farmers — the Karachi Dairy Farmer Association and the Dairy Farmer Association — had distanced themselves from the strike call and insisted on selling milk at the increased rates.

On Thursday, Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani held a joint meeting with representatives of the dairy farmers, wholesalers and retailers who apprised him of their grievances and issues pertaining to price, produce and a shortage of milk in the city due to recent inflation.

The commissioner assured the dairy farmers and milk sellers that the provincial government was fully aware of the problems being faced by the associations and that was why a meeting of all stakeholders was held to resolve the issue amicably.

He informed them that the city administration had already approached the SBP to seek the inflation statement through a third party to determine the milk price.

The commissioner said that another meeting would be held on July 17 with all stakeholders to resolve the present issue of milk price after the SBP inflation statement was received.

The dairy farmers are demanding that the wholesale price of one litre of milk be increased by Rs25 as due to the increase in fodder's cost and other factors, they have been incurring losses.

According to Shakir Umer Gujjar, the commissioner office was supposed to revise the price of fresh milk after every four months in accordance with the food inflation rate notified by the SBP as per an agreement between the farmers' associations and the Commissioner House in light of a Supreme Court decision. "However, no price revision has taken place since April 1, 2018," he said.

On Saturday last, Sindh Minister for Supply and Prices Mohammad Ismail Rahu had directed the city administration to initiate strict action against those selling fresh milk at higher than the government-fixed prices as one of the dairy farmers' associations announced an increase in the milk price by Rs10 per litre.

The minister had said that the city administration would consider the concerns of dairy farmers, but it would not tolerate hike in milk price without provincial government's approval.

Later, the crisis deepened when the retailers refused to accept the increase in milk price by the wholesalers as they feared a crackdown in case they sold milk at a high retail price, telling the farmers that they would not receive milk from them at the increased wholesale rate.

On the other hand, the wholesalers decided that they would not collect milk from the dairy farms from Wednesday onwards, leaving the farmers in a fix as they did not have a mechanism to preserve milk.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1493520/milk-shortage-in-karachi-averted-as-trader-associations-put-off-strike-till-17th

GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY AGREE ON INCREASE IN UREA PRICES

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN JUL 12TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The government and fertilizer industry are said to have agreed on increase in urea prices by Rs 110 per bag instead of Rs 210 per bag to pass on recent increase in gas prices and GIDC impact, well-informed sources told Business Recorder. This agreement was reached between the Prime Minister's Adviser on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul RazakDawood and the representatives of fertilizer industry.

However, a formal announcement of increase in urea prices will be made after Abdul RazakDawood gets the nod from Prime Minister, Minister in-Charge Industries and Production. The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet, in its decision of April 3, 2019 directed Ministry of Industries and Production to review the price mechanism for urea fertilizer.

A series of meetings were held with the fertilizer industry wherein the industry was urged not to pass on full impact of gas price increase, i.e. Rs 210 per bag to the farmers on account of revision in gas price. Industry has voluntary decided to absorb Rs 100 per bag on account of anticipated GIDC reduction in future. An official told this scribe that as desired by Advisor to the Prime Minister representatives of fertilizer companies individually consented to reduce the pass through impact of recent gas price from Rs 210 to Rs 110, absorbing Rs 100 on account of envisaged impact of GIDC settlement of 50 percent as agreed earlier, notwithstanding the stance on inability to pass on the impact of GIDC due to price intervention.

According to the agreement, the new price of urea will be Rs 1890 per bag against current price of Rs 1780 per bag without withholding tax.

The fertilizer industry maintains that sales are held up as farmers are not buying urea due to current confusion. However, there are apprehensions that the delay in purchase of fertilizer will not only delay crop cultivation but also have a negative impact on crop output.

“Cabinet people don’t understand the issue, they compare GIDC pass

through impact like CNG where as fertilizer has different dynamics,” said the industry sources.

When GIDC was levied in 2012, price was 1580 per bag. If full impact of GIDC of Rs 400 is passed on gas price increase would have been to the tune of Rs 393 per bag. GST reduction is 191, inflation @1.4 percent which implies that Rs 182 per bag was factored in the price due to which it should have been Rs 2364 per bag.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190712496497/

GOVT PROPOSES CATEGORISING SEED FIRMS ON QUALITY PARAMETERS

July 12, 2019 Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Thursday proposed categorising seed companies on the basis of various parameters to not only improve the quality of the products but also promote healthy competition in a market that has mushroomed unevenly in the absence of strong regulations.

A statement said a proposal to this effect was shared in the 16th meeting of National Seed Council (NSC) of Pakistan, which was held under the chair of Minister National Food Security & Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan.

The move is aimed at regulating one of the agriculture sector’s basic input providing sub-sector, whose development, in terms of quality, has been hampered mostly due to a mushroom growth of seed companies in the country.

The categorisation of member companies of Seed Association of Pakistan (SAP) will eventually improve quality of seeds. It will also incentivise research and development activities in the agriculture sector.

However, according to a participant of the meeting, the government had introduced a preliminary proposal for the same and recommendations in this regard would be finalised after taking stakeholders in confidence.

It is learnt that SAP representatives did not oppose proposal of federal government and were willing to submit their proposals in this regard.

Earlier, in the meeting, Secretary Ministry of National Food Security, DrHashimPopalzai proposed the categorisation of seed companies into “A”, “B” and “C” on the basis of the provision of quality seed.

This, he said, would bring healthy competition on one hand and on the other hand guarantee the provision of healthy seeds to farmers.

For a company to jump from list “ B” to list “A” certain standards were to be followed and companies falling in “A” category

SahibzadaMehboob Sultan said, “It is a good step by the Ministry of National Food Security to revitalise the NSC and with the cooperation of seed councils/bodies and provincial representatives we plan to strengthen the body and ensure the provision of quality seeds to increase the magnitude of production thereof.

“We are moving ahead in the direction of zero hunger and the provision of best seed is vital for that to be achieved,” the minister added.

The NSC meeting was held after a lapse of considerable time. The NSC, which was formulated under Pakistan seed act 1976 and Federal Seed Certification Department (FSC&RD) of the Ministry of National Food Security, has been mandated to ensure

the availability of certified seeds across Pakistan.

The registration of seed companies is also the responsibility of the Ministry of National Food Security & Research.

In the 16th meeting of NSC, the certification process of 19 varieties of crops were finalised, which include citrus, mango, guava, olive, date palm, banana, pomegranate, grape, cotton, and tomato, among others.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/497023-govt-proposes-categorising-seed-firms-on-quality-parameters

RICE EXPORTS REACH $2.07BN MARK IN FY19

RECORDER REPORT JUL 12TH, 2019 KARACHI

Rice exports from Pakistan maintained upward momentum and touched all time high level of $2.07 billion mark in the last fiscal year (FY19). According to rice export statistics, in term of quantity, Pakistan exported total 4.097 million metric tons of rice during July-June of FY19 compared to some 4.082 million metric ton in corresponding period of FY18. During the last fiscal year, some 537,133 tons basmati rice and 3.545 million tons other varieties of rice were exported.

In term of value, Pakistan earned all time higher foreign exchange amounting to $ 2.074 billion in FY19 up from $ 2.035 billion, showing 2 percent growth.

Convener Rice Export Committee of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and former chairman Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) has said that Pakistan’s rice exports have posted growth in a difficult time, when the country’s remaining major exports were on decline.

He said that there is need of development of new seed varieties to earn more foreign exchange, but unfortunately it requires regulatory framework. “Pakistan has exported over $ 2 billion worth rice in absence of Research and Development (R&D). We can export over $ 5 billion rice in next five years with some concrete efforts towards introduction of new rice seeds and varieties,” he added.

Presently, Pakistani rice exporters are importing hybrid rice seeds from China on self-made basis to get better yield, however these hybrid seeds are not successful in long term, Rafique mentioned.

Regulatory framework should be devised for development of high yielding and commercially viable varieties and accordingly intern registering them for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), he suggested.

China, Kenya and European Countries were leading importers of Pakistani rice. While, during the last fiscal year, exports to Indonesia also resumed and some 70,000 tons non-basmati rice was exported, he informed.

He said that Kenya is the largest buyer of Pakistani non basmati rice and approximately Pakistan has exported over 400,000 metric tons of rice during the last fiscal year. One of the largest buyer of Pakistani Basmati rice was Iran, but due to the non availability of banking channel, Pakistani rice exporters are unable to export rice to Iran, he mentioned.

Supply chain of rice should be regulated through centralized system to confront future challenges, he said added “sanitary &phytosanitary standards are also biggest challenge for Pakistani rice and there is need to devise a long term policy. In addition, grain standards like Thailand and India should be implemented at rice markets to ensure the quality of rice”.

Rafique also urged for up-gradation of local mills, improved storage practices and better transportation channel from farms to markets to avoid breakages and insecticides. Presently, Pakistan is losing some 15 percent of rice grains/ crop due to bad handling and storages practices.

He said that Minister of Commerce Abdul RazakDawood is fully supporting and assured full support for increase in rice exports. With present government’s efforts, Qatar has recently lifted ban on export of rice from Pakistan and also placed a 5000 tons rice export order.

There is need to explore new market and renegotiate the Free Trade Agreements with Indonesia, China and EU to further enhance the rice exports.

He said that Pakistan’s rice crop is also facing a challenge of higher cost of production against regional competitors, which are providing subsidies to farmers to produce high yield. Government should support the farmers for an improved crop, he demanded.

Rafique has said that the milestone of all time exports has been achieved by the consistent efforts and under the leadership of SafdarMehkari Chairman REAP and former Chairman REAP Abdul Rahim Janoo as they worked hard to increase the Pakistan’s rice export volume.

He also warned that uncertainty of exchange rates may hit the rice exports in future; therefore there is need to of sustainable exchange rate so exporters can finalized their deals with foreign buyers.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190712496540/

PAD ADVISORY TO COTTON GROWERS

RECORDER REPORT JUL 12TH, 2019 LAHORE

The Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) has advised the cotton growers to pay heed to their crop especially because the recent rains as it may help weeds grow in the fields. Weeds not only share the food of the crops but also prove shelters for different pests.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190712496562/

TAX ON FLOUR LEAVES STAKEHOLDERS CONFUSED

By Rizwan Asif Published: July 12, 2019

LAHORE: The imposition of general sales tax on flour has created a crisis in the milling industry and provincial government machineries, while tandoor owners have demanded that a flat rate of Rs20 be fixed on naans and Rs15 on roti.

Senior officials of the Punjab government contacted FBR officials on the matter and also continued their consultation with the tax experts. The FBR claimed there was no imposition of GST on flour. However, when it was pointed out there was no sales tax code for flour as an exempted commodity under Schedule VI, the revenue board officials were unable to explain.

Stakeholders of the flour milling industry, after completing legal consultation and confirming the imposition of GST, sought an emergency meeting of officials and important leaders of all the provinces in Lahore. The objective was to decide the next course of action.

Punjab Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry remained active on the matter of sales tax on flour. He also informed the Punjab chief minister and has even directed his department's secretary to contact FBR officials to correct technical mistakes, if there are any.

Flour mill owners all over the country are left scratching their heads and those with large production units are consulting tax experts. Pakistan Flour Mills Association group leader Asim Raza and central chairman Naeem Butt say the imposition of GST has spread extreme apprehension. They add that apart from mill owners consulting tax experts, the association itself is consulting them. After reviewing budget documents, the association has come to the conclusion that a levy has been imposed on flour, white flour and fine flour – whether by mistake or not.

They say the sales tax code for flour is 1101;46;0010 and it was included in Schedule VI of the Sales Tax Act in the previous fiscal year. He explains that this schedule included those commodities which were exempt from GST. However, in this fiscal year, the sales tax code was not included in Schedule VI nor Schedule VIII – the latter which reduces sales tax. This makes it clear that flour is not exempt from GST and this poses a severe problem for people. The association leaders stress that their peers will not accept this situation and that is the reason they have called all stakeholders on 12 July.

They continue that tax experts will also participate in the meeting and the group will announce their next plan of protest. Both leaders say they were informed before the budget about the possibility of 10% GST being imposed on flour. However, they were hoping that the government would refrain from such a levy to facilitate the poor.

They say that thousands of 79kg bags of flour are sold every day, while companies also use the same. As a result, prices of all things will increase. Lahore Tax Bar President Khurram Butt tries to clarify the situation. He says the sales tax code for white flour and fine flour was not included in both the schedules which either exempt or reduce levies.

He outlines that Schedule VI exempts commodities from GST, while Schedule VIII dictates that the entire 17% GST will not be imposed. However the latter schedule also highlights that any rate between 5 and 11 % can be imposed.

In reply to a query, Khurram Butt outlines there is the possibility of an unintentional mistake which can be rectified through an FBR notification. Speaking to Express, FBR Islamabad Chief Sales Tax Officer Amir Amin Bhatti says the board has not imposed GST on any kind of food, therefore, there is none on flour either. However, he was unable to clarify the situation when it came to the commodity's sales tax code from Schedule VI and VIII.

Tandoor Association leader Lahore flour dealer Aftab Gill explains there are more than 10,000 tandoors in Lahore feeding thousands of workers and laborers. He has demanded that the rate of naan be fixed at Rs20 and roti at Rs15 otherwise his associates will be compelled to go on strike. "Nobody will be able to buy such expensive rotis," he concludes.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2011349/1-tax-flour-leaves-stakeholders-confused/

LOCUSTS' ARRIVAL IN THAR CAUSES ALARM

A Correspondent July 13, 2019

MITHI: Locust swarms have arrived in different areas of Nagarparkartaluka posing a serious threat to whatever farm produce is being grown in the area.

Residents of different areas of the taluka, including JavedSamoon, RiazRajar and Mohammad Wassan, told this reporter on Friday that locusts in large numbers were seen eating leaves of big trees as well as plants.

They were of the view that locusts could cause heavy damage to the plants and small crops that had grown after the recent widespread rains in the region. "Locust swarms had first arrived in our area some three weeks back but in a small number.

They have increased to an alarmingly bigger number over the past few days," they said.

The insect was devouring green trees and bushes in these areas, they said.

They apprehended that their presence in the area was a serious threat to the crops to be cultivated soon after the expected rains. "If proper measures are not taken by the federal or Sindh government at the earliest, the swarms could ravage our crops," they said.

Last month, agriculture experts had warned that locusts might travel to Thardesert in the event of rainfall here. The warning was issued after swarms of locust were spotted in the desert region of Khairpur district.

Tharparkar Deputy Commissioner DrShahzad Tahir Thaheem, in the wake of the warning, had set up a cell to meet any emergency.

Despite the repeated attempts, no official of the departments concerned could be reached by phone to comment on the arrival of locusts in the Thar region.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1493664/locusts-arrival-in-thar-causes-alarm

PFMA'S THREE-DAY STRIKE AGAINST GST TO BEGIN ON JULY 17

ZAHID BAIG JUL 13TH, 2019 LAHORE

The Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) has announced to go on a three-day strike from July 17, 2019, to register their protest on imposition of general sales tax (GST) on wheat products and bran. PFMA Central Chairman Naeem Butt and Group Leader Asim Raza Ahmad announced this at a press conference along with other office-bearers and leaders of the flour milling industry here on Friday.

They said there had been no precedent of imposing GST on wheat or bran in the country in the past but it had been introduced on these products in the Finance Act 2019. They said it would directly hit all flour products and their prices would register increase. They said 17 percent sales tax had been imposed on flour and bran while 10 percent sales tax had been introduced on fine.

The PFMA leader claimed that the flour bags would register increase of Rs 170 per 20 kilograms flour bag. They warned that supply of flour would be stopped throughout the country, if the sales tax is not withdrawn. They said the Chairman FBR had said that there was no GST on flour products but Finance Act 2019 shows imposition of sales tax on wheat and bran. They alleged that wheat and flour products had been struck off from Schedule 6 which includes items exempted from the sales tax.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190713496845/

CROP MAXIMIZATION PLAN TO BE LAUNCHED SOON IN THREE DISTRICTS: PAD

RECORDER REPORT JUL 13TH, 2019 SIALKOT

Agriculture department said that two-year crop maximization through cooperative farming project costing Rs 400 million would soon be launched in three districts of Punjab.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Thursday that the plan would be carried out in Sialkot, Sargodha and Rahim Yar Khan districts of the province. The concept of the plan was to increase productivity and profitability of small farmers in project districts through participatory approach of learning by doing, food security and alleviating poverty through improving income of small farmers.

Special attention under the programme would be focused on increasing productivity of major crops like wheat, rice, cotton sugarcane and maize from 10 t0 15 percent per acre and reduce their cost of production as well as to ensure the availability of food round year on affordable price.

80 percent farmers were small holding land from 0.5 to 10 acres in the province an over the years attempts had been made to improve the condition of small farmers but capital intensive modern technologies and improved means of enhancing farm productivity remained out financial range of the small farmers, sharecropper and tenants.

Unfortunately, majority of the farmers had limited access to the institutional credit facility and they could not use or adopt the improved technologies or purchase critical inputs as certified seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and water.

Special focus under the programme be accorded on formulation and registration of 137 village organizations (VOs), establishment and operation of revolving fund to tune of Rs 297.080 million in the VOs, setting up of operation of 14 implement pools, establishment of 137 farmers field schools for farmers capacity building, setting up of 14 income diversification intervention and establishment of 14 input sale centres in project districts sources disclosed.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190713496814/

RICE PRODUCTION TARGET FIXED AT 3,992M METRIC TONS

RECORDER REPORT JUL 14TH, 2019 LAHORE

This year rice crop has been sown over an area of 4.754 million acres of land in the province and the government has fixed a production target at 3,992 million metric tons. The government is committed to guiding the paddy growers at every stage in order to meet the production target. The agriculture sector tops the priority list of present government and it has taken numerous farmers' friendly steps in its brief period.

Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial said this while addressing a 'Khushaal Kissan' seminar arranged by the Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association (PBHA) in collaboration with the Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) at Gujranwala on Saturday.

The Minister said that Pakistan stands at the fourth place in rice exporting sector and has exported 2.19 million tons of rice during the year 2018-19 fetching precious foreign exchange of US 1.04 billion dollars. He hoped that the export figures would touch US 2 billion dollars during the current year.

He said the provincial government had allocated collectively over Rs 40 billion for the development of agriculture in the budget for current year and taken many steps like increase in the limit of interest free loans, subsidy on seeds and fertilizer, crop insurance scheme and etc to bring down cost of production and push up the profit for well being of the growers.

Convener Pakistan Basmati Heritage Association Shahid Tarar speaking on the occasion said that the objective of the Association is to protect the Basmati variety and strengthen its value chain besides promotion of responsible and balanced use of pesticides and fertilizers.

Rana Nazir Ahmad Khan, Shaheena Riaz Cheema MPA, Naveed Anwar Bhinder Chairman Punjab Agriculture Marketing Regulatory Authority and others also spoke on this occasion. Experts in their addresses throw light on methods of using the latest technology to ensure maximum per acre yield.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190714497256/

COMMITTEE TO SET NAAN PRICE IN K-P

By our correspondent Jul.14, 2019

PESHAWAR: The Khyber-Pakhtunkhawa government has decided to form a committee to resolve the issue of the price and weight of naan, the staple flatbread consumed by millions across the country.

The district administration had approved a 50% increase in the price of naan from Rs10 to Rs15 with the condition of increasing its weight from 150 grammes to 190 grammes.

K-P Information Minister Shaukat Yousufzai, replying to a query from The Express Tribune, said the provincial government had approved Rs2 increase in the price of naan from Rs10 to Rs12 at the current weight.

The district administration has apparently exceeded its mandate, the minister said. Fixing the weight and price of naan at 190 grammes a piece for Rs15 was solely a decision of Peshawar DC and would be reviewed by a committee.

Regarding the demand of the nanbais to increase the rates of roti he said the FBR's decisions have no effect on the flour prices. However, increasing prices of naan on the pretext of increase in gas tariff could be considered, the minister said adding a committee has been formed to look into the matter.

Meanwhile, a petitioner has challenged the prices of the bread in the province in the Peshawar High Court on Saturday. He has made K-P chief secretary, the provincial government and nanbai associations respondents.

The Nanbai Association a representative body of bread makers has refused to sell naan weighing 190 grammes for Rs15.

The 50% increase in naan price from Rs10 to Rs15 was approved by the Peshawar Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Ali Asgar with the condition of increasing the weight of the staple flatbread from 175 grammes to 190 grammes.

They want to sell a roti weighing 175 grammes for Rs15, saying they will increase the price,

Addressing a press conference in Peshawar Press Club on Saturday the Nanbai Association President Muhmamad Iqbal said the government should revisit the directives issued for fixing the official weight and price of naan.

Iqbal, representing thousands of people who make and sell flatbreads from earthen ovens or tandoors, said the government should give subsidy on gas and flour for nanbais in the province.

"We reject the weight and price fixed during the meeting with DC Peshawar," Iqbal said.

While the district administration has started crackdown against the bread makers who are selling bread below the fixed weight of 190 grammes and arrested over 22 bread makers in the provincial capital only.

On the directives of the DC Peshawar Muhammad Ali Asgar crackdown was conducted in Hayatabad, Kohat Road, Warsak Road, University Road and the walled city of the Peshawar where police hauled away 22 nanbais to lockups of respective precincts.

Meanwhile, people have shown resentment over the 50 per cent price hike province and demanded the bread makers and district administration reconsider their price list for the welfare of the public.

Most of the shops in the provincial capital were remained closed over the weight issues directed by the DC Peshawar, while the public has also remained refrained to buy bread at Rs15.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2012798/committee-set-naan-price-minister/?amp=1

FLOUR MILLS BODY REBUTS FBR REPS CLAIM ON ROTI PRICE

Hanif Khalid July 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Flour Mills Association (FMA) Punjab Chairman Habibur Rehman Leghari and All Pakistan Flour Mills Association Central Chairman Asif Raza have said the 'roti' and 'naan' price has gone up from Rs10 to Rs15 only because of the federal government's weakness.

While talking to a senior member of the Association, they rejected the claim of Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) representatives that roti price was hiked due to hoarding to the wheat by the flour mills. The Association senior member told the reporter that 20-kg flour bag was being sold for Rs738 before the arrival of the new crop, which is now being sold for Rs820.

That means per kilogram price was increased by four rupees. If eight roties (naans) and made of one kilogram flour, there should be only 50 paisa increase in a roti/naan, he said.

He regretted that the Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa governments connived with the roti-makers and tandoor-wallahs, who increased per roti price to Rs15 in Peshawar and Lahore.

He questioned that who pressurized the local administrations in Peshawar and Lahore to increase roti price to Rs15 and naan price to Rs20. He said the government was responsible for 150 per cent increase in the gas price and hike in wages of a labourer from Rs800 to Rs1200 per day. He said the government actions and policies created unusual price-hike in the country and the flour millers could not be blamed for increase in prices of roti and naan.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/498017-flour-mills-body-rebuts-fbr-reps-claim-on-roti-price

INCREASE IN ROTI PRICE IN PESHAWAR CHALLENGED IN COURT

Akhtar Amin July 14, 2019

PESHAWAR: The increase in the price of roti from Rs10 to Rs15 by the district administration was challenged in the Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Saturday.

The decision was challenged by one Afaq Hussain and other citizens through their lawyer Muhammad Khurshid Khan in the court.

Following a daylong shutter down strike by nanbais on Thursday, the district administration agreed to increase roti price from Rs10 to Rs15.

The agreement to raise the price of roti, the bread made of wheat flour which is the staple diet of the people, was made during a meeting between the officials of the Peshawar district administration and representatives of the Nanbai Association.

The Nanbai Association president Haji Mohammad Iqbal said the strike had been called off after the agreement with the district administration.

One roti would now weigh 190 gram instead of 150 gram as was the case earlier and would be sold for Rs15, he added.

The abrupt decision was severely criticised by the public in the social media. Commentators demanded withdrawal of the decision and transfer of the deputy commissioner Peshawar for succumbing to the pressure of the owners of the tandoors who bake rotis.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government through the chief secretary, deputy commissioner Peshawar and president Nanbai Association Muhammad Iqbal were made parties in the petition. The petition noted that before the budget the price of one roti was Rs10, but after the budget the Nanbai Association pressured the district administration to increase the price to Rs15.

It said the district administration accepted the demand of the Nanbai Association after a day-long strike during which the tandoors remained closed causing difficulties for the customers. The petitioners maintained that the Nanbai Association managed to get an increase in the price of roti in the past as well by agreeing to provide roti weighing more but this wasn't ensured.

The petitioners submitted that majority of people are underprivileged and increase in the price of roti, which is basic need of every person, would mean that many households won't be able to buy enough bread for their need.

The petitioners wondered why the elected representatives and the Price Review Committee were not consulted while taking the decision to increase the price of roti.

The petitioners requested the court to declare the Peshawar district administration's unilateral decision void and order restoration of the old roti price of Rs10.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/498025-increase-in-roti-price-in-peshawar-challenged-in-court

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 1st TO JULY 7th 2019

EATING LOCUSTS

Editorial July 01, 2019

SINDH'S agriculture minister is reported to have offered an out-of-the-box solution as the province faces an attack by a huge locust swarm. He has suggested that the people should eat the locusts; apparently they are "as tasty as shrimps". Perhaps he should go a step further and recommend some recipes. Shrimps taste good in soup and biryani, and are delicious when barbecued. What about locusts? There was a time not very long ago when in some areas of the country locusts were indeed consumed as food, and perhaps it is important to add that they do make for a nutritious, protein-rich meal. The residents of Sindh, who are currently facing the brunt of this swarm, may not need any encouragement from the minister to make a culinary delight out of the burgeoning tragedy that their crops are facing. Indeed, hunger can midwife many other such innovations too.

The problem is not so much in the nature of the suggestion, but that the minister appears to be mocking the difficulties faced by the growers as the pest attack increases. Had this been an off-the-cuff remark made during a press interaction that would be one thing. But it seems the minister has gone to considerable lengths to get his message across through leaflets that have been distributed in towns around the province. In the same leaflet, he has called upon federal authorities to do more to help combat the swarm, particularly by deploying aerial spraying of the affected areas. The question still remains, what exactly has the provincial government done about the problem thus far? There are reports of at least one round of aerial spraying conducted by aircraft taking off from Sukkur, and some accounts of ground-level efforts at pest control. But there is little indication that the provincial authorities are alive to the magnitude of the problem. This kind of 'let them eat locusts' attitude is what gets the PPP government in Sindh into trouble during times of crisis.

Published in Dawn, July 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1491449

SINDH TO INTRODUCE MANGOES TO INTERNATIONAL MARKET TO ATTRACT FOREIGN INVESTMENT: SECY

THE NEWSPAPER'S STAFF CORRESPONDENT Published Jul 01, 2019 06:58am

HYDERABAD: The Sindh government would make efforts to introduce mangoes and other fruits to international market to attract foreign investment to the province's farm sector and thereby increase exports of the fruit, said Sind Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah on Sunday.

Mr Shah told reporters at the concluding ceremony of the two-day mango show at Expo Centre that the show would benefit mango exports from Sindh and have positive impact on the fruit's export business.

He said the government agencies would extend full cooperation in this holding such events in future as well and would invite consul generals of different countries to participate in them so that they could learn of range of indigenous fruits and help in their export.

He said the Sindh Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF) would utilise its funds for the promotion of such activities in the province and expressed the hope that the SEDF would work in collaboration with farmers and traders so that they should work jointly.

He said that despite better production of mangoes, growers did not get adequate price for their harvest. The Sindh government would endeavor to introduce mangoes and other fruits to foreign investors and bring other local produce to international market.

The chief secretary said later at the show that the Sindh government was under obligation to support growers as they were backbone of the agrarian economy. With the cooperation of the federal and provincial governments, efforts would be made to ensure that farmers received adequate prices for their produce, he said.

He said that if farmers did not receive desired price, they would face difficulties because they often failed to get cost of production. If exports increased from Sindh to other countries, it would boost farmers' financial condition. Usually the government absorbed interest on loan offered to farmers, he said.

He said that weather conditions in Hyderabad were conducive to agriculture. Farmers must get better rates for their crops, fruits and vegetables, he said, adding that the Sindh government would strive hard to ensure this.

Hyderabad Commissioner Abbas Baloch said that Expo Centre had been rehabilitated for holding of this show. Hyderabad was ideal for agriculture sector as its climatic conditions were beneficial for farming, he said.

He said the growers needed Sindh government's cooperation to market their produce so that they could benefit from it. Usually, middlemen benefitted more in the farm sector because of inadequate marketing facilities, he said.

Sindh investment secretary Ahsan Mangi, DIG Naeem Shaikh and others were also present at the ceremony. At the end of the event, shields were presented to mango growers and other farmers.

Published in Dawn, July 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1491397

FEDERAL GOVT IDENTIFIES PRIORITY AREAS FOR SUPPORT

Amin Ahmed Updated July 01, 2019

The government has lowered the growth target for the agriculture sector for 2019-20 owing to insufficient water and a drop in the fertiliser off-take.

The growth target for the sector is now 3.5 per cent, which is based on the expected contribution from important crops (wheat, rice, sugar cane and maize) at 3.5pc, "other crops" 3.1pc, cotton ginned 2.5pc, livestock 3.7pc, fisheries 4pc and forestry 2pc.

The sector's performance during the last two seasons (Rabi and Kharif) remained subdued. It grew 0.85pc, significantly lower than the target of 3.8pc.

Targets for wheat and cotton will likely be achieved if the quality and quantity of inputs are ensured in addition to the consistent availability of water, certified seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and agriculture credit facilities.

The National Agriculture Emergency Programme aims to spend Rs290bn in the next five years to boost the crop yield, develop fisheries and livestock and improve water conservation

The government is planning to rationalise the area under cultivation for wheat, rice and sugar cane. Pakistan is self-sufficient in these crops. Thus, the area under cultivation is going to be reduced to grow cotton, pulses, oilseeds and high-value horticultural crops to reduce their imports.

The production targets for 2019 Kharif and 2020 Rabi seasons have been finalised. The wheat production target will be 25.55 million tonnes, rice 7.4m tonnes, sugar cane 68,583,000 tonnes, cotton 15m bales and maize 6,357,000 tonnes.

As for minor crops, the target for gram is 550,000 tonnes, onion 2.23m tonnes, sunflower 200,000 tonnes and potato 4.2m tonnes.

The annual development plan document shows that water availability at canal heads for 2019-20 is expected to be 108 million acre-feet (MAF) to support crop production.

The drop in the fertiliser off-take by 7.3pc was because of its high price, not a shortage of input. In 2018-19, domestic production of fertiliser increased 2.6pc. It was mainly because two urea manufacturing plants were functional owing to the supply of LNG at subsidised rates. At the same time, fertiliser imports increased 4.8pc. Thereby, its total availability rose 3.2pc in 2018-19.

The government is going to focus on improving agricultural input and output markets. It is also strengthening the capacity and infrastructure to conduct agriculture research.

Although the private sector plays a major role in the input supply chain, the government's role as a regulator will be strengthened in order to ensure the supply of quality inputs in a timely manner. There are indications that an organisational setup at the federal level is on the anvil for the implementation of the amended Seed Act as well as the Plant Breeders' Rights Act through the establishment of a registry.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research will get an allocation of Rs15 billion as development budget.

The ministry has identified 20 priority areas for the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) in 2019-20. Major projects include Better Cotton Initiative, National Programme for Improvement of Watercourses, National Oilseed Enhancement Programme, enhancement of the command areas of small and mini dams in Barani areas, promotion of research for productivity enhancement in pulses, wheat, rice and sugar cane, promotion of rural poultry, olive cultivation on commercial scale, satellite-based mapping of cropping zones and monitoring system, and the national pesticide residue monitoring system.

There are indications that an organisational setup at the federal level is on the anvil for the implementation of the amended Seed Act as well as the Plant Breeders' Rights Act through the establishment of a registry

According to the annual plan document, the programmes under the technology-driven knowledge economy will receive separate allocations.

In addition to the federal government, the provinces are also investing in agriculture using their own funds. Last year, investments by the provinces were Rs93bn, which is expected to go further up during 2019-20.

The federal government recently announced the National Agriculture Emergency Programme, which aims to spend Rs290bn in the next five years to boost the crop yield, develop fisheries and livestock and improve water conservation.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1491315/federal-govt-identifies-priority-areas-for-support

FISH EXPORTS SHRINK 4.11 PERCENT TO $406 MILLION

RECORDER REPORT JUL 1ST, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The exports of fish and its preparations decreased by 4.11 percent during the fiscal year 2018-19 as compared to the corresponding period of last year. The seafood exports during July-May (2018-19) were recorded at $406.565 million against the exports of $423.977 million in July-May (2017-18), showing negative growth 4.11 percent, according to Pakistan Bureau of statistics (PBS).

In terms of quantity, Pakistan exported 179,743 metric tons seafood during the period under review against the exports of 184,107 metric tons last year, showing decrease of 2.37 percent. On year-on-year basis, the fish exports from the country increased by 10.78 percent by going up from $52.429 million during May 2018 to $58.081 million in May 2019. On month-on-month basis, the seafood exports increased by 6.4 percent in May 2019 when compared to the exports of $54.589 million in April 2019, the PBS data revealed.

Meanwhile, the overall food exports from the country witnessed decreased of 4.61 percent by going down to $4272.750 million during the first 11 months of the ongoing fiscal year compared to the exports of $4479.357 million during the corresponding period of fiscal year 2017-18. It is pertinent to mention here that the country's merchandize trade deficit plunged by 13.62 per cent during the first eleven months of the current fiscal year compared to the corresponding period of last year.

The trade deficit contracted by 13.62 per cent to $29.207 billion during July-May (2018-19) against the deficit of $33.812 billion recorded during July-May (2017-18). The exports during the period under review witnessed nominal decrease of 0.3% by falling from $21.330 billion during last year to $21.267 billion during the ongoing fiscal year declined by 8.47 per cent to $50.474 billion during the period under review from $55.142 billion last year, the data revealed. On year-on-year basis, the exports declined by 1.72 per cent, from $2.139 billion in May 2018 to $2.102 billion in May 2019 while the imports declined by 12.8 percent from $5.782 billion in May 2018 to $5.042 billion in May 2019, the data revealed.

RS 5 BILLION PLAN TO TRACK AGRICULTURE SECTOR ON MODERN LINES

RECORDER REPORT JUL 1ST, 2019 SIALKOT

The Agriculture department said on Sunday that a well knitted plan costing over Rs 5 billion has been chalked out for putting agri-sector on modern lines. Sources in the department told Business Recorder that the basic concept of plan was to improve the economic condition of farmers through making agri-sector more profitable.

Under the plan the government will provide modern agri-implements on half price to the growers in fifteen districts of the Punjab. The government will provide 700 rice trans-planters, power sprayers etc. in Sialkot, Lahore Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Sheikhupura, Jhang, Okara, Gujrat, Mandi Baha Uddin through balloting.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190701493356/

FARMERS MAY LAUNCH PROTEST ACROSS COUNTRY

FAZAL SHER JUL 1ST, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The farmer's community has hinted launching a countrywide protest against the government's failure to meet their demands regarding reducing input costs and providing other incentives to the agriculture sector. Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI), farmers' representative organization, has called an emergency meeting to devise future strategy after the government failed to meet their demands with respect to abolishment of General Sales Tax (GST) on fertilizer, agriculture machinery and reducing electricity tariff for agriculture tubewells.

“The government has not only turned deaf ear to our demands but also imposed Value Added Tax (VAT) on fertilizer and 10 percent GST on cotton ginners in the budget 2019-20 which will further increase cost of production,” President PKI Khalid Khokhar stated while talking to Business Recorder.

He said that the government had assured the farming community that it would abolish 2 percent GST on fertilizer and GST on agriculture machinery. “We had also requested a reduction in electricity tariff for agriculture from Rs 6.85 per unit to Rs 4 per unit that was proposed by the special committee on agriculture headed by National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser,” he said.

Khokhar said that the price of fertilizer including Urea and DAP are much higher in the country compared to prices in neighbouring India: in Pakistan DAP is priced at Rs 3,395 while in India it is Rs 2,350 (in Pakistani equivalent rupees) while price of Urea in Pakistan is Rs 1,830 while it is Rs 526 in India (in Pakistani rupees).

The PKI president said that following imposition of VAT, the price of DAP will further increase by Rs 90 and Urea by Rs 120 per bag. In the budget 2019-20, the government has imposed 10 percent GST on cotton ginning owing to a reduction in cotton putty price from Rs 4,500 to Rs 3,500, Khokhar said.

He said that the parliament on the 1st of May passed a resolution calling for imposition of regulatory duty on the import of cotton and fixing of support price but the government allowed import of duty free cotton. “The government also did not allocate a single penny for agriculture research in the budget 2019-2020,” he said

Khokhar said that PKI will hold a meeting in the next couple of days to devise a future strategy to urge the government to meet their demands. “Now we have no option but to either fight to get concessions or stop farming,” he said. A senior official of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) when asked about the steps taken for uplift of agriculture sector said that Rs 12.5 billion has been allocated for various projects of his Ministry compared to Rs 1.8 billion in fiscal year 2018-19.

He said that 13 government projects in five different sectors of agriculture worth Rs 296 billion in financial year 2019-20 on cost sharing basis between the federal and provincial governments are also part of developing agriculture sector. For the first time after devolution of agriculture, the share of 13 federal government projects of five key sectors of agriculture over the next five years will be Rs 92.5 billion, he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190701493364/

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT SEEKS TO RECLAIM WATER-LOGGED, SALINE LAND

RECORDER REPORT JUL 1ST, 2019   SIALKOT

The agriculture department is paying special attention on reclamation of the land badly affected by water-logging and salinity in various districts of Punjab.

Sources in agriculture department told Business Recorder on Sunday that the land now turned unfit for farming would be made cultivable under reclamation programme. They said the government was making adequate arrangements for making the programme successful. Besides, agriculture department has been working to save water through modern irrigation system. The department is making efforts to motivate the growers that they should adopt modern irrigation modes such as drip sprinkler.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190701493352/

PFA TO MAKE BY-LAWS ON FOOD SUPPLEMENTS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter May 31, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has decided to make by-laws on functional foods and publish Pure Food Regulations 2019 in the form of a booklet.

A decision to the effect was taken at a meeting of the authority held here on Thursday with Director-General retired Captain Muhammad Usman in the chair.

The DG told Dawn by phone that functional foods used for extra energy like vitamins, minerals and food supplements were hitherto considered as pharmaceutical products and no regulations were framed for them despite a verdict of the Lahore High Court's Bahawalpur bench that these should be included in food category.

He said the companies manufacturing the functional foods had neither got their products registered with the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) nor with the food agency and were selling these items without any check on the quality of ingredients, formulas and expiry dates.

After preliminary discussion, he said, it was decided to bring the food supplements, energy drinks and vitamins under a regulatory framework. PFA technical wing had been directed to work on the issue, he added.

He said the wing had also been asked to frame Pure Food Regulations 2019 in the form of a compendium so that these might be publicised and provided to the people associated with the food industry and for the benefit of the public.

Meanwhile, a PFA team led by retired Capt Usman raided a factory manufacturing fake carbonated drink in the basement of a house.

The team confiscated 12,000 litres of soft drink to be labeled as of different popular brands. Thirteen gas cylinders, four filling machines, a huge quantity of fake labels and bottle caps were also seized during the raid.

The DG claimed that the adultrators attempted to dispose of the fake beverages into sewer lines by shutting the factory gate when the raiding team reached there. The officials were also shown the production of licenced juices and cold drinks to hoodwink them.

The fake drinks were to be supplied during Eid days in different areas of the metropolis and its suburbs.

Published in Dawn, May 31st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1485606

PUNJAB FACES LOCUST THREAT, ISSUES ALERT

Amin Ahmed Updated July 02, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab government is on high alert to deal with any emergency in the wake of locusts swarm in South Punjab following reports of locust attack in some parts of Balochistan and Sindh provinces.

Provincial government's agriculture department spokesman on Monday said that in view of the threat, all possible precautionary as well as remedial measures were being taken to save crops from possible attack.

The department has deputed special teams for continuous monitoring of locusts swarm in South Punjab and is in close contact with relevant provincial as well as federal agencies.

Punjab government has contacted and is currently coordinating with concerned federal government institutions, particularly the Ministry of National Food, Security and Research and the Plant Protection Department.

The Provincial Disaster Management Authority and the Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan administrations were in close contact, while situation of locust attacks in Sindh and Balochistan are being closely monitored, spokesman added.

Punjab government has also purchased pesticides to combat locusts swarm attack. The spokesman added that the aircraft of the Federal Plant Protection Department will also be available to Punjab Government.

The provincial government has already arranged pesticides and if required, the remote areas of Cholistan – especially bushes – will be sprayed with pesticides with the help of camels.

According to Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), although control operations have treated nearly 200,000 hectares so far in June, all countries should remain vigilant and be prepared for any swarms that might arrive in Sudan and along the Indo-Pakistan border where higher than normal breeding is expected in summer.

In Pakistan, ground control operations continue in spring breeding areas of Balochistan against hopper groups in the interior of Dalbandin and near the coast in Turbat, Gwadar and Lasbela.

Similar operations are in progress against hopper and adult groups in a few summer areas of Nara and Cholistan deserts. Teams have treated around 4,625 hectares during mid-June. Adult groups will move from Balochistan to the summer breeding areas along the Indo-Pakistan border where more hatching and the formation of hopper groups will occur, FAO says.

Published in Dawn, July 2nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1491568

GROWERS TAKE TO STREETS IN SEVERAL TOWNS AMID 'DROUGHT-LIKE' CONDITIONS

Dawn Report July 02, 2019

LARKANA: Growers took to the streets of Naudero and Shahdadkot on Monday over the acute shortage of water that persists in the area. They condemned the provincial government's failure to ensure availability of adequate water for paddy cultivation even until the start of the season.

In Naudero, a large number of growers and tillers coming from more than 20 villages, situated around the town, held a sit-in near Panjodero village along the Larkana-Sukkur road. They were carrying bunches of dried-up paddy seedlings and raising slogans against irrigation officials.

The participants put up obstacles at different places along the road to disrupt movement of vehicular traffic.

Police intervened in an attempt to persuade the protesters to clear the road and kept assuring them that their grievances would be conveyed to the authorities concerned. However, after agreeing to suspend their protest for the time being, the protesters proceeded to the Rice Canal regulator and held a sit-in there.

They continued to raise slogans against irrigation officials until the latter found it better for them to leave the place.

Speaking to reporters, representatives of the protesting growers condemned the local irrigation officials' callousness pointing out that they [protesters] kept sitting outside their offices for eight long hours but none of the officials even bothered to give them a hearing.

In Shahdadkot, growers, farmers and tillers from three taluka headquarters — Qubo Saeed Khan, Sujawal and Shahdadkot — assembled at Koto Moto Chowk on Monday to hold a sit-in under a tent pitched for the purpose.

Barrister Akhtar Jabbar Shaikh, PTI activist Ms Musarrat Shah, Comrade Uris Selro and Wahab Pindarani led the protest.

They complained that perhaps the irrigation secretary's clear-cut instructions to his subordinates for the release of water into the Shahdadkot and Saifullah Magsi branches — the offshoots of Khirthar Canal — had landed on deaf ears.

They noted with concern that thousands of growers and their livestock were facing a serious situation as water scarcity had severely affected paddy cultivation and fodder production.

They said almost 40 irrigation branches and their tributaries irrigating thousands of acres for rice cultivation were either dried up or were flowing with a negligible amount of water. The available supply was not sufficient enough to cater to the drinking requirement of the areas' population, they added.

They termed the inaction on the part of the Sindh government and irrigation department "gross negligence" and warned that if they did not pay any heed to the situation even now, this might lead to starvation and drought.

In Naushahro Feroze, growers receiving water from Sehralet minor [irrigation channel] held a demonstration outside the Moro Press Club on Monday against an acute water shortage in their area.

The protesters were carrying banners and placards inscribed with demand for water and raising slogans against irrigation officials.

Their leaders, Manthar Marri, Pir Ejaz Ali, Ghulam Mustafa Bhatti, Ismail Almani and others, said a shortage in this channel had been persisting for more than two decades but now it had aggravated to an unbearable level.

They said the tail-enders had been living a miserable life due to the situation. Their lands had turned barren and a drought-like situation was emerging, they added.

They alleged that their share in water was still being sold to influential figures of the area.

They demanded deployment of Rangers' personnel along the channel to check water theft.

Published in Dawn, July 2nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1491504/growers-take-to-streets-in-several-towns-amid-drought-like-conditions

EGG PASTEURISATION JOINT VENTURE STARTS PRODUCTION IN SINDH

By Usman Hanif Published: July 2, 2019

KARACHI: With the help of the Netherlands' government, an entrepreneur has established a modern egg pasteurisation company in Sindh, which will help modernise the egg supply chain in the province.

Barkat Frisian Egg Company – a joint venture between Frisian Egg of the Netherlands and the Buksh Group of Pakistan – has started processing a million eggs per day. Pakistan's egg production grew by a billion from 13.7 billion eggs in 2017-18 to 14.7 billion in 2018-19 and by 2020, the number is expected to grow by more than a billion.

Barkat Frisian Egg Company is the first of its kind liquid egg pasteurisation company set up at the Bin Qasim Industrial Park with monthly production capacity of 1,000 tons.

The project was set up with a total cost of Rs243 million comprising Rs170 million in debt and Rs73 million in equity. A debt of Rs110 million (€500,000) was provided by the Netherlands government. The Sindh Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF) has set aside Rs17 million for interest payment that the company will incur on the loan.

The company makes different components from eggs such as whole egg pasteurised liquid, egg yolk pasteurised liquid, egg white pasteurised liquid, sugar and salt blended products, and frozen and fresh products. These products are demanded in the domestic market by confectionaries, bakeries and restaurants. The company can also tap export potential in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and other countries.

Byproducts of the company include egg shells, which are used in cosmetics and animal feed, and egg membrane, which is used in the pharmaceutical industry.

"My dream came true when the government of Sindh and the government of the Netherlands agreed to join hands," said Barkat Frisian Egg Company CEO M Adil Ali. "Besides, Frisian Egg and the Netherlands' government have complete confidence in Pakistan's economic outlook."

"At least 33% of all eggs produced in Europe are processed as liquid or powder and we hope to achieve this in Pakistan too," said Frisian Egg Group Chairman Jacob Stuiver at the inauguration ceremony held recently. Sindh Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah said the province would aim to benefit from European companies like Frisian Egg, adding that the government would invite more Dutch companies to enter and form joint ventures in Pakistan. He extended support to investors in agro-based businesses from the Sindh investment department, livestock and fisheries, agriculture and forest departments.

"We are trying to encourage the agriculture-based industry and for the purpose we have established a fund to assist such industries in Sindh," he said. Also speaking at the inauguration ceremony, the Netherlands Ambassador Ardi-Stoios Braken voiced hope that the joint venture would steer food safety, professionalisation of the food chain and reduction of waste besides creating employment.

Sindh Investment Department Secretary Ahsan Ali Mangi termed the joint venture a success of the SEZs in Pakistan.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 2nd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2004151/2-egg-pasteurisation-joint-venture-starts-production-sindh/

TAREEN ASKS SINDH TO JOIN PM'S AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME

Amin Ahmed Updated July 03, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Sindh still stays away from the Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme, and Jahangir Khan Tareen, a close confidant of Prime Minister Imran Khan, on Tuesday asked the provincial government to become part of the programme for the sake of the country and the agricultural sector.

The federal government has kept an allocation of close to Rs18 billion for the development of agriculture in Sindh. The provincial government should set aside politics and join the programme, Mr Tareen said while addressing a press conference along with Minister for National Food Security and Research Mahboob Sultan and the provincial agriculture ministers of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Sindh government has not made a decision yet on whether or not it will participate in the programme.

Agriculture was of national importance and needed immediate attention, Mr Tareen said. Participation by Sindh could uplift the agriculture economy, he said, adding that he would request the province to join hands to boost agriculture in the country.

PTI leader claims rise in sugar price is going to benefit govt, not any particular sugar mill

When a journalist asked about his capacity to speak on government policies, Mr Tareen said he used to give advice to the government whenever asked. However, he avoided responding to another question in what capacity he was addressing the press conference.

Responding to a question, Mr Tareen explained that the rise in the sugar price was not going to benefit any particular sugar mill. In fact, he added, it was the increased tax on this commodity that would go to the government.

Mr Sultan and the two provincial agriculture ministers were all praise for Mr Tareen in guiding to formulate the national agriculture emergency programme.

The 'National Agriculture Emergency Programme' has been revised and Mr Tareen said that the entire programme consisting of 16 projects across five areas would cost Rs309.7bn, and the Executive Commit-tee of National Economic Council would approve the projects this month.

Originally, the programme intended to spend Rs290bn over the next five years to boost the agriculture sector in 10 areas. However, the details of the programme announced by Mr Tareen are composed of 16 projects.

According to the presentation document prepared by the office of the national agriculture emergency programme at the Prime Minister Office, "this is one of the largest consolidated efforts on agriculture by any government in Pakistan's history and is a flagship programme of the PTI government, the size of which will grow beyond the Rs309bn mark in the coming years".

Mr Tareen explained that Rs44.8bn with the federal government share of Rs7.4bn would be spent to dramatically increase yields of major crops and boost adoption of oilseeds. At present, the yield gap per acre between progressive and ordinary farmers is nearly double. This exists due to a lack of 'capital for mechanisation', 'knowledge of modern techniques', 'timely formal credit' and 'assured marketability at harvest time'.

In the area of wheat, an amount of Rs19.3bn, including federal share of Rs2.47bn, has been earmarked, and the project will help increase average yield from 33 to 40 maunds per acre to produce excess wheat for export without compromising on food security. The government would free up 1.5 to 2 million acres of land for more productive crops, he said.

Mr Tareen listed details of all the 16 projects and said that given the same water and area, Pakistan had the potential to drastically increase aggregate production of major crops by increasing productivity.

The sugarcane project will cost Rs3.9bn, including federal share of Rs0.7bn, and is aimed at increasing yield by 150 maunds per acre from 650 to 800 maunds. The objective is to increase productivity to export sugar without subsidy.

"We will replicate and improve the project in the second phase, and the government will line up to 50 per cent of total length of 73,078 watercourses inclusive of 13,875 water storage tanks. In addition, the government will subsidise additional 12,110 laser levellers," he said.

Mr Tareen also mentioned command area development of the Gomal Zam dam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Katchi canal in Balochistan.

The Punjab agriculture minister said that the provincial government would establish four new private markets by 2022 in Lahore, Dera Ghazi Khan, Hafizabad and Rawalpindi.

Published in Dawn, July 3rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1491715

REPORT SUGGESTS ANTI-LOCUST SPRAY TO BE CONDUCTED IN MONSOON

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent July 03, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Sindh agriculture extension department has prepared a report about presence of locusts in various districts of the province.

A meeting between officials of the agriculture department and department of plant protection (DPP) is likely to be held on Thursday (July 5) to discuss how to ensure anti-locust spray in the affected areas.

Reports from different districts being prepared by the field staff of the agriculture extension department are being compiled on a daily basis.

The compiled report suggested presence of locusts in Naushahro Feroze, Matiari, Umerkot, Tharparkar, Jamshoro, Ghotki, Sukkur, Shaheed Benazirabad, Larkana and Sanghar.

The report recommends that anti-locust spray in desert areas be carried out during monsoon season. The department of plant protection should be requested to depute a team of experts to conduct a detailed survey in collaboration with the agriculture extension department. It says locust swarms are seen scattered in fields but without causing any damage to crops.

The agriculture extension department has established emergency centres in the affected areas in coordination with the local administrations. In some districts, adult population of locust is found. The report notes that the swarms are moving towards the desert region of Tharparkar.

It is learnt that during the expected July 5 meeting, the agriculture department would urge the department of plant protection to ensure that anti-locust spray is carried out in the desert areas.

The agriculture department itself, in collaboration with farmers, would also undertake anti-locust spray to protect standing crops.

"We are also requesting Sindh government to release [the required] funds so that the spray could be done," said an agriculture department officer posted at Karachi.

He said that the chief minister and agriculture minister were quite concerned over the locust invasion, adding that the government was set to eliminate locust before it could cause widespread damage to crops.

He claimed that the agriculture department had been in touch with the plant protection department since it received the first report about locust invasion in Khairpur's Nara area.

He said that an aerial spray was done in that area by the DPP.

The cotton crop in Sindh is currently at the maturing stage. Growers are worried about a possible locust invasion which may destroy their crop and, therefore, are desperate to see that locust swarms are eliminated wherever they are present to ensure no damage is done to their anticipated healthy cotton crop this season.

Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu last week claimed that no major damage was caused to crops by locust.

He, however, warned that the threat was still there as monsoon rains might provide room for breeding of locusts. He said his department was taking every possible step to counter the threat.

Our Khairpur Correspondent adds: Local growers on Tuesday reported presence of locust swarms in the desert area of Nara taluka in this district.

They said they were making efforts on their own to protect their crops with available means.

Some of them told this reporter that the swarms were spotted intruding the region from three districts of Balochistan.

However, they added, the swarms had not yet advanced to the cultivated lands though there was still a risk of locust attack on standing crops in the taluka.

Published in Dawn, July 3rd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1491694/growers-take-to-streets-in-several-towns-amid-drought-like-conditions

RS 309 BILLION AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN UNVEILED

ZAHEER ABBASI JUL 3RD, 2019   ISLAMABAD

The government has announced over Rs 309 billion Prime Minister"s National Agriculture Emergency Programme for the development of agriculture sector, saying that previous governments are responsible for dismal state of agriculture sector due to steep decline in spending in post-devolution period.

Addressing a news conference on Tuesday, Minister for Minister for Food Security Mehboob Sultan, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Jahangir Khan Tareen and provincial agriculture ministers, except of Sindh, stated that Prime Minister"s programme will increase agriculture spending significantly over the next five year to turn around the sector.

Tareen acknowledged that the government must have taken prior action to prevent increase in prices of commodities.

Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan and the provincial agriculture ministers of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa praised Tareen"s role in formulating the programme.

Tareen stated that projects would be approved by the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnec) in the current month to pave way for their implementation.

According to the presentation distributed among the journalists and broad initiatives of the programme explained during the briefing, over the next five years, share of the federal government is Rs 85 billion, provincial governments would contribute Rs 175 billion and share of farmers would be Rs 50 billion.

Tareen said that given the same water and area, Pakistan has potential to drastically increase aggregate production of major crops; however, the yield gap per acre between progressive and ordinary farmer is double due to lack of capital for mechanisation knowledge of modern techniques, timely formal credit and assured marketability at harvest time.

He said that Rs 44.8 billion would be spent, with the federal government"s share of Rs 8.8 billion, to increase yields of major crops and boost adoption of oilseeds. The first project is related to boost the wheat productivity with the spending of Rs 19.3 billion including federal share of Rs 2.47 billion. The project has been designed to help increase average yield from 33 to 40 maunds per acre to produce excess wheat to export without compromising on food security. The government will free up 1.5 to 2 million acres of land for more productive crops, he said.

The sugarcane project will cost Rs 3.9 billion including federal share of Rs 0.7 billion and aims at increasing yield by 150 maunds per acre from 650 maunds to 800 maunds. The objective is to increase productivity to export sugar without subsidy.

Tareen avoided a question when asked in what capacity he was addressing the press conference following the Supreme Court"s decision against him. Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan stated that he had requested Tareen to come and address the press conference. He said that the government also wants to reduce the role of middle man by establishing four new markets to ensure that farmers get maximum prices of their crops.

Tareen said that command areas of Gomal Zam Dam and Kacchi Canal Project would be improved and in the second phase more than two hundred thousands of acres of land would be brought under cultivation.

Replying to a question, he said that actual issue of support price was its enforcement and the present government had ensured full price of sugarcane and wheat support price to the farmers. Tareen also urged Sindh government to join the Prime Minister"s National Agriculture Emergency Programme for the sake of the country and agricultural sector. The federal government has allocated around Rs 18 billion for the development of agriculture in Sindh.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190703493765/

INCREASE IN DUTY/TAXES: GHEE AND OIL PRICES MAY SHOOT UP BY RS 18-20 PER KG/LITRE: PVMA

RECORDER REPORT JUL 3RD, 2019 LAHORE

The Pakistan Vanaspati Manufacturers Association (PVMA) drawing the attention of the government towards increase in duty/taxes suggested in Finance Act 2019-20 has claimed that it may increase the prices of ghee and cooking oil by minimum Rs 18-20 per kilogram/liter.

PVMA Chairman Tariq Ullah Sufi in a letter to Minister for State for Revenue Muhammad Hammad Azhar said that different government representatives had announced (even on the floor of House) that no additional duty/tax will be imposed in the Finance Act 2019-20 on edible oils.

He said the assurance of not adding any supplementary tax burden on industry was also conveyed to PVMA delegation in a meeting with the minister and his team members. “Considering your promise, the industry completely abstained from airing its concern through any mean of media and continued with its business as usual of imports-cum-manufacturing and unhindered supply of ghee and cooking oil in market to meet the consumer demand.”

The letter said it was indeed shocking to learn that contrary to 'government statements' with respect to budgetary measures, the duty/taxes on industrial raw material and finished products have been increased substantially.

Highlighting the details, Tariq Sufi pointed out that the rate of additional custom duty enhanced from previous 2% to revised 7% ie. an increase of 5% vide Customs SRO 670 (I)/2019 dated 28th June 2019. The financial impact of this increase translates into minimum increase of Rs 5-6/kg or liter of Banaspati/Cooking Oil.

Replacement of fixed rate of FED at Re 1/kg as final liability of value addition with normal VAT regime is now applicable to Banaspati & cooking Oil causing an increase in price for consumers by Rs 8-10/Kg.

Similarly rate of FED applicable vide First Schedule read with Section 3 of Federal Excise Act, 2005 enhanced by 1% ie. from 16% to 17% creating another huge impact.

Levy of Income Tax (WHT) on supply of goods to whole sellers/distributors @ 0.3% on gross value of goods. The levy of additional duty/tax on inputs other then edible oil and services including sales tax on services by Provincial Revenue Authorities is likely to cross Rs 4-5/kg.

The PVMA Chairman maintained that in view of above, it is for sure that price of Banaspati and cooking Oil will experience a cumulative jump of Rs 18-20/kg for end consumers due to changes incorporated through Finance Act 2019-20.

The industry has a workable comprehensive plan to augment the efforts/charter of FBR in enhancing the tax base and documentation of economy, without disrupting the industrial production and supply chain mechanism, the letter said and added that the PVMA strongly recommends that above-mentioned harsh taxation measures should be withdrawn forthwith, since ghee and cooking oil are included in the list of staple food items largely consumed by low income and various social segments. He also claimed that on the very first day of fiscal year 2019-20, the supplies to market could not materialize due to anomalies in applicable tax regime rejected by distribution network, which obviously remains out of control or ambit of Industry.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190703493850/

RS 3.295 BILLION UVAS BUDGET APPROVED

RECORDER REPORT JUL 3RD, 2019   LAHORE

The Syndicate of University of Veterinary and Animal Science Lahore approved Rs 3.295 billion budgets for the financial year 2019-20 with focus on Innovation, research, development, improving facilities for quality of education, services and transfer of technology.

Chairing the 59th Syndicate meeting, Vice-Chancellor Meritorious Professor Dr Talat Naseer Pasha said that focus is on applied research and development projects for further improving the quality of education, research and services at the university. The value of the ongoing 144 research projects is Rs 1.454 billion.

Professor Pasha told the meeting that a hefty amount of Rs 1.545 billion has been allocated for development projects. Of the total development allocation, Rs 1.152 billion will be spent on ongoing projects while Rs 393 million on new projects to be initiated in the financial year 2019-20.

Work on "Livestock Sector Development Through Capacity Building Allied Research and Technology Transfer University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (UVAS)" will begin this year for which Rs 300 million have been allocated. The Higher Education Commission is funding this project.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190703493851/

PUNJAB CM UPHOLDS OLD WHEAT PRICES

By Our Correspondent Published: July 3, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, rejecting the support price of wheat, has principally decided to uphold the previous government rates of wheat and flour. To fulfil this objective, the government will bear a subsidy of Rs480 per 40kg at the government rate and the support price for procurement from farmers will be fixed at Rs1,300 per 40kg.

At the same time, wheat will be provided to flour mills from the start of August. There is strong apprehension of losses to traders who will store wheat in the midst of this decision. A few days ago, several suggestions were sent in a summary sent to CM Punjab from the department of food. The CM Punjab made it clear that there should be no increase in the price of flour and the government will bear the subsidy. In the previous season, the department of food sold wheat to flour mills at Rs1,300 per 40kg. The ex-mill and wholesale prices of flour, weighing 20kg, were fixed at Rs760 and Rs775, respectively.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 3rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2004868/1-punjab-cm-upholds-old-wheat-prices/

SUPPLIERS SHIFTING TO PASTEURISED MILK SALE AMID 2022 DEADLINE

By Asif Mehmood Published: July 3, 2019

LAHORE: Complying with the Punjab food regulator's order, milk suppliers in the provincial capital have started shifting towards the sale of pasteurised milk.

The aim is to ensure the provision of uncontaminated milk.

The move comes following a deadline set by the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) that restricts the sale of loose milk by 2022.

In June this year, the provincial food regulator launched a survey to examine the demand for pasteurised milk in different parts of the city. Since then, milk suppliers have set up pasteurisation units.

Responding to a question about the quality of pastuerised milk, Punjab Food Authority Director General Captain (retd) Muhammad Usman said the process of pasteurisation restricts the adulteration of milk.

"The only way to prevent the contamination of milk is through pasteurisation," he claimed. "It will also help us identify suppliers involved in the adulteration of milk," the DG added. According to the

PFA DG, the price of milk is expected to rise by Rs7 per litre due to the process of pasteurisation. However, the cost of transportation would remain unchanged.

Commenting on the process, M Sarwar, who heads a unit pasteurisation, said the milk undergoes rigorous screening at laboratories before being transported to the plant. “We reject milk if it is below our quality standard,” he said.

Despite resistance from major suppliers, the policy is being adopted across the province and a full transition is expected in the next two years. “I want to protect the future generations by providing them healthy milk,” said one of the suppliers, who claims most sellers in the city are irked by PFA’s decision to promote the sale of pasteurised milk.

Pakistan ranks third in the world with 41.6 million tonnes production of milk every year. Sources in the department of Livestock and Dairy Development reveal millions of litres of milk are wasted due to the absence of processing facilities. To tackle this challenge, a number of processing plants have been established in the last decade.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 3rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2004871/1-suppliers-shifting-pasteurised-milk-sale-amid-2022-deadline/

HALF OF JUTE MILLS IN PAKISTAN REMAIN CLOSED

By Omar Qureshi Published: July 3, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan Jute Mills Association (PJMA) Secretary Muhammad Younus has lamented the dismal condition of jute mills in Pakistan, which has emerged largely due to the financial crunch currently plaguing many sectors of the economy.

Talking to The Express Tribune, he said out of 10 member mills of PJMA, only four to five were functional, out of which only two were running efficiently. “Bangladesh has also influenced Pakistan’s jute industry by banning the product’s export to Pakistan from time to time,” he revealed. The jute sector of Pakistan relies heavily on imported raw material.

“Although India is the largest producer of jute globally, it doesn’t export it because the entire produce is utilised in meeting the country’s own needs; hence Bangladesh is the largest exporter of jute,” Younus said. “Therefore, Pakistan has to rely on imports from Bangladesh to run the jute industry.”

“Pakistan has ample export and production capacity but its true potential is not being utilised,” he noted, adding that the government and international politics were to be blamed as Bangladesh halted jute exports whenever Pakistan’s relations with India worsened.

Pakistan’s jute exports were quite low and amounted to just a few million dollars, the PJMA secretary disclosed.

According to the PBS, the country imported jute worth $34.5 million in Jul-May FY19, which was 27.5% lower than imports of $47.6 million in the same period of previous fiscal year. He pointed out that farmers had started storing grain in polypropylene bags, which were imported from Thailand, as they were a cheaper alternative to jute bags.

Such a practice was harmful for the environment as well as human health as grain storage in polypropylene bags for a long time would harm the quality, he pointed out.

He urged the government to increase import duty on polypropylene bags in order to discourage unhygienic practices and promote locally made jute bags.

Welcoming the waiving of duty on jute import from Bangladesh, he said it would help the ailing jute units in restarting production and help promote hygienic storage. Last week at an event, Bangladesh High Commissioner Tarik Ahsan urged the government of Pakistan to waive the duty on jute import so that Pakistani public could enjoy jute products at affordable prices.

According to the Pakistan Customs Tariff 2018-19, posted on the FBR website, the country charges 3% customs duty on the import of raw and processed jute. However, an 11% duty is applicable to the import of jute yarn. On woven fabrics of jute and jute bags, customs duty of 20% is charged.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 3rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2004938/2-half-jute-mills-pakistan-remain-closed/

FARMERS STAGE 'LONG MARCH'

A Correspondent July 04, 2019

THATTA: A large number of farmers and their supporters staged a 'long march' from Makli to Thatta on Wednesday to draw government's attention towards acute shortage of water in coastal areas of the district.

The protesters held a sit-in on the National Highway where their leaders addressed them and said that thousands of people in coastal areas were thirsting for water. They demanded the government take pity on their plight and take serious measures to supply their areas with water.

Published in Dawn, July 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1491922/farmers-stage-long-march

ECC REJECTS PROPOSAL FOR BAN ON WHEAT EXPORT

By Shahbaz Rana Published: July 4, 2019

In order to enhance supply of PSO products to Pakistan Railways, the committee directed the Petroleum Division to divert surplus business to Pakistan Railways that offers lowest freight charges as compared to other modes of transportation. PHOTO: FILE

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ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Wednesday did not approve a proposal for ban on wheat export due to apprehensions that the measure may not stop outward flow of the staple owing to its smuggling to Afghanistan.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research had requested the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet to ban the export of wheat due to nearly 32% reduction in its stock. Headed by Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, the ECC referred the matter to the Price Coordination Committee.

The ECC allowed the Port Qasim Authority (PQA) to hire a legal consultant on “negotiated terms” with relaxation in Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) rules. The rules have been relaxed to expedite the process of constructing the third liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal.

The ECC was informed that as of June 28, the wheat reserves stood at 7.775 million tons as against 11.37 million tons at the same time last year, showing a reduction of 31.8%.

Railways Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed backed the proposal while other members were of the opinion that the ban may not address the issue due to growing smuggling of wheat and its products to Afghanistan.

The country has produced 24.12 million tons of wheat against the target of 25.5 million tons from an area of 8.833 million hectares during the Rabi season 2018-19. Heavy rains coupled with hailstorms affected wheat crop in the country.

Owing to cash-flow problems, the Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) and provincial governments have not been able to pick stocks from farmers, according to the officials.

Passco and the four provinces have so far procured only four million tons of wheat against the target of 6.25 million tons, according to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Against the 1.1-million-ton procurement target, Passco procured 670,000 tons of wheat. Punjab procured 3.3 million tons against the target of four million tons. Sindh did not procure any quantity against the target of 750,000 tons. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) procured only 37,000 tons against the target of 300,000 tons and Balochistan also did not procure wheat against the target of 100,000 tons.

There were also apprehensions that the farmers were hoarding the commodity in anticipation of increase in prices. Neither the federal nor provincial governments have any mechanism to check hoarding and profiteering after the end of magistracy system.

In the past one year, Pakistan exported 5.15 million tons of wheat and wheat flour. This included 3.27 million tons of wheat and 1.87 million tons of wheat products. The country earned export proceeds that the government did not want to forego.

However, some ECC members expressed concern that if the trend continued, Pakistan may have to import wheat after three to four months.

Pakistan exported one million tons of wheat to Indonesia, 424,500 tons to Malaysia and 370,000 tons to Afghanistan, which also imported 84,235 tons of wheat products from Pakistan.

But the quantum of smuggling is said to be far higher than formal exports to Afghanistan.

The Petroleum Division briefed the ECC about the utilisation of railway services for the transportation of petroleum products to upper areas of the country. In order to enhance the supply of PSO products to Pakistan Railways, the committee directed the Petroleum Division to transfer surplus business to Pakistan Railways that offers lowest freight charges as compared to other modes of transportation. The ECC allowed the Ministry of Maritime Affairs to hire a legal consultant with relaxation in PPRA rules.

While giving a presentation to the ECC, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs emphasised the urgency of establishing the third LNG terminal at Port Qasim so as to overcome gas shortage in the country in the years ahead. The third terminal is to become operational before November next year aimed at meeting gas needs that are expected to grow further next year due to the fall in domestic production.

In order to expedite the process of establishing the third LNG terminal, the committee approved resolutions of the PQA board by exempting the authority from public tendering for appointment of legal consultants through negotiated tendering, according to an official statement of the finance ministry.

The ECC also approved the resolution of the board that allowed amendments to the PQA master plan to accommodate the prospective third LNG terminal. The ECC in its decision, in February 2019, had directed the Ministry of Maritime Affairs to expeditiously work on setting up an additional LNG terminal.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 4th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2005521/2-ecc-rejects-proposal-ban-wheat-export/

FERTILISER PRODUCERS PUT OFF PRICE INCREASE

By APP Published: July 4, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce and Textile Abdul Razak Dawood has remarked that the fertiliser industry will not increase prices until further discussions.

In a meeting of the Fertiliser Review Committee, Dawood stressed that provision of relief to farmers and a working relationship with the industry were the government’s top priorities.

He inquired about reports that fertiliser prices had been hiked prior to the meeting, but meeting participants responded that due to the commitment to the adviser, the price increase had been halted.

The PM adviser appreciated the step and encouraged the building of a working relationship between the ministry and the industry as only that could lead to a stable business environment and provide relief for the general public, especially the farmers.

The adviser assured the meeting participants that efforts would be made to ensure gas supply to Fatima Fertiliser and Agritech in order to keep them operational and avoid any shortage of fertiliser in the upcoming sowing season.

The issue of gas infrastructure development cess (GIDC) also came up for discussion in the meeting. It was noted that the revised GIDC Act had been ratified by the federal cabinet and may soon be passed by parliament.

“This will help to settle differences with the fertiliser industry and will also prove fruitful for revenue generation in the country,” he said.

As the matter fell under the purview of Petroleum and Natural Resources Division, the representative concerned was requested to ensure that all stakeholders were on the same page in dealing with the issue.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2005532/2-fertiliser-producers-put-off-price-increase/

BMP LEADER URGES LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR AGRI SECTOR

N H ZUBERI /2019/07/04

KARACHI: Secretary General (Federal) of Businessmen Panel (BMP), Ahmad Jawad has stressed the need for having a long-term strategy for reducing the vulnerability of the farming community and accelerating agriculture development.

“Agriculture reforms, reducing bank interest rate and credit availability to micro, small and medium enterprises will take Pakistan’s economic growth to optimum level,” he observed.

He further said, “We need to look at reforms in agriculture sector to improve productivity and change the type of agricultural produce we make. We do very little increase value added products,” he said. However, he highlighted that farm loan waivers are not a sustainable solution but only temporary patch work to ease farmers’ distress. It only gives immediate relief.”

As the performance of agriculture during 2018-19 remained subdued as the sector grew by 0.85%, which is much lower than the target of 3.8% set at the beginning of the year.

Over the last decade, the performance of agriculture sector has fallen short of the desirable level, mainly because of stagnant productivity of all important crops.

“Crop area of the five traditional crops has largely remained unchanged. Climate change also poses a serious challenge to Pakistan’s agriculture and threatens country’s water availability and food security,” Jawad maintained.

He further said that public and private sectors should come together to facilitate the adoption of efficient agriculture extension system for a robust growth.

He highlighted the need for a focused and strategical designed policy reforms that would increase the outreach for extension agents to large number of agriculture population.

Although Public Private Partnership (PPP) models do exist in agri extension, he opined that PPP mode can still be explored to its full potential. There is a major gap in the availability of the extension agents for the farmers. It is here by advised that the private sector can come forward and plug in the gap.

He stressed the need to use technology and tools with agro-eco region-based land use and weather-based agro Met advisory services to help farmers and reduce weather-related losses.

The BMP leader further said that the government should cut interest rates and adopt consistent policies for the export of agricultural related produce to enable Pakistani exporters to take advantage of the current US-China trade war.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/07/04/19-page/789736-news.html

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS: GOVT NOT TO IMPORT 0.1M TONS OF UREA

/2019/07/04

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has reportedly decided not to import 0.1 million tons of urea due to financial constraints and on assurance from domestic industry that it will not increase price for the time being, well-informed sources told Business Recorder.

The decision was taken at a meeting between the Prime Minister’s Adviser on Commerce, Textile Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood and other stakeholders on Wednesday.

The impact of increase in gas feed price from 185 to Rs 300 per MMCFD and fuel price from Rs 780 to 1,021 per MMBTU has been calculated at Rs 210 per bag.

The meeting was informed that there is no shortage of urea in the country as a surplus is available. However, urea prices have witnessed substantial increase in prices during the last 8-10 months.

The fertilizer industry intended to increase urea prices owing to increase in prices of feed and fuel by the SNGPL and SSGCL, in addition to GIDC.

However, Razzak Dawood has asked the representatives of fertilizer industry not to increase urea prices without taking the Ministry of Industries on board. He further directed that the Ministry’s officials and fertilizer industry should sit together and finalise urea prices.

According to sources, fertilizer industry has also been asked to hold a meeting with Petroleum Division to sort out differences on proposed amendments in GIDC Act.

However, the fertilizer industry wants clarity on contents of GIDC amendment and date of its enactment.

Managing Director Fauji Fertilzer Company (FFC) stated that the industry appreciates the following decisions taken by the former finance minister with regard to settlement of the GIDC issue, pending since long, as it reflects the vision of the government on industrial development and growth: (i) past GIDC on fertilizer sector between January 1, 2012 and the date of commencement of proposed amendment to the GIDC Act, will be settled by waiving off 50 percent of the total GIDC, chargeable under various GIDC Ordinances/Acts as applicable from time to time, without any implications of related input GST; (ii) subject to continuity for the gas consumers in the country, rates of GIDC at second schedule of GIDC Act 2015 will be prospectively reduced by 50 per cent. The sources said, it was decided that import of 100,000 tons of urea would be cancelled because of sufficient inventory. Fertilizer industry has obliged the government to hold the price for a day or so, seeking clarity on GIDC amendment, contents and date. “We are hopeful, the government will honour the agreement on GIDC with former Minister for Finance Asad Umar,” said one of the representatives of fertilizer industry. The prices approved for consumers of SNGPL and SSGC will also be made applicable for fertilizer and power sector consumers to whom gas is supplied directly from field by Mari Petroleum Company Limited (MPCL) and Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL).

On June 26, 2019, the ECC was informed that the government has approved a proposal to amend the GIDC Act whereby 50 per cent waiver in prospective GIDC rates will be available for all sectors excluding domestic and commercial sectors. The resultant reduced rates will off-set the increase in the base tariff to a major extent.

While remaining within the overall scheme of Gas Development Surcharge (GDS) and levy of collection under the law, Petroleum Division in consultation with Finance Division, Ogra and relevant stakeholders will develop a mechanism which would allow adjustment of any shortfall of SNGPL out of the surplus revenue generation of SSGC, so as to create a balance in the overall system. A proposal in this regard will be submitted to the ECC separately for consideration.—MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/07/04/20-page/789743-news.html

16 COUNTRIES SLAM EU REGULATION OF FARM PRODUCTS AT WTO

Reuters Updated July 05, 2019

GENEVA: The United States and 15 other countries launched a broadside of criticism at the European Union on Thursday, saying its “hazard-based” approach to regulating pesticides and other “critical tools” used by farmers was damaging livelihoods worldwide.

Their statement, submitted to the World Trade Organisation, said the EU’s approach created great uncertainty and diverged from science-based risk assessments, creating disruption that threatened to escalate significantly in coming years.

They called on the EU to re-evaluate its approach to product approvals, use internationally accepted methods of setting tolerance levels for potentially harmful ingredients, and stop “unnecessarily and inappropriately” restricting trade.

The statement was backed by Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecu-ador, Guatemala, Honduras, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the United States and Uruguay.

They said farmers needed to be able to access the “full range of safe tools and technologies” in order to meet the challenge of producing more food.

“Yet, our farmers’ choice of safe tools is increasingly undermined by regulatory barriers that are not founded on internationally agreed risk analysis principles and do not take into account alternative approaches to meeting regulatory objectives,” they said.

“This is already having a substantial negative impact on the production, and trade of, safe food and agricultural products, an impact that is likely to increase in the future.” The statement, sent for debate at the WTO’s Council for Trade in Goods later this month, said the EU had effectively banned some substances that other WTO members regarded as safe.

"In implementing these measures, it appears that the EU is unilaterally attempting to impose its own domestic regulatory approach onto its trading partners," they said.

Despite repeated requests at the WTO over the past four years, the EU had not explained what level of protection it was seeking or what risks it was trying to mitigate, and it had ignored comments on draft regulations, they said.

Published in Dawn, July 5th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1492231

DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR AGRICULTURE

RECORDER REPORT JUL 5TH, 2019

Keeping in view the importance of agriculture sector in the economy, the government announced over Rs 309 billion Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme for the development of this sector on 2nd July 2019, stating that this programme would increase agriculture spending significantly over the next five years to turn around the sector. Addressing a news conference in Islamabad, Minister for Food Security, Mehboob Sultan, PTI's leader, Jahangir Khan Tareen and provincial agriculture ministers, except that of Sindh, revealed that projects in the programme would be approved by Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnec) and out of the total amount, the share of federal government will be Rs 85 billion while provincial governments and farmers will contribute Rs 175 billion and Rs 50 billion, respectively. Giving the background, Jahangir Tareen said that, given the same water and area, Pakistan has the potential to drastically increase aggregate production of major crops but the gap in the yield per acre between progressive and ordinary farmers is double due to lack of capital for mechanisation, knowledge of modern techniques, timely availability of formal credit and assured marketability at harvest time. He stated that Rs 44.8 billion, with the federal government's share of Rs 8.8 billion, will be spent to increase yield of major crops and boost production of oil seeds. The sugarcane project would cost Rs 3.9 billion, including the federal share of Rs 0.7 billion, aimed at increasing the yield by 150 maunds per acre from 650 maunds to 800 maunds. The objective was to increase productivity to export sugar without subsidy. Tareen also revealed that command areas of Gomal Zam Dam and the Kacchi Canal project would be improved and more than two hundred thousands of acres of land would be brought under cultivation in the second phase.

In our view, the present government, particularly the Prime Minister, has done the right thing to accord a high priority to the agriculture sector because of its crucial role in uplifting the economy of Pakistan, expanding exports, promoting employment and reducing poverty. Agriculture contributes 18.5 percent to the country's GDP and provides 38.5 percent employment to the national labour force but it remains a backward sector of the economy while high performing agriculture is always the need of the hour due to natural endowment of factors of production in the country. Instead of any improvement, performance of agriculture sector has fallen short of desirable levels because of stagnant productivity of major crops. It is good to see that Prime Minister Imran Khan has taken keen interest in the agriculture sector and initiated PM's Agriculture Emergency Programme to take a holistic view of the issues facing the agriculture sector to enhance agriculture productivity and improve the lives of farmers. The urgency of the situation could be gauged from the fact that while Pakistan is supposed to make a steady progress in the agriculture sector, its sectoral share in the GDP has declined from 21.8 percent in 2011-12 to 18.5 percent in 2018-19.

While welcoming the government's plan to develop the agriculture sector, which seems to be the brainchild of the PM, it needs to be stressed that ample and easy availability of funds is not the only requirement to boost productivity in the sector, the government also needs to provide effective extension services and ask the agricultural universities in the country to strive more for the development of agriculture, including for the improvement in seeds and promotion of research which could really help farmers. Moreover, irrigation system has to be improved by introducing drip irrigation and ensuring enough water for the tail-enders. Besides, although there is no argument that agriculture needs all the support for development of the economy and self-sufficiency in food, the provincial governments also need to raise revenue resources from the agriculture sector according to its potential. Also, the provincial governments themselves need to be more proactive in devising sound policy frameworks for the agriculture sector in the post-devolution period. Lastly, it seems that development plan for agriculture sector and its presentation in the news conference was mainly guided by Jahangir Tareen. A question was asked in the press conference about the capacity in which he was addressing the conference following the Supreme Court's decision against him. Of course, it may be difficult to comment on the issue but the PTI government needs to seriously ponder over the matter before someone else again raises this question at some other forum.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190705494600/

WORLD FOOD PRICES EASE IN JUNE, DAIRY PRICES PLUNGE

RECORDER REPORT JUL 5TH, 2019

World food prices eased slightly in June, ending a run of five months of consecutive gains, pushed down by a plunge in the price of dairy products, the United Nations food agency said on Thursday. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also kept its forecast for worldwide cereal production in 2019 unchanged from June but up some 1.2 percent on 2018 levels, with most of the growth expected to come from higher wheat production.

FAO's food price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar, averaged 173.0 points last month from an upwardly revised 173.5 points in May. That figure was previously given as 172.4.

The FAO dairy price index plummeted 11.9% from May's value, but was still up 9.4% since the start of the year, with June's price weakness triggered by increased export opportunities and weak import demand. The FAO vegetable price index also fell, dropping 1.6% month-on-month and touching its lowest level since December, hit primarily by weakening palm oil and soy oil prices.

By contrast, the cereal price index rose 6.7% from May and was 3.8% up on the year, driven by a sharp increase in maize export price quotations, mainly due to expectations of much tighter export supplies in the world's largest producer, the United States.

The meat price index rose 1.5% on the month and the sugar index 4.2%. In its third forecast for 2019, FAO predicted world cereal production would come in at 2.685 billion tonnes, unchanged from the June report and still up 1.2% on 2018 levels. The forecast for world cereal utilisation in 2019/20 rose marginally and now looks set to exceed 2.708 billion tonnes – up 1.0% on 2018/19 levels, FAO said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190705494725/

JULY-MAY SEAFOOD EXPORT FALLS BY 4.11 PERCENT

RECORDER REPORT JUL 5TH, 2019 KARACHI

Pakistan's seafood export thinned by 4.11 percent to $406.564 million during July-May 2018-19, according to the official figures. Fall in seafood export now stands at $17.413 million in July-May 2018-19, comparing to $423.977 million in July-May 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics says.

In term of volume, Pakistan exported 179,743 metric tons of seafood to the world markets, which is lower by 2.37 percent or 4364 metric tons during the current fiscal year as against 184,107 metric tons in July-May 2017-18. In May 2019, the country's seafood export, however, grew by 11 percent or $5.652 million to $58.081 million from $52.429 million in May 2018. Seafood export quantity surged by 26.08 percent or 5340 metric tons to 25,815 metric tons in May 2019 from 20,475 metric tons in May 2018.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190705494654/

PROJECTS LAUNCHED TO BOOST CROP YIELDS: MINISTER

OUR CORRESPONDENT QUElTA

Balochistan Agriculture Minister Engineer Zamrak Khan Achakzai has said that the government is committed to the progress and prosperity of the province and serving the people is his foremost priority.

"Our doors are always open for the people as they voted us. We will never breach their trust," he said.

Achakzai shared these views, while talking to delegations from different parts of the province who called on him here on Wednesday at his office. He said that the provincial government was taking practical Steps for the uplift of Balochistan and making all- out efforts for the alleviation of poverty.

"All districts of the province were given due focus in the current fiscal budget and after completion of public-friendly projects, the province will enter a new era of progress and development," he noted.

The provincial minister observed that for the promotion of agriculture in Balochistan, projects were being started that would not only encourage the farming sector but would also increase crop production.

"We are striving hard to come up with the expectation of people and ensure all basic facilities at their doorsteps," he added.

Earlier, people apprised Achakzai of their problems upon which the minister directed the concerned authorities for the redressal of their issues.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201907050104&EN_ID=11201907050034&EMID=11201907050013

IRAN KEEN TO IMPORT 0.5M TONS OF RICE FROM PAKISTAN

By Our Correspondent Published: July 5, 2019

Iran's Minister of Industry, Mines and Business Reza Rahmani appreciated Dawood's stance on bilateral trade issues and agreed to step up efforts to enhance trade with Pakistan in order to improve economic wellbeing of both countries. PHOTO: APP

Iran's Minister of Industry, Mines and Business Reza Rahmani appreciated Dawood's stance on bilateral trade issues and agreed to step up efforts to enhance trade with Pakistan in order to improve economic wellbeing of both countries. PHOTO: APP

PHOTO: APPIran's Minister of Industry, Mines and Business Reza Rahmani appreciated Dawood's stance on bilateral trade issues and agreed to step up efforts to enhance trade with Pakistan in order to improve economic wellbeing of both countries.

Pakistan intends to improve bilateral trade and economic ties with Iran, said Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production Abdul Razak Dawood.

He made the remarks while talking to an Iranian delegation, led by Minister of Industry, Mines and Business Reza Rahmani, during first session of the 8th Pak-Iran Joint Trade Committee held to review progress on issues relating to bilateral trade.

The adviser underlined the importance of issues pertaining to two-way trade, which were discussed during the prime minister's recent visit to Iran, and expected positive response from the Iranian side.

These issues included removing barriers which made Pak-Iran preferential trade agreement – signed in 2006 – ineffective and establishing a barter trade mechanism in order to ramp up bilateral trade in agriculture, food and pharmaceutical products.

Pakistan advised to remain neutral in US-Iran standoff

"To start barter trade, both countries should select a few items having competitive advantage," he asserted. "In this regard, Pakistan can enhance export of wheat, sugar, rice and fruits to Iran."

The adviser apprised the delegation that bilateral trade was not up to the true potential and urged Iran to take necessary measures to remove non-trade barriers so that the real potential could be tapped.

He also suggested elimination of various forms of taxes such as road and load taxes on vehicles/trucks, which crossed the borders, to facilitate trade between the two nations.

During the meeting, Iran expressed keen interest in importing 500,000 tons of rice from Pakistan. It urged Pakistan to establish a necessary mechanism for early shipment of rice.

Speaking during the meeting, Rahmani appreciated Dawood's stance on bilateral trade issues and agreed to step up efforts to enhance trade with Pakistan in order to improve economic wellbeing of both countries. He promised to address all the issues which were hampering bilateral trade and assured the PM aide of creating a win-win situation for both sides.

The Iranian side acknowledged the fact that Pakistan-Iran trade relations did not match the real potential and emphasised the need for constituting a committee for barter trade.

"Both the countries have a huge potential in agriculture, which has not yet been exploited," the delegation highlighted.

Iran extended full support for removing potential bottlenecks in order to enhance trade and jointly develop a way forward.

Furthermore, it requested Pakistan government to open more border points between Pakistan and Iran mainly at Ramdan, Pishin and Korak, which would uplift bilateral trade.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 5th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2006221/2-iran-keen-import-0-5m-tons-rice-pakistan/

BREEDING OF DESERT LOCUSTS TO CONTINUE IN NARA, CHOLISTAN: FAO

Amin Ahmed Updated July 06, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Orga-nisation (FAO) of the United Nations has said that breeding of desert locusts will continue in Nara and Cholistan, causing their numbers to increase with the possibility of hopper and adult groups forming.

In its new report titled 'Desert Locust Bulletin', it said that a second round of breeding could commence in August, leading to the formation of bands and eventually small swarms. Breeding might also extend to Thar-parkar desert with the onset of the monsoon rains, it said.

In early June, spring breeding came to an end in Balochistan with the last report of swarm-laying near Lasbela while hoppers and hopper groups persisted near Lasbela, Turbat and Gwadar and in the northern interior near Dalbandin, and scattered immature and mature adults prevailed in a few places near Lasbela and Turbat.

In summer breeding areas, breeding occurred in Nara desert south of Rohri and in Cholistan near Islamgarh. Hopper groups formed in both areas but mainly in Nara where immature and mature adult groups were also present. Control operations treated 8,684 hectares of which 800 hectares were by air.

The bulletin said that this year's summer breeding was anticipated to be heavier than normal, resulting in hopper bands and perhaps small swarms along the Indo-Pakistan border where two generations might be possible.

Keeping in view the current desert locust situation in the country, the plant protection dep-artment in collaboration with the provincial governments, district administration and department of agriculture extension, was preparing to establish 'locust control centres' at the district level for ensuring a thorough surveillance and targeted control operations, sources in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research

Though the plant protection department had sufficient stocks of pesticide for the current control activities, more could be procured in case of large-scale attack of desert locusts, and the department had initiated procurement process for purchase of pesticides, sources said.

It was learned that the plant protection department was seeking financial support from the federal government as well as from the FAO to meet its huge general operating expenditures. The department had been in contact with and sensitising various associations to support the growers in handling the issue where the cultivated areas were at threat.

A 'locust emergency' might be declared to seek support of other departments in terms of manpower, vehicles, accommodation and security, the sources in the ministry said.

Published in Dawn, July 6th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1492411/breeding-of-desert-locusts-to-continue-in-nara-cholistan-fao

FLOUR TO AFGHANISTAN: PFMA PUNJAB OPPOSES MOVE TO BAN

RECORDER REPORT JUL 6TH, 2019 LAHORE

The Pakistan Flour Mills Association (Punjab Zone) has strongly opposed the idea of banning export of flour and flour products to Afghanistan with the view that it will ruin the industry worth billions of rupees. PFMA-Punjab Zone Chairman Habibur-Rehman Leghari and Group Leader Asim Raza Ahmad while commenting on a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) and the Price Monitoring Committee by the federal government apprehended that it was held to slap a ban on export of flour and flour products to Afghanistan.

They claimed that the country has wheat stock in abundance including 4.8 million tons in Punjab, 2 million tons with PASSCO and 800,000 tons of wheat is present in stores of the Sindh government. They were of the view that there should be a ban on direct export of wheat to Afghanistan but flour and flour products export should continue to help the flour milling industry of the country.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190706494908/

FORUM CALLS FOR SPENDING MORE ON AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

By Haseeb Hanif Published: July 6, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Participants of a forum discussion on Friday called for spending at least one per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on research on agriculture which they said is backbone of any economy.

They also laid stress on use of modern technology to efficiently water crops and to increase per acre yield while also protecting agricultural lands from turning into housing societies by building high-rises.

The forum, organised by the Express Media Group, was attended by Minister for Food Security Mehboob Sultan, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce former president Amir Waheed Sheikh, Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce's Khursheed Birlas and agricultural expert Dr Umar Farooq.

Speaking on the occasion, Mehboob Sultan said agriculture is the backbone of every economy and all industries are associated with it. “The present government has a clear-cut policy for agriculture and revolutionary steps are being taken,” he said.

Dr Umar Farooq said agriculture sector in Pakistan is facing shortage of water.

“We should encourage farmers to adopt various water saving techniques. The world spends 3 per cent of their GDP on agricultural research and development while we spend only 0.1 per cent on it against India’s 0.37 per cent. We should raise our allocation to 1 per cent at least.”

The expert said value addition in the agricultural products can increase income of the farmer.

Amir Waheed Sheikh said the rural population depends on crops and livestock. “We need to balance our production so that we get every kind of crop. The government should pay attention to seed development. Value addition to milk can result in many products that can benefit the farmer,” he said.

Khursheed Birlas said agricultural development is not possible without linking it with the prosperity of the farmer. Farmers feel compelled to sell their lands to housing schemes because it is more profitable.

He said the agriculture policy should increase profit of farmer.

“We need joint ventures in agriculture. We should include agricultural development projects in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. We need to make agricultural sector an export-based sector which will increase the income of farmers as well as increase the exports,” he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2007205/1-forum-calls-spending-agricultural-research/

PUNJAB BANS SALE OF GOVT WHEAT OUTSIDE PROVINCE

By Rizwan Asif Published: July 6, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab authorities have decided to halt the sale of government wheat to mills outside of the province in a bid to stabilise flour supply and prices within their jurisdiction.

According to sources, the Punjab Food Department sent a summary, recommending administrative and monitoring measures to prevent the sale of government wheat outside the province to the chief minister on Thursday.

The move is aimed at stemming the daily flow of thousands of tonnes of government wheat and flour to Afghanistan via Torkham and Chaman border crossings, sources said. “The provincial government is aware that flour prices will continue to rise and create a crisis unless the delivery of wheat and flour to Afghanistan is stopped,” an official told The Express Tribune. “That is why it has decided to take stern measures.”

Sales from private stockpiles will still be allowed but those involved in the transaction will have to provide written proof that the wheat being sold is not sourced from the government, sources added. According to them, all mill owners and wheat and flour merchants in Punjab have already provided details on their private stock to the food department.

"In order to make sure enough wheat is available in the open market, the provincial government has decided to sell its stockpile within this month," the official said. "Flour mills will be provided a limited quota initially to encourage the sale of private stock. The government will then increase this quota in August," he added.

Flour Mills Association leader Asim Raza, however, voiced some reservations. "Afghanistan has been a strong market for our flour. Any ban could result in a big loss for the local wheat and flour industry," he said. "The authorities should consult us before taking any such decision."

Once the ban is in place, the provincial government will decide at what price and with how much subsidy the 4.8 million tonnes of wheat available with the food department will be sold to mills within Punjab, sources said.

At present, the food department purchases wheat from farmers for Rs1,300 per mann. The actual price, once the Rs487 per mann spent on taking care of the supply is factored in, becomes Rs1,787 per mann. In order to keep the retail price of a 20kg flour bag at Rs770, the food department would have to forgo the maintenance charge and sell wheat for Rs1,300 per mann. However, this would mean the government would have to bear a burden of Rs42.6 billion on 3.5 million tonnes of wheat.

To reduce the subsidy on 3.5 million tonnes of wheat to Rs33.8 billion, the government would have to sell it for Rs1,400 per mann. However, this would increase the retail price of flour to Rs880 for 20kg bag.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2007017/2-punjab-bans-sale-govt-wheat-outside-province/

CHERRY EXPORT TO CHINA – JUST ONE STEP AWAY

By Sumaiya Kamani Published: July 5, 2019

KARACHI: China might soon be importing cherries from Pakistan. And for Pakistani officials, it'll be six years of efforts finally coming to fruition.

A delegation of Chinese quarantine experts and government officials travelled to Pakistan late last month to check the farm-to-market quality of Pakistani cherry. And, according to Pakistani officials, the visitors returned home satisfied.

The delegation from China's food and quarantine department visited the picturesque Gilgit-Baltistan region – home to cherry orchards in Pakistan.1

Currently, China imports bulk of its cherry from South American countries to meet growing demand of the exotic fruit. However, the transportation cost and time is a major predicament.

"China wants to gain market access for cherry from Gilgit-Baltistan – something which it didn't have access earlier," said Ministry of Food Security the Directorate of Plant Protection Department Deputy Director Shahid Abdullah.

Gilgit-Baltistan produces 4,000 metric tons of cherry per season. And since local consumption is limited, farmers export the fruit, Abdullah told The Express Tribune. Cherry is easily perishable fruit – with little shelf life – so Pakistan has been looking for nearby destinations to export cherry to. And

China, being a next-door neighbour with an ever-growing appetite for the fruit, is the most viable option.

Could cherry help make our economy bloom?

“We had been working on it for six years. We would send samples, but they were never accepted. Now, China has finally agreed to take a step forward by sending its officials to Pakistan,” Abdullah said.

The Chinese delegation visited cherry orchards to see if there was any disease, or pest in the fruit that could become a concern of quarantine. They toured cherry orchards, and inspected fruit quality and its shelf life. “Their major concern was fruit fly, but they didn’t find any,” he added.

The Chinese delegation collected samples of leaves and bark of cherry trees for pathologists back home to ensure the fruit is disease-free. “The two countries are expected to complete pest risk analysis (PRA), an international requirement, before exports formally start.”2

The Chinese delegation would also be preparing a post-visit report in which experts might mention mitigation measures and recommendations to rectify issues, if any. “The visit objective was to identify issues and recommend remedial measures.”

The Chinese delegation also visited laboratories. “We have an integrated pest management (IPM) lab that has biological control agents. There are controls in the lab for things found in the plant, like preys in the orchards, refrigerator requirements, etc,” Abdullah said.

They also saw pack houses in the Nomal area of G-B, where cherry is processed to increase its shelf life, among other things. “The delegation was also satisfied with the processing.”

About transportation, Abdullah said shipping containers carrying cherry would be sent by road via Sost dry port on the China-Pakistan border. “Getting access to the Chinese market for cherry would be a major breakthrough, which could be followed by export of apricot and potatoes, etc.”

G-B Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GBCCI) President Imran Ali said the Chinese delegation has assured that they would remove hurdles to cherry imports from Pakistan. “They [Chinese officials] said they would also recommend to their government to import Pakistan’s cherry which is purely organic.”

He said the Chinese delegation was satisfied with everything – from quality of the fruit to processing and packaging. “They tasted our cherries – and liked it.”

Ali said they are trying to improve the fruit quality – and it would be further improved after formal exports starts to China. “We are also trying to increase production by encouraging growers. And I’m sure we would be able to meet the Chinese demand once the supply starts,” he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2006932/2-cherry-export-china-just-one-step-away/

COTTON PRICES STEADY ON IMPROVE PHUTTI ARRIVALS

The Newspaper’s Staff Correspondent July 07, 2019

MULTAN: Cotton prices were stable on the market on Saturday amidst modest trading. The Karachi Cotton Association kept its spot rate unchanged at Rs8, 200.

Cotton experts said a steady trend prevailed in the market as the cotton arrival which is improving with each passing day.

They said the quality of cotton from Sindh is attractive for mill owners. Phutti (seed cotton) from Sindh is priced higher by Rs100 and ranged Rs3,600-4,225 while Punjab variety is pegged at Rs3,550-4,150.

The All Pakistan Oil Mills Association (POMA) on Saturday announced that it will halt the purchase of seed cotton to protest the government's decision of imposing general sales tax on the sale of oil cake. The association said old order will be delivered on Sunday but no purchase will be made. The protest will continue till the government withdraws the decision.

Meanwhile, a joint meeting of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association and POMA on Thursday discussed issued related to the cotton sector including crop target and due payment of the commodity to the cotton growers. The meeting demanded the government should announce a worthy cotton package, since without assistance achieving the set targets is not possible.

The following deals transpired on ready counter: 1,000 bales, Khanpur, at Rs8,600; 1,090 bales, Rahim Yar Khan at Rs8,500; 200 bales, Chichawatni, at Rs8,400; 200 bales, Bure-wala, at Rs8,450; 300 bales, Ahmedpur East, at Rs8,250; 2,000 bales, Sanghar, at Rs8,350, 2,400 bales, Tando Adam, at Rs8,350-8,375; and 1,600 bales, Khanpur, at Rs8,325-8,350.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1492614/cotton-prices-steady-on-improve-phutti-arrivals

COTTON CROP NOT INCLUDED IN PM'S NATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME: PKI CHIEF

FAZAL SHER JUL 7TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The government has not included cotton in Rs 309 billion Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme which has a share of 0.8 percent in gross domestic product (GDP) and contributes 4.5 percent in agriculture value addition.

President Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) Khalid Khokhar while speaking at Aaj TV programme 'Paisa Bolta Hai' with Anjum Ibrahim said that the agriculture programme announced by the government has only covered four crops including sugarcane, wheat, rice and oilseed but unfortunately does not include cotton crop, one of the most important cash crops in the country. "This programme could be a person specific but it would not benefit the country", he said.

Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai secretary Ministry of National Food Secretary and Research (MNFS&R) while talking to Business Recorder said that the government is working on an exclusive programme for betterment of cotton crop and almost 50 percent of the work has been completed. "The programme for cotton would be announced before coming of the next crop", he said.

He said that government is also working to announce indicative price for cotton as well as planning to impose duty on import of cotton. Khokhar further said that 60 percent of country's exports depend on cotton. Other countries have provided level playing field to cotton growers while the government of Pakistan has taken steps to harm the growers by allowing duty-free import of cotton from countries providing heavy subsidies to cotton producers, he said.

He said that India has massively increased cotton production. In contrast, cotton yield in Pakistan is declining every year as a result country's import bill of cotton and edible oil extracted from cotton seed is running into billions of dollars.

If government takes concrete steps for enhancement of productivity of cotton then Pakistan will not import edible oil extracted from cotton seed, he said.

Khokhar said that parliament on the 1st of May passed a resolution calling for imposition of regulatory duty on the import of cotton and fixing of support price but the government allowed import of duty free cotton. The government in spite of parliament's resolution allowed import of duty free cotton which will have a negative effect on the next crop, he said.

According to the five-year Rs 309 billion Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme, the federal government would contribute Rs 85 billion while provincial governments would contribute Rs 175 billion and share of farmers would be Rs 50 billion.

Under the programme the first project relates to boosting wheat productivity with an outlay of Rs 19.3 billion including federal contribution of Rs 2.47 billion. Another project relates to enhancement of rice crop productivity with an outlay of Rs 11.4 billion with the federal government contributing Rs 1.4billion.

The sugarcane project will cost Rs 3.9 billion with the federal government contributing Rs 0.7 billion. The national oilseeds enhancement programme will cost Rs 10.2 billion with federal government's contribution of Rs Rs 4.2 billion.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190707495177/

CRACKDOWN ORDERED ON TRADERS SELLING MILK AT HIGHER RATES

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter July 07, 2019

KARACHI: Sindh Minister for Supply and Prices Mohammad Ismail Rahu directed the city administration on Saturday to initiate strict action against those selling fresh milk at rates higher than the government-approved price as one of the dairy farmers' associations announced a Rs10 per litre increase in the milk price.

Talking to Dawn, the minister said that the provincial government had taken notice of the unilateral increase in milk price and the city administration had been directed to take stern action against profiteers.

He said the provincial government had not approved any increase in the milk price and rejected the one-sided increase announced by a body of dairy farmers.

"I have directed the commissioner and price control magistrates to initiate actions against those selling milk at increased rates," he said.

He said the city administration had been asked to hold meetings with all stakeholders, including representatives of the dairy farmers' associations.

The minister said that the city administration would address concerns of the dairy farmers, but it would not tolerate hike in milk prices without provincial government's approval.

Meanwhile, the Karachi commissioner denied reports of milk price hike in the city and said that a certain group of dairy farmers was working to get the milk rates increased.

He said legal action would be taken against milk retailers or dairy farmers who sold milk at rates higher than the price set by the government.

He said those selling milk at exorbitant rates would be jailed for six months with fines.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1492531/crackdown-ordered-on-traders-selling-milk-at-higher-rates

SECP TO ALLOW REGISTRATION OF AGRICULTURE PROMOTION COMPANIES

RECORDER REPORT JUL 7TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has decided to allow establishment and registration of Agriculture Promotion Companies (Collateral Management Companies) to provide storage and preservation services for a range of agricultural commodities and will issue credible warehouse receipts for agricultural commodity financing.

The SECP has issued Collateral Management Companies Regulations, 2019 here on Saturday. Under the new regulations, a public company desirous of establishing a Collateral Management Company may make an application for permission of the Commission.

The Collateral Management Company may engage in the activities of warehousing, i.e, provision of quality storage and preservation services for a range of agricultural commodities; issuance of credible warehouse receipts for agricultural commodity financing; stock audit, evaluation and verification services and accreditation of warehouses; and (e) any other activity as approved by the Commission.

The Collateral Management Company may grant certificate of accreditation to a warehouse, subject to the fulfilment of laid down conditions, the SECP said.

Under the conditions specified by the SECP, the principle line of business of the company is related to produce for agriculture promotion or managing produce as collateral or engaged in any activity connected with or related to any Produce or other related activities.

The company has a minimum equity of Rs 200 or such higher amount as may be specified by the Commission from time to time. The company has necessary infrastructure including but not limited to adequate office space, equipment, electronic systems and control procedures.

The company has key management personnel and technical experts with relevant qualifications and experience in warehousing and such other conditions as may be notified by the Commission from time to time.

The Commission may, by notification, constitute a committee to be known as the Warehousing Advisory Committee comprising Commission, State Bank of Pakistan, Pakistan Mercantile Exchange Limited and any other entity or person to supervise matters related to collateral management and warehousing and make recommendations for effective implementation of these regulations.

On the complete satisfaction of all the conditions for accreditation, the Collateral Management Company shall grant a certificate of accreditation to the Warehouse. Collateral Management Company shall prepare warehousing guidelines and standard operating procedures in accordance with the applicable laws and as much as possible meet the international standards for the accreditation, management and inspection of Warehouses and have the same approved by the Commission, the SECP said.

Where a Collateral Management Company contravenes or fails to comply with any provision of these regulations or is not in compliance with the conditions of registration or any directive issued or order passed by the Commission, or it is in the public interest to do so, the Commission may, after providing a reasonable opportunity of representation to the Collateral Management Company, may take such actions or impose such restrictions on its business and impose such penalties as may be applicable under this Act, Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan Act, 1997 and the Futures Market Act, 2016, the SECP said.

The Commission shall have the power to carry out inspections and investigation of the Collateral Management Company and any matter connected therewith, the SECP said.

Where the Commission is satisfied that it is necessary and expedient so to do in the public interest or to prevent the affairs of any warehouse that are likely to prejudice the interests of the stakeholders, the Commission may issue directions to the Collateral Management Company or the Warehouse Operator, SECP said.

The Commission may, on representation made to it or on its own motion, modify or cancel any direction issued under sub-regulation (1), and in so modifying or canceling any direction may impose such conditions as it deems fit.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/07/20190707495171/

THREAT OF LOCUST ATTACK LOOMS OVER SOUTH PUNJAB

By Tariq Ismail Published: July 7, 2019

DERA GHAZI KHAN: Since the threat of a locust attack on crops is looming over South Punjab, the provincial government has formed 102 special teams to deal with the situation.

Around 23 teams will work in Dera Ghazi Khan, 36 in Bahawalpur and 43 in Multan to monitor the possibility of a locust attack. Moreover, all relevant departments have also been put on alert to deal with any emergency situation in Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan.

A few days ago, Punjab Chief Secretary Yousaf Naseem Khokhar had directed the authorities concerned to evolve a plan to deal with the threat of a locust attack in South Punjab.

The Punjab Agriculture Department has bought massive aerial and land spray of pesticide sprays to control a locust attack. Punjab Pest Warning Director General Syed Zafaryab Haider told The Express Tribune that the Federal Plant Protection Department will also provide aircrafts to Punjab.

Commissioner Dera Ghazi Khan Division Asadullah Faiz said that the divisional and district administration is monitoring the movement of locusts continuously and no locust has been found anywhere in Dera Ghazi Khan Division so far.

Earlier, the Punjab Agriculture Department secretary said that they were taking care of cotton crops. He added that farmers should be provided training on pest scouting. Haider assured that farmers are being providing vocational guidance to deal with a possible locust attack on cotton crops. He had also reviewed arrangements for cotton crops and pest scouting in different areas of Dera Ghazi Khan, Jampur and Rajanpur.

Faiz had assured that the administration would cooperate with the agriculture department because Rojhan and Rahim Yar Khan are adjacent to Sindh's affected district and there is a possibility of an attack.

Bio Technology Director Dr Zafar Qureshi said that officials of the agriculture department are visiting the cotton zone frequently to guide farmers so that practical steps are taken to solve the problems of farmers. He shared that the department is trying to ensure the availability of standard agriculture medicines and fertilisers on affordable prices.

He pointed out that teams under the supervision of 102 officers are providing guidance to the farmers to review insect attacks and diseases on cotton crops. He said that pest scouting process is underway. He shared that he had a meeting with Dera Ghazi Khan Commissioner Asadullah Faiz and discussed the possible locust attack.

The agriculture department is organising awareness seminars in Rajanpur and Kot Mithan for farmers and livestock workers on a regular basis.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2007816/1-threat-locust-attack-looms-south-punjab/

RESTRICTION ON FISHING FORCES FISHERMEN TO LIVE HAND TO MOUTH

By our correspondent Jul.07, 2019

No step is taken for the welfare of fishermen who earn billions for the country

KARACHI: Restriction on fishing during the months of June and July has left hundreds of thousands of fishermen deprived on their only source of income. As a result, a large number of them are living in abysmal conditions in more than 150 fishermen colonies, located along the 129-kilometre long coastline of Karachi.

These fishermen catch up to 0.8 metric tonnes of fish annually, which is sold in international markets for approximately Rs20 billion, which is added to Pakistan's foreign reserves. However, no step is taken for the welfare of these fishermen, who earn billions for the country.

According to boatsmen in Ibrahim Hyderi, fishermen are living in derelict conditions, in the "rapidly developing Pakistan." The boat pilots explained that the biggest challenge fishermen face is that of employment. They are restricted by various laws and burdened by taxes, the boatsmen remarked, adding that fishermen are exploited by traders, brokers and mole-holders, who buy their catch at extremely low prices.

The boatsmen reflected on fishermen's misery, claiming that they were paid according to rates fixed in 1980 despite significant rise in prices due to inflation.

They were of the opinion that the deprived community of fishermen is now anxious and insecure about its future.

Boatsmen lamented that with no money and living

hand to mouth, fishermen wouldn't be able to celebrate Eidul Azha and criticised the government for not taking any steps to improve their condition.

Fishermen have time and again expressed concerns over the damage caused to marine life due to deforestation of mangroves. Due to the rapid deforestation of mangroves, breeding sites and habitats of fishes, prawns and other marine animals are severely affected.

Fishermen have also warned that overfishing has led to the loss of 75% of fish in the sea and if the situation persisted, no fishes would be left in the sea by 2045.

The fishermen have demanded from government to ensure the availability of facilities like healthcare and education in fishermen colonies.

They have also asked to be provided with employment opportunities and maintained that a durable national fisheries policy be enforced.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 7th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2007905/1-restriction-fishing-forces-fishermen-live-hand-mouth/

AUGUST 2019

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUG 05th TO AUG 11th 2019

FATE OF FISH HARBOUR SET UP IN GADDANI HANGS IN BALANCE

Syed Irfan RazaUpdated August 05, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Authorities have failed to decide the fate of the country's third fish harbour established at Gaddani, Lasbela, Balochistan, four years ago to boost seafood export to European countries and the US.

The fish harbour was developed in 2015 by a private company, MK Pakistan, which purchased 172 acres of land at the rate of Rs350,000 per acre from the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) in 2015.

However, the legal transfer of the land requires approval by the prime minister which has not come yet.

According to the MK Pakistan, despite demand of Pakistani seafood products in international market, the country has only two fish processing plants to export seafood, while India has 396, Oman 27, Iran 101 and Bangladesh 72 plants.

The private firm is of the view that Pakistan is under tremendous pressure for supply of quality fish and fisheries products to international markets to sustain and boost its seafood export. However, the condition at the Karachi Fish Harbour and its facilities do not meet international standards and Pakistan's export to EU are limited to those from only two fish processing plants. Therefore, the country is missing a golden opportunity of exporting seafood products to the European Union and the US and by opening more fish harbours and with available quantum of seafood, the country can export fish products worth over $700 million annually against the present export of $380m.

According to documents available with *Dawn*, the Fisheries Development Board supported the MK Pakistan in establishing the fish harbour in Gaddani. The Privatisation Commission did not make any objection to the purchase of land by the MK Pakistan and urged the firm to seek approval from the federal cabinet.

The PTDC had purchased the 172 acres of land from the Balochistan government some 40 years ago but it had remained under the use of the provincial government which sold the land to the MK Pakistan in 2013 under a profit-sharing agreement.

However, the deal became null and void when the PTDC took possession of the land. Then its auction for a 30-year lease took place in Dec 2014 and being the highest bidder, the MK Pakistan won the auction by offering a bid of Rs350,000 per acre.

After the MK Pakistan approached the Supreme Court to seek legal transfer of the land, a three-member bench including former chief justice Mian Saqib Nisar decided the petition of the firm on March 15, 2018, ruling that as the matter was pending before the Senate's Functional Committee on Devolution, if an adverse decision was taken by the committee, the petitioner could again move the apex court.

The Senate committee in its meeting on Feb 22, 2018 noted with concern that the genuine investor who wanted to contribute to economic development of the people of Balochistan, particularly Gaddani, was being discouraged on the pretext of internal confusion/inaction on the part of departments concerned.

The Board of Investment through a letter asked the Privatisation Commission to consider the MK Pakistan's request in the light of the cabinet division's letter of May 25, 2019 that authorised the commission to privatise 172 acres of the PTDC land. The Marine Fisheries Department, which is working under the Ministry of Ports and Shipping, has also recommended establishment of a fish harbour at Gaddani.

The summary sent to the prime minister in November also suggested that the profit-sharing agreement between the PTDC and the owners of the fish harbour be revised and that the government should increase its share.

Malik Mohammad Khan, owner of the MK Pakistan, says the livelihood of over 40,000 fishermen and their families is linked with Gaddani fish harbour.

When contacted, PTDC MD Intikhab Alam said the transfer of the land was subject to approval by the prime minister. "So far the file is lying with the prime minister and he has not signed it," he added.

The MD claimed that neither the Senate committee nor the federal cabinet had made any decision in favour of the firm.

He said the Privatisation Commission had put the land in the list of its assets to be privatised despite the PTDC request to remove the land from the list so that the corporation could act accordingly in case of any decision by the prime minister.

However, Mr Alam said the MK Pakistan should not have established the fish harbour before legal transfer of the land.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1498156

BAN IMPOSED ON CULTIVATING CROPS ON STATE LAND IN RAIN-SOAKED THAR

A Correspondent August 05, 2019

MITHI: The Sindh home department has imposed ban on cultivation of crops on government lands, tops of sandy dunes and tracts of land reserved for pasturing under Section 144 of CrPC, according to a notification issued on Saturday.

The department directed the functionaries concerned of the district including Mirpurkhas commissioner, deputy commissioner of Thar and others to ensure that no such land was brought under cultivation in the wake of bountiful showers in the desert areas of both Tharparkar and Umerkot districts during current monsoon season.

The notification added that cultivation of crops on such lands not only deprived livestock of enough fodder but also resulted in brawls and feuds among people.

Soon after the rain soaked certain areas in Mithi, Nagarparkar, Kaloi and Chhachhro talukas, Tharis started cultivating their traditional crops in hope of getting more rains in the upcoming weeks and months. The crops in the rain-dependent region mostly need five to six spells of bounteous showers with 10 to 15 days intervals between them to produce good yield.

Thar DC Dr Shahzad Tahir Thaheem told reporters on Sunday that he had already instructed the officials of revenue department to ensure that no prohibited lands were used for agricultural purposes since these pastures locally called gawchar were the only sources of fodder for the livestock, the mainstay of the desert economy.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1498171

THE COST OF POLLUTED COTTON

Amjad Mahmood August 05, 2019

THE dream of clean cotton will remain elusive owing to a lack of political will on the part of successive governments, the discouraging attitude of industrialists and a host of other factors.

The issue of cotton contamination has been plaguing the sector for decades, causing losses to the national exchequer and growers that amount to billions of rupees per annum. No success has been achieved from the half-hearted attempts made to remedy the situation.

As the country lacks implementation of standards, heavy fees have to be paid to foreign consultants for certification of cotton export consignments. In 2002, the Pakistan Cotton Standards Institute was set up to standardise clean cotton and later certify its quality for international markets where Pakistani lint is treated as third grade produce owing to minor contaminations.

To encourage growers and ginners to produce clean lint, the government offered a premium. With the cooperation of the textile millers, the growers were to be paid Rs50 per maund (40 kilograms) and the ginners Rs30. The Trading Corporation of Pakistan promised to purchase pure produce if the millers refused to do so.

The project hit snags after a couple of years. As per the requirements of the project, cotton was brought to units in open trolleys but ginners complained that growers were mixing water in cotton to increase its weight.

Rizwan Chaudhry, a ginner, says checking the ratio of moisture in raw cotton is difficult when it is in a loose form without being packed in bags. He also claims that millers don't pay the promised premium.

The project was revived for a couple of years in 2006 with the federal and Punjab government sharing the premium payments equally.

Lint first gets polluted during the picking, storage and transportation stages. It is traditionally picked by mostly untrained women who are a major source of contamination.

Threads from plastic bags and silk dupattas used for collecting the cotton bolls plucked from flowers, as well as hair, get mixed with the produce causing impurity during spinning, dyeing and subsequent processes. Pieces of leaves, immature and empty bolls, stems, flowers, sticks and weeds, trash and dust also become part of the produce during storage and hauling stages.

To circumvent this issue, the Punjab agriculture department prepared a proposal for training pickers and providing them with special clothes to wear while they picked cotton bolls. Trolleys were also to be provided for the transport of produce to ginning units or markets. Under the plan submitted in 2017, at least 416,000 female pickers were to be trained by master trainers from among women officials of the department.

But the proposal never got the go-ahead from the political leadership. The general impression is that the government remained obsessed with the Orange Line Metro Train which sucked up funds that were meant for other projects across the province.

"Not a single penny was released for the project. The relevant documents sat on tables of high-ups collecting dust," laments an official associated with the project. "We could not even provide grey cloth to pickers or tractor-trolleys to prevent financial losses of over Rs12 billion being incurred by cotton growers. What the country loses because of earning less from the export of impure lint is a separate story."

According to him, some pure cotton was picked through own resources but growers got discouraged when the millers did not pay them the right price.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the extension wing of the department is seeking to intervene and support the harvest of a contamination-free cotton crop in 2019-20. In a letter to all deputy directors of cotton growing districts, director general Dr Anjum Ali Buttar has requested women officers to provide training to pickers and to refresh the knowledge of other extension agents.

Each woman officer has been tasked to conduct at least 15 training sessions during the ongoing cotton season, while agriculture officers and field assistants are to ensure maximum participation and raising of awareness for this purpose.

The deputy directors were asked to submit a schedule for training sessions and orientation seminars latest by July 31. In the meantime, standard operating procedures for cotton picking, storage and transport have been prepared and circulated among the concerned authorities.

But so far nothing has been done as all are waiting for the release of funds, reveals an official privy to the developments.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1498084

OF WHEAT FLOUR CONSUMPTION

BR Research August 5, 2019

In 'Is Pakistan wheat insecure?', it was established that per capita wheat availability in the country stands at an average 122kg, putting it among world's top 25 regions for wheat consumption. Going by calculations of wheat supply in a recent draft study on flour industry by Competition Commission, this column got the number dead wrong.

While it is correct that annual domestic wheat production during past decade has averaged at 25.5 million tons, the CCP document notes that after accounting for factors such as seed and fodder usage, post-harvest loss, external trade, and smuggling, net supply stands at 14 million tons (three-year average), equivalent to barely 67kg per capita per annum.

If the 122kg figure is wide off the mark, BR Research is certainly not the only one to have made this error. For example, SBP's quarterly State of the Economy report noted that wheat "stocks are sufficient to cover domestic consumptive requirements of 25.8 million tons", basing it on per person requirement of 120kg as per MNFSR.

Similarly, an UN-FAO report from 2013 puts Pakistan's wheat consumption for 'food use' at 126kg, whereas a USDA-FAS report from 2017 noted wheat use at 124kg, calling it 'one of the highest in the world'. In fact, the same CCP draft document places per capita consumption of wheat between 120-124kg per annum.

Has CCP made a faux pas? It is very hard to say so. On surface, stable annual production coupled with negligible imports may indicate that Pakistan is mostly self-sufficient in wheat. Thus, crop output is used to extrapolate per capita availability and consumption.

Nevertheless, CCP's estimate is not without basis. According to Global Dietary Database (DDG) of Tufts University, Pakistan's per person whole-grain and fibre-based intake (inclusive of wheat and all other cereals) is just 10.6kg! This column had noted that instead of being one of the world's highest wheat consumers, the estimate from Tufts places Pakistan among few regions that are severely deficient in nutrient from cereal grains.

Mounting evidence from various local and international studies into food security indicate that CCP's estimate may be onto something.

If wheat is in adequate or surplus supply and wheat flour contributing up to 72 percent of caloric intake, why is more than one-fifth of the population still undernourished? Second, average annual wheat procurement by PASSCO, the primary buyer in the crop market, stands at only 6 million tons.

Even if open market contracts are equal to PASSCO operations – a very generous assumption – that still leaves more than half of the annual crop production unaccounted for. And that's where CCP's estimate of pre-milling diversions (external trade, fodder, and losses) comes into play.

Pakistan, as it turns out, is among fifteen worst countries with extreme levels of inequality in caloric distribution across population, as measured by UN-FAO using coefficient of variation. All considered, it is a very real possibility that the country may well be wheat-insecure, even if it is among top eight producers globally. As the CCP study elsewhere notes, reliable estimates of number of total milling units, installed capacity, or processing and flour output, are missing – both with the industry association and relevant government departments.

Growing population pressures mean that Pakistan's demand for wheat flour will continue to compound in foreseeable future. While stakeholders across the policymaking sector insist on a dire need to improve crop yield to meet demand, quantifying crop loss is equally important.If actual domestic demand and consumption are unknown, all forecasting models using current output as basis become irrelevant.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/08/05/515557/of-wheat-flour-consumption/

'COUNTRY LOSES OVER 40 PERCENT OF AGRI PRODUCE'

RECORDER REPORT AUG 5TH, 2019 LAHORE

Pakistan is losing more than 40 percent of its agriculture produce due to both pre-and post-harvest losses. Traditionally, the farmers in Pakistan heavily rely on pesticides to avert the losses mainly due to their quick knockdown effect but overuse result in pesticides resistance and pesticides residues. This was stated by Professor Tariq Butt while speaking at the second technical session at a

symposium organized by the UK-Pakistan Science & Innovation Global Network (UPSIGN) on "Pakistan and its Diaspora; Global Challenges and Opportunities."
The symposium was held at University College London discussing the Pakistan's challenges in relation to selected United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) and issues around Diaspora identity and wellbeing.
Second technical session was titled as "Pakistan Food Security Challenges" and Professor Tariq Butt further also highlighted the incorrect use of pesticides with regards to human and livestock health, biodiversity/environment and commerce. He also outlined environmentally friendly strategies to solve these issues and create greater crop yields. He stressed the need for technology transfer, local manufacturing, providing training and a need for incentivizing farmers and stakeholders.
Pakistan High Commissioner, Muazam Ali spoke about the importance of UNSDGs for Pakistan as chief guest while UPSIGN chairman, Professor Jawwad Darr and Dr Parveen Ali gave a short overview of UPSIGN, its activities over the last year and signposts for future plans, said the information reached here from UK.
UPSIGN Chairman highlighted some of the issues in Pakistan around large youth population, energy, literacy, education/girl's education, debt issues and how these might be addressed via various initiatives and investments. He ended the talk highlighting the tremendous potential for renewable energy such as solar and wind and also the potential for energy storage technologies in relation to Pakistan.
The third technical talk was on "Health Inequalities in Pakistan" by Dr Parveen Ali. Dr Ali's talk focused on the health inequalities in Pakistan and spoke about these inequalities and social determinants of health and their relevance in Pakistani context. Dr Ali then explored issues such as difference in the population growth rate, life expectancy, infant mortality rate, under 5 mortality rate and maternal mortality rate. Reasons for the differences in the rate of these figures among various countries were explored. An overview of the health care system was also presented and possible approach to deal with the issues was explored.
The last technical talk of the morning session from on "Pakistan's water crisis" by Ms Fazila Nabeel who said that Pakistan was well endowed with water; however this was a crisis of space and time. She highlighted issues around surface water pollution, governance, sharing aquifers between Pakistan.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190805504434/

CPEC FRAMEWORK: JOINT COTTON RESEARCH LAB TO BE SET UP IN MULTAN

RECORDER REPORT AUG 5TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The Punjab government has proposed numerous new agriculture sector development projects to be included in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Socio Economic Development Framework. Under the framework, a joint cotton research laboratory would be established in Multan at a cost of Rs 186 million to help improving the productivity of the agriculture sector by increasing cotton cultivation area and production.
It will also help in development of climate resilient cotton varieties that will ensure reliability and productivity. The project will help farmers by lowering the need to invest in insecticides and pesticides and will help alleviate poverty in rural Punjab, sources in Punjab planning department said.
Under the Socio-Economic Development Framework, China had agreed to provide Pakistan a grant of $1 billion for initiating various projects across the country especially in under developed areas.
Similarly, the government will have also an oil laboratory in Faisalabad would also be strengthened to

assist research activities regarding rapeseed crop.
The project will be helpful in developing rapeseed varieties and hybrids with higher oil content and good quality edible oil. Pest warning and quality control of pesticides is another project to be located in Sahiwal, Sargodha, D G Khan and Bahawalpur to benefit farmers by increasing their livelihoods and standard of living by ensuring greater crop security through increasing epidemic resilience.
The project is also expected to complement the IPM programmes of the Agriculture Department and is in line with provincial growth strategy and will also help Punjab with its compliance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The sources said that a Chinese team will due in Pakistan this month to visit all sites of the project and then will give final approval to the projects.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190805504444/

GOVT SURVEY TO CLASSIFY TANDOORS AS COMMERCIAL OR NON-COMMERCIAL ENTITIES

By Rizwan Asif Published: August 5, 2019

LAHORE: In a bid to make the basic necessities of life easily affordable and accessible in Naya Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan is making sure that people can get rotis and naans at the cheapest possible rates.

To that end, the government has offered a subsidy to the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) and Federal Minister for Petroleum Ghulam Sarwar Khan has begun surveying *tandoors* (naan shops) across the country.

Based on annual sales, gas bills and the tandoor shops' independent status or affiliation with restaurants, they will be classified accordingly as commercial or non-commercial tandoors after which the subsidy will be offered to them following a special formula. The survey will also reveal the actual number of tandoor shops operating in the country.

PM Imran Khan and the Chief Minister of Punjab Usman Buzdar have also issued directives to the food and industrial departments to ensure the provision of quality rotis and naans.

"The provision of quality food is a prerogative of the government and it will not make any compromises in that regard," the provincial minister food Sami Ullah Chaudhry told *The Express Tribune*.

In Punjab, over 65 flour mills across have been asked by the food department to pay hefty fines after a laboratory analysis showed that mills were supplying substandard quality of flour to the tandoors.

In this regard, seventeen flour mills in Lahore, 15 in Rawalpindi, 14 in Sahiwal and 15 flour mills in Faisalabad have been fined for not meeting the required standards.

Similarly, the industrial department has taken action against 400 tandoors for not complying with the standardised weights of rotis and naans. The food department only allows 13.5% of moisture in the flour and if that weight is exceeded, the flour mills are either required to pay fines or are sealed. Fines are also imposed if the globin content in the flour is less than the standard rate of 8%.

According to the details obtained by *The Express Tribune*, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) has approved Rs1.5 billion of gas subsidy for non-commercial tandoors. A survey has been initiated by the federal petroleum minister to acquire details of all the tandoors and their gas connections are being checked during the survey. Their annual sales are also being verified with their gas bills.

Tandoors that supply rotis and naans to hotels and restaurants will be categorised as commercial ones and their subsidy will be set following a set formula. According to government sources, the Naan Bai Associations claim that there are more tandoors than the documented ones, therefore, the survey will help reveal the actual number of tandoors in the province.

The secretary and director of the food department have directed all deputy directors and district food controllers to ensure the sampling of flour. Besides, the dough for each roti is being weighed using electronic balances, and based on the results, around 500 tandoors have been fined for selling rotis and naans against the standard weights.

Secretary industrial department Punjab Tahir Khurshid said that the standard weight of a roti and a naan is 100g and 120g, respectively.

"Our teams are checking tandoors across the province and the fines are being imposed on the owners of tandoors who are selling violating the set standards," he affirmed.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2028175/1-govt-survey-classify-tandoors-commercial-non-commercial-entities/

MINISTRY FAILS TO JUSTIFY INCREASE IN WHEAT PRICE DESPITE SURPLUS STOCKS

Ikram JunaidiAugust 06, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of National Food Security (NFS) on Monday failed to explain why the price of wheat was increasing despite surplus stocks in the market as well as in the government godowns.

"Though we don't have the exact reason, we assume that prices of wheat and flour have increased because of smuggling of wheat, holding by some business groups and use of the commodity in the poultry feeds as maize has been more expensive during the past few months," Secretary NFS Dr Hashim Popalzai told the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security.

The committee met with Pakistan Muslim League (functional) Senator Syed Muzafar Hussain Shah in the chair.

Mr Shah asked the official why the prices of Roti and Naan had been increasing across the country.

The secretary said despite damage to crops due to hailstorms, there was surplus wheat in the country.

"Because of smuggling and export through letters of credit, we banned the export of wheat on July 17. However, wheat is still being smuggled to Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. The price of wheat has decreased by Rs40 to Rs50 per 40kg but it can further be decreased if provincial governments and the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) are allowed to sell wheat in the market," he said.

Talking about the increased prices of Roti and Naan, Mr Popalzai said 5,000 Tandoors used gas due to which a subsidy of Rs1.5 billion had been allocated for them.

"The Economic Coordination Committee has taken a decision and we are hopeful that the prices of Roti and Naan would be reduced. There is a support price of Rs1,300 per 40kg wheat but the government of Punjab increased the amount to Rs1,375."

He said the government of Punjab had to procure four million tons of wheat but could procure 3.4 million tons.

"The procurement target for Sindh was 1.2 million tons but the province has not procured wheat at all. Despite this, there is 7.5 million ton wheat available with the government departments and around two million tons wheat is in the surplus," he said.

The chairman of the committee suggested that the wheat support price should further be increased to discourage its smuggling. If the increase is made, he added, farmers would not stop cultivation of wheat as they did regarding cultivation of canola.

"Currently, Pakistan is spending $4 to $5 billion on import of edible oil. We could save this amount if farmers are encouraged and facilitated to cultivate canola," Mr Shah said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1498350/ministry-fails-to-justify-increase-in-wheat-price-despite-surplus-stocks

AGRICULTURAL LENDING JUMPS TO RS1.2TR

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterUpdated August 06, 2019

KARACHI: The banks failed to achieve the target set for agriculture credit for the fiscal year 2018-19 despite disbursing higher amount compared to the preceding year, data published by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) showed on Monday.

The SBP said the banks made disbursements of Rs1.174 trillion or 94 per cent against the ambitious target of Rs1.25tr set by Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee for 2018-19.

The agri-related disbursements in FY19 were 21pc higher than Rs972.6 billion last year. The SBP said the outstanding agri portfolio increased to Rs562.4bn by the end of June registering a growth of 20pc compared to last year's Rs469.4bn.

According to SBP report, the agricultural credit outreach has increased to 4.01 million farmers or 91pc against target of 4.42m farmers at end June, recording growth of 8pc from 3.72m farmers at end June 2018.

The detailed credit performance reveals that during FY 2018-19, five major commercial banks collectively disbursed Rs653.5bn or 100.4pc of their annual target of Rs651bn, specialised banks disbursed Rs81.2bn or 71.8pc of their annual target of Rs113bn and fifteen domestic private banks as a group achieved 86.5pc by disbursing Rs211.9bn against their target of Rs245bn during FY2018-19.

Moreover, Microfinance Banks (MFBs) as a group achieved 98.7pc target by disbursing loans of Rs154bn to small farmers which is 23pc higher than Rs124.8bn during same period last year.

Similarly, the Microfinance Institutions and Rural Support Programs collectively achieved 97.1pc of their targets by disbursing Rs34bn to small and marginalised farmers during FY 2018-19.

Five islamic banks as a group achieved 78.8pc of their annual target of Rs50bn by disbursing Rs39.4bn which is Rs23bn higher than disbursements made during the corresponding period last year. Further, in order to mobilise the islamic windows of commercial banks for agricultural financing, the disbursement targets of Rs50bn were assigned for 2018-19.

Accordingly, the windows of commercial banks as a group disbursed Rs32.7bn or 65.4pc of the annual targets to faith sensitive clients during FY 2018-19.

The SBP said that integrated efforts by central bank, financial institutions and other stakeholders including federal and provincial governments helped achieve disbursement targets.

The efforts included rigorous follow up with the top management of banks, agriculture credit heads and conducting regular farmers' awareness and financial literacy programs across the country. Moreover, initiation of one window operation in KPK and holding job fairs for agriculture graduates in underserved provinces were also helpful.

"The achievement of agriculture credit disbursement is a sizable performance in agriculture lending despite number of demand and supply side challenges," said the SBP.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1498300

FINAL DECISION TODAY: COTTON PRICE MAY BE FIXED AT RS 4,000/40KG

FAZAL SHER AUG 6TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The government is likely to make a final decision with respect to announcement of indicative price of cotton at Rs 4,000 per 40kg today (Tuesday) with an aim to control speedily declining cotton cultivation area in the country. "A committee headed by Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance, Dr Abdul Hafeez Sheikh will take up the summary moved by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) regarding fixing indicative price of cotton at Rs 4,000 per 40kg, which was deferred during the previous meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) on the request of Adviser to Prime Minister on Industries and Commerce Razak Dawood," Secretary MNFS&R Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai said.
He said that the meeting will be held today (Tuesday), adding that the adviser to the prime minister on industries and commerce will also attend it. The committee is likely to make a final decision regarding the announcement of indicative price of cotton before the meeting of the federal cabinet, he said.
Popalzai said that the MNFS&R also proposed to constitute a committee comprising members from the ministries of commerce and textile to keep an eye on the price of cotton in the market and look

into the situation when the price of the commodity comes down from the specific level.
While briefing the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research on indicative price of cotton, he said that his ministry moved a summary for fixing the indicative price of cotton and all stockholders agreed to the summary except All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) and the Ministry of Textile.
The committee recommended the government to announce indicative price of cotton on immediate basis as the full picking flow of cotton will start within three to four weeks. Chairman committee Senator Muzaffar Hussain said if the government fails to fix the indicative price of cotton in this month then the growers will switch to other crops and production of cotton crop will further decline in the country.
While briefing the committee on sowing cotton crop of 2019-2020, Cotton Commissioner MNFS&R Dr Khalid Abdullah said that 95 percent sowing of target (2.895 million hectares) has been achieved which is 14.4 percent more than that of last year. Punjab province has cultivated 2.044 million hectares which comprises 95 percent of the targeted area of 2.145 million hectares, he said, adding that in Sindh province, 96 percent of target or 0.615 million hectares out of 0.640 million hectares has been achieved. He said that the government has fixed production target of 12.7 million bales from an area of 2.895 million hectares.
About availability of wheat and increase in flour prices in the country, Popalzai told the committee that overall availability of wheat is estimated at 28.058 million tonnes including production of 24.279 million tonnes and leftover stock of 3.77 million tonnes as compared to the national requirement of 25.84 million tonnes.
He said that the main reasons behind surge in the prices of flour in spite of sufficient availability of the commodity are smuggling of wheat to Afghanistan and Central Asia, hoarding, shifting of flour mills into poultry feed mills, production loss of wheat crop due to heavy rains, increase in the international wheat prices, permission of the federal government to allow export of public sector wheat, and no restriction on commercial trade of wheat.
He also said that price of flour came down following imposition of ban on export of wheat and wheat flour. Following the instructions of the federal government, Punjab has started release of wheat from its stock to flour mills which will also play role in declining the flour price, he said.
He said that the government has also convened a meeting of National Price Monitoring Committee headed by advisor on finance on August 8 and provincial government have been contacted to strengthen the district price monitoring system for strict monitoring of local wheat prices.
The federal secretary also said that a notification will be issued in a day or two regarding starting of quarantine testing of sacrificial animals being imported from Afghanistan via Torkham border.
Senator Qurat-ul-Ain Marri, Senator Professor Sajid Mir, Senator Sajjad Hussain Turi, Senator Najma Hameed, Minister for MNFS&R Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan and senior officials of the MNFS&R attended the meeting.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190806504637/

JAPAN TO GIVE $5M FOR AGRI DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMME

August 06, 2019

Islamabad - The Government of Japan announced grant aid worth around 560 million Japanese Yen to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to support Agri-Food and Agro-Industry Development in Pakistan’s Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan.

Notes to this effect were signed and exchanged between of Ambassador Japan to Pakistan Mr. Kuninori Matsuda, and Ms. Country Representative of UNIDO Nadia Aftab. A Grant Agreement on the details of implementation of the project was signed and exchanged between Shigeki Furuta, Chief Representative of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Nadia Aftab in the presence of Federal Minister for Ministry of National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan.

The grant amount of Japanese Yen 560 million will be utilised by UNIDO to pilot the enhancement of productive and compliance capacities of relevant actors in the cattle meat value chain within selected production areas of KP (Peshawar, Abbottabad, Kohistan and D.I. Khan) and apple value chain in Balochistan (Qilla Saifullah, Qilla Abdullah, Pishin and Quetta). The project will simultaneously support the relevant governmental bodies to offer adequate services to the industry at a sustainably manner and ensure the sustainability and the possibility to upscale best practices.

This project will revitalise the livelihood of value chain actors, covering their daily income from the apple and cattle value chains and to improve practices of food manufacturers and processors along with the related enabling environment across two provinces of Pakistan.

Speaking on the occasion, Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan said “Agriculture is a priority area for the Government of Pakistan in order to ensure food security for all segments of the society. A growing agriculture sector not only plays a vital role in boosting national economy but also helps in reducing poverty and improving access to quality and safe food. The main emphasis of the new ‘National Food Security Policy’ is on improving nutrition diversification of agriculture through an enhanced focus on high value horticulture and livestock”.

Kuninori Matsuda said “Japan has decided to support this project because almost 60pc of people work for Agri-Industry in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. We expect this project will reduce food losses, improve supply chain management, and will add more value to products, which will lead to more income generation. We believe this achievement will contribute to socio-economic stability of targeted provinces. Agriculture sector of Pakistan will remain one of the priority areas for Japan to support.”

Shigeki Furuta said “Diversification of farmers’ income and creation of assets through development of high-value livestock, and fruit tree crops are the strategy of JICA Agriculture Program. Through this Project on Agri-Food & Agro-Industry Development Assistance in Pakistan, we hope UNIDO and partner provincial agriculture departments in KP and Balochistan will be able to develop and strengthen the capacity of producers and processors engaged in cattle meat value chain and apple value chain industries in both provinces."

Nadia Aftab said, Government of Japan is an important strategic partner and the largest contributor to our organisation.

Currently, there is a lot of work being done to promote the UNIDO-GoJ partnership. UNIDO has long standing and collaboration while providing technical assistance to government of Pakistan and this unique initiative would also mark the first direct collaboration between UNIDO and JICA for the betterment of selected communities in KP and Balochistan while working very closely with the Federal Ministry of National Food Security and Research and provincial agriculture departments.

https://nation.com.pk/06-Aug-2019/japan-to-give-5m-for-agri-development-programmme

OUTPUT OF MAJOR CROPS FALLS DESPITE SURGE IN FINANCING

By Salman Siddiqui Published: August 6, 2019

KARACHI: Despite a notable surge in financing by banks to the agriculture sector, it largely failed to help farmers improve output of crops due to water scarcity in fiscal year ended June 30, 2019.

Financing to the sector jumped 21% to Rs1,174 billion in fiscal year 2018-19.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported that FY19's disbursement was 21% higher than Rs972.6 billion in the prior fiscal year. It was, however, slightly lower than the target of Rs1,250 billion for the year. "There was a marked decline in production of a number of major crops (in FY19)," the central bank said in its third quarterly report on the state of Pakistan's economy issued recently.

Of the five major crops of Pakistan, four namely cotton, rice, sugarcane and wheat recorded a drop in their output in FY19. Maize was the only major crop which had a higher harvest.

Cotton output dropped 17.5% to 9.9 million bales, rice harvest fell 3.3% to 7.2 million tons, sugarcane crop declined 19.4% to 76.2 million tons and wheat production decreased 3.2% to 24.3 million tons. Maize production, however, improved 6.9% to 6.3 million tons, according to the central bank.

"This (drop in outputs) was largely attributed to reduction in area under cultivation, mainly caused by sowing-period water shortages, and hike in prices of basic inputs such as fertiliser, seeds and pesticides," the SBP said.

Wheat output dropped due to rain damages, it added.

Sindh Abadgar Board Senior Vice President Syed Mahmood Nawaz Shah praised the central bank and commercial banks for providing higher financing in FY19 as well. He, however, was of the view that the loans remained much lower than what the agriculture sector required to flourish.

"The financing stood insufficient at $7.33 billion (Rs1,174 billion) for agriculture production worth $54 billion in FY19," he said. "The central bank itself claims the financing meets around 50% requirement of the sector."

More importantly, around 80% of the financing goes to farmers in Punjab whereas the remaining 20% is disbursed among the remaining three provinces – Sindh, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

"We need to improve the disbursement system nationwide," he stressed. "We brought the issue to the notice of Prime Minister Imran Khan when he met the business community in Karachi about three weeks ago."

The central bank said the outstanding loans in the agriculture sector increased 20% to Rs562.4 billion on June 30, 2019 compared to Rs469.4 billion on June 30, 2018.

Similarly, the agricultural credit outreach increased 8% to 4.01 million farmers at the end of June 2019 compared to 3.72 million last year. It covered over 90% of farmers against the target of 4.42 million farmers in the year under review.

To achieve these numbers, the SBP adopted a multifaceted strategy and made concerted efforts, which included sensitising banks to adopt agricultural financing as a viable business line, exploring new avenues of financing, value chain financing, mobilising e-credit, warehousing receipt financing, implementation of crop/livestock insurance and credit guarantee schemes for the farmers, etc.

"The achievement can be made due to integrated efforts of federal/provincial governments, the SBP, financial institutions and other stakeholders," it said.

According to the breakdown, five major commercial banks collectively disbursed agricultural loans of Rs653.5 billion, which was slightly higher than their annual target of Rs651 billion for FY19.

Specialised banks disbursed Rs81.2 billion, which was 71.8% of their annual target of Rs113 billion. Fifteen domestic private banks as a group achieved 86.5% of target by disbursing Rs211.9 billion against the target of Rs245 billion.

Moreover, microfinance banks (MFBs) cumulatively disbursed Rs154 billion to small farmers in FY19. Similarly, microfinance institutions/rural support programmes collectively disbursed Rs34 billion to small and marginalised farmers.

Five Islamic banks provided Rs50 billion whereas Islamic windows of commercial banks disbursed Rs32.7 billion.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2028973/2-output-major-crops-falls-despite-surge-financing/

PAKISTAN TURNS TO SRI LANKA FOR DRY DATE EXPORTS

By Usman Hanif Published: August 6, 2019

KARACHI: After imposition of 200% duties by India on Pakistan's exports during recent escalation of tensions, the latter is shifting towards Sri Lanka for dry date exports.

A three-member delegation of date importers from Sri Lanka arrived in Sukkur on an invitation of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP).

"After imposition of massive duties by the Indian government on Pakistan's exports, wherein dry date exports suffered badly, TDAP held consultative sessions with date exporters in order to address their concerns," said a statement released by TDAP.

During the deliberations, it was noted that Pakistan needed to explore an alternative market for the export of its dry dates. As a result, TDAP through Pakistan's mission in Sri Lanka arranged the visit of date importers to Pakistan from August 4 to 7.

The delegation comprises representatives of three major Sri Lankan date importing companies.

The delegation will visit the Sukkur Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Agha Qadirdad Date Market, Sukkur, where business-to-business (B2B) meetings with their counterparts would be arranged.

Furthermore, the delegation will visit the Khairpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry and dates market in Khairpur for B2B meetings with exporters and later will visit date factories in the district.

"It is expected that the visit of date importers from Sri Lanka will greatly help in increasing exports of Pakistani dates," according to the statement.

"Our dry dates are of lowest quality from the market perspective," remarked Sindh Abadgar Board Senior Vice President Mahmood Nawaz Shah. "We did not develop our product, due to which we don't have much choice in terms of market."

Since last year, Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company (PHDEC) and TDAP have made extensive efforts to find new markets for the dry fruit. However, they could not find any as "we have one of the oldest varieties and nobody demands it." Dry dates only have a few markets, with India being the biggest one, followed by Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

In India, dry dates are used for religious rituals. The consumption is so huge that, despite growing the product itself, Delhi has to import it. Thus, Sri Lanka may not be able to replace India as Pakistan exported 80% of dates to Delhi, said Shah.

Pakistan, the fifth largest producer of dates in the world, is on a downward trajectory in terms of production. In 1999, it produced 540,000 tonnes of dates annually. Instead of growing, this number went down to 467,000 tonnes in 2016, according to data collected by the Sindh Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF).

Prices of dates at the farmers level, where middlemen buy in bulk, have decreased up to 40% and stocks have accumulated in the wake of escalation of tensions between Pakistan and India.

Pakistan produces dry dates in surplus, which is why it has to export. However, the quality of dates is so low that its own population does not consume it and the country has to import dates, especially for Ramazan.

"Now, we need to improve our ways of harvesting and post-harvesting so that we could use the dates as fresh and not dry," suggested the Sindh Abadgar Board SVP. "We also need to introduce new varieties." He said "there are new varieties in the world; we need to work on long-term tissue culture, so that we can replace the existing one. We also need to work on date processing so that we could improve harvesting, grading, packing, etc as well as improve our exports."

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2028954/2-pakistan-turns-sri-lanka-dry-date-exports/

COTTON RATES MOVE LOWER

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterAugust 07, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices nose-dived on Tuesday amid forecast of more rains in coming days and quality issues. Overall buyers remained selective and avoided big deals.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) official spot rates were further lowered by Rs200 (which took last two days fall to Rs400) to reach Rs7,900 per maund. Deals on ready counter were reported to have transpired at a low price of Rs7,700 per maund.

Reports suggest ginners are currently in oversold position while textile spinners are avoiding purchase of the commodity due to quality fears. The recent rains have led to increased moisture content.

Global factors are also not favorable with two of the world's biggest economies – US and China – entering into new trade war and overshadowing other markets. As a result all leading cotton markets crashed.

New York cotton once again lost around one US cent per lb. Indian cotton came crashing down in the range of Rs900 to Rs4,400 per candy for various cotton varieties. Chinese cotton also closed easy.

Following deals were reported to have changed hands: 3,000 bales, station Tando Adam, at Rs7,600-7,900; 1,400 bales, Shahdadpur Rs7,600-7,900; 2,000 bales, Sanghar, at Rs7,600-7,950; 1,800 bales, Mirpurkhas, at Rs7,650-7,900; 2,000 bales, Burewala, at Rs7,950-8,000; 400 bales, Sahiwal, at Rs7,950-7,975; and 800 bales, Khipro, at Rs7,700-7,900.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1498532/cotton-rates-move-lower

PLANTING SEEDS TO TASTE THE FUTURE

BY PRIYA KRISHNA 7 Aug 2019

Kurdieh, left, is an owner of the Norwich Meadows Farm stand at Union Square Greenmarket, which is popular with many of New York's high-end chefs.

But there's something the chefs who regularly crowd the stand know that other customers may not: Its owners, Zaid and Haifa Kurdieh, have an uncanny ability to spot the next big thing in produce and grow it in bulk.

Their farm here in Norwich, a former manufacturing town about 60 miles southeast of Syracuse, is a prime reason that Jimmy Nardello peppers and Persian cucumbers have become ubiquitous in New York City restaurants.

The Kurdiehs provide Michael Anthony, the chef of Gramercy Tavern, with habanada peppers, a mild variant of the habanero. They sell sweet Kyoto red carrots to the chef Derek Wilcox of the Japanese restaurant Shoji at 69 Leonard Street, and tomatillo-like husk cherries to the chefs Jeremiah Stone and Fabian von Hauske Valtierra of Wildair and Contra. Their produce also pops up at Eleven Madison Park, Blue Hill and Momofuku Ko.

"There are certain varietals of vegetables that become hot because one farmer grows them and chefs love them," said Lena Ciardullo, the executive chef of Marta, Caffe Marchio and Vini e Fritti. Norwich Meadows Farm "is always early on that bandwagon. They tend to source awesome varietals that catch a chef's eye," like the Rosa Bianca eggplant, a fleshy varietal with few seeds that she has used on a pizza inspired by pasta alla Norma.

If the Kurdiehs' produce is uncommon, so is the way they grow it — with technology and farmers from one of the world's oldest, most advanced agricultural nations: Egypt.

Each year, they enlist about 25 farmers from that country to work for six to 10 months. They use high tunnels, unheated greenhouses developed in the 1950s and still not widely used in the United States, and even adapt some varieties that are popular in the Middle East.

“The entire world has been affected by Egyptian farming practices,” Mr. Kurdieh said. “The Nile River has been farmed forever. These folks are the cradle of Arabic cultural civilization. It’s in their blood.”

Mr. Kurdieh, 55, was born in Los Angeles, but grew up all over the Middle East as his father worked as an engineer in the oil industry. At a young age he knew he wanted to farm, even though his relatives didn’t see it as a respectable occupation.

“The mothers would tell their daughters, ‘If you misbehave, I am going to marry you to a farmer,’ ” he recalled.

Still, he returned to the United States to attend agricultural school and earned a master’s degree in business administration at the University of South Dakota. He worked at the United States Department of Agriculture and at Cornell University, helping farms with financing and business management; but he always wanted to open a farm with his wife, whom he had met during high school in Jordan.

“We had gardens all the time because we just couldn’t find good vegetables in the United States, and we grew up with such quality,” he said.

In 1998, the couple bought a small house in Norwich, where real estate was inexpensive. In the backyard, they cultivated the types of vegetables they had enjoyed in the Middle East. A few years later, they bought some land nearby, and installed high tunnels. Mr. Kurdieh said he prefers them to standard greenhouses because they require less equipment and are therefore more cost efficient. They also don’t need heating because, unlike with greenhouses, most farmers don’t use them to grow warmweather crops out of season.”

But it was hard to find farmers to operate the tunnels, which require some experience and intuition to operate, Mr. Kurdieh said. Farmers have to know how to spot the pests that the hot, humid climate invites, particularly in an organic operation like his, where chemical pesticides aren’t used. They also have to be more mindful of soil management, as there is no rain to moisten and cleanse the ground.

So in 2002, Mr. Kurdieh flew to Egypt, an early adopter of the high-tunnel system, and found a group of farmers to work for him. Before they arrived in Norwich, Mr. Kurdieh was cultivating 200 varieties; he now grows more than 1,300 on the 250-acre farm.

It seems unlikely that the use of Egyptian labor will catch on in the United States anytime soon. Mr. Kurdieh spends a lot of time filling out lengthy visa applications, and is well versed in Middle Eastern culture. “If you put these Egyptians on an American farm, they will have a hard time,” he said. Many speak only Arabic, and pause for prayer several times a day.

Khaled Abdelrahman, 50, one of the Egyptian farmers, agreed. “I like it here because 90 percent of people are from Egypt,” he said. “Zaid speaks Arabic, and same religion.”

It’s easy to tell when you’ve arrived at the farm: Miles of half-cylindrical greenhouses become visible from the road. Look closer, and you might spot some Japanese negi onions, whose noodlelike sprouts look like creatures from “Star Wars,” or the hairy, purple heads of bronze fennel.

At the house on a recent Monday afternoon, Ms. Kurdieh, 56, was scolding someone for tracking in mud, as she furiously chopped onions and squash for a tagine. (The Kurdiehs have two adult children who live elsewhere.)

“When my husband first started the farm, I thought it would just be here” in Norwich, Ms. Kurdieh said. “But he goes to New York City. I was told about how people get killed and mugged in New York City.”

Now, she eagerly joins him for the four-hour drive back and forth once a week for most of the year. She and Mr. Kurdieh often eat at New York restaurants, and even helped create an offmenu salad at Gramercy Tavern, a generous pile of whatever vegetables are in season.

Mr. Kurdieh’s love of dining out, his obsession with reading seed catalogs and his ability to talk to chefs about flavors have all helped Norwich Meadows Farm stand out.

“I am always thinking about the marketing of the crops,” he said. When chefs come looking for a fruit or vegetable with a particular taste or texture, he offers a suggestion, and often grows it for them.

“Zaid is like the best kind of chef,” Dan Barber, the chef and co-owner of the two Blue Hill restaurants, wrote in an email. “He’s willing to take a bet on unknown varieties with no known market just to experiment with what he believes will yield better flavor. His farmers’ market stand is like a supermarket of future possibilities.”

Mr. Kurdieh grows produce for Mr. Barber’s restaurants, and also testgrows seeds for the chef’s company, Row 7.

When Norwich Meadows Farm introduced Persian cucumbers, which are thin-skinned with minimal bitterness, back in 1998, “there was a fistfight in the market, and we only had 10 pounds,” Mr. Kurdieh said.

“It’s the celebrity effect,” he added. “If chef XYZ says it’s good, someone is going to buy it. That is what makes the new things move.”

He is aware that his success is precarious. As visa restrictions have grown tighter, “my business is at the mercy of the political system,” Mr. Kurdieh said. “Every year we have to prove that it is in the United States’ interest to bring these guys over. If someone says it is no longer in the United States’ interest, that means we are up a creek.”

http://iht.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/viewer.aspx

‘APTAC NOT AUTHORISED TO RELAX ANY CONDITION ON IMPORT OF UNREGISTERED PESTICIDES’

SOHAIL SARFRAZ AUG 8TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The Agriculture Pesticides Technical Advisory Committee (APTAC) Wednesday categorically declared that APTAC is not authorised to relax any condition on the import of unregistered pesticides and customs department should not clear such held-up consignments.
The decision has been taken in the agriculture pesticides technical advisory committee (APTAC) meeting held under the Chairmanship of Dr Hashim Populzai, Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research. Director Generals of all the provinces, representatives from m/o Commerce,

PARC and Dealers Association, were also present. Pakistan Pesticide Association was represented by Saad Akbar. Dr Muhammad Afzal represented the CropLife Pakistan Association.
Chairman advised DG Department of Plant Protection to have a consultative meeting with the stakeholders to make a proposal on the number of Agriculture Graduates required for the distributors, with the purpose to provide technical services to the farmers and present the same in the next meeting of APTAC. It was also decided that the pesticides dealers should be the Agriculture Graduates.
CropLife proposed that distribution companies should be regulated to provide technical services to the farmers and to enable that all such companies should have at least 40 agri graduates. Pakistan Crop
During the meeting issues regarding imports, marketing of an unregistered and adulterated pesticides were was also discussed. Four PCPA companies imported pesticides which were neither registered in the country of origin (China) nor in Pakistan. However, the 53rd APTAC Sub-Committee took a lenient view and recommended that one-year relaxation may be given to such unregistered pesticides.
There was a long discussion on the subject. Finally, the Chair decided that import of an unregistered pesticide falls under the preview of the Law / Act (APO) - Form-17, henceforth, APTAC is not authorized to relax any condition and therefore the consignments should not be custom cleared, held in stock, or processed for sale.
Another similar case related to a product which was registered after approval of APTAC in April 2018. However, this product was being brought and marketed into the country, since February 2016. During this period approximately 368,000 liters of unregistered product was marketed. The relevant company got the registration of its active ingredient by a different name under Form-17 in February 2016 meant for brands registered abroad. The fact is that the product was registered on Crucifer Worms and aphid for use @ 1000 to 1500 ml per acre. However it was marketed by a different brand on an unregistered crop and pest i.e., cotton whitefly and at a much lower rate of 300 to 500 ml per acre. The Chair and the Secretary m/o National Food Security & Research, Dr Hashim Populzai asked DG Plant Protection to properly investigate into the case and report to him.
The Chair of the APTAC opened discussion on the amendments in the much controversial SRO 1017. However, the amended version of the SRO received unanimous approval. Historically, the department of plant protection has been vehemently defending the 2014 version of the SRO 1017.
The Chair also decided that the DPP should start to implement the amended contents of the SRO, as approved.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190808505135/

PTI, PPP TRADE BARBS OVER SUGAR MILL OWNERS

Khaleeq KianiUpdated August 09, 2019

ISLAMABAD: As estimates of wealth stashed abroad by Pakistanis boiled down to just $5-7 billion from a whopping $200bn, senior members of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) on Thursday accused each other of sheltering sugar mill owners on manipulation of its pricing mechanism because of their influence over the top political leadership.

The politically hot issues came up for discussion at a meeting of the National Assembly’s Standing Committee on Finance, presided over by former finance minister Asad Umar.

Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) chairman Shabbar Zaidi and chief of international taxes Ashfaq Ahmad told the panel that Pakistan had received data from 41 countries and vice versa about assets of Pakistanis abroad under agreements signed with OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries for automatic exchange of information.

Mr Zaidi said the government would be able to exchange such data with 80 countries by Dec 31 this year. He said the top 378 Pakistanis in the list had foreign assets worth $5bn — almost 78 per cent of the total wealth.

Mr Ashfaq said the cases involving $100,000 or above were about 3.44pc of the total number, but involved 94.37pc of the reported account balance.

The total amount involved may be close to $7bn, the FBR chief said.

When Asad Umar asked what action had been taken against the 378 big fish who appeared to have held about 80pc of the total assets, the FBR representatives said that about 115 such persons had availed tax amnesty last year and 72 this year, while 19 cases had been disposed of after creating a tax demand of Rs1.64bn, of which Rs888 million had been recovered.

The NA committee was informed that data about 1,980 persons had been received and notices issued to 453 of them. The relevant commissioners had been given a deadline of Oct 31 to complete investigations into the remaining 1,527 cases. In all, data about assets and accounts of 152,000 wealthy Pakistanis had been received. Asked as to how many of them had filed tax returns, the FBR team said the response could be made available after two days because the last date for filing of returns had been extended to Aug 8.

Mr Zaidi said the information received under the OECD convention also had many limitations because of similar names, wrong addresses or so on and formal requests were being made to partner countries to share full details. He explained that full details from the UAE about Pakistanis' assets were not available so far but he was pursuing with those authorities to break that barrier under which the UAE was not sharing information about iqama holders — considering them as their own residents.

PPP's Nafisa Shah said if the assets abroad were just $5-7bn, then PTI's all claims about $200bn assets of Pakistanis abroad were wrong and wondered how much of those funds had been brought to Pakistan as claimed by the party in power.

Mr Umar said the $200bn was not the PTI's number but was reported by former finance minister Ishaq Dar in the National Assembly.

The panel was informed by the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) that sugar prices had increased by over 26pc (Rs15 per kg) over the past one year and sugar mills were found involved in cartelisation and collusive practices at three levels during a previous inquiry.

Asked by Mr Umar if the CCP had also examined the allied earnings of the sugar industry, including ethanol and power sales, because these were the areas where the industry must have earned huge profits due to devaluation, its chairperson and members explained that allied earnings of the sugar industry were not looked into, but suggested that support price for sugarcane should not be based on weight but on sucrose content.

Mr Umar said there was apparently no reason for increase in the sugar price.

Nafisa Shah said no action could be taken by the CCP against sugar mills for such collusive practices and price manipulation because top political leaderships were controlled by ATMs (financiers) of sugar mill owners. "This would never be investigated," she added.

At this, Mr Umar quipped that it was also evident from the fact that sugar mills were previously studied in 2009 and wondered why no action was taken for the next 10 years.

Ms Shah said the ATMs from sugar mills were sitting on the right and left of the leadership of all political parties, including the current prime minister.

Mr Umar said they had raised the issue of ATMs in his party and it was after 10 years in the PTI government that the CCP was once again investigating the issue. "We had also taken it up in the budget and also raised points of order," he said, asking Ms Shah to also raise a point of order on the issue and his party would support that.

Ms Shah agreed to bring a point of order in the National Assembly, but wondered what action the CCP had taken against such manipulative practices.

Mr Umar said former president Asif Ali Zardari also had many sugar mills and the CCP should also report if notices had been issued to him or imposed any fine.

Ms Shah said Prime Minister Imran Khan was also controlled from left and right by ATMs and how many fines had been imposed on them.

The committee directed the finance ministry to expedite the process of 50pc reduction in Gas Infrastructure Development Cess, particularly for the fertiliser sector, as decided by the cabinet in January this year.

Mr Umar said the matter decided by the cabinet should not have been delayed so long.

It was reported that the Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) was engaged in fixing the prices of flour and provided its members a platform to exchange commercially sensitive information and strategic data on flour prices, which was prima facie collusion and cartelisation.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1498890

NA PANEL SEEKS ACTION AGAINST WHEAT, SUGAR BARONS

By Shahbaz Rana Published: August 9, 2019

ISLAMABAD.: The National Assembly panel on Thursday directed the government to take action against wheat flour mills and sugar barons after the anti-trust watchdog suspected that 10% to 26% increase in prices of both the commodities was the result of cartelisation.

The National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance stepped in after the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet failed to take corrective measures to check "unjustified" increase in the prices of wheat flour and sugar.

The ECC that again met on Thursday took a lenient approach towards constant rise in prices of both the commodities. The report presented in the ECC on the wheat situation was contrary to what the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) told the standing committee the same day.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on July 25, 2019 had reported the local price of wheat and wheat flour at the level of Rs362.6 and Rs 422.2 per 10kg, respectively, showing a decrease of 0.03% for wheat and 0.69% for wheat flour, as compared to the price level during the second week of July 2019, an official handout issued by the Ministry of Finance after the ECC meeting stated.

The CCP gave a briefing on the price trend in wheat flour and sugar to the NA Standing Committee on Finance, which was chaired by former finance minister Asad Umar.

“The sugar prices have increased by 25.8% during last year — more than Rs15 per kg,” CCP chairperson Vadiyya Khalil informed the standing committee.

She said the sugar lobby had gone to the courts against the CCP’s 2009 decision established that cartelisation was rampant in the sugar industry.

“After factoring in the sales tax and the impact of paying farmers, the government fixed the price during the period of glut as submitted by the sugar mill representatives. The sudden skyrocketing of the price of sugar in the current year still appears to be an anomaly given that the supply of sugar still appears to be in excess of its demand,” stated the CCP chairperson before the standing committee.

“The sugar mills’ cartel is being represented by the ATM machines in every political party,” said PPP MNA Dr Nafisa Shah in a veiled reference towards the role of a PTI leader in the recent price hike.

“The sugar millers are also making phenomenal profits by selling electricity from their captive power plants and ethanol due to steep devaluation of the currency,” said Asad Umar, urging the government to take action against these cartels.

The Ministry of Finance should take administrative action to bring down prices of wheat flour and sugar, directed the committee chairman.

The CCP recommended the federal government to abolish the wheat and sugar support price and let the market determine the price based on supply and demand.

It said that in July 2019, Ministry of Industries and Production was asked by the CCP to carry out the cost audit of sugar sector for the crop year 2016-17. “The CCP is in the process of gathering information from sugar mills in this regard,” said the CCP chairperson.

The CCP informed the standing committee that the Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) was engaged in fixing the prices of flour and provided its members a platform to exchange commercially sensitive information and strategic data on flour prices, which was prima facie violation of Section 4 of the CCP law.

The CCP stated that the wheat flour prices increased 10% in past four months –which is contrary to the reduction in prices reported to the ECC on Thursday by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

“The support price mechanisms have failed all over the world, including in China, and the government should deregulate all these commodities,” said PML-N MNA Ali Pervaiz.

In a briefing to the ECC, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research stated that the wheat stocks had dipped by over 38% to 7.519 million tonnes as of August 2, 2019.

The ECC instructed the Ministry of National Food Security to regularly monitor the wheat prices and availability of wheat stocks in the country.

The ECC set up a Price Review Committee to suggest the indicative price of cotton after it did not accept the food ministry’s proposal to set Rs4,000 per 40kg cotton support price.

The ECC approved the subsidy claims of five export-oriented sectors for four months (March-June) amounting to Rs5.2 billion.

In order to further simplify the subsidy disbursement process, the ECC also approved a proposal for allowing SNGPL to raise verified subsidy bill/claim of preceding month by the eighth day of every month and directed the Finance Division to release the subsidy within seven days of receipt of claim from the Petroleum Division.

The ECC also approved the proposal for the export-oriented sectors to pay the invoices at ECC-approved tariff of $6.5 per MMBTU along with applicable taxes.

It further approved that waiver of interest/Late Payment Surcharge (LPS) charged by the SNGPL on the amounts over and above the tariff of $6.5 per MMBTU during the FY 2018-19, which was due to delayed subsidy release by the government.

For this fiscal year, the late payment surcharge would only be charged on the delayed payment of $6.5 per MMBTU and it would not be applicable on the subsidy amounts to be released by government to the SNGPL.

The ECC further directed the ministries of energy, finance and commerce and the FBR to convene a meeting on the subject and resolve the issue regarding clarification of nomenclature of export-oriented sectors so that benefits of concessional tariff be limited to exporters under previous notified zero-rated regime and to ensure that any exporter that was previously not beneficiary of concessional tariff would need certification of falling under the clarified regime from the FBR.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2031472/1-na-panel-seeks-action-wheat-sugar-barons/

GOVT TO FINANCE TWO LIVESTOCK PROJECTS WORTH RS900M

AUGUST: 09,2019

QUETTA: The federal government would finance two livestock projects worth Rs900 million in the province, said Livestock and Dairy Development Balochistan Derctor General Dr Ghulam Hussain Jaffar on Wednesday.

The projects include rural poultry and goats' kids and lambs fattening schemes.

"We are going to initiate project of rural poultry under Prime Minister Imran Khan's poultry scheme across the province," the DG said while taking to APP.

Jaffar said poultry would give womenfolk, including widows in remote areas of the province, an opportunity to start their business at small level to eam livelihood for their families, which is also important for livestock sector's progress at the district level.

He voiced hope that poverty would be reduced after the start of the PM's poultry scheme in Balochistan.

"Farmers will provide feeds for goats ' kid and lambs fattening to ensure enhancing new generation of cattle through better health," he said, adding such measures would be helpful for the development of livestock department.

The federal and provincial governments were paying special attention to the development of the sector because 70 per cent of the province's population's livelihood is associated with livestock, he added.

Jaffer stated thet funds have been allocated in the provincial budget 2019-20 for provision of training to farmers and common people in each district.

He also said such campaigns were important for growth of the livestock that includes care of cattle and poultry according to the latest system.

"Steps are being taken to utilise all available resources in proper way to promote livestock sector to encourage investments, which would boost the economy," he said.

The DG added about 150 veterinary doctors would be recruited after approval of the provincial government through Balochistan Public Service Commission to overcome the shortage of staff.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201908090085&EN_ID=11201908090034&EMID=11201908090015

Livestock import ban partially lifted

A Correspondent August 10, 2019

LANDI KOTAL: At least four trailers loaded with sheep crossed into Pakistan via Torkham border the other day as livestock import was partially allowed.

"None of the imported animals was taken to the local market as these were immediately taken to Islamabad," local dealers told Dawn.

They said that at least 15 sheep died of excessive heat and suffocation as the custom clearance was delayed till midday because the importer could not produce goods declaration form immediately.

Islam Yar, a local livestock dealer, said that he along with other dealers lost all hopes of a complete lifting of ban on import as they were not provided any information by either the local administration or the custom staff at Torkham about the procedure of custom clearance of sacrificial animals.

He said that they had already expressed their willingness to pay all taxes and custom duties but the authorities concerned were tightlipped about the resumption of livestock import via the Torkham border.

Mr Yar said that none of the local dealers was in a position to bring sacrificial animals through unfrequented routes as the cost of transportation through those routes was very high.

Meanwhile, sources in Torkham and Landi Kotal said that illegal export of cattle from Pakistan to Afghanistan continued on unfrequented routes despite official ban on its export.

They said that a large number of cattle were taken to Afghanistan in connivance with the border forces and local administration.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1499013

AGRI CREDIT

RECORDER REPORT AUG 10TH, 2019 EDITORIAL
Banks disbursed 1.1174 trillion rupees to the agriculture sector in 2018-19 against the target of 1.25 trillion rupees, according to data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). This reflected a rise of 20 percent in comparison to the year before and more importantly from the perspective of expanding the outreach the number of farmers availing credit rose by 8 percent in comparison to the year before. The SBP website claims credit for these numbers and stated that it "adopted a multifaceted strategy and made concerted efforts for pursuing a massive agricultural credit target which included sensitizing banks to adopt agricultural financing as a viable business line, exploring new avenues of financing, value chain financing, mobilising e-credit, warehousing receipt financing, implementation of crop/livestock insurance and credit guarantee scheme for farmers, etc." Disturbingly, the SBP failed to highlight the result of this increase in credit on crop output and, of greater relevance, on raising the yield per hectare given that Pakistan has the lowest yield when compared to other countries in the region (barring Afghanistan). As per the Economic Survey 2018-19, major cash crops suffered a decline in output as "production of cotton, rice and sugarcane declined by 17.5 percent, 3.3 percent and 19.4 percent...the performance of agriculture remained subdued. It grew by only 0.85 percent against the target of 3.8 percent; the underperformance of agriculture sector hinged upon reduction in the area of cultivation, lower water availability and drop in fertilizer off-take." And poor weather conditions, a factor that post-dated the publication of the Survey, accounted for a further shortfall in the crop output targets set.
The oft raised issue by farm sector experts is that the reason for the wide disparity in the yield per hectare of rich and poor farmers is that the former have access to credit while the latter are subsistence farmers with little or no liquidity as well as little or no education to take advantage of

technology developments that can raise their yield per hectare. And in years when governments made credit available to poor farmers at rates well below those applicable to their richer counterparts, it has been invariably hijacked by the rich farmers. The budget for the current year envisages 100 million rupees as credit guarantee scheme for small farmers (a small amount given the large number of subsistence level farmers in this country), the same amount as was budgeted last year though it remained undisbursed. One would have to wait and see if in the current year the budgeted amount is actually disbursed.

Be that as it may, the Imran Khan-led administration is, as per the relevant minister, making utmost efforts to assist farmers by providing inputs at affordable prices. Input prices have risen dramatically in the past two months due to the raise in gas and electricity tariffs attributed to conditions agreed with the International Monetary Fund under the ongoing Extended Fund Facility programme. The budget for the current year also envisages a subsidy to PASSCO specifically for wheat (our staple) including: (i) wheat operation (2 billion rupees); (ii) wheat reserves stock (five billion rupees); and (iii) wheat supplied to Gilgit-Baltistan (8 billion rupees) and reimbursement on account of donation of wheat by the government (500 million rupees.)

Recently, Jehangir Tareen announced 290 billion rupee farm sector-specific projects (to be funded jointly by the federal and provincial governments with the Sindh government not supporting the projects) though farmers have complained that by not including any cotton-specific projects he has done a disservice to the farm community in general and the country in particular as cotton's contribution to overall exports is significant.

To conclude, there is an urgent need for the government to formulate a farm policy focused on raising yield of all crops as without that, a rise in agriculture credit alone without the needed support measures such as use of mechanization, quality seeds, water availability and proper use of fertilizer and pesticides is not likely to make any meaningful difference.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190810505688/

PAKISTAN TO TARGET HIGH-END EXPORT MARKETS FOR HONEY EXPORTS: RAZAK

RECORDER REPORT AUG 10TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

Pakistan is to target high-end export markets like the European Union (EU) for honey exports. This was conveyed by the Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce, Textile, Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood at a meeting with a delegation from the honey producers and exporters.

Pakistan is home to some of the most diverse flora and fauna and produces 20 types of honey due to its varied ecological and climatic conditions. Pakistan's exports were $ 6.9 Million in 2018 and its major export destinations were Saudi Arabia (70.6 %), United Arab Emirates (15.1%) and Kuwait (6.3%). However, our honey exports are far below than the real potential especially to the high end markets.

The Advisor to PM underlined that the current government is focusing on the diversification of export products through policy intervention by providing technical and financial support. He further highlighted that in order to explore the untapped honey potential of the country Pakistan needs to acquaint the concerned stakeholders and business community of the honey producing regions like Abbottabad with the modern production techniques, encouragement, awareness of the private sector and the most important entrepreneurial growth and cluster development.

For this, there is a need to train our stakeholders so that can comply with requisite standards and SPS requirements of high-end markets including EU which will increase our honey export manifold. He also emphasized that Ministry of Commerce (MoC) would constitute a product (honey) specific working group comprising of all the stakeholders including, honey producers, exporters, marketing

experts and researchers to devise a strategy in order to overcome the bottlenecks and to develop production & marketing techniques that will help boosting the country's honey export. MoC will also provide technical and financial assistance to honey exporters in local and international markets in order to target high end markets like EU. Further, it will help in developing linkages with local business community, beekeepers and other stakeholders to evaluate the trade potential of this viable sector.
MoC has formulated Geographical Indication (GI) Law and E-Commerce Policy which will help SMEs to enhance their exports through registration of the local honey verities in international and online sales, Advisor to PM added.-PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190810505727/

KHAJOOR FESTIVAL & SEMINAR ON 24TH, 25TH IN KHAIRPUR

The Newspaper's Correspondent August 11, 2019

KHAIRPUR: The district administration is organising the 10th Khajoor Festival and Seminar on Aug 24 and 25 at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto open air theatre and auditorium in Sachal Academy.

Khairpur Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Naeem Sindhu chaired a meeting at Darbar Hall on Saturday in this connection and said that the objective of organising this festival was to create awareness among foreign traders, investors and researchers regarding the date production in this region and help growers earn foreign exchange.

He stressed the need for a strong forum at district level to resolve problems of date palm growers, traders and investors so that the production of date could further be improved.

He asked growers and traders of date palm to extend cooperation to the district administration to make the event a success, which in turn would help them send their produce to international market directly and save money at the same time.

He said that mutual efforts would help improve packaging and quality in the market. Massive research was being done on date palm fruit in Faisalabad, Haripur and other areas of Punjab and similarly, Sindh government should provide facilities and free samples to growers for tissue culture adoption, he said.

He said the district administration would seek assistance from secretary of commerce, Board of Investment, trade and development and other departments concerned for the promotion and successful organisation of the event.

The meeting was also attended by growers’ representatives and officials concerned.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1499195

WHEAT, SUGAR ‘CARTELISATION’

By Editorial Published: August 11, 2019

There is a storm brewing and few of us are prepared for it. No, this does not refer to the new weather system that is storming us from the east, but one which has been forming within the country for a while. This refers to the hikes in prices of wheat flour and sugar — by 10% to 26% —

as pointed out by the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP). The National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance has been informed of the 'unjustified' increases in the prices of the two commodities. To make it worse, the federal cabinet's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) had failed to take adequate corrective measures. In part, it was led by an allegedly misleading report presented to the ECC claiming that the prices of wheat and wheat flour had fallen by 0.03% and 0.69% respectively.

This was, however, in stark contrast to the ground realities reported by the CCP which presented its report to the NA panel the same day. The CCP said the price of sugar has gone up by 25.8% amid a five-year high in inflation. The most shocking aspect of the sugar price rise is that there is currently an oversupply of the commodity as compared to its demand. The flour mills were allegedly involved in fixing prices of flour, sharing critical strategic data on flour prices apparently violating CCP laws. Here too, the CCP said the flour price had increased by 10% as compared to the reduction reported to the ECC.

The word the CCP used to describe the anomalous behaviour of mill owners was 'cartelisation'. What is more worrying is that at least at some level, the government is being misled into a trap to release billions of rupees of subsidy for the products. This is one of the rare times that we have had an 'early warning' on this gathering storm. With the masses still waiting for the promised change to happen, the government must take effective steps to break up the cartels and not allow itself to be blackmailed.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2032814/6-wheat-sugar-cartelisation/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUG 14th TO AUG 18th 2019

AFGHANISTAN ASKS PAKISTAN TO REVIEW HIKE IN DUTY ON FRESH FRUITS

RECORDER REPORT AUG 14TH, 2019 PESHAWAR

The Afghan Consul General (CG) Hashim Niazi has expressed dismay over increase in import duty on fresh fruits and termed it harmful for bilateral trade between both the countries.
Speaking at a meeting with a delegation of Pak-Afghan trade at Afghan Consulate, he demanded the government of Pakistan to review the decision of 35 percent increase in import duty on fresh fruits and said instead of evaluation ruling of Karachi, the evaluation of the prices of goods imported from Afghanistan should be made on the basis of local valuation. Otherwise, he said it would trigger the menace of smuggling.
The delegation was headed by Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) president Faiz Mohammad Faizi and former senior vice president Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi.
Those present on the occasion were included Afghan Trade Commissioner Hameed Fazil Khel, first secretary Ghulam Habib, SCCI Standing Committee on Land Route Trade chairman Imtiaz Ahmad Ali, All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Federation president Malik Sohni and Syed Abdullah Shah. The

Afghan CG welcomed the decision of Pak-Afghan Torkham border to keep opened round-the-clock.
Addressing the meeting, Frontier Customs Agents Group (FCAG) president Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, who is also the senior vice president of Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) said the volume of Pak-Afghan trade had declined from $2.5 billion to even below one billion.
He said strikes, closure of border and political disputes between both neighbouring countries had brought bilateral trade on the verge of collapse. He said the new border policy has rendered thousands of people unemployed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
Recent four-day strike at Torkham border has inflicted loss to the tone of millions of rupees on Pakistan traders, the CG said adding that tribal area has been merged with KP and instead of Political Agent, a Deputy Commissioner (DC) has been appointed in KP. However, the same old system is still operational in the area.
The delegation was unanimous in holding fake importers and exporters responsible for the bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan and demanded of the Afghan Consul General for the discouragement of their activities.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190814506279/

KINNO GROWERS REJECT LOW PRICES

Kalbe Ali Updated August 15, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Citrus growers have rejected the purchase rate of Rs600 per 40 kg for kinno in the upcoming season terming it a conspiracy by traders to fleece orchid owners.

The reaction came after the recent decision by All Fruits and Vegetables Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) and processing plants owners for the produce harvested in 2019-20 season.

A group of growers have demanded the authorities concerned to address farmers’ grievances and announce reasonable rates for kinno.

Ch Ahmad Jawad, a former chairman of FPCCI’s standing committee on horticulture exports and secretary general (federal) of the Businessmen Panel said citrus growers have rejected purchase rate of Rs600 per 40 kg.

“Last year the rates were Rs850 per 40 kg. The rates this year has been released to be Rs600 per 40 kg which is unjustifiable as the prices of DAP, potash and urea have gone up compared to last year and not to speak about the price of diesel that has reached to a record high level,” Mr Jawad said.

He added that urea and DAP prices were Rs1,200 and Rs2,380 per bag respectively in the last government’s tenure whereas currently these are pegged at Rs1,925 and Rs3,395 per bag, respectively.

He added that certain lobbies in the political set up and official mechanism were trying to give favours to kinno processing factories of Sargodha as most of the citrus orchids are situated in that area.

The growers have demanded the government to take up the matter and prevent the exploitation of growers, and find an amicable solution of the brewing crises and ensure that rights of the farmers are snatched.

“It will also help maximise exports.” Mr Jawad added.

Kinno is a major export commodity of the country and constitutes 80 per cent of the citrus fruit consumed locally.

More than 98pc kinno is grown in Punjab mainly in Sargodha district due to favourable climatic conditions and adequate canal and sub-soil water.

Pakistani growers have successfully planted seedless varieties with the help of Citrus Research Institute Sargodha. The institute is responsible for undertaking research and development work on kinno and other citrus varieties.

However the area of plantation of seedless varieties is limited and there is need for application of modern techniques at all stages from growth to post-harvest processing including segregation and waxing etc, which will not only add value to the produce but improve returns for the whole chain.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1499610/kinno-growers-reject-low-prices

DRY LAND FARMING RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO BE ESTABLISHED IN MITHI: RAHU

A CorrespondentAugust 17, 2019

MITHI: Sindh Minister for Agriculture Mohammad Ismail Rahu has said that the provincial government has approved a scheme for the establishment of Dry Land Farming Research Institute in Mithi to research ways and means to make optimum use of ‘hyetal’ (of or relating to rain) cultivation and help growers maximise their produce with very low amount of water.

The minister said while presiding over a meeting of officers of Tharparkar district administration and agriculture department to review ongoing locust spray in the area at deputy commissioner’s office here on Friday that the institute would be a great help for local farmers who would be trained in the use of tunnel system to grow seasonal vegetables and involved in research work so that they were able to increase yield with the help of latest methods.

He said the Sindh government had taken serious measures to save agriculture land from locusts’ attack and launched insecticide spray in time.

The minister was briefed by Tharparkar Deputy Commissioner Dr Shahzad Tahir Thaheem and officials concerned of agriculture department about anti-locust spray in the district. He was informed that the spray was in full swing in the district, especially in Nagarparkar, Dahali, Chhachhro and Islamkot talukas. Seven teams working with the help of as many spray vehicles had covered 40 villages and 9,500 acres of land in four talukas, they said.

Mr Rahu assured the officials that all hurdles to the drive against dangerous insects would be resolved.

His department was not only making efforts to boost agriculture in barrage areas but was also trying to maximise yield and cultivation of land, he said.

He said that if Thar region got three or four more bountiful spells of showers Tharis would not only get enough fodder for their livestock but also harvest good yield of their traditional crops.

Mr Rahu visited several areas in Nagarparkar, Dahli and Chhachhro talukas to assess the situation and directed the officials concerned to expedite the anti-locust drive so that the insects were exterminated completely before they were able to cause serious damage to crops and grass.

He made it clear to the district administration and the officials of the departments concerned that lethargy would not be tolerated in fight against locusts. The Sindh government had greatly achieved its target to control the swarms of insects in several districts of Sindh without adequate assistance from the federal government, he said.

He alleged that the federal government was trying to poke its nose in the affairs of Sindh government, which demonstrated its “childish” approach and “immaturity” in running the government both in the Centre and provinces.

The minister strongly condemned what he saw as highly vindictive attitude towards top leaders of Pakistan Peoples Party and warned high-ups of the federal government to mend their ways and mind their own business, especially when situation along the borders had become tense.

The director general of Agriculture Extension Sindh Hidayatullah Chhajro, director general of Agriculture Research Noor Mohammad Baloch, assistant commissioner of Tharparkar Nooruddin Hingorjo, director of Federal Plant Protection Department Ghulam Qadir Loond, additional director of Agriculture Extension Tharparkar Tikam Das and other officers concerned also accompanied the minister during his visit.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1499864

NEW LAW TO GRANT FORMAL RECOGNITION TO FEMALE AGRICULTURE WORKERS

By Vakeel Rao Published: August 17, 2019

KARACHI: For the very first time, female workers in the agriculture sector will be formally recognised and be able to demand the stipulated minimum wage, besides healthcare and other benefits. The draft law, which will be tabled in the next meeting of the Sindh cabinet, is being made to ensure the provision of legal, social and financial protection for women by the departments of fisheries, livestock and agriculture.

Under the proposed law, titled Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act, female agriculture workers will be registered and paid the minimum wage as stipulated by the provincial government. The draft, prepared by the Sindh government, comprises seven pages and 72 clauses.

The women will work for up to eight hours a day and get 90 days maternity leave, besides being given a secure environment to feed their babies for up to two years. They will also be eligible to avail the facility of social security, subsidies and loans from government schemes.

According to the draft, women working in these sectors will have the right to take sick leaves, leaves for routine medical check-ups and other reasons and money will not be deducted from their monthly wages. A written appointment letter will be issued to the female agriculture workers. They will have the opportunity to form organisations for their rights and duties according to labour rights. They will not be discriminated against on the basis of their job, wages, gender, working hours and environment, religion and language.

The health department will register the female agriculture workers and the Benazir Women Agriculture Workers card will be issued to them. The registered workers will have the right to avail the allowances, schemes and projects. Under the proposed law, the Government of Sindh will launch a permanent Benazir Women Support Programme to be headed by the Sindh chief minister under the proposed act.

The board members of this programme will include the government officials, female agriculture workers, agriculturists and representatives of civil society. The board of Benazir Women Support Programme will appoint the chief executive and prepare a policy framework. It will also ensure the provision of financial aid to the women workers and protection of their rights.

The Sindh government will also form a tri-party council for female agriculture workers, which would decide the amount of additional wages for women working in the farms on the basis of seasonal crops. All the relevant departments will be bound to submit three-month reports in the Sindh Assembly regarding compliance with the Act.

According to the Labour Force Survey, hundreds of thousands of women work in the agriculture, fisheries and livestock sectors but they don’t have social, financial and legal protection. The proposed draft will be presented in the Sindh Assembly after the cabinet’s approval.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2035585/1-new-law-grant-formal-recognition-female-agriculture-workers/

FISHERMEN RELUCTANT TO INSTALL TRACKING SYSTEM FOR BEING TOO COSTLY

By Aftab KhanPublished: August 17, 2019

KARACHI: The installation of a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) would make it possible to locate any launch stranded at sea in any emergency situation. However, according to Maritime Security Agency (MSA) Director General Rear Admiral Zakaur Rehman, the owners of fishing launches are unwilling to install the system in their vessels.

According to Rear Admiral Rehman, through the VMS system, only a button would be pressed and the VMS headquarters would be able to monitor the vessel with its location easily. Although the law says that a vessel longer than 15 metres cannot venture into the deep sea without this system, the owners of the launches have not been adhering to the law, said Rear Admiral Rehman. However, the matter is not as simple.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Rear Admiral Rehman said that the owners of the launches which are used in fishing expeditions manipulate the common fishermen and push them forward to protest over the enforcement of laws. The fishermen are given the impression that the MSA is subjugating them, he said, adding that the fishermen cannot afford the vessels which cost around Rs20 million each. The MSA does not expect them to be able to afford the Rs200,000 cost of the VMS system and it is actually the owners who are unwilling to install the system. Rear Admiral Rehman further said that the reason behind this is that the system would also alert the authorities of the illegal fishing activities these launches are often used for.

Claiming that the VMS would only ensure the safety and protection of the fishermen, the MSA DG gave the example of a launch named Al Saddam which was caught in an emergency situation in the sea near Karachi due to bad weather. Around 22 people were on the vessel which drowned in the sea. Of the 22, ten fishermen were rescued but 12 remain missing, said Rear Admiral Rehman. A helicopter, an aircraft and a ship of the MSA were sent for the rescue mission along with a helicopter of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and a ship of the Pakistan Navy. These were five naval and air force ships and helicopters which were used in the rescue mission and that required a lot of fuel, he said, adding that this could have been averted if the location of the drowned vessel had been traced. The rescue operation could have been carried out more effectively, efficiently and at lower cost had the vessel been equipped with the VMS system, he claimed.

Besides, he added, the VMS system would allow the monitoring of any vessels crossing the sea borders and entering Indian, Omani or Iranian territories leading to arrests of Pakistani fishermen.

It is a difficult task to find a stranded vessel or a vessel stuck in an emergency situation when there are hundreds of other launches in the sea at a time, said Rear Admiral Rehman. The launches could easily be located if the system is installed, he adds. According to him, the MSA is very lenient with the fishermen but there are some issues that cannot be compromised on. “The launch owners may not care about the fishermen but we are trying to ensure that no vessel sets off to the sea without proper safety gear,” he said adding that the GPS facility should be available on every boat and fire fighting equipment must also be installed in the boats.

Meanwhile, speaking to The Express Tribune, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum President Muhammad Ali Shah said that the fishermen are willing to install the VMS in the larger launches but it is the smaller boats that present a problem. The fishermen who own those boats cannot afford to install the costly system in their vessels, he added. Referring to the law that the MSA DG had cited – of vessels longer than 15 metres not permitted to venture into the deep sea without the system – Shah said that according to his knowledge, there was no such law stated in the policy.

Rear Admiral Rehman said that fishermen often complain of arrests by the agencies deployed at sea but the primary reason behind those arrests is the non-compliance with safety measures and the use of banned fishing nets. The use of illegal nets destroys fish eggs and prevents future breeding as mature fish, fry and baby fish and fish eggs are all captured through the illegal nets, he said.

The nets are sent from illegal jetties through boats which distribute these nets to the bigger launches out at sea, explains Rear Admiral Rehman. This is difficult to prevent as the MSA does not have any authority on land and cannot prevent the boats from leaving the shore with these nets. The capture of fish eggs and baby fish is a loss for the whole nation as well as for future generations, he said. "It is the primary responsibility of MSA to enforce national and international laws," he added.

The maritime sector plays a significant role in the national economy all over the world and the secret behind their progress is adherence to laws, he remarked. "The contribution of the maritime sector in our economy is limited and we cannot use it properly despite the sector having immense potential in this regard," added the MSA DG. "The deep sea fishing policy was formulated in consultation with all stakeholders but when time to enforce the policy came, resistance came from all sides and the policy was suspended after only two months," he said. According to him, if the illegal fishing activities continue in the same way, it would be harmful for our marine ecosystem. Many species of fish have already become extinct in the Pakistani sea, he claimed.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2035595/1-fishermen-reluctant-install-tracking-system-costly/

LOCUST CONTROL OPERATIONS BEING CARRIED OUT DAILY: SINDH MINISTER

By Our Correspondent Published: August 17, 2019

HYDERABAD: Locust control operations are still going on in parts of the province, said Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahoo, adding that sprays are being carried out on a daily basis. Rahoo, who chaired a meeting with agriculture and district administration officials in Tharparkar on Friday, said that the relevant departments have been directed to protect the crops from locust attacks through regular sprays.

Deputy Commissioner Shahzad Tariq Thaeem and agriculture officials informed the minister that a vast area of 9,500 acres of land in the desert region Tharparkar has been sprayed so far since the last week of June. Locusts invaded other parts of Sindh in last week of May. The DC said that seven teams with as many vehicles mounted spray machines are conducting the operation regularly.

Swarms of locusts began to invade vegetation in parts of Sindh after a long interlude of around 22 years. Experts of the federal department of Plant Protection and provincial departments fear a steep rise in the locust population after monsoon rains if timely sprays are not carried out.

The DC said locust eggs have been reported from ten villages in four different union councils, adding that teams are being sent to spray those villages. The provincial minister assured officials that financial bottlenecks obstructing the drive against locusts will be resolved.

Although, the federal department of Plant Protection is responsible for conducting the spray and bearing the cost of operation, due to the department's limited resources the provincial government has been contributing towards both the manpower and the finances. Rahoo said that the Sindh government immediately responded to the threat of locusts after the insects emerged in Khairpur, Jamhoro, Matiari, Nawabshah and other districts of Sindh.

The minister said that the government is trying to promote agriculture in the arid regions like Tharparkar.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2035602/1-locust-control-operations-carried-daily-sindh-minister/

GOVT UNLIKELY TO ACHIEVE 15M COTTON BALES TARGET

Parvaiz Ishfaq RanaUpdated August 18, 2019

KARACHI: The country is unlikely to produce the projected 15 million bales of cotton during the 2019-20 season mainly due to lesser area coming under cultivation for the crop.

This means that the country will have to spend huge amount of foreign exchange for importing around 2.2-2.5m bales to meet the expected shortfall. Last season the import bill for 4m cotton bales stood at $1.3 billion.

According to official figures the total area under cotton cultivation this season was achieved at 69 million acres against the target of 71.54m acres. Undoubtedly, this area stands 14.3 per cent higher over 2018-19 when cotton was sown on 67.01m acres and a production of 10.07m bales was achieved.

Analyst Naseem Usman told *Dawn* that the Punjab agriculture minister had already put the province's cotton production at 8m bales for current season this means the total production will stand at around 12-12.2m bales on including Sindh's 4 to 4.2m bales and 0.1m bales of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Even when looked at historic perspective it could be easily stated that the area under cotton sowing this season still stands less than 73.17m acres when the country produced a record 14.871m bales in 2014-15 season. The successive governments have failed on a number of accounts in enhancing cotton production which is a cash crop and could earn invaluable foreign exchange for the country even on achieving higher production than the domestic consumption.The domestic consumption stands at around 15-16m bales whereas cotton production is stagnant at around 11-12m bales for the last many years. Pakistan has very low yield of cotton at around 680kg lint per hectare against other cotton producing countries of the world have above 1,700kg lint per hectare.

It is high time that the government on a war-footing should take necessary measures to enhance cotton production by providing proper certified seed and also crack down on those supply poor quality pesticides and other inputs to growers.

The fibre length also had been a big issue because in 70 years the country failed to produce long staple fibre due to poor quality of seed and lack of research on this account. As a result the textile industry annually has to import huge quantity of long staple cotton on spending huge foreign exchange.

Asif Inam, former chairman All Pakistan Textile Mills Association, Sindh Balochistan Zone, said that textile industry had been importing cotton from India to meet the shortfall but now they will have to pay extra cost towards freight on importing cotton from far-away countries after suspension after New Delhi illegally changed Occupied Kashmir's status.

He said the government had proposed to fix indicative price for phutti (seed-cotton) to encourage growers to cultivate more cotton but this was never done and no announcement was made in this regard.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1500186/govt-unlikely-to-achieve-15m-cotton-bales-target

MET DEPARTMENT WARNS COTTON FARMERS OF WORM ATTACK

RECORDER REPORT AUG 18TH, 2019 KARACHI

The Met Office on Saturday warned the farmers of a worm attack on cotton crop, asking them for steps to protect the production. It attributed a higher temperature for the worm attack, saying that the farmers should take adoptive measures in consultancy with the plant protection department. After the recent rainfall spell, measures may be taken to pump out the accumulated rainwater from cotton and vegetables fields. It also said that the growers of Potohar region should remove weeds from peanut fields.

Widespread rains and wind-thunderstorms with isolated heavy falls are expected mainly over the northern and parts of central Punjab, besides upper half of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Kashmir this weekend. Isolated rains/wind-thunderstorms are expected in Gilgit-Baltistan. Hot and humid weather is expected in Sindh and Balochistan.

In the next 24 hours scattered rains and wind-thunderstorm with isolated heavy falls are expected in Malakand, Hazara, Mardan, Peshawar, Kohat, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Sargodha, Faisalabad and Lahore Divisions, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir. Hot and humid weather is expected elsewhere in the country.

In the last 24 hours scattered rains and wind-thunderstorm were reported in Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sahiwal, DG Khan, Peshawar, Bannu, Malakand and Hazara Divisions, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir. Weather remained hot and humid in the other parts of the country.

Maximum rainfall was recorded in Islamabad Zero Point as 77 mm, Rawalpindi Shamsabad 75 mm, Islamabad Saidpur and Chaklala 48 mm, each, Chakwal 40 mm, Balakot 36 mm, Malamjabba 34 mm, Peshawar and Kot Addu 33 mm, each, Joharabad 32 mm, Islamabad Bokra 31 mm, Islamabad International Airport and Noorpur Thal 30 mm, each, Okara 28 mm, Murree 27 mm, Cherat 25 mm, Said Sharif 23 mm, Kakul and T T Singh 22 mm, each, Kalam and Muzaffarabad City 20 mm, each, Jhang 18 mm, Upper Dir, Islamabad Golra and Gujranwala 16 mm, each, Muzaffarabad Airport and Rawalakot 14 mm, Garidupatta and Sargodha 12 mm, each, Barkhan, Drosh and Sahiwal 11 mm, each and Lahore Airport 10 mm.

Sibbi was the hottest place with 43 degrees Celsius followed by Turbat and Dalbandin 42, each. "Seasonal low lies over north Balochistan. Weak monsoon currents are approaching upper and central parts of the country. A westerly wave is also present over upper parts of the country," the Met said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190818506866/

PFD TO RELEASE WHEAT TO FLOUR MILLS TOMORROW

ZAHID BAIG AUGUST 18,2019
LAHORE: Punjab Food Department (PFD) will start issuing wheat to flour mills from Monday (tomorrow) at the rate of Rs 1375 per 40 kilograms (including the cost of bardana) to ensure uninterrupted supply of wheat flour to the masses on a fair price.
According to a notification issued here on Saturday, PFD has 4.795 million metric tons of wheat in its godowns and in response to need/demand arising for commencing official wheat release to flour mills, it is starting the supply of wheat to functional/approved flour mills based on approved roller bodies.
The flour mills having official wheat will be bound to sell flour at the maximum ex-mill price of Rs 786 per 20 kilograms and maximum retail price of Rs 808 per 20 kilograms bag.
The notification entitles flour mills getting wheat from the Food department to grind their private wheat stocks.
The Rawalpindi, Gujranwala and Lahore Divisions except Nankana Sahib District will be treated as deficit Divisions and wheat will be issued to the flour mills/chakkies as per body quota to be notified by the Director Food Punjab, from time to time. Director Food will also fix priority of wheat releases keeping in view the stock position of the Districts, the notification added.
The requirement of the flour mills of deficit Divisions over and above the prescribed number of bags per body will be met from surplus divisions. However, the surplus stocks of Sargodha Division and Okara District will be kept reserved for the flour mills of Rawalpindi and Lahore Division respectively, the food department further mentioned in the wheat release notification.
The notification further said that wheat to the defaulter mills (which have not deposited their outstanding dues) will not be issued from government stocks. It should be ensured that the wheat quota issued from the government godowns must be ground by the flour mills and justified by the electricity bills. Execution of agreement with every flour mill for the observance of the process may be ensured, besides abiding by all the departmental instructions and codal formalities regarding advance deposit and issuance of wheat, the notification concludes.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/08/18/5-page/796623-news.html

COTTON PRICES STABLE ON STRONG BUYING BY MILLS

RECORDER REPORT AUG 18TH, 2019KARACHI

Strong mills' buying helped the rates to sustain present levels on the cotton market on Saturday, dealers said. The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs 7750, they added. In ready session, about 8000 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs 7600 and Rs 8000, they said. Rates of seed cotton per 40kg in Sindh were at Rs 3000-3300, in Punjab prices were at Rs 3300-3700, they said. In Balochistan, seed cotton prices were at Rs 3500-3600, they said.
In Sindh and Punjab, Binola prices per maund were at Rs 1500-1600, they said and adding that polyester fibre per kg rates were at Rs 192. According to the market sources some positive developments propelled mills to make deals, besides, rising concerns about quality was also a factor behind the increase in demand.
Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that strong export sales data in the United States and some other countries encouraging developments gave a boost to the ailing cotton business locally.
Adds Reuters: ICE cotton futures edged up on Friday, hitting a two-week peak, helped by hot weather

in major cotton growing regions in the United States and strong export sales data, with the natural fiber battling demand woes. The most-active cotton contract on ICE Futures US, the second-month December contract, rose 0.44 cent, or 0.74 %, at 60.06 cents per lb at 12:53 pm EDT. It earlier rose to 60.18 cents a lb, its highest since August 2.
Total futures market volume fell by 8,312 to 11,679 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 521 to 215,266 contracts in the previous session. Following deals were reported: 1400 bales of cotton from Tando Adam at Rs 7700/7750, 1000 bales from Shahdadpur at Rs 7700/7750, 1000 bales from Sanghar at Rs 7600/7700, 800 bales from Sinjoro at Rs 7675/7700, 200 bales from Dawlatpur at Rs 7700, 800 bales from Shahpur Chakar at Rs 7650/7700, 400 bales from Khipro at Rs 7625/7650, 1200 bales from Burewala at Rs 7950/8000, 400 bales from Haroonabad at Rs 8000, 200 bales from Chichawatni at Rs 7950 and 800 bales from Moongi Bangla at Rs 7950, they said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190818506927/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUG 19th TO AUG 25th 2019

FLOUR MILLS TO GET SUBSIDISED WHEAT FROM TODAY

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterAugust 19, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab food department will begin supply of subsidised wheat to flour mills in the province from today (Monday).

The department will supply the millers with wheat at Rs1,375 per 40kg, including the cost of the gunny bag, while the millers will sell flour at Rs808 per 20kg bag. The ex-mill price of the same bag will be Rs786.

Chairman of the Punjab chapter of the Pakistan Flour Mills Association, Habibur Rehman Leghari, has urged the government not to impose any new tax on the units to help maintain the prices of roti and naan.

He says that all members of the association have been directed to follow the provincial government’s orders regarding fixing the rates of flour and other wheat products as well as maintain quality and weight of the flour bags.

He says a meeting of the Punjab PFMA executive body has also been convened for Tuesday (tomorrow) for consultation on flour and wheat supplies and their prices.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1500279/flour-mills-to-get-subsidised-wheat-from-today

FARMERS TAKE A HIT AS EID ECONOMY SINKS

Afshan Subohi Updated August 19, 2019

The pain of economic slowdown is growing in rural households as the market for sacrificial animals shrank and prices crashed this Eidul Azha.

In desperation to contain losses, many traders decided to return to the market early with the unsold stocks instead of waiting for buyers until the third day of Eid.

Traditionally, farming families raise animals, mostly goats or calves, to sell in cities at a premium on Eidul Azha to generate funds for purposes not covered by routine income.

“The money earned from the sale of cattle makes Eid in rural Pakistan sweeter. It is treated as an annual bonus. Besides affording some indulgence for the family, the money is often used to replace agricultural tools, do home repairs or invest in assets. Small farm-holders may also use the money to retire debt,” Adil Gujjar, manager at a commercial farmhouse in Multan, told Dawn over the phone.

Market watchers project a 40-50 per cent fall in the total volume of livestock trade this year. The average price of a goat, calf, cow or sheep was down by 10-15pc from last year, chewing up margins at low volumes.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has kept out of maweshi mandis (cattle markets) for now. Recent reports about a tax on the sale and purchase of sacrificial animals proved incorrect. FBR Chairman Shabbar Zaidi told Dawn the sale and purchase of cattle on Eid was tax free.

A senior officer of the FBR, however, told Dawn privately that a proposal to this effect did come under discussion in the recent past. “You need to inquire the sales tax people in the FBR as I am not sure if cattle trade falls in the purview of any tax.”

The contraction in the Eid market reinforces the perception about the growing financial stress in average Pakistani households as the economy slumps under the watch of the PTI government.

“I used to sacrifice a goat every year. I switched to collective qurbani — where the cost of a cow is shared equally by seven participants — for affordability reasons last year. God knows that this year I had to forego qurbani as I simply couldn’t afford it anymore,” Amir, a young professional with two school-going kids, told Dawn.

Businessmen with rural linkages also expressed concerns. They foresee a major reduction in the cattle population, propelling a chain of reactions that may not bode well for the future of the sector.

The livestock sector has been posting healthy growth even when the crop sector underperformed. Livestock has a growing share of 60.5pc in agriculture and 11.2pc in GDP, according to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19, up from 58.9pc and 11.1pc in 2017-18. It grew at the rate of 4pc in 2018-19 against 3.8pc a year before.

“It is not easy to raise healthy animals. Cattle need persistent care and attention like children. Farmers will stop breeding cattle if the market continues to punish them.

“The farming community is a neglected lot. It is on the losing end for one reason or the other. It will be perfectly understandable if the farming community trims time and resources dedicated to cattle after the debacle this year. I foresee a short supply and vertical price hike in the livestock market on Eid next year,” said Saqib Butt, owner of a food company and supermarket chain.

Another leading businessman, Sardar Rafiq Khan of Bukhari Cattle and Dairy Farm, sounded worried. “It is sad. I know many who took their animals back to farms from mandis all across the country. This is a major setback to the rural economy that could drag down sentiments in the breeders’ community.”

He urged the government to provide farmers with support before the situation gets out of hand and starts eroding the agricultural base that is already under stress.

The cash-based trade in livestock on Eid makes it difficult to gauge the flow of funds. Besides, there is a chain of stakeholders involved in the activity that spans a whole year and culminates on Eid. There are companies, short-term investors, cattle-farm owners, brokers, transporters and mandi operators along with a host of service providers and temporary workers. Estimating the share of each segment in the Eidul Azha economy is hard. Risks are high and returns are uncertain in this trade.

A few indicators that help in assessing the size of the market, such as the number of hides and skins collected and the consolidated figure for the arrival of animals in the government-managed markets, are released after a lag of one month.

At this point, we know that the funds transferred by overseas Pakistanis shot up by 24pc to $2.04 billion in July from $1.65bn a year ago, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The SBP issued fresh banknotes of various denominations to the tune of Rs284bn as demand for cash increases on Eid.

According to initial estimates, the size of the Baqra Eid economy — dominated by the sacrificial animal trade — slumped to Rs200bn from around Rs360bn in 2018. In the absence of credible data, the calculation is based on an intelligent guess.

The subdued market on Eid belies the latest reports about an improvement in consumer confidence. According to the SBP, consumer confidence in Pakistan increased to 43.3 index points in July from 43.1 index points in May. The index covers household perceptions relative to the last six months and their expectations for the next semester. It is based on a stratified random telephone survey of 1,600 households across Pakistan.

"The gap between the market and the survey projections exposes the weaknesses of the exercise and its lack of relevance in providing a credible insight into consumer behavior," commented an analyst.

"Unusual rains and a lack of proper drainage in many cities — including Karachi, the biggest cattle market — aggravated the situation for cattle traders, heightening the risks amidst low customer footfall and inadequate arrangements," another businessman commented.

Overall business dynamics did not undergo a major change this year, though the participation of short-term investors was comparatively limited.

"The young, urban, professional class either assessed the market was riddled with a higher risk and low return projection or the financial squeeze left them with no spare funds to play around with in the seasonal market," a banker said while trying to explain the phenomenon in the absence of relevant data.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1500256/farmers-take-a-hit-as-eid-economy-sinks

ANIMAL CENSUS AND BAQRA EID TRADE

From the Newspaper Updated August 19, 2019

In Punjab, people have credible data on the livestock population. In other provinces, they don't. The reason is that the Punjab government released in 2017-18 the results of its 2016 census of livestock based on physical surveys. The other three provinces have yet to follow suit.

The authors of the Pakistan Economic Survey are thus incapable of reporting national-level, actual livestock numbers. They present estimates every year based on the growth rate of the animal population recorded in the 2006 census over the 1996 census. The last livestock survey was conducted in 2006 across Pakistan. But that was a sample survey. Using an old inter-census growth rate for estimating the livestock population keeps policymakers in the dark. It also makes it difficult to assess how the slaughtering of cows, calves, bulls, buffaloes, goats, sheep and camels every Baqra Eid is affecting their countrywide population.

The Pakistan Tanners Association (PTA) releases the number of hides and skins of sacrificial animals every year after the three-day religious event is over.

Tanneries get supplies through a network of dealers and agents, seminaries, NGOs, political parties and social groups involved in the collective sacrifice of animals.

The PTA number serves as a proxy for the number of animals sacrificed. But a flawed system of hide collection, inaccurate reporting and deliberate under-reporting reduce the credibility of the PTA number. Also, this number appears small when we apply other proxies. These proxies include the number of sacrificial animals sold in major markets, amount of additional home remittances ahead of Baqra Eid and sales reported by online animal sellers etc.

So there is a need to obtain actual data on the sales of sacrificial animals on this occasion to collect applicable taxes as well as help evaluate the size of the Baqra Eid economy. This is a complex task and cannot be fulfilled without effective coordination among federal, provincial and local governments and relevant departments and agencies. Obtaining a closer-to-reality estimate of the size of the Baqra Eid economy is crucial for more informed future estimates of consumption, movement of funds and the informal economy. Till the time we get the results of a nation-wide animal census, more reliable estimates of sales of sacrificial animals will help us understand the effects of Baqra Eid on the livestock economy.

After last year's Baqra Eid, tanneries reported the arrival of up to 8.01 million hides and skins of sacrificial animals. That included 5m skins of goats and sheep, 3m hides of cows, calves, bulls and buffaloes and about 100,000 hides of camels.

According to the federal government's estimates, a total of 90m hides and skins were collected last year. This means that Baqra Eid-specific slaughtering of sacrificial animals accounts for about 9pc of routine slaughtering in a year. This is a big number even if we overlook the flaws in data collection and reporting.

The country's economy is under stress, joblessness is high and the income level is lower than a year ago. Inflation is soaring. So the sales of sacrificial animals this year cannot be expected to exceed the last year's level. But even if the nation slaughters the same number of animals this year (8.01m), it will constitute more or less the same share (9pc) in the entire year's routine slaughtering of animals for meat supplies and exports.

Shouldn't the economy of an event that accounts for 9pc of the total animal slaughtering in a country be documented properly?

According to the federal government's statistics, populations of cattle, buffalo, goats and sheep have been on the rise. But the application of inter-census growth rates for estimating the population of livestock can be misleading at times. For example, the national population of cattle, buffaloes, goats and sheep estimated with this formula showed a handsome increase even in 2010-11. Officials concerned had obviously not factored in the direct and indirect effects of the super floods in August and September of 2010 on the livestock.

When Punjab began the census of domestic animals in 2016, its initial results showed that the actual provincial livestock were far less than what the federal government had reported previously. The culprit was the use of the inter-census growth rate.

Conducting an animal census across Pakistan and making a realistic assessment of large-scale sales of sacrificial animals on Baqra Eid are important for food security and efficient crop management as well. Raising livestock on local fodder crops consumes a large area of land part of which can be spared for import-substituting crops.

Since policymakers don't know the actual population of livestock across Pakistan, they cannot make well-informed decisions about how much land should suffice for growing fodder crops.

Similarly, in the absence of credible data on the sales of sacrificial animals, they cannot make realistic projections about the specific needs for fodder in different cities and towns during Baqra Eid. Consequently, prices of animal food shoot up and supplies remain erratic. —**MA**

https://www.dawn.com/news/1500252

PROFESSOR SOWS THE SEEDS FOR RESEARCH, TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

By Kashif Hussain Published: August 19, 2019

KARACHI: In a world increasingly driven by technology, artificial intelligence (AI) poses itself as an effective mechanism to provide solutions for Pakistan's development issues. Dr Muhammad Khurram, an associate professor at NED University of Engineering and Technology strongly believes in the power of research and emerging technologies to combat local problems. He heads the Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence at NED University and has been seminal in the centre's establishment.

Dr Khurram laid the foundations for the laboratory in 2014 and two years later, with support from his department, the Koshish Foundation Research Lab and the German Research Centre of Artificial Intelligence, the laboratory evolved into a research centre which now has around 30 researchers associated with it as well as a number of innovative projects under its belt. These include projects pertaining to infrastructure, agriculture, water and energy conservation, urban solutions, among other things.

The research centre, which has two laboratories operating under it – a Smart City Lab and a Neuro Computation Lab, has several completed and on-going projects under its belt.

A smart water management system was developed under the name 'Aqua-Agro' to help farmers assess how much water to use by analysing weather and environmental conditions using artificial intelligence.

NED students working on this project built a device, which when placed in the soil, uses censors to assess soil moisture, temperature, humidity, wind speed, and heat index. This data can help the farmer determine when to irrigate the crops and how much water is needed. Aqua Agro, now a start-up, is currently incubated in the National Incubation Centre in Karachi and has six deployments in Gadap Town. Those associated with the start-up claim that their system has enabled farmers to save up to 50 per cent of irrigation water besides increasing crop yield by 30 to 35 per cent.

Another project being developed at the lab focuses on parking issues in urban areas. According to those working on the project, 30 per cent of all traffic congestion is caused by drivers circling to find parking space. The Smart Parking system helps drivers find parking space more efficiently by informing them of vacant parking spaces through smartphones or electronic street panels. The system claims to save time and fuel by minimising circling while also lowering carbon emissions. Besides, the system is equipped to generate targeted offers and promotions for citizens based on parking data, enable efficient traffic monitoring and better planning, reduce parking ticket disputes, reduce traffic congestion and improve general quality of life with improved traffic flow and lesser problems while commuting in the city.

Yet another project at the lab, ‘AIDEE’, aims to ease access to education for hearing-impaired persons. AIDEE is a robot equipped with artificial intelligence which is capable of speech recognition and is trained in the English Language. It can be attached to the hand of a hearing impaired person and would change speech input to visual representation. The device, which is at its prototype stage, is meant to act as an interpreter between the hearing impaired person and the speaker and aims to improve the former’s access to education. It could also be used in other aspects of life to improve quality of living for those with hearing loss.

Other projects in the research centre include those pertaining to health, environment protection, and rescue and surveillance systems. Several of these projects would be presented to government bodies and utility agencies.

The research centre which started as a research laboratory in 2014 was initially funded solely by Dr Khurram. He was supported by Dr Shehzad from NED’s computer science department but provided the finances from his own pocket for the most part.

To encourage researchers to join the lab, students enrolled in NED’s masters programme were incentivised with the option of receiving assistance in paying for their education at the university in return for their research work at the lab. Dr Khurram accounted for the stipends and financial assistance of the first two students who availed this option.

Later, the Koshish Foundation, a non-governmental organisation, extended its support and bore the expenses of four research assistants. During this time the laboratory was named after the foundation. Undergraduate students were also provided with research opportunities at the laboratory which by 2016 had begun expanding with increased donors and funding from local and international organisations such as the German research institution DAAD.

The funds collected during this time were divided such that 60 per cent went towards expanding opportunities for Pakistani students with five to six students being sent to research programmes in Germany each year. The remaining 40 per cent was spent on research projects at the laboratory with the aim of producing technological solutions for development problems.

As the laboratory evolved into a research centre and garnered the recognition it received funds from the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and is now being run under HEC funds. The centre has around 30 student researchers associated with it.

It was during his post-doctorate degree at Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand that Dr Khurram felt the need to establish his own research lab. He was pursuing a PhD in Integrated Circuit Design on a scholarship after completing his masters at NED and noted that most scientists and researchers across the globe had their own laboratories where they were assisted by students in their research work. This benefitted both the scientists and the students, says Dr Khurram. Besides, it promotes a culture of research and innovation.

Dr Khurram inherited his inclination for the sciences from his father who had been an engineer in Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). After graduating from PIA Model School in 1995, Dr Khurram completed his intermediate education from DJ Sindh Government Science College and then pursued higher education at NED University.

After his undergraduate studies, Dr Khurram joined a tech company. “I have always found joy in challenging myself and working hard,” he says adding that he never planned ahead and carved his own path in life.

He is optimistic about the talent and progress in the field of technology in Pakistan and opines that the field is gaining traction and has expanded in the past ten years. “Imported systems and solutions have become to expensive. People want to solve problems using our own resources.” Dr Khurram has also set-up an artificial intelligence solutions company under the name of Smart System and Services (S3) with the intention of combining innovation with entrepreneurship to expand opportunities for youngsters.

Currently, the company provides solutions for trade and industrial challenges using machine learning, data mining, cloud computing, statistical analysis and Internet of Things [interconnection via the Internet of computing devices embedded in everyday objects, enabling them to send and receive data]. Besides, Dr Khurram conducts a series of workshops called, ‘The Gum Bot’, which caters to younger children interested in computer science and artificial intelligence.

His PhD and subsequent research work provided him with opportunities to settle down abroad. His post-doctorate thesis was included among the Dean’s List at Massey University, says Dr Khurram while referring to his time in New Zealand from 2007 to 2012. “However, I never considered settling in another country because I believe the sense of ownership and responsibility reduces in a foreign land. Being in one's own country among one's own people motivates you to work harder," he says.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2036837/8-professor-sows-seeds-research-technological-solutions/

CHINA MUST ALLOW PAKISTANI KINNOW ON ALL ENTRY POINTS: BMP

RECORDER REPORT AUG 20TH, 2019 KARACHI

Secretary General (Federal) of Businessmen Panel (BMP) and former Chairman of Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports FPCCI, Ahmad Jawad has suggested that Chinese Authority must allow Pakistani kinnow on all entry points, including its CPEC route, so that trade may facilitate.
He said that China is a market for a minimum of 100,000 tonnes of Pakistani kinnow due to their high demand and it depends how we tap this big opportunity.
He said kinnow (Mandarin) have always been considered as a traditional symbol of good fortune in China. This is mainly because the word orange, when spoken in mandarin, sounds similar to the word "wealth". The orange hue of the fruit is also said to symbolise "gold", which makes it a very auspicious fruit.
Jawad also briefed that Pakistan managed to find out two new markets for citrus export as Philippines and China are open for Pakistan's citrus fruits now. "It is very heartening to note that Pakistan has targeted China and Philippines markets for kinnow export and expected boost in kinnow export is about 20 percent this year."
"CPEC is poised to give tremendous boost to the horticulture industry in Pakistan, which has a promising outlook," Jawad added. "However, presently we are facing many challenges internationally as European Union and other developed countries of the world are creating barriers for our agro exports."
UK, Australia, Japan, Korea even few central Asian countries are setting new standards for imports; there are SPS, pesticide residue elimination, cold treatment and pest free area. He said these are difficult and costly and hence affecting our exports to a considerable level. Jawad further said we are facing two problems in citrus: citrus canker and citrus graining which is detrimental to "kinnow" exports but now growers are very conscious to overcome it.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190820507380/

RIGHTS ISSUES IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

RECORDER REPORT AUG 20TH, 2019 EDITORIAL
Growers of the hybrid citrus fruit, kinnow, think they are getting a raw deal. Voicing their grievances Secretary General (federal) of Businessmen Panel and a former chairman of the FPCCI's standing committee on horticulture exports has pointed out that the purchase price for the produce has been reduced from last year's Rs 850 for 40 kg to Rs 600 in the current year which is unjustifiable as the prices of inputs such as DAP, urea and potash as well as diesel have soared during this period. Urea and DAP, for instance, are currently selling for Rs 1,925 and Rs 3,395, respectively, per bag as against last year's Rs 1,200 and Rs 2,380 for the same quantity. Growers certainly have genuine complaints to make. Which merits the question who is to blame? According to farmers, prices are decided by Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers (PFVA) officials in cahoots with the processing plants owners. And that the export volume figures and international

prices are not shared with them. In other words, growers are being cheated by other players in the field.

This mistrust between growers and exporters needs to be addressed in a manner that balances the demand of citrus farmers with those of business interests. That calls for proper streamlining of the sector's affairs. As the farmers spokesman rightly pointed out, there is need to identify growers in a database, and setting up a forum where growers, exporters and traders can air their grievances and find solutions acceptable to all. What also calls for attention are the rights of farm labour - a vast majority of them women - who work as fruit, vegetable and cotton pickers as well as for harvesting grain crops. They are the most exploited lot in the agriculture sector. Pakistan is a signatory to no less than eight ILO conventions but farm labour is not covered by the minimum wage law, nor do they have defined working hours. The labour laws such as the Workmen's Compensation Act, the Payment of Wages Act and the Provincial Employees Social Security Ordinance do not apply to them.

The reason the landless rural poor remain outside the purview of these laws is not difficult to identify. Most of those who have the power to change the conditions happen to be wielders of political influence which they use to perpetuate unfairness of the situation. Many traditional politicians in national and provincial assemblies are big land owners. They are averse to application of labour laws to the agriculture sector. The present government, claiming to be a champion of the rights of the poor and the dispossessed, needs to do right by the most downtrodden section of the populace. It must lead the way to enactment of laws that secure the rights of workers in the agriculture sector.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190820507360/

COTTON SUPPORT PRICE AT RS4,000 PER 40KG SOUGHT

HASEEB HANIF AUGUST 20,2019

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Food Security and Research has recommended the government to set the support price of cotton at Rs4,000 per 40kg in order to increase its production.

The purpose of setting the support price is to overcome the decline in cotton production.

Trade Adviser Abdul Razzaq Dawood, heading the recently constituted committee, will decide the final support price of cotton,

Sources in the Ministry of Food Security and Research said the ministry informed the government that the support price should be set at Rs4,000 per 40kg in order to seize the decline in cotton production.

"The purpose of sending the summary is to increase cotton production and overcome shortage," they added.

In the recent past, the matter of determining the cotton support price came under discussion in the Economic Coordination Committee in which a committee with Trade Adviser Dawood as its head was formed.

https://tribune.com.pk/epaper/

KHARIF CROPS: WHO'S THE THIRSTIEST OF ALL?

BR ResearchAugust 21, 2019

Bore a well in any part of Sindh, and eight out of ten times the aquifer will spurt out saline water unusable for irrigation purposes. Thus, it is no surprise that of 2.2-2.5 million hectares of land cropped annually in the province, an overwhelming 86 percent is surface-water dependent, majority of which is supplied by vast network of canals built on Indus river.

But the availability of surface water has become increasingly erratic during the past decade, marked by years of semi-drought conditions dotted with periods of abundance – and at times, even flooding (Read: "Sindh's water volatility", published on August 19, 2019). This has been further exacerbated by increased demand-pressures on the IBIS (Indus Basin Irrigation System) by upper riparian regions, in part due to growing population and distorted water pricing that keeps the resource incredibly cheap, but equally a result of falling water tables and contamination of aquifers that has made tapping into groundwater an increasingly unattractive alternative in Punjab.

In this context, inadequate rainfall during 2018 prompted a public conversation about prioritizing resource allocation – largely centred on agriculture which is said to consume close to 95 percent of all freshwater in the country. While the narrative has revolved around generic themes of inefficient consumption practices and platitudes such as 'more crop per drop', holistic analysis that considers geographic, climatic, and food security perspectives appears to be missing.

For example, singular focus is laid on increasing yield of crops such as wheat – no doubt a laudable goal. After all, wheat is Sindh's largest crop and is grown on nearly half of net sown area. And, at 3,300 kg per hectare, its yield is far below regional potential.

Yet, when it comes to water productivity, addressing the rabi crop's yield is not the answer. All of autumn season crops put together consume no more than 25 percent of water drawn from the canal system annually, even though these are sown in off-monsoon season when rainfall has typically subsided.

The remainder three fourths is instead drawn from canal system for kharif crops, which also have the added advantage of coinciding with monsoon rainfall. But even there the conversation is dominated by truisms. For example, sugarcane, universally recognized to be a water-intensive crop, is widely imagined to be the bane of provincial water woes.

Yet, a look at decade-long cropping patterns between 2007-2016 in the province reveals that increased sugarcane production has had little to no bearing on province's water availability. For one, Sindh's sugarcane growth spurt has come from the northern-most district of Ghotki (Read:"Changing landscape of Sindh's sugarcane", published on August 09, 2019). Ghotki and adjoining northern districts, note, are supplied by feeder canals from Guddu Barrage.

In order to establish the impact of increased sugarcane cultivation on water withdrawals, BR Research delved into irrigation data published by statistics division of Sindh government. Between 2007-16, cane cultivation in regions irrigated by Guddu barrage system grew from 3,000 hectares to over 50,000 hectares. However, water withdrawals from the canal system showed no substantial growth, oscillating between period average of 5-6 million-acre feet.

In fact, as the illustration for Guddu Barrage shows, the canal withdrawals appear to more closely follow the peaks and troughs of rice cultivation, which not only is the largest kharif crop sown in the areas irrigated by the Guddu system but is also the largest kharif crop of the province.

Southern Sindh, on the other hand, took a complete 180-degree. The regions of Badin, Thatta, Sujawal, Hyderabad, Matiari that are irrigated by Kotri barrage system have historically been synonymous with province's sugarcane belt and home to largest concentration of milling units (Read: "Anatomy of sugar milling in Sindh", published on August 08, 2019). While sugarcane cultivation in the region remained stable during 2007-16, rice acreage kept pacing ahead, growing to over-one-and-third. The Kotri barrage illustration indicates that kharif season water withdrawals in the region supplied by Kotri barrage also grew by over 80 percent during this period.

Additional evidence comes from trends in cotton cultivation in the heart of IBIS – Sukkur barrage – and its irrigated regions of central and eastern Sindh. Cotton, and not rice or sugarcane, rules the day in central Sindh due to high yield achieved in the area. Canal withdrawals from the barrage, although highest in the province due to sheer scale and size of barrage and its network, showed no substantive growth spurt during the period, while moving in tandem with total cotton acreage.

This connects back to the earlier point made about yield. Not only does the province grow high-quality basmati, Irri-9, and Irri-6 rice varieties, its yield is competitive with the rice bowl of Gujranwala, and regional competitor India. Unlike sugarcane and cotton, Pakistan's rice is also export competitive with up to half of domestic production exported, and growers in Sindh have the added advantage of proximity to port.

This is not to downplay the severity of province's freshwater shortage; but to insist that those in policy circle need to widen their lens and make a business case to counter the challenge.

If rice is the thirstiest of all major crops, policymakers will be well-advised to avoid missing the mountain for the molehill by instead remaining fixated on sugarcane. The criticism on sugarcane is well-intentioned considering the excess production, fiscal cost in shape of subsidies and lack of export competitiveness. But ignoring data for agenda-pushing on sugarcane will not solve Sindh's water troubles.

Source: Kharif season canal withdrawals; rice, sugarcane & cotton area under cultivation as per Annual Development Statistics of Sindh 2009-2017. In absence of command region-wise data, irrigation networks defined as follows: Guddu Barrage – Kashmore, Shikarpur, Jaccobabad, Ghotki; Sukkur Barrage – Khairpur, Sukkur, Naushero Feroze, Nawabshah. Larkana, K.S. Kot, Sanghar, Mirpurkhas, Dadu; Kotri Barrage – Hyderabad, Matiari, Tando Allahyar, TM Khan, Badin, Thatta & Sujawal. Regions excluded: Jamshoro, Umerkot, Tharparkar, & Karachi for various reasons incl. dryland/rainfed farming, saline groundwater dependent irrigation and/or fed by canals other than from barrages under discussion. Author's definition based on secondary research & is open to feedback/dispute.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/08/21/518895/kharif-crops-whos-the-thirstiest-of-all/

'PADDY SOWN OVER 380,000 ACRES OF LAND ACROSS PUNJAB'

RECORDER REPORT AUG 21ST, 2019 LAHORE

Paddy has been sown over an area of 380,000 acres across the province out of which 40 percent area is under Basmati, 37 percent under Sela, 7 percent under Coarse and two percent under Hybrid rice. This was disclosed at a meeting of the Rice Working Group held at Kala Shah Kaku Rice Research Institute (KKRRI) here on Tuesday. The meeting was presided over by Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial while progressive farmer Jahangir Khan Tareen attended it as special guest.

The meeting was informed that a production of 4 million tons of paddy is expected in this season. It was also informed that till date the research institute has developed 25 varieties having resistance against different diseases. Speaking on this occasion, the Minister urged that such new varieties should be developed which have no parallel in taste and aroma to export these to the international markets.

Speaking on this occasion, Jahangir Tareen claimed that the government is paying special attention towards rice export and the federal government is launching a special project for rice at a cost of Rs 4 billion. The project is aimed at developing special varieties having resistance against diseases and more per acre yield. Punjab Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial thanked Jahangir Tareen for participating as special guest and providing guidelines to develop agriculture. Others who attended the meeting included Secretary Agriculture Punjab Wasif Khursheed, DG Agriculture (Extension) Dr Anjum Ali, DG (Research) Dr Abid Mahmood and members of the Rice Working Group.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190821507723/

GOVERNMENT URGED TO ANNOUNCE COTTON SUPPORT PRICE

RECORDER REPORT AUG 21ST, 2019 LAHORE

The Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) has urged the prime minister to take notice of delay in announcement of support price for cotton crop and making non-elected people accountable for chaos in this sector.

Cotton prices for the last two weeks are depressing day-by-day and touch as low as 2500 per maund of Phutti in the Sindh whereas in the Punjab and the Sindh it hovers around 2800 to 3200 per maund which is far below than the cost of cultivation. Resultantly, cotton growers are not making any money out of cotton production hence they withdrew their interest in pesticide application and fertilizer.

This is the reason the cotton crop is severely damaging by white fly, thrips and pink boll worm and turning into black due to subsequent development of sooty mold on affected leaves.

The Pakistan Kissan Ittehad is continuously demanding of the government to announce support price to save the cotton growers from losses and ultimately the industry.

The Parliament had also passed a resolution and the special committee on agriculture headed by the speaker NA made recommendations to announce support price or intervention price and impose duty on import of raw cotton in May 2019, said PKI President Khalid Khokhar in a statement issued on Monday.

Unfortunately, all recommendations of the highest forum and demands of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad were thrown into waste bin and stubborn attitude of an adviser intelligently delayed the decision of import duty (the notification is still not issued yet) and put the issue of support price on back burner.

The cotton growers have a number of options to grow other crops in the next year and the government should take immediate notice of the situation, Khalid concluded.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190821507724/

SINDH'S YIELD MASKS PAKISTAN COTTON POTENTIAL

BR ResearchAugust 22, 2019

What is an anomaly? In 2012, Pakistan's cotton recorded its highest-ever yield at 815 kg per hectare. According to Annual Economic Survey that year, the increased productivity and profitability from lint crop could be attributed to "use of BT cotton, and control of widespread attack of cotton leaf curl virus, and sucking pests". Aggregate area cropped had recorded slight up tick too, suggesting that the crop was finally set to stage a turnaround.

Recall that this was the same year when global cotton prices had reached their historical peak after the widespread destruction of crop in Pakistan in the aftermath of 2011 floods. Cotton's high yield, it could be argued, were a result of farmers of all sizes increasing investment on crop via improved fertilizer and pesticide application, in response to better financial returns.

The reality was starkly different. 2012, in fact, was a year of anomaly. While cultivation had improved in Punjab, area in Sindh had reduced by almost half of long term-average, at just 260 thousand hectares. While Punjab managed to rebound, small-scale growers in Sindh were still reeling from devastation of floods.

It is important to recall here that historically, cotton has performed better in Sindh than Punjab, with yield in southern region averaging above 1,050 hectares since 2010, a feat Punjab yet to be achieved by growers in Punjab. Within Sindh, cotton cultivation is primarily dominated in the central Mirpurkhas division which incidentally also has the highest yield.

Back to 2012. Mirpurkhas division saw a decline of over 87 percent in area under cultivation, as did other traditional cotton regions in Hyderabad and Sukkur divisions. But as the historical yield illustration shows, cotton yield shot up to over four thousand kg per hectare in Mirpurkhas; with yield in its Sanghar district closing in at 5,700 hectares.

What explains the anomaly? Sanghar district, for example, saw cotton acreage of just 13 thousand hectares versus 130 thousand hectares on average. The elimination of small growers due to floods, in fact revealed the remarkable yields achieved by few large-scale progressive farmers in the region, who usually get lost in annual averages of economic survey.

The story is similar for other crops such as maize, sugarcane and rice, where progressive farmers across the country have been achieving target yields competitive with global averages. Yet, they often go unnoticed, in the pedantic reviews and surveys that talk about Pakistan's generic agriculture woes. The need is to not only highlight these anomalies, but to popularize their best practices in order to address Pakistan's abysmal crop yields.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/08/22/519166/sindhs-yield-masks-pakistan-cotton-potential/

MILK PRICE INCREASED BY RS16 A LITRE

August 22,2019

KARACHI: The Karachi Dairy Farmers Association on Wednesday unilaterally increased the milk price by Rs16 a litre; and now the commodity would be available at Rs110 per litre at retail outlets. The situation has triggered a wave of anger among the consumers who are already burdened by growing inflation. The government had set the price of milk at Rs94 a litre.
Sources familiar with the matter told the media that the price of milk was notified at Rs94 per litre by the city administration, while a large number of milk sellers have refused to sell milk at this price.—NNI

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/08/22/5-page/797339-news.html

KP PDWP OKAYS 14 PROJECTS WORTH OVER RS10.374BN

RECORDER REPORT AUGUST 22,2019

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa met here on Wednesday and approved 14 projects worth Rs10374.624 million and deferred four others due to inadequate designs.
The party meeting chaired by the Additional Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Dr Shahzad Khan Bangash discussed a total 18 projects pertaining to different sectors including Roads, Local Government, Multi-sectoral Development, Water, Elementary and Secondary Education, Agriculture, Home and AIP sectors for the uplift of the province and Merged Areas.
In a historic session of PDWP the first eight projects worth Rs 9132.643 million under the Tribal Decade Strategy (TDS) were given approval, said a press release issued here after the meeting, adding that this will usher in a new era of development in the merged areas which will help brining it at par with the rest of the province.
The Government has allocated Rs 59 billion for TDS for the Financial Year 2019-20 alone. The total envelope of ten years development campaign is approximately Rs one trillion for ten years.
The approved projects in roads sector included "Provision for Liabilities of Land Compensation: Sh. Mohammad Arif Khan S/O Haji Muhammad Ashoor Khan versus District Collector Land Acquisition/Additional Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, Executive Engineer Peshawar, Khazana Naguman Road Project Division Peshawar, Construction and Blacktopping of Banda Fateh Khan Road Darmalak road, Darmalak to Ghorzandi road, Darsha Khel road Rehman abad Pakka road, Krappa Shakardara road including bridge and PCC Roads in UCs, Sodhal, Lachi rural, Mandori

District Kohat, Construction of Shaktoo bridge on Janikhel road and Construction/Rehabilitation of roads in Tehsil Bakha Khel and adjoining areas District Bannu.
In Local Government sector the approved projects included “Clean Drinking Water for All (CDWA)”.
In water sector the approved project was “Construction of Neeli Tangi Weir Sub project District Khyber, Construction of Bada Khel Weir Sub project District Khyber”.
In Elementary and Secondary Education sector “Provision of Free Basic Stationary and School Bags, Provision of Basic and Missing Facilities through Parent teacher Committee-led conditional Grants” were approved.
The PDWP approved “Integrated Agriculture Development in Merged Areas under AIP of the TDS, Cultureable waste Land Development and Solarization of existing Agriculture Tube/Open wells in the MAs, Rain water harvesting in Merged Areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa” projects in agriculture.
The meeting was attended by Atif Rehman, Secretary Planning and Development Department, members of PDWP, Special Secretary P&D Merged Areas, concerned departments and Districts level officers of Merged Areas.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/08/22/7-page/797355-news.html

PUNJAB CM REVIEWS PROPOSALS FOR FIXING NEW SUPPORT PRICES

MUHAMMAD SALEEM

LAHORE: Terming the PTI-government as farmer-friendly in real sense, Punjab chief minister Sardar Usman Buzdar Wednesday said the government has ensured payment of more than 99.7 percent dues to sugarcane growers.

“Farmers will be given subsidy and other incentives through credit card programme, as the government is working for the promotion of agriculture sector as well as enhancing the income of the farmers,” the chief minister said while reviewing proposals for fixing new support prices of wheat and sugarcane, here on Wednesday. The chief minister said that interests of sugarcane and wheat growers will be protected by the government. He directed to conduct a comprehensive survey for estimating the production cost for fixing new support prices of wheat and sugarcane. He further said the Punjab government will fulfil its commitment of change through new agriculture policy.

Provincial ministers Malik Nauman Langrial, Samiullah Ch, Muhammad Aslam Iqbal, secretaries of finance, food and industries departments and others attended the meeting.

Moreover, inaugurating the new examination center of the Punjab Public Service Commission (PPSC) at Johar Town, the CM expressed the hope that digital information system will help the candidates to seek necessary information. “Merit is the foundation of the new Pakistan and it will be promoted at every level,” he said.

The four-storey center has been established on an area of 10-kanal with an amount of Rs360 million. Up to 24 examination halls are set up for around five thousand candidates.

Chairman PPSC Lt-Gen Maqsood Ahmad(retd), PPSC members and others were also present on the occasion.

Furthermore, talking to Chairman Muttahida Ulema Board (MUB) Maulana Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, the Punjab CM said the PTI government has planned to issue 'Sehat Insaf Cards' to religious scholars and seminaries' students in phases and proposals in this regard have been sought.
The CM assured that every possible step will be taken to make the MUB effective and added that consultations with the religious scholars will be welcomed in socio-administrative matters.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/08/22/16-page/797438-news.html

FEARING TOBACCO'S FATE, PALM OIL INDUSTRY FIGHTS BACK

August 22,2019

On the morning of Feb. 26, executives from a Washington consultancy presented a strategy paper to some of the most powerful officials in the Malaysian palm oil industry.
The message: Don't allow environmental activists and Western governments to tarnish palm oil to the extent that it ends up a pariah product, like tobacco.
The $60 billion palm oil trade has been vilified by environmentalists because of the vast areas of tropical rainforest they say have been cleared to grow the commodity that is consumed by billions of people.
Malaysia and Indonesia, which together produce about 85% of the world's palm, had been largely passive in response, comfortable in relying on the sustainability of demand for an oil used for cooking and in items like soaps and shampoos, snack foods, pizza, bread and biodiesel. Food accounts for nearly 70% of global consumption of palm oil.
But last year, Malaysia launched a global public relations and lobbying offensive to protect the reputation of its key export, particularly in Europe. Reuters has pieced together a picture of the sweeping effort from internal public relations strategy documents as well as interviews with dozens of palm oil industry participants.
The European Union passed an act earlier this year to phase out palm oil from renewable fuel by 2030 due to deforestation concerns. While demand for palm oil used in EU biodiesel accounts for a fraction of global supply, palm oil producers in Malaysia and Indonesia worry the law could spur calls for regulation in its usage in food.
Malaysia has led the PR offensive since the EU began working on the law, as it is far more reliant on exports than larger rival Indonesia, and ships about 85% of its total palm oil production overseas annually.
Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has said the EU law was "grossly unfair" and was an attempt to protect alternative oils that Europe produced itself.
The publicity campaign aimed at critics of palm oil has been coordinated by the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC), a state agency responsible for promoting palm oil and looking for trade opportunities for the product.
The agency is funded at least partly by a fee paid by plantation companies based on palm oil production. MPOC's board includes representatives from plantation companies, including Sime Darby Plantation Bhd, the world's biggest oil palm planter by land, and IOI Corp.
The representatives of the two companies did not respond to requests for comment.
Its campaign is centred around small holder farmers, carried out by platforms that say they represent farmers but are created or run by PR firms hired by the MPOC, the strategy documents dated Aug 6, 2018 and Feb 26, 2019, show.
MPOC has also approved funding news sites, researchers, op-eds and former politicians to speak up for palm oil and undermine the EU law, the documents show.
None of the groups or individuals identified in the proposals have been transparent about their funding and have often claimed to be independent voices.

At least three PR firms hired by the MPOC are running these campaigns, copies of their proposals seen by Reuters show. The MPOC approved all their proposals, according to two sources with direct knowledge of the matter.

The main company involved in the strategy is the DCI Group, a Washington-based public relations firm that has previously developed campaigns for tobacco and oil multinationals. Its clients have included Altria and the former Burmese military junta, according to U.S. public records and DCI itself.

Asked by Reuters for comment on its strategy, DCI said it was engaged in the Malaysian campaign but did not give details.

"We are proud to work with Malaysia's palm oil industry in its fight to defend the jobs and livelihoods of small farmers against unfair trade and environmental policies which perpetuate global poverty," said Justin Peterson, managing partner at DCI Group, in an e-mail.

The MPOC has not spoken publicly about the campaign. It told Reuters that it uses various methods, including engagement of PR agencies and advisory firms, to pursue its objectives, but for competitive and client confidentiality reasons, it would not disclose details.

"Industries and governments across the world engage in an array of efforts to defend their national interests. In MPOC's case, however, we ensure that all such activities are above board and are in accord with local rules and regulations governing such engagements," the MPOC said.

The Malaysian ministry in charge of palm oil declined comment.

The other two firms running PR campaigns are: Kuala Lumpur-based Invoke, run by Rafizi Ramli, a former Malaysian lawmaker; and Unitas Communications, a PR firm with offices in London and Jeddah.

Invoke runs its campaign through the 'Planters United' platform, which describes itself as a non-governmental organisation made up of smallholder farmers, according to a Feb. 26 copy of its proposal seen by Reuters.

Unitas, Rafizi and Invoke did not respond to calls and emails for comment.

EU lawmakers declined to talk about lobbying by the palm oil industry but environmental group Greenpeace said the lobbying by Malaysia had resulted in the EU law relating to biodiesel being diluted.

Officials at the European parliament were not available for comment and Reuters was unable to independently confirm this.

According to documents reviewed by Reuters, DCI's campaign pitch to the MPOC this year sought a budget of over $1 million. The MPOC approved the budget after negotiating the price slightly down, the two sources said.

MPOC also approved a 2019 budget of around $120,000 for Invoke and $200,000 for Unitas, the sources said.

MPOC and the three PR companies did not comment on the amounts and whether it was approved.

Reuters has seen a copy of an eight-page public affairs proposal distributed by DCI at the February 26 meeting with at least a dozen officials from MPOC, the Malaysian ministry of primary industries and palm oil companies. The proposal said: "The eco-colonialists have turned to a scorched earth approach of junk science and faulty logic: they label palm oil as the new tobacco."

"Attempting to reason with these opponents, through dialogue or scientific research will not stop their attacks and will not advance Malaysia's position."

The document did not name the "eco-colonialists" but in previous paragraphs it refers to the EU.

Farmers should be the "primary messengers" globally of the campaign against critics of palm oil, DCI said in a previous proposal to MPOC, in August, 2018.

"Small farmers are Malaysia's most powerful weapon against Europe and the NGOs," it said.

DCI has been running or coordinating grassroots campaigns through front groups such as Farmers Unite, DCI's campaign proposals from August 2018 and February 2019 show.

Farmers Unite says on its website it is a global coalition of oil palm small farmer associations and other supporting organisations, and that it speaks for more than 7 million oil palm smallholders across the world.

It did not respond to requests for comment.

Farmers Unite took out full page advertisements last December in the UK against British retailer Iceland when the company said it would stop selling in-house products containing palm oil. Iceland

says it has ended the use of palm oil in such products by the end of 2018.
Iceland declined to comment on the Farmers Unite campaign.
In August 2018, DCI pitched to the MPOC the creation of an African platform with the help of Nigerian think tank, the Initiative for Public Policy Analysis (IPPA), saying "recruiting support from African allies is necessary to put maximum pressure on your opponents."
"These are weak spots for EU NGOs and politicians - they fear accusations of neo-colonialism and discrimination," the proposal said.
In its next presentation in February, 2019, DCI asked for a budget of $10,000 per month for Farmers Unite, which it described as a project of IPPA. IPPA has previously opposed tougher legislation against tobacco products in Nigeria, citing the negative impact on farmers and investment.
IPPA said "where we raise our money and get support is immaterial."
In its August 2018 proposal, DCI also set out a strategy to use a group called Faces of Palm Oil, which says it represents 650,000 farmers in Malaysia, in the campaign.
"Faces of Palm Oil will once again serve as the campaign hub; and small farmers should be the primary messengers in Malaysia, European and international media," DCI said in the proposal.
Faces of Palm Oil has been the most vocal farmers' group on social media, criticising NGOs, EU lawmakers and journalists, based on its social media feed and environmental groups tracking palm oil.
It says on its website it is a joint project of three major farmers' groups and other bodies.
Faces of Palm Oil did not respond to a request for comment.
MPOC did not comment on the funding of the farmers' groups.
DCI has also sought to influence opinion through paying for news articles, columns and research, according to the documents seen by Reuters.
This year, for example, DCI asked the MPOC to provide a budget of $11,000 a month to a newsletter called Palm Oil Monitor, according to the February proposal. The newsletter has been publishing news stories and behind-the-scenes information on the negotiations of the EU law, scooping mainstream media on the contents of Mahathir's strongly-worded letters to European leaders. The plan was accepted, the two sources said.
Khalil Hegarty, one of the two authors of Palm Oil Monitor, told Reuters in an emailed statement that the newsletter "benefited from support from various sources (including industry sources)." He declined to provide specifics.
Hegarty said "we don't lobby, and any insinuation that Palm Oil Monitor is a part of some grand lobbying effort would be inaccurate."—Reuters

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/08/22/18-page/797460-news.html

PFA PASSES NEW REGULATIONS

By Our Correspondent Published: August 22, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has passed three new regulations during its 30th board meeting held at the PFA Headquarters on Wednesday. The meeting was chaired by PFA Chairman Omer Tanveer Butt. PFA Director General Muhammad Usman said that the board has approved the amendments in service regulation. In the meeting, PFA's budget for the fiscal year 2019-2020 was also approved while the number of enforcement inspector has been increased for the effective recovery of fees and fines. He added that the Hajj quota system has been increased from two to ten PFA employees.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2039081/1-pfa-passes-new-regulations/

PTI GOVT SET TO WAIVE RS208B DUES OF INDUSTRIALISTS

By Shahbaz Rana Published: August 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government is set to write off a minimum Rs208 billion in favour of a handful of industrialists with the stroke of a pen after it and the previous two governments failed to recover dues on account of gas infrastructure development cess (GIDC).

It is seen as an injustice to the people, mainly poor farmers, who have already paid the amount but the industrialists have refused to deposit it in the national exchequer and have moved courts. It will also put Punjab-based industrialists at a disadvantage who have already settled some of their liabilities.

The government is in the process of promulgating a presidential ordinance, according to a statement given by the director general gas in a meeting of the sub-committee of Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on Tuesday. The amount that the PTI government is going to waive in favour of the industrialists, mainly Karachi-based, is close to the total loans written off from 1971 to 2009.

Commercial banks wrote off Rs256 billion between 1971 and 2009, according to the details submitted in the Supreme Court a few years ago. Depending on the settlement date, the amount may exceed Rs208 billion.

Total GIDC dues stand at Rs416.3 billion as of the end of December 2018 and according to a proposed ordinance, half of the amount will be written off in favour of just four sectors – fertiliser, textile, power generation and compressed natural gas (CNG).

The Petroleum Division has submitted details of the outstanding cess in the National Assembly in response to a question raised by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz’s (PML-N) Member of National Assembly Ali Pervaiz. The cumulative GIDC since 2012 stood at Rs701.5 billion till the end of December 2018, of which only Rs285 billion had been paid.

The Petroleum Division ducked questions about the unjust treatment being meted out to those industries which have already discharged their legal obligations. The division also did not answer a question on whether it would compensate those companies.

In January this year, the PTI government had decided to bail out big defaulters by waiving 50% of their outstanding dues. It has now decided to promulgate a presidential ordinance to amend the

GIDC law aimed at waiving half of the outstanding cess. Only half a dozen fertiliser companies will be given a benefit of Rs69 billion, which they have recovered from the poor farmers but have refused to deposit in the national kitty. The total outstanding amount against them was Rs138 billion as of the end of December. Fertiliser firms are still recovering the GIDC from the farmers.

The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government had imposed the GIDC, which the industrialists challenged in courts. Subsequently, the PML-N government amended the law in 2015 but still the industries refused to discharge their legal obligations.

It seems that the PPP, PML-N and PTI governments lacked the political will to recover the huge sum from the powerful and influential industrialists.

However, the people who have remained involved in sorting out the GIDC dispute argued that there was no other way except to settle the row out of the court. They said the government had a strong case to recover the dues under the 2015 GIDC legislation but the 2011 legislation was weak.

If one goes by this argument, the government is in a position to recover at least Rs269 billion as of end-December 2018, which remains outstanding under the 2015 GIDC legislation. Under the 2011 legislation, the total outstanding amount was Rs147.2 billion.

These companies also owed interest payments on the unpaid bills, which would be sufficient to compensate for the Rs147-billion loss.

The last PML-N government had also addressed legal deficiencies in the 2011 legislation through Section 8 of the 2015 law, which validated the cess imposed and collected in the past. Sources said the cess concession was going to benefit only a few tycoons in Sindh. These people involved in the business of fertiliser, captive power and textile have huge liabilities. Total dues against the textile sector were Rs42.5 billion, of which about Rs21.2 billion would be waived, according to the Petroleum Division’s statistics.

The liabilities against captive power plants stood at Rs91.4 billion and half of it would be waived, according to the Petroleum Division information. The CNG sector owed Rs80.1 billion, of which Rs40 billion would be written off, subject to promulgation of the presidential ordinance. While looking at the liabilities of the two public gas utilities, the Sindh-based industrialists will be the main beneficiaries. SSGC’s total arrears stood at Rs178 billion even after payment of Rs56 billion, according to the Petroleum Division data.

SNGPL's total arrears amounted to Rs136 billion after deducting Rs81.8 billion payments. K-Electric and power generation companies have also not settled Rs57.4-billion dues, according to the Petroleum Division.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2039108/2-pti-govt-set-waive-rs208b-dues-industrialists/

BNP-MENGAL OPPOSES NEW COASTAL AUTHORITY IN GWADAR

Behram Baloch August 23, 2019

GWADAR: Central leader of the Balochistan National Party (BNP-Mengal) and MPA Mir Hamal Kalmati has opposed the proposed establishment of a new institution named National Coastal Development Authority (NCDA) for Gwadar and termed the move interference in the provincial affairs.

Speaking at a press conference along with representatives of other political parties here on Thursday, he said that by establishing NCDA, the federal government was trying to take control of Gwadar, which was not acceptable to the people of Gwadar and their representatives.

He said that a similar institution with the name of the Balochistan Coastal Development Authority (BCDA) already existed in the province and there was no need to establish another institution as it would be interference in the affairs of Balochistan.

He asked the provincial government to strongly oppose the proposed move and provide required funds to the BCDA for the development of Gwadar and other coastal areas of Makran.

Referring to the proposed Gwadar Master Plan, Mr Kalmati said that authorities concerned were trying to approve the plan without taking the MNA, MPAs of the area and representatives of other political parties into confidence.

"Public representatives from Gwadar have been completely ignored in the preparation of the Gwadar Master Plan," the BNP-M leader said, adding that approval of the plan should be postponed at least for a month.

The Gwadar Master Plan will be presented at a meeting on Aug 23. The meeting will be chaired by Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani. MNA from Gwadar Muhammad Aslam Bhootani and MPA Hamal Kalmati will attend the meeting.

Mr Bhootani has also taken up the Gwadar Master Plan issue in the National Assembly and threatened to resist any move about approval of the plan without consultation of the public representatives of Gwadar.

Mr Kalmati warned that if the proposed Gwadar Master Plan was presented in the meeting for approval without consulting the MNA and MPA of the area, the all-party alliance would stage a strong protest against the move.

He said the Gwadar Port was the biggest asset of Baloch people and representatives of the people would not compromise on the rights of the people.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501174/bnp-mengal-opposes-new-coastal-authority-in-gwadar

MILLERS JACK UP FLOUR PRICES YET AGAIN

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated August 23, 2019

KARACHI: Amid higher wheat stocks, flour millers in Sindh hiked prices again on Thursday by up to Rs2 per kg.

They made the first price increase on Aug 15 (third day of Eid ul Azha) by Rs1.5 per kg in flour no 2.5 and Rs2 per kg in maida (super fine flour) and fine flour, respectively.

Retailers on Thursday quoted 5kg and 10kg Ashrafi fine flour and Bake Parlour bags prices at Rs250-260 and Rs500, up from Rs240 and Rs480 per bag.

After the two price jumps on Aug 15 and Aug 22, Sindh millers have issued new rate of flour no 2.5 at Rs42.50 per kg while the rate for super fine flour and fine flour has been fixed at Rs46 per kg.

Flour mills have raised prices by at around 7-8 times since April, citing soaring wheat rates in the open market.

From April to date, the price of flour no 2.5 climbed up by Rs9 per kg followed by Rs9.5 per kg rise in super fine and fine flour varieties.

In April, the 10 kg bag produced by flour mills was priced at Rs340 which rose to Rs390 ahead of Eid and now costs Rs430.

Like past practice, the previous and fresh price hikes in flour varieties went unnoticed both at federal, provincial and local government levels, further burdening consumers already impacted by food inflation of other items.

Pakistan Flour Mills Association (Pema) Sindh Chapter's Chairman Mohammad Jawed Yousuf attributed the hike to increase in 100kg wheat flour bag to Rs3,900 in open market, from Rs3,625 ahead of Eid ul Azha and Rs3,000 in April.

He said on official papers, Sindh government has over 840,000 tonnes of wheat but n reality its stocks stand around 500,000 tonnes.

The government has also not procured wheat from growers this year.

On the request of flour mills, Sindh government on May 21 had imposed ban on inter-provincial wheat movement to control grain shortage and flour prices but millers said the Sindh grain is still finding way into Punjab through illegal channels. Punjab had faced wheat shortage following damage to crop because of rains a few months back.

To control wheat flour prices and especially curbing Roti rates, the federal government first banned wheat exports and its products in third week of July 2019 but it could not produce any result.

The federal government in July had also raised gas tariff for tandoors to Rs1,283 per mmBtu for over 300 cubic metres consumption, up from Rs980 per mmBtu. However, it later on reverted the rate to pre-October 2018 level of Rs700.

Likewise, tariffs for smaller tandoors were approved for reduction to Rs110 per mmBtu for 50 cubic metres, Rs220 for 100 cubic metres and Rs300 for 200 cubic metres instead of the existing Rs121, Rs300 and Rs553 per mmBtu, respectively.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501124/millers-jack-up-flour-prices-yet-again

FISHERMEN PROTEST MOVE TO REIMPOSE CONTRACT SYSTEM

A Correspondent August 23, 2019

BADIN: Fisherfolk held a charged protest demonstration here on Thursday against Sindh government's move to re-impose contractual system for fishing in coastal belt and in freshwater bodies in the rest of the province.

The protesters including children gathered at Deputy Commissioner Chowk and then marched to the Badin Press Club where they staged the demonstration for several hours. All "conspiracies" by the functionaries concerned of the Sindh government to deprive thousands of fishermen of their right to catch fish in the coastal belt would be resisted strongly, said Syed Mohammad Ali Shah, chairman of Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF).

He said while speaking to the protesters that an "anti-fishermen" director general of fisheries department had suggested to Sindh chief minister in a letter a few months back to stop allowing fishermen to catch fish.

He said that now the officers were trying to occupy all the 1,209 water sources of the province while over 500 water bodies had already been occupied.

Mr Shah said that Sindh Assembly had passed a bill in favour of fishermen, recognising their rights on the water resources of the province in 2011, after a historic struggle by fishermen for safeguarding their fundamental rights.

He said that two years ago Sindh High Court had also ordered the provincial government to end occupation of all lakes and water bodies on a petition filed by the PFF. "All attempts to abolish the bill will be resisted strongly," he added.

He asked the department concerned to immediately issue licenses to genuine fishermen and demanded that all the persons who had occupied water bodies in Badin and other districts be taken to task and local fishermen be allowed again to catch fish.

Mr Shah said that awarding contracts for fishing both in sea and water sources in lower Sindh region to influential persons was not only an attempt to deprive the poor community of their livelihood but was also illegal.

He vowed to continue their peaceful protest till their demands were met and recalled that the slain leader of PPP Ms Benazir Bhutto had opposed contract system for fishing but the present rulers, including the provincial minister concerned, were bent upon rendering thousands of people jobless.

He said that all the people engaged in fishing should be issued licenses for catching fish in all freshwater bodies and in the costal belt as prolonged water crisis and devastating impact of climate change had already played havoc with marine life along coastal belt.

Mr Shah lamented that stagnant rainwater in most coastal villages had multiplied hardships for villagers and filled their settlements with mosquitoes and other harmful insects.

Other PFF leaders also spoke and vowed to continue their protest against the Sindh government decision to deprive fishermen of their fundamental right on water bodies.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501060/fishermen-protest-move-to-reimpose-contract-system

RICE BOWLS OF SINDH AND PUNJAB

BR Research August 23, 2019

The illustrations of district-wise yields in Sindh and Punjab look like a patchwork. Only one district in each region has champion yield, with majority concentrated near the averages. But pay close attention: while the maps may be color-coded the same, the yield scale for Sindh is higher by nearly 1.6 times!

But even intra-province yield-comparisons may be misleading. Above average yield in Sindh for example, appears to be concentrated in northern- and central districts, beginning near the Kashmore and Jacobabad border region, down to Shikarpur.

This contiguous region, together with rest of the Larkana division, in fact, is known as Sindh's rice belt, and contributes more than two-third of Sindh's paddy production. Yet, Sindh has precious little paddy production in the southern region, where the champion yield is concentrated in Badin. Even though the district has the highest country-wide yield, it contributes less than 15 to average paddy output.

The stark difference in champion yields and crop concentration in fact indicate two disadvantages to Pakistan's rice potential. First, Pakistan's flagship rice variety – basmati – is concentrated in the north-eastern border of Punjab, popularly known as Pakistan's basmati bowl.

Although the region is home to most of Punjab (and Pakistan's) export-oriented rice potential, its basmati yield is lower when compared to region such as Lodhran and Toba Tek Singh within the province. Meaning that while the region may historically have been deemed most suitable for premium rice cultivation, growers in other less conducive climatic zones manage equally productive yields if not more.

Second, from a logistics perspective, the Gujranwala rice bowl is located at the farthest distance from seaport, resulting in increased freight cost for export-oriented producers and millers. The Sindh story is not quite dis-similar, where the Irri-6 and Irri-9 are more popular. While the variety may fetch lower premium compared to basmati in international markets, it is not entirely devoid of export-potential.

In fact, Irri-varieties have dominated rice export volume for all of last decade. Yet the rice bowl of Kashmore-Jacobabad-Ghotki is located at the northern-most hinterlands of provincial border, farthest away from Karachi port.

The other more revealing factor is how traditional agro-climatic zones for major crops hardly ever record highest-ever yields. As small-scale growers dominate farming across the length of the country, even in climatic-zones most suitable to a particular grain, average yield inadvertently falls.

Pakistan's district-wise crop yields actually reveal the strength of its progressive farmers, who manage target yield even outside traditional crop belts.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/08/23/519374/rice-bowls-of-sindh-and-punjab/

MINISTER VOICES CONCERN OVER HIKE IN SUGAR PRICE

RECORDER REPORT AUG 23RD, 2019 LAHORE

The Price Control Committee has expressed its serious concern over artificial hike in the prices of sugar and it has also been decided to undertake severe crackdown against hoarders, illegal profiteers and those found involved in creating artificial price-hike. In this connection, a meeting was held on Thursday which was chaired by Punjab Industries and Trade Minister Mian Aslam Iqbal. The meeting reviewed prices of essential commodities and performance of price control magistrates. Provincial Minister Nauman Akhtar Langrial, Samiullah Chaudhry, Spokesman Punjab government Dr Shahbaz Gill, Muhammad Akram Chaudhry and secretaries of concerned departments also participated in the meeting while commissioners and deputy commissioners of the province also participated via video link in the meeting.

While addressing the meeting, Mian Aslam Iqbal said that those found involved in exploiting the poor people should be behind the bars. "Implementation on laws will have to be ensured by getting out in field without wasting further time. Those found involved in inflation and hoarding do not deserver any concession and will be dealt with an iron hand," he added.

The Minister directed that price control magistrates, officers of market committees and concerned departments should perform their duties with devotion. "The process of auction in open markets and wholesale markets should be monitored with the help of modern technology. It is need of time to transform the system of market committees and make it more vibrant and useful and will have to move forward by carving out effective price mechanism system of essential commodities," he added.

During the meeting different options were reviewed regarding ascertaining the prices of essential commodities, monitoring system, improving price control mechanism, making market committees and price control magistrates more proactive and vibrant.

Secretary Industries and Trade Tahir Khursheed gave a briefing about the prices of sugar, flour, ghee and other essential edibles. He also informed about the current prices of 'roti' and 'naan'.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190823510325/

NAB NOTICES WITHDRAWN, CLAIMS PFMA

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter August 24, 2019

LAHORE: The NAB has withdrawn all notices issued to flour millers of south Punjab, claims the Punjab chapter of the Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA).

The step was taken on the directives of NAB Chairman retired Justice Javed Iqbal after a delegation of the PFMA, led by Habibur Rehman Leghari and Asim Raza, called on him in Islamabad on Friday.

The delegation apprised the NAB chief of the reservations the millers have regarding the notices and their impact on the working of the units as well as the economy, says a press release issued here.

It said Justice Iqbal not only ordered withdrawal of the notices but also assured the delegation that the bureau would neither bother any business nor create an atmosphere of harassment to deter investors away.

Liaquat Ali Khan, a member of the delegation, told Dawn that NAB notices were related to Ramazan Package the last government had introduced in 2016-18.

He said at least 315 flour mills of south Punjab had been sent the notices to submit their respective record related to the Package with the NAB within 15 days, while Faisalabad and Sahiwal units had yet to be sent the notices.

Alleging that NAB initiated the step when some food officials were found involved in wrongdoings, Mr Khan said the mills submitted the record as per NAB demand and were waiting for further directions apprehending they could be harassed in the name of investigations even though “no illegality or irregularity was found against them in the record” as they had nothing to conceal.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501309/nab-notices-withdrawn-claims-pfma

KHAJOOR FESTIVAL KICKS OFF IN KHAIRPUR TODAY

The Newspaper's Correspondent August 24, 2019

KHAIRPUR: The annual Khajoor Festival is being held by the district administration of Khairpur on Aug 24 and 25 at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Open Air Theatre Khairpur and Sachal Auditorium Hall, Khairpur.

As per schedule, the festival will be inaugurated by former Sindh CM Syed Qaim Ali Shah on Saturday (today) morning. He will visit stalls set up by growers, government departments, banks and NGOs.

Later, a seminar will be held where Pakistan Peoples Party MNA Nafisa Shah will be the chief guest.

Sindh Minister Manzoor Hussain Wassan will be chief guest at the concluding ceremony to be held on Sunday.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501237

GOVERNMENT URGED TO WRITE-OFF LOANS OF CALAMITY AFFECTED AREAS

RECORDER REPORT AUG 24TH, 2019 LAHORE

Kissan Board Pakistan (KBP) has urged the government to declare areas damaged by recent rains and flood as 'Calamity Hit' areas and write-off the loans taken by the growers besides extending some financial assistance to enable them sowing the next crops.
KBP Central President Chaudhry Nisar Ahmad demanded this after visiting the areas situated along Sutluj River and affected by the flood water released by India. KBP media secretary Haji Muhammad Ramzan and General Secretary Ch. Shaukat were also with him.
Chaudhry Nisar said that crops standing over thousands of acres of land in over 50 villages of District Kasur only are feared to be damaged. This damage may cause a loss of billions of rupees. He also claimed that hundreds of families were under open skies because of loss of their homes. People and animals are suffering shortage of food and a number of diseases are spreading among them. Similarly dozens of villages are also under flood in Okara and Pakpattan.
He said that on one had we are fearing a like desert like situation as India had constructed over 60 dams and can stop flow of water towards Pakistan while on the other hand it can damage our crops and villages by releasing untimely water.
KBP Chief said that this Indian water aggression could not be tackled without getting Jammu & Kashmir liberated from India and constructing new dams. He urged the government to announce Jehad against India for Kashmir liberation and said that millions of farmers of the country would be standing with our brave soldiers for this noble cause.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190824511123/

ZAHOOR TAKES UP ISSUES OF BULEDI TEHSIL FARMERS

AUGUST 24,2019

QUETTA: Provincial Finance Minister Zahoor Buledi instructed officials of agriculture department and Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) to address issues of farmers on an urgent basis because a majority of residents of Buledi Tehsil in Turbat district rely on agriculture.

He said this while chairing a meeting to review farmers' issues for addressing them at Commissioner Office Turbat, said a press release issued here.

Buledi said that the responsibility to address farmers' problems lies with the government to prevent food crisis in Kech district as Tehsil Buleda provides most of the crops to Kech.

The minister instructed officials of agriculture department to provide latest seeds to farmers for promoting agriculture in the district.

He also instructed WAPDA officials to avoid unscheduled power outage in the area as it affects operations of agriculture.

Buledi instructed other relevant officials to visit respective areas to resolve farmers' issues. He directed provision of tractors and bulldozers to local farmers. Farmer leader Abdul Rehman demanded the officials of WAPDA to address issues of low voltage of electricity and damaged transformers immediately.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201908240088&EN_ID=11201908240034&EMID=11201908240013

KP HALAL FOOD AUTHORITY'S EXPANSION TO DISTRICTS HITS SNAG

Manzoor Ali Updated August 25, 2019

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority's expansion to 15 districts of the province has hit a roadblock as its management puts the hiring of over 200 staff on indefinite hold.

The authority, which was established under the KP Food Safety and Halal Food Authority Act, 2014, began operation in March 2018 and is currently working in the provincial capital and seven divisional headquarters, Kohat, Mardan, Malakand, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu and Abbottabad.

Sources claimed that in the next phase of its expansion, the authority board, which was headed by the additional chief secretary, had approved earlier this year the appointment of over 200 staff members in 15 districts of the province.

They said the district, where the authority would open offices, included Khyber, Kurram, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Chitral, Malakand, Buner, Tank, Lakki Marwat, Hangu, Haripur and Mansehra districts.

An official told Dawn that more than 200 posts were advertised for those districts, while the Pakistan Testing Service was contracted to hold the screening tests of candidates.

He said more than 10,000 people had applied for those positions, while the PTS had carried out a lengthy exercise to determine the eligibility of applicants.

The official said when the testing agency was to announce test schedule in June or July this year, the authority approached it to stop the process.

He said the PTS was informed by the authority about certain irregularities due to which the entire process was being put on indefinite hold.

The official said there had been no progress on the issue since then. He said the PTS had also collected test fee amounting to Rs 3 million from the candidates for the purpose.

The official said the government had procured 35 vehicles for the authority's district offices, which were also gathering dust due to prolonged delay in opening its offices at district level.

He said the hiring was launched by the former director general but after his transfer, his successor stopped the process in July 8 this year.

The official said political interference apparently to adjust blue-eyed boys of influential people was behind the suspension of hiring.

He said the new DG not only stopped the hiring process but at the same time soon after taking over the charge, he also transferred two non-technical people and posted them to technical posts.

The official said the assistant director (human resources) was transferred and made the assistant director (food safety) for Kohat division, while the assistant director (food safety) was transferred and appointed the AD (HR).

He said both officials had neither experience nor qualification to perform jobs assigned to them.

The official said the principal staff officer to the DG was also transferred and posted as the AD (food safety), Bannu division, despite lacking the relevant qualification and experience.

He said the two assistant directors, who were hired specifically for food safety and were food scientists, had been posted as the principal staff officer and AD (HR).

Dawn has copies of the transfer and posting notifications.

The official said the move was a clear violation of the law as food scientists knew nothing about HR and food science.

When contacted, Food Safety Authority DG Sohail Khan said the authority was going to call a meeting.

He said currently, the authority's budget was not approved and until that happened, the authority couldn't hire staff.

The DG said after the budget's approval, which was scheduled to happen on Aug 26, a meeting would be called to begin the process of the authority's expansion to districts.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501499/kp-halal-food-authoritys-expansion-to-districts-hits-snag

SINDH CABINET APPROVES 'HISTORIC' BILL RECOGNISING WOMEN FARM WORKERS' CONTRIBUTION

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated August 25, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh cabinet on Saturday approved the Sindh Women Agriculture Act 2019 aimed at empowering the women of the rural swathes of the province.

"Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has called the drafting and approval by the cabinet of the Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act 2019 a historic moment," Information Minister Saeed Ghani said while briefing reporters about meeting of the Sindh cabinet presided over by the CM.

During the meeting, the chief minister said the cabinet approved the bill in accordance with the vision of the chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party to provide social security to women agriculture workers.

Minister Ghani said the chief minister was of the view that although their role was not being recognised appropriately, rural women were central to Sindh's predominantly agro-based economy.

The minister said the act would be presented before the provincial assembly within a week.

After the passage of this act, rights of women agriculture workers would be safeguarded, he said, adding that the act provided that those affiliated with cultivation, fisheries, poultry and animal husbandry would be considered agriculture workers, who would enjoy rights equal to workers in industries etc.

"The law would also permit these workers to seek assistance from the endowment fund of the Benazir Income Support Programme."

A woman worker shall receive a written contract of employment if she so demands. The new law also gives the right to woman workers of collective bargaining, social welfare, including child health, community development, economic profit and for accessing publicly supplied goods and services.

Minister Ghani said the cabinet also discussed formation of the Benazir Women Support Organisation under the labour department with an endowment fund to provide technical and financial assistance to women workers.

To simplify the process of purchasing essential medicines for the health facilities in Sindh, the cabinet formed a committee comprising the ministers for excise and taxation, and agriculture, and the adviser to chief minister on law. He said medicines available with the health ministry would immediately be provided to the healthcare facilities across the province.

The cabinet also approved regularisation of staff and faculty members of the Khairpur Medical College keeping in view their qualification and age limit.

The minister said the cabinet decided to give the charge of the executive director of the Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Trauma Centre to a grade 20 medical officer. He said now the management board of the teaching hospital would function under the vice chancellor of the medical university concerned, who would preside over meetings of the board.

He said the meeting was briefed that at present there was no flood emergency in Sindh and the situation was in total control.

The water flow at Guddu Barrage upstream was recorded at 274,000 cusecs against a discharge of 241,000 cusecs.

The meeting was told that all right-bank and left-bank dykes were being carefully looked after and spurs had been constructed at the old Tori dyke.

The cabinet approved the formation of a 14-member governing body of the Sindh Employees' Social Security Institution.

Minister Ghani said the cabinet approved the establishment of the Sindh Minimum Wage Board.

The cabinet decided to form an advisory council for empowerment of disabled persons. Minister for special education would head the council.

He said the meeting approved the formation of an Information and Technology Board. The minister said an IT Advisory Committee would also be formed.

The chief minister formed a committee comprising the ministers for excise and taxation and mines and minerals, the adviser to the CM on law, and the secretary for finance and general administration for the establishment of an information and technology board.

He said the cabinet showed serious concern over the alarming malnutrition in the province and approved the Sindh Food Fortification Bill 2019.

Half of the women and children are far below the acceptable levels of nutrition. Iron, folic acid, iodine, zinc, vitamins A and B are major micronutrient deficiencies. The poor nutrition in childhood has profound effects on immunity, growth and cognitive development.

The cabinet was told that food fortification pertained to the addition of key vitamins and minerals, for example iron, folic acid, zinc, vitamin B-12, iodine, vitamin A and D staple foods to prevent nutritional deficiencies.

The minister added that the cabinet agreed to exemption of registration and stamp duty for Dawat-i-Hadya — a charity being run by the Bohra community.

The minister said the cabinet formed a committee comprising the ministers for forest and mines and minerals, and the adviser to CM on climate change to present a draft of sustainable forest policy in 15 days.

The cabinet also formed a committee to look into the use of water for irrigation by the Sindh Engro Coal Mines comprising the ministers for irrigation and energy and the adviser to CM on climate change. The committee would present its recommendations in the next cabinet meeting.

The cabinet approved the Sindh Safe City Authority Bill 2019 as the authority would be headed by an officer from the police department.

The provincial cabinet established a cabinet committee on legislation comprising the minister for parliamentary affairs and the adviser to CM on law.

He said the committee would look into matters pertaining to private bills.

Answering a question, Mr Ghani said the Sindh local government minister had briefed the Federal Minister Ali Zaidi in a letter on the Clean Karachi drive.

He said garbage of the city could be dumped at designated landfills only. Parks, grounds and other open spaces were not meant for it.

Answering another question, he said those "conspiring" against the PPP, which ruled Sindh, should learn from the recent results of a by-election in Ghotki.

He said the money submitted in the apex court by the management of Bahria Town belonged to the Sindh government and not the federal government.

Mr Ghani said the federal government, as it had promised earlier, should pay 50 per cent of the total cost for the S-III and K-IV projects.

Besides, he demanded 1,200 cusecs of water be immediately made available exclusively for Karachi.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501437

'PAKISTAN NEEDS TO FOCUS ON BIOGAS AND BIOMASS GASIFICATION'

Dawn | Aug 25, 2019 at 7:06 AM

Highlighting global trends towards developing sustainable biofuels from non-edible resources and renewable bio-energy production to reduce the impacts of climate change, speakers at a seminar held at the NED University of Engineering and Technology discussed how Pakistan could shift towards environment-friendly locally produced fuels.

Dr Syed Asim Rehan Kazmi, the director general of the Agricultural Research Centre (southern zone) Pakistan Agricultural Research Council Karachi traced the history of jatropha cultivation and called for coordinated efforts by all stakeholders to evaluate this crop as a means to produce biofuel.

Prof Nasim Ahmed Khan, former secretary, Alternative Energy Development Board Pakistan (AEDB), emphasised the need to work in the biogas and biomass gasification sector to produce bioenergy from agricultural waste.

https://world-news-monitor.com/climate/2019/08/25/pakistan-needs-to-focus-on-biogas-and-biomass-gasification/

OVER 60 STALLS SET UP AT DATES FESTIVAL IN KHAIRPUR

Mansoor Mirani August 25, 2019

KHAIRPUR: The 10th Khajoor Festival and Seminar was inaugurated by former Sindh chief minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah at the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Open Air Theatre here on Saturday. Pigeons were released into the air amid clapping to mark the formal opening of the festival.

More than 60 stalls have been set up at the venue by date palm growers, various provincial departments and non-governmental organisations, including those working in the agriculture sector. Mr Shah visited many of the stalls and discussed with growers and exporters ways to improve the quality and increase the per-acre yield of date crops in Khairpur and other parts of the province.

He advised growers not to stay contented on exports of dry dates (chhuwara) to India alone but explore opportunities to expand the export to other countries as well. In this regard, he said, they should seek assistance of federal government and relevant institutions.

Speaking as the chief guest at the seminar, Mr Shah noted with pleasure that ripe and dried dates of Khairpur district were in great demand abroad. He said federal government should pay due attention to the crop and its export in order to earn as much foreign exchange as possible. This would also bring prosperity to the country, the province and obviously greatly benefit the growers of dates.

He particularly encouraged date growers' organisations to play a proactive role in this regard. Mr Shah said agricultural experts should attend such seminars in a bigger number and guide growers and other stakeholders about how to increase production of various date varieties and how to improve and preserve the commodity.

He suggested publication of awareness and technical information including lectures, advice and expert opinions so that such material could be distributed among stakeholders in the larger interest of the country. Literature to attract local and foreign buyers should also be published to promote the chief crop of this district, he said.

He said Khairpur district should be recognised as producer of quality dates and its potential must be explored further. He regretted that heavy allocations were made every year for the agriculture sector but much of the funds would lapse due to non-utilisation.

Khairpur Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Naeem Sandhu speaking at the seminar proposed introduction of agricultural reforms and setting up of a board of date palm growers and traders.

The former CM stressed the need for educating growers about protecting their crops from diseases, pests and viruses. Especially, he added, the young generation should seek proper knowledge of farming and they must be guided by their elders and experts of the field.

Agriculture Extension director at Sukkur Rasool Bakhsh Junejo, several agricultural experts, major date palm growers and officials of the departments concerned also expressed their views at the seminar.

A delegation of Chinese industrialists who are currently setting up a steel industry in thew Khairpur Special Economic Zone also attended the seminar.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501430/over-60-stalls-set-up-at-dates-festival-in-khairpur

TRACTOR INDUSTRY ADVISES AGAINST IMPOSITION OF MVA TAX

By Our Correspondent Published: August 25, 2019

KARACHI: The local tractor industry has urged the government not to impose Minimum Value Addition (MVA) tax as it will hike the input cost and negatively impact end consumers.

"Presently, the agricultural tractor is applicable to a sales tax at the rate of 5% in addition to input tax payable on local as well as imported raw material at a rate of 17%," said AI-Ghazi Tractors Executive Director and CFO Kashif Lawai in a statement.

"This results in regular monthly sales tax refund claims."

In this regard, a clause has been added to Sales Tax Act through Finance Act 2019 which says, "The sales tax on account of minimum value addition as payable under twelfth schedule (hereinafter referred to as value addition tax), shall be levied and collected at import stage from the importer on all taxable goods as are chargeable to tax under section 3 of the act."

The CEO said that the law excluded charging of value added tax on raw materials and intermediary goods meant for use in an industrial process which is subject to customs duty at a rate less than 16% ad valorem under the First Schedule to the Customs Act, 1969.

"This additional undue levy will add to the cost of production for tractor manufacturers as this is only adjustable through the monthly sales tax return and no refund is allowed," he said. It is to be noted that AI-Ghazi Tractors imports raw material under various customs tariffs ranging from 11% to 35%.

"However, for all practical purposes, only 1% customs duty is charged at import stage under customs notification SRO-656(1)/2006 allowing approved original equipment manufacturer to import raw material at reduced rates of customs duty to assemble agricultural tractors," he said.

He was of the view that since the tractor manufacturers were allowed to import raw material at less than 16% duty and covered under the aforesaid exclusion, therefore no such levy should be imposed at the import stage.

He requested member inland revenue to resolve the matter at the earliest for smooth clearance of raw material consignment at the port.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2041453/2-tractor-industry-advises-imposition-mva-tax/

ICCI SEEKS MICROCREDIT SCHEMES FOR FARMERS

By Our Correspondent Published: August 25, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has called upon the government to launch microcredit schemes for small farmers.

This will enable them to adopt modern agricultural techniques that would help them boost per acre yield of crops, chamber officials said on Saturday. "Pakistan is an agricultural country, however, its inability to introduce the latest agricultural machinery and technology, means that per acre yield of its crops is far less in comparison to other countries." Speaking on the occasion, ICCI President Ahmed Hassan Moughal said that agriculture was contributing 21% to the country's GDP and providing employment to around 45% of the workforce.

"However, Pakistan has yet to achieve the required targets of self-reliance in agricultural production due to the non-adoption of modern techniques." He emphasised on the need to train, support and encourage farmers to utilise modern-day tools in agriculture to achieve food security and self-sufficiency. Moughal said that the diffusion of modern agro-technology has considerably increased the growth of all crops in many countries.

He urged the government to adopt this approach in order to increase production and incomes of farmers. He said that the majority of the peasants were reluctant to adopt modern technologies due to factors such as the high rates of agriculture appliances and the unavailability of quality seeds.

"The government should provide fertilisers and pesticides at affordable rates to address these issues on a priority basis." Farmers are mostly using tractors for cultivation and losing around 40% of their yield in post-harvest losses, due to the non-adoption of modern agricultural technologies, ICCI President informed.

He also asked the government to educate farmers on the use of combine harvesters and other modern techniques, which would not only save time but also increase per acre yield as well.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2041460/2-icci-seeks-microcredit-schemes-farmers/

BAD PATCH

Shahzada Irfan Ahmed August 25, 2019

This Eid ul Azha was not an occasion for buyers of raw hides to celebrate. The prevailing prices of hides were quite low. A sheep skin sold for Rs30 to Rs50, a goat skin Rs100 to Rs150, and a cow hide for Rs600 to Rs800. There were hardly any buyers for a camel hide.

For the first time in many years, one saw sheep skins thrown on the roadside because buyers were not going door-to-door to collect hides. In some cases, the cost of a house call to collect a hide was more than the price of the hide itself.

The reasons for this steep fall in prices included improper handling of hides, delay in preserving them, presence of unutilised stocks of hides and finished leather stocks, fall in demand for Pakistani leather and leather products, and the failure in capturing new markets.

About a decade ago, a properly removed raw hide would fetch between Rs2,500 and Rs3,000 during eid days. Keeping in view the level of inflation and devaluation of the rupee over the years, the price should have doubled by now.

The case of other animals' hides was no different. This discouraged charity and welfare organisations who could cover part of their expenses by selling hides to hide merchants. Hides of sacrificial animals are of superior quality as these are healthier and larger in size than those slaughtered during the rest of the year.

Mian Tahir, the procurement head of a leather industry giant, tells *TNS* that despite repeated instructions by Livestock Departments and players in the leather sector, people do not properly handle animal hides. "One should save a hide from water and sun but people leave them soaked in water right under the sun for hours," he laments. Karachi was even worse in this respect as heavy rains made it difficult to transport hides to the warehouses in time for preservation.

"Many traders avoided procuring hides in large numbers because they could not import enough chemicals for hides' treatment because of appreciation of dollar against the rupee." In Karachi, the special salt used to preserve raw hides could not be produced in sufficient amount because there was excessive load-shedding during the rains.

While selling and buying of hides was not a roaring business during this Eidul Azha, one must also look at the state of our leather Industry. A large number of tanneries have closed down and the volume of exports is dwindling. The overall exports of finished leather and goods manufactured from this material have come down from $ 948 million in 2017-18 to $ 844 million in 2018-2109, showing a percentage shortfall of 11 percent.

According to data provided by Pakistan Tanners' Association, leather industry contributes about 4 percent of the export earnings of the country. It is an employment-intensive sector providing jobs to more than one million people, mostly to weaker sections of society through its supply chain. Though the total number of tanneries in the country is estimated to be around 800, representatives of 213 tanneries are registered as PTA members. The leather products produced here include footwear, garments, gloves and products like wallets, belts, and handbags, etc.

In a global market of $120 billion, China earns $10.9 billion annually from leather exports, India $ 3.05 billion and Pakistan $ 948 million. Five years ago in 2013-14, the exports of leather products from Pakistan were worth $ 1.275 billion.

Agha Saiddain, the PTA central President points out that "besides generic issues lack of a level-playing field for Pakistani industry in the region is a major cause for the fall in its leather exports." While other competing industries are facilitated the situation here is otherwise.

Citing some examples, he says they are offered low duty drawback rates on finished leather, made to pay multiple local, provincial and federal taxes, have to face higher tariffs in importing countries due to poorly negotiated free trade agreements and preferential trade agreements with them, face delays in clearance of huge amounts of stuck up sales tax, duty drawbacks, income tax and deferred sales tax claims, increasing labour costs, higher rate of minimum wages and higher input cost on import of tanning chemicals, especially after a drastic appreciation of US dollar against the rupee.

“The government will have to solve these issues in order to give a lease of life to this industry,” he adds.

Given the situation, a positive development has taken place earlier this year. Following persuasion by the PTA, Pakistan has signed a trade agreement with Indonesia under which Pakistan’s finished leather will be exempted from customs duty in Indonesia. This will encourage export of finished leather of cow, buffalo and sheep and cow skins from Pakistan to Indonesia.

Dr Asif Sahi, the Breed Improvement director at Punjab Livestock Department highlights another reason for a decrease in demand for Pakistan’s leather products in the global market. “Animal rights movements condemning excessive consumption of meat and products made of animal parts have yielded results. Another reason is the global warming and higher temperatures that reduce the demand for leather garments that are meant to keep one warm.”

Syed Shujaat Ali, Pakistan Leather Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association Chairman, says artificial leather developed by China has affected sales of genuine leather because it is not costly. “If a genuine leather jacket costs $60, the one made of artificial leather will cost $15.”

Nevertheless, Ali says Pakistan stands to gain a lot as its share in global leather exports is less than one percent. “Pakistan can increase its percentage share by training its workforce according to the global standards, introducing new technology, supporting the livestock sector, and going for value-added product development.”

http://tns.thenews.com.pk/bad-patch/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUG 26th TO AUG 01st 2019

LOCUST SWARMS INVADE AREAS IN NAGARPARKAR, ISLAMKOT

A Correspondent August 26, 2019

MITHI: Locust swarms invaded vast agricultural lands in Nagarparkar and Islamkot talukas, affected growers and villagers told reporters on Sunday.

Residents of Dhabho Sama,Chamat Naval Bheel, Punhoon-Ji-Wandh, Mureed-Jo-Tarr, Mouwao and other villages told reporters in Islamkot that the swarms were devouring standing crops, fodder and green sprouts seen in the area only after the recent rainfall after a long dry spell.

They appealed to the authorities concerned to take emergency measures to protect their crops and lands from complete destruction.

Sindh Minister for Agriculture Ismail Rahu, has said that the affected areas were being identified and arrangements were being made to carry out anti-locust spray. He said that he and his party colleagues were in touch with officials of the affected areas in this regard.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501629/locust-swarms-invade-areas-in-nagarparkar-islamkot

PLUNGING PRICES OF SKINS AND HIDES

Mohammad Hussain Khan August 26, 2019

The prices of sacrificial animal hides had plunged substantially during Eidul Azha this season. After the salting process, the hides are stored in warehouses in the anticipation that tanneries would buy them at a fair price. The other option is to sell the hides in the wholesale market through middlemen in Karachi and Lahore.

People associated with the business and cattle bazaars feel that the quantum of slaughtering had increased this year. This view was echoed by seminaries such as Hyderabad's largest Darul Uloom Mazahirul Uloom. Keeping the dynamics of supply and demand in mind, an increase in the number of slaughtering is a major factor for the decrease in the price of hides this Eid.

"The number of animals we slaughtered as collective qurbani this Eid has increased from 320 last year to 368 this year. We bought those animals at prices varying from Rs55,000 to Rs62,000 from different markets of lower Sindh," says Mufti Faseeh of Darul Uloom Mazahirul Uloom, Hyderabad.

Skins and hides of healthy animals are preferred by the value-added industry. During non-Eid routine slaughtering the average weight of animals is 1.5-2 maunds whereas during Eid the average weight is 4-6 maunds.

"Last year, I purchased a cow or bull hide for Rs1,000-1,500 but this year the average rate was Rs600-700," said Mohammad Hanif from Paretabad where most of the hide and skin warehouses are located. Similarly, a goat's skin was sold for Rs90-100 against last year's price of Rs300.

Given the cost of labour for the skins' salting process, and that of managing the temperature during the summer season, traders made losses on the purchase of hides and skins due to their low resale value. A salted hide can be preserved for around 10 days before it is sold to wholesale dealers or tanneries. Tanneries have not yet started buying stocks.

Mr Hanif claims to have lost around 300-400 goat skins because of a lack of manpower. A labourer that preserves hides demands Rs25,000 for three days of work whereas workers that clean slaughtered skins charge Rs7,000-8000 for three days of work.

While unable to explain the price decline, an elderly hides' trader Abdul Rasheed subscribed to Mr Hanif's views that prices have decreased drastically. Last year the price of a cow's skin was Rs1,600 but this year it was Rs650-700, Mr Rasheed said.

The monsoon season had a major adverse impact on the profits of traders of sacrificial animals. Rain, which continued intermittently almost till Eid, kept buyers away from the annual cattle markets. On one hand, buyers preferred purchasing animals from roadside markets; on the other hand, those who visited Sohrab Goth's or Sukkur's cattle bazaar offered lower prices for animals.

Many livestock owners agreed to sell them below expected prices to save miscellaneous expenditures amidst unfriendly weather conditions. Or else return home without selling them. Those who opted to return home with cattle were those who had healthy animals that could yield beef.

"Livestock owners who had taken their cattle to Sohrab Goth market — Sindh's largest cattle market — had returned to our bazaar a day before Eid but they ended up suffering losses. They either didn't sell them or had to accept lower rates", says Azizullah Gabol, the contractor of Sukkur's cattle market auctioned by Sukkur Municipal Corporation. A drop in the arrival of cattle was witnessed in Sukkur's market as, according to Mr Gabol, around 700 animals were brought for sale this year whereas last year the number had been around 1,500-2,000.

According to Latif Qureshi of Tajiran Maveshian Association, foot and mouth disease was also reported among animals due to rains. Buyers were reluctant to visit Karachi's market due to filth so they preferred to buy cattle from small mandis on roadsides.

"A goat weighing 10-15 kilograms was meant to be sold for Rs15,000 or about Rs1,500 per kg of mutton from a seller's point of view. But those who were unable to sell the goats will be selling the meat for Rs800 in regular meat markets, resulting in losses of about Rs7,000 per goat," Mr Qureshi said.

A healthy animal, be it a cow or a bull, ages if it is not sold by the owner by the next qurbani season and meat of such animals appears more red than usual. It won't be cooked well, he added.

However, the business of waste obtained from slaughtered cows and bulls appears to be flourishing. Goat or cow's tripe is cooked by people and sold in the market commonly. "But waste, called pota in business parlance, is consumed by the Chinese. We supply it to Karachi's traders for Rs30 to Rs50 per piece," Abdul Waheed told this writer while cleaning cow's waste in the densely populated area of Paretabad to get pota.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501618

COTTON WOES AND INDIAN IMPORT BAN

Ahmad Fraz Khan Updated August 26, 2019

As the cotton crop enters a crucial phase of its life cycle, it raises assorted concerns for the planners and the textile industry. Both are keeping their fingers crossed as the weather turns anti-cotton — long spells of hot and humid weather, worsened by floods, causing an increase in pest pressure. And September, normally considered a make or break month, is about to start.

The situation in Punjab, which contributes over 70 per cent of the crop, is more worrisome.

The government has set a production target of 15 million bales this year with a goal of 25m bales by 2025. Therefore, Punjab has been told to jack up its production to 10m bales from 6.8m bales last year — a 32pc increase.

The current year represents the first year in achieving this colossal target. And the government is already failing.

Punjab started on the wrong foot this year. It had planned to sow cotton over 5.3m acres — a herculean task in itself given the competition from rice and sugarcane that have elbowed into cotton-growing areas. Punjab claims to have planted 5m acres of cotton crop however the Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco), based on its satellite imagery, contends only 4.6m acres were sown.

Punjab considers its figures more credible since they are based on surveys of individual villages and farmers. Nonetheless, the controversy is there.

Punjab also lists a few other positive factors that may help hike up its production and compensate for the acreage loss. On average, the plant population has increased by 1,000 plants per acre in the province.

Early Kharif water shortage, which was more than 50pc for Sindh and 40-45pc during the entire season last year, has dropped to 10-15pc this year. The Indus River System Authority depleted Mangla Dam thrice this year to help sow cotton and is now struggling to fill the lake. Furthermore, germination was better and the crop, by and large, has escaped early pest attacks.

However, as the weather turns anti-crop, the Punjab authorities estimate that they would be able to increase cotton crop cultivation to 7m bales at best, a 2pc increase over the 6.8m bales cultivated last year.

The calculations are based on two factors: weather and pesticides quality. River Sutlej runs through the core cotton belt and if it overflows, it spells trouble for the crop. The Indian side has warned of

200,000 cusecs being released at the entry point (just South of Lahore), which could recede to 80,000 cusecs by the time it reaches the southern part of the province where cotton is cultivated.

“Eighty thousand cusecs will be too much for the belt,” says Zafar Hayat, farmer and cotton crop in-charge of the Farmers Associates Pakistan. The area could withstand an inflow of 40,000 cusecs but at 80,000 cusecs, massive areas along the banks will be inundated and humidified.

And River Sutlej is not the only river that poses this threat; others are also overflowing and turning the water-weather cycle humid. With temperatures during the day hovering around 40 degrees Celsius, and 30°C at night, pest pressure will increase further, Mr Hayat fears.

Media reports suggest that jassid and whitefly have already attacked the crop in South Punjab and are joined by thrips and pink bollworm. Though these pests have not crossed the economic threshold level yet, they are lurking close to it.

“People have lost faith in pesticides and are reluctant to use them because of quality issues,” says Naeem Hotiana, a farmer from South Punjab. The jurisdictional fights between federal and provincial agencies, legal confusion and monitoring problems have together forced farmers to lose faith in pesticides.

Despite the cases against pesticides companies, there are over 70 stay orders by courts that allow them to continue selling their products. Therefore, farmers are not ready to invest much on pesticides, Mr Hotiana explains.

If Pakistan again ends up at 11m bales like last year, where would the textile industry get the required cotton to fill the demand and supply gap? Last year, it imported around 1.2m bales (for $334m) from India. This year, imports from India are banned and the industry is worried.

“Indian imports helped the industry on two accounts — the time lag and freight costs,” says Kamran Arshad, owner of Ghazi Fabrics. Import from India was a two-week affair. Now, imports will most probably be sourced from the United States which is a 10-12 weeks process.

This means maintaining stocks for 10 additional weeks at a massive mark-up cost and paying about three to four times higher freight charges. With the textile industry already facing a significant liquidity crunch, this additional cost will be hard to bear.

“Not everyone is in a position to import from the United States and that too under the current high duty regime. The industry is waiting for a compensatory package to neutralise the impact, assuming such a package is offered”.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501617

UAF SCIENTISTS DEVELOP LIQUID FERTILISER MACHINE

KHALID ABBAS SAIF AUG 26TH, 2019FAISALABAD

The University of Agriculture Faisalabad's (UAF) scientists have developed Indigenous Liquid Fertiliser Machine by applying reverse engineering. The cost of the indigenous fertiliser machine is half than that of the imported one. The cost of the imported machine is Rs4 million whereas the indigenous machine cost stands at Rs 1.8 million. The machine is developed by Dr Junaid Nawaz of the Water Management Research Station of the University.
Inaugurating the machine, UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ashraf said that it is the need of the hour to develop the indigenous machinery to reduce the cost and make it available for the farming communnity at the affordable price. He said that the country agrarian production can be doubled with

the adoption of the modern trends. He said that Technology Development Fund of the Higher Education Commission was a hallmark step to promote the innovative ideas.
He said the traditional way of the farming was the hindrance to get the fruits of our potential agriculture. He said that academia-industry linkages would pave the way for the building up the knowledge based economy. He added that the agriculture was the backbone of the economy that was contributing 20 percent to our Gross Domestic Product. He also planted a sapling there as a step of Green Pakistan drive.
He said that the university had set up the target of planting 0.5 million plants. He was flanked by Director Water Management Abdul Khaliq, Project Partner Anjum Sharif, Muhammad Daraz, Dr Adnan, Ahmad Waqas and Secretary to VC Muhammad Jamil was also present on the occasion.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190826511869/

SMUGGLED INDIAN FRUIT AND VEGETABLES NO LONGER AVAILABLE IN PUNJAB

By Asif Mehmood Published: August 26, 2019

LAHORE: Fruit and vegetables smuggled from India are no longer available at the markets of Punjab after Islamabad suspended trade with New Delhi in response to the latter scrapping occupied Kashmir’s special status and imposing a lockdown in the disputed territory.

Fruit and vegetables smuggled from occupied Kashmir into Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) through Chakothi were sold at markets in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Faisalabad and other parts of Punjab as well as in Peshawar.

They included tomatoes, garlic, ginger, green chillies, apples and grapes

The All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Merchants and Commission Agents Trade Group said it had decided to boycott Indian produce.
The association has asked its member traders in all four provinces to stop selling Indian fruit and vegetables.
Pakistan has also suspended trade with India through Wagah border after New Delhi’s IOK move.

In 2008, Kashmiris started barter trade across the Line of Control (LoC) and fruit and vegetables from Poonch sector in occupied Kashmir were brought to Pakistan through Rawlakot area of AJK.

The trade across the LoC has been suspended for some time, but with the recent spike in tensions between Pakistan and India, Pakistani traders and commission agents have announced that they were permanently boycotting Indian produce.

"The country comes first. The traders don't care about losses even if it's millions of rupees," All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Merchants and Commission Agents Trade Group President Chaudhry Zaheer Ahmed told *The Express Tribune*.

"I have met traders from Balochistan to discuss the issue and meet the vendors from Sindh next," he added.

"The traders have decided that they won't sell Indian produce until it ends its illegal occupation of Kashmir."

Pakistan imports goods worth $1.8 billion from India annually whereas its exports to the neighbour stand at $340 million.Pakistan has chalked out its strategy to deal with any crisis arising out of an embargo on import of raw material supplied by India for medicine manufacturing.

Customs officials had already started sending back consignments coming from India on contract and the letters of credit even before the government issued a statutory regulatory order regarding suspension of trade ties with India.

Sources said 60% of the raw material used in medicine manufacturing is imported from India and there are concerns that this embargo may result in a shortage. They said the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association has written a letter to Drug Regulatory Authority Pakistan in this regard asking it to take steps to address any possible crisis.

When contacted, DRAP CEO Dr Asim Rauf said a meeting has been called next week of all the stakeholders to address any shortage of raw material used in medicine manufacturing.

"The first option would be China and then other countries. All options will be utilised and we will prove to India that we can do everything without their support," he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2042128/1-smuggled-indian-fruit-vegetables-no-longer-available/

K-P MINISTER FOR IMPROVING AGRICULTURE IN SWAT

By Our Correspondent Published: August 26, 2019

SWAT: Noting that the valley is popular around the world for producing delicious fruits, vegetables and other organic products, the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock Mohibullah Khan on Sunday directed senior officials of his department to ensure that the process of expediting and streamlining the extension of the department's wing in the Swat district.

“Protecting crops and orchards from numerous diseases, increasing their per-acre-yield and providing the latest information, training and guidance to the farmers is the need of the hour,” Mohibullah said while visiting orchards in Swat on Sunday.

Mohibullah also gave necessary instructions to the Extension District Director Uzair Khan.

Appreciating the overall performance of agriculture extension and research sectors, the provincial minister urged all officers and employees of the department to jointly develop the agriculture sector in the valley.

He further hoped that they would also leave no stone unturned in making the province self-sufficient in food production by introducing modern technologies for the purpose.

The minister stated that he wanted to see practical work in the sector. He added that he has undertaken frequent visits all over the province with senior department officials to ensure maximum output.

Mohibullah said that Pakistan is an agrarian country in general and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) in particular, enjoying a unique reputation and respect in agriculture.

The minister said that his government is embarking on a policy of reward and punishment’ to make all departments subservient to the masses.

For this purpose, he said that agriculture scientists are exploring and developing new varieties of crops, fruits and vegetables, along with human-friendly pesticides and modern technologies would be highly encouraged but lethargic and corrupt would not be spared at any cost in his department, he concluded.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2042286/1-k-p-minister-improving-agriculture-swat/

AGRICULTURE RESEARCH COUNCIL ON VERGE OF COLLAPSE

By Zafar Bhutta Published: August 26, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The agriculture sector is said to be the backbone of Pakistan’s economy. But it is on the verge of collapse due to failure to conduct necessary research.

This sector has not been treated like an industry. Farmers are following the old conventional way of farming, which has resulted in low yields over the past several years.

The pro-industry Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) era was the worst for the sector when the country faced the lowest cotton production in history and the agriculture sector recorded a negative growth.

With the new government in power, the farmers voiced hope some measures would be taken to address their grievances. However, nothing has changed due to the bureaucracy that has control over a body formed to conduct research in the agriculture sector to enhance crop yields.

The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc) is an autonomous apex research organisation established under the Parc Ordinance 1981. However, this body is on the verge of collapse due to interference in its affairs.

The Parc chairman, being the chief executive of the council, should have exceptional capabilities, competency to plan and pursue national agricultural agenda, lead the team of agricultural scientists in various disciplines and help in implementation of the food security policy at the highest level.

The Parc chairman also represents the country at different national and international forums. As per the Parc Reforms Agenda 2007-08 approved by the prime minister, Parc is bound to do merit-based recruitments and performance-based promotions. As per Section 5 of the Parc Ordinance 1981, the federal government has no role in the affairs of Parc, except for policy decisions. The same was endorsed by the attorney general of Pakistan before the division bench of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) in a case of 269 illegal appointments and reinstatements.

Due to the intervention of bureaucrats of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research in its macro and micro-level management affairs, Parc has to sustain a loss in terms of its reputation, administrative and financial resources.

Instead of obeying the IHC verdict, dated June 12, 2019 in the case of 269 illegally appointed and unlawfully reinstated employees by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government (2008-10), the food ministry has appointed a non-scientist as Parc chairman to protect the illegal appointees.

Due to non-implementation of the IHC verdict, the council has to sustain a loss of millions of rupees on a monthly basis on account of salaries and allowances for these appointees. The matter of 269 illegal appointments and reinstatements has already been taken up by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which is at final stages of filing a reference.

Parc is facing a budgetary deficit of about Rs1.5 billion to meet pension liabilities and salaries/allowances of employees. More than 150 pensioners have been waiting for service benefits and medical facilities since March 2018, but bureaucrats in the administrative ministry are trying to protect the illegal appointees.

Section 9 of the Parc Ordinance 1981 says, “The President of Pakistan shall appoint an eminent scientist connected with agriculture” to the post of Parc chairman.

Parc senior scientist has challenged the appointment of a non-scientist chairman in court, which has sought explanation from the federal government for not appointing an eligible scientist in terms of aforesaid section of the Parc Ordinance 1981.

Research activities at Parc’s largest research wing – National Agricultural Research Council (Narc) – are on the verge of closing down for want of funds, quality manpower and incompetent chairman, who lacks required qualification, experience and expertise.

The prime minster has constituted a three-member committee, headed by Member Prime Minister Inspection Commission Waqar Ahmed, this month and Parc scientists are looking towards it for saving the council from total collapse and restoring its mandate, autonomy and research activities. The institution has been handed over to bureaucrats who are damaging it. It is right time for the prime minister to take action to clean the mess so that this institution could contribute to the agricultural economy.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2042173/2-agriculture-research-council-verge-collapse/

10TH KHAJOOR FESTIVAL CONCLUDES

The Newspaper's Correspondent August 27, 2019

KHAIRPUR: The 10th Khajoor Festival and seminar concluded here at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Open Air Theatre on Monday night amid Sufi music and fragrance of date palm fruit.

Classical dancer Sheema Kermani created an impression on the audiences through her performance whereas local singers made a mark too.

At the end of the event, awards were distributed among high performers and traders/growers who had set up stalls on the occasion.

Speaking as chief guest, Pakistan Peoples Party MPA Munawwar Ali Wassan said that holding of such festivals for promotion of date palm fruit as well as welfare of the growers was necessary.

Suggesting that cold storage units for the fruit should be installed at Khairpur Special Economic Zone, he congratulated the district administration of Khairpur for holding a successful event.

Khairpur Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Naeem Sandhu distributed awards and appreciation shields among growers, activists and officials who performed well at the festival.

Sheema Kermani along with her group performed on Sufi poetry of Sachal Sarmast, Shah Bhitai and other Sufi poets. Sufi singers Irshad Hussain and Qalandar Faqeer were lauded for their renderings.

Singers Nighat Naz, Shazia Marvi, Mumtaz Kanwal, Aaliya Samo, Vinod Kumar and others also performed at the concluding ceremony.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1501817/10th-khajoor-festival-concludes

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT TO PROMOTE EXPORT OF FLOWERING PLANTS: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT AUG 28TH, 2019 LAHORE

The Punjab government is going to spend Rs 451.725 million in three years to promote floriculture and floriculture exports from the country. At present flowers worth Rs 37.5 million are being exported from Pakistan which is a negligible share in the total international market of US$67 billion.
Promotion of floriculture exports Punjab will ensure bringing huge foreign exchange to the country, said Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial while presiding over a meeting to review the project for cultivation and promotion of flowers in the province.
The Minister said international floriculture market is growing at the rate of 10 percent annually and there is a need to make presence of Pakistan felt by increasing flowers exports from here.
At present, about 14,000 acres of land is under flowers cultivation in Punjab, out of which 6823 acres are under red roses, Director Floriculture Punjab informed the meeting on this occasion.
The Minister Agriculture termed this project of development of floriculture and export of flowers as important for the farmers and the economy of the country. Out of the total amount, Rs 400 million will be provided by the government of Punjab while Rs 51.725 million will be provided by flower growers.
It was briefed in the meeting that 150 exhibition plots will be set up in which 32 plots were exhibited on government farms and 118 plots will be set up to showcase the latest technology on farms of flower growers. In addition, 50 exhibition plots will be set up in South Punjab. Farmers will be provided commercial floriculture and export training along with technology demonstration.
The Agriculture Minister further said that under this scheme provision of cold storage, auction hall, mechanical dehydrator and rose water plants for flowers in Patuki, Tiba Sultanpur and Chunian will significantly increase the income of the farmers and increase the sale of flowers.
At the meeting, the Minister was informed that Bagh-e-Jinnah was under the control of agriculture department from 1904 to 2009 but the previous government handed it over to the PHA for the personal interest of some people. They were told that Bagh-e-Jinnah is the largest garden in South Asia with over 6,000 different types of trees. On the occasion, the Minister said that Bagh-e-Jinnah will be withdrawn from the Parks and Horticulture Authority and will be used to upgrade floriculture department.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190828512607/

PUNJAB TO LAUNCH OILSEED ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME

ZAHID BAIG AUG 28TH, 2019 LAHORE

The federal government is going to launch a national oilseed enhancement programme with a total cost of Rs 5115 million by promoting its cultivation in Punjab. The programme will be implemented in all 36 districts of the Punjab with contribution of Rs 3069 million by the Punjab government and a fund of Rs 2046 million by the federal government.

Sources in the provincial Agricultural department told *Business Recorder* here on Tuesday that objective of this national oil seed enhancement programme is to make oilseed crops comparable with cash crops, address low yields by enhancing oilseed production both vertically and horizontally, promote mechanization for oilseed crops to minimize post-harvest losses and get good yields. Under this programme, farmers will be provided high quality oilseed in the province with the collaboration of the federal government and saving billions of dollars spent on import of oilseeds every year. The government will also provide a subsidy of sowing oilseed at the rate of Rs 5000 per acre.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/08/20190828512606/

FLAWED ECONOMIC POLICY TAKES ITS TOLL ON LEATHER INDUSTRY

Afzal Ansari August 29, 2019

KASUR: Flawed economic policies of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government, recession, skyrocketing inflation and devaluation of rupee against the US dollar have started badly affecting the leather industry hides business in Kasur.

There is always a great demand for hides of sacrificial animals after Eidul Azha in Kasur, a hub of tanneries and leather industry, but it was not so this year, which witnessed a decline in demand for hides due to poor policies of the government while bad weather conditions also aggravated the situation.

There are no buyers of the hides this year and the traders have started disposing them off by either throwing them off or burying them in the ground to save the cost of warehouses, Dawn had learnt.

Besides being a hub of leather industry, Kasur has textile industry too and both the industries are on the verge of destruction while hundreds of workers and daily wagers associated to these industries have already been rendered jobless.

According to the leather merchants, including Khalid Hussain, Muhammad Ashraf and Haq Nawaz, about five million hides of the sacrificial animals reach Kasur every year after Eidul Azha from Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat, DG Khan, DI Khan, Badin, Pishin from various parts of Punjab. They said the leather units in Kasur and other parts of the country are reluctant to purchase hides and preserve them as the cost of chemicals used to preserve and prepare leather has gone up manifold due to high rates of the US dollar. The cost of finished leather, resultantly, has risen also and affecting the production by the leather products manufacturers. They argue that the Pakistani leather has already lost its lustre in the international market due to high prices and it has less demand as compared to India, China and Bangladesh.

The skin of goat and sheep is being purchased at Rs40 to Rs80 while the hide of cow is being bought at Rs600 to Rs1200. Some five years back, the price of sheep or goat skin was Rs1,000 to Rs1,500 while the price of cow skin was up to Rs8,000. The fist process of salting the hides through labour cost them Rs200 per hide.

“Those who had collected hides during Eidul Azha have started wasting them as the cost of rent of warehouses is unbearable for them, especially when the price of finished leather is very low,” another leather merchant, Muhammad Rafiq, says.

The traders also blamed the muggy weather, which is unsuitable for the preservation of hides that required extra care in such a weather, resulting in higher cost.

The traders have demanded the PTI government to relax taxes on chemicals and export of leather, recently imposed general sales tax besides reining in the price of dollar. They say the leather industry is on the decline for the last several years for want of the attention of the rulers and policymakers but the recent imposition of the GST and rise in dollar might prove the last nail in its coffin if the remedial measures are not taken by the government.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1502249/flawed-economic-policy-takes-its-toll-on-leather-industry

PUNJAB INITIATES STEPS FOR TIMELY START OF CRUSHING SUGARCANE

By Our Correspondent Published: August 29, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government has initiated steps for timely start of sugarcane crushing as well as payments to farmers during the upcoming harvesting season.

The crushing season usually starts on November 10 but for the past two years it was delayed for extended periods because sugar millers were reluctant to accept demands of the government.

This year, the Punjab government is determined to force sugar mill owners to start crushing by the first week of November.

"The basic aim of revision of rules by the provincial government is to ensure timely payments to the farmers in a transparent manner for sugarcane sale," said Punjab Cane Commissioner Wajid Ali Shah.

He added that owing to the absence of regulations for sugarcane purchasing agents, there was no check on the purchase and sale of farmers' produce. "Such informal and undocumented sale of sugarcane is detrimental to the interests of helpless growers," he said.

Shah emphasised that the purchasing agents ran their business without following any rules because nothing was mandatory for creating a balance in sugarcane purchase.

"It is his (purchasing agent) will whether to issue a cane purchase receipt (CPR) to the farmers or not," he pointed out. "Almost everything is out of the books – right from sugarcane purchase on behalf of sugar mills to sugar manufacturing and its storage for the commodity's sale later."

Shah added that these stocks were used to manipulate market forces, providing leverage to sugar mill owners for dictating their terms with the help of government subsidy either for exports or purchase by the government.

As per earlier practice, the purchasing agents were supposed to deposit only Rs1,000 as security to the sugar mill.

"Now, the government has made it mandatory for the purchasing agents to pay Rs10 million to the cane commissioner," he revealed. "By introducing this condition, the government aims to check the worth of agents and it will also make payments possible to the farmers in case an agent defaults."

More importantly, he added, according to government regulations, the purchasing agents were now liable to disburse all payments to the farmers through banks. By doing so, not only timely payments can be ensured but records of transactions will also be available digitally.

"Through these interventions, we will know the purchase quantity as well as prices and information about the seller, hence, the room for exploitation will be minimised," he said. Amendments have been made in Rule 12 of the Punjab Sugar Factories Rules 1950.

The cane commissioner added that a meeting of the cane board had been scheduled for September 3 to streamline the issues relating to timely beginning of sugarcane crushing season.

"I have repeatedly asked sugar mill owners to sort out the issues they have with the government well before the deadline," he said. "We will increase interaction with the mills for the purpose of ensuring implementation of rules in letter and spirit."

The basic aim of such initiatives is to protect the interests of sugarcane growers. The present government has ensured the payment of more than 99.7% of past dues to the growers. "Earlier last month, the provincial government also approved an end to the reallocation policy for sugar mills in Punjab. The purpose of this policy is to protect the farmers," Shah added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2044453/2-punjab-initiates-steps-timely-start-crushing-sugarcane/

UREA SALES DROP 6% TO 465,000 TONS IN JULY

By Our Correspondent Published: August 29, 2019

KARACHI: Total urea offtake dropped 6% to 465,000 tons in July 2019 compared to the corresponding period of last year.

National Fertiliser Development Corporation (NFDC) recorded a decrease of 28% month-on-month in urea sales in July. The offtake stood at 643,000 tons in the previous month of June.

"The decline is primarily due to early buying in the previous month owing to an expected hike in retail prices post-hike in gas tariffs," said Aba Ali Habib Securities in a report.

"On the other hand, the offtake of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser grew 28% month-on-month. Overall, the nutrient offtake recorded a decline of 6% month-on-month."

Company-wise, Fatima Fertiliser recorded the largest monthly growth of 69% in urea sales. To the contrary, Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim Limited (FFBL) and Fauji Fertiliser Company (FFC) recorded a decline of 62% and 33% respectively, whereas urea sales of Engro Fertilisers remained unchanged at 175,000 tons.

"Benefiting from seasonality, the overall fertiliser sector posted growth of 28% in DAP sales," said the brokerage house.

The largest increase of 74% in DAP sales was recorded by FFC in the month under review, followed by FFBL at 62% and Engro Fertilisers 37%.

Volume-wise in the urea segment, FFC remained the market leader, capturing 38% of industry sales in July 2019 followed by Engro Fertilisers at 37.6%, Fatima Fertiliser 9.3% and FFBL 7%.

In the DAP segment, FFBL emerged as the market leader capturing 49.5% of industry sales, followed by Engro Fertilisers at 20.3%, FFC 19.30% and Fatima Fertiliser 1.5%.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2044450/2-urea-sales-drop-6-465000-tons-july/

WB TO ASSIST MANUFACTURING, AGRIBUSINESS COMPANIES

APP Updated August 31, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The World Bank is ready for providing technical and financial advisory services to public and private sector by assisting local and foreign companies to venture into priority sectors of manufacturing and agribusiness in Pakistan.

A delegation of International Finance Cooperation (IFC), a member of World Bank Group, called on Commerce and Investment Adviser Razak Dawood to deliberate upon the issues pertaining to manufacturing-cum-export sectors in order to revitalisation of economy of the country, said a press release on Friday.

"Pakistan has taken various effective steps to improve trade procedures by establishing better trade facilitation regime," Razak observed.

Razak highlighted huge business potential in food processing, power, textile, leather and rice sector. He emphasised to attract investment in these sectors and urged IFC to provide necessary assistance to public and private sector companies.

He informed the delegation that big companies, both local and foreign, are interested to invest in different projects, pertaining to value addition like PepsiCO and Cargill has started to invest in food processing business in Pakistan.

Pakistan has launched a programme titled Regulatory Guillotine to remove two to three regulations every month to ease out the business activities, the adviser added .

Moreover, the adviser also informed the delegation about enormous investment opportunities in technology upgradation of whole value-chain of textile sector as the textile manufacturers are using very old technology which is eroding their competitiveness in the global market.

Further, Pakistan has taken a strategic decision to increase share of renewable energy from four per cent to at least 20pc of total energy-mix which offers massive investment opportunities in power sector, the said.

The IFC team headed by Regional Industry Director of Manufacturing, Agribusinesses and Services Asia and Pacific Ms Rana Karadshseh-Haddad apprised the adviser that Pakistan is the priority country for projects in agribusinesses and services and the IFC has undertaken various projects in this regard to attract investment in these areas.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1502738/wb-to-assist-manufacturing-agribusiness-companies

PROPOSALS INVITED FOR SETTING UP MANGO COLD STORAGE

By Usman Hanif Published: August 31, 2019

KARACHI: The Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) has sought proposals for setting up a mango cold storage in Sindh as most of the exporters have failed to make shipments due to high temperature in the southern province of the country.

TDAP Director General (RD-South) Azhar Ali Dahar held a meeting with mango growers of Sindh to discuss the issues faced by the growers and to inform them about the steps needed to be taken to increase exports, according to a TDAP statement.

“In 2018-19, most of the mango shipments could not be loaded due to high temperature in Sindh, therefore, TDAP has sought proposals for establishing a chiller/cold storage facility for mango exporters in Karachi,” said the statement.

“Mango doesn’t face only the cold storage problem, it faces a plethora of issues due to which Pakistan does not export more than 5-7% of the total mango production,” said Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) Senior Vice President Mahmood Nawaz Shah.

“When you want to sell a product, whether it is agro-based such as mango, it is not enough now to transport the product in a good shape,” he pointed out.

The official said a number of certificates were required to comply with international standards which included the Global GAP (Good Agricultural Practices), which was needed for exports to the

European Union. “Not many companies have acquired these certificates so they cannot export to the western countries.”

Social compliance was also important for the international business, for instance how labourers were treated at workplaces, he added.

Apart from these, it is also important to ensure pesticides are utilised in accordance with the international standards and that the product is packed keeping in view the same.

Pakistan could not introduce its mango in many of the western countries. “We export mostly to the Middle Eastern nations – more than 50% – and in western countries only people belonging to South Asia are familiar with our mango. Other communities are not aware of Pakistan’s mango,” Shah said.

He was of the view that Pakistan needed to improve the ease of doing business not only internally but also externally. For example, the Middle Eastern airlines’ fares for cargo shipments were up to 20% higher for Pakistani exporters than those for Indian exporters.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2046087/2-proposals-invited-setting-mango-cold-storage-2/

PFA TO START SAMPLING OF MILK PRODUCTS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter September 01, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) will start ghee, butter and cheese sampling campaign across Punjab from the next month to ensure provision of safe and healthy food to the public by checking the quality and standard of the products.

PFA Director General retired Captain Muhammad Usman has directed the teams to collect samples for laboratory testing from the open market on Sept 4 and Sept 5. He said the samples would be collected in presence of the company’s representatives by following the blind-sampling method. In this connection, the PFA had released notification to the companies to contact the PFA no later than Sept 3.

Furthermore, the PFA chief added, the authority’s teams would collect samples according to the standard operating procedure (SOP) if any company did not contact the authority. He said the PFA would send samples to more than one laboratory for lab test.

“On the completion of the sampling campaign, results would be published for public interest and awareness. In the light of the laboratory reports, indiscriminate action would be taken against ghee, butter and cheese manufacturing companies whose results would not be satisfactory.”

Mr Usman said every food that was accessible to the public would be checked multiple times in a year as per schedule and analysis of ghee, butter and cheese is the part of the PFA Annual Sampling Schedule 2019.

“The Punjab Food Authority would cancel the license of the company in case of proved,” he added.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1502851/pfa-to-start-sampling-of-milk-products

COTTON CROP IN SOUTH PUNJAB UNDER MASSIVE PEST ATTACK

Our Correspondent September 1, 2019

MULTAN: A severe attack of mealybug is being witnessed on cotton crop in south Punjab districts.

In the wake of the attack, the Punjab Agriculture Department has warned the cotton growers to adopt measures to offset the attack. The Punjab Agriculture Department has assessed that mealybug has attacked almost 60pc cotton crop in all 11 districts of the south Punjab.

Mealybug infestations appear on plants as tiny, soft-bodied insects surrounded by a fuzzy, white mess around the stems and leaf nodes. Mealybugs are common indoor pests. Mealybugs are related to scale insects.

They cause damage by sucking the juice from their host plants. Cotton Mealybug is an exotic pest of several crops, including maize, okra, brinjals, potato, sorghum, ground nuts, pigeon peas, sunflower, beat root, mulberry and especially cotton, agriculture officials maintained.

Pakistan stands at fourth position among 60 cotton growing countries of the world and third largest consumer of the cotton. Cotton as a major crop of Pakistan contributes 7.8pc in value addition in agriculture, 1.6pc in gross domestic product making upto 60pc of the total export revenue and 55pc of Pakistan's domestic cooking oil comes from cottonseeds. Punjab Agriculture Information spokesperson Naveed Asmat Kahloon said that field teams had observed mealybug attack in majority areas under cotton sowing.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/520395-cotton-crop-in-south-punjab-under-massive-pest-attack

SEPTEMBER

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEP 02nd TO SEP 08th 2019

FARMS, FACTORIES GO HAND IN HAND

From the Newspaper September 02, 2019

In Pakistan, the agriculture sector's performance impacts the industrial output growth quite significantly.

If agriculture suffers, it tends to decelerate growth in large-scale manufacturing (LSM), the only standard of the industrial performance that is measured regularly.

During the last fiscal year, the agricultural output expanded just 0.8 per cent against the target of 3.8pc. LSM declined 3.6pc instead of increasing at the targeted rate of 8.1pc.

Apart from other factors, what caused the LSM debacle was a fall in its food and textile sub-sectors that together account for one-third of the entire sector. The output of the food sector declined 1.5pc and that of textiles 0.05pc. A massive decrease of 6.6pc in the cumulative output of our key crops — cotton, rice, sugar cane and wheat — also had a hand in it.

A less-than-targeted output of cotton always strains the textile sector's production and a shortage of food crops impacts food industries negatively. When agricultural growth was a negligible 0.2pc in 2015-16, food and textile sub-sectors of LSM had also shown a nominal output increase of 0.12pc each.

So we see that a poor showing of agriculture either slows down growth rates for food and textile sub-sectors of LSM as in 2015-16 or contribute (along with other factors) to a contraction in their output as in 2018-19.

The agriculture sector's output could have risen faster in 2018-19 had the federal government developed a good working relationship with Sindh and taken some measures to remove its grievances about the unfair distribution of water resources. The water shortage across Pakistan and an increase in the cost of agricultural inputs owing to the depreciation and high inflation affected agricultural growth.

An improved working relationship between the federation and Sindh, the second largest agricultural province, could not have averted the depreciation or decelerated inflation. But it could have helped in formulating more inclusive policies to mitigate the devastating effects of the rising cost of agricultural inputs.

Had the government been mindful of the fact that farms and industries go hand in hand, it would have addressed the structural issues of agriculture, like water shortages, yield gaps, on-farm crop losses and storage inadequacy. But the nation did not see any such thing happening in the first year of the PTI rule — not at least across the country — and the federal government rolled out its much-promised agricultural revival plan towards the end of its first year in power.

In the PTI's economic planning, what remains amiss so far is the development of a growth model that takes into account the impact of the underutilisation of the agriculture sector's potential on industries. Perhaps the most obvious reason for it is not the lack of expertise but the failure of the PTI's top leadership in taking the provinces on board. Agriculture, being a provincial subject, needs to be treated as such with no resentment at the federal level. But given that agriculture still drives much of our industrial- and services-sector activities and its role in export enhancement is pivotal, both federal and provincial authorities should develop a trust-based relationship to handle issues related to agriculture. Working in isolation at the provincial or federal level cannot serve the national interest.

This necessitates the devolution of decision-making on the one hand and respecting collective wisdom on the other. Can this happen in the near future? Well, that depends on how quickly political leaders learn to work together for the economy without making compromises in the areas where healthy differences serve the cause of democracy and nationalism.

The provinces ought to cooperate in the development of reliable databases and the federal government must spearhead a drive for it. If Sindh continues to delay the physical animal census, for example, how can one even begin to examine the impact of livestock growth on the industry? Similarly, if the federal authorities don't ensure judicious distribution of water resources across all provinces, how can the provinces make realistic projections about agricultural growth in their respective jurisdictions? In the absence of such realistic projections, how can the federal authorities do realistic planning for industrial growth?

Sustained growth in agriculture is sure to accelerate growth in industries and services sub-sectors over time. There are no two opinions about it. All efforts currently being made to push agriculture growth are just the need of the hour. But it is equally necessary to reassess the linkages between agriculture, industries and services sub-sectors. It is common knowledge that the agricultural performance begins impacting the industrial sector via small industries. But sadly, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have remained and still remain neglected. By March 2019, SME financing constituted just 7.7 per cent of the total private-sector credit and the overall number of SME borrowers stood below 182,000.

Under the much-publicised National Financial Inclusion Strategy, SME finance as a percentage of total private-sector credit has to be raised to 17pc and the number of SME borrowers to half a million by 2020. Do you still believe we can meet the twin targets? Optimism knows no bounds.

Enabling our industrial sector to benefit more from the agriculture sector and allowing agriculture to grow more steadily on the back of industrial demand will remain challenging if we continue to ignore SMEs. —**MA**

https://www.dawn.com/news/1502991/farms-factories-go-hand-in-hand

THE BATTLE OF KINNOW PRICES

Amjad Mahmood September 02, 2019

The shrinking international market space for Pakistani kinnow (mandarin) is leading to a crisis on the domestic front, pitching the growers against the exporters.

Though there is nothing new about hostilities between farmers and supply chain stakeholders, as in cotton and sugar cane crops, it is not a phenomenon that has occurred between kinnow growers and processors since the early 1990s when the country began exporting processed and graded citrus fruit.

Kinnow is grown over about 6.67 million acres with a yield of over 26m tonnes per anum, making Pakistan the 12th largest producer in the world. Punjab's Sargodha district contributes around 80 per cent of the country's mandarin produce. Processors and exporters of kinnow have unilaterally fixed its purchase price by at least 25pc less than last year.

The All Pakistan Fruits and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) and processing plant owners recently held a meeting at the Sargodha Chambers of Commerce and Industry. It was decided that Rs600 per 40 kilograms will be offered to kinnow growers this year though it was Rs800 last year. The reasoning was that exporters suffered losses last season because of poor international rates and costlier domestic purchases.

"Russia and Ukraine gave us only half the rate promised before the shipments, resulting in at least 40pc financial losses last year," says Qasim Aijaz, a representative of the exporters. Pakistan exports around 5,000 containers, roughly 0.13m tonnes, of kinnow per annum to Russia which is an important market for citrus fruits.

The director of Roshan Enterprise Mr Aijaz explained that exports were paid $3-3.5 per kg against the promised price of $7.0 offered at the onset of the season since the Russian ruble had devalued against the US dollar.

On the other hand, exporters also have to pay for packaging and shipping in dollars which the rupee's devaluation has made more expensive. Thus, offering last year's purchase price of Rs800 per 40kgs has become completely unfeasible, he argues.

Exporting to other countries is not a viable alternative either. For the last couple of years, the European Union has become a no-go area for Pakistani mandarins while Iran is also not allowing imports of the fruit. Mr Aijaz claims that the export ban to European markets is self-imposed on federal authority advice to avert a permanent ban owing to fruit fly infestation and other diseases.

However, growers are not convinced by this argument. They demand the concerned authorities to address their grievances and announce reasonable rates for their produce. To put pressure on stakeholders, the growers are planning protest marches and sit-ins at some major kinnow processing units.

“The [processing] factories’ owners are committing economic murder by reducing the purchase price by over 20pc. Keeping in view the inflationary trend in rates of farm inputs even the previous price of Rs800 per 40kgs is an injustice,” bemoans Ahmed Yar Haral, a leader of the Kinnow Growers Association.

“We’ll take out processions and stage sit-ins outside the factories to press the owners to pay due prices for our produce. The rate of Rs600 is simply unacceptable and we won’t let them steal from us; the association will finalise the protest decision within days,” vows Mr Haral, who is also a former nazim of Mattela Union Council in Kot Momin tehsil.

Supporting their cause, ex-chairman of the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s standing committee on horticulture exports Ahmad Jawad says the rate of Rs600 is unjustifiable as the prices of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), potash and urea have gone up compared to last year. Furthermore, price of diesel has reached record high levels.

Previously, urea and DAP prices were Rs1,200 and Rs2,380 per bag respectively, while their current prices are Rs1,925 and Rs3,395.

Mr Jawad alleges that certain political lobbies and officials are trying to extend favours to the processing factories at the cost of growers.

Sensing that the situation may lead to a crisis defaming the incumbent government, some ruling PTI parliamentarians of the district have sprung into action in a bid to defuse the tensions.

MPA Ghulam Ali Asghar Lahri claims that he, along with a couple of other legislators and representatives of growers, has met with the Sargodha deputy commissioner to resolve the issue. He hopes that the kinnow procurement price may be fixed at Rs1,100 per 40kgs as the authorities have assured them about positive developments in this respect.

However, the growers are sceptical of the credibility of the ‘intervening’ legislators. Sheikh Ahmed Sher, an orchard owner and ex-nazim of Lalliani union council in Bhalwal tehsil, says Mr Lahri’s constituency doesn’t fall in the kinnow-growing belt so it is unlikely he will sympathise.

Furthermore, Mr Sher says that the district administration does not have the means and resources to solve their issues so that the claim of obtaining higher rates through the deputy commissioner is unfounded and misleading.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1502987

RICE EXPORTERS FOR FORWARD EXCHANGE RATES BOOKING

RECORDER REPORTSEP 3RD,2019 KARACHI

Rice exporters have asked the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) for forward exchange rates booking against import of plant machinery and grain storages and allied equipment for export sector. In a meeting with Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Dr Reza Baqir at Federation House on Friday, Rafique Suleman Convener FPCCI Standing Committee on Rice Exports and former Chairman Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) highlighted the issues being faced by the rice exporters. He said that SBP has continued to provide incentivised financing schemes for exporters in lieu of BMR and setting up new infrastructures for plant machines and grain storage solutions which definitely helps the export sector immensely, but due highly volatile exchange rates, the planned expansions bring in uncertainty thus the volatility deterring the incentives provided by SBP. Therefore, he requested governor SBP that exporters particularly rice sector should be allowed forward exchange rates booking against import of plant machinery and grain storages and allied equipment, in order to have sound expansion planning. Suleman mentioned that Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has announced to issue the bonds to rice exporters against their Sales Tax Receivables and accordingly accepted by exporters, however, these are not yet tradable instruments. He requested that since these bonds will be issued in lieu of Payables by the State to exporters, SBP may instruct National Bank of Pakistan to commence purchasing these bonds at face value. This will help the exporters to manage their liquidity.

Convener FPCCI Sanding Committee on Rice also informed that commercial banks are refusing to certify Form-E when product value is higher than the listed Minimum Export Price (MEP). During off season especially for premium varieties such as IRRI-9, PK-386, Basmati, 1121 and similar, the price of rice increases due to premium derived from high cooking results.

"We have received multiple complaints by REAP members that where price per unit is higher than the listed MEP, commercial banks are refusing to certify the Form-E," he added. There is need to be clarified here that the enforcement of Minimum Export Price was implemented on the suggestion of REAP to TDAP to address the menace of under invoicing, but there should be no bar on higher values, on the contrary government should encourage premium value exports by fetching higher value of per unit price, he urged.

Suleman said that exporters are making efforts to enhance rice exports up to $5 billion dollar in next few years, however there is need to address the issues being faced by the rice trade. During the meeting, governor SBP assured to facilitate the rice exporters to earn more foreign exchange for the country.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190903515002/

CHINESE ACADEMY, UAF INK MOU FOR AGRICULTURE RESEARCH

KHALID ABBAS SAIF SEP 3RD, 2019 FAISALABAD

Chinese Academy of Tropical Agriculture Sciences and the University of Agriculture Faisalabad(UAF) on Monday inked a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate in the area of academia and research, especially in the agriculture. The MoU was duly signed by Chinese Institute Vice President Dr LIU Guodao and UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Muhamad Ashraf.

Dr LIU Guodao said that through the collaboration, we will able to learn from each other experiences. He said that Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences (CATAS) is the national institution engaged in tropical agricultural research and development as well as graduate student education. He said that it is engaged in researches on tropical fruits, tropical bio-fuel crops, tropical vegetables, tropical textile fiber crops, tropical oil crops, and crops, tropical medicinal crops, agricultural machinery, environment and plant protection, biotechnology, genetic resource conservation and development for tropical agriculture, as well as agro-product quality and safety standards formulation and monitoring and test technology for tropical agriculture.

Dr Muhammad Ashraf said China has adopted a model of small scaled implements for small farmers, he said, adding that the university had taken up the challenges of developing small implements as more than 90 percent of our farming community consisted of small farmers. He stressed upon the need to learn from the Chinese experiences in farm machinery value addition and seed. He said that Pakistan was producing abundant and good quality agri produces, but we could not able to earn foreign exchange. It was because of lack of value addition and not following modern trends and international standards.

He said that China is Pakistan's fair-weather friend as she always stands with us in difficult times. He said that UAF research portfolio had touched to 3 billion. The meeting discussed fruits, vegetable and crops. UAF Dean Agriculture Dr Muhammad Aslam, Institute of Horticulture Science Director Dr Aman Ullah Malik, Director Research Dr Zahir Ahmad Zahir, Director External Linkages Dr Rashed Ahmad and other notables attended the meeting.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190903515009/

'PAKISTAN'S MILK PRODUCTION DOES NOT MEET NEEDS'

By Usman Hanif Published: September 3, 2019

KARACHI: Engro Foods, acquired by one of the world's largest dairy companies in 2016, has changed its name to FrieslandCampina Engro Pakistan (FCEPL).

The Netherlands-based FrieslandCampina, having €12.1 billion in annual revenues, acquired 51% voting shares in Engro Foods at an estimated price of $446.81 million.

Engro Foods was the second most profitable subsidiary of Engro Corporation, considered Pakistan's largest private sector conglomerate.

"FrieslandCampina is a champion of safe dairy nutrition in many countries across Asia, Africa, Europe and this rebranding represents our commitment to Pakistan," said FCEPL Managing Director Ali Ahmed Khan in an email interview with The Express Tribune.

"Our team of experts has ensured that this transition is communicated smoothly across all stakeholders and the new corporate identity will be well established. We are here to stay for now and for generations to come."

Pakistan's per capita milk consumption is 119 litres, according to 2011 data of the Planning and Development Division (Nutrition Section).

"Although no study has been published recently to confirm the changes, I believe the figures have changed," said the MD. "As a nation, we love milk and within the livestock sector, milk is the largest and single most important commodity."

He expressed concern that in spite of being the fourth largest producer of milk, Pakistan remained the second most malnourished country in Asia and per capita consumption of milk had not yet been met. Pakistan has a low ranking (106) among 119 developing countries in the Global Hunger Index and it is lagging behind countries like India and some states of Africa.

He pointed out that the country's milk production did not meet the per capita requirements mainly because of low yield per cow.

"Yields can be improved if our farmers are trained in best practices for dairy farming," he said. "The loose milk consumed by 90% of the population is highly adulterated and to overcome adulteration, the government needs to expedite efforts for implementation of food safety laws, like the minimum pasteurisation law."

Terming Pakistan an evolving market for the packaged milk industry, he said currently 90% of the market still remained untapped hence there was immense potential for growth.

The acquisition enabled FrieslandCampina to obtain a key position in Central Asia, he said. Though the market was challenging, the company believed as consumers became aware of the importance of consuming safe milk, the change would be reflected in their purchasing behaviour.

"Over time, it will convert consumers from loose milk to safe packaged milk," he said. The acquisition of Engro Foods by FrieslandCampina was the single largest foreign direct investment (FDI) in the dairy sector in the history of Pakistan. Without doubt, the acquisition was a defining moment for the dairy industry.

"It reflected the confidence of FrieslandCampina in the country and the potential of untapped growth residing in our local dairy sector," he said. "The government just needs to incentivise the industry and within years, this sector will increase its contribution to the GDP considerably."

Khan pointed out that the biggest difference between packaged milk and loose milk lied in the fact that the packaged milk was tested and was safe and free from adulteration and aflatoxin.

"We have invested in people, processes and technology to ensure that our milk meets local and international food safety standards and regulations strictly. We conduct milk safety checks at all our milk collection centres," he said.

"Additionally, we conduct 28 food safety tests at our plants to ensure that the milk reaching the consumers and customers is wholesome, safe and nutritious," said the MD. "Loose milk, however, which caters to 90% of Pakistan's population, has zero food safety checks."

He explained that loose milk contained pathogens and aflatoxins which were not safe for human consumption. It was neither standardised nor transported in food-grade cans, he said.

“The absence of cold supply chain infrastructure affects the nutritional value of milk, hence the chances of adulteration in loose milk are very high,” he said. “Milkmen have no means of checking that loose milk is safe from hazardous chemicals or aflatoxins.”

From chemicals to water and other additives, there have been major crackdowns – with media coverage – by regulatory bodies on loose milk recently, which illustrates how prevalent the adulteration is in loose milk.

According to the MD, lack of awareness among consumers of the importance of safe milk consumption is one problem and affordability for safe packaged milk is another. “It is also a matter of consumer awareness,” he said.

“Changes in consumer behaviour happen over time,” he said. “When 90% of the population realises that no food is nutritious unless safe, then it will reflect in their spending patterns.”

He asked the government to incentivise the industry and bring the dairy sector under the zero tax regime so the benefit could be passed on to the consumers.

The government levied high taxation on the packaged milk industry whereas the loose milk sector remained untaxed and unregulated, he pointed out.

“To ensure that safe packaged milk is available to the masses, the government needs to create tax regimes where the benefit could be directly passed on to the consumers in terms of reduced pricing,” he said. “Currently, the impact of taxation translates into significant price variation between loose milk and packaged milk, which makes affordability for the safe packaged milk an issue.”

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2047869/2-pakistans-milk-production-not-meet-needs/

AS FARMER INCOMES DWINDLE, TRACTOR SALES SINK

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated September 04, 2019

KARACHI: After experiencing a dismal FY19, Fiat tractor sales recovered in the first month of the current fiscal year, while Massey Ferguson (Millat) was still in hot waters.

Fiat sold 1,122 units in July versus 814 units in July 2018. In 2018-19, its sales plunged by 35 per cent to 17,993 units.

The sales of Massey Ferguson, which already suffered drop to 32,018 units in FY19 from 42,707 units in FY18, could not recover in July 2019 depicting 1,938 units as compared to 3,006 units.

Despite rise in sales of Fiat in July 2019, its CEO Al Ghazi Tractors Limited, Mohammad Shahid Hussain described the situation as “challenging and difficult.”

“There seems to be a major cash crunch within the farmers’ community” he surmises, “and resultantly they are shying away from investing in mechanization and new tractors in particular.”

Crop output and yields could yet be another reason during the last one year where farmers perhaps are barely surviving to make ends meet and are able to pay only their debts rather than having any surplus. Owing to the struggling economy, every type of economic activity has slowed down and the sentiments are lukewarm, he added.

He said due to a major reduction in demand, the manufacturers of tractors had to curtail their production plans. This curtailment also has a direct bearing on the vendors as well. Vendors employ a much bigger workforce than the manufacturers to keep the wheels of the industry rolling.

“We have not laid off any people as such but our vendors definitely have to take that route since with low order intake from assemblers, the cost to carry the normal level of employment is impossible for cost reasons given the gloomy demand,” Shahid said.

On future sales prospects, “The overall situation will perhaps remain similar till the end of 2,020 unless, the Government is able to afford coming forward supporting the farmers and the industry with some extraordinary measures.”

One of the key challenges currently faced by the tractor industry is accumulation of overdue sales tax refunds amounting to Rs 5 billion which is increasing every month. No refund payments have been made since May 2018 resulting in huge borrowing and large burden of financing cost ultimately.

Al Ghazi CEO said the best strategy under the circumstances is to cut costs and try to feed the market according to the demand. “We also need to remain in the grandfather mode to understand the difficulties being faced by our vendors and support them accordingly to the best of our ability in such difficult times,” he added.

Partial absorption of enhanced input costs and depletion of margins is something which assemblers have to accept currently as a reality to keep the ball rolling, Shahid said.

An official in Millat Tractors Limited (MTL), who asked not to be named, said the company is focusing on exports of tractors to African countries where farm machinery demand is growing.

He said the company has also not fully passed on the impact of rupee depreciation against the dollar to the consumers.

Despite depressed sales and reduced production in the last 13 months, the company has so far not removed any workers and staffers, he tells Dawn. If the sales continue to decline in coming months, the company may have to take some drastic step like off loading staff strength, he feared.

He said future sales would depend on the farmers’ income and crop output especially in sugarcane, cotton, rice, wheat and other crops. Tractor sales also rely on public and private sector construction activities which also remained slow in the last one year.

Country’s agriculture performance during FY19 remained subdued. On the aggregate, the sector grew by 0.85 per cent, much lower than the target of 3.8pc set at the beginning of the year.

Economic Survey 2018-19 attributed under-performance of agriculture sector mainly due to insufficient availability of water which led to a drop in cultivated area and a drop in fertiliser off take.

The crops sector experienced a negative growth of 4.43pc. Sugarcane production declined 19.4pc to 67.174 million tonnes, cotton 17.5pc to 9.861m bales and rice 3.3pc to 7.202m tonnes.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1503382

KINNOW EXPORTS RATE LIKELY TO BE REVISED

N H ZUBERI SEP 4TH, 2019 KARACHI

Secretary General (Federal) of Businessmen Panel (BMP) and former Chairman of FPCCI Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports, Ahmad Jawad has said that efforts are under way to normalize the situation for kinnow exports, as majority of kinnow exporters think that the rate for kinnow Rs 600 per 40kg was unjustified which was announced by some circles of PFVA Association without any detailed deliberation.
Jawad said that the immature statement created uncertainty among the exporters, resultantly purchasing has almost stopped, adding that however, we are trying our best to normalise the situation so that kinnow exports could not suffer which will be commence from December 1. "It is now expected that revised rate will be announced soon which may around Rs 850 per 40 kg in the light of inflation."
He also urges the Ministry of Commerce to initiate negotiation with Chinese Authority for allowing Pakistani kinnow through all entry points, including its CPEC route.
He said that China is a market of a minimum of 100,000 tonnes of Pakistani kinnow due to their high demand and it depends on how we tap this big opportunity.
He said kinnow (Mandarin) have always been considered as a traditional symbol of good fortune in China. This is mainly because the word orange, when spoken in mandarin, sounds similar to the word "wealth". The orange hue of the fruit is also said to symbolise "gold", which makes it a very auspicious fruit.
Jawad further said that Pakistan could find out two new markets for citrus export - Philippines and China. "It is very heartening to note that Pakistan has targeted China and Philippines markets for kinnow export and expected boost in kinnow export is about 20 percent this year."
"CPEC is poised to give tremendous boost to the horticulture industry in Pakistan, which has a promising outlook," Jawad added. "However, presently we are facing many challenges internationally as European Union and other developed countries of the world are creating barriers to our agro exports."
UK, Australia, Japan, Korea even few central Asian countries are setting new standards for imports.
Jawad further said we are facing two problems in citrus - citrus canker and citrus graining which is detrimental to "kinnow" exports but growers are now very conscious to overcome it, which will further help to increase the export volumes.
He further said with the due assistance from the government; kinnow exports will touch a handsome figure of 500,000 tons in the next two years.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190904515285/

FARMERS ADVISED TO DRAIN OUT DELUGE FROM COTTON FIELDS

RECORDER REPORT SEP 4TH, 2019 KARACHI

The Met Office has warned the farmers of accumulated rainwater could be fatal to their standing crops, asking them to drain out the deluge, especially from cotton fields for a better output.
"Accumulation of stagnant water in the fields due to heavy rains is fatal for standing crops like cotton etc." it said, adding that farmers should take suitable measures to pump out rainwater.
It also alerted the farmers to negative effects of weeds that outgrow the standing crops during the rainy seasons, asking them to remove them at earliest to help improve yield. It said that the weeds cost a considerable yield loss to the farmers annually. Farmers of rain-crop areas may take measures to preserve rainwater for crops and livestock.
Keeping in view the existing weather season, the Met said that the farmers should evolve schedule to irrigate their crops. Besides, it urged the growers to step up efforts to protect the standing crops especially the vegetable from the damaging effects of the changing weather pattern during the continuing monsoon season.
Daytime temperature is likely to remain below normal but the nighttime may remain slightly above normal in the most of the agricultural plains with the normal wind pattern.
Weather in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Balochistan may remain hot and humid in the next 10 days However with isolated rain and wind-thunderstorm in Rawalpindi, Gujranwala and Lahore Malakand and Hazara Divisions in the coming days. Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir are expected to receive isolated rain with wind-thunderstorm is expected at nighttime.
In the next 24 hours: Mainly hot and humid weather is expected in the most parts of the country with an isolated rain-thunderstorm in Malakand, Hazara, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore, Peshawar and Kohat Divisions, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir.
In the last 24 hours: Scattered rain and wind-thunderstorm fell in Gujranwala and Makran Divisions in parts of the Sindh including Karachi. Weather remained hot and humid in other parts of the country during the period.
Keamari received the maximum amount of rainfall as 32mm followed by Mithi 30mm, Kaloi 25mm, Landhi 24mm, MBD in 16mm, Faisal Base 14mm, Jinnah Terminal and Shaheed Benazirabad 12mm, each, Saddar, MOS, Thatta and Badin 11mm, each, Dadu and Lasbella 10mm, each, University Road, Surjani and Padidan 7mm, each.
D I Khan was the hottest place with 43 degrees Celsius, Bhakkar 42, Turbat, Dalbandin, Sibbi and Chillas 41, each, Faisalabad and Multan 38, each, Peshawar and Lahore 37, each, Islamabad, Muzaffarabad and Quetta 36, Karachi, Hyderabad and Gilgit 35, each. "Seasonal low lies over north Balochistan and its adjoining areas. Weak monsoon currents are penetrating southern parts of the country," the Met said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190904515292/

UAF AGRICULTURE EXHIBITION OPENS AT EXPO CENTRE

RECORDER REPORT SEP 4TH, 2019 FAISALABAD

The University of Agriculture Faisalabad on Tuesday opened agricultural exhibition at expo centre in which more than 140 university-made technologies were put on display. The expo centre was inaugurated by UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ashraf who was flanked by deans and directors.
The university scientists, faculty and students' technologies were staged at 70 stalls of all faculties for the agricultural lovers who thronged the expo to know about latest agri trends. The expo comprised new varieties, techniques, methods, university patents, innovative ideas, regarding agriculture, veterinary, animal sciences, farm machinery, engineering, social sciences, basic sciences, food,

nutrition textile and paintings etc.

Addressing on the occasion, UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ashraf said that expo had become a permanent feature of the university as all university technologies will remain displayed all the year under one roof for the visitors.

He said that we need to commercialize our technologies so that heavy import in the country could be reduced. He said that academia-industry strong ties would help raise income of people, way of living and to eliminate the poverty. He said that one idea can change the society. He urged the researches to work on the real issues of the common man. He urged industry to point out areas of research work, so that UAF scientists can increase their role in addressing the issues.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190904515312/

GOVT ASKED TO STOP ILLEGAL FISHING ALONG MAKRAN COAST

Behram Baloch September 05, 2019

GWADAR: The provincial government has failed to stop illegal fishing in Balochistan waters, said the All Parties' Alliance of Gwadar on Wednesday.

Speaking at a press conference along with representatives of political parties, alliance's convener Faiz Nagori demanded of the government to solve the problems of illegal fishing and electricity loadshedding faced by the people in Makran.

He said that despite tall claims of the provincial fisheries department about stopping illegal trawling, big trawlers could be seen fishing in the Makran coast.

He said that trawling in coasts of Gwadar had increased tremendously; illegal fishing had become a routine for trawlers coming from Sindh, hampering the fishing business of fishermen of Gwadar and coastal area of Makran.

"The fisheries department has failed to take any action against such illegal fishing, instead it is facilitating such criminals," Mr Nagori said. He demanded that genuine representatives of fishermen should be included in the Balochistan fishermen society.

He said the agreement reached between Quetta Electric Supply Company (Quesco) and all parties' alliance and trade unions was yet to be implemented and as a result of loadshedding had increased in the entire Makran region, including Gwadar.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1503593/govt-asked-to-stop-illegal-fishing-along-makran-coast

FEMALE COTTON PICKERS DEMAND STATUS EQUAL TO INDUSTRIAL WORKERS'

Hasan Mansoor September 05, 2019

KARACHI: Several women engaged in picking of cotton in fields on Wednesday demanded the provincial government award them the status equal to industrial workers with all privileges that the latter were entitled according to the Workers Welfare Board (WWB).

"It is very hard job that we do for at least 12 hours a day in extreme hazardous environment," said Shabana Khatoon, leader of one of the first ever unions of cotton picking women in Jamal Dahiri village of Matiari district. She was speaking at a press conference at the Karachi Press Club organised by the Sindh Community Foundation in which representatives the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Aurat Foundation also spoke.

She said workers, mainly women and children, did their work in extreme hard conditions while picking cotton in the fields where they suffered from diseases of eyes and infections because of no safety gears given to them by employers.

She demanded of the government to take quick steps to help cotton picking workers get better wages under secured environment.

Javed Soz, executive director of the Sindh Community Foundation (SCF), said Pakistan was the fourth largest producer of cotton in the world where approximately 1.5 million smallholding farmers relied on cotton for a living.

"Cotton is the country's most widely cultivated crop grown on 15 per cent of land and an important raw material for its growing textiles industry, representing 8.5pc of GDP."

He added that cotton was grown mostly in Punjab and Sindh that accounted for 99pc. Cotton picking is primarily carried out by women, which is considered a cash job.

Mr Soz said there were 4.9 million casual and hired farm workers in Sindh of which approximately 1.7 million were women.

"The cotton pickers mostly fall in the first category of labourers. More than half a million cotton pickers are working in Sindh of which 70pc are estimated to be women.

"In Sindh, more than 10 districts cultivate cotton including Sanghar, Matiari, Ghotki, Hyderabad, Tando Allayhar, Mirpurkhas, Khairpur, and Benazirabad.

"Although they contribute to the growth of textile and clothing industry, they remain poor and are exploited as their wages are extremely low, they have weak bargaining power and their health suffers from hazardous working conditions that involve excessive use of poisonous pesticides. No measures are taken by landowners for safety gears such as gloves, masks, hats etc., to protect them."

He said those workers were not given health insurance or medical compensation.

"As cotton pickers are illiterate, they receive misleadingly calculated low wages by landlords. They are unaware about labour rights and are not united for collective bargaining and negotiation for wage fixation."

He added the SCF worked with 3,000 cotton pickers from 30 villages in Matiari district. As a result, through increased awareness about their rights and collective bargaining, the groups secured a 50pc increase in their wages – from Rs200 per 40kg of cotton picked in a day to Rs300.

"These wages are still lower than the current market wages, yet still their collective struggle is a baby step towards success."

The SCF director said there was need to apply the minim wage law of country for those workers to protect their economic and labour rights.

He said Sindh Industrial Relations Act had secured the right to form association but due to lack of information on registration of formal trade union in cotton sector among workers, they were not registered. Cotton growers, industrialists, government and public at large remained unaware of cotton pickers' plight.

He said the first ever registration of seven trade unions of women cotton pickers with the labour department had been made while the same for three more unions was in progress.

Appreciating the approval of Sindh Agriculture Women Act 2019 by the Sindh cabinet, he demanded it be passed without further delays.

Speakers, including Badar Soomro of the HRCP and Mehnaz Rehman of the Aurat Foundation, demanded agriculture workers must be included in the list as secured labour to get social security benefits, health coverage, and worker welfare fund etc. Besides, the process of registration of their unions needed more clarity and convenience.

Aisha Agha, Niaz Soomro, and worker Shamim Bano also spoke. Later, the cotton picking women staged a demonstration outside the KPC.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1503513/female-cotton-pickers-demand-status-equal-to-industrial-workers

LOCUSTS ATTACK IN THAR GOES UNCHECKED

A Correspondent September 05, 2019

MITHI: Swarms of locusts continued to eat up crops, grass and shrubs in some villages of Nagar-parkar and Islamkot talukas.

Villagers told this reporter on Wednesday that locusts were still out there denuding their crops, fodder and bushes of all the green leaves and barks at a fast pace.

They said the government functionaries had sprayed insecticides a few days ago, but the spray proved ineffective due to continuous rain in their areas.

They demanded of the high-ups to send teams with required machinery for killing insects.

Sindh Minister for Agriculture Mohammad Ismail Rahu told this reporter that he had already directed the teams engaged in Thar to visit the affected areas as soon as possible and report him to avoid major damage to crops in Tharparkar district.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1503510/locusts-attack-in-thar-goes-unchecked

RICE EXPORTERS PLAN MASSIVE INVESTMENT TO IMPORT MACHINERY

RECORDER REPORT SEP 5TH, 2019 KARACHI

Rice exporters plan billions of rupees investment for import of latest and modern machinery to improve domestic rice farm practices and production. Rafique Suleman, Convener, FPCCI Standing Committee on Rice called 2nd meeting of his committee on Wednesday at the Federation House here. The meeting was attended among others by Abdul Rahim Janoo former chairman Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP), Muslim Muhammedi Vice President FPCCI, Safdar Mehkri Chairman REAP, Muhammad Raza Member REAP's Managing Committee, Faisal Anis, Shiraz Shaikh, Sufiyan Rahim, and a large numbers of rice exporters.
Various matters relating to rice export trade were discussed. Rafique Suleman informed the meeting that rice trade got very good results following REAP rice conference held in November 2018 in Larkana as after the successful conference, a few rice exporters were working towards rice research & development and planned billions of rupees investment towards import of modern rice machinery and equipment.
"A number of exporters have already imported millions of rupees latest and modern rice machinery

and equipment such as harvester to improve farm practices and rice production. With these efforts we will be able to overcome gaps in the supply chain and with the improved farm practices, rice exporters will get good crop," he added.

Suleman said rice export target of over $2 billion was achieved successfully during FY19. He said that Kenya, which has been the largest destination for Pakistani non-Basmati rice, faced some issues last year. However, Suleman was hopeful that rice export from Pakistan to Kenya will increase during this fiscal year.

REAP's trade delegations should be sent to West African countries, Azerbaijan and Jordan and other countries to explore new markets, he said.

Suleman thanked all participants for attending this meeting and congratulated the newly Un-opposed elected Members of Managing Committee and nominated Office Bearers for the tenure 2019-2020 for Shahjahan Malik as Chairman REAP, Muhammad Raza Amjad as Senior Vice Chairman and Abdul Wali Khan as Vice Chairman REAP.

During the meeting Abdul Rahim Janoo appreciated the services of Muslim Muhammedi Vice President FPCCI for the patronage and betterment of rice export trade.

He suggested a committee led by Muslim Muhammad along with Safdar Mehkri, Rafique Suleman, Muhammad Raza and Faisal Anis to resolve rice trade related issues.

REAP Chairman Safdar Mehkri drew the attention of the committee towards gaps in the rice value chain and urged them to put the own house in order. He suggested to give preference in REAP delegations to those members who are doing value addition in rice export trade.

He was of the view the all agricultural sectors were facing same challenges, however, the government is appreciating rice export sector for its due role in fetching valuable foreign exchange without any financial subsidy from the government.

Muslim Muhammad Vice President FPCCI said that Safdar Mehkri Chairman REAP and Rafique Suleman former chairman REAP are putting their best efforts to improve rice export sector. He assured his full cooperation to resolve the issues and problems of rice export sector.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190905515542/

FRESH INITIATIVE TO BOOST AGRICULTURE

By APP Published: September 5, 2019

ISLAMABAD: In a fresh bid to boost the agriculture sector, the Balochistan government has initiated multi-dimensional projects to make the provincial industry profitable.

Talking to APP, spokesperson of the Balochistan government Liaquat Shahwani said the government will establish various joint fruits and vegetables processing laboratories and plants at Kila Saifullah, Naseerabad, Gwadar, Loralai and other districts.

He said around Rs400 million were allocated for the project. The specific objectives were to reduce the post-harvest losses by increasing the shelf life of fruits and vegetables.

Talking about providing incentives to the farmers, the spokesman mentioned that the government is working on improving road communication, to provide easy access to the farming community from fields to the markets.

Emphasising efficient management of fruits and vegetables to conserve commodities for a longer period, Shahwani said that despite producing millions of tonnes of fruits annually, the farmers could not get appropriate output due to lack of proper processing facilities.

“The provincial government is making a strategy to introduce local fruits in the international markets,” he added.

In order to improve the underground water level, the spokesman declared that the government is working in collaboration with the capital to build more small dams at a cost of Rs5 billion.

Moreover, work on the expansion of Kachhi and Patfeeder canals is also expedited to resolve the water issue in the province. Around 3,000 tube wells will be converted to solar energy, the spokesman informed the state news agency.

Shahwani mentioned that a large area linked with agriculture was affected due to long-lasting, serious drought-like situation in the province. The government will be providing farmland sprinkler irrigation equipment to the farmers of 16 drought-stricken districts to compensate for the losses, explained the spokesman.

Rs1,870 million is the estimated cost of the project which will also include revolving sprinkler irrigation system and perforated pipe system.

The government has also purchased 20 bulldozers to pave the land for cultivation of local farmers.

“Under the prime minister’s vision of clean and green Pakistan, Balochistan government has planted 25 million saplings across the province,” Shahwani said.

According to the government spokesman, around 150,000 olive saplings were planted in the province this year.

Meanwhile, a green tractor scheme will also be launched at a cost of Rs250 million and at least 300 tractors will be distributed among small farmers soon.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2049445/1-fresh-initiative-boost-agriculture/

PARC APPROVES SEVEN NEW RICE VARIETIES FOR CULTIVATION

By APP Published: September 5, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Variety Evaluation Committee of Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) has approved seven new rice varieties for commercial cultivation across the crop sowing areas of the country.

The committee, chaired by PARC Chairman Muhammad Ayub Chaudhry, discussed characteristics of different varieties of rice seeds for commercial cultivation and their impact on per-acre yield.

In the meeting, PARC national coordinator on rice presented working paper for all 33 proposals of rice hybrid varieties for recommendation to the Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department.

The committee recommended seven rice hybrid varieties for commercial cultivation in the country.

Representatives of seed companies appreciated the role of PARC for setting new benchmarks for testing of rice hybrid varieties in Pakistan aimed at benefitting farmers as well as the rice sector.

Addressing the meeting, Chaudhry appreciated the roles of the private and public sector for taking interest in research and development of rice in the country.

He briefed the participants regarding upcoming projects on rice under ‘Prime Minister’s National Agriculture Emergency Programme’ and underlined that he was happy to see foreigners participating in the committee’s meeting.

Meanwhile, PARC Plant Sciences Division Member Dr Abdul Ghafoor emphasised the role of quality seed in productivity and profitability of farmers. He further appreciated the role of seed companies and public sector institutes for making efforts to improve potential of rice hybrids/varieties in Pakistan.

The meeting was attended by technical members from National Agriculture Research System Representatives of seed companies also attended the meeting.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2049361/2-parc-approves-seven-new-rice-varieties-cultivation/

AS HARVEST WILTS, GOVT MULLS INCENTIVES TO BOOST COTTON PRODUCTION

Khaleeq Kiani Updated September 06, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government is finalising incentives for cotton growers that may include an indicative cotton price of more than Rs3,800 per 40 kg to encourage farmers to use quality inputs to enhance output this season.

PM's Adviser on Finance and Revenue Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh on Thursday presided over a meeting of stakeholders including cotton growers, Kissan Ittehad, textile millers and ginners besides the relevant government entities to consider various options and incentives.

Informed sources said the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) had proposed an indicative price of Rs4,000 per 40 kg. The meeting was informed that relevant authorities were expecting at least two million additional bales of cotton production this year when compared to last year.

It was argued that a helping hand from the government could further boost this additional output as farmers would be encouraged and better placed to invest in quality inputs, particularly fertiliser and pesticides etc. The core objective of the meeting was to take all possible measures that help farmers get better price this season to secure even better output next year.

There was still an ongoing debate on the indicative price because it involved about Rs80-100 billion financial impact. The finance ministry is in a tight position given PM Imran Khan's clear instructions that he wanted to uplift the farmer community to enhance output and the prevailing financial conditions of the government particularly at the beginning of the International Monetary Fund programme.

A participant said it was explained that domestic cotton price was around Rs3,500-3,600 per 40 kg compared to about Rs4,400 per 40kg imported price and the MNFSR wanted a middle ground as offering indicative price for local farmers this season. There was also a suggestion that the provinces should also be persuaded to bear at least a part of the financial burden to support cotton farmers.

A view also came from the textile sector that import price had now come down and an intervention price would artificially jack up local prices and negatively affect international competitiveness.

At the same time, ginners would also have to be offered some incentives including through lower energy prices so that they pick up the commodity at indicative prices to reduce financial burden on the public sector. The government will have to activate Trading Corporation of Pakistan to ensure better prices for cotton.

The consultations would also be joined by Syed Fakhar Imam, MNA, the chairman of PM's task force on agriculture and Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser to finalise a way forward also keeping in mind the PM's programme for enhancement of cotton crop output.

The meeting was informed that cotton crop had been on the decline over the past few years owing to lack of attention and support from the government over past few years. The crop output fell from 14m bales to just 10.8m bales last year and textile industry's requirement of about 15m bales.

Resultantly, the textile industry had to bank on imported commodity at a foreign exchange cost of more than $1bn last year. The cotton output target for current year is set at 15m bales that may not be achieved unless farmers were offered good returns.

Shaikh told the participants that government was extending unprecedented focus on the growth of agriculture sector which does not merely look at agriculture as providing the main pivot to the growth of economy but also allocating vast sums for its further growth. "Only last week, the government approved projects worth Rs250bn for the uplift of agriculture sector with focus on enhancing crop productivity and improving the means and resources for better farming," he said.

Adviser to the Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile, Industry and Production and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood, Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Chairman Shabbar Zaidi and senior officials of Finance Division were also present.

Shaikh said the government was fully aware of the cotton growers' difficulties in getting better prices which not only offset their cost of production but also provide them with incentives to use more inputs and increase the crop area for enhanced productivity. "The government is actively considering various options and hopefully we have an arrangement which addresses the concerns of cotton growers and helps them fetch good prices for their produce," he was quoted as saying in an official statement.

He also asked the textile industry, ginners' association and other stakeholders to sit with the FBR officials and Commerce Ministry to discuss their issues and finalise realistic proposals within the next few days to help government take a decision that could address the concerns of all stakeholders particularly the cotton growers in getting better prices in the upcoming season.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1503823

TROUT FARMING BEGINS IN SWAT

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter September 06, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Minister for National Food Security and Research Muhammad Mehboob Sultan has said that the government is formulating the country's first-ever fisheries policy to exploit the huge potential of this sector.

Inaugurating the trout farming programme in Swat on Thursday, the minister said the per capita annual fish consumption in the country was only 2kg against the world average of 20kg. "Pakistan is the only country where the 1,100-km coastline has not been utilised for coastal and marine fish culture farming," he added.

He asked fish farmers to take maximum benefit from the wealth of natural resources and join hands for the trout fish farming and contribute towards economic and social development of the country. As part of the Prime Minister's Agriculture Emergency Programme, the Rs2,355 million Trout Fish Farming has three components: shrimp farming, cage fish culture and trout fish farming in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan. "The fisheries policy will be formulated with the technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations," the minister added.

The Task Force formed by the government for the development of fisheries sector had formulated the projects in consultation with the provincial government. Sultan expressed his resolve that the project would be rigorously monitored and supported for the maximum output.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1503815/trout-farming-begins-in-swat

BALOCHISTAN GOVT UPGRADING DAIRY AND LIVESTOCK SECTORS

By APP Published: September 6, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Balochistan government has chalked out a comprehensive plan to upgrade dairy and livestock sectors to exploit their full potential and generate economic activities across the province.

Giving an outline of the plan, Livestock and Dairy Development Department Director General (DG) Ghulam Hussain Jaffer on Thursday said some 29 dairy and poultry farms in the province would be overhauled to meet the international standards and achieve maximum outcome.

"The government has also planned to establish new veterinary hospitals and dispensaries for which an amount of Rs500 million would be earmarked to ensure livestock's better health and productivity."

He said establishing camel research and milk processing units at Musakhail and Washuk district would also be approved in the coming days. "In order to generate more revenue, the government would also set up a cattle farm in Lehri district," the DG said.

Moreover, Jaffer said, an amount of Rs215.340 million has also been allocated to treat the patients suffering from the Congo virus and to provide vaccination to the livestock keepers.

Modern livestock equipment to cater to the needs of cattle-owners and to boost the sector would also be provided. The government would launch the project of Backyard Rural Poultry Balochistan, he added.

Jaffer said lack of proper marketing of livestock is the main issue and for this purpose, the government has approved the plan of the construction of hiding, skin and meat markets to help improve the standard of marketing of this huge sector.

The government has also started a sheep and goat fattening programme and that would boost the sector and also attract people to invest in the sector. The DG said the department is working to strengthen the Semen Production Unit and Animal Disease Investigation Laboratory in Quetta.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2050302/1-balochistan-govt-upgrading-dairy-livestock-sectors/

PTI GOVT, STAKEHOLDERS AT ODDS OVER COTTON SUPPORT PRICE

By Shahbaz Rana Published: September 6, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Differences between the government ministries and various stakeholders persist on setting a minimum cotton support price and giving tax incentives to the agriculture sector, as former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) secretary-general Jehangir Tareen seeks an early resolution.

Various stakeholders led by Tareen met with Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh on Thursday at his office and discussed ways for ensuring competitive prices for the cotton farmers for their produce in the coming season.

However, no agreement could be reached after Shaikh told them that the finance ministry did not have fiscal space to give tax incentives and allocate funds for procurement of cotton from the farmers, according to the officials who attended the meeting.

Shaikh is said to have told the meeting participants that any fiscal relief provided to the cotton growers will come at the expense of others, as the government did not have fiscal space, said the officials.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research had proposed the minimum price of cotton at Rs4,000 per mound and to purchase 500,000 bales from the farmers. However, the quasi-fiscal operations like procurement of wheat and sugarcane increased the liabilities of the federal and provincial governments. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also wants to put a full stop to quasi-fiscal operations.

The representative of All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma) – the main buyer of locally produced cotton – opposed the proposal of Rs4,000 minimum support price. Instead, he asked to link the price with the international market.

Shaikh is said to be against the idea of fixing the support prices, which create distortions in the market. Due to minimum guaranteed prices for wheat and sugarcane, the cultivation areas of cotton and pulses have greatly reduced and the country meets its needs by importing these commodities.

The ginners also demanded that they should be taxed under a final income tax regime but the FBR chairman did not agree to the proposal.

The officials said that Tareen urged the stakeholders to reach an agreement at the earliest.

The matter will now be taken up at the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture forum, which is chaired by National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser.

The government was fully aware of the difficulties being faced by cotton growers in getting better prices which not only offset their cost of production but also provide them with incentives to use more inputs and increase the crop area for enhanced productivity, the finance ministry handout quoted Shaikh as saying.

Shaikh added that the government was actively considering various options and hopefully we have an arrangement which addresses the concerns of cotton growers and helps them fetch good prices for their produce.

Last month, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet had constituted a Price Review Committee, headed by adviser ministry of commerce and textile, to review and suggest the indicative price and other measures to be taken in case of abnormal fluctuations in the cotton prices.

Last year, the cotton production was 10.77 million bales against a national requirement of around 13-14 million bales. The decline in production of cotton has been attributed to low returns to growers, higher cost of production and decline in the price of cotton at a critical time, and low yield and attack of virus and pests.

Shaikh claimed that there was an unprecedented focus on the growth of agriculture sector by the current government, which not only merely saw agriculture as providing the main pivot to the growth of the economy but also allocated vast sums for its further growth.

He said that the agriculture sector is expected to achieve a 3.3% growth rate this year.

The adviser said that last week the government-approved projects worth Rs250 billion for the uplift of agriculture sector with a focus on enhancing crop productivity and improving the means and resources for better farming.

Shaikh asked Aptma, Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) and stakeholders to hold meetings with the officials of FBR and the commerce ministry to discuss their issues and finalise realistic proposals within the next few days to help the government take a decision that could address the concerns of all stakeholders, particularly the cotton growers in getting better prices in the upcoming season, according to the finance ministry.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2050203/2-govt-stakeholders-odds-cotton-support-price/

LOCUST INVASION

Editorial September 07, 2019

AN ancient scourge is back with a vengeance in Pakistan for the first time in two decades. Swarms of locusts have been advancing inside the country since early June, and after cutting a swathe of destruction through Balochistan, are now ravaging vast areas of Sindh. Thousands of acres of cotton crop could be devastated, that too at a time when Pakistan is already reeling from an economic crisis. South Punjab is on high alert given the alarming invasion of these insects in other parts of the country. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation in its latest Locust Watch Report has warned that the situation in Pakistan is "most serious". According to it, the second generation of these voracious insects has emerged and as they proliferate, so will their capacity to lay waste to cropland and exacerbate food insecurity.

Heavy rainfall coupled with high temperatures creates the perfect conditions for locusts to breed, and climate change could reshape their distribution area. Research organisations and government authorities in Pakistan must turn their attention to this possibility, of which we may well be experiencing the opening act. Provincial agriculture departments claim they are taking measures to combat the infestation, but they have been very slow off the mark. While close to 40,800 acres have reportedly been treated so far and training sessions held in Punjab to build the capacity of government officials and technical staff, many farmers in Sindh — Balochistan has already seen the worst — are complaining that vast areas have not been sprayed with insecticide. Interestingly enough, the present invasion may have its roots in the Yemen war, which has affected locust control measures there, enabling huge numbers of the insects to migrate further, through Saudi Arabia, Iran and onward to Pakistan. The authorities here thus had a substantial window in which to prepare for their arrival and ensure that spraying was done at the nymph stage — before the insects can fly — to forestall proliferation. Of course, the most severe impact of the swarms will be borne by the farmers. Aside from those in the fertile agriculture belt, rural populations in already impoverished areas will see their difficulties intensify further. Severe locust infestations, by giving rise to local food shortages and the disadvantages that come with malnutrition, have been shown to even impact school enrollment rates. This is an emergency — which may become a recurrent one — and must be treated as such.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1504001/locust-invasion

'LATEST IRRIGATION SYSTEM MAY HELP GROWERS'

RECORDER REPORT SEP 7TH, 2019 LAHORE

Additional Secretary Agriculture (Planning) Ubaid Ullah has said that latest irrigation system can help the growers to timely provide water and fertilizer to its crop according to the need while in conventional method it is not possible. This is why the provincial government is working to attract growers towards adoption of drip irrigation system so as to ensure food security while mitigating the challenges posed by the issues like climate change and water scarcity.

He was speaking to a delegation of the World Bank while briefing them about progress on Punjab Irrigated-Agriculture Productivity Improvement Project (PIPIP) being run with the cooperation of the World Bank. The Bank's team consists of agriculture, economic, rural and social experts. The team was briefed on all aspects of the project.

Director General Agriculture (Irrigation) Malik Muhammad Akram was also present on this occasion. The team also visited different cities including Chakwal, Toba Tek Singh and Bhakkar to review the projects being run under this project in these areas.

World Bank team said that drip irrigation is the future of Pakistan's agriculture. The team said that rapidly increasing population and shortage of water can become a serious threat to Pakistan in future. To meet these challenges, the team said Pakistan would need to take maximum per acre yield by using minimum water.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190907516060/

CHITRAL GETS TWO VERTICAL FISH INCUBATORS

By **News Desk Published: September 7, 2019**

The provincial fisheries department on Friday received two vertical flow fish incubators in Chitral to promote and strengthen trout fish farming in the region through improved technology.

The incubators were provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) under their Multi-Year Humanitarian Program (MYHP). The vertical fish incubators will be used for incubation and hatching of trout fish eggs to ensure a consistent supply of fingerlings to the farmers, the sustainability of the enterprises and to strengthen the extension services of the fisheries department.

The programme aims to restore the livelihoods of affected communities and to build their resilience to cope with unforeseen disasters. Under it, the FAO has helped develop ten small-scale fish enterprises.

During the handing-over ceremony, FAO field officer briefed the participants about their on-going FAO projects in the district.

Chitral Assistant Commissioner Alamgir appreciated FAO's efforts to promote livelihood sources and its contribution towards food security in the district.

He also pledged support to communities that had recently been affected by the Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) in Golan valley of Chitral.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2051249/1-chitral-gets-two-vertical-fish-incubators/

GOVERNMENT TO INITIATE THREE LIVESTOCK PROJECTS THIS MONTH

ZAHEER ABBASI SEP 8TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The government has decided to initiate three livestock projects this month to increase livestock productivity under the Prime Minister's Initiatives for Livestock.
Sources said that the projects included: (i) Save the Calf; (ii) Fattening of Calf and; (iii) Backyard Poultry. These are being initiated from this month with the objective to increase production of livestock as well as export-oriented meat.
Under the "Save the Calf" project, the government will distribute 0.380 million calves to provinces, AJK and ICT. Under another project titled "Fattening of Calf," the government would distribute 0.375 million calves to increase meat production in the country.
Under this project, the government will distribute 0.320 million calves to Balochistan, eighty thousand to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 0.150 million to Punjab, 0.1milion to Sindh, fifteen thousand to GB, fifteen thousand to AJK and fifteen thousand calves will be given to Islamabad Capital Territory

(ICT).
Moreover, under the "Backyard Poultry" project, which was launched on September 2, 2019, the government is distributing 5 million poultry including hens and cocks to people in rural areas to boost the local poultry industry and fight poverty.
The federal government is giving 0.5 million poultry to Balochistan,1 million poultry to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2 million poultry to Punjab,1 million poultry to Sindh, 0.150 million to Gilgit-Baltistan, 0.250 million to Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and 0.1 million to Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) residents.
The government is giving 30 per cent subsidy and rest of price will be borne by the consumers, while more than 0.1 million families would be getting benefit from these projects.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190908516334/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEP 09th TO SEP 15th 2019

RS2048.9M APPROVED TO RAISE SUGARCANE PRODUCTIVITY IN PUNJAB

ZAHID BAIG SEPTEMBER 10,2019

LAHORE: Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) has approved the national programme worth Rs2048.90 million for enhancing the productivity of sugarcane in the Punjab province.
The programme named as 'National Programme for enhancing profitability through increasing productivity of sugarcane' will be launched in 13 main sugarcane growing districts of the Punjab province.
These districts include Sargodha, Bhakkar, Faisalabad, Toba Tek Singh, Jhang, Chiniot, Mandi Bahauddin, Kasur, Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Rajanpur, Bahawalpur and Rahim Yar Khan.
It is a financially shared project in which Punjab will contribute Rs1737.70 million while Federation's share is Rs311.23 million, sources in the Punjab Agriculture Department told Business Recorder here on Monday.
Objectives of the project are to enhance the profitability of sugarcane farming through increasing productivity of sugarcane to 200 maunds/acre and to allocate area retrieved (in the longer run) for oilseeds and high-value crops etc, sources added.
They further said that productivity enhancement will be achieved through promotion of mechanization under which the provincial agriculture department aims to distribute 2291 chisel ploughs, 1142 early hill-up implements, 1142 planters with band fertilizer, 7 billet planters, 1142 granular fertilizer applicators and demonstration of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).
These include weed/pest management and nutritional management in line with latest practices at 2961 places in these 13 districts.
The department will also arrange 270 mega farmer gatherings in the main sugarcane hubs of the province besides holding of 986 farmer days to impart training and information to the sugarcane growers about the project and the machines.
Under this project around 210 Best Growers will also be recognized and appreciated through different means at District to provincial level while the government will share 50 percent cost on application of micronutrients on 297,010 acres, the sources added.
Sources said that the government also plans to extend subsidy for intercropping and September planting at 13,000 acres and strengthening of Bio-Labs by development of IPM techniques.
Regarding when the project is going to be launched, the sources said that now the project will come in discussion at the provincial development working party (PDWP) and then implemented after fine tuning according to the need of the province, the sources concluded.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/09/10/3-page/800379-news.html

0.3M TONNES OF WHEAT IN SINDH DEVOURED BY RATS

By Irshad Ansari Published: September 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Of the 0.8 million tonnes of wheat stocked by the Sindh government, 0.3 million tonnes have been devoured by rats, it was revealed during a recent meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet.

Adviser to the PM on Finance Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, who was presiding over the meeting, quipped that the rats should be subjected to a DNA test.

To stabilise the prices of flour in Sindh, 0.4 million tonnes of wheat have been sought from the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco).

According to sources, the claim that rats had devoured the wheat was made by Maritime Affairs Minister Ali Zaidi and the participants of the huddle were both amused and surprised.

The participants were told that the price of 10 kilogrammes of flour in Lahore was Rs350 while in Karachi it was being sold at Rs400.

Briefing the participants, National Food Security Secretary Muhammad Hashmi Popalzai said there were satisfactory reserves of wheat in the country. He added that the Sindh government had sought 0.4 million tonnes of wheat from Passco while statistics showed that the province had over 0.7 million tonnes of wheat in stock.

The secretary said Sindh government had been told to release the reserves in the market to stabilise the prices of flour and it had agreed to do so.

Zaidi, quoting the Sindh food and agriculture minister, said rats had devoured 0.3 million tonnes of wheat. Another ECC member said it was informed on the Sindh Assembly floor that a bigger quantity had been devoured by rodents.

Economic Affairs Minister Hammad Azhar revealed during the meeting that flour mills were acquiring wheat from the government at subsidised prices and selling it in the market at expensive rates.

“There is a need to look into the distribution of wheat,” he said pointing out that flour mills in Punjab buy wheat on a large scale from farmers during the harvesting season and purchase it from the government through quota and other sources as well. “They [flour mills] then hoard the wheat.”

He also said there was no mechanism to check the use of wheat purchased by flour mills from the government. "There is no way to ascertain whether the wheat bought by the mills is grounded into flour or sold directly in the market at expensive rates," he added.

The ECC directed the National Food Security secretary to meet the four mill owners to address the matter.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2052485/2-0-3m-tonnes-wheat-sindh-devoured-rats/

FARMERS FEAR FURTHER DECLINE IN COTTON PRODUCTION

By Imran Rana Published: September 10, 2019

FAISALABAD: Agriculturalists and farmers are afraid that cotton production may decline further this year as the sector is plagued by wrong policies of federal and provincial governments.

Cotton production and area under cultivation is also falling primarily because growers have shifted to sowing sugarcane and wheat which guarantee minimum support price.

In the previous fiscal year 2018-19, area under cotton cultivation dropped to 2.37 million hectares compared to 2.7 million hectares in the preceding year – a reduction of 12.1%. Production of the crop also witnessed a decrease of 17.5% to just 9.9 million bales during the last fiscal year.

In 2017-18, cotton production reduced to 11.94 million bales from 13.96 million bales in 2014-15.

Government has set a target of 15 million bales of cotton for fiscal year 2019-20, which experts claim would be missed again.

Additionally, production of cotton has also endured a hit from pest attacks.

A few months ago, Prime Minister Imran Khan took notice of the declining cotton production and directed the agriculture department to resolve the issue. However, neither the provincial government of Punjab nor the federal government has done anything to improve the situation so far.

A meeting, held to fix minimum cotton support price of cotton at Rs4,000 per 40 kilogram, ended inconclusively last week.

Punjab produces 65% of total cotton majority of which is produced in Southern Punjab. Both Bt and non-Bt cotton varieties are cultivated in Pakistan, however, the share of Bt cotton is 80%.

While talking to The Express Tribune, cotton experts said that situation of textile industries was worsening day-by-day due to lower availability of local produce due to which, the industry had to rely on imports.

“Textile mills had made deals in advance with ginners at relatively higher prices but actual price of cotton at the time of harvesting was less which resulted in losses for them,” Hameed Ahmad, an agriculture expert, told The Express Tribune. “On the other hand, cotton farmers had also taken advances from local ginners and middlemen and they also suffered losses due to low prices.”

Talking about crops of Sindh, he added that the cotton plantations were hit by swarms of locust pests which destroyed some of the produce.

The key reason behind 30% reduction in cotton output was continuous decline in area of cotton production, non-feasibility of good seeds, low returns and lack of awareness in farmers regarding cotton production.

“Farmers are not getting good average yield per acre,” an official in the Punjab Agriculture Department commented. “Agriculture department has fixed a quota of 2.85 million acre land for production of 15 million bales of cotton.”

University of Agriculture Faisalabad Entomology Department Chairman Dr Jalal Arif shared plans to organise a national level seminar on September 20 to uplift cotton sector.

The meeting would be chaired by Jahangir Tareen as well as progressive farmers.

In southern Punjab, Lodhran, Khanewal, Multan and Muzaffargarh are major cities of cotton production and in central Punjab, Faisalabad, Gujranwala and Sheikhupura are cotton producing areas.

Dr Jalal added that diseases caused by whitefly and bollworm were adversely affecting cotton production.

“These insects damage the yield every season,” he lamented. “Every year, nearly four million bales are destroyed by pink bollworm and white fly.”

He further expressed sorrow that country lacked adequate technology to deal with these pests

He added that low price and yield had forced growers to shift to maize and sugarcane crops.

According to him, this was the prime time for government to deal with falling cotton production.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2053083/2-farmers-fear-decline-cotton-production/

PFA ISSUES WARNING TO 27 DAIRY PRODUCTION UNITS

RECORDER REPORT SEP 12TH 2019 LAHORE

The dairy safety teams of the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) on Wednesday fined two food business operators and served warning notices for improvement to 27 others while checking the big dairy production units across Punjab.
PFA Director General Muhammad Usman said the PFA watchdog teams have inspected 30 production units including 20 in Lahore Zone, five in Rawalpindi, three in Muzaffargarh and two in Multan Zone. He said the purpose of the inspection was ensuring the provision of pure and nutritious milk for people as per the vision of Prime Minister and CM Punjab.
During the inspection, the PFA had collected 13 samples of dairy products and sent to accredited laboratories for further analysis. He said the PFA would share the results of laboratory report for public interest after completing the sampling campaign. He added that the PFA would not be allowed any failed dairy units to sell their products in the market and removed its stock from the market as per the standard operating procedures. Muhammad Usman said the authority is checking all food items/ products according to annual sampling schedule for 2019.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190912516820/

BAN ON EXPORT OF WHEAT, FLOUR IMPOSED

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN SEP 13TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The federal government has imposed a ban on export of wheat and wheat flour with immediate effect to control its price in domestic market. On September 11, 2019, Commerce Division issued amendment under the heading (wheat and wheat flour) of Export Policy Order, 2016 to formally impose a ban on export of wheat and wheat flour. Earlier, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research also issued a notification and circulated it among all stakeholders.
On July 17, 2019, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet headed by Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance, Economic Affairs and Revenue, Dr Hafeez Shaikh accorded approval to ban wheat and flour, after it was observed that data provided on the availability of wheat stock does not appear realistic as the data showed that there is no shortage of wheat in the country and sufficient wheat is available.
On July 25, 3019, federal cabinet ratified by the federal cabinet in its meeting on July 25, 2019 and directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to coordinate with the provincial governments to ensure that sufficient quantities of wheat are released to flour mills in order to ensure that there is no shortage of wheat flour in the market.
Cabinet also took cognizance of undue increase in the price of Atta/Roti on the pretext of shortage of wheat stocks and desired that National Food Security and Research Division, in collaboration of Provincial Agriculture Departments, must conduct extensive field research/survey to ascertain the factual position on the ground, both in urban/rural areas and submit its report to the cabinet with 15 days.
Wheat stocks as reported by Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO) and provincial food departments were at the level of 7.418 million tons as on August 29, 2019 as compared to 10.776 million tons of corresponding period of last year.
International wheat prices as reported by the International Grains Council on August 28, 2019 were at

the level of $ 203 million per ton for Hard Red Winter Wheat and $ 208 per ton for US No.2 Soft Red Winter. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on August 22, 2019 reported that local prices of wheat were Rs 361.9/10kg and wheat flour at Rs 425.6/10 kg.
Department of Plant Protection (Ministry of National Food Security and Research) has reported that from the period August 1, 2018 to August 25, 2019, around 17655 tons of wheat products were exported through sea and land route.
There is also an impression that the provincial governments have failed to control wheat and wheat flour prices as speculators are extremely influential and are selling flour at higher prices. Provincial Food Departments do not have powers to shut down flour mills for violating prescribed rules.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190913517019/

PBIF SEEKS INCENTIVES, SUPPORT PRICE FOR COTTON GROWERS

RECORDER REPORT SEP 13TH, 2019 KARACHI

President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum (PBIF), Mian Zahid Hussain has suggested that government should consider incentives and support price for the cotton growers which may attract farmers resulting in enhanced production.
Expressing concern over low cotton production which will become a threat to the textile industry, he said that reduced cotton production will result in imports which will increase the cost of doing business; therefore, steps should be taken in the right direction.
Farmers are losing interest in cotton crop due to increasing problems which is resulting in a reduction in area under cultivation and production which can become a problem to largest urban employment and largest export sector of textile, he said.
He noted that area under cultivation dropped by 12.1 percent in 2018-19 while production fell by 17.5 percent. Last year's cotton production remained at 9.9 million bales which were 11.94 million bales in 2017.18 and 13.96 million bales in 2014-15, he said.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190913517071/

PAK, CHINA JOIN HANDS TO PROMOTE COTTON INDUSTRY

RECORDER REPORT SEP 13TH, 2019 BEIJING

The third Sino-Pak International Conference on Innovations in Cotton Breeding & Biotechnology just concluded in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, reports China Economic Net. The conference attracted over 100 experts and scholars on cotton field. They made communication and discussions on related aspects, such as, cotton germplasm, transgenic cotton against insect and herbicide, transformation technology as well as the mechanized planting and picking of cotton.
The experts of both countries agreed the China-Pak Joint Laboratory for Cotton has made plentiful achievements after three years' construction. They hope to further deepen cooperation field and will strive to promote the development of the two countries' cotton industries.
The success holding of the third Sino-Pak International Conference on Innovations in Cotton Breeding & Biotechnology not only pushes ahead the sci-tech communication and cooperation in agriculture between the two nations, but also injects new vitality for the Belt and Road Initiative. The third Sino-Pak International Conference was jointly sponsored by the Biotechnology Research

Institute of Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, MNS-University of Agriculture and Bahauddin Zakariya University.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190913517077/

PETITIONS REGARDING GIDC LEVY TO BE HEARD ON SEPTEMBER 19TH

TERENCE J SIGAMONY SEP 14TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

A three-member special bench of the Supreme Court will start hearing 107 pending petitions regarding Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) levy from September 19. The bench headed by Justice Mushir Alam and comprising Justice Faisal Arab and Justice Mansoor Ali Shah will take the cases of textile mills, cotton mills, sugar mills, ceramics companies, chemicals, CNG filling stations, match factories, cement companies and aluminum industries , which have been pending since 2017.

The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on May 31, 2017 had rejected a set of petitions challenging the validity of the GIDC Act 2015 on grounds that the transgression of legislative authority by the federation does not qualify as a breach of fundamental rights of citizens and therefore the petitioners before the high court were not aggrieved persons within the meaning of Article 199 of the Constitution and thus have no locus standi to challenge the validity of the act.

The PHC in its judgement had also held that when Article 142 (a) was read with Article 154 of the Constitution, it became evident that the Parliament had the exclusive authority to legislate on Entries in Part II of the Federal Legislative List of the Constitution.

Earlier, the GIDC Act was approved by the National Assembly in December 2011 imposing cess on gas consumers, other than the domestic sector, to develop infrastructure for a number of projects including the Iran-Pakistan Pipeline Project, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline Project and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project and for price equalization of imported alternative fuels including LPG (liquefied petroleum gas).

In April 15, 2015, the apex court rejected the federal government's petition seeking review of its Aug 22, 2014 verdict and clarified that the collection of the then over Rs 100 billion under the GIDC Act was not liable to be refunded to the industrial consumers of gas from whom it was recovered. The then GIDC law had legalized the cess recovery from the non-domestic consumers, mainly industries.

Later, on the expiry of the GIDC Ordinance, the National Assembly and Senate passed the GIDC Act 2015 and repealed the GIDC Act 2011. The GIDC controversy gained attention when the government on 28th August promulgated the GIDC (Amendment) Ordinance 2019 with an offer to grant Rs 210 billion financial amnesty to big businesses including fertilizer, general industry, power generation companies, K-Electric and CNG sector. However, due to the pressure of opposition parities and media, the ordinance was withdrawn on September 6.

Attorney General for Pakistan Anwar Mansoor Khan on September 6 on behalf of the federal government had filed an application before the apex court stating that the cases relating to the GIDC Act 2015 involved huge sums of government revenue. It stated the matter has been pending since 2017 and petitions had been filed against the PHC judgement.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190914517650/

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY: BADIN'S THREE-DAY DONKEY FEST ATTRACTS ENTHUSIASTS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY

By Sameer Mandhro Published: September 14, 2019

KARACHI: They came in all shapes and sizes. White ones. Grey ones. Brown ones. Even black ones, although they turned out to be a darker shade of brown on closer inspection.

It was the donkeys' day and enthusiasts from across the country had gathered in a large field in Tando Ghulam Ali – a small town in Badin district some 70 kilometres from Hyderabad – which has been hosting the annual three-day donkey festival for the past 70 years. Most of the traders hail from Karachi, Badin, Thatta, Tando Muhammad Khan, Tando Allah Yar, Tharparkar and adjacent districts of Sindh.

The donkeys are given a persona of their own which is often reflected in their unique names much to the amusement of visitors. A few names like atom bombs, rocket launcher, F-16, Kalashnikov, Madhuri, Sheela, Dilpasand, Pawan and Sindh Malook, stand out among the herd.

"It [Madhuri] was black last year and this time it's white and I like the name it got this time," said Allah Rakhio, a buyer in the market. He said that he has been visiting the place for the past 10 years and interacting with various donkey-lovers. "It also gives me in-depth information on how people in other areas care for these innocent animals," he explained.

A few local species are commonly found in the market such as *Lasi*, *Irani*, *Laari*, *Thari*. These are local breeds which, according to visitors, are found across the province.

Increase in prices has also affected the donkey market much to the dismay of buyers. The minimum price this year remained at around Rs20,000 for a common donkey and the maximum price went as high as Rs200,000.

The market is set-up on a plot of four-acre land which is the property of MNA Mir Ghulam Ali, the son of former Sindh chief minister Mir Bandeh Ali Khan.

The district government officially patronises the market, allowing organisers to collect two-per cent charges on sale proceeds and facilitate visitors by fixing tents and water tanks.

"I visit this market every year," said Mohammad Ali, a resident of Lyari. "I learnt [at the market] how many species of donkeys are found across Pakistan," he added.

Ali said that many donkey lovers and those who want to purchase young foals usually wait for this market to set up. “This is an awesome place where you find your choice easily,” he explained.

Sharing details of the market’s history, a local journalist, Mohammad Suleman, said that it was just like a festival and has been arranged for years. “No one is sure when it actually started – might have been a century ago. Some elderly traders say it’s the only donkey market in the Subcontinent,” he said.

Suleman said that people who would visit Matli, Tando Ghulam Ali and its adjacent areas to attend mourning processions during Muharram used to come from far-flung areas. “There was no transportation and the only form of conveyance those people had was the donkey,” he narrated. “Hundreds of donkeys were chained in an area and people started selling and purchasing donkeys and now, it continues.”

Visitors at the market complained that the venue of the market was far from major cities such as Hyderabad and Karachi.

“Donkey markets should be patronised by the government and buyers and sellers must be supported,” said Muhammad Anwar, a visitor from Thatta. “There is an opportunity for people who want to invest in this field. We can export donkeys to China and other countries,” he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2056027/1-donkey-kong-country-badins-three-day-donkey-fest-attracts-enthusiasts-across-country/

WOMEN COTTON PICKERS’ WORKING CONDITIONS DISCUSSED

RECORDER REPORT SEP 15TH, 2019 HYDERABAD

Labor and civil society leaders have raised concern over poor working condition of women cotton pickers. This discussion was organized by Sindh Community Foundation and led by the Javed Hussain, Executive Director of Sindh Community Foundation (SCF), Mahnaz Rahman of Aurat Foundation Karachi, Badar Soomro of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.
Javed Hussain said on the occasion that Pakistan is the fourth largest producer of cotton in the world where approximately 1.5 million smallholder farmers rely on cotton for a living. Cotton is the country's most widely cultivated crop (grown on 15% of land) and an important raw material for its growing textiles industry, representing 8.5% of GDP (All Pakistan Textile Mills Association, 2018). He further added that cotton is grown mostly in two provinces that account for 99% of production - Punjab and Sindh. Cotton picking is primarily carried out by women, which is considered a cash job. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data for 2010, there are 4.9 million casual and hired farm workers in Sindh of which approximately 1.7 million are women.
Javed further shared that in Sindh more than 10 districts are cultivating cotton including Sanghar, Matairi, Ghokti, Hyderabad rural, Tando Allayhar Mirpurkhas, Kahaurpur, Banazirabad. Although

they contribute to the growth of textile industry, they remain poor and are exploited as their wages are extremely low. They are not given health insurance or medical compensation.

Aisha Agha, Programme Officer SCF said that the women cotton pickers are unaware about labour rights and are not united for collective bargaining and negotiation for wage fixation. She further shared that SCF worked with 3,000 cotton pickers in 30 villages in Matiari District. The project trained 30 village groups on labour rights, socio-economic rights, and rights to association and collective bargaining skills.

As a result, through increased rights awareness and collective bargaining, the groups secured a 50% increase in their wages - from 200 rupees per 40kg of cotton picked (average amount picked in a day), to 300 rupees - which is still lower than the current market wages.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190915518006/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEP 16th TO SEP 22nd 2019

AGRICULTURE: LOVE THY FARMER

Mohiuddin Aazim September 16, 2019

Farmers buy their inputs retail and sell their produce wholesale. The retail buying of inputs is inclusive of freight and raises their cost of production. The bulk selling of their produce, minus the cost of transport and often on forced conditions, reduces their margins.

Ideally, the IT revolution should have changed this situation: by now, farmers should have been able to buy in bulk and sell directly to smaller groups of consumers. But to make that happen, provincial governments should have taken the lead and federal authorities should have facilitated them. That is nowhere in sight. Farmers continue to suffer.

Support prices are fixed for major crops to ensure fair returns to growers. But those support prices are never adhered to. Farmers have to grease the palms of corrupt officials to get sale proceeds calculated at support prices that effectively reduces their returns.

More often than not industries refuse to buy wheat and sugar cane at officially fixed minimum prices. Growers have to sell their produce at so-called market prices while governments watch their helplessness in criminal silence. When it comes to perishable agricultural produce like fruits and vegetables, the situation gets worse the produce is in abundance. Farmers have to sell them at throwaway prices.

Sometimes, a few dejected farmers choose to burn their produce rather than sell them for nothing. What can be done to ensure fair returns to our six million farmers in a manner that does not result in abrupt or excessive price hikes for the consumer or industrial buyers?

Block-chain technology might offer a solution. How about developing a block-chain ledger to record and update the status of crops from planting to harvest, storage and delivery? Block-chain-powered agricultural trade holds promise for millions of farmers who can find niche markets for their produce. In China, it took off in late 2017 and has since been growing gradually.

Technology-driven premium produce marketing is another area where opportunities await innovative farmers. Sugar cane with higher sucrose content is sold at higher rates. Premium quality basmati rice also sells at better prices. Cotton of better staple length also fetches higher rates. And the same is the case with other crops. Online marketing platforms offering better quality crops can help growers earn more and ensure timely and hassle-free delivery to the buyers. After the launch of the 5G mobile internet facility, such online marketing will become a lot easier. Zong has already conducted 5G tests and once the 5G internet service is available to all mobile phone users (161m as of June), farmers will have no problem in finding niche markets and targeted consumers for their premium agricultural produce.

Even ordinary food grains' marketing from farm to industries and trade centres can be planned and executed with the cooperation of provincial governments. Why is it that delays in the official procurement of wheat from farms damages large quantities in traditional storage points whereas flour mills suffer shortages in supplies? Just a legal nod from provincial authorities can allow wheat farmers to dispose of a certain percentage of freshly harvested wheat to flour mills of their choice using online trading platforms. That will save them the hassles of transporting wheat to faraway city centres and flour mills can make trading agreements with wheat growers of their choice.

The Agriculture Marketing Information Service, an online service of the Punjab government, keeps farmers posted about price trends in food commodity markets. Other provinces can follow suit as price discovery is the first step towards revolutionising farmer-friendly online marketing of crops and other agricultural produce.

Futures trading of wheat, sugar cane and Irri-6 rice at the Pakistan Mercantile Exchange also provides farmers with a window to keep track of price trends. But for the online trading of food crops using a complete supply chain — right from harvesting to delivery — they need to partner with solution providers at each stage. And finally, they will have to join hands with payment-solution providers like phone companies.

Many of our farmers need to be educated before they can enter online business on a sustainable basis. That is also an area where provincial governments and experts of marketing and payment solutions should help them. Farmers' education and awareness programmes by Engro and Karandaaz are impressive. They should think about extending the scope of these programmes. In addition to helping farmers do better at farms, they should also educate them on how to capture specialised segments within commodity markets.

The federal government's agricultural revolution package is wanting on many counts. Officials of Sindh and Balochistan governments complain they don't know exact details of this programme. The revamping of commodity marketing and supply chain is part of the programme. One hopes it will start sooner than later. But on the ground, nothing has happened so far.— MA

https://www.dawn.com/news/1505441/agriculture-love-thy-farmer

PRICES OF CHICKEN MEAT, PULSES AND VEGETABLES UP IN RETAIL MARKET

AMJAD ALI SHAH SEP 16TH, 2019 PESHAWAR

A considerable increase in prices of live chicken/meat, pulses, vegetable, fruits and others was witnessed in retail market, according to a survey conducted by Business Recorder here on Sunday. The survey noticed price of live chicken/meat has crossed double century as available at Rs211 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs185 per kilogramme, showing an increase Rs26 per kilogramme in the retail market. However, price of farm eggs was remained unchanged as available at Rs100-110 per dozen.

Cow meat is available at Rs350 and 420 and Rs450 against the price of Rs270 per kilogramme. Mutton beef priced at Rs850 per kilogramme. According to the survey, the price of sugar has decreased at Rs76 per kilogramme which was selling at 80-82 per kilogramme in the previous week. Similarly, good quality gram flour (baisen) was available at Rs100-120 per kilgoramme, while other being sold at Rs80-90 per kg in local market.

A noticeable increase in prices of pulses was also witnessed in retail market, as good quality rice (sela) is being sold at Rs150 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs140 per kilogramme, according to the survey. Toota rice is being available at Rs70-80 per kilogramme. Dal mash is being sold at Rs170-190 against the price of Rs160 per kilogramme.

Rs10 per kilogramme increase was witnessed in price of big-size white channa as available at Rs140 per kilogramme against the price of Rs130 per kilogramme in the previous week. Similarly, Rs20 per kilogrmmme surge was noticed in price of red-bean as being sold at Rs150 per kilogramme against the price of Rs130 per kilogramme in the last week.

However, price of white lobiya has decreased at Rs130 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs140 per kilogramme in the last week. Moonge, is being sold at Rs150 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs140 per kilogrmame in the last week, while dal chilka (green) was being sold at Rs140 and Dal Chilka (Black) being sold at Rs130 per kilogramme.

Price of gram flour (baisen) has also decreased at Rs130 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs120 per kilogramme in the previous week. Fruits are staple food, which had become costlier and complete reach out from purchasing power of common man. As per survey, apples are being sold at Rs140-150 per kg, peach at Rs120 per kilogramme, mangoes within range of Rs80 and Rs100, apricot at Rs150-160 per kilogramme, banana at Rs70-80 per dozen, black-coloured plums at Rs100-120 per kg, grapes are being sold at Rs200 per kilogramme, mukesh melon was being sold at Rs150-200 per piece with different size and guava was available at Rs80-100 per kilogrmame.

The survey noticed that price of ginger has increased at Rs400 per kilogramme which was selling at Rs300 per kilogramme in the previous week. Similarly, the price of garlic had also gone up at Rs280 per kilogramme against the price of Rs180-200 per kilogrmme in the last week.

Tomatoes are being sold at Rs50-60 which was selling at Rs40 per kilogrmme in the last week. Onion was priced at Rs70-80 per kilgoramme against the price of Rs50 per kilogramme in local market. According to the survey, cucumber is being sold at Rs60 per kilogramme against the price of Rs40 per kilogramme. Green chili was available at Rs120 per kilogramme. Lemon is being sold at Rs100 per kilogram which was selling at Rs120 per kg in the last week, it added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190916518153/

CCOTTON REVIE: RAISE IN PRICE ATTRIBUTED TO IMPOSITION OF ST

NASEEM USMAN SEP 16TH, 2019 KARACHI

The prices of cotton increased by Rs 200/per maund. The prices of cotton increased in international market due to decrease in the intensity of America and China trade conflict. The prices of cotton increased due to imposition of sales tax on cotton as a result of which there is uncertainty in the ginning sector.

In the local cotton market during the last week the prices of cotton increased by Rs 150 to Rs 200 due to the interest of spinning and textile mills in buying and decrease in the supply of Phutti.

The prices of Phutti increased by Rs 50 to Rs 100 per 40kg during the week because the cotton picking was stopped due to the Muharram holidays. The trading remains slow but after the increase in supply of Phutti after Thursday the trading volume also increased. The rate of Phutti in Sindh remained low due to the rains. The rate of cotton in Sindh is in between Rs 7700 to Rs 8150. The rate of Phutti is in between Rs 3300 to Rs 3650 while the rate of Khal and Banola remained low.

The rate of cotton in Punjab is in between Rs 8350 to Rs 8650 due to high quality while the rate of Phutti is in between Rs 3400 to Rs Rs 3850 per 40 kg. The rate of cotton in Balochistan is in between Rs 8300 to Rs 8350 per maund while the rate of Phutti is in between Rs 3900 to Rs 4300 per 40kg. The rate of cotton in Balochistan has increased by Rs 200 to Rs 300. The Spot Rate Committee of Karachi Cotton Association has increased the rate of cotton by Rs 100 per maund and closed it at Rs 8200 per maund.

Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum Naseem Usman told that due to the news of decreasing of trade conflict China and America the trend of increase in the prices of cotton was seen in international cotton market.

According to the weekly report of New York cotton there is a decrease in the export and increase of three American cent was witnessed in the Rate of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) of USDA while the rate of cotton increased in China and India. The increasing trend was seen in the prices despite negative monthly report because ice is breaking in trade conflict between China and America.

Naseem Usman said that during the last week rains cotton crop was effected in cotton growing areas especially standing crops in Sindhi were more hit by rains as compared to Punjab. The quality and quality both were effected. On the other hand news were coming of attack of viruses and insects on crop especially Milli Bug, Pink Bollworm and White Flies.

The agriculture officers are giving directions to the farmers that they should use insecticide. It is expected that this year cotton crop will be 12.0 million bales while some people related to cotton crop are saying that crop will be less. Up till now these all are estimates but real estimates will come in first week of October.

Moreover, to increase the cotton production and bring modernity in technology third international conference between China and Pakistan was concluded in China last week. According to China net the conference was attended by more than 100 cotton experts. The success of the conference will not only increase the cooperation between the two countries as well as scientific and technical ties will also be strengthened.

President of Pakistan Businessman and Intellectual Forum (PBIF) Mian Zahid Hussain has demanded from the government that government should fix the support price of cotton inorder to increase the production of cotton in the country. After the announcement of fixing the support price farmers will take interest in increasing the production of cotton. The textile sector is suffering due to the less cotton production and they spend foreign exchange to import cotton from abroad due to which our economy is in loss.

The FBR has imposed 10 percent sales tax which is paid by textile sector through ginners due to which there is uncertainty in the market, especially uncertainty prevails among ginners because mills are not cooperating. In this situation ginners had to arrange money and they blocked their money. Ginners who don't have the capacity to arrange money are facing problems.

Chairman PCGA Mian Mahmood Ahmad had talked to the chairman FBR and related officials a few days ago in which they assured him that 10 percent sales tax will be directly collected from mills but up till no notification was issued in this regard. In this situation, the ginners were not happy.

Elections were held to elect 15-member governing body of PCGA for the year 2019-20. After many years there was a tough contest between two big panels. The total number of voters was 696 ginners out of which 149 ginners are from Sindh and 547 from Punjab. The results were not announced till the filing of this report. Moreover textile sector is passing through extreme crisis time especially it is under extreme financial crisis.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190916518155/

FISHING FOR TROUBLE : SINDH GOVT'S PLAN FOR JETTIES HAS FISHERFOLK UP IN ARMS

By Razzak Abro Published: September 16, 2019

KARACHI: In a bid to recoup what it sees as lost revenue, the Sindh government has decided to regularise all 'illegal' jetties being operated privately along the coastal belt of the province. The move, however, has raised serious concerns among Sindh's fishing communities, who maintain these jetties have existed for decades to facilitate them.

There are, at present, as many as 42 private jetties operating along Sindh's coastline, according to provincial government officials. Most of them are located on the coast of Karachi in areas like Ibrahim Hyderi, Rehri, Shams Pir, Mubarak Village, Salehabad and the Baba and Bhit islands.

Sindh authorities believe that millions of rupees worth of fish caught daily is sold at these jetties bypassing the commission the government collects. As a rule, all business related to fish caught from the sea must be carried out through the Karachi Fisheries Harbour, where the government collects its 6.25 per cent commission. As a result, Sindh government officials say the jetties are inflicting a huge loss on the national exchequer and providing benefit only to certain individuals.

To put an end to this bypassing of the official commission, it was decided in a meeting presided over by the Sindh chief secretary to prepare a draft bill to regularise privately operated jetties. The bill will soon be presented before the Sindh Assembly for approval.

The decision to regularise privately operated jetties has been strongly pushed by the Fishermen Cooperative Society (FCS), which currently runs the official Karachi Fisheries Harbour jetty. Although the harbour's affairs are looked after by the Karachi Fisheries Harbour Authority (KFHA), the government body is currently renting out the jetty to FCS, which was formed in 1945 to ensure the welfare of fishing communities.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, FCS Chairperson Abdul Bar claimed that most of the privately operated jetties are owned and run by private fish factory owners. “Around 70 per cent of fish that is caught is sold through these jetties,” he insisted.

“These privately owned jetties do not have representation from any government body therefore no record is maintained about the fish that lands up there,” said Bar. “As such, we have seen that many fishing boats land their catch at these jetties to circumvent the official 6.25 per cent commission they have to pay to the government.”

The FCS chairperson also alleged that these private jetties allow fishermen to continue catching and selling fish during the months of June and July, when the government bans fishing to allow fish and shrimp to breed. “This is why we want these jetties to be registered with the government.”

However, contrary to the claims of the government and fisheries authorities, representatives of fishing communities insist that no commercial business takes place at the privately operated jetties. They maintain that the ‘traditionally set up’ facilities exist only to provide members of their communities a place to park their fishing boats. The jetties themselves, they add, are community-operated in the first place.

Fishing community leaders urged authorities to consult them before carrying out any such move and also to draw a distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘private’ jetties.

“We do not object to the regularisation of private jetties, but the term ‘illegal’ should not be used for all of them,” said Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum Chairperson Syed Mohammad Ali Shah. “The government must differentiate between private and traditional jetties as most of them were set up by fisherfolk to park their boats near areas they live in.”

Shah added that provincial authorities were being ‘misguided’ on the matter as no commercial activities take place on most of these jetties. He also urged the government to improve facilities at the community-run jetties or to establish new jetties in areas where fisherfolk actually live.

Another fishing community leader, Saeed Baloch, also expressed his reservations. “The government should ensure that funds meant for fishing communities’ welfare are judiciously utilised before taking any steps against private jetties,” he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2057280/1-fishing-trouble-sindh-governments-plan-jetties-fisherfolk-arms/

AGRICULTURE TOP PRIORITY OF GOVT, SAYS MINISTER

A OUR CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 16,2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Agriculture Minister Engineer Zamarak Khan Achakzai said on Sunday that promotion of agriculture sector is the top most priority of the government and comprehensive measures have been taken to boost this sector to uplift overall growth.

Calling agriculture a crucial sector for the province, he said it provides direct employment to a large number of people and greatly contributes in the GDP.

"Steps are underway to provide all basic facilities to growers and farmers so that they can increase yield production and have timely access to the market," the minister affirmed, adding that the issue of provision of maximum electricity to agri-tube wells would also be addressed on priority levels.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201909160117&EN_ID=11201909160039&EMID=11201909160019

AGRI DEPT BEGINS SEED DISTRIBUTION

SEPTEMBER 16,2019

FAISALABAD. The agriculture department has started the distribution of seed packets for the winter season under the kitchen gardening programme. According to sources from the agriculture department, each packet contains the seeds of eight vegetables including radishes, carrots, spinach, turnips and coriander and will be available for the general public until October 31. The kitchen gardening programme not only promotes a healthy activity but also provides 280 grammes of fresh vegetables daily. These vegetables are free of pesticides and fit for human consumption.

The vegetables can be grown in pots, plastic bags, crates, boxes, open spaces and even rooftops. The agriculture department has also started a special campaign to educate and impart training to people so that maximum benefits can be obtained from the kitchen gardening programme, sources added.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201909160200&EN_ID=11201909160065&EMID=11201909160028

EFFORTS ON TO CONSERVE SINDH’S RARE ANIMAL BREEDS, SAYS MINISTER

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent September 17, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Minis¬ter for Live¬stock and Fisheries Abdul Bari Pitafi has said that his department is making efforts for conservation of rare species of animals in Sindh and in this regard breeders and cattle pen owners are also being encouraged to seek knowledge about breeding and artificial insemination.

Development of the livestock sector was directly linked with breeding of animals, he said while speaking at a seminar on the ‘Sindh Livestock Breeding Act 2016’, which was organised at a local hotel here on Monday by livestock component of the World Bank-funded Sindh Agriculture Growth Project.

He said that data regarding different species of animals was being collected in order to know their exact numbers. According to an estimate, Sindh had seven million cows and 7.5 million buffaloes, he said, adding that objective of the seminar was to gather farmers on one platform.

Quality species of animals for meat and milk production were available in Pakistan and research work for conservation of red cow of Sindh was under way in 25 countries of the world, he said. This species of cow survived all kinds of conditions in Pakistan, he added.

The minister said Thari cow was also under research in India and Brazil, adding that the government was committed for promotion of livestock and dissemination of information among cattle breeders; this was aimed at increasing milk and meat production in the country to make it prosperous.

Besides, he said, the youth were also being encouraged in rural areas for cattle breeding in order to end unemployment.

Dispelling the impression that red Sindhi cow was facing extinction, he said it was available in large numbers in the province. He said that Sindh's animals had the potential to survive in the climatic conditions of Sindh whereas species from other countries did not survive under such conditions.

He said that Thari cow was also surviving in Sindh whereas animals from Australia, Brazil or any other country would hardly be able to live in those conditions. Red Sindhi cow's history dated back to Moenjodaro where its imprints were found, he added.

Mr Pitafi regretted that cattle breeders of Sindh went for insemination without research, but that trend was in fact posing threat to Sindh's animals. He urged cattle farmers to coordinate with the livestock department and opt for artificial insemination for conservation of those species.

He said that earlier no facility of artificial insemination existed in the department and establishment of that wing was a big step for breeding of animals. He said non-existence of the wing had prevented growth in artificial insemination.

The minister expressed the hope that with the wing's establishment, the livestock department of Sindh would make great strides to benefit veterinary doctors and cattle farmers. He said centres for artificial insemination were being established at the union council level. He said that unless breeding was given due attention, livestock sector could not make progress.

Speaking on the occasion, livestock and fisheries secretary Aijaz Ahmed Mahar said that efforts were under way to collect exact data of animals. He said Sindh had those species which outdid other animals of foreign countries in terms of meat and milk production. He said the Livestock Breeding Service Authority (SLBSA) had been established for development of breeding sector.

He said the authority would focus on breed improvement. He said rare species of bulls would be provided to farmers' committees in 153 villages of Sindh by the SLBSA.

Livestock Director General Abdul Qadir Junejo, Prof Dr Parshotam Khatri of the Sindh Agriculture University Tando¬jam, Dr Abdullah Sethar and Abdullah Arejo also spoke.

Earlier, talking to reporters, the minister said the establishment of the SLBSA was aimed at promoting milk and meat export. He said Pakistani breed of animals was becoming famous in different countries and their breeding was increasing. He said Sindh had 12 breeds that were not available anywhere in the world.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1505552/efforts-on-to-conserve-sindhs-rare-animal-breeds-says-minister

MANGO EXPORTS MAY TOUCH 120,000 TONNES: BMP

N H ZUBERI SEP 17TH, 2019 KARACHI

Secretary General (Federal) of the Businessmen Panel (BMP) and former Chairman on Horticulture Exports FPCCI, Ch Ahmad Jawad said that Pakistani mango crossed the export volume of 100,000 tonnes after the span of eight years and it is expected that export volume may touch around 120,000 tonnes before the closure of the season which will be completed by end of this month, comparatively last year it closed around 80,000 tonnes only.

Jawad said these figures do not include the unofficial trade with Iran, Afghanistan and beyond, the same figure of 100,000 tonnes was touched in 2011-12 after that the mango exports faced a sudden drop due to strict import conditions by the EU countries due to issue of fruit fly.

He was of the view that Pakistan needed to improve the ease of doing business not only internally but also externally. For example, the Middle Eastern airlines' fares for cargo shipments were up to 20 percent higher for Pakistani exporters than those for Indian exporters of mangoes.

In 2018-19, most of the mango shipments could not be loaded due to high temperature in Sindh, therefore, Sindh Government and PHDEC should establish chillers/cold storage facilities for mango exporters in Karachi. "Mango doesn't face only the cold storage problem, it faces a plethora of other issues due to which Pakistan does not export more than 5-7 percent of the total mangos produced," he said.

Pakistan could not introduce its mango in many of the western countries. "We export mostly to the Middle Eastern nations - more than 50 percent - and in western countries only people belonging to South Asia are familiar with our mango. Other communities are not aware of Pakistan's mango," he added. Jawad further said that to improve competitiveness, it needs to control the pests.

He said that there is a need to boost commercial varieties and introduce new ones. The entomologist stressed the need for increasing the area of cultivation and giving benefits to farmers.

"Right now, the middleman takes everything, hence, farmers should be made part of the export process." Similarly there is a gap between production of Sindhri and Chaunsa varieties. Due to which, there is a break in export of the two varieties, that is filled by India's Alphonso mango.

"We must be working on new varieties that can cover this gap and maintain market share for Pakistan," he added and said that there is also a need to improve the flood irrigation system in mango orchards and switch to drip irrigation.

Jawad briefed that this would not only save water but would also improve the yield and quality of the fruit. He urged the government to encourage farmers and provide them a direction.

On the other hand new mango belt - starting from Bhimber to Mirpur (Kashmir) right down to Gujrat and Sialkot are also getting louder in demanding attention for their variety of desi mango. "This variety is mainly used for local value addition (like pickle) but should be marketed globally as an organic variety," he said.

Kashmir's foothills escape frost which is the main threat to mangos. Both topography and sociology favour the fruit as most of the youth from this region resides outside Pakistan and the older ones take care of trees and organically maintain the orchards, he added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190917518287/

PTI GOVT SET TO LAUNCH 13 MEGA AGRI-PROJECTS

By Our Correspondent Published: September 17, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government is set to launch 13 mega projects across the country in an effort to give a fresh boost to the agriculture sector with assistance from China, announced Federal Minister for National Food Security Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan.

Talking to a delegation of China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) on Monday, the minister said Pakistan was lagging behind due to lower value addition in its products because of a lack of requisite technology. “A joint venture with China and adoption of best practices will help efficiently tap Pakistan’s agricultural resources,” he said.

Under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), both countries had gone beyond traditional levels of cooperation such as assistance in crop farming, cattle farming and mechanisation and were moving towards collaborating in food storage and exports, he said.

“This assistance will be mutually beneficial and bring the two countries closer,” Sultan added.

The delegation expressed the desire to hold the China-Pakistan Agricultural Cooperation Summit in Islamabad, in collaboration with the Chinese embassy in Pakistan, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc) and China Agricultural Association for International Exchange.

The delegation highlighted their eagerness to collaborate with Pakistan through the Pak-China Modern Agriculture Comprehensive Development project.

Pakistan’s Ministry of Food Security was processing a memorandum of understanding between Parc and CMEC, the delegation added.

Under the project, China would provide assistance in the relevant field through technical and financial support, the delegation said. “The collaboration will help advance the government’s objective of poverty alleviation.”

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2058064/2-pti-govt-set-launch-13-mega-agri-projects/

COTTON PRODUCTION FALLS BY 26PC

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana Updated September 19, 2019

KARACHI: The country’s cotton output faces a shortfall of 0.664 million bales or 26.41 per cent compared to same period last year, according to official figures released on Wednesday.

The production shortfall, recorded at the initial period of the season (2019-20) up to Sept 15, is unlikely to be fulfilled during the remaining period, observed cotton analyst Naseem Usman.

“It is an alarming situation which will directly impact country’s GDP and also put pressure on country’s foreign exchange reserves because huge quantity of around 3-4m cotton bales will have to be imported to meet the shortfall,” he added.

Further, Pakistan Cotton Ginners’ Association (PCGA) Chairman Mian Mahmood Ahmed said the promised incentives to cotton growers for achieving higher cotton production target were never released by the government.

The government had officially announced to fix indicative price of Rs4,000 per 40kg for phutti (seed cotton) to encourage growers to bring more area under cotton cultivation. However, the government failed to set the price at announced level.

Similarly, he said that despite agreeing during the several high-level meetings to engage Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) for the procurement of around 0.5m bales to stabilise cotton prices in the market, the government also backtracked on this promise.

The government promised incentives after carefully taking in to account the crop situation including rapid fall in cotton cultivation area as growers were shifting to other crops, a leading ginner from Bahawalpur, Abdul Sattar told Dawn.

He added that much of the area under cotton cultivation has been replaced by sugarcane crop as the government was giving export subsidy to sugar producers. Similarly, growers had also shifted toward corn as they could get three crops in a single year.

Chandar Lal, member advisory committee of Karachi Brokers' Forum said climate change has also played havoc with cotton crop as high temperatures in Punjab are retarding cotton and resulting in lesser cotton balls. The output is further affected by pest attacks including Mealy Bug and Pink worm, he added.

He further said that atearlier in the season, cotton crop in Sindh had to face heavy rains and gusty winds, which resulted in shedding of cotton balls, therefore, the crop in the southern region, suffered quantitative as well as qualitative loss.

The cotton production in Punjab as of Sept 15, recorded a steep fall at 0.598m bales as against 0.980m bales produced in the corresponding period last year.

Cotton crop in Sindh also recorded a shortfall but fared better by producing 1.254m bales as against 1.537m bales recorded in the same period last year. This shows a shortfall of 0.283m bales or 18.42pc.

There is also a glaring difference in the pattern of fortnightly (Sept 1-15) arrival of phutti, which recorded a steep fall from 2.517m bales to 0.496m bales.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1506030/cotton-production-falls-by-26pc

COTTON PRICES SOAR TO RS9,000

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter September 19, 2019

KARACHI: The cotton prices maintained rising trend for the third day in a row on Wednesday on fears of short crop amid mounting uncertainty on the global front.

Spinners' chase for quality cotton, which was still in short supply, pushed lint prices further higher on each bout of buying and selling and at one stage it touched peak level of Rs9,000 per maund, brokers said.

The official cotton spot rates were revised upward by Rs150 per maund taking the total increase of Rs450 in the three-day run-up.

Both the Sindh and Punjab varieties recorded fresh gains as buyers covered up the position to meet their near-future requirements, they added.

The world leading cotton markets gave mixed trend with New York Cotton Exchange after recording gains for last three sessions came under profit selling. The Chinese and Indian markets were mixed to steady.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) raised its spot rates by Rs150 for the third consecutive day to Rs8,650 per maund.

The following major deals were reported to have changed hands on the ready counter: 2,200 bales, Shahdadpur, at Rs7,800 to Rs8,000; 2600 bales, Tando Adam, at Rs7,900 to Rs8,200; 1,400 bales, Sanghar, at Rs7,750 to Rs7,900; 1,200 bales, Nawabshah, at Rs8,300; 1,800 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,600 to Rs8,650; 1,600 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs8,600 to Rs8,675; 100 bales, Khanewal, at Rs8,775 to Rs9,000; 2,600 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs8,750 to Rs8,850; 1,800 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs8,750; 2,000 bales, Rajanpur, at Rs8,750 to Rs8,850; and 400 bales, Kasowal, at Rs8,750.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1506025/cotton-prices-soar-to-rs9000

ECC ASKS PROVINCES TO CARRY OUT WHEAT STOCK CHECKS

Khaleeq Kiani Updated September 19, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordina-tion Committee (ECC) of the cabinet on Wednesday expressed serious concern over ‘artificial hike’ in prices of key kitchen items, particularly wheat flour, and decided to call an urgent meeting with representatives of provinces so that corrective steps could be taken.

The ECC meeting presided, over by Prime Minister’s Adviser on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, also decided to continue with a ban on export of wheat and wheat flour and ordered a stocktaking of wheat in the provinces.

Sources said at least two senior cabinet members — Dr Shaikh and Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed — challenged the data presented by Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) regarding prices of wheat flour.

Dr Shaikh said he had received reports from many parts of the country, including the federal capital, that prices of wheat flour as well as other kitchen items like ghee, sugar and tea were on the rise. But there is no justification for the hike.

The railways minister opposed the view that prices were stable in the market. He said the prices of wheat flour had increased by Rs70-100 per 40 kg in recent days and he had himself bought a 20-kg bag of flour for Rs900 even though the shopkeeper did not charge any profit.

“We can fool ourselves but cannot satisfy the people with the official numbers,” Mr Ahmed was quoted as saying during the meeting. He proposed that wheat stocks in the provinces should be re-checked to ascertain how much quantities were actually in the godowns and how much had been “consumed by rats”. Another minister chipped in and said that a minister from Sindh had reported that 400,000 tonnes of wheat had been “lost to the rodents”.

The MNFSR representative had put Sindh stocks at about 800,000 tonnes. The official said that as of early this month the total stocks, at 7.4 million tonnes, were about 30 per cent less than in the same period last year (about 10.7 million tonnes). However, the current stocks were more than sufficient for local requirement.

Mr Ahmed said that consumption of wheat flour generally increased significantly from November onwards and hence there was a need to be vigilant about supplies.

The meeting was told that Punjab government was releasing wheat to millers at a rate of Rs1,375 per 40 kg who often procured more wheat than their grinding capacity, to be able to sell surplus quantities in the market at higher rates. Some millers earned a whopping Rs10-20 million a month by selling the commodity without actually grinding it.

Another view was that the provinces seldom cared for the decisions of the ECC and they could only be requested to implement its decisions. At this, the ECC "decided to propose to the provincial governments to undertake a fresh stocktaking of wheat in godowns to ensure adequate supplies would be available in the winter season".

Dr Shaikh instructed his own ministry "to call an early meeting of the National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) to assess the wheat and flour supply situation in different parts of the country, including the federal capital, in view of recent reports of rising prices of some core food items, including flour," an official statement said.

An official quoted the prime minister's adviser as saying that if the administration was unable to control prices in the federal capital, there should be some limit "to what should be expected from the provinces".

He said that because the government was extending a subsidy on wheat and the price of natural gas for tandoors had not been raised, there was no valid justification for a hike in the price of bread, etc. He also expressed his displeasure that despite payment of Rs1.5 billion in subsidy on gas, why the naan and roti prices had not come down.

Interestingly, the commerce ministry officially notified a ban on export of wheat and wheat flour on Sept 11 through an amendment to its 2016 export order even though the ECC had ordered the ban on July 17 which was ratified by the federal cabinet on July 25. The MNFSR had issued a notification for ban on export of wheat and wheat flour earlier, but that remained ineffective because of a legal lacuna.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1506049/ecc-asks-provinces-to-carry-out-wheat-stock-checks

SHC ORDERS SETTLING CLAIMS OF CANE GROWERS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter September 19, 2019

of a seven-member committee, constituted by the court to settle the outstanding dues of growers, within 10 days to sort out pending claims of sugar-cane growers.

The cane commissioner appe-ar-ed before the two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar on Wednesday, filed a report and contended that various claims had been settled.

However, some growers were present in the court during Wed-nes-day's proceedings as their claims had not been addressed.

One of the members of the committee was present in the court and the bench directed him to go through the report and point out names of growers at the next hearing who had not been paid their dues. The bench also asked the cane commissioner to convene a meeting of the committee within 10 days with written intimation to all the members of the committee so that after reading the report the committee can identify the growers whose claims were pending.

The cane commissioner in the report said that 1,119 applicants/claims were filed by the growers against the sugar mills over non-payment of dues and added that the committee had reconciled outstanding dues of 11 sugar mills.

However, the report said that eight sugar mills, including Ansar Sugar Mills Matli, Bawany Sugar Mills Talhar, Chambar Sugar Mills, Khoski Sugar Mills, Larr Sugar Mills Sujawal, Naudero Sugar Mills, New Dadu Sugar Mills and Tando Allahyar Sugar Mills said that since their bank accounts had been frozen on directives of the Supreme Court, they were unable to make payments.

It further said that 588 claims amounting over Rs580 million were pending against these eight sugar mills, while out of 34, nine claims were still pending against Bandhi Sugar Mills and 82 against Sakrand Sugar Mills.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1505942/shc-orders-settling-claims-of-cane-growers

ECC DECIDES TO CONTINUE BAN ON WHEAT, WHEAT FLOUR

ZAHEER ABBASI SEP 19TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The Econ-omic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet has decided to continue ban on export of wheat and wheat flour following growing criticism from all quarters on increase in the prices of staple food items. A meeting of the ECC chaired by Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh discussed the wheat situation in the country and also decided that provinces would be asked to undertake a fresh stocktaking of wheat in godowns to ensure that adequate supplies are available in the winter season.

An official on condition of anonymity stated that some members, particularly the minister for railways, emphasized that the government must provide relief to the people against price hike. The adviser on finance agreed with him and stated that he also received information about increase in prices of some commodities, the official added.

Sources said that the meeting was told that the government recently provided a subsidy of Rs 1.5 billion on gas supply to non-commercial tandoors to bring down the price of roti to previous level but the ECC noted with grave concern that there is no decrease in price of roti at clay ovens. He said if the government is unable to get implemented its decision in the federal capital, how it can enforce its decision in other parts of the country.

The meeting further instructed the Ministry of Finance to call an early meeting of the National Price Monitoring Committee to assess wheat and flour supply situation in different parts of the country, including the federal capital, in view of recent reports of rising prices of some core food items, including flour.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet approved separate proposals for payment of over Rs 1.5 billion subsidy charges to the executing agencies of the Prime Minister's Youth Business Loan Scheme as well as transfer of Rs 2 billion funds from the Cabinet Division to the Planning, Development and Reform Division as a technical supplementary grant.

The ECC considered a proposal by the Finance Division and approved a technical supplementary grant amounting to Rs 1.516 billion in Cost Centre KA-3012, Prime Minister's Youth Business Loan Scheme, from development expenditure of Finance Division in favor of development expenditure outside the Public Sector Development Program during the current financial year.

The ECC also approved a proposal by the Planning, Development and Reform Division for surrender of funds amounting to Rs 2 billion from its demand related to SDGs Achievement Program (SAP) in favor of the Planning, Development and Reform Division for the year 2019-20 as a technical supplementary grant to meet the requirements of important projects without affecting the overall PSDP allocation of the federal government.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190919518790/

GOVERNMENT URGED TO REVISIT MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE OF CROPS

RECORDER REPORT SEP 19TH, 2019 LAHORE

Agri Forum Pakistan Chairman Muhammad Ibrahim Mughal has urged the government to revisit the minimum support price of different crops and announce them afresh in line with increase in the prices of different agricultural inputs.

Mughal claimed that after the depreciation of Pakistani rupee against greenback, companies, providing different agricultural inputs including fertilizers, pesticides, diesel, water charges, have increased the prices of these items from 30 to 60 percent.

In such a case, there is a need to reevaluate the worth of these crops and minimum purchase price of wheat should be fixed at Rs1500 per maund, cotton (Phutti) at Rs5,000 per maund, Sugarcane at Rs350 per maund, coarse paddy at Rs1600 per maund, paddy basmati at Rs3200 per maund, corn at Rs1450 per maund, sunflower at Rs4000 per maund and canola at Rs4200 per maund.

Ibrahim Mughal was of the view that if the government fails to refresh the prices of these agricultural commodities upward, then at present our import bill for lentils, edible oil, fruit and vegetables is around Rs600 billion may reach Rs1000 billion per annum.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190919518838/

COTTON ARRIVAL DECREASES 26.41PC IN LOCAL MARKETS: PCGA

SEPTEMBER 19,2019

ISLAMABAD: Owing to lower pricing trend in domestic market, cotton arrival in the start of the current season had witnessed sluggish trend, going down by 0.365 million bales as compared the arrival of the corresponding period of last year.

According to the latest data released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginner's Association (PCGA), by September 15, 2019, the cotton arrival in the local markets decreased by 26.41% as about 1,852,408 cotton bales arrived against the arrival of 2,517,345 bales of same period of last year.

The slow crop arrival in the local markets was mainly attributed to the low pricing trend in the markets, coupled with delay in the announcement of the minimum support prices for the crop by the government.

The cotton arrival from Punjab also decreased by 38.95% as about 598,314 cotton bales arrived in the market from Punjab as against arrival of 980,139 bales of the same period of last year, it added.

Meanwhile, crop arrival from the Sindh Province including Balochistan also remained on the down track as it decreased by 18.42% and was recorded at 1,254,095 bales against 1,537,208 cotton bales of the period under review, the data reveled.—APP

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/09/19/15-page/801760-news.html

FERTILIZER INDUSTRY REFUSES TO WITHDRAW RECENTLY-INCREASED UREA PRICE

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN SEP 19TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

Fertilizer industry has reportedly refused to withdraw recently increased urea price by Rs 200 per bag, as the government scrapped GIDC Ordinance 2019 due to pressure from different stakeholders. On Wednesday, talks between Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce, Textile Industries and Production and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood and representatives of fertilizer industry remained inconclusive as both sides stuck to their respective positions.

The local fertilizer industry has increased urea prices by Rs 200 per bag taking the price to Rs 2210 per bag, after the u turn on GIDC Ordinance by the government. The government has already requested the Supreme Court of Pakistan to conduct early hearing of the GIDC case. This issue was taken up at the cabinet level where Abdul Razak Dawood was directed to hold a meeting with the fertilizer industry and bring the price of urea to Rs 1810 per bag.

"If feedstock price is reduced to previous Rs 185 from Rs 300 per MMBTU and fuel price raised from Rs 1021 to Rs 1180, it will reduce the selling price of urea by Rs 70-80 per bag, without any impact on revenue collection," said one the participants in the meeting. Insiders claimed that Prime Minister Imran Khan is not being properly briefed about the main reasons for the increase in urea price which is directly related to gas prices.

Fauji Fertilizer, one of the key urea manufacturers, in a letter to Abdul Razak Dawood, praised him for actively supporting the fertilizer industry on GIDC issue, which according to the fertilizer firm, was unfortunately derailed inspite of win-win situation for the government, the farmers and the industry. The fertilizer company further argued that a study of gas prices provided to the fertilizer industry worldwide reveals that Pakistani manufacturers are receiving the gas at almost double the price as compared with the Middle East. It is against the spirit of Fertilizer Policy 2001 and the farmers are the ultimate sufferers.

Gas forms the basic raw material for fertilizer manufacturing process and is consumed as fuel (20 percent) and feedstock (80 percent). The recent price revision (twice) led to higher cost of production, ultimately impacting on the end user (the farmers).

Fertilizer industry maintains that the price revision was driven by the quest for higher revenue targets without much deliberation in relation to its impact on end users (the farm community). The fertilizer industry believes that the impact on farmers can be minimized through reduction of gas price for fertilizer industry in the following manner: (i) the gas price increase should be minimal for feedstock, as its impact is four times more on the farmers and is further aggravated due to multifold financial load on old plants, since new plants are operating at a fixed price; and (ii) gas price slab(fuel) for fertilizer industry may be specified separately from other industrial sectors.

"We believe, in doing so, improvement in government revenue could be achieved through adoption of uniform fuel gas price across the board within the fertilizer industry. With this mechanism, if the government decides to pass on the benefit to the farmers, it may do so by reducing the feedstock price for the old plants," said the company secretary FFC, Brig Ashfaq Ahmed (retd).

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190919518805/

TAPPING THE POTENTIAL: K-P TAKES STEPS TO PROMOTE FISH FARMING

By Wisal Yousafzai Published: September 19, 2019

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) is not only famous for its tourist spots but is also known for different species of fish – a feature which attracts fishing enthusiasts from both home and abroad.

Popular varieties of fish available in K-P include rainbow trouts, brown trouts, schizothorax, rohu, mrigal carp, grass carp, silver trout and common carp, among others.

Different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Swat, Kalam Bahrain and Madyan have been famous for trout production.

However, after the insurgency in Swat from 2007 to 2009, most people were forced to abandon their trout-fish production businesses and move to other areas of the province. According to people who were once associated with the industry, militants regularly threatened fish farmers and demanded fish from them without paying anything.

Apart from the problems caused by militancy, the province experienced devastating floods in 2010 because of which the remaining fish farms were damaged. As a result, owners had to suffer huge financial losses.

Faqir Muhammad, who owns a fish farm in Bahrain, Swat, told The Express Tribune that he owned a farm before the insurgency took place but he was compelled to wind up his business.

“I had to lose my flourishing business because of the militants but now that peace has prevailed in the area once again, I have reestablished a fish farm which is currently doing very well,” he said. “With the reopening of the finishing industry in the province, people from all over the country, including foreign tourists, have started coming here to look for trout fish."

He further explained that per kilogram of trout fish is sold for Rs1,500 to Rs2,000, adding that he also supplies fish to difference restaurants and hotels which earns him an income worth Rs500,000 every year during the peak season.

According to a report by K-P's Fisheries Department, the province has a total production capacity of 1.4 million tons per year at a governmental level. The report further stated that private fish farms in the province produce an additional 300 million tons of fish per year.

Per the report, in 2015-16, the target for revenue was 53 million but only 48 million could be achieved. In 2016-17, the revenue target was set at 55 million and an impressive 63 million was achieved. In the successive financial year 2017-18, the revenue target was 70 million and 69 million was achieved. Meanwhile, from 2018 up to May 2019, the revenue target was 72 million and 70.2 million have so far been achieved.

Director-General Fisheries Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Khisro Kaleem said that in the Annual Development Programme (ADP), the cost of promoting carp fisheries in KP was set at 7 million but only Rs.3.719 million were allocated in 2018-19.

"In the ongoing development portfolio for the province, a project titled the "Strengthening of Fisheries Department in Merged Districts" is being planned which will cost Rs237 million," he said. "In this way, the government will not only be able to develop fishing farms in K-P but also in the merged districts, which will double the production capacity and bring more revenue."

Kaleem said that before the tenure of the PTI government, there were only 17 government-owned fish farms in the entire province but now there are 200 of them.

"Every year, fisheries contribute more than Rs70 million to the country's economy, therefore, it is a very important sector," he said. "The government has planned to establish trout villages in Malakand and Mansehra and funds have already been allocated for the project. Moreover, one fish farm has the potential of giving a job opportunity to more than 10 people."

He further added that the provincial government's focus is on tourism and we also want to promote fish farming and fish hunting tourism in K-P so that more people visit these places. The industry has the potential to reap multiple benefits.

"Earlier, trout fish was available in a few places but now people will be able to purchase it everywhere in Swat and other villages and cities in K-P," he said. "One will be able to get trout fish in every hotel of the province."

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2059726/1-tapping-potential-k-p-takes-steps-promote-fish-farming/

RICE MILLS ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCES PROTEST

By Our CorrespondentPublished: September 19, 2019

QUETTA: The President of Sindh Balochistan Rice Millers and Traders Association (SBRMTA) Haji Qamar Din said that the provincial government has failed to arrest killers of the slain association's president Muhammad Nawaz Mengal, therefore, rallies would be staged across Balochistan and Sindh.

He made the announcement on Wednesday while addressing a meeting, adding that the association would lock the rice units for an indefinite period until the provincial government arrests the killers of the former president.

“Government of Balochistan has failed to protect the province’s businessmen community. The investigation is completed over Haji Nawaz Mengal’s case but police and LEAs are reluctant to arrest the killers.” Haji Qamar Din said, urging CM, Home Minister and IG Police to take immediate action against the assassins.

He added that traders and businessmen are the backbones of the country’s economy but despite paying billions of rupees in taxes, they are not protected in the province.

“Terrorists received ransom from five traders of Balochistan and they are still threatening us from foreign numbers to withdraw from demands of protection,” Haji Qamar said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2059740/1-rice-mills-association-announces-protest/

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SYSTEM SIGNED INTO LAW

By Rizwan Asif Published: September 19, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Governor of Chaudhry Muhammad Sarwar has signed the law to abolish the current system of market committees and introduced a new agricultural marketing system.

The government will dissolve the 135 market committees via a gazette notification shortly, after the end of the current session of the Punjab Assembly on October 1. Constituting a new market committee within 60 days is mandatory under the law. The new law, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, will impose Rs500,000 fine and six-month imprisonment for breaching the new law in the markets.

The notified area of the new market committees will be confined within the four boundary walls of the market.

The procedures for paying the government dues and pension of the retired or late employees associated with the current committee have not been made clear. The new law clearly stated that the agribusiness market fees will be charged in line with the cost of the agricultural items. However, the percentage of the fee is still unclear.

The market committees will be dissolved next week but rules for completely enforcing the new law could not be formulated. A few days back, the Punjab governor had approved the Punjab Agriculture Markets Regulatory Authority Act (PAMRA) and the manuscript of the new law for gazette notification has been dispatched which will be issued shortly after the end of the Punjab Assembly session on October 1.

This will abolish Agriculture Produce Markets Ordinance 1978 and 135 market committees and their notified area.

As per PAMRA law, the new market committees will be formulated in 60 days and their jurisdiction will be limited to the four boundaries of their markets.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2059710/1-agricultural-marketing-system-signed-law/

ECC MAINTAINS BAN ON WHEAT EXPORT

By Shahbaz Rana Published: September 19, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Wednesday decided to continue with the ban on wheat export due to a continued hike in flour prices and also approved the diversion of Rs2 billion allocated for parliamentarians' schemes to its priority projects that were not fully funded.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet approved the transfer of Rs2 billion from the Cabinet Division to the Planning, Development and Reform Division as a technical supplementary grant, according to a statement issued by the finance ministry.

The funds were withdrawn from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Achievement Programme (SAP) in favour of the Planning, Development and Reform Division for current fiscal year 2019-20 to meet requirements of important projects without affecting the overall allocation of Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) by the federal government.

The SDG funds are meant for the parliamentarians' schemes. In the current fiscal year, the government has allocated Rs24 billion for such schemes. In the last fiscal year, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government had diverted funds from China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects to the parliamentarians' schemes.

For this fiscal year, the government has approved Rs701 billion for the federal PSDP. However, the release of funds remains slow and the planning ministry has so far authorised Rs84.4 billion for development spending.

The ECC approved separate proposals for payment of over Rs1.5 billion in subsidy charges to executing agencies of the Prime Minister's Youth Business Loan Scheme. Unlike the previous fiscal year, this year the government is not approving supplementary budgets due to a tough primary deficit reduction target.

However, the finance ministry cleared the file of PM's Youth Business Loan programme, which was built upon the programme of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

The ECC also thoroughly discussed the wheat situation in the country and in light of a briefing by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research decided to continue the ban on export of wheat and wheat flour.

However, despite the ban which was imposed in July, the wheat stocks remained low this year due to less procurement by Sindh, Punjab and Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) and smuggling of the commodity to Afghanistan.

Passco and the four provinces have so far procured only four million tons of wheat against the target of 6.25 million tons, according to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

The ECC asked provincial governments to undertake a fresh assessment of wheat stocks in storages in order to ensure that adequate supply was available in the winter season.

It instructed the Ministry of Finance to call an early meeting of the National Price Monitoring Committee to assess the wheat and flour supply situation in different parts of the country, including the federal capital, in the wake of recent reports of rising prices of some core food items, including flour.

In July this year, it approved the proposal to ban wheat and wheat flour export with reservations that the move may not stop outward flow of the staple commodity owing to its smuggling to Afghanistan.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research had requested the ECC to ban the export of wheat due to nearly 32% reduction in its stock. Wheat reserves stood at around 7.5 million tons as against 11 million tons at the same time last year.

A study by the Competition Commission of Pakistan has found that provincial price control laws lack teeth and cannot effectively check price hike and hoarding of essential commodities. It has advised the four federating units to bring new legislation and set up a single authority to nab profiteers.

The CCP has issued a policy note to the provincial governments weeks after sugar barons pocketed billions of rupees by increasing sugar prices despite having surplus stock and wheat flour prices also shot up.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2059701/2-ecc-maintains-ban-wheat-export/

PAKISTAN ACHIEVES MANGO EXPORT TARGET AFTER FIVE YEARS

RECORDER REPORT SEP 20TH, 2019 KARACHI

Pakistan has attained the mango export target after five years and achieved a record export volume of 115,000 metric tonnes during this season supported by high standard and aggressive marketing. Exporters said that Pakistani mango managed to get better price in the international market and earned some $80 million for the national exchequer during this season due to its high standard coupled with an aggressive marketing campaign by the Pakistani companies.

Waheed Ahmed, leading exporter and former chairman All Pakistan Fruit & Vegetable Exporters, Importers & Merchants Association (PFVA) has informed that some 115,000 tonnes mangos have been exported by mid of September as against export target of 100,000 tonnes for the current year.

Compared to the last year, this year there has been substantial increase both in volume and revenue. This year so far valuable foreign exchange worth of US$80 million has been generated by export of 115,000 tonnes of mangos. Export of mango would continue till mid of October and it's expected to exceed volume target of 130,000 tonnes by conclusion of the current mango season, he added.

Last year the production of mango was 1.3 million tonnes and export volume stood at 85,000 tonnes, while this year mango production was 1.5 million tonnes, he informed.

Waheed attributes the substantial enhancement in export volume of mango to an aggressive and ambitious marketing which included mango promotions in 25 different countries under the joint sponsorship of Pakistani foreign missions and PFVA.

During the promotions, Pakistani mango was launched in a unique way and the participants in these events praised delicious taste and specific aroma of the fruit.

Another favourable factor was good production of late variety of mango as well and despite climatic challenges, the price of mango remained stable at Rs75-85 per Kg on the level of farms while the exporters and management of PFVA kept their attention well focused on quality of mango and packaging standards which assisted Pakistan to maintain prominent position in the international markets, Waheed mentioned.

The export of mango has also enhanced due to an extra attention paid to the conventional Asian markets of UAE, Iran, Afghanistan, Europe and UK.

Talking about the production, he informed that mango production is being multiplied because farmers are developing mango orchards as per international standards and adopting modern techniques leading to production of high quality mango while chance of production of mango in KP has also been enhanced and in a period of 5 years.

It is expected to get huge production from the KP, which clearly reflects a bright future of Pakistan in terms of high Production of mangos. "To take advantage of these opportunities it is imperative to continue conducting effective mango promotion events and to enhance export of mango, logistic and warehouse facilities is a must," he suggested.

There is also a need to pay more attention to high value and huge potential promising markets of Japan, USA, South Korea and China to exploit potential of these markets a definite improvement in "appearance" of mango would be a key factor thus research would be essentially required in that context.

Export of mango is around 10-11 percent of the total export of the horticulture sector which can be further enhanced to 25 percent in next five years and thus export of mango can generate revenue up to $200 million, former chairman PFVA mentioned.

Pakistan exports 60 percent of mango through sea and 25 percent is being sent via land routes and 15 percent by Air. However, he said that, there are inadequate facilities to ensure smooth export via land & sea routes.

Fruits and vegetables are perishable commodities, highly sensitive to temperature and thus specific temperature is required to maintain its quality otherwise its quality quickly deteriorates rapidly posing a danger of rejection of an entire export shipment, he informed.

Scarcity of handling facilities at the airports for export of fruits & vegetables is highly concerning since the export consignments are kept in an open area, Waheed said and added that the exporters have sustained huge financial losses during the current rainy season in Karachi due to inadequate cargo storage facilities.

Similarly by establishing modern warehousing facilities in close proximity to the border areas of Afghanistan and Iran, problems encountered in export of fruits & vegetables can be reduced significantly providing an ease for generation of foreign exchange badly needed by the country, he suggested.

To enhance export by air, the national carrier (PIA) is required to enhance its cargo space capacity and upgrade its handling facilities particular related to this specific sector ie fruits and vegetables as due to limitation on availability of cargo space and number of flights the exporters have to rely heavily on foreign carriers and hence these airlines taking advantage of limitations of the national carrier enhance their freight charges according to their sweet wish, he mentioned.

Waheed has also attributed achievement of mango export target to the concerted efforts, national spirit and cooperation of the concerned govt organisations namely Ministry of National Food Security & Research, Ministry of Commerce, Department of Plant Protection, Customs, ANF, and private sectors. He stressed that the provincial governments and concerned departments to play an active role to contribute in export enhancement of this specific promising sector.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190920519111/

KCCI CHIEF FOR EXPLORING CHINESE SEAFOOD MARKET

RECORDER REPORT SEP 20TH, 2019 KARACHI

President Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI), Junaid Esmail Makda said, "China is a leading seafood importer, and Pakistan should not remain oblivious to the huge market of China. It should rather take this opportunity as a challenge and put its best and timely resolve all issues hampering this sphere of development." He said that with the expansion of CPEC to more and more countries, Pakistan could become a major world channel for petro-chemical trade and greatly stimulate its economic growth.

"Hence, the government has to prop up the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) to handle the expected high growth in trade and not to miss out on this great opportunity," he stressed while speaking at the concluding session of 9th Annual Sustainable Shipping, Logistics & Supply Chain Summit & Exhibition 2019 on Thursday.

He said that it was heartening to see that sense has finally prevailed and Pakistan has now renegotiated its trade terms with the Chinese. The Chinese, in turn, have now been convinced that a significant increase in exports from Pakistan's side is necessary in order to correct the gross imbalance in trade. "They appear convinced that the only way forward is to enhance trade on bilateral terms and with the notion that the Chinese would incrementally be placing export orders to Pakistan in different sectors henceforth, the logistics sector should now be prepared to handle a higher share of the load," he added.

He was of the opinion that with the next phase of the CPEC projects focusing on agrarian development leading to formation of Joint Ventures (JVs) and Chinese transfer of technology, Pakistan needs to put its house in order with respect to enhancing its supply chain efficiency and plug in the gaps which have hitherto restrained Pakistan from exporting to its maximum potential. "The main reason for Pakistan for being not able to enhance its fruits, vegetables and seafood exports is lack of proper warehousing infrastructure which includes cold chains, and cost effective transportation from farm/processing facility to the ports," he added.

He further stressed that Pakistan needs to develop industries in sectors like meat, sea food, fresh fruit and milk processing, metal ores and concentrates, medical instruments and marble with the help of Chinese technical knowhow and must have surplus enough to export these items to China and beyond. Moreover, infrastructural improvement will encourage Greenfield industrial setups, but it is the focus on high tech and value additive industries that will provide the real platform for competitive trade in the global economy.

The private sector should come forward by forming Public Private Partnerships or form JVs with the Chinese, who have become quite adept in logistics, Junaid Makda said, adding that KCCI, on its part, was fully prepared to play its role as a facilitator and matchmaker in such partnerships owing to its critical role in Karachi's business and its cordial relations with the Sindh government.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190920519204/

SHAH FARMAN INVITES CHINA TO INVEST IN K-P

By Our Correspondent Published: September 20, 2019

PESHAWAR: China was on Thursday urged to invest in agricultural opportunities in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, particularly olive plantation. This was suggested by Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) Governor Shah Farman on Thursday as Chinese Ambassador Yao Jing called on him at Governor House in Peshawar. The two discussed matters of mutual interests and relations between the two countries. Farman said that land of the province is quite fertile for agricultural including fruits and olive plantation. He suggested that China can cooperate and invest in fruits and olive plantation in the province. “K-P has huge potential in fruit and olive production as large swathes of barren land in the province can be utilized for this purpose,” he said, urging China to work with K-P to develop this idea further. The K-P governor further expressed his interest in holding a Minerals-based Road Show in China to attract Chinese investors. He said there are different kinds of valuable and precious minerals in K-P which requires the attention of investors.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2060648/1-shah-farman-invites-china-invest-k-p/

SALES TAX REGISTRATION MADE COMPULSORY FOR COTTON TRADERS

By Irshad AnsariPublished: September 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has made it mandatory for cotton traders to register themselves with the sales tax department while cotton ginners have been advised to submit invoices and details of their supply of taxable cotton products.

As per new tax rules, the cotton traders are required to furnish details pertaining to purchases and related sales tax returns on a monthly basis. Those failing to submit the details of purchases and supplies within the stipulated time frame would not be entitled to input tax refund claims.

On the other hand, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) may take action against such violations in line with the rules specified in the Sales Tax Act.

According to a notification issued on Thursday, sales tax returns must be filed by the traders instead of cotton ginners. Consequently, sale and purchase of cotton by non-registered traders has been banned and they wil

According to the notification, the cotton ginners will have to issue invoices as per Section 23 of the Sales Tax Act 1990. The invoice must state, among other details, the value of cotton supplied to the traders and the applicable sales tax.

Registered traders would have to ensure that payment challans against their purchase invoices bear details of supplies, the name of supplier, registration number and related returns will be submitted to the FBR.

Traders who fail to make tax payments in time would no longer be entitled to the input tax refund claims of the FBR until clearance of their dues along with additional taxes and penalties as per Section 33 and 34 of the Sales Tax Act 1990.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2060510/2-sales-tax-registration-made-compulsory-cotton-traders/

USAID SPONSORED SEMINAR ON OLIVE PLANTATION HELD

RECORDER REPORT SEP 21ST, 2019 ISLAMABAD

USAID-supported Centre of Excellence for Olive Research and Training (CEFORT) partnered with Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) and USAID Punjab Enabling Environment Project (PEEP) for organising seminar on sharing experiences on olive sector development, at NARC Islamabad today.

The Project Director "Promotion of Olive Cultivation on Commercial Scale in Pakistan" Dr Muhammad Tariq, Director General Agriculture Dr Abid Mehmood and BEE specialist USAID PEEP Asad Zahoor joined 60 olive sector stakeholders, researchers, entrepreneurs and expert on the occasion.

While addressing to the participants of the seminar, Dr Muhammad Tariq, Project Director Olive said that "This Seminar has brought olive researchers, experts, farmers and investors together to share experiences and enhance coordination for olive sector development in Pakistan."

The seminar has provided an effected opportunity to olive farmers, researchers and olive related institutions to strengthen mutual linkages besides sharing experiences from across the country. The activity will help stakeholders adopt a shared strategy for scientific research, best olive farming practices and value addition.

Dr Tariq further added that the pace of olive plantation and resources needs to be enhanced considerably and Precious foreign exchange could be saved if olive cultivation is stepped up in Pakistan and the country begins processing its own olive oil to help reduce oil imports. -PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190921519655/

YOUNG FARMERS FOR EFFICIENT WATER MANAGEMENT

RECORDER REPORT SEP 22ND, 2019 HYDERABAD

Young farmers on Saturday called for to adopt efficient water management practices to curtail water shortages. For this, they highlighted how to initiate preparation of land for smart agriculture, strengthening water management, crops productivity enhancement and grading of products to get proper rates.

They were speaking at a Certificate Distribution Ceremony after completing 15-day course titled "Foundation Course on Water Leadership for Youth" at a local hotel here, which was attended by growers, representatives of irrigation institutions and academia.

The event was organized by Research Development Foundation (RDF) presided over by Commissioner Mirpurkhas Division Adbul Waheed Shaikh.

The young farmers told participants how the world has adapted modern practices to use small pieces of lands and getting more products instead of performing traditionally. Sustainable and efficient use of irrigation water is only way out to get crops productivity and help in ending poverty in rural areas, they asked.

Abdul Waheed Shaikh, Commissioner Mirpurkhas division urged the farmers to utilise learning in agriculture and water management practices to face emerging challenges.

He suggested promoting smart agriculture and bringing change of farmer's behaviour through training courses for water users, most importantly young ones.

He said farmers should be sensitized about utility of crops and agriculture entrepreneurship to earn enough.

Ghulam Ali Jariko, Director Sindh Development Study Center (SDSC), Professor Muhammad Ismail Kumbhar focal person of Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Tandojam, Ghulam Mustafa Nangraj, deputy director Agriculture Extension Department, Pervez Banbhan representing Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (SIDA), Ashfaq Ahmed Soomro, Executive Director RDF and farmer representatives also spoke on the occasion.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190922519912/

GOVT SEEKS TO TAP MEAT EXPORT MARKET IN BALOCHISTAN

By Mohammad Zafar Published: September 22, 2019

QUETTA: The sprawling landmass of Balochistan, with its pasture and verdant patches, are suitable for the development of the livestock sector and allow the province to benefit from the lucrative meat export industry, particularly with the streamlining of the process of halal certification.

Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal shared these views while chairing a meeting to review the progress on province’s first-ever livestock exhibition which is scheduled to be held in the first week of October.

“The halal meat industry is worth $80 billion globally and Balochistan has the potential to make massive inroads in the international market through export of organic meat,” Kamal added.

Minister for Livestock Mitha Khan Kakar, Balochistan Chief Secretary Captain (retd) Fazeel Asghar, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Ejaz Raisani, Livestock Secretary Dostain Jamaldini and government officials were present in the meeting.

“Balochistan is blessed with clean drinking water and healthy fodder for cattle. Developing the sector will allow us to produce organic meat, which could provide a much needed boost to the province’s economy,” he said.

He also pointed out that the meat expo would be the ideal platform to attract local and foreign investors to the provincial livestock sector. It was unanimously decided in the meeting that the expo would be held over three days in the first week of October. He instructed authorities to ensure the necessary arrangements are made for the exhibition, including publicity through print and electronic media.

The provincial chief executive stressed the need of digitalisation during a visit to the archeology department of the University of Balochistan (UoB) the other day.

He was accompanied by provincial minister Mir Arif Jan Muhammad Hassani, the provincial chief secretary and the secretary for higher education, Abdul Saboor Kakar.

During the visit, UoB Vice-Chancellor Dr Javed Iqbal gave them a comprehensive briefing regarding the department and about those enrolled to study archaeology.

“Balochistan is a province rich in history and replete with heritage sites. The archaeology department should conduct extensive research on sites like Mehrgarh and Gandhara, which were cradles of civilization in antiquity,” Kamal said.

He stressed the need to use modern digitalisation techniques to enhance the effectiveness of their work. “The use of smart technology could also improve governance of infrastructure projects like the Quetta Smart City project,” he added.

Kamal also visited polytechnic institutes on the same day, where he underscored the importance of technical education in order to build human resources and contribute to the provincial industry.

“By developing polytechnic education, we could provide educated manpower to our commerce industry. This is how polytechnic institutes can make a pivotal contribution to the development of civil engineering in Balochistan,” the chief minister said while meeting students.

He visited Electronics, Mining, B-Tech, Mechanical, Electrical and Civil Engineering departments, and he was given a comprehensive briefing about the enrollment and curricula of each department.

Kamal directed the Higher Education Department Secretary Abdul Saboor Kakar to start an internship programme, where students work on mega projects so that they may get hands-on experience to meet the demands of the various fields.

The CM also visited the polytechnic institute for girls, where he was briefed about the giant strides the institute has made in contributing skilled employees to the burgeoning sector.

“Fortunately, our girls are keen on getting technical education which is reflected in the enrollment numbers of this institute. I am confident they will prove their mettle,” he added.

“Government of Balochistan will make sure of the availability of resources and support for talented students of polytechnic institutes as they are an asset to the province,” he concluded.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2062206/1-govt-seeks-tap-meat-export-market-balochistan/

Mango exports likely to surpass 120,000 tons

By Salman Siddiqui Published: September 22, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan is anticipating to make record high mango exports of over 120,000 tons in the ongoing year 2019 as higher production and significant rupee depreciation helped push export volumes at a time when exports of many other goods remain sluggish.

“Pakistan made record-high exports of around 120,000 tons of mangoes some five to six years ago,” All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) former chairman Waheed Ahmed told The Express Tribune. “This year, we are anticipating exports close to 130,000 tons,” he estimated.

The country has so far exported 115,000 tons of mangoes worth $80 million in the current season, which started in May 2019. The export season would culminate by the end of October, meaning a whole month was still left to reach close to the record high.

He said traders failed to fetch higher prices for mangoes in export markets. However, significant growth in export of the fruit in volumetric terms helped the country achieve higher export proceeds compared to the last season.

The country had fetched close to $70 million through the export of 82,000 tons of mangoes last season – May-October 2018. “We are likely to make mango exports worth a total of $85 million this year,” he said.

Pakistan exports mangoes of around a dozen varieties including Sindhri, Summer Chaunsa, White Chaunsa (late variety), Fajri, Ratawala/112 (late variety), Kaiser, Anwar Ratol and Lal Badshah.

He elaborated that traders exported mangoes within a price range of $650-800 per ton in the current season compared to $650-1,000 per ton in the previous season. “The rupee depreciation played a leading role in helping to attain a five-year high export volume of 115,000 tons so far in the current season,” he said.

He said higher production of the fruit at 1.5 million tons this year compared to 1.3 million tons last year and drop in its price to Rs75-85 per kg at farm level also helped traders to increase exports this year. He added that the adoption of global standards for nurturing mangoes on trees and tree plantation in orchards also helped achieve the higher crop size this year.

“Pakistan adopted world standards for mango plantation and cultivation after Europe banned Indian mango in 2014,” he said. “Adoption of the standards not only helped Pakistan successfully avert the ban from European and other countries but also helped in higher production and exports in the following years.”

The third thing, which helped Pakistan achieve higher export of the fruit, was the availability of the export time slot.

“Pakistani mango export accelerates during July-September every year. This is the time slot when no other country makes significant export of the fruit across the world,” he said. Last but not least, the aggressive marketing of Pakistani mango in export countries supported exporters in getting the desired results.

“Mango exporters, in collaboration with Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) and Pakistani embassies in the export countries, aggressively marketed the fruit,” he said.

He said Pakistan marketed mangoes in 25 traditional markets in Asia, Europe, and the US.

"Still a huge potential is available for growth in mango export to existing markets despite the surge in exports this year," he said. Pakistan exported a significantly high quantity of mangoes to countries including the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Iran, Afghanistan and some European countries.

Traders also achieved higher exports in countries including the US, Canada, Germany, France, Belgium, Poland, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Ireland. Traders also tried their best to make higher exports in high-value markets including Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and Japan, he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2062197/2-mango-exports-likely-surpass-120000-tons/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEP 23rd TO SEP 29th 2019

FEDERAL GOVT SHOULD COLLECT AGRICULTURE TAX: FAROGH

By Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana | 9/23/2019 12:00:00 AM

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Law and Justice Dr Farogh Naseem has said that because a lot of economic activity is generated in the agriculture sector, the federal government should collect agriculture tax.

Speaking as chief guest at the annual dinner of Pakistan Tax Bar Association (PTBA) on Saturday night, the minister said that under Article 77 of the constitution tax had to be imposed as per the law, but after adoption of the 18th Constitution Amendment it had become a provincial subject.

However, Dr Naseem was quick to add that the law should be fair. When the size of the agro-based economy was so large and `constituted up to 80 per cent of [the country`s economic activity] what was wrong if tax on agriculture is collected by the federal government?` Referring to a recent controversy over Article 149, the law minister said it was unfortunate that whenever an article of the Constitution was discussed a lot of hue and cry was raised.

He said the immediate reaction to his statement about the article was `this was being done to divide the province of Sindh. But the fact is that they want to 1(eep on looting and plundering the country`s wealth`.

He said that tax was being collected only from `20-25 per cent of the economy and the question was: what about the 70-80 per cent of the activity generated in rural Pakistan?`

He spoke at length about the hurdles created in the appointment of a judicial member of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal. The Federal Public Service Commission organised a test in 2013-14 but the appointment was made earlier this year.He said the issue had been taken up with Prime Minister Imran Khan and Chief Justice of Pakistan Asif Saeed Khan Khosa would also be approached for his guidance in developing a system for ensuring early appointments.

The minister said the vacancies of accountants and technical members of the tax tribunal could be filled by qualified tax practitioners, chartered accountants and others.

Dr Naseem stressed upon the need to broaden the tax base and added that a limited number of people could not be expected to shoulder for eternity the great burden of generatingrevenues.

He said the role of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) had changed af ter Syed Shabbar Zaidi took over its control and the tax collecting agency had been transformed into a facilitator.

Answering the questions raised by the PTBA president, Abdul Qadir Memon, the law minister agreed that sufficient time should be given for the filing of tax returns and that the FBR should take all stakeholders on board before taking any major decision.

Dr Naseem expressed the hope that the country would soon overcome its problems.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=23_09_2019_001_001

LACK OF SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

By Mohammad Hussain Khan | 9/23/2019 12:00:00 AM

THE Sindh government is struggling to meet the challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as far as the agriculture sector is concerned.

The provincial government had set up an SDGs Support Unit in its Planning & Development Board (P&DB) two years back to meet 169 targets of these 17 goals.

Of the 17 SDGs, three pertain to agriculture directly or indirectly. These are poverty (SDG-1), zero hunger (SDG-2) and climate action (SDG-13).

The last one is very important as far as sustainable growth in the farm sector is concerned.

Vibrant farmers` bodies like the Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), however, regret that no substantive progress is seen. The government tends to link donor-funded programmes with SDGs and there are no success stories in terms of agriculture which continues to face extreme weather events like rainfall and drought that affect the growth process.

`Climate change one of the main SDGs has emerged as a major threat for the farm sector and this leads to serious losses in productivity while we sit idle,` argues SAB vice president Mahmood Nawaz Shah. He is worried about the lack of investment in research and development-oriented works that can otherwise play a pivotal role.

`Research enables governments to achieve SDGs relating to `zero hunger` and `poverty` because it helps increase yield per acre with given available resources. Surpluses don`t resolve matters because it is availability and accessibility of food around the year that is required [to end hunger]`.

Sindh has come up with a policy that also talks about climate-smart agriculture but to borrow SAB vice president`s words, a paradigm shift is needed to link the agriculture sector with this policy in all spheres. `If we are unable to find the solution to perennial problems we are doomed and huge losses in the agrarian economy will be a foregone conclusion. Perhaps research alone helps protect the farm sector and achieves SDGs`, he asserts.

The SAB leader is not wrong. In the last few years, Sindh has been at the receiving end of torrential rains that played havoc with the cotton crop. Even keeping aside the damage wrought by the monsoons, the province has not been able to meet its cotton balesproduction target for the last several years.

A P&DB`s SDG Support Unit official Mumtaz Halepoto says that `Sindh remains a hot spot within Pakistan in terms of climate change scenario.

According to it, if we don`t act to address the climate change issues then Sindh will lose 20 per cent of its GDP. An investment of 2pc will allow the SDG-13 to be achieved and thus save 18pc of GDP,` he remarked.

But the agricultural department doesn`t have a clear understanding or knowledge of the issues either. `This is an institutional puzzle people within different departments don`t know how to develop linkages for addressing the climate change phenomenon,` said an SDGs Support Unit official.

This is the challenge that the Sindh government is trying to overcome by connecting different new and on-going schemes of the agriculture department to address SDGs related to poverty and climate change. For example, the Sindh Chief Minister has committed plantation of 200,000 trees for 2019-20under the Sarsa6z Sindh programme.

According to Rafiq Mustafa Shaikh of the Support Unit, the government has also reflected on an allocation of Rs6.5 billion in its annual development plan (ADP) 2019-20 for a `social protection programme strategy to reduce poverty` and Harris Gazdar, an expert, is working on it. `Administrative departments have to work in tandem to avoid lack of understanding and that is what the government is precisely aiming for`, he says.

But given the overall size of the development portfolio, which is around Rs283.5bn for 2019-20, he is also concerned about the gap in resource availability and federal fiscal transfers. And it is not the agriculture sector alone that faces these resource constraints but other departments do as well.

For instance, Mr Shaikh says, to address safe management of water and sanitation as expressed in SDG-6: clean water and sanitation Sindh requires Rs80bn every year for 10 years. But realising its importance, the Sindh chief minister gradually increased the Public Health Engineering allocation from Rs4bn two years back to Rs19bn in 2019-20.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=23_09_2019_602_006

COTTON CROP: FARMERS ADVISED TO ADOPT BETTER PRACTICES FOR WEED MANAGEMENT

RECORDER REPORT September 26, 2019

KARACHI: Farmers should make plans to irrigate their crops keeping in view the changing weather, according to the Met Office.

"Adopt better practices for weed management of cotton crop as it is in critical weed period. Plant protection measures for worm may be initiated. Accordingly farmers are advised to take adoptive measures, especially use of PB ropes in consultancy with plant protection department," it said, adding that cotton picking may be made after 10am to avoid dew impact.

Daytime temperature is likely to remain below normal whereas nighttime may be slightly above normal in the most of the agricultural plains of the country during the decade. "Generally, normal wind pattern may prevail in most of the agricultural plains of the country," it said.

Weather in Punjab is likely to remain mainly hot and humid weather is expected. However, rain-wind-thunderstorm is expected at isolated places in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala and Lahore divisions during the current decade.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, mainly hot and humid weather is expected. However, rain-wind-thunderstorm is expected at isolated places in Malakand, Hazara, Kohat and Mardan divisions during the current decade.

Sindh may receive rains-wind-thunderstorm in the most of the province. Weather in Baluchistan is expected to remain mainly hot and humid. Gilgit-Baltistan is likely to witness rain-wind-thunderstorm. Rain and wind-thunderstorm is expected to occur in Kashmir until Sep 30, the Met said.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/09/26/5-page.html

PAD ADVISORY

RECORDER REPORT, BR – ePaper September 26, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) has asked the growers intended to receive laser land levellers under 'Watercourses Improvement Project' of the government to apply for it till October 10, 2019.

Those interested can obtain forms from their respective office of the Agriculture Department (Irrigation Improvement wing) or download from the website of the department and submit to the Deputy Director of Agriculture (Irrigation).

According to a spokesman of the department, the government will provide 1700 laser units to the growers during the current financial year and the applicant should have a personal tractor to operate this land leveller and should not have land over 12.5 acres either personal or on lease. Those providing services of agricultural machinery will also be given preference, the spokesman added.

The applicant should be agreed to level annually 300 acres of land but those who have already obtained laser land leveller in any other scheme of the government are not eligible for this scheme.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/09/26/16-page/802870-news.html

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT HINGES ON NEW DAMS: CM BALOCHISTAN

By Mohammad Zafar Published: September 26, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal has said timely completion of dams in the province would be helpful in boosting provincial agriculture and livestock sectors.

"There is a need to speed up work on water development projects in order to prevent depletion of underwater reservoirs," Kamal said while presiding over a meeting.

Minister for Irrigation Nawabzada Tariq Magsi, Adviser to CM on Excise and Taxation Malik Naeem Khan Bazai, Parliamentary Secretary for Quetta Development Authority (QDA) Bushra Rind, Additional Secretary P&D Abdul Rehman Buzdar and Secretary Finance Noorul Haq Baloch attended the meeting.

Secretary Irrigation Akbar Baloch briefed the CM about irrigation schemes.

Kamal said after the development of these irrigation schemes, farmers who depend on River Sindh would be able to take benefit from the water resource of the province.

CM Balochistan promises to promote boxing in the province

The meeting also reviewed the performance of provincial Excise and Taxation Department. The CM noted that online taxation system would strengthen the performance of the department.

Emphasising the use of modern technology, Jam Kamal said in order to meet its economic demands, the province must go for digitalisation of provincial sectors.

"Space research, virtual education and e-governance have become imperative for Balochistan's economy," he said. He directed the IT department to upgrade the Balochistan government's website with more information for masses.

Responding to a briefing given by Urban Planning Department secretary, Kamal said the department should review master plans in view of the burgeoning population in Balochistan.

Air Vice-Marshal Officer Commanding Southern Command Ghulam Abbas Ghumman on Wednesday called on Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal and discussed the security situation and development progress in the province.

Balochistan chief minister lauded the role of Pakistan Air Force in securing the country's airspace and also acknowledged their efforts in strengthening the country's air-defence capabilities.

During the meeting, Air Vice Marshal Ghulam Abbas discussed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)'s development projects in Balochistan, particularly in Gwadar.

The two agreed to increase security for CPEC projects in and around the port city of Gwadar to halt any vicious attempts against the country's development.

Chief Minister Jam Kamal and Air Vice Marshal Officer Commanding Southern Command Ghulam Abbas also reviewed measures regarding educational, human resource and skill development projects.

Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal has lauded the efforts of Prime Minister Imran Khan for raising voice on all international forums against the Indian oppression on the people of Kashmir.

In a tweet, the chief minister said that Prime Minister Imran Khan had given a clear and firm message to the world leaders and international media regarding the Kashmir issue.

"Prime Minister Imran Khan has rightly and adequately put the case of Kashmir upfront during several interactions with media and global leaders. And it was all from the heart and with no hesitation," he said.

Chief Minister Jam Kamal added that efforts of Imran khan should be lauded as his stance is a reflection of the feelings of the Kashmiri people.

Published in The Express Tribune, September 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2065357/1-agricultural-development-hinges-new-dams-cm-balochistan/

UREA SALES JUMP 45% DUE TO WIDESPREAD RAINS

By Our Correspondent Published: September 26, 2019

KARACHI: Widespread rains throughout the country in the monsoon season led to a 45% jump in urea sales in August 2019 compared to the same month of previous year, according to the National Fertiliser Development Centre (NFDC).

NFDC reported sales of 625,000 tons of urea in August 2019 against sales of 431,000 tons in August 2018.

“The surge is mainly due to timely rainfall throughout the country,” said Sunny Kumar, analyst at Topline Research.

Overall, sales for the first eight months of 2019 came in at 3.97 million tons, up 8.8% from 3.66 million tons in the same period of previous year.

Among individual companies, Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim posted the highest growth of 32% year-on-year in urea sales in August as it sold 44,000 tons. It was followed by Fauji Fertiliser Company and Engro Fertilisers, which reported increase of 22% and 13% year-on-year to 233,000 tons and 186,000 tons respectively.

On the other hand, NFDC reported imported urea offtake of around 22,000 tons in August 2019.

Overall urea production in August 2019 depicted a growth of 17% to 569,000 tons against 486,000 in the corresponding month of previous year. “This is mainly due to the resumption of production by LNG-based players Fatima Fertiliser and Agritech, which cumulatively added 75,000 tons in August 2019 versus no production in August 2018,” said the analyst.

Total di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) sales came in at around 105,000 tons, up 33% year-on-year, while in the first eight months of 2019, DAP sales were down 10.4% to 953,000 tons against the same period of 2018.

On a month-on-month basis, urea sales increased 34.3% to 625,000 tons in August 2019 compared to 465,000 tons in July 2019.

“This growth is due to the lower base amid pre-buying done by farmers and dealers on expectations of a hike in urea prices in June,” said the analyst. DAP sales, however, decreased 48% month-on-month from 202,000 tons in July 2019 to 105,000 tons in August 2019.

The industry’s urea inventory at the end of August 2019 stood at 324,000 tons, while DAP inventory stood at around 418,000 tons.

Published in The Express Tribune, September 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2065273/2-urea-sales-jump-45-due-widespread-rains/

LOCUST SWARMS REAPPEAR IN THARPARKAR AFTER RAINS

By A Correspondent | 9/27/2019 12:00:00 AM

MITHl: Farmers in several areas of Chhachhro taluka and pans of Tharparkar district have reponed reappearance of locusts which have stahed eating away green leaves and stalks of plants in fields, shrubs and trees.

Many villagers told journalists on Thursday that large swarms of the insects had been sighted in many areas after recent rains and demanded the functionaries concerned send teams to affected areas to carry out sprays for the elimination of the harmful insect.

Sindh Minister for Agriculture Mohammad Ismail Rahu told this reponer that he had already directed Tharparkar district administration to act swiftly to conduct the spray so that damage to the plants could be prevented.

Mr Rahu said that he had also directed the officials in Badin to visit the affected areas where locusts were reponed by media and asked farmers to contact local officials in case of the insects` onslaught. The government was making sincere efforts to kill off the insect before it posed serious threat to crops, he said.

Lightning kills cattle during rain in Thar Two villagers suffered injuries and four cows and six goats were killed when lightning struck them during heavy rains in several parts of Islamkot and Nagarparkar talukas on Thursday.

The hilly town of Nagarparkar and Karoonjhar hills received 16mm of rainfall.

It also rained in Mithi, Diplo, Kaloi, Tando Bago, Pangrio, Khoski, Shadi Large, Talhar, Kario Ghanwar and other areas of Badin district late on Wednesday night and early on Thursday.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=27_09_2019_117_001

CONTINUOUS RAINS SCUPPER EFFORTS TO KILL OFF ALL LOCUSTS, SAYS MINISTER

A Correspondent September 28, 2019

MITHI: Sindh Minister for Agricul-ture Mohammad Ismail Rahu has said that they are finding it difficult to kill off all locusts breeding in Thar desert because of continuous rains though they are trying their best to exterminate the highly harmful insect in Thar and other parts of the province for the past five months.

Mr Rahu, who arrived in locust-affected areas in Chhachhro taluka along with a team of experts and officials concerned on Friday, directed local officials to expedite their efforts to take the issue head-on so that the insects could not pose a serious threat to crops, shrubs and trees, which had sprouted new leaves after the rainfall.

He said that they had been fighting the insects for the past five months in several areas of Sindh. Over 24,000 acres of land had been sprayed in Thar and the process would continue as long as the threat of their breeding remained in the desert region.

He said that locusts could not cause large-scale damage anywhere in the province due to timely move by Sindh government. Despite this he had directed the officials concerned to conduct a survey for assessing losses caused by the insects in order that proper compensation be provided if possible, he said.

He said that a control room had been set up in Hyderabad to move into action rapidly in case of emergency. Timely rains after decades of drought had turned Thar green and now farmers would have record harvest of their traditional crops.

Mr Rahu said that current rains had created some civic issues but they had also given great boost to agriculture both in Thar and other parts of the province, which were facing drought.

He said that Sindh government would continue to provide all required facilities to the people of Thar. Various initiatives and schemes were being undertaken to boost traditional farming in the rain-dependent arid region.

He said in answer to journalists' questions that the federal government was trying to "usurp" the resources of the province after having miserably failed to provide any relief to people of the country.

He criticised recent attempt by federal law minister to take over revenue collection of the agriculture sector, which had always been a provincial subject.

He warned Dr Farogh Naseem to stop meddling in the affairs of the province, which according to him, was functioning smoothly under "able" leadership Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah.

He said that agriculture in Sindh was already facing problems due to unjust distribution of irrigation water by federal bodies. "The federal ministers are creating a mess by issuing childish statements and threats at a time when the province is not being given its due share in NFC award," he said.

He said that Imran Khan-led government was only wasting time in its desperate attempts to tinker with the Constitution since they did not have enough numbers in both houses of parliament to bring amendments.

Published in Dawn, September 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1507689/continuous-rains-scupper-efforts-to-kill-off-all-locusts-says-minister

OCTOBER

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEP 30th TO OCT 06th 2019

MINISTER EXPECTS CHANGES IN FARM SECTOR WITH CHINA'S HELP

Staff Reporter September 30, 2019

QUETTA: Changes in Balochistan's agriculture sector will be seen in the near future with the help of China, said Provincial Minister for Agriculture Zamarak Khan Achakzai during his visit to China.

"We are glad that the Chinese government is supporting us in the construction of dams and to bring about modern changes in agriculture," stated the minister.

"The people of Balo-chistan are dependent on farming and if this sector is developed, people will benefit and many issues may also be resolved," he added.

He further said that development in the sector would lead to job opportunities and boost people's morale.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508138/minister-expects-changes-in-farm-sector-with-chinas-help

SUGAR CANE PRODUCTION IN SINDH REGISTERS SIGNIFICANT DROP IN 2018-19

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated September 30, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sugar cane production in Sindh recorded a significant drop in 2018-19 season from what it was in 2017-18 caused mainly by seemingly unending controversy over the issue of fixation of cane price, long delays in release of payments to growers and clearance of liabilities by factory owners.

The mills crushed 15.930 million tonnes cane and produced 17.193m sugar in 2018-19 season, more than four million tonnes less than the corresponding figures of 2017-18 season, when the cane's crushing was recorded at 21.625m tonnes and sugar's production stood at 22.814m tonnes.

However, the mills did not suffer considerably from this drop because of the sucrose recovery from the cane remained almost intact at 10.411 per cent which meant that millers got more sugar from the cane despite having lower production in outgoing season.

"Growers feel increasingly disappointed because of the controversy over cane price that takes place and goes on unendingly every year. With the matured crop ready for harvest and millers not appearing in hurry to buy it from growers, farmers who always remain at the receiving end agree to sell their crop for lower prices offered by middlemen," said Mehmood Nawaz Shah, Sindh Abadgar Board's vice president.

He believed that this year too the cane's acreage might show decline but per acre productivity would be better due to impact of monsoon rains on the crop.

Sindh government has been fixing the cane price at Rs182 per 40 kilogramme for at least last five years while growers reject it outright on the ground that it is not enough even to meet their cost of production. The mill owners assert that the rate of Rs172 per 40kg or Rs182 per 40kg is not viable when they add cost of certain taxes to their ex-factory price.

"The provincial government doesn't consider price of sugar while fixing the cane's rate for any season. In last season, a rate of over Rs200 per 40kg was paid to farmers," said Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) chairman Aslam Farooq.

Interestingly, he did not explain if the millers could comfortably pay Rs200 per 40kg last year then why had they been questioning the official price of Rs182 per 40kg for one or the other reason for the last few years.

The PSMA leader contended that if growers had not been getting competitive rate, they would not have been growing the corp. If sugar price had shot up to Rs75 to Rs80 per 1kg in retail market, the government should investigate it because the ex-factory rate of the sweetener remained pegged at Rs66 per 1kg, he said.

The Sindh Abadgar Board said that while the sweetener's price increased by Rs20 a kilo, the crop's price did not rise. "The cane crop is becoming a serious issue although this crop is protected under a law. Other crops also didn't offer better returns to us," he remarked.

Every year, the price controversy mars cane crushing season as Sindh government decides to fix the cane price mostly in October and the seesaw between millers and growers starts all over again, with millers rejecting the notification and growers demanding increase in price. Finally, by the time the crushing season starts growers are so fed up they supply the cane to factory owners at lower rates.

"It is a story of every season that we face deductions from crop on the ground of approved and non-approved variety of sugar cane. Massive deductions on each cane laden trolley put growers in deep trouble and they had to supply their crop for lower prices in order to reduce their losses," said Sindh Chamber of Agriculture's vice president Nabi Bux Sathio.

He anticipates less cane production in 2019-20 season as well and argued that neither the government nor the millers were ready to realise that a farmer's cost of production had increased manifold in recent past. "Still, the cane's rate i.e. Rs182 per 40kg remains unchanged for last few years," he said.

It is recovery of sucrose which determines payment of quality premium over and above actual rate of cane. Sindh's benchmark for sucrose is 8.7pc and when recovery crosses the benchmark, a miller has to make payment at the rate of 50 paisa per 40kg of cane for each 0.1pc of excess sucrose benchmark recovery.

Sindh's millers lost their quality premium case in March this year in Supreme Court. They had challenged Sindh High Court's judgment in favour of Sindh Abadgar Board on quality premium issue back in 1997. Now the millers have no option but to pay quality premium to growers but it was not made in last season.

The sugar cane acreage in last crushing season dropped by 13.2pc as against a target of 322,000 hectares, the cane was cultivated on 279,472ha whereas in 2017-18 333,262ha were brought under cane cultivation against a target of 320,000ha, showing an increase of 4pc over and above the sowing target.

Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) president Nawab Zubair Talpur subscribed to Sathio's view on less cane production this season (2019-20) again. "A representative of Mehran Sugar Mills of Tando Allahyar told me that they will try to get the cane from the area connected with Faran Sugar Mills of Tando Mohammad Khan on account of likely drop in the cane crop," he said.

On quality premium's liabilities, he said that these were calculated at Rs34bn if 2018-19's sugar cane production was taken as average production for the last 20 years when quality premium was last paid.

He said the government's indifference had always worried growers as it left them high and dry when their legitimate interests were undermined by vested interests in every season.

Mr Shah pointed out that the government had not taken any measures in this regard to make sure that quality premium was paid to growers. "What does it show?" he asked. Besides, he said, growers were still demanding payment of their outstanding dues from millers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508066

ORGANIC FARMING NEEDS ATTENTION

Mohiuddin Aazim September 30, 2019

The potential for organic farming is huge, but it is not being tapped fully in the absence of adequate government support.

Growing demand for organic vegetables has encouraged urban entrepreneurs to join hands with farmers and help them market their produce. These entrepreneurs are now penetrating into the niche market, but the overall environment for organic farming remains depressing owing to a lack of government support.

Since the turn of the century, organic farming has been growing steadily across the world and particularly in Asia. India boasts of the largest number of organic farmers — 835,000 as of 2017 against the global total of 2.9 million — according to the latest report of FiBL, an organic farming information and research centre. But in Pakistan, this number is just nominal — 5,000. A lobbying group by the name of Pakistan Organic Association exists that runs a Facebook page to promote the cause of these 5,000 farmers spread across the country. Most of them continue to experiment organic cultivation of veggies on small farms measuring five acres or less, according to multiple local media reports. The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) says that the total area under organic farming stood over 60,000 hectares in 2010.

No official update is available, but even if we assume that the area has since doubled to 120,000 hectares, that would still compare poorly with India's 1.78m hectares as of 2017.

Obviously we are nowhere on the global or Asian map of organic agriculture. And that is not a good thing.

Organic farming needs due attention as it can ensure the supply of healthier food and also help us reduce the heavy import bill of chemical manure and pesticides and cut subsidies on locally produced fertilisers. At a time when foreign exchange-starved Pakistan is trying to limit its import spending and the federal government is trying to control local expenses by rationalising subsidies, promoting organic farming should make sense.

It is often argued that organic farming turns out to be more expensive than conventional farming. But a lot depends on ensuring economies of scale as well. Countries that have undertaken organic farming on a large scale find it affordable. The cost of production of the organically cultivated crops can be kept in check by applying some innovative methods and setting up clusters of organic farmers. Once federal and provincial authorities decide to promote organic farming, they can sort out this and all other issues through direct interaction with local and foreign agricultural experts, farmers and specialised global and regional research bodies.

With demand for organic food growing worldwide, Pakistan needs to produce more with an exportable surplus of organic products. The promised Chinese cooperation in our agriculture sector is yet to start in a big way. Pakistan can ask China, itself a sizable producer of organic food products, to provide funds for setting up exclusive organic agricultural zones across Pakistan.

According to PARC estimates, organic agriculture in Pakistan was worth $100m back in 2010. More recent data is not available, but given the pace of progress since then, one can assume the number would have at least doubled. But that is the size of organic farming and we don't know exactly how much worth of organic food we export every year.

Exporters of organic food products currently get organic certification from abroad. The government should consider establishing a certification authority that meets international standards. Exporters of Halal food were in the same situation some years ago, but the establishment of the Pakistan Halal Authority has eased their certification problems.

The federal government has so far not shared all the details of the five-year agricultural revival programme worth Rs309.7bn, which will be jointly financed by the provinces. If this plan does envisage a road map for the uplifting of organic agriculture, then the government should share its details with the public at large, especially organic farmers. Ordinary Pakistanis also don't know what the National Institute of Organic Agriculture of the PARC has been doing in recent years and how the government plans to strengthen the role of this institute.

Marketing of organic food products, in general, and organically grown vegetables and fruits, in particular, is an uphill task. Producers find it difficult to market the latter in regular wholesale fruit and vegetable markets for the simple reason that middlemen are less enthusiastic about it owing to higher prices. Supplying them directly to chains of superstores also becomes unfeasible owing to the much higher margins demanded by their owners. That is why only a handful of growers are somehow able to sell their produce to superstores and most of them have resorted to direct online marketing. Occasionally, they hold organic bazaars in shopping malls — the latest one was held in Lahore.

Or they find places in big cities to organise a weekly bazaar of organically produced vegetables and fruits. One such bazaar is held every weekend in Defence, Karachi.

Provincial and city governments can help farmers of organic vegetables and fruits by encouraging them to sell their produce in weekly bachat bazaars that are set up in large numbers in almost every district. They can be offered free-of-cost transportation services. Such a subsidy can also be provided to urban households involved in kitchen gardening or backyard organic farming.—-MA

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508034

PRICES OF ESSENTIAL KITCHEN ITEMS WITNESS UPWARD TREND

AMJAD ALI SHAH SEP 30TH, 2019 PESHAWAR

The upward trend in prices of important kitchen items, including vegetable, pulses, fruits, flour, sugar and others was witnessed in local market, according to survey conducted by Business Recorder here on Sunday.

Tomatoes are being sold at Rs 60-70 per kg, which was selling at Rs 40 per kg in the previous week, while onion was available at Rs 60 per kg against the price of Rs 50 per kg in the last week, according to the survey.

Similarly, it added that ginger is being sold at Rs 350-400 per kg, showing an increase of Rs 40 per kg in local market, while garlic was available at Rs 200 and Rs 240 per kg.

Lemon is being available at Rs 120 per kg against the price of Rs 100 per kg. Green chili was priced at Rs 80-90 per kg; cucumber was being sold at Rs 50-60 per kg against the price of Rs 40 per kg in the previous week. Red-potato is being available at Rs 70-80 per kg while white-colored potatoes are being sold at Rs 30 per kg. Arvi is being available at Rs 100 per kg against the price of Rs 70 per kg in the previous week.

Likewise, Ladyfinger is being sold at Rs 70 per kg, capsicum at Rs 100 per kg, apple, long and round gourds are being sold within range of Rs 50-60 and Rs 70 per kg. Cabbage is being sold at Rs 50 per kg, cauliflower at Rs 60-70 per kg, bringle at Rs 50 per kg. Bitter gourd (kerala) was being sold at Rs 100-120 per kg. Peas is being sold at Rs 150 per kg.

According to survey, an Rs 20 per kg decrease in price of live chicken/meat was witnessed as available at Rs 206 per kg which was selling at Rs 226 per kg in the last week. A dozen of farm eggs are being sold at Rs 100-120 per kg.

Cow meat was available at Rs 380-400 and Rs 450 per kg against the official fixed price of Rs 270 per kg. Fresh milk is being sold at Rs 130-120 per litre against the official fixed rate of Rs 90 per litre, while yogurt was available at Rs 130 per kg against the official fixed rate of Rs 90 per kg.

However, the price of sugar has increased at Rs 76 per kg which was selling at Rs 74 per kg in the previous week, whereas the rate of gram flour (baisen) has slightly up as available at Rs 120 per kg against the price of Rs 110 per kg in last week.

According to the survey, the prices of pulses/food grains were remained high-side in local market, as good quality rice (sela) is being sold at Rs 150 per kg which was selling at Rs 140 per kg, according to the survey. Toota rice is being available at Rs 70-80 per kg. Dal mash is being sold at Rs 170-190 against the price of Rs 160 per kg.

Big-size white channa was available at Rs 140 per kg against the price of Rs 130 per kg in the previous week. Similarly, Rs 20 per kg surge was noticed in price of red-bean as being sold at Rs 150 per kg against the price of Rs 130 per kg in the last week.

However, price of white lobiya has decreased at Rs 130 per kg which was selling at Rs 140 per kg in the last week. Moonge, is being sold at Rs 150 per kg which was selling at Rs 140 per kg in the last week, while dal chilka (green) was being sold at Rs 140 and Dal Chilka (Black) being sold at Rs 130 per kg.

As per survey, apples are being sold at Rs 140-150 per kg, peach at Rs 120 per kg, mangoes within range of Rs 80 and Rs 100, apricot at Rs 150-160 per kg, banana at Rs 70-80 per dozen, black-coloured plums at Rs 100-120 per kg, grapes are being sold at Rs 200 per kg, mukesh melon was being sold at Rs 150-200 per piece with different size and guava was available at Rs 80-100 per kg.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/09/20190930522167/

SMES, CAN CURE ECONOMIC ILLS

By Shakeel Ahmad RamayPublished: September 30, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Stagflation is a terminology which is used to describe the twin problem of higher inflation and low or stagnant economic activities.

The current economic situation in Pakistan can also be described as stagflation. Prime Minister Imran Khan-led government is putting in every effort to overcome the problem, but the crisis is big enough.

Stagflation has stemmed from heavy borrowing, artificial management of the exchange rate and a consumption-led growth for a longer period of time. Pakistan's debt has reached Rs37.7 trillion.

The situation has become more complicated over the past one year. A latest report released by the Asian Development Bank highlighted the seriousness of the economic woes. According to the bank, Pakistan's growth rate is estimated to fall to 2.8% whereas inflation will rise to 12% in current fiscal year 2019-20.

The impact of inflation will be felt the most in energy prices, food items and transportation cost. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the prices of many commodities have increased sharply in the past one year.

Among these, gas charges went up 114.64%, onion prices rose 59.06%, pulse (moong) 45.89%, cigarettes 37.91%, gur 34.34%, sugar 32.82% and chicken 30.40% in urban areas.

In rural areas, the price increase was noted in onions at 65.21%, pulse (moong) 48.60%, gur 39.86%, sugar 34.47% and newspapers 33.33%. However, there was a decrease of 4.04% in electricity charges. The country's economic condition requires the government to deeply assess the problem in a bid to find out the reasons of slow progress and the room available for implementing policies for economic revival.

However, the government's hands are tied in the wake of conditions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan programme. It is also bound to implement stern conditions of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

The prime minister's economic team is busy selling the dream of miracles and is missing the tiny steps required for the revival of economy. For instance, an idea is floating in government circles that Pakistan's economy will be transferred to an engineering base in the next five years.

But the government needs to understand that economic transformation is a long-term process and takes time to deliver results. It needs to frame policies and take initiatives according to the country's development status. A major impact of misplaced focus is a sharp increase in inflation and decrease in the growth rate.

In order to tackle stagflation, the country will have to invest in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and agriculture and livestock sectors. The current economic status suggests that the country should pay attention to the commodity sector for making rapid progress.

Agriculture does have a multiplier effect on the economy and society. It will help overcome issues of food insecurity, stunting, lack of raw material for industries and widespread poverty through better livelihood opportunities.

Agriculture also has the potential to bring foreign exchange as estimates show Pakistan can earn $5-6 billion annually by exporting agricultural products.

Apart from the farm sector, the SMEs can also help transform the economy from the primary to secondary stage. It provides basic infrastructure for the transition. Scores of examples can be found from around the world where SMEs have played and are playing a leading role in different economies.

Germany is a prominent example. According to official statistics, 99% of companies in Germany are registered as SMEs and they contribute 68% to the national economy.

According to China's statistic year book 2015, 97.7% of registered companies in China are SMEs, which have a share of about 62% in national revenue.

Germany and China revolutionised their industrial sector by promoting the SMEs and by forging strong linkages with big players. China achieved the status of world factory due to strong engagement with the SME sector. Germany is still sustaining its growth by investing in SMEs.

These are good examples for Pakistan to follow. Pakistan has already a large number of SMEs producing sports goods, leather products, electric fans, medical instruments, shoes, cutlery and textile products.

The country needs to expand the base and modernise these sectors. The inclusion of food, livestock and agriculture sectors will help give a fresh boost to the economy. Pakistan can easily encourage investment in the SMEs by China and Germany. Joint ventures can be a way to attract investment.

The government can declare two to three Special Economic Zones as SME zones. These zones should be open to investors from all over the world. Three-country SME zones can also be set up by forging partnerships with China and Germany. China already has a good experience of working with Germany through the Sino-German Economic Park in Qingdao city. It is considered one of the most successful ventures between China and Germany.

Similarly, Pakistan can also launch a three-country SME zone for agricultural commodities, especially for food and meat processing. The government should talk to China about inclusion of other countries in the SEZs planned by the two countries. Past record of China shows that it will be happy if other countries join forces.

However, in order to give priority to the SMEs and agriculture sector, the government will have to develop and implement a comprehensive framework, provide financial support and create a good investment environment.

Lastly, the people of the country will have to show patience and wait for the outcome as any policy initiative takes time to deliver results.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2068398/2-smes-can-cure-economic-ills/

JIWANI FISHERMEN PROTEST AGAINST ILLEGAL FISHING

Behram Baloch October 01, 2019

GWADAR: Fishermen of Jiwani and adjacent areas staged a sit-in outside the fisheries department's office in Jiwani town against illegal fishing by trawlers in the sea near Balochistan's areas.

Leaders of the National Party, including Manzoor Baloch and Haroon Sahir, and the Balochistan Awami Party participated in the protest sit-in that continued for several hours.

The protesting fishermen alleged that the fisheries department had issued illegal cards to fishermen hailing from other provinces, saying that it was an injustice with local fishermen because it had snatched their livelihood.

Addressing the protesters, Jiwani Fishermen Union's leader Ghulam Nabi, Master Elahi Bakhsh, National Party leader Manzoor Baloch said that the influx of illegal trawlers was continuing at the coast of Jiwani. They said they had informed the local administration and fisheries department about their reservations and also recorded their protest.

They said taking notice of the situation, the commissioner of Makran division visited Jiwani after which the fishermen ended their protest. They said the fisheries department had ignored the directives of the commissioner and local administration and provided shelter to illegal fishermen.

They said illegal trawling had increased at Jiwani's coast and it was depriving the local fishermen of their livelihood. The influx of fishermen from other provinces had doubled the miseries of local fishermen, they added.

They warned that if their demands were not accepted and illegal trawling was not stopped they would widen their protest, adding that the fisheries department and district administration would be responsible.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508297/jiwani-fishermen-protest-against-illegal-fishing

DECISION TO TAKE UP ISSUE OF CITRUS GROWERS IN NA LAUDED

N.H.ZUBERI OCT 2ND, 2019 KARACHI

Former Chairman of Horticulture Exports, Ahmad Jawad has said it is a rightly decision of the parliamentarians to take up the important matter issue of citrus growers in the National Assembly because right now kinnow belt in Punjab emerged as a industry for kinnow exports, if we don't offer appropriate rates to farmers, then ultimately kinnow exports may suffer which will be commence on first December.

Referring to Mohsin Nawaz Ranjha MNA and other who submitted a "Calling Attention Notice" in National Assembly in which they draw the attention of the ministry for national food security and research towards the problem faced by citrus growers in the country. The citrus exports association has reduced the price per mound of citrus by Rs 250 as compared to last year pricing of Rs 850 to Rs 600, which is a matter of grave concern for the millions of citrus grows in the country. "It is serious matter which warrants appropriate response from the Minister on the floor of the house immediately"; legislators added. "The silent slip of the local administration of Sargodha has proved that they don't want to resolve the important issue which was exist from the last two months in the largest belt of kinnow".

He said last year kinnow exports were closed around 360,000 tons and we have the capability to increase up to 500,000 tons with the support of the government, provided also due relief to local farmers. Jawad told that last year 40 kg kinnow were purchased for Rs 850 and now Rs 600 rate which is unjustifiable as the prices of DAP, Potash and Urea have gone up compare with last year including the price of diesel reached up to Rs 133 per liter, so how growers can compete that rate when their cost of production already increased. "In Previous Government tenure Urea and DAP prices were Rs 1200 and Rs 2380 per bag respectively and in the incumbent government the Urea and DAP Prices are Rs 1925 and Rs 3395 per bag respectively and the price of potash Rs 4200".

As Punjab produce over 95% of the fruit mainly in Sargodha district; because of its favorable growing conditions, and adequate canal and sub-soil water. Kinnow constitutes 80% of the citrus fruit and is a major export commodity. He further mentioned application of modern techniques and traditional practices at all stages of growth and during the post-harvest phase can not only add value to the fruit which attracts premium prices but can also increase exports which fetch foreign exchange.

Citrus Research Institute Sargodha is responsible for undertaking research and development work on kinnow and other citrus varieties, besides the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC); he added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191002523083/

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS: CROPLIFE PAKISTAN VOICES CONCERN OVER CROP LOSSES IN PUNJAB

RECORDER REPORT OCT 2ND, 2019 LAHORE

CropLife Pakistan Association has claimed that based on field visits and the study of weather data, it is evident that an exceptional shift in climatic conditions at a critical phase (pollination) of the crop has impacted the yields of cotton, maize and rice crop across the province.

This assessment is consistent with the consensus amongst experts across the country, said a statement issued by the Association here on Tuesday. It further said that they are deeply concerned about the cotton, maize and rice crop losses in certain parts of Punjab. Initial assessments suggest that the phenomenon is indiscriminate, irrespective of seed varieties used by farmer.

According to statement issued to media, CropLife said that they fully understand the challenge faced by hardworking farmers and remain committed to serve them. CropLife said that the member companies have very stringent quality control regime in place that ensures the highest levels of seed germination and genetic purity. Each hybrid introduced to Pakistani farmers goes through rigorous in-house adaptability trials and Government of Pakistan's National Uniform Yield Trials (NUYT) before they are approved for commercial cultivation.

The impact of climate change is a stark realty in present times and requires due attention of all stakeholders. "At CropLife we take this challenge very seriously and our members are dedicating their research efforts to bringing about innovations to secure food supplies and sustainable agriculture in the country. Going forward we will look to work closely with the relevant government departments and research institutes to better understand some of these emerging challenges", CropLife stated.

"In the meantime, our member companies are reaching out to farmers to provide guidance. We assure the farming communities that we will uphold our business values and continue provide quality products and services to increase their overall productivity and also meet the future food and feed demands of our country" the Association assured.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191002523113/

TO CHECK PRICES, GOVT OPENS WHEAT STOCKS

Staff Reporter October 03, 2019

ISLAMABAD: A day after Prime Minister Imran Khan showed displeasure over the rising flour and bread prices, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Wednesday ordered release of 350,000 tonnes of wheat in the market to check price hike.

The ECC meeting, presided over by Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, approved a proposal of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to release of 150,000 tonnes of wheat from the stocks of Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation to the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The meeting also directed the Sindh government to release 100,000 tonnes of wheat subject to the condition that it would also release another 100,000 tonnes out of its own stocks in to the market.

The wheat flour and bread prices had reportedly increased by more than 10 per cent in the last couple of weeks and some parliamentarians have been raising the issue at various forums including the parliament and its committees and during the interactions with prime minister.

The ECC had been discussing the rise in flour and bread prices for almost three months. In the last ECC meeting held on Sept 18, the members had spent almost an hour on the issue and blamed rodents, exports by unscrupulous traders, provincial governments, failure of national price monitoring committee for the crisis as the ministry reported that wheat stocks were about 30pc lower than last year.

While presiding over the cabinet meeting on Tuesday, PM Imran Khan had expressed displeasure over the flour and bread prices and directed the provincial governments to ensure stability of roti prices (bread) and wheat flour in the provinces.

He also directed the Ministry of National Food Security and all provincial governments to ensure that prices of roti and wheat flour did not increase at any level.

The meeting also approved a set of proposals, presented by the Ministry of Energy, to resolve issues pertaining to 1,124 MW Kohala Hydropower Project including minimum ecological water flow of 42 cusecs by maintaining the e-flow of 30 cusecs and releasing additional flow of 12 cusecs from the spillway. The meeting also approved construction of sewage treatment plants and water bodies, the cost of which will be included in the National Electronic and Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) tariff to be passed on to consumers.

The ECC also discussed the issue regarding the Cabinet Committee on Energy's “Approval of the Settlement of Liquidated Damages” payable to independent power producers as referred to it by the cabinet because of media controversies.

The ECC constituted a committee comprising Economic Affairs Minister Hammad Azhar, Adviser to the PM on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Dr Ishrat Hussain and Special Secretary Finance Omar Hamid Khan to examine the matter and submit firmed up recommendations to the ECC.

The ECC also approved a proposal of the Ministry of Energy to allow Central Power Purchasing Agency to approach Nepra for approval of extension of tariff as agreed between Pakistan and Iran on Mar 15 for supply of power to Makran Division from Iran's Power Generation and Transmission Management Company TAVANIR.

The ECC also approved a technical supplementary grant of Rs419.154 million to be paid to court and foreign counsels in case of Dr. Hilal Hussain Al-Tuwairiqi and Al-Ittifaq Steel Products Company Limited vs Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508700/to-check-prices-govt-opens-wheat-stocks

HIGH PRICES HURT COTTON TRADING

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter October 03, 2019

KARACHI: Trading activity on the cotton market slowed down on Wednesday as buyers were reluctant to enter into big deals because of high prices of the commodity.

Cotton rates have been rising for the last three days due to heavy buying.

Despite slow down in buying activity, cotton prices remained static at high level. Millers restricted their buying activity to small lot deals, brokers said.

According to market sources many textile spinning groups have started to place import orders under the Duty and Taxes Remission on Exporter (DTRE) scheme. Private estimates place cotton production at not more than 11 million bales for current season.

The recent heavy rains and storm in Bahawalpur and Lodhran in Punjab have damaged standing cotton crop. Although downpour normally helps to wash whitefly from cotton crop but strong winds have damaged standing crop. It is being feared that crop size and quality of cotton would also be affected. Some reports suggested storm also damaged sugarcane and corn crop.

The world leading cotton markets were firm with New York cotton partially recovering recent losses. Indian cotton was also firm while Chinese cotton market remained close.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were firm at overnight level at Rs8,700 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,000 bales, station Nawabshah, at Rs8,225; 2,200 bales, Hyderabad, at Rs8,750-8,800; 1,200 bales, Fazilpur, at Rs8,850; 1,200 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs8,800-8,850; 1,000 bales, Rajanpur, at Rs8,850; and 1,000 bales, Layyah, at Rs8,750-8,800.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508695/high-prices-hurt-cotton-trading

CHINA GIFTS EQUIPMENT TO GWADAR FISHERMEN

By Our CorrespondentPublished: October 3, 2019

QUETTA: Realizing the economic hardship of Gwadar's fishermen, the Karachi Consulate General of the People's Republic of China, on behalf of the Chinese people and government, has gifted goods worth 200,000 US dollars including boat power engines, solar handy lights, a small home solar system, fishing nets etc. It has also said that it hoped the gifts would help the local population gain some relief from their day-to-day difficulties. The goods are expected to support a substantial number of fishermen. The Chinese government has also pledged further aid for Balochistan, including for the Gwadar Port City, under the socio-economic development phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which addresses the issues that people are facing.

The People's Republic of China's Karachi Consul General Wang Yu presented the goods at a simple ceremony in Karachi to Gwadar Fishermen Alliance Chairman Khudadad Wajo and fishermen's representatives. Also present on the occasion were Balochistan Economic Forum President Sardar Shoukat Popalzai and prominent city leader and former Gwadar Nazim Baboo Gulab.

In his remarks, the Consul General said the Pakistan-China relationship could best be described as promising, flourishing and a success story, adding that, over the years, the unique friendship had evolved into a strong strategic partnership featuring robust economic cooperation and increasing people-to-people contacts.

He termed Pakistan-China strategic ties as being on an upward trajectory, with an increased thrust on economic interaction, after CPEC's initiation. He further said that CPEC would also address the economic backwardness of the province of Balochistan, thus enabling the province's people to progress economically and enjoy the fruits of development.

The province's natural resources would also be explored which would further enhance the strategic significance of Balochistan, adding that CPEC would also provide job opportunities for Balochistan's youth and equip them with modern innovative skills.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2070818/1-china-gifts-equipment-gwadar-fishermen/

INFLATION RISES 11.4% ON HIKE IN FOOD, ENERGY PRICES

By Our Correspondent Published: October 3, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The inflation rate rose to 11.4% in September 2019 largely due to a hike in food prices and partially because of energy prices – the causes that could not be addressed by artificially keeping the interest rates at a higher level.

The pace of inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), increased to 11.4% in September over a year ago, stated the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on Wednesday. There was an increase of 0.9% as compared to the preceding month.

However, the core inflation – measured by excluding the impact of food and energy prices – slightly decelerated to 8.4% in urban areas and remained static at 8.8% in rural areas. State Bank of Pakistan Governor Dr Reza Baqir had recently changed the central bank's target rate for determining the policy rate.

As against the earlier policy of setting the monetary policy rate while keeping in view the core inflation, the SBP has now shifted to the projection for headline inflation for determining the policy rate. It has projected the headline inflation in the range of 11-12% and set the interest rate at 13.25%.

Had the central bank not changed its policy, there would have been a strong case to cut the interest rate due to stable core inflation in the past three months.

The September inflation rate was in line with the central bank's inflation projection.

The government had last month changed the inflation calculation methodology and the 11.4% rate has been calculated on the basis of the new methodology. When calculated with the old methodology and old base year of 2007-08, the rate of inflation in September would be 12.55%. However, on the basis of both the methodologies, the rate of inflation is increasing.

The inflation in urban areas recorded an increase of 11.6% while in rural areas, it rose 11.1% in September over a year ago.

The chief economist of the central bank said on Tuesday that inflation would start receding from the second half of the current fiscal year.

A special panel of the National Assembly, set up to suggest measures to contain inflation, has called for stability in the exchange rate, reduction in the monetary policy rate, the introduction of a meaningful cut in current expenditure, reduction in indirect taxes on basic consumption goods and reduction in utility prices.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2070892/2-inflation-rises-11-4-hike-food-energy-prices/

FISHING BOAT RESCUED

Staff Reporter October 04, 2019

Pakistan Maritime Security Agency officials carry out a rescue operation near Keamari on Thursday after a fishing trawler capsized.—PPI

KARACHI: The Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PSMA) on Thursday rescued a fishing trawler carrying a crew of 19 fishermen.

The PMSA rescue team reached the place of the incident and rescued the boat and its crew after it was informed about the trawler, Al-Razziqui, in distress since 6am.

One crew member, Naeem Ishaque, was missing. Efforts to find him were under way.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508790

FARMERS SEEK PROBE INTO HAZARDOUS PESTICIDES

Staff Correspondent October 04, 2019

HYDERABAD: Progressive farmers and representatives of growers' organisations expressed grave concerns over application of hazardous pesticides on crops and called for launching inquiries into some recent incidents in which farm workers died or fell unconscious while spraying such drugs in fields in Punjab and Sindh.

They were speaking at a workshop organised by a private concern held at a private hotel here on Thursday. Farmers from nine districts of Sindh, representatives of Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) and other growers' bodies and department of agriculture extension and research participated in the daylong discussion on productive use of pesticides.

SCA vice president Nabi Bux Sathio urged representatives of the company to direct their authorised dealers to guide farmers not to use the harmful pesticide Thimet on rice, wheat, vegetables and fruits as it emitted a foul smell and caused harm to crops and humans. "The spray of Thimet is suitable for sugar cane and viable for cotton. It must be kept in safe coating of the pesticide until it is dissolved in water," he suggested.

He said that China manufactured this pesticide but it banned it due to some environmental risks while it was being deployed in USA because the country used the latest technology and mechanised farming where farmers did not need to touch the drug until it was applied.

He said that the pesticide must contain literature with some pieces of advice for quick treatment in case a farmer fell unconscious during the spray. He said he wrote a letter to Sindh agriculture extension director general of Hyderabad against poisonous pesticides after the reports emerged that four farmers died in Lodhran and a number of growers fainted in Bathoro, Sujawal, Thatta and Tando Mohammad Khan while using some highly toxic pesticides.

He said that he took up the issue with the federal plant protection department as well and proposed immediate ban of such pesticides.

He said that two pesticides including Thimet and Quick harmed farmers in Punjab and Sindh. "In case of use of phorate, 5-G chemicals on rice crop might disturb our $2 billion export market due to residual effects on rice," he said.

SCA senior vice president Syed Aijaz Nabi Shah stressed that field assistants (FA) of agriculture department were assigned responsibilities to guide farmers about the hazards but no field assistant could be seen in the fields nowadays.

He said that FAs must be provided proper training about the use of all pesticides so that they could apprise growers of their proper application. "FAs should inform peasants about which pesticides are suitable for which crops so that better results can be achieved," he said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508779/farmers-seek-probe-into-hazardous-pesticides

BONDED LABOURERS FREED

A Correspondent October 04, 2019

NAWABSHAH: Acting upon a directive issued to them by the Shaheed Benazirabad district and sessions court, the Nawabshah police carried out a raid on the farms of a landlord, Abdul Hameed Khoso, to recover 13 members of a peasant family on Thursday.

Applicant Dharmoun Kolhi had claimed in his application that the landlord had been holding his family in bonded labour for about a year.

The recovered persons would be produced in court later, the police said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1508778/bonded-labourers-freed

PARLIAMENT TO HAVE EXHAUSTIVE DEBATE ON AGRICULTURE SECTOR: QAISER

RECORDER REPORT OCT 4TH, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser announced on Thursday that the Parliament will host a comprehensive debate on agriculture to boost up the agriculture growth in the county. Asad Qaiser was speaking at the 5th meeting of the Special Committee on Agricultural Products here at Parliament House. He emphatically stressed the need for connecting Pakistani farmers with the global markets and projection of the 'made in Pakistan' brand across the world.

He stated that Pakistan is a producer of best quality agricultural products; however, the lack of effective penetration in the global value chain precludes Pakistani farmers from higher productivity and profitability. He announced that the Special Committee on Agriculture Products is actively pursuing linkages with the global food outlets through partners and investors of international repute.

The representatives of the SGS and Swiss Consulting Private Limited presented a comprehensive plan for integrating Pakistani farmers in the global value chain. An international business development consultant on agricultural food supply chain from SGS Gevena Hans Peter Heus Peter briefed the committee on the successful implementation of the plan in China. The plan presented to the committee centered on leveraging a tech-driven connectivity of the Pakistani farmers with the global food chain. The committee was informed that the entire plan of e-commerce-based access to the global market would be based on data management and self-assessment system where farmers will have wider access to buyers of their choice. The system indicates reducing the exploitative role of middlemen.

He highlighted that previously the Pakistani farmers remained one of the most neglected segments in the policy and developmental priorities. He added that the Special Committee of the NA is committed to sustained endeavors to protect the rights of the farmers and enhance their profitability and productivity.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191004523598/

FARMERS URGE GOVT TO DECLARE AGRI-EMERGENCY

By Our Correspondent Published: October 4, 2019

LAHORE: The Farmers Bureau of Pakistan (FBP), a representative platform for progressive growers, has urged the government to declare agriculture and climate emergency in the country in order to save the sector from bad weather that the country has experienced over the past few days.

“Cotton, rice and corn crops have been nearly ruined because of the erratic weather, heat wave and a lack of promotion of new technologies in the agriculture sector,” said founding members of the FBP. “We may witness a loss of 40% in rice and maize yields while cotton may also face a similar fate.”

Talking to a group of journalists on Thursday, FBP founding members Dr Zafar Hayyat, Mian Shaukat, Aamir Hayat Bhandara and Imran Shah Khagga urged the government to make immediate intervention to save the growers. They pointed out that maize was not a crop for the southern region of Punjab but due to the poor performance of cotton crop, the farmers were opting to plant rice and maize in that region.

"Seed companies should have informed the growers earlier that varieties being marketed by them were not meant for all regions and they should test them while keeping changing weather conditions in mind," they said. They were of the view that the agriculture sector could register negative growth this year, even lower than the previous year.

The FBP founding members urged the government to immediately improve its policies, control seed trade, introduce such seed varieties that were resistant to climate changes and bring technology in the sector.

Hayyat pointed out that untimely windstorms, erratic rains and sudden heat wave had impacted the rice and maize crops. Khagga pointed out that the formula for manufacturing pesticides, which were being marketed in the country, was 30 to 40 years old and they did not prove effective against pests.

He said pesticides of billions of rupees were being imported and marketed but such insecticides had no efficacy against pests rather they were causing illness among human beings and contaminating water.

He was of the view that independent surveys showed that the country might produce only 12 million bales of cotton this season against the target of 15 million bales despite an increase in the area under cultivation.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2071811/2-farmers-urge-govt-declare-agri-emergency/

NA BODY APPROVES ISLAMABAD FOOD SAFETY BILL

10/5/2019 12:00:00 AM

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Interior on Friday approved The Islamabad Capital Territory Food Safety Bill 2019.

The committee chairman, Raja Khurram Shahzad Nawaz, did not take up any other agenda item in protest against constant absence of minister and interior secretary from the committee meetings.

However, the committee meeting, held in the Parliament House, approved the bill which was moved by Ali Nawaz Awan.

The basic objective of the bill is to keep a check on whole chain of food items from raw material to its sale and even from production to the sale points.

The Pure Food Ordinance 1960 is currently applicable in Islamabad which does not even prohibits the sale of cooked food like samosas, pakoras, etc., in envelops made of newspapers.

The Islamabad Capital Territory Food Safety Bill 2019 has described that `food` means anything whether processed, semi processed, raw or cooked and used as food adulterant for human consumption other than drugs defined in the Drug Act 1976.

Food includes any substance intended to be used in composition or preparation of food, flavours and colouring materials in food, chewing gum, confectionery and other products, water in any form, including ice directly consumed by human or use in the preparation of food.

The bill defines `Adulterated Food` as edible items being sold that contains poisonous or other ingredient that are injurious to health and the food items that do not match the prescribed standards of the law or which are prepared, packed or kept under unhygienic and insanitary`conditions.

The bill after approval will allow the estab-lishment of a food authority as well as food laboratory under the ICT administration.

The food authority will not only have the powers to set up food laboratories but accreditation of private sector food lab too.

Currently all food samples are sent to the labs of NIH and the PARC for confirmation of food adulteration. The bill defines that the food authority director will be the chief executive of ficer of the authority and responsible for ef fective implementation of the food law.

The bill has also enhanced penalties for the violation of food related law and any person selling adulterated food can be awarded six months imprisonment or fine up to Rs1 million or both.

For commercial manufacturing, storing, sale or distribution of substandard or misbranded food items will be liable to six months imprisonment or Rs1 million fine or both.

The Bill has also described punishments resulting from consumption of `unsafe food` and if there is no health issue after consuming unsafe food the seller will be liable to six month imprisonment or Rs1 million fine or both.

If unsafe food consumption results in injury to any person the punishment can be extended to three years or fine up to Rs1 million or both.

If such unsafe food results into death of a person, the punishmentis life imprisonment or fine up to Rs5 million but not less than Rs3 million or both.

The new bill has determined compensation to the consumer or the legal heirs of the consumer of Rs1 million in case of death, up to Rs500,000 in case of injury and if the food operator fails to pay the compensation the authorities will recover the compensation by selling the assets of the food outlet.

The bill will be presented to the National Assembly and after getting approved from the lower house it will be forwarded to the Senate for approval. -Kalbe Ali

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=05_10_2019_004_007

‘FARMERS NEED EASY ACCESS TO CAPITAL, INTERVENTIONS TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY’

Amjad Mahmood Updated October 05, 2019

LAHORE: Lack of capital for mechanisation, poor knowledge of modern farming techniques, absence of formal credit and marketability at harvest as major reasons behind the failure of ordinary farmers in achieving productivity, a report on Pakistan’s agriculture sector notes.

The report, a copy of which is available with Dawn, has been prepared by the National Defence University (NDU) in consultation with agriculture sector stakeholders.

It presents a set of recommendations to boost to the agriculture sector which is presently on the decline because of certain official policies, climate change impact and unregulated sub-sectors.

Official support price for at least 20 major crops, research budget equal to 2 per cent of the agriculture GDP, abolishing all taxes from farm inputs and providing a level playing field to the local farming community to put them at par with their counterparts in neighbouring states are some of the proposals prepared by the forum.

The NDU says the consultation followed a seminar on 'Pakistan Economy: Challenges and Way Forward' held on June 27 on the request of the GHQ. Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa attended the consultation for five hours and assured the participants that he would personally talk to Prime Minister Imran Khan for maximum implementation of the suggestions, claims Kissan Ittehad Pakistan president Khalid Mahmood Khokhar who represented growers at the meeting.

The report warns that if the four factors are not addressed, the sector will reach nowhere. It further called for incentivising the farmers to supplement their income, manage supply of raw material and regulate prices of the final product.

It asserts that the incumbent government's step to slash tax on farm loans from 39pc to 20pc will only benefit the banking sector increasing their assets without providing any relief to the farmers. The lack of incentives is marked by non-reduction in fertiliser prices, exploitation by middlemen in agri-marketing and high input costs.

The report suggests extending subsidy support to local farmers at par with what is given to Indian farmers that is $250 per annum per farmer; blanket tax exemption; subsidies on fertiliser, seed, energy and irrigation water; soft loans; cheap crop insurance; high tariffs on food imports; and support price for over 20 crops.

"This will provide level playing field to Pakistani farmers to compete with the Indian farmers on export end."

Observing that no relief was provided to an average farmer in the current budget, it calls for reducing to a minimum all taxes on electricity, fertiliser, diesel, pesticide, seeds, tractors and farm implements, timely announcing cotton support price for securing grower profitability in the wake of monopoly of the textile industry in buying lint.

Expressing concern at only 5pc of bank loans for purchase of farm machinery in the last five years, the report holds lack of policy direction, low bank lending and poor local farm machinery manufacturing as responsible for slow mechanisation and suggests a "well-integrated agriculture mechanisation plan with a focus on local industry" and "the government should provide small-scale farmers machinery on minimal rent".

Criticising unregulated seed business, it says "the 850 private seed distributors have no ethics and are manipulating the sector profits only" flooding the market with impure seeds of different names leading to seed pollution.

It recommends public-private research partnership for introducing hybrid and genetically modified crops and preserving indigenous seed.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509098/farmers-need-easy-access-to-capital-interventions-to-increase-productivity

COTTON PRICES STEADY

Staff Reporter October 05, 2019

KARACHI: The cotton market remained steady on Friday amid falling trade activity as leading textile spinning groups shift their focus towards lint imports.

Cotton prices were stable but trade volume declined further since there is short crop and quality issues with the local commodity.

Erratic weather with heavy rains and gusty winds — at times high temperatures — has damaged standing cotton crop in Sindh and Punjab. It is being feared that the crop size would be much less than initial estimates.

The Cotton Crop assessment Committee (CCAC) of Ministry of National Food Security and Research in its first meeting has placed the crop size at 10.200 million bales which stands 33 per cent lower than earlier official estimates.

Cotton analyst Naseem Usman told Dawn that with climate change the government has to chalk out new plan for cotton crop in order to avert such situation in future.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509090/cotton-prices-steady

ADVISORY FOR GROWERS

RECORDER REPORT OCT 5TH, 2019 LAHORE

Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) has advised the growers of gram crop to complete their sowing till October-end in Barani areas and by November 15 in irrigated areas. At the same time, the department advised the growers from Jhelum, Rawalpindi, Gujrat and Narowal districts that best sowing time for gram crop in their respective areas is till November 10. Giving names of approved varieties of gram, the spokesman of the department said that these include Balkasar 2000, Punjab 2008, Vinhar 2000, Battal 98, Battal 2016, NIAB CH 2016 and Bhakkar 2011.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191005523795/

COTTON OUTPUT TARGET MASSIVELY REVISED DOWNWARD

TAHIR AMIN OCT 5TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) has revised downward cotton production target by around 33 percent, i.e. to 10.2 million bales against the initial target of 15 million bales set for the current season 2019-20, after missing the sowing target by over six percent.

This shortfall of 33 percent in cotton production translates to the requirement of importing at least five million bales, increasing the import bill very substantially, said an official of All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA).

The first meeting of Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) was held under the chairmanship of Chaudhry Mohammad Ayub, Additional Secretary Ministry of National Food Security & Research.

Representatives of provincial governments of Sindh and Punjab, Plant Protection Department (PPD), Trading Cooperation of Pakistan (TCP), Federal Seed Certification & Registration Department (FSC&RD), Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC), All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA), Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA), Karachi Cotton Association (KCA), and Cotton Growers attended the meeting. The committee met to asses the volume of current cotton crop in the country.

Talking to Business Recorder Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said that missing the sowing target, pests' attacks as well as weather led to revising downward the crop production target.

Target for cotton production set for this year by the Ministry of Food Security/Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) was 15 million bales. The first Cotton Crop Assessment Committee met on Friday and it was unanimously agreed that the actual cotton production that can be realistically be expected is 10 million bales.

Dr Khalid Abdullah dilated upon the overview of cotton production scenario in the country. Challenges faced by the cotton crop especially high input prices, insect pests pressure and higher temperature were also discussed in detail. Representatives of the provincial government explained the methodology for crop assessment and informed the meeting about the crop estimates.

The official sources said the country has missed cotton sowing target by over 6 percent. Cotton was sown on 2.658 million hectares against the target of 2.785 million hectares. Sources said that due to increased sugarcane cultivation in cotton areas, delay in harvest of wheat and shortage of water, decline in cotton sowing was registered.

The government had fixed the cotton area and production target for the year 2019-20, according to which Punjab was expected to cover 2.145 million hectares and produce 10.2 million cotton bales, Sindh had to cover 0.64 million hectares and produce 4.6 million cotton bales, Balochistan had to cover 0.1 million hectares and produce 0.2 million bales and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been targeted to sow cotton on 0.01 million acres and produce 0.0002 million bales of cotton.

Sindh reported a drop of 30% in the expected cotton crop while Punjab reported a drop of 15% over last year's production. This shortfall of 33% in cotton production translates to a drop of two percent in GDP as well as the requirement of importing at least 5 million bales increasing the import bill very substantially, claimed an official of All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA). The expected quality of cotton is also much worse than last year, he added.

The official said this is bad news for the economy of the country and the blame for this fiasco can squarely be placed on the Ministry of Food Security and the PCCC. The transfer of PCCC from the textile ministry to food ministry was a parting gift from the previous government who approved this transfer in their last cabinet meeting. The failure of the cotton crop calls for urgent and immediate action by the government in restructuring of PCCC with private sector leadership. The need for a long-term stable and progressive textile and cotton policy has been underscored by this disaster, which is inescapable if Pakistan is to progress and achieve economic stability and aggressive growth. This is a national security paradigm and should not and cannot be ignored.

The member representing APTMA was of the opinion that the assessment is very realistic and the ground realities are very close to this forecast. Cotton growers emphasized the need of price intervention by the government in such a way that benefit should go directly to growers.

The additional secretary MNFS&R stated that cotton crop size is assessed on the basis of data provided by provincial governments, and ensured the second assessment will be held after 3-4 weeks. The meeting was adjourned with vote of thanks from the chair.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191005523773/

NA BODY APPROVES ISLAMABAD FOOD SAFETY BILL

Kalbe Ali October 05, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Interior on Friday approved The Islamabad Capital Territory Food Safety Bill 2019.

The committee chairman, Raja Khurram Shahzad Nawaz, did not take up any other agenda item in protest against constant absence of minister and interior secretary from the committee meetings.

However, the committee meeting, held in the Parliament House, approved the bill which was moved by Ali Nawaz Awan.

The basic objective of the bill is to keep a check on whole chain of food items from raw material to its sale and even from production to the sale points.

The Pure Food Ordinance 1960 is currently applicable in Islamabad which does not even prohibits the sale of cooked food like samosas, pakoras, etc., in envelops made of newspapers.

The Islamabad Capital Territory Food Safety Bill 2019 has described that 'food" means anything whether processed, semi processed, raw or cooked and used as food adulterant for human consumption other than drugs defined in the Drug Act 1976.

Food includes any substance intended to be used in composition or preparation of food, flavours and colouring materials in food, chewing gum, confectionery and other products, water in any form, including ice directly consumed by human or use in the preparation of food.

The bill defines 'Adulterated Food' as edible items being sold that contains poisonous or other ingredient that are injurious to health and the food items that do not match the prescribed standards of the law or which are prepared, packed or kept under unhygienic and insanitary' conditions.

The bill after approval will allow the establishment of a food authority as well as food laboratory under the ICT administration.

The food authority will not only have the powers to set up food laboratories but accreditation of private sector food lab too.

Currently all food samples are sent to the labs of NIH and the PARC for confirmation of food adulteration.

The bill defines that the food authority director will be the chief executive officer of the authority and responsible for effective implementation of the food law.

The bill has also enhanced penalties for the violation of food related law and any person selling adulterated food can be awarded six months imprisonment or fine up to Rs1 million or both.

For commercial manufacturing, storing, sale or distribution of substandard or misbranded food items will be liable to six months imprisonment or Rs1 million fine or both.

The Bill has also described punishments resulting from consumption of "unsafe food" and if there is no health issue after consuming unsafe food the seller will be liable to six month imprisonment or Rs1 million fine or both.

If unsafe food consumption results in injury to any person the punishment can be extended to three years or fine up to Rs1 million or both.

If such unsafe food results into death of a person, the punishment is life imprisonment or fine up to Rs5 million but not less than Rs3 million or both.

The new bill has determined compensation to the consumer or the legal heirs of the consumer of Rs1 million in case of death, up to Rs500,000 in case of injury and if the food operator fails to pay the compensation the authorities will recover the compensation by selling the assets of the food outlet.

The bill will be presented to the National Assembly and after getting approved from the lower house it will be forwarded to the Senate for approval.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509021/na-body-approves-islamabad-food-safety-bill

FARMERS NEED LEVEL PLAYING FIELD TO COMPETE GLOBALLY

By Shahram Haq Published: October 5, 2019

LAHORE: Farmers are worried over the performance of the country's agriculture sector and have cautioned that the recent decline in cotton production will cost the exchequer an approximate $7 billion.

Latest data indicates a shortfall in the cotton production target of 15 million bales for the ongoing crop season.

Apart from the revenue loss, a huge amount will be spent by the country on cotton import from different countries to make up for the shortfall. The decline in production was primarily due to poor decision-making and absence of cotton support price.

In this regard, the farmers met Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa and asked for support to steer the ailing sector out of crisis. They looked for help in implementing the recommendations made by the agriculture sector stakeholders and Pakistan's top economic think tanks for giving a boost to the sector.

The recommendations were presented to the army chief at a seminar organised by the National Defence University (NDU).

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad President Khalid Khokhar said on Friday the army chief had assured them of making all-out efforts to save the sector and convey their grievances to the prime minister.

After successive consultations, NDU had presented its recommendations on agriculture, large-scale industries and small and medium enterprises to the army chief last month.

As per the document available with The Express Tribune, recommendations for the agriculture sector included extension in subsidy support for farmers so they can purchase farm inputs, like $50 per annum per farmer, blanket tax exemption, subsidy on fertilisers, seeds, energy and water for irrigation, low interest loans, cheap crop insurance, high tariffs to block food imports and price support for more than 20 crops.

"This will provide a level playing field to Pakistani farmers, enabling them to compete with Indian farmers in the global market," according to the document.

It was noted that the government gave no relief to the average farmer in the FY20 budget as it raised the 2% tax on value addition in the fertiliser sector by a further 3% instead of waiving it. It was recommended that all taxes on farm inputs be reduced to a minimum.

The document suggested timely announcement of cotton support price to ensure profit for the growers as the only buyer of cotton – the textile industry – had monopolised the market and suppressed prices far below international rates.

"Pakistan also needs to ensure price regulation of its products as the farmers are not given their due share in line with international standards."

The document called for introducing indigenous technology in the field of agriculture and introduction of subsidy schemes by federal and provincial governments.

"India got the technology from Israel and tailoured it accordingly; Pakistan needs another green revolution and mechanisation because manual sowing is impossible on a large scale."

It was noted that research and development in agriculture was almost non-existent. People who run agriculture departments have no expertise in the field. Research centres are under-equipped due to limited financial assistance.

The findings suggested that "the government should enhance R&D expenditure from 0.2% to 2% of agri-GDP. In addition, farm budget should be allocated to agricultural universities."

It was noted that value addition was a process of increasing economic value and consumer appeal of an agricultural commodity. However in Pakistan, the main challenges facing the agro-processing industry are post-harvest losses due to lack of storage and transportation, inability to supply raw material, absence of cold chain facilities and other such factors.

It was recommended to set up processing plants at production sites in order to reduce transportation costs. "Government must encourage the setting up of processing plants through tariff incentives, accelerated depreciation of 100% and through turnover tax."

The role of middleman was another critical issue as without the middleman's credit, over 80% of farmers would not be able to buy seeds and fertilisers. However, this promoted black marketing, duplicate products and sale of expired goods.

The document urged the government to ensure easy availability of seeds, fertilisers and pesticides for farmers.

The NDU recommendations also called for framing a new marketing policy to cope with the challenge of new markets with special focus on streamlining the role of middlemen and introducing regulations, which limit the margins.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2072458/2-farmers-need-level-playing-field-compete-globally/

EXPERTS INVITED TO EGYPT'S AGRI-RESEARCH CENTRE

By APPPu blished: October 5, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani agricultural experts and scientists have formally been invited to visit the Agriculture Research Centre of Egypt – one of world's pioneers in agriculture research and development – in order to further explore opportunities in the field, particularly in research.

The invitation was extended by Egyptian Ambassador Ahmed Fadel Yacoub, who along with a delegation called on Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan to discuss areas of mutual cooperation, particularly in agriculture and livestock sector development.

Speaking on the occasion, Sultan said both countries shared common agricultural traditions and there was a lot of potential for exchange of research and techniques between the two countries, according to a statement issued on Friday.

"Pakistan imports two-thirds of its requirement of diammonium phosphate (DAP) from various countries and Egypt will be welcome to form any joint venture for establishing a plant in Pakistan and investing in the country," he stated.

"Pakistan can also benefit from Egyptian research and development in various crops like cotton as it has comparatively much better yield."

Egyptian Ambassador Yacoub, while speaking on the occasion, said Pakistan could consider scholarships from Egyptian agricultural universities, which would help in sharing knowledge and expertise, particularly in cotton production.

Local agricultural specialists and scientists should visit one of the world's pioneer agri-research centres in Egypt to further explore opportunities, particularly in research and development, he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2072455/2-experts-invited-egypts-agri-research-centre/

IMPORTS FAIL TO BRING DOWN ONION PRICES

Aamir Shafaat KhanUpdated October 06

KARACHI: Arrival of Iranian and Afghanistan onions failed to provide any relief to the consumers as traders further pushed up prices of the staple food to Rs90-100 per kg from Rs80.

Non-availability of Sindh onion and dependence on Balochistan variety has paved way for imports from Iran and Afghanistan.

Onion prices had been under pressure for the last few months as only Balochistan crop is feeding the entire country until new Sindh crop of onion is harvested by middle of October.

Retailers had already increased prices to Rs80 per kg ahead of Ashura (Sept 10) from Rs60 per kg in view of the demand and supply gap.

Traders said they had been procuring Iranian and Afghani onion at Rs60-70 per kg depending on the quality while Sindh variety, which started with very low quantity, sells at Rs80 per kg.

However, rupee-dollar parity had remained stable during July-August, keeping cost of imports under control.

They said they are lifting Sindh crop from the Sabzi Mandi in very little quantities due to higher rates. The Afghani onion is black in color while Iranian onion is of different color than Sindh crop. Very small quantity of Afghani onion is also available in the market. Many traders have mixed both the countries' onions.

Falahi Anjuman Wholesale Vegetable Market Super Highway President Haji Shahjehan said "If Iranian and Afghani onion had not arrived then the consumers would have been paying over Rs150 per kg. Imports were made as Balochistan crop was insufficient to meet the demand."

Around 15-20 big containers carrying 25-30 tonnes each have been unloading in Karachi's vegetable market daily for the last 20-25 days to satiate the city's demand.

He said the Sindh crop has also started arriving in the market but in small quantities amid reports of crop damage due to bad weather and rains.

However, he said there are reports that Balochistan growers had protested to the government over thriving imports of Iranian onion. As a result, arrival of Iranian onion had slowed down in the last two days in the markets.

Besides onion, consumers have been paying higher prices for almost all vegetables, barring potato, are selling at Rs80-160 per kg.

Tomato prices had been fluctuating between Rs80-120 per kg followed by Rs160 per kg for Capsicum (Shimla Mirch), Lady Finger (Bhindi) and Ridge Gourd (Turrai).

Bottle Gourd (Lokki) and Apple Gourd (Tinda) are selling at Rs100 per kg. Cabbage (Bund Gobhi) is priced at Rs80 per kg, while Cauli Flower (Phool Gobhi) is bring sold at Rs120 per kg. Cucumber (Kheera) price hovers between Rs80-100 per kg.

The price of good quality ginger came down to Rs320 per kg from Rs400 per kg while garlic price stands unchanged at Rs320 per kg.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509280

ITC'S INITIATIVE TO HELP LIVESTOCK, HORTICULTURE SMES

The Newspaper's Reporter October 06, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Geneva-based International Trade Centre (ITC) has begun a dialogue in Pakistan to identify projects in priority areas of agriculture sector in Sindh and Balochistan under the 'Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP)' initiative.

The project, funded by the European Union, will strengthen small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the two provinces associated with livestock, diary and horticulture in a period of over five years.

Following consultations with provincial governments and stakeholders in Quetta and Karachi, the dialogue moved to Islamabad where stakeholders completed the first round of consultations on the that will lead to poverty reduction in the country.

The discussions held earlier this week focused on identification of priority products in the horticulture, livestock and dairy sectors. In addition, key issues such as producers' capabilities, support service, policy and regulatory environment were also determined.

About the consultations in Quetta, Karachi and Islamabad, ITC's Chief of Sector and Enterprise Competitiveness Robert Skidmore said the contributions from partners will help ITC achieve a measurable reduction in poverty and increase economic growth in addition to creating more job opportunities.

Speaking during the Islamabad round of discussions, Adviser to PM on Commerce, Textiles and Industries Abdul Razak Dawood said the SMEs make up for the bulk of businesses activities in the country.

In order to achieve coherent, broad-based and sustainable economic growth, there is a need to focus on SMEs and unlock the potential in livestock and horticulture besides other sectors in the country and GRASP comes at the most appropriate time as Pakistan is gearing towards improvement in these sectors, he said.

Cooperation in EU Pakistan Head Milko Van Gool said that GRASP aligns with the rural development and economic cooperation initiatives of the EU in Pakistan as it will help SMEs in horticulture, livestock and dairy sectors become more competitive by making improvements at all levels of value chain.

These consultations will help us adapt to the federal and provincial context in Pakistan for maximum impact on the lives of people in Sindh and Balochistan, he said.

Under the project, the ITC has developed criteria to shortlist priority products through quantitative and qualitative assessment to categorise long list of potential products from the two provinces.

For this, 'green' and 'yellow' lists have already been prepared for the short listing process, given their good market reputation. Each product has also been analysed based on the environmental criteria for climate resilience.

Pakistan is among the top countries that will be most affected by climate change. The global phenomenon has already started to affect livelihoods of those living in the arid, semi-arid and coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan.

During stakeholder consultations, horticulture and livestock products were discussed to select top four products for Balochistan from vegetables and fruits including onions, dates, melons, grapes, tomato, olive, apricots and apple, while in livestock sector, sheep, goats, poultry or camel will be decided for two top priority products.

In Sindh, among the horticulture products, five products from vegetables and fruits including onions, tomatoes, dates, bananas, chilies, mango, guava and melon will be shortlisted. Among the livestock products, two products would be finalised for the project from goat, cattle, and buffalo and poultry sectors.

Livestock, dairy and horticulture — which accounts for 70 per cent of the value-added agriculture — have particularly strong potential for growth, climate adaptation and increased participation of women, small and medium-sized enterprises in these two sectors, face major challenges, according to the ITC.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509274

LOCUSTS SPREAD THROUGH THAR, LAND IN KHANPUR MAHAR

Dawn Report October 06, 2019

MITHI: Swarms of locusts have spread to Chhachhro, Nagarparkar and Dahli in Tharparkar and as far as Khanpur Mahar over the past two days in the wake of continuous rains, devouring leaves of trees and crops and leaving a trail of destruction behind them.

People in Thar told journalists that all their efforts to kill off the insect with sprays had proved ineffective because of continuous rain. They deplored the fact that massive swarms of insects were denuding their crops, trees and shrubs of leaves.

They said that the functionaries concerned in their areas had no resources to eliminate the insect and demanded both federal and provincial governments carry out aerial spray of fields through planes to exterminate the highly destructive insect as soon as possible before their threat became uncontrollable.

Meanwhile, it rained in Mithi, parts of Diplo, Kaloi, Nagarparkar and their surrounding areas on Saturday.

SUKKUR: Massive swarms of locusts landed in desert areas of Khanpur Mahar after recent rains and attacked standing crops on hundreds of acres.

The insects were seen eating away standing cotton crop in the villages of Mohammad Saleh Mahar, Sakhani, Jauro Pat, Bhurt Pat, Sardar Garh, Ali Sher Mahar, Abdullah Mahar, Nanhandhi and Beer Pat.

The affected villagers and growers Maqsood Gul Mahar, Shah Ali Mahar, Ranjhan Mahar and others told reporters that they had sustained heavy losses due to the locusts' attack on different crops.

They said that they had informed the department concerned time and again about the looming threat from locusts but they did not take their warnings seriously and no team had reached the area even after the attack had taken place.

They demanded the authorities concerned take notice of the highly damaging attack on their crops and send teams immediately to avert further damage to the remaining crops.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509160

NA BODY INFORMED: INCREASE IN FOOD, STEEL PRICES MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO INFLATION

ZAHEER ABBASI OCT 6TH, 2019 ISLAMABAD

The government has acknowledged that increase in sugar, edible oil and steel prices might have contributed to the inflation in the country and price hike is mostly emanating from oil, gas and electricity tariffs adjustment and inflationary expectation in economy. This has been submitted by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in a presentation to the sub-committee of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance, constituted to look into the factors after taking briefing on taxes as well as other economic decisions' contribution to the inflationary pressure in the country.

The FBR argued in the brief that increase in income tax rates of individuals' category is anti-inflationary as they reduced disposal income of high earners while on the other hand, the sales tax/FED measures are aimed at high-end consumption tax increase and they will not contribute to the inflation. Additionally, it claimed that sales tax and FED measures are having impact on areas that do not carry much weight in Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The FBR conceded that three things which might have contributed to inflation are tax increases on sugar, edible oil and steel. It is FBR's stance that there is only a tax impact of Rs 3.60 per kg for sugar, Rs 2 per kg for ghee and cooking oil and none in steel. The price hike is mostly emanating from increase in tariffs of oil, gas and electricity or from inflationary expectation in the economy, the Board added.

Additionally, the FBR further stated that there is a need for price control committees of the provinces to be proactive to effectively handle the excessive profiteering.

The FBR added that GST occupies a pivotal role in the current regime of taxation and is a consumption-based tax. However, the GST regime is structured in a manner targeted towards placing reduced minimal burden upon low and middle income segments of society.

The FBR argued that basic human needs are either not subject to GST or are taxed to a minimal extent and basic food items such as unprocessed agriculture produce, dairy products, grains cereals pulses, meat, fish poultry eggs, fruits, vegetables, products of milling Industry, etc, are exempt from payment of sales tax.

Some of these items, if branded and sold in retail packing such as dairy products excluding milk, prepared meal and poultry products such as sausages and products of milling industry excluding flour are subject to reduced tax rate of 10 percent. All the medicines and their raw materials and inputs are fully exempt from payment of sales tax; furthermore, equipment relating to treatment of diseases and purchases made by hospitals are also generally exempt from payment of sales tax, the FBR added in its brief presented to the sub-committee of the finance committee.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191006524876/

LOCUST ATTACK: DC THARPARKAR DIRECTS URGENT SPRAY ON YIELDS

RECORDER REPORT OCT 6TH, 2019 HYDERABAD

To save the yields from the locusts attack the spray work will be done urgently. These directions were given by the Deputy Commissioner Tharparkar Dr Shahzad Tahir Thaheem to the revenue officers and Agriculture Department Tharparkar.

He further said after the heavy rainfalls in district, the peoples have cultivated their lands with seasonal vegetables and fodder for the live stock which they are depended. To save their yields from the attack of locusts the spray work would be done as soon as possible so they can cultivate their lands by producing more yields.

The Deputy Commissioner Tharparkar Dr Shahzad Tahir Thaheem further said that timely spray teams along with vehicles are being sent to those areas where the locust's attack reported in the District.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191006524902/

FBP URGES GOVT TO DECLARE EMERGENCY IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

ZAHID BAIG OCT 6TH, 2019 LAHORE

The Farmers Bureau of Pakistan (FBP), a representative platform of progressive growers, has urged the government to impose agriculture and climate emergency to save the sector from a bad patch it is witnessing at present. "Cotton, rice and corn crops have almost ruined because of erratic weather, heat wave, lose control of seed trade and lack of promotion of new technologies in the agricultural sector. We may be witnessing a loss of 40 percent in rice and maize crops while cotton is also facing the same fate," said founding members of the Farmers Bureau of Pakistan.

Talking to members of the Agriculture Journalists Association (AJA) the other day, FBP founding members Dr Zafar Hayyat, Mian Shaukat, Aamir Hayat Bhandara and Imran Shah Khagga urged the government to ensure immediate intervention to save the growers.

They said maize is not a crop of South but due to poor performance of cotton, people opted for planting rice and maize. They said the companies should have told the growers that varieties being marketed by them are not meant for their region or they should plant it while keeping the weather conditions in mind.

They claimed that this year agriculture may register downward growth even lower than the previous year. They said the government should immediately improve the policies; control seed trade, introduce seed varieties resistant to climatic changes and promote the technology.

Dr Zafar Hayyat said they had formed the platform of FBP to play their role in putting the policymakers on the right path which could steer this sector out of the present marsh.

Imran Shah Khagga, another progressive grower, said that the formula of pesticides being marketed at present is 30-40 years old and it is not resistant against pests. He said pesticides of billions of rupees are imported and marketed but such medicines have no efficacy against pests rather cause illness even among human beings. He claimed that as per independent surveys we might have 12 million bales of cotton against the target of 15 million despite an increase in area under cultivation. Weight of the bales has also been reduced from 160 kg to 120-130 kg, he added.

He said our issue is pink bollworm and world has introduced cotton seed varieties which have resistance against this pest. He said we have requested the National Productivity Organisation (NPO) and other institutes concerned to ban such seed which has no proper gene expression and cannot fight against diseases prevailing in this region.

Mian Shaukat, farmer and seed producer, claimed that 75 percent of rice and corn has ruined because of bit higher temperature at the time of pollination. He said rice and maize plants are devoid of any grain. He said a law should be enacted under which seed trade could be registered under set parameters for any seed.

He said we cannot increase our production by importing seed rather hybrid seed should be developed in the country in line with our requirements. He also called for strict control over the sale of fake/stolen seeds without which, he said, no seed industry would invest in Pakistan.

LCCI Senior Vice President Ali Hussam Asghar also called for imposing agricultural and export emergency in Pakistan. However, he claimed the present government is working in the right direction in the agricultural sector. He said agricultural machinery such as rice transplanters, rice harvesters and laser land levelers are being introduced. He also invited the growers to work in collaboration with LCCI for working on producing an exportable agricultural surplus to enhance exports.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191006524945/

GOVT TO MAKE BALOCHISTAN A TOURIST ATTRACTION

By Mohammad Zafar Published: October 6, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Secretary Captain (retd) Fazeel Asghar has urged employees of the secretariat to perform their duties with dignity and honesty, adding that all efforts should be made for better future of the province and the country.

“The provincial government is keen to address issues of our employees by taking all necessary steps,” Asghar said while addressing the oath-taking ceremony of Balochistan Civil Secretariat Staff Association.

Asghar said his team has been working hard for the prosperity of the province and insisted that all other employees of the secretariat must do the same. “Employees are the backbone of the government. It is important that they serve the people with honesty, sincerity and dignity,” he said.

Assuring that he will visit all departments, the chief secretary said measures would be taken to improve the structure of all departments. Asghar also took oath from the newly elected cabinet of the Civil Secretariat Staff Association.

Reiterating the government’s commitment to ensure development, he said the provincial government is utilising all resources to provide quality health, education, infrastructure and clean drinking water facilities to the masses.

He said following the chief minister’s directives, the provincial departments should identify development schemes that will benefit the people across the province

“A new era of development would start in Balochistan through the timely completion of development schemes,” the chief secretary said while referring to education, health, infrastructure and clean drinking water projects initiated in remote areas of the province.

He also directed secretaries to submit monitoring reports.

Emphasising the development of the tourism sector, the CS said comprehensive plans are being made to enhance tourism opportunities in different parts of Balochistan including Khuzdar’s Jhalawan area.

He said the government wants to make Balochistan a centre of recreational and leisure activities. People from all over the country will come to the province to enjoy its scenic beauty, lakes and mountains, he added.

“Tourism spots will be focused to enhance the development of the province. These attractions are Balochistan’s identity,” he said. He pledged that special arrangements will be made for the public at the tourist sites to promote a positive image of Balochistan.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2073129/1-govt-make-balochistan-tourist-attraction/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCT 07th TO OCT 13th 2019

COTTON DAY BEING OBSERVED TODAY

ReporterOctober 07, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The first ‘World Cotton Day’ will be observed on Oct 7 (today) to emphasise the cotton’s enormous potential and need for further research on and development of cotton.

Cotton is considered as the lifeline of Pakistan’s economy. However, the cotton production in the country is decreasing, as during 2018-19 it was 9.8 million bales which was below 17.5 per cent over the last year’s output of around 12m bales.

An official document attributed the low production to the less economic incentives to cotton growers.

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is founding partner of World Cotton Day, alongside the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Cotton Advisory Committee, the International Trade Centre and the World Trade Organisation. Through its technical cooperation work, UNCTAD has assisted cotton-producing countries to improve their yields, meet international standards and attract investments in value-added industries.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509495

GROWERS WANT PADDY PRICE FIXED AT RS1,500/40KG

Correspondent October 07, 2019

HYDERABAD: Leaders of growers’ organisations have demanded Sindh government should fix price of paddy at Rs1,500 per 40 kg and direct rice millers to purchase the crop from farmers at the official rate.

The government should consider the fact that growers had already incurred huge losses for multiple reasons and therefore they be paid the paddy price commensurate with the rise in dollar’s rate, thay said while speaking at a growers' convention organised by Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) in Tando Mohammad Khan on Sunday.

SCA president Kabool Mohammad Khatian, who chaired the gathering, said the rice mills were offering Rs1,150 for 40 kg rice although farmers had got Rs1,300 per 40kg for their produce last year.

He said that considering increase in dollar's rate the government should fix the price for paddy at Rs1,500 per 40kg. The millers, who refused to comply with government directives, should be taken to task, he said.

He said the sugar mills which did not start crushing in October should commence it by Nov 1 and called for fixing sugar cane price at Rs300 per 40kg for 2019-20 in view of the current market price of sugar of Rs80 per kg.

He said that sugar cane price was fixed at Rs182 last year and since then the price sugar had registered Rs40 per kilo rise, therefore Rs300 per 40 kg should be fixed for the cane this year.

He said that after having curtailed cane cultivation due to various reasons the farmers would give up paddy cultivation altogether. The government's wrong policies and bad planning had affected productivity in agriculture sector by 70pc and if injustices continued against farmers, they would launch a Sindh-wide protest, he warned.

SCA general secretary Zahid Bhurgari said that growers and peasants of Sindh were facing economic exploitation and peasants were the worst sufferers. The government must take action against traders and millers in line with relevant laws to save agriculture sector, he said.

He said the government should ensure an end to unjustified deduction in paddy crop by rice millers and fix the paddy price at Rs1,500 per 40kg. A notification in this regard should be issued immediately, he said.

SCA senior vice president Syed Aijaz Nabi Shah said that Sindh's agriculture sector was facing 50 per cent losses due to multiple factors including water shortage, sea intrusion and anti-farmer policies. After having suffered losses in sugar cane crop farmers were now bracing for losses in paddy crop as well, he said.

SCA vice president Nabi Bux Sathio said that after sugar cane crisis a drought-like situation was created in Sindh but farmers would not let the government continue with its step-motherly treatment.

The chamber's divisional president Asghar Noonari said that paddy prices were beig artificially managed to cause losses to farmers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509350/growers-want-paddy-price-fixed-at-rs150040kg

PADDY GROWERS BRACE FOR PRODUCTIVITY LOSSES

Mohammad Hussain Khan October 07, 2019

The paddy crop in Sindh is facing multiple problems that are leading to productivity losses in northern parts of the province.

The otherwise bumper crop that is cultivated on over 770,000 hectares has been hit by temperature variations in the right-bank districts.

The entire right-bank strip from Dadu to Kashmore is home to paddy cultivation in the Kharif season. Many paddy growers in upper Sindh say the temperature variation is causing sterility in the crop, which will lead to zero grain formation.

“The early sowing of the hybrid variety failed to sustain the temperature variation experienced in September. The hybrid variety needs a low temperature at the time of flowering,” says Ashraf Soomro, director of the Dokri Rice Research Institute of the Sindh Agriculture Department.

Agriculture officials confirmed that the Sindh agriculture secretary has called for conducting a survey to assess losses in the paddy crop. According to Sindh Agriculture Extension Director General Hidayatullah Chhajro, the survey is underway in the right-bank districts and its result will soon be available with the department.

A team from Dokri’s research institute recently visited the districts in upper Sindh to determine the cause of sterility. According to one member of the team, it was caused by a rise in temperature between Sept 3 and 12. Paddy needs a temperature of less than 30 degrees at night, but it remained close to 49 degrees during this period. The quantum of losses may vary, he says, but it can be as high as 90 per cent in some cases.

Paddy grower Ameer Bux Pahore says sterility as well as a rice blast fungicide and an attack by leaf folders have led to crop losses. “Intense heat in the maturity stage has badly damaged the crop. I had obtained a yield of 70 maunds per acre last year in the hybrid variety. But this year, I got only 33 maunds per care from the same piece of land (owing to this problem),” Mr Pahore added.

Paddy growers like Nadeem Shah from lower Sindh say their region also witnessed the temperature problem on a smaller scale. “Rains have also damaged our paddy crop in Badin and Thatta districts,” Mr Shah says.

Sindh’s growers grow mostly coarse and hybrid varieties whereas Punjab’s farmers are inclined to basmati, which is unique in terms of aroma, texture and the elongation ratio. Post-cooking rice elongation is an important factor. Basmati rice is a luxury item and has a greater export value. According a rice exporter, its export value is around three times higher than those of other varieties.

The trend of the imported hybrid variety continued in Sindh for several years. Sindh’ local varieties like DR82, 83 and 92 have taken a back seat. But a veteran paddy grower Gada Hussain Mahesar considers the hybrid variety the main culprit in this year’s temperature-related losses.

He says market dealers sell the imported variety claiming that it is imported from China. In reality though, he says, it’s a mixture of different varieties that is sold in the garb of the hybrid variety. He says the hybrid variety is on 75pc of the area under cultivation in Sindh whereas local varieties are grown on the rest of the 25pc of land. “Most hybrid varieties are unregistered. This variety is exported to African countries because other nations don’t opt for it,” he says.

In the last season (2018-19), the crop missed the sowing target by 10.36pc. It grew on 690,224ha against the target of 770,000ha. A year before (2017-18) Sindh had surpassed the sowing and production targets by 10.44pc and 9.6pc, respectively.

This year, growers sowed the hybrid variety early (June) although it is a late-grown variety. Farmers prefer the hybrid variety to Sindh’s indigenous varieties for higher productivity because the former offers greater yield potential. But the over-reliance of growers on the hybrid variety is not going down well with veteran paddy growers like Mr Mahesar.

Sindh leads in the per-hectare paddy yield by 42pc (3,441kg per hectare) as the national yield is 2,423kg per hectare, according to provincial agriculture officials. Sindh contributes 28.6pc to the total area of paddy crop and 40.6pc to national rice production as per 2017-18 figures issued by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Within Sindh, Irri varieties are cultivated on 43pc of the total paddy acreage. It contributes 55pc to the national acreage. Out of Sindh's total rice production, the share of Irri varieties is 30.8pc. It is 49.3 pc nationally.

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (Reap) Chairman Shahjahan Malik says the association is poised to double rice exports in terms of tonnage in the next five years. If farmers in Sindh start using laser land levellers and adopt better harvest practices, they can substantially increase their paddy production, he adds.

He called for the enhanced use of laser land levellers to save water. Growers need to give up the use of harvesters for paddy as it is more suited for wheat thrashing, he said. The harvester causes losses of around 5pc in yields, he added.

When the private sector was allowed to export rice in 1998-99, the value of Pakistan's rice exports was only $300 million, according to Reap. But its members managed to export over 4m tonnes of rice amounting to more than $2bn a year until 2008-09.

Rice is a high-delta crop requiring plenty of water from sowing to harvesting. Uneven farmlands need more water. But the use of equipment like laser levellers ensures uniformity in water distribution and saves around 30-40pc of irrigation water. The equipment is being distributed on a cost-sharing basis under Rs18bn foreign-funded Sindh Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Project.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509343

THE ANGUISH OF BALOCHISTAN'S FARMERS

Muhammad Akbar Notezai October 07, 2019

Wayara, called Wayaro by the locals, is situated between Bela and Uthal town in Balochistan's Lasbella district. The Regional Corporation Development (RCD) road connects Quetta and Karachi. Across the RCD road, farmers cultivate their lands.

The Lasbella district is the area that Balochistan's Chief Minister Jam Kamal hails from; before him, his father and grandfather also served as the province's chief ministers. Though the chief minister's roots belong to this area, like other parts of Balochistan, the government exists only in name.

Nawab Saleem Baloch hails from Panjgur district in Balochistan, which borders Iran. Mr Baloch, who is in his late 20s, used to smuggle oil and diesel from Iran which allowed him to save up some money. In 2015, he came to Wayaro with Rs3 million to cultivate 30 acres of his family-owned land. He expected to double his savings through farming but fate had other plans.

While living near his fields for supervision, he brought peasants from Sindh to work on his land. "We grew vegetables, watermelon and other crops," recalls Mr Baloch as he sips green tea while sitting in Quetta. "To prevent diseases, I consulted agriculturalists for medicines."

Similar to other farmers of the district, none of his initiatives was the least bit supported by the government.

'Even an empty crate costs Rs50 and our farmers are compelled to sell a crate filled with 17kg of tomatoes for Rs100'

However, he did not give up though he had to pay for electricity and water expenses as well. Two seasons came and went but instead of making a profit, he fell into debt.

One instance he narrated was the time when he rented a pickup truck, for Rs10,000, with a load of watermelons and went to Karachi. He waited for buyers from dawn to dusk at a wholesale market. Not a single buyer was willing to pay more than Rs8,000 for his entire load.

"Even if I had sold it for Rs8,000, I would have had to pay the driver Rs2,000 from my pocket," he said full of regret. "Finally, I gave the watermelons to madrassah students for the sake of spiritual reward rather than profit and returned to Lasbella empty-handed."

There are similar stories to be heard from other parts of northern Balochistan. Farmers dumped crates of tomatoes on streets because of falling fruit prices in wholesale markets. According to the protestors, the farmers are facing losses of millions of rupees.

Secretary General Abdul Rehman Bazai of Balochistan Zamindar Action lamented government's imports from Iran and India. "If the country imports edibles like tomatoes and onions, how can we sell our crops locally? Even an empty crate costs Rs50 and our farmers are compelled to sell a crate filled with 17 kilograms of tomatoes for Rs100. This is sheer injustice."

Echoing Mr Bazai's assertions, Mr Baloch narrates his own experience of selling crates of tomatoes at throwaway prices. "I put 18kg of tomatoes in each crate and had to sell them for Rs100. One day, a man wanted to pay Rs70 for a crate, I was about to cry. I just dumped the crate instead of selling it."

One of the challenges faced by this community is the lack of cold storage facilities because of which farmers have to take loans. A farmer is forced to sell 15kg of apples for Rs350. And he is willing to offer further concessions on this price as well because if the apples are not sold, they will rot.

The Agriculture Department occupies a mammoth space on Sariab Road. Director Information Kareem Jaffer is busy chatting with his colleague when he is approached. There are over 70,000 farmers in Balochistan, according to him.

"Whatever we can do, we are doing for these farmers," he tells Dawn. "However, so many things have privatised that farmers have to manage on their own these days."

As per the Balochistan Land Utilisation Statistics 2016-2017, the cultivated area is 3.19m acres, the uncultivated area is 14.9m acres, and the total cropped area is 1.06m acres.

In his concluding remarks, Mr Baloch explains that a farmer takes care of his land like his child, regardless of his losses. "I spent Rs3m and lost half of it. Despite it, I continue farming because I feel there is still a ray of hope."

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509342

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT VOWS TO PROMOTE COTTAGE INDUSTRY

RECORDER REPORT OCT 7TH, 2019 SIALKOT

Punjab government has formulated a plan for rehabilitation and strengthening the cottage industry across the Province. Official sources told Business Recorder here on Sunday that under the plan loan amounting to Rs 300,000 would provide on soft terms to the industrialists rehabilitation of cottage industry and priority would be given to women entrepreneurs in the Punjab.

The PTI led government was committed to promote cottage industry as livelihood of thousands of families was linked with it. The government was keen to promote women entrepreneurship enabling them to play their instrumental role in boosting up the export volume as well as work shoulder to shoulders with men for enhancing exports of the country. The plan would soon be carried out in major industrial towns of the Punjab sources added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191007525061/

EXPORT OF WHEAT FLOUR TO AFGHANISTAN RESUMES PARTIALLY

Ibrahim Shinwari Updated October 08, 2019

LANDI KOTAL: Pakistan resumed partial export of wheat flour related items to Afghanistan via Torkham border after about two months.

Sources at Torkham told Dawn that federal government had banned export of wheat flour and related commodities to Afghanistan since July 30 due to rising domestic demand. “The export quota of wheat flour had also exhausted by the end of July and thus its export was stopped,” they added.

Sources said that federal government finally agreed to lift the ban on semolina (suji), refined flour used in bakery items and fine atta (flour) on September 24 after prolonged negotiations with the exporters. However, ban on regular wheat flour was intact, they added.

Jamal Afridi, a wheat exporter in Jamrud, told this scribe that so far only one truck loaded with refined flour, fine atta and semolina flour had crossed over to Afghanistan after the ban was lifted.

He said that other three to four trucks loaded with the same commodities were awaiting custom clearance at Torkham as the clearing agents and customs staffers were busy in sorting out duty in accordance with the value of the items.

Custom staff also acknowledged resumption of wheat-related items export to Afghanistan and said that at least 15 to 25 trucks loaded with wheat flour and other related items would go to Afghanistan via Torkham on daily basis prior to the imposition of ban on July 30.

Other sources at Torkham said that smuggling of wheat flour through unfrequented routes to Afghanistan had picked up momentum during the nearly two-month ban. They said that custom staff in assistance with the border guards had only recently seized hundreds of flour bags concealed in a truck apparently loaded with daily use retail items on the surface of the truck.

However, Jamal Afridi expressed the hope that with the round the clock opening of Torkham border and sufficient stocks at hands, the federal government would also lift ban on export of regular wheat flour as it would convey a positive message to the people of Afghanistan.

VISIT: Capital City Police Officer Karim Khan said on Monday that a grand operation would be launched soon in Khyber tribal district against narcotics.

He said this during a brief visit to Jamrud Press Club. He urged the local journalists to help police in tracking down drug smugglers.

"Illegal drugs are a curse and its eradication is a mission in which help and assistance of journalists is vital," said the official. He added that a comprehensive strategy would be devised to nab all the culprits involved in the heinous crime.

He said that all the doubts and apprehensions of Khasadar and Levies personnel would be removed as they had become part of regular police. He said that all their issues would be resolved.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509602

BADIN FARMERS ACCUSE GOVT FUNCTIONARIES OF 'MISGUIDING' WB DELEGATION

Hanif Samoon October 08, 2019

BADIN: The leaders of Save Badin Action Committee have accused officials of Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority and irrigation department of "misguiding" World Bank delegation about flows of water in Phuleli Canal and Akram Wah and availability of water in the canals' tail ends.

If the government officials' claims were right then why did they keep "genuine representatives" of farmers away from the visiting delegation, it was asked. "It was another farce staged by the officials of Sida and irrigation department to fool international donors, so they purposely kept local farmers in the dark about their visit," they said in a joint press statement issued here on Monday.

They requested the WB high-ups to send experts' teams to meet local farmers and growers to gain firsthand knowledge about their grievances and stop funding "controversial" projects in future under Water Sector Improvement Project (WSIP).

They lashed out at the officials for not inviting "genuine stakeholders" including lawmakers and journalists from Badin district to meet the WB delegation and accompany them to the sites of the bank-funded projects on Sunday.

The committee led by Mir Ghulam Rasool Talpur, Khalil Ahmed Bhurgari, Mir Noor Ahmed Talpur, Azizullah Dero and others was formed earlier this year to highlight the worst water crisis that hit the tail-end district mainly because of erection of blockages in Phuleli Canal at Alipur and 30-Mile regulators that diverted the canal's water flows meant for Badin to the lands in the command area of Sukkur Barrage.

They said the government officials had invited their "favourite leaders" of farmers' organisations, who were already hand in glove with them when the blockages were being built without taking genuine representatives of growers into confidence.

They termed the act as a cruel joke with those who had been striving with the support of people of the district for just distribution of water for their bare survival with no mala fide intention.

They outright rejected claims of both government officials and the so-called leaders of farmers' organisations that water was distributed judiciously in the tail-end areas.

They claimed that "white lies" were told before the WB delegation regarding availability of water in the tail-end areas after erection of "Rs6 billion" worth blockages in Phuleli Canal.

They said that they took the matter to Sindh High Court two months back and the court formed a committee of experts of NED University directing them to visit the sites and submit a detailed report. They were waiting for the detailed report to be submitted to the court and for the announcement of judgement on their petition.

They said that thousands of people had struggled for more than eight months in every nook and corner of the district and beyond to get their due share in water. The tail-end areas were still facing the same conditions when rain brought some respite to the farmers.

The leaders said that they were once again mobilising farmers of the district to effectively register their protest against the proposed construction of Sindh barrage near Thatta and against rice millers' reluctance to offer them fair price for the crop.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509541/badin-farmers-accuse-govt-functionaries-of-misguiding-wb-delegation

RISING FOOD PRICES

By DR HAFIZ A PASHA on October 8, 2019

Food prices have been rising rapidly in the last few months. According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the inflation rate in food prices was only 1.4 percent in the September 2018. A year later in September 2019 the rate of increase in food prices has spiraled up to 14.3 percent with the old CPI and to 15 percent according to the new CPI. The big increase has been in the last quarter. In June 2019, the rate of inflation in food prices was still single digit at 8.2 percent.

Increasingly also the contribution to the overall rate of inflation is coming from food prices. In September 2018, the contribution was only 22 percent. Since then it has gone up to over 40 percent. Consequently, anti-inflationary policies will have to focus more on controlling the rise in food prices.

There is need also to emphasize that inflation in food prices has a very regressive impact. The share of consumption expenditure devoted to food by the lowest income quintile of the population is as high as 50 percent, while for the top quintile it is much lower at 29 percent.

The fundamental implication of higher food prices is that of rising poverty. Low income households will increasingly fall below the poverty line. There is, in fact, a big clustering of households close to the poverty line in Pakistan. Most of these households will now slip below the poverty line. A conservative estimate is that over 4 million more people will become poor in 2019-20. Consequently, the number of poor people in Pakistan could rise to 75 million.

The other major implication of the big increase in food prices and the resulting decline in calorie intake is the rise in the number of stunted children in the country and increase in the incidence of wasting among children. According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey of 2017-18 the prevalence of stunting and wasting among children aged up to 5 years is already very high at 37 percent and 23 percent respectively.

There is need, therefore, for the Federal and Provincial Governments to give the highest priority to bring about relative stability in food prices. But before appropriate measures can be taken there is a need to understand clearly the causes of inflation in prices of different food items and then formulating appropriate policies and actions to eliminate these causes.

The roots of the problem are difficult to diagnose because the import content of food expenditure is somewhat lower than that of non-food expenditure. The fall in the value of the rupee is one of the main reasons why Pakistan is experiencing double-digit inflation currently. Therefore, the rate of inflation should be lower in the case of food prices. Instead, it is higher. What then are the domestic factors which are contributing to the inflation in food prices'

Two food items, viz., sugar and chicken, are produced within the country. However, the big surprise is the high rate of inflation in the prices of these items of 35 percent in the case of sugar and 64 percent in chicken. The support price for sugarcane to farmers has remained unchanged at Rs 180 to Rs 182 per 40 kg. As such, there is no major cost push element in sugar price. The export price of sugar is also relatively low and subsidy has been offered to facilitate export.

Therefore, there is no immediate or obvious explanation for the big increase in sugar prices of 35 percent. The only visible contribution is the rise of 9 percentage points in the sales tax on the product. As such, there is the likelihood of the emergence of a monopoly or cartel in the marketing of sugar in the country. Similarly, there is no obvious explanation for the 64 percent upsurge in the price of chicken. Both cases ought to have been subject to investigation by the Competition Commission of Pakistan.

The imported component of inflation is dominant in the case of three food items only, namely, vegetable ghee, pulses and tea. Prices of these items have gone up by 16 percent, 29 percent and 9 percent respectively. The rupee price of imported palm oil, the major input into the production of vegetable ghee, has gone up by only 4 percent. Yet the price of vegetable ghee has increased by 16 percent.

Another apparent mystery is the explosion literally in prices of vegetables. The price of onions has gone up by as much as 96 percent, that of potatoes by 30 percent and of fresh vegetables by 25 percent. The only vegetable where the price has remained relatively stable or fallen is tomatoes with a decline of 21 percent. Vegetables have, in fact, made a disproportionate contribution to the on-going inflation in the country. Their combined weight in the food price index is 9 percent but their combined contribution to the overall inflation in food prices is as high as 31 percent.

An in-depth examination of the trend in vegetable prices reveals the presence of a ‘cob-web' in these prices. This is the year-to-year big fluctuation in prices. As of last September of 2018, prices of vegetables had been falling. The price of onions had declined by as much as 53 percent, that of potatoes by 20 percent and of fresh vegetables by 10 percent. Consequently, farmers apparently moved out of production of these vegetables. The resulting decline in supply is probably the major factor behind the big jump in prices of these items currently.

The primary mechanism for reducing the big fluctuation in vegetable prices is to offer support prices at the time when prices are likely to fall. This is the policy being followed in India. This will lead to elimination of the 'cob-web' in prices. A similar policy may also need to be followed in the case of some fruits.

The other area of concern is the increase of 12 percent in the price of the staple food, wheat flour (atta). The procurement price of wheat has remained unchanged at Rs 1300 per 40 kgs. However, the production of wheat in 2018-19 was lower by almost one million tons compared to the initially estimated level. There have also been some attempts to export wheat. The export price has averaged Rs 1524 per 40 kgs. Therefore, there is the risk of a shortage in the availability of wheat in the domestic market. The ECC has taken the appropriate decision to stop the export of wheat. A similar decision needs to be taken in the case of export of vegetables.

Other factors which have contributed generally to food prices are, first, the rise in transport costs due to increase especially in the price of HSD oil of 19 percent due to the devaluation. Second, the escalation in the gas tariff has led to a rise in fertilizer prices like that of urea by 25 percent.

What are the other policy measures and steps which need to be taken to stop the on-going high inflation in food prices' First, as an immediate relief step the transfer from the Benazir Income Support Program to poor families must be increased by at least 15 percent. Second, local price controls in fruit and vegetable retail markets have to be made much more effective. Economic Intelligence Units should be established in each province to monitor the supply and demand position of major commodities and suggest remedies in the case of emerging gaps.

Third, as highlighted earlier, the emergence of monopolies and cartels must be effectively regulated by the Competition Commission of Pakistan. Fourth, the Government must implement a plan of a big expansion in the number of outlets of the Utility Stores Corporation.

In conclusion, it is unfortunate that the people of Pakistan have been hit severely by 'stagflation' in the first year of the PTI government. The expectations of a big positive change following the change of government are changing to one of despair. The relevant agencies must begin to play a more effective role in controlling inflation, especially in food prices, and preventing further erosion of jobs in the country.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/08/528031/rising-food-prices/

WORLD COTTON DAY: PROVISION OF PURE SEEDS, STEPS TO TACKLE WEATHER CHANGES URGED

RECORDER REPORT OCT 8TH, 2019 KARACHI

Speakers, on the occasion of World Cotton Day on October 7, urged the government to provide pure cotton seed and take necessary measures to tackle weather changes in the country.

The Pakistan Institute of Cotton Research and Technology (PICR&T), for the first time, arranged discussion at a private hotel here on Monday. The Day was also celebrated in Geneva.

On the occasion, Karachi Cotton Association's Chairman Khawja M Zubair said that "what we feel to improve the cotton production and quality, we try to convey the government, but the government could not give timely and due attention to the cotton related issues. We also arranged seminars and workshops to draw the attention of the government, but in vein," he said.

"Despite disappointments, we hope that government will take measures to bring positive changes in the cotton field," he expects.

Speaking on the occasion, PICR&T Director Ahmed Ali Khan highlighted the importance of practical steps in right direction. He said the rates of cotton must be based on quality not on area.

Cotton analyst Naseem Usman said "in past despite several difficulties, we achieved our desired targets, but today, the situation is changed." The major challenge is change of weather and the government must prepare strategy to combat effects of climate change on crop.

Other speakers Usman Kosar Lutfi, syed Naseem Ali, Zubair Shakoor, Chandar Lal and Babu Ramesh called for practical steps to meet the challenges. -PR

https://fp.brecorder.com/2019/10/20191008525564/

AGRICULTURE VARSITY HOSTS FIRST-EVER BANANA FESTIVAL IN HYDERABAD

By Z.AliPublished: October 8, 2019

HYDERABAD: The first-ever banana festival at Sindh Agriculture University, Tando Jam, explored the potential for increasing the fruit's production and marketing its different by-products locally and internationally. The event was organised by the Agriculture Tourism Development Corporation Pakistan, in collaboration with the varsity.

The director-general of Sindh agriculture research, Dr Noor Muhammad Baloch, speaking at a seminar which was part of the festival, said that scientists and banana growers will have to liaise for enhancing production and introducing new varieties. He said that Sindh contributes to around 90 per cent of the country's total banana production, placing it at the second position after mangoes.

He said that the research department, along with the varsity, has been working to introduce new banana varieties for cultivation in the province. A laboratory for the fruit's tissue culture and seeds has recently been established at the university which will provide banana seeds to the farmers, he added.

Banana is a high-delta crop and it is mostly grown in Sindh's Tando Allahyar, Matiari, Nawabshah and Mirpurkhas districts. Until over a decade ago, Sindh's coastal districts' riverine areas were the highest producers of the crop before the bunchy top disease wiped out banana from that belt.

According to Sindh agriculture department, the banana crop, which takes 16 to 18 months to mature, was cultivated on 28,200 hectares in the province in 2017-18. The fruit's production stood at 109,472 tonnes that year. The Basrai or Bombay variety of the crop is largely grown in the province besides an Australian variety, Williams.

"Introducing new varieties has remained a big challenge. But our scientists have been working over this issue with dedication," said Baloch. He added that the festival will now be organized annually.

Tariq Tanveer, director of the Agriculture Tourism Development Corporation Pakistan, said that efficient cultivation of banana and preparation of its by-products can multiply earnings of the crop's farmers. He said that Sindh's banana is also being exported. "There is a need to establish model banana farms where visitors can also be provided various dishes which are made from banana."

Agriculture official Abdul Jabbar Memon said that banana's production has recently increased to 127,000 tonnes. He said that the fruit is attacked by various diseases and the farmers ought to be trained for prevention and cure.

Agha Zafarullah Durrani, former agriculture official and a progressive farmer, stressed the need for cultivation after acclimatisation of new varieties of banana. He asked the scientists to lead the way.

The farmers' representative, Syed Nadeem Shah, said that the crop price and market played a pivotal part in encouraging a farmer to cultivate a particular crop. He said the crop prices lacked stability and a price hike often met resistance from the buyers and consequently the government. He also drew the government's attention towards establishing cold storage facilities.

During the festival, various stalls were set up by a number of banana farms. The fruit's by-products and dishes like fried banana were also put on display.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2074460/1-agriculture-varsity-hosts-first-ever-banana-festival-hyderabad/

AGRICULTURAL TAX COLLECTION IMPROVED IN BALOCHISTAN

By APP Published: October 8, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Minister for Revenue Mir Saleem Khan Khosa on Monday said the incumbent government was utilising all possible resources to remove backwardness from the province to ensure the provision of basic facilities to the people in respective areas on equality basis.

Talking to APP, he said numerous development projects including construction of roads, education, health, agriculture and irrigation have been approved under Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for the interest of people.

The Revenue Minister said the provincial government was working hard to address basic problems of the masses in a positive manner to provide relief, adding that flaws and weakness of revenue department were being removed through sincere efforts of administrations and officials for the betterment of the department.

"Efforts are being made to modernise revenue records to decrease land related issues," he said, adding that strict directives have been issued to collect agricultural revenue new tax while tax collection of agricultural was improved as compared to past.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2074344/1-agricultural-tax-collection-improved-balochistan/

'WITHDRAW COTTON IMPORT DUTIES'

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana October 09, 2019

KARACHI: The All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma) on Tuesday urged the government to withdraw 11 per cent duties and taxes on cotton imports.

Addressing a press conference, Aptma chairman Dr Amandullah Kassim Machiyara said the textile industry would collapse if the government does not withdraw duties and taxes on cotton imports.

“It is now clear that cotton crop would be short and industry’s demand will have to be met through imports. Imposing duty and taxes on raw material (cotton) would only result in damaging exports,” Dr Machiyara added.

The Aptma chairman regretted that the government has initially fixed cotton production at very high level of 15 million bales which was ‘impossible to achieve’.

The Cotton Crop Assessment Com-mittee (CCAC) twice revised cotton production figures – first to 12m bales and later to 10.2m bales. According to unofficial estimates, the production would not be more than 9m bales.

Since the textile industry would importing around 5m bales to meet the shortfall, the removal of 3pc customs duty, 2pc additional customs duty, 5pc sales tax and 1pc income tax has become necessary, he said.

In the past, textile industry used to import cotton from India with nominal cost of freight due to close proximity, he recalled. “Now cotton imports will be from far off countries like United States, Brazil, etc which will lead to higher freight costs, thereby burdening the industry,” he lamented.

Responding to a question, he said, import of 5m bales would cost the country up to $1.5 billion therefore measure should be taken that such failures do not take place in future.

The Aptma chairman said it was the responsibility of the government department to evolve and develop new varieties of cotton seeds which should be of high yield and also pest resistance.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509868/withdraw-cotton-import-duties

SAB SEEKS END TO SALE OF UNREGISTERED SEEDS, PESTICIDES

Correspondent October 09, 2019

LARKANA: The Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) has decried the sale of unregistered hybrid seeds, insecticides and pesticides in the province that had inflicted colossal losses on the growers in the shape of grain-less produce.

Talking to Dawn, Larkana division SAB president Irfan Khan Jatoi held the Sindh agriculture department responsible for it. It had failed to have any check on the infiltration and sale of different varieties of paddy’s hybrid seeds in the market, he said, adding that Pakistan imported around 10,077 tonnes of hybrid seeds, mostly from China, which was enough for cultivating 1200,000 to 1400,000 acres of land.

He said it was purely Sindh government’s responsibility to block the sale of unregistered varieties of hybrid seeds of paddy as in the wake of 18th Amendment, it was its [Sindh government’s] domain to act against such activity in the market. He said the paddy crop was near maturity when growers had noticed the state of the crop.

He said that presently 22,000 to 27,000 acres of land was available in Sindh at the Rice Research Institute, Dokri, Tando Jam, Sindh Seed Corporation, Sakrand, and other research institutions, but despite allocation of huge funds, no research was seen carried out by the department concerned to evolve indigenous rice varieties suiting the climatic conditions.

He asked when hybrid seeds were banned in Punjab, who had allowed selling them in Sindh. In 10-12 years, the Sindh Seed Corporation had failed to evolve any indigenous rice variety, he claimed. He disputed the Sindh government's figure that paddy crop had been affected only on 44,000 hectares.

Quoting recent reports, he said 50 samples of insecticides were sold in the market without mandatory certification, which spoke of the Sindh government's 'sincerity'.

Later, in a press release, he alleged that the agriculture department was permitting the sale of fake insecticides and pesticides in the market.

The SAB has called for compensation to the affected peasants and taking measures to curb the illegal sale of hybrid seeds, insecticides and pesticides in Sindh.

Activists of the Awami Workers Party (AWP) in the lead of its central vice president Assar Imam demonstrated outside Larkana Press Club recently against Sindh government's "anti-hari policies" and the damage caused to the paddy crop in the province.

Speaking on the occasion, the AWP leaders said the "defective" agriculture policies had negatively affected the poor peasants. The abadgars had been sandwiched between the anti-tiller policies of the government and ruthless attitude of traders' monopoly, they said.

They alleged that the government had left peasants at the mercy of brokers and exporters who sucked the blood of haris, weakening them further economically. They said mafias were behind sale of uncertified paddy seeds, insecticides and pesticides.

They called for establishing purchase centres for seeds, pesticides and insecticides to ensure certified varieties to save growers from damages. They demanded of the government to fix support price of paddy at Rs2,000 per 40kg and declare Larkana as a calamity-hit district in the light of vast damages.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509735/sab-seeks-end-to-sale-of-unregistered-seeds-pesticides

APTMA SEEKS WITHDRAWAL OF DUTY, TAXES ON COTTON IMPORT

By RECORDER REPORT on October 9, 2019

All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA), showing serious concern on lower cotton output, has urged the federal government to remove duty and taxes on the import of raw cotton to support the domestic textile industry. Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday at APTMA office, newly elected Chairman Dr Amanulla Kassim Machiyara said that as per initial estimates there is shortfall of some 5 million cotton bales in the demand and supply during this season due to massive decline in the cotton production.

Raw cotton prices are now higher than import substitution and if this trend persists then the textile industry will be rendered uncompetitive directly impacting the country's exports, he said and added that the domestic cotton prices are gradually increasing due to short crop and reached all most equal to price of high quality US cotton and the prices are likely to further increase on higher demand, he added. He said that initial cotton crop estimate was some 15 million bales, later it was revised up to 12 million bales and now as per second revision, cotton crop may be 10.2 million cotton bales. However, he said that, the recent market survey suggests that cotton output end of this season will be even lower than 10 million bales as against the domestic industry demand of 15 million bales.

The Chairman APTMA informed that the latest cotton production statistics of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) and the domestic cotton prices shows the current arrivals to be well short as compared to the corresponding period last year. Comparative analysis of cotton arrival up to 1st October 2019 versus 1st October 2018 shows a 39 percent decline in cotton arrival.

In the latest development in crop estimates, he urged the federal government for immediately withdraw of 3 percent Custom Duty and 2 percent Additional Duty and 5 percent Sales Tax levied on the import of raw cotton to enable the textile industry to meet its requirements for domestic as well as for export orders.

The removal of taxes and duty on import of raw cotton will support the textile industry to fulfill its foreign commitment, he added. Machiyara mentioned that Pakistan's textile industry requires medium and longer staple contamination free and organic cotton, which are not being produced in Pakistan and always textile mills need to import to produce specialty yarns.

He said that the government should act without further delay and announced an emergency to support the domestic textile sector. The import of cotton at low cost will help the industry to fulfill its export commitments.

The Chairman APTMA has pleaded with the Prime Minister, Ministry of Commerce for immediate removal of duty and taxes on import of cotton so that the textile industry could retain its competitive edge.

On the occasion, former chairman APTMA Yasin Siddik, Asif Inam and others were also present and talked about the current situation of the textile industry. They also demanded for relief in shape of removal of taxes and duties on import.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/09/528224/aptma-seeks-withdrawal-of-duty-taxes-on-cotton-import/

12,000 WHEAT BAGS EMBEZZLED IN UBAURO GODOWN

Correspondent October 10,

SUKKUR: About 12,000 bags of wheat were found missing from godown of food department in Ubauro in Ghotki district which were allegedly embezzled by former district food controller (DFC), the godown in-charge and head clerk, according to sources.

The sources said the food department purchased 200,000 bags of wheat in 2017-18 and stocked them in the godown in Ubauro out of which 12,000 bags were misappropriated by the officials who prepared fake challans and vouchers to prove the missing bags were sold to a local flour mill in Mureed Shakh in December 2018 and 2019, said the sources.

The sources said that the Anti-Corruption Establishment raided the food department offices in Ghotki eight months ago and since then the record of the missing wheat bags had disappeared.

The former DFC told the NAB Sukkur that the entire record was seized by the ACE personnel.

The value of the 12,000 bags of wheat was said to be around Rs41.4 million but nobody, including food department, bothered to take notice of it.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1509919/12000-wheat-bags-embezzled-in-ubauro-godown

PM ATTENDS INT'L HORTICULTURE EXHIBITION IN BEIJING

October 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Prime Minister attended the closing ceremony of International Horticulture Exhibition 2019 in Beijing.

He was accompanied by ministers in his entourage and senior officials, says a press release issued here on Wednesday.

The Prime Minister had also attended the opening ceremony of the Horticulture Exhibition in April this year when he visited China for the second Belt and Road Forum.

The Prime Minister was received by Premier Li Keqiang at Beijing Horticulture Exhibition.

The exhibition was co-organized by the Central Government of China, the Beijing Municipal Government and the Bureau of International Horticulture Exhibition to demonstrate the application of most advanced technologies and showcase the progress China has made in the development of both horticulture and ecological civilization. The exhibition also featured horticultural achievements from all over the world.—PR

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/10/10/5-page/804789-news.html

CHINA KEEN TO INVEST IN FOOD PROCESSING AREA: PCJCCI PRESIDENT

By RECORDER REPORT on October 10, 2019

President Pakistan China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCJCCI) Zarak Khan Wednesday said China is keen to invest in food processing area besides joint ventures in clothing, dyeing and embroidery sectors.

He was addressing the first think tank meeting of the PCJCCI that was also attended by other office bearers and executive committee members. He said the potential market of Pakistani food and clothing with Chinese assistance will enhance competitiveness and will add value to the existing standards of production.

Zarak Khan further said that the joint venture of both countries would prove to be momentous in increasing mutual conviction, cooperation, and regional connectivity between China and Pakistan. Punjab ranked in the world top 10 in terms of food production but due to lack of technology and post-harvest losses, it is unable to expand its exports base of food items.

He said that the transformation of food processing technology from China to Pakistan would bring a remarkable shift in expanding export base by reducing cost and introducing state of the art features.

The meeting also discussed the new prospects for establishing processing units for fresh foods including vegetable preservation, dehydration, and life enduring plants of fruits and vegetables.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/10/529084/china-keen-to-invest-in-food-processing-area-pcjcci-president/

BALOCHISTAN LOOKS TO TAP HALAL MARKET POTENTIAL

NEWS DESK OCT 10,2019

Balochistn Chief Minister Jam Kamal on Wednesday reiterated that the government is committed to uplift livestock and agriculture sector in the province.

Talking to a European Union Cooperation delegation led by Milko Van Cool in Quetta, Jam Kamal said that the provincial government was taking concrete steps to promote the agriculture sector in the country, Radio Pakistan reported.

He said that the provincial government will hold the first ever livestock expo in Quetta next month. The three-day livestock Expo will aim at in-creasing meat productivity to boost the economy of the province.

Earlier, Chief Minister Jam Kamal also chaired a meeting to review progress on the expo .

He said that $80 billion Halal meat industry exists at international level and Balochistan can boost the overall economy by exporting organic meat.

"The expo would be helpful in gaining foreign and local investors attention in the province's livestock sector," the chief minister added.

He directed the authorities to make all the necessary arrangements and promote the expo through print and electronic media.

Balochistan government spokesperson Liaquat Shahwani also criticised the previous governments saying that no efforts were made in the past to develop this sector further. He said livestock and dairy are the backbone of the province's economy.

"Present government is committed to developing and improving the structure of livestock and dairy," Shawani said in a statement.

Balochistan has the capacity to expand its livestock sector and all stakeholders must unite at a single platform to ensure implementation of the collective measures. The sector will contribute in the prosperity of the province," he said.

Liaquat Shahwani briefed that the training workshops are being conducted on a divisional level by the Agriculture Academy of Balochistan, where officers of agriculture engineering, agriculture research, agriculture farms and water management will participate. The workshops will begin from Noshki (Rakhshan Division) on September 30.

"Government of Balochistan is planning to develop the agriculture sector in accordance with the modern techniques to meet the needs of the province. People will soon witness a massive improvement in the sector after the execution of the pans,: Shahwani aded.

He assured that the people of the province will avail benefits under the ongoing Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP).

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201910100091&EN_ID=11201910100028&EMID=11201910100015

TARGETS FOR RABI CROPS FIXED

Reporte rOctober 11, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) set a wheat production target of 27 million tonnes for 2019-20 Rabi season from a projected crop sowing area of 9.2m hectares.

Last season the country produced 25.507m tonnes of the commodity from 8.833m hectares.

The committee, which met under the chair of Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan, also fixed production targets for other Rabi crops including gram, lentil, potatoes, onion and tomatoes.

The output target for gram has been set at 525,500 tonnes; lentil 8,700 tonnes; onion 2.1m tonnes; and tomatoes 600,000 tonnes. Gram is grown mainly in Thal and contributes about 80 per cent to the production.

The committee proposed that provinces should focus on oilseeds and pulses cultivation in order to reduce the import bill.

For Rabi 2019-20, Indus River System Authority (Irsa) advisory committee has anticipated a shortfall of 15pc of water for irrigation. During Rabi season. provinces are allocated 31.44 million acre foot (MAF) of water, however prevailing weather conditions are supportive and shortage is manageable.

Pakistan Meteorological Department told the meeting that summer monsoon rains from July-September remained normal and well distributed all over the country. Significantly, above normal (46pc) rainfall was observed in Sindh while Gilgit Baltistan, AJK and KPK received 24pc, 22pc and 14pc - slightly below the normal.

Due to rainfall received in late September and early October, sufficient amount of soil moisture is available for sowing of Rabi crops. Weather outlook for October-December suggests that amount of rainfall will remain normal in agricultural plains of all the provinces.

The committee reviewed the performance of kharif crops and was informed that sugarcane production for 2019-20 is estimated at 64.77m tonnes from an area of 1.06m hectares; rice at 7.7 million tonnes over 3.36m hectares; maize output at 6.9m tonnes on 1.386m hectares.

Production achievements of major and minor crops like wheat, mung, mash, gram, potato, lentil, onion, tomato and chilies were also discussed during the meeting.

During 2018-19, banks also managed to meet the agricultural lending target of Rs1.174 trillion, achieving Rs1.25tr. A total of 4.012m borrowers were served during the period by 50 agriculture lending institutes including commercial, specialised, microfinance, Islamic banks and other microfinance.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1510221

OVER 4.5M COTTON BALES TO BE IMPORTED

October 11, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has to import over 4.5 million cotton bales that would cost around $1.5 billion, owing to 33 percent decline from the target set for cotton production this season, sources revealed to Business Recorder.

Officials said that imports of such a large quantity would not only increase the country's import bill, but also the cost of value-added production. Currently, the customs duty, additional custom duty, sales tax and income tax have been imposed @ 3 percent, 2 percent, 5 percent and one percent respectively on the import of cotton.

Pakistan has produced around 10 million bales of cotton on average for the last several years against consumption of over 14 million bales. Additionally, 1 to 1.5 million bales Extra Long Staple (ELS) cotton per annum is also imported, as this quality is not produced in the country.

According to a fortnightly report of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) as of 1st October, around 2.93 million bales of cotton have arrived as compared to 4.02 million bales during the same period of last year, registering a 27.04 per cent decline. Out of total arrivals, over 2.47 million have undergone the ginning process. The arrivals in Punjab were recorded at 1.16 million bales and Sindh, over 1.7 million bales. Total sold bales were recorded at over 2 million bales.

The arrivals of seed cotton in Punjab declined by 35 percent to 1.16 million bales as against 1.818 million bales. Seed cotton arrivals in Sindh recorded at 1.767 million bales showing a decrease of 19.74 percent as compared to 2.202 million bales in last year.

Official said that current position of cotton crop in both Punjab and Sindh is that most of the farmers have started cutting their cotton crop and are preparing their land for sowing of wheat crop. The situation is not satisfactory and the production will be very far behind the target. The Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) has revised downward cotton production target by around 33 percent, i.e, to 10.2 million bales against the initial target of 15 million bales set for the current season 2019-20, after missing the sowing target by over 6 percent.

Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said that pests' attacks as well as weather led to revising downward the crop production target.

Cotton was sown on 2.658 million hectares against the target of 2.785 million hectares. Sources said that due to an increase in sugarcane cultivation in cotton areas, delay in harvest of wheat and shortage of water, there was a decline in cotton sowing.

The government fixed the following cotton area and production target for the year 2019-20: (i) Punjab was expected to cover 2.145 million hectares and produce 10.2 million cotton bales, (ii) Sindh had to cover 0.64 million hectares and produce 4.6 million cotton bales, (iii) Balochistan had to cover 0.1 million hectares and produce 0.2 million bales and (iv) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been targeted to sow cotton on 0.01 million acres and produce 0.0002 million bales of cotton.

Sindh reported a drop of 30 percent in the expected cotton crop while Punjab reported a drop of 15 percent over last year's production.

According to All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) short fall of 33 percent in cotton production translates to a drop of 2 percent in GDP as well as the requirement of importing of around 5 million bales thereby increasing the import bill very substantially. The expected quality of cotton is also much worse than last year.—TAHIR AMIN

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/10/11/20-page/805067-news.html

PAKISTAN SETS WHEAT PRODUCTION TARGET AT 27M TONS

By Our Correspondent Published: October 11, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) has set the wheat production target for Rabi 2019-20 season at 27 million tonnes from an area of 9.2 million hectares.

The committee also suggested that provinces should focus on oilseeds and pulses cultivation in order to reduce the import bill.

In a meeting chaired by Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan on Thursday, the committee reviewed the performance of Kharif crops (2019-20) and the production plan for Rabi crops (2019-20). It also discussed the availability of agricultural inputs for Rabi crops.

The committee was informed that sugarcane production in 2019-20 was estimated at 64.77 million tonnes from an area of 1.06 million hectares while rice production for the year was estimated at 7.7 million tonnes from an area of 3.04 million hectares. The area and production are up 5.5% and 3.6% respectively from the target fixed by the previous FCA meeting.

Meanwhile, the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) Advisory Committee has anticipated a water shortfall of 15% for Rabi 2019-20. In the Rabi season, the provinces are allocated 31.44 million acre-feet (maf) of water.

Given the prevailing weather conditions, which were supportive, the shortage was manageable, it said. Irsa also highlighted the wastage of water in the country.

It told its members that the water storage capacity in 1976 was 15.7 maf against 13.7 maf at present. Officials said the economic cost of one million acre-feet of water in Pakistan was $0.5 billion. Thus, from 1976, the country lost a resource unutilised into the sea worth over $600 billion.

They pointed out that Pakistan had an annual GDP growth of over 6% from 1970 to 1990 mainly because of the major water reservoirs including Mangla and Tarbela.

If Pakistan wanted to develop economically, it must construct new reservoirs of about 20 maf, allowing 8.5 maf downstream Kotri to cater to environmental flows and also to check seawater intrusion in the Indus delta, it added.

The Meteorological Department said summer rains from July to September 2019 remained normal and well distributed all over the country. Due to the rainfall received in late September and early October, there is sufficient soil moisture for sowing Rabi crops.

By the end of August, the lending institutions had disbursed agri-loans of Rs163 billion, which was 12.1% of the annual target of Rs1.350 trillion. "Availability of urea and DAP fertilisers during Rabi 2019-20 seems comfortable," the meeting was told.

The committee was also informed that the availability of food commodities in the country was satisfactory and Kharif crop production was better compared to previous years.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2076923/2-pakistan-sets-wheat-production-target-27m-tons/

'WORLD EGG DAY' MARKED: POULTRY INDUSTRY PRODUCING OVER 17,500M TABLE EGGS PER ANNUM: WB SURVEY RESULTS

By ZAHID BAIG on October 12, 2019

Pakistan's poultry industry is producing more than 17,500 million table eggs per annum against per capita consumption of 88 eggs annually. The developed countries consume 300 eggs per capita per annum. Recent nutrition survey results from World Bank revealed that Pakistan is included in countries where severe stunting (44%) in young children is found and is at alarming level and increased consumption of eggs can help overcome this issue, said newly-elected Vice chairman of PPA Northern Region, Ch Muhammad Fargham, in a press conference here on Friday.

He said that the Pakistan Poultry Association celebrated this year's World Egg Day falling on Friday, by organizing seminars at different places to make the general public aware of the nutritional value of eggs and its importance for human health.

He said that eggs have a vital role to play in feeding people around the world, in both developed and developing countries. The eggs are excellent and affordable source of high quality protein. Ch Muhammad Fargham informed that poultry sector is one of the most organized branches of the agro-based sector of Pakistan. Poultry sector has been serving the nation since 1962 and providing affordable poultry products to the masses to fulfill the requirements of animal protein. Poultry at present contributes 40% of the total meat consumption and generates employment and income for about fifteen hundred thousand people.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/12/530151/world-egg-day-marked-poultry-industry-producing-over-17500m-table-eggs-per-annum-wb-survey-results/

FALL IN PULSES IMPORT STANDS AT $15.875 MILLION

By RECORDER REPORT *on* October 13, 2019

Pakistan imported 15.14 percent less pulses to $88.974 million during July-Aug 2018-19, official figures say. Fall in pulses import now stands at $15.875 million during July-Aug 2018-19 from $104.849 million in July-Aug 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics shows.

In term of quantity, pulses import fell by 4.15 percent or 8417 metric tons to 194,457 metric tons in July-Aug 20181-9 from 202,874 metric tons in July-Aug 2017-18.

In Aug 2019, the country import 19.36 percent or $9.488 million of less pulses to $39.525 million comparing to the commodity's import of $49.013 million in Aug 2018. Pakistan's pulses import stood at 86,843 metric tons in Aug 2019, which is lower by 3.08 percent or 2763 metric tons from 89,606 metric tons in Aug 2018.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/13/530367/fall-in-pulses-import-stands-at-15875-million/

GOVT DECIDES TO MERGE PFA, PDRA

OUR CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 13, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government has decided to merge Punjab Food Authority (PFA) and Punjab Drug Regulatory Authority (PDRA).

An initial homework has been completed in this regard. Once these two authorities are merged, the new 'Punjab Food and Drug Regulatory Authority' will be established. It will work under the provincial health ministry. The recommendations have been sent to the provincial cabinet for approval.

The development has com amidst the surety of healthy and secure food to citizens and to protect them against the diseases.

A senior official of PFA, confirming this plan, said that Punjab Food Authority's basic work is to ensure the provision of healthy and safe diet to the citizens, "If the diet is of substandard quality then the citizens will be sick," he said, adding that as both health and food go hand in hand so it is decided to merge them into one entity.

According to the PFA officials, this step will help improve the issues pertaining to health and diet of the citizens.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201910130312&EN_ID=11201910130107&EMID=11201910130052

INDIAN BSF CLAIMS CAPTURING FIVE 'PAKISTANI' FISHING BOATS

October 13, 2019

GUJARAT, India: The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has allegedly seized five Pakistani fishing boats in the Harami Nala creek area, close to India-Pakistan border in Gujarat, the international media reported.

The five single-engine fitted boats were seized around 10:45 pm on Friday from the creek area near Kutch district, the BSF said in a press statement on Saturday.

"A special operation has been launched in the area and the search is still underway. Till now, nothing suspicious has been recovered from the region," it stated.

Harami Nala is a sluggish and shallow water channel in the Sir Creek area, from where the BSF has allegedly recovered several abandoned Pakistani boats in the last couple of months.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/540339-indian-bsf-claims-capturing-five-pakistani-fishing-boats

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCT 14th TO OCT 20t 2019

FARMERS PROTEST AGAINST RICE MILLERS, DEMAND FAIR PRICE FOR PADDY IN BADIN

A Correspondent Updated October 14, 2019

BADIN: Paddy growers resumed their protest against rice millers in Kario Ghanwar town on Sunday, demanding the authorities concerned force the millers to pay them fair price for their crop.

The protesting farmers led by Hisam Nizamani, Mustafa Ayaz Mehri, Ghulam Mustafa and other who had set up a hunger strike camp along Hyderabad-Golarchi road in the town, told journalists that millers continued to fleece farmers by refusing to pay them Rs1,500 per 40kg and compelling them to sell their crop at Rs1,200 for 40 kg and that too with three to five kilos extra per 40 kilos on the pretext of moisture in the grains.

They deplored the fact that despite continuous protests in various areas of Shaheed Fazil Rahu taluka no elected member of the area had bothered to take notice of their problem and helped them get fair price for their chief crop. They threatened to widen the protest if their demands were not met.

They announced launching a peaceful movement by staging a march in Golarchi town today (Monday) against farmers' exploitation by rice millers in Badin district.

Local leaders of different political parties including Ustad Mohammad Rahimmon, Mohammad Juman Nohani and others also visited the protesters' camp and assured them of their support in the peaceful struggle.

Leaders of Save Badin Action Committee Mir Ghulam Rasool Talpur, Mir Noor Ahmed Talpur, Khalil Ahmed Bhurgari and others issued a joint statement, supporting the protest by rice farmers.

They asked Sindh Minister for Agriculture Mohammad Ismail Rahu and other lawmakers of the district to extend support to the farmers at a time when their crop was ready to be harvested and being brought to mills for sale.

Members and supporters of Arbab group continued on Sunday their protest in Mithi, Kaloi, Diplo, Dahli, Naukot and other towns against Umerkot police's excesses with villagers in Kuplore village.

The protesters' leaders told journalists that Umerkot police had raided the village at the behest of PPP MPA Syed Ali Mardan Shah in the wake of a land dispute and tortured innocent villagers of Nohrio community.

The villagers were being subjected to torture and fake cases were being registered against them. A day earlier, complete shutdown was observed in Chhachhro town on a call for protest given by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf and Arbab Group against police, they said.

Arbab Zakaullah, former MNA and main leader of the group, described before local journalists how police raided the village and tortured men and women.

He said that police registered cases against their supporters on flimsy grounds to subject them to political victimisation at the behest of a PPP lawmaker from Umerkot.

He said the supporters of their group had been protesting peacefully against police brutalities for the past three days. He warned of widening the protest if the cases were not withdrawn and those who had been arrested were not released immediately.

He demanded judicial inquiry into the incident in which dozens of people including women and children were subjected to torture by policemen. There was a negligible dispute over land but PPP leaders were trying to make mountain out of molehill as a pretext to politically victimise their supporters, he said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1510649/farmers-protest-against-rice-millers-demand-fair-price-for-paddy-in-badin

SCOPE OF E-COMMERCE IN AGRICULTURE

From the Newspaper October 14, 2019

The recently launched e-commerce policy is expected to open the floodgates of opportunities in all sectors, including food and agriculture. Now it's up to farmers, financing institutions and entrepreneurs to exploit those opportunities.

The government has already asked the Ministry of Information Technology and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to reach out to PayPal and other global payment gateways to facilitate e-commerce in the country. The central bank is also supposed to issue a set of guidelines on e-commerce for banks.

Foodpanda, a food-delivery app, has now become quite a household name in big and small cities of Pakistan. Hotels and restaurants get themselves registered on this app and cater to large numbers of home-delivery orders received online. This is an example of the great scope for e-commerce in food retailing.

In farming, Ricult Pakistan is already connecting small farmers with industrial purchasers of their produce. Guard Rice is one of the several partners of Ricult. It uses its services to purchase quality rice from farmers. According to media reports, thousands of paddy farmers in Pakistan and Thailand are currently using Ricult services. Essentially a fintech, the brainchild of some MIT graduates of Pakistani origin also provides farmers with finances to purchase inputs like fertilisers.

It charges a high interest rate but the company clams it sells inputs to farmers at lower rates — thanks to its partnership with leading input-producing companies, including Fauji Fertiliser.

These and similar examples show the food and agriculture sector is already exploiting the potential of e-commerce on a limited scale. The purpose of the newly designed e-commerce policy is to provide existing and future e-commerce entities with the regulatory and facilitation umbrella. Besides, it also aims at monitoring their activities and taxing them appropriately.

The use of fintech in agricultural lending and the promotion of virtual markets for agricultural produce can help address two chronic issues of our farmers: a lack of formal finance and the absence of nearby markets for agricultural products. Local online payment systems, however, need to align themselves with international payment gateways to take e-commerce to the next level. That is where the SBP and the Ministry of Information Technology need to work together.

The rapid evolution of e-commerce around the world and Pakistan's efforts to catch up with this trend are encouraging signs for farmers. But can it address structural issues of Pakistan's agricultural marketing and pricing to the satisfaction of millions of farmers? More web portals and apps linking producers and buyers of agricultural goods will not immediately ensure fair prices for farmers. Nor will it ensure the supply of fairly priced agricultural inputs in the short run.

There are several models of e-commerce in agriculture. But the one that is most needed in Pakistan and, thus, has greater chances of flourishing quickly aims at enabling farmers to sell their produce to targeted companies instead of end-consumers.

Sustaining e-commerce entities requires a rapid and constant increase in sales volumes. And that means a sizable investment in technology, logistics and human resources at the initial stage.

That is why collaboration among stakeholders, including investors, entrepreneurs and banks offering venture capital, is a must. The federal government, through the central bank and relevant ministries, can reach out to international payment gateways. Or it can help importers and exporters make the most of evolving e-commerce.

Provincial governments also need to work closely with individual farmers and their cooperative societies. Besides, brick-and-mortar setups, warehouses, logistics and transportation will be needed to support e-commerce of agriculture, livestock, fisheries and food. The provincial governments will need to work with the private sector to help and facilitate it in each of these areas.

In some cases, particularly in the development of warehouses, new projects can be undertaken under public-private partnership. E-commerce can be employed also for the procurement of farm produce by provincial food departments and federal agencies like the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco). But federal and provincial authorities will have to develop new procedures and dedicate qualified human resources for this purpose.

In e-commerce, volumes of transactions matter a lot. You cannot survive on meagre margins earned on agricultural goods and services offered online if your websites or apps continue to attract low traffic for long. So it is possible that venture capitalists — i.e. founders and developers of web portals and apps and large companies that join them as commercial partners — try to set pricing trends through cartelisation. This is a real danger in online sales of agricultural inputs, manufactured by big companies, to small farmers. Similarly, the peril of price manipulation exists for consumers in cases where e-companies collude with their bulk suppliers.

As part of the e-commerce policy, such entities are required to get registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan. This can somewhat mitigate the possibility of cartelisation, manipulation and tax evasion. But creating greater awareness about e-commerce among individual farmers and consumers is a must so that they can protect themselves from e-business malpractices.

The e-commerce policy proposes the establishment of consumer courts and inclusion of e-commerce disputes in the draft Trade Dispute Resolution Act, according to a Dawn report. Crucial aspects of consumer protection and trade-dispute resolution in e-commerce have been taken care of. E-commerce in agriculture can also benefit from them. —MA

https://www.dawn.com/news/1510787

PAKISTAN'S MEAT PROCESSING INDUSTRY THRIVES WITH RETAIL SECTOR EXPANSION

By Shahram Haq Published: October 14, 2019

LAHORE: The booming retail sector of Pakistan has created new avenues for the business community for expansion and the government for increasing tax collection besides creating new jobs for the youth.

Hafiz Muhammad Kashif, owner of a medium-range meat processing unit, has found new business horizons in the backdrop of the growing retail sector of the country.

His unit, Muzammil Foods Private Limited, located in Raiwand city near Lahore, is equipped with modern facilities to process red and white meat. He has all the required certifications to work and supply fresh meat to some international and domestic retail chains operating in the country.

Though dealing with livestock and selling meat is Kashif's family business, his forefathers ran it in the traditional way like operating a butcher shop. Kashif himself had earlier opted to follow the traditional method of selling meat, primarily beef and mutton, as he was not familiar with modern ways of doing business in this category.

The entry of multinational retail giants into Pakistan has sparked demand for semi-processed quality meat, hence their managements are usually tasked with searching for meat suppliers who can invest in modern processing facilities and ensure continued supply as per global standards.

"I started supplying beef to Dubai-based retailer Carrefour in 2009," Kashif told The Express Tribune. "It convinced me to continue working for it therefore I decided to avail the opportunity and build my business on modern lines."

He shared that proper training, spanning about four months, was given to him in which he learnt new ways of sourcing live animals, traceability, slaughtering as per Halal procedures, hygiene checklist, product specifications and warehouse management.

Pakistan is blessed with a rich livestock population and for many people in rural areas it is the primary source of livelihood. However, when it comes to supplying meat, the country lags behind and remains unable to gain a modest share in the global Halal food market.

According to statistics, Pakistan has a meagre share of 0.25% in the $3-trillion international Halal food market.

Locally, a few companies are supplying processed red and white meat through their retail outlets but their share remains small.

Kashif lamented that there was not a single government agency in the country which offered training and motivated traditional butchers to enter the modern retail sector.

"I was lucky to become a meat supplier to a well-known retailer," he said. "Once I streamlined my entire network, I got new opportunities to expand my business."

After Kashif was contacted, he immediately started supplying red meat to the foreign retailer, however, it took him almost six years before he started supplying white meat.

During this time, he worked on enhancing his supply line and inked an agreement with three local retailers.

“Currently, my revenues from all retailers are touching approximately Rs80 million per month,” he revealed. “My business has expanded 400% since 2009.”

Besides supplying fresh meat to retailers, Kashif established his own retail outlet in Raiwand, however, the recent anti-encroachment drive proved detrimental and he had to close it down.

“I managed to secure ample land during the tenure of previous governments and started my first retail shop. It was performing good but the current government, in its anti-encroachment drive, demolished all the 37 shops there,” he said. “Though I received compensation but still I am searching for a better place to re-launch the retail store and then expand it to Lahore.”

For the time being, Kashif has shifted his retail business to a single ordinary shop in a semi-urban area and still he has been able to make modest sales.

“My sales revenue is approximately Rs3 million per month from that small shop and this is primarily due to the goodwill that I built over a period of time,” he added.

He said he had also started exporting meat to Saudi Arabia but quit the business due to a number of issues and the absence of Saudi government’s support for settling disputes.

He emphasised that the meat processing industry had great potential but the government of Pakistan treated it like an orphan.

“The most important thing in modern retail is that suppliers like me are registered under the tax net,” he said. “I pay more than Rs10 million per annum in taxes but in return I receive no government support.”

He called on the government to give the sector due attention and training, which would turn it into a highly profitable industry in the future.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2078638/2-pakistans-meat-processing-industry-thrives-retail-sector-expansion/

BACKYARD POULTRY FARMING INITIATIVE LAUNCHED

Bureau Report October 15, 2019

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan on Monday launched the prime minister’s Backyard Poultry Initiative in the province under the National Agricultural Emergency programme.

A statement issued here said around 1,000,000 chickens would be distributed to eligible families at subsidised rates in the province during the next four years.

It said a unit comprising a rooster and five hens would be sold for Rs1,050 and 40,000 such units would be given away to families every year.

Addressing a ceremony, the chief minister said his government had focused its attention on the development of the downtrodden segments of the society and the chicken farming initiative would help economically develop farmers, especially women.

He said though Pakistan was an agricultural country with 43 per cent of labour force employed in the agriculture sector, KP had spent a paltry sum of Rs47 billion on the agriculture, livestock and poultry sector during the last seven decades.

Mr Mahmood said the government had planned to spend Rs85 billion on the development of the agriculture, livestock and poultry sectors from 2018 to 2023.

“We are working for the development of the agriculture sector and industrialisation simultaneously to earn revenue, create jobs, and alleviate poverty,” he said.

The chief minister said the PTI government was restructuring economy through reforms besides providing relief and assistance to the underprivilegedsegments of society.

He said the government was taken initiatives to promote industrialisation to generate revenue.

Mr Mahmood said industrialisation of the province would create massive employment opportunities.

Federal minister for food security and research Sahibzada Mohammad Mehboob Sultan, who was also in attendance, said the government had planned to distribute two million chickens to families for backyard farming in Punjab, one million in KP and Sindh each and 0.5 million in Balochistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir each in the next four years.

He said the initiative was meant for the alleviation of poverty and eradication of stunted growth.

Senior leader of the ruling PTI Jehangir Khan Tareen, who also attended the ceremony, said though the government faced financial constraints, the prime minister had taken the initiative as he believed that true development couldn’t happen without the development of the downtrodden segments of society.

He said the programme would be extended to the newly-merged tribal districts of the province, including Kurram, Bajaur and Khyber, in the next phase.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1510941/backyard-poultry-farming-initiative-launched

COTTON HITS RS9,100

Staff Reporter October 15, 2019

KARACHI: Amid frenzied buying, cotton prices on Monday reached record high level of Rs9,100 per maund on ready trading.

At the outset there was heavy buying from all categories of buyers but quality and quantity constraints kept the volume from expanding. A deal of 400 bales from Sadiqabad was finalised at season’s highest level of Rs9,100 per maund.

According to market sources, textile spinning units strived hard to get hold of maximum deals that came their way. Most deals were finalised at higher rates indicating that buyers are keen to replenish their stocks form local cotton. Nevertheless, big spinning groups are equally engaged in imports of cotton.

On global front, indications of re-opening of trade negotiations between US and China had positive impact on leading cotton markets. New York cotton market remained closed on account of Columbus Day holiday but earlier it gained 3 cents. The Chinese and Indian cotton markets also closed steady amid routine trading activity.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were raised by Rs50 to Rs8,850 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 4,000 bales, station Khairpur, at Rs8,750-8,900; 1,000 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs8,800; 2,000 bales, Rajanpur, at Rs9,000; 1,400 bales, Alipur, at Rs8,800-8,850; 800 bales, Yazman Mandi, at Rs8,900-8,950; and 600 bales, Fort Abbas, at Rs9,000.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1510904/cotton-hits-rs9100

14PC OF FOOD LOST WORLD OVER BEFORE REACHING RETAILER: REPORT

Amin Ahmed Updated October 15, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The State of Food and Agriculture 2019, a report published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations on Monday, said that globally around 14 per cent of the world's food is lost after harvesting and before reaching the retail level, including through on-farm activities, storage and transportation.

Losses and waste are generally higher for fruits and vegetables than for cereals and pulses at all stages in the food supply chain, with the exception of on-farm losses and those during transportation in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.

The report highlights the need, and offers a new methodology, to measure carefully losses at each stage in the food supply chain.

Doing so will help to identify critical loss points across the supply chain. These are points where food losses have the highest magnitude, the greatest impact on food security, and the largest economic dimensions, as well as to identify the appropriate measures for their reduction.

It also points to the importance of reducing food waste, which occurs at the retail and consumption level and is linked to limited shelf life and consumer behaviour, such as demanding food products that meet aesthetic standards, and limited incentive to avoid food waste.

In lower-income countries, more fresh fruit and vegetable loss is attributed to poor infrastructure than in industrialised countries. In fact, many lower-income countries lose significant amounts of food during storage, often due to poor storage facilities, including refrigerated warehouses, the report says.

Despite the fact that in most high-income countries adequate storage facilities, including refrigerated warehouses, are available throughout the supply chain, losses do occur during storage, generally because of a technical breakdown, poor management of temperature, humidity or overstocking.

The report also reveals the results from a number of case studies conducted by FAO for identifying critical loss points. Results indicate that harvesting is the most frequently identified critical loss point for all types of food. Inadequate storage facilities and poor handling practices were also named among the main causes of on-farm storage losses. For fruits, roots and tubers, packaging and transportation also appear to be critical.

The FAO report has urged countries to step up efforts to tackle the root causes of food losses and waste at all stages and provides guidance on policy and interventions to reduce food loss and waste.

The report says FAO will also help governments to analyse constraints and trade-offs for more efficient interventions.

Citing examples it says they can raise awareness of the benefits of reducing food loss and waste among suppliers and consumers and influence their decision-making through various types of actions or policies.

However, the report stresses that the policy measures aimed at reducing food loss and waste should be coherent and involve effective monitoring and evaluation of interventions to assure accountability of existing actions and efforts. Reducing food loss and waste generally entails costs, and farmers, suppliers and consumers will only take necessary measures if their costs are outweighed by the benefits.

Thus, changing incentives for various stakeholders in the supply chain will involve identifying options that either increase the net benefits or provide better information on the existing net benefits, the report states.

Even when stakeholders are aware of the benefits of reducing food loss and waste, they may face constraints that prevent them from implementing actions. For example, without financial help private actors in developing countries, especially smallholders, may not be able to bear the high upfront cost associated with implementing such actions.

Improving credit access could be an option even in the absence of detailed information on losses.

However, the report stresses that the policy measures aimed at reducing food loss and waste should be coherent and involve effective monitoring and evaluation of interventions to assure accountability of existing actions and efforts.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1510883/14pc-of-food-lost-world-over-before-reaching-retailer-report

PADDY GROWERS STAGE PROTEST MARCH

A Corresponden tOctober 15, 2019

BADIN: Hundreds of paddy farmers and growers on Monday came on the roads and streets of Golarchi town on a joint call to register their protest against rice millers and dealers for their reluctance to pay proper rates.

The enraged protesters first gathered at Tazi Stop in the town from where they started the march. After passing through different roads and streets, they converged on Ahmed Rajo Road outside the local press club where they staged a demonstration for over two hours.

Addressing the protesters and later talking to local reporters, Ameer Azad Panhwar, Aftab Ahmed Bughio, Amir Ahmed Dahri, Zulfikar Ali and other protest leaders alleged that the rice millers of Badin district had crossed all the limits of excesses against the farmers who had already faced the worst water crisis during the crop cultivation in the region.

The millers on one hand were paying only Rs1,200 per maund while on other hand were taking Rs5 to Rs7 per maund on the pretext of moisture in the rice crop.

They demanded that millers should be bound to buy the rice at Rs1,500 per maund. They deplored the fact that despite their continuous protests in various parts of the district, the high-ups of the Sindh government were not bothered to even talk to the peaceful farmers. They warned to widen the scope of the protest if their demands were not met.

They also staged protest demonstrations in Kario Ghanwar and Tando Bago towns against the millers for their refusal to buy their chief commodity at the proper rates.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1510836/paddy-growers-stage-protest-march

FARMERS ASKED TO PROTECT COTTON CROPS FROM WORM ATTACKS

By RECORDER REPORT on October 15, 2019

The Met Office on Monday asked the farmers to step up measures to protect their cotton crop, which is in critical weeds period, from worm attacks.

“Plant protection measures for worm may be initiated," it said in advisory for the period until Oct 20, saying that “adopt better practices for weed management of Cotton crop as it is in critical weed period".

It said that the farmers should start cotton picking after 10 am in the morning to avoid dew factor that involves plants in early hours of the day. It urged the growers to evolve irrigation plans for their crops keeping in view the mainly dry weather spell.

Daytime temperature may stay below normal but night hours slightly above the normal while normal wind is likely to blow in the most of the agricultural plains of the country.

Punjab: Mainly dry weather is expected. However, rain/thunderstorm is expected at few places in upper Punjab (Sargodha, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore and Faisalabad) and Islamabad after Oct 15.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Mainly dry weather is expected. However, rain/thunderstorm is expected at scattered places in Dir, Swat, Chitral, Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Peshawar, Swabi, Mardan and Kohat districts after Oct 15.

Sindh: Mainly dry weather is expected in most of the province during the decade. Balochistan: Mainly dry weather is expected in most of the province during the decade.

Gilgit-Baltistan: Rain/wind-thunderstorm is expected at isolated places in the province after Oct 15. Kashmir: Rain/wind-thunderstorm is expected at isolated places in the province after Oct 15.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/15/530896/farmers-asked-to-protect-cotton-crops-from-worm-attacks/

COUNTRY'S CURRENT COTTON WOES

October 15, 2019 Shahid Sattar and Asad Abbas

The current cotton arrival estimates fall far short of fulfilling domestic requirement of the textile industry. The share of cotton crop in agricultural GDP is 4.5 percent while its share in national GDP is 1 percent. Cotton being the basic raw material for the Pakistan's textile industry accounts for almost 70% of the basic cost and therefore any movement in price or quantity of cotton has significant impacts on production and the farmer's revenue. According to a PCCC report, the cotton production has witnessed a decrease of 32 percent for the year 2019-20 which has caused a loss of more than 2 percent of the GDP to the economy for this year alone. The importance of the textile industry can be assessed from the fact that it is contributing $ 13.3 billion in exports (60 percent of total exports), 8.5 percent in GDP and employs over 10 million people with many more dependents in 2018-19.

Imprudent policies by successive governments have taken a heavy toll on cotton production and resulted in progressive decrease of cotton acreage and yield per hectare. Cotton production target set for this year by the Ministry of Food Security/PCCC was 15 million bales but necessary measures were not taken to achieve the target and as a result only 9-10 million bales are expected this year.

In a recent meeting on crop assessment, Sindh reported a drop of 30% in the expected cotton crop while Punjab reported a drop of 15% over last year's production. The cotton crop has witnessed a decrease of 29 percent in its yield since FY12. The principal reason of low yield this year is the low number of plants per acre (need to increase 50 percent more plants per acre). A recent study reveals that the yield in Punjab will record a historic low this season.

The expected requirement of cotton bales by industry is more than 15 million and hence 5 million are short. The production shortage forces the entire value chain to rely on imported cotton to meet the shortfall substantially increasing the import bill and negatively impacting the competitiveness of our exports. One of the many things that is likely to reduce our net exports this year.

Other reasons behind reduction in cotton output include unavailability of quality seed, pest resistant seed, outdated technology, water shortage, low profitability and lack of awareness of farmers regarding cotton production as well as competing crops and government policies or the lack thereof.

One major reason behind diminishing cotton crop is sugarcane which has cropped up in the best cotton sowing area. From FY10 to FY18, the area of sugarcane crop has increased from 0.94 million hectares to 1.34 million hectares up by 42 percent. Similarly, the increase in area of Punjab and Sindh is 42 percent and 43 percent respectively. This encroachment is primarily due to the protection provided by the government for sugar as well as illegal extensions in capacity of mills already existing in the areas.

Moreover, sugarcane crop is subsidized through protective prices as a 40% customs duty on the import of sugar has been imposed. This crop has assumed the status of a "political good" like wheat in the last decade, regardless of its economic comparative disadvantage.

The target of 15 million bales of cotton could easily be achieved if strict prohibition of sugarcane crop cultivation in cotton growing area is imposed (Zoning has to be implemented and regulated). This will not only provide the raw material for country's largest manufacturing sector but will also lead to higher economic output, higher employment and increased foreign exchange earnings. The area with cotton cultivation will add an additional 0.25 percent to GDP along with minimum 1.27 percent of additional wheat contribution to GDP if half of the sugarcane production area reverted. This in short means that 1.523 percent (0.25%+1.273%) to GDP per annum can be added while letting go of 0.35 percent (half of sugarcane contribution with current area under cultivation) of sugarcane production contribution.

Another reason is the failure of cotton seed which is unproven, substandard and not resistant to pests and diseases (old generation BT cotton). The world shifted to genetically modified seeds and improved their cotton production and yield per acre but Pakistan still has inferior quality seed. Our cotton needs GMO transformation against pink bollworm and Whitefly which is available with private sector and can be seen at their research farm and labs. Pink bollworm can only be controlled by GMO varieties, Pesticides cannot control it. It is a very deceptive pest at the time when it appears on the surface of crop it has already caused the damage on the crop. Every year, nearly four million bales are damaged by pink bollworm and whitefly. The currently available pesticides have failed to yield results on the major cotton pest i.e., Whitefly, contrary to the claims made by various companies. This has caused Whitefly to go beyond ETL (Economic Threshold Level) and has resulted in a complete disaster.

The average farm gate price of "Phutti" this season has been Rs 3600 per 40 kg and ginning cost is approximately Rs 700 per bale plus 7% wastage. Whereas the sale price of cotton is almost Rs 9200 per 40 kg. This huge difference in marketing and risk margin is kept by ginners and market profiteers and resultantly farmers suffer huge losses. Pakistani ginned cotton bales are underweight and contain sand, dust, threads of nylon, moisture and leaves of the cotton plant as well as up to 10% trash (2 to 3 times above world average. In short, the real sufferers are the farmers and industry in this whole game.

Pakistan is a net cotton importer for many years and textile industry has to meet the shortage by importing cotton from other countries. Afghanistan and the CAS countries are best suited to fulfill this shortfall. The ECC of the Cabinet had decided to allow import of cotton for one year from the Torkham border in its meeting held on November 2018. This import had been a big relief for the textile industry because it not only reduced the cost of imported raw material, but the quality of this cotton was superior (containing less trash and impurities) to Pakistani cotton and could be used to produce finer count yarn.

In the meeting of ECC, it was also decided that the Plant Protection Department (PPD) would construct fumigation area shed at the Torkham border and send teams to inspect the land and soil of Afghanistan and adjoining areas. Moreover, APTMA offered to arrange such visits and a committee was formed to oversee the matter. The committee has only met once during the year and the team has to verify the pest control has only just left for Afghanistan.

The government has decided to pair PCCC with the Chinese counterpart to faster development of new seed varieties. This agreement is highly unlikely to succeed as the PCCC is not properly staffed and has a legacy of unwilling and low level workers with hardly any scientists. The PCCC not only lacks basic infrastructure but hasn't been able to appoint a permanent professional as CEO to streamline the matters.

The failure of the cotton crop calls for urgent and immediate action by the government in restructuring of PCCC with the help of private sector stakeholders. The need for a long-term stable and progressive textile and cotton policy has been underscored by this disaster, inescapable if Pakistan is to progress and achieve economic stability and aggressive growth. This is a national security paradigm and should not and cannot be ignored.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/10/15/18-page/805645-news.html

AGRICULTURE SECTOR TO BE MODERNISED IN BALOCHISTAN

By APP Published: October 15, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Balochistan government has initiated radical steps to modernise agriculture sector of the province and to introduce latest equipment and techniques to cope with the drought that has hit some parts of the province.

The province has huge potential in the agro sector but water scarcity and prolonged drought had badly destroyed the agriculture of the province, said spokesperson of Balochistan government, Liaquat Shahwani.

The Balochistan government, he said, was taking initiatives to resolve issues in the agriculture sector in the province on priority.

“Agriculture is the backbone of country’s economy and it provides 50 percent employment opportunities to the country’s workforce,” said Shahwani.

He said the provincial government under the leadership of Chief Minister Jam Kamal has been working to increase agricultural output by devising out-of-the-box and effective solutions.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2079497/1-agriculture-sector-modernised-balochistan/

LIVESTOCK DEPT DISTRIBUTES SUBSIDISED CHICKEN

By Qaiser Shirazi Published: October 15, 2019

RAWALPINDI: Following Prime Minister Imran Khan’s vision of helping people generate subsistence at grass-root level through his chicken and egg business model, the Rawalpindi livestock department launched backyard poultry farm project PM’s Murghi Paal Programme.

Poultry Research and Livestock Department distributed a set comprising five chickens and a cockerel to some 250 families on Tuesday while for promotion of healthy meat option, the department would distribute a set of 12 cockerels amongst the masses on October 16.

Government is offering 30 per cent subsidy on these organic chicken, charging Rs1,050 per set of five females and a male from buyers.

The ceremony was chaired by Director Livestock Syed Nadeem Badar and Additional Director Naveed Seher Zaidi while the units were distributed under the supervision of Deputy Director Dr Sajid Akhtar.

Livestock officials said that all six birds were of indigenous breeds, while the chickens would start laying eggs within 45 days. Each chicken will lay up to 250 eggs a year, they added.

The distribution of birds for poultry meat will take place on Wednesday. Each family will get a dozen cockerels not more than three months old weighing around and 450 grammes.

Livestock department employees will give basic knowledge of backyard poultry farming and necessary medicines to people buying the subsidised chicks.

On Tuesday, officials distributed 1,500 birds and each set was sold for Rs1,050 after 30 per cent subsidy.

Further, the livestock officials said that they launched the programme on a self-help basis without government's assistance. They added poultry was a potential domestic industry.

Highlighting how these birds could be utilised, the officials said that people living in suburban areas could daily feed on eggs laid by their chickens while they could also sell them to increase their monthly income.

They said desi eggs were filled with all essential nutrients and help in children's growth too.

The livestock officials said that they would soon launch a programme for distribution of cattle on a domestic level.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2079589/1-livestock-dept-distributes-subsidised-chicken/

ENSURING FOOD SAFETY

By Editorial Published: October 15, 2019

The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) is doing a good job by regularly checking the quality of food at restaurants and manufacturing units. The importance of ensuring food safety can be gauged from the fact that most visitors to developing countries from advanced countries eat only at the high-end hotels where they stay. Otherwise, they eat only peanuts and bananas. We expect other provinces too to undertake regular inspections of food points to ensure food safety. The PFA sealed 640 food points and had production stopped at 344 food outlets in September. In the same period, food safety teams imposed fines worth over Rs19 million on food business operators for violations of PFA regulations. Notices were served to 32,963 eateries while carrying out routine inspection drives across the province. PFA Director General Captain (retd) Mohammad Usman said PFA teams inspected as many as 40,526 food points in all 36 districts of Punjab. These included dairy shops, ice-cream parlours, general stores, bakeries, poultry shops, confectionery shops and food manufacturing units.

In September, food safety officials seized the carcass of a dead animal while it was being transported to Lahore from Kasur. The carcass weighed around 500kg. The PFA also carried out an inspection of 144 production units of Jams and pickles. Around 2,640 kgs of jams were found affected by fungi and 873 kgs of pickles unfit for human consumption. Fines were slapped on 26 production units for failing to adhere to health safety rules. As many as 82 food production units in Lahore zone, 29 in Rawalpindi, 26 in Multan and seven in Muzaffargarh were inspected. Food manufacturing units were sealed for using rotten stuff and for the use of prohibited chemicals. Dead flies and mosquitoes were found in pickles. In any case, excessive intake of food should be avoided. A man wrote on a piece of paper, “I am a big eater. Today, I broke the world record,” and lost consciousness, which he never regained.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2079355/6-ensuring-food-safety/

TOMATO, ONION PRICES GO BEYOND COMMON MAN’S REACH

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated October 16, 2019

KARACHI: As people are already paying very high prices for Afghan and Iranian onions, they are now compelled to face another price hike as prices of tomato have been raised to Rs140-160 per kg while capsicum (Shimla mirch) and green chilli are now selling at Rs280-320 per kg.

Last week, tomato was selling at Rs80-120 per kg while capsicum and green chilli were available at Rs160 per kg.

Traders said capsicum and green chilli were in short supply in the Superhighway vegetable market and expressed their annoyance when consumers demanded some green chilli for Rs10 or Rs20.

“A handful of green chilli comes at Rs20 while previously traders used to give handful of chillies for free with purchase of different vegetables,” a vegetable buyer said adding that “the government does not look serious in controlling food inflation”.

However, confusion has gripped the market as to whether Indian tomato is arriving via Afghanistan or the red fruit is finding its way from Swat or Iran.

Push-cart vegetable sellers said that they had purchased Indian-origin tomatoes loaded in plastic crates at Rs2,400-2,500 for 20-22 kg weight which were coming from Afghanistan.

They said locally produced tomatoes usually arrived in wooden boxes of 12-15 kg but this imported tomato was arriving in plastic crates.

Being in this business for over 20 years, “I know that it is Indian tomato which tastes different from Pakistani tomato,” a push-cart seller said adding that trucks carrying imported tomatoes were coming in Sabzi Mandi on the Superhighway.

Disagreeing with market traders, president of Falahi Anjuman Wholesale Vegetable Market New Sabzi Mandi Superhighway Haji Shahjehan said that some tomato quantity was actually finding its way into the market from Swat while some vehicles carrying Iranian tomato had also started to arrive.

The wholesale price of tomato has shot up to Rs100 per kg from Rs50-60 per kg last week. Before selling it at Rs140-160 per kg, many traders were demanding Rs80-120 per kg depending on the areas.

He attributed tomato crisis to end of Balochistan crop while the Sindh crop would arrive by next month. Imports are being made to overcome market demand.

People are already consuming substandard quality of Iranian and Afghan onion at costlier rates as soaring imports have failed to provide any relief to consumers. Many feel that these imported onions are not fully ripe and lack taste.

Some onion variety of Sindh crop has also started to arrive in lower volumes. The price of both imported and local onions hovers between Rs80-100 per kg.

Traders had jacked up the onion price ahead of Ashura (Sept 10) to Rs80 from Rs60 per kg.

Consumers' problems have further aggravated as prices of various biscuits produced by leading companies have gone up followed by tetra fruit juices.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511040/tomato-onion-prices-go-beyond-common-mans-reach

SHUTDOWN FOR FAIR RATE OF PADDY

A Correspondent October 16, 2019

BADIN: Businessmen, traders and shopkeepers kept their businesses closed in the town of Kario Ghanwar in Badin district on Tuesday to express solidarity with paddy growers, who have been running a campaign for a fair rate of their crop.

A call for the shutdown was given by various organisations of growers and supported by several political parties and nationalist groups.

Markets, bazaars, commercial streets, shops and vending stalls in the town and its outskirts remained closed throughout the day.

Paddy growers demand a rate of Rs1,500/40kg without any "unfair" deduction while rice millers are not ready to pay more than Rs1,200/40kg and stop deduction of three-five kilos in weight for moisture.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511035/shutdown-for-fair-rate-of-paddy

KP FLOUR MILLERS THREATEN TO LAUNCH PROTEST ACROSS PROVINCE

By AMAJAD ALI SHAH on October 16, 2019

The owners of flour mills in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tuesday threatened to launch phase-wise protest campaign across the province, if the provincial food department didn't start wheat supply to their mills till October 25.

Speaking at a joint press conference along with president of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce of Industry, Senior Vice President Shahid Hussain, Group leader Mohammad Naeem Butt, former chairmen Anees Ashraf, Mohammad Tariq, former senior vice chairman, Haji Musarrat Shah at chamber house on Tuesday, Pakistan Flour Mills Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chapter Chairman Mohammad Iqbal said that the wheat supply to flour mills in Punjab had started from August 19, 2019.

But, he said the wheat supply was yet not began to mills in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and called it as anti-labour and industry-hostile policy of the government and provincial food department.

PFMA provincial chairman said that around 130,000 metric ton wheat is available in government godowns, which could fulfill the province food requirements for next one and half month.

The total wheat demand of KP is about 4.4 million metric ton against the province own production 1.2 million metric ton, whereas the rest of 3.4 million metric ton food requirements are being fulfilled by rice, flour in the province, he added.

Iqbal said that the flour industry is currently receiving 2000 metric ton wheat against its demand of 6,000 metric ton on daily basis, so the supply is insufficient to meet food needs and ensure availability of flour to people on subsidized rates.

He blamed the KP food department for not utilizing subsidy on wheat/flour efficiently, announced by provincial government every year in fiscal budget.

He added the non-consumption of wheat subsidy was another major cause of flour industry downfall and high-prices of flour in the province.

PFMA provincial chief demanded of KP food department to purchase wheat from PASSCO and provide it to the flour mills of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the price that is charged in Punjab province to arrest the crises faced by the flour millers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He urged the Prime Minister Imran Khan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan to take immediate notice of unavailability of wheat to KP flour mills.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/16/531293/kp-flour-millers-threaten-to-launch-protest-across-province/

IMPORT OF RAW COTTON; APTMA URGES GOVERNMENT TO REMOVE DUTY, TAXES

By HASSAN ABBAS on October 16, 2019

All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) on Tuesday has urged federal government to remove duty and taxes on the import of raw cotton otherwise the domestic textile industry would not be able to full fill its export commitments.

Central chairman All Pakistan Textile Mills Association Dr Amanullah Kassim Machiyara said this while addressing a hurriedly called press conference along with Chairman APTMA Punjab Adil Bashir at the Punjab office.

He also said that the industry would have to spend $1.5 billion on import of 5.5 million bales due to a 35 percent production shortage this year. He said the quality of locally produced cotton has also deteriorated as compared to other cotton-producing countries. The imposition of duty with heavy incidental impact for the entire value chain meant to produce goods meant for exports, he stressed.

He said it is an irony that the government's crop estimates are always on the higher side, which are seldom proved true. This year again, he said, the initial estimate of 15 million bales was suddenly revised to 10 million bales, which is now apprehended to be around 9.5 million bales, resultantly causing a shortage of 5.5 million bales.

Amanulah Kassim said that instead of announcing support price of cotton government should invest in enhancing the quality of the seed. He also said the industry would have no option but to procure cotton from the international sources while incurring extra cost in terms of freight charges.

According to him, Pakistan is 3rd largest producer of denim and it is far better in quality than its immediate competitors.

While listing down the reasons of low productivity, he said, poor research on seed, adulterated pesticides and encroachment of sugarcane of cotton growing areas are prime reasons for it.

While urging to encourage the production of new GMO varieties, he said APTMA was set to launch research work on cottonseed. He has also questioned the performance Pakistan Central Cotton Committee on cotton research.

He lamented that Pakistan has become a net importer of cotton today while it was a cotton exporting country once.

He has also urged the government to release refunds of exporters without further delay, as the exporters on account of sales tax and duty drawback without further delay, as the industry was facing a liquidity crunch at present and banks are not willing to increase limits of the industry, as there is a strident increase of liquidity requirement due to imposition of sales tax and devaluation. He said the stuck up refunds have added fuel to the fire.

Also, he has urged the government to resolve the CNIC issue with small traders so that sales in the domestic commerce should pick up.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman APTMA Punjab Adil Bashir said duty-free import be immediately allowed as both contamination-free and large-staple cotton are not produced locally to meet production Programme of the industry.

The Chairman APTMA informed that the latest cotton production statistics of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) and the domestic cotton prices shows the current arrivals to be well short as compared to the corresponding period last year. Comparative analysis of cotton arrival up to 1st October 2019 versus 1st October 2018 shows a 39 percent decline in cotton arrival.

In the latest development in crop estimates, he urged the federal government for immediately withdraw of 3 percent Custom Duty and 2 percent Additional Duty and 5 percent Sales Tax levied on the import of raw cotton to enable the textile industry to meet its requirements for domestic as well as for export orders.

The removal of taxes and duty on import of raw cotton will support the textile industry to fulfill its foreign commitment, he added. Machiyara mentioned that Pakistan's textile industry requires medium and longer staple contamination free and organic cotton, which are not being produced in Pakistan and always textile mills need to import to produce specialty yarns.

He said that the government should act without further delay and announced an emergency to support the domestic textile sector. The import of cotton at low cost will help the industry to fulfill its export commitments.

The Chairman APTMA has pleaded with the Prime Minister, Ministry of Commerce for immediate removal of duty and taxes on import of cotton so that the textile industry could retain its competitive edge.

On the occasion, former chairman APTMA Yasin Siddik, Asif Inam and others were also present and talked about the current situation of the textile industry. They also demanded for relief in shape of removal of taxes and duties on import.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/16/531313/import-of-raw-cotton-aptma-urges-government-to-remove-duty-taxes/

WHEAT SOWING: PLAN TO INCREASE USE OF CERTIFIED SEED FROM 17PC TO 50PC UNDER STUDY

By ZAHID BAIG on October 16, 2019

Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) is embarking upon an ambitious plan to increase the use of certified seed in wheat sowing from present meager 17 percent to 40-50 percent in the current season by ensuring the provision of high-quality certified seeds through cooperation of public and private seed organizations.

“We are trying to improve the ratio of certified seed for considerable jump in production starting with the wheat crop this year under Rs 12 billion national package for the all-important national staple food," said Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Langrial while talking to Business Recorder here on Tuesday.

“Wheat sowing is going to start next month and we want to change the ratio of using 83 percent of wheat seed from farmers' own reserves from the previous crop. We will try to improve this ratio up to 40-50 percent for this season and have convened a meeting in the next two days with the public and private sector seed companies."

This will help increase wheat production from the current average of 30 maund per acre to around 40 maund per acre ensuring the better financial position of individual farmers, agriculture sector as well as the national economy.

He said the government may adopt the policy of replacing the seed reserves of farmers by certified seed from different government and private organizations. It will cost a differential of Rs 750 per 50 kilogram bags to the government, he added, and said that similar policy is also being introduced for other important cash crops like cotton, rice, sugarcane and oilseeds.

Agreeing with the point that the climate change is playing havoc with the crops in the province, he said and added that the new seed varieties to be approved by the government will be heat tolerant. He said a rust resistant variety of wheat seed has also been approved in recently approved 31 new varieties by the Punjab Seed Council.

He regretted that the council met here on Monday after a break of almost two years as the previous government kept ignored the agriculture sector. He also hoped that next meeting will also approve cotton varieties having resistant against different viruses including white fly and pink bollworm.

Answering a query, he said in the past authorities would reject a seed variety if it failed to win approval from all four agriculture laboratories, one of them in private sector, in the province. “But, now a policy decision has been taken that a variety will need to pass tests of any of the three laboratories so that the private sector may be encouraged to more get involved in research and development work."

About the Kisan Card project the government plans to launch for providing directly targeted subsidy to the farming community, Langrial said a campaign for registration of 5 million farmers is in full swing and hopefully the scheme will be formally launched soon.

The minister said the cards would not only be used for providing targeted subsidy to the farmers but also to extend them loan facilities and most importantly for procuring their produce at officially designated rates.

He disclosed that with input from farmers the government has decided to undertake as a pilot project an initiative for setting up a dedicated market called “Kissan Mandi" where certified seed, authentic pesticides and fertilizers as well as farm machinery would be available at subsidized rates.

The process for selecting tehsil of a district has been initiated and the scope of the scheme would be expanded if proved to be a success in the pilot project. He said that soil health cards are also being prepared by the provincial agriculture department and under this programme one million farmers would be given soil health card of their land. He hoped that digitization on which department is working will help resolve various issues being faced by the growers such as passing on the subsidy to them, crop zoning etc.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/16/531319/wheat-sowing-plan-to-increase-use-of-certified-seed-from-17pc-to-50pc-under-study/

WORLD FOOD DAY OBSERVED AT UVAS

By RECORDER REPORT on October 16, 2019

The Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition (FSHN) of the University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (UVAS) Lahore observed “World Food Day" with the theme of “Our Action are our Future; Healthy Diets for A Zero Hunger World". Various activities including an awareness seminar, speech, healthy cooking and poster competitions, presentations and documentary featured to mark the day.

VC Professor Dr Talat Naseer Pasha preside over the seminar while Chairman (FSHN) Dr Sana Ullah Iqbal and many guest speaker from public private sector organization including Nutrition officer (UNICEF) Punjab Uzma Safdar, Provincial Manager Food Fortification Program Dr Amber Elahi and a large number of students and faculty members were present.

Addressing the audience, Professor Dr Talat Naseer Pasha advised students that being professionals it is your responsibility to create awareness among peoples to clarify myths and controversies associated with eggs and poultry meat also about the pure high quality healthy food by utilize your knowledge and skills to curb malnutrition and stunting issues in the country. He said egg is the unique and affordable source for getting protein which is the basic need for the growth of human body. He urged to provide healthy desi foods like lassi, milk, egg and butter to school going children in a day. He said all kind of soda drinks and tea whitener are unhealthy and acknowledge the role of Punjab Food Authority to bane soda drinks in institutions.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/16/531312/world-food-day-observed-at-uvas/

SKYROCKETING FOOD PRICES

By Editorial Published: October 16, 2019

The prices of food commodities in the country are indeed skyrocketing. Fortunate is he who can manage two meals a day from his own pocket. Basic food items are getting dearer by the day so much so that even pulses and vegetables — which were once considered affordable — have gone beyond the reach of too many. As for meat, mutton has vanished from the menu plans of even middle class families, and beef has become a rarity. For all these ‘forced vegetarians’ in the country, chicken offers some bit of room to afford a ‘cheat day’ — once in a long while. Besides, the consumption of fruits by even those belonging to the middle class has dropped significantly simply because of being expensive, let alone those from the poor and the lower middle class.

The rise and rise in food prices appears to have caught the attention of the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan who has ordered steps to control the prices of basic food items. The Prime Minister has convened a high-level meeting — to be attended by the chief ministers of the four provinces, besides the authorities concerned — on the coming Friday to devise a strategy to control inflation which has turned into a double-digit demon over the last months. In one of its recent reports, the World Bank has warned that the rate of inflation will rise to 13 per cent in the next fiscal year, from 11.4 per cent currently — heralding even tougher days ahead for the common man.

There is an urgent need for the government to focus on how to bring the prices of basic food items under control. The government needs to activate the price control committees — which only seem to exist on paper — across the country with the help of elected representatives and ensure that those responsible for fluctuation in prices and hoarding are strictly dealt with. The government also needs to devise ways to ensure stocks at utility stores from where the common man can purchase the monthly ration at government-controlled rates without any difficulties.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2080251/6-skyrocketing-food-prices/

PM TO INAUGURATE AGRICULTURE SECTOR’S SCHEMES SOON: MINISTER

By RECORDER REPORT on October 17, 2019

KP Minister for Agriculture and Livestock, Mohibullah Khan has said that Prime Minister would soon inaugurate mega projects in agriculture and livestock sectors soon and a sum of Rs85 billion would be spent on the uplift of the sector in next four years.

He expressed these views while presiding over a review meeting on the implementation of initiated Agriculture Emergency Programme initiated under Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) and annual development programme (ADP) here Wednesday. Beside, Chairman, District Development Advisory Committee (DDAC) MPA Fazal Hakeem, Secretary Agriculture, Israr Khan, Vice Chancellor Agriculture University, Bakht Jehan Khan, Focal Person Agriculture Department, Dr Sher Mohammad and other concerned officers attended the meeting. Speaking on the occasion, the Provincial Minister for Agriculture said that steps are being accelerated for the implementation of the projects including Agriculture University Swat and Agriculture Training Institute (ATI) in Swat.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/17/531697/pm-to-inaugurate-agriculture-sectors-schemes-soon-minister/

MISMANAGED AFFAIRS: PUNJAB AGRICULTURAL MARKETING DEPT IN DIRE STRAITS

By Rizwan Asif Published: October 17, 2019

LAHORE: As a result of the failure of the provincial government to chalk out and implement new rules governing the auction of crops, the Punjab Agricultural Marketing Department has lately been suffering from an intense administrative and financial crisis.

According to sources, the provincial authorities are reportedly facing difficulties in regulating, monitoring and stabilising crop prices due to the ambiguity associated with the application of the old and the new system of agricultural marketing and its associated rules. The confusion in price mechanism has also started to affect the prices of fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, the Punjab government has expressed dissatisfaction over the draft rules prepared by a committee formed three weeks ago, following which consultant services are sought for the purpose.

Sources further revealed that the provincial government promulgated an ordinance to establish the Punjab Agricultural Marketing Regulatory Authority (PAMRA) on October 15, because of which previous regulations became null and void.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Punjab's special secretary for agricultural marketing Zahid Gondal maintained that PAMRA has been formed with the purpose to regulate the sale and purchase of food grains with the view to ensure benefit of the farmers.

"The authority has also been formed to protect consumers from high prices and price manipulations," he said.

Per the new law, the ordinance would be fully implemented within 60 days during which PAMRA's chairman, vice chairman and other committee members must be appointed, while the law must also undergo parliamentary approval from the Punjab Assembly within 90 days.

Following the advice of the agricultural secretary and special secretary for agricultural marketing, an eleven-member committee was formed on September 23 with the task to present recommendations and draft rules for agricultural marketing by September 29.

However, the committee could not chalk out its final recommendations even after a lapse of three weeks, per sources. So far, the committee has not even obtained basic information about the staff, assets, income and outstanding payments of the market committees. On the other hand, the recommendations which have been formulated until now are controversial and confusing at best.

The committee has advised the imposition of a one per cent fee on value of agricultural crops auctioned in the markets and 0.5 per cent fee on products of agro-based industry. However, officials of the provincial agricultural department maintain that imposition of the varied market fee on the two types of products will bring in losses as farmers would sell their produce to agro-based industries for higher prices.

Consequently, the supply of food grains in the market will be affected while changes in prices and availability of vegetables and fruits will disturb the consumers. The committee, therefore, suggested that uniform fees be applied to both the markets and the agro-based industry.

What's more, the committee could also not chalk out practical recommendations pertaining to salaries and pension of the staff serving in the market committees, who have been demanding a centralised system for the purpose. Sources also revealed that the recommendations presented by the committee regarding pay-scales of employees and secretaries of the market committee are against the orders of Lahore High Court (LHC).

"The committee set up for the formulation of rules in this regard did not present satisfactory recommendations due to which in a meeting held on Wednesday, the PAMRA chairman Naveed Bhandar has decided to hire the services of a competent lawyer," Gondal shared.

"The incumbent will serve PAMRA as its consultant, who will be assisted by high-performing market secretaries working for the agricultural marketing department for the formulation of PAMRA rules," he added.

The consultant, he said, will also be assisted by retired secretaries with legal education and ample experience in the field.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2081100/1-mismanaged-affairs-punjab-agricultural-marketing-dept-dire-straits/

PAKISTAN'S KINNOW EXPORTERS OPPOSE MINIMUM PURCHASE PRICE

By Salman Siddiqui Published: October 17, 2019

KARACHI: Kinnow exporters have expressed apprehension over the announcement of minimum purchase price of Rs1,000 per 40 kilogramme for the citrus and have voiced fear the decision may badly hurt exports in the current fiscal year.

All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed said the Sargodha deputy commissioner had fixed the minimum price in a meeting held with the fruit growers and exporters on Monday.

"The association has serious reservations about this meeting conducted by an office beyond its legal jurisdiction and hence the decision taken to fix the kinnow price also stands null and void," PFVA Secretary General Mohammad Ilyas Khan said in a letter sent to Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood on Wednesday.

"The association being a main stakeholder was not involved in this consultative meeting," he said in the letter, which was also sent to the Federal Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Sargodha is the main centre for citrus orchards as the city produces over 80% of the total production of 3.4 million tons.

Earlier in August, the growers had rejected the exporters' offer of Rs600 per 40 kg for the current season compared to Rs850 per 40kg paid last year, FPCCI Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports' former chairman Ahmad Jawad said the other day.

"This has happened for the first time that any authority has fixed the price of a fruit. Secondly, the fruit price fixation has nothing to do with the commissioner's office," the PFVA patron-in-chief told The Express Tribune.

"Price fixing is not a provincial or town-level subject. It is a federal subject. Secondly, the minimum purchase price is set for major or staple crops while kinnow is neither a major, nor a staple crop."

Fruit price is always paid according to its quality and grade. "We (exporters) paid in the range of Rs700-1,200 per 40 kg as per quality and grade of the fruit last year," he said.

The fixed price would compel the exporters to pay a minimum Rs1,000 per 40 kg for even a low-grade kinnow, which they purchased at Rs700 per 40 kg last year.

He said the decision would put kinnow exports at risk as competition was already stiff in the export market. "We not only lag behind in per acre yield, but world markets now also demand clean skin and seedless kinnow, which we unfortunately do not produce."

Pakistan earned $210 million through the export of 350,000 tons of kinnow and other citrus fruits in the previous fiscal year.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2081090/2-pakistans-kinnow-exporters-oppose-minimum-purchase-price/

NA COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS CULTIVATION OF GM CORN

By Shahram Haq Published: October 17, 2019

LAHORE: The platform of National Assembly Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research is being used by the pro-genetically modified organism (GMO) lobby to highlight benefits of GM corn crop, which is currently banned in the country.

The seventh meeting of the Standing Committee on National Food Security is scheduled to be held on Thursday at the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (Parc). Its agenda included discussion on the introduction of GM seeds in Pakistan coupled with a briefing by Crop Life Pakistan on Bt cotton and Bt corn, said sources. Crop Life Pakistan is a joint platform of multinational seed companies.

Several members of the standing committee have already expressed their reservations about the introduction of GM corn in the country.

It may be recalled that the current government, following extensive discussion on the issue earlier this year, had decided that commercial cultivation of GM corn would not be permitted in the country.

In light of the policy guidelines provided by the federal government, the decision to forbid commercial plantation of GM corn was subsequently communicated by the governments of Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the two major maize-growing provinces, through separate letters.

Despite clear policy guidelines on not adopting biotechnology in food crops, various members of the standing committee have expressed their astonishment over discussion on so-called benefits of GM corn. Chaudhry Muhammad Ashraf, an MNA from Sahiwal which is a major maize-growing area, said he was unable to comprehend the logic behind repeated discussion on the GMO technology in meetings of the standing committee.

“There is no logic behind taking up this dead issue,” he said and vowed to oppose GM corn forcefully in the upcoming meeting.

Similar views were echoed by Choudhary Faqir Ahmad, an MNA from Burewala. “I am strongly against granting permission for cultivating GM corn,” he said, adding that Pakistan must not allow import of such seeds because they were not suitable for plantation in the country.

Shaukat Ali, MNA from Peshawar, and Dr Nausheen Hamid, MNA from Lahore, also expressed their reservations about the introduction of GM corn in the country.

When contacted, Standing Committee Chairman Rao Muhammad Ajmal Khan said no decision to stop commercial cultivation of GM maize had been made by the current government.

He pointed out that in Thursday’s meeting, the participants would listen to the companies’ perspective once again but mainly for the cotton crop. Cotton production in Pakistan had experienced a dip in recent years, though in India per acre yield had increased sharply following use of Bt seeds, he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2081088/2-na-committee-discuss-cultivation-gm-corn/

FLOUR BECOMES MORE EXPENSIVE

Aamir Shafaat Khan October 18, 2019

Workers are filling bags with wheat flour. Millers have raised prices by Rs14 per kg during Arpril-October period of this year.

KARACHI: Consumers are set to face a harsher wave of food inflation as flour millers once again raised flour no. 2.5 rate and 10 kg bag prices to Rs47.50 per kg and Rs480 from Rs45.50 and Rs460 per bag, respectively.

Apart from flour, biscuits, juices and packaged/tetra pak milk are set to become more expensive.

The price of maida and fine flour had been jacked up to Rs50.50 from Rs48.50 per kg. From April to Oct 17, flour millers had raised flour No.2.5, maida and fine flour prices at least a dozen times — a surge of Rs14 per kg — while the rate of 10 kg bag rose by Rs140.

In April, the rates of flour No.2.5 and 10 kg bag were Rs33.50 per kg and Rs340 while maida and fine flour were available at Rs36.50 per kg. Consumers had been paying high prices for flour varieties despite good wheat crop and ample stocks in the country.

High quality five kg and 10 kg bags of Bake Parlor and Ashrafi are being sold at Rs270-280 and Rs540. However, retailers claim distributors of these brands have hinted further jump in prices of five kg and 10 kg bag to Rs290-300 and Rs560-580.

Biscuits, juices and packaged milk to cost more

Defending the latest price hike, Chairman Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA), Sindh Zone, Khalid Masood said millers remain dependent on open market for wheat as the Sindh government did not procure the grain from growers this year. The provincial government has not fixed any rate on old carryover stocks of last year, he added. “On paper, the Sindh government has 832,000 tonnes of wheat stocks but physically it does not have any,” the PFMA chief claimed.

He said despite carryover stocks of last year, the Sindh government should have procured at least 500,000-600,000 tonnes from the growers. In the past, every year Sindh government procured over one million tonnes.

He said wheat rate in the open market has swelled to Rs4,300 per 100 kg bag, showing a major jump from April 2019 when it was priced at Rs3,000 for a 100 kg bag.

The government in the third week of September decided to continue with a ban on wheat export to keep flour prices under control. Pakistan's wheat exports in July-August 2019 plunged to 44,134 tonnes fetching $10.5 million as compared to 229,243 tonnes valuing $$49m, according to the figures of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

In first week of this month, the Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet ordered release of 350,000 tonnes of wheat in the market to check price hike.

The ECC approved a proposal of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to release of 150,000 tonnes of wheat from the stocks of Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation to the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The meeting also directed the Sindh government to release 100,000 tonnes of wheat subject to the condition that it would also release another 100,000 tonnes out of its own stocks in to the market.

"The price of wheat and flour may remain under pressure in case Sindh government fails to release wheat," Masood said.

In the second week of October, Governor Punjab Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar inaugurated a manufacturing plant at Nestle Pakistan's Sheikhupura factory. The investment at Nestle's Fruita Vitals plant is $22m and the production capacity is 24,000 units per hour.

Before inauguration, the company in September had surged price of small fruit juice pack to Rs35 from Rs30, followed by one litre pack price to Rs200 from Rs175.

The company from October 1, 2019 had also raised price of Milk Pak one litre pack to Rs140 from Rs135, followed by one quarter pack to Rs35 from Rs30.

Similarly, the maker of Slice juices also raised prices to Rs25 from Rs20.

In biscuits, a packet, previously marked at Rs17 is now selling at Rs20, while some manufacturers had increased price of Rs10 pack to Rs15.

Retailers said neither tetra pack milk producers nor other manufacturers had given any reason of price hike despite the fact that rupee-dollar parity had remained stable for the last over two months.

They said the government is also not taking any notice that manufacturers are raising prices without enhancing weight and quantity of the products like biscuits, powder milk products, and shampoos, etc.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511500

NA BODY BRIEFED ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS

October 18, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Nat¬ional Assembly's Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research on Thursday was briefed on the prospects for the introduction of genetically modified (GM) food crops in the country.

The ministry of national food security and research and the parliamentary committee were in disagreement over the introduction of GM crops since the ministry strongly opposed the use of GM seeds, arguing that these carry health and environmental implications for human life.

Secretary of the ministry Muhammad Hashim Popalzai informed the committee members that the bio-safety committee had imposed a ban on the trials of GM crops, whereas the ministry of commerce had also opposed GM technology, saying that it would hurt exports.

The ministry of health opposed it on the grounds that it would harm public health, while the climate change ministry was of the view that GM crops would have environmental impact.

Committee chairman Rao Muhammad Ajmal Khan and members of the committee stated that they would try to convince the ministries opposing GM technology.

On this, Mr Popalzai informed the committee chairman and members that the ministry was ready to introduce the technology in cotton crop but would not support GM seeds for maize crop. The prime minister had also been given a briefing on this issue when he convened a meeting to introduce GM crops in the country, he said.

It was informed that the ministry of national food security had taken input from all stakeholders and submitted a comprehensive report to the prime minister. The report enlisted the consequences that have health and environment impact as per stakeholder and would also hit exports since a major corn oil producer now marketing its product in Pakistan had conveyed to authorities that it would not import corn from Pakistan if the country decided to use GM seeds.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511501/na-body-briefed-on-gm-crops

PANIC BUYING ON COTTON MARKET

Staff Reporter October 18, 2019

KARACHI: Buyers active¬ly procured cotton on Thursday which helped prices stay on the higher side.

According to cotton market sources, buyers are opting for big lot deals despite high rates – a strong indication that textile spinners are in panic mode. As a result a very large number of deals were finalised between Rs8,900-9,100 per maund.

Much of the trading activity was concentrated around Punjab variety cotton which is now available in large quantity. However, the cotton yarn market strike in Faisalabad is somewhat affecting buyer sentiment.

The world leading cotton markets were firm. New York cotton recovered previous day's losses for all future contracts.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were pegged at overnight level of Rs8,900 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,600 bales, station Rohri, at Rs8,800-8,900; 1,800 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs8,800-8,900; 2,000 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,800-8,900; 2,000 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,100; 400 bales, Khanewal, at Rs9,100; 800 bales, Mianwali, at Rs9,050-9,100; 400 bales, Fazilpur, at Rs9,000; 400 bales, Bahawalpur, at Rs9,000; 800 bales, Dera Ghazi Khan, at Rs8,975-9,000; and 400 bales, Yazman Mandi, at Rs9,000.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511494/panic-buying-on-cotton-market

COTTON GROWERS BE DISCOURAGED FROM SWITCHING TO OTHER CROPS: PBIF

By RECORDER REPORT on October 18, 2019

President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum (PBIF), Mian Zahid Hussain has emphasised the need that cotton growers should be supported to discourage them from switching to other crops and maintain area under cultivation which is shrinking, otherwise it will be damaging for the textile sector.

He said fixing the target for cotton production is not enough which should be backed by supportive steps. Talking to the business community, he said that Pakistan must import five million bales to keep market stable which will increase the import bill and cost of doing business for the textile sector while it can hit the exports.

He said that cotton accounts for 4.5 percent of the agricultural GDP, one percent of national GDP and it covers seventy percent cost in textile production.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that reduction in area under cultivation, pest attacks, substandard seed, pesticides, water scarcity, low profit and high cost of inputs will reduce cotton output by 33 percent which will reduce GDP by two percent.

He noted that pink bollworm and whitefly wastes almost four million bales due to the substandard seed which should be tackled.

He noted that the textile industry is earning thirteen billion dollars of foreign exchange and providing employment to ten million people, therefore, it should be given preference by policymakers. Pakistan is at the bottom of ten major cotton-producing countries while the area under cultivation has been reduced by 29 percent since 2012. India will produce 30 million bales while Pakistan will produce hardly ten million bales during the current year.

Pakistan and India have identical weather but the later is using latest machinery which has boosted the production, he said, adding that growers are selling cotton for Rs90 per kg while textile mills are getting it for Rs230 per kg which is damaging both. The difference is pocketed by the middlemen which is not profit but exploitation and that should be discouraged. He also called for reforms to make Pakistan Central Cotton Committee an effective institution to improve situation.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/18/532125/cotton-growers-be-discouraged-from-switching-to-other-crops-pbif/

PKI BLAMES MINISTER FOR MISSING TARGETS OF MAJOR CROPS

By RECORDER REPORT on October 18, 2019

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) has alleged that the Punjab province missed targets of all the major crops including Cotton, Wheat, Maize and Rice due to sluggish and below-average performance by the Punjab Agriculture Department headed by the Minister Nauman Ahmad Langrial. 'Cotton production declined from the target of 10.4 million bales to 5.5 million bales and missing 5 million bales means loss of US$5 billion,' said PKI President Khalid Khokhar in a letter to the Prime Minister Imran Khan, copies of which were also released to media here on Thursday.

Khokhar said that the ill-planning of the department also caused heavy loss of potato and farmers as well as they sold their crop at Rs3/kg which is far below the cost of production. The Punjab province has fertile land, four seasons, hardworking farmers; God gifted environment and lively rich culture and have the potential to feed entire Pakistan. Indian Punjab is feeding the entire Indian population of more than 1.20 billion.

He also alleged that the Minister appointed his relative Ahmed Yousaf Langrial as Director in Board of Director of Punjab Seed Corporation. Punjab Seed Corporation has increased wheat seed rate to Rs2800 per bag, which will further burden farmers with the elevated cost of production. He said the minister did not participate in a cotton seminar at Multan rather also stopped his officers to participate in that Farmers gathering. During World Cotton Day, huge gathering at Rahim Yar Khan kept waiting for the Minister, but he did not turn up and disgraced the farming community, Khokhar alleged.

Punjab should have Agriculture Minister who is a capable and knowledgeable person who understands the issues of farmers, ability to resolve and initiate grower friendly policies in the best interest of Pakistan. The present minister should be replaced with some well-versed visionary person capable of giving a boost to agriculture productivity, PKI Chief demanded.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/18/532134/pki-blames-minister-for-missing-targets-of-major-crops/

'KINNOW EXPORTS MAY HIT AROUND 400,000 TONS IN COMING SEASON'

By RECORDER REPORT on October 18, 2019

Former Chairman of FPCCI Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports and renowned Horticulturist, Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad has expressed hope that Kinnow exports may hit around 400,000 tons in the coming season as this year crop is in appropriate condition and timely rains helped to increase the productivity of the produce.

Finally after the intervention of the Federal Government and Punjab Government, the revised kinnow rate which has been fixed at Rs 1000 per mound is a good omen for farmers and it also helps to increase kinnow exports in the coming season which will be commence from December 1, he said.

He said Pakistan Fruit Vegetable Exporters Association (PFVA) rejection on revised rate of kinnow was unjustified, though Deputy Commissioner Sargodha taken the decision of the revised rate unanimously after series of detailed meetings. In the final meeting; Exporters, representatives of PFVA, farmers and Parliamentarians were part of that when official rate was fixed.

Despite the fact, kinnow growers association have demanded Rs 1200 per mound earlier in the response of utter unique decision by PFVA members regarding kinnow rate of Rs 600 per mound few months back for the coming season without taking stakeholders on board.

He said, “We must understand that Kinnow taste is different from all mandarins around the globe because of the salt range near sargodha, which makes it unique. We must accommodate farmers to continue the production of kinnow because every year farmers are switching to other fruits and crops which is alarming."

However, dollar rate was around Rs 120 when the rate was fixed Rs 850 in previous season. Now the dollar is of Rs 157 and kinnow factories are still getting at Rs 1000 per mound where agriculture input prices were gone up. “Included in remittances, exporters get more Pak Rupee's too now".

Jawad also pointed Ministry of National Food Security Parliamentary Secretary clearly stated on the floor of the house that's it's a provincial subject and we already sent the letter to Punjab government in the response of calling attention notice submitted by respected parliamentarians.

Similarly, in the second phase of CPEC may help kinnow exports another kick to tap the big market of China with full potential where Prime Minister Imran Khan was the Chief Guest in the International Horticulture Expo held at China.

He said that China is a market for a minimum of 100,000 tonnes of Pakistani kinnow due to their high demand and it depends how we tap this big opportunity with the help of PHDEC.

He said kinnow have always been considered as a traditional symbol of good fortune in China. This is mainly because the word orange, when spoken in mandarin, sounds similar to the word “wealth". The orange hue of the fruit is also said to symbolise “gold", which makes it a very auspicious fruit.

He also briefed that Pakistan already managed to find out two new markets for citrus export as Philippines and China are open for Pakistan's citrus fruits now. “It is very heartening to note that Pakistan has targeted China and Philippines markets for kinnow export and expected boost in kinnow export is about 20 percent this year."

It may note here calling attention notice has been served earlier by the Parliamentarians before National Assembly (NA) of Pakistan on kinnow rate for farmers and seek clarification from Minister of National Food and Security.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/18/532141/kinnow-exports-may-hit-around-400000-tons-in-coming-season/

NA BODY RECOMMENDS GOVERNMENT TO REVISIT FISHERY POLICY

By RECORDER REPORT on October 18, 2019

National Assembly Standing Committee on Maritime Affairs has recommended the government to revisit current fishery policy in order to update it in accordance with the ground challenges.

The committee met with Mir Amer Ali Khan Magsi in the chair here at the Parliament House on Thursday where it discussed the agenda of the meeting.

The parliamentary panel took notice of the rapidly depleting stocks of fish in Pakistan. All the management and regulation of local fishing boats are being done by the provincial fisheries department of Sindh and Balochistan, but there is no mechanism in the provinces to monitor the fishing activities of the local fishing boats.

In Balochistan, the fishing permit clearly shows that it is valid for fishing within the territorial waters of Balochistan, but in Sindh, Karachi Fisheries Harbour Authority is issuing fishing permits for those fishing boats which are registered with them and it is open-ended.

Most of the fishing fleets are not sustainable. In this regard regulation and imposition of proper fishing gears is required by the provinces. The major cause of depletion is irregular fishing. In this regard the fishing policy is being reviewed and formulated and the same will be shared with the committee. The committee recommended that the government should take steps to take care of the indigenous fisherman present in Sindh and Balochistan. It was further told that the Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme would address three sectors of fisheries.

The committee was informed that Gwadar Port is fast becoming the focal hub of Afghan Transit Trade. Various projects in Gwadar are nearing completion, such as construction of Industrial units in the Pilot Zone is 90 percent complete. Holding of second expo in Gwadar was a huge success and WEBOC has been made operational at Gwadar Port. Also issue of Eastbay Expressway in Gwadar has been resolved. The committee recommended considering the concerns of people of Gwadar which have not been addressed during the initial agreement.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/18/532169/na-body-recommends-government-to-revisit-fishery-policy/

RS4BN BEING SPENT TO INCREASE PADDY'S PER ACRE YIELD: MINISTER

RECORDER REPORT October 18, 2019

LAHORE: A huge sum of Rs4 billion is being spent in Punjab under Prime Minister's Agriculture Emergency Programme to increase per acre yield of paddy.

Under this programme, growers will be given approved and certified seed varieties and promotion of mechanization to bring down the cost of production, said Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Langrial while addressing a seminar in Muridke.

The seminar was arranged to discuss improving the quality of rice and its better harvesting. Director General Agriculture (Research) Dr Abid Mahmood, Director General Agriculture (Extension) Dr Anjum Ali Buttar, DG Agri (Pest Warning) Syed Zafaryab Haider and a large number of stakeholders attended the event.

The objective of the seminar was to make all stakeholders understand that yield could not be enhanced by adopting the latest production technology. The Minister said that efforts are being made to develop our agriculture in line with the international standards and requirements to win a prominent place in the international commodity markets.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/10/18/15-page/806114-news.html

HALAL FOOD TRADE

By Editorial Published: October 18, 2019

The government's lethargy towards tapping the international Halal food market is inexplicable given the huge potential that Pakistan has in livestock, dairy and poultry sectors. Experts believe that the country can export Halal products worth $5 to $6 billion a year if they focus on a few key areas. The government, to the contrary, has for months been fighting over what is called jurisdiction dispute in police parlance. The federal cabinet is divided on whether to place the Pakistan Halal Authority (PHA) — a body responsible for promoting and regulating Halal food trade — under the administrative control of the Ministry of Commerce or the Ministry of Science and Technology.

The cabinet held long deliberations over the issue earlier this month, but failed to reach a consensus. Some cabinet members believe that since the PHA is essentially a certification authority, its functions are more aligned with those of the Ministry of Science and Technology while others are of the view that the PHA's role — i.e. promotion of Halal products' trade — is more relevant to the Ministry of Commerce. It was in March this year that the Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet had directed the PM's Adviser on Institutional Reforms and Austerity, Dr Ishrat Husain, to present a viable plan for turning the PHA into a vibrant organisation.

However, the deadlock on a non-issue is delaying the urgently-needed steps for promoting export of Halal products. The government must do away with this stumbling block related to the administrative control forthwith and concentrate on: formulating a robust strategy to raise exports with the involvement of the private sector; expediting work on Halal certification and developing a Halal logo for all its Halal products; helping private companies develop technical skill in processing, storing, transporting and marketing of Halal products; and maintaining the international standards in packaging and marketing of Halal products.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2081796/6-halal-food-trade/

'PAKISTAN BANNED IMPORT OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED MAIZE SEEDS ON HEALTH GROUNDS'

By APP Published: October 18, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research was informed on Thursday that owing to health and environmental issues, the import of genetically modified (GM) seeds of maize had been banned.

However, the government will provide possible facilities to companies for technology transfer for Bt cotton production.

The meeting, chaired by MNA Rao Muhammad Ajmal Khan, discussed the introduction of GM seeds for food crops in the country.

Speaking on the occasion, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research Secretary Dr Muhammad Hashim Popalzai informed the meeting that Pakistan was a non-genetically modified organism (GMO) country in terms of food grain production and the countries which imported maize from Pakistan was also of the non-GMO category.

He cautioned that the import of GM seeds would adversely impact exports from Pakistan and local buyers would also avoid the purchase of corn produced through these seeds.

Popalzai told the committee that hybrid maize had been cultivated over large areas, adding that it was yielding good results for the farmers. The maize crop had remained bumper for the past many years, he added.

The ministry official remarked that the Bio-Safety Committee had approved the import of GM seeds for tests and trials but imposed a ban on the import of GM maize seeds in 2018. The committee wanted to engage in further deliberations on the health and environmental impact and effects of cross-pollination in other varieties.

The committee was told that three other ministries – health, climate change, and commerce – had also suggested the imposition of ban on the import of GM maize seeds in order to avoid any threat to the local crop and carry out further studies on the safety of these varieties.

The committee chairman called for convening secretaries of other ministries as well for their input on the subject, saying the national interest and farmers would be preferred and their rights must be protected at every cost.

He said all the legislative work would focus on safeguarding the national interest besides protecting the agriculture sector and farmers. He also directed that the Seed Association of Pakistan should be invited for its input and appreciated the role of multinational companies in per-acre crop production.

A representative of the GM seed providing company apprised the meeting that cultivation of such seeds was safe as was the case in conventional seeds, adding that they were cost-effective and reduced the cost of pesticides.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2081973/2-pakistan-banned-import-genetically-modified-maize-seeds-health-grounds/

COTTON PRODUCTION DIPS 27PC

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana October 19, 2019

KARACHI: The country's cotton production plunged by 26.54 per cent, suffering a massive blow of 1.603 million bales up to October 15.

According to data from Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association (PCGA), 4.440 million bales were produced up to Oct 15, down from 5.044m bales in same period last year.

Cotton alone accounts up to 4.5pc in the agricultural GDP and 1pc towards the national income. It also accounts 70pc of the cost in textile production.

The impact of this season's poor production and losses suffered by growers is expected to adversely impact next year's as many will shift to other crops, Gomomal, a grower from Umer Kot, Sindh told Dawn.

He further said that initially heavy rains and later gusty winds battered the standing cotton crop in Sindh where worst affected areas including Umer Kot, Kundri etc.

A leading ginner from Punjab, Mian Mahmood Ahmed said that the crop was first damaged by high temperatures at flowering stage and later by heavy rains, adding that growers have suffered financially and are now thinking to shift to other crops next year.

Besides the climate's impact, he said growers also have to suffer at those who supply substandard seed and pesticides which results in high cost of inputs but a low production.

A leading cotton broker Naseem Usman said the government has to give extra attention to cotton to ensure supply of raw material to textile industry, which earns up to $13 billion in foreign exchange and is a major job provider.

He added that cotton production would not be more than 9m bales this season which means around 5m bales will have to be imported at an estimated cost of $1.5bn.

A staggering fall in production was recorded in Punjab where it dipped 34.37pc to 2.049m bales during the period, as against 3.123m – representing a decrease of 1.073m bales.

Similar situation was witnessed in Sindh as output declined by 18.15pc to 2.390m bales compared to 2.920m – recording a shortfall of 0.530m bales.

Due to a reduced crop, the number of operating ginning units also declined to 738 during the period, from 909.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511698/cotton-production-dips-27pc

COTTON HITS SEASON'S HIGH OF RS9,150

Staff Reporter October 19, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices on ready trading soared to a new high of Rs9,150 per maund on Friday.

Short crop fear continues to haunt textile industry and cotton prices are likely to go up in coming days. Many mills do not have the facility of remission of duty and taxes on imports and are in panic mode as they buy locally. Mills which have remission facility on exports are focusing more on imports, brokers said.

The world leading cotton markets were mixed to firm with New York cotton continued to gain for all future contracts. Chinese and Indian cotton were mixed.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were revised upward by Rs50 to Rs8,950 per maund.

The following major deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,600 bales, station Rohri, at Rs8,875-9,000; 1,000 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs8,875-9,000; 2,000 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,850-8,900; 2,000 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,125-9,150; 1,000 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs9,125-9,150; 1,000 bales, Ahmedpur East, at Rs9,000; 1,600 bales, Bahawalpur, at Rs9,000; 1,200 bales, Fort Abbas, at Rs9,050-9,100; and 1,200 bales, Yazman Mandi, at Rs9,000-9,050.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511693/cotton-hits-seasons-high-of-rs9150

14 FISHERMEN SAVED OFF MANORA

Reporter October 19, 2019

KARACHI: The Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) saved 14 local fishermen on Friday after a successful four-hour-long rescue operation off Manora.

According to details, the PMSA received a 'save our souls' (SOS) call from a fishing boat, Al Anwar, at around 11.30pm on Thursday. It was two nautical miles away from Manora when it experienced a leakage in the stern seal followed by heavy flooding. The agency promptly sent out its assets to save the fishermen. After four hours of efforts, they saved the boat from capsizing by extracting water from it through a de-flooding pump.

The rescue operation culminated at around 3.30am on Friday with the boat and men brought safely back to Karachi.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511594/14-fishermen-saved-off-manora

TALKS WITH MINISTER ON FIXING OF SUGAR CANE PRICE REMAIN INCONCLUSIVE

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated October 19, 2019Face

HYDERABAD: A meeting held in Karachi on Friday to decide sugar cane price for 2019-20 remained inconclusive as sugar millers appeared unwilling to pay the price being demanded by cane growers. They, however, showed their readiness to start cane crushing on Nov 15.

The meeting was chaired by Sindh Minister for Agriculture Ismail Rahu and attended by Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) president Abdul Majeed Nizamani and general secretary Dr Zulfikar Yousfani, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) president Qabool Khatiyan and general secretary Zahid Bhurgari and representatives of other Sindh-based growers' bodies on the one side and Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) Sindh zone chairman Dr Tara Chand and other sugar millers on the other side. Agriculture Secretary Agha Zaheer was also present.

It is learnt that Punjab has not yet fixed the current crop's rate. It is likely to announce the same in the last week of the current month.

Sindh government usually fixes sugar cane price per 40kg a couple of rupees more than the rate in Punjab considering more sucrose recovery in Sindh's crop.

Sindh's cane growers demand Rs250 per 40kg which millers are not ready to pay arguing that they have their own constraints, like levy of general sales tax (GST) on ex-mill price of the sweetener.

SCA vice president Nabi Bux Sathio citing facts and figures, that had been part of the entire sugar cane price fixation saga, rejected millers' contentions.

Sugar millers also complained that they had not yet been paid the subsidy of Rs10.70 per kg as was announced by federal government in 2017-18 season and said the amount came to around R4.25 billion. They said the non-payment had created financial issues. In that year, Sindh government had separately paid Rs9.30 per kg on export of 20,000 tonnes of sweetener for Sindh-based sugar mills.

Growers' representatives said that for several years, a rate of Rs182/40kg was being fixed by Sindh government whereas sweetener's price had increased substantially. Despite that, millers were not ready to accept a fair price being demanded by them.

Millers have also been questioning Sindh government's decision of fixing the price at Rs182/40kg. They even moved Sindh High Court last year to seek remedy.

Lower Sindh region has been home to sugar cane cultivation as several factories are located there and farmers manage the crop with difficulty as sugar cane remains a high delta crop and inadequate water flows create problems in its management.

Most sugar millers paid Rs160/40kg to cane growers for the 2018-19 crop.

It was only after a competition among millers to get more and more sugar cane stocks that factory owners started paying Rs200/40kg after passage of the first 10 days of January 2019.

"We also demand disbursement of Rs22/40kg [differential] that was denied to us in the last season when millers paid Rs160/40kg against notified price of Rs182/40kg because sugar price had increased considerably in retail market and the ex-factory rate had also gone up. Millers are morally bound to pay this differential amount to us," Sathio said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1511588/talks-with-minister-on-fixing-of-sugar-cane-price-remain-inconclusive

SEAFOOD EXPORT STANDS AT $15.255M IN JULY-SEP

RECORDER REPORT October 19, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan's seafood export mounted to US$79.549 million in July-Sep 2018-19 with 18.21 percent rise, official figures say.

Increase in seafood export now stands at US$15.255 million in July-Sep 2018-19 from US$64.294 million in July-Sep 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics shows.

In term of volume, the country's seafood export also showed an increase of 32 percent or 8231 metric tons to 34,090 metric tons in July-Sep 2018-19 from 25,859 metric tons in July-Sep 2017-18.

In Sep 2019, Pakistan exported 17.38 percent or US$5.427 million more seafood to US$43.156 million in Sep 2019 than US$37.729 million shipped in Sep 2018.

Seafood export volume also surged to 31.47 percent or 4174 metric tons to 17,438 metric tons in Sep 2019 from 13,264 metric tons in Sep 2018.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/10/19/3-page/806212-news.html

DAP, UREA PRICES: IMPORTERS MADE WINDFALL PROFITS, GOVT CONCEDES

By ZAHEER ABBASI on October 19, 2019

The government has conceded that there has been a massive increase in the prices of urea and DAP, which shows high profit margin of importers/industries on critical inputs for agriculture production. An official said that increase in the cost of input eventually translates into cost of commodities although the tax on all fertilizer products has been reduced from 17 percent to 2 percent.

Sources said that according to Food Ministry, an increase of 36 percent in price of urea was noted in October 2019 as opposed to a year before and DAP was being sold at Rs 3,712 as opposed to what it should have been Rs 3,080 on the basis of DAP price in the international market, higher by Rs 632 per bag.

The document shows that the urea price from Rs 1,500 per bag in June 30, 2018 increased to Rs 2,040 in October 2019, reflecting 36 percent increase. The urea manufacturing industry attributed the price increase to removal of cash subsidy, inflation, increase in gas prices and withdrawn of Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC).

The Ministry of Food added that DAP price in international market was US $ 418 per ton (FOB) in July 2018 and for the same month price of DAP in the domestic market was Rs 3,238 per bag. However, when the price in the international market slid to US $ 312 per ton in October 2019, equivalent to Rs 3,080 per bag, the price in the domestic market in principle was to be reduced but the price went up gradually to Rs 3,721 per bag during the first week of October 2019, which clearly shows high profit margin by importers/industries, the ministry added.

Sources said that the government had fixed urea and DAP prices at Rs 1,400 and Rs 2,500 per bag respectively in June 2016. However, revision in gas prices from time to time by the government and inflation caused urea and DAP prices to increase to Rs 2,040 and Rs 3,721 per bag respectively in October 2019.

However, the fertilizer has been a deregulated commodity since 1995 and as per Fertilizer Policy 2001, market forces would determine fertilizer prices on the understanding that manufacturer would allow market forces to prevail and will pass the benefit in form of lower price of fertilizer to the farmers.

National Fertilizer Development Center (NFDC) only provides technical assistance to all the relevant stakeholders. The issue of fertilizer price reduction/fixation falls under the purview of Ministry of Industries and Production, the document added.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/19/532494/dap-urea-prices-importers-made-windfall-profits-govt-concedes/

OVER 4.4M COTTON BALES REACH GINNERIES ACROSS COUNTRY

October 19, 2019

MULTAN: Seed cotton (Phutti) equivalent to over 4.44 million bales has reached ginneries across the country till October 15, registering shortfall by 1.6 million bales compared to corresponding period of the last year. According to a fortnightly report of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) released to the media on Friday, out of total arrivals, over 3.6 million bales have undergone the ginning process, including over 1.7 million bales in Punjab and over 1.9 million bales in Sindh. Arrivals in Punjab were recorded at over two million bales registering a shortfall by over a million bales that comes around to 34.37 percent.

Arrivals in Sindh were recorded at over 2.3 million bales registering a shortfall by 18.15 percent.

Total sold out bales were recorded at over 3.2 million bales, including 3.194 million bales bought by textile mills and another 36,737 bales purchased by exporters.

Exactly 1.2 million bales were still lying with the ginneries as unsold stock. Sanghar district of Sindh continued to remain on top with cotton arrival figures of over a million bales.

The report does not include cotton figures from districts of Kasur, and Sargodha.

Out of total around 1300 cotton ginning factories, 738 were operational in the country, including 279 in Sindh and 459 in Punjab.—APP

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/10/19/18-page/806332-news.html

AGRI, CORPORATE AND SMES: SBP AMENDS THREE PRUDENTIAL REGULATIONS

By RIZWAN BHATTI on October 20, 2019

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has amended Prudential Regulations for agriculture financing, corporate/commercial banking and SMEs financing for electronic warehouse receipt under the Collateral Management Companies Regulations, 2019 issued by the Securities Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP).

The fresh amendments to Prudential Regulations will be applicable with immediate effect. The SBP has advised banks/DFIs to ensure meticulous compliance of the revised instructions in letter and spirit. Any deviation or non-compliance of Prudential Regulations will attract punitive action under the relevant provisions of Banking Companies Ordinance, 1962, the central bank warned.

According to AC&MFD Circular Letter No. 03 of 2019, in order to provide enabling regulatory framework for channelising financing to develop an efficient and standardized infrastructure for the storage of commodities, inter alia, to reduce spoilage of produce, amendments in the Part-A: Definitions 20 (ii) and Regulation R-1 of Prudential Regulations for Agriculture Financing have been incorporated regarding Electronic Warehouse Receipt under Collateral Management Companies Regulations, 2019 issued by the SECP.

As per amendment, Part A-Definitions: 20 (ii) should be read as “Other Form of Security means hypothecation of movable agricultural machinery, pledge/hypothecation of agriculture produce on the farm or in godown, and charge on livestock on the farm. In case of pledge/hypothecation of agriculture produce lying in godown, the title/ownership of the produce in the name of the borrower shall be determined based on appropriate documents, for example Electronic Warehouse Receipt (EWR) as defined under Collateral Management Companies Regulations 2019 issued by the SECP."

Amended Regulation R-1: Comprehensive Agriculture Financing Policy viii) said that: The policy shall cover different aspects related to financing against pledge of stock under EWR including list of eligible commodities, quality of collateral, valuation, price volatility, margin, limits, tenor of loans, diversification, insurance, substitution of collateral and managing collateral in the event of counter party default, etc.

Similarly, According to BPRD Circular Letter No. 21 of 2019, SBP has also announced following amendment in the Part-A: Definitions of Prudential Regulations for Corporate/Commercial regarding Electronic Warehouse Receipt under Collateral Management Companies Regulations, 2019 issued by the SECP.

Part-A: Definitions: Secured means exposure backed by liquid assets, pledge stock – including pledging against Electronic Warehouse Receipt (EWR) as defined in Collateral Management Companies Regulations, 2019 issued by the SECP, mortgage of land, plant, building, machinery or any other fixed assets, hypothecation of stock (inventory), trust receipt, assignment of receivable, lease rentals, and contact receivables but does not include hypothecation of household goods. The unsecured exposure will be considered as clean.

In addition, SBP through circular IH&SMEFD Circular Letter No. 7 of 2019, following amendments in the Definition and Regulation SME R-1 of Prudential Regulations for SME Financing have incorporated regarding Electronic Warehouse Receipt.

Readily Realizable Assets means and include liquid assets and stocks pledged to the banks & DFIs in possession or stock pledged under Electronic Warehouse Receipt (EWR) as defined in Collateral Management Companies Regulations 2019 issued by the SECP, with ‘perfected lien' duly supported with complete documentation.

SME R-1: SME Specific Credit Policy: (vi) The policy shall cover different aspects related to financing against pledge of stock under EWR including list of eligible commodities, quality of collateral, valuation, price volatility, margin, limits, tenor of loans, diversification, insurance, substitution of collateral and managing collateral in the event of counter party default, etc.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/20/532742/agri-corporate-and-smes-sbp-amends-three-prudential-regulations/

SINDH FOOD DEPARTMENT ASKS CENTRE TO PROVIDE 400,000MT WHEAT MORE

By RECORDER REPORT on October 20, 2019

Sindh Minister for Food and Minorities Affairs Hari Ram Kishori Lal has said that considering the needs of the domestic consumers, Sindh Food department had requested federal government to provide further 400,000 metric tonnes of wheat.

He while repudiating the report that the wheat stock had plummeted in Sindh province made it clear that there was sufficient stock of wheat available in the province.

He said that the federal government's economic committee initially had approved to furnish 100,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Sindh.

He said that Sindh cabinet would soon announce the official wheat price policy for the crop 2019-20 and following that the Food department would start selling the wheat to the flour mills owners in accordance with the decided official rate.

He assured the general public that Sindh government would ensure the ample supply of wheat in the markets so that the domestic as well as the commercial consumers didn't face any difficulty.

Hari Ram Kishori also asked the people to not to pay heed to any deceptive propaganda.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/20/532796/sindh-food-department-asks-centre-to-provide-400000mt-wheat-more/

WHEAT & SUGAR: PM DIRECTS MINISTRIES TO BRING DOWN PRICES: FIRDOUS

By NUZHAT NAZAR on October 20, 2019

Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting has said that Prime Minister Imran Khan taking strict notice of rising inflation has directed the authorities concerned to take steps to bring down the price of flour.

This special assistant was briefing media persons here on Saturday about Friday's important meetings chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan. She said the Prime Minister also expressed anger over the increase in price of sugar, adding the Prime Minister had directed to take strict action against profiteers and hoarders.

Imran Khan also sought suggestions from various ministries to bring down the prices of essential items of daily use. Awan said the price of flour increased in Sindh as the provincial government did not make purchase of wheat on time. She said the Prime Minister directed to release 100,000 tons of wheat immediately for Sindh.

The special assistant said the Prime Minister while chairing another meeting directed to prepare a database of properties of Evacuee Trust Property Board in order to make best utilization of them. She said federal and provincial governments would work together to devise a strategy regarding the Auqaf properties.

Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan said the income of Muslim shrines would be used for facilitation of visitors. Replying to a question, she said Ulema of all schools of thought attended the meeting with the Prime Minister on Friday last. She said the meeting had nothing to do with sit-in. She said the exploitation of people will not be tolerated in the guise of religion.

Dr Awan said protest was democratic and basic right of every citizen and government supports it, but it would not allow anyone to take law into own hands.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/20/532769/wheat-sugar-pm-directs-ministries-to-bring-down-prices-firdous/

FLOUR MILLS CARTELISATION CASE TO BE SENT TO CCP

By Zafar Bhutta Published: October 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: As the price of wheat flour continues to rise, the government has decided to forward a case against cartelisation by flour millers to the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP).

Following the pressure of the Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA), the government had imposed a ban on the export of wheat and flour in July to tackle the issue of demand and supply.

Despite the ban, the millers continued to increase the price.

The federal government has constituted a committee comprising provincial governments and relevant stakeholders to implement the recommendations of the CCP to check cartelisation, undue profiteering, and monopolistic practices in order to control price hike in the country.

Sources told The Express Tribune that the National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) in its meeting on September 6 discussed the price hike of essential food items including wheat/atta in detail and constituted the committee.

The sources said Minister for Railways Sheikh Rashid had also taken up the matter in a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) last month and pointed out that the price of flour was high in the Rawalpindi region.

Rashid said the flour mills had reduced the size of the atta bag from 20 to 15 kg which was not justified. He also expressed concern over the stocks of wheat.

The fact came to the fore that a huge quantity of wheat had been wasted due to bad storage conditions in the warehouse. Rashid said the actual stock position in the country should be analyzed.

The minister said as consumption of wheat flour increased from November onwards, there was a need for vigilance about supplies during the period. Minister for Economic Affairs Hammad Azhar observed that the price of roti/naan was higher in Punjab despite the reduction in gas rates for tandoors.

Azhar sought details of the agreement between Punjab government and Tandoor Owners' Association regarding fixation of price for roti/naan.

Ministry for National Food Security and Research said in pursuance of the decision of the ECC taken on July 17, 2019 a ban on the export of wheat and wheat flour was notified.

The Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) and provincial food departments on September 5, 2019 reported wheat stocks at the level of 7.27 million tons as compared to 10.6 million tons for the corresponding period last year.

On September 4, the International Grains Council (IGC) London had reported the price of Soft Red Winter Wheat at US$203 per ton, which is equal to Rs31,719 per ton as compared to the export parity price of Rs36,420 per ton in the country.

On August 29, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported the local price of wheat and wheat flour at the level of Rs364.20 and Rs429.30 per 10kg respectively.

Department of Plant Protection (DPP) had reported that around 17,650 tons of wheat products had been exported through the sea and land route from August 1, 2018 to August 30, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2083410/2-despite-ban-millers-continue-increase-flour-prices/

QCCI SLAMS PUNJAB'S WHEAT POLICY

By Mohammad Zafar Published: October 20, 2019

QUETTA: The Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry (QCCI) has criticised Punjab's wheat policy saying it would increase flour and bread prices in Balochistan.

"Punjab has tightened its wheat monitoring policy and announced that it would sell wheat on a subsided rate but that policy shouldn't be applicable in the open market," QCCI Senior Vice President Badar ud Din Kakar told a delegation of the Balochistan Flour Mills Association led by its chairman, Syed Saleh Agha. "This policy is unconstitutional and illicit," he added.

The delegation informed the QCCI vice president that Punjab was preventing vehicles from transporting wheat to other provinces.

"The Punjab government has imposed the policy on its flour mills and providing them wheat on a subsidized rate and halting trucks carrying wheat to Balochistan and other provinces," Agha told Kakar.

The QCCI vice president condemned the move and said the Balochistan government and food department should intervene in the matter to avoid a crisis in the province.

"The Punjab government's policy will increase wheat and flour prices in Balochistan and further add to the woes of its people," he added. Kakar assured the QCCI's full support and assistance to the provincial flour mill association on the issue and vowed to raise the matter with the government.

There is a flour crisis in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa too where mill owners have threatened to launch a protest across the province unless the provincial food department started releasing wheat to their mills by October 25.

Pakistan Flour Mills Association-Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chapter Chairman Mohammad Iqbal said wheat supply to flour mills in Punjab had started from August 19 but mills in the K-P had yet to start work.

He termed the provincial food department's reluctance to release wheat to mills a part of the government's 'anti-labourer' and 'industry-hostile' policy.

The PFMA provincial chief claimed that around 130,000 metric tonnes of wheat were currently available in government granaries which could fulfill the province's food requirements for the next 45 days.

"K-P's total wheat demand is about 4.4 million metric tonnes against the province's production of 1.2 million metric tonnes," Iqbal said, adding that the flour industry was currently receiving just 2,000 metric tonnes of wheat against a demand of 6,000 metric tonnes daily, affecting the availability of flour to people on subsidised rates.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2083327/1-qcci-slams-punjabs-wheat-policy/

PFA SEALS THREE FACTORIES KIN OKARA

OUR CORRESPONDENT: OCTOBER 20,2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) sealed two grinding factories as well as a salt processing unit on Saturday for adulteration charges during an operation to curb the sale of loose spices in Okara.

Meanwile, the authority Has confiscated around 7,000 kilogrammes of loose spices, five grinding units and a large quantity of raw material during different raids so far. On Saturday, PFA teams sealed Haji Munaawar, Haji Rehman Atta Masala Chaki and Karmarwala Namak for producing loose spices.

PFA Director General Muhammad Usman stated that red chilli powder was being produced by adding substandard and hazardous ingredients such as non-food grade colouring and chemicals.

Raiding teams also took action against the units for failing to properly print and package the spices, poor cleanliness and hygiene and for a proper storage system. In addition to this, workers did not possess medical certificates. The director general stated that the use of unsafe ingredients in loose spices can lead to ulcers in the stomach and intestines.

Food business operators would not allow vendors to sell substandard spices and flaunt the rules and regulations outlined by the province's labelling and packaging laws, he maintained.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201910200315&EN_ID=11201910200103&EMID=11201910200040

THE OLIVE TREE PLAN

By Editorial Published: October 20, 2019

In addition to its ongoing 10 billion tree plantation campaign, the federal government is planning to launch a 50 million Olive Tree Tsunami plan for small landholding farmers in the country's drought-stricken areas. The olive tree has been chosen for the purpose due to the fact that it is a drought-tolerant plant. Besides providing livelihood for farmers, olive farming, it is believed, will enable the country to export olives and olive oil and also produce enough edible oil to meet domestic demand.

This is certainly a step in the right direction and the government must be commended for developing the plan. It is also important, however, to diversify and emphasise the production of other drought-resistant crops to counter the country's water crisis. The black-eyed pea, a high-protein grain grown mainly by small farmers in more than 80 countries around the world, is another such crop. Yet another drought-resistant crop, the chickpea, is already widely grown in South Asia. Maize, one of the world's most important cereal crops, is another such crop which has also been genetically modified to include the desired DNA traits that thrive in drought conditions. There are also several varieties of beans that can withstand drought.

And then there are techniques which are used to counter drought conditions. In intercropping, for example, two or more crops are grown together which means farmers have a crop to fall back on if one of them fails due to poor rainfall. In another technique, millions of farmers are increasingly planting new varieties of food crops that take less time to grow, thus reducing the need for rain. It is critical for our country's planners to remember that scientists are constantly engaged in research to develop new drought-resistant crop varieties and practices, and that we must stay up to date on the research if we are to ensure food security for our country.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2083233/6-olive-tree-plan/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCT 21st TO OCT 27th 2019

AGRICULTURE: LABOUR WOES AND LOW COTTON PRODUCTION

Amjad Mahmood Updated October 21, 2019

THE rural economy is set to suffer losses worth billions of rupees because of the low cotton crop yield, leading to an increase in poverty. The Pakistan Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (PCCC) in its first estimate of the current crop season predicts that only 10 million bales will be produced against the target of 15m bales this year. Some quarters fear that the yield loss will be more than seven million bales with each bale weighing at least 155 kilograms.

Since cotton and textiles accounts for about 60 per cent of the country's exports, this will adversely impact the economy. But the women working in this sector will be hit the hardest.

Around 80 per cent of the country's cotton is produced in Punjab. It provides employment opportunities to rural womenfolk of the cotton belt from sowing till harvesting.

A loss of 5m bales translates roughly into Rs10 billion in earnings for women employed as cotton-pickers

These part-time female farm workers are paid Rs1,000 per acre for sowing cotton seeds where the germination of seed in the first sowing could not take place for any reason. They are offered Rs2,000 per acre to loosen compact soil in cotton fields. Furthermore, women are paid Rs500-800 per 40kg of raw cotton picked.

A loss of the expected minimum 5m bales of cotton output indicates that the women workers miss out around Rs10 billion in earnings from the cotton-picking job alone.

Earnings from other related jobs such as loading and unloading of produce for transportation from fields to markets, and then to ginning units and textile factories will also suffer. Labourers from rural areas are generally employed for most of these jobs. A 33pc reduction in output means a third of loaders employed at various stages of transportation in the largest value chain in the country will fail to find work.

Another factor that will hit the rural economy because of low cotton yield is the loss of wood as fuel because of diminished availability of cotton stalks. Dr Jalal Arif, focal person of the Cotton Research Group says that while stalks can become a breeding ground for the cotton whitefly and other insects, they also serve as a source of fuel for many rural households.

He estimates that about 2,400kg-3,200 kg of cotton stalks are produced per acre. At a market rate of Rs200 per 40kg, the villagers get free wood fuel worth roughly Rs12,000-16,000 per acre of cotton field. Now they will need to spend their meagre resources to purchase fuel for their kitchens.

The coming years paint a gloomier picture. In the absence of an official support price mechanism and other facilitation schemes at par with regional countries, the gap between the cost of production and market price of is decreasing, acting as a disincentive for growers.

Quoting official estimates, President of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad Khalid Mahmood Khokhar says the cost of production per 40kg of cotton stands at Rs4,385 whereas the market rate for the produce ranges between Rs3,300 to Rs3,500.

“We are thinking of turning towards alternatives. Many of us have already started sowing maize, rice and other crops such as mangos. In the next season, the majority of cotton growers will follow suit.”

“Allowing the field to remain uncultivated is also viable for us since it provides a much-needed gap to restore the land’s fertility naturally. This way, we can sow wheat earlier and get about 800kg more grain per acre,” he added.

Calling it a “step-motherly” treatment, Mr Khokhar bemoaned the government’s attitude towards cotton crop which runs the national as well as the rural economy. Cotton has been excluded from the so-called Agriculture Emergency Programme of the prime minister for which only wheat, rice, sugarcane and oilseed crops have been considered.

“Cotton has the potential to ride the country of the persistent financial crunch and out of the clutches of lenders like the International Monetary Fund. However, growers need incentives at par with their counterparts in neighbouring countries in the form of tax-free farm inputs, cheap electricity and availability of affordable quality seeds and pesticides.”

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512016/agriculture-labour-woes-and-low-cotton-production

GOVT PUSH FOR TAMING FOOD INFLATION

Nasir Jamal Updated October 21, 2019

Last week, the federal cabinet took notice of the increasing food prices, a major source of surging inflationary pressures in the economy. It ordered (administrative) steps for controlling prices of essential food items and devise a strategy to curb inflation.

The cabinet also decided to activate the provincial price control committees and deal strictly with hoarders and speculators. Even though the administration has a very limited ability to control the markets, it is good news that the government has finally realised its responsibility to deal with surging inflation and chip into the central bank’s efforts to stabilise the prices.

Inflation, a phenomenon whereby the prices of everything persistently increases, and the value of money or the purchasing power of people declines, is one of the major problems facing Pakistan for more than the last one year.

The monthly headline inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which has been running in double digits since the inception of the present financial year, was recorded in September at an eight-year high of 12.5 per cent (base year 2005-06) compared with 10.6pc the previous month and 5.1pc a year ago. Core inflation — the non-food, non-energy (NFNE) inflation, also escalated to 9.2pc from 8.5pc in August and 5.8pc from a year ago.

The current phase of the price hike is a reflection of the macroeconomic adjustments being made

Measured against the new base year of 2015-16, the CPI inflation clocked in at 11.4pc, which still was in line with the forecast of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) that held back from cutting the policy rate last month in spite of the strong demand from the country's business community.

According to official data for last month, urban dwellers faced a slightly higher increase of 11.6pc in prices. Similarly, the 40 cities from where inflation data is collected saw an uneven distribution of the pace of price rise. The people in Dadu, Sindh, for example, had to cope with the highest rise of 21.2pc in food prices while Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, led in non-food inflation with a spike of 18.7pc.

In many cities, the CPI clocked in between just 5pc and 9.9pc. The uneven pace of price increase in rural and urban areas, as well as cities, is attributed mainly to different consumption patterns and income levels of households.

Financial analysts are projecting inflation to start receding into single digit from the third quarter of the present fiscal year, although the pace of increase in the prices is likely to slow down from this month, thus creating a little room for a small cut in the policy rate. The central bank is looking at a scenario where headline inflation will moderate to 6pc to 7pc in the next financial year, which will allow it to reboot economic growth to boost domestic productivity.

The inflation forecasts largely draw on the assumptions that the global oil and commodity prices will remain subdued in the short- to medium-term, no major supply shock is going to hit the economy, the twin current account and fiscal deficits will continue to shrink, and the exchange rate will remain stable despite small, necessary adjustments.

The jump in inflation comes at a high cost for the low- to middle-income groups of the population. Thus, the rising prices, especially of food, energy, healthcare, education and house rents, mean that the people in these income brackets are barely able to sustain their old lifestyle.

With the economic growth projected to slow down to 2.4pc during the present financial year with little chance of any rise in wages in the near- to medium-term, the higher price inflation is likely to bring greater pressures on people living paycheck-to-paycheck, compelling them to further cut their essential household expenditure as they struggle to get through the month.

Higher inflation equally hurts businesses by creating economic uncertainty, forcing the central bank to raise interest rates to slow down monetary expansion, impeding investment and job creation, and hurting export competitiveness.

A look at the CPI numbers since 2000 shows that prices have increased at a moderate pace most of the time — at less than 5pc for nine years and between 5pc and 10pc for six years. The only time, other than the first quarter of the present fiscal year, inflation hit the double digits was in 2008-12 when a dramatic currency devaluation accompanied by a sudden spike in global oil and food prices hit the economy, pushing CPI to 20.8pc, food prices to 23.7pc and non-food inflation to 18.8pc in 2009.

Former Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Almas Hyder blames cost-push factors — upward adjustments in administered prices of petrol, gas and electricity for managing the high level of the twin deficits, currency devaluation, supply-side constraints and higher transportation costs that led to higher food prices and increase in the house rents — for the current bout of inflation. "The current phase of inflation is but a reflection of macroeconomic adjustments being made for the last one year or more."

According to Saad Hashemy, executive director of BMA Capital Management, the high inflation periods in Pakistan have always coincided either with currency devaluation or increasing global oil prices or a combination of both. Therefore, he adds, "the administrative actions the government is contemplating will only have a partial impact on prices, and will be limited to ending or reducing sudden periods of volatility in the market, which is important to protect consumers."

The long-term solution to controlling the prices lies in documenting the economy, removing the irritants hampering the smooth operation of domestic commerce, and more importantly, continuing on the path of macroeconomic structural reforms to enable the economy to absorb the impact of sudden extraneous shocks like a jump in global oil markets.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512033

PTI GOVT PLANS INCREASE IN PAKISTAN'S MEAT PRODUCTION

By Haseeb Hanif Published: October 21, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has released Rs50 million to increase the production of meat in the country.

According to a document, the plan, prepared under the PM's emergency programme to increase meat production, includes the establishment of 9,000 farms across the country and the registration of 7,000 farmers to fatten calves and 2,500 farmers to fatten buffaloes. 595,000 calves are to be fattened under the plan.

The four-year plan will cost Rs2.3851 billion rupees. The federal government will finance 20 per cent of the project while the provinces will provide the remaining 80 per cent.

100,000 calves are to be fattened in Sindh, 150,000 in Punjab, 15,000 in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), 80,000 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and 20,000 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). 320,000 sheep are also to be fattened in Sindh and Balochistan.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2083829/1-federal-govt-plans-increase-countrys-meat-production/

COTTON PRICES SURGE

Staff Reporter October 22, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices on Monday surged to a new high of Rs9,200 per maund on ready trading. Meanwhile market reports suggest that in late evening trading, a deal from upper Sindh was done at Rs9,300 per maund — season's record high.

The textile industry is firmly focused on quality lint. Strong demand for the commodity is keeping prices high. However, leading textile spinning groups are eyeing imports and have so far booked a substantial quantity of lint in order to meet the expected huge shortfall of around 5 million bales.

Cotton analyst Naseem Usman said most textile units are keen on replenishing their stocks from local cotton as it would take import consignments a minimum of 2-3 months to reach Karachi port.

The world leading cotton markets including New York stood firm. Chinese and Indian cotton markets were also steady.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were raised by Rs50 to Rs9,000 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 2,000 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,875-9,000; 1,200 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs8,900-9,000; 1,000 bales, Pano Aqil, at Rs9,200; 1,000 bales, Mirpur Mathelo, at Rs9,200; 1,000 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs9,200; 1,000 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,200; 600 bales, Mianwali, at Rs9,175-9,200; 600 bales, Shujabad, at Rs9,050; and 600 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs9,200.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512167

MURAD URGES CHINESE FIRM TO INTRODUCE WATER-EFFICIENT SEEDS IN THAR

Staff Reporter October 22, 2019KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has urged the Sino Sindh Resources Limited (SSRL) to introduce new varieties of drought-resistant, water-efficient and high-yield seeds in Thar to help revolutionise the des-ert agriculture and usher in a new era of prosperity under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The SSRL, which is developing 7.8 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) open-pit coal mine in Thar coal block-1, is 100 per cent owned by Global Mining Company and holds a 30-year lease for block-1 spread over about 150 square kilometres. The block holds lignite coal resources of about 3.5 billion tonnes.

The chief minister said at a meeting with officials of SSRL and Board of Revenue Sindh at CM House here on Monday that Thar desert was vast and rich in mineral resources but hardly a few crops were cultivated there and those too produced low yield due to water scarcity and deeper water table. “Therefore, I am keen to develop desert agriculture to open up new possibilities of prosperity in the area,” he said.

SSRL vice president Zheng Xing assured the chief minister that his company would fulfil all the CSR obligations. He would involve agricultural experts of China and would distribute seeds among people in Thar. “Our intervention will definitely realise the vision of the chief minister for agriculture-rich Thar,” he said.

The Shanghai Electric, a Chinese company, has started development of 7.8 mtpa coal mine in Thar coalfield block-I under the SSRL to install 1,320 MW power plant through a direct investment of $3 billion. The company has started removing overburden for development of the mine.

The company’s vice president told the chief minister that they had a land acquisition issue for 8,216 acres, which included 6,322 acre state and 1,894 acres private land for mining, dumping, camp, coal yard and for captive power plant.

An official told the chief minister that the price determination of state land was under process. The minister then directed the official to resolve the issue within next 20 days.

The chief minister said that there was a model set by SECMC for settlement of displaced people by developing a modern residential colony. “This is my condition that the 1,200 affected families must be given the same kind of houses as have been given to the affected people of Thar block-II,” he said.

The SSRL chief requested the chief minister for implementation of the water usage agreement to which the Minister for Energy Imtiaz Shaikh said that Makhi-Farash Canal would discharge 200 cusecs of water and as per directives of the chief minister Nabisar to Vajihar connection was being considered. It would be constructed through private investors on build, operate and transfer (BOT) basis.

Mr Shah directed the minister to bring this water usage matter in the cabinet for approval. He was told that over 1,000 locals had been provided jobs in Thar coal block-I.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512138/murad-urges-chinese-firm-to-introduce-water-efficient-seeds-in-thar

SAI URGES GOVT TO FIX SUGAR CANE PRICE AT RS250 PER 40KG

Staff Correspondent October 22, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Itte-had (SAI) has urged the Sindh government to fix the sugar cane crop’s rate at Rs250 per 40kg for 2019-20 crushing season pointing out that no upward revision had been done in the official rate of Rs182/40kg for several years.

Speaking at a press conference at the local press club here on Monday, SAI president Nawab Zubair Talpur said that the agriculture department had not taken practical steps for commencement of crushing, which was supposed to start on Oct 1. He noted with concern that neither a date for the start of the crushing season had been notified nor sugar cane crop’s rate was fixed as yet.

He said that Sindh government had set a wrong precedent of notifying sugar cane rate after start of cane crushing. This had put farmers in great trouble as far as payment of the notified rate was concerned, he added, and urged the government to fix and notify the rate ahead of the crushing process. “Even last year’s dues have not been paid to growers by sugar mills,” he said.

Mr Talpur said that last year, sugar was selling at Rs48 per kg in the retail market and current rate was Rs75 per kg but millers were not ready to increase sugar cane price. He called for fixing the price at Rs250/40kg in view of increasing cost of inputs.

SAI president also criticised the Indus River System Authority for issuing its no-objection certificate (NOC) for a powerhouse to be built on Chashma-Jhelum Link Canal for Punjab. He said that people of Sindh would not accept it because it’s a flood canal and if a powerhouse was built on it, then the canal would need regular flows. He apprehended destruction of crops in Sindh due to this project.

Regarding the wheat crop rate, he said growers had sold their crop to traders for as low as Rs1,100 per 40kg but the wheat flour price in market was increased to Rs60 per kg which was causing financial loss to consumers as well.

The SAI chief expressed grave concern over locusts' invasion in different parts of Sindh, and observed that both federal and provincial governments had failed to cope with the situation. After ravaging crops in upper Sindh, locust swarms were devouring fields in Tharparkar, Hyderabad and Kohistan. He urged Sindh government to take effective measures in this regard.

Mr Talpur also urged the agriculture department to curb the sale of spurious and substandard pesticides in market.

Mohammad Anwar, Pir Ashfaq Jan, Abdul Rahim Dars and other leaders of growers' organisations were also present.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512135/sai-urges-govt-to-fix-sugar-cane-price-at-rs250-per-40kg

GOVERNMENT STRIVING TO ENSURE PROVISION OF ADULTERATION FREE MILK: MINISTER

By RECORDER REPORT on October 22, 2019

Punjab Minister for Livestock Hasnain Bahadur Dareshak here on Monday said that the provincial government is working hard on providing adulteration free milk to the consumers and making this sector viable and profitable for the livestock farmers.

'Livestock farmers are on ventilator at the moment and the provincial government is taking all out steps to bring them back to life,' said the minister while talking to media at the sidelines of a seminar on 'Safe Milk: The Way Forward' arranged by the Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA). The seminar was aimed at to gather all the relevant stakeholders at one place to share their expertise and reach a consensus to uplift the dairy industry.

The minister said that livestock sector could not progress without ensuring prosperity of its farmers. He stressed the need for paying attention to animal health, nutrition and improved farm houses to bring white revolution in the province.

Earlier, speaking at the seminar said that the present government's priority is to fix the issue adulteration. He regretted that Pakistan was largest milk producer but inefficient at the same time. He disclosed that the Cholistan University of Veterinary Sciences will start functioning by June next. He hoped that this university will support livestock industry.

Dr Salman Shah, Chief Minister Punjab's advisor on Economics, Planning & Development said that the livestock is 11 percent of the GDP and realizing its importance government has initiated various schemes. He said that the Prime Minister also gave this sector much importance as this sector can both generate economic activities as well as jobs.

The second edition of Economic Impact Report, an independent study conducted by LUMS, which covers the economic impact of Pakistan's Dairy Sector was also launched on this occasion. The dairy sector of Pakistan has become one of the most vibrant and strategic sectors which a major impact on the national economy, public health and the environment.

Speaking on this occasion, Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA) Chairman Sulaiman Monnoo said currently Pakistan is amongst the 5 largest dairy producing countries in the world, yet unfortunately 95 percent of the milk traded in Pakistan is sold as loose milk most of which is unhygienic or adulterated and is not providing masses with required nutrition. He appreciated the Punjab government for taking a very positive step of introducing minimum pasteurization law to ensure that all the milk being produced is free of adulterants and harmful bacteria and complies with certain minimum nutritional standards that make it fir for consumption.

The seminar will provide a platform to the government to take necessary steps for the provision of safe milk to consumers. The purpose of having such seminars is to facilitate the government in this endeavor by sharing knowledge and best practices from around the world by dairy experts who have successfully implemented this exact process in other countries.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/22/536301/government-striving-to-ensure-provision-of-adulteration-free-milk-minister/

CLIMATE CHANGE: RICE, MAIZE AND COTTON FARMERS MAY SUFFER LOSS OF RS 300 BILLION

By ZAHID BAIG on October 23, 2019

Farmers of rice, maize and cotton may have to suffer a loss of Rs 300 billion as their crops suffered severe damages due to climate change which caused prolonged hot season in the province.

Cotton is the worst hit crop which may receive not more than 5 million bales this year, said Punjab Water Council (PWC) Convener Farooq Bajwa while talking to Business Recorder here on Tuesday.

Bajwa said though area under cultivation of rice and maize had increased this year but climatic changes had left their negative impact on these crops. He said area under rice cultivation had increased to 5-5.2 million acres while area under cultivation of cotton had reduced to 4.5 million acres from 5.5 million acres. He said that area under maize and sugarcane had also increased in the province but again farmers were hurt because of climatic changes. He said this year rate of the commodities was also low which would further hurt the growers. He lamented that the government was paying a deaf ear to farmers' plight. He questioned that why finance availability for industrial sector is more than the agriculture which is producing the raw material for our major exportable industries.

Farooq Bajwa to a question claimed that there was no benefit of the crop insurance scheme as he alleged that banks only cover the amount of loan they extend to growers and practically farmers get nothing as compensation of their losses. He urged the government to take immediate steps for assessing the actual losses and extending relief to the growers to make them able to sow the next crops.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/23/536918/climate-change-rice-maize-and-cotton-farmers-may-suffer-loss-of-rs-300-billion/

WHEAT PRODUCTIVITY: NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR ENHANCING PROFITABILITY APPROVED

By RECORDER REPORT on October 23, 2019

Federal government under Agriculture Emergency has approved a project “National Programme for Enhancing Profitability" to increase productivity of wheat across the country.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder here on Monday that under the programme special attention would be focused on seed replacement through the provision of certified seed of rust resistant wheat of various varieties.

Agriculture department has formulated a five-year action plan under Agriculture Emergency to cope with future food challenges of the country. The major activity of the programme was to replace seed through the provision of certified wheat seed to the farmers on subsidized rate across the country.

The share of Punjab government will be Rs 9,445,912 million while other three provinces would contribute Rs 12.535 million in the project.

Sources claimed that under the plan special attention would be focused on enhancing profitability through increasing the productivity of wheat. The seed replacement will be carried out through the provision of certified seed to the farmers on subsidized rates of 50 percent having land up to 12.5 acres up to maximum 5 acres of land and the subsidy would be provided to the farmers on first come basis.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/23/536912/wheat-productivity-national-programme-for-enhancing-profitability-approved/

SINDH STRUGGLES TO STABILISE WHEAT PRICES

By GM Jamali Published: October 23, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh government has reportedly failed to control the prices of wheat. The crop which is sold for Rs35 per kilogramme is now being sold at higher than Rs50 per kg due to the monopoly of some hoarders. The letters issued by the secretary of the food department to all divisional commissioners directing the launch of an operation against all hoarders have come to no avail. Due to administrative incompetence, no action has been taken against such elements in Sindh. The provincial government could not stabilise the prices of wheat despite Sindh having more than 800,000 tonnes of wheat in stock.

On Wednesday, however, the Sindh Cabinet will give approval for wheat stock to be provided to flour mills on a quota basis in efforts to stabilise wheat prices.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Sindh Food Secretary Laeeq Ahmed, maintained that there was no crisis of wheat in the province. According to Ahmed, 99,077 tonnes of wheat is available in Mirpurkhas, 52,192 tonnes in Hyderabad, 102,500 tonnes in Karachi, 309,000 tonnes in Sukkur, 175,000 in Larkana and 90,000 tonnes in Shaheed Benazirabad.

Ahmed said that wheat would be provided to flour mills after approval by the Sindh Cabinet. He added that it has been suggested that the flour mills engaged in plea bargains with the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) or those which are defaulters are not to be provided with the designated quota. The strategy forward would be planned after approval by the Cabinet, he said.

In response to a question, Ahmed said that wheat crops were damaged due to heavy rain in Sindh and 300,000 tonnes of Sindh's wheat was shifted to Punjab. It is now present in Rahim Yar Khan, said the food secretary, adding that inland transfer of wheat could not be restricted which is why traders transferred the wheat to Punjab after purchasing it from Sindh's open markets.

The food secretary maintained that Sindh had ample wheat stock available and the federal government has agreed to provide 100,000 tonnes of wheat as well. Besides, further 300,000 tonnes of wheat could be acquired from Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASCO) if a wheat shortage arose in Sindh.

In response to another question, Ahmed said that letters have already been issued to all commissioners to take action against the hoarding of wheat but some elements have increased wheat rates by creating the illusion of wheat shortage in the province. However, he said, the rates will be stabilised once the wheat quota is released after the cabinet's approval.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2085238/1-sindh-struggles-stabilise-wheat-prices/

SENATE PANEL CALLS FOR CURBING FRUIT SMUGGLING

By APP Published: October 23, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government is taking measures to eradicate smuggling, Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce and Textile Abdul Razak Dawood told a Senate panel on Tuesday.

The adviser was addressing a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Commerce and Textile, which discussed cross-border smuggling of fruits, including apple, and other goods from Iran.

Speaking on the occasion, Senator Shibli Faraz and Kauda Babar raised the issue of illegal import of apples from Iran, demanding that trade should be brought under the legal channel. They also called for imposing duties to protect farmers of Balochistan.

Apart from that, the meeting also discussed the import of onions and tomatoes and urged the levy of taxes.

Dawood suggested holding a meeting with the Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry to resolve such issues and address the grievances of importers. The committee noted that restriction on the import of onions and tomatoes had not strengthened Pakistan's farmers and did not help in reducing prices. Responding to the concerns, the commerce secretary assured meeting participants that whatever the committee directed would be done to address such issues. The committee recommended swift appointment of quarantine officers in Balochistan to curb smuggling and support legal imports.

Discussing the import of re-rollable scrap, mutilated scrap and petroleum products like white spirit and hydrocarbon, the committee was told that restriction on the import of three containers by an importer was due to the dispute over whether the cargo qualified as scrap or not.

Chief Collector Balochistan told the meeting that the case had been sent to court and would be decided by it. Additionally, a sub-committee, headed by Senator Ahmed Khan, was constituted to investigate the matter and assess the scale of smuggling.

The committee also discussed the problems faced by local manufacturers, spinners, weavers, traders and exporters in relation to the input tax, turnover tax, CNIC copy condition and additional 10% tax imposed on traders as well as the status of tax refunds under the new system.

A Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) member said the revenue authority held a meeting every Monday with all five sub-sectors of the textile industry to address their grievances on a regular basis.

He revealed that 561 refund claims of the five sectors were received till Monday morning and 287 were processed and cleared last week.

Senator Babar said the problem was arising mainly due to the absence of quarantine officers, who could streamline the import process by applying proper taxes.

Representatives of the Customs and food security departments told the committee that the quarantine act had been in place since 1976 but was not being implemented. However, since 2017 it had been made mandatory and a new draft would be brought to the cabinet soon to curb smuggling of apples and pave the way for legal imports and issuance of import permits, they added.

The FBR official assured committee members that it was willing to sit with all associations' representatives and manufacturers/exporters to resolve their issues regarding visits of inspection teams to their outlets and not headquarters, time and assistance required for becoming part of the integrated scanning mechanism and revision in sales tax.

"This system will help the consumers check if the taxes they pay are transferred to the government or not," he added.

The committee was told that only 41,000 people were filing sales tax returns while the number of commercial units was much higher and the steps taken for documentation of the economy would encourage more and more people to get registered. The committee decided to hold a detailed briefing on the subject, which could harm Pakistan's case with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the domestic industry and revenue generation.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2085228/2-senate-panel-calls-curbing-fruit-smuggling/

COTTON SCALES SEASON'S PEAK OF RS9,500

Staff Reporter October 24, 2019

KARACHI: Steady flow of buying orders from textile spinning industry on Wednesday kept cotton prices on the higher side.

Most of the transactions were finalised at Rs9,300 per maund. However, a deal of 800 bales from Ghotki (prime mark) was done at season's peak rate of Rs9,500 per maund.

Amid fear of short crop the textile spinners were induced by higher off-take of cotton yarn and positive development on world cotton markets where US-China trade optimism forced markets to rise, brokers said.

Meanwhile, Punjab Cotton Council has estimated a loss of around Rs300 billion to farmers of cotton, maize, rice and sugarcane due to climate change, they added.

The world leading cotton markets were firm with New York cotton rose for all future contracts, while Chinese and Indian markets closed steady.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) kept its spot rates firm at overnight level of Rs9,100 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on the ready counter: 1,000 bales, New Saeedadbad, at Rs7,700; 4,000 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,900 to Rs9,000; 1,600 bales, Haroonabad, at

Rs9,100 to Rs9,200; 1,000 bales, Fort Abbas, at Rs9,100 to Rs9,200; 1,600 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs9,100 to Rs9,200; 800 bales, Bahawalpur, at Rs9,150 to Rs9,300; 3,000 bales, Rahimyar Khan, at Rs9,300; and 600 bales, Feroza, at Rs9,300.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512651/cotton-scales-seasons-peak-of-rs9500

SHC CONCERNED OVER DELAY IN SETTLING CANE GROWERS' DUES

Staff Reporter October 24, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court on Wednesday expressed concern over delay in settling the outstanding dues of sugar cane growers and directed the provincial secretary of agriculture to appear in person on Nov 17 to explain exigencies of frequent transfers of the cane commissioner.

Hearing a set of petitions, a two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar observed that despite specific directions to one of the members of a seven-member committee constituted by the court to settle the outstanding dues of growers, he (the secretary) could not bring the list of growers who had not been paid their dues yet, and requested for more time.

The bench observed that once the member filed the list, the court would ask the representatives of sugar mills to answers whether dues had been paid to them or not.

"We have noted that at least four or five cane commissioners have been changed during the interregnum and there is justification as to why these transfers are being made and still new cane commissioner has not taken over the charge. These abrupt transfers have frustrated the payments of the growers without any lawful justification," the bench in its order said.

The bench directed agriculture secretary Agha Zaheeruddin to appear in person on the next hearing and explain the exigencies for frequent transfer of the cane commissioner.

The court also issued directive for the chief and agriculture secretaries to immediately assign the job of cane commissioner to someone.

In the last hearing, the then cane commissioner in the report said that 1,119 applicants/claims were filed by the growers against the sugar mills over non-payment of dues and added that the committee had reconciled outstanding dues of 11 sugar mills.

However, the report stated that eight sugar mills said that since their bank accounts had been frozen on the directives of the Supreme Court, they were unable to make payments, adding that 588 claims of over Rs580 million were pending against those sugar mills.

The Sindh Growers' Alliance and others had moved the court and submitted that hundreds of applications, filed by growers to the cane commissioner complaining of non-payment of their lawful dues by the sugar mills, were still pending.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512527/shc-concerned-over-delay-in-settling-cane-growers-dues

GOVERNMENT EVALUATING WHEAT IMPORT PROPOSAL: OFFICIAL

By MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN on October 24, 2019

The federal government is evaluating wheat import proposal anticipating a concerning situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh with respect to flour availability at reasonable prices. This was disclosed by Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Dr Hashim Popalzai while briefing the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security & Research on Wednesday.

The meeting was attended by Senator Najma Hameed, Senator Seemee Ezdi, Senator Gul Bashra, Senator Professor Sajid Mir, Senator Hafiz Abdul Karim and senior officers from the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO), Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC), Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC), Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL). Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan was also present.

Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Punjab government is releasing wheat to the mills at Rs 1,375 with Bardana and the flour price is Rs 1650 per 40 kgs. However, the price of Atta (flour) in KP and Sindh was between Rs 1,850 to 1,950 per 40 kgs which is 18 percent dearer than Punjab. He argued that the main reason for the crisis in Sindh was the provincial government's failure to procure wheat officially, first time in history. The province was to procure 1.4 million tons. KP government also did not procure wheat as per the agreed target.

Keeping in view the demand from provinces, federal government has approved 0.15 million tons of wheat for Sindh and 0.1 million tons for KP, with the direction that first the two provincial governments should release wheat from their godowns then federal government would match quantity from their own wheat reserves (Passco).

“We are waiting for Sindh government's response about release of 0.15 million tons of wheat," he said, adding that the government fears a wheat crisis in KP due to Azadi March. The federal government planned to supply wheat to KP from Passcos' godowns in Muzaffargarh (South Punjab) from where supply can easily reach Dera Ismail Khan.

“We have also started work on wheat import option if crisis deepens as presently we have sufficient stocks for three months. The proposal will be placed before the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet," he maintained.

According to Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research Punjab has imposed a ban on movement of wheat from Punjab to KP, which is creating the crisis.

“We have also called an inter-provincial meeting on (Thursday) to find a way out to restore wheat movement to KP," he maintained. The current wheat stock is around 6.5 millions which can cater for the requirements of provinces. Senator Hafiz Abdul Karim expressed concern over not procuring required quantity of wheat, which according to him is the main reason for the increase in wheat/flour prices adding that during last four months prices increased by Rs 300 per 40 kgs.

However, Minister for National Food Security and Research, Mehboob Sultan clarified that the provincial government usually procures agreed stock of wheat every year but this year Sindh did not procure the wheat.

Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research said that federal government has asked provinces to streamline their monitoring system.

“What the federal government can do is that it can allocate wheat to provinces, but first provinces have to release wheat from their stocks, then federal government will supplement it," he maintained.

The main reason for reduction in stocks was destruction of commodity due to heavy rains. Punjab's production is on average 19.5 million tons whereas total production is 26 million tons but this year wheat production in Punjab was 18.2 million tons which is 1.2 millions tons lower than last year.

Standing committee chairman said that wheat sowing has begun but the government has yet to fix minimum support price, urging officials of Ministry of National Food Security and Research to announce the support price.

Secretary said that the Ministry of National Food Security and Research has already held a meeting with provinces. He said input prices have increased and minimum price is static for the last four years, which needs to be revised.

Secretary further stated that urea price was over Rs 2,000 per bag this year as compared to Rs 1,400 per bag last year. The price of DAP was Rs 3,500 per bag which is linked with dollar-rupee parity.

“We had recommended subsidy of Rs 500 per bag for DAP but the government didn't approve it due to financial constraints," he continued.

Member Sindh, Irsa, Syed Mazhar Ali Shah informed the committee that Irsa has calculated 15 per cent water shortfall in Rabi for Sindh and Punjab but inflows are higher than expected due to which supply will be more than expected in November (next month).

Cotton: Muzaffar said that one third of the cotton crop has been destroyed due to weather, especially in lower Sindh. A cotton emergency must be declared and efforts must be made to determine a heat resistant variety of cotton so that growers may not face the same problem again.

He also stressed the need for determining an indicative price for the cotton crop so that emergencies such as these may be addressed. He directed Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) to give a detailed briefing in this regard to the committee in the next meeting. He emphasized the need for proper funding and also gave instructions that the committee be briefed about funds received by PCCC and the research conducted since 2015.

The committee was informed that the government had fixed the target of 15 million bales for 2019 which was revised down to 13 million bales but the Secretary claimed that production would not be even 10 million bales.

The committee deliberated on causes of the failure of the cotton crop in 2019 and concluded that one of the major reasons had been the lack of research especially on evolving new seed variations that are heat resistant. The committee also strongly recommended to the Federal Government for an immediate grant for the purposes of research to PARC and PCCC; if not the cotton crop output will continue to decline. While taking up the issue of filling vacancies at PARC, the committee was informed that there are 397 vacancies out of while 144 are being processed.

Cotton Commissioner Khalid Abdullah informed the committee that estimated production cotton is 10.8 million bales which is 11 per cent less than the target. But arrivals came from ginners are 4.4 million bales which are 26 per cent less than the last year.

The last three arrivals are less than the target. This difference of 1.6 million bales indicates that the revised target will also not be achieved.

“I don't think we will achieve the revised target of 10.8 million tons," he said, adding that 34 percent reduction has been witnessed with 18 per cent in Sindh. He said, high temperature and heavy rains are the main reasons for the decline in production. Initially, prices of cotton were about Rs 3,600-3,700 per 40 kgs which was even less than the cost. This week prices were around Rs 4,000 per 40 kgs and those areas where rains hit the crop, prices were only Rs 2,600-2,700 per 40 kgs.

He said, Rs 1.8 billion liabilities have been created towards Aptma on account of cess but the Association is not paying cess for the last three to four years due to which research activities have been cut, adding that if research of new varieties is not conducted, Pakistan will not achieve its targets.

He said five million bales less production means $ 5 billion. The price of one million bales in the international market is $ 1billion. The committee enquired about the newspapers in which these advertisements were placed for recruitment and the list of applications received.

The committee asked the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to announce indicative price of cotton so that the growers may be encouraged.

Discussing the availability of water in the Indus River for Rabbi Season, the Committee was informed that there was 65,000 cusecs inflow as of Wednesday.

The committee raised objection to the increase of price of wheat and was informed that this came as a result of non-procurement of wheat from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The committee was assured that the government would do its best to ensure no further increase.

Discussing the Kitchen Garden Scheme that was introduced by PARC, Chairman Committee Senator Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah said that it has been successful and in order to procure broader benefits PARC must ensure community inclusion. He stressed the need to contact NGOs, Civil Society Organizations and Women's Organizations to spread awareness. The committee was also informed that retirement dues to PARC employees are not being paid due to financial constrains.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/24/537248/government-evaluating-wheat-import-proposal-official/

JULY-SEP IMPORT OF PULSES DOWN BY 25.38PC

RECORDER REPORT October 24, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan’s import scaled down by 25.38 percent to $362.435 million in July-Sep 20181-9, official figures say. Fall in pulses import now stands at $123.28 million in July-Sep 2018-19 from $485.715 million in July-Sep 2017-18, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics indicates.

In term of quantity, the country’s pulses import also declined by 5.30 percent or 102845 metric tons to 671,774 metric tons in July-Sep 2018-19 from 774,619 metric tons in July-Sep 2017-18.

Pakistan imported 38.12 percent or $18.329 million less pulses to $29.742 million in Sep 2019 from $48.071 million in Sep 2018. Volume of the country's pulses import plunged by 24.43 percent or 20294 metric tons to 62,770 metric tons in Sep 2019 from 83,064 metric tons in Sep 2018.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/10/24/5-page/806980-news.html

UAF EVOLVES STRATEGY TO PROVIDE CERTIFIED SEED

By KHALID ABBAS SAIF on October 24, 2019

The University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF) has devised a strategy to provide certified seed of various crops to farming community in order to maximize volume of crops productivity.

This was stated by Office of Research Innovation & Commercialization (ORIC) UAF Director Professor Dr Zaheer Ahmad Zaheer while giving briefing to Mid-Career Management Course Officers of National Institute of Management Peshawar during their visit to University.

Dr Zaheer said that on the direction of UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ashraf, the agricultural scientists were trying hard to develop affordable and practicable agricultural technologies and agronomic packages for small farming community. He added that University faculty of Agri Engineering and Technology was developing new implements through reverse engineering for small farmers so that they could achieve maximum potential of productivity by utilizing innovative technologies.

ORIC Director told the Guests that University scientists have got approved two new varieties of Brassica and Quinoa for cultivation on mass level. He also said that we have already got patented mastitis vaccine which was being sold throughout the country to reduce the chances of infection in milking animals. He was of the view that the university was striving hard to obtain a position among the top 500 hundred best universities of the Globe.

Chief Instructor NIM, Abdul Sattar while expressing his views about University's role said that being a pioneering institution in the field of agricultural education, the UAF had played a pivotal role in a bid to produce competent human resource for up-gradation of livestock and agricultural sector. He stressed upon the need for developing collaboration among all agricultural universities of five provinces in order to obtain better results for enhancement of maximum yield potential.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/24/537308/uaf-evolves-strategy-to-provide-certified-seed/

COTTON GAINS AS INVESTORS COVER SHORTS ON HOPES OF US-CHINA TRADE THAW

By RECORDER REPORT on October 24, 2019

ICE cotton futures gained for a second-straight session on Wednesday as investors covered their short positions on optimism over Sino-US trade ties, ahead of the US weekly export sales data.

The front-month December contract, rose 0.5% to 65.00 cents per lb by 12:36 p.m. EDT (1636 GMT). It traded within a range of 64.4 and 65.10 cents a lb.

“Short-covering from the speculators sort of pushed it up to this level, to the top end of the range. Also, optimism over the potential for a trade deal with China (supported prices)," said Jordan Lea, senior trader at DECA Global.

However, a good harvest, given the favourable weather conditions at present, and the possibility of no trade deal being reached between Washington and Beijing, could trigger a pull back in cotton, he added.

The natural fiber has slid by about 10% so far this year owing to a long trade tiff between cotton's top consumer China and one of the top producers, the United States.

On Tuesday, China offered 10 million tonnes of tariff-free quota to major Chinese soybean crushers to import soybeans from the United States.

Signs that the trade dispute will not be resolved quickly and concerns over its impact on global growth have roiled markets since its conception.

“The market is in surplus now and it will stay in surplus unless the price goes down," said Rogers Varner, president of Varner Brokerage in Cleveland, Mississippi.

The United States Department of Agriculture will release the weekly export sales report on Thursday. Meanwhile, as per the USDA's weekly crop progress report from Monday, 40% of US cotton was harvested compared with 32% a week ago.

Total futures market volume fell by 14,325 to 15,830 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 303 to 237,912 contracts in the previous session.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/24/537390/cotton-gains-as-investors-cover-shorts-on-hopes-of-us-china-trade-thaw/

HEATWAVE DESTROYS ONE-THIRD OF COTTON CROP IN PAKISTAN

By APP Published: October 24, 2019

ISLAMABAD: One-third of the cotton crop has been destroyed due to the heat wave in Pakistan, especially in lower Sindh, said Senator Muzaffar Hussain Shah.

Chairing a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research on Wednesday, he stressed the need for developing heat-tolerant, insect-resistant and high-yielding cotton seed varieties.

He also called for declaring a countrywide cotton emergency. “Production of only 10 million bales is expected in current fiscal year 2019-20 against the target of 15 million bales,” he added. The committee voiced concern over the consistent decline in cotton output and underlined the need for taking immediate remedial measures for sustainable economic growth.

Moreover, it demanded the constitution of a special committee to examine the reasons behind the declining cotton production and come up with recommendations for enhancing the harvest.

The committee directed the cotton commissioner, who was present in the meeting, to submit a comprehensive report on local cotton production along with the issues and challenges faced by farmers and measures taken to address them. It asked the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to fix a minimum support price for cotton to protect the farmers and encourage them to grow more cotton in future.

The national food security and research secretary informed the committee that the matter of indicative price of cotton had been taken up with the authorities concerned.

Attributing the low cotton yield to the use of conventional seed varieties, he stressed the need for approving special grants for research institutions such as the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc) and the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) aimed at promoting research for developing new seed varieties.

The secretary pointed out that the government had fixed the wheat support price at Rs1,300 per 40 kg while the commodity was available for Rs1,648 per 40kg in the market.

He said the annual domestic consumption of wheat was about 26 million tonnes and sufficient stock was available to meet local needs. “In Punjab, the price of a 20kg flour bag is Rs808,” he said.

Senator Hafiz Abdul Karim said the price of wheat had increased by Rs300 per 40 kg while the price of flour had risen to Rs2,000 per 40 kg.

The committee was assured that the government would do its best to ensure no further increase in prices.

The Indus River System Authority chairman told the meeting that during the current Rabi sowing season, the water flow in four canals was 65,000 cubic feet compared to 55,000 cubic feet last year.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2085873/2-heatwave-destroys-one-third-cotton-crop-pakistan/

‘SMART SUBSIDY’ SUGGESTED FOR SMALL FARMERS

By Our Correspondent Published: October 24, 2019

LAHORE: Measures such as smart subsidy can not only substantially increase the income of small subsistence farmers but can also go a long way towards catalysing growth of the agriculture sector in Pakistan, said a high official of Pakistan’s largest fertiliser manufacturer.

“This measure (smart subsidy) will help uplift livelihoods of millions of Pakistanis while ensuring food security with affordable prices,” Engro Fertilisers Chief Financial Officer Imran Ahmed told a group of journalists on Wednesday.

In Pakistan, landholding is mostly concentrated in the hands of 10% rich landlords, who own over 50% of farmland in the country. The remaining 90% of farmers have very small landholdings, which highlights the significance of small and subsistence farmers in Pakistan.

In that scenario, he said, the subsidy given by the government on the urea produced with the help of imported LNG was directly and disproportionately benefitting the large farm owners and landlords whose agricultural income had remained untaxed.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2085882/2-smart-subsidy-suggested-small-farmers/

FOOD SAFETY TERMED A 'SERIOUS' ISSUE

By RECORDER REPORT on October 25, 2019

A daylong seminar has stressed the need for effective role of stakeholders, particularly food authorities, in ensuring and promoting food safety culture in the country.

In this connection, PepsiCo Pakistan, the Pakistan Council on Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR) and KP Food Safety and Halal Authority jointly organised a seminar titled 'Food Safety; A Collaborative Approach' here on Thursday.

The event aimed at raising awareness about food safety served as a forum for collaboration amongst some of the key stakeholders in the food value chain.

KP Minister for Food Qalandar Khan Lodhi commented that the food safety is a serious issue and a meaningful resolution will require a concerted effort from all the stakeholders present in the seminar.

The KP government through its Food Safety and Halal Food Authority had been working tirelessly to raise awareness on food safety across the province. "I would like to recognize PepsiCo's initiative of ensuring long-term and sustainable progress in food safety. Forums such as this seminar offer a great opportunity for sharing best practices and perspectives", KP Minister for Food said.

Suhail Khan, DG KP Food Safety and Halal Food Authority, remarked that in order to prevent food borne diseases and to protect the health of our families and communities we must all ensure that food safety is a top priority for all of us.

Director Corporate Affairs PepsiCo Pakistan, Hatim Khan said that the food safety is a top priority for PepsiCo. We are happy to collaborate on this multi-stakeholder approach to food safety championed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Authority and the Pakistan Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. We will continue to support such knowledge sharing platforms, he added.

The event was attended by over 100 participants and had representation from government bodies, academia, industry and trade associations. A panel of experts shared their knowledge and experiences of food safety aspects through various technical presentations. This was followed by a panel discussion on the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the food value chain.

DG PCSIR, Farid Ullah Khan in his address said that the economic losses are directly linked with failure in food safety but can be overcome by using modern techniques. All stakeholders gathered should come together to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to food safety issues.

He, especially mentioned that PCSIR Peshawar is located at an ideal position regarding the agriculture products as there are several foods and herbal processing units in its vicinity. Peshawar is also a dry port and hub of imports and exports of the food and herbal products to the Gulf countries andAfghanistan and Central Asian countries. He said that we should avail maximum benefits from such pivotal location to add to our foreign exchange reserves, Farid Ullah Khan added.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/25/537733/food-safety-termed-a-serious-issue/

PALM TREES PROJECT A MILESTONE: WAHAB

By Our Correspondent Published: October 25, 2019

THATTA: Sindh Chief Minister's Adviser on Law, Environment and Coastal Development Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that the pilot project of palm trees plantation in Kathore Forest Thatta is a milestone for the government.

He stated during his visit to the pilot project on Thursday that 1,100 palm trees have been planted initially as part of the project from which 1,200 mounds of palm oil could be extracted annually.

He said that all the trees planted on government land of 50 acres were mature for harvesting and the production of palm oil had already started.

He praised the officials and staff involved in the preparation of the project and said that they will take measures to extend the project on a bigger scale with the approval of Sindh CM Syed Murad Ali Shah.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2086602/1-palm-trees-project-milestone-wahab/

AGRICULTURAL BREAKTHROUGH: NEW ORGANIC FERTILISER PROMISES WONDERS

By Asif Mehmood Published: October 25, 2019

LAHORE: Sowing and reaping have been at the core of human society's survival and have helped civilizations through the ages. But this primitive exercise faces a myriad of threats. One of them is the consistent decline of arable land in many parts of the country, which puts an ever-greater pressure on the ability of humanity to feed itself.

After six years of intense research, a firm in Lahore may have cracked the code to create what qualifies as the 'miracle fertiliser.'

According to Babar Hussain Bukhari, who heads Converde Farm Developers, the organic liquid fertiliser can restore the fertility of barren land.

"Our organic fertiliser can transform a barren piece of unproductive land into one that is fertile," Bukhari claimed.

To verify the efficacy of the new product, Bukhari said the firm carried out experiments across the province.

"The organic fertiliser was successfully tested in Lahore, Kasur, Pakpattan, Sahiwal, Chakwal, Jauharabad, Khoshab, Kahuta, Narowal, and Zafarwal," he said.

Bukhari's new organic fertiliser promotes the growth of earthworms to combat rising soil infertility, caused by the indiscriminate use of conventional fertilisers. In the long run, these worms rejuvenate the fertility of inarable land.

Known as 'ecosystem engineers' for their ability to naturally improve the physical, chemical, and biological properties of the soil profile, earthworms produce rich nutrients that increase fertility.

According to experts at Converde Farm Developers, who created the organic fertiliser, these worms inject organic materials into the soil. Nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen become readily available to plants through material excreted in earthworm casts. Studies suggest earthworms take nutrients down through the soil profile, bringing them into closer contact with plant roots.

In the long run, Bukhari believes the new fertiliser will improve the situation for farmers struggling with large swathes of inarable land. “With one-time use, up to 2 liters of liquid can improve the fertility of 2 acres of land,” he added. Within days, the liquid produces earthworms that help change the composition of the soil.

Bukhari claims the firm has experimented with growing crops. “We saw an excellent yield in Sahiwal, Zafarwal, and even in Kahuta Hilly Areas,” he claimed.

Talking about commercially selling his product, Bukhari said, he expects Rs 400,000 to 500,000 for a one-acre land. But for farmers who cannot afford the product, Bukhari plans to offer subsidies and even loans.

All set to launch the organic fertiliser, Bukhari has already registered the formula with the Agriculture Department of Punjab and started selling it in Pakistan.

“This formula has been in use in Canada, the US, and the UAE,” he claimed.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2086568/1-agricultural-breakthrough-new-organic-fertiliser-promises-wonders/

RELIEF SOUGHT FOR FARMERS HIT BY HEATWAVE

Staff Reporter Updated October 26, 2019

LAHORE: Farmers have called upon the government to declare emergency in areas hit by the current heatwave, document the tentative losses incurred by the farmers due to failure of corn, cotton and rice crops and announce an incentive package enabling them to bear the brunt and go for the next crops.

The government should write off loans of, disburse financial or other assistance to farmers from the heatwave hit areas, demands Dr Zafar Hayyat, president of the Farmers Bureau of Pakistan (FBP), a platform of progressive growers.

“This should include per acre financial aid, special subsidy on fertilizer and seed for the next crops, waiving off abiyana (water rate) and theka (lease) and loans on soft terms or preferred rates for the next rabi crop,” he says while speaking at a press conference here on Friday.

South Punjab, particularly cotton growers who were also suffering from whitefly attack, faced this brunt more than the rest of the country, he says, lamenting that no scientific impact analysis has so far been done by the concerned departments of the impact.

He says the farmers tried their best to overcome the issues but falling prices of cotton and no timely policy intervention by the government discouraged them to spend more on their ailing crop, resulting in further loss to national cotton production.

“Lower cotton yield is not going to hit the farmers alone, but the textile industry and overall national economy in the form of reduced exports.”

Likewise, maize crop suffered grain loss due to the heatwave and many farmers converted it either to silage or sold it as green fodder to recover some of their losses. Poor maize crop will affect the poultry industry, which uses corn as a major ingredient in the feed, he fears.

The situation of rice crop, which fetches $2 to 2.5 billion per annum foreign reserves, is also no different due to poor grain setting and it may face 20 to 35 percent yield shortage.

The FBP president demanded a proper scientific analysis of the climatic change to assess the impact of current heatwave and sharing it with farmers and policy-makers on the priority basis, setting up a task force to assess the factors responsible for the lowering cotton production and documenting them for the stakeholders.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512918/relief-sought-for-farmers-hit-by-heatwave

FLOUR CRISIS LOOMING AS PUNJAB HALTS WHEAT SUPPLY

Ali Hazrat Bacha Updated October 26, 2019

PESHAWAR: There are fears that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will be hit by a flour crisis in the days ahead as the Punjab government has prohibited the movement of wheat and flour out of the province causing a sudden increase in price in Peshawar.

During a visit to the retail market on Friday, this correspondent observed that the price of a 20kg flour bag had gone up by Rs80, 20kg mixed flour bag’s by Rs40 and 80kg bag’s by Rs400-Rs600.

Pakistan Flour Mills Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chairman Haji Mohammad Iqbal told Dawn that the Punjab government had suspended wheat supply without citing any reason.

He said the PTI ruled both the centre and KP but even then, flour crisis was looming in the province.

“We met the food department’s officials and demanded an increase in wheat quota for local mills from 2,000 metric tons to 5,000 metric tons on a daily basis but the government is not ready to do so,” he said.

Mr Iqbal said the province’s around 50 per cent flour mills had closed down due to the indifference of the government to their problems.

Peshawar witnesses sudden increase in flour price

He said KP procured 95 per cent of the required flour from Punjab, so the suspension of supply would create a serious flour crisis in the province.

The PFMA chairman feared that the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl’s march on Islamabad and the two-day trader strike would aggravate the situation.

He said fine atta,maida and semolina were frequently transported to Afghanistan and thus, worsening shortage in the province.

“We took up these issues with the provincial government but unfortunately, no one is willing to pay heed to them,” he said.

Mr Iqbal warned that if the government didn't resolve problems, more flour mills would shut down.

An official document shows that the Punjab government has begun checking the movement of wheat and flour in areas bordering KP, including, including Trimun, Bowatta, Shaiwala in DG Khan division, Jinnah and Chashma of Sargodha division, Attock, Jhari Kas and Khushalgarh of Rawalpindi division and Kot Sabzai and Dauwala of Rahim Yar Khan.

When contacted, food minister Qalandar Khan Lodhi said he was aware of the situation.

He said the food secretary met the relevant authorities in Punjab to seek the early restoration of the supply of wheat and flour.

When asked about a possible flour crisis in the province, the minister said, "What can I say?"

He, however, said he hoped that the food secretary's meeting with Punjab authorities would restore wheat supply to KP.

Information minister Shaukat Yousafzai wasn't available for comments on the matter despite repeated telephonic calls.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1512958

FARMERS' BODY DEMANDS GOVT WRITE OFF LOANS

By Our Correspondent Published: October 26, 2019

LAHORE: The government should write-off interest-based loans disbursed to farmers by public and private financial institutions and extend monetary and other forms of assistance to the agricultural areas hit hard by the current heat wave, said Farmers Bureau of Pakistan (FBP) President Dr Zafar Hayyat.

While talking to journalists on Friday, he called upon the government to declare emergency in areas affected by extreme weather conditions and document the tentative losses incurred by farmers due to destruction of corn, cotton and rice crops.

He further urged the government to announce an incentive package enabling farmers to recover the losses and sow crops for the next season.

"This should include per acre financial assistance, special subsidy on fertiliser and seeds and soft loans for the next Rabi season," he stressed.

He lamented that the entire agriculture sector of Pakistan was badly affected by the heat wave, which started around end of August and continued till mid-September 2019.

According to Hayyat, south Punjab was hit the worst throughout Pakistan.

He noted that cotton farmers were facing poor yield for the second successive year and during this year, the output was damaged far more than the previous year.

"Unfortunately, no scientific impact analysis has been done so far by the concerned departments and no measures or policies have been announced for the affected areas by the government," he said.

Apart from the heat wave, cotton crop also suffered from white fly infestation.

He pointed out that farmers tried aggressively to contain the outbreak but falling cotton prices coupled with absence of intervention from the government discouraged spending heavily on the ailing crop.

Hayyat expressed concern that lower cotton production would have devastating impacts on the country's cotton and textile industries and the overall economy of Pakistan in the coming days.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2087314/2-farmers-body-demands-govt-write-off-loans/

FLOUR MOVEMENT OUT OF PESHAWAR BANNED AS PRICE SOARS

Dawn Report Updated October 27, 2019

PESHAWAR/KOHAT: The Peshawar administration strictly restricted the movement of wheat and wheat flour out of the district for 30 days as the price of the commodities further soared in the provincial metropolis on Saturday.

The district administration imposed the section 144 in order to avoid any possible shortage of the flour. "Anyone contravening this order is liable to be proceeded against under section 188 of PPC," according to a statement issued from the office of deputy commissioner Mohammad Ali Asghar.

The ban was imposed following a suggestion of the director food that shortage of wheat and flour was likely to be created in Peshawar due to its illegal movement out of the district.

Kohat region hit by flour shortage after Punjab ban on wheat transportation

"If movement of wheat and wheat flour is not checked, it is likely to create a crisis-like situation in the district and cause hardship to the public at large and might lead to law and order situation," the statement said.

Meanwhile, it was observed that a 20kg bag of mixed wheat flour, which was available for Rs840 on Friday, was sold at Rs920 in the wholesale market on Saturday.

The fine flour price on Friday was Rs980 but it increased to Rs1,050 a day after. The 80kg bag, which was available for Rs4,000, was now selling at Rs4,500.

Consumers told Dawn that in the suburban localities the shopkeepers were charging the price on their own free will.

Provincial minister for information Shaukat Yousufzai told Dawn that he had personally brought the issue into notice of Prime Minister Imran Khan, who had directed the Punjab government to withdraw its order regarding ban on movement of wheat and wheat flour.

Chief Minister Mahmood Khan, he said had also taken notice of the reports and directed the authorities concerned to resolve the issue at the earliest.

The minister said the crisis had been created due to transportation of wheat flour and other products to Afghanistan, but now the supply had been restricted by the federal government in order to overcome any possible shortage.

The minister said that there was no shortage of wheat and wheat flour in KP and the government had sufficient stock to meet the local requirement.

Meanwhile, acute shortage of wheat flour has hit the entire Kohat region after a ban on its transportation from Punjab into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was imposed.

Traders claimed that the dealers transporting the commodity from Punjab had to pay Rs25,000 to Rs43,000 per truck at the checkpoint on the Punjab side of Khushalgarh Bridge to cross into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

They said the price of 20kg flour bag had risen to Rs1,200 from the earlier Rs830 and Rs850 after the ban.

Likewise, the 85kg bag used by the 'tandoors' and available at Rs4,000 was now being sold at Rs5,200 in the market.

The price of 'suji' and 'maida' has risen to Rs2,600 from Rs2,000 per 20kg bag.

A whole seller, Rehmat Elahi, told Dawn that after the Punjab government sealed the mills and warehouses the prices of flour and other items like 'suji' and 'maida' had risen sharply. "We are also bearing huge losses due to the ban on the commodity's export to Afghanistan via Parachinar," he added.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1513133

FLOUR PRICES RISE BY UP TO RS16 PER KG SINCE APRIL

Aamir Shafaat KhanU pdated October 27, 2019

KARACHI: Flour millers on Saturday further pushed up rates after the Sindh government increased the wheat issue price to Rs3,450 per 100 kg bag from last year's Rs3,250.

After the fresh hike, the flour no.2.5 and 10 kg bag rates have been fixed at Rs48 per kg and 10kg bag at Rs485 as compared to Rs 47.50 and Rs 480. The new rates issued by the millers for Maida and fine flour are Rs52.50 as compared to Rs50.50.

In April, the rates of flour no.2.5 and 10kg bag were Rs33.50 per kg and Rs340 respectively, while maida and fine flour were available at Rs36.50 per kg.

With fresh price hike in flour varieties, the makers of 5kg and 10kg bags of Bake Parlor and Ashrafi are likely to jack up prices further higher. The prices of two high-selling brands have already been raised to Rs290-300 and Rs580 from Rs270-280 and Rs540.

The flour no.2.5 price was raised by Rs14.50 per kg, maida and fine flour by Rs16, while the 10-kg bag by Rs145 during the April-October period. Chakki flour rate had been increased by Rs 18 per kg from April till to date.

Provincial and the federal governments had so far not taken any serious notice of massive price hike in main staple food from April on wards. Only meetings are being held regularly at the federal capital to monitor price hike situation in the country rather than taking any practical steps to curb prices.

Flour millers claimed that traders in the open market have resorted to hoarding on available wheat stocks while some are releasing 100kg wheat bag at Rs4,400 as compared to Rs4,300. Despite a good crop and sizable carry-over stocks of last year, the 100kg wheat bag price had risen by Rs1,400 since April.

Pakistan Flour Mills Association, Sindh Zone, chairman Khalid Masood said the Rs200 hike in wheat issue price for 100 kg bag has nothing to do with Saturday's hike in flour prices by the millers.

He attributed flour price rise to Rs100 hike in wheat bag price in the open market. Wheat is continuously getting shorter in the open market as Sindh wheat had been going out to Punjab for the last six months while the Punjab government has recently imposed ban on inter-provincial wheat and flour movement.

He said the Sindh government had not procured wheat this year and it had announced the issue price based on old stocks of last year.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1513205/flour-prices-rise-by-up-to-rs16-per-kg-since-april

RICE GROWERS YET TO ASCERTAIN EXACT CAUSE OF CROP LOSS THIS YEAR

Jan Khaskheli October 27, 2019

HYDERABAD: It is the first time in Fida Hussain Khoso's career as a rice grower that he believes he will receive less than 50 percent yield due to the sudden heat wave that struck his crop right when it was ripening.

Residing near Mehar town, Dadu district, he said his family as usual had cultivated rice on 20 acres. They follow the sowing season starting from the months of May to June. "Everything was fine, but then a sudden heat wave destroyed the crop in the entire neighbourhood," he said.

Farmers buy hybrid varieties of seeds from markets and normally get 50-60 maund per acre yield. But now it might be less than 50 percent of the yield, which would hit the rice producers hard as they have already invested a huge amount on cultivation.

About 20-25 years ago, Dadu was among a few districts along with Qambar-Shahdadkot, Larkana, Kashmore, Jacobabad and others in Sindh that produced fine quality rice.

Recalling the old varieties of rice and their distinct aroma and taste, Fida Hussain said now all the growers relied on the market to buy hybrid seed varieties for all the crops.

Ramzan Nangraj, a graduate from Sindh Agriculture University Tadojam, working with growers in Dadu district, said the reports were different from each area. Some farmers though their crop was affected by a virus, while others found white butterfly (insects) on the crop plants, which has affected the grain, he said.

"However, the growers are yet to ascertain the exact problems which may have destroyed the food crop at the time of ripening," Nangraj added.

According to estimates given by the growers, they might lose 50-70 percent of crop yield this year.

So, if they harvested 50-60 maunds/acre in the normal season, they might not get only 25-30 maund/acre, depending on the situation in the area. He said this happened in early October, when the heat wave hit the crop.

Talking to rice producers from different areas it was learned that the supply of impure seeds and chemical input by unauthorised dealers and companies in the province has caused colossal losses to farmers. Growers have been observing empty cobs, which has alarmed the entire community.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture President Qabool Muhammad Khatian linked the recent loss of major rice crop in the northern districts of the province to the adulterated seeds sold by certain dealers. He said they were receiving complaints by growers accusing seed providers for this loss.

Khatian did realise that climate change also contributed to lower yield of all crops, and said, “We have observed that for the last few years, farmers receive less than 50 percent yield of all crops, mainly wheat, cotton, rice, chilli and sugarcane.” In some areas growers could not even recover the cost of cultivation, he added.

“However, we cannot blame only climate change. These unauthorised dealers and companies have played a destructive role by providing adulterated seeds of seasonal crops and chemical inputs to farmers,” Khatian said, adding that it was happening because there was no check and balance by government authorities.

Sindh Growers Alliance (SGA) President Nawab Zubair Talpur also accused the provincial government authorities of putting growers at the mercy of unauthorised dealers, who supply impure seeds and chemical inputs.

“I have witnessed this in my own fields of cotton and chilli, where we received impure hybrid seeds,” he said. “We have cried against these happenings, but nobody from the government department paid heed to our complaints. Now, these complaints are pouring in from different areas by different crop producers,” he lamented.

He urged the government to implement much needed policies to avoid such happenings in future, as food security depended on agricultural success.

Altaf Mahesar of Basic Development Foundation (BDF), whose organisation has collected traditional seed varieties of different food crops, mainly wheat, rice, sorghum, pearl mullet and vegetables through farmers’ network in Dadu district, said it was enough to open the eyes of both growers and government authorities.

“We opposed the Seed Act 2015, which does not carry the issues facing farmers in terms of seed varieties. The Seed Act supports the hybrid seed varieties, advocating it as the only solution to have more yield to feed the growing population of the country,” he said.

Introduction of hybrid seeds on the pretext of population increase was not justifiable at the time, when growers were experiencing loss and failed to get the right yield, he added.

Mostly farmers have lost indigenous and traditional seed varieties and depend on the market to buy hybrid seeds, which were not authentic. It was observed that some rowdy elements kept these seeds from crops and used those seeds in the packing of brands to sell to unaware farmers.

Mahesar pleaded that these hybrid seed varieties were not prepared as per the local environment and weather. Thus, the recent climate change phenomenon like heat wave created problems for rice producers, who lost their entire crops.

“This will happen in future too until the seeds are not prepared in the local environment.

He gave examples of old high yielding rice varieties like irri 6, irri -9 and others, which survived heat waves in the province, as they were prepared as per the local environment. These varieties of irri family were considered good quality, and usually grew in parts of Sindh and southern Punjab.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/546697-rice-growers-yet-to-ascertain-exact-cause-of-crop-loss-this-year

COTTON CONNECTION

Shujauddin Qureshi October 27, 2019

This year's long spell of monsoon rains and use of traditional seeds and technology have resulted in a decline in cotton production in Pakistan. Estimates by the Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) have cut the target by about 33 percent, to 10.2 million bales of raw cotton against the earlier estimates of 15 million bales for the year.

The Karachi Cotton Association had also estimated cotton production for the year 2018-19 (in terms of bales of 375 lbs. each) at 14.37 million bales, including 10 million bales for the Punjab and 4.2 million bales for Sindh, 0.150 million bales for Balochistan and 0.020 million bales for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. But this target seems difficult to achieve this year, keeping in view the current arrival figures of cotton, experts say.

Pakistan Cotton Ginners` Association (PCGA) statistics indicate that a total of 4.44 million bales had arrived at the cotton market till October 15, which is 1.6 million bales or 26.54 percent less than 5.044 million bales over the corresponding period during the last year.

This shortfall in the production may result in limited supply of raw cotton to the textile and processing mills, thus they may have to import costly cotton from abroad in order to meet the demands of export orders.

Besides exporting finished textiles and garments, Pakistan has also been exporting raw cotton, yarn and grey cloths. But many textile mills import long-staple raw cotton every year, as this variety is not produced in Pakistan.

Earlier, Pakistani textile manufacturers used to buy raw cotton from India at comparatively cheaper rates to meet the shortfall. The import of cotton from India, which is the largest cotton-producing country in the world, is now banned after Modi government's August 5 decision on the Indian-Held Kashmir, so Pakistani textile manufacturers have to rely on imports from other cotton-producing countries like China, Turkey and Uzbekistan. The US is the second largest cotton producer in the world and Brazil the fourth but imports from American countries would be quite costly for Pakistani manufacturers due to longer distances and heavy freight costs.

Pakistan is the fifth-largest cotton-producing country in the world. Its textile producers need at least 16 million cotton bales annually to meet the local and international textile products demand. Besides consuming the locally-produced cotton, the textile mills also have to import cotton. This year import of at least 5 million cotton bales is expected, which may require 1.5 billion dollars.

Experts believe that importing raw cotton to produce value-added textiles for exports is not bad for the economy. Bangladesh has done the same for many years. Its export of cotton textiles and garments has increased manifold despite the fact that the country does not produce cotton.

Imported longer-staple cotton is better in quality than the locally-produced raw cotton. “Textile exporters usually prefer to add some quality of the imported cotton to their products,” says Arsalan Hanif, a researcher at Arif Habib Limited Securities.

According to Hanif, the government has shown little interest in increasing cotton production and state’s research institutes seldom do any research and development for improving the quality of locally-produced cotton seed.

Increasing imports has always been a challenge for Pakistan’s economy as the country is suffering from a huge trade deficit problem for many years on account of an increased reliance on imported goods, raw material and machinery.

Stagnant exports have resulted in wider gaps between imports and exports in recent years. Textile and allied exports form over 60 percent of the exports from Pakistan. There has been no increase in their value.

Pakistan earned $22,958 million from exports whereas imports stood at $54,763 million during the fiscal year 2018-19 against exports of $23,212 million and imports worth $60,795 million during the fiscal year 2017-18.

Last year’s massive devaluation of the rupee also failed to have any positive impact on Pakistani exports, despite the fact one of the major demands from the key textile exporters’ associations had been the currency depreciation to help boost the exports in a competitive international market.

Experts believe that importing raw cotton to produce value-added textiles for exports is not bad for the economy. Bangladesh has done the same for many years. Its export of cotton textiles and garments has increased manifold despite the fact that the country does not produce cotton.

According to official statistics, cotton output growth had declined from a low average of 3 percent over the period between 1990 to 2015 to negative 3 percent over 2016-2018 and has further plunged to negative 17.5 percent in 2018-19.

According to Economic Survey of Pakistan 2018-19 report, during the fiscal year 2018-2019 cotton production remained at 9.86 million bales against 11.95 million bales in the previous fiscal year, thus showing a decline of 17.5 percent.

Despite the fact this year the cotton was grown on more areas in both the Punjab and Sindh the production is feared to be lesser than the initial estimates. The official sources indicated that this year’s target of cotton sowing was 2.78 million hectares.

“This year cotton production has declined due to several reasons, including supply of inferior-quality pesticides and seeds,” says Haresh Kumar Vedani, senior vice chairman of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA). Shortage of irrigation water from the Indus river, pests and locust attacks in lower Sindh districts further added to the low cotton crop prospects in the province. Although the share of Sindh in the production of raw cotton is low, the yield per acre in Sindh is more than southern Punjab.

Talking to TNS, Vedani says in Sindh the provincial government collectsvarious taxes from growers and ginners for research and development of seed and development of new varieties, “but nothing is spent on improvement of seeds’ quality. We are using decades-old seeds, whose productivity is declining with the passage of time,” he adds.

The Sindh government has meanwhile raised cotton tax from the previous 4 percent to 8 percent this year. The Federal Excise Duty, has also been raised on ginning factories. This has caused heavy losses to the cotton growers. The main victims of the interventions are workers, especially cotton pickers, women mostly.

This situation has not been helped by many state institutions for the production of cotton, including Pakistan Central Cotton Committee under Ministry of National Food Security and Research and Pakistan Cotton Standards Institute (PCSI) under the administrative control of Textile Division, the Ministry for Commerce and Textile, Government of Pakistan. A Cotton Exchange is also working in Karachi for daily trading of cotton bales.

http://tns.thenews.com.pk/cotton-connection/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCT 28th TO NOV 03rd 2019

CHITRAL VILLAGERS HIT BY LONG DELAY IN REHAB OF IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Correspondent Updated October 28, 2019

CHITRAL: The glacial lake outburst flood (glof), which hit the Golen valley on July 7 this year, has left poverty-stricken people in peril in Golen, Mori Payeen, Barghuzi and Kuju Bala villages.

Villagers complain that an inordinate delay in the rehabilitation of the siphon irrigation system had left the crops of wheat, pulses, fodder, vegetables and fruits vulnerable, while maize hadn't been cultivated.

Rizwanullah advocate of Barghuzi village said the 'economy' of all four affected villages had been badly affected due to the disconnection of irrigation water, while the government wasted time for its rehabilitation.

He said the four villages were known throughout the district for fertile land, where a variety of pulses, vegetables, grapes and pomegranates on a commercial scale, while cheese and desi ghee was also produced in the area.

The villager said all three villages got irrigation water from the Golen valley through siphon system, which was washed away by glof suspending water supply.

He added that the villagers had to wait for the government's help, which came but only after they lost a large chunk of their economy.

Mohammad Nabi Khan of Mori Payeen said the cultivation of wheat for the coming season had been affected in his village as farmers had lost capacity to buy seeds, fertilisers and pesticides and faced the shortage of irrigation water as the siphon system had yet to be restored to ensure smooth water supply by pipes.

He said the pair of oxen to plough fields was also unavailable as farmers had sold livestock, including oxen, cows, goats and sheep when the village virtually became a desert after the severing of water supply.

The villager said cereal crops and fruits had zero output this year that used to provide hard cash to many families to meet the entire year's household expenses.

He said many affluent villagers had turned indigent after losing the source of their livelihood due to the drought caused by unavailability of water.

Former district nazim Maghfirat Shah said the local government was penniless, while his repeated requests to the government to restore irrigation system in the glof-hit villages had fallen on deaf ears.

He said only Rs3.5 million was required for the purpose but it had taken more than two months for the government to manage the meagre amount of money.

Mr Shah said the government was bound by the law to compensate the calamity-affected villagers to help them make ends meet especially after they lost everything from chickens to livestock to cereal crops and fruits to drought due to the sheer negligence of the government.

He said water supply to a large part of Chitral city had yet to be restored by the public health engineering department as glof had affected it, while water pipes were washed away.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1513325

PINNING HOPES ON AGRICULTURE

October 28, 2019

The government has targeted 3.5 per cent growth in the agriculture sector this year, up from 0.85pc last year. It hopes to achieve this target on the back of an increased output of major and minor crops plus sustained growth in livestock.

Achieving targeted expansion in agriculture is a must to keep overall economic growth from falling below the last year's level of 3.3pc. The IMF says this year's GDP growth may slip to 2.4pc, but the government and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) believe it could be 3-3.5pc. Industry is not accelerating and, thus, the services sector is not expected to outpace its own performance last year. Naturally, all eyes are on agriculture.

During the recently concluded Kharif season of farming, major crops showed a mixed trend. Targets for the ongoing Rabi crops were fixed month. So it is early to say whether Rabi crops' performance will be strong enough to achieve the targeted agricultural growth. Given the performance of Kharif crops and favourable prospects of Rabi crops, the overall output this year should be definitely stronger than a year ago. That is one silver lining. And, the last year's low base will help achieve agricultural growth anyway.

The federal government should set up a separate body to monitor the performance of the livestock sector

Among Kharif or summer crops, rice and maize have done well, according to statistics shared by the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA). But sugar cane has missed its target marginally and cotton by a wide margin. The sugar cane output has been estimated at 64.77 million tonnes against the target of 68.7m tonnes. The anticipated slippage in the cotton output is too big — 10m bales against 14.37m bales. That means the major crops' contribution to targeted agricultural growth might be smaller than what officials are expecting. However, since the major crops' output receded 6.6pc in 2018-19, their current performance, marked with some success and some failure, can still contribute significantly to aggregate agricultural expansion in 2019-20.

In a recent meeting, the FCA noted that the rice output this year totalled 7.7m tonnes, exceeding the 7.43m-tonne target, while maize production grew to 6.9m tonnes, beating the last year's record bumper crop of 6.3m tonnes.

FCA members were upbeat about output prospects of Rabi or winter crops on the basis of improved water availability and increased supply of inputs. The production of wheat, potato, onion and other minor Rabi crops are likely to remain higher than before. The wheat output is expected to exceed 27m tonnes against 25.2m tonnes last season. But if the estimated water availability — up to 85pc of the requirement — does not materialise and the sowing of the wheat crop over the targeted area of land is not obtained, the wheat output cannot rise to the targeted level. The availability of last year's wheat stocks — in excess of 7m tonnes — can also discourage growers from sowing wheat aggressively. This is a real concern.

Unlike the crops' sector whose performance comes under review periodically, we come to know about the growth in livestock towards the end of the fiscal year when the federal government releases the Economic Survey of Pakistan.

Provincial governments keep harping on agricultural uplift projects around the year, but have so far not devised any mechanism to tell people periodically how the livestock sector is performing. In the last fiscal year, livestock registered growth of 4pc, beating the target of 3.8pc. That's what the nation knows. How this number was arrived at and what contributed to the better showing of livestock was not shared with the public.

So one can only hope that livestock will perform better during the current fiscal year, too. The physical animal census has not taken place for the past 13 years, except in Punjab. Every year, growth in the population of animals is calculated on the basis of the inter-census growth rate (1996 and 2006). Thus, making a smart guess about the livestock performance is an exercise in futility.

The government had promised to revolutionise the agriculture sector. It would do us all a favour if, with the cooperation of the provinces, it set up a body on the lines of the FCA to monitor the livestock performance. The estimated number of livestock heads, actual production of milk and meat and performance of value-added meat processing and exports should be monitored on a regular basis and results shared with the public at least twice a year. The same can be done with fisheries, another component of agriculture, though not as dominating as livestock because all information regarding inland and offshore fishing activities are currently shared with the public just once a year.

For boosting agricultural growth to 3.5pc, authorities are also pinning high hopes on a possible increase in the distribution of agricultural finance. The SBP has set a target of Rs1.35 trillion for agricultural loan disbursement during this fiscal year, up from Rs1.17tr a year before. Officials boast of Rs263bn loans already disbursed in the first three months of 2019-20.

But what they conveniently forget is that larger agri financing does not necessarily push the agricultural economy, more so if double-digit inflation increases the borrowing requirements of farmers. Below 1pc agricultural growth in the last fiscal year amidst a 20pc increase in agri lending (Rs1.173bn versus Rs973bn) is the most recent example. —MA

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1513249/pinning-hopes-on-agriculture

THE SUGAR WARS CONTINUE

Mohammad Hussain Khan October 28, 2019

A decline in sugar cane crop acreage is being anticipated in Sindh this year. Still, sugar factory owners and sugar cane growers hope for better per acre yields largely due to the monsoon rains which had a positive bearing on the crop.

A Sugarcane Control Board meeting — chaired by the agriculture minister on October 18 in Karachi — to fix a minimum sugar cane price remained inconclusive. Millers disagreed with the rate of Rs250 per 40 kilograms demanded by growers. They, however, indicated they would start crushing from November 15.

For the last six years, the Sindh government has been fixing the price at Rs182 per 40kg of sugar cane under the Sugar cane Factories Control Act. Farmers disagree with such a price saying it is unviable given their cost of inputs; the federal government has also withdrawn subsidy on fertilisers. Therefore, the price should not be less than Rs250 per 40kg.

But the millers contend that the government fixes sugar cane's indicative price whereas the rate of sugar is not fixed and for them, even the rate of Rs182 per 40kg is not affordable given the cost of sugar production. They want the government to fix sugar's price as well.

Farmers demand a rate of at least Rs250 per 40kg whereas the Sindh government has been fixing it at Rs182 for the last six years

The act primarily talks about fixing sugarcane's minimum possible price per 40kg rate. Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) Sindh zone chairman Dr Tara Chand points out that millers don't object to a reasonable hike in sugarcane's price. But, he says, the government must take into account the factors relating to sugar's ex-factory per kg price. "Government doesn't consider it and given its constraints, the sugar industry resists the sugar cane price", he said.

In 2014, the millers had challenged section 16 of Sugar Factories Control Act 1950, which empowers the government to fix the minimum price of sugarcane, in the Sindh High Court (SHC). But the court had rejected the millers' joint petition.

Dr Tara Chand says when the industry demanded permission for sugar exports a couple of years back to clear its carryover stocks, the government disallowed it as a policy decision, even without a subsidy. But then a subsidy was announced.

"When millers challenged the rate of Rs182 per 40kg in court in 2018, the ex-mill price of sugar was Rs48-49 per kg, but now it has increased to Rs66 per kg or so. There is a difference of at least Rs10 per kg between the retail and the ex-factory rate due to the levy of Rs10.2 per kg sales tax," he said. He explains that since sugarcane crop takes 14 months to mature, crushing can't start in October as demanded by growers every year.

However, a look at official dates for the crushing season between 1991 and 2001 reveals that the government had always notified that mills would start crushing in October. Even in 2004-05, October 1st was notified as the date for the start of the crushing season. In later years, however, the government issued notices of the crushing season starting in November and December, to the great chagrin of growers, leading to a permanent millers-farmers discord.

Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) vice president Syed Mahmood Nawaz Shah calls for a strong regulatory framework that ensures implementation of the Sugar Factories Control Act, fearing in its absence the farmers will stop cultivating sugarcane entirely. “It is difficult for us to keep running from pillar to post to get their payments”, he said.

There are 38 sugar factories are located in Sindh of which 32 bought sugarcane for crushing last fiscal year. This year one more factory is likely to start the crushing process again. Last year mills had crushed 15.4 million tonnes of sugar cane to produce 1.72m tonnes of sugar. That was around 4m tonnes less than the corresponding figure of 2017-18 when 2.28m tonnes of sugar was produced from 21.52m tonnes of sugarcane.

“We expect nearly the same volume of sugar production this year, despite the 10-15pc decline in sugarcane’s crop acreage, because the recent spell of monsoon rains will lead to better yield per acre,” said Dr Chand.

Last year 279,472 hectares were brought under sugar cane cultivation against the sowing target of 322,000ha, which is 13.2pc less. The first estimate of this year’s sugar cane crop indicates that it was cultivated on 287,000ha against the target of 310,000ha. The figures indicate a disturbing trend for sugar factories which cumulatively have installed larger crushing capacity.

Growers attribute the gradual decline in acreage to factors like the belated commencement of the crushing season, liabilities and back-to-back controversy over sugar cane price. Such factors discourage growers and it appears that they are losing interest in the crop, despite the fact that other crops, particularly cotton, have not performed well.

It was only in the last few years that farmers replaced area under cotton with sugar cane. This was evident from the number of milling factories whose number increased substantially in Sindh from 30 or so to 38 in one decade.

According to growers, millers intentionally delay commencement of sugar cane crushing to get more sucrose out of the crop. “The delay in harvesting increases the sucrose level of the crop while the cane starts losing weight; this is a loss to us as we get paid on the basis of the crop’s overall weight. Despite a decrease in acreage in 2018-19, sucrose recovery was at 10.41pc — almost a 2pc increase from Sindh’s sucrose recovery benchmark of 8.7pc. So, millers are still earning a windfall profit even with lesser acreage,” argues Nabi Bux Sathio of Sindh Chamber of Agriculture.

Official figures indicate that despite the decline in sugar cane acreage, the sucrose (sugar) recovery has been impressive. In the last two years, it has been over 10pc against the recovery benchmark of 8.7pc that makes payment of premium mandatory. But millers don’t pay the premium despite losing their appeal on quality premium in Supreme Court after two decades last year.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1513248

WEEKLY COTTON REVIEW: RATE SOARS TO RS 9,500 PER MAUND

By NASEEM USMAN on October 28, 2019

The rate of cotton reached Rs 9500 per maund which is highest during the current season. Senate Standing Committee proposes imposition of cotton emergency in the country keeping in mind the drastic decrease in the production of cotton. Committee directed that positive steps should be taken to increase the production of cotton. The textile sector faces financial crises due to increase in the cost of production.

In the local cotton market during the last week continuous buying was witnessed by textile and spinning sector and supply of Phutti was also increased due to which the trading volume increased. The rate of cotton, Phutti, Banola, Khal and eatable oil reach at Rs 9500 per maund which is highest during the current season. The rate of cotton in Sindh as per quality is in between Rs 7800 to Rs 9500 per maund. The rate of Phutti is in between Rs 3000 to Rs 4400 per 40 Kg. The rate of cotton in Punjab is in between Rs 8750 to Rs 9500 per maund while the rate of Phutti is in between Rs 3600 to Rs 4500 per 40 Kg. The rate of cotton in Balochistan is in between Rs 8700 to Rs 9400 per maund while the rate of Phutti is in between Rs 4200 to Rs 4700 per 40 Kg.

The Spot Rate Committee of Karachi Cotton Association has increased the rate of cotton by Rs 250 per maund and closed it at Rs 9200 per maund. Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum Naseem Usman told that this year it is difficult to achieve the target of 1 crore 50 lac (15,000,000) bales and due to untimely rains, extreme hot weather, unfavorable weather conditions, substandard seeds and low quality pesticides there will be a loss of 50 lac (5,000,000) bales worth Rs 200 billion. 45 to 50 lac bales will be imported of worth 1 crore 60 (16,000,000) lac dollars.

In this way country will suffer a loss of Rs 200 billion and foreign exchange of 1 and a half billion dollar will be spent on the import of cotton which will further deteriorate the economic condition. According to the government officials due to unfavorable weather conditions other than cotton crop the crops of rice, wheat and corn were also damaged.

Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security in its meetings held the other day told that one third of the cotton crop of the country was destroyed due to weather conditions which are very alarming. Cotton is not only the important cash crop of the country but the bread and butter of thousands of people is associated with it as well as the textile sector reliance is on this crop.

The government should take practical steps to increase the production of cotton. Proposals for increasing the cotton crop were presented in the meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security. The repetition of details of those recommendations will be helpful. One third of the cotton crop was destroyed in the country due to the extreme hot wave in the country which came as result of climate change.

Senator Muzzaffar Hussain Shah presented these facts while presiding the meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security. He also said that it is very important that we should produce seeds which are heat resistant as well as they will increase the production of cotton. He said that cotton emergency should be imposed in the country.

He said that only 1 crore bales will be produced against the target of production of 1 crore 50 lac bales set for the year 2019-20. The members of the committee showed their concerns on the decreasing production of the cotton crop. It was also demanded in the meeting that especial committee should be constituted which will probe the reasons of the low cotton production and the recommendations prepared in the light of their research should be implemented.

Committee also asked the Cotton Commissioner to prepare a comprehensive report on the production of cotton as well as the problems faced by the farmers. It was also decided that Ministry of National Food Security will announce minimum support price of the cotton and convince them to sow cotton in future.

Secretary National Food Security told the committee that matter of price of cotton will be presented before the concerned departments. He said that research grant should be given to Pakistan Agriculture Research Council and Pakistan Central Cotton Committee so that they will prepare new variety of seeds after research. Moreover, Naseem Usman told that mixed trend was witnessed in international cotton market. In the New York Cotton Market Rate Of Promise (Waday Ka Bhao) witnessed upward and downward trend according to the news regarding long standing America and China trade conflict.

During the last days due to the positive news the rate reached between 64 to 65 American cent and it started coming down because according to the weekly export report of USDA exports decreased by 32 percent due to which the rate was decreasing. According to the report Pakistan was the second largest importer of American cotton after signing export agreement of 44,000 bales. Bearish trend was witnessed in Chinese cotton market while it is expected that cotton production will increase in India because of sufficient rains.

Last year in India 3 crore 12 lac bales were produced where as this year target of cotton production in India is 3 crore 80 lac to 85 lac bales due to which the rate of cotton in India is decreasing. According to the experts the textile sector in India is in crisis especially business ties effected after the rising of tension between India and Pakistan during this year. Pakistan which is the biggest buyer of Indian cotton for many years will not import Indian cotton due to this the already low rate of cotton will further come down.

Moreover in the local yarn market there is an increasing trend and the price of cotton has reached at highest level. According to the experts prices of cotton will not increase further due to two reasons firstly government has imposed seventeen percent sales tax due which textile mills are in financial crunch. On the hand big textile groups had stocked the cotton till January and February.

Moreover they had also signed import agreements with foreign countries in large number and they will start opening Letter of Credit due to which there are chances that the rate of local cotton will come down. This year due to heavy cost ginners and textile mills will not be able to stock the cotton for long time. The economic conditions of the country are deteriorating day by day.

Business was affected due to the strikes in Faisalabad which is the biggest textile market of the country during many months. Few days back long strike was observed in the yarn market of Faisalabad due to the action of FBR. Power looms were on the strike for the last 12 days against the increasing power prices, imposition of taxes by FBR.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/28/538553/weekly-cotton-review-rate-soars-to-rs-9500-per-maund/

KP GOVERNMENT IMPOSES 144 ON FINE ATTA MOVEMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

BY MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN ON OCTOBER 28, 2019

Owing to wheat crisis in the province, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has imposed section 144 Cr.P.C on movement of fine atta to Afghanistan with immediate effect.

This has been conveyed by Director Food KP, in a letter to different provincial government officials and administration of concerned Districts bordering Afghanistan.

According to the letter, in view of the impending crisis of wheat, flour and fine Atta in the KP and also a note moved by the Secretary National Food Security and Research, Government of Pakistan on the request of KP Food Department regarding ban on the export of fine Atta to Afghanistan, Director Food has requested Deputy Commissioners of eight districts to immediately impose section 144 Cr.P.C on movement of fine Atta to Afghanistan.

Director Food KP further says that there is already a complete ban on export of wheat and wheat flour to Afghanistan. The list of executive staff of Food Department KP for establishment of check posts at the exit points have also been shared with the Deputy Commissioners.

Last week, Secretary National Food Security and Research Dr Hashim Populzai informed Senate Standing Committee that the Ministry is evaluating a proposal to import wheat due to crisis like situation in KP and Sindh.

He said, the federal government has asked Sindh and KP to release 0.15 million tons and 0.1 million tons of wheat from the stocks promising that federal government will also release same quantity of wheat from stocks of Passco.

Secretary National Food Security and Research also expressed concern on ban inter-provincial movement on movement of wheat which has created crisis like situation in KP. Unconfirmed reports suggest that Prime Minister was unhappy with Punjab government for imposing unannounced ban on movement of wheat to KP.

Last month, federal government has imposed a ban on export of wheat and wheat flour with immediate effect to control its price in domestic market. On September 11, 2019, Commerce Division issued amendment under the heading (wheat and wheat flour) of Export Policy Order, 2016 to formally impose a ban on export of wheat and wheat flour. Earlier, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research also issued a notification and circulated it among all stakeholders.

On July 17, 2019, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet headed by Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance, Economic Affairs and Revenue, Dr Hafeez Shaikh accorded approval to ban wheat and flour, after it was observed that data provided on the availability of wheat stock does not appear realistic as the data showed that there is no shortage of wheat in the country and sufficient wheat is available.

On July 25, 3019, federal cabinet ratified by the federal cabinet in its meeting on July 25, 2019 and directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to coordinate with the provincial governments to ensure that sufficient quantities of wheat are released to flour mills in order to ensure that there is no shortage of wheat flour in the market.

Cabinet also took cognizance of undue increase in the price of atta/roti on the pretext of shortage of wheat stocks and desired that National Food Security and Research Division, in collaboration of Provincial Agriculture Departments, must conduct extensive field research/survey to ascertain the factual position on the ground, both in urban/rural areas and submit its report to the cabinet with 15 days.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/28/538531/kp-government-imposes-144-on-fine-atta-movement-to-afghanistan/

GOVERNMENT TO DIGITISE WHEAT PROCUREMENT

By Rizwan Asif Published: October 28, 2019

LAHORE: Following the directives of Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar, the Punjab government has taken an initiative to digitise and link all 384 wheat centres for transparent procurement and sale process.

The new digitised system will also link the offices of more than 50 food offices across Punjab. With the collaboration of the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) over the next two years, the procurement centres will have a digital record of wheat reserves, procurement of wheat from farmers, payment to them and sale and purchase of wheat from flour mills.

The record will be computerised, centres will be provided with desktops while flag centres will be given tablets for monitoring. Whereas, the district food controllers, deputy directors, deputy secretaries and additional secretaries will be given laptops.

All the employees of the food department will be trained by the PITB on specific software to operate the new system. As per specifications, the Punjab government buys wheat of more than Rs140 billion each year from farmers and sells the same to flour mills.

To procure wheat from about 500,000 farmers each year, there are around 384 wheat procurement centres present in almost every area of Punjab.

In the past, serious complaints were received regarding the issuance process of gunny sacks to farmers, embezzlement in food and wheat storage and discrepancies in weight. That is why the government has decided to digitise the whole process.

The World Bank has also indicated the need to digitise the food department while conducting the smart programme with the government. The government has planned its course of action in collaboration with the PITB. The department will develop food software and dashboards.

Wi-Fi devices will also be provided for internet connection. Each wheat procurement centre will feed the entire detail of the wheat reserves into the software system, along with the number of wheat stock in a jute sack and plastic bag, respectively.

Also, the date on which the stock was given to the farmer, how much wheat was purchased and through which bank the transaction has been made, would be monitored through the new system.

The new system will also include details of the wheat sold to flour mills and all the records will be updated on a regular basis. Laptops will be provided to the district food controllers, divisional deputy directors and food directors so that they could review the latest status of any wheat sales and purchase centre any time.

Punjab Food Secretary Dr Zafar Nasrullah Khan told The Express Tribune that the food department's sale and purchase of wheat were worth Rs300 billion annually.

To regulate the sales and purchase process and to keep matters updated, it was inevitable to take this measure of digitising the food department. "We will also be conducting special training courses in this regard and will ensure that the digitisation plan be enabled before the due date," he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2088381/1-government-digitise-wheat-procurement/

KP GOVT INCREASES WHEAT SUPPLY TO MILLS, RESTRICTS FLOUR MOVEMENT

Ali Hazrat Bacha Updated October 29, 2019

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government on Monday increased the daily wheat supply to flour mills in the province from 2,000 tons to 3,000 tons and restricted the inter-district flour movement to preent shortage.

However, the Pakistan Flour Mills Association's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter rejected the move calling the 3,000 tons wheat supply insufficient.

Demanding 6,000 tons wheat for flour mills on a daily basis, it said the price hike couldn't be contained in the open market under the prevailing circumstances following the Punjab government's restriction on wheat supply to KP.

Also, nanbais demanded the authorities increase roti price and warned if that didn't happen within two days, they would increase price on their own.

They insisted that they won't be able to work if flour supply wasn't subsidised.

Millers say increase insufficient; nanbais demand higher roti price

Information minister Shaukat Ali Yousafzai and food minister Qalandar Khan Lodhi told a joint news conference here that the decision about increase in wheat supply to flour mills and restriction on flour movement through the imposition of Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure was made during a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mahmood Khan and attended by the chief secretary, provincial police chief and senior food department officials here.

The meeting was informed that the province had sufficient stock of wheat and flour but the vested interests were trying to create artificial shortage.

"We have enough wheat stock and therefore, the supply of wheat to flour mills has been increased from 2,000 tons to 3,000 tons from Monday," said Mr Lodhi.

The minister said he was optimistic that better wheat supply to mills would stabilise the market and reduce flour price.

Mr Yousafzai denied the shortage of wheat and flour in the province and said Section 144 had been imposed to restrict the movement of wheat and flour out of the province.

He said the deputy commissioners had been told to check flour price on the market on a daily basis and conduct raids on mills and godowns to check hoarding.

The minister said the federal government recently decided to allow the export of semolina and fine flour (maida) to Afghanistan prompting the smuggling of flour under the garb of the export of the flour by-products.

He said the Punjab government had banned the wheat supply to KP in light of the flour smuggling to Afghanistan.

The minister profiteers exploited the situation and began hoarding flour to create shortage.

He said at the KP's request, the centre had withdrawn the notification of semolina and fine flour export to Afghanistan.

The minister said the chief minister had requested the prime minister to review the decision about the export of the by-products of wheat flour.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Flour Mills Association, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, demanded the government lift restriction on the supply of wheat and flour to ensure that the districts without flour mills don't suffer.

The demand was made during a meeting of the association's executive committee.

PFMA, KP, chairman Haji Mohammad Iqbal chaired the meeting, where the representatives of flour mills were in attendance.

"Over 50 per cent of KP's flour mills have already closed down, while the government's latest policy is forcing the rest to follow suit. If that happens, the local economy will suffer badly leaving thousands jobless," Mr Iqbal said.

He told Dawn afterward that the government should provide wheat to mills at the rates charged in Punjab.

The PFMA chairman said 3,000 tons supply was insufficient, so the government should ensure the supply of 6,000 tons wheat to the mills on a daily basis to prevent flour crisis in the province.

He feared that if the government didn't meet the demand, the province would be hit by a serious flour crisis.

Mr Iqbal also opposed any crackdown on flour dealers and warned such move would lead to a serious flour shortage and unprecedented price hike.

Also, Nanbai Association, Peshawar, president Khaista Gul warned if the demand for higher roti price wasn't met within two days, nanbais would either increase the roti price or reduce its weight.

Published in Dawn, October 29th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1513483/kp-govt-increases-wheat-supply-to-mills-restricts-flour-movement

FIRE DESTROYS SUGAR CANE FIELD ON FOUR ACRES

By Our Correspondent October 29,2019

MIRPURKHAS: Fire completely destroyed a sugar cane field on four acres near Sindhri town on Monday morning.

Villagers said the field owned by landlord Mohammad Ali Samoon caught fire accidentally when children were exploding firecrackers near it.

Perhaps the wind carried some spark to the field and fire engulfed it within minutes, they said.

They said that villagers and growers tried to extinguish the fire till fire brigade vehicle arrived. The blaze was extinguished after four hours.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=29_10_2019_117_001

PTI GOVT INTENDS TO LIFT RICE EXPORTS TO HIGHEST-EVER LEVEL

By APP Published: October 29, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Rice is the largest agriculture commodity in the export basket of Pakistan with total export value of over $2 billion annually, which will be increased up to $5 billion in the coming five years, said Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood.

He stated this during a meeting with a delegation of the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) on Monday. The meeting was aimed at chalking out policy proposals in order to enhance exports of rice up to $5 billion over the next five years.

Dawood appreciated all the proposals presented by REAP and assured the association of full cooperation of the Ministry of Commerce in that regard. He asked the delegation of rice exporters to introduce new varieties of rice in order to enhance production and quality of the commodity by investing in research and development work.

“All bottlenecks in the way of rice exports will be removed as soon as possible through effective coordination and cooperation with all the relevant government ministries and departments,” the adviser said.

He pointed out that rice exports to China and Indonesia were on an uptrend due to the additional market access secured by the government. “The government intends to lift exports to the highest-ever level,” he remarked.

“The government is taking different measures for enhancing exports including recapturing traditional markets besides enhancing access to new markets,” he added.

REAP President Syed Almas Hyder appreciated the government’s endeavours to boost exports of traditional and non-traditional products.

The delegation presented various proposals for achieving the envisaged targets, which included better farm practices, higher crop yields through water management, mechanical transplanting, drying and storage, and balancing, modernisation and replacement (BMR) of existing rice mills.

Published in The Express Tribune, October 29th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2088965/2-pti-govt-intends-lift-rice-exports-highest-ever-level/

MOBILISING RURAL ECONOMY THROUGH POULTRY FARMING

By DR MUHAMMAD KHURSHID Published: October 28, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan, with over 60% rural population, is blessed with a variety of agro-ecological zones well suited for agro-pastoral and poultry production. Livestock contributes 56% to value addition in agriculture and nearly 11% to Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP).

Being the third largest goat producing country in the world after China and India, Pakistan has around 53.8 million goats and their population is increasing at a pace of 3% per annum. Backyard poultry farming is quite common and is very important for rural households because of being small-scale enterprises with 10-12 birds.

It provides a source of healthy protein intake and generates cash income. Prior to the spread of commercial poultry business, household chickens were the only source of eggs and poultry meat in Pakistan. These were mainly taken care of by female members in households as it did not require any upfront cost.

Having average household size of six to seven persons, almost 70% of rural families in Pakistan are keeping a couple of goats and sheep and around 10 to 12 chickens either for family consumption or income generation. A study shows the major source of livelihood in rural areas is livestock and poultry. With limited cash, livestock and poultry farming helps rural families to meet their daily food needs mostly through dairy and poultry products.

Compared to urban dwellers, rural households do not spend much on house rent, utilities, transportation, health and education as they have a simple lifestyle. Poultry farming, being easy and without requiring any upfront cost, is an integral part of the rural economy and can be given a boost by making small interventions, such as through value addition.

Poultry meat has low cholesterol and can fetch a higher price in the current-day organic market if proper value addition, certification and tagging is ensured and sustained. This not only provides healthy food but also facilitates income generation on a sustainable basis. The success of such an intervention depends on establishing smart enterprises by linking rural markets with urban centres. Capacity building and awareness creation about such innovative intervention will greatly help in gearing up the supply chain to meet demand in the urban centres. Rural producers also require consistent training and supervision for maintaining quality in value addition as per required market standards.

Each rural household can play the role of a manufacturing unit as it already takes care of a small number of poultry birds. Many have surplus poultry as well and can enhance production provided sustainable enterprises are available. Therefore, a system of decentralised production units clustered in and around rural villages has to be established purely under the market mechanism of passing on profits from primary to tertiary levels and ensuring distribution of just share at all levels.

Such types of enterprises already exist in rural areas but what is lacking is their training and awareness of value addition, quality standards and smart ways of doing business through certification. In this age of technological prowess, information technology can play an important role in disseminating information about any organic product that has a high demand and raise awareness as well.

Such interventions bring many benefits as well as provide an opportunity to push development work in rural areas. These will assist in mobilising the rural economy, enhancing livelihood opportunities for rural communities and facilitating transfer of cash from urban to rural areas.

On the other side, the development work and enhanced livelihood opportunities will slow down the pace of rural-to-urban migration, thereby controlling the influx of people into the already crowded urban areas. This way, the local, provincial and national economies will get a boost. Key benefits of supporting and promoting small rural farmlands include a steady revenue stream for the poor households in such areas and the supply of healthy food to consumers. These interventions will also greatly help in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which Pakistan is required to meet by 2030.

Challenges Now, the challenge ahead is how and when such good things will happen? As already said, these activities are already happening but not in the desired way. Rural communities are selling their livestock and poultry in local markets but in a highly crude way and without any direct benefit to them. Middlemen are taking away the lion’s share.

There is also no value addition nor is there any effort to get certification for organic and healthy food. The way forward is the creation of a production system for rural livestock and poultry where healthy feed is supplied to the birds and animals.

Rural development agencies working in the public sector, civil society and private sector should focus on the capacity building of small-scale livestock and poultry farmers to pave the way for value addition and certification of their produce besides directly linking them with urban markets through smart enterprises.

Unfortunately, most of the modern livestock experts promote caging and supply of artificially prepared feed which have traces of dirty chemical that are not fit for human consumption. Consumers are increasingly demanding organic products which must the focus of attention and the farmers should be pushed to produce such products in order to fetch higher prices. THE WRITER IS A PHD IN NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND IS A CIVIL SERVANT

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2088429/2-mobilising-rural-economy-poultry-farming/

GOVT URGED TO DECLARE ‘COTTON EMERGENCY’

Staff Reporter October 30, 2019

KARACHI: The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) on Tuesday urged the government to declare an emergency for arresting rapidly falling cotton production.

It also sought a ban on cultivation of paddy and sugarcane as well as setting up of sugar mills in areas already earmarked for cotton crop.

Expressing deep concern over falling cotton production figures, which went from 15 million bales to 10.20m bales for current cotton season 2019-20, the body said the government needs to immediately launch an action plan for bringing in more area under cotton crop cultivation.

The cultivation of sugarcane in areas earmarked for cotton as well as supply of uncertified seed and pesticides are major factors behind rapid fall in cotton production, KCA said in a press release.

For ensuring higher yield of cotton per acre the government should ensure supply of certified cotton seed to growers and also create awareness among farmers to switch over to modern integrated pest management system.

Moreover, revamp and gear-up Pakistan Central Cotton Committee and all cotton research institutes with a task to evolve high yield and virus resistant seed varieties.

All measures should be taken by the government to ensure import of certified pesticides in small packing instead of bulk in order to avoid adulteration.

Published in Dawn, October 30th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1513733/govt-urged-to-declare-cotton-emergency

KCA VOICES CONCERN OVER DRASTIC CUT IN COTTON'S OUTPUT

By RECORDER REPORT on October 30, 2019

The Karachi Cotton Association is extremely perturbed over the drastic decline in cotton production from 15.0 million bales to 10.20 million bales, as reported officially, in the current cotton season 2019-20. The KCA understands that decline in cotton production again in cotton season 2019-20 is mainly due to (i) reduction in yield per acre (ii) cultivation of sugarcane in the areas earmarked for cotton cultivation (iii) supply of uncertified Cotton Seed & Pesticides etc. Hence, there is a gap of minimum 5.0 million bales in cotton production and local mills consumption.

The local textile industry is, therefore, compelled to import raw cotton from abroad to meet its requirement of basic/primary raw material and to ensure its contribution towards achieving the target of exports fixed by the Government through exports of valued added products as well as earning much needed foreign exchange for the country.

However, after payment of heavy duties and taxes imposed on import of cotton, the cost of the basic/primary raw material of the textile industry is considerably increased due to which the local textile industry becomes unable to compete in the international markets. As a result of this, the exports of value added products of cotton and foreign exchange earning of the country are being badly affected.

In order to increase cotton production in the coming years to meet the rising requirements of the local textile industry and leave adequate surplus for export in order to ensure the presence of Pakistan Cotton in the international market to earn valuable foreign exchange for the country through export of cotton and its value added products, the KCA urges upon the Government to declare emergency and evolve necessary plan of action on war footing basis in this regard.

The KCA also urges upon the Government (i) to mobilize all resources at Federal and Provincial level to bring more area under cotton cultivation, (ii) increase yield per acre, (iii) ensure to produce and supply of Certified Cotton Seed to the growers for cultivation, (iv) provide education to growers to switchover to modern integrated pest management system, (v) place ban on cultivation of Paddy/Sugarcane and setting-up of Sugar mills in the areas already earmarked for cultivation of cotton, (vi) revamp/gear-up Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC)/all the Cotton Research Institutes to evolve high yield/virus resistance cotton seed varieties for cultivation, (vii) take measures to import pure and certified pesticides in small packing instead of bulk in order to avoid adulteration, (viii) advice the cotton growers and the ginners to switchover to modern farming and ginning practices year after year to increase cotton production and improve quality of cotton and (ix) implement Cotton Control Act in letter and sprit to achieve the desired results.

The KCA further urges upon the government to waive all duties and taxes on import of cotton immediately in the national interest so that the local textile industry could be able to export optimum quantity of value added products of raw cotton in the international market to earn valuable foreign exchange for the country and play its due role in the sustainability and growth of country's economy.-PR

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/30/539319/kca-voices-concern-over-drastic-cut-in-cottons-output/

OVER 100 FAMILIES EVACUATED FROM FISHING VILLAGES IN SINDH

By Our Correspondent Published: October 30, 2019

KARACHI: The very severe cyclone, Kyarr, which formed in the Arabian Sea on October 25, earlier this month, has diminished in intensity, with Chief Meteorologist Sardar Sarfaraz claiming that it has been downgraded to a Category 4 cyclone as opposed to the initial Category 5.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department also reiterated in its latest advisory that the ‘super cyclonic storm’ does not pose any risk to the coastal areas of Pakistan. Nevertheless, at least 100 families living in coastal villages had to be evacuated to nearby schools and other public facilities as the rising tide caused the seawater to enter their homes.

According to the seventh advisory issued by the PMD, Cyclone Kyarr is centered in the middle of the Arabian Sea at a distance of 730 kilometres from Karachi and 665kms from Gwadar.

The advisory added that the cyclone was likely to move further to the northwest, before turning into the southwest direction. It added that though there was no imminent risk to the coastal belt, strong winds and high tides were expected to affect the coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan.

According to Chief Meteorologist Sardar Sarfaraz, with the intensity of the cyclone decreasing, the speed of winds, which was earlier recorded at 270kms per hour, has also decreased. He added that the western system will affect the cyclonic storm today (Wednesday), as a result of which light to moderate rain is expected in Karachi, Thatta and Badin as well as Balochistan's coastal area of Makran.

According to Sarfaraz, the cyclone is continuously moving towards Oman while it will turn south-west today (Wednesday), after which it will enter the Gulf of Aden and may hit the Socotra Island on November 3.

The latest advisory has again warned the fishermen to avoid venturing out into the open sea for fishing. Fishing launches at different jetties of Karachi have been restricted from setting off for fishing expeditions for the next three days as the tides may get extraordinarily high.

The tides have been predicted by the Met department to rise up to 10 feet in the night and early morning. According to the Met department, citizens should avoid visiting beaches and residents living along the coast should take precautionary measures.

Meanwhile, seawater entered homes in Rehri Goth, Lath Basti and Chashma Goth on Monday night and Tuesday morning due to the storm and high tides. According to Coastal Media Cell of Ibrahim Hyderi, different jetties in the surroundings of Ibrahim Hyderi have submerged, adding to the fishermen's difficulties. The sea level has risen near the islands close to Keamari including Shams Pir, Kika Pir, Baba Bhitt Island and others.

According to the Fishermen Cooperative Society, fishing launches anchored near the floating jetty of Karachi Fish Harbour swayed over several feet-high tides while a flood-like situation was created as a result of the seawater entering residential areas like Malkani and Bil Mohalla in Rairhi Goth. The sea water entered even those houses that are built on raised ground. FCS officials said that its volunteers and workers visited the affected areas and shifted more than 100 affected families to nearby schools and colleges.

Fishermen Cooperative Society's Harbour Security in-charge Nasir Boneri said that they had also requested the Maritime Security Agency late on Tuesday night for assistance in the rescue operation.

Meanwhile, even as residents of coastal villages struggled to keep sea water from entering their homes, Karachi's citizens flocked to the beaches to witness the situation for themselves.

Hundreds of citizens, armed with cameras, arrived at the Sea View beach and Do Dariya to take pictures of the rough waves.

According to the Met dept, this is the first storm of this magnitude since 2007. The weather is expected to remain cloudy for the next two days.

Published in The Express Tribune, October 30th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2089624/1-100-families-evacuated-fishing-villages/

UREA SALES DECLINE 35% IN SEPTEMBER

By Our Correspondent Published: October 30, 2019

KARACHI: Urea sales declined 35% to 405,000 tons in September 2019 on a month-on-month basis owing to the seasonality factor and price hike following withdrawal of Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) Ordinance.

Sales of urea had been recorded at 625,000 tons in August 2019, according to the latest data released by National Fertiliser Development Corporation (NFDC).

In July, the government increased gas prices for the fertiliser sector but the manufacturers did not pass the impact on to consumers awaiting exemption from GIDC payments. In addition to being a fuel, gas is also utilised as raw material in fertiliser production, therefore, the companies believed that they would be able to adjust prices following the exemption.

"The other reason behind the decline in fertiliser offtake is the transition from Kharif to Rabi sowing season. The gap between the two seasons causes a decline in fertiliser consumption temporarily," said Taurus Securities' analyst Syed Mustafa Zamin.

"The preceding month had recorded extraordinary growth, which was why the September numbers look drastically down, otherwise they were normal."

On a year-on-year basis, urea sales for September 2019 fell only 16% against 482,000 tons in September 2018.

"The yearly decline is attributable to lower volumes on the back of increase in urea prices (20%), which dragged down fertiliser sales as a whole," said a Taurus Securities' report.

On the other hand, di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) offtake grew 99% in September 2019 to 210,000 tons against 105,000 tons in August 2019.

"The reason behind this twofold growth is that farmers have started purchasing plant nutrients for the Rabi sowing season. The season begins from mid-October," said Zamin.

Published in The Express Tribune, October 30th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2089701/2-urea-sales-decline-35-september/

650,000 TONNES OF WHEAT FOR SINDH, BALOCHISTAN AND KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA RELEASED

Khaleeq KianiUpdated October 31, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Amid continuous rise in flour prices, the government on Wednesday decided to immediately release another 650,000 tonnes of wheat to Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) to ease out demand and supply equilibrium in the market.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Economic Coordination Com-mittee (ECC) of the cabinet presided over by Prime Minister's Adviser on Finance and Revenue Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh which also offered incremental power consumption at a flat rate of Rs11.91 per unit.

The ECC was informed that wheat flour price was continuously rising almost across the country due to an insignificant buffer in demand and supply situation. It was reported for example that national average for 20kg wheat four stood at Rs1,140 on October 26 compared Rs1,100 exactly a month ago in September.

Likewise, the 20kg price of flour was recorded at Rs1,050 on October 26 in Hyderabad compared to Rs1,000 on September 26 while 20kg flour price had increased from Rs750 on August 25 to Rs1,030 on October 26 in Faisalabad.

The ECC also approved a uniform seasonal pricing structure of "Use more electricity-pay less"

The ECC noted the rising trend in wheat prices, and "approved a proposal by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) for release of 300,000 tonnes each to governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh and 50,000 tonnes to the government of Balochistan," an official statement said.

The ECC also approved an amount of Rs2.745 billion to be paid to Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) as incidental charges at the ratio of 50:50 to be equally shared by the federal and respective provincial governments.

The latest release follows an earlier release of 250,000 tonnes of wheat to the governments of Sindh and KP governments – 100,000 tonnes for the former and 150,000 tonnes to the latter –from Passco stocks on an ECC decision taken in its meeting on Oct 2, 2019. The Passco incidental charges for the previous release had also been shared at the ratio of 50:50 equally by the federal and respective provincial governments.

The MNFSR informed the ECC that Passco and provincial food departments had reported their stocks at 6.44 million tonnes as compared to 10.09m tonnes of the corresponding period of the last year. However, despite the fact that the total availability of wheat this year was estimated at 28.26m tonnes, including the leftover stock of 3.78m tonnes as compared to the national requirement of 26.91m tonnes of the country, the prices of wheat and flour showed upward trend in the local market.

On a proposal of the Ministry of Energy, the ECC also approved a uniform seasonal pricing structure of "Use more electricity-pay less" to be applicable during the four winter months from November 2019 to February 2020. Under the decision, a flat rate of Rs11.9 per unit will be applicable on all units consumed over and above the units consumed in the corresponding months last year by the consumers. The facility will be applicable to domestic consumers (5kW and above), Time of Use (ToU) meters, commercial consumers 95kW and above), ToU meters, and all except temporary industrial consumers.

The ECC was told that the proposal was aimed at utilising the massive surplus electricity during the winter months when the demand plunges to 8000-9000 MW from an installed capacity of 35,000 MW. The energy ministry said the proposal was expected to lead to utilisation of additional electricity to the tune of Rs24bn in four months.

The ECC constituted a committee led by Minister for Economic Affairs Hammad Azhar to resolve within two weeks the issue of outstanding payments to the port authorities by Wapda and Pakistan State Oil (PSO). The meeting was informed that Wapda owed an amount of Rs1.076bn to Karachi Port Trust (KPT) after 52 consignments imported by the power authority were cleared by the KPT Board on Wapda's request on deferred payment and following approval of the federal government. Wapda paid a sum of Rs334m as against Rs1.41bn while the remaining Rs1.076bn is still pending.

Likewise, the Petroleum Division owed an amount of Rs1.696bn to Port Qasim Authority (PQA) for wharfage charges against the LNG imported by Pakistan State Oil. The Ministry of Maritime Affairs requested the ECC to direct Wapda and the Petroleum Division to make their respective payments to the PQA.

On a proposal by the Ministry of Energy, the ECC extended the timeline by another one and a half year for the commencement of Competitive Market Operations/commercial operation date (COD) of the Competitive Trading Bilateral Contracts Market (CTBCM).

The ECC was told that the CTBCM model and plan prepared by the Central Power Purchasing Agency Limited (CPPA) following an ECC decision for transition of the power market to a Competitive Trading Bilateral Contract Market, had been submitted to Nepra for review and regulatory approval and the approval was anticipated by December 2019.

Therefore, the ECC allowed that the full operations should begin 18 months after the Nepra's approval i.e July 2021 as required under Schedule-I of the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Market Operator Registration, Standards and Procedure) Rules, 2015.

The ECC also took up an issue regarding the supply of gas to Habibullah Coastal Power Company (HCPC) and approved a proposal by the Petroleum Division for supply of indigenous gas for the interim period of 3 to 6 months, purely on 'as and when available basis' with no Liquidated Damages attached, to HCPC.

During this period the supply of RLNG would be evaluated together with commercial terms, if CPPA agreed to switch the plant on RLNG and extend the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) accordingly.

The Ministry of Energy informed the ECC that no long term firm commitment of supply of indigenous gas to HCPC could be offered in view of the depletion of indigenous gas and the widening gap between demand and supply. However, considering the plant location of Quetta and voltage issues, the abrupt suspension of gas supply upon expiry of GSA might not allow CPPA to make alternate arrangement to stabilise the grid which is neither in the interest of Balochistan nor the country.

The ECC also approved allocation of up to 8 mmcfd gas from Chabbaro and up to 10 mmcfd gas from Gundanwari to the M/s SSGCL with the price of gas as per the applicable Petroleum Policy.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1513977

FROM PASSCO STOCK TO PROVINCES: ECC DECIDES TO RELEASE 650,000 TONS OF WHEAT

By ZAHEER ABBASI on October 31, 2019

Decision taken after a huge increase of Rs 140 in national average price of 20kg bag of flour.

The meeting approved Rs 2.745 billion to be paid to PASSCO as incidental charges on 50/50 basis to be shared between the center and provinces.

The government had earlier released 250,000 tons of wheat to the governments of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from PASSCO.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Federal Cabinet has decided to release 650,000 tons of wheat from PASSCO stock to the provinces after a huge increase of Rs 140 in national average price of 20kg bag of flour.

Sources told that there has been a massive increase of Rs 140 in price of 20kg bag of flour with the national average price of flour increasing from Rs 1,000 in Sep 2019 to Rs 1,140 in Oct 2019.

An ECC meeting chaired by Adviser to PM on Finance, Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, on Wednesday approved proposal of Ministry of National Food for release of 300,000 tons each to governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh and 50,000 tons to the government of Balochistan. The meeting approved Rs 2.745 billion to be paid to PASSCO as incidental charges on 50/50 basis to be shared between the center and provinces.

The government also released, earlier, 250,000 tons of wheat to the governments of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from PASSCO stocks following the ECC decision of Oct 2. However as the price of flour kept increasing, the ECC decided to release more wheat to the provinces.

The Ministry of National Food informed the ECC that PASSCO and provincial food departments had reported their stocks at the level of 6.444 million tons compared to 10.093 million tons for the same period a year before and despite the fact that the total availability of wheat was estimated at the level of 28.256 million tons, including the leftover stock of 3.777 million tons, the prices of wheat and flour still showed upward trend in the local market, the ECC was told.

The ECC also considered two separate proposals put up by the Ministry of Maritime Affairs for payment of different outstanding amounts by WAPDA and Pakistan State Oil to the Port Qasim Authority and constituted a committee under Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Hammad Azhar to resolve the issue of outstanding payments to Port Qasim Authority.

The ECC was told that WAPDA owed an amount of Rs 1.076 billion to Karachi Port Trust after 52 consignments imported by WAPDA were cleared by the KPT Board on WAPDA's request on deferred payment and following approval of the federal government.

The ECC was told that Wapda paid Rs 334 million against Rs 1.41 billion and Rs 1.076 billion are pending. The other payment was related to the Petroleum Division which owed an amount of Rs 1.696 billion to the Port Qasim Authority for wharfage charges against the LNG imported by Pakistan State Oil. The ECC formed a committee headed by minister for economic affairs to examine the matter and suggest a solution within two weeks for resolution of the issue.

The ECC also approved a technical supplementary grant of Rs 706.050 million with Rs 650.426 million current and Rs 55.624 million development expenditure, to the Ministry of Human Rights subsequent to the cabinet's decision to transfer the functions, subjects and organizations – administrative and financial matters – of the Special Education & Social Welfare along with their allied institutions from Federal Education and Professional Training Division to the Human Right Division.

The ECC also approved a proposal of the Ministry of Interior for grant of a technical supplementary grant amounting to Rs 100 million, Rs 43 million for employee related expenses and Rs 57 million for operating expenditures.

The ECC was told that the ICT administration has already implemented the part of approved summary by the prime minister dealing with the collection of taxes on increased rates and is way ahead of its revenue collection targets while 125 new posts have also been agreed for creation among the Finance, Establishment and Interior Divisions for revamping the departments as per the approved summary.

The ECC also considered supply of gas to Habibullah Coastal Power Company (HCPC) and approved a proposal by the Petroleum Division for supply of indigenous gas for the interim period of 3 to 6 months, purely on ‘as and when available basis' with no liquidated damages attached, to HCPC, during which period the supply of RLNG could be evaluated together with commercial terms, if CPPA agreed to switch the plant on RLNG and extend the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) accordingly.

The ECC also approved a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Energy for allocation of up to 8 MMcfd gas from Chabbaro and up to 10 MMscfd gas from Gundanwari to the M/s SSGCL with the price of gas as per the applicable Petroleum Policy.

The ECC also approved a proposal submitted by Ministry of Energy with regard to uniform seasonal pricing structure of “use more electricity-pay less" to be applicable during the four winter months from November 2019 to February 2020, at the rate of Rs 11.9 per unit on all units consumed over and above the units consumed in the corresponding months last year by the consumers using Domestic Consumers (5kW and above), ToU meters, commercial consumers 95kW and above), ToU meters, and all except temporary industrial consumers.

The ECC was informed that the proposal was aimed at utilizing the massive surplus electricity during the winter months when the demand plunges to 8000-9000 MW from an installed capacity of 35,000 MW. The Ministry of Energy said the proposal was based on similar models adopted in various countries, including Chile, and it was expected to lead to utilization of additional electricity to the tune of Rs 24 billion in four months.

The ECC on a proposal of the Ministry of Energy also extended the timeline by another 1.5 year for the commencement of competitive market operations/commercial operation date of the Competitive Trading Bilateral Contracts Market (CTBCM) to allow completion of CTBCM plan within 18 months after approval of CTBCM plan by NEPRA.

The ECC also approved the proposal for NEPRA to amend the timelines of market transition towards a Competitive Market Operations/CTBCM operations mentioned in Schedule-I of the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Market Operator Registration, Standards and Procedure) Rules, 2015.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/10/31/539663/from-passco-stock-to-provinces-ecc-decides-to-release-650000-tons-of-wheat/

GOVT PROMOTING FARM SECTOR: MINISTER

By Our Correspondent Published: October 31, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Agriculture Minister Zamrak Khan Achakzai has said the provincial government was particularly focusing on the promotion of the agricultural, livestock and fisheries sectors to ensure sustainable development in the province.

“The development and promotion of these sectors will strengthen the economy of the province and improve the living standards of the people,” he told a delegation.

The minister regretted that in past, these important sectors were neglected.

“Agriculture, livestock and fisheries contributed billions of rupees to the provincial kitty in the past, but they are suffering now because the previous rulers did not pay any attention to them.”

However, he added that the incumbent government had taken concrete steps for the revival of these sectors. “This will yield long-lasting results. These sectors will again generate revenue and help in improving the provincial economy.”

Achakzai said funds had been allocated for agricultural, livestock and fisheries schemes in development programmes. “After schemes are completed, the province will witness prosperity and progress,” he added.

“The current government is committed to the development of the province, eradication of corruption and provision of all basic facilities to the people.”

Liaquat Shahwani, the spokesperson for the Balochistan government, recently said radical steps had been taken to modernise the agricultural sector of the province and to introduce latest equipment and techniques to cope with the drought that has hit some parts of the province.

“The province has huge potential in the farm sector but water scarcity and prolonged drought have badly affected it,” he added.

The Balochistan government, he said, was taking initiatives to resolve issues in the agricultural sector in the province on a priority basis.

Published in The Express Tribune, October 31st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2090326/1-govt-promoting-farm-sector-minister/

LIVESTOCK EXPO 2019 ‘TO BRING CHANGE’

Published October: 31, 2019

QUETTA: Special Assistant to Balochistan Chief Minister Ejaz Ahmed Sanjrani said that Livestock Expo 2019 would change the fortune of the department emphasizing government efforts to strengthen provincial livestock sector on modern technology.

Sanjrani along with Secrtary Livestock Dostain Jamaldini shared these views during a meeting with Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry (QCCI) Senior Vice President (VP) Badruddin Kakar.

Stressing need of joint efforts to revamp provincial livestock department, the special assistant said, “Government is conducting International Livestock Expo 2019 in Balochistan to uplift the sector because majority people in the province are attached with it.”

During the meeting, the QCCI VP and other members lamented policies of previous government

Over ignoring the sector. Jamaldini said that provincial government was working to introduce latest machinery for livestock industry.

“Meat of Balochistan livestock has international demand therefore government is interested to drift the sector towards industrialization,” he said.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201910310184&EN_ID=11201910310058&EMID=11201910310028

GOVT LIKELY TO RAISE WHEAT, SUGARCANE SUPPORT PRICES

By Rizwan Asif Published: October 31, 2019

LAHORE: The federal government has decided to increase support prices of wheat and sugarcane after a gap of six years and has completed consultations with all provinces in this regard, sources say.

The decision was taken while keeping in view the economic problems faced by farmers and the rising cost of farming.

According to sources, it is highly likely that the support price of wheat will be increased to Rs1,400 per 40 kg from the current Rs1,300 per 40 kg while in Punjab the sugarcane support price is expected to be enhanced to Rs200 per 40 kg from the existing Rs180 per 40 kg.

Keeping in view the problems and recommendations of farmers and representatives of the flour mills industry, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government is considering fixing next year’s wheat procurement target at up to 4 million tons.

Sources in the federal government told The Express Tribune that the centre had not increased support prices of wheat and sugarcane since 2014-15. They pointed out that during the period there had been a considerable increase in the cost of electricity, diesel and agricultural tools coupled with the rise in cost of crop cultivation.

Since the PTI came to power in August 2018, there had been persistent pressure from the farmers on Prime Minister Imran Khan and his close aide Jehangir Tareen to raise the support price of major crops including wheat and sugarcane. The federal government had enhanced the support price of wheat in 2014-15 to Rs1,300 per 40 kg from Rs1,250 per 40 kg. This was the last increase in the support price.

Sources added that according to the estimates sent by Punjab to the federal government, the support price of wheat should be raised to Rs1,400 per 40 kg or to a minimum Rs1,375 per 40 kg. The wheat cultivation season will begin next month.

The cultivation cost of sugarcane had increased to Rs192 per 40 kg so the procurement price should be in line with the cultivation cost, they said.

Published in The Express Tribune, October 31st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2090277/2-govt-likely-raise-wheat-sugarcane-support-prices/

COMMODITIES: COTTON TOUCHES SEASON’S NEW PEAK OF RS9,750 ON BRISK BUYING

Staff Reporter November 01, 2019KARACHI: Cotton prices on Thursday touched the Rs9,750 per maund as buying intensified.

Brokers said lint prices are likely to cross the Rs10,000 per maund mark in coming days as short crop continues to create panic among textile spinning mills.

According to market sources a deal from Ghotki materialised at a record price of Rs9,750 per maund while 2,000 bales from Rahim Yar Khan were done at Rs9,650 to Rs9,700 per maund on ready counter.

Much of the buying originated from textile mills which have no DTRE facility and depend on local cotton. However, those mills which can avail the remission of duty and taxes scheme are seeking imports.

On global front New York and Chinese cotton continued to firm up for all future contracts. However, Indian cotton remained under pressure owing to reports of bumper cotton crop.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were raised by Rs100 more to Rs9,450 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 3,400 bales, station Ghotki, at Rs9,700; 1,000 bales, Khairpur, at Rs9,000-9,100; 2,000 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,650-9,700; 1,000 bales, Mianwali, at Rs9,475-9,500; 600 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs9,700; 400 bales, Marrot, at Rs9,500; and 600bales, Haroonabad, at Rs9,400.

Published in Dawn, November 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1514149/commodities-cotton-touches-seasons-new-peak-of-rs9750-on-brisk-buying

'INCREASE IN WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE IMMINENT'

Staff Reporter November 02, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Langrial says that increasing the minimum support price of wheat has become necessary to keep the country food secure in view of the hike in prices of farm inputs.

"The cost of almost all farm inputs has shot up in the wake of 25 per cent devaluation of rupee against dollar necessitating to revisiting the support price of wheat," Mr Langrial told Dawn on Friday.

He argues for fixing the minimum support price at Rs1400 per 40kg up by Rs100 from the current rate of Rs1300 per 40kg. "The increase is essential to maintain food security of the country as wheat is the major staple food and the recent devaluation of the rupee against dollar has affected the farming sector because most of the farm inputs are imported."

The minister says so far they could not convince Prime Minister Imran Khan to enhance the support price as the latter fears it may hit particularly urban consumers.

"But the step is essential to offset the impact of increased cost of production and keep the country food secure."

Mr Langrial argues that the negative impact of the extra funds needed for procuring wheat at increased rates may be eradicated by reducing the procurement size to two million tons at national level for emergencies.

Published in Dawn, November 2nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1514432/increase-in-wheat-support-price-imminent

COTTON RISES TO RS10,000

Staff Reporter November 02, 2019

KARACHI: Rising price trend continued on the cotton market on Friday as demand for quality lint intensified. Brisk activity pushed cotton prices to a record Rs10,000 per maund.

According to market sources, some high quality cotton deals from Daharki, Ghotki and Dera Ghazi Khan were finalised at Rs10,000 per maund – season's highest rate so far. Phutti (seed cotton) prices also shot up owing to short supply of quality cotton, brokers said.

Reports coming from fields indicate that some locust attacks have happened in cotton growing areas of Muzaffargarh in Punjab. However, the damage to cotton crop remained below the threshold.

On the global front, New York cotton came under pressure after weekly cotton exports figures were released showing a decline of 23 per cent in exports. The biggest buyers of US cotton are Turkey and Pakistan.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were firm at Rs9,450 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,000 bales, station Khairpur, at Rs9,100-9,200; 1,000 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs9,300-9,450; 1,000 bales, Ghotki, at Rs9,600-9,700; 1,000 bales, For Abbas, at Rs9,375-9,400; 800 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs9,375-9,400; 1,000 bales, Jalalpur, at Rs9,500; 800 bales, Ahmedpur, at Rs9,500; and 800 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs9,700.

Published in Dawn, November 2nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1514371/cotton-rises-to-rs10000

ORDINANCE BE AMENDED TO WIDEN SIDA'S SCOPE TO ENTIRE SINDH, SAYS WB TEAM

Staff Correspondent November 02, 2019

HYDERABAD: The World Bank task team, led by Toru Konishi, on Friday held a meeting with officials of the Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (Sida) and discussed with them the issues relating to water management.

Appreciating the institution's working and performance, Mr Konishi noted that its work relating to establishment of farmers' organisations (FOs), management of projects and capacity-building of area water boards (AWBs) was laudable.

He told the officials that work was under way to bring all stakeholders of water resources under the umbrella of an integrated water resource management for which the Sindh Water Management Ordinance, 2002 should be amended.

Apprising the WB task team of the institution's future strategy, Sida chairman Abdul Basit Soomro said the authority had done a tremendous job for enhancing capacity of farmers' organisations and ensuring participation of growers in the irrigation system. He said relief could be provided to farmers by amending the ordinance in line with present-day needs. He said Sida's scope would be widened beyond four canals to entire Sindh.

He said that since Sida was not allowed to manage Sindh's three barrages, it should not be blamed for doing nothing on account of barrages.

He said that integrated water resource management needed to be established in Sindh and it would be fully supported. He said representation should be given to the departments of agriculture, forest, wildlife, local government, industries and other stakeholders on Sida's board so that they could play their due role in decision-making.

He said Sida was established in the wake of 120-year performance of the old irrigation system and related experiences. He said the authority was in its 23rd year and had successfully completed 99pc work for the formation of FOs and three AWBs. It was also ensuring their proper management, he added.

Mr Soomro said that 300 FOs were established within the jurisdictions of three AWBs and around 10,000 watercourse associations were also created. Around two million farmers were connected with these bodies directly or indirectly.

The Sida chairman told the WB team that the Water Sector Improvement Project (WSIP) was completed on time and within its given project cost and even some savings were also achieved, which reflected proper management on the part of Sida.

He said the WB and the economic affairs division of the federal government had also appreciated that performance. He claimed the WSIP stood number one in WB's ranking of projects as far as standards were concerned.

Mr Soomro said that a draft of the integrated water resource management could be presented in the next meeting of Sida's board for a review.

Sida member Prof Dr Rasool Bux Mahar suggested that the Sindh Water Management Ordinance, 2002 should be revamped after identifying its defects, which would lead to an improvement in the distribution of irrigation water up to the tail-end areas. This would ensure progress in agriculture sector as well, he added.

Others who also spoke included Sida managing director Wali Mohammad Naich, general manager (transition) Farzana Abbasi, Dr Bakhshal Khan Lashari and Dr Sajjad Chandio.

Published in Dawn, November 2nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1514304/ordinance-be-amended-to-widen-sidas-scope-to-entire-sindh-says-wb-team

'ILLEGAL APPOINTMENTS' IN PARC EAT AWAY MILLIONS

By Zafar Bhutta Published: November 2, 2019

ISLAMABAD: A member of the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (Parc) board of governors has criticised the Ministry of National Food Security and Research for its intervention into the affairs of the council and has called for convening a meeting of the board to resolve the outstanding issues.

In a letter sent to the minister for national food security and research, Parc board of governors non-executive member Naseer Muhammad Khan revealed that posting of project directors on political grounds as well as family and friendly connections had made a mess of all projects.

It was evident from their performance in terms of very low rate of fund utilisation, surrender of funds, inordinate delay in recruitment of project staff, etc, he said.

Khan drew attention of the minister to what he called mismanagement, unlawful intervention, indecisiveness and indifferent attitude of the Ministry of National Food Security towards the affairs of Parc.

He said funds approved by the board of governors in the previous meeting including the additional budget for clearing liabilities could not be arranged.

Resultantly, more than 200 retired officers and staff members could not be paid their legitimate service and pension dues and their families were suffering as there were no funds to pay medical bills, utility bills and so on.

He pointed to the persistent refusal to resolve a longstanding issue related to “269 illegally appointed and reinstated employees as per rules and the Islamabad High Court decision of June 12, 2019”.

“Millions of rupees are being spent on keeping the said employees at the cost of public exchequer,” he said.

Litigation was increasing due to failure of the administrative ministry earlier to process cases for appointing the Parc chairman and the council was facing a serious leadership crisis.

“Outreach establishments of Parc are also facing a financial and leadership crisis as funds expected to be generated from their own sources have decreased drastically due to these factors,” he said and called for holding a meeting of the board of governors to resolve the issues.

The appointment of the regular Parc chairman, Dr Azeem Khan, has also been questioned as a tailour-made advertisement was published where the age limit was set in the range of 55 to 62 years with MP-I scale position.

According to the federal government policy issued on March 28, 2019, a selection committee can be constituted for the appointment of chairman and must comprise the federal minister, federal secretary, one to three technical members and a non-executive senior member of the Parc board.

However, the Ministry of National Food Security formed the selection committee in violation of the government’s guidelines by including some unauthorised members, documents show.

The committee comprised the federal minister, federal secretary, Establishment Division additional secretary, food security ministry additional secretary and two co-opted members. The addition of unauthorised additional secretaries as members of the selection committee made its recommendations questionable.

Despite repeated attempts to seek comments, the national food security secretary did not respond to the requests.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 2nd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2091786/2-illegal-appointments-parc-eat-away-millions/

NANBAIS DEMAND 50PC RISE IN ROTI PRICE

RECORDER REPORT November 03, 2019

PESHAWAR: Nanbais (bakers) have demanded the district administration to increase roti price by Rs5.

Importantly, the representatives of the nanbai association have given a deadline till November 5 for the acceptance of their demand and warned if that didn't happen, they would increase price on their own.

Some nanbais said the rate of a 85kg flour bag has gone up to Rs 5,200, so they couldn't afford to follow the official roti price list.

"The roti, whose weight will be 150gm, will sell at Rs15," they said, adding that the recent hike in prices of flour was not affordable.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/11/03/3-page/808568-news.html

PAKISTAN TO LEARN FROM CHINA'S AGRICULTURE RESEARCH: VC SARGODHA VARSITY

By RECORDER REPORT on November 3, 2019

Vice-Chancellor, University of Sargodha, Ishtiaq Ahmed said that cooperation in the agriculture sector is very important between Pakistan and China and Pakistani universities which can benefit from Chinese research and technology in this vital field. Talking to China Economic Net (CEN) over prospects of agricultural cooperation between the all-weather friends and strategic cooperative partners, he said that in the areas of cooperation between China and Pakistan, the most important thing is agriculture.

Ishtiaq Ahmad said he has proposed many directions for cooperation between the universities of two countries. In the current phase of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), agriculture cooperation is identified as a very important area over which the two countries should strive to develop.

The VC said China offers a lot of opportunities because of its exceptional progress in agriculture, we can learn from China in term of viable seed production to have a greater per acre yield, he added. Pakistan, he said, is lagging behind in seed, pesticide and other forms of agricultural research. In fact, the world is way behind China and it is a great opportunity for Pakistani universities particularly those who specialized in agriculture to learn from what the Chinese have accomplished. He said Chinese academy of agricultural science is known for advanced research and technology.

“It is our great desire that apart from our other Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) with other Chinese institutions, we are focusing on our cooperation with Chinese academy of agricultural sciences in the future," he added. It may be mentioned that Pakistan and China have decided to expedite their bilateral cooperation in the field of agriculture under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The cooperation is being extended with a special focus on boosting cooperation in the areas of climate change, desertification control, desalination, water management, and ecological restoration, wetland protection and restoration, wildlife protection, forestry industry development, disaster management and risk reduction and other areas of mutual interest.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/03/540962/pakistan-to-learn-from-chinas-agriculture-research-vc-sargodha-varsity/

CHINA BOOKS DEAL FOR 132,000 TONNES OF US SOYABEANS: USDA

By RECORDER REPORT on November 3, 2019

Private exporters reported the sale of 132,000 tonnes of US soyabeans to China on Friday, the latest in a string of purchases the top buyer of the oilseed has booked as the world's two largest economies negotiate to end a bilateral trade war that has lasted more than a year.

The deal, which calls for delivery by Aug. 31, brings China's total US soyabean purchase commitments to 6.322 million tonnes for the marketing year. Since Sept. 1, the beginning of the marketing year, 1.64 million tonnes of US soyabeans have been exported to China, according to US Agriculture Department data.

Two years ago, before the trade war started, China had booked deals for 16.0 million tonnes of US soyabeans and 8.51 million tonnes had been shipped by the end of October.

US and Chinese negotiators have been racing to finalize text of the “phase one" agreement for US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping to sign, a process clouded by wrangling over US demands for a timetable of Chinese purchases of US farm products.

Chile's decision to cancel the Nov. 16-17 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Chile threw a wrench in plans for Trump and Xi to sign a deal on the sidelines of the meeting. Trump said on Thursday the United States and China would soon announce a new site.

US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said on Friday that “phase one" appears to be in good shape and is likely to be signed around mid-November. Lead trade negotiators from both the United States and Chine are expected to speak by telephone on Friday.

Ross added that there will be “some very good-sized transactions" announced while he is at a three-day summit of Southeast Asian nations in Thailand.

At 8:49 a.m. CDT (1349 GMT), Chicago Board of Trade January soyabean futures were up 3 cents at $9.35-1/4 a bushel.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/03/540897/china-books-deal-for-132000-tonnes-of-us-soyabeans-usda/

FARMERS BE IMPARTED EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE ENGINEERING, SAYS SAU VC

Staff Correspondent November 07, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Tandojam Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Mujeebuddin Memon Sahrai while speaking at a conference on agriculture has said that farmers should be educated in the discipline of agriculture engineering to get maximum yields and minimise environmental impact for their better livelihood.

It was time to strengthen connectivity through technology with the global community, he said and urged agriculture engineers to initiate research in various fields, focusing on emerging technologies especially high-efficiency irrigation system, artificial intelligence, modern drones, laser land levelling technology to cope with challenges of climate change and food security.

He said recommendations of the conference would be submitted to the government, and public and private organisations to follow the same for proper implementation of technology at the grass-root level. He said scientist's recommendations should be taken carefully and seriously for economic development.

Prof Dr Khalil Ahmed Ibupoto, dean faculty of agricultural engineering, delivered an address of welcome and shared contribution of his faculty which organised this successful event. He said they received papers and presentations of various subjects from scholars of the country and abroad.

Prof Dr Mashooq Ali Talpur highlighted the conference recommendations and said 110 research papers were received and 60 of them were presented in five technical sessions. He presented 18 recommendations of the conference.

He said agriculture management problems should be focused through use of information communication technology, capillary irrigation system and management of micro-irrigation system, and that integrated water conservation measures should be taken properly. There was a need for provision of purified water in the community living at the tail-end of Indus River, especially coastal areas of Badin, Sujawal and Thatta, for their better livelihood.

He said recommendations highlighted that organic matter should be focused for improved soil fertility and better yield of crops through various practices at the grass-root level, research areas should be focused on climate change and food security to get maximum yield.

He said it was suggested that modern technology should be adopted for agriculture; integrated mechanism should be framed to protect and revive wetlands of Sindh; technologies be introduced to improve shelf life and value addition for export of fruits and vegetables, green species (plant trees) should be planted in industrial areas for better environment and solar and wind energy should be focused to cope with challenges of energy.

VC Sahrai awarded shield of recognition to guest of honour Masood Ahmed Lohar, country head of GEP small grants programme Pakistan, and Dr Ahmed Amadi from Nigeria.

Prof Abdul Ghafoor Siyal, secretary of the organising committee, thanked delegates from different universities and institutes.

Published in Dawn, November 7th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1515289/farmers-be-imparted-education-in-agriculture-engineering-says-sau-vc

EU, CHINA AGREE TO PROTECT 100 OF EACH OTHER'S REGIONAL FOODS

By RECORDER REPORT on November 7, 2019

The European Union and China have agreed to protect 100 European regional food designations, known as geographical indications (GI), in China and 100 Chinese geographical indications in the EU, the EU Commission said on Wednesday.

The deal will protect the names of such products as cava, Irish whiskey, feta and prosciutto di Parma, as well as China's Pixian bean paste, Anji white tea and Panjin rice.

The deal significantly expands the number of foods protected by GIs from the 10 products on both sides that were agreed in 2012 and should help boost trade in higher-value goods.

“It is a win for both parties, strengthening our trading relationship, benefitting our agricultural and food sectors, and consumers on both sides," said Agriculture and Rural Development Commissioner Phil Hogan, who is currently visiting China.

Consumers are willing to pay more for GI products, he said, trusting the origin and authenticity of the goods.

But the agreement needs to be accompanied in China by updated laws and stronger enforcement, the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China said in a statement.

Government agencies often fail to help protect GIs because they are not defined as intellectual property rights under any specific Chinese law, leading to losses for EU companies, the statement said.

In addition, some of the cheese products mentioned in the deal cannot be exported to China anyway at present, it added. The agreement still needs to be approved by the European Parliament and European Council, which represents the national governments of the EU, but is expected to enter into force before the end of 2020, the Commission statement said.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/07/542316/eu-china-agree-to-protect-100-of-each-others-regional-foods/

COTTON YIELD TARGET LIKELY TO BE REVISED DOWN

By FAZAL SHER on November 7, 2019

The government is likely to revise down country's cotton production target of 10.2 million bales for the current season 2019-20 owing to increased moisture level in the produce following recent rains which will further deteriorate cotton lint quality.

Cotton Commissioner of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) Dr Khalid Abdullah while talking to Business Recorder said that rains would badly affect cotton crop as downpour during picking and harvesting stage of cotton increased moisture level in open balls which deteriorated its quality and delays its harvesting. “Delay in harvesting of cotton will indirectly impact on the upcoming wheat crop as it would delay its sowing," he said.

The Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) had earlier revised cotton sowing target downward by around 33 percent to 10.2 million bales from the initial target of 15 million bales for the current season as it missed sowing target by over six percent.

CCAC further stated that cotton arrivals in the ginning factories of Pakistan were lower by 27.04 percent compared to last year's arrivals of the same time period. This year cotton arrivals were recorded at 2.934 million bales as compared to 4.021 million bales last year.

Another official said recent rains would have a positive impact over other crops including sugarcane, wheat, Basmati rice and fodder. He said rains before sowing and till grain formation stage were greatly beneficial.

He said the government had set wheat production target at 27 million tons for Rabi season 2019-20 from an area of 9.2 million hectares of land. The official said sugarcane production for 2019-20 was estimated at 64.77 million tons from an area of 10.060 million hectares.

The rice production for 2019-20 is estimated at 7.7 million tons from an area of 3.036 million hectares. The area and production increased by 5.5 percent and 3.6 percent respectively from the target.

According to farmers advisory by National Agromet Center of Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), proper precautions during picking of cotton must be taken because the cost of good and clean quality cotton is higher.

Farmers were further advised to schedule the irrigation plans in context of upcoming Rabi crops. 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.

According to PMD widespread rain/wind- thunderstorm with snowfall over the hills is expected in all districts of Upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad, Gilgit Baltistan, Kashmir and at scattered places in Lower Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (DI Khan, Laki Marwat, Bannu, Karak, Tank, Kurram, Kohat and Waziristan) till Friday. Scattered rain/wind-thunderstorm is also expected at districts of upper/central Punjab on Wednesday and Thursday.

Isolated heavy falls may also occur in upper parts of the country. Hailstorm is also expected at isolated places during the period.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/07/542275/cotton-yield-target-likely-to-be-revised-down/

AGRI ENGINEERS URGED TO FOCUS ON EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

By RECORDER REPORT on November 7, 2019

Vice Chancellor, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam, Prof Dr Mujeebuddin Memon Sahrai has said that farmers should be educated for precession agriculture, engineering to get the maximum yields and minimize environmental impact for their better livelihood.

Addressing the closing session of the 1st International Conference on Agricultural Engineering and Technology (ICAET-2019), he maintained that it is the time to strengthen connectivity through technology with global community and urged the agriculture engineers to initiate research in various fields especially focusing on emerging technologies specially GI System, High Efficient Irrigation System, Artificial Intelligence, Modern Drones, Lazer Land Leveling Technology to cope the challenges of climate change and food security.

Prof Dr Khalil Ahmed Ibupoto, Dean Faculty of Agricultural Engineering and Chairman Conference Organizing Committee said that they have received papers and presentation of various subjects including climate change, GIS, RS, Artificial Intelligence, Post Harvest Technology, Environmental related and Farm Mechanization and Technology from scholars of country and abroad.

Prof Dr Mashooque Ali Talpur said that agriculture management problems should be focused through use of information communication technology, capillary irrigation system, management of micro irrigations system and integrated water conservation measures.

Later, Prof Dr Mujeebuddin Memon Sahrai awarded the shield of recognition to guest of honor Masood Ahmed Lohar, Country Head, GEP small grants program, Pakistan and Engr Dr Ahmed Amadi from Nigeria.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/07/542196/agri-engineers-urged-to-focus-on-emerging-technologies/

NOVEMBER

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOV 04th TO NOV 10th 2019

CHINA KEEN TO INVEST IN HALAL MEAT INDUSTRY

Ikram Junaidi Updated November 04, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Leader of a Chinese delegation Zhu Maa has shown interest in investing in Halal meat industry in Pakistan and exporting it to China and Middle Eastern countries.

Mr Zhu said this during a meeting with Minister for States & Frontier Regions and Narcotics Control Shehryar Khan Afridi.

According to a statement issued by the ministry on Sunday, the delegation from Sichuan Province has also a number of Muslims.

Saying China has good equipment and services, Mr Zhu vowed to showcase Pakistani products and Halal food in Chinese markets.

“I have visited Pakistan around half a dozen times and each time it was a great experience. People of both countries are very friendly. There is a need to project opportunities for investment in Pakistan to Chinese people,” he said.

Minister says one-window service for foreign investors has been introduced

The minister said that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has created opportunities for the underdeveloped countries to rise like China.

“Chinese President Xi Jinping’s vision will benefit the underdeveloped countries to join the world and they will rise with help from BRI,” he said.

Mr Afridi said the PTI government had launched a reforms process in Pakistan so it could be open for foreign investors.

“China and its people live in our hearts. Chinese people stood for Pakistan since day one. It gives me immense delight that I am meeting Muslims of China who believe in one God and faith.”

He said that China’s unprecedented rise reflects that a strong nation can get all parts of the country along and this is how President Xi has done wonders with his poverty alleviation campaign.

“We salute and cherish the way the Chinese government has got 800 million people out of poverty. Today China is an inspiration for the entire globe,” he added.

The minister said that Pakistan provided firm support to China during Ping Pong diplomacy and helped it become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and it (Pakistan) is still with China when it has become a great world leader.

“It is unfortunate that Pakistan’s image has been replicated negatively. I hope after watching Pakistan closely you would become ambassadors of Pakistan and tell Chinese nation how peaceful and loving Pakistanis are,” he said.

Mr Afridi said that due to Chairman Mao Zedong leadership and Deng Xiaopeng’s reform agenda, China has become one of the greatest economic giants of the world.

“Entrepreneurship is the way of Sunnah of Holy prophets. Pakistan is blessed with all resources. We have all seasons and we are blessed with our youths and we have rich mineral resources and fertile lands. Return on investment is much higher in Pakistan in the entire region and our government has opened Pakistan for international investors to come and invest here,” he said.

The minister said that Pakistan has rich resources of religious tourism and it has most out of 14 top mountains.

“Kohat is oil and gas producing district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Our manpower is doing wonders across the globe. One-window service for foreign investors has been introduced and the World Bank has declared Pakistan top country in Asia in Ease of Doing Business policy,” he said.

“Every single penny you invest here will be taken care of by Pakistan government. More people in Pakistan are now learning Chinese and inter-marriages are taking place,” the minister said.

Published in Dawn, November 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1514725

‘EXPIRED PESTICIDE AGGRAVATED LOCUSTS ATTACK SITUATION’

Irfanul Haq Updated November 04, 2019

RAHIM YAR KHAN: The locusts in the desert areas could not be eliminated soon after the onset of attack due to use of expired pesticide (malathion) Ultra Low Volume (ULV) which was in the stock of the Directorate of Locusts Control (DLC), Islamabad, sources told Dawn.

They said the efficacy of fresh pesticide would have been far more than the one used by the officials. The spray was done through plane and vehicle mounted machines. The danger of locusts attack on the crops had eventually been reduced because its breeding season had ended with the start of winter and it is migrating towards coastal areas of the north, they said. Speaking on the issue of recent locusts attack, Director General Agriculture Pest Control Punjab Syed Zafaryab Haider told Dawn that the newborn insect did more damage to the crops than that was done by mature locusts. He said the last time locusts appeared in the desert areas of Bahawalpur division was in 1997 and it did not reappear for more than two decades.

“Basically locust is an insect of desert. Initially, it started its journey from African countries and later travelling from Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Iran, it entered the coastal areas of Balochistan in March and then it started breeding. After its breeding season it entered Nara desert in Khairpur district of Sindh in April 2019.

“By the end of June, locusts entered some areas of RYK desert (Cholistan) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UNO organised a workshop of the stakeholders of three provinces for awareness,” said Mr Haider who came here to check the recent complaints of locusts attacks in the district.

He said Punjab Agriculture Secretary Dr Wasif Khurshid wrote a letter to the federal government to combat the insect. “The DLC which works under the Ministry of Food Security and Research provided 35,000 litres of Malathion ULV which was in very low quantity and quality in July last. In August 2019, two aircraft were also sent by the federal government for aerial spray. Later, the Punjab government requested the pesticides firms who donated 17,000 litres of pesticide.

The Punjab government in August provided funds for emergency purchase of Malathion and 10,000 litres of it was imported from China to control the locusts in RYK and Bahawalpur. After that 12,200 litre were added to the stock in September and last month, the DLC placed order for 100,000 litre fresh malathion for precautionary measures, he said.

Published in Dawn, November 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1514775/expired-pesticide-aggravated-locusts-attack-situation

PM TAKES NOTICE OF FLOUR SHORTAGE IN KP: MINISTER

By RECORDER REPORT on November 4, 2019

Minister for Information Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shaukat Ali Yousafzai Sunday said that Prime Minister Imran Khan has taken notice of the shortage of flour and directed federal government for distribution of demanding flour to other provinces. In a statement issued here Shaukat Yousafzai said that complete ban has been imposed on export of wheat, flour and semolina to Afghanistan adding after imposing ban it price would be decreased.

Shoukat Yousafzai said that 1.5 lac ton wheat has been provided to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa so far that would overcome the shortage of flour in local markets and people would be facilitated. He said that Chief Minister Mahmood Khan had informed the Prime Minister about the shortage of flour in the province and also imposed section 144 throughout the province in this regard.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/04/541170/pm-takes-notice-of-flour-shortage-in-kp-minister/

PUNJAB LIFTS BAN ON FLOUR SUPPLY TO KP

Staff Reporter Updated November 05, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government has lifted ban on the supply of flour to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

A decision to the effect was taken by Chief Minister Usman Buzdar at a meeting, attended by food ministers and secretaries of both provinces, on Monday.

Mr Buzdar said Punjab would fulfill flour needs of the KP and that the decision to restore the flour supply has been as a goodwill gesture for the people of the KP.

The flour supply to the KP would regularly be monitored and the chief minister also ordered the establishment of a joint body of two provinces to monitor the steps taken.

The KP food minister welcomed the decision and thanked Mr Buzdar.

At another meeting, the chief minister reviewed steps relating to welfare and protection of rights of farmers.

The meeting also reviewed proposals regarding the revision of support prices of wheat and sugarcane.

The CM pledged to protect rights of farmers and said sugar mills owners would have to issue valid receipts to sugarcane farmers and none would be allowed to usurp rights of the farmers.

Published in Dawn, November 5th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1514962/punjab-lifts-ban-on-flour-supply-to-kp

PADDY GROWERS PROTEST AGAINST MILLERS OVER LOW PRICE OF CROP

Correspondent November 05, 2019

BADIN: Hundreds of paddy growers and farm workers from various areas of Shaheed Fazil Rahu taluka gathered in Golarchi town on Monday and staged a rally and sit-ins on main roads and roundabouts to register protest against rice millers for offering them low price for their produce and unfairly deducting over five kilos extra grain on sale of each 40kg paddy.

They demanded that official price of paddy be fixed at Rs1,500 per 40kg and rice millers be stopped from exploiting them.

They warned if the government did not resolve the issue at the earliest they would continue their protest and observe sit-ins on all roads in the entire district.

The protesters' leaders Mohammad Ismail Mahery, Karim Bux Rajo and others said that the millers in the district were exploiting small farmers with impunity. They were forcing growers to sell paddy at cheap rate and were also deducting five to six kilos extra from sale of 40kg each on the pretext of moisture in the grain, they said.

They said that farmers had already suffered huge losses due to prolonged shortage of irrigation water before the onset of heavy rains and demanded the government fix the price at Rs1,500 per 40kg at the minimum. Besides, the millers be stopped from deducting the grain from their produce, they said.

Earlier, the marchers blocked all main roads leading in and out of the town by staging demonstrations and sit-ins, leading to traffic jams on highways of Badin-Karachi, Badin-Hyderabad and all bypass roads for over 10 hours.

Published in Dawn, November 5th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1514891

COTTON BALES ARRIVAL AT GINNERIES FALL 20.88 PERCENT

By RECORDER REPORT on November 5, 2019

Over 6.097 million cotton bales had arrived in the local markets as against the arrival of 7.706 million bales of the corresponding period of last year. The cotton arrival in the local markets by November 1st decreased by 20.88pc as compared the arrival of the corresponding period of last year, according the consolidate data statement of cotton arrivals in factories, issued by Pakistan Cotton Ginner's Association

Out of the total arrived cotton bales, about 4.467 million bales were sold as against the selling of 5.80 million bales during the same period of last year, where as unsold stocks were recorded at 596,447 bales by start of current month as against 793,598 bales of same period of last year, it added.

Out of the total arrived cotton bales, 4.425 million bales were sold to local textile mills as compared the selling of 5.720 million bales of same period of last year.

According the data, about 41,960 cotton bales were exported by the start of November, 2019 which was stood at 83,958 bales during same period of last year, it added

During the period under review, about 5.06 million bales were pressed compared with the pressing of 6.597 million bales of the corresponding period of last year.

By November 1st, stock of unginned cotton bales were stood at 1.033 million bales which were recorded at 1.108 million bales of same period of last year.

According the data, this year fourth nightly flow was recorded at 1,657,202 bales as against the flow of 1,662,137 bales of same period of last year, registering short of about 4,935 bales.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/05/541539/cotton-bales-arrival-at-ginneries-fall-2088-percent/

NA COMMITTEE TAKES NOTICE OF FERTILISER PRICE HIKE

By Haseeb Hanif Published: November 5, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Taking a strong note of the continuous increase in the price of fertiliser and fearing its negative impact on wheat production and food security, the National Assembly Special Committee for Agricultural Products has summoned a meeting on Thursday in which officials from the concerned departments would participate.

The committee session presided over by NA Speaker Asad Qaiser was held at the Parliament House on Monday.

The participants of the meeting, while expressing strong concerns over the increase in the price of fertiliser, maintained that the hike must be checked in order to avoid a crisis of wheat and food security in the future.

The committee directed to take immediate measures to ensure that the price of fertiliser was cut by Rs100 per bag and expressed concerns over the reports that fertiliser companies were collecting all sorts of taxes from farmers.

Representatives of companies who were present on the occasion could not convince the committee with their explanations.

The body observed that the price of fertiliser sold to Pakistani farmers was highest among Asian countries, while the competitive commission had failed to end the cartelisation. It was feared that increasing the price of fertiliser, especially Diammonium Phosphate (DAP), would affect wheat production.

The committee made it clear for the concerned ministries and fertiliser companies that wheat was directly related to food security and the crop cultivators and farmers would be disappointed if their complaints were not addressed.

The committee added that the farmers were helpless before the fertliser companies and if the matter was not resolved, many would be forced out or compelled to forgo wheat production, which would pose a risk to food security in the country.

The committee has called an immediate meeting of its price review committee on Thursday in which officials from the Ministry of Industries and Production have also been summoned along with other stakeholders, including the fertiliser companies.

Speaking on the session, PTI leader Asad Umar said that the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) tax was collected from fertiliser companies, while its burden was shifted on to the farmers.

The committee sought a balance sheet of the fertiliser companies.

During the meeting, committee members Fakhar Imam, Ghulam Sarwar Khan, Riaz Fatyana and others reviewed the complaints made by farmers and crop cultivators.

The NA body announced that the government would safeguard the rights of poor farmers rather than the privileged class. It was observed that other people took advantage of the relief and government support meant for the farmers.

The committee directed the federal and provincial authorities to present their policy framework regarding the export and storage of fruits, vegetable, and edible oil. It expressed the resolve that it would facilitate the farmers and cultivators in getting access to international markets.

Speaking to media after the session, Fatyana said that fake and substandard seeds had been hampering agricultural growth.

He lamented that cultivators of rice and maize had suffered losses in the current season and fixed responsibility on the Ministry of National Food Security and the Punjab Agricultural Department to resolve the issue.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2093691/2-na-committee-takes-notice-fertiliser-price-hike/

SCIENTISTS URGED TO COME UP WITH IDEAS TO FACE CHALLENGES IN FARM SECTOR

Staff Correspondent November 06, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Agriculture Minis-ter Mohammad Ismail Rahu has urged scientists to come up with new ideas to face challenges of water scarcity, climate change and food security with new technology.

He said the Sindh government had laun-ch-ed many programmes and projects for the development of the agriculture sector.

He was speaking at the first international conference titled ‘Agricultural Engineering and Technology (ICAET-2019)’ at the Sindh Agriculture University (SAU), Tandojam, on Tuesday. He said Sindh had potential in the agriculture sector and there was need to focus on agriculture value-addition and value chain to export quality products for economic development.

He said that agricultural engineering and technology was the best solution to cope with the challenges of climate change and food security. He added that the Sindh government was drawing a roadmap to achieve value addition, enhancing quality of produce and products, improving export viability and deployment of new technology for betterment of the farming community of Sindh.

He said the Sindh agriculture department was focusing on vertical agriculture farming, information and communication technology for sustainable agriculture and food security, cold chain system, climate-smart agriculture and drone technology for desert areas of Sindh.

He appreciated Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Mujeebuddin Memon and his team for efforts in agricultural engineering and technology and holding the first ever conference of agricultural engineering and technology in Pakistan at SAU.

The VC highlighted key issues which were hampering development in the agriculture sector of Pakistan. He said lack of technology and certified seed, and old methods of cultivation, conventional farming practices, absence of ecological-based cropping pattern, depletion of forests and lack of modern post-harvest technologies were main issues in Sindh.

Those issues could be resolved through organising national and international forums to come up with possible remedies and improving agricultural productivity, he added.

Pakistan’s economy was based on agriculture and Sindh was blessed with fertile lands and irrigation system, he said, adding that SAU would utilise these blessings for well-being of the rural communities of Sindh. He said there was a need to adopt modern technology of agricultural engineering for development of farm sector and the university was trying to organise national and international conferences to promote research and technology.

The conference would provide a platform to researchers, farmers, academia, experts and researchers to share and exchange innovation and technology.

Prof Dr Altaf Siyal from the US-Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies in Water (USPCAS-W) in his speech on ‘Wetlands of Sindh: Issues and Options’ highlighted importance of wetlands and discussed the related issues.

Engineer Dr Amadi Oko Amadi from Nigeria highlighted application of information and communication technology (ICT) in agriculture programme for sustainable economic development. He said this event would strengthen relationship between underdeveloped countries in the field of agricultural technology.

Prof Dr Khalil Ahmed Ibupoto, chairman of the conference organising committee, threw light on the role of agricultural engineering technology in meaningful development of agriculture in Pakistan.

Prof Dr Abdul Ghafoor Siyal thanked the conference delegates from different universities and institutes and those who came from abroad. The conference received 75 research papers and presentations from Pakistan and abroad on various subjects related to agricultural engineering and technology.

Dignitaries, delegates from KP, Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh and a large number of students, researchers, faculty members, scholars and other stakeholders from agriculture research, agriculture engineering, agriculture extension were present. The event would conclude on Wednesday.

Published in Dawn, November 6th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1515077

ICAET-2019 OPENS AT SAU: SINDH INITIATES AGRICULTURE SECTOR'S UPLIFT PROJECTS: MINISTER

By RECORDER REPORT on November 6, 2019

Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam organized 1st International conference on Agricultural Engineering and Technology (ICAET-2019).

Addressing the Inaugural Session of the conference, Sindh Minister for Agriculture Supply and Prices Department, Muhammad Ismail Rahoo, in his speech said that the provincial government has initiated many programs and projects for the development of Agriculture Sector in Sindh. He added that scientist should come up with new emerging technology to cope the challenges of water scarcity, climate change and food security from the country.

He added that Sindh has potential in agriculture sector and there is need to focus on Agri value addition and value chain to export the quality products for the economic development of the country. He said that Agricultural Engineering and Technology is the best solution to cope the challenges of climate change and food security.

He said that Sindh Government is working on a road map to achieve value addition, enhance quality of produce & product, improve export viability and deployment of new technology for the betterment of the farming community of Sindh.

Prof Dr Mujeebuddin Memon Sahrai, Vice Chancellor, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam while addressing inauguration ceremony said that lack of technology, lack of certified seed, old methods of cultivation, conventional faring practices, absence of ecological based cropping pattern, depletion of forests, lack of modern post-harvest technologies are the main issues in agriculture sector.

He further added that these issues can be resolved through organizing the national, international forums to come up with possible remidies under the environment of Pakistan and their adoption to improve the agricultural productivity through precision agriculture technology in the country.

Prof Dr Altaf Siyal, Engr Dr Amadi Oko Amadi from Nigeria, Prof Dr Khalil Ahmed Ibupoto, and others also spoke on the occasion.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/06/541911/icaet-2019-opens-at-sau-sindh-initiates-agriculture-sectors-uplift-projects-minister/

AGRARIAN DILEMMA: IS THE SMART SUBSIDY REALLY SMART FOR PAKISTANI FARMERS?

By Amir Naveed Chaudhry Published: November 6, 2019

LAHORE: For long, Pakistan has relied significantly on agriculture to bolster its economy. But lately, despite having extensive fertile land, abundant water, a suitable climate and an army of hardworking farmers, the country's agriculture sector seems to have dramatically slumped as production cost continues to increase and food prices skyrocket by the day.

According to Engro Fertilisers' Chief Financial Officer Imran Ahmed, introducing smart or targeted subsidy is the answer to Pakistan's growing food insecurity. Unlike the current subsidy offered by the government on the urea produced from imported Re-gasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG), he believes that smart or targeted subsidy has the potential to elevate the livelihood of Pakistanis and ensure food security with affordable prices for millions of people as well as small-scale farmers.

Data provided by fertiliser manufacturers in the country reveals that approximately 90% of the farmers in Pakistan own less than 12.5 acres of land and have access to only 45% of cultivated area, out of which 65% of small scale farmers own less than five acres of land. However, 10% of rich landlords claim more than 50% of the country's agricultural land, leaving the remaining 90% of farmers limited to small-scale holdings.

Hence, fertiliser manufacturers like Ahmed believe that the current form of subsidy selectively favours large-scale farmers whose agricultural income is untaxed, all the while neglecting small-scale and subsistence farmers, who form the majority of Pakistan's agricultural sector. This highlights the need for a targeted subsidy to empower the majority of small-scale farmers in the country.

However, farmer representatives dismissing the opinions of the fertiliser sector believe that the current method of subsidy is far more beneficial for them as compared to the proposed idea of a smart subsidy and rather demanded an increase in the current model.

According to President Farmers Bureau Pakistan (FBP) Zafar Hayat, the government will have to continue providing subsidy to both, small and large scale farmers for the agriculture sector to prosper.

"Not providing subsidy to 20% of large-scale landlords would mean ignoring about 80% of the country's agricultural land," he told The Express Tribune. "The proposal to implement smart subsidy is useless, as it potentially will hurt rather than benefit Pakistan's agriculture sector as a whole."

On the other hand, the fertiliser manufacturers have maintained that the area being prepared from imported RLNG is unserviceable to the farmers and has only been stocked in excess. They believe that if the same efforts were invested in providing subsidy to small-scale farmers with less than five acres of landholding, they would have had the chance of obtaining urea for free.

"Only 25% of the annual subsidy and cost would've been required to run an RLNG based plant and import urea, in order to reduce the price of urea by Rs500 per bag, for small-scale farmers," said a fertiliser manufacturer.

According to manufacturers, such a targeted subsidy would not only benefit farmers with small landholdings but can also balance the use of fertiliser in the country.

For instance, the Punjab government's targeted subsidy scheme reaped plenty in profit by directly providing phosphorous and potassium-based fertiliser to small-scale farmers.

Using Punjab government's initiative as a reference, fertiliser manufacturers believe the current method of subsidy could be further developed to be more effective.

"The mechanism should mandatorily be stake based so that it can be brought into action through a web portal, like Punjab government's model. Subsidy amount should be transferred directly into pockets of the small-scale farmers using their unique CNIC numbers"

Punjab Director General for Expanding Agriculture Dr Muhammad Anjum opined that the price of fertilisers must be reduced in order to ease the burden of agricultural cost on the farmers.

"The Punjab government, along with providing fertilisers to farmers is also taking several other steps to ensure the development of the agricultural sector," he concluded.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2094219/1-agrarian-dilemma-smart-subsidy-really-smart-pakistani-farmers/

SINDH COLLABORATES WITH BANKS TO FINANCE AGRI-BASED SMES

By Usman Hanif Published: November 6, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF) has collaborated with five banks to provide subsidised financing to agriculture-based small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

In a ceremony held on Tuesday, SEDF, a subsidiary of Investment Department Sindh, signed agreements with Bank Alfalah, Askari Bank, Meezan Bank, JS Bank and Al Baraka to facilitate agriculture related SMEs.

According to the agreement, SEDF will pay interest to banks on account of loans granted to SMEs based on the Karachi Interbank Offered Rate (Kibor). SEDF has offered interest rate subsidy at 100% Kibor of the capital cost and 50% Kibor of working capital to selected individuals who are found capable of setting up agri-business projects and can apply for a loan for a period of three years.

However, the total monetary value of the SEDF interest subsidy shall not exceed Rs50 million and SEDF financial support shall not exceed projects valuing Rs200 million.

"The Sindh government is making efforts to assist people associated with the agricultural sector in a bid to promote the use of modern technology," said Mohammad Usman Chachar, Chairman of Inspection Team of Sindh Chief Minister while talking at the ceremony. "Previously, it was believed that population was multiplying while resources were limited and eventually, the population would outnumber the available resources."

However, he added that technology has proved the theory wrong by providing exponential growth in agriculture therefore, the department wanted to support these innovations.

He added that the Sindh government had always taken a lead in such initiatives but for some reason, it was unable to materialise the initiatives and reap desired results, stressing that there was a need to identify the issue.

"We provide this facility to those who are bringing some innovation and modernisation in agriculture sector, which is lagging behind," SEDF Managing Director Mehboob ul Haq told The Express Tribune. "Previously, we gave the subsidy to similar business through a cumbersome process only to find out that banks had rejected loans to selected applicants, hence we decided to ink an agreement with banks to streamline the issue."

Now, he added, the banks would review the applicant's case and if they agree to grant the loan, they would forward the case to SEDF which will in turn inform the bank within seven days whether the case falls under its criteria or not.

Speaking on the occasion, farmer Muhammad Khan Sumejo said, "Every bank has different criteria with plethora of conditions to issue loans, which is a hurdle in the way of getting swift loans."

Published in The Express Tribune, November 6th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2094271/2-sindh-collaborates-banks-finance-agri-based-smes/

POST-HARVEST CROP LOSSES COST PAKISTAN OVER $1BN YEARLY: ADB

Amin Ahmed Updated November 08, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan could save about $1.13 billion annually by reducing up to 75 per cent of the current post-harvest losses, according to estimates mentioned in a paper on agricultural wholesale markets in Pakistan, released by the Asian Development Bank.

The annual value of post-harvest losses of potato, tomato, peas, cauliflowers, carrots, turnips, radish, brinjal, squash, okra, onion, grapes and mango in Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh, valued at the respective 2016 provincial wholesale prices, is about $700 million to $934m.

Discussing the case of Pakistan in a country market brief, titled 'Dysfunctional Horticulture Value Chains and the Need for Modern Marketing Infrastructure', the Rural Development and Food Security (Agriculture) Section of ADB, led by Akmal Siddiq, suggests that post-harvest losses in fruits and vegetables due to mishandling of the perishable product, poor transportation, and inadequate storage facilities and market infrastructure account for about 30 to 40pc of total production.

There is a dearth of reliable and timely data on production in Pakistan making it hard for the government to undertake effective actions related to export, import, public procurement of crops, or provision of advisory services to farmers to stabilise agricultural prices.

In view of these facts, the paper emphasises the need for the establishment of a national agriculture production information system to provide big data on production and prices using frontier technologies as used in developed countries.

The paper observes that several players are involved in different segments of the horticulture value-chain in Pakistan. Majority of the farmers sell their produce at wholesale markets while most of them contract out fruit orchards during the flowering stage to the middlemen, commission agent or wholesalers who provide loans to the farmers over the course of production.

Vegetables and fruits are transported by the same cart or truck from farms to the main markets in the absence of specialised vehicles for specific products. The same vehicle is used for many other purposes, including animal transportation. However, recently reefer trucks have been introduced on a limited scale in some parts of Pakistan.

Fruits and vegetables are packed using local materials before shipment, and in most cases such packaging fails to preserve the freshness and quality of the products. Another problem is absence of cooling and packaging centers, and inadequate cold storage facilities to preserve the produce at or near the wholesale markets.

More than 555 cold storage units have been identified in Pakistan with about 900,000 metric tons storage capacity, against more than 15m metric tons of production of fruits and vegetables. There are no available cooling and packaging houses, and cold storage facilities close to the farms that can be used by the producers.

The negative impacts of the current value chain can be assessed in terms of the low share of farmers in consumer prices. Usually producers get 15 to 20pc of the retail price. Production of perishables like potato, onion and tomato suffers from a major setback every three to four years. Usually two or three good harvests are followed by a bad harvest.

Published in Dawn, November 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1515596

RS2BN RELIEF PACKAGE MAY BE APPROVED TODAY

Mubarak Zeb Khan Updated November 08, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday asked top officials of the Utility Stores Corpo-ration (USC) to devise a relief package worth approximately Rs2 billion for selling five essential food items on discount across the country, Dawn has learnt from official sources.

The five products — rice, flour, pulses, sugar and edible oil — will be available at 4,000 USC outlets throughout the country.

Presiding over a meeting with his economic team to discuss ways for controlling the prices of essential commodities, the prime minister asked USC officials to work out details of the package by Friday (today).

The visibly disturbed premier held two consecutive meetings on the issue in two days.

“The package is expected to be approved at a meeting on Friday,” a source told Dawn.

Traditionally, the government offers subsidy on essential food items in Ramazan. But, according to the source, the prime minister is genuinely concerned and wants immediate relief.

The source said the prime minister would decide the total amount, mode of payment of subsidy on these products and duration of the scheme. The scheme will also devise some mechanism to allow the use of subsidised items only to genuine consumers and stop its misuse for commercial purposes.

During Thursday’s meeting various proposals were presented to bring prices of flour, ghee, sugar, pulses and rice down.

Communications Min-ister Murad Saeed proposed that besides 4,000 USC outlets, offices of the Pakistan Post in far-flung areas of the country could also be utilised for this purpose. The post offices could be used for selling subsidised essential food items, he suggested.

The prime minister is of the opinion it is the prime responsibility of the government to ensure not only availability of essential items in abundance, but their prices should also be checked. The state has to ensure that no person has to go to bed hungry, Mr Khan said, adding that the government is making all possible efforts to fulfill this responsibility.

Special Assistant to the PM on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation Dr Sania Nishtar presented proposals regarding provision of essential items to low-income and downtrodden people under the Ehsaas Programme.

The premier has already asked for establishment of a 'Special Cell' in the Ministry of National Food Security with immediate effect. The cell will take timely decisions about assessment of demand and supply of essential items.

Published in Dawn, November 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1515578

NON-FUNCTIONAL MILLS WON'T GET WHEAT: CS

By RECORDER REPORT on November 8, 2019

Sindh Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah Thursday directed the district administration to check flour prices in the market on a daily basis and conduct raids on mills and godowns for checking possible hoarding.

He was presiding over a meeting regarding hike in flour price in the city.

The meeting was attended by Food Secretary Laeeq Ahmed, Secretary Agriculture, Price Bureau and Supply, Agha Zaheeruddin, Secretary Implementation and Coordination, Riaz Ahmed Siddique, Additional Commissioner 1 Karachi, members of flour mills association and officers of Sindh Food Department.

The Chief Secretary stated that in Karachi, as per the requirement, 200,000 metric tons of wheat is being provided to flour mills and there is no shortage of the commodity.

He added that when the required wheat is being provided to them, why the prices of flour have gone high. Stern action will be taken against hoarders and officers concerned, he warned.

While briefing the meeting, the Secretary Food and members of flour mills association said out of 76 flour mills only 56 are functional in Karachi division, in Hyderabad division 9 mills out of 18, in Larkana division 18 out of 19 flour mills, in Mirpurkhas division 5 out of 9 flour mills, in Shaheed Benazirabad 8 out of 16 mills and in Sukkur division 26 flour mills out of 62 are functional.

The members of Flour Mills Association demanded of the government not to provide wheat to the non-functional flour mills. On this the Chief Secretary stated that those mills which were not functioning for last 13 months will not be given wheat quota and in this regard a policy will be put before the Sindh Cabinet for approval.

Mumtaz Ali Shah further stated that the provincial government has sufficient wheat stock and additional 400,000 metric tons will be given by the Passco to the provincial government.

The meeting was informed that the province had sufficient stock of wheat and flour but vested interests were trying to create artificial shortage. The association also informed the CS about illegal smuggling of wheat from Jacobabad to KPK and even Afghanistan.

The CS said he was optimistic that better wheat supply to mills would stabilize the market and reduce flour price. The CS also directed the deputy commissioner concerned to check flour price on a daily basis and conduct raids on mills and godowns.

On the occasion, a committee comprising one officer from each district administration and Sindh Food Department and two members of flour mills association was set up to check the quality of available wheat at warehouse of Sindh Food Department and submit report within 24 hours.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/08/542631/non-functional-mills-wont-get-wheat-cs/

CHINA IMPORT EXPO FOOD DEAL WORTH $42M SIGNED IN SHANGHAI

November 08, 2019

Food deal worth $42m signed in Shanghai

BEIJING: A Chinese snack company signed a deal with Pakistan pine nut provider worth 300 million yuan ($42 million) during the second China International Import Expo in Shanghai as the company furthers overseas efforts with opportunities brought by the Belt and Road Initiative.

With the new move, Halo Foods, Pakistan’s largest pine nut purchase and processing firm will continue to offer pine nuts to the Chinese firm, Bestore following their cooperation for over ten years, according to the Chinese media here on Thursday.

Hand-peeled pine nuts is now one of the most expensive nut products for our company, but both demand and output has grown rapidly with an annual increase of 20 percent, according to Yang Yinfen, CEO and president of Bestore.

“For Halo Foods, such cooperation will help the Pakistan firm to further explore the potential of the Chinese market,” said Shahbaz Siddique, financial head of Halo Foods.

“Globalization has been one of our key strengths. Currently, over 25 percent of our raw material comes from overseas,” Yang said. Among overseas purchases, Belt and Road economies including Malaysia and the Philippines as well as Turkey are some of the major sources.

“We are also considering and exploring some emerging markets, such as the African market,” Yang revealed. An earlier report pointed out that Chinese people consume around two trillion yuan of snack food every year following the country’s booming internet wave accelerating the growth.

To date, the Wuhan-based company in Hubei province has adopted 190 types of raw materials from 32 countries and regions. It has developed over 1,000 kinds of snacks so far.

Over 35 Pakistani companies will participate and showcase their products including top textile, leather and sports goods, surgical equipment, home furnishing and other products at the 2nd China International Import Expo (CIIE) scheduled to be held in Shanghai from November 5 to 10.—APP

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/11/08/7-page/809356-news.html

SUBSIDIZED RATES: PSC TO PROVIDE 200,000 CERTIFIED WHEAT BAGS TO GROWERS

By RECORDER REPORT on November 8, 2019

Punjab Seed Corporation (PSC) will provide 200,000 bags of approved varieties of wheat this year to the growers on subsidized rates. During the last fiscal, the Corporation earned a profit of over Rs29 million through sales of different seeds, said the Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial while chairing 116th meeting of the Board of Directors of Punjab Seed Corporation.

The meeting was attended by Dr Ghazanfar Ali Managing Director Punjab Seed Corporation, Member P&D Dr Arif, Member Finance Ch Abdul Ghafoor, Deputy Managing Director, Director Admin Rana Rafat, Director Finance Tariq Mehmood, Director Marketing Malik Ilyas, Director and Advisor Minister for Agriculture Shahid Qadir.

On this occasion, the Agriculture Minister was given a detailed briefing on the agenda of the Board of Directors meeting. The Agriculture Minister was also informed about the pace of construction of the new building of Punjab Seed Corporation. Naman Langrial said that the desired results could not be achieved without providing the best environment to the employees, therefore the construction of the State of the Art building is inevitable. We will also encourage agricultural scientists at all levels so that farmers can get high quality seeds at affordable prices. He said that Punjab Seed Corporation has the role of leader in the seed industry which is providing farmers with certified quality seeds at affordable rates as compared to the national and local seed companies and this is the dream of the present government of Punjab.

Agriculture Minister said that the mission of the present government is to raise the standard of living of the farmers of Punjab for which efforts are being made day and night.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/08/542597/subsidized-rates-psc-to-provide-200000-certified-wheat-bags-to-growers/

GWADAR FISHERIES DELEGATION VISITS CHINA

November 7, 2019715

BEIJING, Nov 7 (APP):A five-member Gwadar fisheries delegation visited leading enterprises in aquaculture, offshore fishing and aquatic product processing in China’s Fujian Province.

The delegation, at the invitation of China Economic Net, visited Fuzhou, Quanzhou and other places to examine the leading enterprises in aquaculture, offshore fishing and aquatic product processing.

The member of the delegation took a round of the production workshops, ports, docks, frozen storage, nursery, breeding bases and other places of the enterprises to learn more about the production scale, operation mode, deep processing of aquatic products, cold chain logistics, sales and trade.

The Pakistani side said that through this field visit to Fujian's seafood fishing, cold chain logistics, deep processing, and other industrial chains, it is full of expectations for the prospect of fishery cooperation between the two countries, and hopes to further strengthen communication and exchanges and accelerate cooperation to achieve substantive results as soon as possible.

It may be mentioned that Prime Minister Imran Khan, during his recent visit to China, had suggested enhancing fisheries trade between the two countries.

The two countries can increase cooperation in establishing fish meal factories, vessels monitoring system and fishing traceability to prevent illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing beside more exchange programs pertaining to the training of fishermen.

Trade liberalization policies of these two countries have resulted in increased commercial cohesion through fishery trade.

Under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework and trade liberalization, a new era of enhanced fishery trade between China and Pakistan is imminent. Now, China is the largest emerging potential market for Pakistani fishery products.

https://www.app.com.pk/gwadar-fisheries-delegation-visits-leading-enterprises-in-fujian-province/

PM APPROVES RS6BN RELIEF PACKAGE FOR CONSUMERS

Mubarak Zeb Khan November 09, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan approved on Friday an unprecedented relief package of Rs6 billion to provide consumers five essential items on discounted rates at Utility Stores Corporation outlets throughout the country.

Under the package, rice, flour, pulses, sugar and edible oil/ghee will be available at 4,000 USC outlets at subsidised rates from Dec 1. The prime minister asked the USC to complete the procurement of these commodities and its subsequent packaging within three weeks.

The package covers a period of three months for all consumers. It will be replaced with a targeted subsidy programme for needy people through Ehsaas Cards Scheme to be launched after three months.

The relief package includes a grant of Rs4bn for procurement of the five commodities and Rs2bn for subsidising the prices of these items. Under the package, the government will provide a subsidy of Rs132 per 20kg on flour, Rs20 per kg on rice, Rs9 on one kilogram of sugar, Rs30 per kg/litre on ghee/oil and Rs15 per kg on pulses.

Under the package, five essential commodities will be available at 4,000 USC outlets at discounted rates

Prime Minister Khan said the provision of relief to people was a top priority of his government. “We strive to provide special relief to low-income groups and poverty-stricken families,” he said, adding that in view of the challenging economic situation, the government had taken difficult decisions.

He directed the USC administration to ensure immediate and uninterrupted availability of essential food items to the public after the release of Rs6bn.

As per the directive of the prime minister, the Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Supply Corporation (Passco) will provide 200,000 tonnes of wheat to the USC to maintain the quality and quantity of flour at reduced rates.

PM Khan held three consecutive meetings on the issue in three days. The package was approved at a meeting attended among others by Minister for Planning and Development Khusro Bakhtiar, Minister for Communications Murad Saeed and Special Assistant to the PM on Social Welfare Dr Sania Nishtar.

The meeting was briefed on the current situation of the prices of flour, wheat, sugar, ghee, rice and pulses and the measures to control them.

USC chairman Zulqiurnain Ali Khan briefed the premier on the steps taken to curb corruption and embezzlement in the corporation and to ensure sufficient and steady supply of essential food items to the public. He said it was being ensured that the purchased items at the Utility Stores were received at the USC warehouses without pilferage for packaging and onward dispatch to its outlets. The measures were aimed at ensuring the quality of goods at the Utility Stores, in addition to eradicating corruption, he added.

However, the prime minister said it should be ensured through use of information technology and corruption must be eradicated at all USC outlets.

Murad Saeed said that in addition to a network of 4,000 Utility Stores, 800 post offices spread across the country could also be used to supply essential food items to the public. He said home delivery service would soon be started by the Pakistan Post Office to supply items to the poor and the needy.

After the meeting, USC managing director Umer Lodhi told Dawn that the package would provide immediate relief to the low-income people. The package will also revive sales at the USC outlets which have considerably dropped over the past few years.

Mr Lodhi said that it was a big challenge for the USC to complete the procurement in three weeks’ time and repack items and supply them to USC outlets across the country. “We have assured the premier that we would do the job within the projected time,” he said.

On the issue of misuse of the facility, Mr Lodhi said that a strong vigilance system would be in place to curb any such practice, adding that action would be taken against those responsible for selling these products for commercial purposes. “We will introduce special packing of these products,” he said.

Prime Minister Khan informed the meeting that due to government’s decisions the economy was stabilising and economic indicators were showing improvement and the situation would improve further in the coming days. “Despite the difficult conditions, every possible effort to provide relief to the people will be undertaken,” he added.

Published in Dawn, November 9th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1515738

TORKHAM RESIDENTS PROTEST FLOUR BAN

Correspondent Updated November 09, 2019

LANDI KOTAL: Scores of residents of Torkham held a protest demonstration on Friday against the ban on carriage of flour and other food items to their houses.

The protesting residents accused the staff of food and livestock departments posted at Michni checkpost of forcibly restraining them from taking flour to their houses for domestic consumption.

Qari Nazeem Gul, a spokesman for the residents of Bacha Maina, a residential locality close to Torkham border, said over 300 families resided in the area, while there were a number of nan bais (bakers) in Torkham Bazaar, but the livestock and food staff were not allowing them to take flour to their houses on the pretext that the commodity was smuggled to Afghanistan.

He alleged that the ban on flour for domestic use was imposed without taking people into confidence and that it had caused shortage of the commodity in a number of houses.

Nazeem Gul said the ban had also pushed up the prices of flour in the local market. He demanded of the district administration and respective departments to allow them to carry flour to their houses in accordance with their requirements.

Published in Dawn, November 9th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1515695/torkham-residents-protest-flour-ban

SLOW DAY ON COTTON MARKET

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterNovember 09, 2019

KARACHI: Trading activity on the cotton market slowed down on Friday as leading buyers suddenly withdrew to the sidelines. The previous day’s brisk activity was no more evident.

Barring a couple of big lot deals the market turned slow as major textile spinning groups took to the sidelines after replenishing their stocks at higher level a day earlier, brokers said.

There was marked evidence of prices coming down on ready trading. The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) also reduced spot rates by Rs50 per maund.

On the global front New York cotton moved up after US Department of Agriculture released export figures showing 52 per cent increase in export of cotton last week. However, Indian and Chinese market remained mixed to easy.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were lowered by Rs50 to Rs9,300 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,600 bales, station Khairpur, at Rs8,900-9,125; 1,400 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs9,550-9,700; 1,800 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,500-9,600; 600 bales, Yazman Mandi, at Rs9,100; 400 bales, Bahawalpur, at Rs9,100; 800 bales, Alipur, at Rs9,000; 600 bales, Rajanpur, at Rs9,000; 1,200 bales, Faqirwali, at Rs8,975; and 600 bales, Hasilpur, at Rs8,975-9,000.

Published in Dawn, November 9th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1515754/slow-day-on-cotton-market

PBIF CHIEF FOR INTRODUCING PEST-RESISTANT COTTON SEED

By RECORDER REPORT on November 9, 2019

Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum (PBIF) president Mian Zahid Hussain has emphasized the need to introduce pest-resistant cotton seed which can withstand climate change and other problems otherwise all stakeholders will suffer as hundreds of ginning factories have already been closed due to low output.

He said cotton growers are shifting to other crops due to low productivity, reduced profit, climate change, sub-standard seed and pesticides and other factors which are a great threat to the country's agricultural and industrial base. Mian Zahid Hussain said cotton production was 15 million bales in 2013-14 which fell to 10 million bales during the last year while the production in the current season is yet dismal.

He said the country can lose title of major cotton-producing country if cotton policy and sowing methods are not changed altogether. Cotton crop is failing to cope with the challenge of climate change, therefore, the government should intervene in it immediately while the textile sector should also step forward to save its future, he said.

Continued reduction in cotton output is hitting the largest export earner and job providing sector while the textile sector should not remain confined to the demand for duty-free cotton imports.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/09/542914/pbif-chief-for-introducing-pest-resistant-cotton-seed/

MORE EXPORTABLE SURPLUS IN RICE POSSIBLE BY INTRODUCING MACHINES

By ZAHID BAIG on November 9, 2019

Pakistan can easily produce more exportable surplus in rice, without bringing more land under rice cultivation, by just introducing rice transplanters, laser land levelling and Kabuta harvesters as these machines will help increasing farm yields by about 30 percent.

More exportable surplus means fetching more precious foreign exchange, increasing the profitability of the growers and ensuring food security.

At present manually, around 50,000-60,000 plants of rice are sown in an acre in the country while using a transplanter can take this number to 100,000 plants an acre leading to increase in per acre yield. By this way, Pakistan can increase basmati rice production by another 20 percent or so without bringing more arable land under rice cultivation.

Similarly, if the land is levelled by the use of laser land levellers, we can ensure saving of 30 percent of water in rice cultivation besides saving the fertilizers, pesticides and other nutrients. This will bring down the cost of sowing adding to the profits of the growers. According to studies, 4000 litres of water is needed to produce 1 kilogram of rice and by saving 30 percent we can save billions of rupees in a country which is already water-starved.

Samee Ullah Chaudhry, former Chairman Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) and CEO Atlas Foods disclosed this while talking to a delegation of the Agriculture Journalists Association (AJA) here on Friday. The delegation observed the process of converting paddy into bright shining super basmati rice.

REAP Treasurer Abubakar Farooq Mirza and Secretary-General Kashif ur Rehman were also present on this occasion.

“We have a lot of potential to export rice but government and farmers are lacking vision and policies whereas India is getting almost 2 tons yield from 1 hectare whereas we are still hovering around 1.2 ton only."

Samee said that using rice harvesters can help to control the post-harvest losses which account 10 percent of the total crop at present. “World overuse of harvester is being encouraged whereas in Pakistan, mostly the Paddy is cut using wheat harvesters which produce more broken in the Paddy and farmer is losing money.

For example, one per cent of additional damage to paddy reduce the export price by $10 to a ton and you can multiply this to millions of tons of paddy. If implemented this saving will be a great addition," Samee Ullah Naeem claimed.

At REAP we are of the policy “Preserve what we grow and Grow More – Export more", Samee Ullah said, adding that paddy in Pakistan is mostly sun-dried that increases yellow kernels due to heat damage and produces a fungus that risks a generation of mycotoxins, a carcinogenic and genotoxic material.

Less than 10 per cent of paddy harvest is mechanically dried and we need to incentivize industry that uses mechanical dryers for paddy drying. Almost 10% of the crop is damaged due to lack of drying facility and by this interception, we can have surplus grain worth 250 million USD to export.

The unavailability of low markup (ERF) funds is considered as an impediment for rice exports. If funds aren't available on priority, we will lose out our competitiveness and will miss the target of 2.5 billion USD for this year.

Demand-driven research is the only workable solution as proven elsewhere in the world many times. We still follow the process of research in isolation whether in the public or private sector, federal or provincial or between traditional rice breeder or molecular scientist. As a combination of the above and other factors, the result is an agricultural disaster in the making.

If all these measures are handled on priority, we may be able to double exports to 5 billion USD in next 3 years.

Atlas Foods (Pvt) Limited is a well-known name in rice export around the world. Since last year, Atlas Foods in collaboration with Ebro Foods (Spain) is successfully disseminating the standards of Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) in Punjab and Sindh provinces.

SRP is a global multi-stakeholder alliance launched in 2011 and led by UN Environment, IRRI and GIZ, comprising 120 institutional stakeholders, including public and private sector stakeholders, research, financial institutions and NGOs.

Atlas Foods and Ebro Foods are practically implementing the principles of Sustainable Rice Platform with the help of farmers. Initially, work has been started with 250 farmers in tehsil Kamoki (district Gujranwala) and tehsil Khanpur (district Shikarpur) on sustainable Rice production. In this project, practical training is being given to the farmers on sustainable rice production by making learning groups (LG's).

This will not only reduce the cost of production but also increase the per acre yield of rice crop. Sustainable Rice Platform will not only boost the yield but also help improve the quality of rice according to the international standards which will not only result in a major boost to the export sector of the country but also make its mark around the globe.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/09/542906/more-exportable-surplus-in-rice-possible-by-introducing-machines/

CLIMATE CHANGE EFFECTS: SOWING OF CROPS-INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM STRESSED

By MUHAMMAD SALEEM on November 9, 2019

The Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar on Friday said that institutional mechanism should be devised to deal with the climate change effects in sowing of crops while steps should be made for improving capacity of agriculture research institutions.

The CM held a meeting at his office here in which different steps were reviewed to provide facilities to the farmers and to develop agriculture sector on modern lines. The meeting reviewed measures to save crops from locust attack and start of internship program for agriculture graduates was decided as well.

The chief minister was informed that a new floriculture program will also be started with an amount of Rs 400 million.

Addressing the meeting, Sardar Usman Buzdar said that agri development will strengthen the economy and vowed to continue the protection of farmers' rights. The government will give proper reward to sugarcane growers in the next season as was done for wheat and sugarcane growers, he added.

He directed continued monitoring of Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalnagar and further directed to continue spraying till the complete elimination of swarms.

The meeting was told that six camps have been set up in Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalpur along with 16 surveillance teams for anti-locust operations.

Provincial ministers Raja Basharat, Nauman Langrial, Chief Secretary, Chairman P&D, provincial secretaries, chairman taskforce for fertilizers and others attended the meeting.

The CM in another meeting said that further delay in release of vehicles' number plates will not be tolerated. "Instead of lip-service, performance has to be given now and further time should not be wasted in departmental activities.; immediate steps should be taken in accordance with the law and early release of number plates should be ensured," he said.

He directed that Excise & Taxation Department should work with more speed keeping in view the difficulties of the people.

Moreover, a delegation of Sikh leaders came from Amritsar called on Chief Minister Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar at CM's Office today. Provincial Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights Sardar Mahinder Pal Singh was also present on the occasion.

Sikh leaders from Amritsar thanked the chief minister Punjab for Baba Guru Nanak University project in Nankana Sahib. Sardar Mahinder Pal Singh while lauding the services of Chief Minister Punjab said that Sardar Usman Buzdar has won the hearts of Sikh community of Pakistan as well as India. Baba Guru Nanak University project is a historic step of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf government. Sikh leader from Amritsar Bikram Jeet Singh Lati said that we will always be thankful to Prime Minister Imran Khan and Usman Buzdar.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/09/542907/climate-change-effects-sowing-of-crops-institutional-mechanism-stressed/

PUNJAB TO SET UP FARMER MARKETS, HOME DELIVERY SYSTEM

By RECORDER REPORT on November 9, 2019

The Punjab government has decided to set up farmer markets at tehsil level and start home delivery system in five big cities to ensure availability of eatables at fixed prices in the province.

Presiding over a meeting to review steps to control prices on Friday, the Chief Secretary Punjab Yousaf Naseem Khokhar said that initially home delivery system would be launched in Lahore, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Multan as a pilot project.

He mentioned that Qeemat Punjab App had been developed to monitor prices and effectively address complaints of consumers, adding that facility of online purchase of commodities at fixed rates would now also be provided through this app. He asked the officers to enhance awareness among people to fully benefit from Qeemat Punjab App.

The Chief Secretary stated that from next week farmer markets would start working in 30 fruit and vegetable markets in different districts where farmers would directly sell vegetables, fruits and similar commodities without involvement of a middle man. Later, two such farmer markets would be established at Tehsil level in every district, he maintained. He said that profiteering would not be tolerated in any case, adding that it is top priority of the government to provide relief to the common man and no compromise can be made on this important matter. He directed that stern action be taken against profiteers, hoarders and those creating artificial dearness. He asked the officers to keep a strict check on wholesalers rather than shopkeepers because it would help stabilize prices.

He said that sale of eatables, especially wheat flour, sugar, ghee and Roti, would be ensured at the prices fixed by the government and for this purpose price magistrates and market committees be made ‘more active'. He directed that administrative officers must oversee the auction process in fruit and vegetable markets in districts, besides keeping a check on demand and supply of commodities, which is a key factor in controlling prices.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/09/542908/punjab-to-set-up-farmer-markets-home-delivery-system/

LIVESTOCK SECTOR MADE LITTLE PROGRESS IN PAST: CM KAMAL

By Our Correspondent Published: November 9, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal said that the province lagged behind in livestock in comparison with other provinces because little progress had been achieved in the sector.

“The province can develop with a rapid pace if basic needs like water are fulfilled,” said the CM addressing a seminar on livestock in Islamabad.

Kamal vowed to utilise available resources to expand the livestock sector in the province.

Comparing natural resources of Balochistan with Australia, the CM said, “Balochistan is spread over a vast area of land, the coastal belt of the province is huge and resources of Reko Diq are immense.”

Kamal emphasised that the projects of solar power in the province could be successfully accomplished because the province was rich in resources.

The CM anticipated that the province could serve as a reservoir of water in the future.

“People were busy discussing drought when the provincial government took charge of Balochistan in 2018. However, after a short span of two months, the province faced heavy rains and floods,” said the CM.

Kamal said that the province has the capacity to store massive quantity of water in the seasons of heavy rains.

“The provincial government is working to utilise resources for storing water,” he said.

The CM claimed possibility of foreign investment in Balochistan as according to him interest was expressed by governments and independent organisations.

Reiterating the provision of basic necessities of the province, Kamal said that the province could grow rapidly after the needs were fulfilled.

Stressing the importance of the province, the CM said, “The economic progress of Pakistan is associated with Balochistan.”

Kamal said that success was ultimate if proper investment was made in specific sectors of the province.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 9th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2096317/1-livestock-sector-made-little-progress-past-cm-kamal/

AGRI GRADUATES TO BE TRAINED: CM

NOVEMBER 09,2019

LAHORE: A total of 130 agriculture graduates would be given training at a cost of Rs200 million, said Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar.

He was presiding over a meeting which reviewed efforts to provide facilities to farmers and development of the agriculture sector on Friday.

It was decided in the meeting that an internship programme would be started for agriculture graduates. The chief minister said that a new programme for the promotion of floriculture would be launched in the province at a cost of Rs400 million.

He added that the country's economy would strengthen with the development of the agriculture sector. "The rights of farmers would be protected in the future as well. The incumbent government had given due price to growers of wheat and sugarcane for their hard work.

The CM further saed that sugarcane growers would get due price for their crop in the coming season as well.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201911090258&EN_ID=11201911090083&EMID=11201911090029

'RICE SECTOR MODERNISATION CAN TAKE EXPORTS TO $5B'

By Our Correspondent Published: November 9, 2019

LAHORE: Modernising the rice sector through the introduction of transplanters, laser land-leveling and Kubota harvesters can help enhance farm yields and save pre and post-harvest losses, said Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) former chairman Sameeullah Naeem.

He added that this will ensure the availability of more exportable surplus to fetch precious foreign exchange, increase the profitability of the growers and ensuring food security.

At present, around 50,000-60,000 plants of rice are sown manually in an acre in the country, while using a transplanter can take this number to 100,000 plants an acre, he added. This way, Pakistan can increase basmati rice production by another 20% without bringing more arable land under rice cultivation, said Naeem.

Similarly, if the land is leveled by the use of laser land leveling, we can ensure saving of 30% of the water in rice cultivation besides saving the fertilisers, pesticides and other nutrients. This will bring down the cost of sowing adding to the profits of the growers, the official remarked.

He said that using rice harvesters can help to control the post-harvest losses, which account for 10% of the total crop at present.

''World overuse of harvester is being encouraged whereas in Pakistan, mostly the paddy is cut using wheat harvesters which produce more broken paddy and farmers lose money."

Citing an example, he said 1% of additional damage to paddy reduces the export price by $10 to a ton and you can multiply this to millions of tons of paddy. "If implemented this saving will be a great addition,'' Naeem claimed.

"Less than 10% of paddy harvest is mechanically dried and we need to incentivise the industry that uses mechanical dryers for paddy drying."

He said that almost 10% of the crop is damaged due to lack of drying facility, adding, "By this method, we can have surplus grain worth $250 million to export."

The unavailability of low mark-up funds is considered as another impediment for rice exports. "If funds are not available on priority, we will lose out our competitiveness and will miss the target of $2.5 billion for this year," Naeem said.

Demand-driven research is the only workable solution as proven elsewhere in the world many times, he added.

If all these measures are handled on priority, we may be able to double exports to $5 billion in the next three years.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 9th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2096289/2-rice-sector-modernisation-can-take-exports-5b/

CONSUMERS IN KARACHI GET FRESH SHOCK AS TOMATO PRICE JUMPS TO RS320 PER KG

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated November 10, 2019

KARACHI: Tomato prices hit Rs320 a kilogram on Saturday, sending a shockwave to consumers with a massive jump from Rs160 per kg in a single day.

More bad news was on the cards for consumers as greengrocers said that onion prices in the wholesale market on the Superhighway had reached Rs75-80 per kg from Rs60 in just one day.

"Only two consumers bought half a kilo of tomato each out of 12 to 15 customers as most of them purchased 250 grams because of the high rates," said a vendor in FB Area, adding that consumers received a shock after hearing tomato prices. He blamed the hike on the soaring wholesale rate of tomato to Rs260-270 per kg from Rs120-140 on Friday.

He was of the view that the arrival of tomato from Quetta and Swat had slowed down drastically over reports that the winter wave had affected the tomato crop.

City govt has quoted Saturday's consumer price of Rs199 per kg for tomato; item unavailable at this rate in the metropolis

The city government had quoted Saturday's consumer price of Rs199 per kg for tomato which was Rs147 on Friday. However, neither tomato nor any other such items were available at official rates in the city.

Yet there is some stability in the prices of other vegetables such as capsicum, whose price dropped to Rs240 from Rs280-320 per kg of last week.

Tinda (apple gourd) price remained unchanged at Rs100 per kg while bottle gourd (lokki) and ridge gourd (turrai) came down to Rs60 and Rs60-80, respectively, from the previous prices of Rs100 and Rs160 per kg.

Brinjal was selling at Rs60 per kg while cauliflower, cabbage, carrot and turnip were priced at Rs60-80 per kg, whose prices came down by Rs20-40 per kg.

The president of the Falahi Anjuman Wholesale Vegetable Market New Sabzi Mandi, Haji Shahjehan, said the arrival of Iranian tomato had also come to a halt followed by slow arrival of Balochistan crop. Some quantity of it was also coming from Kabul which had also stopped. While disagreeing with Rs276-270 per kg wholesale rate at the mandi, he said vegetable dealers quoted very high wholesale rates to justify their retail price as tomato's actual wholesale rate on Saturday was Rs220 per kg.

He said onion's wholesale rate swelled to Rs75 from Rs60 following suspension in arrival of the Iranian variety.

Haji Shahjehan said Sindh's tomato crop had been delayed, which used to arrive in October every year. However, the new crop would find its way into the market after the third week of this month.

He said the Sindh onion crop had started arriving in a low volume but it would improve after 15-20 days.

Surprisingly, export of onion is also going on at a very high wholesale rate of Rs75 per kg since Indian onion is not finding its way into some Far Eastern countries, Sri Lanka etc. In these destinations, Pakistani onion is being sent regularly, he said.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1515873

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOV 11th TO NOV 17th 2019

WHEAT SUPPLY TO SINDH, KP BEGINS

Amin Ahmed Updated November 12, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The supply of wheat to Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have commenced as decided by the Economic Coordination Committee of the cabinet at its recent meetings, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research announced on Monday.

The ECC had allowed the Pakistan Agricultural Stor-age and Services Corpora--tion (Passco) to dispatch 0.95 million tonnes of wheat to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Balochistan.

Passco has started releasing its surplus wheat stocks amid the continuous rise in flour prices in the country.

The first phase of transportation began on Sunday with 250 tonnes of wheat from Passco's Khanewal and Vehari godowns.

On Monday, almost 600 tonnes of wheat was transported from Passco's Khane-wal, Vehari, Burewala and Baha-wal-nagar zones.

The ministry said in its press release that the transportation of wheat to Balochistan is likely to start soon.

It added that dispatch of wheat to Khyber Pakhtun-khwa is starting from six Passco zones — Alipur, Multan, Khanewal, Vehari, Burewala and Bahawal-nagar.

Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mohammad Mehboob Sultan has directed Passco to rigorously pursue the transportation to avoid any emergency situation.

The ministry is in close liaison with Passco on the movement of consignments to the provinces, stated the press release.

Published in Dawn, November 12th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1516192/wheat-supply-to-sindh-kp-begins

MINISTER VOWS TO UPLIFT FARM SECTOR

A Corresponden tNovember 12, 2019

QUETTA: Provincial Minister for Irrigation Tariq Magsi on Monday vowed to uplift the agriculture and irrigation sectors of Balochistan.

During a meeting with Minister for Agriculture Zamrak Khan Achakzai, the irrigation minister said: "Irrigation and agriculture departments have been playing a vital role in booming Balochistan's economy, so these sectors need to be shifted on modern technology."

Mr Magsi said the Balochistan government had been taking measures in agriculture and irrigation departments. He said the chief minister believed in merit so new recruitments would be made on merit in order to allow talented youths to utilise their skills for development in the province.

Published in Dawn, November 12th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1516183/minister-vows-to-uplift-farm-sector

ADB $2.5M GRANT TO IMPROVE FARM SECTOR PRODUCTIVITY

Amin Ahmed November 12, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank has approved a grant of $2.5 million for a technical assistance designed to facilitate rapid adoption of advanced technologies to improve the productivity and profitability of the agriculture sector in Punjab.

The ADB assistance will help increase farmers access to technologies to strengthen agriculture value chains in rural Punjab, and contribute to farmers' high income, improved livelihood in rural communities, increased food security, and sustainable agriculture growth of the province, a report released by ADB said.

Through the activities financed under the technical assistance, farmers' access to technologies for harvest, post-harvest and direct marketing will be enhanced, and engagement of agribusinesses and agriculture-based industries operating in value chain businesses will be strengthened.

The Punjab Agriculture Department had requested assistance from ADB to improve the overall performance of the sector through strengthened value chains supported by advanced technologies.

The technical assistance is co-financed by the Japan Fund fort Poverty Reduction and will be administered by the environment, natural resources, and agriculture division of Central and West Asia Department of ADB. The Punjab government's agriculture policy emphasises modernised agriculture management and improved value chain development.

The ADB-financed Punjab basmati rice value chain knowledge and support technical assistance which was implemented from 2014-18, supported small farmers' use of advanced technologies in their farming practices for basmati rice, a premium commodity for export.

According to the project document, the basmati technical assistance set the stage for ADB private sector support to the basmati rice producers, and based on the achievements of basmati technical assistance, the Punjab agriculture department intends to further support Punjab's small farmers in using and adopting advanced technologies with a focus on harvest, post-harvest, and marketing activities for three grain crops — rice, wheat and maize — that are the main income source of many small farmers in This further support will include engagement with private sector service providers and relevant industries in the grain value chain, for which ADB's continued assistance is required.

The document says the technical assistance will have four outputs: demonstration of advanced harvest and post-harvest technologies conducted; ICT-based direct marketing platform developed and installed; capacity of stakeholders in developing and adopting advanced technologies increa--sed; and investment opportunities to scale up the adoption of technologies formulated.

Published in Dawn, November 12th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1516245/adb-25m-grant-to-improve-farm-sector-productivity

GROWERS DEMAND FIXING OF CANE PRICE BEFORE 21ST

Staff Correspondent November 12, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) has threatened to launch a protest movement from Nov 21 if the Sindh government does not issue notification for sugar cane's indicative price for 2019-20.

Addressing a press conference at the local press club on Monday, SAI president Nawab Zubair Talpur said sugar cane was cultivated on 700,000 acres in Sindh, but due to "intransigence and arrogance" of sugar mill "mafia", its cultivation had declined to 500,000 acres.

He said that due to climatic conditions, sugar cane harvesting took place in October and because of cartelisation, its crushing could not take place on time in Sindh. Only two sugar factories had started crushing while on the other hand sugar mill "mafia" was again ready to exploit growers like every year.

He said that sugar mill owners are bound to commence crushing in October as per Sugar Factories Control Act. He said that for sugar mills to start crushing, it was necessary for the Sindh government to fix sugar cane price first. He regretted that the Sindh agriculture department had not issued a price notification yet.

He said that currently due to hoarding of wheat, flour crisis was being witnessed and due to delay in harvesting of sugar cane, sowing of wheat crop was also being delayed. He stated that the SAI had decided to start protest on Nov 21 if the Sindh government did not fix sugar cane price by Nov 20. He also condemned registration of cases against paddy growers of Golarchi who were booked for holding a protest.

He also expressed concern over damage caused by locust in Sindh. The Sindh agriculture department did not take any action to control locust attack which was also being witnessed in Karachi.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516132/growers-demand-fixing-of-cane-price-before-21st

A CRUSHING WHEAT CRISIS

From the Newspaper November 12, 2019

Wheat flour prices are on the rise even though we have enough stocks in the country and the government has banned the exports of wheat and wheat flour.

Six months ago, prices of ordinary wheat flour were in the range of Rs33.5 and Rs34 per kilogram. But now they have soared to Rs48.5-49 per kg, according to a recent Dawn report. This price surge, more than 30 per cent within six months, betrays the soundness of our entire wheat economy. It is a proof of the lack of coordination between the provinces and the federation.

In August, Pakistan had wheat stocks of 7.42 million tonnes, far less than 10.77m tonnes it had a year ago. The federal government had already banned the export of wheat and wheat flour on July 25. On the face of it, the country was bound to see a wheat flour crisis and averting it required enough imports and effective checks on the smuggling of wheat and wheat flour from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Afghanistan.

But between July and September, not a single grain of wheat was imported and the smuggling of wheat flour from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Afghanistan continued. The federal government did realise the seriousness of the wheat crisis — that hit Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa severely — in October and sprang into action.

Effective curbs were imposed on smuggling and the federal government told a Senate committee on Oct 23 that it was considering allowing imports.

The problem has its roots in the improper assessment of the grain availability, bureaucratic delays and poor coordination within different tiers of government

So the wheat flour crisis has its roots in the improper assessment of the grain availability, bureaucratic delays in decision-making and a lack of coordination between federal and provincial governments as well as within provincial governments. Pakistanis experience a wheat flour crisis after every few years, but the current crisis is unique: we are experiencing it at a time when the same party is in power in centre Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. During the PML-N rule, this was not the case.

Whether it is the naivety of the PTI's maiden federal government or our rotten and corrupt bureaucratic system — or perhaps both — we are once again in the vortex of a wheat flour crisis. The federal and provincial governments are trying to mitigate its effects on the public, but they are late. People have already suffered. They suffer now and may continue to suffer until these efforts bear fruit.

This is not to suggest that general inflationary trends in the economy have nothing to do with the recent price escalation of wheat flour. Headline inflation has remained in double digits since August when the year-on-year increase was 10.5pc. It increased to 11.4pc in September before inching down to 11pc in October, data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reveals.

What is more disturbing is that food inflation in both urban and rural areas has remained even higher. Urban food inflation in August stood at 11.9pc. It soared to 15pc in September before falling to 13.7pc in October. Food inflation in urban Pakistan was 12.6pc in August. It rose to 15pc in September before slipping to 14.6pc in October.

Wheat flour is one of those 51 essential items that are included in the basket of goods and services for calculating the Sensitive Price Index or SPI. Inflation measured through the SPI is regarded as inflation for the poor. If the prices of food items like wheat flour rise sharply, poor Pakistanis suffer more.

According to the PBS, SPI inflation during the week ending on Oct 29 recorded an 18.44pc annual increase with the wheat flour price accelerating 17.64pc. The veracity of officially admitted prevailing prices of essential items almost always comes under question from political parties of the opposition and independent market watchers. But even if we believe that wheat flour prices went up by 17.64pc between November 2018 and October 2019, it is still too much.

Perturbed about the meteoric rise in the prices of essential items of daily use, Prime Minister Imran Khan has now decided that the PM Office will monitor these prices on a weekly basis. He has also directed provincial authorities to take effective steps against profiteering and hoarding. Former premier Benazir Bhutto during her second term in office had initiated this exercise, but her approach was more inclusive. She had created a forum for all stakeholders, including business representatives, to meet and discuss threadbare the root causes of food inflation.

It is time for our policymakers to dig deeper into the root causes of the past and current wheat flour crises, learn their lessons and spell out clearly for all stakeholders what they are supposed to do to avert such a crisis in the future.

Such an exercise must also examine honestly how political meddling and economic anomalies in the fixing of support prices and corruption in the distribution of subsidised wheat to flour millers have mired our entire wheat economy. —MA

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516010/a-crushing-wheat-crisis

SUPPLY CONCERNS WEIGH ON PRICES

Ahmad Fraz Khan Updated November 12, 2019

AS supply-side stresses in the wheat market take hold, the country runs the risk of a difficult flour season for the next six months unless it reassesses the situation and takes corrective measures.

Current stocks, at around 4.5 million tonnes — if strategic requirement of one million tonnes is taken out — are hardly enough to see it through for the rest of the season, provided no unforeseen factors alter the calculations. Bad weather can exacerbate the situation by delaying the crop.

The exact size of the stocks is also a matter of controversy, especially in Sindh. Porous border with Afghanistan adds yet another layer of uncertainty to the longevity of these stocks.

All these factors, with each one of them individually capable of disturbing the entire national calculation, warrant a reassessment of the supply-demand equation to ensure nothing goes wrong until the next crop arrives.

Punjab, which holds the key to national food security, currently has around 3.5 million tonnes of wheat, of which around 22,000 tonnes are being supplied to mills daily for grinding.

Multiplied by 26 days (taking out Sundays, when the Food Department does not supply wheat), its release comes to 550,000 tonnes a month.

Traders believe the government needs to allow the import of 200,000 to 300,000 tonnes of wheat, at least for Karachi, which itself needs over 100,000 tonnes a month

At this rate, Punjab would have consumed 3.2 million tonnes by mid-May. But the release rate is expected to increase as the local market dries out further in the coming days and weeks, and other federating units exhaust their stocks, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh.

KP, with almost negligible stocks of 200,000 tonnes, traditionally depends on Punjab. This dependence was amplified in the last few weeks when Punjab, calculating fast drainage of stocks, tried to regulate supplies through purchase permits.

Resultantly, flour prices went through the roof in KP, and the federal government had to intervene to ensure that Punjab withdraws the permit condition.

The withdrawal is, however, not without cost, as Punjab faces the risk of running out of wheat stocks. It is also feared that hugely subsidised wheat from the provincial exchequer would now find its unhindered way to KP and even to the Afghan market.

Sindh has made its own contribution to national uncertainty. It did not procure wheat this season on the plea that it has over 800,000 tonnes in carryover stocks, enough to see it through the season.

Since it had very calculated stocks, delayed releases saw exceptional hike in wheat price.

Now, despite the start of releases last week, prices are still higher. In Karachi, the price is hovering well above Rs1,700 per maund (1 maund = around 37kg) against the official price of Rs1,340 per 40kg (without gunny bags).

Theoretically speaking, 800,000 tonnes should have been enough to last until the arrival of the next crop, but rumours have it that up to 200,000 tonnes are missing in the stocks — some reports put the figure even higher.

Investigations by the National Accountability Bureau have aggravated the stock situation.

As rumours always arrive in the market earlier than traders, they gripped wheat bazaars, worsening the situation by putting missing quantity at higher than stipulated 200,000 tonnes.

Karachi is bearing the brunt more than any other part of the country and the Punjab is bracing for the eventuality two months down the line.

The federal government has asked the Pakistan Agriculture Services and Storage Corporation to contribute 100,000 tonnes each to KP and Sindh, but markets are not ready to respond to it and are keeping price volatile.

Millers contest that the prevailing volatility doesn't stem from the market. Some of them think that commodity is far less than the requirement to keep market stable and pre-empt speculative pressures on it.

Others blame it on official mismanagement more than the actual stock condition. However, both sides now agree that federal government now needs to allow import of 200,000 to 300,000 tonnes of wheat, at least for Karachi, which itself needs over 100,000 tonnes every month.

"The trouble, however, is the 60 per cent duty that the government has imposed on the import of wheat," says Majid Abdullah, an old hand at the flour milling industry.

The price of Ukrainian wheat is currently around Rs1,660 per maund at arrival in Karachi, and almost Rs966 per 40kg would be added to the tally in the name of duty, taking the total price close to Rs2,700 per maund.

If duty is taken off, wheat's arrival in Karachi would be less than the current market rate. This is where the federal government needs to step in and retrieve the situation.

Only duty-free imports can set the market equilibrium right and save the situation, which cannot be left to speculative pressures, he says.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516008/supply-concerns-weigh-on-prices

PUNJAB MOVES TO REGISTER 5.2M SMALL FARMERS

Amjad Mahmood November 12, 2019

ALL states, whether developed or developing, subsidise the agriculture sector. Various international and local studies, including the one conducted by the Punjab Economic Research Institute (PERI), find a positive correlation between subsidy and agriculture productivity.

In line with global practice, Punjab's agricultural sector is also subsidised. However, the subsidies are not reaching most farmers. In the 2018 financial year, the sector received direct and indirect subsidies of Rs135 billion, of which 41 per cent was paid by the provincial government.

A large chunk of these subsidies was used for wheat procurement, gas for fertiliser manufacturing, electricity for tube-wells, agriculture credit and irrigation maintenance.

Fertilizer and seed companies and big landholders were among the major beneficiaries at the expense of small farmers.

Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial says a substantial share of fertilizer subsidy benefits the companies manufacturing farm nutrients, which is also leading to unbalanced use of compost.

"We have embarked upon a two-year plan to register 5.2 million small farmers in the province so that public money can be used more productively and efficiently by providing targeted subsidies," the minister tells Dawn.

Under the plan, farmers with up to five acres of land will get direct subsidy on the purchase of fertiliser, seed and other inputs

Under the plan, farmers with up to five acres of land will get direct subsidy on the purchase of fertiliser, seed and other inputs. Help will also be sought from the databases of the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) and the Punjab Land Revenue Authority (PLRA).

Similarly, the use of technology will also be deployed. An e-voucher system was successfully piloted for fertiliser (potash and diammonium phosphate) and certified seed (canola and sunflower) subsidies last year.

In that system, cash is directly transferred to a farmer's mobile banking account seconds after he/she finds the voucher in the fertiliser or seed bag, scratches its hidden code and sends it through a mobile phone to an automated digitalised system.

Punjab Agriculture Secretary Wasif Khurshid says the subsidy system is intended to promote the use of quality seed for wheat crop, whose sowing season is just around the corner.

"Funded through the Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme, we are going to offer Rs1,200 per 50kg bag of quality wheat seed," he says. "At least 432,500 bags will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis."

Moreover, 50kg bags of treated and fungicide-laden seed will be available through vouchers for Rs2,700 (with a subsidy of Rs1,200) to registered beneficiaries.

To ensure that the subsidy reaches deserving farmers, the applicant's contact number used to send the code will be verified with Nadra and PLRA records to ensure that he/she is a small farmer. After verification, the seed dealer will transfer the subsidy to the buyer.

Subsidy will not be given on more than 10 bags to any farmer as a further check to ensure that the monetary benefit reaches maximum people, Khurshid says.

Five companies have been pre-qualified for the scheme and all deputy directors of the department's extension wing have been directed to use all available tools to attract the farmers towards the sale of subsidised seed at the nearest dealer shops and also check availability of the seed at the designated dealer shops, he adds.

The government's targeted subsidy scheme has found support from unexpected quarters.

Imran Ahmed, the chief financial officer of Engro Fertilisers, says, “Small landholders can get urea bags even free of cost if the government adopts a smart mechanism for distributing subsidy among the most deserving.”

“Across-the-board subsidy benefits large landholders, who constitute just 10 per cent of the farming community but own 52 per cent of the cultivable land,” he adds. “It’s like offering free treatment to the rich at a public health facility.”

At a cost of just Rs4 billion the government may reduce urea price by Rs200 per bag and by Rs400 per bag against Rs8bn subsidy and Rs600 per bag against Rs12bn subsidy for small farmers and see what impact this small investment could make on the rural economy, he says.

He argues that any effort to reduce the nationwide fertiliser cost benefits primarily the big landlords, who avoid paying even tax on their large incomes. The government is spending Rs44bn on the import of urea and producing LNG-based urea. The benefit of this money may be passed on to small farmers through targeted subsidy like the one the government has already introduced for phosphate fertiliser earlier in the year, he says.

He regrets that the current government promised to begin paying subsidy to small farmers by July 2019 under its National Financial Inclusion Strategy, but no step has so far been taken in this respect.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516003/punjab-moves-to-register-52m-small-farmers

COTTON REVIEW: PRICES DECREASE BY RS200 PER MAUND

By RECORDER REPORT on November 12, 2019

The prices of cotton decreased by Rs 200 per maund. 60 lac bales will be imported due to the unprecedented decrease in the production of cotton. Import duty on cotton should be abolished. All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) demanded that government should take steps on war footings to increase the production of cotton.

According to Karachi Cotton Association the rate of cotton is expected to increase in international market amid hopes of decreasing trade conflict between China and America.

In the local cotton market during the last week cautious buying was witnessed by the textile and spinning sector. On the other hand due to increase in the supply of Phutti and due to the interest of ginners in buying of cotton the rate of cotton over all decreased by Rs 100 to Rs 200 per maund. However, the rate of quality cotton was not under pressure but except two days trading volume was low.

In Sindh the rate of cotton is in between Rs 7,800 to Rs 9500 per maund while the rate of Phutti was in between Rs 3200 to Rs 4350. In Punjab the rate of cotton was in between Rs 8700 to Rs 9600 while the rate of Phutti remained between Rs 3600 to Rs 4700 per 40 Kg. The increasing trend in the prices of Khal, Banola and eatable oil was witnessed in Sindh and Punjab. In Balochistan the rate of cotton was in between Rs 8800 to Rs 9450 while the rate of Phuttti was in between Rs 4200 to Rs 4800 per 40 kg.

The Spot Rate Committee of KCA has decreased the rate of cotton by Rs 100 per maund and closed it at Rs 9300 per maund.

Chairman Karachi Cotton Brokers Naseem Usman said this year cotton production was low due to the untimely rains, extreme hot weather and due to the attack of different viruses and worms. In many areas cotton crop was attacked by Locusts due to which the cotton production as well as quality was badly effected. The government had set the target of production of one crore 50 lac bales but the Cotton Crop Assessment Committee has decreased the target by 48 lac bales and set the target of production of Rs One crore 2 lac bales.

According to private experts 90 lac bales of cotton will be produced.

According to the estimates of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association 61 lac bales are produced till November 1 this year as compared to the production of 77 lac bales during last year which is 16 lac bales almost 20 percent less.

According to the experts it is expected that till the end of last year season One crore 7 lac bales were produced while up till now 61 lac bales were produced and if more 30 lac bales will be produced like

This year due to the exceptionally low production of cotton 50 lac to 60 lac bales of worth one billion 60 crore dollar will be imported.

Accoring to the information up till now agreements for the import of 29 lac bales had been signed while textile and spinning mills are signing more agreements.

Chairman APTMA Dr Amanullah Kassim Machiyara and Chairman KCA Khawja Muhammad Zubair during a joint press conference few days back complained that the amount of Rs 80 billion to Rs 90 billion was stuck in Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). They said that Sales Tax Bonds issued to exporters were not accepted by any bank nor they were cashed. Interestingly, there was no guarantee of government on issued bonds to exporters.

In this situation due to nonpayment of refunds and worse financial crunch APTMA has threatened to stop the payment of sales tax of current month.

During the press conference Amanullah Kassim and other leaders said the government was not releasing Rs 90 billion of refund of exporters. He also said that this year cotton production was exceptionally low. 60 lac bales of cotton will be imported from abroad in order to fulfill the demand of local industry. Moreover, they requested to abolish import duty on cotton.

Chairman KCA Khawja Muhammad Zubair demanded that government should take notice of the exceptionally low production of cotton and should take steps on war footings to increase the production of cotton. He said they had given many suggestions to increase the production of cotton. Moreover, he also demanded the abolition of import duty on cotton to full fill the demand of local textile sector.

Furthermore, due to the threat of APTMA that they were unable to pay sales tax this month due to the nonpayment of the sales tax refund amount FBR officials talk to APTMA delegation on Thursday for the solution of the problem.

Chairman APTMA told Naseem Usman FBR officials had assured them to release the amount of Sales Tax Refund to exporters in two to four days. Fluctuation was witnessed in the Waday Ka Bhao (Rate of Promise) of New York Cotton.

According to the weekly report of USDA during the last week increase of 52 percent was witnessed in exports while the level of trade conflict between China and America is also decreasing despite this the Waday Ka Bhao (Rate of Promise) of New York Cotton was not increased as expected. According to the report Pakistan is the biggest importer of American cotton. While matter of satisfaction is that China signed import agreements with America while Indonesia cancelled import agreements of 65,000 bales.

Chairman Cotton Association of India Atul S Ganatra has hinted that cotton production in India for the year 2019-20 will be satisfactory. The bearish trend continued in Indian cotton market while the rate of cotton remained stable in China. According to the local textile spinners the price of cotton like good Pakistani cotton was Rs 500 to Rs 600 less but local mills don't have any choice except they buy local cotton. Due to the increase in the prices of cotton increase in the prices of cotton yarn and textile products was also witnessed however difficulties are faced due to financial crunch.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/12/543465/cotton-review-prices-decrease-by-rs200-per-maund/

LIVESTOCK EXPO FROM NOVEMBER 18

By Our Correspondent Published: November 12, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Secretary Captain (retd) Fazeel Asghar on Sunday chaired a meeting to review preparations of Livestock Expo scheduled to take place from November 18 to 20 in Quetta.

Relevant officials from different departments attended the meeting where the Chief Secretary was briefed about the expo’s arrangements, said a press release issued here.

On the occasion, Asghar said provincial government was organising Livestock Expo for the first time in the province to create awareness among the public and to promote investment in the sector.

He called livestock the backbone of the province and said its development would have a positive impact on the economy of the country. Foreign and local companies will also attend the expo, Asghar added. “This expo is an important step towards the progress of this sector in Balochistan,” he said.

Asghar appreciated the efforts of the officials for organising the expo.

Adviser to Chief Minister for Livestock and Dairy Development Mitha Khan Kakar also said Monday that the provincial government was taking all possible measures to modernise the livestock sector and to enhance the capacity of the department, which is essential for improving the economic situation of the country and Balochistan.

Talking to APP, he said the government was striving to provide all available facilities to the farmers in the province for the development of the sector, adding that Livestock Expo would highlight the latter’s importance.

He affirmed that if the local and international companies invest, livestock and agriculture would be developed in the province.

The adviser further said that the incumbent government has started working on various projects in the department to increase the production of milk and meat.

He said the top officials have been instructed to take measures for the uplift of the livestock sector.

(With additional input from APP)

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2097787/1-livestock-expo-november-18/

PAKISTAN, JAPAN TO INCREASE COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE

By APP Published: November 12, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Japan and Pakistan have immense potential to expand bilateral trade and economic ties, said Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan Kuninori Matsuda.

In an interview with APP on Monday, he highlighted that Pakistan was a major exporter of goods such as cotton, apparel, fruits, cement, leather and leather goods to Japan.

"Both countries have the potential to enhance bilateral trade from the current volume and double the figure by exploiting the resources," he said. The envoy pointed out that Japan and Pakistan were enjoying excellent historical, diplomatic and economic relations and Japan had always lent support to Pakistan.

Replying to a question, the ambassador said Pakistan and Japan were making efforts to increase bilateral cooperation in agriculture-based industries and value addition.

"In fact, Japan has already announced financial aid to enhance productivity in relevant agricultural fields," he added.

Matsuda revealed that Japan was willing to enhance cooperation in the auto parts industry as well to enhance the capacity of local labour force and create employment opportunities in Pakistan.

He maintained that Japanese companies were interested in establishing industrial units of auto parts in Pakistan in order to bring foreign investment and provide opportunities to the local people.

Replying to another question, he said that Japanese firms had directly invested in the production line of Pakistan as Suzuki was engaged in producing cars in the country.

"Suzuki and Toyota cars are popular vehicles in Pakistan because they meet the local demand efficiently," he pointed out. "Recently, Japan announced an aid of $5.2 million to support agri-food and agriculture-based industrial development in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan."

The diplomat detailed that the amount would be utilised for the enhancement of productivity and capacities of relevant sectors in the cattle meat value chains in different districts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

He said that the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) was already working in potential agro-based regions of Khyber-Pakhtunkwa including Hazara, Swat and Chitral and in Gilgit-Baltistan for promoting innovation and value addition culture.

"Through Jica, the Japanese government is working on cold storage facilities for the preservation of apple, apricot and other perishable fruits," he said. "In November, Pakistan and Japan agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at export of thousands of high-skilled labourers from Pakistan to Japan."

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2097800/2-pakistan-japan-increase-cooperation-agriculture/

NA SPEAKER ORDERS URGENT STEPS TO STOP LOCUST ATTACKS ON CROPS

Ikram Junaid iUpdated November 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser on Tuesday ordered officials concerned to urgently do their best to control locust attacks on crops to ensure national food security.

On the instructions of the National Assembly speaker, a sub-committee of the Special Committee on Agricultural Products held an emergency meeting at the Parliament House on Tuesday to suggest measures to minimise and stop the potential damage to crops from likely locust attacks.

The matter was referred to the committee on a point of order raised by MNA Nawab Muhammad Yusuf Talpur.

According to a statement, the federal minister and secretary for the ministry of National Food Security and Research, respectively, briefed the sub-committee on the locust attack phenomenon, ongoing efforts to tackle them, availability of pesticides, funding, airplanes for aerial sprays and hurdles to address the issue.

The panel was informed that no substantial crop damage had been reported during the current locust attack.

The meeting was informed that an invasion of locusts had taken place after 35 years. The secretary of ministry of national food security and research (MNFS&R), Hashim Popalzai, informed the meeting that the attack could not be entirely eliminated, but its intensity could be minimised through effective aerial and ground sprays.

The meeting was informed that pesticides worth Rs10 million had been purchased and arrangements with donors had been made to beef up the government efforts. The committee was further informed that locusts were now moving to their habitat in Balochistan.

The members of the committee stressed the need for launching an awareness campaign among farmers and the general public to reduce the intensity of the problem.

The members also underlined the need for using drones for anti-locust sprays.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516348/na-speaker-orders-urgent-steps-to-stop-locust-attacks-on-crops

BALOCHISTAN ALL SET FOR LIVESTOCK EXPO ON 18TH

The Newspaper's Correspondent Updated November 13, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani has said that by organising the Livestock Expo, scheduled to be held from Nov 18 to 20, his government is trying to boost investment in the province which will improve its image nationally as well as internationally.

Claiming the three-day exhibition, to be held at the University of Balochistan, would be the largest in the province's history, the chief minister said they were looking at all aspects of its arrangements including its security plan.

Earlier, adviser to the chief minister for livestock and dairy development Mitha Khan Kakar told APP: "The livestock expo is aimed at promoting cattle farming in the province and to increase meat production in the country."

India's declining red meat exports are creating a space for Pakistan in the Middle Eastern market, according to a recent Dawn report.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516347/balochistan-all-set-for-livestock-expo-on-18th

UPLIFT OF TRIBAL DISTRICTS TOP PRIORITY: CM

Anwarullah Khan November 13, 2019

KHAR: Chief Minister Mahmood Khan on Tuesday said that sustainable development of tribal districts was the top priority of provincial government and all out efforts were being made for the purpose.

He was addressing a jirga during his visit to Bajaur to inaugurate several schemes under the National Agriculture Emergency Programme. Tribal elders, political activists, youth and students attended the jriga in a large number.

Provincial Minister for Agriculture and Livestock Mohibullah Khan, local lawmakers, provincial secretary of agriculture and livestock and officials were also present on the occasion.

The chief minister said that provincial government was giving special attention to the development of tribal districts as the region had been ignored in the past. He said that Prime Minister Imran Khan directed him to personally visit every tribal district once a month to step up the improvement process in the region.

Mahmood Khan launches backyard poultry initiative in Bajaur

He claimed that he had visited all the tribal districts at least once since he had assumed the charge of his post last year. He said that pace of development schemes in the tribal districts was very slow and any visible changes and improvement was not made in the region since it was merged with province last year.

However, the chief minister said that government conducted surveys and made planning for development of tribal districts in its first year. He said that government sped up its efforts to ensure provision of every basic and modern facility to the people of tribal districts.

He said that government launched scores of development schemes in various sectors in the tribal districts. He added that completion of schemes would not only improve the standard of life of people but would also end their sense of deprivation.

Mr Khan said that government had planned to build several new health and educational institutions in Bajaur to provide modern health and education facilities to people. He said that prime minister was very keen to reopen Pak-Afghan trade routes in the tribal districts and efforts were under way in that regard.

The chief minister said that government had also decided to construct a number of new colleges in the tribal districts. He added that those institutions would be constructed on the basis of need.

About the merger of the personnel of Khasadar and Levies forces in police, he said that all the 28,000 personnel of both the forces had already been merged in police. He said that work on Barang tunnel would be launched soon to connect Bajaur with Swat Expressway.

The chief minister launched the Prime Minister's Backyard Poultry Initiative and a number of schemes related to agriculture in the district.

Earlier, the local lawmakers briefed the chief minister about the main issues and problems of the region.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516423/uplift-of-tribal-districts-top-priority-cm

THE PRICE OF TOMATOES

Editorial November 13, 2019

AT a press conference called to tout the government's achievement in stabilising the economy, and to announce the first stimulus measures since the period of adjustment began, the prime minister's financial adviser, Hafeez Shaikh, found himself peppered, instead, with questions about the rise in prices of essential items.

Rarely has a government official found himself so much at sea in trying to field questions of such intimate importance to ordinary people.

When the responses given by Mr Shaikh sounded too vacuous, the questions became more pointed, ending, ultimately, with one reporter asking about the massive spike in the price of tomatoes, to which the adviser famously responded that, as per his information, tomatoes were selling for Rs17 per kilo in Karachi's wholesale vegetable markets.

In that one fleeting moment, videos of which went viral in a matter of minutes and made Mr Shaikh the target of derision around the country, we all saw the immense gulf that separates the rulers from the ruled in this country.

It is entirely possible that many of our worthy policymakers have hardly ever gone to the market to purchase tomatoes. It is equally possible that they are largely indifferent to the impact that the food price hikes have on the daily lives of tens of millions of people in this country, who have no choice but to spend more than half their household income on food for their family.

But surely, our decision-makers should look beyond their mandate to fix the deficits in the economy and “create buffers”, to use the soulless parlance of the IMF, in the fiscal equation as well as the foreign exchange reserves.

Surely, they should not be indifferent to how their policies will impact the population even as the financial managers try to correct the economic flaws.

Meanwhile, the macroeconomic stability that Mr Shaikh wants to underscore has actually been earned on the backs of the working and unemployed poor of this country. It is they who have made the heaviest sacrifice in the government’s slash-and-burn economic stabilisation effort thus far, and who have felt the greatest pain of these ‘demand compression’ policies.

Yet, once the buffers are created, and fiscal resources become available, they are to be spent on the rich first and foremost, in the old-fashioned hope that from there the wealth will trickle down to the poor. This is how Mr Shaikh was able to announce that Rs200bn will be spent to subsidise interest rates on loans for exporters, and Rs30bn would be similarly spent on loans for construction magnates. But for the poor, we see a package worth Rs6bn to be spent through the utility stores to make essential items affordable. The disparity is unmistakable, as is the terrible injustice behind it all.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516372

IMPORTED TOMATOES TO THE RESCUE

Mubarak Zeb Khan Updated November 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: After a delay of more than a month, the government has finally reached a decision to explore avenues including import of tomatoes from Iran to arrest the skyrocketing prices of the vegetable in the domestic market.

The combination of ill-timed government policies and bad weather caused disruption in supply of tomatoes — a kitchen staple — across the country since early October. Tomato prices in the region have shot up due to heavy rains last month.

The average maximum national price of tomatoes was Rs180 per kg, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics; though it is selling at as high as Rs300 per kg in several parts of the country.

As the situation spirals out of control, the Ministry of National Food Security (MNFS) is meeting importers on Wednesday in Islamabad to look into ways of speeding up imports tomatoes from neighbor countries.

“We will consider allowing import of tomatoes from Iran,” MNFS Federal Secretary Muhammad Hashim Popalzai told Dawn. He said some importers are coming to meet him in this regard. “We will think over it and make a decision in the meeting,” Popalzai added.

It is estimated that new crop of tomatoes and onion will reach the market in the next two to three weeks from Sindh. In the meanwhile, imports from Iran will help fill the gap to some extent.

The Ministry of Commerce has also introduced non-tariff measures related to quality standards on almost all vegetables as part of the measures to reduce import bill of the country. The import was linked with the quarantine certification requirement but no staff of the quarantine department is posted at boarder areas with Iran and Afghanistan.

Currently, not a single non-objection certificate was issued for import of tomatoes from Iran owing to absence of quarantine department at Taftan border. Now, the government has no option but to make special arrangements for quarantine checking at the border.

These standards also hit import of tomatoes and onion from Afghanistan at Chaman and Torkham border as well.

The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industries President Daroo Khan Achakzai told Dawn that authorities are not accepting quarantine certificates of Afghanistan to allow entry of tomatoes and onions into the country through Chaman and Torkham border stations.

He said that Afghanistan has adequate tomato and onion production. Other vegetables, he said are also subject to similar quarantine restrictions.

The supply gap has also been partially supported by the lack of imports from Wagah border from India. The suspension of trade with New Delhi in the wake of Kashmir issue has also contributed to rising prices of vegetables in the domestic market.

The government is yet to decide on waiver of duty and taxes on import of three essential vegetables — tomatoes, onions and potatoes.

Currently, there is only 5.5 per cent income tax on import of tomatoes while there is no customs or sales tax on it. However, on import of onion, the government charges 20pc sales tax and 5.5pc income tax only. And on the import of potatoes, the government collects 25pc additional customs duty, 17pc sales tax and 5.5pc income tax.

To reduce the import price of these commodities, the government needs to withdraw these meaningless revenues to pass the benefit forward to end consumers.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516364

PAKISTAN TO EXPORT PINE NUT TO CHINA

By RECORDER REPORT on November 13, 2019

Chinese snack company, Bestore, signed a deal with Pakistan pine nut provider worth 300 million yuan ($42 million) as the company furthers overseas efforts with opportunities brought by the Belt and Road Initiative.

According to China Daily, with the new move, Halo Foods, Pakistan's largest pine nut purchase and processing firm, will continue to offer pine nuts to the Chinese firm following their cooperation for over ten years.

Hand-peeled pine nuts is now one of the most expensive nut products for Bestore, but both demand and output has grown rapidly with an annual increase of 20 percent, according to Yang Yinfen, CEO and president of Bestore.

“For Halo Foods, such cooperation will help the Pakistan firm to further explore the potential of the Chinese market," said Shahbaz Siddique, financial head of Halo Foods.

The deal was signed during the second China International Import Expo, which held in Shanghai last week.

“Globalization has been one of our key strengths. Currently, over 25 percent of our raw material comes from overseas," Yang from Bestore told China Daily.

Among overseas purchases, Belt and Road economies including Malaysia and the Philippines as well as Turkey are some of the major sources.

“We are also considering and exploring some emerging markets, such as African market," Yang revealed.

An earlier report pointed out that Chinese people consume around 2 trillion yuan of snack food every year following the country's booming internet wave accelerating the growth.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/13/543814/pakistan-to-export-pine-nut-to-china/

PCJCCI URGES GOVT TO BOOST MEAT EXPORT TO CHINA

By RECORDER REPORT on November 13, 2019

Pakistan China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCJCCI) urged the government to boost export of meat from Pakistan to China. PCJCCI President Zarak Khan while addressing the export promotion committee of his chamber on Tuesday said that there was a big gap in the world meat trade to be fulfilled and Pakistan had the potential to increase its export and earn foreign exchange by promoting Pakistan's high quality meat worldwide.

He said that Pakistan has the 4th largest livestock population in the world-180 million animals growing at 4.2 percent annually. Moreover there are above four dozen breeds of sheep and goats that have helped Pakistan to become 2nd largest goat meat producing country but our exports are still lacking far behind because of having limited techniques and skilled labour, he added.

PCJCCI chief proposed to avail of Chinese assistance to have training for enhancing the skills and livestock techniques up to the world's standard. He further said that by exporting meat to China we can contribute millions of dollars in the national economy.

The Pakistan's government is already convincing the Chinese government to permit import of meat from Pakistan, he added.

PCJCCI Senior Vice President Moazzam Ghurki speaking on the occasion urged the government and the private sector to create state of the art slaughter houses to attract the Chinese market. We can develop specific brand as per specific needs of Chinese people, he said. He cited an example "Omasum", the second stomach of cows and buffaloes is very much liked in Vietnam and China.

The Chamber's Secretary General Salahuddin Hanif said currently China is importing meat from Vietnam. Brazil and Australia, who are struggling to meet the demand while maintaining the standard too. Therefore in such a competitive environment there is a great possibility for Pakistan to initiate the production of good quality meat to cater the needs of Chinese Market. Viewing the increased demand, China is also considering to import meat from Pakistan to China, he added.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/13/543791/pcjcci-urges-govt-to-boost-meat-export-to-china/

COURT SEEKS PROCESS OF FIXING MILK RATES, REGULATING PRICES

By Our Correspondent Published: November 13, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court sought arguments from the parties on Tuesday over the contempt of court plea filed against the sale of milk on inflated prices. A two-member bench comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Agha Faisal was hearing the contempt of court plea filed by Imran Shehzad which stated that the court ordered to sell milk at the official rate which is Rs94 per litre but milk is being sold at higher prices in the city.

The petitioner prayed the court that contempt of court action is taken against All Karachi Milk Retailers Association. The petitioner's counsel argued that the dairy-mafia has increased milk rates according to their own will. All Karachi Milk Retailers Association's counsel maintained that the mechanism for fixing milk rates has become redundant. He argued that new laws should be made before fixing milk rates.

"We are focusing on compliance with milk rates fixed by the commissioner [right now]," remarked the bench.

The Karachi commissioner's report pertaining to milk rates was submitted before the court. The report mentioned that a fine of Rs3,366,000 has been imposed on 550 milk shops and four people have been arrested and sent to jail for violating judicial orders.

Assistant Commissioner Wasimuddin told the court that the official rate was fixed after consultation with all stakeholders.

The bench inquired if the spokespersons of All Karachi Milk Retailers Association were consulted while fixing the rates. Wasimuddin said that the spokespersons of the association were present at the meeting.

The court sought reply pertaining to the association's counsel's argument that the laws for fixing milk rates have become redundant. The court directed that the reply must state the law under which milk rates are fixed. The hearing was adjourned till November 5.

Meanwhile, a single bench comprising Justice Salahuddin Panhwar directed that security be provided to the petitioner of the plea pertaining to over 75,000 cases in Sindh which haven't proceeded further as the accused nominated in them have not been arrested.

The police submitted a report before the court which stated that seeking assistance from the Pakistan Rangers to arrest the accused has been recommended. According to the police report, around 75,269 A Class cases in Sindh have been set aside.

These include over 25,000 cases pertaining to marriages in Karachi which have been made A-Class since 2009, around 4,998 murder cases, over 15,000 robbery cases and over 4,000 kidnapping cases registered in Karachi, as well as 3,016 cases registered in Hyderabad and 1,447 cases registered in Sukkur.

The court observed that despite Rangers, police and other law enforcing agencies being active in Karachi the inability to arrest the accused is worrisome because the non-arrest contributes to the increase in crimes. The court remarked that only registering cases was of no benefit as it only spreads fear among citizens when accused are not arrested despite the registration of cases against them. People consider it futile to file cases in such circumstances, said Justice Panhwar, adding that action should be taken on an urgent basis to arrest the accused on the run.

Court Assistant Ibaad Hasnain requested that assistance from the Rangers be sought to arrest the accused. He added that the Rangers be consulted on their mechanism for investigating and arresting wanted persons. He said that a report on the accused who have not been arrested should be sent to all district and sessions judges. The court assistant said that the judicial magistrate should monitor all such cases and gather the records of all A-Class cases. He added that CCTV footage should be used more efficiently to arrest the accused.

The court ordered the provision of security to the petitioner and his family and adjourned the hearing.

Another bench comprising Justice Iqbal Kalhoro and Justice Abdul Mobeen sought a report from jail officials and expressed annoyance at them for not submitting their reply on the alleged torture of former Fishermen Cooperative Society chairperson Nisar Morai in prison. The bench was hearing the plea filed by Morai's wife, Seema Nisar, which stated that Morai's health was in critical condition but medical facilities were not being provided to him in prison.

Jail officials did not submit their reply on the plea alleging torture and lack of medical facilities to Morai. The court gave jail officials time till the first week of December to submit a report on the issue.

Meanwhile, a two-member bench comprising Justice KK Agha and Justice Zulfiqar Ali Sangi accepted convict Muhammad Idrees's appeal against the sentence awarded to him in a murder case. The court annulled the sentence awarded by the trial court and acquitted Idrees in the murder case. According to police, Idrees was accused of murdering Abdullah in 2014 and finding him guilty, the trial court had sentenced him to death.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 13th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2098477/1-court-seeks-process-fixing-milk-rates-regulating-prices/

AS HOPE SHINES ON KHARI ISLAND, FISHERMEN STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE BLEAKNESS

By Aftab Khan Published: November 13, 2019

KARACHI: One of the famous opening lines by Charles Dickens includes the phrase, “it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness,” which aptly describes the present-day state of Khari island and neighbouring fishing communities.

Located at a distance of 80 kilometres from Lasbela in Balochistan, within close proximity of Sonmiani tehsil, Khari Island rests amid the deep blue sea as an untouched marvel of nature. White birds contrasting against the clear blue sky, crabs scurrying along sandy beaches and whale sharks leaping out of crystal clear water are not uncommon sights on the island, and as locals of adjacent areas claim, the temperature here remains moderate throughout the year.

According to fishermen of nearby localities situated along Balochistan’s coast, Khari has remained unchanged for the past several years- as far back as their memories go. Since time immemorial, it has served as a temporary abode of fishermen who would leave their homes for months-long fishing expeditions.

However, these fishing communities located nearby the majestic island present a picture of tragic irony. Sunken in a mire of destitution and dereliction, these stand in stark contrast against the natural opulence of Khari.

One such neglected community constitutes the population of around 6,000 people residing in the surroundings of Dam Jetty in Sonmiani. Most from among the locals in the area work as fishermen, who live in abject poverty and miserable conditions. Challenged by a lack of resources and facilities, survival is tough for them.

Dam Jetty was built in 2005 and presently, boats from among the 700 belonging to the fishermen living in nearby dwellings are moored here before they set out on fishing expeditions. Though, according to Fishermen Cooperative Society Chairman Sardar Kamran Lasi, the jetty has been of little help in allaying the miseries and difficulties of the fishermen.

“It was planned in haste and the construction is flawed,” he said, adding, however, that another one is being constructed though it wouldn’t displace the existing one.

Lasi said that 10 landing sites are being constructed Lasbela, as well as auction halls for the fishermen to sell their catch. He added that demands have also been made to extend the boundaries of the zone where fishing is allowed from 11 nautical miles to 30 nautical miles, in accordance with fishermen’s rights listed under the Deep Sea Fishing Policy.

But fishermen’s problems in the region go way beyond the faulty construction of the jetty and fishing-zone restrictions.

Speaking in this regard, 75-year-old fisherman Muhammad Usman complained about “huge fishing trawlers often sailing across Dam Jetty’s creek and cleaning the sea of fishes,” which are the sole source of income for the fishermen of Sonmiani. “These are not trawlers but an evil that doesn’t even leave behind baby fish,” he said, vexed by the loss of earning opportunities.

Lasi pointed towards a similar issue, saying that fishing trawlers at Karachi Fish Harbour operate throughout the year when they have been issued licences for catching shrimps over a period of two months. These trawlers, carrying out fishing activities all year round, in violation of the regulations, results in a significant drop in the number of fish near Balochistan’s coasts.

Moreover, Usman lamented the non-availability of medical facilities to the fishermen in the area. “There is no hospital here to treat the injured, tend to those who survive drowning or heal those afflicted by disease,” he said. To add to it, there is just one dispensary to cater to such a large population, where there is no medical professional but only a compounder, added Usman.

“Consequently, the patients have to be taken to Karachi for treatment and a single trip costs around Rs4,000 to Rs5,000,” he said. “What’s worse is that most of the patients die on the way to the city.”

Usman, and many other fishermen like him, have been living in a quagmire of difficulties and miseries. They have been bewailing their misfortunes for a long time but their complaints seemingly fell on deaf ears hitherto.

Authorities have turned attention to them so far untouched Khari Island, planning to develop into a beach, as the neighbouring fishing communities continue to survive in adversity and distress.

According to Lasi, in the past, little importance was given to the Khari Island, much like the nearby fishing localities, but now it has been planned to develop the island along the lines of Thailand and other famous tourist attractions of the world. “Authorities now plan to equip the island with facilities like camps and washrooms for tourists,” Lasi said.

Also, date palms are to be planted at Khari and speedboats will run from the island to the Sonmiani port, as part of the development plan, he said. Moreover, contracts have been awarded for the construction of a floating jetty and installation of paraphernalia for leisure activities including water sports, jet skiing, paragliding and desert safari, he added.

Lasi expects that the development work will complete by the end of this year, and while the island might turn out to be a prime tourist attraction, the progress of the nearby fishing communities is likely to remain halted and their future bleak, due to the government’s neglect.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2098486/1-hope-shines-khari-island-fishermen-struggle-survive-bleakness/

CM LAUNCHES AGRICULTURE EMERGENCY IN BAJAUR

By Our Correspondent Published: November 13, 2019

KHAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan on Tuesday inaugurated six projects in the Bajaur District for the tribal districts under the Prime Minister’s National Agricultural Emergency Programme.

The six projects include olive plantation and olive seeds for oil extraction, subsidised wheat seed, poultry and livestock distribution and milk chiller tanks for dairy business.

As per the national agriculture emergency programme, Rs44.5 billion will be spent for the development of agriculture, livestock, fisheries and irrigation sectors in K-P dring the next four years.

According to details Rs25.21 billion have been allocated for the development of agriculture sector in the tribal districts whereas an additional amount of Rs10.46 billion will be spent on short term projects. Under the initiative 8,000 acre of barren land in the tribal districts will be converted into orchards whereas 28,000 acre of barren land will be brought under cultivation. Furthermore 25,000 acre of land will be utilised for production of corn and wheat seeds whereas 16,000 acres of land will be allocated for cultivation of vegetables for which seeds will be provided to farmers free of cost. Similarly 327 tube wells will be solarised and 1,000 ponds will be dug for water storage.

Moreover, establishment of safety walls, vaccination of one million livestock and establishment of 30 dairy farms are part of the development of agriculture, livestock, fisheries and irrigation sectors.

The chief minister during his day-long visit to Bajaur district inaugurated olive cultivation and its oil extracting plant.

The inauguration was part of implementation of the prime minister's directives for introduction of emergency programme for agriculture development in tribal districts of K-P.

The chief minister during briefing by the Livestock and Agriculture Department was told that work on 11 projects of fisheries, livestock and agriculture was in progress in the area.

Chief Minister stated that numerous opportunities for development of the agriculture, livestock, fisheries and irrigation sectors are available in the province and the incumbent government is taking pragmatic and efficient measures for their development as per the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

"Hefty amount have been allocated for the Annual Development Program in comparison with previous years. Once implemented, it will help in bringing about agricultural and economic revolution in the province," Mahmood Khan said.

Chief Minister on this occasion also announced regularization of project employee's of the agriculture, livestock, fisheries and irrigation department, initiation of grafting project for wild olive trees and also directed the Deputy Commissioner to prepare a detail PC-1 for resolutions of all the problems and developmental initiatives for Bajaur Khar.

The chief minister also distributed poultry products and wheat seed among people and urged upon them to add their share in making the Agriculture Emergency Programme a success story.

On the occasion, the chief minister was briefed that wheat seed worth Rs2.195 billion would be distributed in Bajaur for cultivation on an area of 4,500 acres.

It was said that at present 1.9 million acre of land was under cultivation across the province out of which 56 per cent was arid, adding that 1.3 million acre land could bring under cultivation.

Later, the CM distributed motorcycles among the staff of livestock department.

While addressing on the occasion the CM Mahmood said that that PM Imran Khan has directed him to keep in mind the poor of the province and never fall short of promises made to the people. "We showed in a year's work that we have completed the challenges of the tasks assigned by the PM," the chief minister said.

Prime Minister Imran Khan will never disappoint the nation, the country's economy will soon be on track and assured the masses that keep believes on Imran Khan and assured the masses of the newly merged district we have made 28,000 levies and supporters part of the police.

He said the tribal district would be connected to the Swat Express way through Bajaur-Swat motorway via a permanent tunnel, also assured that where there is need of the college and schools would be provided on the priority basis and the construction of Bajaur highway will begin soon and also try to establish a medical college and university here for the future.

For improving the local economy the decision to open the Bajaur route with Afghanistan will be expedited, CM said.

Moreover, he assured that the government will give the lease of the minerals being extracted in the area to the local people.

Provincial Minister of Agriculture Mohibullah Khan said that Prime Minister Imran Khan focused on agriculture sector while agro based industry and agro related investments were among priorities of his agriculture plan.

"We will make the tribal districts the model districts across the country," he said.

Mohibullah said the K-P government would spend Rs95 billion on agriculture sector in next four years out of which Rs20 billion will be spent in tribal districts only.

Speaking on the occasion, Swat Dedak Chairman Fazal Hakim said vegetable and cattle markets would be set up in every area, small dams would be constructed to store rain water, prevent floods and also improve ground water level.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2098459/1-cm-launches-agriculture-emergency-bajaur/

GROW VEGETABLES AT HOME: RDA

November 13,2019

RAWALPINDI. A meeting of Agriculture Department Rawalpindi officers with Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) Chairman Tariq Mehmood Murtaza was held here on Tuesday.

RDA Governor Body Member Muqarrab Khan, Director Agriculture Department Rawalpindi Sajjad Haider and other RDA and Agriculture Department Rawalpindi officers attended the meeting.

In Meeting, the project of kitchen gardening was discussed that would be clustered in 50 homes, stands and seeds will be freely distributed for kitchen gardening. For this project, he directed the respondents to prepare the survey questions and answers till December 31.

He said for this purpose from January 1, training of fifty men and women will be started and on February 15, in these homes vegetables would be planted. He directed to provide four gardeners for this purpose.

He said due to use of chemicals in the fields most people get sick. Planting these vegetables in homes will benefit the common people, in fact they will get free vegetables and will be healthy, he added.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201911130249&EN_ID=11201911130088&EMID=11201911130028

THE PRICE OF TOMATO

By Editorial Published: November 13, 2019

A wisecrack has said: If you don't read newspapers you are uninformed; if you read them you are misinformed. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance Dr Hafeez Shaikh caused the same embarrassment to the informed the other day when he snubbed a reporter, saying tomato was selling dirt cheap in Karachi. The reporter was drawing the attention of the adviser to the rising prices of food items. When the reporter said tomato was selling for Rs250-300 a kg in Karachi, the adviser dismissed him and said with all the confidence in the world that tomato was available at Rs17 a kg in Karachi's sabzi mandi. There is nothing surprising about the answer.

However, the adviser's claim about the price of tomato in Karachi does not in the least change the reality that tomato is selling at ridiculously inflated prices in the city. Its price has shot up so high that only those who have money to burn can buy it. Now that there are no buyers for this common kitchen item it is not being seen even on the carts of vegetable sellers. Besides, an onion which is an essential kitchen item is selling for Rs100-120 a kg. Prices of other vegetables too have shot up. As a result, most vegetables have gone beyond the reach of the common man.

Some quarters are attributing the rise in prices of vegetables to hoarding and smuggling to other countries. Our people are known to put up with many deprivations. So the rising food inflation is not much of a problem for them. But what has both saddened and bemused them is the kind of information that the adviser has about prices of food items. It is a total disconnect from the ground realities. The minister is, however, not that ignorant that he appears to be. He who answers every question, it is said, must be very ignorant. When the heart murmurs, the mouth does not obey properly.

The prime minister has ordered the setting up of a special cell to curb the rising food inflation.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2098334/6-the-price-of-tomato/

WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE INCREASED TO RS1,350

Mubarak Zeb Khan Updated November 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC), in a meeting chaired by Finance Adviser Hafeez Shaikh on Wednesday, increased minimum support price for wheat by Rs50 to Rs1,350 in order to safeguard growers' interests.

The increase comes after a gap of five years, as the government last raised wheat support prices by Rs100 to Rs1,300 for 40kg bags back in 2014.

Although, the move will benefit local wheat growers, it is expected to push up prices of rotis which have already increased two times in the last twelve months owing to rising flour and gas prices.

However, a Ministry of Food Security official claimed the new minimum support price would not translate in any increase in the price of rotis. He said the minimum price will help farmers cover rising input costs.

He said the minimum support will encourage wheat production in the country while adding that the revised price is also lower than the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) official rate of Rs1,375 on which wheat is being released to provinces.

The ECC meeting also reviewed various factors such as the global wheat situation, cost of production, export-import parity and domestic producer prices.

It was estimated that the cost of production of wheat had risen in 2019-20 to Rs1,349.57 per 40kg in Punjab and Rs1,315.72 per 40kg in Sindh, as per findings of the Agriculture Policy Institute.

The meeting was also told that the global wheat price hovers around Rs1,575 per 40kg and Rs1,440 per 40kg excluding duties.

The ECC also asked the Ministry of Food Security to approach provinces to make adequate wheat procurement in the coming season. In case of failure to procure stocks, any request by provinces to Passco would entail 100 per cent payment of incidental charges.

The ECC also asked the ministry to invite provincial chief secretaries or their representatives in the next meeting for a detailed presentation on the rising circular debt on the commodity operation which had already crossed Rs450 billion.

On the proposal of Rs6bn PM Relief Package for Utility Stores Corporation (USC), the ECC approved a transfer of Rs4bn from the Benazir Income Support Programme and another Rs2bn by the Finance Division for provision of essential commodities such as flour, sugar, ghee, rice and pulses at a fair price to the under-privileged sections of the society.

A high-powered committee led by the Adviser to PM on Commerce Razak Dawood has been advised to come up with a realistic and foolproof method involving use of IT to ensure poorest of the poor benefit from the scheme and subsidy by purchasing essential items from the 3,600 utility stores spread across the country.

The ECC also approved release of 200,000 tonnes of wheat at the rate of Rs1,375 per 40kg from the Passco stocks to the USC to compensate vulnerable segments of the society and discourage hoarding and profiteering. The financial implications of Rs1.314bn on account of price differential and incidental charges will be absorbed by the Finance Division.

A committee was constituted to look into the issues related to utilities, particularly the installation of gas connections, electricity and other facilities in the Special Economic Zones. The committee was tasked to submit proposals in the next meeting.

The ECC approved the proposal for execution of amendment to the implementation agreement governing Thal Nova Power Private Limited and Thar Energy Limited by increasing the time period for exercise of the government’s right to terminate both projects from 400 days to 490 days.

However, the ECC directed the Cabinet Division to take further input from the Planning Division and bring the matter back to the ECC if there were substantive and fundamental issues requiring further discussion and any change in the approval.

The ECC also approved a detailed proposal based on a comprehensive four-year Circular Debt Capping Plan of the Power Division to address the flow of circular debt through effective efficiency improvement measures and ensure an effective implementation of the National Electricity Policy 2019.

The plan, which mainly addresses sector inefficiencies, discrepancies in tariff regime, fiscal allocations and government policy measures, planning and debt servicing of Power Holding Private Limited Loans, would improve power distribution collection, 100pc collection by five distribution companies, reduce line losses, rationalise subsidy allocations, reduce running and permanent defaulters and power sector flows to less than Rs75bn per annum from the current level of Rs465bn per annum.

The ECC also approved a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Interior for release funds through a technical supplementary grant to the tune of Rs670.553 million to HQ Frontier Corps KP (North) Peshawar for the completion of laid down codal, financial, procedural and legal formalities for various Project Implementation Letters, including the upgradation of FC KP (North) training centre at Warsak Peshawar and construction of FATA Levies Training Centre at Shakas and 10 extra FATA Levies check posts.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516600

GOVT ALLOWS TOMATO IMPORTS FROM IRAN

Staff Reporter Updated November 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government on Wednesday allowed import of tomatoes from Iran for a period of one month to arrest the skyrocketing prices of the vegetable in domestic market.

The decision was taken at a meeting of importers with top officials of the Ministry of National Food Security (MNFS), Ministry of Commerce and other stakeholders.

"Yes, we have decided to allow import of tomatoes from Iran," MNFS Federal Secretary Muhammad Hashim Popalzai told Dawn after the meeting.

As per the decision, importers will be allowed to procure tomatoes from Iran for a period of three to four weeks for selling in the domestic market. Although, the government did not specify the exact quota for the procurement, it has set a deadline of Dec 13 for the imports.

The government believes that new crop of tomatoes and onion will reach the market in the next two to three weeks from Sindh. In the meanwhile, imports from Iran will help fill the gap to some extent.

The tomatoes are expected to reach Pakistan in the next four days.

To resolve the issue of quarantine requirement, Pakistan will accept the certificate of Iranian quarantine department for release of tomatoes at Taftan border. Moreover, it was also decided to make special arrangement for the presence of Pakistan's quarantine department at Taftan border.

Currently, not a single non-objection certificate has been issued for import of tomatoes from Iran owing to absence of quarantine department at Taftan border.

On the other hand, the government has not waived off the 5.5 per cent withholding tax on import of tomatoes. The impact of this tax is estimated at approximately Rs2 per kg. However, tomato imports are not subject to customs or sales tax.

The tomato price shot up owing to a combination of ill-timed government policies and bad weather, which caused disruption in supply of tomatoes — a kitchen staple — across the country since October. Moreover, tomato prices across the region have shot up due to heavy rains last month.

As per the latest figures released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the average maximum national price of tomatoes was Rs180 per kg, though it is selling at as high as Rs300 per kg in several parts of the country.

The Ministry of Commerce has also introduced non-tariff measures related to quality standards on almost all vegetables as part of the measures to reduce import bill of the country.

However, the lack of quarantine department staff at the border with Iran and Afgha-nistan has hit import of tomatoes and onion.

The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industries President Daroo Khan Achakzai, while speaking to Dawn, welcomed the government's decision to allow import of tomatoes from Iran. This, he said, will help curtail rising price of the pulp in the domestic market.

He also urged the government to accept Afghan quarantine certificate for clearance of vegetables from Afghanistan at Chaman and Torkham border stations.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516598/govt-allows-tomato-imports-from-iran

COTTON PRICES MOVE DOWN

Staff Reporter November 14, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices moved down for the third straight day on Wednesday as leading buyers remained on the sidelines due to paucity of funds.

According to market reports, huge sales tax refunds are stuck with the government. The liquidity crunch is crippling the working and manufacturing operations of the entire textile industry, brokers said.

Talking to Dawn, a textile industry leader suggested that a scheme like bonus voucher should be launched as was done in the early 1970s. Since the trading of bonus voucher would be done on stock exchange, it will allow exporters to encash these and get the required funds needed to meet their future export commitments, he explained.

With receding buying interest for cotton, ginners have also slowed down their procurement of phutti (seed cotton) fearing huge losses if lint prices continue to fall.

Meanwhile, Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah has recommended to the government to withdraw 5 per cent sales tax on cotton seedcake on the ground for it being animal feed.

The world leading cotton markets remained easy with New York cotton managing to recover recent losses.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,600 bales, station Fort Abbas, at Rs8,975-9,000; 1,000 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs9,000; 1,000 bales, Yazman Mandi, at Rs9,000-9,050; 1,000 bales, Sadiqabad, at R9,250-9,300; and 1,400 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,300-9,350.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516593/cotton-prices-move-down

45.5PC CHILDREN UNDER FIVE ARE STUNTED, 41.3PC UNDERWEIGHT, MINISTER TELLS PA

Tahir Siddiqui November 14, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly was informed on Wednesday that nearly half of children under five had stunted growth and 41 per cent children were underweight, mainly due to malnutrition, across the province.

While furnishing a statement and replies to the lawmakers' written and verbal queries during the Question Hour session in the house, Health Minister Azra Fazal Pechuho said the provincial government was taking certain measures for stabilising nutrition in children.

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf member Sidra Imran had asked the minister to inform the house about the estimated percentage of malnutrition in children under the age of five and those between 10 and 18 in the province.

Quoting figures from the National Nutrition Survey-2018, the health minister said that 45.5pc children under five were stunted, 41.3pc were underweight and 23.3pc children were wasted in Sindh.

She further said that 16.6pc girls and 30.6pc boys aged between 10 and 19 were underweight, while 61.2pc adolescent girls and 45.3pc women of reproductive age were anaemic.

In reply to another question by Ms Imran, the health minister said 156 blood banks were registered in the province. She said 41 unregistered blood banks were closed down as they did not meet the requirements.

Dr Pechuho said that four Regional Blood Centres had been established in Jamshoro, Sukkur, Nawabshah and Karachi.

Answering a question asked by Jamaat-i-Islami member Abdul Rasheed, she said Rs23.46 million was earmarked for the purchase of medicines for the Lyari General Hospital and Rs5.1m was spent in six months.

In reply to another question by Mr Rasheed, the minister said that there were five ambulances available at the Lyari General Hospital.

Answering a question by Khwaja Izharul Hasan, she said 160 provincial government health facilities were managed by five non-governmental organisations under public-private partnership.

Answering a verbal question by PTI member Dr Imran Shah, the minister said that 1,300 doses of anti-rabies medicine were available with the provincial health department and all the medical superintendents of provincial hospitals had been asked to make requisition if the medicine was required there.

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RAW COTTON EXPORTS INCREASES 53.65PC IN Q1

November 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Exports of raw cotton form the country during first quarter of current financial year increased by 53.65 percent as compared the exports of the corresponding period of last year.

During the period form July-September, 2019-20, about 6,980 metric tons of raw cotton worth $10.828 million exported as compared the exports of 4,619 metric tons valuing $7.043 million of same period of last year, according the data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

However, the exports of cotton yarn and cotton cloth decreased by 6.19 percent and 5.60 percent respectively and were recorded at $294.280 million and $499.419 million during the period under review. On the other hand, over 6.097 million cotton bales had arrived in the local markets by the first week of current months as against the arrival of 7.706 million bales of the corresponding period of last year. The cotton arrival in the local markets decreased by 20.88 percent as compared the arrival of the corresponding period of last year—APP

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/11/14/7-page/810136-news.html

2 FARMER MARKETS IN EACH TEHSIL (ISLAMABAD CITY)

By APP Published: November 14, 2019

PESHAWAR: The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) government has decided to set up two Farmers' Markets in each tehsil of the province to cater to fruit and vegetable to consumers. K-P Chief Minister Mahmood Khan has directed to maintain dedicated spaces for farmers without charging any market free or deducting commission.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2099134/1-2-farmer-markets-tehsil-islamabad-city/

HUNGARY OFFERS ASSISTANCE IN AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES

By APP Published: November 14, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan government would extend full cooperation and support to strengthen trade and economic ties with Hungary, said Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce and Textile Abdul Razak Dawood.

In a meeting with Hungarian Ambassador István Szabó on Wednesday, the PM aide stressed that agriculture played a pivotal role in Pakistan's economy as it accounted for around 20% of the gross domestic product (GDP).

"Agriculture not only ensures food and raw material supplies but also provides employment to a large part of the population," he said.

The adviser welcomed the planned establishment of the Hungarian National Trading House in Karachi. He asked Hungary to convey suitable dates for organising the first Pakistan-Hungary Business Forum in Pakistan and also indicate the areas of interest.

Both sides agreed to boost bilateral trade and investment through a proactive approach and improved collaboration. The Hungarian envoy offered technical assistance to Pakistan in the areas of agriculture, livestock, fisheries and food processing.

He pointed out that Hungary had achieved impressive progress in the agriculture sector through the introduction of modern technology, research and improved farm practices. "Hungary also offers the possibility of providing an interest-free credit line," he added.

The ambassador said the inaugural session of Pak-Hungary Joint Economic Commission was held in September this year at Budapest, which paved the way for enhanced economic cooperation between the two countries. He noted that Hungary had already invested in the oil and gas sector of Pakistan and the Hungarian MOL group was operating in collaboration with local partners.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2099067/2-hungary-offers-assistance-agriculture-fisheries/

BILAWAL REJECTS 'MEAGRE' INCREASE IN WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE

Aamir Yasin Updated November 15, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has rejected the increase of Rs50 per maund (40kg) in the wheat support price.

In a statement on Thursday, he said that increasing the wheat support price by a mere Rs50 after five years was a joke with the farmers. After the last PPP tenure, all successive governments had ignored the plight of the farmers, he said. During the last PPP government, Mr Bhutto-Zardari said, the wheat support price was increased from Rs450 to Rs1,200. This increase resulted as an incentive for the farmers and the PPP was able to shift Pakistan from a wheat importing country to an exporting one.

"The wheat support price should at least be increased to Rs1,600 per maund," he said.

He said that across the world currently the wheat price stood at Rs1,575, while in Pakistan farmers would only get Rs1,350.

"The governments across the world protect and support the rights and interests of their farmers and agricultural communities, but in Pakistan the exact opposite is happening. Our government is anti-farmers," he said.

The PPP chairman pointed out that the prices of inputs for the farming community like urea, DAP and energy had skyrocketed and the meagre increase in support price was not in line with production costs and inflation.

"This government's anti-agriculture policies have destroyed our farming communities and as a result agricultural produce has declined. This policy will lead to food shortages," he said.

The PPP chairman said that all major crops had seen reduction in output like cotton wheat and rice. This year, decline in cotton production stood at almost seven million bales. The government has left farmers at the mercy of market forces, leading to chaos.

"After destroying our industrial sector, the PTI government is now destroying agriculture. If our farmers stop tilling their land, our country will not have enough food to survive. Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan," he said.

He urged the government to immediately bring forward a well thought out farmer-friendly agricultural policy and place it before parliament for approval.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516836/bilawal-rejects-meagre-increase-in-wheat-support-price

FIRST LIVESTOCK EXPO OF BALOCHISTAN NEXT WEEK

A Corresponden tNovember 15, 2019

QUETTA: President Dr Arif Alvi will inaugurate the first livestock expo of Balochistan, Livestock Expo-2019, here on Monday.

Adviser to the CM on Livestock Mitha Khan Kakar and Livestock Secretary Dostain Khan Jamaldini told reporters that 58 companies would set up their stalls in the expo. Teams from Iran and China have arrived in Quetta to participate in the expo, which is set to become an annual feature of Balochistan's trade calendar, Mr Kakar said.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516785/first-livestock-expo-of-balochistan-next-week

CENTRE BLAMES SINDH FOR WHEAT CRISIS

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated November 15, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Minister for National Food Security Mehboob Sultan has blamed the Sindh government for the surging prices of wheat and flour in the province.

Addressing a news conference on Thursday, the minister said for the first time in history the Sindh government did not procure even a single grain during the last procurement season.

The Sindh government officials had informed the federal ministry that 1.6 million tonnes of wheat would be purchased but failed to carry out procurement during the last wheat crop.

Punjab and Sindh are the two provinces which grow wheat during rabi season.

Only Sindh government can provide the answer as to why it did not procure last wheat crop, the minister said. In fact, non-procurement of wheat by the Sindh government resulted in wheat and flour prices to surge in the province, the minister added.

The Sindh chief secretary and the food secretary had requested the federal government for supply of 400,000 tonnes of wheat for the first time in history which according to them would be sufficient for the province.

The federal government immediately approved the release of wheat from the stocks of Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco). These stocks will be released from Passco godown in Khairpur.

Mr Sultan and federal secretary will be visiting Khairpur on Friday to oversee the release of wheat to Sindh government.

The federal government will bear incidental costs worth Rs1.6 billion for the supply of wheat. As per the formula of bearing 50 per cent cost of incidental expenses, the federal government will spend Rs1.9bn on supply 450,000 tonnes of wheat to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Rs211m on supplying 50,000 tonnes of wheat to Balochistan, the federal minister explained.

Statistics referred to by the minister show that a 20kg bag of wheat flour costs Rs810 on an average in major cities of Punjab, Rs1,113 in Sindh, Rs981 in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and Rs970 in Balochistan.

The federal government has asked Passco to release 200,000 tonnes of wheat to the Utility Stores Corporation (USC) to sell wheat flour at controlled price. In addition, the USC has also been asked to supply wheat, sugar, ghee, pulses and rice at controlled price to consumers throughout the country.

The minister was confident that the tomato crisis would come to an end within weeks when fresh crop from Sindh hits the markets. This year, Sindh has a bumper tomato crop, he said.

To ease the situation, the government has allowed import of tomato from Iran for a limited period and it is expected that prices will settle down during next few days, he said.

About the tomato crisis, he said it is usual that a period of gap in production comes during the year when prices of certain commodities shoot up. Unfortunately due to unfavourable weather conditions, there was a loss of wheat crop during last season, he recalled.

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‘PAKISTAN CAN BE FOOD BASKET FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANISATION STATES’

Staff Reporter Updated November 15, 2019

KARACHI: Sindh Governor Imran Ismail said on Thursday that Pakistan having huge agriculture potential can become food basket for Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) member countries.

Speaking at the 27th Executive Committee meeting of ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the governor said that Pakistan would welcome investment and transfer of technology in food processing industry.

He said for attracting investment from ECO member countries the government will not only relax rules and regulations but also ready to follow an open visa policy.

He noted Pakistan being a developing state offers plenty of investment opportunities.

Giving example of European Union (EU), the governor said that more than 66 per cent of total trade was carried out within the bloc and only 8pc was external.

Therefore, he said the ECO member countries having huge economic potential could easily beat EU trade figures provided they get united and move together after identifying each country's needs.

He regretted that most of the ECO member countries even today look at the West despite the fact that there was willingness for increasing trade relations among themselves.

He lauded Turkey for doing wonders on economic side as they managed to get rid of debt whereas Iran though standing alone but still was working hard and moving forward.

However, the Sindh governor stressed the need of stronger trade relation among the ECO states.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516829/pakistan-can-be-food-basket-for-economic-cooperation-organisation-states

MINISTRY URGED TO ALLOW COTTON IMPORT FROM MOZAMBIQUE, MALI & TAJIKISTAN

By MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN on November 15, 2019

All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) has urged the Ministry of Commerce and Textile to lift restrictions on import of cotton from Mozambique, Mali and Tajikistan, sources in Textile Division told Business Recorder.

Shahid Sattar, Executive Director, APTMA, sources said, has talked to Dr Falak Naz, Director General, Plant Protect Department, saying that APTMA's member mills are facing difficulty in obtaining import permits from Mozambique, Mali and Tajikistan; he maintained that cotton from these countries was allowed to be imported in the past.

"Pakistan is facing severe shortage of raw cotton and fresh restrictions at this stage on import of cotton will have an extremely negative impact on the industry and consequently on exports," he said, adding that the restrictions on import of cotton from these countries must be included in the list of cotton importing countries so that the industry and exports do not suffer unnecessarily.

Pakistan has missed cotton sowing targets, largely in Sindh, due to acute water shortage attributed to climate change. The situation may lead to low cotton production compared to the target of 14 million bales in the next season (2018-19) as well.

Recently, a member of National Assembly Standing Committee on Commerce and Textile, MNA Raza Nasrullah raised the issue of higher duty on import of cotton from Central Asian States, which, according to him, was even higher than the price of American cotton.

Secretary Commerce acknowledged that Commerce Division has a difference of opinion on duty/ tariff issues with other public stakeholders.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/15/544539/ministry-urged-to-allow-cotton-import-from-mozambique-mali-tajikistan/

FAO DISTRIBUTES RABI PACKAGES

NOVEMBER 15, 2019

PESHAWAR. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations on Thursday started distributing Rabi packages to some 8,000 households, including 410 women-headed households, in the newly-merged tribal districts (NMTDs) of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

These packages are being distributed under a project supported by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), called "K-P Merged Districts Programme."

The FAO is providing 50-kilogrammes of certified wheat seed, 25kgs of pea seeds and Rhode grass fodder seeds to each household. Another 1,000 farming families are being provided with these packages under a project supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

The improved climate-resilient crops seed packages are provided to support the farming families in the restoration of crop production, food security and improve the self-sufficiency of farmers in quality seeds.

The beneficiaries were also oriented by the Farmer Field School Facilitators on improved crop management practices, post-harvest handling and disease control.

Some 74,651 households are being assisted to resume agricultural production sustainably," said FAO's Deputy Representative Farrukh Toirov.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201911150121&EN_ID=11201911150041&EMID=11201911150018

PTI GOVT ALLOWS TOMATOES IMPORT FROM IRAN TO ARREST PRICE HIKE

By Our Correspondent Published: November 15, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government has allowed tomato import from Iran for a limited time period in a bid to bring down skyrocketing prices, which recently crossed Rs300 per kg, in the domestic market.

"Consignments from Iran will start reaching Pakistan in the next four days. It's a seasonal shortage as in this season tomato supply from Balochistan comes to an end while Sindh's crop takes a few weeks," said Federal Minister for Food Security and Research Sahibzada Muhammad Mehmood Sultan on Thursday.

"In this interval between Balochistan and Sindh crops, the shortage emerges for almost a month." Iranian tomato will reach Quetta at a cost of Rs53 per kg.

Speaking at a press conference, the minister emphasised that Sindh was going to harvest a bumper tomato crop this year and it would start reaching markets in the next four weeks.

Estimates suggest that tomato production in Sindh would be higher by around 40,000 tonnes compared to last year, he said, adding that the government was also working on establishing public markets in cities in an attempt to end the role of middlemen, who were receiving abnormal profit margins while the common man was suffering.

Turning to the country's staple food crop, the minister emphasised that there was no shortage of wheat as millions of tons of the commodity were available in the country. He pointed out that flour prices in Sindh were higher than other provinces, but it was due to zero procurement by the province.

The Sindh government had committed to procure 1.6 million tons in the season that ended in April but for the first time it did not procure even a single grain, he said.

The federal government has allowed the release of around 400,000 tons from Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Supplies Corporation (Passco) stocks for Sindh.

According to the minister, the price of 20kg flour bag is Rs810 in Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan and other cities of Punjab. In Peshawar, the price is Rs981 per bag and in Quetta it is Rs970 per bag. However, in Karachi and Hyderabad, the price is Rs1,113 per bag.

As Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) and Balochistan are not self-sufficient in wheat supplies, the federal government provides them the commodity every year. The centre has decided to release 450,000 tons for K-P and 50,000 tons for Balochistan.

"With these releases, the flour prices will come down," the food security minister stressed.

Provinces and the federal government will bear incidental charges at an equal ratio. According to the minister, the federal government will provide Rs1.6 billion to Sindh, Rs1.9 billion to K-P and Rs211 million to Balochistan in incidental charges and the provincial governments will also contribute the same amounts.

The prime minister has directed Passco to provide 200,000 tons of wheat for the Utility Stores Corporation. Utility stores have also been asked to ensure provision of five essential commodities – wheat flour, sugar, ghee, pulses and rice – at controlled prices all over the country.

Regarding the rising prices of bread (naan), the minister said the government was already bearing a subsidy of Rs1 billion on gas supply to the tandoors.

Talking about desert locust, the minister said it was for the first time after 30 years that the insect had attacked the country. "It is a migratory insect that has travelled from Yemen to Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sindh, Punjab and then to India," he said.

“It is the insect’s migration time and from India it will gain come back to Sindh, Punjab and then to Balochistan, where we are planning to do aerial spray. However, the insect cannot be completely killed.”

Responding to a question as to why the government had increased the wheat support price by only Rs50 to Rs1,350 per 40 kg, the minister replied that as a grower he would like to increase the price to Rs1,600 but keeping in view the common man the price was raised by just Rs50.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 15th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2099831/2-pti-govt-allows-tomatoes-import-iran-arrest-price-hike/

FARMERS TO HOLD BEGGING RALLIES IN LAHORE, ISLAMABAD

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 16, 2019

LAHORE: Farmers have announced a begging march on the provincial metropolis on Nov 27 against, what they call, stepmotherly treatment being meted out to the agriculture sector.

The Kissan Kashkol (begging bowl) March will begin from Lahore on Nov 27 and beg from motorists on The Mall for meeting their crop expenses and then in Islamabad Super Market on Nov 28, says Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) President Khalid Mahmood Khokhar.

He said the farmers would also not pay their tube-well electricity bills for not being offered flat Rs5 per unit facility.

Demands of the farmers will include Rs300 per 40kg increase in wheat support price, payment of Rs25,000 per acre to cotton and maize growers whose yield dropped by 40 per cent owing to climate change and poor quality seed, restoring fertilizers prices to the last year level, provision of diesel at half the market rate, fixing sugarcane indicative price at Rs250 per 40kg against Rs180 per 40kg last year.

Mr Khokhar said PKI members would burn electricity bills on Nov 20 in front of press clubs at district level.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1516967

NANBAIS CALL OFF STRIKE SLATED FOR TODAY

| 11/16/2019 12:00:00 AM

ISLAMABAD: After reaching a settlement with the ICT administration, nanbais have called off their strike scheduled for today (Saturday).

The meeting held here on Friday was chaired by Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Hamza Shafqat, and attended by representatives of nanbai associations in Islamabad and flour mills.

It has been decided that the flour mills will sell fine wheat flour to nanbais at Rs4,300 per sack of 84kg, from its current price ranging between Rs4,800 and Rs5,000 per sack.

As a result all the three nanbai associations in the federal capital have agreed to end the strike scheduled for today (Saturday) against the increase flour prices.

However, one association opposed the new rates of fine wheat flour.

“We are selling roti at Rs10 and nan at Rs12. If the flour rates are not reduced to the rates charged in Rawalpindi we will increase the prices,” said Habib Khan, president Bara Kahu Nanbai Association and representative of Nanbai Association of Pakistan.

While most of flour mills are situated in the industrial area of Islamabad but the rate of fine wheat flour for Rawalpindi is Rs4,100 per sack of 84 kg whereas it was Rs4,300 per sack for Islamabad.

However, Sajjad Abbasi, president Capital Nanbai Association has accepted the deal brokered by the deputy commissioner and the Food Department Islamabad.

In a similar settlement brokered by the Rawalpindi Administration the new roti rate in Rawalpindi will be Rs8 but nan rates will remain at Rs12.

Under the agreement, the flour mills will supply fine wheat flour in Rawalpindi at Rs4,100 per sack.

Similar talks were held by the respective deputy commissioners and the officials of Punjab Food Department across the province to ward off the strike call made by the nanbai associations of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Rawalpindi and Islamabad.—Kalbe Ali

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=16_11_2019_004_003

FLOUR PRICES DROP, IRANIAN TOMATOES REACH TAFTAN

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated November 16, 2019

KARACHI: After increasing prices of various flour varieties by Rs15-20 per kg from April till Nov 12, millers are reducing rates of flour no.2.5 to Rs47.50, down a rupee from Rs48.50 per kg.

Prices of 10 kg bag for the same variety have been lowered to Rs480 from Rs490.

Meanwhile, the government has issued import permit for 4,500 tonnes of Iranian tomatoes. Some shipments have already reached the Taftan border which means that the vegetable is likely to reach markets by Sunday.

The reduced pricing and improved availability of these two edibles is likely to provide some relief to inflation-hit consumers.

Surprisingly, millers had kept fine flour and maida (super fine flour) rates unchanged at Rs54.50 per kg.

The government’s decision to release wheat stocks from Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) to Sindh government coupled with decline in wheat prices in open market to Rs4,400-4,500 from Rs4,700-4,800 per 100 kg bag are the main reasons of price decline. In April, 100 kg wheat bag was available at Rs3,000.

The federal government would provide 400,000 tonnes to the Sindh government. The provincial government was under fire from the Ministry of National Food Security and Research for not procuring wheat from growers for the first time in country's history.

The federal government, however, woke up very late when the millers had already raised price of flour No.2.5 by Rs15 per kg, followed by a hike in maida and fine flour rates by Rs18 per kg and the 10kg bag by Rs150 from April till Nov 12, 2019.

"We may further cut prices by Rs1-2 per kg next week when mills start getting wheat for grinding after completing official paperwork," Chairman Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA), Sindh Zone, Khalid Masood assured.

Karachi needs 200,000-250,000 tonnes of wheat per month out of 350,000 tonnes total monthly requirement of Sindh.

When questioned why the Sindh government did not procure wheat from growers, he said that he was unable to understand the logic of the government which was claiming that it has 800,000 tonnes carryover stocks of last crop. Masood claimed that the Sindh government's claim of higher wheat stocks only existed in official papers.

On November 11, Sindh Minister for Food Hari Raam Kishori Lal said that Passco had started supply of 100,000 tonnes of wheat to the provincial food department through their Khairpur and Noshehro Feroz facilities.

The food department had decided to issue prepaid challan to facilitate flour millers who, after purchasing these challans, could lift wheat quota directly from Passco.

He said sufficient stock of wheat is available with the Sindh Food Department, while 100,000 tonnes of wheat has been procured from Passco and supply of same started from Monday. An additional 300,000 tonnes had been approved by federal government on the request of Sindh government.

He claimed the food department had started supply of wheat to flour mills in October on subsidised price and 41,000 tonnes of wheat was released to flour mills/atta chakkis on Oct 25, whereas a record 150,000 tonnes are being released to flour mills in the current month (November).

The minister said that there was no reason for increase in atta prices in Sindh when wheat had been released on subsidised rates to flour mills.

Millers continued to lift wheat from the open market from April where the Sindh grain was also finding way to Punjab despite repeated request from flour millers to curb shipments to the big province.

The government later acted on the request. In contrast, Punjab government had imposed ban on wheat and flour movement to other provinces. Mill owners few days back had informed the Sindh government about illegal smuggling of wheat from Jacobabad to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and even Afghanistan.

All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers, and Merchants Association Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed said the government has issued import permit of 4,500 tonnes of Iranian tomato and some quantities have already reached Taftan border.

Imported tomato may find way into the Balochistan market by Saturday or Sunday which would then reach to other markets like Karachi, he added.

The price of tomato, which had touched up to Rs320 per kg in Karachi, now hovers between Rs240-250 per kg. "I am sure the price will decline after arrival of Iranian tomatoes in the markets," he said adding that the government reacted very quickly on the request of the association for allowing imports.

When asked that previous imports of tomato from Iran could not provide any relief to the consumers, he said a limited quantity had arrived but it was also not clear whether it was legal or illegal imports.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517059

SLOW TRADING ON COTTON MARKET

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 16, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices reeled back on falling demand from leading spinners on Friday. Liquidity crunch, acute shortage of quality lint and reports of more rains in cotton growing areas also affected market sentiments negatively.

Climate change is having a devastating impact on cotton crop and there is an urgent need to work out future plans before the arrival of new cotton season 2019-20, alarmed brokers said on Friday.

The situation is so grim that due to poor quality of cotton and short crop many ginners have stopped their operations as they cannot process local cotton without mixing it with imported variety, they added.

Cotton analyst Naseem Usman said the government has to work on war footing for developing high yield and pest resistant cotton seeds.

He also suggested that in order to increase cotton production, incentives, such as support price, should be given to growers and only then targets can be met.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were lowered Rs100 to Rs9,000 per maund and this took the total fall in a week to Rs300 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,000 bales, station Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,150; 1,200 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs9,100; 1,000 bales, Rajanpur, at Rs8,950; 1,000 bales, Yazman Mandi, at Rs8,900; and 800 bales, Fazilpur, at Rs8,950.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517054/slow-trading-on-cotton-market

ECONOMIC TARGETS CANNOT BE MET UNLESS FARM SECTOR GIVEN A BOOST, SAYS MINISTER

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent November 16, 2019

HYDERABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan said Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government (PTI) is focusing on the agriculture sector because it understands that economic targets cannot be met unless farm sector is given a boost.

Realising decline in cotton sector, he said federal government is collaborating with international experts and scientists to ensure sustainable growth in cotton, get quality seed and pesticide.

He was speaking to journalists after addressing a programme held to start wheat supply from godown of Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) on Friday.

The minister admitted there was price hike in the country and there was no doubt about the fact that the PTI government inherited a loan of Rs30,000 billion borrowed by the past regime, and the PTI government paid 50pc of the money to clear mark-up of the loan. He said due to "better policies" of the present government, even the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and Asian Development Bank reports indicated that Pakistan's economy was at a take-off stage now.

He said that currently 20kg bag of wheat flour was being sold in Punjab for Rs808 to Rs900 and Rs925 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and for over Rs1,100 in Sindh due to wheat crisis, indicating a difference of Rs300 in the cost of flour in Sindh and Punjab.

Pakistan's wheat production target was 25.8m tonnes, but there was a deficit of 1.2 to 1.4m tonnes of crop due to climate change factor that triggered unusual rains which caused losses, he said, adding that export of wheat had been banned.

He said that following Sindh's request to the federal government, Passco released 400,000 tonnes of wheat here. With the start of wheat's release, cost of per kilogram flour had decreased from Rs50 to Rs46 per kg in Sindh. Until recently wheat used to be imported involving spending of foreign exchange by Pakistan and ever since Passco started procuring wheat, Pakistan became self-sufficient in wheat.

He said that Passco had 1.6m tonnes of wheat in godowns of which 400,000 tonnes was immediately released for Sindh, 450,000 tonnes for KP, 50,000 tonnes for Balochistan and 200,000 tonnes for the Utility Stores Corporation under PM's directives.

About persistent decline in the growth of cotton sector, he said the agriculture sector was the backbone of Pakistan's economy, but cotton was backbone of the farm sector. This sector had been placed under administrative control of the ministry of food security one year back which was otherwise lying with the textile ministry. Before devolution of ministries, agriculture budget had an allocation of Rs30bn. After devolution allocation was not more than Rs15 to Rs18bn, he said.

He said the past governments did not focus on agriculture. The Pakistan Central Cotton Committee, main body of cotton sector, was not collecting cess for a long time and even salaries were hardly paid to employees, but now his ministry was working on the cotton sector, he said.

"We are seriously focusing [on] cotton and consulting with Chinese experts who visited Pakistan recently. We are collaborating with scientists and experts of other countries also to ensure sustainable growth in cotton production by obtaining quality seed and quality pesticides," he said. He said it was for the first time that the present government introduced over Rs300bn projects for the agriculture sector to focus on water and enhancement in per acre productivity.

He said the federal government did not believe in allowing subsidy because it knew that agriculture would become profitable only when farmer got higher yields. The government wanted to see how to increase per acre productivity in major crops and lessen import bill of edible oil by increasing yields in oilseed crops.

He said the livestock sector was witnessing different projects and for the first time, the fisheries sector was given a policy. As far as provincial share in agriculture emergency programme was concerned, other provinces were cooperating with the federal government.

Answering a question about locust attack, he said the attack was seen after 30 years. Currently locust was in migrating phase. But it could not be eliminated completely. He said aerial spray was done in Nawabshah which was currently under attack.

Published in Dawn, November 16th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1516930/economic-targets-cannot-be-met-unless-farm-sector-given-a-boost-says-minister

JAM MAKES A PITCH FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS IN MINING, FISHING

By RECORDER REPORT on November 16, 2019

Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Friday said the province has enormous investment opportunities in mining, agricultural, fishing and other sectors for local as well as foreign investors.

He was addressing an investment conference organized by the Federation Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) in collaboration with the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Agricultural and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Chamber of Commerce and Industry at a local hotel here.

Jam Kamal said that Pakistan is bestowed with natural resources and Balochistan has massive reserves of gold and copper. So far, only one percent of these reserves has been extracted from Chagi mines. These reserves have multiple investment opportunities for domestic and foreign investors. The government of Balochistan is fully committed to supporting investors, he added.

He said Balochistan is on track in terms of growth. The country's largest deep sea port has already been operational in Gwadar and now the country's second shipyard is being set up in Balochistan to support the shipping industry. He said that Gwadar sea port has attained prime importance in the region and will be the hub of regional trade in future with low-cost trade facilities.

“There are lots of investment opportunities in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan with attractive margins," he said. He urged foreign investors to come forward and get benefit of these investment opportunities.

Jam said foreign investment also creates employment opportunities along with economic growth, therefore ease of doing business for foreign and local investment is the top priority of the government.

Jam Kamal said agricultural and cotton cultivation experiment proved successful in different parts of the province. Recently, the province has produced export quality cotton and with proper planning, Pakistan can enhance its cotton production. In addition, quality dates and other different fruits are also some of the best products of Balochistan, he added.

He said Pakistan has hundreds of kilometers costal belt with most of the parts within Balochistan having investment opportunities in fishing and shipping sector.

He appreciated the efforts of the FPCCI, Islamic Chamber and the ECO for arranging the investment conference in Pakistan and hoped that these kinds of investment conferences will encourage foreign investors.

Earlier, Engineer Daro Khan, President FPCCI in his address of welcome said that this conference will help promote investment and trade among Islamic countries.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/16/544900/jam-makes-a-pitch-for-foreign-investors-in-mining-fishing/

CENTRE BEGINS WHEAT SUPPLY TO SINDH

By Our Correspondent Published: November 16, 2019

HYDERABAD: As the wheat crisis spiralled flour price in Sindh, the federal government formally began the supply of wheat to the province on Friday. National Food Security and Research Minister Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan inaugurated the ceremony held to mark the commencement of the supply from a warehouse of Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Supply Corporation (PASSCO) in Hyderabad.

“The federal government is giving a gift of 400,000 tonnes of wheat to the Sindh government to help it reduce the increasing price of flour [in the province],” he said, while talking to the media at the inauguration ceremony. Federal Secretary Hashim Popalzai and Sindh Food Secretary Laiq Ahmed Khan, among other officials, were also present on the occasion.

However, the help came with an admonition for the provincial government to improve its wheat security policy. “Sindh government ought to take more effective steps in the future,” Sultan underscored.

The Economic Coordination Committee set the wheat support price at Rs1,350 per 40 kilogrammes (kg), slightly enhancing the price by Rs50 per 40 kg of wheat. Pakistan Peoples Party’s Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has disapproved the increase as unsubstantial. He said the price should have been raised by Rs200 per 40 kg and warned that the lower support price will likely make the wheat crisis continue into the next year.

Sultan said that Prime Minister Imran Khan immediately ordered a supply of 400,000 tonnes of wheat to the province as soon as the provincial food secretary conveyed a request in this regard. He added that the supply of wheat to the province has also begun from the PASSCO’s warehouses in Khairpur and Ranipur.

According to him, the expected target of wheat production was set at 25.8 million tonnes but the yield was limited to only 24 million tonnes due to unfavourable weather conditions. The crop’s export was also not allowed in the ongoing year owing to the lower yield. The minister claimed that the price of a wheat bag has been reduced by Rs4 per kg, following the provision of the Center's help to the province.

He defended the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf- led federal government's withdrawal of certain agricultural subsidies. "Our government doesn't believe in subsidy. We want to create an environment in which the farmers no longer require subsidy."

Sultan said that the federal government's Plant Protection Department is actively combatting the locust attacks in Sindh and parts of Punjab, with its three planes regularly carrying out aerial sprays in the affected areas. He apprised that the government is working over the agricultural export projects worth around Rs300 billion.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 16th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2100511/1-centre-begins-wheat-supply-sindh/

GOVT MOVES TO REINTRODUCE AGRICULTURAL DISPLAY PLOTS IN PUNJAB

By Rizwan Asif Published: November 16, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab agriculture department has decided to set up agricultural display plots for wheat and canola across 3,000 rural union councils of Punjab. The move, which comes as part of the Prime Minister's Agricultural Emergency Program, seeks to motivate local farmers and bring them up to pace with the most productive agricultural techniques.

Each agricultural display plot will occupy an acre of road-facing farming land and will be allotted to farmers with premium quality produce. Farmers, who consider their produce to be of the caliber, may apply for the plots by submitting an application to the department of agriculture.

As per details, the plots will be allotted via a lucky draw and qualifying farmers will be granted Rs 11,000 per plot for wheat and Rs 15,000 for canola. Each plot will be identified and advertised by a separate five-foot tall signboard erected on its premises.

After the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) declared the federal capital an urban area, no agriculture display plots could be set up in the district. However, in a bid to create awareness the Punjab agricultural department has moved to foot the bill for seeds, fertilizers and other agricultural products needed to reintroduce the agriculture display plots in the rest of the province.

Out of the 3,296 rural union councils, 3000 have been green-lit for setting up the display plots, and the number of plots will be increased to 7,000 by next year. So far, all farmers of the 36 districts of the province have been termed eligible for the wheat plots, whereas farmers from only 13 districts will be able to apply for the canola plots. A new lucky draw will be held for each crop to extend the opportunity to a maximum number of farmers and all qualifying farmers will be free to own and utilize the yield from their display plots.

While agricultural display plots are not a new scheme, they've never been introduced at such an extensive scale. Before 1996, farmers were paid a nominal amount to set up a limited number of display plots, which were allotted on basis of personal recommendations. "This is for the first time that a project for setting up agricultural display plots has been introduced at a provincial level.

Where Lahore as an urban district cannot host agricultural land, most of the farming will take place in place in Raiwind, Manga Mandi, and Wagha," Director General of Agricultural Department Muhammad Anjum, told The Express Tribune.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 16th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2100479/1-govt-moves-reintroduce-agricultural-display-plots-punjab/

COTTON MARKET SLUGGISH

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 17, 2019

KARACHI: Activity remained slow on the cotton market on Saturday as leading buyers stayed away from the trading ring. Shortage of quality lint and a liquidity crunch in the textile industry is restricting trade.

In the absence of buying interest, cotton prices also remained under pressure. However, buyers readily paid high rates for quality lint which is running in short supply.

With each passing day, availability of quality cotton is becoming difficult and big millers have already shifted their focus on imports. Around 6 million bales are needed to meet the shortfall on harvesting around 9m bales, brokers said.

Cotton Analyst Naseem Usman said measures need to be taken by the government immediately if the next cotton crop has to be saved. The biggest issue is related to the supply of certified cotton seed and pesticides to growers, he said.

The seed should be of high yield and pest resistance, he added.

Secondly, some 700 companies are currently supplying pesticide in the country and these should be reduced to 30-35 only as is the case in India, the analyst said.

The world cotton markets also remained devoid of activity.

The Karachi Cotton Association spot rates were steady at Rs9,000 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,200 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,500-8,700; 600 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,150; 600 bales, Ghotki, at Rs9,100; 400 bales, Pano Aqil, at Rs9,200; and 600bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs9,100.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517208/cotton-market-sluggish

TOMATO PRICE AGAIN CROSSES RS300 MARK IN KARACHI MARKETS

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated November 17, 2019

KARACHI: Traders on Saturday increased the per kilogram price of tomato to Rs300-320 from Rs240-250 per kg even before the arrival of Iranian tomato in Karachi markets.

Consumers in the second week of the current month had to pay over Rs300 for a kilo of tomato and many people are not able to pay the high price of the commodity.

Many retailers have also increased the per kilogram price of onion to Rs90-100 from Rs80 per kg despite the fact that Sindh's crop in lower quantities from various producing areas along with onion from Afghanistan and Swat has reached markets.

The wholesale price of onion is Rs70 per kg. Sindh's onion crop may increase from the end of the current month, but traders already jacked up the price manifold.

Amid high prices, onion is also being exported to Sri Lanka, Far East and Bangladesh at $550 per tonne (FOB price).

About the tomato crisis, traders in the city's main vegetable market said that the wholesale tomato prices had fallen to Rs200 from Rs240 per kg during the last one day. They expressed surprise as to how the retailers were fleecing consumers by increasing the price.

Nowadays, many people are picking one or two tomato as per their requirement instead of buying in kilos.

Many retailers are charging Rs80 per 250 grams of tomato and Rs300 for one kg.

Stakeholders in Sabzi Mandi are refusing to reveal the landed price of Iranian tomatoes. The government had initially issued permits for importing 4,500 tonnes of Iranian tomato.

All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers, and Merchants Association's patron-in-chief Waheed Ahmed said: "Actually clearing agents have been engaged in providing services by importing, clearing and transporting tomato from the Taftan border to Pakistani markets. "I think the landed cost of Iranian tomato will not be more than Rs100 per kg," he said.

Imported tomato would first arrive in Balochistan markets and then reach Karachi and other markets, he said, adding that the situation relating to more imports and price would be clear by next week.

He said recent rains in Sindh and Balochistan may pose a threat to the ready crops of tomato and onions.

Mr Ahmed said that the ongoing protest campaign of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl by blocking main arteries might create problems in transportation of vegetables and other items from one province to another. The government should take steps in ensuring smooth movement of goods, particularly perishable goods, he added.

Published in Dawn, November 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1517097/tomato-price-again-crosses-rs300-mark-in-karachi-markets

GOVERNMENT URGED TO ALLOW DUTY-FREE IMPORT OF WHEAT

By RECORDER REPORT on November 17, 2019

President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum (PBIF), Mian Zahid Hussain has said that the government has tried to keep prices stable but to no avail, therefore, the government should allow duty-free import of wheat to keep prices stable.

He said confusion prevail as the government claims that it has 4.5 million tonnes of wheat while the private sector is asking for permission to import up to 300,000 tonnes of wheat which must be considered.

He said that the government claims that it has sufficient stock of wheat in the country but the private sector has expressed concerns which should be taken seriously.

However, he lauded the decision of the government to increase wheat support price by Rs50.

The support price has been increased after five years which will provide some relief to farmers but it may increase the price of roti which has already been increased twice during this year, he said.

He noted that situation should be reassessed to keep the balance between demand and supply lest some other factors disrupt the supply side.

He said that wheat stocks in Sindh are under pressure, rumours are fanning speculation resulting in a price hike while smuggling to Afghanistan continues unabated.

Punjab has 3.5 million tonnes of wheat; KP has 200,000 tonnes of wheat while Sindh claims to have 800,000 tonnes of wheat which are contested by market forces.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/17/545077/government-urged-to-allow-duty-free-import-of-wheat/

NEXT RABI CROPS: MET URGES COTTON GROWERS TO ENSURE TIMELY COMPLETION OF SOWING

By RECORDER REPORT on November 17, 2019

Cotton growers should prepare fields for the next Rabi crops and ensure timely completion of sowing, according to the Met Office.

Farmers, it said, should also schedule irrigation plans in line with the expected cloudy and rainy weather. “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.

Day time temperature is likely to remain below normal whereas night-time may be slightly above normal in the most of the agricultural plains of the country, where normal wind pattern is expected to prevail until Nov 20.

Sindh: Cloudy weather is expected. However, scattered rain/wind-thunderstorm is expected in northeast Balochistan (Quetta, Zhob, Kalat, Sibbi, Khuzdar, Ziarat districts) during the current decade.

Punjab: Cloudy weather is expected. However, scattered rain/wind-thunderstorm (with light snowfall over hills) is expected in most districts of southern Punjab during the 2nd half of the current decade. Dust storm/hailstorm is also expected in few plain areas.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Cloudy weather is expected. However, isolated rain/wind-thunderstorm (with light snowfall over hills) is expected in most districts of upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the current decade. Balochistan: Cloudy weather is expected. However, scattered rain/wind-thunderstorm is expected in upper Sindh (Sukkur, Larakana, Jacobabad and Ghotki districts) during the 1st half of the current decade.

Gilgit-Baltistan: Cloudy weather is expected. However, isolated rain/wind-thunderstorm is expected during the 2nd half of the current decade. Kashmir: Cloudy weather is expected. However, isolated rain/wind-thunderstorm is expected during the 2nd half of the current decade. In the next 24 hours: Mainly dry weather is expected in the most parts of the country, while cold in northern parts.

“A westerly wave is still affecting upper parts of the country and will move in north easterly direction during next 12 hours," the Met said. Over the past 24 hours: Widespread rain-thunderstorm occurred in districts of upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir while scattered fall in districts of Rawalpindi, Bahawalpur Bahawalnagar, R. Y. Khan, Khanpur, Layyah, Kasur, Khanewal, Lahore, Okara , Sahiwal, Narowal, Attock, Sukkur, Larkana, Hyderabad, Zhob, Khuzdar, Quetta, Lasballa and Islamabad.

Maximum rainfall was recorded in Malamjabba 45 mm, Muzaffarabad (Airport 36 mm, City 15 mm), Kalam 32 mm, Dir (Upper 25 mm, Lower 18 mm), Balakot 25 mm, Mirkhani 21 mm, Pattan, Mohenjo-Daro and Bahawalpur Airport 20 mm, each, Garidupatta 19 mm, Tahktbai 18 mm, Bahawalpur City 17 mm, Peshawar City and Jaccobabad 16 mm, each, Saidu Sharif 14 mm, Bahawalnagar 13 mm, Cherat and Kakul and Astore 12 mm, each, Khanpur and Sukkur 11 mm, each, Drosh, Chitral and Parachinar 10, each, minimum temperature was recorded in Bagrot minus 2, Kalam minus 1 and Kalat zero degree Celsius.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/17/545072/next-rabi-crops-met-urges-cotton-growers-to-ensure-timely-completion-of-sowing/

FARMERS DIRECT GUN BARREL TOWARDS LOCUST TO PROTECT CROPS

November 17, 2019

GHOTKI: The farmers finally have put the barrels towards the looming locust swarms to get rid of the vicious attacker, claiming that the sound of the fire and drums compels them to go away for awhile.

Worried with the presence of locust in parts of Ghotki including Garhi Chakarwar and Kenjodad Laghari, the local farmers said to get rid of the attacking swarms of locust, they used the sound of gun fire and drums to stop them from attacking their crops.

The farmers of Ghotki said if the government did not take any concrete action to remove the locusts, it can inflict serious harm during the sowing season of the wheat crop.

Earlier, the locusts attacked standing crops in Tharparkar and ravaged them heavily. The farmers were also worried after the recent locust attack in Memon Goth Malir and Gadap Town of Karachi extensively damaged different vegetable crops.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner Ghotki, Khalid Saleem said it is the responsibility of the Department of Plants and Protection to control the locusts. He claimed the DPP did not provide the medicine causing serious damage.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/570076-farmers-direct-gun-barrel-towards-locust-to-protect-crops

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOV 18th TO NOV 24th 2019

PUNJAB SETS UP VEGETABLE STALLS IN SHAMSABAD

Staff Reporter November 18, 2019

RAWALPINDI: The Punjab government has set up stalls in front of the Shamsabad Public Park selling vegetables directly from farms.

Agriculture department assistant directorMustamir Ahmed Awan told Dawn that the government had sought to set up stalls where farmers could sell vegetables directly, without involving middlemen.

He said these stalls were first set up on Peshawar Road, but the district administration asked for them to be moved to Shamsabad.

Deputy Commissioner Saifullah Dogar said district price magistrates undertook a campaign against profiteering and hoarding in the district between Nov 1 and Nov 16.

Teams inspected 2,940 shops and markets in the district and found 1,284 violations in various areas, he said.

They imposed fines totalling Rs2.3 million, lodged 336 FIRs in 24 police stations and arrested 217 people, he said.

He claimed the campaign against price hikes has gained momentum and prices of commodities are being controlled.

He also said action against price hikes “would be strengthened in the coming days” and violations of the administrations price list will face punitive action.

Published in Dawn, November 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1517376/punjab-sets-up-vegetable-stalls-in-shamsabad

IRRIGATION OFFICIALS ACCUSED OF EMBEZZLEMENT

The Newspaper's Correspondent November 18, 2019

SHEIKHUPURA: An embezzlement of millions of rupees has been alleged in the irrigation department’s Rachna drainage division by an applicant.

The complainant in his application submitted to the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) Lahore director general said two executive engineers Abid Akram and Sadaqat Latif during their six-year tenure in Sheikhupura did not bother to carry out desilting works on drainages under their jurisdiction.

He alleged that the funds allocated for this purpose had been misappropriated which caused flooding in many parts of the district.

The floodwater, he said, damaged standing crops and also caused a great loss to the farmers and people in residential areas.

He said executive engineers had also appointed many people on a temporary basis after taking bribe from them. Chief Engineer Riaz Rasheed was also involved in the scam, he said.

The ACE director general ordered an inquiry headed by the deputy director Sheikhupura range and directed him to submit a report as soon as possible.

Published in Dawn, November 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1517418/irrigation-officials-accused-of-embezzlement

GROWERS' BODY CALLS FOR STEPS TO AVERT GRAIN CRISIS NEXT YEAR

Dawn Report Updated November 18, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has warned the Sindh government to ensure transparent procurement of wheat this season in order to preempt shortage of the grain and flour next year.

If the government did not take right steps now then no one could avert an imminent food crisis next year, said Miran Mohammad Shah, SCA's newly elected president, at a press conference held after the chamber's general body meeting on Sunday.

He called for banning import of tomatoes to save Sindh's tomato crop that would be in markets from Nov 25. If the import was not stopped local farmers would bear huge losses, he said.

He rejected wheat support price of Rs1,350 per 40 kilogramme fixed for 2019-20 season and said the price should be fixed at Rs1,600 per 40kg this season and procurement target should be increased from 1.2 million tonnes to 2.5m tonnes.

Shah termed unjustified the deduction of 5 to 8kg of paddy by millers on the pretext of moisture in the grain. The Sindh government should curb the practice and fix paddy price at Rs1,500 per 40kg, he advised.

He said that sugar cane crop was ready for harvest but cane price and date of crushing had not been notified yet due to obduracy of sugar mill owners. Growers anticipated that the Sindh government would fix cane price at Rs192 per 40kg like Punjab which had fixed the price at Rs190 per 40kg but the SCA would not accept any rate below Rs250 per 40kg this year, he said.

He regretted that growers had suffered around Rs25bn losses due to substandard cotton seed and pesticides and called for ban on sale of spurious seeds in Sindh and compensation for the cotton growers. Now, he said, due to damage to cotton crop the government would have to import cotton by spending $5bn which would be an additional burden on national exchequer, he said.

He warned irrigation department to end artificial water shortage in Tando Allahyar, Hyderabad, Tando Mohammad Khan and Thatta failing which the SCA would launch a protest drive.

Shah was elected as new head of SCA after Kabool Kathian stepped down citing personal reasons. He was a lawyer by profession and son of late Syed Qamaruzzaman Shah and younger brother of central PPP leader Syed Naveed Qamar.

MIRPURKHAS: Growers and office bearers of different farmer associations have warned that if sugar mills do not start crushing and government do not fix cane rate at Rs250 per 40 kg then growers will be compelled to launch a province-wide protest campaign.

Local grower leaders Maqsood Rajput, Nadeem Bhurgari, Khalid Arain and others told media persons on Sunday that Sindh government had not yet issued a notification for fixing rate of cane under a conspiracy against growers.

They said that cane commissioner too had not pressurised the mills to start crushing season, thereby allowing matured cane crop to start getting dry and reduce weight.

They said that this year, the mills would have to purchase cane from outside the district to run their boilers because many growers had reduced the acreage of cane after having to suffer huge losses in cane cultivation.

Published in Dawn, November 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1517295/growers-body-calls-for-steps-to-avert-grain-crisis-next-year

HUGE SWARM OF LOCUSTS INVADES THAR AREAS AGAIN

A Correspondent Updated November 18, 2019

MITHI: A huge swarm of locusts again invaded many Tharparkar areas and devoured plants, mature crops and leaves of trees causing heavy losses to the local farming community on Sunday. Dr Satram, Mohammad Moosa Samejo and other panicked peasants and abadgars told this reporter that the swarm appeared to be many times larger than the one that had unleashed devastation in the district a couple of months back. They recalled that when the locusts were spotted in Sindh before the recent monsoon rains, the provincial government and other authorities concerned had held out the assurance that anti-locust spray would be conducted after rainfall. However, they deplored they did not keep their word and helpless growers had to suffer heavy losses. A much bigger swarm, comprising millions of locusts, again hit the area and ravaged mature crops, farmlands, green pastures and trees in Dahli taluka and parts of Umerkot district, they lamented.

They urged the authorities concerned to rush to their rescue by taking all possible measures to eliminate the pest.

Meanwhile, a consignment of anti-locusts pesticide has been donated to the district administration by the Thar Foundation, according to a statement issued here on Sunday.

It said that 800 bags of lambda cyhalothrin were handed over to senior officials of the administration.Tharparkar Deputy Commissioner Dr Shahzad Tahir Thaheem, commenting on the situation, said that recent locust attack had damaged crops in parts of Thar but most agricultural lands were protected by applying numerous methods. Due to the recent spells of rains in the region, the danger of locust invasion had remained there, he added.

He said the donated pesticide would be used in western parts of Tharparkar to eliminate locusts.

Published in Dawn, November 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1517288/huge-swarm-of-locusts-invades-thar-areas-again

PAPERING OVER CRACKS THROUGH CRACKDOWNS

Ahmad Fraz Khan November 18, 2019

AS prices of almost all staple vegetables — tomato, onion, garlic, ginger, etc. — shoot through the roof, the provincial governments are in the middle of a massive administrative crackdown to keep prices in check.

The extent and depth of these measures are telling. On Nov 13, the Punjab government reported 8,316 raids in 24 hours, registering 110 cases against violators of daily price list, arresting 57 of them and slapping fines worth Rs2.46 million.

These raids are a routine exercise for a week now. However, with the magistracy system gone, these punitive raids are more of a firefighting exercise, conducted on the pressure, and under the glare, of media to satisfy enraged public rather than a system to keep things under control.

Such administrative measures do have some utility, but only up to a point. Beyond that point, market forces take over.

To keep things under control, the government needs to identify deeper causes of the issue, i.e. production patterns, a weakening rupee, ever-increasing oil prices taking freight charges higher and higher, and double-digit inflation.

A national vegetable policy is required that identifies potential production areas in different ecological zones across the country and comes up with a production plan

Take the example of tomato, which has come to symbolise the current spike and has caused much embarrassment to the government after Advisor to the Prime Minister on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Sheikh put the price at Rs17 per kilogram, when market was selling at Rs250 per kilogram.

During November and December, Pakistan's tomato requirement is met from the rain-fed areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Being weather-dependent crop, tomato's yields are naturally low, creating a huge gap between inelastic demand and fluctuating supplies during these months.

This was particularly a bad year for such essential commodities, as heatwaves affected the crop. The freight factor also came into play, as the areas where tomato's crop is grown are quite far from demand centres like Lahore and Karachi.

With diesel now costing over Rs130 per litre, even a small vehicle costs well over Rs100,000 to bring goods to urban centres. The entire transportation cost is thus shifted to commodity, which, in most of the cases, is higher than the commodity itself.

However, the downtrend is seasonal. Two months down the line, when massive yields from the irrigated areas of Sindh and Punjab hit the market, the pendulum would swing to the other extreme.

Prices, on average, would drop by 60 to 70 per cent and the farmers from these areas would be found full of complaints about low prices. But these two months are enervating enough for everyone to drive them over the edge.

Right now, garlic and ginger prices have two additional factors: rupee's devaluation and official love for taxes in every form, regardless of social cost.

Currently, both vegetables are imported from the Far East (mainly China and Thailand), costing $1,000 per tonne (garlic) and $1,100 per tonne (ginger).

On the devaluation head alone, the price has gone up by 35pc in the last 18 months.

"Add customs duty of Rs75 per kg to the devaluation differential and the current spike is hardly hard to understand," argues Khalil Bhatti, an importer from Lahore.

In case of garlic, the current price trend is likely to hold until the end of April when the local crop joins the market, he suggests, and warns: "In case of ginger — being an imported crop — no such relief can be seen unless the government does away with massive duties."

The case of onion is even more curious. Despite soaring prices within the country, Pakistan has so far exported 33,006 tonnes (mainly to the Gulf region, Europe and Bangladesh) this season to maximise export figures and earn foreign exchange.

"The country is up in arms because of ever-increasing onion prices, which has seen a rise of around 35pc in the last few weeks, and the government has allowed unhindered export," laments Muhammad Ramzan, an onion trader from Lahore.

He fears that the country would shortly be importing onion and losing whatever foreign exchange gain it made in the first place.

Pakistan needs to realise that most vegetables are seasonal, perishable items that suffer high harvest losses and travel across the country at different times of the year. Their production cycles are particularly vulnerable to climate, and even a smaller variation in yield spells trouble throughout the country, as happened in case of tomato this year.

That is precisely why the country needs, as suggested many times earlier, a national vegetable policy, which documents requirement of each one of them, identify potential production areas in different ecological zones across the country and come up with a production plan.

The policy should also include early warning systems to raise alarm when a crop fails in any part of the country and take corrective measures.

This year, tomato crop partially failed due to heatwave, but no one rang the bell. Instead, people realised the failure through price spike rather than an official warning system.

Unless, we have such a policy in place, varying vegetables yields and prices would continue to create political problems for the government and financial troubles for common man.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, November 18th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1517248/papering-over-cracks-through-crackdowns

THAR FOUNDATION DONATES ANTI-LOCUST PESTICIDE TO DISTRICT GOVERNMENT

By RECORDER REPORT on November 18, 2019

To arrest the menace of locust in Thar, Thar Foundation has joined hands with district administration of Tharparkar by donating a consignment of anti-locust pesticide to the district government of Thar.

The consignments of 800 Lambda Cyhalothrin bags were handed over to the senior officials of district administration Tharparkar by Thar Foundation representatives. Lambda Cyhalothrin is an organic compound that is used as a pesticide. It is a pyrethroid, a class of synthetic insecticides that mimic the structure and insecticidal properties of the naturally occurring insecticide pyrethrin. Pyrethroids such as cyhalothrin are often preferred as an active ingredient in insecticides because they remain effective for longer periods of time.

Just after the recent monsoon rains allowed green vegetation to flourish in Thar, swarms of locusts invaded Chachro, Dalhi and parts of Islamkot and Nangarparkar taulkas, damaging agricultural crops in huge quantity. Swarms of locusts recently attacked cluster beans (gawar), split green gram (moong), pearl millet (bajra) crops in Chachro and Dalhi Taulkas mainly.

Thar Foundation is not-for-profit organisation and subsidiary of Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company (SECMC), a public private partnership endeavor between the Government of Sindh and Engro Corporation and other private sector players.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/18/545285/thar-foundation-donates-anti-locust-pesticide-to-district-government/

PRICES OF ESSENTIAL FOOD ITEMS RISE SHARPLY

By AMJAD ALI SHAH on November 18, 2019

Prices of essential food commodities, including vegetable, pulses, fruits, sugar, flour and other have risen sharply in local market, according to a survey carried out by Business Recorder here on Sunday.

Almost hundred to two hundred per cent increase in the prices of vegetable, grocery items, fruits, and other commodities mocks local administrationâ€(tm)s claims of controlling profiteering, as shopkeepers continued to charge masses with exorbitant rates in the provincial capital.

â€œIs anyone there to see food price hike,â€� says a consumer while purchasing tomato in local market. No respite for poverty stricken masses as prices have touched new peak in local market, another buyer said.

The vegetable merchants and vendors say the prices have increased due to hike in fuel prices and low supply against the demand in local market.

The survey noticed that price of tomatoes has doubled in local market as available at Rs160-170 per kg in local market, which was selling at Rs80 per kg in the previous week.

Similarly, price of ginger has become costlier which is being sold at Rs400-500 per kg in local market. Likewise, prices of garlic are also dearer which is being available at Rs300-400 per kg.

It was noticed that price of green chili has also touched new heights as available at Rs250-300 per kg. Lemon is being sold at Rs100 per kg. Cucumber is being sold at Rs60-70 per kg.

A considerable increase was witnessed in prices of other veggies in retail market. For instance, peas are being sold at Rs250-300 per kg, capsicum at Rs250 per kg, bitter groud (karela) at Rs150 per kg, Arvi at Rs120 per kg. Cabbage was available at Rs60 per kg, cauliflower at Rs70 per kg.

Apple, long and round gourds are being sold within range of Rs70-80 and Rs90 per kg. Bringle is being sold at Rs50-60 per kg. Ladyfinger is being sold at Rs100 and Rs120 [per kg] in local market. Red potato is being available at Rs70-80 per kg, while others are being sold within range of Rs40-50 per kg in retail market.

Turnip is being sold at Rs50-60 per kg. A bundle of Radish is being sold at Rs30, while carrots are being sold at Rs30 and Rs40 per kg.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/18/545271/prices-of-essential-food-items-rise-sharply/

KAKAR VOWS TO MAKE LIVESTOCK EXPO SUCCESSFUL

By Our Correspondent Published: November 18, 2019

QUETTA: Adviser to Balochistan Chief Minister for Livestock Mitha Khan Kakar on Saturday chaired a meeting of provincial committee for Livestock Expo 2019. He said the expo will be a mega event that will not only promote livestock but will also become a trendsetter for other sectors to follow.

Kakar reiterated commitment to make the event successful by utilising all capabilities and resources.

Special Assistant to Chief Minister Ejaz Ahmed Sanjrani, provincial secretary for Livestock Dostain Khan Jamaldini and Livestock Department officials were also present on the occasion.

The participants of the meeting were given a detailed briefing by Jamaldini about the private and public sector stalls attending the expo. He informed about the security measures and said the transportation and accommodation arrangements have been completed.

A special desk has also been set up at the Quetta International Airport and shuttle services have also been arranged for the commute of the guests, Jamaldini added.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 18th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2101454/kakar-vows-make-livestock-expo-successful/

MOUNTING CONCERNS: RISING PRICES OF ESSENTIALS ADD TO CITIZENS’ WORRIES

By Imran Adnan Published: November 18, 2019

LAHORE: The prices of most essential commodities, especially seasonal vegetables, continue to rise unabated in the provincial capital due to the absence of an efficient and effective price control mechanism.

A survey of markets and model bazaars shows that vendors, in collusion with market committee officials, have raised the prices of almost all seasonal vegetables.

Tomatoes, an essential ingredient of almost all Pakistani dishes, are being sold for between Rs300 and Rs350 per kilogrammes in different areas of Lahore; the government has fixed the prices of tomatoes between Rs200 and Rs210/kg at markets and between Rs190 and Rs200/kg at Sunday bazaars.

Similarly, onions, another commonly used ingredient, are being sold for up to Rs130/kg in retail markets while the price of the vegetable has been fixed between Rs64 and Rs76/kg. In addition, several citizens have complained that vendors are selling a mixed variety of onions at Sunday bazaars and charging locals the price for the sorted variety.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Nasreen Rashid, a housewife, explained that because of the country’s deteriorating economic situation, citizens are losing their jobs.

“Instead of controlling inflation and an artificial hike in the prices, the government has given traders and greengrocers a free hand to fleece citizens,” she maintained. “The prices of essential commodities are skyrocketing but no government action is being taken to deal with the situation,” she said.

Another citizen, Muhammad Usman, highlighted that the prices of seasonal vegetables have become so high that people have to think twice about buying them.

“The district government’s price control system has proven to be worthless. The officials of price control committees are checking the prices of commodities to merely demonstrate that they are performing their duties,” he said. He added that the officials have no control over the traders and shopkeepers who have jacked up prices.

Meanwhile, an official from the Punjab agricultural department highlighted that the new tomato crop from Sindh is due to arrive next month, which will help in bringing down the prices of tomatoes. He maintained that the supply of tomatoes is limited which is why the prices are witnessing an upward trend.

In order to control the prices of seasonal fruits and vegetables, the Lahore deputy commissioner directed all major departmental stores to enforce the prices notified by the government for fruits and vegetables.

Last week after a public outcry over an exorbitant increase in seasonal fruits and vegetables, the district administration decided to abolish the deputy commissioner’s counter in major departmental stores and decided to enforce the notified rates across the board.

The deputy commissioner’s office also issued a warning to the management of departmental stores regarding displaying poor quality fruit and vegetables and going against the notified rates.

Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar also expressed concern over the artificial price hike in cities across the province. He directed the Price Control Task Force to take effective measures to stabilise the rates of food items, especially seasonal fruits and vegetables.

The chief minister had also announced the establishment of a provincial price control authority which will function along the patterns of the Punjab Food Authority (PFA). Buzdar directed the authorities concerned to constitute a comprehensive mechanism for controlling inflation, adding that the district administration should strictly monitor the rates of items.

Price control magistrates should perform their duties proactively and the rate lists should be displayed at all shops where they can be seen easily, he said.

In order to curb profiteering, the government has decided to eliminate the role of the middle man from agricultural markets. The government has already announced the establishment of farmers markets at a tehsil level, as well as setting up a fruit and vegetable home delivery system in five major cities, including Lahore, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Multan, to ensure the availability of essential at fixed rates, he said.

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Published in The Express Tribune, November 18th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2101428/2-mounting-concerns-rising-prices-essentials-add-citizens-worries/

IRANIAN TOMATOES BRING NO RELIEF FOR CONSUMERS

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated November 19, 2019

KARACHI: The arrival of Iranian tomato consignment at Super Highway Sabzi Mandi failed to bring any relief to consumers in the city on Monday as retailers continued to charge Rs300-320 per kg for the vegetable.

Talking to Dawn, traders said only a limited quantity of imported tomato reached the wholesale market in Karachi which kept retail prices under pressure. They added that depending on the quality, Iranian tomato was being sold Rs180-220 per kg – almost the same prices were quoted for tomatoes from Swat and Sindh.

A large number of retailers did not lift tomatoes owing to higher prices. “I did not purchase tomatoes today for the first time in 20 years due to very high prices which many consumers are unable to pay,” a push cart dealer at F.B. Area said. A 20-22 kg crate of Iranian tomato is costing Rs4,500 in which 4-5kg are rotten and go to waste,” he added.

Many consumers have either stopped buying tomatoes buying or are only purchasing maximum 250 grams for Rs250 for their daily cooking needs, he said.

Consumers are surprised by the wholesalers silence in revealing the actual landed cost of Iranian tomato. In the absence of any strict price checking mechanism, higher wholesale prices have been fixed keeping in view the demand and supply gap.

The government had initially issued permits for importing 4,500 tonnes of Iranian tomatoes last week.

Patron-in-Chief All Pakis-tan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers, and Merchants Association (PFVA) Waheed Ahmed claimed that only 989 tonnes out of the 4,500 tonnes have arrived so far. “Out of these 989 tonnes, only two containers carrying 44 tonnes impo-rted tomatoes had reached in Karachi Wholesale Mandi,” he added.

On Saturday, the PFVA chief had told Dawn that the landed cost of Iranian tomato would not be more than Rs 100 per kg. “I cannot tell the landed cost now. However, trading price of tomato is ranging between Rs180-250 per kg,” he added.

The ongoing sit in of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl at main arteries is also creating problems in transportation of vegetables and other items from one province to another.

President Falahi Anjuman Wholesale Vegetable Market Super Highway Mandi, Haji Shahjehan also confirmed the arrival of two containers of tomato, with trading price ranging between Rs180-220 per kg.

Published in Dawn, November 19th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1517574/iranian-tomatoes-bring-no-relief-for-consumers

COTTON OUTPUT FALLS BY 1.8M BALES

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana Updated November 19, 2019

KARACHI: Battered by climate change, the cotton production continues to give a gloomy picture as effects of high temperature, heavy rains and gusty winds reduced crop by around 1.814 million bales.

Data released by Pakistan Cotton Ginners’ Association (PCGA) on Monday shows cotton production up to November 15 at 6.857 million bales, down 21 per cent over 8.671m bales in same period last year.

A steep fall in cotton production in Punjab was the major factor which reduced overall output in the country. Sindh also suffered immensely due to impact of climate change.

According to details, Punjab produced 3.692m bales as against 4.985m in corresponding period last year, showing a decline of around 26pc.

Similarly, Sindh's crop was lower by 14.14pc or 521,167 bales at 3.165m bales, compared to 3.686m produced in same period of previous season.

A cotton broker and grower from Sindh, Girdhari Lal Assudomal, told Dawn the situation was alarming and this strongly indicates that next crop could be even lower if no remedial measures were taken.

Cotton Analyst Naseem Usman urged the government to work on 'war footings' on many fronts to save the indigenous crop of Mehran valley – which had grown for centuries in the region – from vanishing.

He regretted that the basic issue of cotton crop had been the supply of certified seed to growers. But unfortunately the concerned government departments were not working or doing research work for evolving high yielding, pest and high temperature resistance seed. Another analyst, Taqi Abbas, said that one of the biggest issue confronting cotton crop was the supply of substandard pesticides.

He further said it was not possible to ensure pure pesticides when there are around 700 companies in the field, and added only 30-35 should be allowed to operate as is the case with India.

Looking at the developing scenario, private estimates now put cotton production at around 8.5-9m bales and this would mean heavy imports of around 6m would be putting burden on foreign exchange reserves to the tune of $1.5 billion, he added.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517573/cotton-output-falls-by-18m-bales

RICE MILLS CLOSED, PADDY BUYING STOPPED IN SHAHDADKOT IN PROTEST

By M.B. Kalhoro | 11/19/2019 12:00:00 AM

LARKANA: Rice millers, who had come to Shahdadkot`s grain market (Anaj Mandi), on Monday stopped procurement of paddy from growers over what they termed `intervention by district administration in the trading`. Their withdrawal from the market caused panic and anguish among paddy growers, who blocked the nearby roads by parking their crop-laden vehicles in the middle of the thoroughfares in protest against millers` reaction.The trading came to a halt when Shahdadkot sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) Sajjad Haidar Qadri and DSP Yar Mohammed Rind along with a police team arrived in the market and tried to enforce an agreement reached between millers and paddy growers a few years baclc Under the agreement, millers had undertaken to do away with the practice of deducting certain quantity from the actual weight of the paddy stocks they would buy.

The agreement was inked during the tenure of Qambar-Shahdadkot Deputy Commissioner Anwarul Haq.

Millers were supposed to stop such cuts in the weight because it was an illegal practice, Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) general secretary Abdul Khalique Khoso said while talking to Dawn on Monday.

Incumbent Deputy Commissioner Jawed Ahmed Jagirani retained the agreement after two rounds of negotiations betweenthe stakeholders,he said.

Abdul Wahab Pandrani, president of the district`s Shehri Ittehad, endorsed growers` stand on the issue. He noted with concern that when the SDM and DSP asked the millers, present in the market, to desist from applying illegal cuts, they stopped buying the crop. He pointed out that the crop was transported from across the district and parts of the adjoining Balochistan province to the market. He said that millers, reacting to the district administration`s involvement in the trade, shut down their mills. The road blockage by paddy growers caused severe disruption in the flow of vehicular traffic in the market area.

Traffic jam was witnessed on all roads leading to Shahdadkot town.

Balochistan Abadgars Action Committee also joined in the protest, said Mr Pandrani.

The SDM and DSP tried to dissuade millers from going for a closure of their millsbut in vain.

Talking to Dawn, DSP Yar Mohammed Rind said that growers had resorted to blocking roads to register their protest against millers` act of violating the agreement. He said the protesters cleared the roadsin the evening.

SAB leader Khoso said that millers were applying a Rs26 cut on every 40 kilograms of paddy and a 120kg cut on a trolley-load of the commodity weighing about 4,000kg.

Thestand-offbroughttheroutine bidding and trading process for paddy in the market to a halt.

Mr Khoso said that paddy crop from Gandakha (Balochistan) and its adjoining areas along with the crop of QambarShahdadkot district used to be brought in the market regularly.

There are around 98 rice mills in QambarShahdadkot district, sources said.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=19_11_2019_117_005

PIR PAGARA WARNS OF LOOMING FAMINE IN SINDH

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 19, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan Muslim League-Functional chief Pir Pagara has said that if Sindh’s agriculture department, which mostly remains dormant and fails to guide farmers to tackle challenges, does not take timely measures to protect standing crops of cotton, rice, wheat and maize from locusts it will have serious implications for entire farm sector.

Both the federal and provincial governments had failed to check ceaseless attacks by locusts on standing crops and trees and prepare for consequences of changing weather conditions and if the situation persisted, the country would have to face famine and drought, said Pagara while presiding over a meeting of the Grand Democratic Alliance core committee here on Monday.

He said that no provincial department was self-sufficient and efficient and as was expected the Sindh government did not take any measure to prevent the locust attacks, which had badly damaged the standing crops.

He said that since last three years weather had been changing in Sindh but people who lived in cities would have no idea of the impact of changing weather and locust attack which might result in famine.

Pagara said that airplanes had reached Rahimyar Khan to protect crops from the deadly insect while Sindh farmers had been left waiting for aerial spray on their crops for the past two months.

He said the low price of wheat was also an outcome of incompetence of the Sindh government. Although wheat was being sold at Rs3,000 per 40 kilogrammes but the government had fixed its price at Rs1,300 per 40kg only, he said.

He recalled seizure of Dr Zulfiqar Mirza's farmland and said that earlier "they" had tried to grab Jatoi's land but were chased out by his men. Law and order situation had worsened and people of Sindh had become fed up with the government due to rising prices of essential commodities and increasing unemployment, he said.

He expressed gratitude to all opposition parties which extended support to the GDA candidate in by-election for a Sindh Assembly seat in Larkana and helped the alliance win by defeating Pakistan Peoples Party.

He said that the alliance had expected support from the federal government but unfortunately it was disappointed when it did not get any help from federal level, neither did the Centre take any notice of the unprecedented win after the by-poll. Nevertheless, "we will continue to contest polls as allies of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf. We have fought alongside PTI and have always fielded our candidates against PPP", he said.

Qaumi Awami Tehreek chief Ayaz Latif Palijo, who was also at the meeting, said that if wheat price was not fixed at least at Rs1,500 per 40kg, farmers would stop cultivating the grain from next season.

He demanded sugar cane rate be fixed at Rs230 per 40kg and pointed out that even Rs20 which were added to the cane price had not been paid yet to farmers by factory owners.

He said that Karachi gave a look of a massive junkyard with heaps of refuse everywhere. Likewise, he said, there was no clean drinking water in Sindh and no action had been taken to arrest killers of innocent daughters of nation like Nimrita and Naila.

He said that no dog-bite vaccine was available in Sindh hospitals and children were left to meet painful end. Neither Sindh nor federal government had taken any measures to provide relief to rain-affected people in Thar as ministers were only interested in photo sessions.

Palijo said that GDA respected all court judgments on cases of former prime minister Mian Nawaz Sharif.

The meeting, which was attended, among others, by Pir Sadruddin Shah Rashdi, Sardar Abdul Rahim, Ali Gohar Khan Mahar, Ayaz Latif Palijo, Murtaza Khan Jatoi, Hasnain Mirza, Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah, Nusrat Sehar Abbasi, Nand Kumar Goklani, Abdul Razzaq Rahimoon and Dr Safdar Abbasi, deliberated on organisational issues of the GDA.

It also discussed pressing issues being faced by people across the country, Sindh in particular, and decided to participate fully in upcoming local government election.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517458/pir-pagara-warns-of-looming-famine-in-sindh

LAWMAKER, ACTIVISTS CALL FOR DECLARING THAR CALAMITY-HIT

Dawn Report November 19, 2019

MITHI: Pakistan Peop-les Party Thar chapter leaders, including a lawmaker, have demanded Sindh chief minister declare Tharparkar as calamity-hit in the wake of unabated onslaughts of locusts and disastrous rains with unprecedented lightning strike incidents, which have played havoc with the region, claiming scores of human lives and ruining crops and vegetation.

PPP MPA Arbab Lutfullah and others requested the chief minister in a letter written on Monday that besides declaring the region as calamity-hit, the chief minister should also order revenue officials to stop collecting taxes from farmers in the desert district. "The recent heavy rains and ceaseless attack of locusts on crops, grasses and trees have inflicted heavy losses on Thari farmers," he said.

He shared copies of the letter with journalists and said that lightning strikes last Wednesday and Thursday had claimed as many as 29 lives across the desert district. It was, therefore, need of the hour to announce a relief package for the families of the victims.

He said that most parts of Thar needed special attention of high-ups and urged both the federal and Sindh governments to take prompt action to exterminate the deadly insects.

Rights activists, members of civil society and farmers reiterated the demand for declaring the region as calamity-hit and suspending collection of all agricultural taxes.

A spokesperson for Chief Minister House confirmed receiving the letter and said CM Murad Ali Shah had already sought detailed report from senior revenue officials on the degree of losses caused by the natural calamity in Thar.

PPP MPA Qasim Siraj Soomro, who was member of a ministerial committee on Thar, told this reporter that the committee would soon submit a detailed report to the chief minister and recommend remedial measures.

KHAIRPUR: Citizens recorded videos of ominous swarms of locusts flying over Khairpur and uploaded them onto social media on Monday, raising concerns about imminent attack by the insect on crops and trees.

Growers have appealed to authorities concerned to immediately move into action and kill off the insects before they caused heavy losses.

HYDERABAD: PPP senior leader Taj Haider has accused federal ministry of national food security and research of slumbering undisturbed as another and much larger swarm of locust attacks Thar.

It was the duty of department of plant protection (DPP) which came under the federal ministry to eradicate locusts but it had so far remained unmoved to cries of farmers whose crops were destroyed, and repeated appeals by provincial government, said Mr Haider in a statement emailed to Dawn on Monday.

He said that locusts had been in Sindh and southern Punjab for the past six months and Sindh did arrange for ground spray of pesticides out of its own resources but nothing short of an aerial spray on the insects and their breeding grounds would exterminate them completely. Forty per cent of mature cotton and other crops had already been lost to the insect's attacks, he said.

He said that the locusts, which attacked earlier after causing immense damage, had migrated to desert and laid eggs there. The fresh swarms came from those eggs that had hatched after recent rains, he said.

This viscous cycle would not break unless aerial spray eradicated the insect and its eggs once and for all, he said and demanded the federal government conduct the aerial spray on war footing.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517456/lawmaker-activists-call-for-declaring-thar-calamity-hit

SUGARCANE PRODUCTION DOWN 3.8PC

FAZAL SHER November 19, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Sugarcane production in the year 2019-20 decreased to 64.77 million tons from 67.17 million tons the year before showing a decrease of 3.8 percent however cotton crop has not picked up as a consequence, well informed sources told Business Recorder.

According to officials, total sugarcane cultivated area in 2019-20 was 1.06 million hectares against an area of 1.1 million hectares the year before; however cotton crop has not picked up as a consequence and the government has revised cotton production target downward to 10.2 million bales from the initial target of 15 million bales in the current year. Pakistan on average has been importing around 4 million bales of cotton for the last several years costing up to 5 billion dollars. The government has not included cotton in Rs 309 billion Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme which has a share of 0.8 percent in gross domestic product (GDP) and contributes 4.5 percent in agriculture value addition. Under the programme, the sugarcane project will cost Rs 3.9 billion with the federal government contributing Rs 0.7 billion.

Sources stated that the reason main behind a decrease in production and area of sugarcane in 2019-20 is attributable to an increase in area and production of rice and maize: rice crop this year was cultivated on an area of 3,036,000 hectares which is 8.05 percent more than last year's area of 2,810,000 thousands hectares, with output at 77 million tons, showing an increase of 6.93 percent over last year's output of 72 million tons.

Rice acreage increased due to higher domestic price and increase in exports that made rice cultivation attractive for farmers.

Official said that during 2019-20 maize was cultivated on 1,386,460 hectares with annual production of 6.93 million tons, reflecting an increase of 1.53 percent in production. In area and production maize also increased due to higher domestic price because of its utilization in the feed and wet milling industries.

Both cotton and maize are short duration crops of 120 days and require less water while sugarcane is long duration crop of 360 days and requires more water.

According to a study conducted by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) on environmental impacts of effluents from sugar mills with its high Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) rapidly depletes available oxygen supply when discharged into water bodies endangering fish and other aquatic life. The high BOD also creates septic conditions, generating foul-smelling hydrogen sulfide, which in turn can precipitate iron and any dissolved salts, turning the water black and highly toxic for aquatic life.

The influential sugar mafia has continued to increase its crushing capacity and increase the number of sugar mills despite a ban on installation of new mills. "Growing number of sugar mills and increase in the crushing capacity in the existing sugar mills resulted in reduction of cotton area in Rahim Yar Khan, Muzaffargarh etc," sources further revealed.

Both government officials and agricultural experts urge the federal government to advise provincial governments not to issue no objection certificate (NOC) for installation of new sugar mills and instead focus on increasing acreage under cotton.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/11/19/2-page/810890-news.html

68 VEGETABLE AND FRUIT TRADERS PENALISED

By RECORDER REPORT on November 19, 2019

The District Administration Lahore has penalised 68 vegetable and fruit traders for overcharging and issued fines of Rs154,000 while seven shopkeepers involved in overcharging were sent to jail and nine cases were registered against the profiteers.The Deputy Commissioner is also paying regular visits to markets and camps that had been set up in critical markets to check the on-ground performance of the assigned price control magistrates.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/19/545625/six-8-vegetable-and-fruit-traders-penalised/

LIVESTOCK BOOM TO ENHANCE EXPORTS: ALVI

By Mohammad ZafarPublished: November 19, 2019

QUETTA: President Dr Arif Alvi has said Pakistan has entered a new era of development as other countries have started recognising the county’s potential for business.

“Pakistan is on the threshold of a new era of economic development. It has become a lucrative place for foreign investors. There is a huge potential of investment in Pakistan in various fields,” Dr Alvi said while addressing Balochistan Livestock Expo 2019 in Quetta on Monday.

He said he met a number of heads of states and governments and business executives during his recent visits to Japan and Baku and found them positive in their responses regarding business with Pakistan.

President Dr Arif Alvi highlighted the importance of the livestock department and said development in livestock sector can help scale up exports, eliminate poverty and stabilise the economy.

Lauding the provincial government's efforts to boost the livestock sector, he said livestock is a comprehensive field that contributes to nutrition, poverty alleviation, rural development and overall economic growth. "Pakistan can export livestock after meeting its domestic needs."

"When Prime Minister Imran Khan said in his speech that poultry will be provided to poor households as it will help eradicate poverty then people made a mockery of the idea. On the other hand, breeding livestock and poultry birds in Africa has paved way for the elimination of poverty," he said.

He said Balochistan is quite rich in resources, including mining, coast, fishing and livestock.

Earlier, President Alvi inaugurated Livestock Expo at the University of Balochistan (UoB) as a chief guest after his arrival in Quetta on a two-day visit.

Balochistan Governor Amanullah Khan Yasinzai, Chief Minister Jam Kamal, Minister for Communication Arif Jan Hassani, Quetta Development Authority (QDA) Chairperson Bushra Rind, MPA Mubeen Khan Khilji and other senior officials received the president at Quetta Airport.

The president also met Balochistan governor, chief minister and members of the provincial cabinet during the trip.

Later, Alvi said he was happy with the performance of Jam Kamal's government in Balochistan.

"On seeing Kamal, one can feel there is no misunderstanding between the federation and the federating units," he said.

The president was of the view that with the completion of CPEC projects, other countries will pay heed to Pakistan, and the mega schemes will especially pave the way for development in the province.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2102091/1-livestock-boom-enhance-exports-alvi/

RISING FLOUR PRICE

By Editorial Published: November 19, 2019

It has become a familiar problem that no one seems to be able to resolve. Yet again, the country is faced with the possibility of flour shortages over the next six months. And this despite the fact that Pakistan had begun the year with a wheat stock of 27.9 million tonnes which is more than enough to meet the national annual requirement of 25.8 million tonnes. Instead, the country now finds itself importing wheat at a substantial cost. As an immediate measure, therefore, it is essential that the government temporarily eliminate the 60 per cent duty on import of wheat in a bid to bring down flour prices.

But for a long-term solution to the problem of high flour prices, there is a dire need for the government to take certain concrete measures. Firstly, the authorities must move to stop the obvious theft and smuggling of wheat. In Sindh, for example, of the province's initial wheat inventory of 800,000 tonnes, there are reports that up to 200,000 tonnes are missing. It would simply be impossible to keep prices under control if the government shows negligence in such matters.

Secondly, we must remember that commodity price hikes are being caused largely by unscrupulous middlemen who, in a largely undocumented economy, purchase wheat from farmers at extremely low prices and sell it at the market at exorbitant rates. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) must, therefore, continue — in fact speed up — its efforts towards a documented economy to ensure fair competition and proper taxation.

Thirdly, it is crucial for the authorities to concentrate on improving the country's per hectare wheat yield which currently lags behind both global and regional competitors due to a host of issues, including water shortage, the absence of high-yield seed varieties, lack of research and development, and the use of outdated technology by farmers. All of these issues must be addressed on an emergency basis to increase the supply of wheat.

Unless these measures are implemented, we risk the prospect of a never-ending cycle of increased flour prices year after year.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 19th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2101915/6-rising-flour-price-2/

SBP SETS AGRI LOAN TARGET AT RS1.35TR

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated November 20, 2019

KARACHI: After achieving a record-high disbursement of Rs1 trillion to the agriculture sector in the last fiscal year, the State Bank of Pakistan has set next fiscal year's target at Rs1.35tr.

SBP Governor Reza Baqir, while chairing the annual meeting of the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee in Peshawar, appreciated banks for their efforts in increasing credit to the agriculture sector in FY19.

"It is for the first time in Pakistan's history that credit to the agriculture sector has surpassed one trillion rupees," he remarked in his keynote address.

Baqir, however, urged banks to enhance their efforts to achieve qualitative aspects of the assigned targets as well in line with the strategic shift and key policy actions taken by the SBP regarding agricultural financing.

He highlighted that most of the banks met their assigned targets except for some of banks including Zarai Taraqiati Bank Ltd, Punjab Provincial Cooperative Bank Ltd, some private banks and Islamic banks.

The province-wise agriculture credit disbursement witnessed double-digit growth; however, banks struggled to achieve their assigned targets in the underserved regions.

The governor apprised the committee that the SBP is considering three policy actions to further promote financial inclusion in the agriculture sector.

At first, enhancing transparency through disclosure of bank-wise performance statistics on monthly basis covering agriculture credit disbursement, geographic distribution, outstanding amount, number of borrowers, and agriculture credit infrastructure.

Secondly, the SBP will introduce a comprehensive scoring model for ranking of banks against key agriculture credit indicators and targets. Third, introducing incentives and penalties based on performance scores of banks.

The keynote address was followed by a presentation wherein the performance of banks on agricultural financing was reviewed against the targets during FY19.

While assigning the agriculture credit target for FY20, it was shared that the overall disbursement target of Rs1.350tr has been assigned to banks which is 89 per cent of the total estimated agriculture credit requirement of Rs1.518tr.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517680

TOMATO PRICE HITS RECORD HIGH AT RS400 A KILO IN KARACHI

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated November 20, 2019

KARACHI: The price of tomato hit a record high in Karachi on Tuesday and reached Rs400 per kilogram from Rs300-320 per kg on Monday.

In the absence of any landed price of the Iranian tomato, greedy traders also brought the price of Swat and Sindh crop at par with the Iranian tomato rate to make huge profits.

But the local administration, like its past practice, quoted an unrealistic retail rate of Rs253 per kg compared to Rs193 per kg on Monday.

In the first week of November, the official retail rate of tomato was Rs117 per kg and Tuesday's official price clearly indicated that the government itself was revising the price upward.

There are hardly any traders selling tomato at the control rate.

A representative of wholesalers asks citizens not to buy tomato to break monopoly of a few traders

Traders said a box containing 13-14 kg of tomato was available at Rs4,200-4,500 depending on the quality, thus forcing many traders to suspend purchasing.

The government had last week issued a permit for importing 4,500 tonnes of tomato from Iran, but the arrival of the red fruit had yet to pick up pace in the market, resulting in a persistent hike in the rates in view of rising demand.

Of the 4,500 tonnes, only 989 tonnes had arrived in the country so far, a trader said, adding that he could not confirm whether more quantities arrived at the Taftan border on Tuesday.

Falahi Anjuman Wholesale Vegetable Market president Haji Shahjehan said two containers carrying 44 tonnes of tomato had arrived on Sunday while on Tuesday only one container reached the market. This failed to bring any relief for consumers. The wholesale price had crossed over Rs300 from Rs180-220 per kg on Monday, he added.

He blamed the federal government for restricting import to a few people instead of allowing a free import by any trader. As a result, the limited quantities were already booked and sold at the Taftan border. Previously open imports had somewhat kept the tomato prices stable, he said.

"Being president of the wholesale market, I can only urge the customers to restrict their purchases for two to three days as it may break the monopoly of a few traders as well as bring down the tomato prices," he said.

He claimed that the Sindh crop had started in limited quantities and the price of a 10-kg wooden box of tomato in Mirpurkhas was Rs2,300.

Consumers are paying Rs100 for a mere 250 grams or just four tomatoes. They said the government had yet to take serious notice in checking the landed and selling price of the Iranian tomato to curb profiteering by traders.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517704

SHC ORDERS ACTION AGAINST SUGAR MILLS DEFAULTING ON GROWERS' DUES

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 20, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court on Tuesday directed the cane commissioner to ensure payment of all outstanding dues of sugar cane growers and take action against defaulting sugar mills.

Hearing a set of petitions, the two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar observed that the cane commissioner had been provided various opportunities but the dues outstanding against millers remained unpaid.

The bench asked the cane commissioner to take legal action against defaulting sugar mills in accordance with the Sugar Factories Control Act, 1950.

The cane commissioner submitted a report about the payments made by different sugar mills upon which a representative of growers said that the mode of payment was not mentioned in the report.

Putting off the matter till Dec 19, the bench directed the cane commissioner to submit a report at the next hearing with regard to the mode of payment and the number of cases filed by him against defaulting sugar mills.

The Sindh Growers' Alliance (SGA) and others had moved the court stating that hundreds of applications regarding non-payment of growers' dues by sugar mills were still pending action by the cane commissioner.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517695/shc-orders-action-against-sugar-mills-defaulting-on-growers-dues

RICE MILLERS PROLONG CLOSURE TILL FRIDAY AS STAND-OFF WITH PADDY GROWERS CONTINUES

The Newspaper's Correspondent Updated November 20, 2019

LARKANA: The stand-off between rice millers and paddy growers over cuts in weightage of crop consignments prolonged on Tuesday when former announced that they would keep their mills closed till Friday. Growers also vowed to intensify their protest by staging sit-ins outside the Qambar-Shahdadkot deputy commissioner’s office over the next three days and hold a march up to the Sindh Assembly building if the issue remained unresolved by Friday.

Owners of close to 100 rice mills in the district abruptly shut down their establishments on Monday when Sub-Divisional Magistrate Sajjad Haider Qadri and DSP Yar Mohammed Rind along with a police team arrived in the Anaj Mandi — a major paddy trading market in Sindh — to ensure compliance of the agreement between the two sides on doing away with applying cuts on weightage of consignment.

Some millers were found violating the agreement and were asked by the SDM to mend their ways which irritated millers. Their association announced closure of their mills in protest against official monitoring of the trading.

Paddy growers blocked the roads leading to Shahdadkot with their crop-laden vehicles for many hours over millers’ attitude but were persuaded by the district administration to end their protest in the evening.

On Tuesday several hundred paddy growers assembled at Koto-Moto Chowk in Shahdadkot to demand resumption of the trade and compliance of the agreement.

The protesters riding different vehicles later moved to Qambar, some 30 kilometres away from Shahdadkot, in a big procession and reached the town’s by-pass, where growers from Qambar also joined them.

The joint rally proceeded to the deputy commissioner’s office, where a sit-in was held.

Sindh Abadgar Board general secretary Abdul Khalik Khoso, Khalid Umar Khoso, Gaibi Khan Mugheri, Shehri Ittehad president Abdul Wahab Pandrani and other leaders of growers’ organisations, including those from Gandakha (Balochistan), spoke to the protesters and endorsed their demand.

SDM Qadri and Additional Deputy Commissioner-I (ADC-I) Amir Ali Mirani held negotiations with their leaders but could not convince them to end their sit-in. DC Jawed Ahmed Jagirani then joined in the talks and asked them to suspend their protest till Friday. He told growers’ leaders that he had talked to the agriculture secretary on the issue and requested him to issue notices to paddy buyers through the market committee in order to stop the illegal cuts. Notices were also being issued to millers in this regard, he added.

The DC said that if they [traders] did not adhere to the administration’s orders, action against them would be initiated in accordance with the relevant law.

After the DC’s assurance, the protesters ended the sit-in.

Later, speaking to local reporters, growers' leaders criticised the indifferent attitude of the elected representatives from the area who, according to them, would always turn to them for votes but were found nowhere at the time of need.

A good number of women activists belonging to the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) led by Naheed Khuhawar also joined the protest.

Speaking to local reporters on Tuesday, rice miller's representative Manzoor Chandio declared that the mills would remain closed till Friday in protest against interference by the district administration in trading at Anaj Mandi.

Daily wage earners and other labourers associated with the business and employed at the mills appeared to be the worst-hit segment due to the stand-off.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517694/rice-millers-prolong-closure-till-friday-as-stand-off-with-paddy-growers-continues-in-shahdadkot

LARKANA, QAMBAR-SHAHDADKOT ALSO COME UNDER LOCUSTS' ATTACK

The Newspaper's Correspondent November 20, 2019

LARKANA: A huge swa-rm of locusts invaded different parts of Larkana district, including the Bhu-tto estate in Naudero, on Tues-day causing damage to guava orchards, the recently sown wheat crop and late varieties of paddy.

Sirajul Auliya Rashdi, the Larkana district president of the Sindh Chamber of Agri-culture, speaking to Dawn said that guava orch-ards in Aghani, Chuhar--pur, Paro-jo-Goth and other areas were being devoured by the pest at the crop's near-mat-ure stage.

The farming community looks quite helpless and worried about damage to their crops at this stage as the losses caused by such a huge swarm of locusts would definitely run in millions, according to him.

Locusts' swarms also devoured seasonal vegetable crops, particularly tomatoes and ladyfinger, besides fodder.

Reports from Nau-dero say that the areas of Keti Mumtaz, Sharifpur, Bhu-tto estate and a vast belt of the katcha area has been invaded by locusts to eat away recently sown wheat crop and guava orchards in Mahota town.

The swarm was also des-tro-ying green trees and pla-nts all along its route, said Mr Rashdi.

Besides big landowners, abadgars, tillers and peasants, those who have acqui-red lands under contract are also worried over the losses.

People are applying traditional methods in their desperate bid to keep the swarm away from their lands but in vain.

These measures included beating drums and making loud noise to scare away the pest.

The SCA leader estimated that 70 per cent of vegetable crops in the affec-ted areas was eaten up by locusts. “This may lead to an escalation of vegetable prices in the market,” he apprehended.

He said that the ongoing invasion appeared to be the second biggest in Larkana and its adjoining areas after the one seen in 1960.

Thick swarms of locusts were also seen flying in the urban areas of Larkana.

A day earlier, the swarm had invaded Qambar-Shah-dadkot district. People said it entered the area like thick black cloud and poun-ded farmlands like rain. They said the locusts caused heavy damage to the vegetable and late variety of paddy crops.

There were also reports of locusts’ onslaught in Pakho town’s green fields.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517692/larkana-qambar-shahdadkot-also-come-under-locusts-attack

PUNJAB FOOD DEPT MARKS ‘WORLD FOOD DAY’

By RECORDER REPORT on November 20, 2019

Speakers at a seminar arranged by the Punjab Food Department (PFD) in connection with the World Food Day stressed the need to revolutionize the agriculture sector to ensure food security. The current government imposed an ‘agricultural emergency' to improve agricultural and nutritional status of the country besides well being of the farmers who were badly neglected during the past regime.

According to Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision, the agriculture department of Punjab is taking all steps to protect masses from the food shortage. Pakistan is ranked 106th among 119 countries in the world facing food shortages.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/20/545939/punjab-food-dept-marks-world-food-day/

IN PAKISTAN, BANKS URGED TO INCREASE AGRI-CREDIT DISBURSEMENT

By Our Corresponden tPublished: November 20, 2019

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Dr Reza Baqir on Tuesday praised banks for their efforts to increase lending to the agriculture sector, which reached a historic high by the end of the fiscal year 2018-19.

“It is for the first time in Pakistan’s history that credit to the agriculture sector has surpassed Rs1 trillion,” said the governor in his keynote address.

He was chairing the annual meeting of the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) held in Peshawar as part of efforts to enhance agriculture credit in the underserved provinces and regions.

Baqir, however, urged the banks to meet qualitative aspects of the assigned targets as well in line with the strategic shift and key policy actions taken by the SBP for agricultural financing.

He highlighted that most of the banks met their assigned targets except for some including Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL), Punjab Provincial Cooperative Bank Limited (PPCBL), some domestic private banks and Islamic banks, which fell short of the targets.

Province-wise agriculture credit disbursement showed a double-digit growth across all provinces and regions but banks struggled to achieve the targets in underserved regions. He urged the banks and institutions to step up efforts and commitment to ensure the achievement of agriculture credit targets in the underserved provinces and regions. The central bank governor pointed out that the SBP was considering three policy actions to further promote financial inclusion in the agriculture sector.

First, it wants to enhance transparency through disclosure of bank-wise performance statistics on a monthly basis covering agriculture credit disbursement, geographical distribution, outstanding amount, number of borrowers and agriculture credit infrastructure. Second, it seeks to introduce a comprehensive scoring model for the ranking of banks based on key agriculture credit indicators and targets. Third, it will introduce incentives and penalties based on the performance scores of banks.

Baqir emphasised that there were huge lending opportunities for banks, which would promote financial inclusion and aid their profitability.

The governor’s speech was followed by a presentation where the performance of banks in agriculture financing in FY19 was reviewed.

It was shared that the overall agriculture credit disbursement target of Rs1,350 billion had been assigned to banks for FY20, which was 89% of the total estimated credit requirement of Rs1,518 billion.

It was highlighted that Islamic banks and Islamic branches of commercial banks had been assigned the disbursement target of Rs110 billion for FY20, which was in line with the previous year to help realise the potential of Islamic agriculture financing.

Furthermore, the overall target of outstanding borrowers was enhanced to 4.67 million with the addition of 650,000 new borrowers.

The committee deliberated on the new directions in agriculture financing by focusing on technology, especially the digitalisation of agriculture loan processes through the adoption of Land Record Information Systems, Electronic Warehouse Receipt Financing System and initiatives like the Kissan Digital Portal. These were key priorities under the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023.

Subsequently, presentations were made on the dairy value chain in Gilgit-Baltistan by the Bank of Khyber, olive plantation and its value chain development by the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, the innovative project to reclaim barren land by a progressive farmer, rural lending through digitisation by HBL, agriculture credit through alternative delivery channels by Khushhali Bank and opportunities for co-financing of Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) projects through banks by the Ministry of National Food Security.

Concluding the meeting, the central bank governor encouraged all stakeholders to collaborate in order to enhance the flow of formal credit to the agriculture sector.

He expressed optimism that banks would explore new investment opportunities through collaboration and experience sharing to achieve the annual target for FY20 besides achieving their regional targets, particularly in the underserved areas.

Senior officials of federal and provincial governments, presidents/CEOs of banks, members of provincial chambers of agriculture, progressive farmers, representatives of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa farming community and SBP officials attending the meeting.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2102876/2-underserved-areas-banks-urged-increase-agri-credit-disbursement/

GOVT TO END 5% SALES TAX ON COTTONSEED

By Irshad Ansari Published: November 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has decided to exempt cottonseed from 5% sales tax in line with a recommendation given by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

The matter is subject to final approval by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet.

The Ministry of National Food Security has prepared a summary for presentation in an ECC meeting and its copy has also been forwarded to the Ministry of Industries, Ministry of Finance and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

According to a copy of the summary available with The Express Tribune, about 1,200 ginning factories are currently in the business of extracting lint from cottonseed, which is also utilised by 6,000 edible oil factories.

Pakistan's annual cotton produce yields about 4 million tons of cottonseed, from which about 400,000 tons of edible oil is produced, which constitutes about 60-70% of the total edible oil produced in the country.

The government had imposed a 5% sales tax on cottonseed. On the other hand, cottonseed cake, used as livestock feed, is exempt from the sales tax. According to Annexure-I of the Sales Tax Act 1990, the feed for cattle including sunflower seeds and canola is exempt from sales tax. Owing to the tax exemption, cattle farmers and other growers in Pakistan are increasingly using cottonseed for livestock feed, instead of utilising the seed in edible oil production.

Consequently, the production of edible oil is going down. This poses a risk for the country because it will be required to import edible oil in huge quantities in the near future, which will put pressure on the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Keeping the ongoing developments in view, the Ministry of National Food Security has proposed exemption from a 5% sales tax on cottonseed.

Although the FBR maintains that the decision on the exemption would be taken by the ECC, it has itself introduced a new sales tax collection system, according to which cotton ginners are being taxed at Rs7-8 per maund. The FBR has also made it mandatory for all the ginners to get registered for sales tax payment.

In a notification issued earlier this year, the FBR laid down a special procedure for sales tax collection from the composite ginning units involved in the extraction of edible oil from cottonseed.

According to the notification, all ginning units, whether registered and unregistered with the FBR, were liable to pay Rs7 per maund in sales tax on cottonseed until June 30, 2019 while from July 1, 2019, they would be required to pay Rs8 per maund in sales tax.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2102877/2-govt-end-5-sales-tax-cottonseed/

SITUATIONER: FOOD CRISIS IN SINDH TAKES AN UGLY TURN WITH FLOUR SHORTAGE

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated November 21, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh is hit by a double whammy insofar as provincial food sector is concerned. While growers sold their wheat crop this season for lesser price early this year after the government did not procure the crop, consumers are now paying more to buy a kilogram of flour.

So, market players or traders remained the main beneficiary by making a quick buck thanks to government's indecision. It perhaps also points to a defective wheat procurement policy.

Consumers are buying expensive flour at chakki invariably at a rate of Rs58/1kg-Rs60/1kg which was otherwise Rs40 per 1kg until recently. The federal government has intervened on Sindh's request to assist it with release of 400,000 tonnes. Still, the surge in flour's price is unending.

Out of its stocks of 1.6 million tonnes of wheat procured this year, the Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) is to release 400,000 tonnes. Of them, 100,000 tonnes have been released in Sindh which is being lifted by the food department from Passco's godowns. Rest of 300,000 tonnes (3m bags of 100kg) would be released in December. Major quantum of it (2.6m bags of wheat) would be consumed in Karachi.

Sindh Food Secretary Laeeq Ahmed Khan told this reporter that the provincial and federal governments would share incidental charges of 400,000 tonnes of wheat ie Rs450 per 100kg bag on 50-50 basis. "Incidental charges to be shared are calculated at Rs900 per 100kg. Passco will get cost of wheat procurement," he disclosed.

The food department had also started releasing its stocks from Oct 25. Currently, the food department has around 800,000 tonnes of stocks. With 400,000 tonnes of the federal supplies, it would have 1.2m tonnes of wheat to meet the demands of flour mills and chakki owners by next procurement season, which begins in April 2020.

Multiple factors could be attributed to panic being witnessed in Sindh's market. Initially, the Sindh government did not procure wheat crop this season in view of its 800,000 tonnes stocks. Sindh remained short of meeting sowing target of 1.150m hectare (ha) in 2018-19. Production target remained unmet, too.

Then came the rains that damaged the crop in Punjab's 15 districts, prompting its traders to buy crop from Sindh. Against its production target of 19.510m tonnes of wheat, 19.369m tonnes were produced in 2018 crop. Sindh got 3.5m tonnes against the target of 3.8m tonnes, according to figures shared in the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA).

Another factor, said a food official, was trend of use of wheat by poultry industry for feed. “Poultry industry uses maize for feed, but maize is being used for oil extraction. So, poultry industry opted for wheat as feed alternate,” he said.

While wheat’s exports were open early this year, it reached Afghanistan through informal channels. “These factors disturbed our surplus regime in wheat,” he said.

Wheat’s price has risen to Rs4,900 per 100kg bag in Karachi. Reports indicate federal releases have reduced prices to Rs4,300 per 100kg bag. Further decline is likely with food department’s releases to stabilise market.

But chakki owners and traders said provincial releases are negligible and speak of disparity in distribution of wheat among chakki and flour mill owners. “We were initially provided 150kg of wheat per stone per chakki which too has now been reduced to 133kg. But each flour mill was being released 258 bags per day by the food department,” said Hyderabad Atta Chakki Owners Association general secretary Haroon Arain. Arain says people in Hyderabad mostly prefer chakki’s flour which has all of wheat’s ingredients like super fine flour and granulated wheat flour.

Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industry president Doulat Ram Lohano said food department’s wheat releases were just peanuts. “It’s not going to meet flour requirement of the people in Hyderabad. Mills get more than their requirement and flour produced by mills is transported to other cities,” he said.

The food department last year released 950,000 tonnes of wheat to chakki and mill owners between November 2018 and March 2019. As close to 0.8m tonnes are available with the food department, the government decided against procuring crop in 2019 despite food department’s insistence.

Usually, the government procures around 23 per cent to 25pc of the total crop to ensure balance in market. Procurement normally remains around 1.2m tonnes. Sindh has procured even up to 1.5m tonnes of wheat once also. But this year traders and hoarders got full advantage of Sindh government’s no-procurement policy.

According to growers, they sold wheat for Rs1,050/40kg to Rs1,150/40kg and traders got advantage of it. Average price of Rs1,050 to Rs1,150 per 40kg in the absence of procurement against support price of Rs1,300 per 40kg was inadequate for growers. Growers were then piqued by the government’s indecision and had feared that wheat crisis might hit Sindh.

Sindh Abadgar Board vice president Mahmood Nawaz Shah believed it was mala fide intention and incompetence on government’s part. “The government had surplus stocks, but where have those stocks gone and why this crisis?” he quipped. “When the government refuses to play its regulatory role, producers and consumers suffer. Only a third party always takes advantage of such situation,” he asserted.

In 2013-14 season, Sindh alone got four million tonnes of wheat production in line with target, prompting the agriculture department to revise it upward ie 4.2m tonnes. Since then it is missing target. And therefore it had to be revised downward at 3.8m in 2018 by the agriculture department after remaining unchanged till 2017-18.

The food department stores around 700,000 tonnes in its official storage. And the remaining quantity is kept on the elevated platforms under tarpaulins out of total procured quantum. The food department is said to be building storages to store around 5,000 wheat bags of 100kg each.

Around 1.4m tonnes of wheat can be kept on these elevated surfaces. The Sindh food department has been unable to build silos and still opts for conventional storage.

A silo project was designed off Karachi-Hyderabad Superhighway, but it was not completed. Silos could better hold wheat crop and protect it against climatic conditions which otherwise affect the crop.

The Sindh food department is currently facing a multibillion rupee wheat scam as well involving the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) reference and Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) embezzlement cases.

A sizeable tonnage of wheat has been missing from food godowns. The food department has not yet officially disclosed figures of missing wheat crop yet. “Plea bargain has taken place with the NAB in this scam,” said an official source.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517866/situationer-food-crisis-in-sindh-takes-an-ugly-turn-with-flour-shortage

GROWERS OPPOSE IMPORT OF TOMATOES AND ONIONS

Staff Correspondent November 21, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Board urged the government to ban import of tomatoes and onions at this point in time as it will do “irreparable harm” to local production of both produce items, which are ready to be harvested within a few days.

The board’s president Abdul Majeed Nizamani said in a statement issued here on Wednesday that crops of tomato and onion were ready for harvest in Thatta, Sujawal, Badin, Tando Mohammad Khan, Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas and Sanghar.

He said that onion in Nasarpur was about to be reaped and tomato would be in markets soon. So, at this point in time the import of tomato and onion would undermine local production in lower Sindh region and growers would have to bear huge financial losses.

He said that cost of production had substantially increased due to hike in prices of agriculture machinery and inputs and inadequate price the growers were getting for their crop. Onion was cultivated on 56,000 hectares and around 800,000 tonnes was produced while the vegetable was grown on 55,000 hectares and 750,000 tonnes were produced last year, he said.

Likewise, bumper tomato crop was expected this year as it was grown on 21,000 hectares and 153,000 tonnes was produced last year whereas this year the area under tomato cultivation had increased from 21,000 to 27,000 hectares and the production was likely to reach 210,000 tonnes.

Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) president Nawab Zubair Talpur in his statement on Wednesday slammed delay in fixing sugar cane indicative price and said that “economic exploitation and murder” of farmers continued unabated due to negligence of agriculture department. He said that cane price had remained unchanged for the past five years despite substantial increase in cost of inputs including fuel, urea, electricity tariff etc. The cotton production target could not be achieved due to a variety of reasons and now $2.5 billion worth cotton would have to be imported, he said.

He said that SAI had decided to launch a protest campaign in Sindh with growers staging demonstrations outside Shahbaz Building in protest against government policies.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) on Wednesday urged federal and provincial governments to take immediate steps to control locust attack in Sindh and feared if adequate steps were not taken the insect might attack upcoming wheat crop which had been sown a month back.

SCA president Miran Mohammad Shah said in a statement that locusts had devoured guava trees and other crops in Larkana and Qambar-Shahdadkot, causing colossal losses to farmers. He feared if the insect was not stopped at this stage it would then turn to wheat crop and devastate it.

He said that massive damage was being reported in Sanghar, Naushahro Feroze and Nawabshah districts from the locust attack. Farmers stood helpless watching their fields being mowed down by the insect, causing them billions of rupees losses, he said.

He said that federal and Sindh governments should avoid further loss of time and help growers by carrying out sprays in affected areas. Vegetables, peas, pulses and mustard crops were likely to be eaten away by locusts, he said, adding the insect might threaten just-sown wheat when it returned to southern Sindh.

He said the situation could lead to food insecurity in the province and the government would then be unable to control it.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1517862/growers-oppose-import-of-tomatoes-and-onions

GOVT URGED TO FIX WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE AT RS1,400/40KG

November 21, 2019

ISLAMABAD: A sub-committee of the National Assembly Special Committee on Agricultural Products has recommended the government to fix wheat support price at Rs 1,400 per 40kg for 2019 owing to increase in prices of pesticides and other inputs.

The meeting chaired by Syed Fakhar Imam expressed serious concern over locusts entry into Punjab from Sindh and urged the government to take immediate measures to deal with the problem which may pose serious damage to crops.

The members of the committee stated that minimum support price should be in line with price hike in agricultural inputs particularly fertilizers, fuel and pesticides. They stated that the government's recommended minimum wheat support price at Rs 1,350 should be revised. The meeting was held on the directives of the speaker National Assembly who referred the business to the sub-committee after several MNAs complained regarding the minimum support price for wheat, minimum indicative price for sugarcane, negative growth of cotton, outstanding power bills against the farmers and increase in farmers' electricity bills.

The members of the committee expressed disagreement to the suggested minimum support price at Rs 1,350 by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. They stated that the farmers across the country are demanding upward revision of the minimum support price for wheat. The convener of the sub-committee Syed Fakhar Imam stated that wheat is vital to Pakistan's national food security. He added that the price mechanism is a viable policy instrument to promote crops according to the national requirements. He stated that cotton is vital to Pakistan's export earnings and edible oil requirements.

After the members of the committee pointed out that decline in cotton production would adversely affect the agro-based Pakistani economy, the chairman of the committee underlined the need for marked improvement in agricultural technology and seed variety to boost the farmers' profitability and productivity.

He urged the government to aggressively pursue linkages with other countries for agricultural cooperation. The committee urged the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to tackle the recent locust attack on war footing basis as the locust may destroy miles of crops in a single day. The committee directed Ministry of Power to brief the committee on the upward surge in electricity bills due to increase in fuel price adjustment in the next meeting.

The meeting was attended by MNAs Malik Muhammad Ehsan Ullah Tiwana, Nafeesa Inayatullah Khattak, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Nawab Muhammad Yousuf Talpur and officials of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research and agriculture departments of Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. —ZAHEER ABBASI

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/11/21/15-page/811338-news.html

KAKAR PRAISES LIVESTOCK EXPO

By Our Correspondent Published: November 21, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Minister for Livestock Mitha Khan Kakar on Wednesday said the livestock expo being organised by the government has proved to be successful in luring investors to one of the key sectors of the development.

"Balochistan government has succeeded in organising livestock expo, which grabbed attention of national and international companies seeking to invest in the provincial livestock sector," the minister said while addressing the last day of Balochistan Livestock Expo 2019 in Quetta.

Kakar called the expo as an opportunity to boost livestock sector, adding that most of the people's livelihood in Balochistan is connected with livestock. He said: "The expo has presented the economic benefits of the province."

He further said the intention of conducting such an expo was to aware people regarding importance of livestock in Balochistan.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2103495/1-kakar-praises-livestock-expo/

FEARING ARRESTS, STREET VENDORS STOP SELLING VEGETABLES IN RAWALPINDI

By Our Correspondent Published: November 21, 2019

RAWALPINDI: In a bid to avoid any action by the district administration on profiteering, most of the vendors in Rawalpindi have stopped selling vegetables, complaining that they could not put themselves in a loss.

Vendors said the brokers and bulk sellers at wholesale market of Sabzi Mandi were selling vegetables at higher than the officially designated rates, but the city officials arrest retailers only. “How can we buy expensive and sell cheap,” said a vegetable pushcart owner Adnan Husain.

Vegetable shop owners too were short of inventory owing to exorbitant prices in the wholesale market. “I did not go to mandi today,” a shop owner said explaining it was getting impossible to sell vegetables at such high rates.

The current situation has irked the citizens as they kept roaming here and there to find vegetables to cook food but had to return hopelessly.

According to the details, the official price of per kilogramme of tomatoes was fixed at Rs198 however the vendors claimed that it was being sold at Rs230 per kilo in Subzi Mandi. Similarly, the district administration has set price of local garlic at Rs255 per kilo however, the vendors said, wholesalers were demanding Rs300 per kilo. Same was the case with ginger which was available in the vegetable market for Rs300 whereas its official rate was Rs285 per kilo. Green chilies are selling at Rs180 per kilo in the wholesale market, whereas the official rate is Rs160 per kilo, similarly, bell peppers are tagged at Rs200 per kilo in wholesale against official rate of Rs188 per kilo, vendors said.

In this regard, a vegetable seller Muhammad Aslam said that it was impossible to sell vegetables on official rates after purchasing them at way higher prices. He lamented that doing business in the current times had almost become impossible.

“We cannot sell vegetables in a loss. We are arrested and face cases if we don’t sell it in official rates,” he said and added that it was better not to sell than face any danger.

A customer Muhammad Waheed said that he had purchased minced meat but was tired of looking for onions, ginger, garlic tomatoes, green chillies, coriander and mint to make the meal.

Meanwhile, residents of Islamabad to have complained to the district magistrate about how some items were being sold in the IMC weekly bazaars at higher than the prices fixed by the local administration.

When contacted, an Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration spokesperson said that they had accelerated action against hoarders and profiteers by imposing Section 144 to curb the artificial price-hikes on edible items, especially fruits and vegetables.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2103584/1-fearing-arrests-street-vendors-stop-selling-vegetables-rawalpindi/

GOVT BARRED FROM TAKING ACTION AGAINST GHEE MILLS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 22, 2019

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Thursday restrained the federal and provincial governments from taking coercive measures against vegetable ghee manufacturing mills with respect to enforcement of new prices.

The association of the ghee manufacturing companies had challenged a notification by director general Industries, Prices, Weights & Measures, the Punjab government issued on Nov 9 under Section 6 of the Price Control and Prevention of Profiteering and Hoarding Act, 1977.

The counsel for the association said the respondent was forcing the mills to sell their product on a price not more than Rs180 per kg, infringing their fundamental right to life protected under Article 3 of the Constitution. He said the members of the association had the right to do lawful trade and they had fixed price of the product due to the free market economy with open competition.

The counsel argued that the impugned notification was based on ulterior motives and devoid of any justifiable reasons as the provincial government had no authority to fix price of the product.

Justice Jawad Hassan issued notices to the respondents and sought their parawise comments by Nov 29. The judge also restrained the respondents from adopting any coercive measures against the petitioners/mills till next date of hearing.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1518108/govt-barred-from-taking-action-against-ghee-mills

GOVT ALLOCATES RS500M TO CONTROL LOCUST ATTACK, NA BODY INFORMED

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated November 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The ministry of food security and research on Thursday briefed the National Assembly Standing Committee on National Food Security that over Rs500 million had been allocated to control the attack of desert locust in areas of Sindh and Balochistan, and 100,000 tonnes of pesticide would be imported for this purpose.

National Food Security and Research Secretary Hashim Popalzai briefed the committee on the measures being taken by the federal government to control the desert locust in the two provinces. Aircraft were being used for aerial spray on areas where desert locust was concentrating. He informed the committee that locusts had laid eggs in the affected areas and it was expected that the larvae would remain there for two to three years.

According to the ministry, the control teams of the Department of Plant Protection had treated an area of 131,130 hectares out of which 5,000 hectares had been treated by aerial means in Sindh and Balochistan by spraying 115,455 litres of pesticides so far, while the control operation was still in progress in all the infested areas.

The department also carried out aerial spray operation in district Benazirabad (Nawabshah) against the locust adults and its nymph in an area of 1000 hectares till November 20. One more Beaver aircraft would be deployed for effective aerial operation in Sindh.

Sufficient stock of pesticide was available with the department that is procuring 100,000 liters of pesticide Malathion, and an action plan has been chalked out for better and effective desert locust management.

As per the desert locust update of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, the locust will migrate towards the coastal areas of Balochistan, and the department has made an action plan to start early desert locust survey operations in Balochistan to have strict watch over any desert locust activity. The plant protection department is fully geared to deploy its aircraft in Balochistan for aerial control operation if required.

The issue of tomato, the daily use vegetable the price of which crossed Rs300 per kg in the recent weeks, was heatedly debated by the committee members. Secretary Popalzai assured the committee that prices of tomato would be normalised very soon when tomato crop from Sindh would hit the market. The import of tomato from Iran was allowed for a period of four weeks to stabilise the market.

The committee meeting, chaired by Rao Ajmal Khan, recommended that the top officials of Public Procurement Regulatory Authority, Passco and Utility Stores Corporation should devise modalities for the procurement of essential food items directly from the farmers in the country.

The committee also recommended that the deputy commissioner of Islamabad should be invited to brief it over the progress of the ‘durst daam’ (correct price) application, which was recently launched in the federal capital for marketing and provision of the food items at the door steps.

The food security secretary explained to the committee that the government was unable to give tax exemption to the Utility Stores Corporation in view of the IMF conditions. The USC officials informed the committee that the government had imposed a 1.5 per cent tax on USC. Contrary to the past practice when USC was buying commodities direct from farmers, the corporation is now not allowed to procure directly in view of PPRA rules.

The representatives of the Millat and Al-Ghazi tractor plants apprised the standing committee that three tractor manufacturing companies were presently operating in the country. The Engineering Development Board (EDB) is in process of adoption of WP-29 vehicle regulation which would internationally standardise the Pakistani tractor manufacturing units.

The committee decided to visit the site office of Millat Tractors to practically examine the process adopted for tractor manufacturing in near future.

Published in Dawn, November 22nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1518158/govt-allocates-rs500m-to-control-locust-attack-na-body-informed

GROWERS RALLY FOR FIXING OF SUGAR CANE RATE

Staff Correspondent November 22, 2019

HYDERABAD: A large number of sugar cane growers gathered outside Shah-baz Building and blocked Fatima Jinnah Road on Thu-r-s-day in protest against a delay in the fixing of the rates for their crop for the crushing season 2019-20.

The protest was organised by the Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI), which is led by Nawab Zubair Talpur.

Speaking to the protesters, Nawab Talpur and other SAI leaders, Anwar Kam-boh and Mohammad Javed, said that by delaying a notification for the sugar cane rate, the Sindh government was committing “economic murder” of growers. They deplored that sugar mills’ owners had formed a cartel and were bent upon forcing cane growers to accept the rate of Rs182/40kg. Rejec-ting the rate, they said the injustice was causing heavy losses to growers.

They pointed out that the sugar cane crop was cultivated on around 500,000 acres in Sindh which was ready for harvesting. If the unfair treatment continued to be meted out to them, cane growers would stop opting for the crop in sheer disappointment.

After two hours of protest, Hyderabad Commissio-ner Mohammad Abbas Bal-och invited growers’ leaders to his office for talks. He contacted the chief secretary and requested him to help resolve the issue.

The chief secretary conveyed to the growers’ leaders that their issues were at present under the consideration of the provincial cabinet and soon would be resolved.

The commissioner also held out the assurance that the notification for the current season’s sugar cane rate would be issued soon in consultation with growers’ leaders and liabilities of growers would also be cle-ar-ed as soon as possible.

On the assurances, the growers ended their protest.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1518113

ALVI FOR MODERN TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

By RECORDER REPORT on November 22, 2019

President of Pakistan Arif Alvi has said that modern agricultural techniques of China can bring a revolutionary improvement in agriculture sector of Pakistan.

He was speaking at the inaugural ceremony of 5th CAC Pakistan Exhibition at Expo Center, Lahore on Thursday. He said that Pakistan wants to get benefit from the experiences of China in agriculture, harvesting and other agricultural sectors and definitely, CAC Pakistan Exhibition is paving way for this.

“Agriculture plays a key role in Pakistan's economy and has an important contribution to GDP and employment", Arif Alvi said and added it has a great potential to gain more benefits so the government is attaching great importance to this sector.

Arif Alvi said the joint ventures between Pakistan and China will bring Chinese researchers, agriculture experts and business community to Pakistan and when they join hands with Pakistani businessmen, our agriculture sector will get a boost. It will also help Pakistan to get rid of the issues of low production in agriculture sector and post harvest losses. He said that investment can play a fundamental role in economic stability. Government is ensuring all possible facilities for ease of doing business to encourage local and foreign investors.

LCCI President Irfan Iqbal Sheikh said that Pakistan cannot do well without improving the performance of agriculture sector. It is necessary that all the sectors of economy pick up and complement each other to excel for ensuring viability of economy and long term growth,. The agriculture sector cannot be left out due to inherited limitations of resources and various challenges in the way of moving from conventional method of farming to modern technologies, he said.

The present scenario demands that both government and private sector need to join hands to make the most of the available resources through introducing innovative ways at affordable prices to our farmers. We need to understand that mechanized farming has to be adopted to enhance the per-acre yield in our country, he added.

The LCCI President said that desperately require locally developed as well as imported solutions in the fields of fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, agriculture machinery and equipment. It is important to mention that Chinese companies are gathering a lot of success on account of improving their standard and products range", he added.

Consul General of China Long Ding Bin said that Pakistan and China have already initiated government to government cooperation in agriculture sector and CAC has provided an opportunity to businessmen of both countries to initiate B2B cooperation. He said that China is expanding its cooperation with Pakistan under different sectors including agriculture, and it wants to extend more cooperation.

Chanyan Ma said that Pakistan can ensure fast growth in agriculture sector by availing Chinese expertise and advanced technology. She said that 5th CAC Pakistan exhibition is a great achievement for the both countries.

It is pertinent to mention here that over 100 stalls have been placed by 68 Chinese and 50 Pakistani companies. They are exhibiting state-of-the-art technologies and solutions to improve productivity in agriculture sector.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/22/546579/alvi-for-modern-techniques-to-improve-agriculture-sector/

SINDH CABINET MEETING: GOVERNMENT TO DISALLOW WHEAT QUOTA TO DEFAULTING FLOUR MILLS

By RECORDER REPORT on November 22, 2019

The Sindh cabinet in its meeting held under the chairmanship of Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has decided to prohibit wheat quota to the flour mills involved in plea bargain/VR, defaulters of the government dues and non-functional flour mills and chakis.

The provincial government in order to control wheat/flour price has purchased wheat from PASSCO and decided to release the wheat quota to the flour mills at a subsidies rate of Rs3,450 per 100 kg bag.

The cabinet decided that the wheat would be released to functional flour mills on body formula and to the chakis on `stone Formula'. However, wheat would not be released to the flour mills involved in Plea bargain/VR, government dues defaulters and non-functional mills/chakis, however the defaulters have been given 15 days to pay their dues and get the quota.

The functional flour mills owners will have to show the electricity bills of their mills to prove their functionality.

The mills which would get their quota and would not function would be liable of penalty, including payment of subsidy the government had given on the wheat.

The cabinet was told that the flour mills in plea bargain/VR have paid Rs2 billion to NAB. The chief minister directed the chief secretary to coordinate with NAB authorities to get back the collected amount of Rs2 billion.

Recruitment Policy: The cabinet decided that the recruitment from grade BS-1 to 4 would be made through selection committee. The recruitment from grade BS-5 to BS-15 would be made through third party and above grade BS-15 by SPSC.

The local recruitment from grade BS-1 to BS-4 would be made by a selection committee headed by deputy commissioner under section officer of S&GAD and other concerned officers as member. On divisional level the selection would be headed by the commissioner as chairman and section officer of finance would be its member apart from the members of the concerned departments.

The chief minister constituted a high power committee with Chief Secretary Mumtaz Shah, Minister Energy Imtiaz Shaikh, Minister Labour Saeed Ghani, Advisor Law Murtaza Wahab and Secretary Services to work out a mechanism for recruitment from grade BS-5 to grade BS-15 and submit their recommendations within 15 days. The chief minister directed police department to make their recruitments through IBA.

Wildlife Act 2019: The Sindh cabinet after thorough consultation approved Sindh Wildlife Protection, Preservation, Conservation, and Management Act 2019 with the objective to avail their current and potential value by the present and future generations in the protected areas of the province. In the definitions, animals have been declared as animals of wild origin, terrestrial and or aquatic that includes fish, birds, reptiles, mammals, amphibians and their eggs, excluding livestock. Ibex has been declared as animal of Sindh.

Under the newly passed law by cabinet a nine-member council for conservation of Wildlife has been established under minister/advisor or special assistant for wildlife department. The function of the council will be giving vision and guidance for sustainability of wildlife.

The new law prohibits hunting, shooting, killing, trapping, snaring and poisoning of wild animals found therein. The hunting of game animals shall be regulated in a prescribed manner.

The cabinet approved the bill and referred to the assembly for passing it into a law.

Forest policy: The cabinet also approved Sindh Sustainable Forest Management Policy, 2019 with the objective to maintain, restore, enhance and sustainably manage the forest resources by following highest standards of professional forestry, promoting public awareness and participation, strengthening institutional capacities and mobilising stakeholders' support.

SCDA: The cabinet was told that the Sindh Governor has referred back the amendments in Sindh Coastal Development Authority (SCDA) with the observation of interfering in the jurisdiction of Pakistan Maritime Security. The cabinet was told that the SCDA was existing from 1994. The amendment made in the law was to authorise the authority to carry out development in the coastal belt which could not be termed as interference. The cabinet approved the bill once again and referred it to the assembly.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/22/546582/sindh-cabinet-meeting-government-to-disallow-wheat-quota-to-defaulting-flour-mills/

LOCUST ATTACKS TO BE MORE SEVERE IN COMING YEARS

By Haseeb Hanif Published: November 22, 2019

ISLAMABAD: An official of the Ministry of Food Security has told a parliamentary panel that swarms of locust are also likely to attack crops in the coming two to three years and may wreak havoc in Balochistan, Sindh and south Punjab.

Ministry of Food Security Secretary Hashim Popalzai on Thursday told the National Assembly's Standing Committee for Food Security and Research that tender has been placed for purchase of Malathion spray that is used to kill the locusts.

"One hundred thousand litres of spray will be purchased that will be enough for six months. The insecticide will be sprayed in Thal and Hub areas. We are ready to deal with locust swarms and are preparing plans for next three years.

"The government has allocated a fund of Rs5.3 million. We have one airplane in working condition for aerial spray. Another will be operational soon. These aircrafts are 50 years old are not sufficient for the needs. We are planning to award the contract of aerial spray to Pakistan Air Force," he said.

The committee recommended that the Finance Ministry immediately release the funds specified to counter possible locust attacks. The committee chairman Rao Ajmal Khan said locust swarm lays 500 million eggs at any place where it sojourn during its journey.
"The loss this year is not too much but the next year we expect much greater damage to crops. The attack will start from sub-district Haroonabad in south Punjab and will move towards Sindh and Balochistan," he said.

The meeting, held at the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, was attended by MNAs Zain Qureshi, Rai Murtaza Iqbal, Shaukat Ali, Ahmed Hussain Deharr, Nausheen Hamid, Shahnaz Saleem, Kamal Uddin and officials of relevant departments.

The chairman said, "Agriculture is the backbone of our economy and we need to focus on this sector and increase its production. We need to increase the capacity of our farmers."

The committee set up a three-member subcommittee to check the standards of the locally produced tractors. The committee decided to visit the tractor manufacturing plants in Pakistan as it felt that these tractor manufacturing companies were not following any particular standards.

Ministry of Food Security secretary said the government is focusing on reducing the import bill for pulses. Local production of pulses will enable citizens purchase cheap pulses.

Murtaza Iqbal said open-shade policy should be adopted for the farmers as it will protect them from the market mafia. He said a mobile application has been introduced in Islamabad to end role of middleman. If it succeeds them it will be extended to other cities as well.

Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) is supplying 200 thousand tons of wheat to the Utility Stores Corporation (USC).

The USC authorities told the committee that subsidy on all the items in the stores was abandoned in 2014.

Rs500m are paid to its employees as salaries and other monthly expenses are RS650m, they said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2104210/1-locust-attacks-severe-coming-years/

ON WORLD FISHERMEN DAY, SINDH'S FISHERMEN LOOK TO THE GOVT FOR HELP

By Sameer Mandhro Published: November 22, 2019

KARACHI: Umar Mirbahar goes to the beach every day on his age-old bicycle for fishing. The 46-year-old father of five hardly manages to make enough money to make ends meet and feed his family.

"There is almost no fish in the sea," lamented Umar. "And there is no other profession for me. I was born a fisherman and I will die as a fisherman. But I don't think my kids will opt for this profession," he said, his tone giving away both resentment and hope.

When asked who he holds responsible for the situation the fisherfolk community finds itself in, Umar simply looks confused. "The situation was quite good until around a decade ago. But every passing day brings a new challenge," he said, adding that the government can at least start a rehabilitation scheme for underprivileged persons, especially those belonging to the fisherfolk community.

There is no exact data of the total number of fishermen in the province. But the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) – a rights body working for fisher folk rights – puts the number at around three million, including at least two million living along the coastal areas, while the remaining relying on inland water sources for their catch.

According to the PFF, around a million fishermen live along Karachi's coastal belt along, but their living conditions tell a sorry tale of neglect and official apathy. "There is no policy for us," said Talib Kutchi, a fisherfolk activist. "We are an ignored people," he complained.

On Thursday, Karachi's fishermen marked 'World Fisherman Day', commemorated across the world on November 21. This year, the theme was 'Fishermen's Sovereignty on All Water Bodies'. Hundreds of fishermen from different areas, including Khadda Market, Keamari, Baba Island, Bhitt Island, Baldia and other parts of the city, gathered in Ibrahim Haidery – the hub of the fisherfolk community.

"Marine life is on the decline," said Muhammad Ali Shah, the president of PFF. He counted a number of reasons for the decline of fish in the sea and in fresh water bodies. "Marine pollution, degeneration of wetlands, deforestation of mangroves, overfishing in deep waters, encroachments on fresh water bodies, lack of fresh water and no interest of the government in this sector are some the reasons directly impacting the fisherfolk community," said Shah. He added that there has been a decline of up to 70% in the fish population. "Several species recently vanished," he pointed out.

"There is no sustainable policy for fishermen," complained Shah. "Marine life and ecology must be protected and for this, the government needs to have a vision." Lashing out at the Sindh government, the PFF leader said that the provincial government did not have pro-fishermen policies and laws.

For his part, an official of the Livestock and Fisheries department told The Express Tribune that the fishermen should also take care of their resources. "The government really wants them to have a better lifestyle but they [fishermen], along with their so-called leaders, destroy their own resources," the official added.

Explaining the situation of fishermen of fresh water bodies, especially those of Manchhar Lake, the official said that the decision taken during General Zia-ul-Haq's tenure was anti-fishermen. "Poisonous water has been released into the lake since 1979." He added that around 800,000 fishermen, who used to catch fish at the lake, were disturbed socially, culturally and economically.

The official added that most of the fresh water bodies have been encroached by the 'leaders' of fishermen, not by the government.

Supporting Umar's concerns, Aijaz Ahmed Mahesar, the Livestock and Fisheries Department Secretary, said that the condition of Sindh's fishermen was far from satisfactory. "I know their issues. The government has various projects in the pipeline," he added.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2104180/1-world-fishermen-day-sindhs-fishermen-look-govt-help/

COUNTRY MUST ADOPT CHINESE TECHNOLOGY: ALVI

By Our Correspondent Published: November 22, 2019

LAHORE: President Arif Alvi has emphasised that modern agricultural techniques of China can bring revolutionary improvement in the agriculture sector of Pakistan.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the 5th CAC Pakistan Exhibition on Thursday, the president said Pakistan wanted to take benefit of the Chinese experience in agriculture, harvesting and other areas and definitely the exhibition was paving the way for that.

"Agriculture plays a key role in Pakistan's economy and makes an important contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) and employment," Alvi said, adding that agriculture had a great potential to gain more benefit which was why the government was attaching great importance to the sector.

The president suggested that joint ventures between Pakistan and China would bring Chinese researchers, agricultural experts and business community to Pakistan and when they joined hands with Pakistani businessmen, the agriculture sector would get a boost.

"It will also help Pakistan to get rid of the issues of low productivity and post-harvest losses," he said.

Alvi stressed that investment could play a fundamental role in economic stability and the government was ensuring the provision of all possible facilities for the ease of doing business to encourage domestic and foreign investors.

Speaking on the occasion, Chinese Consul General Long Ding Bin pointed out that Pakistan and China had already initiated government-to-government cooperation in the agriculture sector and the exhibition had provided an opportunity to businessmen of both sides to initiate B2B cooperation.

"China is expanding cooperation with Pakistan in different sectors including agriculture and it wants to further deepen ties," the envoy said.

China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) Chairperson Ma Chunyan suggested that Pakistan could ensure fast growth in the agriculture sector by taking benefit of Chinese expertise and advanced technology.

Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) President Irfan Iqbal Sheikh said a well-performing and high-yielding agriculture sector was the need of the hour.

"Pakistan cannot do well without improving the performance of the agriculture sector. For ensuring the viability of the economy and long-term growth, it is necessary that all sectors of the economy pick up and complement each other," he pointed out.

Sheikh was of the view that the agriculture sector could not be left out due to the inherited limitation of resources and various challenges in the way of moving from conventional methods of farming to modern technologies.

"The present scenario demands that both the government and private sector need to join hands to make the most of the available resources by introducing innovative ways at an affordable cost for our farmers," he said.

"We need to understand that mechanised farming has to be adopted to enhance the per-acre yield."

The LCCI president said the agriculture sector desperately required locally developed as well as imported solutions in the fields of fertilisers, pesticides, seeds, farm machinery, equipment, etc.

"Our Chinese friends, who have developed cost-effective solutions in these areas, are offering these at reasonable rates. These Chinese companies are getting a lot of success in improving their standards and product range."

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2104242/2-country-must-adopt-chinese-technology-alvi/

CENTRE UNDER FIRE FOR 'BIASED' ATTITUDE TOWARDS SINDH OVER LOCUST ATTACK

Tahir Siddiqui Updated November 23, 2019

KARACHI: Lambasting the federal government for its "biased" attitude towards Sindh, Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu informed the Sindh Assembly on Friday that the Centre was not cooperating with the provincial government to tackle the locust issue.

He said although the plant protection department under the ministry of national food security and research was the competent authority to tackle the locust issue, still the federal government was not assisting the provincial administration.

"The plant protection department has 20 planes for aerial spray to control locust, but only three of them are functional," he said, adding that two planes were on stand-by in Punjab where locust had not yet arrived.

The minister said that only one plane was sent to Sindh by the federal government and that too after repeated requests. He said this indicated the Centre's "dual standards" for Sindh and Punjab.

At the beginning of the session with a very thin attendance of lawmakers, Mr Rahu rose to seek permission from Speaker Agha Siraj Durrani to make a policy statement on what he called a "very serious issue".

PA unanimously passes a law to register and regulate charity organisations in the province

"Why is Sindh being treated like this? Is it not part of the country?" he asked and said that Sindh and Bengal were the two provinces that took initiative for the creation of Pakistan.

"You have separated Bengal and now are treating Sindh like this," he said without specifically mentioning anyone.

Mr Rahu said that he had written several letters to the federal government since May, but it remained lethargic.

He said that the federal government sent only one plane on June 19 for aerial spraying in the province.

He said the plane sprayed only 6,000 acres in Naro in Thar and Salehpat in Sukkur, while there was millions of acres' area yet to be sprayed. "The federal government should send all three functional planes to Sindh so that most of the desert area could be covered."

Giving details of measures taken by the provincial government, he said that 15 centres were established in different districts with a central control room in Hyderabad.

He said that agriculturists were also provided with local pesticides and added that the medicine required to control the locust could only be imported by the federal government.

Mr Rahu said that 12 districts of the province including Shaheed Benazirabad, Ghotki, Mirpurkhas and Umerkot were affected by locust.

Later, on a calling-attention notice by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's Dr Imran Ali Shah, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Kumar Chawla assured him that efforts would be taken to provide facilities to the government schools in his constituency sooner rather than later.

Dr Shah said that several schools in his constituency were deprived of basic facilities. "Girls' schools lack toilets. The students were compelled to sit on the floor. We have given them darees [mats] to sit but the same have now been damaged," he said, asking the minister concerned to visit his constituency.

The house also unanimously passed the Sindh Charities Registration and Regulation Bill, 2019. The lawmakers were informed by the parliamentary minister that a commission — Charities Registration and Regulation Commission — would be formed following enactment of the law.

The commission would be mandated to ensure that charities and promoters comply with their legal obligations in exercising control and management of the administration of charitable funds.

The commission would also institute a mechanism including central database for effective monitoring and evaluation.

Earlier, while furnishing statements and replies to lawmakers' written and verbal queries during Question Hour, Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh said that as many as 36 sugar mills were producing bagasse-based electricity. (Bagasse is the dry pulpy residue left after the extraction of juice from sugar cane.)

To a question by Grand Democratic Alliance's Arif Mustafa Jatoi, the minister said that a 100MW gas turbine power plant was providing electricity through the Sindh Transmission and Dispatch Company (STDC) via a 132 kV double circuit transmission line.

He said that the STDC transmitted power from Sindh Nooriabad Power Company.

The minister said that the project, a joint venture of the provincial government with a private company, transmitted electricity to a K-Electric grid station.

He said that the company had earned revenue of Rs595.718 million from wheeling charges.

In reply to a question by treasury member Heer Soho, the minister said that as many as 89 villages in Karachi had been electrified during the period between 2015 and 2018 by the energy department.

To a verbal question, he said that the Rs695m Village Electrification Programme was financed by the provincial government. "Only one village in district Malir is yet to be electrified, while 89 villages have been energised," he added.

The chair adjourned the sitting till Wednesday.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1518298

CORPORATIZING THE AGRI SECTOR

By RECORDER REPORT on November 23, 2019

Despite a severe shortage of arable land China ranks first in worldwide farm output. The arable land in India's Punjab is one-third of our Punjab but its irrigation area is 90 percent and cropping intensity 189 percent. In terms of arable land and water availability, Pakistan is better placed than both China and Indian Punjab, but its agri output is deficient as compared to theirs. The situation came under spotlight at the 5th China Agro Chemical (CAC) Pakistan Exhibition in Lahore on Thursday. Addressing the gathering, President Arif Alvi said that modern techniques from China can inject a revolutionary improvement into agricultural sector of Pakistan. According to him, "joint ventures between Pakistan and China will bring Chinese researchers, agricultural experts and business community to Pakistan and when they join hands with Pakistani businessmen, our agricultural sector will get a boost." Consul General of China Long Dingbin, who was present on the occasion, said, China and Pakistan have already initiated government-to-government cooperation in agriculture sector, and thanks to CAC there is now an opportunity for businessmen of both countries to promote "B2B cooperation". How this cooperation will come about and grow only time will tell. Is the farming community's leadership on board at the B2B cooperative joint ventures? This question needs to be answered. Almost coincidental to the president's take on the subject chief of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad Khalid Mehmood Khokhar told Business Recorder that "economic reforms and the opening of Pakistani agriculture to the global market over the past decades have made small farmers vulnerable to unusual changes and fluctuations". And according to Kisan Board Pakistan (KBP), the farmer is becoming poorer by the day because the support prices of farm produce are not commensurate with cost of inputs.

Even when Pakistan's successive elected governments that are dominated by landed gentry are in office, nothing worthwhile, both in terms of legislation and economic patronage, has been done to retrieve the small farmer from his grinding poverty. Given this indifference he tends to get poorer by the day. If prices of inputs are beyond his reach, the market machinations are no less vicious. But the fact should not be overlooked that despite being stepmotherly treated the agriculture sector's contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is nearly 25 percent. And it provides employment to about 40 percent Pakistanis – more than any other sector of national economy. Accepted, the per farmer landholding now stands at 5.6 acres – less than half of what it was in 1972 – but that small piece is still a viable economic unit because of modern farming technology, efficient usage of water and inputs, reasonable market prices and benevolent governmental parentage. But, as the PKI chief pointed out, small farmers have to compete with bigger ones, who are well-endowed with capital, irrigation and supplementary businesses to buffer them against shocks. "The unfair injustice towards small-scale farmers is discouraging them to pursue agriculture as a means of economic survival". It would be, therefore, in the B2B's own interest that they see to it that their joint ventures do not cause joblessness, which in today's world is the most serious threat to peaceful and stable governance. Pakistan agricultural sector is no doubt in dire need of modernisation – on which the CAC has the right potential to deliver – but no less feared is its negative fallout on the future of small landholders. The question in relation to the upcoming corporatization of the country's agricultural sector, therefore, is: Is there a pro-small farmer plan as well?

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/23/547010/corporatizing-the-agri-sector/

EXTREME WEATHER PUTS POULTRY PROJECT IN A COOP

By Shahabullah Yousafzai Published: November 23, 2019

PESHAWAR: With hilly areas of the province receiving heavy snow and rains, it has slammed the brakes on the provision of poultry 'units' to the less privileged in the province.

This was disclosed by the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) Livestock District Director Dr Masoon Ali on Friday.

Talking about the programme, he explained that it was part of Prime Minister's Agriculture Emergency Programme to uplift the agriculture sector in the province. He added that of the Rs309 billion cost of the programme, the federal government is expected to provide Rs84 billion to fund some 13 projects, including the poultry rearing project. The remaining Rs225 billion will be provided by the provincial government.

It includes a project to subsidise poultry units — each comprising of five hens and a cock – amongst the underprivileged of the province.

The project aims to boost local agricultural production, reduce dependence on imports and improve the lives of poor farmers.

Dr Ali said that they had received an overwhelming response for the programme, with 4,000 applications filed so far. The only thing that stopped the applications from flowing in was that district offices ran out of forms. More applications are expected to come in once additional forms are distributed.

The K-P government, he said, has adopted a uniform policy for all applicants, he added.

"We have been directed by the provincial government that under that pre-set criteria, the less privileged class of every district such as widows, orphans and those who have been nominated by the community such as payer leaders of any mosque, and women section of any districts will be given priority," the district director said.

He added that the chickens which will be provided under the programme will be a special breed and will be 100 per cent vaccinated.

Districts which are currently experiencing extreme weather conditions such as snow and heavy rains could see the distribution process deferred by as much as two months, though the process will resume latest by March when relatively warmer weathers return, he said.

The districts where the process has been deferred are the hilly regions of Malakand and Hazara division.

"Such weather is not suited for chickens to lay eggs, but later they will be provided chickens which can breed in any season," he stated.

Further explaining the process, he said that the livestock offices in each district will serve as the collection and distribution point for the programme.

He further urged that only the downtrodden and deserving people should apply for the poultry package so that it is easier for them to sort through applications.

However, he clarified that they will entertain all applications.

"We will not refuse any applicant if insist on it," he replied.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 23rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2104888/1-extreme-weather-puts-poultry-project-coop/

FROM BOON TO BANE: THE UNDUE GROWTH OF PAKISTAN'S FLOUR INDUSTRY

By Rizwan Asif Published: November 23, 2019

Most of Pakistan's flour mills are situated in Punjab and subsequently the province receives the largest share of the government's wheat quota. PHOTO: FILE

Most of Pakistan's flour mills are situated in Punjab and subsequently the province receives the largest share of the government's wheat quota. PHOTO: FILE

LAHORE: With an optimal wheat grinding capacity of more than 13 million bags, Pakistan's flour milling industry has the potential to accommodate the flour requirement of the entire Asian continent, says Pakistan Flour Mills Association Central Chairperson Asim Raza. However, with 500 out of the total 1,700 flour mills non-functional, the flour milling industry is fast becoming a burden on the country's economy.

According to an industry source, for quite some time now, all governments have turned a blind-eye to the demands of the flour mills association and granted unchecked establishment of new flour mills in the country. "The reason behind this abrupt and undue increase in flour mills is the potential for profit in the industry given the provision of wheat at a standardized rate by the government, and the export of flour to Afghanistan," revealed the source.

As per details, there are currently 984 flour mills in Punjab; out of which, 754 are entitled to the government wheat quota. In Sindh only 160 out of 350 flour mills are functional, while Balochistan relies on 20 out of 44 mills for its flour output. On the other hand, there are currently 230 flour mills in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P), out of which 130 are entitled to the government quota.

However, whether functional or non-functional, Pakistan has the overall capacity to grind 300,000 tonnes of flour per day or 11.5 million (20 kg) bags, while on the contrary, the country's flour consumption is capped at only about two million bags.

There are three kinds of flour mills in Pakistan, each with a different building cost. The local machinery flour mill which can grind up to 300 tonnes of wheat per day can be built in Rs100 to 200 million. While a flour mill built with the fusion of local and imported machinery can cost almost Rs250 to 270 million and a flour mill built exclusively with imported machinery can incur a cost between Rs500 to 600 million.

Most of Pakistan's flour mills are situated in Punjab and subsequently the province receives the largest share of the government's wheat quota. "The establishment of big Pakistani flour market in Afghanistan resulted in the creation of several flour mills in Punjab, as the flour to Afghanistan would be dispatched via Rawalpindi, Gujranwala and Lahore division. But now that the flour market in Afghanistan is dominated by the Central Asian states, it has resulted in reduction of demand for Pakistani flour, which in turn has rendered many Punjab flour mills non-functional," a flour mill owner told The Express Tribune on condition of anonymity.

According to Raza, their organisation has been demanding the federal and provincial governments to ban the formation of new flour mills, given the superfluous grinding capacity of the current flour mills. "Although the prime minister's policy of supplying wheat to the people which helped reinstate

150 flour mills is commendable, wheat should still be imported at zero rate to keep moving the flour milling industry and let wheat be exported.”

Punjab Minister for Food Samiullah Chaudhary told The Express Tribune that the government should consider cross-checking wheat production by seeking electricity bills from flour mills it provides raw wheat to. “The business community itself should reflect– it is a waste of their own efforts to keep building an industry which is already capable of providing more than enough,” he added.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2104875/boon-bane-undue-growth-pakistans-flour-industry/

LOCUSTS ATTACK PARTS OF NASIRABAD

The Newspaper's Correspondent November 24, 2019

DERA MURAD JAMALI: A huge swarm of locusts has attacked different parts of Nasirabad, posing a serious threat to various crops.

Balochistan Development Authority parliamentary secretary Mir Sikandar Khan Umrani on Friday contacted Provincial Minister for Agriculture Engineer Zamrak Khan Piralizai to discuss steps to be taken to protect the crops on an emergency basis.

The agriculture minister then directed the director general of agriculture department to send teams to affected areas without any delay.

Speaking to media, Mir Sikandar Khan Umrani said that Nasirabad was the agricultural hub of the province, where most people were associated with this sector.

He said that if the swarm of locusts increased, the provincial authorities would be asked to carry out aerial spray to minimise financial losses to the farmers.

Mr Umrani said that different areas of Nasirabad, including those irrigated by Rabi Canal, had been attacked by a huge swarm of locusts, causing damage to tomato, vegetable, mustard and other crops.

He said that they would make efforts to protect the crops and ensure less damages to the farmers. He assured that if needed the spray would be carried out through helicopter.

Published in Dawn, November 24th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1518509/locusts-attack-parts-of-nasirabad

INDIA AND PAKISTAN URGED TO INTRODUCE ‘NO ARREST POLICY’ FOR FISHERMEN

The Newspaper's Correspondent November 24, 2019

THATTA: Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) chairman Mohammad Ali Shah has urged India and Pakistan to implement Article 73 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as a mutual gesture of goodwill and introduce “no arrest policy” for the fishermen who mistakenly find their way into either country’s territorial waters.

Arrests of Pakistani fishermen and their incarceration in jails for indefinite periods had ruined lives of innumerable fishing families in coastal region of lower Sindh, which had the largest number of fishermen languishing in Indian prisons mostly in Gujarat for years, said Mr Shah while speaking to media persons at Makli here on Saturday.

He said that 60 of the jailed fishermen belonged to various creeks of Thatta and Sujawal coastline but neither the government nor privately-run fishing businesses were taking any concrete measures to help end the families' agony.

He disclosed that out of the 60 fishermen, 24 belonged to Janghisar and Atharki Tar (creek) of Keti Bandar taluka. Among them three were real brothers, sons of an octogenarian widow Kariman who lived in Abun Machi village. The old lady regularly bought Sindhi newspapers, on the advice of a schoolteacher, to look for news about her sons Ali Hassan, Asghar and Ashraf, he said.

Shah called incarceration of Pakistani fishermen in Indian jails as "wrongful confinement" and said it was a stark violation of Article 73 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

He said that recently one of the fishermen of Shahbandar taluka succumbed to his unending agony and died in an Indian jail. His relatives were formally informed about the death but delivery of the body was refused, he said.

He said that a 225km stretch of Thatta to Badin coastline contained 17 big creeks and over 200 small ones which fishermen frequented for fishing. But time and again Indian naval forces and other marine agencies trespassed into Pakistan's territorial limits to take away Pakistani fishermen at gunpoint.

In total, there were 163 Pakistani fishermen in Indian jails out of whom 60 belonged to Sindh alone. Pakistan's waters were dominated by powerful fishing trawler operators while the poor and small fishing communities faced the brunt of Indian activities, he said.

Shah claimed that four fishermen of Shahbandar taluka identified as Usman Sachu, Zaman, Usman and one whose name could not be ascertained had been taken away by Indian naval forces more than 15 years ago and one of them died recently in jail but the body was not handed over to relatives.

He said that Pakistan must make concerted efforts to get its fishermen released from Indian jails and pass legislation to provide maximum relief to poor local fishing community.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1518430/india-and-pakistan-urged-to-introduce-no-arrest-policy-for-fishermen

MILLS IN PUNJAB, SINDH: AVERAGE COST OF 1-KG OF SUGAR COMES TO RS51.93: CCP

By SOHAIL SARFRAZ on November 24, 2019

The Com-petition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has calculated the average manufacturing cost of one kilogramme of sugar at Rs 51.93, based on actual data received from sugar mills of Punjab and Sindh for 2016-17.

This has been stated by the CCP in the cost validation report recently prepared by the Commission on sugar on the directions of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC). The ECC had through case No. ECC-125/23/2017 dated November 28, 2017 allowed exports of an additional 1,500,000 metric tons of sugar. An export quota of 500,000 metric tons was announced earlier on September 14, 2017. The exercise to validate the cost of sugar production is necessary to pay the subsidy amount to the millers for exporting the surplus stocks.

According to the CCP report, the total manufacturing cost of sugar has been calculated at Rs 51.74 per kg (Sindh), Rs 52.12 (Punjab) and average Rs 51.93 per kg.

The report said that the CCP played the role of third party and validated cost calculations for the crushing year 2016-17 as calculated by the Ministry of Industries & Production (MOI&P) in compliance with the ECC decision.

The CCP's past actions in the sugar sector also point to the competition distortions as a result of the government policies and anti-competitive practices by the millers. A CCP's inquiry of 2009 had found that the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association was involved in cartelization and the CCP had proposed maximum penalty on the association. However, the CCP could not make the order public due to stay orders granted to the PSMA by the courts.

Later on, in its policy note issued in 2018, the CCP had strongly recommended that provincial governments to review the legislative framework under which the sugar sector operates. The sugar act is severely outdated and does not serve any purpose in the contemporary times. All provincial governments should review legislation to limit the government intervention and bring it in line with the recommendations given above. Any revised or new legislation should encourage principles of free market.

The CCP had recommended that the provincial governments should ideally not fix price floor of sugarcane and let the market determine price based on supply and demand. Price floors should only be imposed for limited periods in the situations where food security is gravely threatened.

The CCP's policy note further recommended that the government may set up a committee comprising all the pertinent government departments dealing with the sugar sector at the federal and provincial level (such as provincial food departments, research departments whether attached or independent, provincial cane commissioners, Agriculture Policy Institute, Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Ministry of Commerce and Trade Corporation of Pakistan) in addition to representatives of farmers and mill owners to be able to coordinate effectively in aligning their objectives and be able to deliberate upon a workable long-term plan based on the recommendations provided above and/or any new ideas or issues that may emerge overtime for making the sugar sector internationally and locally competitive and thereby an economically efficient sector catering to the welfare of its stakeholders as well as consumers in the longer term, it added.

According to the cost validation report of the CCP on sugar, the Commission had constituted a committee to validate the calculations of cost of production of sugar for the crushing year 2016-17 as calculated by the Ministry of Industries and Production (MOI&P). The committee comprises three CCP officials i.e. Director General (Finance & Admin) Shahzad Hussain, Assistant Director (C&TA) Aqsa Suleman and Management Executive (OFT) Amin Akbar.

Accordingly, the committee initiated its work and held several meetings. The committee agreed that in order to validate the cost figures, it is necessary to have cost audit reports, for crushing year 2016-

17, of all sugar mills. For this purpose the letters were written to the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) and Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP).

The PSMA and SECP in their replies informed the committee that the requirement of cost audit is subject to the recommendation of regulatory authority supervising the business. As there is no such requirement in place; therefore, no such report has been prepared.

To proceed further in the matter, the CCP committee agreed to issue General Order under the Section 36 of the Competition Act, requiring all the sugar mills to submit audited financial statements for the FY 2016-17, cost audit reports for the FY 2016-17 and the information detailed therein for the crushing season 2016-17.

Based on the information provided by the sugar mills, the committee has calculated manufacturing cost per kg of sugar for each province, ie, Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

Therefore, the committee has also calculated the average cost per kg of sugar based on actual data received from sugar mills of Punjab and Sindh, in order to bring conformity with the calculations performed by the MOI&P.

The committee also held a meeting with the MOI&P to discuss the assumptions taken by the Ministry for calculating the average cost of production of sugar. Both the committee and the MOI&P have taken following assumptions to calculate the average cost of production: The sale price of molasses is Rs 12 per kg. Although there is a disagreement between the mills and the MOI&P on this sale price; however, Rs 12per kg price is based on the export price of the molasses for last five years as reported by the PSMA.

The miscellaneous charges, ie, Road Development Cess, marketing fee and freight have been taken as per the calculations of MOIP based on the notifications.

The calculations are based on notified ex-mill price of 40 kg sugarcane, ie, Rs 182 for Sindh and Rs180 for Punjab with an average price of Rs 181. The sugar recovery percentage and molasses recovery percentage are based on average of actual recovery percentages for Punjab and Sindh. The sugar mills of KPK have not been included in order to bring conformity with the calculations of MOIP.

All the calculations performed by the committee are based on actual data received from the sugar mills of Punjab and Sindh, whereas the calculation of MOI&P are based on data available in the annual report of PSMA for the year 2016-2017.

The calculations shows that the average cost calculated by the MOI&P is Rs 52.46 per kg, whereas, the average cost calculated by the committee comes to Rs 51.93 per kg. The overall average cost is almost the same with a minor difference of Rs 0.53 per kg. The difference in average cost calculated by the MOI&P and the committee is due to the different recovery percentages of sugar and molasses and the sample taken. The calculations done by the committee are based on actual data received from the mills, while the figures taken by the MOI&P are based on the annual report of PSMA for the year 2016-17 and average of the figures provided by the cane commissioner.

The average support price of sugar cane for Punjab and Sindh comes to Rs 181/kg. The difference in the sale of molasses is due to the difference in the recovery percentages of molasses. Net cost of raw material is same in both the cases. Road Development Cess, Marketing fee and Freight cost are as notified by government for Punjab province. The differences between the total cost of raw material, sugar obtained from 40 kg of sugarcane, cost of raw material per kg of sugar and processing & other overheads arises because of the difference between actual data gathered from mill and data available on the PSMA's website used by the MOIP for calculation purpose, the CCP added.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/24/547218/mills-in-punjab-sindh-average-cost-of-1-kg-of-sugar-comes-to-rs5193-ccp/

MINISTER FOR PROTECTING RIGHTS OF FARMERS

By RECORDER REPORT on November 24, 2019

Punjab has exported six million tonnes of potatoes during the year 2018-19 which is 100,000 tonnes more than the exports made during the corresponding year.

Government is making efforts to increase the minimum purchase rate of sugarcane from Rs 180 to 190 per maunds during this year.

Protection of rights of farmers is the top priority of the current government and all efforts are being done to enhance profitability of this sector, said the Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmed Langrial. He was presiding over an emergency meeting in which farmers' organisations took part and performance of the agricultural sector was reviewed.

The Minister said that the Chief Minister Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar consider farmers as capital. In past, the agriculture sector was ignored but now the protection of the rights of agriculture and farmers is at the top of the current Government.

Under the Prime Minister's Agricultural Emergency Program, 432,500 sacks of certified seeds of approved varieties of wheat are being sold to farmers on subsidized rates.

The meeting was attended by Rana Ali Arshad Additional Secretary Task Force Punjab, Dr Anjum Ali Director General Agriculture (Extension), Advisor Minister Punjab Agriculture Shahid Qadir, Rana Iftikhar Ahmed President Anjuman Farmers Punjab, Rao Tariq Ashraf, President Farmers' Alliance Lodhran, Mian Arshad , Sajid Ashraf Watto President Punjab Youth Farmer's Alliance, Muhammad Hussain Khokhar, Malik Zulfiqar Hussain Awan, Chaudhry Tabasam Bhallar and other farmer representatives.

Dr Anjum Ali Director General Agriculture (Ext & AR) briefed the participants that production of rice remained 4.27 million tonnes and maize 6 million tonnes, which is 0.37 million tonnes and 0.6 million tonnes more as compared to last year, respectively. For the first time for cotton crop 2018-19, the government provided approved seeds of subsidized varieties for up to 100,000 acres.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/24/547168/minister-for-protecting-rights-of-farmers/

FARM WORKERS FOR ENHANCING SUGARCANE RATE

By RECORDER REPORT on November 24, 2019

A large rally of farm workers demanded of the government to increase the procurement rate of sugarcane and ensure start of the crushing season in all sugar mills of Sindh.

The rally was jointly organized by Sindh Agricultural General Workers Union and National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) which started from the Hyderabad Press Club (HPC) and led by Sindh Agricultural General Workers Union general secretary Lal BuxLalan. A large number of peasants and farm workers, carrying flags and banners, attended the rally and raised slogans in favour of their demands.

Addressing the rally, speakers said that the sugarcane mafia is once again using its old tactics to delay crushing season and not increasing procurement rate, which has resulted in economic problems for farmers and crisis for the workers of sugar industry. They said the livelihood of at least 250,000 workers is at the stake.

They said that as per the Sindh Sugar Mills Act, it is compulsory for the owners of sugar mills to run their mills from November 30 each year, but so far all sugar mills in the province are closed. They said that under this law a Sugar Board was to be established to set procurement prices and duration of the crushing season, with the provincial agriculture minister as its chairman and with two MPAs and representatives of sugar mills owners and growers as it members; however, so far no such board is set up.

They regretted that the sugar mill mafia is calling the shots, bypassing all rules and laws and the government is playing the role of a silent spectator.

They demanded to set up procurement rate of sugarcane at Rs 250 per Maund and immediately start crushing process in all sugar mills of Sindh province.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/24/547153/farm-workers-for-enhancing-sugarcane-rate/

PROTECTION OF FARMERS' RIGHTS TOP PRIORITY

Our Correspondent November 24, 2019

LAHORE: Minister for Agriculture Punjab Malik Nauman Ahmed Langriyal has said that the agriculture sector was ignored in the past but now the protection of rights of farmers is at the top of the current government's priorities.

Presiding over a meeting organised for farmer organisations in the Agriculture House, he said during 2018-19, 6 millions of tonnes of potatoes were exported, which was 100.000 tonnes more than the last year.

The government is taking measures to finalize the rate of sugarcane from Rs 180 to 190 per monds during this year. Under the Prime Minister's Agricultural Emergency Program, 432,500 sacks of certified seeds of approved varieties of wheat are being subsidized to farmers.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/573614-protection-of-farmers-rights-top-priority

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOV 25th DEC 01st 2019

RETAILERS EARNING HUGE PROFIT ON TOMATO DESPITE DROP IN WHOLESALE RATE

Aamir Shafaat Khan November 25, 2019

KARACHI: Despite the arrival of Iranian tomato in the local market, retailers in the city are earning a windfall profit by keeping the retail rate of the red fruit at Rs280-320 per kilogram, it emerged on Sunday.

Local administration, who is responsible for curbing profiteering and hoarding, has so far played an ineffective role in rescuing consumers' interest, leaving them at the mercy of the retailers who have been earning Rs100 profit on one kg of tomato.

In what appears to be a mere formality, the administration has been issuing the wholesale and retail rates on a daily basis, but not a single retailer want to display what they called an 'unrealistic' official price list.

The tomato price had hit an all-time high at Rs400 per kg compared to Rs240 a kilo a few days back, showing a steep hike of Rs160 per kg in a single day. At that time, the wholesale rate had jumped by Rs100 to Rs300 per kg.

When the wholesale rate decreased to Rs200-220 per kg, the retailers kept the rates at Rs 280-320 per kg.

On Saturday, the city government had issued the retail price of high-quality tomato at Rs153 per kg but it was hard to find the red fruit available in markets on this price.

Consumers believe that the government should ensure availability of tomato at the reduced rate if it releases daily rates.

Waheed Ahmed, the patron-in-chief of the All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers, and Merchants Association, said the government had issued an import permit for 16,500 tonnes of Iranian tomato out of which 2,242 tonnes had reached Pakistan between Nov15 and Nov 22.

In Karachi, over 40 containers carrying 22 tonnes each had landed since import got under way.

He said tomato crops of various producing areas of Sindh were also now finding way to various areas of Punjab where prices had also risen sharply.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1518648/retailers-earning-huge-profit-on-tomato-despite-drop-in-wholesale-rate

TOMATO IMPORT, ONION EXPORT TO BANGLADESH WILL CAUSE LOSSES TO LOCAL FARMERS, WARNS RAHU

A Correspondent November 25, 2019

BADIN: Sindh Minister for Agriculture Ismail Rahu on Sunday lashed out at federal government for exporting onion to Bangladesh and importing tomato when the crop was ready for harvest in Badin, Thatta, Sujawal, Tando Mohammad Khan, Mirpurkhas and other districts of the province.

Rahu told journalists after visiting a tomato market in Badin and meeting with farmers, traders and dealers that incompetent rulers were responsible for the tomato crisis and other problems,, which were caused by their 'illogical and childish' policies.

He said that there was need to review decision on importing tomatoes from Iran as it would greatly harm local tomato produce and deal a blow to farmers, producers and consumers. It was the need of the hour to make a mechanism for keeping prices of vegetables and other agriculture products stable in the country, he said.

Rahu said that Sindh government was committed to providing maximum relief to both farmers and dealers of vegetables and other farm products. Sindh was ready to construct a cold storage in Badin town for preserving vegetables such as tomato which was chief crop of current season in lower Sindh, he said.

"The federal rulers are not serious to provide relief to common man, instead they have willfully created problems for the people of the entire country," he said and added that such rulers had become a liability for the country.

He said the government was not run the way Imran Khan and his naive cabinet members were running it. Inflation had already broken the back of common man and agriculture sector had been ruined by those, who had been imposed on the country. He held Imran Khan and his aides responsible for the crisis.

He said that despite limited resources the provincial government was busy eliminating swarms of locusts, which according to him, had attacked crops and vegetation in more than 12 districts of the province.

The federal government that had not so far bothered to take the issue seriously must send planes for conducting aerial spray in areas like Thar which were still facing serious threat from the deadly swarms of insects, he said.

Rahu said that former prime minister Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif was being ridiculed by 'selected' rulers despite his serious health condition. It was a good decision of the court to allow the ex-premier to travel abroad for better treatment.

He said that biased and incompetent rulers were not allowing ailing former president of the country to be shifted to a Sindh hospital to get medical assistance from his personal doctors.

Imran Khan and his team members would have to face serious consequences for their bias and hatred towards leaders of smaller provinces, he said.

Rahu said that all the democratic forces as well as people of the entire country were on the same page to get rid of incompetent rulers as soon as possible.

Published in Dawn, November 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1518643/tomato-import-onion-export-to-bangladesh-will-cause-losses-to-local-farmers-warns-rahu

MINISTER PLEDGES MORE FACILITIES FOR LIVESTOCK FARMERS

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent November 25, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Livestock and Fisheries Minister Abdul Bari Pitafi has said that his department was striving hard to work in a direction that benefits livestock and cattle farmers to a greater extent. “The department is trying to complete all its schemes, although the federal government has withheld funds for livestock”.

Mr Pitafi was speaking at the oath-taking ceremony of Pakistan Veterinary Medical Association, Sindh zone, office-bearers and managing committee and later speaking to the media late on Saturday evening.

He said that department was also working to collaborate with the veterinary association to ensure development and progress.

He said that postings and promotion of officers and staff would be done purely on merit. He said that a free veterinary ambulance service had been launched which would greatly benefit livestock farmers. District veterinary health centres would also be established to ensure free vaccination and treatment for their animals, he added.

The minister pointed out that a call centre had been established at the Sindh secretariat for livestock farmers. He said a huge number of cattle heads were vaccinated during recent rainfall in Tharparkar. Besides, he said, fish seedling was provided for Manchhar Lake and fishermen were provided engines for their boats.

The minister expressed the hope that the newly-elected veterinary association would perform better.

He said that the services of doctors appointed on a contractual basis in the department had been regularised.

Regarding political situation in Sindh, Mr Pitafi observed that it was quite different when compared with other provinces. He said Sindh’s politicians, especially those belonging to the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), were being meted out step-motherly treatment. He claimed that the federal government had interned former president Asif Ali Zardari on baseless charges, and stressed that ailing prisoners should be provided proper treatment facilities. He said Mr Zardari had the potential to face all persecution but his health was not good and needed proper treatment.

Livestock secretary Ejaz Mahesar said the department was committed to keep livestock healthy for which appropriate measures were being taken.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1518641/minister-pledges-more-facilities-for-livestock-farmers

PRICEY TOMATOES OFFER SOME POLICY

Mohiuddin Aazim Updated November 25, 2019

EXACTLY a year ago, in November 2018, farmers in Sindh faced one of the worst gluts of tomatoes. A Dawn correspondent reported from Badin at the time that growers were forced to sell tomatoes at throwaway prices — one small grower sold 245kg for just Rs735, or Rs3 per kg.

And now in November 2019, a tomato supply crisis has taken the nation by storm.

However, the ongoing crisis is the symptom of a deeper malady. There's no denying that imports can mitigate the crisis to some extent, but they don't offer a perfect solution to this deep-rooted, perennial problem.

Pakistanis have grown accustomed to periodical skyrocketing of vegetable prices every few years, especially potato, tomato and onion. Politicians exploit such crises against the government of the day, and media outlets comment on their immediate causes, but all is conveniently forgotten once prices come down.

Therefore, policymakers must get to the root causes of food crop shortages if they want to address the situation in the long term.

In Pakistan, overall production of vegetables remains in surplus and we routinely export many of them. A crop becomes scarce particularly because of a high percentage of post-harvest losses—30 to 40 per cent in some cases—and a broken supply chain.

Food crop crises will continue to haunt us until root causes are addressed, including post-harvest losses, a broken supply chain and a lack of coordination between provinces and the federal government

Potatoes, tomatoes and onions are essential staples in our nutritional landscape, and a sudden change in their supply (and hence prices) affects our diet in a big way.

Countrywide production of tomatoes has ranged between 500,000 and 600,000 tonnes a year since 2011. No significant measures have been taken to increase the output. Similarly, not much effort has been undertaken to increase the per-hectare yield, which has oscillated between 9.5-10 tonnes, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

As expected, domestic demand for tomatoes, and all other food crops for that matter, has increased in the meantime. And there are no prizes for guessing what happens when supply remains low and demand keeps rising — even a small shortfall in production is bound to cause a crisis.

At the same time, post-harvest losses of fruits and vegetables remain high despite several initiatives taken to address the issue.

Such losses remain high not only due to crop mishandling at the farm but also because of poor storage and transportation facilities and inadequate market infrastructure. Improving these areas requires significant investment and effective coordination between federal and provincial governments.

A communication gap among provinces and with the federal government routinely aggravates food crop shortages. And this is what happened this time as well.

The decision to import tomatoes from neighbouring Iran was taken quite belatedly. That, together with the fact that importers/traders indulged in profiteering, explains why consumers got little price relief even after the imports.

Had the federal government ordered imports immediately after the crisis hit the markets towards the end of October, consumers would not have to pay Rs320 to Rs360 for a kilogram of tomato.

According to a Dawn report, roadblocks set up by Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (F) protestors demanding Prime Minister Imran Khan's resignation also partially delayed the arrival of tomatoes in Karachi. Roadblocks by political parties or influential interest groups always lead to delayed and pricier supplies of perishable food items to urban markets.

Gluts and scarcity spells of vegetables cannot be checked effectively unless each province forms large purchase centres and wholesale markets at district level, preferably under public-private partnerships.

Onward supplies to other districts of the same province or of another province can be made cheaper by establishing a network of licensed transporters so that at the time of supply shocks they cannot overcharge. To make this happen, provincial governments need to work with local governments.

Provincial governments, with active collaboration of the corporate sector, can also set up large processing units for vegetables under public-private partnerships. At times of peak production of a certain vegetable, these units can get supplies at agreed prices so that growers don't have to sell their produce for a song. Also, during a lean production period in a certain district or province, processed vegetables can be supplied to retail markets there.

After the devolution of agriculture as a fully provincial subject from the 2010-11 fiscal year, the federal government should not micromanage agricultural markets. However, it must work closely with all the provinces to ensure that none of them suffer from the glut or supply scarcity of a particular crop.

That is where the federal government can provide provinces with a common platform, on the pattern of federal committee on agriculture, to share timely information regarding vegetables as they do on other minor crops. This will help develop an early warning system on abundance and scarcity spells in any part of the country.

Similarly, based on real-time information, the federal government should immediately decide about importing a particular vegetable in times of scarcity or promoting exports when there is a glut.

Besides, effective coordination between federal and provincial governments is a must to stop smuggling of some vegetables to and from neighbouring Afghanistan and Iran to avoid an artificial scarcity. It did happen in August this year in Balochistan where large quantities of tomatoes smuggled from the two countries created a surplus after the arrival of local crop, compelling local growers to sell tomatoes at throwaway prices.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1518585

SINDH BESET WITH LOW COTTON OUTPUT

Mohammad Hussain Khan November 25, 2019

WITH a share of 0.8 per cent in GDP and a contribution of 4.5pc in agriculture value-addition, cotton has been a lifeline to Pakistan's economy.

However, the country has failed to achieve the cotton production target of around 15 million bales (with each bale weighing at least 155kg) for several years.

In the 2018-19 fiscal year, cotton output dropped 17.5pc year-on-year to 9.861 million bales. The figure was also 31.5pc lower than the 14.4m-bale target.

Provincial data shows that cotton production in Sindh, the second-largest contributor after Punjab, remains on the lower side since 2009-10, when the output hit 4.2m bales.

The production stood at 3.5m bales in 2014-15, 3.7m bales in 2017-18 and 2.9m bales in 2018-19.

Major reasons behind the declining output are said to be the shrinking area under cotton cultivation and a drop in per-acre yield.

Provincial cotton production has remained on the lower side since 2009-10

Khair Mohammad Junejo, a cotton grower from lower Sindh with 30 years of cotton cultivation experience, says he is getting a per-acre yield of fewer than 30 maunds (1 maund = around 37.3kg) this year compared to 49 maunds in the not-too-distant past.

He grows cotton on 1,841 acres in Mirpurkhas district and Sanghar, Sindh's largest cotton-producing district.

Growers believe that production has been hit by unfavourable weather, especially a delay in monsoon rains and prolonged hot and dry weather.

Cotton growers also lament "inadequate payments" from ginners and cite it as a main reason why many cotton producers have switched to other crops (mainly sugarcane and maize) over the last several years.

"Those at the helm seem to have no time to address the issues facing the cotton sector, which earns foreign exchange for the country and meets textile industry's needs," says Hassan Ali Chanhio, a former caretaker agriculture minister in Sindh and a grower from Sanghar.

He believes that climate change has affected the cotton sector, and Pakistan should send experts to countries having identical weather patterns to see how they are performing well in cotton and other crops. "We may borrow seed from these countries," he says.

Sindh's growers have been cultivating Bt cotton — a genetically modified pest-resistant cotton variety — for a decade now.

The variety gave higher yields in the beginning and became a household name in rural Sindh, especially in lower Sindh because of the region's suitable climate for Bt cotton.

But now the seed has perhaps lost its vigour and is susceptible to different pest attacks like pink bollworm.

"I clearly remember there was a time when cotton growers even extended their Bt cotton crop until autumn (the February-March period) when cotton plants start producing new fruit. This helped growers save land-preparation and other miscellaneous expenses," says Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) Mahmood Nawaz Shah.

Official cotton-sowing figures show that nearly 28pc area could not be brought under cotton cultivation in 2018-19. Against a target of 620,000 hectares (around 1.5m acres), cotton was sown on 448,189 hectares during the year.

During this season, the sowing target has been increased to 640,000 hectares and cotton sowing has reportedly been achieved on 614,579 hectares, or 96pc of the total area.

Sindh's cotton production target is set at 4.6m bales for the current season. However, a report released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association on Nov 3 confirms arrivals of 2.928m bales in the province against last year's arrivals of 3.434m bales.

Growers say that uncertified cotton seed has flooded the provincial market. Seed from Punjab also reaches the market without check. The same goes for pesticides, whose quality remains substandard.

The federal government has recently formed a cotton-review committee to find ways to revive cotton production.

The committee, headed by Agriculture University of Multan's Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Asif Ali, will submit its report by the next month and recommend some concrete steps to be taken before the next kharif season in late February.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1518576/sindh-beset-with-low-cotton-output

PAKISTAN TO HARVEST OVER 40,000 TONS OF OLIVE THIS YEAR

By RECORDER REPORT on November 25, 2019

The country will harvest about 40,000 tons of olive (fruit) during current season to produce about 3,500 tons of extra-virgin olive oil that would help in tackling with the domestic edible oil requirements.

The domestic production of olive oil would also help in fetching the handsome amount of foreign exchange by exporting it, besides saving the precious foreign exchange reserves being spent on the import of the commodity.

While exploiting the abundant opportunities existing for the cultivation of olive across the country, olive had been cultivated over a vast areas of Potohar region of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan Project Director of Olive Cultivation of Commercial Scale in Pakistan Dr Muhammd Tariq said.

Talking to APP here on Wednesday, he said that under the project about 1.2 million olive plants were planted in Potohar region of Punjab that had immense potential of olive cultivation.

Besides, he said that over one million olive plants were planted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 500,000 in Balochistan Province under olive cultivation on commercial scales project.

Dr Tariq said that over 4 million hectares of marginal land had been identified for olive cultivation across the country, adding that by utilizing that areas Pakistan could cross Spain a leading world olive producer and could earn billions of dollars annually. He said the country was spending an average of $4 billion per-annum on the import of edible oil including soya bean and palm to meet with the domestic consumptions.

By cultivating the olive on commercial scales, Pakistan would not only able to save its precious forex reserves, but it could fetch billions of dollars by exporting olive oil, its by-products including olive pickles, soap, tea and other cosmetics, he remarked.

The project director informed that government had allocated an amount of Rs 2.3 billion in its Public Sector Development Program for the year 2019-20 on promotion and development of olive on commercial scale, adding that several other steps were being taken to encourage the small land holders to cultivate olive to alleviate poverty from the rural areas of the country. He said that in order to promote the exports of the domestic olive oil, the government would provide branding, labeling, packaging and marketing facilities to private sector.

Dr Tariq further informed that in order to promote the exports as well as producing the extra virgin oil, the government was enforcing the standards of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and International Olive Council. He said that the locally produced olive oil was competing with the international standards as it was certified by Italy, adding that Italy was also providing financial and technical assistance to government for olive promotion.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/25/547321/pakistan-to-harvest-over-40000-tons-of-olive-this-year/

TUNNEL FARMING GAINS POPULARITY AMONG FARMERS

By RECORDER REPORT on November 25, 2019

Tunnel farming technology for vegetable production has gained the popularity among the small growers and farmers in Punjab. Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Sunday that tunnel farming was being carried out over 16101 acres of land across the Province.

Over 2000 small farmers including female farmers have adopted tunnel farm technology on their own expanse in Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur and Sambrial tehsils of the district. More farmers are considering to opt this technology keeping in view the economic benefits in the district and contacting Agriculture department for obtaining guidance and necessary information for starting tunnel farming.

The experts of Agriculture department are extending full cooperation and assistance to the interested farmers in this regard. Some progressive farmers have successfully installed walk-in and low tunnels in Sialkot, Daska, Sambrial and Pasrur tehsils of the district and cultivating off-season vegetables like cucumber, tomato, green chilly, paprika, pumpkin, bitter gourd, watermelon and melons etc.

The tunnel technology had paved the way for bringing revolutionary changes in agriculture sector not only enabling the growers to produce off-season vegetables but also for improving their economic condition.

Some progressive farmers Maqsood Jutt, Masooma Bibi, Batool Bibi and Aslam Akhtar Choudary said, “We are successfully attaining the yield of off-season vegetables and gaining better return of crops, adding that farmers' community had installed walk in and low tunnels without the finical support of the provincial government."

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/25/547376/tunnel-farming-gains-popularity-among-farmers/

MIRPURKHAS GROWERS DECIDE NOT TO REAP SUGAR CANE

The Newspaper's Correspondent November 26, 2019

MIRPURKHAS: The Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) Mirpurkhas chapter on Monday decided not to harvest sugar cane till the announcement of the official procurement rate of the crop.

A meeting of the local SAI chapter held in Digri town under the chairmanship of Chaudhry Saifullah Gill also resolved to boycott those sugar mills that had defaulted on last year’s dues payable to cane growers at the rate of Rs22/40kg.

The meeting noted that the Sindh government was deliberately delaying notification of the office cane procurement rate, arguing that it would ultimately benefit sugar millers as growers would have no option but to dispose of their crop at a low rate. They pointed out that millers were buying the crop at low rates from those growers who could not afford a further delay as their crop would lose weight.

Meanwhile, three out of four sugar mills in Mirpurkhas district have started the cane crushing process after buying the crop at last year’s rate of Rs182/40kg.

Sources said that the Tharparkar Sugar Mills, Mirpurkhas Sugar Mills and Al-Abbas Sugar Mills have started crushing cane after issuing a number of indents to their registered cane growers for the supply of the crop.

The Digri Sugar Mills is also ready to fire its boiler but could not do so reportedly due to some technical fault in its machinery.

Published in Dawn, November 26th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1518788/mirpurkhas-growers-decide-not-to-reap-sugar-cane

SEAFOOD EXPORT SURGES BY 18.11PC TO $129.655M

KARACHI: Pakistan’s seafood export surged by 18.11 percent to $129.655 million in July-Oct 2019, according to official figures.

Increase in seafood export now stands at $19.879 million in July-Oct 2019 from $109.776 million in July-Oct 2018, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics shows. In term of volume, seafood export grew by 22 percent or 9664 metric tons to 54,177 metric tons in July-Oct 2019 from 44,513 metric tons in July-Oct 2018. The country exported $50.106 million of seafood in Oct 2019, which is higher by 18 percent or $7.624 million from $42.482 million in Oct 2018.

Export quantity of seafood went up by 8 percent or 1434 metric tons to 20,087 metric tons in Oct 2019 from 18,653 metric tons in Oct 2018.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/11/26/5-page/812021-news.html

‘GOOD’ OPPORTUNITIES EXIST FOR US INVESTORS: USDA AGRICULTURE COUNSELOR

By RECORDER REPORT on November 26, 2019

Agricultural Counsellor of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rey Santella has said good opportunities for US investors exist in Pakistan where they can surely explore trade and investment opportunities in numerous sectors including the agriculture, dairy, food items and animal feeds etc.

Speaking at a meeting of Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), he said that Pakistan had many challenges in the past but the country has been progressing well and the situation was much better now. However, he expressed although they were inviting the US business community but many of them were still reluctant to visit Pakistan mainly due to negative perception and also because of legal and information technology related hurdles that need to be addressed.

Rey Santella pointed out that besides exporting meat, soybean and other agricultural products, non-fat dry milk worth US$50 million was also being sent to Pakistan annually.

“There is a big potential for further expanding trade and investment ties between the two countries but the business communities will have to meet more frequently so that this potential could be realised. Meanwhile, USDA, which is already cooperating in the agriculture sector, is ready to provide technical assistance and training of trainers in the dairy and animal husbandry that would lead to improving the productivity.

He sought KCCI's assistance in identifying numerous trade opportunities so that these could accordingly be focused and disseminated amongst US companies with a view to improve the existing trade ties between the two countries.

Rey Santella further informed that USDA will be participating in Gulfood Exhibition scheduled to be staged in Dubai in February 2020 where Pakistani companies can visit the stalls of numerous US companies to examine their products and services.

President KCCI Agha Shahab Ahmed Khan, in his welcome address, stated that it was really heartening to see many US companies were taking keen interest in Pakistani market hence, it was the right time to fully facilitate and encourage joint ventures between the business communities of the two countries in numerous sectors.

He was of the opinion that there was a huge potential to enhance trade and investment cooperation between Pakistan and the United States, particularly in the agriculture, dairy, livestock, fisheries etc.. “We must promote collaborations in all such sectors with huge trade and investment potential which would certainly prove favourable for both the nations," he added, while acknowledging the support and cooperation being extended by USDA.

He mentioned that Pakistan, being the 4th largest producer of milk, produces around 54 billion litres of milk per annum hence, this was an area where the business communities of the two countries must look for joint ventures while the USDA must extend technical cooperation so that the dairy yield could be improved further.

Agha Shahab further noted that as US has an advanced agricultural sector while Pakistan's economy is also agri-based, it is very crucial to cooperate in this particular sector by focusing on exploring ways and means on how to transfer US technology to Pakistan's agricultural sector, which was facing several issues including limited cultivatable land, water and fertiliser scarcities and also the energy crises. “US can provide assistance in enhancing the yield of cultivatable land and you can also share water conservation and energy saving techniques, besides providing good quality fertilisers at competitive prices to Pakistani farmers," he added.

He also underscored that instead of staying confined to just sending the same old traditional items only, the business community must look into the possibility of diversifying the exports by exploring new avenues and they must also effectively market their products and services in order to maximise share in the US markets.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/26/547693/good-opportunities-exist-for-us-investors-usda-agriculture-counselor/

IMPORTANT CROPS: PBIF FOR PUTTING IN PLACE STRICT MONITORING SYSTEM

By RECORDER REPORT on November 26, 2019

Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum (PBIF) President Mian Zahid Hussain has emphasised the need for putting in place a strict monitoring system for important crops to keep their prices stable, ensure availability and look after the interests of growers and consumers alike.

He said tomato prices are not receding despite imports due to profiteer mafia. The important issue of food security should not be left to profiteers and middlemen, therefore, the federal and provincial governments should join hands for effective monitoring of vegetables, he said.

He noted that last year the farmers were selling tomato at Rs3-4 per kg in Sindh while tomato smuggling in August damaged the poor farmers of Balochistan, therefore, the government must take steps to safeguard the rights of masses and planters. The price volatility despite imports not only point towards profiteering but also the fact that imports will not resolve the problem. The government should take steps to enhance per acre yield to cater for increasing demand.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/26/547657/important-crops-pbif-for-putting-in-place-strict-monitoring-system/

'THREE PLANES, 32 VEHICLES NEEDED TO ELIMINATE LOCUSTS IN SINDH'

By Our Correspondent Published: November 26, 2019

KARACHI: Swarms of locusts have infested vegetation in Sindh. The issue has persisted for some months now with repeated reports of crop destruction due to the infestation. On Monday, the provincial government formally requested the Centre to provide three planes and 32 vehicles to spray the affected areas to ward off locusts and terminate the threat from existing attacks.

In a letter written to the Centre, Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahoo apprised the authorities that the provincial government has only one plane which is not sufficient to address the menace as anti-locust spray is needed in all four divisions. The letter states that the Centre is also responsible for procuring anti-locust pesticide while adding that the infestation was growing in Shaheed Benazirabad, Larkana, Sukkur and Mirpurkhas divisions. The provincial government expressed the fear that crops in Sindh would suffer further damage if the federal government did not come through on the matter. The Sindh government has sought eight vehicles for each district to terminate locusts from the province.

The letter expressed dismay on behalf of the provincial government at what it called lack of cooperation and assistance from the Centre.

Rahoo stated in the letter that the Sindh government has allocated Rs330 million to address the problems faced by locust-infected areas, however, the infestation appears to be persisting despite sprays in several districts. Besides, the letter states, the plane for spray in Khairpur, Naru, Saleh Putt and Shaheed Benazirabad, is not functional. The Centre must provide three more planes to Sindh to use for spraying the dry regions of the province, demanded Rahoo, adding that the infestation could be very damaging for the harvest next year if the Centre did not take the required measures to eliminate locusts. The minister claimed that the Centre had given Sindh a compromised plane, which was in poor condition, while functioning planes remained on stand-by in Punjab.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2106477/1-three-planes-32-vehicles-needed-eliminate-locusts-sindh/

PAKISTAN'S EXCESS UREA CAN FETCH $250M IN EXPORTS

By Usman Hanif Published: November 26, 2019

KARACHI: Pakistan has surplus urea manufacturing capacity of almost 20% over and above the domestic demand of 5.8 million tons, which can be exported and fetch up to $250 million in foreign exchange for the country.

"Through improved utilisation of manufacturing units by providing them with re-gasified liquefied natural gas (RLNG), the country has been able to build urea inventory of 900,000 tons," said an industry source on condition of anonymity.

"This presents an excellent opportunity for the country to make use of its excess urea and earn dollars," he added.

The aggregate capacity of urea manufacturers in Pakistan is calculated at seven million tons. At present, the urea production hovers around 5.5-5.8 million tons, which is enough to meet domestic demand.

This below-optimum capacity utilisation is because of interruption or no supply of natural gas to the fertiliser plants, which include Engro Fertilisers' base plant, Fatima Fertiliser and Agritech. The aggregate unutilised capacity of these three plants crosses one million tons per annum.

An official of a leading fertiliser company said domestic suppliers were very competitive and could export urea to the international market.

"It is imperative for the government to encourage the fertiliser industry to compete in the international market and generate foreign currency for the country through enhanced exports," the official said.

Assuming exports of one million tons, the industry may easily generate $250 million in revenues. In addition to the increase in foreign currency revenues, the exports may also help in bridging the fiscal deficit as up to Rs5 billion worth of taxes can be collected on the profit made by the fertiliser sector from exports.

"In this regard, the textile industry presents a good model to replicate," the official pointed out.

Based on locally available gas under the petroleum policy, the country was benefitting from significant foreign currency inflows, which were contributing positively and helping improve the balance of trade, he said.

"The fertiliser sector with its multibillion-dollar investments over the past decades is well poised to export value-added urea," he suggested.

"Indeed, Pakistan accumulates urea inventory due to the seasonal impact of urea offtake," said Arif Habib Limited's fertiliser-sector analyst Tahir Abbas.

Seasonality means more urea sales when farmers were sowing, especially in November and December, than other times of the year, he added.

At the end of this year, Pakistan may be left with a surplus of more than 500,000 tons of urea, which can be exported with caution. "In case the country itself needs urea in future, it will have to import, which will not be a good bet," he added.

In 2017, Pakistan had exported 700,000 tons of urea because it had been in surplus.

Abbas said there were some companies which had a huge quantity of urea left in first four months of the current calendar year as Pakistan's Kharif season starts in April and hits peak in June. Until then, they carry on their inventory, which incurs a cost.

To some extent, it makes sense that instead of keeping the inventory and bearing the cost, the companies should export if the country is not creating any demand.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2106428/2-pakistans-excess-urea-can-fetch-250m-exports/

SLASH EMISSIONS NOW OR FACE CLIMATE DISASTER, WARNS UN

AFP Updated November 27, 2019

PARIS: The world will miss its chance to avert climate disaster without an immediate and all-but-impossible fall in fossil fuel emissions, the UN said on Tuesday in its annual assessment on greenhouse gases.

The United Nations Environment Programme said that global emissions need to fall by 7.6 percent each year until 2030 to limit global temperature rises to 1.5C.

The harsh reality is that emissions have risen on average 1.5 percent annually over the last decade, hitting a record 55.3 billion tonnes of CO2 or equivalent greenhouse gases in 2018 — three years after 195 countries signed the Paris treaty on climate change.

The World Meterological Organisation said that atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations hit an all-time record in 2018.

The Paris deal committed nations to limit temperature rises above pre-industrial levels to “well below” 2C, and to a safer 1.5-C if at all possible. To do so they agreed on the need to reduce emissions and work towards a low-carbon world within decades.

Yet the UN found that even taking into account current Paris pledges, the world is on track for a 3.2C temperature rise, something scientists fear could tear at the fabric of society.

Even if every country made good on its promises, Earth’s “carbon budget” for a 1.5-C rise — the amount we can emit to stay below a certain temperature threshold —would be exhausted within a decade. In its own words, the UN assessment is “bleak”.

While it insisted the 1.5C goal is still attainable, it acknowledged that this would require an unprecedented, coordinated upheaval of a global economy that is still fuelled overwhelmingly by oil- and gas-fuelled growth.

“We are failing to curb greenhouse gas emissions,” UNEP’s executive director, Inger Andersen, said.

“Unless we take urgent action now and make very significant cuts to global emissions we’re going to miss the target of 1.5C.”

The Emissions Gap report, now in its tenth year, also details the cost of a decade of government inaction.

Had serious climate action begun in 2010, just after the Copenhagen summit that breathed new life into the debate, annual needed emissions cuts would be 0.7 percent for 2C of warming and 3.3 percent for 1.5C.

“Ten years of climate procrastination has led us to where we are today,” said Andersen.

The report highlighted specific “opportunities” for big emitters to push their economies into line with the Paris goals.

While advice varies between countries, the theme is clear: completely phase out coal, significantly pare back oil and gas, and dramatically build up renewable energy.

G20 nations were singled out as laggards: although they produce around 78 percent of all emissions, only 15 rich nations have outlined plans to reach net-zero.

In all, countries must increase their contributions to the climate fight five-fold to deliver the cuts needed for 1.5C.

“Incremental changes will simply not make it,” said lead author John Christensen.

“We really need to transform societies in these 10 years.” Wendel Trio, director of Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe said 2020 needed to be a “major historical turning point” in the climate fight.

“The hope lies in millions of people taking to the streets, who can force politicians to act according to the recommendations from scientists,” he said.

Last year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — the world’s leading scientific body on the subject — issued a stark warning that going beyond 1.5C would increase the frequency and intensity of heatwaves, superstorms and mass flooding. With just 1C of warming so far, 2019 is projected to be the second hottest in human history, a year marred by deadly wildfires and cyclones rendered more frequent as temperatures climb.

Published in Dawn, November 27th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1519071/slash-emissions-now-or-face-climate-disaster-warns-un

PM’S AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME: SINDH PART OF ONLY FOUR PROJECTS OUT OF 13 LAUNCHED

By FAZAL SHER on November 27, 2019

Sindh is part of only four projects out of a total of 13 launched under the Rs 277 billion Prime Minister's National Agriculture Emergency Programme (NAEP).

Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit Baltistan (GB) are part of all 13 projects. Under the programme, over the next five years, the contribution of the federal government is projected at Rs 81 billion, said, a senior official of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R).

He said that the estimated cost of the NAEP including agri market development of Punjab earlier announced by the government was Rs 309.7 billion.

He said that the federal government has so far released a total of around Rs 1.8 billion to Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, AJK and GB under the programme but the share of Sindh has not yet been released as the province only recently became part of the programme.

Muhammad Ismail Rahoo, the provincial minister for agriculture Sindh told Business Recorder on telephone that his government has become part of four projects notably productivity enhancement of (i) wheat, (ii) rice, (iii) sugarcane, and (iv) National Oilseeds Enhancement Programme (NOEP). Enhancement of conservation areas of small and medium dams in barani areas is under consideration.

Rahoo said that Sindh government did not become part of other projects as it had already begun work in some areas identified under the NAEP while others are not applicable to the province.

Rahoo said that federal government's share of cost in the productivity enhancement of wheat, rice and sugarcane is 25 percent while Sindh government's share in the cost is 75 percent. The total cost to be borne by Sindh government for NAEP is 60 percent while share of the federal government is 40 percent, he said, adding that total share of federal government enhancement of command areas of small and mini dams is 36.6 percent and Sindh government's share is 63.4 percent.

According to the official of MNFS&R, in the first two quarters, the centre released Rs198 million for productivity enhancement of wheat under Prime Minister's NAEP, Rs150 million for productivity enhancement of rice and Rs50 million for productivity enhancement of sugarcane.

He further stated that government has released Rs140 million for NOEP to provinces to minimize the reliance on imported edible oil. Rs 42 million has been released for save and fattening of calf program and Rs10 million for backyard poultry program.

Under current year's development programme, an amount of Rs62 million was also released for promotion of trout cage farming in northern areas of the country to exploit fresh water fish farming in these areas as well as provide livelihood to a large number living in these areas.

He said that government has allocated Rs1.05 billion for national programme of improvement of watercourses and Rs40 million for water conservation in barani areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/27/548008/pms-agriculture-programme-sindh-part-of-only-four-projects-out-of-13-launched/

DOMESTIC DAIRY PRODUCTS: NA BODY CONCERNED AT LOW PRODUCTIVITY

By NAVEED BUTT on November 27, 2019

National Assembly's Standing Committee on Inter-Provincial Coordination showed serious concern over low productivity of domestic dairy products and recommended that provincial livestock and fisheries departments should ensure their presence in the rural and far-flung areas.

The committee met with Agha Hassan Baloch in the chair here at the Parliament House on Tuesday and discussed the issues relating to the Pakistan Veterinary Medical Council (PVMC), Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and others.

The committee showed concern over the low productivity of the domestic dairy products and asked the ministry to take necessary steps in this regard. It was also recommended that provincial livestock and fisheries departments should ensure their presence in rural and far-flung areas of their respective provinces.

The committee decided to inspect and hold meetings with each provincial livestock department in its respective province to ascertain its on-ground performance. The secretary Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination gave a briefing on the compliance with the recommendations given by the committee in its previous meeting.

Afterwards, a detailed briefing on the role, functions, achievements and future proposals of Pakistan Veterinary Medical Council (PVMC) was given to the committee. It was informed that a twelve-member council is elected for a term of four years with its representation from the four provinces of Pakistan.

The committee recommended that the ministry should move legislative proposal for inclusion of members from Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan to cater for representation from those areas as well.

The committee was briefed that the council has taken steps to standardize and bring uniformity in the curriculum of the veterinary science teaching institutes. It was recommended that the council should also undertake research projects to provide solutions for the problems in domestic livestock farming. The committee confirmed minutes of its sixth meeting held on September 27, 2019.

MNAs including Mehboob Shah, Gul Zafar Khan, Robina Jamil, Munawara Bibi Baloch, Shaheen Naz Saifullah, Iqbal Muhammad Ali Khan, Chaudhary Zulfiqar Ali Bhinder, Rana Mubashir Iqbal, Rasheed Ahmed Khan, Zulfiqar Ali, Shahida Rehmani, Naseeba Channa, and Muhammad Anwar attended the meeting.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/27/547994/domestic-dairy-products-na-body-concerned-at-low-productivity/

THOUSANDS OF FARMERS IN MASS TRACTOR PROTEST IN BERLIN

By RECORDER REPORT on November 27, 2019

Thousands of farmers drove their tractors to Berlin's famed Brandenburg Gate on Tuesday in a mass protest against new environmental regulations they say threaten their livelihoods.

Long convoys brought traffic to a standstill in the heart of the city's government district, in the biggest display yet of farmers' anger over agricultural policy changes agreed by Chancellor Angela Merkel's cabinet in September.

“First the plants starve, then the farmers, then you," read one sign attached to a green tractor. “Do you know who feeds you?" read another.

The government's policy package includes plans to limit the use of fertiliser to tackle nitrate pollution in groundwater, and ban the controversial weedkiller glyphosate by 2023 to protect insect populations.

Furious farmers say the environmental protection measures go too far and pose an existential risk to their farms.

Many are also fed up with the “farmer bashing" they say has cast them as villains in the fight against climate change.

“I'm feeling less and less confident about the future," 24-year-old farmer Rene Wessler told AFP at the protest.

Police said more than 5,000 tractors rolled into Berlin for the four-wheeled protest, leading to convoys as long as 20 kilometres (12 miles) on some roads. Organisers said as many as 8,500 tractors took part.

Other German cities have seen similar demos in recent weeks, including a large one in Bonn last month. Farmers have also taken to the streets in France and the Netherlands with similar complaints.

Germany's agriculture minister Julia Kloeckner defended the government's measures, aimed in part at bringing the country in line with EU regulations, but said she understood the farmers' frustrations. “Consumers keep expecting farmers to do more, but are increasingly less willing to pay more for it," she told ARD broadcaster, calling for more appreciation for the industry.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/27/547931/thousands-of-farmers-in-mass-tractor-protest-in-berlin/

DESPITE PRICE RISE, WHEAT FARMERS GET NO INCENTIVE

By Zafar Bhutta Published: November 27, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Though the government has increased wheat support price by Rs50 per 40 kg after a hiatus of five years, the farmers of Punjab may not get any incentive because of higher cost of production and government’s efforts to avoid further rise in flour prices which can spark protests.

Wheat is a major food crop and its adequate production ensures food security in the country. The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet sets the minimum support price for wheat every year.

Last year, the price was kept unchanged at Rs1,300 per 40 kg in an ECC meeting held on July 11, 2018. This year, the government has set the price at Rs1,350, but the cost of production in Punjab has been worked out at Rs1,349.57 per 40 kg, which is equal to the support price.

However, Sindh farmers will get some relief as the Agriculture Policy Institute (API) has calculated the production cost in the province at Rs1,315.72 per 40 kg.

A senior official of the food security ministry told The Express Tribune that the API had worked out the cost of production of the 2019-20 wheat crop in a bid to determine an appropriate support price for the next crop. For the purpose, major factors like world wheat supply situation, cost of production, export and import parity prices and domestic producer prices are taken into consideration.

Southern Punjab is a big producer of wheat crop and chief minister of the province also belongs to that region. However, Punjab had opposed any increase in the support price and called for keeping the price static at Rs1,300 per 40 kg, which was even less than the cost of production in the province.

Farmers had been bearing the cost of gas infrastructure development cess (GIDC) since long, but the current Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government waived cess worth billions of rupees, which was due to be paid by fertiliser producers. However, criticism from the people forced the government to take back its decision.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research told the ECC in a recent meeting that the support price had been discussed by the wheat review committee when it met on October 17, 2019 at the ministry. In the huddle, API's calculations were shared with provincial governments and they were requested to provide their input on the wheat support price for crop year 2019-20.

The Punjab government called for keeping the support price at the previous level of Rs1,300 and argued that any price hike would spark calls for increase in flour prices in the market. This could trigger unrest in the country as flour prices were closely linked with the wheat support price, it said.

The other three provinces, however, did not share their views on the support price.

Earlier, keeping in view the world market situation and fluctuating cost of major farm inputs, the minimum support price had been left unchanged at Rs1,300 for the past five years.

According to the International Grains Council, London, the world wheat production would slightly go up to 762 million tons in 2019-20 as compared to 733 million tonnes in 2018-19. The global wheat trade and consumption would, with a slight change, stay at 173 and 756 million tonnes respectively, it said.

The food security ministry suggested in the ECC meeting that as wheat sowing had commenced in southern parts of the country, it would be prudent to announce the minimum support price for the 2019-20 crop.

The Cabinet Division secretary noted that the support price provided an incentive for the wheat growers and also ensured price stability in the market.

The Finance Division pointed out in the meeting that the Sindh government had not procured wheat in time. Now, wheat was being provided to the province from stocks of the Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco), it said.

Apart from that, a substantial subsidy was being given to the province on account of incidental charges by the federal government, which put burden on the public exchequer.

It was suggested that all the provincial governments may be directed to make timely procurement of wheat according to their requirements. In case of failure, no subsidy would be given to the provincial governments on purchase from Passco stocks.

The ECC endorsed the proposal and said since the minimum support price had been maintained for the past five years and the production cost had gone up, Rs1,350 per 40 kg would be a reasonable support price for the wheat crop.

The ECC also directed the food security ministry to convey to the provinces to timely procure wheat and the federal government would not offer any subsidy on incidental charges while procuring the commodity from Passco.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 27th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2107160/2-despite-price-rise-wheat-farmers-get-no-incentive/

MINISTRY, FERTILISER INDUSTRY DISCUSS UREA PRICE REDUCTION

By Our Correspondent Published: November 27, 2019

KARACHI: The Ministry of Industries and Production held a meeting with the Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC) to discuss the reduction in urea prices.

"The ministry told the fertiliser manufacturers that the government wants a reduction of Rs107 in the per-bag price of urea as the rates have been increased in the recent past," FMPAC Executive Director Sher Shah said.

He added that the government was of the opinion that the fertiliser manufacturers had raised prices abruptly after it came to power in August 2018, terming the approach illogical.

He regretted that the government did not consider the withdrawal of subsidy for the fertiliser sector as well as the gas infrastructure development cess (GIDC) issue while discussing the prices. He added that the previous government had granted a subsidy of Rs156 per bag, which it withdrew in the budget announcement in 2018.

"Over time, former finance minister Ishaq Dar decreased the subsidy and increased the industry's share to Rs100 per bag in 2017," he said. "Even then, the government failed to pay the due amount of subsidy and Rs20 billion of the fertiliser sector got stuck with the government."

The current government wanted to reduce the price of urea for its own political interests and to make farmers happy, remarked Shah.

Former finance minister Asad Umar had agreed to waive 50% of GIDC arrears of the industry but when the government approved it, the issue became controversial and the prime minister withdrew the ordinance issued in that regard.

"In July 2019, the gas price was also increased for the fertiliser sector, causing an impact of Rs210 per bag, however, the industry did not pass the impact on to consumers till September 15 as it anticipated the adjustment of GIDC arrears."

He decried that for two and a half months (July 1 to September 15), the industry booked losses of Rs4 billion.

The withdrawal of GIDC ordinance caused an impact of Rs400 per bag of urea while the hike in gas prices contributed Rs340 to the price, he claimed.

In the meeting, the industry suggested that the government should reduce the GIDC and gas prices, which were the main causes behind the hike in urea prices.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 27th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2107151/ministry-fertiliser-industry-discuss-urea-price-reduction/

KAZAKH ENVOY FOR ENHANCING INDUSTRIAL, AGRI-COOPERATION

By Our Correspondent Published: November 27, 2019

LAHORE: Kazakhstan and Pakistan have agriculture and industry-based economies, therefore, they should enhance cooperation in these areas, emphasised Kazakhstan Ambassador Akan Rakhmetullin.

Speaking at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) on Tuesday, the envoy said both countries direly needed foreign direct investment and cooperation between the two sides would help yield desired results.

He added that this was the perfect time to collaborate and lift the bilateral trade volume. “There is a lot of trade potential between the two countries,” he said. “Business-to-business contacts and exchange of trade delegations can contribute massively in this regard.”

He invited Pakistani businessmen to invest in free economic zones in Kazakhstan, which were exempt from all sorts of taxes, and promised full cooperation in that regard.

Replying to a question about the tourism sector, the envoy pointed out that Kazakhstan did not have a lot to offer to tourists but Pakistan had immense potential in the sector and tourists from Kazakhstan would love to visit Pakistan due to its natural beauty and historic sites.

Speaking on the occasion, LCCI President Irfan Iqbal Sheikh said diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Kazakhstan dated back to the early 1990s. “In fact, Pakistan was among the first countries to recognise Kazakhstan as a sovereign state in 1991 after the break-up of Soviet Union,” he recalled.

The LCCI president said in 2017 the two-way trade volume stood at around $78 million, which rose to $90 million in 2018 due to 24% rise in Pakistan’s exports to Kazakhstan.

Goods that Pakistan exported to Kazakhstan included rice, oilseeds and fresh fruits whereas its imports from Kazakhstan comprised mostly chemicals.

“Although the trade balance has been in favour of Pakistan and it is going up, still its magnitude needs to be enhanced,” he stressed.

He held the opinion that Pakistan had a considerable potential and it could enhance exports to Kazakhstan, particularly of pharmaceuticals, value-added textile products, ceramics and furniture.

“In order to enhance the volume of trade, more tradable items should be identified while keeping in view the market demand in the two economies,” he emphasised. “There is also a strong need for increasing people-to-people contacts through trade delegations to help in business matchmaking.”

Published in The Express Tribune, November 27th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2107156/kazakh-envoy-enhancing-industrial-agri-cooperation/

250KG MEAT OF DEAD ANIMAL SEIZED

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 29, 2019

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) on Thursday seized 250kg carrion from a slaughterhouse in Adra and lodged a criminal case against its owner.

The goat meat was disposed of by the civic agency. The RCB said the illegal slaughterhouse was to supply the carrion to various restaurants.

After receiving reports, the food branch of the RCB raided the slaughterhouse.

During checking, a food inspector found that the meat was of dead animals. The meat was confiscated and later destroyed by burning along Leh Nullah, said RCB spokesman Qaiser Mehmood

Meanwhile, 12 challans were issued on Thursday against butchers who failed to cover meat while displaying on roadsides, he said.

To a question, the official said they were trying to take all butchers to Sihala slaughterhouse for slaughtering animals so people would get fresh and healthy meat. He said 300 animals were slaughtered at the slaughter house daily and the demand was more.

However, butchers claimed that they slaughtered 6,000 animals in the city on a daily basis. They said proper arrangements were not available at the Sihala slaughterhouse so they did not go there.

Meanwhile, teams from Punjab Food Authority (PFA) imposed a fine of Rs46,500 on two milk shops in the garrison city for selling substandard milk and failing to maintain cleanliness.

Published in Dawn, November 29th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1519436/250kg-meat-of-dead-animal-seized

WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE INCREASED AGAIN

By ZAHEER ABBASI on November 29, 2019

A meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet has increased the wheat support prices for the second time during the last two weeks to Rs 1,365 per 40 kg due to increase in cost of production.

Wheat support price was increased to Rs 1,350 per 40kg from Rs 1,300 for the next crop on November 13 for the first time and now again on Thursday a meeting of the ECC presided over by Advisor on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh on the feedback that wheat production cost has gone up to Rs 1,349 per 40 kg and there was a demand from farmers and government forums including cabinet and Special Committee of the National Assembly on Agriculture, decided to increase the wheat support price to Rs 1365 per 40 kg.

The meeting also viewed a presentation from the Ministry of Finance on the government commodity operations, which had over the years resulted in a Rs 757 billion debt and liabilities and recommended for reducing the debt.

The ECC also considered a proposal from the Ministry of Energy with regard to increasing power tariff for the first quarter of the current fiscal year by 15 paisas per unit. The meeting approved proposal for notifying the National Electric Power Regulation Authority (NEPRA) approved quarterly adjustment of 15 paisas per unit after incorporating an additional charge of 11 paisas per unit for maintaining uniform tariff on all categories of consumers except lifeline and domestic consumers. The increase will be effective from December 1, 2019 for the next twelve-month billing.

A ministerial committee was also constituted with the adviser on finance in the chair with Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar, Abdul Razak Dawood and Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Petroleum Nadeem Babar as members to review and examine existing framework of determining power tariff to make it simpler in line with the practice in mature markets.

The ECC considered a set of proposals of Power Division for risk mitigation of post-privatization of National Power Parks Management Company on fuel basket price owing to none or reduced off-take of 66 percent generation under the PPA till 2024 and cost of diversion of Regasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG) to other sectors with workable options to mitigate the risk.

The meeting approved the proposals with a proviso that any other option that could be considered as part of the mitigation plan by the Power Division could also be taken into account and approved, if found suitable, by the ECC.

The ECC constituted an inter-ministerial committee for preparation of a policy framework for promotion of steel and iron in the country through foreign direct investment.

The ECC also constituted a committee on a request by the Ministry of Communications for converting its loans whether direct or relent, including interest accumulated up to June 30, 2019 into grant. The committee would examine the proposals and submit their recommendations to the ECC.

The ECC also took up a proposal from the Ministry of Industries and Production for a technical supplementary grant of Rs 6 billion to the Utility Stores Corporation (USC) for subsidy and procurement of essential commodities, including flour, ghee/oil, rice, sugar and pulses, to be sold at a fair price to the poor segment of the society.

The ECC asked the USC to prepare within the next few days a practical and comprehensive mechanism involving use of information technology to ensure the disbursement of specific food items to the poorest of the poor.

The ECC also constituted a committee comprising adviser to prime minister on industries and production, governor State Bank of Pakistan, chairperson Benazir Income Support Program and representatives from NADRA and PPRA to advise and assist the USC to firm up their proposals and present them to ECC.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/29/548744/wheat-support-price-increased-again/

PUNJAB PA VALIDATES PUNJAB AGRI MARKETING ORD FOR 90 DAYS

By HASSAN ABBAS on November 29, 2019

The Punjab Assembly on Thursday extended the period of validity of The Punjab Agricultural Marketing Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Ordinance 2019, The Punjab Local Government (Amendment) Ordinance 2019, The Punjab Village Panchayats and Neighbourhood Councils

(Amendment) Ordinance 2019 and The Punjab Local Government (Second Amendment) Ordinance 2019 for the period of 90 days.

The House extended the period of validity of The Punjab Agricultural Marketing Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Ordinance 2019 promulgated on 26 September 2019 for a further period of 90 days with effect from 25 December 2019.

It also extends the period of validity of the Punjab Local Government (Amendment) Ordinance 2019 (XV of 2019) and Punjab Village Panchayats and Neighbourhood Councils (Amendment) Ordinance 2019 (XVI of 2019), promulgated on 05 November 2019, for a further period of ninety days with effect from 03 February 2020.

The Punjab Assembly further extends the validity of the Punjab Local Government (Second Amendment) Ordinance 2019 (XVII of 2019), promulgated on 16 November 2019, for a further period of ninety days with effect from 14 February 2020.

Audit reports on the Accounts of Revenue Receipts of Government of the Punjab for the Audit Year 2017-18, reports on the accounts of Public Sector Companies Government of the Punjab for the Audit Year 2017-18 (Volume-II), report on the Accounts of Disaster Management Organisations, Punjab for the Audit Year 2017-18 and audit Report on the Accounts of C&W, HUD&PHE, Irrigation, LG&CD Departments and Infrastructure Development Authority Punjab (IDAP), Government of the Punjab for the Audit Year 2018-19 were laid in the House.

While responding to the adjournment motion of PML (N) MPA Sheikh Allauudin regarding sexual abuse of children and pornography, Law Minister Raja Basharat said that the government has taken strict action against those who were involved in this inhuman activity. He said the government will bring legislation if needed for punishing the culprits involved in such kind of heinous crimes.

Earlier, PML (N) MPA Sami Ullah Khan pointed out the quorum but it was completed upon which both oppositions and treasury members chanted slogans against the leadership of each other.

While responding to the sloganeering of opposition, Raja Basharat said that opposition leader Hamza Shahbaz is using the production order only for doing politics. He does not have any interest in proceedings of the House. He also said that there was no amendment introduced by opposition in the bill the other day presented in the House. The answers of the questions relating to communication and works department were given by Parliamentary Secretary by Sardar Shahabuddin Sehar.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/29/548689/punjab-pa-validates-punjab-agri-marketing-ord-for-90-days/

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES WHEAT PROGRAMME WORTH RS 9 BILLION

By RECORDER REPORT on November 29, 2019

The Punjab Government has launched a programme worth Rs9 billion aimed at increasing the production of wheat per acre.

The programme has been launched on the directives of the Prime Minister and the provincial government has a vision to make the province a 'Grain House' for rest of the country.

The Minister was speaking to a large gathering of farmers at Jallo More the other day. Seminar was attended by Ejaz Ahmad Diyal, Dr Anjum Ali Director General (Ext & AR), Mudassar Abbas Director Agriculture Information Punjab, Advisor to Minister for Agriculture Shahid Qadir and a large gathering of farming community.

Minister for Agriculture, Punjab advised farmers to cultivate wheat with a standard and certified seed of Punjab Seed Corporation to get a bumper crop of wheat.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/29/548691/punjab-government-launches-wheat-programme-worth-rs-9-billion/

EXPERTS FOR ADOPTING AGRI-TECH TO ENSURE FOOD SECURITY

By Our Correspondent Published: November 29, 2019

BHURBAN: There is a need to adopt innovative and latest agricultural technology coupled with implementation of good agricultural practices to tackle the issue of decreasing available farmland per person and feed the increasing mouths.

This was stressed by speakers at a two-day workshop on "Sustainable Agriculture".

Compared to 1950, global population will be 300% in 2020, while arable land in this period will increase only by 15%, thus bringing down the farmland availability by 60% per person per hectare.

The workshop was aimed at highlighting the importance of sustainable agriculture in the face of numerous challenges to the national food security. In his introductory presentation, CropLife Pakistan Executive Director Muhammad Afzal explained that the growing population, climate change, scarcity of water and changing lifestyles continue to pose challenges to the national food security. He emphasised the need for promoting sustainable means to grow food and embrace technological innovations.

"This workshop is part of CropLife Pakistan's broader effort to create awareness and understanding of agricultural technologies," he added.

Subsequent speakers also highlighted the importance of an enabling business environment that encourages investment in innovative technologies, with specific focus on enhancing crop productivity while reducing the impact on environment.

Sustainable agricultural practices involve judicious use of water resources, minimising soil erosion, reducing fuel consumption and optimising land utilisation. While providing an overview of sustainable agricultural technologies, Afzal explained at length the benefits of biotechnology in relation to promoting sustainable agriculture.

"Biotechnology allows farmers to produce more using fewer resources; it has the potential to reshape productivity in Pakistan by addressing both climate change and food security challenges," he said.

Afzal pointed out that the government of Pakistan has a clear policy on biotechnology for the past three decades and has invested heavily in research and development of this technology. He stressed that regulatory decisions must be consistent with the policy to build confidence of the plant science industry.

“Pakistan has 45 biotech institutions, over 500 Phd scientists and numerous ongoing projects across various food and non-food crops. Biotechnology also features prominently as a priority area in all government policy documents, including the Vision 2025 and the National Food Security Policy 2018.”

The official added that it is imperative that policymakers provide a stable regulatory and legal framework to facilitate investment and technology transfer and “ensure that regulatory decisions are guided by the overarching policy framework and scientific evidence”.

He was of the view that by combining sustainable agricultural practices with innovative agricultural technologies, Pakistan can combat the adverse effects of climate change and ensure food security for the generations to come.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 29th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2108421/2-experts-adopting-agri-tech-ensure-food-security/

COTTON MARKET LISTLESS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter November 30, 2019

KARACHI: In the absence of buying interest, cotton market on Friday remained listless. The availability of quality cotton is becoming difficult with each passing day, with the result that trading volume is also shrinking.

Market sources said presently cotton prices are varying by huge margins owing to quality difference with prime lint being quoted between Rs9,000-9,200 per maund while remaining fall in the range of Rs6,000 per maund.

Climate change has badly battered cotton crop and hit productivity levels, brokers said. On the other hand, the textile industry continues to suffer due to non-payment of refunds for the last five months and non-implementation of concessionary tariffs of power and gas for export oriented industry, they added.

Buyers are generally adopting the wait and see approach and strongly felt that if the government is serious to see growth in exports it has to immediately fulfill its commitments, they added.

The world leading cotton markets were also slow and devoid of activity and prices closed easy.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were firm at overnight level at Rs9,000 per maund.

Trading on ready counter was extremely slow.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 3,000 bales, station Rahim Yar Khan, Rs9,000-9,100; 2,000 bales, Sadiqabad, Rs9,100-9,150; and 400 bales, Fort Abbas,Rs8,350.

Published in Dawn, November 30th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1519629/cotton-market-listless

LOCUSTS RAVAGE FARMLANDS IN MORE AREAS OF LARKANA

By Our Correspondent | 11/30/2019 12:00:00 AM

LARKANA: After destroying near-mature crops in Aghani and several other villages as well as a vast pan of the adjoining katcha area a day earlier, a huge swarm of locusts on Friday turned to Keti Mumtaz, Sharifpur, Bhuttos` Estate and its surroundings again.

Repons from the affected areas suggested that the swarm swiftly and vigorously devoured the recently cultivated wheat crop in a big area and was still there to attack more areas.

In the absence of any measures or assistance from the government and an indifferent attitude being shown by local officials of the agriculture extension wing, growers and peasants were seen making desperate attempts to save their crops from the massive attack. They were mostly employing traditional methods like beating drums to make loud noise to scare away locusts and burning weeds, dry grass and junk to create smoke that could push the swarm away from their fields.

However, all their attempts have proved to be an exercise in futility so far. Some of the people said that such methods worked to the extent that the locusts would leave the targeted places just for a while.

The locusts` swarm has already inflicted heavy damage to the guava crop in a considerably vast area in the district. The produce was ready to be taken to market within a week`s time.

The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture, Larkana chapter, warned that if no action was taken by the agriculture depanment, small growers who had taken loans for cultivation would not be able to pay off the loans or make two ends meet.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=30_11_2019_117_002

SHORTFALL OF 7M COTTON BALES FEARED

By ZAHEER ABBASI on November 30, 2019

The government has stated that there would be a shortfall of 7 million bales of cotton as total production is now estimated at 8 million bales against the requirement of 15 million bales, which may have a negative impact on textile exports.

A meeting the National Assembly Standing Committee on Commerce and Textile, chaired by Syed Naveed Qamar, met here on Friday to receive a briefing on the GSP Plus status, sales tax refunds and estimate of cotton production in the current fiscal year. The meeting was told by Adviser on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood that as per revised estimates, a shortfall of 7 million bales is expected. The country's requirement is 15 million bales.

The committee has asked the chairman Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to turn up in the next meeting to provide details of refunds data as well as quantum of tax collected on local sale of zero-rated sectors after senior tax officials failed to provide any data to the committee.

On the issue of refunds, some members said that exporters, especially textile exporters, are facing problems in production due to non-payment of their refunds. Upon this, the FBR representatives stated that out of Rs 4.8 billion refund claims, Rs 2.02 billion has already been paid to exporters.

The adviser on commerce acknowledged that FBR refund claim form is quite complicated but stated that although it is difficult yet if the information is provided, it would plug the fake refund claims. However, he stated that he has asked the FBR to make refund claim form easier.

The meeting was informed about the delay in scheduled meeting on GSP Plus with the European Union in December 2019. Dawood added that four out of the 10 conventions for GSP Plus have not been met but appeared confident in getting extension in GSP Plus status as there are positive signs from the EU. However, he underscored the need for showing no complacency.

He said that by the end of next January, the situation would become clearer about extension in GSP Plus status for Pakistan. “We have got positive signs on GSP plus status from the European Union," he further said.

The meeting was informed that the EU countries have expressed some reservations and work is in progress to remove their concerns and all the relevant ministries on this issue should submit their progress report. He said that committees have been established in all the provinces with regard to GSP Plus whose reports would be required and the federal government is trying to ease concerns of the EU countries regarding labour laws.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/30/549116/shortfall-of-7m-cotton-bales-feared/

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT INCREASES WHEAT, SUGARCANE’S SUPPORT PRICE

By ZAHID BAIG on November 30, 2019

The Punjab Government deciding to increase the support price of wheat and sugarcane in the larger interest of farmers, has fixed it at Rs 1365 per maund for wheat while sugarcane's new support price will be Rs 190 per maund.

The farmers will get a huge benefit of more than Rs40 billion due to this increase, claimed the Punjab Minister for Trade & Industries Mian Aslam Iqbal, Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial and Food Minister Sami Ullah Chaudhry disclosed this at a joint press conference here on Friday.

Punjab Minister for Industries, Mian Aslam Iqbal said that support prices of wheat and sugarcane were not increased during the last five years. The incumbent government has decided to increase the support prices of wheat and sugarcane keeping in view the difficulties being faced by the farmers due to increase in production cost of these crops.

He pointed out that provision of financial reward of sugarcane farmers' hard work has been ensured and no one was allowed to exploit them. Last year, sugarcane crop worth Rs 138 billion was procured from the farmers and an amount of Rs137.40 billion was given to them as payment which is an important step.

The minister said that farmers will get a benefit of Rs 29 billion due to Rs 10 increase in sugarcane support price. Proper reward of farmers' hard work will be ensured this year as well. He announced that soft loans will also be provided to the farmers having less than 12.5 acres land.

Provincial Minister Sami Ullah Chaudhry said that 85 percent farmers have less than 12.5 acres land in Punjab adding that interest of small farmers is being protected by the government.

Agriculture Minister Nauman Akhtar Langrial said that 42 percent farmers belong to Punjab who fulfill food needs of 58 percent non-farmers. 4.32 lakh bags of certified seeds have been distributed among the farmers and farmer-friendly policies are being introduced as well, the minister concluded.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/11/30/549072/punjab-government-increases-wheat-sugarcanes-support-price/

FARMERS TO GET RS40B BENEFIT FROM HIGHER SUPPORT PRICES

By Our Correspondent Published: November 30, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab government has decided to increase the support price of wheat and sugarcane crops to safeguard the interest of farmers, said Punjab Minister for Trade and Industries Mian Aslam Iqbal.

New support prices will be Rs1,365 per maund and Rs190 per maund for wheat and sugarcane respectively, the minister announced at a press conference on Friday.

Iqbal highlighted that the farmers would get a huge benefit of more than Rs40 billion due to the increase in support prices.

“Support prices of wheat and sugarcane had not been enhanced in the past five years,” he pointed out.

“The government has decided to lift the support prices of wheat and sugarcane keeping in view the difficulties faced by the farmers due to the hike in cost of production of these crops.”

He pointed out that financial reward for the hard work of sugarcane farmers had been ensured and no one would be allowed to exploit them.

Last year, sugarcane crop worth Rs138 billion was procured from the farmers and Rs137.40 billion was given to them in payments, which was an important step.

The minister was of the view that the farmers would get a benefit of Rs29 billion due to the increase of Rs10 in the minimum sugarcane price. “Proper reward for the farmers’ hard work will be ensured this year as well,” he remarked.

The minister announced that soft loans would also be given to the farmers having less than 12.5 acres of land.

“A vigorous campaign has been launched against hoarding and profiteering and as a result, prices of essential items have stabilised. A bag of 20kg flour is available at Rs808 while sugar is priced at Rs70 per kg.”

Published in The Express Tribune, November 30th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2109094/2-farmers-get-rs40b-benefit-higher-support-prices/

DATES CAN HELP ALLEVIATE HUNGER: FAO

Amin Ahmed Updated December 01, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has listed five reasons for dates to become food of the future, stating that dates are nutritious and important for livelihoods besides being part of a long heritage and culture, tolerant to difficult environmental conditions, and have untapped potential.

Discussions are now ongoing to review how traditional and local crops can make an impact in achieving Goal-2 of the Sustainable Development Goals that aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. The FAO recently organised an activity sponsored by Saudi Arabia to promote the benefits of date production for economic, environmental and social development.

The FAO said cultures and respect for the value of food were being revitalised, and fruits and vegetables that had been overlooked on a global level were gaining new attention. There was a wide range of foods that fit this description, but one in particular was dates.

The date palm has been cultivated since 4000BC and is potentially the oldest domesticated tree in the world. It is difficult to identify the exact centre of origin for date palm, although evidence suggests that this could be Iraq. However, what is certain is that date palm has served as a critically important staple food, a main source of wealth and is of unrivaled cultural importance in arid regions of North Africa and Middle East.

Date palm is a multipurpose tree that provides fruit, fibre, sheltering material and fuel. The world production of dates was valued at $8.4 billion in 2016, while global trade accounted to some $1.2 billion, providing a major source of export revenues as well as of livelihoods and income for millions of rural small holders.

Date palms are genetically diverse with several known varieties: 595 accessions are conserved in genebanks held in Afghanistan, Cuba, India, Jordan, Libya, Pakistan, Spain, Sudan, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, UK, USA and South Africa. In addition, there are 1,104 accessions of date palm relatives belonging to the same genus conserved in genebanks that can be used for breeding purposes.

Food and agriculture around the world form an important part of cultures and identities. To celebrate and preserve this heritage, FAO has designed the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) programme to award sites around the world that have maintained traditions of growing and harvesting foods that are unique and well-adapted to local landscape.

The FAO said that date palm was an important sector not only for the food and nutrition security of people in rural areas but also for their livelihoods. However, in the last 30 years, these livelihoods are being threatened by the 'Red Palm Weevil', the most destructive pest of palm trees worldwide. The red palm weevil originated in South East Asia and has spread rapidly to other regions.

The FAO is developing a mobile application, to be known as 'SusaHamra' to assist farmers worldwide in collecting data when inspecting and treating palms for this pest. It is also combining remote sensing with artificial intelligence to map palm trees and monitor the spread of these pests to help safeguard livelihoods throughout the Near East and North Africa region.

Published in Dawn, December 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1519812/dates-can-help-alleviate-hunger-fao

LOCUSTS RETURN TO THAR

A Correspondent December 01, 2019

MITHI: Huge swarms of locusts have once again landed on trees, crops and bushes in villages in Dahli and Chhachhro talukas and western parts of Thar, eating away green leaves and bark and leaving in their wake destruction and ruin.

Affected villagers told journalists on Saturday that millions of the deadly insects had returned to Thar seemingly stronger, but no serious efforts were being made to exterminate them though they had been playing havoc in various areas of Thar for the past four months.

Published in Dawn, December 1st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1519777/locusts-return-to-thar

DRONES TO THE RESCUE IN FIGHT FOR PEST CONTROL

By Razzak Abro Published: December 1, 2019

KARACHI: As swarms of locusts continue to infest and destroy vegetation in Sindh and the issue has persisted for months, it has become evident that the authorities concerned have still not been able to control the situation.

Farmers complain that farms in Karachi's Malir area, where the attack happened, had not been sprayed with pesticides in the last three decades. Owing to the destruction, they are urging the Sindh government to take steps on an emergency basis to prevent further loss.

To top it all off, the province is struggling with a shortage of helicopters and planes for aerial pesticide spray, which is so far the only way to eliminate locusts in Pakistan.

Under the circumstances, a young man hailing from Sindh has come up with an inexpensive and more effective solution for the complete elimination of locusts through the use of agricultural drones. Dr Shahzad Nahiyoon belongs to Tando Jam, Sindh. He has recently returned from China after completing a doctorate in Pesticides Sciences with a special focus on pesticides toxicology and application technology.

He is the first Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) or agricultural drone pilot in Pakistan as well as the only PhD scholar in the country possessing expertise in the field.

Dr Nahiyoon completed a master's degree in pesticides and plant protection from the Sindh Agriculture University, Tando Jam in 2016. Later, he received a scholarship to pursue his doctorate studies at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

Talking to The Express Tribune, Dr Nahiyoon said that Pakistan can control the infestation of locusts more effectively and easily through the use of agricultural drone technology for pesticide spray.

"To control the situation, the provincial government has asked for at least three helicopters, 32 spraying vehicles and pesticides from the federal government to control the locust swarms attack in various parts of Sindh," he said. "This is, so far, the only way in Pakistan to deal with the situation which is very expensive."

According to him, if Pakistan uses the UAV spraying technology, it would prove to be far more effective and cheaper.

"The UAV technology has been tested and deployed at a low scale in different countries of Asia and is now rapidly gaining popularity in China," he explained.

According to official statistics by the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture, more than 178 types of agricultural UAVs were used in the country in May 2016.

"The UAV has emerged as a capable plant protector because it has high operational efficiency, high speed and low drift. UAVs are more suitable for complex terrain and small-sized farms with separate plots," Dr Nahiyoon added.

"In contrast to the commonly used manned fixed-wing aircraft in the United States, UAVs do not require a take-off airport which makes them much more cost-effective. They have higher work efficiency, lower operator exposure and improved ability to spray chemicals in a timely and highly spatially-resolved manner," he said.

The UAVs have efficiency up to six to 10 hectares per hour. They come with a five to 20 litres liquid tank and a two to 20 meters spraying swath under different field chemical control application conditions. Due to their great value and potential, UAVs have been the subject of much research in the field of spray application.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 1st, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2109581/2-drones-rescue-fight-pest-control/

DECEMBER

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DEC 02nd TO DEC 08th 2019

WHEAT GROWERS BITTER ABOUT LATE SUGAR CANE HARVEST

Mohammad Hussain Khan December 02, 2019

WHEAT sowing is likely to face delays this year in Sindh owing to the late harvesting of the sugar cane crop.

Sugar cane crop is supposed to be harvested by October or November, but it usually faces delays because of multiple reasons. This year is no different.

Sugar cane is cultivated on around 800,000 acres, and this substantial acreage is subsequently brought under wheat sowing after sugarcane's harvesting. It is important to note that Sindh is missing its wheat production target of four million tonnes since 2014-15.

November has already passed and the Sindh government has yet to notify a sugar cane price for the 2019-20 season and fix date for crushing by sugar factories. The provincial government is awaiting Punjab government's decision for fixing of sugar cane prices.

Conventionally, Sindh's sugar cane price is fixed a couple of rupees up from Punjab. That's why Sindh awaits the fixation of price by the largest province.

However, Sugar Factories Control Act requires the Sindh government to announce the date for crushing by Nov 30.

November has already passed and the Sindh government has yet to notify a sugar cane price for the 2019-20 season and fix date for crushing by sugar factories.

Only a few sugar mills have started crushing so far and growers are selling sugar cane for Rs182 per 40kg, a rate that has been unchanged for six years. Reports indicate that some mills are paying Rs190 per 40kg owing to higher sugar prices on the retail market.

A meeting of factory owners with government officials and sugar cane growers to decide sugar cane prices ended inconclusively, which suggests that the harvesting of sugar cane and sowing of wheat will face delays.

Wheat crop is cultivated on around 2.8m acres, whereas sugar cane is usually grown on around 700,000 to 800,000 acres.

A delay in sugar cane harvesting results in the diversion of irrigation water from wheat to sugarcane, which needs a lot of water to sustain.

Farmers start sowing wheat by late October. This year, around 35pc of the sowing target was achieved till mid-November, according to official sources. The cultivation of the Rabi crop will continue till December.

By that time, the government is likely to have announced sugarcane's official indicative rate that may accelerate pace of crop's harvesting to enable growers bring the area under wheat sowing.

Sindh has been unable to meet its wheat production target for the last five years for one reason or the other. For instance, the target could not be met last season owing to hailstorms, which adversely affected an otherwise bumper crop, according to an agriculture official.

The government has announced a wheat support price of Rs1,350 per 40kg for this season, an increase of Rs50 as compared to the previous season.

However, growers are not content with the official rate, which they say is unjustified because of high input costs. Moreover, a rise in prices isn't passed on to farmers during the food department's procurement exercise.

"With present cost of inputs including urea, rising electricity tariff, seed and pesticides, the support price of wheat should have been set at Rs1,500 per 40kg," wheat grower Syed Nadeem Shah argues.

He says the agriculture sector needs government patronisation at all levels to put an end to perennial issues such as unjustified deduction in the paddy crop, lower per-acre cotton yields, timely start of crushing and adequate wheat support price, as all these factors are interlinked.

"As if this was not enough, we are faced with a poor tomato harvest this year, which saw its prices go through the roof," he laments. "Tomato is an essential kitchen item, and its shortage has affected all and sundry. It clearly reflects that our farm sector remains largely unregulated despite being the backbone of the economy, and producers of commodities are exploited by market forces in the absence of government oversight."

Earlier this year, the Sindh government didn't announce wheat procurement, leaving growers at the mercy of market players, who took full advantage of the situation.

The Sindh government decided against procuring crop at a support price of Rs1300 per 40kg in view of its carry-over stocks from last year. However, the decision backfired in the middle of the current year as the market started to face wheat shortage. This led to a surge in prices of flour which was increased from Rs40 to Rs60 per kg. The provincial food department then had to start releasing stocks from October instead of November.

But atta chakki owners like Javed Qureshi said the food department is releasing only negligible quantities of wheat and that crop was procured three years ago but lying in godowns. He said consumers mostly prefer chakki's flour having nutrients like granulated wheat flour and super fine flour.

On growers' part, a 40kg wheat bag was purchased from them for Rs1,050 to Rs1,150 only to be hoarded by traders. The government's presence in the market by way of procurement does help maintain a balance to some degree. The price of flour has not been fully stabilised till last week of November despite release of wheat by the food department.

This year, Sindh's famers have borne losses not only in wheat but in cotton and paddy crops as well. Cotton's production has once again remained lower while paddy growers complained of an unjustified deduction in crop by factory owners at the pretext that moisture in crop is more than the permissible limit.

Looking at the present shortage of wheat in the market, wheat producers expect that government would ensure transparency in wheat procurement next year in April to make sure that support price of Rs1,350 reaches targeted and small farmers instead of middlemen, big landowners, politicians and other influential sectors.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, December 2nd, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1519882

PESTICIDE USE AND HIGH COST OF PRODUCTION

Amjad Mahmood December 02, 2019

THE agricultural economy will continue to suffer from a high cost of production in the form of a growing use of pesticides. One of the major reasons is that an extremely understaffed Plant Protection Department (PPD) has failed to check the entry of pests and diseases through a “free-for-all” import of farm produce and food items at all land, air and sea routes of the country.

More worryingly, the issue doesn’t seem to be on the government’s list of priorities.

Nowhere in the world can one import any kind of farm products without getting a clearance certificate from the plant quarantine division of that country’s PPD declaring that the consignment is free from any pest and disease.

Even the baggage of passengers entering a country from any land, sea or air route is checked if they carry fruit, vegetable or seed. If the item being transported doesn’t have proper phytosanitary certification, it is seized and properly destroyed.

In some countries, quarantine checks are so strict that even researchers coming from abroad and carrying seed for their projects have to report to the department concerned and follow certain protocols

The quarantine checks are so strict that even researchers coming from abroad and carrying seed for their projects have to report to the department concerned and follow certain protocols.

Faisalabad Agriculture University Vice-Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ashraf recalls that he carried some seeds to Australia for a research project back in 1993. Although he produced phytosanitary certificates, the plant protection officials at the airport cleared the baggage only after a thorough inspection and testing, results of which were given after two months.

They also imposed the condition that the seeds would be destroyed in the presence of a PPD official after the completion of the project.

The situation is quite contrary in Pakistan. Anyone can import anything from anywhere without any check. While there are “small-time smugglers” bringing bagful of seeds from Bangkok and Dubai to meet their trip expenses, tonnes of vegetables, fruits, cotton and other crops are being imported through various sea, air and land routes without any inspection for pests and diseases.

While there are “small-time smugglers” bringing bagful of seeds from Bangkok and Dubai, tonnes of vegetables, fruits, cotton and other crops are being imported through various sea, air and land routes without any inspection for pests and diseases

PPD officials say they don’t have sufficient staff needed to work properly. “We have just 16 employees against the department’s approved strength of 75,” says a senior official of the department.

“Just consider the fact that two matriculate inspectors at Karachi seaport have to inspect 400 containers daily,” he laments, adding that influential importers routinely get their consignments released, even those suspected of containing diseased goods.

The situation is graver at land entry points such as the Torkham border, where there are no plant quarantine facilities, the official says. In violation of the law, large consignments of cotton from

Central Asian states are imported through this point. These consignments are not free from live seeds, which are believed to be a source of attacks of whitefly and other pests, unheard of in the region, on the local cotton crop.

Dr Ashraf says 65 to 70 per cent of crop diseases are imported through the agriculture trade. He recalls that the unchecked import of some banana plants led to the destruction of the whole crop in Sukkur a few years ago.

But the quarantine issue or bio-security of the local crop is not on the radar screen, as neither the law is being strictly implemented nor is the strength of the PPD being improved.

“Despite repeated reminders, the authorities are not ready to give the already approved staff for which we don’t need extra budget and funds,” a PPD official says. “At an anti-smuggling meeting chaired by the prime minister, we sought 123 posts to meet the quarantine challenge but to no avail.”

A senior official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research blames the “pesticide mafia” for not allowing the Plant Protection Department to function effectively for decades. “Pesticide business worth Rs80 billion is involved behind this situation. Now, the farmers need multiple sprays for the crops for which pesticides were rarely used in the past. So, allowing the quarantine law to take effect means losing huge profits earned through the sale of farm drugs.”

He says the PPD remained without a full-time director-general for two decades — from 1998 to 2018 — and the vacancy was filled on a one-year contract basis only after intervention by the Sindh High Court.

Understaffing also opens the door to corruption, as it makes it difficult to replace corrupt officials, he says.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1519881/pesticide-use-and-high-cost-of-production

BALOCHISTAN LIVESTOCK POLICY AIMS AT PROSPERITY

Amin Ahmed December 02, 2019

THE Balochistan government’s first-ever Livestock Policy and Strategy sets a road map to stimulating rapid growth in the sector, and aims at delivering prosperity and well-being to the families and businesses.

However, the policy is heavily dependent on the significant commitment of donors to achieve its outcome.

Livestock is a major pillar of Balochistan’s economy, contributing more than 50 per cent to the provincial GDP. The sector is not only a mainstay of the provincial economy, but it is also a way of life for its people and is an essential part of Balochistan’s culture and tradition.

“If we use our land, water, climate and livestock resources well, we can create a prosperous livestock sector that can provide our people with employment and good income,” said Mitta Khan Kakar, the adviser to chief minister on livestock.

Following the approval of the policy, the provincial government is now preparing a five-year implementation strategy under which some interventions will be funded with public funds through provincial government and the Public Sector Development Programme. The policy and the strategy will be presented to the federal government and donor community for either direct or joint funding.

At present, the province suffers from significant overstocking, and the productivity from this huge flock is well below its potential

Conservative estimates suggest that escalating these and other interventions through the policy and strategy can improve the livestock household income by 50 per cent over the next ten years. It can also generate over Rs100 billion for the provincial population and businesses by boosting the livestock sector besides improving the food security and nutritional status.

According to the livestock and dairy development department of Balochistan, there are 32 million sheep and goats in the province. The total population of livestock, excluding poultry, is about 39 million. Inevitably, Balochistan suffers from significant overstocking and the productivity from this huge flock is well below its potential, the policy document says.

The rapidly developing road and communication network in Balochistan has improved the delivery of inputs and access to currently important provincial and national markets, as well as the future potential for increased exports to China and the Middle East.

Balochistan is aiming to incentivise complementary CPEC investments by establishing special economic zones focused on processing and marketing provincial products.

The policy and the strategy will be complemented by a detailed five-year strategy and an annual intervention plan outlining the specific roles expected from investors, institutions and policymakers.

The policymakers will identify areas where reform and change are needed to overcome bottlenecks and build an enabling environment that ensures both economic growth and people well-being.

Mina Dowlatchahi, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Representative in Pakistan, was pleased to see the first-ever livestock policy of Balochistan, and commented that the policy is a milestone in the development of the provincial livestock sector. She said the government has shown great commitment and FAO looks forward to continuing its support to help achieve policy outcomes.

A livestock exhibition was organised in Quetta last week to open new prospects for livestock entrepreneurs, investors, traders, processors, male and female livestock farmers and other value chain actors from across Balochistan as well as other provinces. Farmers, experts, students, investors, traders and civil society, attended, and as many as 60 companies showcased their products and services.

An assessment report says Balochistan's livestock sector is facing a crisis, as flock is minimally managed with very low productivity and profitability.

The livestock policy suggests that the provincial government should avoid becoming a market player or introducing subsidies or incentives that compromise business profitability or distort the market.

Instead, the Balochistan government should work with the chamber of commerce, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, and local entrepreneurs and financiers to promote co-investments or credit guarantee arrangements that deliver significant provincial livestock business investment in provincial processing of livestock products, and improved access, range and quality of input products, pharmaceuticals, veterinary services, etc.

Preference should be given to investment options that fill missing market functions for the province or for specific districts. In particular, this should focus on providing localised services wherever feasible and profitable.

In the short term, the national market in Pakistan is the most important for livestock products from Balochistan, which is currently underrepresented in this market. Even in key areas of strength such as sheep and goats, Balochistan only delivers 16 per cent of the national production.

Significant growth in local, provincial and national markets is possible for almost all products. However, this will require a focus on the whole value chain to improve the production efficiency and effectiveness of various steps. Development of these national value chains should be the focus of the government, the sector and key development projects.

In the longer term, access to international markets will require every step of the value chain to work together to meet high product standards.

However, sanitary and phytosanitary compliance, food safety and quality standards, traceability and better product quality are essential to formally access many markets such as the Middle East and China.

One potential market advantage of Balochistan's current low-inputs system is the ability for some producers to market products that comply with organic certification.

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WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE CENTRE REJECTS PUNJAB GOVT'S REQUEST

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN: December 02, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has reportedly turned down Punjab government's proposal to freeze wheat support price at Rs 1300 / 40 kg as the raise in price would create unrest in the province, sources close to Minister for National Food Security and Research told Business Recorder.

Giving the background, the sources said, that Federal Government each year, in order to safeguard the interest of growers and to ensure food security for the masses, reviews the minimum support of price of wheat crop. The ECC fixes the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of wheat each year. Last year, the price was fixed by the ECC in its meeting held on November 07, 2018 @ Ra 1300/ per 40 kg.

Keeping in view the world market of wheat and fluctuating prices of major farm inputs, the MSP @ 1300/ per 40 kg has been maintained for the last five years. According to the International Grains Council, London , the world wheat production would slightly increase to 762 million tons in 2019-20 as compared to 733 million tons estimated in 2018-19. The world wheat trade and consumption would remain with a slight change at the level of 173 and 756 million tons respectively.

Agriculture Policy Institute has worked out the cost of production of wheat crop 2019-20. In order to determine an appropriate support price for the next crop, major determinants like world wheat situation, cost of production, export/ import parity prices and domestic producer prices are taken into consideration. The estimation of cost of production of wheat crop 2019-20 for Punjab at Rs 1349.57/ 40 kg, whereas for Sindh it is at Rs 1315.72/ per 40 kg.

The matter of support prices was discussed in the meeting of wheat review committee on October 17, 2019 in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. The working of API was shared with the provincial governments who were requested to provide their input on the MSP of wheat for the crop year 2019-20. In this regard, Government of Punjab proposed to maintain the support price at the level of Rs 1300/ 40 kg. In their view, any increase in support price will make a call of increase in flour(Atta) price in the market resulting in unrest at the end of consumers, as flour price is closely associated with the support price of wheat. The other provinces did not communicate their viewpoint at that time.

Ministry of National Food Security and Research argued that as the sowing of wheat crop has started in southern parts of the country, it is prudent to announce the minimum support price for wheat crop 2019-20.

In view of this scenario, Ministry submitted following proposals for consideration and approval of the ECC with the request to approve one of the proposals: (i) support price of wheat crop 2019-20 may be maintained at the level of Rs 1325/40 kg and not to burden the consumers;(ii) support price of wheat crop 2019-20 may be fixed in wake of the cost of production of wheat worked out by the API at the level of Rs 1350/40 kg and ;(iii) support price of wheat crop 2019-20 may be approved in line with the release prices of Food Departments of Punjab and Sindh a the level of Rs 1375/ 40 kg.

During ensuing discussion, Secretary Cabinet Division observed that the purpose of the minimum support price is an incentive to wheat growers and is also a step to stabilize the price of the commodity.

Finance Division observed that Government of Sindh did not procure wheat in time. Now wheat is being provided to Sindh from PASSCO and substantial subsidy is being provided on account of incidental charges by the Federal Government, which is a burden on the public exchequer. It was suggested that all the provincial governments may be directed to ensure timely procurement of wheat according to their requirement. In case of failure, no subsidy be given to the provincial governments in connection with procurement of wheat for their provinces from PASSCO. The ECC agreed to the proposal. The ECC also observed that since minimum support price of wheat has been maintained for the last five years and cost of production has now been increased therefore, Rs 1350/ 40 kg would be a reasonable minimum support price for wheat crop 2019-20.

On November 13, 2019, after detailed discussion, the ECC approved minimum support price of wheat at Rs 1350/ per 40 kg. The committee also directed Ministry of National Food Security and Research to inform all provincial governments to ensure timely procurement of wheat according to their requirements. In future the respective provincial governments will bear full cost of incidental charges from their own resources on account of procurement of wheat from PASSCO. The ECC directed Finance Division to make a detailed presentation to the ECC in its next meeting on accumulating circular debt on commodity operations.

On November 28, 2019, Finance Division informed the ECC that the government commodity operations over the years resulted in Rs 757 billion as total debt and liabilities and recommendations for reducing the debt.

The sources said, the ECC decision about fixation of wheat support prices at Rs 1350 / per 40 kg was not supported by some of the influential parliamentarians who raised this issue with the Speaker National Assembly, Asad Qaiser who convened a meeting a few days ago which was also attended by the newly appointed Minister for National Food Security and Research, Khusro Bakhtiar, who wanted the MSP to be fixed at Rs 1400/ 40 kg. However, his proposal was opposed and it was recommended that wheat price should be fixed at Rs 1365/ 40 kg. Later on the ECC approved minimum support price of wheat at Rs 1365/ 40 kg.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/12/02/18-page/813166-news.html

KP TO SPEND RS 1.10 BILLION FOR DEVELOPING LIVESTOCK SECTOR

By RECORDER REPORT on December 2, 2019

The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has prepared four projects worth Rs1.10 billion for development of livestock sector to alleviate poverty and generate employment opportunities for the people of the tribal districts of the erstwhile FATA.

According to officials of the Livestock Department, a gigantic projects worth Rs500 million has prepared under Accelerated Implementation Program (AIP) in the region. The project is aimed to establish small scale livestock farms under integrated livestock development. The project will be implemented during upcoming financial year 2019-20.

The provincial government has also planned to construct 10 cattle markets in all tribal districts at the cost of around Rs.200 million during the current fiscal year. The project would enable farmers to sell and purchase livestock products at their doorsteps and earn maximum profits besides discouraging the culture of commission and eliminating the role of middleman.

Similarly, Rs 300 million would be spent on enhancement of livestock productivity in South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Orakzai, Kurram, Khyber, Mohmand and Bajaur tribal districts with special focus on increasing milk, meat and eggs production.

Farmers would be encouraged to look after their calf for longer period of times at least for six months to one year so that they could get maximum profits besides bolstering meat production in the province.

The KP government would make special focus on establishment of livestock, research and development facilities with proposed allocation of Rs.100 million to help livestock growers and farmers in treatment of their animals

In this regard, a mega project of Rs834.814 million has already been launched to develop rural poultry besides increasing meat and eggs production in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over a period of four years 2019-23.

A huge ‘poverty alleviation through development of rural poultry has been approved for entire KP spread over 2019-23 period under which one million poultry birds would be distributed among 166,667 households.

Out of this hefty amount, Rs136.936 million would be provided by Federal Government and Rs.547.850 million to be contributed by the KP government for successful implementation of the project.

The provincial government has allocated a substantial amount of Rs70 million for successful implementation of this pro-poor program on ground in KP and erstwhile FATA during 2019-20.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/02/549456/kp-to-spend-rs-110-billion-for-developing-livestock-sector/

PUNJAB’S SILK GROWERS TO GET SMOOTHER ACCESS TO FUNDS

By Asif Mehmood Published: December 2, 2019

LAHORE: The practice of raising silkworms has been around for several thousand years, and this primitive method of silk production has received a brand new lifeline in Punjab. The sericulture unit at the forest department, through interest-free financial assistance, will now help farmers increase production.

According to details, the Akhuwat Foundation, an organization that aims to alleviate poverty, along with a firm from China, is all set to dish out interest-free loans to 500 families in Changa Manga.

The financial support will help farmers procure seeds and raise silkworms. Through the collaborative program, Pakistan has already managed to exceed its production of raw silk by 22,000 kilograms.

“We have successfully managed to increase the silk production from 4,000kg to 22,000kg,” said Assistant Director Sericulture Director Punjab Muhammad Farooq Bhatti. “If we continue to produce at this rate, Pakistan will be on the list of top silk producing countries,” Bhatti added.

Sericulture, the practice of raising silkworms, has been around for several thousand years. It began in China more than three millennia ago. It remains a profitable venture, even for small-scale farmers who raise the larvae and spin the threads as a kind of cottage industry.

In Changa Manga, Bhatti said, more than 100 families started silk farming in 2016. Now, they have more than 800 silkworms.

“In collaboration with the Akhuwat foundation, we will provide a livelihood to many families,” Bhatti claimed.

In December this year, the foundation will dish out funds. In the first phase of the program, according to the sericulture department, 200 families will receive Rs. 20,000-25,000. Similarly, 300 families will receive up to Rs. 4,000 each to procure seeds, which cost Rs. 2,000 per bag when imported from China.

According to information provided by the sericulture department, each year, Pakistan spends Rs. 65 billion on the import of silk. In the next few years, the department hopes, the country will spend less on imports.

"Our target is to make Pakistan self-sufficient in the production of silk, and in the long run, this means the country will spend less on imports," said Bhatti.

With innovation in the seeding process, it is now possible to raise silkworms all-round the year. Earlier, farmers had to keep worms between February and April. A few years ago, the farming industry received a blow due to the deforestation of mulberry trees in Changa Manga. During the 1990s, the industry struggled for its survival after the massive deforestation drive.

Mulberry leaves play an important role during the farming process. Each silk moth lays about 500 eggs in its brief adult life. After hatching, the larvae feed on mulberry leaves.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2110011/1-punjabs-silk-growers-get-smoother-access-funds/

CENTRE-SINDH TUG OF WAR HAMPERING PROGRESS IN FISHERIES' SECTOR: ALI ZAIDI

Faiza Ilyas Updated December 03, 2019

KARACHI: Listing the multiple challenges Pakistan faces in the fisheries sector at an event held at a hotel here on Monday, Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Syed Ali Haider Zaidi said "the tug of war" between the federal and the provincial [Sindh] government was a major impediment to fisheries' development. He emphasised the need for working together.

He was speaking at the opening ceremony of the 22nd session of the Scientific Committee of Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) in which officials from 16 countries are participating.

It's the first IOTC scientific committee meeting being held in Pakistan, which became a member of the commission in 1995, and will conclude on Friday.

Though speaking at an international forum, the minister minced no words in accepting that the working relationship between the federal and Sindh governments was poor and affecting administrative functions.

Tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean are at risk of terminal decline, experts note

"The tug of war [over shared marine resources existing in separate jurisdictions] between the federal and the provincial [Sindh] governments is one of the biggest challenges," the minister said, adding that functioning of governments led by two different political parties made things tough.

The minister regretted that the provincial government looked at the federal government's initiatives for fisheries' development as "intrusion" in its affairs and underscored the need for working together.

"Pakistan has a great potential in the fisheries sector and cooperation will benefit all," he said.

The minister also spoke about growing pollution affecting the Indus River, the coast and the sea and said continued discharge of untreated sewage into the sea had "destroyed the fisheries sector".

"This hasn't only threatened marine life but also humans, especially in Sindh. We must fix this problem as a nation," he said, adding that a shortage of trained human resource and massive encroachment of Karachi Port Trust's land — about 80 per cent of its total land — were matters that needed to be addressed.

"The country had no fisheries commissioner for a decade and it was only recently that a person has been appointed on this post," he said.

Sindh and Balochistan have control over territorial waters up to 12 nautical miles from the coast whereas the federal government's jurisdiction is 200 nautical miles, called the exclusive economic zone. There is a buffer zone of eight nautical miles between the two jurisdictions.

The ceremony was also addressed by IOTC scientific committee chair Dr Shiham Adam, IOTC executive secretary Dr Chris O' Brien and commissioner of fisheries Dr Safia Mushtaq.

Talking to Dawn about the significance of IOTC meeting in Karachi, officials of the World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan (WWF-P), acting as an observer at the meeting, explained that tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean were at risk of terminal decline unless significant and rapid improvements were made to fisheries management.

The environmental organisation, they said, was calling on IOTC scientists to provide a clear and robust set of recommendations to halt the alarming overexploitation of stocks, particularly of yellowfin tuna.

The recommendations agreed by the scientific committee this week will be considered at a meeting of IOTC Commission in June 2020, where a new management plan will be adopted.

About the meeting's importance from Pakistan's perspective, Mohammad Moazzam Khan, technical adviser on marine resources at the WWF-P, said an important event highlight was discussion on Pakistan's data on its tuna fisheries.

"If members find it satisfactory, they will recommend the same for approval to the commission. One of the nine IOTC working parties has already endorsed the data," he said.

There are 16 tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. The meeting is being attended by officials from countries including Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, European Union, Iran, the Maldives, France and Tanzania.

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CM ORDERS RELEASE OF RS10M FOR ANTI-LOCUSTS OPERATION

Dawn Report December 03, 2019

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minis-ter Syed Murad Ali Shah on Mon-day ordered release of Rs10 million to the plant protection depa-rt-ment under 'bridge finance arrangement' for anti-locusts spray in the affected areas of Sindh.

The department is supposed to arrange for three aircraft, fuel and pesticide using the funds.

The order came during a meeting chaired by Mr Shah at CM House to discuss the situation arising out of the locusts' attack. The meeting was informed that swarms of locusts had attacked and caused heavy damage to standing crops in 11 districts.

Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu told the meeting that the desert locusts entering Sindh were first spotted in the Nara area of Khairpur district on May 13.

He said the worst-affected areas, besides Nara, included Salehpat in Sukkur district, and desert areas of Ghotki, Tharparkar, Sanghar (Acchro Thar), Umerkot and Shaheed Benazirabad (Gongo Thar) districts.

The chief minister directed Finance Secretary Hassan Naqvi to immediately release Rs10 million to the federal plant protection department to launch an aerial spray operation jointly with the provincial agriculture department.

He noted that lands had been prepared for wheat cultivation and seedlings would come out by the end of this month. If immediate operation was not launched, then the entire crop would be devoured by locusts, he said. He said the operation must be launched within the next four days.

The CM asked the chief secretary to keep monitoring the operation and maintain close coordination among district administrations and the two departments.

He said had the plant protection department taken timely action, damage already caused would have been at a very lower side. He asked the agriculture department to conduct a survey to assess the damage. Mr Rahu informed the meeting that his department had spent Rs319.695 million on an anti-locusts spray operation covering 247,297 acres of different affected areas.

The funds, he added, were provided to the deputy commissioners concerned with the approval of the chief minister.

Chief Secretary Mumtaz Shah, Senior Adviser to the CM Nisar Khuhro, CM's personal secretary Sajid Jamal Abro, Agriculture Secretary Agha Zaheeruddin, Agriculture Extension director general Hidayatullah, other officials concerned attended the meeting.

LARKANA: Huge swarms of locusts continue to strip guava orchards, wheat, tomato, gram and fodder of green leaves and vegetation in Naudero, Ratodero and villages in riverian area of amid abortive efforts by farmers and landlords to force the insects to fly away.

Reports from Naudero, Bhutto Estate, Keti Mumtaz, Sallar Bhutto, Shinbh Jeho, Ramzan Chauhan, Panjudero, Paro-jo-Goth, Hassan Wahan, Aghani, Saeedodero and other areas suggest the damage to guava orchards, recently sown wheat, tomatoes and vegetables was massive.

Sirajul Auliya Rashdi, president of Sindh Chamber of Agriculture's Larkana chapter, said that overall losses caused by locusts ran into millions and could be adjudged at 20 per cent at this juncture.

Affected growers said that locusts had eaten away fodder, wheat in its budding stage, guava trees, chilly and tomatoes within a day and demanded Sindh government come to their rescue.

Imam Bakhsh Kalhoro, director of locusts control for Upper Sindh, said that the department had received reports of locusts' attack from Salehpat near Achhro Thar, Thari Mirwah in Khairpur district, Ratodero, Naduero and kutcha area of Larkana district.

The attack in Salehpat area was so severe it prompted the department to begin aerial spray to contain the swarms, he said.

The spray still continued but it was not advisable to carry out aerial spray near human settlements, he said.

He said that it was the job of federal government's department of plant protection to act against locusts.

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chamber of Agriculture on Monday expres-sed fear that if ongoing locust attack was not brought under control in time it could severely damage upcoming wheat crop and might cause unprecedented rise in flour price to Rs100 per kilo.

SCA general secretary Zahid Bhurgri said in a statement that the chamber was concerned over indifferent attitude of Sindh government and urged it to immediately start anti-locust spray if the federal government was not forthcoming to assist it.

He warned that present situation could lead to food insecurity if nothing was done to save the upcoming wheat crop from locusts. So far, the insect had damaged wheat on 12,000 acres and rapeseed as well while helpless farmers were looking towards provincial and federal governments for rescue, he said.

He demanded the Sindh government use its own resources to ensure ground sprays on standing crops if the federal government was not coming forward to save Sindh's farmers.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1520134/cm-orders-release-of-rs10m-for-anti-locusts-operation

GOVT INDIFFERENT TO LOCUST INVASION, CLAIM FARMERS

By Our Correspondent Published: December 3, 2019

HYDERABAD: As the locusts cut a swathe through the agricultural fields and pastures in Sindh, farmers have taken to protests in many districts decrying the government's alleged indifference. The growers protested in Mirpurkhas, Khairpur, Tharparkar and Sanghar districts on Monday to vent their anger on both the federal and provincial governments.

The locust invasion in Sindh started in May this year, after a long interlude of almost three decades. "Swarms of desert locusts are devouring our crops but the government has left us in the lurch," deplored Ghulam Rasool Behan, who was among the protesters outside Sanghar Press Club. "The government always tends to wait before taking action until the locusts cause irreparable losses in an area." Abdullah Unar, another farmer, called for pesticide spray on urgent basis to protect their crops from further damage.

The provincial government's role is limited to providing coordination. The central responsibility for dealing with this situation lies with the Department of Plant Protection (DPP) of the federal ministry of national food security and research. It mostly carries out aerial sprays for the insect's control.

The DPP is responsible for conducting the survey and control operations in Pakistan. The surveys are supposed to be carried out regularly in summer and spring breeding areas from June to November and February to May, respectively. During the summer, a monthly meeting is held between Pakistan and India to exchange information on the locust situation. Similar coordination also exists with Iran.

"After many years of complete or partial drought, Tharparkar saw vegetation. But locusts have devastated the desert crops and pastures in a large number of villages," bemoaned Jam Wazir, a village resident of Nangarparkar, Tharparkar.

The farmers in Khairpur district, which was among the first districts where locusts arrived from Balochistan en route from Iran, claimed that crops on thousands of acres of land in the barrage and riverine areas have been destroyed. According to Shahnawaz Channa, a local farmer told that locusts have been eating the crops including wheat, sugarcane, lemon, banana and mango orchards and pastures and crops grown for grazing and fodder of livestock animals.

"The farmers have sustained a financial loss of tens of millions of rupees in Khairpur. But the government is neither conducting spray to kill locusts nor a survey to assess the losses," said Imdad Otho. The farmers warned that if the government does not act without wasting further time, large parts of Sindh will witness drought next year.

The protesting farmers in Mirpurkhas blocked a road connecting the district with Sanghar by burning tyres and staging a sit-in protest. They claimed that crops like wheat, tomato and other vegetables worth millions of rupees have been destroyed but the administration remained invisible.

At a recent meeting in Sukkur, Commissioner Shafiq Ahmed Mahesar expressed dissatisfaction over the ongoing operation to control locusts. He formed assistant commissioners headed teams at taluka level to supervise the operations being carried out by the officials of the Sindh Agriculture Department. "There is no time for argument or blame game. We ought to take action on war footings instead of waiting for the DPP's planes for the spray."

He, however, said the local farmers will have to cooperate with the government to get rid of the menace, asking the farmers to spray their fields themselves after taking guidelines from the government. "The eggs laid by the locusts in the desert regions can become a greater threat," he warned.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the locusts have attacked several countries. The organisation considers Pakistan an important front-line country for desert locusts because it offered the summer and spring breeding areas.

Meanwhile, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah called Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Khusro Bakhtiar on Monday and asked him to provide aircraft of the DPP to spray pesticides in the areas affected by locust attacks. Shah said that to meet the shortage of medicines and pilots due to the lack of funds in the relevant department, the government was also releasing funds of Rs10 million to ensure elimination of locusts. Heading a meeting of the agriculture department, he issued directives to conduct a survey of the areas affected by the infestation and to assess the damage. He apprised Bakhtiar of the destruction of crops in Sindh. “We want immediate elimination of locusts by spraying pesticides through planes in the affected areas,” he said.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 3rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2110656/1-govt-indifferent-locust-invasion-claim-farmers/

SETBACKS: FINANCES THROW A SPANNER IN THE WORKS OF PUNJAB’S FARMING PROJECT

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 3, 2019

LAHORE: Introduced by the Punjab government with hopes of assisting local farmers, Corporate Farming Project has hit a bump in the road amidst disagreements between the provincial government’s finance and cooperative departments.

The Punjab chairperson of planning and development board, while giving conditional approval of the project, has directed the two departments to put their differences aside and assist the agriculture department to initiate the esteemed project.

The project, valued at Rs 400 million, hopes to establish sale points by forming village level organisations for the sale of farming products and agricultural machinery, across the 137 villages of Rahim Yar Khan, Sargodha and Sialkot. The project will also introduce purchase centres for the procurement of arid production and provide farmers with a revolving fund of Rs 2 million at a nominal markup, to acquire farming equipment as well as provide access to easy loans for cultivating a maximum of 5 acres of land.

According to project details issued by the Punjab Agriculture Department to the Planning and Development board, the 137 villages selected from the three cities will be divided into four clusters. The village organisation will be formed in every village in partnership with the cooperatives department and any farmer from the village willing to become a member could do so by submitting a onetime fee of Rs 500 per acre with a limit of 12 acres.

The village organisation, on the request of its members, will be in the position to offer them convenient loans as per their budget to acquire farming machinery required for cultivation during Kharif and Rabi seasons, with an applicable markup of 5%.

Furthermore, the agriculture department with the sponsorship of various companies will set up shops for the sale of fertilizers, seeds and agricultural chemicals at discounted prices in every village. These shops will also be managed by the village organisation and the profit from them will be credited to the bank account of the village council. Moreover, the sales centre will be set up in every village where farmers will be able to sell their crops and the government, as per plan, ensures they get a fair price.

On the other hand, the village organisation will receive nominal charges from farmers who bring their produce to the sales centre. Under the pilot project, Rs 297 million will be provided to the village organisation for up to two years for offering loans to the farmers of the 137 villages. After two years, half of the 297 million allocated to the village organizations will be waived, while the remaining half will be refunded in the next five years in the form of an annual installment, allowing village organisation to gradually increase its financial resources.

Although delayed in the face of interdepartmental disagreements, responding to a question the Punjab Agriculture Minister Malik Naman Lingriyal stated that the Punjab Planning and Development Board has directed all other provincial departments to fully cooperate with the agricultural department to make the Corporate Farming Project a success.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 3rd, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2110707/1-setbacks-finances-throw-spanner-works-punjabs-farming-project/

CABINET TO FIX MINIMUM SUGAR CANE RATE FOR COMING CRUSHING SEASON SOON, PA TOLD

Tahir Siddiqui December 04, 2019

KARACHI: Agriculture Minister Mohammad Ismail Rahu informed the Sindh Assembly on Tuesday that the sugar cane purchase price for crushing season 2019-20 would be notified in a couple of days.

Furnishing a statement and replies to the lawmakers' written and verbal queries during Question Hour, he said that the provincial sugar cane price control board had held a meeting with all stakeholders, including growers and mill owners, to finalise the sugar cane price.

The minister said that the agriculture department had given its recommendations to the price control board and the matter would be approved by the provincial cabinet.

According to the Supreme Court orders, only the cabinet and chief minister can approve and notify the minimum sugar cane purchase price.

Replying to a question asked by Grand Democratic Alliance's Arif Mustafa Jatoi, Mr Rahu said that the purchase price of sugar cane had not been increased for the past three years.

The house is informed that district price controllers have been notified to curb profiteering

He said that he, being the agriculture minister, was the chairman of the Sugar Cane Control Board and he called a meeting for fixation of the minimum price every year in October and November. "The SCB comprises representatives of growers and millers besides official members including agriculture secretary," he added.

The minister said that after having a detailed discussion with all the stakeholders and their mutual consent, the minimum purchase price of sugar cane was proposed for approval of the cabinet. "Therefore, the sugar cane price ... was fixed [the] same as per the last three years", he said.

Mr Rahu further pointed out that the Punjab government had maintained the sugar cane price at Rs180 per 40 kilograms during the last three years.

To another question by Mr Jatoi, he said that the provincial government had designated commissioners, additional commissioners, deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners as the district controllers of prices and supplies in their respective jurisdiction in the province.

"All of them are notified as special magistrate with the powers of first-class magistrate by the home department for the trial of offences relating to price control under any provincial or federal law," he added.

The Bureau of Supply and Prices had also deputed its staff with the DCs and ACs for implementation of the price list notified by the commissioner or deputy commissioner, the minister said, adding that these teams conducted frequent visits in their respective jurisdiction and imposed fine on profiteers.

Besides, he said, the bureau's staff also remained present in the weekly bazaars organised in parts of Karachi to ensure the sale of essential commodities at fixed prices.

To a verbal question asked by GDA member Nand Kumar, the minister said that the federal government was not cooperating with the provincial government to tackle the locust issue.

He said that the plant protection department was under the federal ministry of national food security, which was the competent authority to tackle the locust issue.

"The plant protection department has 20 planes for aerial spray to control locust, but only three of them are functional," he added.

He said that he had made repeated requests with the Centre for providing three aircraft for aerial spray of pesticides to contain the locust growth in the desert area, but to no avail as only one plane was sent to Sindh.

"This plane is most of the time either out of order or runs shorts of fuel and pesticides," he deplored and added that the provincial government was ready to bear the fuel expenses if the planes were provided.

Published in Dawn, December 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1520241

LOCUSTS' ATTACK CONTINUES WITHOUT CHECK

A Correspondent December 04, 2019

MITHI: Swarms of loc-usts on Tuesday attacked trees and green bushes in various areas of Diplo, Islam-kot, Chhachhro, Nag-ar-parkar, Dahli and other parts of the district.

Talking to local reporters, villagers of the desert district deplored that the large insect had been playing havoc with their crops, grass and other vegetation for the past four months in various areas, creating dro-ught-like conditions despite sufficient and timely monsoon rains.

They deplored that since the very beginning of the invasion of the locusts in July this year, no serious attempt was made by the federal and Sindh governments to exterminate small swarms and soon after they increased in size and quantity; now they were posing threats to crops, even those in parts of the barrage areas.

They complained that that an aircraft sent by the federal government for an aerial spray was lying faulty at Chhor area of Umerkot district for the past many days.

Meanwhile, farmers in a large number gathered outside the Deputy Commissio-ner Office and staged a demonstration for several hours against what they called pathetic attitude of the relevant functionaries towards the locust attack in the western parts of Sindh.

The protesters demanded an immediate massive operation in Thar and Umerkot districts to kill off the insects.

Published in Dawn, December 4th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1520234/locusts-attack-continues-without-check

US CG BRIEFED ON STATE OF FARM SECTOR IN MIRPURKHAS

Qamaruddin Shaikh December 04, 2019

MIRPURKHAS: US Consul Gen-e-ral Rob Silberstein along with some other consulate officers visited Mirpurkhas commissioner's office on Tuesday and received a briefing on the state of agriculture in this part of Sindh.

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) MNA Mir Munawwar Ali Khan Talpur briefed the US envoy on major crops grown in Mirpurkhas division and the factors contributing to low per-acre yield and government's measures to address the issues, as well as the problems being faced by agriculturists and the farming community.

Mirpurkhas Commissioner Abdul Waheed Shaikh, Deputy Commissioner Zahid Memon, Additional Deputy Commissioner Salamat Memon, District Council Chairman Mir Anwer Ali Khan Talpur, MPA Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah and former federal minister Pir Aftab Hussain Shah Jilani also attended the meeting.

Commissioner Shaikh informed the consulate delegation that Mirpurkhas division was dependant on agricultural produce like other rural areas of the province. He said mango was the chief fruit crop of Mirpurkhas and both government and growers took keen interest in ensuring a high yield and better quality of the produce.

Each year, a mango and summer fruits exhibition is held in Mirpurkhas which attracts thousands of people, including local and foreign buyers as well as agriculture experts. The other crops grown in this division include sugar cane, cotton, wheat, chilli and onion.

The commissioner pointed out that there were several sugar mills functioning here to meet market demand of the commodity.

Regarding prices, he said the provincial government regulated prices of general commodities and would fix official rates of certain crops in order to check price hike in retail market.

He lamented that due to absence of modern machinery and a shortage of water and certified seeds, the division registered a low per-acre yield as compared to other areas of the province. This, he added, ultimately kept the division's income less than its expenditure.

Commissioner Shaikh said provincial government was making all-out efforts to promote the agriculture sector. In order to provide alternative energy option to growers, solar-powered gadgets and equipment were being provided to the rural population and solar panels were being installed to run tube wells. He also spoke of lining of watercourses and distributaries continuing in the division under a programme being executed to check wastage of water.

MNA Munawwar Talpur told the US envoy that the issue of bonded labour was not one that could not be resolved. District-level committees were there to take every possible measure to curb bonded labour, he added.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1520230/us-cg-briefed-on-state-of-farm-sector-in-mirpurkhas

PILOT PROJECT OF BIO-SALINE AGRICULTURE LAUNCHED IN THAR

By RECORDER REPORT on December 4, 2019

Hallmarking to implementing novel ideas for sustainable development in Thar, the country's top agriculture research body, Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) has declared Thar Foundation's Pilot project of Bio-Saline Agriculture in Thar “a great success".

Thar Foundation and PARC have also decided to scale up the project to more focus on creating livelihood opportunities for local farmers to make sustainable earnings for the poor households of a natural disaster-hit region of Tharparkar.

Thar Foundation in partnership with PARC had joined hands in 2018 for a pilot project and have successfully tested grafted species of Bairi (Jujube), Lemon and Cheeku (Sapota) over an area of 20 acres with drip irrigation as a mode of irrigation through Biosaline Agriculture.

In order to implement the initiative, Thar Foundation and PARC inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to the collaboration which will focus on the trials of salt-resistant fodder and cash crop species, training of local farmers, information exchange and awareness campaigns, and developing an economic value chain for the previously tested species.

According to a statement issued here Tuesday, the partnership between Thar Foundation & PARC strengthened with the renewal of MoU to promote Biosaline Agriculture. The two organizations agree to carry on their collaboration to pursue the common objective of developing Biosaline agriculture and promoting livelihood opportunities in Thar.

The MoU was signed during a ceremony held here at Thar Coal Block site and signed by Naseer Memon, General Manager Thar Foundation and Dr Muhammad Azeem Khan, Chairman PARC.

As per the project, Thar Foundation will provide land in addition to the 20 acres previously allocated for the execution of a multi-directional Biosaline project along with the required resources i.e. water and seeds procurement/ saplings. Thar Foundation will also continue to provide the necessary support to facilitate the execution of projects including the provision of funds to the farmers.

Speaking on the occasion, PARC Chairman, Azeem Khan appreciated the efforts of Thar Foundation for the successful germination and yield of Jujube and Lemon orchard in Thar on saline water. He termed the pilot project a “great success" and said that SECMC and Thar Foundation are an important strategic partner for the promotion of Biosaline Agriculture in the Thar region.

Naseer Memon, GM Thar Foundation said that the Biosaline Agriculture has the potential to contribute towards the Zero Hunger Goal as enlisted under UN-SDG's and TF is aiming to make Islamkot an SDG compliant Taluka by 2025.

HSE Manager of SECMC, Umair Aslam Butt and Project Director of AZRI Center, Dr Attaullah also spoke on the occasion.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/04/550204/pilot-project-of-bio-saline-agriculture-launched-in-thar/

CONFERENCE ON WATER PRODUCTIVITY IN AGRICULTURE HELD

By ZAHID BAIG on December 4, 2019

Speakers at a conference on “Water Productivity in Agriculture – the role of Technology and Private Sector" emphasized the importance of leveraging appropriate technology in achieving more crops per drop and to save water per unit of production.

They said that Pakistan does not lack talent and research. But the uptake of available knowledge by the commercial sector is weak because they do not see an incentive to save water in their production process.

Pakistan is a water economy with 80% of the country's exports depending on water. The government manages a huge irrigation system with 107,000 watercourses stretching to 1.6 million kilometres irrigating about 35 million acres of land with 44 canal systems and water reservoirs providing water at farmers' doorsteps. Despite so much cost investment and dependence of revenues on water, water is a free good for its users in Pakistan. Even the cost of maintenance of the state-owned water management system is not recovered, the speakers observed.

The conference held here on Tuesday was organized by Helvetas Swiss Inter-cooperation. Several eminent water experts, researchers, commercial agro-based companies and experts, farmers and students joined the conference while Mohsin Laghari, Provincial Minister for Irrigation and Drainage was the Chief Guest.

Speakers further observed that agriculture is the largest user of water in the country (about 90%) is water subsidized.

There are several companies whose business depends on agro-based products. Experts said that per unit productivity of water in agriculture is very low in Pakistan compared to other countries. For instance, “we grew 0.13 kg of cereal per cubic meter of water (m^3) compared to 1.56 kg/m^3 in the USA, 0.82 kg/m^3 in China and 0.39 kg/m^3 in India. Rice, Pakistan's 2nd most important economic crop after cotton has the 4th highest rate of water-use in the world. It simply means that the m^3 of water used per unit of GDP – is the world's fourth-highest. This shows that Pakistan's economy is highly water-intensive," they said.

Despite this liberal use (or overuse of water), Pakistan's economy is not doing better than countries which have less water availability from nature. Pakistan stands 35th in the world in term of total renewable water resources (KM3). It means that only 34 countries are better than Pakistan out of a total of 171 countries. The countries located much lower in the ladder include Turkey (41), France (42), Sweden (46), Spain (62), Netherlands (72), Portugal (79) Israel (153) just to name few. All these economies are far better than Pakistan's and are largely dependent on agriculture and livestock. The same countries are analysed for their per-capita access to freshwater: Pakistan as of today stands around $1000m^3$ per capita when compared to Turkey (549), France (512), Sweden (286), Spain (730), Netherlands (642), Portugal (817), and Israel (282). Thus, lack of water is not an acceptable argument as an excuse to lack of progress in the agricultural economy.

Speakers called for changing this attitude by showing the public and private sector that water efficiency has a business case for the companies, farmers, and government. The experts emphasised on the role of the private sector in achieving water efficiency by investing in technology and helping corporate farmers to apply technology. This is not because the private sector is obliged to do due to environmental or welfare argument.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/04/550179/conference-on-water-productivity-in-agriculture-held/

MINISTER STRESSES PUBLIC-PRIVATE TIE-UP IN AGRICULTURE

By Our Correspondent Published: December 4, 2019

LAHORE: There is a need to promote public-private partnership in agriculture and the government is committed to improving ease of doing business and promoting the role of private sector in farming, said Punjab Minister for Irrigation and Drainage Mohsin Leghari.

Speaking at a conference titled “Water Productivity in Agriculture – the role of Technology and Private Sector” on Tuesday, Leghari emphasised that water efficiency could not be achieved by a single actor and the gap could be bridged by the academia, researchers and farmers.

Speakers at the conference emphasised the importance of leveraging appropriate technology to achieve water efficiency and save water per unit of production.

They pointed out that Pakistan did not lack talent and research in the area, however, the absorption of available knowledge by the commercial sector was weak because it had no incentive to save water in the production process.

“Pakistan is an agrarian economy with 80% of the country’s exports depending on water,” they said.

The government manages a huge irrigation system with 107,000 watercourses, irrigating about 35 million acres of land with 44 canal systems and water reservoirs, which provide water at the farmers’ doorsteps. The speakers noted that the agriculture sector was the largest consumer of water in the country. Apart from that, there were several companies whose business depended on agri-based products.

“Experts say that per-unit agricultural productivity of water is very low in Pakistan compared to its regional peers,” they said. “Despite the liberal use of water, Pakistan’s economy is far behind the countries which have less water availability.”

Pakistan ranks 35th in the world in terms of total renewable water resources, which means that only 34 countries are better than Pakistan out of a total of 171 nations.

The countries ranking much lower than Pakistan include Turkey (41), France (42), Sweden (46), Spain (62), the Netherlands (72) and Portugal (79). "All these economies are performing far better than Pakistan's and they largely depend on agriculture and livestock," the speakers added.

They called for training the public and private sectors in utilising water efficiently. They also urged the private sector to achieve water efficiency by investing in technology and cooperating with farmers in this regard.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 4th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2111227/2-minister-stresses-public-private-tie-agriculture/

KP GOVT INCREASES DAILY IMPORT OF VEGETABLES, FRUITS FROM AFGHANISTAN

Bureau Report Updated December 05, 2019

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has increased the daily import of Afghan vegetables and fruits from 12 vehicles per day to 100 to ensure the availability of perishable items in local markets at a cheaper price.

Chief Minister Mahmood Khan was informed about the increase in the number of vehicles during a meeting about price control mechanisms in the province.

Mr Mahmood said currently, the number of vehicles bringing fruits and vegetables to North Waziristan had been increased to contain prices.

A statement issued here said the initiative was meant to ensure the availability of fruits and vegetable at a cheaper price and it allowed the import of perishable items, including potato, spinach, cabbage, onion, peas, radish, bitter gourd, grapes, apples and pomegranate, which were further transported to other districts of the province.

The meeting was attended by chief secretary Dr Kazim Niaz, adviser to the chief minister on merged districts Ajmal Wazir, principal secretary to the chief minister Shahab Ali Shah, relief secretary Abid Majeed and other officials.

Officials say move will ensure lower price of perishable goods

The chief minister directed the relevant authorities to focus on items directly affecting the underprivileged segments of society along with directing to encourage import of vegetables and fruits from Afghanistan.

The officials said the district administrations had formed 97 seasonal farmer markets in 83 tehsils of the province, including merged districts, which were concentrating on the marketing and selling of local agriculture produce by farmers directly eliminating the role of middleman, which had not only ensured the availability of low-priced fruits and vegetables to consumers but had also discouraged hoarding and increased the income of farmers directly.

The meeting was informed that those seasonal markets were concentrating on local and seasonal produce according to which the markets would continue to be shifted accordingly.

Also, strict action against hoarders, adulterators and people involved in artificial price hikes is being taken. A total of 537 units were inspected in Nov compared to only 12 in Oct.

The officials said 26 FIRs were registered in Nov against hoarders, whose units were sealed.

A total of 5,806 food-related units were inspected, while a fine of Rs5.48 million was imposed on law violators and 291 units were sealed, while 137,507 food items were confiscated and discarded by the Halal Food Authority in Nov alone.

The officials also said 827 inspection where carried out against the sales of spurious drugs and 705 inspections for adulteration in agricultural inputs.

They said the actual selling price of perishable items was also being collected from independent sources to ensure targeted action, whereas geo-tagging of price magistrates, who supervised fixation of wholesale price early morning at the auction of perishable items, was also been carried out.

The price of nonperishable items is fixed by the price committees headed by the deputy commissioners in all districts.

The meeting was told that the daily datasheets were shared with commissioners and deputy commissioners for measures to bring down prices and that action was followed by generating trends on a weekly basis examined at provincial level to take macro decisions.

The chief minister appreciated the relevant departments for price control and said the efforts for the purpose was providing relief to consumers.

He said the government would continue taking measures for the relief of people in line with the premier’s directives.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1520464/kp-govt-increases-daily-import-of-vegetables-fruits-from-afghanistan

LOCUSTS RAVAGE CROPS IN SHIKARPUR, MIRPURKHAS

Dawn Report December 05, 2019

SHIKARPUR: Locusts continued to ravage through crops and trees in Shikarpur and Mirpurkhas districts, stripping large swathes of fields of vegetation on Wednesday.

According to reports, a huge locust swarm attacked Shikarpur district and its surrounding localities, affecting civic life and spreading fear among people, especially children, when they saw the locusts in the city on the roofs of their homes and roads.

The insects attacked and destroyed the Rabi crops in various union councils and villages, including Mian Sahib, Jagan, Fatehpur Katto, Humayun, Shahal Sadhayo, Rahimabad, Peer Bux Shujrah, Sultankot and the adjoining areas.

On the occasion, dua was offered in various mosques of Mian Sahib for relief from the locusts' attack.

However, the agriculture depart-ment continued to play a silent role as usual in Shikarpur.

The reports from the affected areas suggested that the swarm swiftly and vigorously devoured the recently cultivated wheat crop in Shikarpur district and its adjoining localities.

Growers and peasants were seen making desperate attempts to save their crops from the massive attack on their fields.

They adopted traditional methods like beating drums to make loud noise to scare away the locusts and burning weeds, dry grass and junk for smoke that could push the insects away from their fields.

The locusts' swarm has inflicted heavy damages to the crops of wheat, guava, vegetables and others in a considerably vast area of the district.

The growers and peasants have appealed to the Sindh government for taking serious and swift action to overcome the locust attack and save them from heavy losses.

In Mirpurkhas, the locusts in a large quantity attacked the crops in taluka Jhuddo, Kot Ghulam Mohammad and Sindhri, damaging the crops of wheat, sugar cane, chilli, onion and others on Wednesday.

Growers complained that locusts arrived from Umerkot and started to damage wheat, sugar cane, onion, chili, mango and other orchards while they watched them helplessly.

They alleged that plant protection department Mirpurkhas remained unmoved despite repea-ted complaints about the imminent onslaught of locusts.

Published in Dawn, December 5th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1520505/locusts-ravage-crops-in-shikarpur-mirpurkhas

DUTY THEFT: NATIONAL KITTY LOSES $6.09 MILLION ON APPLE IMPORTS

By Umer Farooq Published: December 5, 2019

PESHAWAR: At a time when the federal government is struggling to overcome the ongoing fiscal crisis that grips the country, it appears that the national exchequer lost an estimated $6.09 million in taxes on apple imports, that too during the last season alone.

According to the Sales Tax Act 1990, imports of edible goods from Afghanistan are exempt from tax collection, whereas other countries have to pay 17% per kilogramme (kg) as duty on their exports to Pakistan, including the apples imported from Iran.

It has, however, been learnt that traders have been avoiding taxes by documenting Iranian apples as imports from Afghanistan. Apples are sent from Iran to Afghanistan and later are exported by Afghan traders to Pakistan.

"Apples from Iran are smuggled to Pakistan and documented as imported from Afghanistan to avoid 17% duty," a senior official responsible for collecting tariffs told The Express Tribune. The official, who requested anonymity, stated that mafia has been involved in the ongoing mega-tax dodge.

The statistics obtained carry details of only one season of apples from Afghanistan, beginning from November 2019 until December 2, 2019, which showed that an estimated 1,750 trucks full of apples, carrying an average of 27 metric tons or 27,000 kg of the fruit per truck, were cleared into Pakistan.

"Suppose if one kg of apples approximately costs Rs120, 17% tax, which makes around Rs20, is collected on the Iranian apples. However, if the documents are forged and declared as 'imports from Afghanistan', there is zero tax levied on the apples and Rs20 per kg is lost by the national exchequer," another senior customs official said.

The official, who also requested anonymity keeping in view the sensitivity of the issue, stated that if Rs20 is avoided on per kg of apples, it makes Rs500,000 per truck since it carries 27,000 kg of apples. If we multiply Rs500,000 with 1,750 trucks that were cleared into Pakistan during the last season, the duty loss is estimated at Rs945 million.

He admitted that apples are exported from Iran to Afghanistan and then sent to Pakistan from Afghanistan where traders, along with some corrupt customs officials, are involved in corruption.

"A senior government official has said that because of the practice, an estimated $6.09 million – the equivalent of approximately Rs945 million – of duty is evaded on apple imports from Afghanistan," he said.

The official also said that the government has been trying its level best to overcome the financial crisis but illegal imports continue to make things difficult.

"The government must take immediate action against the culprits since the season is currently underway and tons of apples are being imported from Afghanistan through tax evasion," he said.

Officials, however, stated that it is not known for how long such practices have been going on.

"The culprits did the job surreptitiously and we would never be able to find it out had a truck full of Iranian apples, documented as imported from Afghanistan, not been seized," one of the customs officials said.

Customs officials further said that a truck driver has been detained at Torkham Customs House where the matter is being currently investigated. The Express Tribune made repeated attempts to contact senior customs officers, however, no one could be reached for an official version.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 5th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2111840/2-duty-theft-national-kitty-loses-6-09-million-apple-imports/

GROWERS' BODY DEMANDS ALL LOCUST-INFESTED AREAS BE DECLARED CALAMITY-HIT

Dawn Report December 06, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) has demanded that Sindh government declare all locust-infested areas in the province as calamity-hit and waive farm tax on land till the threat from the deadly insect subsides.

The SAI executive committee that met here on Thursday said that federal and provincial governments looked completely helpless before the calamity, which had so far ravaged large swathes of cultivated farmland in several districts.

The meeting chaired by SAI president Nawab Zubair Talpur said that Sindh government was giving lame excuse that it lacked capacity and funds to combat the insect and was thereby pushing farmers into deep financial mire. It said that growers were bearing losses of billions of rupees and demanded the Sindh and federal governments should take measures on a war footing to control the deadly attack.

It urged the government to fix sugar cane support price at Rs250 per 40kg and that of wheat at Rs1,500 per 40kg and issue notifications accordingly. The delay in announcement of sugar cane price was condemnable as 80 per cent of sugar mills had already started crushing but the agriculture department had not yet done its job to fix the cane price, it said.

The meeting said that a rate of Rs250 per 40kg should be fixed immediately and notified accordingly and payment of quality premium should also be ensured to growers as per Supreme Court orders.

The growers' body expressed surprise over Rs15 raise in the support price of wheat to Rs1,365 and said that wheat was being sold for Rs1,800 per 40kg in open market, therefore, the Sindh government should fix the price at Rs1,500 per 40kg at the least.

MITHI: Huge swarms of relatively large-sized locusts have spread across cultivated areas after ravaging through crops, bushes and trees in several areas of Tharparkar district.

Farmers told journalists that reports were received about the swarms landing in barrage areas of Kaloi in Tharparkar, most parts of coastal areas of Badin and eastern parts of Umerkot district.

They deplored that federal and Sindh governments had not made any serious efforts to kill off the insect and save their crops from further destruction being wrea-ked by millions of locusts.

Farmers from western Thar and Umerkot districts said that the insects had already decimated their crops and all the traditional methods to force them away by beating drums and lighting bonfires to smoke them out had completely failed. The insect was still breeding in their areas and they were totally helpless before it, they said.

They lashed out at the functionaries of federal plant protection department and the Sindh government for their indifferent attitude towards massive losses caused by the deadly locust onslaught.

They demanded the federal government send aircraft to their areas to carry out aerial spray of anti-locust insecticide and exterminate the threat.

Published in Dawn, December 6th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1520619/growers-body-demands-all-locust-infested-areas-be-declared-calamity-hit

SUGAR TO BE EXPORTED ONLY UNDER 'SPECIAL CONDITIONS': RAZAK

By TAHIR AMIN & ZAHEER ABBASI on December 6, 2019

Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce, Textile, Industry and Production Abdul Razak Dawood on Thursday said Pakistan will be exported only under special conditions.

While talking to media persons at a conference organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), he said that the government is working to provide cheaper commodities and items of everyday use to the consumers. Dawood said that sugar will now only be exported under special conditions and not as a regular item on the export agenda.

Dawood further said that sugar will only be exported after thoroughly checking the amount of it produced in the year, and if the production is in access of the demand, only then it would be exported. He further said the government would provide subsidy on sugar at utility stores. The government will export rice. He added that a big delegation would be taken to Africa next month in this regard.

He further said industrial policy is in final stage. He also hailed the Pak-China Free Trade Agreement under which Pakistani traders will get the opportunity to export 313 new products to the Chinese markets. The two countries have completed all the legal procedures and formalities to start implementation of the agreement.

"It's not the number of years Babar Ali lives, it is the number of hearts that he touched and he touched my heart too," he said while narrating the story of how the LUMS was established by Babar Ali.

A galaxy of renowned leaders from different fields paid glowing tributes to Syed Babar Ali here at a grand plenary organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute on the last day of 22nd Sustainable Development Conference here under the title 'Living Legends of Pakistan Plenary: Life and Work of Dr Syed Babar Ali (Order of the British Empire).'

Syed Babar Ali, the businessman, philanthropist, educationist and founder of Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), said that he enjoyed every moment of his life and wishes to continue his pursuit for the rest of his life. He also thanked SDPI and his friends to celebrate his life and work.

SDPI's Executive Director Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri presented him the Living Legend shield in recognition to his meritorious services for humanity.

Chairman Higher Education Commission Dr Tariq Banuri said that the true history is constituted by those people who made and built this country through their matchless contributions, and they are the real heroes. He said Babar Ali is among those living legends who built institutions like LUMS which indeed was a great contribution in nation-building.

Former Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz said Babar Ali is an institution builder, great business leader and above all a patriotic Pakistani, who always cares for others around him.

Former Chairperson of National Commission on the Status of Women Khawar Mumtaz commended the Babar Ali for his efforts and love for conservation of art and heritage as well as his contribution for conservation of environment and wildlife.

Dr Parvez Hassan, senior advocate of Supreme Court of Pakistan, said that Babar Ali empowered and inspired so many individuals in various fields and is a role model in his life. He said Babar Ali is a man of principle, who never compromised on merit.

Earlier, speaking at a panel discussion on Achieving Food Security in Digitalized World, Androulla Kaminara, ambassador-designate, delegation of the European Union to Pakistan, said Pakistan has moved from 7th to 5th position in connection with vulnerabilities to climate change. She said only in Interior Sindh two million people are worst hit of food shortage due to drought.

Dr Arnold Elepano from University of Philippines recommended, "We need to develop roadmap for Smart Farm Development to include research agenda, pilot testing and information advocacy." He said the government should provide enabling environment to promote the use of digital technology to increase farm productivity.

Prof Dr Allah Bakhsh, Dean of Faculty of Agricultural Engineering and Technology, University of Agriculture Faisalabad, said that it is an established fact that adoption of appropriate technology enables farmers to modernize their management practices which result in increasing crop yields, reducing crop failure, and ultimately increasing farmer's income, i.e. leading towards profitable farming.

Speaking at a concurrent session on 'Digital Financial Inclusion: Challenges and Opportunities,' PPP MNA Syed Nadeem Qamar accused the banks of discouraging people in using electronic money transfer by imposing high taxes. He said that change in public behavior is the only challenge in the way of financial inclusion. The government policies and difficulties in account opening procedures have financially excluded a larger population, especially the old age people and women, he said and stressed the need for holistic approach towards forming effective policies.

Nadeem Hussain, founder of Easypaisa, said that there are enough elements in place to make Pakistan completely digital. Just like any other country of the world, Pakistan has also moved forward in terms of technology and prosperity, he said, adding, "We need to appreciate ourselves what we have done so far specifically in field of digital inclusion."

At a panel discussion titled 'Leaving No One Behind in the Skills Development Agenda in Pakistan,' Parliamentary Secretary for National History and Literary Heritage Division, Ghazala Saifi stressed the need for inculcating technical and soft skill development and trainings in the curriculum to prepare future generations to meet the challenges of digital revolution.

Michael Meyer, Executive Director of Democracy Reporting International, Germany, joined the conference via Skype. He highlighted the issues of how genuine social media debates are easily manipulated and what that means for genuine humanitarian or human right causes.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/06/550924/sugar-to-be-exported-only-under-special-conditions-razak/

NEW WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE TO ADD RS3B TO FARMERS' KITTY

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 6, 2019

LAHORE: The farmers in Punjab will get an additional profit of Rs3 billion on wheat sale after the federal government decided to increase the support price of wheat from Rs1,300 to Rs1,365 per 40 kilogrammes.

However, the current price of 20 kilogrammes of flour will be increased by at least Rs35 to Rs40 in April next year and the consumers will have to bear an additional financial burden of Rs50 million per day ie Rs18.25 billion annually.

Moreover, the Punjab government will have a limited carry forward stock of wheat; unlike the past, because of that, the government will have to take the exemption from the conditions of Smart Programme of World Bank (WB) once again for setting the purchase target of at least four million tonnes of wheat.

In a recent meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan, the purchase price of wheat support price across the country was increased from Rs1,300 to Rs1,365 per 40kg, while sugarcane support price in Punjab was increased to Rs190 from Rs180 to per 40kg.

The support price of wheat has been increased after five years and the support price of sugarcane after four years.

In 2014-15, the government raised the support price of wheat from Rs1,250 per 40kg to Rs 1,300, which has not been increased since then.

Prior to this in 2012-13, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government had increased the support price from Rs1,050 to Rs1,150 while from 2008-09 the PPP government had increased the purchase of wheat by Rs100.

Similarly, the support buying of wheat in Punjab by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government had increased from Ra150 to Rs160 in 2013-14 and this was increased next year to Rs170 and then to Rs180 in 2015.

The annual production of wheat in Punjab is more than 18 million tonnes and by increasing the price per tonne by Rs65, the farmers will get an additional Rs3 billion. However, it will increase the financial burden on consumers.

Approximately, 1.3 million bags of flour are sold in Punjab daily. At this time, the department of food is selling wheat purchased at Rs1,300 to flour mills at a price of Rs1,375 per tonne and the government has fixed a rate of Rs808 per 20kg bag of flour.

If the current formula is also applied in the next year as well, the price of a 20kg bag is expected to increase by Rs35 to Rs40. However, it remains unclear if the government will increase the subsidy to reduce the prices further or tries to find another way to tackle the situation.

The Punjab food department will have less carry forward stock, which will require the authorities to buy at least 35 to 40 million tonnes of wheat. In this situation, the Punjab government will have to take exemption from the World Bank's Smart Programme.

Under the agreement with the World Bank, the food department of Punjab is to reduce its wheat procurement to two million tonnes in three years.

The wheat procurement is planned to be reduced to 20 million tonnes in 2020 but the PTI government, after taking exemption from the World Bank has purchased 3.3 million tonnes of wheat this year and now in 2020 it will be difficult for the government to implement the Smart Programme and will have to take another exemption from the WB.

If the official wheat procurement for the last five years is to be examined, then in 2015-16, the food department of Punjab procured 3.23 million tonnes of new wheat while it had carried forward stock of 2.6 million tonnes of wheat. In 2016-17, 3.99 million tonnes of new wheat was procured along with 2.6 million tonnes of carry-forward stock.

In 2017-18, with a carry-forward stock of 3.6 million tonnes, 3.9 million tonnes of wheat was procured. In 2018-19, 3.63 million tonnes of new wheat was procured along with 4.6 million tonnes of carry-forward stocks.

While in the current year, the wheat procurement department of Punjab has procured 3.35 million tonnes of new wheat while it has a carry forward stock of 1.56 million tonnes of wheat.

So far this year, the food department has sold 1.5 million tonnes of wheat and has 3.3 million tonnes of more wheat. The current daily sales are more than 21,000 tonnes and the department has to deliver the wheat till April 30.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 6th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2112599/1-new-wheat-support-price-add-rs3b-farmers-kitty/

SUPPORT SOUGHT TO BOOST HONEY EXPORT

Bureau Report December 07, 2019

PESHAWAR: The business community here has demanded of the government to give facilities to beekeepers so as to increase honey export to other countries and overcome joblessness in the country.

The demand was made by Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Maqsood Anwar Pervaiz at a meeting with the representatives of All Pakistan Beekeepers Exporters and Honey Traders Association, led by its president Saleem Khan, at the Chamber’s House, according to a press release issued here on Friday.

The chamber chief said that beekeeping had emerged as a sector with the second biggest export potential, but honey harvesting business was on decline in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa owing to lack of facilities for the beekeepers.

He stressed the need for organising proper training for beekeepers, easiness in issuance of the permit and creating awareness of packing and quality control so that they could export honey products in an efficient manner.

SCCI vice-president Abdul Jalil Jan, the association office-bearers and exporters, including Sher Zaman, Gul Badshah, Haji Israrullah, Abdul Rehman and Anwar Shah, were also attended the meeting.

Mr Pervaiz said that SCCI had planned to set up a business facilitation centre to resolve issues of the community under one roof.

He said the business community’s reservations about property tax had been discussed with the officials concerned.

He said that honey sector was vital for the country's economy so there was a need to resolve issues of beekeepers to give boost to honey export.

On this occasion, Saleem Khan apprised the meeting of impediments and issues of the community.

He appreciated the chamber's president for assuring them of efforts for establishing a training centre for beekeepers, providing one-time grant and curbing deforestation for increasing honey production and export.

Published in Dawn, December 7th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1520861

SINDH GOVT DIVERTED ALL ITS RESOURCES TO CONTROL LOCUSTS, SAYS RAHU

Staff Correspondent December 07, 2019

HYDERABAD: Sindh Agri-culture Minister Ismail Rahu has said that the provincial government has div-er-ted all its resources to the control of locusts. He ackno-wledged that the locusts' swa-rms spiralling in various parts of Sindh were a potential threat to the wheat crop, but expressed the hope that the menace would be controlled within a fortnight.

Mr Rahu was speaking at a press briefing held in the directorate of agriculture extension here on Friday. He said the federal government would also have to strengthen its plant protection department to achieve the desired results and avert such locusts' invasions in coming years.

He regretted that currently the plant protection department could provide only one aircraft for aerial spray so far and committed provision of another one soon. He noted that 17 of its 20 aircraft were lying out of order. He said the provincial government would need at least three such aircraft for the operation. Under the bridge finance arrangement, Sindh government had released Rs10 million for the department, which lacked adequate fuel and pesticides.

The minister said that the Sindh government had on its own released Rs330m for evolving a proper system to counter the locust threat. Soon, six imported sprayer-fitted vehicles would be inducted and employed to carry out ground operation against the swarms, he added.

He said that staff from all wings of agriculture department had been engaged for ground operation.

'Menace will hopefully be overpowered within a fortnight'

He said the swarms, which had entered Sindh from India, were now moving towards Balochistan.

Mr Rahu apprehended that in case of fresh breeding, the population of locu-sts might multiply manifold. However, he said, the Sindh government was in constant coordination with the federal government and had also declared an emergency to meet the challenge.

He promised that a survey of affected areas would be conducted and, if need be, the worst-hit areas would be declared calamity-hit.

Sharing official figures with the media, presence of locusts' swarms was repor-ted from areas measuring 575,000 acres or 407 square kilometres.

He said that 101,613 acres of cropped area was partially affected by locusts. A total of 44,404 acres had been covered through gro-und sprays while aerial spray was carried out on 17,654 acres of desert areas.

The minister said that 40 teams of the agriculture extension department were in the field in addition to the 18 joint teams of the agriculture extension and plant protection department.

Speaking on other issues, the minister pledged that official sugar cane rate would be notified soon. He maintained that the delay was caused because the Sindh government was waiting for Punjab to fix its official rate. He hinted that the rate in Sindh would be a few rupees more than that of Punjab.

The agriculture extension department was sending another 15 field teams today (Friday) to join the operation.

He said the Sindh government was making effort to fix a rate acceptable to both cane growers and sugar millers in order to avoid litigation, often resorted to by the latter over the issue.

Mr Rahu claimed that 26 sugar mills had started cane crushing and a few others did not do so for different reasons.

Published in Dawn, December 7th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1520814/sindh-govt-diverted-all-its-resources-to-control-locusts-says-rahu

FARMERS ASKED TO REMOVE WEEDS FROM STANDING CROPS

By RECORDER REPORT on December 7, 2019

The Met Office has asked the farmers to step up efforts to remove weeds from the standing crops to help scale up production, besides urging them for planning irrigation plans. It said that the weeds removal is ‘very important' since they utilise moisture and food meant for the crops growth. It warned that the weeds inflict a ‘considerable' loss in yield on farmers every year.

“Use proper precautions during picking of cotton because the cost of good and clean quality cotton is high than that of the filthy one," the Met said, adding that harvesting of peanuts may be completed and the fields should be ploughed well soon after. Farmers should schedule the irrigation plans for the upcoming Rabi season crops.

Punjab: Cold and dry weather is expected in most upper areas until Dec 10. Fog is likely to prevail in few plain areas of Punjab during morning and night.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Cold and dry weather is expected till next Tuesday. Sindh: Dry weather is expected in most areas during the next four days. Fog is likely to prevail in few plain areas of Upper Sindh.

Baluchistan: Dry weather is expected in the most areas. However, isolated rain-thunderstorm is expected in western Baluchistan during the mid of next week.

Gilgit-Baltistan: Cold and dry weather is expected in the most areas. Kashmir: Cold and dry weather is expected over the period.

Day time temperature is likely to be below normal whereas night time may remain slightly above normal in the most of the agricultural plains of the country over the period. Generally, normal wind pattern may prevail in the most of the agricultural plains of the country.

In the next 24 hours, cold and dry weather is expected in most parts of the country. Fog is likely to prevail in few plain areas of Punjab and Upper Sindh during morning time. “Dry continental air is prevailing over most parts of the country," the Met said.

Weather in Karachi is expected to remain fair to partly cloudy with cool nights, as temperature may range between 16 and 18 degrees Celsius with 35 percent humidity in the next 24 hours.

In the past 24 hours, weather remained cold and dry in most parts of the country, while very cold in northern parts. Skardu and Astore witnessed minus 8 degrees Celsius, each, Gupis minus 7, Gilgit minus 5, Bagrote and Kalam minus 4, each, Parachinar minus 3, Kalat minus 2, Chitral, Dir and Bunji minus 1, each.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/07/551175/farmers-asked-to-remove-weeds-from-standing-crops/

FEARS OF WHEAT SHORTAGE AS SINDH GOVT FAILS TO MAKE PAYMENTS TO PASSCO

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 7, 2019

LAHORE: Fears of a severe shortage of wheat in Sindh are growing as the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO) has stopped the supply of wheat to the provincial government after the latter’s failure to make timely payments for the previous consignment.

Retailers and wholesalers are expecting both the availability and price of the commodity to be affected as the supply has been stopped for the last eight days. Meanwhile, the flour mill owners, who have paid advance amounts to the Sindh food department for 90,000 bags of wheat, are still waiting for their consignments.

Last month, the Economic Coordination Committee had given the go-ahead to PASSCO to dispatch 0.95 million tonnes of its surplus stock of wheat at subsidised rates to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Balochistan. The federal government had also announced that it would bear 50% of the cost of subsidy.

The first consignment was dispatched to Sindh in the middle of November, 2019. However, non-failure of payment for the consignment within the stipulated time has forced PASSCO to suspend the supply, raising fears of wheat shortage in Sindh, particularly in Karachi. On Friday, the price of flour was recorded at Rs46 to Rs48 per kilogramme in the open market.

The chairman of the Sindh Flour Mills Association, Khalid Masood, told The Express Tribune that the supply of wheat to flour mills by both the provincial food department and PASSCO has been suspended since November 28.

According to Masood, the supply was discontinued after delays in payments by the Sindh government. He added that the Sindh food department has also stopped providing wheat from its reserves. The mill owners have been instructed to procure wheat from Khairpur, but when they approached the centre in-charge, they were told that they did not have any wheat.

Masood said that a week ago, flour mills had made advance payments to the Sindh food department through the State Bank of Pakistan, but still no wheat has been provided to them. He added that Jahangir Tareen, a close associate of the prime minister, was also informed about the situation a few days ago.

On December 6, the association wrote a letter to the federal minister for national food security, Khusro Bakhtiar, drawing attention to the fact that Sindh faces a critical situation because of the provincial food department's negligence in procuring wheat during the buying season.

Masood said that the flour mills are under tremendous pressure and there is risk of a food crisis erupting in Karachi. He demanded that the flour mills be sold wheat by PASSCO directly, instead of the Sindh food department.

According to PASSCO officials, the Sindh govt has been supplied with a total of 60,000 tonnes of wheat, but they have only paid for 24,000 tonnes. Moreover, the flour mills have already paid the full amount to the Sindh food department. The official clarified that despite the delay in payment, the supply of wheat has not been stopped.

However, sources with knowledge of the situation told The Express Tribune that the wheat is not being sold through PASSCO to godowns. Despite repeated attempts, Sindh food secretary Muhammad Laiq could not be reached for comment.

Meanwhile, a Sindh food department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Express Tribune that they had temporarily stopped the supply of wheat due to some complaints. Asked about the nature of the complaints, the official said that some flour mills had been found selling government wheat in the open market. Besides, he said, they were also trying to shift the wheat stock from Khairpur to Karachi. He added that they have paid Rs900 million to PASSCO, while the remaining amount will be paid soon.

Until now, the Sindh government has only paid Rs900 million, while the total amount due is over Rs3 billion. Speaking to The Express Tribune, the food security commissioner of the ministry of federal national food security, Imtiaz Ali Gobang, said that they had managed to supply wheat to all provinces on time and there was no delay from their side.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2113206/1-fears-wheat-shortage-sindh-govt-fails-make-payments-passco/

PASSCO HALTS WHEAT SUPPLY OVER PAYMENT ISSUE

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 7, 2019

LAHORE: After the refusal of the flour mills to pick up what they termed as 'sub-standard wheat' from warehouses, the food department of Sindh has stopped wheat supply to the mills from there and the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation's (PASSCO) stock over the past six days.

Expressing his concern, Member of Pakistan Flour Mills Association Muhammad Naeem Butt told The Express Tribune that the availability and prices of wheat have been affected in Sindh particularly in Karachi. He said a severe shortage of wheat crisis is looming if the supply of wheat to the flour mills is not restored immediately.

The Sindh government has delayed the payment of wheat procurement to the PASSCO and only Rs900 million has been paid so far of the first contract of wheat worth Rs3.67 billion. To secure the supply of 300,000 tonnes of wheat, the government will have to pay an amount of Rs11 billion to the PASSCO.

The flour mills of Sindh have already paid for 150,000 sacks of wheat to the Sindh food department through the State Bank last week.

In a letter addressed to the federal minister for National Food Security, Sindh Flour Mills Association Chairman Khalid Masood has demanded to provide wheat directly to the flour mills of Sindh.

The letter also mentioned the seriousness of the situation that has emerged due to the halt in wheat supply. He said the supply of wheat to the Sindh flour mills has been suspended from November 28.

The mill owners have been told to buy wheat from Khairpur but when they approached the wheat centre in-charge they were told that they do not have any wheat.

He said the flour mills were under severe pressure and there was a concern of food crisis erupting in Karachi. He demanded that PASSCO should directly sell flour to the mills instead of routing it through the Sindh food department.

Out of the 900,000 tonnes of wheat allocated by PASSCO, Sindh has picked up only 49,000 tonnes while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) has picked up 73,000 tonnes of wheat, which is very slow compared to the complex market situation.

While talking to The Express Tribune, Food Security Commissioner of the Ministry of National Food Security Imtiaz Ali Gopang said following the directives of Prime Minister Imran Khan, they have managed to provide wheat supply to all provinces timely and there was no delay from their side. He said the Sindh food department had made an agreement of 100,000 tonnes of wheat out of which Sindh collected only 49,000 tonnes of wheat. The agreement of another 3 million tonnes would be finalised in the next few days.

On the other hand, the flour mill owners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) have termed the wheat being supplied by PASSCO as low quality and said this wheat could only be used after using it with the quality wheat purchased from the open market.

Owing to the crisis of government wheat reserves in Sindh and K-P, Prime Minister Imran Khan had approved giving both the provinces 900,000 tonnes of wheat at concessionary prices through the federal ministry of national food security's subordinate institute of PASSCO. The federal government had also announced to bear 50% subsidy in lieu of incidental charges of wheat.

Under the agreement, the K-P's department of food is buying wheat from PASSCO but the situation in Sindh is headed towards a crisis. The agreement with PASSCO has been delayed for many days and after this, the supply of wheat to the flour mills is underway at a slow pace.

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa has picked up 73,000 tonnes of wheat out of 400,000 tonnes, while the Balochistan government has not yet picked up wheat.

The representative of Sindh food department while talking to The Express Tribune said they have halted the supply of wheat temporarily for a few days due to some complains. Complains have been received that some flour mills were selling the government wheat in the open market.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2113227/1-passco-halts-wheat-supply-payment-issue/

COMMODITIES: QUALITY ISSUES MAR COTTON TRADING

Staff Reporter December 08, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices remained under pressure owing to slow demand from textile spinners on Saturday. Shortage of quality lint is a major factor behind sluggish activity.

Even though ginners are holding substantial -quantity of cotton, textile millers are reluctant to enter into deals because of lint quality constraints, brokers said.

"The situation is highly precarious. The cotton crop size would not be more than 8.5 million bales and yet millers are not ready to enter into big deals," said cotton analyst Naseem Usman.

According to estimates, textile spinners have purchased around 6m bales from local market. Ginners are still holding huge unsold stocks of around 1.4m bales while another 1.2m bales are expected to arrive during the remaining part of the season.

Falling cotton prices on ready counter also forced official spot rates to be slashed by Rs200 to Rs8,800 per maund during the week.

The world leading cotton markets gave mixed trend. New York cotton recovered partially while Chinese and Indian markets were under pressure.

The following deals were reported to have transpired on ready counter: 1,000 bales, station Ghotki, at Rs8,900-9,200; 1,000 bales, Khairpur, at Rs7,950-8,500; 1,400 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,000; 3,000 bales, Khanpur, at Rs8,900-9,000; 1,400 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs8,000-9,000 (conditional); and 400 bales, Mianwali, at Rs8,800 (conditional).

Published in Dawn, December 8th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1521038/commodities-quality-issues-mar-cotton-trading

KP TO PROVIDE WHEAT AT SUBSIDISED RATE TO MERGED DISTRICTS: CM

By RECORDER REPORT on December 8, 2019

KP Chief Minister Mahmood Khan has said that the provincial government is going to give subsidy on wheat to the newly merged districts (NMDs) of the erstwhile FATA. A summary in this regard, he said is already prepared.

He was talking to a delegation of Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) KP Chapter here at Chief Minister's House on Saturday. The delegation was comprised of the Chairman, PFMA KP, Mohammad Iqbal Khan, and Group Leader Mohammad Naeem Butt, Haji Musarrat Shah, Abid Khan, Mohammad Arif and others. Provincial Minister for Food, Qalandar Khan Lodhi, Secretary Food and other concerned authorities were also present on the occasion.

The Chief Minister said that the provincial government had banned the transportation of wheat outside the province to meet our own requirements on priority basis.

He said that he belongs to the same province and their problems are the same and we should have to join hands for the resolution of the problems faced by the people and give relief to them.

The Chief Minister said that the provincial government is fully aware of the requirement and problems of the flour mills association. He said that the shortage of wheat had overcome and also the problems of the association in realistic manner.

Earlier, the delegation of the flour mills association briefed the Chief Minister regarding problems faced by them and requested further increase in the wheat quota purchased from Punjab. Furthermore, they also proposed the allocation of wheat quota for merged districts.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/08/551394/kp-to-provide-wheat-at-subsidised-rate-to-merged-districts-cm/

SARSABZ HOSTS EVENT TO HIGHLIGHT ISSUES OF FARMERS

By RECORDER REPORT on December 8, 2019

Pakistan's leading fertilizer brand Sarsabz, as part of its ‘Salam Kissan, Sarsabz Pakistan' initiative, hosted a special event to celebrate the role and contribution of farmers at Mehran Culture Auditorium in Sukkur.

The event was attended by local residents from all walks of life as well as special Government dignitaries who graced the occasion including Mayor of Sukkur Barrister Arsalan Islam Sheikh, Provincial Minister Transport Syed Awais Qadir Shah, President of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf Sukkur Mobeen Jatoi and DPO Irfan Sammo.

Representatives from Fatima Group were also present at the occasion to receive the guests including Regional Sales Manager Waheed Ali Talpur and Development Head Abdul Samad Abro.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/08/551352/sarsabz-hosts-event-to-highlight-issues-of-farmers/

KINNOW EXPORT BEGINS WITH A TARGET OF 300,000 METRIC TONS

By RECORDER REPORT on December 8, 2019

Export of Kinnow from Pakistan has commenced and an export target of 300,000 metric tons has been set for the current season which is expected to generate valuable foreign exchange of $ 19.5 million during this season.

This year, the expected Kinnow production will be some 2.2 million tons, out of which some 15-20 percent would be exported.

Waheed Ahmed Patron-in-Chief All Pakistan Fruit & Vegetable Exporters, Importers & Merchants Association (PFVA) has said that keeping the huge losses sustained by the Kinnow exporters in Russian market during the previous season the export target for the current year has been kept 50,000 tons less compared to the last year.

“Due to stiff competition in the Russian market, the exporters exported Kinnow at lower cost even less than actual cost of shipments and suffer a financial loss of around $ 6 million in the previous Kinnow season. The exporters of Kinnow from countries of our competitors are rendered financial support by their respective governments, while there is no incentive for Pakistani Kinnow exporters from the government", he mentioned.

In order to attain the export target of 300,000 metric tons, close coordination and cooperation among the shipping companies, ministries concerned and departments is needed. There is also need to ensure improved line, he added.

“Since the existing Kinnow orchards have already completed their life cycle and don't have adequate resistance to protect against effect of climatic changes and diseases, thus we are now confronted with issue of quality hence it's need of the hour to harvest new varieties of citrus fruits", Waheed urged.

The season of citrus fruits is limited to a period of four months, however, with production of new varieties this period can be extended to eight months and the current export volume can be enhanced to US$ one billion.

He said that concerted efforts would be required on government level so that with extensive Research & Development (R&D) new orchards with new varieties can be established across the country. If new orchards with new varieties are not established, the existing export of citrus fruits would be badly affected, he cautioned.

Due to serious issues of quality, the PFVA has “self-imposed" ban since year 2014 on export of Kinnow to Europe. The Europe is a huge International maker for Pakistani Kinnow and can easily accommodate around 1000 containers, however to avert any likely ban by the Europe, Pakistani exporters stopped export of Kinnow to Europe.

The European market offers better price of Pakistani Kinnow compared to other conventional international markets and had export of Kinnow continued to this market, the export should have enhanced by 50 percent.

While putting great emphasis on improvement of quality and exploration of new varieties to tap the European market, Waheed said since Pakistan does not have “Quarantine Protocols" signed with some countries, exporters are facing difficulties to explore new markets.

He has stressed upon the Federal Ministry of National Food Security & Research and the provincial governments to initiate the process of R&D in the horticulture sector so that serious concern over the food security can be promptly addressed.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/08/551364/kinnow-export-begins-with-a-target-of-300000-metric-tons/

WASA PLANS TO USE ABLUTION WATER FROM MOSQUES FOR IRRIGATION

QAISER SHIRAZI NOVEMBER 8,2019

RAWALPINDI: At the onset of the new decade, the water and sanitation utility of the city has come up with a novel idea to utilize ablution water flowing out of mosques for irrigation.

It is also planning to channel rainwater to underground tanks and reservoirs for both irrigation and grey-water flush system.

The Rawalpindi Water and Sanitation Agency (Wasa) will use pipes to channel water coming from ablution places of mosques to underground storage tanks for further use in irrigation. Unlike household and industrial effluent, the waste-water from wazu was devoid of chemical.

“We are going to start this project from our own resources at the beginning of the New Yewr,” Wasa Managing Director Mohammad Tanveer said talking to The Express Tribune. If successful the initiative will be expanded across the city, he said talking about the New Year resolution of the agency.

Initially, ablution water from Sunehri Mosque in Liaquat Bah will go in a storage tank built in the park. Going forward, in the new decade, all mosque will be barred from dumping ablution water in sewerage line. This wastewater will be stored in tanks via separately laid pipelines, Tanveer explained.

https://epaper.tribune.com.pk/DisplayDetails.aspx?ENI_ID=11201912080258&EN_ID=11201912080086&EMID=11201912080028

FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL BODIES LOCK HORNS OVER PESTICIDE LAWS

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 8, 2019

LAHORE: The enforcement of agricultural laws has landed two government departments at odds, as the federal ministry demands to replete the Punjab Agricultural Pesticides Act 2012 and the Punjab Agricultural Pesticides Rules 2018. The Federal Ministry of National Food Security And Research, at odds with the Punjab agriculture department, believes the two laws are redundant in the presence of the all-encompassing National Pesticide Act.

While on the other hand, the agricultural department has stated that all pesticides will need to be registered with the department if they are to be sold within the province. Further, the department has also denied the repletion of the provincial law, stating that such a scenario will only be imaginable if the federal ministry reinstates its extension officers as pesticide inspectors.

Details reveal that almost 100% of pesticides sold in the country are imported from abroad—especially china— only to be locally packaged and sold in Pakistan. Details further reveal that these pesticides have their major buyers in Punjab, which houses more than 22,000 pesticide shops across the province.

Previously, the federal government had introduced the Agricultural Pesticide Act 1997, which allowed the extension department and the pest quality and control department the authority to inspect pesticides on a provincial level in Punjab. But owing to differences in legalities between the federal authorities and the provincial officers, the Punjab government later formulated the Punjab Agriculture Pesticide Act 2012 to replace the previous legislation.

Although enacted, there was little done to ensure the implementation of the new legislation, which left the federal law to remain relevant for the years to come. However, On January 1, 2017, The Federal Ministry of National Food Security And Research, also revoked the authorities of pest inspectors awarded to officers from the extension wing of the Punjab agricultural department, which took a toll on the entire agricultural system in the province.

Currently, the Punjab Agriculture Department's pest warning wing employs nearly 150 field officers, who lack transport and other fundamental facilities. The wing also lacks the required network in the villages, which creates a further roadblock in the way of pesticide accountability.

The department of extension, on the other hand, employs over 11,000 field staff members in Punjab, who possess access to each village in the province and are also equipped with all required facilities and resources. However, with the withdrawal of authority, the department's jurisdiction is limited to inspecting fertilizers.

While efforts are being carried out to resolve the dispute between the two departments, the federal ministry has maintained its demand for the registration of pesticides to be eligible for sale in the province — a mandate, the agricultural department has been actively protesting in its letters to the ministry.

According to sources, Prime Minister Imran Khan's close aide and unofficial advisor on agriculture, Jhangir Tareen has contacted the parties to discuss plausible solutions to settle the dispute. While sources further reveal that in the wake of a dispute between the two departments, certain entities have been using the lack of authority to paddle substandard pesticides in the province.

"We aim to offer standard and amalgamation free pesticide to the farmers in Punjab," said the Punjab agriculture minister, Noman Langrial, addressing the federal government's stance on the pesticide laws.

"The withdrawal of pest inspectors' authority has created certain issues but we do not want to be at odds with the federal ministry and hence we have not fully enforced the provincial law as yet. But we expect the matter will be resolved within the next few weeks," Langrial added.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, federal secretary NFS Hashim Popalzai said that all pesticides being used in the country are imported from other countries, and hence the federal law is more effective.

"We have asked the Punjab agriculture department to hold consultation with us and withdraw the provincial law so that the laws do not contradict each other and that the entities benefiting from don't engage in forgery with the farmers," Popalzai concluded.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 8th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2113683/1-federal-provincial-bodies-lock-horns-pesticide-laws/

KINNOW EXPORTS TO GO DOWN THIS SEASON

By Our Correspondent Published: December 8, 2019

KARACHI: Old farming practices have led to deterioration in the quality of Pakistani fruits which, in turn, is making exporters less competitive in the international market, said All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters Association (PFVA) Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed.

In a statement on Saturday, Ahmed said the country's kinnow exports would be lower by 50,000 tons in the current fiscal year compared to the previous year because Pakistan's competitors were giving it a tough time in the international market.

"Exports of kinnow from Pakistan have just commenced and exporters have set a target of 300,000 tons for the current season, which is expected to fetch $194 million in foreign exchange," he said. "Of the expected production of 2.2 million tons, around 15-20% will be exported."

Pakistani exporters focus less on the European market as they fear imposition of a ban on the country's fruits due to substandard quality. This also makes other countries cautious. He disclosed that the exporters had intentionally stopped exports of kinnow to Europe, fearing a ban over quality issues.

Majority of Pakistan's kinnow was exported to Russia but last year Pakistani businessmen suffered hefty losses because competing countries offered better varieties at lower prices, he pointed out.

Ahmed added that due to the stiff competition in Russia, the exporters had to sell kinnows at a price lower than the actual shipment cost, which caused a loss of around $6 million.

"Keeping in mind the huge loss, the exporters have reduced the export target for the current season by 50,000 tons," said Ahmed. "Kinnow exporters from competing countries are given subsidies by their respective governments while Pakistani exporters can only wish for such privileges."

Exports of Kinnow to Iran discontinued nine years ago due to which Pakistan faced a yearly dent of $40 million in revenues as it had exported around 80,000-90,000 tons of kinnow to the neighbour annually.

He argued that if Iran could export tomatoes and other edible items to Pakistan, then why Pakistan could not ship kinnow.

The official underscored the need for close coordination and cooperation among shipping companies, ministries and departments concerned to achieve the export target of 300,000 tons.

"If there are no disturbances in kinnow supply or transportation-related issues, we will leave no stone unturned to surpass the export target," he emphasised.

Lamenting that kinnow farms in Pakistan had completed their lifecycles, he stressed the need for harvesting new varieties of citrus fruit.

"The season of citrus fruit is limited to four months, however, with the production of new varieties, it can be extended to eight months, which means exporters will have a longer time frame to export and increase the export volume," Ahmed said.

However, he cautioned that the establishment of new orchards could take four to five years.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 8th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2113624/2-kinnow-exports-go-season/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DEC 09th TO DEC 15th 2019

CENTRE SENDS TWO PLANES TO HELP SINDH FIGHT LOCUSTS

Hasan Mansoor Updated December 09, 2019

KARACHI: The agriculture department on Sunday said two airplanes and eight vehicles joined the Sindh government's efforts to eliminate swarms of locust in various districts of the province.

"The plant protection department of the ministry of national food security and research has provided two aeroplanes and eight vehicles to help us in combating the locust in various districts of Sindh," said a spokesperson for the ministry.

Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu confirmed it, saying such a help from the federal government had been made only after the loss of several days when the locust had already played havoc in many regions of the province.

"Had the federal government acted promptly in eradicating locust in Sindh, this menace would have not headed towards Punjab and Balochistan," he told reporters.

He said despite repeated requests made by the Sindh government the federal government had turned a deaf ear as the destruction was already too expensive for the national economy.

"Even the federal government is not too attentive towards this issue and if it continues to be oblivious towards the menace, locust swarms could head towards Islamabad and Banigala," the minister said.

The minister said the two airplanes and eight vehicles given by the plant protection department were being used along with 23 vehicles of the provincial government to combat locusts.

He added a plane, spray machines and several vehicles were being used to combat against locusts in Umerkot district and parts of Khairpur district including Nara desert and Tajal, etc, which were gravely affected by the marauding locust swarms.

"Teams of our agriculture department are working from dawn to dusk," he said.

Besides, he added, 55 field teams of the provincial government were engaged in manual spraying. Each team comprised of four to five employees.

Besides, Minister Rahu said 15 teams of his department were busy in a survey of the affected areas to assess the losses incurred to the economy because of locusts.

He added another airplane and several vehicles were being used to spray in the regions of Sukkur and Khairpur districts.

Earlier, Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, whose government in Sindh crosses one decade, had criticised the federal government for ignoring the cries for help to eradicate locust in Sindh.

He had said in a similar situation when his mother was the prime minister the federal government had got helicopters from the friendly countries to eradicate locusts on time.

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah lately said the elimination of locust swarm was the responsibility of the federal government and it was not playing its role.

He said the Sindh government had provided Rs10 million to the plant protection department for purchase of pesticides for the locust.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1521249/centre-sends-two-planes-to-help-sindh-fight-locusts

SUSTAINING FOOD EXPORTS' GROWTH

From the Newspaper December 09, 2019

That depends on whether the government succeeds in reviving agriculture and food security issues are addressed without disturbing food exports.

During the first four months of this fiscal year, food exports grew to $1.36 billion from $1.17bn in July-October last year. The increase came primarily from larger shipments of rice-fish and other seafood, meat and meat products and sugar besides a rise in export prices of fruits and vegetables.

Pakistan's food export earnings have never crossed $5bn. They peaked at $4.8bn in 2017-18 before slipping to $4.6bn in 2018-19. It seems food exports in 2019-20 will remain below $5bn.

Sustaining a high growth rate in food exports requires a few things: one, we need more surplus rice, wheat and maize, which is not possible without increasing their per-hectare yields; two, we need to export more confectionary and other value-added sugar-based food items instead of raw sugar; three, we need to improve the pathetic conditions of fisheries to increase seafood exports; four, we need to cut pre- and post-harvest losses of fruit and vegetable crops to obtain a larger exportable surplus; five, we need to revamp the livestock sector to boost dairy and meat production and find new export markets for meat and meat products; six, we need to invest in all food processing industries to diversify the base of exportable food items; and seven, we should diversify export markets.

Above all, while pursuing a food export growth policy, it is crucial to ensure that this does not add to existing problems of food security.

Seafood has huge potential. But fishing continues to lack investment in nets and boats, processing and packaging. That is why our average per-tonne export price is $2,200 — less than half of India's

That, in turn, requires more effective coordination between the federal and provincial governments as well as among the provinces. Under the PTI government, the federal-provincial working relationship and inter-provincial coordination are far from ideal. For example, the federal government has involved Sindh in only four of the 13 projects launched under its much-trumpeted Rs277bn National Agricultural Emergency Programme. Grievances of the smaller provinces about the judicious distribution of irrigation water also refuse to go away. A lack of effective day-to-day coordination between Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa recently aggravated a wheat flour crisis across Pakistan.

The wheat and wheat flour crisis also betrays the government's seriousness in ensuring food security. The crisis happened at a time when we had 7m tonnes of carryover stocks. Delays in decision-making on maintaining strategic reserves and exporting surplus wheat are common. By the time exports are allowed, international prices don't remain lucrative enough for exporters.

Besides, owing to poor storage facilities wheat stocks of the old crop do not remain fit for human consumption and a wheat crisis hits local markets.

These and countless other issues need to be resolved.

In July-October, rice exports grew 16.2 per cent to $634m from $445m a year ago, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). Data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) shows that exports to a dozen countries accounted for 60pc of the total export earnings. These 12 countries were: Afghanistan, China, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Mozambique, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, United Kingdom, United States, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The remaining 40pc rice export earnings came from all other countries.

The concentration of rice exports in a dozen markets cannot be helpful in sustaining double-digit exports' growth. Penetrating deeper into other markets is necessary. To make this happen, exporters need continuous support of our trade missions abroad.

PBS statistics reveal that exports of fruits and vegetables are growing primarily because of an increase in the per-unit price. This is partly because of firmer prices in global markets. Also, some of our exporters have improved packaging and quality of export items. If this trend persists, Pakistan can easily earn a billion dollars a year from exports of fruits and vegetables.

Exports of fruits and vegetables fetched $652m in 2018-19 and $191m in the first four months of 2019-20. Enhancing fruit and vegetable exports more through value-added products and less through direct exports is necessary to avoid the spells of scarcity in local markets when exports peak. At the same time, reducing post-harvest losses of 30-40pc in case of some fruits and vegetables ought to be reduced. This requires investments in farmers' training and modern harvesting technology and storage facilities.

Seafood has the potential to emerge as a big foreign exchange earner within our food exports. But sadly, both marine and inland fishing continue to suffer from a lack of investment in nets and boats, fish processing and packaging. That is why we continue to export seafood cheaply to the world and earn about $440m a year by exporting some 200,000 tonnes of fish and fish products. This brings the average per-tonne export price to $2,200 — less than half the average per-tonne export price of $5,000 for India's fish and fish products.

It seems our exports of meat and meat products, which brought in less than $250m in 2018-19, are likely to fetch $300m in 2019-20. The problem is the concentration of export markets. Pakistan exports 90-95pc meat and meat products to Afghanistan and six Gulf countries i.e. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Unless export markets are diversified and a number of large integrated meat processing facilities are set up, foreign exchange earnings cannot rise. Our exports of spices and frozen food also remain heavily concentrated in a dozen countries where a large number of overseas Pakistanis reside. —MA

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1521115/sustaining-food-exports-growth

INCREASE IN WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE, FINALLY

Ahmad Fraz Khan December 09, 2019

THE government has finally increased the support price of wheat to Rs1,365 per 40 kilograms from Rs1,300. The rise is significant as it came after a gap of five years.

While farmers wanted a bigger increase, the federal government has rejected the possibility of a further jump in prices. And both sides have their reasons.

The government factored in the global wheat situation, import-export parity, cost of production and domestic producer prices while increasing the wheat price. Moreover, the food circular debt has already reached an unmanageable level of Rs775 billion, and millions of rupees are required daily to service the debt. A further increase in the support price could only exacerbate the situation.

But farmers say the increase is insufficient. They wanted the price at Rs1,600 per 40kg if their representative bodies are to be believed and Rs1,400 per 40kg if official circles are to be trusted. They justify their demand by citing ever-increasing prices of fertiliser and transportation, the five-year gap since the last increase and a general inflationary trend.

This year, the federation wants farmers to produce 27m tonnes after an increase of 5pc in the official rate

“Leave the first four years. Just consider what’s happening during this year alone. In the last few months, urea and DAP prices went up by Rs200 per bag,” says Ibrahim Mughal, a farmer and the head of an agriculture think tank. “Besides, seed prices have jumped by Rs300 per 40kg.”

So, according to his calculations, even if wheat is sown on 20 million acres (the federal government’s target is 22.73m acres this year), the rise in just these there heads is likely to increase the cost of production by around Rs15bn (Rs8bn in terms of urea, Rs4bn DAP and Rs3bn seed).

Add another Rs10bn on the diesel head and the demand for Rs,1,600 per 40kg starts to make perfect sense, Mr Mughal insists.

Official circles have their own explanation for a restricted raise. They say that the Agriculture Policy Institute (API) calculated the cost of production at Rs1,349 per 40kg for Punjab and Rs1,315 for Sindh. So, the current support price at Rs1,365 means a profit of only Rs16 per 40kg given API’s calculations.

The profit does sound meagre, "but one must not forget that API's calculation already includes a premium of 25 per cent," says Dr Anjum Buttar, the director general (extension) of Punjab.

As per official calculations, a farmer who produces 32.5 maunds (1 maund = around 37kg) per acre, which is the average yield for the last five years, would be investing a little over Rs35,512 and selling the produce for Rs44,362, thus making a profit of Rs8,850 per acre.

It may not be an ideal income bracket, but is certainly not as bad as being projected by community leaders, Mr Buttar explains.

Beyond this debate, the stated logic of the increase is to encourage farmers to produce more. Last year's climatic debacle cost the country around 1.5m tonnes, as final production figures came in at 24m tonnes against the target of 25.5m tonnes.

This year, the federation wants farmers to produce 27m tonnes after the increase of 5pc in the support price.

But the fear is that this recipe may not work as much because of various reasons. First, it came too late. Punjab had already sowed over 80 per cent of its targeted 19.6m acres when the announcement came. Second, the increase in fertiliser prices is bound to dent its application and drag the final yield down. Third, the Indus River System Authority has warned of a 15 per cent water shortage during the Rabi season.

However, despite these negative factors, there is a hope. The last year's dent in production not only wiped out longstanding stocks but also pushed the price higher. Currently, wheat is selling at well over Rs1,600 per 40kg in most of Punjab. It is expected to climb up in the next few weeks as markets dry up and official stocks drain more.

This price incentive is big enough to help increase production this year. However, it is a double-edged sword: if it leads to additional production, the country might not have any problems next year. But if the crop size remains small, stockists and hoarders — given this year's massive margins — may jump in early, outmanoeuvre provincial food departments to purchase and hoard the commodity and dictate next year's flour price as they did this year to create social chaos. So, this aspect should remain on the official radar.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1521114

PTI GOVT EXTENDS LOAN WAIVER FOR FARMERS OF TRIBAL DISTRICTS

By Irshad Ansari Published: December 9, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has approved writing off loans owed by the farmers of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (Pata) between 2009 and 2012 by extending an existing relief package.

The step has been taken on the recommendation of the Senate Standing Committee on States and Frontier Regions.

To write off the loans worth Rs275 million, the government has decided to use the Rs1.17 billion funds in the State Bank set aside under the package.

In addition, a food ration scheme would be introduced for the erstwhile Fata and Pata at the earliest.

As per documents available with The Express Tribune, the committee in its meeting on January 10 this year had proposed that that the State Bank letter issued on February 2, 2011 – on writing off loans in Malakand, Swat, Buner and Chitral districts under the government's fiscal relief package — should be applied to all of the erstwhile Fata and Pata and the scope of the package be extended from 2009 to 2012.

Under the package, all debts owed by the farmers of erstwhile Fata and Pata should written off as they were not in a position to repay them because of the militancy and the army operation against terrorists there.

In a letter dated July 4, 2019, the State Bank wrote that the federal government had given it Rs5.26 billion under the financial aid package to waive off the loans.

It further read that a sum of Rs275 million was needed for the relief package's extension. Of the 5.26 billion allocated earlier, Rs4.08 billion has been used and the remaining Rs1.17 billion remains with the State Bank.

The extension of the relief package will benefit the citizens of Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Mohmand, Malakand, Swat, Buner, Shangla, Lower Dir, Malakand and Chitral.

The previous government had approved exemption from income tax on profits and gains of existing businesses conducted by individuals of the erstwhile Fata and Pata for five years.

It had approved exemption from sales tax for the retailers to facilitate general consumers. Domestic consumers of electricity would be exempted from sales tax.

Non-customs duty-paid vehicles would be allowed to be used in Fata and Pata for five years ending June 30, 2023. However, these vehicles will not be allowed to cross over to other areas of the country.

On the expiry of five years, vehicles will be regularised on payment of duty and taxes.

There was also exemption from all types of withholding taxes, except for the withholding tax on salary.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2114009/1-govt-extends-loan-waiver-farmers-tribal-districts/

RELEASE OF 50,000 TONNES OF WHEAT TO SINDH ORDERED

The Newspaper's Reporter Updated December 10, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Minister for National Food Security and Research Makhdum Khusro Bakhtyar on Monday issued directives for immediate release of 50,000 tonnes of wheat to Sindh from Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) stocks.

In a statement, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research said that there is no issue with the wheat stocks released from Passco to provincial food departments of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The minister also formulated a committee comprising representatives from Passco, provincial food departments and Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA). The committee would be chaired by Secretary Food Security Muhammad Hashim Popalzai to ensure smooth and timely distribution of wheat to the two provinces.

The meeting was attended by food secretaries of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, representatives of Punjab food department, PASSCO managing director, senior officials of the ministry and PFMA.

The meeting focused on the availability of wheat in the country and its pricing trends, releases of wheat from Passco and its financial implications.

Passco and Sindh government are also finalising a deal to be signed during next few days for the release of 300,000 tonnes of wheat to the province.

During the meeting, issues of PFMA including delayed release of wheat, transportation costs and distribution of wheat stock among flour mills of Sindh were also heard. It was unanimously agreed that PFMA will deliver wheat flour at ex-mill price of Rs43 per kilogramme in Karachi.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1521426/release-of-50000-tonnes-of-wheat-to-sindh-ordered

CABINET DECIDES: SINDH FIXES SUGARCANE PRICE AT RS 192/40KG

By RECORDER REPORT on December 10, 2019

Sindh Minister for Information, Archives and Labour Saeed Ghani said on Monday that the Cabinet after detailed discussion fixed the price of sugarcane at Rs 192/40kg. He said that Agriculture Minister Mohammad Ismail Rahu and Secretary of Agriculture Department gave detailed briefing to the Cabinet and said that Punjab had fixed the price of sugar cane at Rs 190/40kg.

Saeed Ghani said that the Agriculture Minister told the members of the cabinet that the price of sugar has also increased to Rs 66. The Cabinet was also told that 26 mills were currently had started crushing. The cabinet had also set November 30, a date to begin crushing, adviser said. It also fixed the premium for sugar cane growers at the rate of 50 paisa/kg.

He said this while addressing a press conference after the cabinet meeting on Monday. The cabinet meeting was chaired by Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah. The meeting was attended by all Cabinet ministers, administrative secretaries and other officers concerned.

Saeed Ghani said that the cabinet after discussion approved the bill to restore student unions. The cabinet decided that the bill would be introduced in the Assembly and then sent to the Standing Committee on law. The minister said that the bill would be passed only after consulting all stakeholders. He said that this was also discussed in the cabinet that student unions could not stop educational activities and secondly they could not spread hatred among the students.

Student union members would not be allowed to have weapons with them nor will they be allowed to carry these arms into the educational institution. Students' Union would work to improve discipline, environment, and to promote extra curricular activities in the educational institutions, he said. Saeed Ghani said that a student union would comprised 7 to 11 members and would be elected by students.

According to the minister, the provincial cabinet was told that the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association had requested the federal government in 2016/17 to allow exporting surplus sugar. The Pakistan Sugar Mills Association also requested that it should also be given cash freight support at Rs 20/kg as the price of sugar in the global market was low.

The cabinet was informed that the federal and the provincial governments had agreed to share the cost of subsidy on 50-50 percent basis with a rebate of Rs 10.70/kg. The Sindh government gave conditional approval to release 3.393 billion of its shares. These funds would go to the State Bank's account.

The provincial minister said that the cabinet decided that on this particular issue the decision made at the previous cabinet meeting would be met. He said that this matter was currently under investigation by the National Accountability Bureau, so the funds to the State Bank could not be issued at this moment in time as the inquiry of NAB was underway. The Minister said the National Accountability Bureau would be approached for the clearance and if the NAB had no objection then the funds would be released to the State Bank.

Saeed Ghani said the cabinet members had a detailed discussion on allowing Sui Southern Gas Company Limited to lay a pipeline from Ayesha Gas Field to the MVA Golarchi. The cabinet members were told that the land belonged to the Forest Department. The land the Sui Southern Gas Limited Company wanted to lay pipeline was 40 feet wide and 8km long. Saeed Ghani said that after discussing the issue, the cabinet instructed the Forest Department to work out the procedure according to the rules and regulations.

Saeed Ghani said that on the issue of amendment in the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1965 the cabinet decided that Minister for Transport and Law Adviser would review this amendment and the cabinet would discuss the same in the next meeting. The amendment was intended to improve issues related CNG fitness, he said.

Similarly, the Minister said that according to the Cabinet decision, the Health Minister after reviewing the amendment in Sindh Mental Health Rules 2014 would present it at the next Cabinet meeting.

He said that cabinet also approved the bill of Shaheed Allah Bux Soomro Center of Art, Design and Heritage. The cabinet decided that the bill would be tabled in the Assembly soon.

The Cabinet also approved amendment in the law Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University. After the amendment, the word sub-division would be used instead of the word town.

According to Saeed Ghani, the cabinet after discussion decided to refer the proposal of Energy Department's Minister Imtiaz Ahmed Sheikh that the Thar Coal field which was a special economic zone should be exempted from Workers Profit Participation Fund and the Workers Welfare Fund to the Finance Committee.

Sindh Minister for Information said that the cabinet also gave the authority to Energy Department's Minister Imtiaz Ahmed Sheikh to nominate the Director of The Power Company Limited.

Saeed Ghani said that the cabinet also approved Sindh Prize and Correction Service Rules 2019 at its meeting. Under these rules, arrangements would be made for immediate release older prisoners. Under these rules, the age of the elderly male prisoner would be 65 years, while the age of the elderly woman would 60 years. It had also been decided under these rules and regulations that the rights of the prisoners who had not yet been convicted would be taken care of.

The minister also informed the cabinet directed the Advocate General Sindh to file an application in the Supreme Court requiring them to transfer the money submitted by Bahria Town for the land in Sindh to the Sindh Government. According to the Cabinet's decision, the Sindh government would utilize this money for the improvement of water sector in the province.-PR

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/10/551910/cabinet-decides-sindh-fixes-sugarcane-price-at-rs-19240kg/

PROPOSED RULES FOR FOOD AUTHORITY SENT TO INTERIOR MINISTRY: CHIEF COMMISSIONER

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 11, 2019

ISLAMABAD: After the prime minister recently approved the formation of a food authority in the capital, the administration has proposed rules for the authority to the Ministry of Interior, the chief commissioner told Dawn on Tuesday.

Chief Commissioner Amer Ali Ahmed said Prime Minister Imran Khan approved the establishment of an Islamabad food authority on Nov 29.

“After the prime minister’s approval, we also moved proposed rules to the Ministry of Interior for the authority,” he said, adding that once the authority has been established the administration will ensure safe and hygienic food for residents.

“Currently, in the absence of the authority, we face several issues with inspections and subsequent action against those found [involved in] adulteration as we have to follow Punjab’s laws to conduct milk inspections etc,” he said.

Another Islamabad Capital Territory official said it was unfortunate that the capital did not have an authority to ensure hygienic food for its more than two million residents.

The matter of establishing such an authority has lingered for around a decade, with many bills in this regard being presented in parliamentary committees. The issue has remained unsettled because no practical steps have been taken to set up such an authority.

In its absence, the Islamabad food department carries out inspections under the Pure Food Ordinance 1960, which proposes nominal fines for violations.

Two bills aiming to set up a food authority in the capital are currently in the Senate and National Assembly and have been approved by the relevant standing committees.

Speaking about the bill approved by the Senate Standing Committee on Interior on Dec 9, Mr Ahmed said that with approval from the committee and the prime minister "no we are hopeful that within three months the authority will start functioning."

Published in Dawn, December 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1521542/proposed-rules-for-food-authority-sent-to-interior-ministry-chief-commissioner

WAREHOUSE WITH HAZARDOUS WASTE IN SUKKUR SEALED

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 11, 2019

KARACHI: A warehouse with large quantities of highly infectious waste was sealed in a raid conducted with police assistance on Monday in the SITE area of Suk-kur city, the Sindh Envir-onmental Protection Agency (Sepa) officials told Dawn.

The waste included infectious waste of hospitals such as used syringes, glucose bottles, surgery equipment and refuse of dialysis machines, e-waste, used leather products and refuse of pesticides.

The electronic waste inclu-ded parts of used computers, prin-ters, laptops, mobile pho-nes and other accessories.

"All of the waste was kept in an open area. No worker was found at the warehouse," said a Sepa official on condition of anonymity, adding that the waste was to be transported to Lahore where it was sold to recycling factories.

Each item of the waste would be recorded and necessary legal action would be initiated, he said.

Asked about waste's disposal, he said no strategy had been formulated yet. "The matter will be taken up at a higher level and decided. Meanwhile, contacts have been made with the landowner who apparently has rented out the property to someone."

The departmental action, he said, was part of the mea-sures being taken to ensure implementation of Sindh Hos-pi-tal Waste Manage-ment Rules.

According to sources, only four public sector hospitals located in Nawabshah, Lark-ana, Jamshoro and Sukkur have incinerators in entire Sindh, apart from Karachi.

Operation of these decades-old facilities, however, has remained under criticism and it was only after the Supreme-Court mandated water commission that the government showed some seriousness on the matter.

The process to install new imported incinerators at eight public sector hospitals in the province is yet to start.

Under Section 12 and 13 of Sindh Environmental Pro-tec-tion Act 2014, handling, import and unsafe storage and transportation of all types of hazardous waste is strictly prohibited and is a punishable offence.

It may be recalled that the lack of bio-safety control measures at healthcare facilities and unsafe disposal of hazardous waste, especially the type produced by hospitals and allied facilities such as laboratories, clinics and maternity homes, is a serious public health issue in the province.

Only a handful of hospitals in Karachi have incinerators.

Published in Dawn, December 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1521607/warehouse-with-hazardous-waste-in-sukkur-sealed

SHC GIVES SINDH CABINET 20 DAYS TO FIX QUALITY PREMIUM RATE

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 11, 2019

KARACHI: While partly striking down an earlier notification about sugar cane price, a two-member bench of the Sindh High Court on Tuesday directed the provincial authorities to convene a meeting of the cabinet within the next 20 days to determine the quantum of quality premium on sugar cane payable to growers at the end of the 2018-19 crushing season.

Over 20 sugar mills have jointly filed a petition partially challenging the May 2 notification of Sindh government regarding fixing of the quality premium as well as the minimum sugar cane procurement rate at Rs182/40kg for the season.

The counsel for petitioners prayed to the bench, comprising Justice Moham-med Ali Mazhar and Justice Agha Faisal, that his clients had no objection to the first part of the impugned notification [fixing of a minimum price of the season’s sugar cane crop], but to the second part through which Sindh government had fixed the quality premium at 50 paisa/40kg cane for each 0.1 per cent (including fraction thereof to be calculated prorate) of excess sucrose recovery about 8.7 per cent determined on overall sucrose recovery basis of each mill.

Notices also issued to respondents on plea for anti-locusts operation

The counsel further contended that the matter of determining quality premium was not placed before the provincial cabinet [for an approval].

After examining minutes of the April 24 meeting of the Sindh cabinet, the bench observed that the cabinet had decided to accord a fresh approval of minimum cane procurement rate at Rs182/40kg for the 2018-19 season in the light of the directives given by the same bench since the earlier notification was struck down. However, it ruled that since the cabinet had not taken any decision about the second part of the notification, therefore, it was being struck down with direction to the province to convene a meeting of provincial cabinet within 20 days and determine the quantum of quality premium under Section 16 of the Sugar Factories Control Act, 1950.

The same bench issued notices to the national food security and research secretary, Sindh chief secretary and other respondents on a petition pertaining to a huge locust swarm attack in the province.

The petitioner contended that the respondents had already failed to control the locusts’ attack in Balochis-tan by not carrying out aerial and ground operations. He contended that since the first generation of locusts could not be controlled, the swarm had now invaded Sindh, causing extensive damage to crops.

Impleading the national food security and research secretary, Sindh chief secretary and Sindh agriculture minister as well as

secretaries of the agriculture and supply and prices department as respondents, the petitioners sought directions for them to carry out anti-locusts operations without any further delay to protect growers' livelihood, besides conducting a survey of the affec-ted areas [to assess losses] and providing compensation/relief to affected growers.

Published in Dawn, December 11th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1521604/shc-gives-sindh-cabinet-20-days-to-fix-quality-premium-rate

JAPANESE SUPPORT FOR LIVESTOCK LINKED WITH RESULTS OF ONGOING PROJECTS

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent December 11, 2019

HYDERABAD: Japan-ese diplomat Nozo-mu Aoki has said that his government would continue its technical support in livestock sector in Pakistan on the basis of results of the ongoing cooperation.

He was speaking to the media at the end of a day-long inspection of Japan-funded projects in Sindh.

The projects included a school for deaf children, livestock farms and facilities and other schemes.

The livestock sector has a financial assistance of Rs838 million from Japan.

A buffalo calf salvation centre was set up in Hyderabad's directorate of Sindh livestock department. This will be replicated by other organisations in Sindh.

Under this programme 5,000 livestock farmers are to benefit in terms of technological training in eight different areas of livestock management for improved practices.

The Sindh government is also pitching in Rs227m in this project, which would end in June 2020.

The Japanese financial assistance was used in technology transfer, transportation and capacity building of livestock farmers to ensure growth of buffaloes and milk production.

"Pakistan is a huge country with many needs, that's why Japanese government is supporting its livestock sector," the diplomat said while answering a question. He said support through Japanese International Co--o--p-eration Agency (JICA) was supporting Pak-is-tan government in different sectors. He said that successful results were seen in livestock project and based on research and results of the project such support would continue in future.

He said that some policy issues at governmental level needed to be addressed to change mindset of farmers.

He said that sanitation was an important area farmers needed to pay heed to. He said that JICA had provided technical knowledge and it yielded good results.

JICA is supporting farmers with provision of calf to livestock farmers so that they could improve their livestock practices and increase milk production.

Pilot farmers were identified and they were provided with two female calves each in order to increase number of buffaloes for getting more per-animal milk production amid improved feed formula identified in the project with Japanese experts' advice. Journalists also met a pilot farmer, Pahlaj Kohli, in Saleh Dal village, Hyderabad rural taluka.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1521602/japanese-support-for-livestock-linked-with-results-of-ongoing-projects

AGRICULTURE SECTOR TO BE GIVEN RS 100 BILLION SUBSIDY

By ALI HUSSAIN on December 11, 2019

The federal cabinet has decided to provide Rs 100 billion subsidy to agriculture sector to ameliorate the sufferings of farmers, besides issuing directives for uninterrupted gas supply to domestic consumers in winter.

Briefing media persons after the meeting of federal cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information & Broadcasting Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan Tuesday said that Water and Power Division in a briefing told the cabinet when Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government came to power, circular debt was very high which has been brought down by this government.

The cabinet was informed that Rs 242 billion subsidy was given to protect consumers using up to 300 electricity units from fuel adjustment effects.

She said the industrial sector was given a Rs 29 billion subsidy whereas Rs 100 billion subsidy is being given to agriculture sector. She said the PM also directed the Water and Power Division to bring the summary of fixed billing for tube-well farmers in the next meeting. The cabinet also asked the division to take steps for redressing consumers' reservations about tampering with meters by Discos' employees which results in additional burden on consumers.

The cabinet appreciated the performance of the Water and Power Division in controlling line losses and taking steps to introduce a regulatory mechanism in Discos, she said.

She said that the Oil and Gas Division informed the cabinet that it inherited Rs 181 billion deficit due to bad policies of the previous government but it formulated a structural plan to protect the consumers against major increase in gas bills.

She said the cabinet was informed that Rs 10 billion subsidy was given to fertilizer industry to ensure stability in the prices of fertilizers. She said the domestic consumers were given Rs 19 billion subsidy in 2018-19 whereas the estimate of the subsidy for year 2019-2020 is Rs 30 billion.

She said the Prime Minister has directed the uninterrupted gas supply to domestic consumers in winter. Firdous said the Oil and Gas Division was directed to activate its redundant meter manufacturing industry to reduce the extra cost of gas meters, being bought from the market.

Awan said the cabinet was informed that Maryam Nawaz Sharif, PML-N's Vice President and daughter of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, has filed an application for removal of her name from the exist control list (ECL) to fly abroad and said that she may not be allowed to go abroad without any ‘concrete' reasons.

She said the application has been referred to a sub-committee of the cabinet headed by Law Minister Farogh Naseem for recommendation to be presented before the cabinet. “It happened for the first time in the world's history that a convict desires removal of her name from ECL so that she can travel aboard and take care of her ailing father [Nawaz Sharif]. Unfortunately, it shows that Nawaz Sharif only trusts her daughter and not his sons, daughters-in-laws, grandsons and grand-daughters who are already in London," she added.

She said that Law Minister Farogh Naseem apprised the federal cabinet that there is no law which allows convicts to travel abroad to visit their ailing relatives. “Why does she need to visit her ailing father in London when all of her relatives including her siblings are there to take care of him?" she asked.

She said that various ministers pointed out that a new legislation needs to be framed to stop glorifying those convicted from the court in corruption cases, especially those absconders who are sitting abroad. She said that the Prime Minister has tasked the law minister to devise a strategy under the law to bar coverage of convicts and absconders by media.

“Unfortunately, those convicts and absconders who had looted public money are glorified in the media as they frequently appear on TV channels and claim themselves innocent and criticize the government and its policies," she further said.

To a question whether the curb will only be imposed on opposition leaders, she said it is a desire of the Prime Minister to place media curbs on convicts and absconders and they will be applied across the board. She said that Law Minister will sit with Perma officials to finalise the draft law.

She said that cabinet expresses reservations over the proposal of sukuk bonds presented by Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister directed the ministry to revisit the summary and bring it back for approval before the cabinet after proper homework.

She said the cabinet also withdrew the idea of formation of a commission under the Local Government Act of Islamabad Capital Territory and also issued directives to bring it back after proper homework.

She said that cabinet gave approval to appointment of Justice Abdullah Baloch as judge Special Appellate Court, Balochistan. She said a special court has been constituted with an objective to stop smuggling.

She further said that the cabinet also approved inclusion of Irfan Mustafa, Zulkarnain Ali Khan and Haris Chaudhry as members on the board of governors of Overseas Pakistani Foundation.

She said that federal cabinet expressed its dissatisfaction over the performance of Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) and issued directives to take concrete steps for ensuring food security in the country and book the hoarders and profiteering cartels.

She said the Prime Minister has summoned the CCP for briefing on cartelization and hoarding of flour and sugar and its role in controlling the practice in the country. She said the cabinet was informed that most of the laws related to food security are obsolete and there is no harmony between the federation and the provinces.

According to her, the Prime Minister noted that the CCP has failed in its role for timely taking action against mafia and cartels as well as ensuring food security. The Prime Minister issued directives with a timeline for CCP's reforms and empowerment.

She said the Prime Minister also directed the Law Ministry to pursue on war footing the cases of stay orders obtained by different "cartels/mafias" at the level of Supreme Court and high courts through meetings with respective judges.

Awan said the cabinet also requested the superior judiciary to decide such cases on a priority basis as they are related to public interest. She said that the Prime Minister has also directed that decisions on the constitutionality of the CCP law, challenged in courts, should be expedited and the law minister should assist the speedy disposal of such pending cases.

She further said the Prime Minister expressed displeasure over vacant post of a member of CCP Appellate Tribunal which is hampering its functioning and called for earliest filling of the post.

The cabinet also constituted a committee headed by Dr Ishrat Husain to amend food security laws in the country. She said the committee would present its report in a month which would be approved by the cabinet as food security policy to get rid of the elements involved in hoarding and adulteration of edible items. She said the cabinet also condemned the latest legislation by Indian Lok Sabha that offers Indian nationality to the nationals of Pakistan and two other South Asian countries except Muslims, saying it is premised on a falsehood and is in complete violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international Covenants on elimination of all forms of discrimination based on religion or belief.

She said the Indian legislation has also, once again, exposed the hollowness of the claims of 'secularism' and 'democracy'. Pushed by the majoritarian agenda, she said, it has revealed to the world the RSS-BJP exclusivist mentality and the true extent of their animus against Muslims.

To another query about the government's strategy of creating harmony with the opposition for the passage of over 150 pending bills in Parliament, she said the government has tried its level best to appease the opposition and met its all demands but even then they are not ready to cooperate, adding that production orders of jailed opposition leaders were issued.

She said the government on the opposition's demand has introduced a bunch of bills in the National Assembly that had been promulgated through ordinance by the President.

Commenting on the remarks of PML-N leader Khawaja Asif on the floor of the National Assembly that "opposition will not cooperate with the government" allegedly as the PTI was behind the recent protest staged outside the residence of Nawaz Sharif in London, she said that on one hand Khawaja Asif is advocating for the freedom of expression while on the other he and other PML-N leaders feel offended by a peaceful protest in London during their meeting.

Referring to the recent meeting of PML-N leaders in London, she said: "All absconders gathered in London to decide what kind of legislation should be made in Pakistan."

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/11/552235/agriculture-sector-to-be-given-rs-100-billion-subsidy/?page&year=2019&monthnum=12&day=11

LOCUSTS' ATTACKS: SHC ISSUES NOTICES TO FEDERAL, SINDH GOVERNMENTS

By RECORDER REPORT on December 11, 2019

Sindh High Court (SHC) on Tuesday issued notices to Federal and Sindh Governments in a petition pertaining to swarming of the various districts of the provinces by locusts. A division bench of the SHC headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar ordered the authorities to submit their comments by December 10, 2019 in the petition, filed by Syed Mureed Ali Shah Advocate.

Federal Government through Ministry of National Food Security & Research, Chief Minister Sindh, Chief Secretary, provincial minister and secretary of agriculture department have been made respondents in the petition. Petitioner submitted that the reports, photographs and videos of swarms of locusts flying and resting around agricultural fields emerged from Mirpurkhas, Umerkot, Tharparkar, Khairpur, Dadu, Matiari, Jamshoro, Nawabshah, Naushehro Feroze and Sanghar districts, sparking fears of large-scale crop devastation and the agriculture sector would suffer huge financial losses of billions of rupees.

The petitioner also stated that situation is very serious but Agriculture Minister in a video message told the public not to fear, but enjoy locust biryani and karahi.

He said it is the duty of all the executive authorities in the federation and the provinces to protect the life and property of the common people but in this case they have failed to perform their duties as enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973.

The petitioner requested the court to direct the respondents to ensure constitutionally guaranteed right to life by carrying out aerial and ground spray operations to kill the locusts without any further delay to protect the grower's livelihood.

He also prayed the court to direct the respondents to carry out the survey of the affected areas and provie relief to the affected farmers by declaring such area stricken/damaged.

He also pleaded the court to declare that respondents failed to perform their constitutional duty by failing to carry out ground and aerial spray operations to kill the locusts which caused huge amounts of damages to Sindh's farmers.

Meanwhile, Additional Advocate General Sindh submitted the notification of sugarcane price of Rs192 per 40 kgs for the current crushing season in the province the division bench of the SHC, hearing the petition regarding non-compliance of court orders to fix the sugarcane price.

Additional Advocate told the court that provincial cabinet gave approval to the new sugarcane price for crushing season 2019-20, which has been notified by meeting all the legal requirements.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/11/552194/locusts-attacks-shc-issues-notices-to-federal-sindh-governments/

FPCCI URGES GOVT TO IMPLEMENT FOOD SECURITY POLICY

December 11, 2019

KARACHI: Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) President Engr Daroo Khan Achakzai Tuesday urged the government to implement the national food security policy which was announced in 2018 and also increase investment in agriculture research which is currently very low, ie, 0.18 percent of agriculture GDP compared to regional countries such as India 0.30 percent, Nepal 0.28 percent, Sri Lanka 0.34 percent, China 0.62 percent and Bangladesh 0.37 percent, etc.

Moreover, due to insufficient facilities and lack of technological advancement, our post harvest and supply chain losses in agriculture are also very high that also need to be curtailed. According to the Asian Development Bank studies the post harvest crop losses cost $ 1.12 billion annually.

He emphasized on the food security in Pakistan which has high linkage with human capital and strong economic implications.

While highlighting the facts and figure of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, he added that high rate of malnutrition can cost to an economy around 3-4 percent of GDP and incase of Pakistan it is around $ 7.6 billion every year.

He added that Pakistan is among the top seven countries that cumulatively account for two-thirds of the world's under-nourished population.

He stated that the food security affects our human capital particularly the future labor force.

At present, 37 percent of our population is food insecure despite the fact that Pakistan is self sufficient in major staples and the main problem is access to food.

He further stated that the malnutrition is high in rural area of Sindh and region of Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan and Fata.

He added that the State Bank of Pakistan also expressed concern over the food security situation in its quarterly report because high population growth and unfavorable water and climatic conditions in the country means that concerns regarding food security may increase manifolds over the next two to three decade.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/12/11/5-page/814534-news.html

PAD INVITES APPLICATIONS FROM CANOLA GROWERS

By RECORDER REPORT on December 11, 2019

The Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) has invited applications from the canola growers of the province to take part in the competition for achieving maximum yield per acre under the national project of edible oil crops. Those who are aspirant to compete in this project can submit their duly filled applications from December 15 to December 31, 2019.

Both male and female growers can participate in this competition having three acres or more land under canola sowing. Those who are working on a land under a joint system, tenants or lease can also apply under this project after attestation of their documents by the respective Tehsil Committee. Grower should have sown any approved or verified Canola variety over three acres of land to participate in this competition.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/11/552179/pad-invites-applications-from-canola-growers/

PM WANTS COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY TO BOOST FARM SECTOR

APP Updated December 12, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday met with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Chief for Rural Development and Food Security Dr Akmal Siddiq and discussed a comprehensive strategy to boost agricultural sector of the country.

PM Khan said the provision of all possible facilities to farmer community is government's top priority as agriculture sector was the backbone of the country's economy as a huge chunk of population was attached directly or indirectly to it.

He said the government was also focusing on fisheries and farming sectors, besides increasing production of wheat, rice and other major crops through introduction of modern modes and technologies.

The government is also keen to take advantage from the Chinese experience in the agriculture sector, he added.

During the meeting, issues pertaining to the agriculture sector challenges faced by the developing countries especially Pakistan, like technology, environment, lack of facilities in research, development and marketing which negatively impacted this sector, and the technical assistant, future mechanism and other support provided by the Asian Development Bank in the agriculture sector were discussed at length.

Briefing PM about the study conducted by the ADB and its recommendations, Akmal said the agriculture sector, under the present requirements, especially due to introduction of the modern technology, required consistent patronage from the government.

He said that special focus should be made on research and development, provision and supply of latest seeds, chemicals (fertilisers, pesticides etc), availability of financial resources, cold chain and marketing.

Kamal said the ADB had approved a grant of $1 million for the promotion of information and technology in this sector and the project would commence from next year.

Besides, the bank also plans to introduce corporate agriculture on wider scale for the promotion of agriculture sector in Balochistan province especially in the Kacchi canal area, he added.

On a separate occasion, a delegation led by ADB's Director General for Central and West Asia Department Werner Liepach met with Power Minister Omar Ayub Khan and Assistant to PM on Petroleum Nadeem Babar and announced an investment of $2 billion in the energy sector during the next three years.

The ADB remains country's top energy sector partner with $2.1bn with $300 million released this week for sector reforms including addressing the circular debt.

The meeting took stock of the ADB-funded projects in the energy sector and it was decided that a comprehensive portfolio review meeting would be held by the end of this month between Power Division and bank officials to steer the projects to their logical culmination.

It was also agreed that both sides would make efforts to ensure maximum transparency during the execution of projects.

The ADB team was also apprised regarding the approval of New Renewable Energy Policy which will be placed before Council of Common Interest in its scheduled meeting by the end of this month.

The team was also briefed regarding various steps taken by the Power Division to boost system efficiency and campaign against power theft. The team was also notified on the circular debt capping plan which is being perused and implemented by the Power Division resulting in considerable reduction in its growth from Rs39bn a month to Rs12bn per month.

The ADB also showed interest in facilitating technical studies for the gas storage facility in Pakistan and said it would consider financing the project as well, Werner Liepach added.

Published in Dawn, December 12th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1521747/pm-wants-comprehensive-strategy-to-boost-farm-sector

COTTON PRICES UNDER PRESSURE

The Newspaper's Staff ReporterDecember 12, 2019

KARACHI: Cotton prices came under renewed pressure and closed easy on Wednesday as buyers restricted their activity around quality lint. As a result phutti (seed cotton) prices also moved lower.

Textile spinners are finding it difficult to get hold of quality cotton and this is slowing down trading activity and pushing prices lower. This is despite the fact that there is a huge gap between demand and supply.

Cotton picking in Sindh has almost come to an end while second picking is going on in Punjab. However, short crop is likely to close the current season much earlier than usual period.

According to market sources, phutti prices came down in line with cotton rates. Phutti from Sindh was quoted between Rs3,000-4,500, Punjab quality range around Rs3,200-4,100 and Balochistan between Rs3,200-4,200 per 40 kg. World leading cotton markets gave mixed trend with New York cotton recovering partially, while Chinese and Indian cotton were mixed to steady.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were raised by Rs50-8,750 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 600 bales, Shahdadpur, at Rs7,700-8,000; 2,400 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,000-8,500; 2,000 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs8,900-9,000; 2,400 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs8,900-8,950; 400 bales, Dunga Bunga, at Rs8,300; 600 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs8,250; and 400 bales, Fort Abbas, at Rs8,200.

Published in Dawn, December 12th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1521739/cotton-prices-under-pressure

CENTRE NOT SERIOUS IN HELPING SINDH ELIMINATE LOCUSTS, SAYS MINISTER

Dawn Report December 12, 2019

SUKKUR: Sindh Minis-ter for Agriculture Moham-mad Ismail Rahu has said that the Centre is not serious in helping Sindh government eliminate locusts as it has provided three planes but only one pilot for carrying out spray of pesticides on the insect-infested areas.

The minister told journalists after chairing a meeting of deputy commissioners and officials of agriculture department at commissioner’s office here on Wednes-day that because of this the government had held up the aerial spray.

He asked how was it possible for one pilot to fly three planes. When they dem-an-ded two more pilots, the federal government repli-ed they had gone on training, he said.

The Sindh government had been in the field against locusts for past seven months. They wrote to the federal plant protection department while emergency centres had also been set up, he said.

At least 27 vehicles of Sindh government were working day in and day out against the scourge while planes and the pesticide to kill locusts were with the federal government. “We are ready to pay rent for the planes and cost of pesticides to the federal government,” he said.

He said the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government and its leaders could not frighten them with talk about governor rule in Sindh. Pakistan Peoples Party did not know of fear; it was used to coping with difficulties, he said.

MITHI: Locusts continued to ravage cultivated fields and all types of vegetation in Mithi, Diplo, Islam-kot, Chhachhro, Nagarpar-kar and Dahli talukas on Wednesday.

People of the affected areas told this reporter that despite alarming situation in their areas the government functionaries appea-r-ed least concerned about their plight. Nobody seemed to be making concerted and coordinated efforts to eliminate the insect, which had now grown in size, they said.

They regretted the insect had been present in Thar for five months but functionaries had not taken any serious efforts to save them from massive devastation.

Published in Dawn, December 12th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1521778/centre-not-serious-in-helping-sindh-eliminate-locusts-says-minister

GOVERNMENT URGED TO INTRODUCE MODERN HARVEST TECHNOLOGY

By N H ZUBERI on December 12, 2019

Secretary General (Federal) of the Businessmen Panel and former chairman FPCCI Standing Committee on Agriculture Produce, Ahmad Jawad has said modern technology should be introduced for pre- and post-harvest. Such technology should especially be provided to small farmers at their doorsteps, he added.

Welcoming the federal cabinet decision to provide Rs 100 billion subsidy to agriculture sector to ameliorate the sufferings of farmers, he said we are waiting for the details which is yet to be announced.

He said if we want to take up the country GDP growth to 8% then we have to strengthen the agriculture sector and in this regard a coordination committee should be formed between the federal government and provinces so that on quarterly basis they review the situation and implement the relief towards the farming community in the same time.

Jawad briefed cost of production of farmers are going beyond their range. Now it's is uncompetitive for local farmers to compete the prices internationally.

According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2018-2019, the agriculture sector growth is estimated at 0.85 percent. The sector has witnessed a negative growth of 4.4 percent during FY-2019 mainly due to negative growth (-6.6 percent) of important crops.

The production of wheat, Maize and rice have been drastically down 30% in this year while cotton production have gone down up to 45% and it is mainly due to hike of input prices of fertilisers, diesel and electricity tariff rate.

He said if the incumbent government wants to uplift the agricultural sector and its share in the GDP before ending of the ongoing finance bill of 2019-20, immediately Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) should reduce the prices of the fertilisers, reduce the electricity tariff rate for agriculture sector, and further reduce the prices of diesel so that farmers may provide some breathing space.

Jawad also said initial focus should be on increasing agricultural production and productivity through the intensification, diversification, and commercialisation of agriculture based on a sound physical, organisational and institutional infrastructure. Rural development depends on sustained growth as rural income is primarily derived from agriculture and has the capacity to meet the cost of any development programme, he added.

He said growth centres should be established for every 10 union councils that should work towards marketing produce and establishing small and medium-sized industries to create jobs for the rural population so they don't have to migrate to cities.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/12/552537/government-urged-to-introduce-modern-harvest-technology/

'EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO INCREASE WHEAT PRODUCTION'

By APP Published: December 12, 2019

LAHORE: Punjab Minister for Disaster Management Mian Khalid Mehmood said on Wednesday that a programme to increase

per acre wheat yield had been started as per the direction of Prime Minister Imran Khan and Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar.

He said this while addressing a seminar organised by Punjab Agriculture (Extension) in Sheikhupura, says a press release.

Agriculture Lahore Division Director Sher Muhammad said the farmers must follow the guidelines of the agriculture department to increase per acre yield of wheat.

He further said the growers should contact agriculture department field officers in case of any queries.

Experts said there was a capacity to increase per acre wheat yield, adding the use of the best seed, proper preparing of land, removal of weeds and appropriate use of fertilizers were vital to achieve bumper crop.

It is pertinent to mention here that under the national programme to increase per acre wheat production certified seeds, agricultural machinery and other inputs were being provided to farmers on subsidy.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 12th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2115950/1-efforts-underway-increase-wheat-production/

IN PAKISTAN, MODERN TECHNOLOGY FOR AGRI-SECTOR TOP PRIORITY

By APP Published: December 12, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Introduction of modern technology and provision of all possible facilities for the farming community are among top priorities of the government because the agriculture sector is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, said Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Talking to Asian Development Bank (ADB) Chief for Rural Development and Food Security Dr Akmal Siddiq on Wednesday, the prime minister pointed out that practical steps were being taken under a comprehensive strategy to boost the agriculture sector because a major chunk of the population was directly or indirectly associated with it.

"The government is also focusing on the fisheries sector besides increasing production of wheat, rice and other major crops through the introduction of modern methods and technologies," he said. "These sectors were neglected in the past despite the fact they have a massive potential."

The prime minister reiterated the government's commitment to take advantage of the Chinese experience in the agriculture sector.

He also appreciated the support and technical assistance extended by the ADB and welcomed the introduction of information technology. Challenges faced by the agriculture sector including outdated technology, unsupportive environment, lack of facilities in research, development and marketing were discussed at length.

In addition to these, technical assistance, future mechanism and other kinds of support provided by the ADB in the agriculture sector also came up for discussion.

Talking about the study conducted by the ADB and its recommendations, Siddiq said the agriculture sector needed consistent patronage from the government, specifically for the introduction of modern technology.

"Special focus should be on research and development, supply of latest seeds, chemicals and fertilisers, availability of financial resources, cold chains and marketing," he emphasised.

Discussing outcomes of the 2018 study on Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam, he said required infrastructure for agricultural produce had been in shambles for a long period of time and the produce, like fruits, hardly made way to the market through cold chains. He endorsed the prime minister's view that the agriculture sector had been neglected and pointed out that investment in the sector had also been negligible. "Growers do not fully reap benefits of their toil owing to poor yield," he pointed out.

Siddiq noted that the ADB had approved a grant of $1 million for the promotion of information technology in the sector and the project would commence next year. The bank is also considering providing loan to support the setting up of a modern wholesale market in Lahore.

"Besides, the bank is also mulling over introducing corporate agriculture on a wider scale for the promotion of agriculture sector in Balochistan, especially in the Kachhi Canal area," he added.

The meeting was also attended by Minister for National Food Security and Research Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar, Minister for Planning Asad Umar and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf senior leader Jahangir Tareen.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 12th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2115909/2-pakistan-modern-technology-agri-sector-top-priority/

RS460M OKAYED TO DEAL WITH LOCUST SWARMS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordi-nation Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Thursday approved Rs460 million for procurement of pesticides required to control the spread of desert locust (tiddi) in the country and sought a detailed presentation on various aspects of the challenge.

A meeting of the ECC presided over by Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh also approved Rs300m for protection of Kartarpur corridor on the request of Pakistan Army.

The meeting was informed that around nine districts in southern part of the country had come under locust attack. The Department of Plant Protection, which has been given the responsibility of dealing with the threat, has effectively dealt with locust swarms but now the government machinery is facing shortfall of pesticides and sprays.

According to a participant of the meeting, Dr Shaikh told the committee that he had received reports from some affected growers that their areas had not yet been covered by pesticide sprays. The adviser sought a detailed presentation on affected areas, action taken and areas that were still not reached out, the source added.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) will brief the ECC in its next meeting on the measures taken so far.

In the meantime, the committee also approved a technical supplementary grant of Rs459.5m on a proposal moved by the MNFSR to deal with the locust emergency threat in the country. The ECC was informed that PPD had three helicopters at its disposal and had so far cleared 170,000 hectares. The ministry said that it is being provided updates on daily basis and a WhatsApp group had been created for real time exchange of information about the locust threat, followed by field visits by the staff and then aerial sprays.

The ECC also approved the 'Enactment of Pakistan Single Window Bill, 2019' to be sent to the Federal Cabinet. The enactment of the Bill is aimed at facilitating businesses in Pakistan. The ECC was apprised that 42 government agencies were involved in granting approvals for different businesses.

Through this single window, all parties involved in trade and transport would be able to lodge standardised information and documents with a single-entry point to fulfill all import, export and transit related regulatory requirements.

The Customs Wing in the Federal Board of Revenue had developed the 'National Single Window (NSW) Roadmap and Implementation Framework' in April 2018 with the help of international experts. This initiative is expected to improve Pakistan's rating at ease of doing business index of the World Bank. The project is targeted for completion in December 2021.

The ECC also allowed the continuation of funding facility by Gas Holding Private Ltd for Interstate Gas Systems for another two years.

There will be a provision in the agreement that as soon as the first project reached closure, ISGS would have to be financially self-sustaining and it should put forward a business plan as how it would return the loan it had taken so far. The ECC approved the placement of the Annual Report of the National Economic Council (NEC) as required by Article 156 of the Constitution before the Cabinet.

The Ministry of Energy was also given an approval to its proposal for the extension and rehabilitation of gas network in oil and gas producing districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Phase 1 involving supply of gas to villages falling beyond 5km radius of Mardan Khel-III District Hangu and supply of gas to Hafizabad.

Accordingly, Sui Northern Gas Pipeline Limited (SNGPL) was allowed to execute gas development schemes recommended by Departmental Working Party (DWP). This was endorsed by the SNGPL Board of Directors along with appropriate share of the funding between the gas company and the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

On the proposal sent by the Ministry of Interior, the ECC approved allocation of Rs300m through Technical Supplementary Grant (TSG) for raising of one Special Wing of Pakistan Rangers for protection of Kartarpur Corridor on the direction of GHQ. The ECC directed that a three-member committee comprising Adviser to Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Dr Ishrat

Hussain, Secretary Finance and a representative of Ministry of Interior shall look into the details of the proposal and further rationalise the costs.

Published in Dawn, December 13th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1521986

11 SUGAR MILLS START CRUSHING WITHOUT INSTALLING EFFLUENT TREATMENT PLANTS

Mohammad Hussain Khan December 13, 2019

HYDERABAD: Eleven mills have so far started crushing sugar cane in ongoing season without bothering to comply with directives of Supreme Court-mandated commission on water supply and sanitation in Sindh, which had ordered the mills to install effluent treatment plants before the onset of 2019-20 crushing season.

The order passed on January 4 this year had also warned that in case the mills failed to comply with the directive, the Sindh Environmental Prot-e-ction Agency (Sepa) would seal the industrial units.

Sepa had yet to make a move to seal the errant mills or conduct sample analysis of effluent of the 11 mills located in the agency's Hyderabad and Sukkur regions, it was learnt on Thursday.

There are 24 mills in Hyderabad — of them 11 are owned by one group — and none of them has installed effluent treatment plants (ETPs). Eight are likely to start crushing and three will not run this season. The rest of 13 are owned by different companies and three of them will remain closed while 10 will crush cane this season. Eight of them have their plants and two have not set up their ETPs so far.

"Sampling of the 16 mills including those having ETPs or those without ETPs is to be done," said a source in Sepa. Personal hearing of mills' representatives was conducted in November after physical verification and its detailed report was lying with Sepa Karachi office, said the source.

Similarly, out of eight sugar factories in Sukkur region, six have installed ETPs. One of them has made 60 per cent progress on ETP's installation and another has to build lagoons. Their sampling is to be carried out for this crushing season. Most of these mills are located in Sukkur, Khairpur and Ghotki districts.

Since the mills' effluent affects freshwater bodies and groundwater, directly and indirectly, in rural areas to the great disadvantage of rural population, the commission had taken notice of the nonexistence of ETPs in the mills.

Sepa officials who were summoned by the commission had complained that factory owners were so powerful that they were often not allowed by factory managements to visit the mills' premises.

The commission then employed services of Dr Ghulam Murtaza Arain of Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources to have a report prepared on the sugar mills, 38 in all, which divides the factories into two categories ie the mills which have already installed ETPs and those which have either initiated the process of installation or remain without ETPs.

Under Dr Arain's supervision and as per commissions' directives, Sepa had examined reports of the mills' consultants for the establishment of ETPs and then around 18 months' time was allowed to the mills to install the plants by 2019-20 season or Sepa "would seal the (non-complying) industries".

As commission's one year term came to an end in January this year it submitted on Jan 7 the final report to the SC, which mentioned "the commission passed an order on Jan 4 that all industries have to complete installation of treatment plants and make them functional before (the start of) crushing season 2019-20 and in case of failure Sepa will seal industries".

The commission noted in the final report that Sindh had 38 sugar mills, out of which 33 were operational and five were not functioning, and only four of the operational mills had ETPs. The rest of 29 mills were functioning without ETPs, they discharged untreated effluent into lagoons and storage ponds on mills' land for evaporation, release into saline water drains (where available) or used by farmers for cultivation.

A task force that included Sepa officers later visited all sugar mills after the intervention of the commission and submitted a report with suggestions for installation of effluent treatment plants.

The commission had said that out of the 29 mills, four would complete work on ETPs in 2018-19 season and the remaining 25 submitted their Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) reports to Sepa in the second week of Dec 2018 for approval of ETPs.

All the cases of IEE were scrutinised by Sepa in the presence of member of the task force and issued IEE approvals in the first week of Jan 2019 for installation of plants.

The commission then passed the order on Jan 4, stating that "all industries have to complete installation of treatment plants and make them functional before the advent of crushing season 2019-20 and in case of failure Sepa will seal the industries".

Since then Sepa has not collected samples of effluent of mills and the agency has not issued any statement in this regard. Sepa director general Naeem Mughal was not available for comments.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1521950/11-sugar-mills-start-crushing-without-installing-effluent-treatment-plants

MODEL AGRICULTURE MARKETS TO BE SET UP ACROSS PUNJAB

By RECORDER REPORT on December 13, 2019

Punjab government has chalked out a well knitted plan costing Rs21.27 billion for establishing model agriculture markets in the Province. Under the programme Kisan Platforms would also be established in Subzi Manid (Vegetable Markets) across the Province aimed at facilitating the grower and to eliminate the role of middle man in the Punjab.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Thursday that the government was taking the step to cope with price hike, profiteering and to provide inexpensive vegetables and fruit to the consumers and specific areas would be allocated in existing in Subzi Mandi (vegetable markets) for the establishment of " Kisan Platforms" with the provision of drinking water facility and setting arrangements would made available.

The concept of the plan was an attempt to eliminate the role of middle man and to enable growers to sell their agricultural proceeds without paying market fee and commission.

Initially Kisan Platforms would be established at Sialkot, Lahore, Multan, Gujrat, Sargodha, DG.Khan, Jhelum, Chakwal, Kasur, Mianwali, Sadiqabad, Toba Take Singh, Sheikhupura, Rajanpur, RahimYar Khan and Gujranwala etc. Sources further told that farmers of tunnel farming could avail the facility for selling their agricultural produce in model markets. Work on the plan would soon be initiated in the Punjab sources added.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/13/552839/model-agriculture-markets-to-be-set-up-across-punjab/

PSC APPROVES QUINOA VARIETY DEVELOPED BY UAF

By RECORDER REPORT on December 13, 2019

Punjab Seed Council (PSC) has approved first ever Quinoa variety, a super food, titled Q7 developed by University of Agriculture Faisalabad scientists. The varsity was developed by UAF scientist Dr Shahzad Maqsood Basra and his team including Dr Irfan Afzal.

UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ashraf said this at a Memorandum of Understanding ceremony signed between UAF and Shandong Normal University China (SDNU)to establish Quinoa Breeding Centre in both universities.

The MoU was duly signed by UAF Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ashraf and SDNU Vice President Huanbin Wang at meeting Room, UAF.

Dr Muhammad Ashraf said that the Quinoa is one of the world's most popular health foods. He said Quinoa is gluten-free, high in protein, fiber, B vitamins, iron, potassium, calcium, phosphorus, vitamin E and various beneficial antioxidants. He said that it is new crop in our homeland.

In the MoU , adaptability trials of each other Quinoa germplasm will also be carried out. It was also agreed upon that faculty and students exchange programs would also be kicked off in the project. The scientific materials, publications, and other information will also be exchanged. SDNU will offer the PhD and post doc scholarships for the students of UAF in the field of agricultural sciences.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/13/552832/psc-approves-quinoa-variety-developed-by-uaf/

BALOCHISTAN CONTRIBUTES 40% TO TOTAL LIVESTOCK

By APP Published: December 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Balochistan's potential of 'Livestock Industry' offers a wide range of opportunities and prospects for local as well as the international companies to invest in this emerging sector of the region.

The province is rich in livestock resources that are contributing about 40 percent of Pakistan's total livestock population.

The development of this sector is linked with poverty alleviation as 70 percent population of the province is directly or indirectly linked with livestock related activities. The socio-economic conditions of the farmers can be boosted with investment and innovation in the industry. The local farmers aren't aware about the modern animal husbandry practices as there are no organised cattle farming activities.

Hence, the province suffers low productivity due to poor breeding and rearing. They also lack proper healthcare coverage for animals, marketing system and extension services. The provincial government is working to upgrade the dairy and livestock sectors to exploit its full potential to generate economic activities for the people of the province.

Livestock is dependent on grazing in rangelands, which makes 40 percent of the total landmass in the province. During winter, the farmers living in central Balochistan migrate with their flocks to lower lands in Sibi and Kachhi plains for the grazing purpose.

Livestock is an important sector of the rural economy contributing about 40 percent to the provincial GDP. According to an estimate, the province maintains 2.253581 million cattle, 12.804217 million sheep, 11.784711 million goats, 0.319854 million buffaloes, 0.379528 million camels, 0.059973 million horses, 0.006256 million mules, 0.471942 million donkeys and 5.911304 million poultry. Livestock contributes Rs. 20 billion with share of meat 40%, milk 35%, eggs 13%, skin, hides & wool 10% and others 2%. The province annually produces 28,000 tons of beef and 204,000 tons of mutton.

Ironically, the provincial government allocates a nominal amount for the development of this sector, which is the primary sustainable source of living for over 70 percent of the local population. The provincial government held first-ever livestock expo in Quetta on November 18-20 this year. The three-day livestock Expo aimed at increasing meat productivity to boost the economy of the province.

For highlighting the livestock potential of the province, the Government of Balochistan in collaboration with Food and Agriculture Organization (UNO), University of Balochistan, Quetta, and Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS) organised an International Conference on "Livestock in Balochistan Prospects and Opportunities" on November 08, 2019.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 13th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2116676/1-balochistan-contributes-40-total-livestock/

STRICT MEASURES: GOVT SUSPENDS WHEAT QUOTA OF SEVERAL MILLS FOR MISAPPROPRIATION

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 13, 2019

LAHORE: In a crackdown operation in the provincial capital, the food department has suspended the official wheat quota of seven flour mills involved in selling wheat in the open market instead of using the government wheat to prepare flour. Besides, some mills were also found to be involved in supplying insufficient quantities of flour for which the mill owners concerned have been issued show-cause notices.

The shortage of supply in the market has created a crisis as the demand for flour increases in the winter season. The food department, therefore, has decided to seek permission from the provincial cabinet to increase the total supply of official wheat to flour mills. Accordingly, the amount will be increased from four million tons to 4.5 million tons to ensure the consistent availability of flour and the stabilisation of fixed government price during the peak season. For the purpose, a summary of the decision to seek authorisation will be forwarded to the provincial cabinet soon.

Punjab is the only province in the country where flour is being sold at the prescribed rates set by the provincial government. In the other three provinces, prices ranging from Rs100 to Rs150 per bag are being overcharged from the public. According to details, Secretary Food Waqas Ali Mehmood and Director Food Wajid Ali Shah have set up a procedure to ensure 100 per cent grinding of the government wheat supplied to flour mills.

Per the practice, all flour mills are liable to provide their monthly electricity bill to the food department from which a comparison is drawn between the mills' electricity consumption and the quantity of government wheat provided to them.

During an inspection carried out by the food department Lahore, it was revealed that the electricity bills provided by Afzal Flour Mills, Ramzan Flour Mills and Good Luck Flour Mills were not consistent with the amount of wheat that they have received from the food department. As a result, the official wheat quota of the three mills was suspended upon the directives of director food and show-cause notices were also issued.

The food department's monitoring also revealed that the supply of flour from Al-Rai Flour Mills, Ali Hajvery Flour Mills, Qaisar Flour Mills and Barkat Flour Mills in the open market has been less than the agreed quantity. Consequently, their wheat quota was suspended and show-cause notices were issued to them as well.

Sources said that this year, the food department has provided 1.8 million tons of wheat to flour mills and has around 3.1 million tons of wheat reserves.

Talking to The Express Tribune, the Provincial Minister for Food Sami Ullah Chaudhary said that Prime Minister Imran Khan and Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar have paid special attention to the availability of flour in Punjab to keep prices stable.

"Owing to strict monitoring, Punjab has become the only province in Pakistan where standard flour is available to the public in large quantities at a fixed government price," he said. "The Punjab government has fixed the price of a 20 kg bag at Rs808, while in some areas, the flour is also available at a price less than Rs800, which is due to the business competitiveness of the flour mills."

He added that even though the government is supplying an abundant amount of flour to the masses, it has ensured that a strict scrutiny system is in place so that people do not engage in embezzlement and official wheat is not sold illegally.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 13th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2116706/1-strict-measures-govt-suspends-wheat-quota-several-mills-misappropriation/

GHQ RECOMMENDATION: PTI GOVT APPROVES R300M TO RAISE PAKISTAN RANGERS SPECIAL WING

By Shahbaz Rana Published: December 13, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Thursday agreed to divert Rs460 million to deal with the emerging situation due to insect attacks on crops in nine districts of the country which, if not property tackled, may create food shortages.

To thwart the desert locust threat in Pakistan, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet approved a technical supplementary grant of Rs459.5 million on a proposal moved by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, according to a finance ministry statement.

Newly appointed Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar has not yet started attending the ECC meetings. On a proposal sent by the Ministry of Interior, the ECC approved allocation of Rs300 million through the technical supplementary grant for raising a special wing of the Pakistan Rangers for the (protection of) Kartarpur Corridor on the recommendation of General Headquarters.

The ECC directed that a three-member committee, consisting of Adviser to Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Ishrat Husain, finance secretary and a representative of the Ministry of Interior, would look into details of the Kartarpur special force proposal and further rationalise the cost.

The ECC directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to brief it in the next meeting on the measures taken so far, including the areas treated with spray and pesticides, to tackle the threat of desert locust in different parts of the country.

The ECC was informed that nine districts of the country were affected by the locusts and the Department of Plant Protection had been given the responsibility of dealing with the threat. So far, 170,000 hectares have been cleared and the ministry has been provided updates on a daily basis.

The insect attacks on crops have the potential to affect food production, which can create problems at a time when food inflation is already very high, ranging from 16.6% to 19.3% in various parts of the country.

Meanwhile, the ECC again did not begin the process of reviewing the prices of essential commodities. In the past, the Ministry of Finance used to give updates on the supply of essential commodities and the price situation to the ECC. However, this process has been discontinued.

The Sensitive Price Indicator, which monitors prices of 51 essential items in 17 urban cities, surged 18.57% last week as compared to the same period of previous year. The ECC also approved the enactment of Pakistan Single Window Bill 2019, which would be sent to the cabinet for final approval. The bill will highly facilitate businesses in Pakistan.

The ECC was apprised that 42 government agencies were involved in granting approval for different businesses. Through the single window, all parties involved in trade and transport can lodge standardised information and documents with a single-entry point to fulfil all import, export and transit-related regulatory requirements.

The Customs Wing in the FBR developed the PSW Roadmap and Implementation Framework in April 2018 with the help of international experts. This initiative is expected to improve Pakistan's ranking on the Ease of Doing Business Index. It is expected that the project will be completed by December 2021.

The ECC allowed the continuation of funding facility by Government Holding Private Limited (GHPL) for Inter State Gas Systems (Private) Limited for another two years.

There will be a provision in the agreement that as soon as the first project reaches closure, ISGS needs to be financially self-sustaining and it should put forward a business plan as to how it will return the loan it has taken. The ECC approved the placement of the annual report of the National Economic Council (NEC) – as required under Article 156 of the Constitution – before the cabinet after the chair was briefed that the points raised regarding the report, for its placement before the cabinet, had been duly addressed.

The Ministry of Energy got approval for a proposal for extension and rehabilitation of the gas network in the oil and gas producing districts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (phase-I).

Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited was allowed to execute the gas development schemes recommended by the Departmental Working Party and endorsed by the company's board of directors along with an appropriate share of funding shared between SNGPL and the K-P government.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 13th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2116662/2-pti-govt-approves-rs460m-dealing-pest-attack/

LOCUST ATTACKS ON AGRICULTURAL LAND KCCI CHIEF FOR EFFECTIVE STEPS TO MINIMISE DAMAGES

December 14, 2019

KARACHI: President Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI) Agha Shahab Ahmed Khan has stressed that the government will have to take steps to minimize such damages in future with a view to safeguard the agriculture sector.

He said that keeping in view the projections of US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and other independent estimates, Pakistan's cotton production was likely to descend further by around 19 percent to somewhere close to 8 million cotton bales during FY20 which would terribly affect the exports of textile sector as cotton is a major raw material for this important sector. He pointed out that cotton production stood at 11.946 million bales in FY2018, which declined by 17.5 percent to 9.861 in FY2019 and with a further decline of approximately 19 percent being forecasted for FY20, the cotton shortages would terribly affect the performance of textile sector which will also depict in the export figures as this sector is the mainstay of Pakistan's overall exports.

He was of the opinion that low production of cotton would mean heavy imports of around 6 million bales, putting burden on foreign exchange reserves to the tune of $1.5 billion. Hence, the government will have to look into the causes of low cotton production and accordingly devise practical and effective strategies, besides adopting latest scientific techniques being used globally, to ensure enhanced cotton production, he stressed. "We are already struggling hard to deal with the ongoing economic crises and can neither afford further burden on foreign exchange reserves due to cotton imports nor depressed performance of the textile sector. The lawmakers will have to take notice of the deteriorating performance of the agriculture sector as Pakistan's economy is based on the agriculture sector otherwise, the economy would remain under pressure", he added.

Referring to recent locust attacks on the agricultural land in Sindh, President KCCI mentioned that in October, the federal Department of Plant Protection (DPP) had issued a report warning of the possibility of attacks by farm destroying grasshopper that breeds in November while United Nations' Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) in first week of September had warned that the situation relating to locusts in Pakistan was "most serious" as a second generation of the insect had been bred. "Some meager steps were taken by the federal and provincial governments to minimize the damages but the reaction came only after the loss of several days when the locust had already played havoc in many regions of Sindh. It is really unfortunate that the crop eating insects ranging from 100,000 to a billion capable of devouring 200 tons of food in a day were set free to ravage wheat, cotton and vegetable crops", he said, adding that it has always been the mindset to only react after the damages and nobody bothers to take any precautionary measures despite the fact that warnings have been received from credible sources. This mindset has to be changed to save Pakistan from all types of calamities in future".

Agha Shahab said that as per numerous reports, the attacks had destroyed up to 40 percent of crops in which wheat, cotton and tomatoes had all been ravaged. These insects have been particularly deadly to the standing crops in 11 districts in Sindh whereas the wheat crop spread across at least 10,000 acres has been destroyed so far by locusts in southern Sindh he added.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/12/14/3-page/815071-news.html

SINDH FOOD DEPARTMENT SIGNS MOU FOR PROCURING 300,000MT OF WHEAT WITH PASSCO

By RECORDER REPORT on December 14, 2019

The Sindh Food Department has signed memorandum of understanding for procurement of 300000 metric ton wheat with Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation (PASSCO) at a simple ceremony.

General Manager PASSCO Colonel Tanveer Ahmed Meo (retd) and additional director food Sindh Khalid Qaimkhani inked the agreement. Sindh minister for food Hari Ram Kishori Lal, Secretary Food Sindh Laeeq Ahmed, Director Food Khadim Hussain Bhutto, Chairman Pakistan flour Mill Association Khalid Masood and ex chairman Pakistan Flour mill Association Muhammad Yousif and others were also present on the occasion.

Talking to media Sindh minister for food Hari Ram Kishori Lal said that Sindh food department has already procured 100,000 metric ton wheat from PASSCO which was being supplied to flour mills. He added that sufficient wheat stock was available in Sindh for its requirement till the next crop season.

He said that wheat procured from PASSCO was being supplied on subsidized rates to flour mills with fifty percent cost share of federal and provincial government. He said that Sindh food department has fixed Rs 43 per Kg rate of atta with the consensus of Pakistan flour mill association. Provincial minister said that at present atta prices were at Rs 46 per kg but within a week prices of atta would reduce to Rs 43 per kg.

To a question, the minister said that Sindh government had decided not to procure wheat in last season as enough stock of 800000 metric ton was available in the godowns of food department. To another question he said that due to rumors the atta prices increased.

He added that when wheat was being supplied to flour mills on subsidized rates then benefit should be passed to consumers. He said that strict action would be taken against flour mills and retailers who were selling atta on exorbitant rates.

General Manager PASSCO Colonel Tanveer Ahmed (retd) PASSCO said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been supplied 450000 thousand metric ton, Sindh 100000 metric ton while 50000 metric ton to Balochistan on the demand. He said that today a MoU was signed with Sindh food department for additional 300000 metric ton wheat which will help in providing relief to general public.-PR

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/14/553176/sindh-food-department-signs-mou-for-procuring-300000mt-of-wheat-with-passco/

COMMERCIALISATION OF AGRICULTURE BIOTECH HIGH PRIORITY: FAWAD

By RECORDER REPORT on December 14, 2019

Hinting at the revival of the National Biotechnology Commission, Fawad Chaudhry, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Friday said that one of the top priorities of the government is to promote development and commercialization of agriculture biotechnology in Pakistan.

He was addressing the National Dialogue on Agricultural Biotechnology organized by Pakistan Biotechnology Information Center (PABIC), in collaboration with Forman Christian College University (FCCU) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Fawad Chaudhry highlighted that the agriculture biotechnology is vital for future food security. He reinforced the sentiment that the government should establish a legal and regulatory environment that is conducive to investment and transfer of technology. “Pakistan must take advantage of the latest technologies, in particular biotechnology, for the advancement of agriculture. It is therefore a top priority of the Ministry of Science and Technology to promote the development and commercialization of agriculture biotechnology in the country and they are developing a biotechnology park in Jhelum," Chaudhry stated.

He further promised that “we will revive the National Biotechnology Commission in the Ministry to expedite the introduction of biotechnology."

The two-day event succeeded in bringing together relevant stakeholders on a single platform to discuss the issues and impediments of introducing biotechnology in Pakistan. There was a clear consensus amongst the stakeholders that biotechnology is a key solution in addressing the food, feed and fiber security challenges and further the development of Pakistan's agriculture sector.

The purpose of the two-day dialogue was to review the status of agricultural biotechnology and highlight the constraints in its successful adoption in Pakistan. The event was attended by scientists, policymakers, representatives from leading biotech institutes, academia, crop science industry, farmers and other stakeholders.

The participants were provided an overview on the development of biotechnology infrastructure and expertise in Pakistan over the years, the impediments for commercialization and the laws and regulations governing this technology.

In his introductory presentation, Dr Kauser Malik, Dean of Postgraduate studies FCCU and Director of PABIC, highlighted that Pakistan was one of the earliest countries to show interest in biotechnology, starting with a nomination to host an international biotechnology research center back in 1981. He further lamented that despite all the early promise, the country has not fully benefitted from this innovation.

“Pakistan has a longstanding policy to adopt biotechnology, reflected in the establishment and funding of numerous research institutes and academic programs across the country since 1994; however, a policy disconnect amongst relevant ministries and regulatory bodies continues to create roadblocks in the way of technology approvals," Dr Kauser explained.

“The government and its relevant ministries must provide an enabling environment to introduce innovative technologies in accordance with international standards," he added.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/14/553145/commercialisation-of-agriculture-biotech-high-priority-fawad/

FOOD DEPT SIGNS MOU FOR 300,000 TONNES OF WHEAT

By News Desk Published: December 14, 2019

The Sindh food department has signed a memorandum of understanding for the procurement of 300,000 tonnes of wheat with the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO).

Talking to the media, provincial food minister Hari Ram Kishori Lal said that his department had previously procured 100,000 tonnes of wheat from PASSCO. He stated that this wheat was being supplied to flour mills at subsidised rates, with the federal and provincial governments covering 50 percent of the cost.

Lal further said that the Sindh food department had fixed the rate of wheat flour at Rs43 per kilogramme with the consensus of the Pakistan Flour Mills Association. While the current price is Rs46 per kilogramme, he claimed that it would fall within a week. He maintained that the supply of wheat to the flour mills at subsidised rates meant that consumers too should receive the benefits of this, adding that strict action would be taken against the mills and retailers selling wheat flour at exorbitant rates.

According to the food minister, Sindh has sufficient wheat for its requirements until the next crop season. He said that the provincial government had decided not to procure wheat during the last season as it had 800,000 tonnes of the crop stored in its godowns.

Meanwhile, PASSCO general manager Col (retd.) Tanveer Ahmed said that 450,000 tonnes of wheat had been supplied to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, 100,000 tonnes to Sindh and 50,000 tonnes to Balochistan on the provinces' demand. He added that the MoU was signed to provide additional wheat in order to provide relief to the people.

PASSCO had previously suspended the supply of wheat to the Sindh government after the latter's failure to make timely payments for the previous consignment of the crop, raising fears of a wheat shortage in Sindh, particularly in Karachi.

The first consignment was dispatched to Sindh in the middle of November. However, non-failure of payment for the consignment within the stipulated time had forced PASSCO to suspend the supply.

Meanwhile, flour mill owners who had paid the Sindh food department in advance for 90,000 sacks of wheat were left waiting for their consignments. The chairman of the Sindh Flour Mills Association, Khalid Masood, had told The Express Tribune that the supply of wheat to flour mills by both the provincial food department and PASSCO had been suspended since November 28.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2117352/1-food-dept-signs-mou-300000-tonnes-wheat/

PAC SLAMS POOR PERFORMANCE OF LIVESTOCK SECTOR

By Mohammad Zafar Published: December 14, 2019

QUETTA: Balochistan Public Accounts Committee Chairman Akhtar Hussain Langove lamented dismal performance of provincial livestock department on Friday while addressing a meeting.

The participants of the meeting included provincial minister for Agriculture Engineer Zamrak Khan Achakzai, members of provincial assembly, including Balochistan National Party (BNP) leader Malik Naseer Shahwani, Syed Fazal Agha, Sana Baloch and Livestock Secretary Dostain Jamaldini.

"Provincial livestock generates Rs10.35 million annually which is cause for serious concern, although the department is capable of steering Balochistan out of economic difficulties," said the PAC chairman.

Langove considers corruption a prime factor behind the department's downfall.

"Government releases millions of rupees for salaries of livestock department but nepotism and corruption have hit its performance," said Langove.

He added that earlier livestock was considered the backbone of provincial economy.

Stressing the need of uplifting livestock sector, the PAC chairman said, "Developed countries consider livestock and agriculture integral part of sustainable economy. However, in Balochistan the authorities have neglected the sector for 70 years."

The PAC chairman said that livestock sector in Balochistan was facing heavy debt instead of uplifting the economy. Langove vowed to take action against irregularities and corruption in the provincial livestock sector.

During the meeting, Shahwani slammed the government for neglecting the livestock department. “Government of Balochistan is interested in benefitting the party’s ministers instead of focusing on social development for the masses,” he said.

Shahwani emphasised to privatise the livestock sector to uplift its performance, adding the federal secretary and livestock director general should visit the province.

Jamaldini presented the government’s viewpoint during the meeting. Assuring the participants that the government will take steps for the sector, the secretary said, “Government is expected to generate Rs10.5 billion from the sector in the coming year.”

Earlier, in the month of November, Livestock Expo 2019 was held in Quetta. President Dr Arif Alvi inaugurated the expo at the University of Balochistan (UoB) as a chief guest. During his address, the president claimed huge potential of foreign investment in Pakistan’s livestock sector.

Dr Alvi highlighted the importance of the livestock department and said development in livestock sector can help scale up exports, eliminate poverty and stabilise the economy.

Lauding the provincial government’s efforts to boost the livestock sector, he said livestock is a comprehensive field that contributes to nutrition, poverty alleviation, rural development and overall economic growth. “Pakistan can export livestock after meeting its domestic needs.”

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2117409/1-pac-slams-poor-performance-livestock-sector/

AS COTTON OUTPUT FALLS, COUNTRY MAY SPEND $1.5B ON IMPORTS

By Usman Hanif Published: December 14, 2019

KARACHI: Lack of research and development work, fall in profit margins of farmers and change in weather patterns have caused a drop in cotton produce in Pakistan, which may be forced to import the commodity worth $1.5 billion this year.

In a statement, Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) President Agha Shahab Ahmed Khan pointed out that keeping in view the projections of US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other independent estimates, Pakistan’s cotton production was likely to descend 19% to 8 million bales in FY20.

He expressed concern that such a dip would terribly affect exports of the textile sector because cotton was a major raw material. Khan was of the view that the low production of cotton would mean massive import of around 6 million bales, which would put a burden on the foreign exchange reserves to the tune of $1.5 billion.

“Pakistan has always targeted production of 15 million bales and has managed to achieve the goal around eight years ago,” said Sindh Abadgar Board member Mahmood Nawaz Shah. “However shortly afterwards, the output began to decline because the achievement was accidental.”

He explained that the target was achieved with the help of Australian Bt cotton seeds, which the farmers secretly brought to Pakistan. Bt cotton is an insect-resistant transgenic crop developed to combat bollworm – a pest that attacks the cotton crop.

With the advent of Bt cotton, pest attacks went down and the cotton crop increased by leaps and bounds in the fertile areas of Sindh and Punjab, said Shah. Sometime later, he added, the imported seeds became localised and were multiplied due to which they lost their vigour. He elaborated that pest-resistant varieties lost their shield against insects over time and underscored the need for investing in research and development where one seed would be in production while another would be in the pipeline.

Continuing, he said another reason for the fall in cotton production was the change in global weather patterns owing to global warming as Pakistan's agriculture sector was not prepared for that. He pointed out that lower Sindh received 200 millimetres of rain in August and September 2019, which had been projected for the full year.

"Rains wreaked havoc on the ripe crop just before the beginning of picking season," he said.

He lamented that the low price offered by middlemen was also one of the factors contributing to the decline in cotton production. Middlemen pay only Rs3,000 per 40 kg in addition to keeping 2 kg extra on account of deduction for packaging material weight and moisture. "Losses due to weather and low prices have forced the farmers to think about sowing alternative crops," he said.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 14th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2117305/2-cotton-output-falls-country-may-spend-1-5b-imports/

WHEAT FLOUR PRICE TO DROP TO RS43 A KILO WITHIN A WEEK, SAYS SINDH MINISTER

Aamir Shafaat KhanUpdated December 15, 2019

KARACHI: Sindh Minister for Food Hari Ram Kishori Lal has hinted at drop in wheat flour price by Rs3 per kg to Rs43 a kilo within a week in the wake of Sindh Food Department's signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) for the procurement of 300,000 tonnes of the grain.

The department had earlier received 100,000 tonnes wheat from Passco which was at present being supplied to flour mills. Passco general manager retired Colonel Tanveer Ahmed Meo and additional director of food Khalid Qaimkhani signed the MoU.

Lal said the food department had fixed the price of flour at Rs43 per kg in agreement with Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA), Sindh zone. The flour was currently being sold at Rs46 per kg but it would drop to Rs43 a kilo within a week, he said.

The province, he said, had 800,000 tonnes of wheat stocks in its godowns, which were sufficient for its needs and could last till the harvest of next crop; that was why the government did not procure wheat last year from growers.

The wheat being procured from Passco was being supplied to flour mills at subsidised rate with 50 per cent cost shared by federal and provincial governments, but they were not passing on the benefit to consumers, he said.

He warned that strict action would be taken against the flour mills and retailers who were overcharging people.

According to a handout issued by Sindh information department, the Passco GM said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been supplied 450,000 tonnes, Sindh 100,000 tonnes and Balochistan had been provided 50,000 tonnes on demand.

He hoped the MoU between Passco and Sindh food department for additional 300,000 tonnes would provide relief to general public.

Sindh zone PFMA chairman Khalid Masood said the mills would try to ensure sale of subsidised flour at weekly bazaars as well. The mills had got 137,000 tonnes of wheat in November while the allocation for December was 92,000 tonnes, he said.

He said the price of wheat in open market hovered around Rs4,600-4,650 per 100kg bag while the food department was providing wheat at Rs3,450 per 100kg.

Published in Dawn, December 15th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1522255/wheat-flour-price-to-drop-to-rs43-a-kilo-within-a-week-says-sindh-minister

SUGAR MILLS LIKELY TO STOP CANE CRUSHING TODAY

Mohammad Hussain Khan December 15, 2019

HYDERABAD: Most of the 11 sugar mills that have started cane crushing for the year 2019-20 are likely to suspend the process on Sunday on the ground that they are getting no sugar cane supplies from growers.

There are 38 sugar mills functioning in Sindh. While 11 of them have already started cane crushing, more are likely to follow suit in due course of time.

The Sindh government on Nov 30 notified Rs190/40kg the minimum cane procurement rate. Before issuance of the notification, millers had started buying the fresh crop for Rs230-Rs240/40kg. However, some growers claimed that they were now offering Rs192/40kg, a little above the notified rate.

“I’m yet to harvest sugar cane on 80 acres of my land but I have been told by the management of my area’s sugar mills not to bring the crop because the crushing process was going to be halted by Sunday morning,” said Haji Azizullah Memon from Tando Allahyar, where three sugar mills — Chambar, Tando Allahyar and Mehran — are located. These mills had started cane crushing early last month.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) vice president Nabi Bux Sathio subscribed to Mr Memon's claim. Mr Sathio hails from Tando Mohammad Khan district where Abadgar and Faran sugar mills are located.

"We are told to deliver cane consignments by Sunday morning but stop harvesting the crop as the crop procurement was being stopped for the time being," Sathio said.

He confirmed that a rate of Rs220/40kg to RS230/40kg was paid for the fresh crop by mills until the notification fixing the rate at Rs192/40kg.

The notification was issued after Punjab government notified its rate as Rs190/40kg.

"None of the sugar mills has declared in writing a halt to the cane crushing process but yes, we have been told off the record that they are going for a closure of mills for the time being on the ground that they are not getting cane supplies," said a Sindh government source.

Another Tando Allahyar-based grower and Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) vice president Mahmood Nawaz Shah said that he was also getting vibes that mills were suspending cane crushing on Sunday. A sudden drop in the rate previously offered by mills was going to cause a jerk," Mr Shah said.

He said that growers were not supplying their crop at Rs192/40kg because they wanted the rate of Rs220/40 to Rs230/40kg be retained for the current season.

Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) leader Dr Tara Chand did not take calls to verify or deny the reported intention to suspend cane crushing.

Published in Dawn, December 15th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1522254/sugar-mills-likely-to-stop-cane-crushing-today

SENATOR DRAWS ATTENTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE'S CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN

By Our Correspondent Published: December 15, 2019

KARACHI: The third edition of the Women of the World Festival (WOW) began yesterday (Saturday), laying emphasis on themes of resilience, transformation and environmental sustainability. The two-day event, ending today, has been organised by the British Council, and is primarily aimed at highlighting challenges faced by women as well as their achievements.

The event opened with a keynote address by Senator Sherry Rehman, the chair of the Climate Change Caucus in parliament, who spoke of challenges faced by women in the aftermath of climate change.

Rehman said that women who depended on natural resources, like water and firewood, to carry out their daily chores have been hit harder by climate change and its consequences.

"They have been thrust to the forefront in dealing with the harsh realities of this rapidly changing environment," she said, at the same time emphasising, "As we celebrate women, we must continue to push back, disrupt and defy the emerging challenges, risks and problems women face at multiple levels."

She lamented that most women were deprived of their rights, adding that 70 per cent of women in the world were poverty-stricken. The senator commended the women of Pakistan “for their struggle” and said that they played a significant role in the fight for the survival of democracy.

“While women contribute significantly towards economic development, they don’t [even] have the right to form unions,” she said.

The Pakistan Peoples Party senator also touched upon the subject of environmental change at large, stressing that measures needed to be taken to raise awareness about the issue. “Today, more people die of environmental pollution than due to war,” she told the audience, emphasising the need for enforcing an “environmental emergency.” She deplored that no measures to curb the growing crisis of climate change were being taken at the governmental level and stated, “We have to make the environmental protection agencies work efficiently.” Rehman further said that members of the civil society would also have to play their part in solving the problem.

British Council Arts Director Chantal Harrison-Lee, who inaugurated the event, also spoke on the occasion.

She said that the event featured the accomplishments of 100 women and men, while also focusing on climate change. Harrison-Lee further said that ensuring gender equality in all spheres of life required concerted efforts from all segments of society.

“WOW is a vital platform to celebrate and empower women, to provide a space for discussion around key issues and barriers women and girls face, and it aims to make bottom up change,” she added.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 15th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2118006/1-senator-draws-attention-climate-changes-challenges-women/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DEC 16th TO DEC 22nd 2019

LOCUSTS REVISIT AREAS THEY HAD MOWED DOWN TWICE IN ROHRI, MIRPURKHAS

The Newspaper's Correspondent December 16, 2019

SUKKUR: Huge swarms of locusts have once again visited upon the areas surrounding Rohri and Mirpurkhas for the third time in past few months and started stripping all plants of green leaves and bark, sending shockwaves through farming community.

Farmers said the locusts appeared on Saturday and attacked standing crops of wheat, sugar cane, vegetables and grass for the fourth time in Rohri, Nara Canal, Saleh Pat, Arore and their adjoining areas.

They said that they were so helpless before the deadly insect they could do nothing but watch their investment being mowed down mercilessly. They had to sow wheat for the third time after destruction of the crop in earlier two attacks and they had already become highly indebted as a result, they said.

They said the latest attack had created a crisis for them because the attack had not even left them with any fodder for their livestock. Their protests and appeals did not bear any fruit and the government was simply doing lip service, they complained.

They said the government needed to take effective steps on a war footing to eliminate the menace. Having disappointed in the government, many farmers had started calling adhan in their fields to seek God's intervention against the calamity, they said.

They said the government was simply preparing reports on the damage caused by the insect instead of taking practical steps like aerial spray to eliminate it.

They appealed to the government to protect the province's agriculture from the scourge and save them from financial losses caused by repeated attacks of locusts.

MIRPURKHAS: Massive swarms of locusts, which have spread across the district, continue to eat away standing crops in several talukas, say farmers.

They complained that the government had not taken any adequate measures to eliminate the insect which continued to devastate wheat and other crops.

They demanded the Sindh government take steps on a war footing to carry out spray on affected fields across the district.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1522437

COUNTRY TO ACHIEVE BUMPER WHEAT CROP THIS SEASON

By RECORDER REPORT on December 16, 2019

Owing to multiple factors that includes government initiatives to enhance the output of major crops, favourable weather conditions and timely harvesting of seasonal crops, country was expecting to harvest bumper wheat crop of 27 million tonnes during current season as against the last year's produce of 24.47 million tonnes.

Every year delay in harvesting of two major cash crops including sugarcane and cotton were attributed to delay in wheat cultivations and decrease in area under crop sowing, but due to timely intervention of the government the sugarcane crushing season has started by the end of November as 12 sugar mills in Sindh and 4 in Punjab have started sugarcane crushing, said Food Security Commissioner in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research Dr Imtiaz Ahmad Gopang.

While talking to APP here on Wednesday, he said that the other factor in increased sowing was harvesting of cotton due to pest attacks as the farmers harvested the crop and cultivated the wheat to achieve higher output as substitute and profit maximizer.

The third factor was timely rains across the wheat growing areas, particularly these rains boosted the cultivation of seasonal crop in Potohar Region which comprised of 10 to 12 percent total land under wheat production, he added.

The Commissioner informed that so far ministry has received the sowing data from two provinces including Sindh and Balochistan, where as data from a major wheat producing province Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was awaited that would be received in couple of days.

He said that according to the wheat sowing data of Sindh, the province has achieved about 51 percent of targeted area by the start of current months as compared the 36 percent area of the same period of last year. In Sindh, wheat has been cultivated on over 583,863 hectares as against the set target of 1,150,000.

Dr Imtiaz further informed that wheat sowing during same period of last season was recorded at 480,000 hectares, adding that so far start of crop sowing was encouraging and would gain momentum during the days to come and help in achieving the higher output as compared to last season.

Meanwhile, he said that due to timely rains, the wheat sowing in Balochistan also witnessed increasing trend as crop have been cultivated over 49% of targeted area as an area of 215,900 hectares were put under the wheat crop against the set target of 550,000 hectares for the current season.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/16/553523/country-to-achieve-bumper-wheat-crop-this-season/

CULTIVATION OF OILSEED CROPS TO BE PROMOTED IN PUNJAB

By RECORDER REPORT on December 16, 2019

Punjab Agriculture department is taking up a well knitted project costing more than Rs5 billion for the promotion of oilseed crops cultivation like sunflower, canola and sesame across the Punjab.

Official sources told Business Recorder on Sunday that under the plan special attention would be accorded on enhancing the acreage for the promotion of Sunflower, Canola and Sesame crops in the Province. The Punjab government has decided to provide subsidy to the growers of oilseed crops for enhancing acreage. The objectives of the plan were to produce maximum edible oil in the Province for lessening the import to save huge foreign exchange.

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 oilseed crops especially sunflower crop could play a vital role in enhancing the production of edible oil because the sunflower seeds had 40 percent oil capacity as compare to other oil seed crops.

Keeping in view the importance of edible crops the Agriculture department was making strenuous efforts to motivating the growers that they should cultivate oilseed crops in their fields and get maximum economic benefits and help in enhancing the production of edible oil sources said.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/16/553517/cultivation-of-oilseed-crops-to-be-promoted-in-punjab/

WHEAT FLOUR BODY INVOLVED IN FIXING PRICES: CCP

By SOHAIL SARFRAZ on December 16, 2019

The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has found that the wheat flour association was involved in fixing prices of wheat flour and sharing commercially sensitive information and strategic data among its members.

According to the report of the CCP submitted to the last meeting of the Federal Cabinet, the production quota was also fixed by the association. The said activities prima facia seems to obstruct the normal functioning of flour mills in the economy and is against the spirit of competition and level playing field in the market, CCP added.

According to the CCP study on wheat, a review of the regulatory framework indicates that the present system of wheat procurement and quota has generated excess production capacity and ‘ghost mills' (which are actually not in production but sell their allocated government wheat quota to other mills). Besides the system is expensive and has inefficiencies. Its positive impact for both farmers and consumers ie. For whom the whole system was designed, is questionable in the present day circumstances.

The reason is that the implementation experience has made the industry less competitive internationally as well as providing costly flour to the national consumers. Mostly the outdated laws and rules made there-under for control of production and distribution do not facilitate and encourage establishment of modern mills, branding and marketing nor can optimize the role of the private sector engaged in the flour milling.

The CCP study has highlighted that a well-functioning commodity exchange can help create a marketplace where producers of agricultural commodities could meet potential buyers and get benefit from fair transactions. The advocacy agenda of a competition agency has to focus on producers' associations and groups, here the Flour Mills Association, to create awareness about the competition law and cartel formation.

It is to be mentioned that the government may not ‘negotiate with the associations, which encourages anti-competitive conduct.9In the past, the CCP has observed the likely anti-competition impact of negotiating prices with the associations.10Therefore, in the case of wheat flour also, the Government should not involve in price negotiation with the Association, and should fix price of this essential commodity based on independent analysis of market situation, CCP recommended.

The CCP has recommended that the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) with special incentives to industry and agriculture is an essential step under the CPEC. China has huge food imports of about $500 billion. Therefore, Pakistani industry needs to convert SEZs into an opportunity, instead of taking SEZs as a threat, by identifying potential avenues for exports. The key elements of an export strategy would be production as per international standards at competitive rates.

CCP recommended that a large portion of the wheat flour industry is in the un-documented informal sector. This situation promotes unfair competition to the advantage of un-documented milling due to avoidance of taxes and social security. The competition based on investment, innovative branding, fortification and quality improvement, is thus restricted to a disadvantage of consumers.

Likewise the existence of ghost mills point towards flaws in the administrative mechanism, which in fact is not possible without the connivance of the relevant government functionaries. In the present setup, the inefficient mills continue operations while getting cheaper wheat on quota.

There is an elaborate mechanism for monitoring of quotas but the system has loopholes. Consequently, non-operative/ ghost mills receive a quota and sell it to other millers. The installed capacity data has discrepancies. Therefore, the quota system requires overhaul targeting phasing out of inefficient interventions, minimizing price differentials and more focus towards maintaining strategic reserves.

Almost a year ago, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) approved listing of wheat futures contracts on Pakistan Mercantile Exchange Limited (PMEX). Wheat futures contracting were launched as a pilot project in some districts of Punjab. However, the wheat volumes traded are relatively low as investors in Pakistan generally invest in internationally liquid commodities such as gold, silver, crude oil, and to a limited extent in wheat.

Farmers are not able to get the right price of their produce due to the middlemen and inefficient traditional markets. A well-functioning commodity exchange can help create a marketplace where producers of agricultural commodities could meet potential buyers and get benefit from fair transactions.

However, the farmers in Pakistan lack capacity to use the opportunity of marketing and investment through futures market. Commodity exchange serves as a transparent trading platform for the growers. However, there is a need to create awareness about the functioning of futures trading. In addition, the adequacy of mechanism for insurance, performance guarantees and indemnity funds be ensured to align domestic and international parameters. Once in place, the system will improve documentation of the informal business dealings, CCP recommended.

Enhancing competition requires ease of market entry and exit. The flour millers in Islamabad informed that the revision in the CDA bylaws and the Islamabad Manufacturing Industry Area Zoning Regulation, 1963 was approved in 2015. Even without notification of these amendments, the CDA's Building Control Section (BCS) received fees to change the drawings. The amendments and the new drawings are still pending approval from the CDA. Owing to this, the present resource allocation is suboptimal. To shed the excess milling capacity, it may be considered that the bylaws may allow certain provision to provide ease.

After the National Agricultural Policy, 1991, there have been some documents, which provided useful information about the agriculture sector in Pakistan. The fact remains that Pakistan was without a suitable agriculture policy for decades. Though agriculture became a provincial subject under the 18th Constitutional Amendment, yet the country needs a holistic agriculture policy. However, at any level, one can readily identify the absence of much needed land reforms, which continue to hamper development of the agriculture sector in Pakistan.

The CCP has recommended that the several factors that limit productivity need to be reduced and eliminated by concerted efforts. Considering the practices prevailing in other countries, the wheat experts suggest the following the specific areas requiring actions:

Efforts to abridge the yield gap through coordinated efforts of institutions involved in training and information dissemination. Availability of high quality inputs and credit are necessary for meaningful efforts. The agricultural policy, environment protection policy and water policy are crucial to address major concerns identified. Therefore, the need to implement an integrated agricultural policy was reiterated, CCP recommended.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/16/553550/wheat-flour-body-involved-in-fixing-prices-ccp/

K-P TO IMPROVE AGRI-INDUSTRIAL BASE IN DI KHAN

By Our Correspondent Published: December 16, 2019

PESHAWAR: As part of their strategy to develop the southern district of Dera Ismail Khan (DI Khan), the provincial government on Sunday lifted the veil on some of the projects it aims to complete in the district, including watercourses to feed cultivable fields and providing power to industrial zones.

This was disclosed by Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) Chief Minister Mahmood Khan on Sunday during a meeting with a delegation from DI Khan, led by Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and DI Khan native Ali Amin Gandapur. The meeting was held at the Chief Minister House in Peshawar.

During the meeting a briefing was given on upgrading an agricultural institute there to the level of an agriculture university, the establishment of nurseries for fisheries, watercourses, the Chashma Right Bank Lift Canal (CRBC) project, maintenance of road infrastructure, drinking water problems, agricultural and drainage issues, health, education and other issues in the district.

Chief Minister Mahmood asked the DI Khan Deputy Commissioner and other local government officials to resolve the issues of drainage in the district on priority.

He further stated that existing agricultural land and barren fields will be made cultivable in DI Khan by setting up watercourses.

Moreover, to improve industrialization in the district, he said that electric power at cheap rates will be supplied to industrial zones through wheeling. This will not only help increase employment opportunities for locals but will also attract investors.

Mahmood further directed to initiate work on the CRBC project with both the provincial agriculture and irrigation departments directed to work together to complete it.

Once complete, the province will help irrigate over 300,000 acres of agricultural land in the district boosting not only the agricultural produce of the district but provide gainful employment and feed the associated industries, thereby contributing the economy of the province.

Further, the construction of the Peshawar-DI Khan Expressway will further enhance commercial and economic activities in the district by improving access.

On the other hand, the completion of the Gomal Zam Dam will help improve water supply to the rural areas and provision of power.

CM Mahmood also directed to resolve the problem of drinking water in the neighbouring Tank district, adding that schemes in this respect have already been identified.

He directed the Tank deputy commissioner to ensure that all small and major developmental schemes are implemented in consultation with the elected public representatives of the area.

During a briefing on development projects in the education sector of the district, it was informed that Rs360 million have been allocated for 85 different schemes, including the establishment of 11 new primary schools — work on which has been completed. Work on four remaining primary schools is currently underway.

Moreover, five mosque schools have been converted into regular schools while tenders for another have been issued.

Similarly, five primary schools have been upgraded to middle schools while five high schools have been upgraded to higher secondary schools. Similarly, two schools have been completed as part of a rehabilitation plan for schools while work on rehabilitating the remaining four schools is in progress.

Mahmood said that provision of doctors and other allied staff for new wards of DI Khan hospital will also be ensured on priority, adding that provincial government is working to ensure availability of required staff in all the hospitals throughout the province.

The meeting was also attended by Advisor to the Chief Minister on Newly-Merged Tribal Districts Ajmal Wazir, members of the provincial assembly from DI Khan, administrative secretaries of the concerned departments and other senior officials.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2118562/1-k-p-improve-agri-industrial-base-di-khan/

BALOCHISTAN GOVT STRIVING ‘HARD’ TO UPLIFT LIVESTOCK SECTOR

By Our Correspondent Published: December 16, 2019

QUETTA: Provincial Livestock Secretary Dostain Khan Jamaldini has said the government was giving special attention to the livestock sector.

“We recently held a Balochistan livestock expo where international and local renowned companies expressed their interest in investing in this sector,” he added.

“Emergency measures are being taken to bring this sector at par with modern standards.”

The provincial secretary said the livestock sector was ignored by governments in the past.

“Major steps have been taken to enable the [livestock] department to function smoothly and achieve its goal.”

Jamaldini said employment opportunities would be created soon by expanding the sector.

“People will be able to earn their livelihoods by increasing livestock income and it will not only help strengthen the province’s economy, but also eliminate poverty.”

The secretary said there was no shortage of qualified and skilled staff in the livestock department and he was confident that they would fulfill their responsibilities to promote the sector.

“The day is not far when the Balochistan’s livestock department will be ranked among the most developed in the world,” he maintained.

According to a report, Balochistan is rich in livestock resources that are contributing about 40% of Pakistan’s total livestock population.

The development of the sector is linked with poverty alleviation as 70% population of the province is directly or indirectly linked with livestock related activities. The socio-economic conditions of the farmers can be boosted with investment and innovation in the industry. The local farmers are not aware about the modern animal husbandry practices as there are no organised cattle farming activities.

Hence, the province suffers low productivity due to poor breeding and rearing. They also lack proper healthcare coverage for animals, marketing system and extension services. The provincial government is working to upgrade the dairy and livestock sectors to exploit its full potential to generate economic activities for the people of the province.

Livestock is dependent on grazing in rangelands, which makes 40 percent of the total landmass in the province. During winter, the farmers living in central Balochistan migrate with their flocks to lower lands in Sibi and Kachhi plains for the grazing purpose.

Livestock is an important sector of the rural economy contributing about 40 percent to the provincial GDP. According to an estimate, the province maintains 2.253581 million cattle, 12.804217 million sheep, 11.784711 million goats, 0.319854 million buffaloes, 0.379528 million camels, 0.059973 million horses, 0.006256 million mules, 0.471942 million donkeys and 5.911304 million poultry. Livestock contributes Rs. 20 billion with share of meat 40%, milk 35%, eggs 13%, skin, hides & wool 10% and others 2%. The province annually produces 28,000 tons of beef and 204,000 tons of mutton.

Ironically, the provincial government allocates a nominal amount for the development of this sector, which is the primary sustainable source of living for over 70 percent of the local population. The provincial government held first-ever livestock expo in Quetta on November 18-20 this year. The three-day livestock Expo aimed at increasing meat productivity to boost the economy of the province.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 16th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2118578/1-balochistan-govt-striving-hard-uplift-livestock-sector/

CAUTIOUS TRADING ON COTTON MARKET

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 17, 2019

KARACHI: Ginners were reluctant to enter into deals on the cotton market on Monday as they held back their stocks in the hope of getting higher prices in coming days.

However, the market also witnessed some big lot deals as many textile spinners booked stocks at prevailing prices to meet their near future demand, brokers said.

The prospects of a positive outcome from the ongoing US-China trade talks turned the global markets optimistic which in turn influenced the local market as well. Despite that, ginners stayed away from the trading ring in hope of getting higher prices.

The brokers said there was strong demand for cotton by textile spinners who were in a hurry to replenish their stocks at current prices but volumes failed to pick up.

The higher cotton export figures released by US Agriculture Department for last week pushed New York cotton market prices close to 70 cents per lb. The Chinese cotton was firm but Indian markets closed easy.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates stood firm at weekend level at Rs8,750 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 200 bales, station Nawabshah, at Rs8,700; 600 bales, Mirpur Mathelo, at Rs9,000; 400 bales, Ghotki, at Rs8,900; 3,000 bales, Khairpur, at Rs8,000 to Rs8,300; 3,000 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs8,100 and 600 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs8,900.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1522668/cautious-trading-on-cotton-market

PFMA FINED RS75M FOR FIXING FLOUR PRICES

Kalbe Ali Updated December 17, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Comm-ission of Pakistan (CCP) has imposed a fine of Rs75 million on Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) for fixing the price of wheat flour, fixing the quantities of production of wheat flour among its members and providing a platform to share commercially sensitive information.

The commission took notice of various news items suggesting an unusual price hike in the prices of wheat flour (atta) across the country and carried out a raid at PFMA premises.

As the initial inquiry concluded that PFMA was providing a platform to its members for settling of prices of wheat flour to avoid any form of competition, and it was ruled that such an act was violation of Section 4 of the Competition Act.

The CCP bench comprising of chairperson Vadiyya Khalil and members Dr Muhammad Saleem, Dr Shahzad Ansar passed the order after hearing the parties.

In its order, the CCP bench observed that under Article 38 of the Constitution - the State is responsible to ensure the provisions of food and basic necessities at fair prices along with other social and economic benefits to its citizens.

The Provincial Food Departments set a maximum cap of the wheat flour price under the Foodstuffs (Control) Act 1958 as wheat is Pakistan's dietary staple and used by consumers belonging to all socio-economic groups, it contributes to around 72 per cent of the country's daily caloric intake with per capita consumption of around 124 kg per year, one of the highest in the world.

The CCP order noted that PFMA deliberately fixed the rates of wheat flour by conducting meetings and discussing the prices as well as the quantities to be produced and supplied by flour mills.

It further observed that fixing of prices by competitors; is one of the most egregious and serious violations of Competition Law; in fact it disturbs the central nervous system of the economy, hence cannot be tolerated at all. However, the CCP noted that it is not the role of association to ensure that each and every member of the association, who should be competitors, has a profitable business.

The CCP also observed that discussion, deliberation and decisions regarding purely business concerns like current and future pricing, production and marketing are anti-competitive and should be avoided at all costs by the associations.

“Associations have a responsibility to ensure that their forum is not used as a platform for collusive activities,” it concluded.

Published in Dawn, December 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1522664

INDONESIA FILES WTO PALM OIL SUIT AS TENSIONS WITH EU GROW

Reuters December 17, 2019

JAKARTA: Indonesia has filed a lawsuit at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) against the European Union, claiming the bloc’s restrictions on palm oil-based biofuel are unfair, the latest in a series of disputes between the two sides.

The EU launched a complaint at the WTO in late November over Indonesian curbs on nickel ore exports and hit Indonesian biodiesel with tariffs last week.

The two are meanwhile seeking to forge a free trade agreement.

The European Commis--sion concluded this year that palm oil cultivation results in excessive deforestation and should not count towards renewable energy targets.

The result is that palm oil-based diesel would not be considered a biofuel and its use in transport fuel would effectively be phased out between 2023 and 2030.

Published in Dawn, December 17th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1522662/indonesia-files-wto-palm-oil-suit-as-tensions-with-eu-grow

EXPLOSIONS AND FLAMES LEAVE FISH HARBOUR IN FRENZY

By Our Correspondent Published: December 16, 2019

KARACHI: The fish harbour witnessed a fierce fire on Sunday night. Flames erupted in a restaurant at the fish harbour, which resulted in the explosion of a gas cylinder. Persons on site narrated that a fireball landed on a neighbouring scrap warehouse where drums of black oil exploded and the flames further intensified with the howling winds at sea. The inferno engulfed nine fishing launches, two restaurants, one mobile phone easy load cabin, a fishing net shack and a scrap warehouse. A complaint was received by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) fire brigade department at around 2:15am after ad hoc efforts of the fishermen failed to contain the fire. It was four hours and 13 fire tenders later that the fire was eventually brought under control. Fortunately, there was no loss of life reported.

According to Fishermen Cooperative Housing Society Security In-Charge Nasir Baneri, the fire erupted in Zirkhan Restaurant, located between spot number three and four at the fishing harbour. Speaking to The Express Tribune, he said that the fire spread to neighbouring cabins and warehouses and escalated with the explosions of the gas cylinder and black oil drums. He added that gusts of wind led to the nearby launches catching flames as well. Baneri said that the wooden launches were coated with grease and as a result, they were immediately engulfed by the flames. As efforts to extinguish the flames were underway, he said that there was a gas cylinder warehouse nearby, which was at risk of exploding if the flames reached there.

The security in-charge was of the view that the flames intensified due to the strong gale and the lack of water in the fire tenders sent by the authorities.

Meanwhile, KMC fire brigade spokesperson said that they received information about the fire at around 2:15am. Earlier, he said, the people on site tried to contain the fire through ad hoc efforts and only called the fire department when the flames had intensified. He said that because the area falls under the Karachi Port Trust (KPT), assistance was sent through the KMC. According to him, it was after efforts of five KPT tenders, four of the Pakistan Navy, and four of KMC's fire tenders, which persisted for four hours, that the fire was contained. He said that the financial loss caused by the inferno could not be ascertained as of yet. However, millions of rupees worth of loss could be estimated, he added. The spokesperson confirmed that the incident rendered nine launches, two restaurants, an easy load cabin, and fishing net and scrap warehouses, to ashes. He appealed to the authorities to restrict the establishment of hotels and oil warehouses at the fishing harbour so that such losses can be avoided in the future.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2118947/1-fire-karachi-fish-harbour-causes-damage-worth-millions/

CCP SLAPS RS75M PENALTY ON FLOUR MILLS ASSOCIATION

By Our Correspondent Published: December 17, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The antitrust watchdog on Monday slapped a maximum penalty of Rs75 million on Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) after it found that the body was involved in fixing the price of wheat flour in violation of an Act of parliament.

The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has held that PFMA violated Section 4 of the Competition Act 2010 by fixing the price of wheat flour, providing a platform to share commercially sensitive information and fixing the production quantities of wheat flour, according to a statement issued by the CCP. Accordingly, a maximum penalty of Rs75 million was imposed on PFMA, it added.

The decision came amid an increase in prices of wheat, wheat flour, sugar and other edible items due to supply disruptions and administrative failures.

However, the CCP has been unable to enforce its decisions in the past, except in a few cases, due to ongoing court cases that have questioned the existence of one of the most critical government departments.

The CCP is mandated under the Competition Act to ensure free competition in all spheres of commercial and economic activity, enhance economic efficiency and protect consumers from anti-competitive practices including prohibited agreements.

The CCP had taken notice of various news stories suggesting an unusual hike in prices of wheat flour or wheat atta across Pakistan and carried out raid on PFMA's premises. The search and inspection of the premises was carried out on October 4, 2016 and documents were seized.

The inquiry into the matter concluded that PFMA was providing a platform to its members for setting prices of wheat flour to avoid any form of competition, which was in violation of Section 4 of the Act, stated the CCP.

After hearing the parties, the CCP's bench comprising Chairperson Vadiyya Khalil and members Muhammad Saleem and Shahzad Ansar passed the order.

In its order, the CCP observed that under Article 38 of the Constitution the state is responsible to ensure the provision of food and basic necessities at fair prices along with other social and economic benefits to its citizens. Accordingly, Provincial Food Departments set a maximum cap of the wheat flour price under the Foodstuffs (Control) Act, 1958; as wheat is Pakistan's dietary staple and used by consumers belonging to all socio-economic groups.

Wheat flour currently contributes 72% of Pakistan's daily caloric intake with per capita wheat consumption of around 124 kg per year, one of the highest in the world.

The CCP observed that having a maximum cap on the essential food item benefits the consumer to bargain for a lower price and prevents retailers from overcharging consumers. This also enables retailers to offer discount on the product in order to increase their sales.

The PFMA, in complete disregard of the aforesaid objective, deliberately fixed the rates of wheat flour by conducting meetings and discussing the prices as well as the quantities to be produced and supplied by flour mills in violation of Section 4 of the Competition Act.

In its order, the CCP further observed that fixing of prices by competitors; is one of the most egregious and serious violations of Competition Law; in fact it disturbs the central nervous system of the economy, hence cannot be tolerated at all.

While disposing of the matter CCP, with reference to the role of associations, observed that rule of thumb is not to allow discussion, deliberations or sharing of sensitive commercial information that may allow members, who are competitors, to coordinate business policy. Further, it is not the role of association to ensure that each and every member of the association has a profitable business.

CCP also observed that discussion, deliberation and decisions regarding purely business concerns like current and future pricing, production and marketing are anti-competitive and should be avoided at all costs by the associations. Associations have a responsibility to ensure that their forum is not used as a platform for collusive activities.

Given the seriousness of the violation as discussed above and the importance of wheat flour in our daily life and the continued practice of price fixing since 2009; a maximum fine of Rs75 million was imposed on PFMA.

Although the prices were determined by the Punjab government in 2015 as well, the notice of the executive committee meeting clearly indicates that PFMA is engaging its members in order to formulate a uniform policy viz, the availability ie production quotas and the prices to be fixed by them.

During hearings, the PFMA took a stance that it was not an undertaking as defined in Competition Act, 2010; since it was not in any way engaged directly or indirectly in the production, supply or distribution of goods or provision of services. The PFMA did not enter into any agreement prohibited under Section 4 of the Competition Act, 2010, it added.

The association had further claimed that the PFMA did not fix the purchase or selling price of wheat flour and PFMA was not involved in any other restrictive trading conditions. The PFMA Counsel had submitted that the association was not fixing any price in fact it was only communicating the price which was notified by the government.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2119314/2-ccp-slaps-rs75m-penalty-flour-mills-association/

PUNJAB MOVES TO PROTECT SUGARCANE GROWERS

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 17, 2019

LAHORE: Sugarcane growers have long complained that they are not being paid their dues by the owners of mills they sell to. Luckily for them, the Punjab government has now decided to step in and help by amending the existing law to protect them from any unfair deduction and delays in payment.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, sources familiar with the development said proposed amendments to the Sugar Factories Control Act will be taken up at a high-level meeting set to take place today (Tuesday). Both the provincial food secretary and the cane commissioner will be present at the meeting.

According to the sources, the proposed amendments, among other steps, will make it mandatory for sugar mill owners to pay sugarcane growers through banks. They added that the amendments will also grant official document status to the cane procurement receipt (CPR) that sugarcane growers receive from mills while concluding a sale. As such, not only will mills be bound to issue a CPR to growers, it will also allow the latter to pursue any disputes that arise using the receipt.

“Sugarcane accounts for a significant chunk of Punjab’s overall agriculture produce, but those who grow it have time and again complained of payment issues,” an official privy to the development said. “The growers say the mills often pay them less on account of ‘sweetness’ or hand them CPRs without paying them the full amount and promising to pay the rest on instalments.”

“The provincial government also realised that mills are not making payments through banks, another reason why growers suffer the aforementioned problems,” the official added. “So, on Prime Minister Imran Khan’s direction, the Punjab government has decided to amend the Sugar Factories Control Act.”

When contacted, Punjab Cane Commissioner Wajid Ali Shah said protecting sugarcane growers is one of the government’s top priorities. “We have taken many steps already and saved Rs550 million, most sugar mills have sorted out all dues to growers," he said. "Now, we are looking at amending the law to protect growers from illegal deductions and deferred payments."

Kissan Ittehad (Farmers' Union) President Khalid Khokhar complained a 'sugar mill mafia' has long exploited sugarcane growers. "We have complained several times, so the proposed amendments are welcome. But it is imperative that the new law, once enacted, be strictly enforced," he said.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2119301/2-punjab-moves-protect-sugarcane-growers/

MAN DIES AFTER 'UNWHOLESOME' FOOD INTAKE

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 18, 2019

LAHORE: A young man died while three others were hospitalised shortly after they took 'unwholesome food' at a restaurant near the railway station here on Tuesday.

According to initial police inquiries, the four persons fainted after they took food at a restaurant located near Haji Camp.

They were rushed to hospital where one of them, Saddam (20), expired, while the condition of another was stated to be serious. The remaining two persons were stable. A police official said apparently the incident occurred because of adulterated food served to the victim at the restaurant.

Following the incident, police took some staffers of the restaurant in custody for questioning, he said.

He said a criminal case would be lodged against the restaurant owner in the light of police inquiry which was under way.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1522964/man-dies-after-unwholesome-food-intake

SPEAKERS URGE INVESTMENTS IN AGRICULTURE TO ENSURE FOOD SECURITY

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 18, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Speakers at a seminar on Tuesday said though investments in agriculture are becoming riskier, especially for small farmers, these are key to ensure productivity and food security with the altering climate.

"Today we need to act. We need to accelerate and amplify our interventions and find ways to better support Pakistan and smallest farmers to increase their resilience to climate change," said International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Country Director for Pakistan and Asia Pacific, Hubert Boirard.

He believed that this year had brought extreme weather to every corner of the world.

"Our best chance of adapting to these rapidly changing conditions is through investing in smallholder farmers. It is important to equip them with the skills and resources needed to minimise the impact of agriculture on the environment," said Mr Boirard.

Lessons should be learnt from China's technological advancement for smallholder farmers, MNA Sher Ali Arbab says

The one-day seminar provided an opportunity for development experts from IFAD, China and Pakistan to share innovative solutions, experiences and knowledge on how to develop resilient and high-value cropping systems.

They shared proven technical solutions to combat desertification and other related technologies that could be applied to the local context.

Climate-resilient and sustainable reforestation practices to support Pakistan's national development were the focus of the seminar, convened by IFAD and the governments of China and Pakistan.

In Pakistan, high levels of agricultural production and the continuously increasing population placed huge demands on the country's water resources. Lack of rain and other climate-related trends have further stressed the agriculture sector, said the participants.

IFAD representatives shared their experience in developing strategies and policies that contributed to sustainable rural poverty reduction and supported smallholder farmers in rural communities to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Chinese experts spoke on expertise in climate-resilient agriculture and reforestation and afforestation techniques, its interest in promoting knowledge sharing through South-South and Triangular Cooperation. The ideas shared were particularly in context of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative collaboration with Pakistan.

"There are lessons to be learnt from China's technological advancement for smallholder farmers. Pakistan is interested in adopting agricultural technologies that will enable them to farm sustainably," said Chairman Parliamentary Committee on CPEC, Sher Ali Arbab, MNA.

He expressed the hope that agriculture cooperation between the two nations would help grow their relationship and give opportunities to both countries for strong investment and joint ventures.Since 1979, IFAD has implemented 27 projects in Pakistan costing $2.8 billion, benefiting more than 17 million people.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1522910

PAKISTAN, US TO BOOST AGRI COOPERATION

The Newspaper's ReporterDecember 18, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United States will hold talks on cooperation in areas of agriculture in February next year.

Though the dates are yet to be announced, Food Security Minister Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtyar told US Ambassador Paul W. Jones during a meeting here on Tuesday that Prime Minister Imran Khan had emphasised that agricultural cooperation between the two countries must be prioritised.

Bakhtyar said that the government is looking forward to working in developing cold chain, value addition facilities in various horticulture products, dairy and meat. Joint ventures in these areas would be a convenient approach for unleashing potential in a short span of time, he suggested. He said the government is looking for a healthy cooperation in agro sector especially tapping on Pakistan's significant halal meat production and entering the world market through US support.

"We are focusing on mutual collaboration by providing enabling platform in public sector, and the incumbent government has launched largest agriculture development programme worth over Rs3 billion, which shows our commitment towards the revival of this sector," he said.

Bakhtyar informed the envoy that achieving high yield through scientific means would enable the government to plan the crop sowing priorities and meet the challenges of production, especially enhancing cotton, pulses and edible oil growth indigenously for there is a huge import bill of these commodities.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1522867/pakistan-us-to-boost-agri-cooperation

GROWERS SEEK MINISTER'S HELP OVER SUGAR MILLS' CLOSURE TODAY

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent December 18, 2019

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Cham-ber of Agriculture (SCA) has described a Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) decision to close mills as a violation of Sindh Sugar Factories Control Act and demanded of the government to impose ban on such mills.

According to a SCA press release issued here on Tuesday, a delegation of the SCA led by its president Syed Miran Mohammad Shah and general secretary Zahid Bhurgari met Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahu in Karachi and briefed him about PSMA's "tyranny", locust attack situation and other matters related to growers.

The minister assured the delegation that the Sindh government would give preference to such matters of growers.

The chamber president informed the minister that 24 sugar mills and the PSMA had decided to close crushing from Wednesday and said that action should be taken against those mills for violation of the act and they should be banned completely.

He said the Sindh government should take its own initiatives to control locusts instead of depending on the federal government because the situation was getting serious.

He said that sprays should be immediately done in all affected areas, otherwise locusts would devour the entire upcoming wheat crop.

He also called for banning import of tomatoes because Sindh's tomato crop was about to reach market and now rates of tomatoes had stabilised. If import of tomatoes continued, it would cause losses to the growers, he added.

The minister was informed that steps should be taken for export of Sindh's onion crop so that the growers could get better rates.

He was also told that farmers had suffered Rs5 billion losses due to spurious seeds of cotton and paddy crops this season and they should be compensated.

The delegation demanded that measures should be taken to check sale of spurious seeds.

It also demanded a wheat support price of Rs1,600 for 2019-20. It said farmers should be provided subsidy by the Sindh government on the pattern of Punjab.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1522808/growers-seek-ministers-help-over-sugar-mills-closure-today

'PM TO INAUGURATE AGRICULTURE EMERGENCY PROJECTS NEXT MONTH'

By RECORDER REPORT on December 18, 2019

KP Minister for Agriculture and Livestock, Mohibullah Khan has said that Prime Minister Imran Khan would inaugurate mega projects in agriculture and livestock sectors next month in D.I Khan. The projects have been initiated under the Prime Minister Agriculture Emergency Programme. Presiding over a meeting here to review progress on Public Sector Development Program (PDSP), he said hopefully the Prime Minister would inaugurate the projects.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/18/554165/pm-to-inaugurate-agriculture-emergency-projects-next-month/

GOVERNMENT TO SET UP MODEL BAZAARS, AGRI FAIR PRICE SHOPS IN 142 TEHSILS

By Imran Adnan Published: December 18, 2019

LAHORE: For market intervention to rein in prices of essential commodities, Punjab government has decided to establish model bazaars and agriculture fair price shops in 142 tehsils of Punjab, The Express Tribune learnt on Tuesday.

Though, earlier this decision was made in a meeting presided over by Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar, but the matter was deliberated in detail here in a meeting at Punjab Civil Secretariat, which was chaired by Punjab Industries and Trade Minister Mian Aslam Iqbal.

It was highlighted in the meeting that spadework for establishing model bazaars at tehsil level has been finalised as per vision of the chief minister.

Places have also been identified for setting up model bazaars at tehsils level.

Iqbal directed the officials concerned to complete registration of shops in collaboration with urban units for establishing agriculture fair price shops. Proper parking, lighting, cleanliness and security arrangements should be ensured in the model bazaars.

He underlined that the primary objective of these model bazars is to provide relief to common man. Provincial minister said more shops should be set up instead of making joy land. Model bazaars and agriculture fair price shops are big source of providing relief to common man therefore, government has decided to extend the network of fair price shops and model bazaars, he maintained.

A senior official of the Punjab Model Bazaars Management Company (PMBMC) highlighted that the company was already running 32 model bazaars in different districts across Punjab. In big district, like Lahore, there are more than one model bazaar to cater maximum number of citizens and control prices of essential commodities.

He indicated that the government has also decided to keep these model bazaars open for seven days a week to give maximum relief to masses. In several district where these model bazaars have already been established, they helped to control prices in open market too.

The company is providing free of charge electricity to vendors, free cleanliness services, daily official price list and free parking space for citizens to make this initiative a great success, he maintained.

There is room for opening new model bazaars in big cities and districts, but the only problem is the availability of space. He pointed out that there is a dire need of establishing new model bazaars in Shahdara, Samanabad and some other underprivileged neighbourhoods of Lahore.

Responding to a question, he said as decision for establishment of model bazaars at tehsil level has been made. The company has initiated process to estimate financial cost to roll out the project. It would take a couple of weeks to find out the exact cost estimates. If the government provide availability of financial resources the company would establish all these model bazaars in 8-10 month. Considering previous experience, the company would require Rs8 million to Rs15million for construction of new model bazaars.

He pointed out that the company was working in collaboration with local administration in all district for identification and allocation of land for setting up new model bazaars.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2120084/1-government-set-model-bazaars-agri-fair-price-shops-142-tehsils/

CLIMATE DAMAGE TO COTTON CROP RIPPLES THROUGH ECONOMY

Reuters Updated December 19, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Mahboob Ahmad was so sure he would have a bumper crop of cotton last season that he was planning to finally fix the date of his eldest son’s wedding.

Then unusually heavy rains pelted Khanewal district, destroying the cotton plants just as they were fruiting.

“All my dreams and plans were shattered,” said Ahmad. “I am so disappointed with this year’s loss that I may quit cotton cultivation from next year.”

Another season of erratic weather has crippled Pakistan’s already ailing cotton sector, resulting in lost revenue and jobs that could cost the economy more than $3 billion by the end of the fiscal year in June 2020, industry experts have warned.

Heavy rains and high temperatures during the whole of the cotton-growing season from April to September severely damaged the crop, said Khalid Abdullah, cotton commissioner and vice president of the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee.

That has put a strain on the entire textile industry, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Most of Pakistan’s cotton is grown in the southern part of Punjab province which experienced unexpectedly high temperatures in August and September, even at night, Abdullah explained.

Together, the heavy rains and dry spells destroyed over a third of the country’s expected cotton harvest, according to the state-run Central Cotton Research Institute (CCRI) in Multan.

Cotton sector may suffer loss of revenue and jobs that could cost Pakistan over $3bn by the end of current fiscal year

Yet again, Pakistan’s cotton farmers have seen their cash crop devastated by unpredictable climate extremes, said Abdullah. “The farmers are continuously hit by changing weather conditions,” he said.

Last year, the culprit was unusual heat which parched crops and dried up rivers in the two regions.

Cotton is a major driver of the economy, contributing almost one per cent of GDP, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. But this fiscal year, cotton farmers will fall drastically short of the government’s target of 15 million bales.

To meet the demands of its textile industry, Pakistan regularly imports cotton — mainly from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the United States, according to the CCRI.

By June, the country will have to bring in at least six million bales — almost double what it imported last financial year, said Shahid Sattar, executive director of the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA).

Importing cotton is expensive, which pushes up the overall cost of textile production, he explained.

Figures from the APTMA show that cotton, the main raw material for the textile industry, accounts for about 70pc of the basic cost of the final garment. “Failure of the cotton crop translates into damage to the country’s economy,” Sattar said.

Pakistan’s Economic Survey 2018-2019, published in June this year, said climate change poses “a serious challenge” to agriculture.

For the past decade or so, Pakistan’s cotton industry has been struggling to adapt. Production fell by more than a quarter from 2011 to 2019, according to the CCRI.

This year, Pakistan's ranking among cotton-producing nations dropped from fourth to fifth behind Brazil, the United States, China and India, showed data from the Washington-based Internatio-nal Cotton Advisory Committee.

Employment will also take a hit, Sattar warned. About 2pc of the estimated 25 million people whose livelihoods are linked with cotton and the textile sector are at risk of losing their jobs this fiscal year, he said.

"This low [cotton] production will definitely... result in a burden on our fragile economy," said Abid Qaiyum Suleri, executive director of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, an independent think tank in Islamabad.

Much of that burden falls on farmers, Suleri noted, as one poor cotton crop after another eats away at their standard of living.

Farmers often rely on the money they make from cotton to procure what they need to cultivate other crops for the rest of the year, he explained. "If one crop is affected, it affects other crops as well because farmers have to buy inputs like seeds, fertilisers and water," he said.

To help farmers cope with the increasingly extreme weather, Abdullah said the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee has directed its national seed-breeding programme to come up with new climate-resilient varieties to hand out to farmers.

Another major problem is that most rural growers lack access to weather forecasts from the meteorological department, he added. And that information is only delivered in five languages, including English and Urdu, which is a problem for many farmers in a country where more than 70 languages are spoken.

In a bid to tackle the issue, in 2016 the cotton committee launched TeleCotton, a text message service that delivers simple, clear weather information and advice to farmers in their local language, Abdullah said.

So far, only about 25,000 farmers have signed up, but the committee is working on registering more users and increasing the frequency of the messages, he added.

Ahmad, the farmer in Khanewal, said the government needed to do more to make it possible for him to keep growing cotton — otherwise, he might have to abandon the crop for rice.

He told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that he would like to see the government set up testing stations in every village.

If farmers can check the quality of their seeds and pesticides before using them, that would go a long way to improving cotton production, he said.

"Cotton is not only our lifeline but the lifeline of the country's economy too," he said. "It needs the policymakers' attention."

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1523099/climate-damage-to-cotton-crop-ripples-through-economy

COTTON OUTPUT SET TO HIT RECORD LOW

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana Updated December 19, 2019

KARACHI: Continuing its consistent fall for the sixth year in row, the country's cotton output in the ongoing season is set to hit record low at 8.5 million bales.

Production data released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) on Wednesday rev-e-aled that the country is likely to face a shortfall of around 2.1m bales. Cotton analysts firmly believe that the total production to remain below the 9m mark.

PCGA Chairman Jawed Sohail Rehmani feared the current season would be the worst as initial estimates suggest that only 8.5m bales of cotton may be produced.

He added that cotton is a cash crop and backbone of the economy because around 65 per cent of the country's exports depend on this crop but lamented the government's lack of attention to the changing trend.

Sohail alleged that there is a sugar lobby within the government which protects its interests at the cost of cotton crop but there should be a realisation that sugar is consumed locally whereas cotton earns foreign exchange.

He demanded the government for removal of import duty on cotton until local stocks are picked up by textile spinning mills as ginners are still holding sizeable cotton inventory in anticipation of selling at higher prices.

Cotton analyst Amir Naseem said that as a result of this demand-supply gap, local consumers are likely to import around 6m bales putting a huge burden on the country's foreign exchange reserves.

The country's production has been on a declining trend after producing bumper crop of 14.86m bales in the 2013-14 seasons and is feared to hit lowest at around 8.5m bales during this season, Naseem added.

The country's cotton production, as of Dec 15, faces a shortfall of 2.10m bales as production clocked in at 7.8m bales over the corresponding period last year when production was at 9.96m bales.

Dayaram, a cotton grower and ginner from Kandiaro, Sindh, told Dawn that presently, around 1.2m bales of unsold stocks are held by ginners while adding that they are faced with financial crisis as textile industry is focusing on imports.

He urged the government to save ginners from an imminent collapse because growers have almost sold their entire phutti (seed cotton) but ginneries are presently holding huge stocks of unsold cotton.

Dayaram drew government's attention towards rapidly falling cotton production and urged that measures be taken on war footing to ensure higher production.

Cotton production in Punjab declined to 4.467m bales as against 5.918m bales produced in the same period last year. Similarly, production in Sindh stood at 3.394m bales compared to 4.04m bales in the corresponding period last year.

Published in Dawn, December 19th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1523117/cotton-output-set-to-hit-record-low

'PAKISTAN CAN BE FOOD BASKET OF WORLD'

APP December 19, 2019

LAHORE: China's technological advancement and expertise can help Pakistan to serve as a food basket to this part of the world.

Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) President Irfan Iqbal Sheikh expressed these views while addressing a six-member trade delegation from China on Wednesday.

He said that Pakistan has vast fertile land, all weathers and one of the best canal systems in the world but has been unable to reap benefits due to lack of modern technologies.

Sheikh said that China had transformed itself into an economic giant and is already playing a vital role to make Pakistan prosperous. Transfer of technology would ensure speedy growth for Pakistan's industrial and agriculture sectors.

Government-to-govern-ment collaboration supported by frequent interactions between private sector representatives is encouraging, he added. The bilateral trade volume between Pakistan and China was above the $16 billion while China was the highest contributor to the net foreign direct investment in Pakistan.

Sheikh said that there are countless opportunities for Chinese investors in various sectors of the economy including engineering, surgical instruments, pharmaceuticals, value added textiles, leather products, poultry/meat and agriculture machinery. Moreover, he added that it was important that there should be win-win situation for all the stakeholders.

"It is the right time to invest in Pakistan," he said while lamenting that despite having skills, labour in Pakistan was cheap compared to China, therefore, investors should avail this opportunity by setting up joint ventures with their Pakistani counterparts.

China Pakistan Economic and Trade Council President Chen Jianlu hoped the relations between the business communities from the two sides would strengthen and was also optimistic that the visit would help Chinese businessmen find new partners in Pakistan.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1523116/pakistan-can-be-food-basket-of-world

NA SPEAKER FOR CELEBRATING 'SPECIAL DAY' FOR FARMERS ANNUALLY

By RECORDER REPORT on December 19, 2019

Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser said on Wednesday that farmers play a pivotal role towards economic development of Pakistan and special day for farmers should be celebrated every year. He was addressing a special event organized in connection with the 'Kissan Day' celebrations.

Sarsabz Fertilizer, a flagship brand of Fatima Fertilizer under the Fatima Group, marked a special initiative to recognize December 18 as ‘Kissan Day' in Pakistan.

This is because unlike many other developed countries around the world, Pakistan never had any such day to celebrate its farmers, despite being an agri-based economy and having 60 percent of its population residing within rural communities having 100 percent reliance of income on Agriculture.

The speaker lauded the efforts of Fatima Fertilizers for recognizing the contribution of the farmer community. He also agreed on the fact that a special day for farmers should be celebrated every year in Pakistan. Sarsabz Fertilizer has been active since a long time advocating on giving due importance and recognition to Pakistan's underserved farmers in order to curb national food security challenges on the face of constantly increasing food demand. Sarsabz's Salam Kissan initiative recognizing December 18 as Kissan Day holds a unique importance of being the first-ever initiative not only to celebrate the farmers of Pakistan, but to also serve as a constant reminder about the importance of agriculture for our economic betterment.

‘Kissan Day' was celebrated during a special event organized at the Marriot Hotel in Islamabad on December 18, 2019 with a recommendation to the government to recognize and announce it officially as part of the country's annual national calendar of special days to be celebrated. The event was attended by high profile dignitaries from both Government and agriculture sectors.

The government representatives included notable figures such as Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan Asad Qaiser and Member of National Assembly Syed Fakhar Imam.

Also present at the event were Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Yao Ling and Srilankan High Commissioner to Pakistan, Noordeen Mohamed Shaheid. Representing the Agricultural sector were renowned agriculture entrepreneurs including Imdad Ali Nizamani, who is also a progressive farmer, as well as top management officials from Sarsabz including Ali Mukhtar, Director at Fatima Group, Khurram Javed Maqbool Director Marketing and Sales at Fatima Group and Rabel Sadozai, Head of Marketing at Fatima Group.

Having a special day for farmers meant to recognize and honor their important role and contributions to the national economy.

While speaking at the occasion, Khurram Javed Maqbool, Director Marketing and Sales at Fatima Group stated that farmers are the backbone of our great nation and a key driving force to enable growth and prosperity within Pakistan's agriculture sector. Without their contribution, it is impossible to resolve our food security challenges, keeping in view the growing population in Pakistan. We need to provide an enabling environment for them and remove any impediments in the way of their growth. Let this day become a reminder for everyone every year that within the progress of our small-scale farmers lies in the prosperity of our beloved country.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/19/554549/na-speaker-for-celebrating-special-day-for-farmers-annually/

PA PASSES LAW TO PROVIDE RIGHTS TO SINDH'S WOMEN AGRICULTURE WORKERS

Hasan Mansoor Updated December 20, 2019

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly on Thursday passed the Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Bill, 2019, providing rights to women who carry out agriculture and livestock activities. The law concerns their pay and minimum wages, gives them recognition and ensures measures for promotion and protection of their rights.

The bill was presented by the chairman of the standing committee on labour and human resources, Shahid Thaheem, after detailed scrutiny of the original draft that had earlier been presented by the government in the house.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Chawla presented the bill clause by clause in the house with Deputy Speaker Rehana Leghari in the chair and got it passed unanimously.

The bill offers a law to provide for the recognition of women's work in agriculture sector, including farming, livestock and fisheries and related sectors and promotes and protects their rights to ensure their participation in decision-making and foster empowerment.

Law says women farm workers cannot be paid less than minimum wage

It ensures various long-denied rights to the women agriculture workers.

"A woman agriculture worker shall receive pay in cash or in kind, for any agriculture work undertaken individually, or as part of a family unit, on land and livestock belonging to her or her own family, or to someone else which shall be an equal to pay received by male workers for same work," said the bill.

The pay of a woman agriculture worker shall not be less than the minimum wages fixed by the government, it said.

"The working day of a woman agriculture worker shall not exceed eight working hours, and shall not commence until one hour after daybreak, or continue beyond one hour prior to sunset."

It said these workers shall take time off work due to sickness or for antenatal and postnatal care and routine check-ups.

A woman agriculture worker is entitled to 120 days of maternity leave.

Every woman agriculture worker is entitled to iddat leave.

The law says female agriculture workers having children of up to two years of age may breastfeed their children in safe and hygienic conditions and in the first six months of a child's life a worker should receive the necessary support to exclusively breastfeed her child.

They should have the right "to access government agricultural, livestock, fisheries and other services, credit, social security, subsidies and asset transfers in their own individual rights, or in association with other women agriculture workers".

Each of these workers should perform work free from all forms of harassment or abuse.

A woman agriculture worker shall receive a written contract of employment if she so demands.

The law sanctions these workers the right to form unions or associations or to associate themselves with an association.

The new law makes it clear that these workers should not be discriminated against with respect to employment opportunities, wages and working conditions on grounds of sex, land ownership, caste, religion, ethnicity and residential status.

These rights are applicable to all women agriculture workers.

The new law makes the provincial labour and human resources department bound to maintain a register of women agriculture workers at every union council.

Every woman agriculture worker could apply for registration to a union council she resides in.

The registered woman agriculture worker would be issued a Benazir Woman Agriculture Worker Card.

A union of women agriculture workers should consist of at least five Benazir card holders for registration.

The ministries of health, population welfare, local government, women development and labour have been asked to prepare and implement a two-year plan to ensure that their outreach and services are appropriate and accessible to the needs and rights of women agriculture workers.

The house also unanimously passed The Sindh Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Bill, 2019 to establish the Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation keeping in view the increasing number of congenital and acquired disabilities and limited services available in society.

The Sir Cowasjee Jahangir Institute of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences, Hyderabad Bill, 2019 was introduced in the house and the draft was referred to the relevant standing committee for consideration.

Earlier, several members, mostly belonging to the ruling PPP, made congratulatory speeches after Faryal Talpur, who has recently been released on bail, entered the house.

During his speech, MQM-P’s Mohammad Hussain said the government should make arrangements to ensure that no undertrial woman prisoner should be jailed and instead be held under house arrest.

Minister Chawla requested Speaker Siraj Durrani to form a committee to consider the suggestion about female prisoners.

Health Minister Azra Pechuho told Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf’s Shahnawaz Jadoon that her ministry was already taking measures against quacks and unlicensed medical stores.

Faryal Talpur thanked the court that granted her bail “on merit”.

She narrated her ordeal in Adiala jail, where, she said, she endured worst days of her life.

She said she was charged for misappropriating Rs30 million, while the amount she paid in tax was more than this sum.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1523257/pa-passes-law-to-provide-rights-to-sindhs-women-agriculture-workers

UNCERTAINTY LOOMS LARGE OVER SUGAR SECTOR AS MILLS IN SINDH SUSPEND CANE CRUSHING

Mohammad Hussain Khan Updated December 20, 2019

HYDERABAD: Most sugar mill owners have suspended the crushing of sugar cane over the past 24 hours in Sindh, jeopardising the crushing season once again.

Uncertainty had already been looming large over the sugar cane sector as farmers kept claiming that they had been told by factory managements not to harvest the crop.

Growers like Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) general secretary Zahid Bhurgari claimed that half of the mills that had started crushing had stopped the process and Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) Sindh chapter chairman Dr Tara Chand also confirmed that “12 mills have closed operations, thus suspending sugar cane crushing”.

“Mills are there to crush sugar cane but when there is no cane, mills perforce stop crushing,” argued Dr Tara Chand while mentioning that Shah Murad, Sindh Abadgar, Tando Allahyar, Chambar, Mehran, Matiari, Mirpurkhas, Digri, Tharparkar, Al-Abbas and Ansari sugar mills had suspended crushing.

Reports said that a meeting of millers and sugar cane growers had been convened by Sindh cane commissioner Javed Sibghatullah Mahar to discuss the situation arising out of suspension of crushing.

Growers’ leaders like Mehmood Nawaz Shah, who is vice president Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), consider it an “orchestrated campaign” to pressurise sugar cane growers and said that farmers had been repeatedly told by millers to stop harvesting the crop as they would crush only that crop that had arrived at their backyard. “Even otherwise it looks unlawful because there is a procedure to it if a mill owner wants to suspend sugar cane crushing and this perhaps has not been followed,” he said.

In 2017-18 season, 20.611 million tonne sugar cane was produced against the target of 19m, eight per cent over the target. But in the last season (2018-19), 16.691m tonne was produced against the target of 18.752m, short by 11pc. The crop was 19pc short in terms of achievement in 2018-19 over the 2017-18 season.

Drop in sugar cane production last year was attributable to every year’s bickering between growers and miller over payment of sugar cane rate and belated start of crushing season by sugar millers. “Sugar cane producers are now losing interest in sugar cane crop because of these problems which look unending,” commented a grower.

This year crop sowing target was revised downward by the agriculture department in view of three years’ mean production of sugar cane in Sindh. Against sowing target for 310,000ha in 2019-20, 287,118ha had been brought under sugar cane acreage so far which is 92.6pc of target. The production target is fixed at 18.338m tonne.

Sugar millers, rightly or wrongly, had been complaining about non-supplies of crop by farmers and had informed the Sindh cane commissioner about the situation. The PSMA has not yet officially asked its members to close crushing, but its chairman said that it had been left to each mill's discretion to continue crushing or otherwise in view of supplies of sugar cane.

Growers feel millers have once again jeopardised the entire sugar cane season to protect their interests. They believe that millers wanted to create a situation in market that benefits them as cost of sugar increases on the one hand and farmers get panicked on the other. "Once growers get panicked, [they] supply sugar cane at lesser price in view of approaching wheat harvesting," said SAB leader Shah.

Dr Tara explained that he himself had been facing no-cane situation in his Abadgar Sugar Mills of Tando Mohammad Khan. "Hardly 20,000 tonnes of cane was available in mills backyard. Even after closing mills, we have to bear losses considering numerous expenses of labour, etc," he said.

He blamed farmers for not supplying sugar cane at Rs192/40kg — notified by the Sindh government in November. "There is no point in denying notified rate [to growers] as we adhere to government's notification. We are telling the government, cane commissioner and farmers to ensure supply of cane and get Rs192/40kg cash for every maund of crop," he said.

Sindh has 38 sugar mills and of them around four are closed for the past three years. Over two dozen mills were said to have started crushing sugar cane and according to SCA general secretary Zahid Bhurgari, almost half of sugar mills that had started crushing have suspended their operation till Thursday.

"If any mill gets 30pc to 40pc of its required sugar cane supplies, it won't be opting for closing crushing," said Dr Tara. "For how long mills will wait for supply of sugar cane [to pick momentum] as [without] supplies it is difficult to continue the process," he remarked. He believed that the present situation had arisen ever since mills reduced payments from Rs230/40kg to officially fixed price of Rs192/40kg. "Some growers feel Rs250/40kg be paid or even Rs300," he said.

Out of 38, majority of sugar mills are located in lower Sindh region. When mills started this season's crushing, they started paying Rs220/40kg to Rs240/40kg before reducing it to notified price of Rs192/40kg. Growers decided to hold up supplies of sugar cane after sudden decline in rate and they also wanted millers to increase the rate.

Nawaz Shah contended growers could not guarantee supplies in line with crushing capacity of each mills.

"Since mills were comfortable with Rs192/40kg that's why it was notified by the government 'on their whims', otherwise for growers it was still unjustified," he said.

He also said that given raise in sugar's price, this cost appreciation was not seen in sugar cane's rate, he said. He conceded that arrival of sugar cane had slowed, but that did not mean that mills should close crushing. Supplies gradually become sustainable, but millers wanted to disturb the entire regime, he said.

Shah believes that millers had been looking for a way to close crushing to pressurise growers through such tactics. "Sugar millers want to squeeze crushing season because once they close mills for some time, it will cause uncertainty in sugar market and price of sweetener will jack up," he said.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1523247

OVER RS 15 BILLION WINDER DAM TO IRRIGATE 10,000 ACRES OF AGRICULTURE LAND

By TANVEER AHMED on December 20, 2019

Winder Dam project will irrigate 10,000 acres of agriculture land in Balochistan, which will be constructed at the cost of Rs 15.230 billion.

Federal government will finance the project entirely, which would be executed by Irrigation Department of Balochistan government.

The project will be implemented in four years, the documents related to the project revealed. Documents showed that the main objective of the project is to provide 50 cusecs assured irrigation water supply to irrigate 10,000 acres of agriculture land round the year with average cropping intensity of 82 percent.

Lined watercourses will be constructed in the command area under the project. It will improve socio economic conditions of communities living in and around the project area.

The physical scope of work envisages, construction of 40-m high and 1,452-m long earth core rock filled type embankment dam with live storage of 46,724 Ac-ft (57.63 MCM), gated control Ogee type spillway with design discharge of 256,800 Cusecs and 20.5 kms long irrigation canal with 50 cusecs maximum design discharge capacity to irrigate 10,000 acres of land.

Keeping in view of the potential agriculture land in the project area, the Government of Balochistan, through Irrigation Department, planned to construct Winder Dam project.

The feasibility study of Winder Dam was carried out by Wapda through a consultant firm. The project is part of water sector strategy, which centers around five important elements i.e. water augmentation, water conservation, groundwater management, protection of infrastructure from water logging, salinity, floods and institutional reforms.

The project is related to the issue of water scarcity, need for additional water reservoirs and increased poverty in backward irrigated areas.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/20/554951/over-rs-15-billion-winder-dam-to-irrigate-10000-acres-of-agriculture-land/

BALOCHISTAN, KP PARC CHIEF FOR GROWING COTTON IN NEWLY IDENTIFIED AREAS

FAZAL SHER December 20, 2019

ISLAMABAD: Cotton should be grown in newly identified areas in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to improve its declining production in the country, said Dr Muhammad Azeem, Chairman Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC), on Thursday.

Talking to media persons during exposure visit to National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC), he said new areas including Sibi, Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Barkhan, Lasbella, Khuzdar and DI Khan had been identified for cotton cultivation. "We need to focus on cultivating cotton in newly identified areas instead of focusing over the areas where farmers shifted to other cash crops," he said.

He said textile industry did not care about the declining cotton production in the country. Despite decline in production of cotton, farmers did not get proper price for their crop, he said.

The PARC chairman also said the government was planning to fix support price of pulses in order to increase their production and minimize import bill. He said, "Improvement in the country's economy would be difficult until we develop export-led agriculture."

He said the present government had taken many initiatives including agriculture emergency programme for improvement of agriculture sector. The NARC has launched new project for improvement of fishery, poultry and honey production. He said NARC had signed an agreement with the Capital Development Authority (CDA) regarding production of honey.

Azeem briefed in detail about the research activities being carried out at NARC at its different institutes. He said PARC institute and centers were working across the country for the promotion and development of agriculture sector. He briefed media about research activities regarding livestock, poultry and fisheries.

He said the Fish Cold Chain and Processing Unit was an investment to prevent food loss and was widely used in developed countries. Due to that unit, the resident of federal capital and its nearby areas would be able to get fresh fish with full nutrition, he added.

Azeem said NARC had started yogurt production which was 100 percent natural. The yogurt produced by NARC was far better than yogurt produced by other companies, he claimed.

Media team also visited NARC Agricultural and Biological Engineering Institute (ABEI) where a number of farm machines were displayed. The media persons were briefed about farm machinery including olive extraction machine, wheat straw chopper, and sisal decorticator with practical demonstration. They also visited vegetables experimental area where a number of vegetable nurserie

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2019/12/20/7-page/816011-news.html

YARN DEMAND RISES ON COTTON MARKET

By RECORDER REPORT on December 20, 2019

Yarn demand picked up on the cotton market on Thursday in the process of modest trading session, dealers said.

The official spot rate was unchanged at Rs8750, they added. In ready session, over 9,000 bales of cotton changed hands between Rs8050-9100, they said.

Rate of seed cotton per 40kg in Sindh low quality was at Rs3200, while the best quality was available at Rs4100, and in the Punjab prices were at Rs3500-4300, they said.

In Sindh, Binola prices per maund were at Rs1400-1800, in Punjab rates were at Rs1650-1800, they said and adding that polyester fibre was available at Rs179 per kg.

According to the market sources, demand for yarn improved which is an encouraging factor for the traders. It is surprising to note that exports of textile products picked up, this factor would help the basic fundamentals, they added.

Commenting on the market trend in the near future, cotton analyst, Naseem Usman said that trading activity likely to maintain present trend owing to short supply of fine quality cotton.

Adds Reuters: Cotton futures gained nearly 1% on Wednesday as prospects of a "phase one" US-China trade deal boosted investor sentiment ahead of weekly federal export sales data from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Cotton contracts for March rose 0.50 cent, or 0.75%, at 66.94 cents per lb by 01:00 p.m. EST (1800 GMT).

Total futures market volume fell by 6,469 to 15,616 lots. Data showed total open interest gained 1,097 to 206,101 contracts in the previous session.

The following deals reported: 1400 bales from Ghotki at Rs9100 (Prime cotton), 1600 bales from Dharki at the same rate, 1000 bales from Salah Pat at Rs8200, 600 bales from Sadiqabad at Rs8900, 1600 bales from Rahim Yar Khan at Rs8300-8900, 800 bales from Haroonabad at Rs8050-8100, 600 bales from Faqeerwali at Rs8100, 600 bales from Bahawal Nagar at Rs8050, 400 bales from Donga Bonga at Rs8100 and same figure from Fort Abbas at Rs8900 (seed), they said.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/20/554878/yarn-demand-rises-on-cotton-market/

'PAMRA ACT WILL PLAY KEY ROLE IN ESTABLISHING AGRICULTURE MARKETS'

By RECORDER RPEORT on December 20, 2019

The Punjab Agriculture Marketing Regulatory Authority (PAMRA) Act will play a key role in establishing the agricultural markets system on modern lines. After the implementation of this Act, all market committees across the province will carry out their work under the new system.

Separate markets for fruits, grains, green zones, cotton, fisheries, vegetables, sugar, jaggery will be set up which will facilitate the farmers and provide better facilities to the consumers, said Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial Minister while talking to media during a meeting with Chairman PAMRA Naveed Bhinder today at Agriculture House.

Minister for Agriculture Punjab also presided over a meeting to make marketing system more active. The meeting was attended by Minister for Holding Department, Punjab Syed Samsam Bukhari, Chief Advisor Media Minister for Agriculture, Punjab Shahid Qadir, Director (E&M) Punjab Liaqat Ali Raza along with other officers and media representatives.

Speaking on the occasion, Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial Minister for Agriculture, Punjab said that present Government is implementing various steps and development schemes for welfare of farmers.

Under the Prime Minister's Agriculture Emergency Program at the National level, plans of Rs300 billion are being implemented to increase the yield per acre of wheat, paddy, sugarcane, oilseeds commodities. Marketing system has also been revamped under PAMRA Act for the betterment of farming community.

Now, the farmers can also sell directly their products to consumers which will help in limiting role of middleman. Speaking to media, Minister for Holding Department Syed Samsam Bukhari has said that the prosperity of the farmers and increase in agricultural production is at the top of the current Government's priorities. Me and Minister for Agriculture Punjab belong to farming community and are well aware of the problems of the farmers and we are trying to solve them.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/20/554939/pamra-act-will-play-key-role-in-establishing-agriculture-markets/

REAP PLANS TO SEND TRADE TEAMS TO S ARABIA, AUSTRALIA

By ZAHID BAIG on December 20, 2019

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) is planning to take trade delegations to Saudi Arabia and Australia during the next calendar year in a bid to boost Pakistani rice exports to the two nations.

‘Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest buyers markets for Pakistani rice. Currently, it is importing around one million tons of rice out of which 70 per cent is Basmati and this figure can be enhanced substantially provided both the public and private sector make concerted efforts,' said REAP Chairman Shahjahan Malik while talking to Business Recorder here on Thursday.

REAP has decided to send around 18-members Trade Delegation to enhance rice export to Saudi Arabia at the end of January 2020. It will be the second delegation under Shahjahan Malik as he took first such delegation during his tenure as Senior Vice Chairman too.

Shahjahan said that they are planning to visit Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam and holding Biryani festivals there to showcase Pakistani rice's taste, aroma and potential to the big buyers.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/20/554927/reap-plans-to-send-trade-teams-to-s-arabia-australia/

VIETNAMESE CC TERMS COOPERATION IN TEXTILE, SEAFOOD & PHARMA SECTORS POSITIVE

By RECORDER REPORT on December 20, 2019

Vietnamese Commercial Counselor Nguyen Hong Tien, who is leading a 15-member Vietnamese trade delegation, has said that a large number of companies, investors and tourist firms of his country want to explore Pakistan.

Speaking at a meeting of Korangi Association of Trade and Industry (KATI) here on Thursday, he said that cooperation in sectors of textile, seafood and pharma between both countries is very positive and many joint ventures can be possible in these fields.

Gulzar Firoz said, “Vietnam has a great production capacity in shoemaking, but they were buying Pakistani leather from third parties, we want them to buy leather directly from us."

Ghazanfar Ali Khan introduced delegation members to local industrialists and investors.

He said that this visit of Vietnamese delegation would prove a milestone in increasing bilateral trade and financial relations between Pakistan and Vietnam.

After the luncheon, B2B meetings were held between guest delegation and local industrialists and investors at KATI.

SVP KATI, Ikram Rajput briefed the delegation about the scope of Korangi Industrial Area.

He mentioned that while both countries have a good bilateral trade relation but there are vast fields of opportunities in pharmaceutical, textile, leather, Seafood and tourism sectors to boost the volume of trade and investments.

Rajput highlighted the importance of business to business relations and contact to strengthen bilateral trade and financial relations.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/20/554908/vietnamese-cc-terms-cooperation-in-textile-seafood-pharma-sectors-positive/

CLIMATE CHANGE & COTTON PRODUCTION

By Editoria Published: December 20, 2019

Pakistan is among countries most vulnerable to devastating effects of climate change. Erratic weather in the past two seasons has crippled the country’s already ailing cotton sector. In the ongoing fiscal year, the loss to the economy caused due to the destruction of the cotton crop is being estimated at $3 billion in terms of revenue and jobs. Heavy rains and high temperature during the entire cotton-growing season from April to September have severely damaged the cotton crop. Last year, heavy rains and dry spells in south Punjab and Sindh, the two main cotton-growing regions in Pakistan, destroyed more than a third of the country’s expected cotton harvest.

Cotton is a major driver of the economy, as it contributes almost one per cent of GDP, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. This year, the government’s target of 15 million bales of cotton production is feared to fall drastically short of the target. To meet the demands of its textile industry, Pakistan regularly imports cotton mainly from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the US. The All Pakistan Textile Mills Association says the country will likely have to import six million bales by June next. It will be double what it imported the previous fiscal year. Cotton accounts for 70 per cent of the basic cost of the final garment, so failure of the cotton crop means damage to the country’s economy. In Pakistan, cotton production fell by more than a quarter from 2011 to 2019. APTMA says around two per cent of the people whose livelihoods are linked with cotton and the textile sector are at risk of losing jobs this fiscal year.

Farmers have demanded that they be provided timely information on weather condition to enable them to take remedial measures. At partition, in Pakistan were included regions which produce the finest long-staple Egyptian cotton. Besides climate change, other factors too might be contributing to the declining production. This needs to be looked into.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 20th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2121397/6-climate-change-cotton-production/

GROWERS, SUGAR MILLERS MEET TO HELP RESUME CRUSHING

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent December 21, 2019

HYDERABAD: A meeting between sugar millers and growers was held under the chairmanship of Sindh cane commissioner in his office on Friday and discussed modalities for resuming crushing of sugar cane that has been suspended by 12 sugar factories of lower Sindh region — Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas — abruptly.

Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) Sindh zone chairman Dr Tara Chand also attended the meeting along with other sugar mill owners. Nadeem Shah of the Sindh Abadgar Board and Nabi Bux Sathio of the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) represented their organisations at the meeting that continued for around 90 minutes.

According to the PSMA chairman, it was decided in the meeting that every mill would conduct survey in its area while growers' leaders would persuade farmers to continue harvesting crop to be procured by factories.

He said it was a temporary shutdown primarily on account of "no sugar cane" supply situation in lower Sindh, otherwise mills in the rest of Sindh were functioning.

Answering a question, he told Dawn that sugar mills in Ghotki were not paying Rs200 or over Rs200 because he owned a factory in that district. "Mills will start crushing wherever growers in their areas show willingness to harvest the crop," he said.

He said that as harvesting picked up momentum in every crushing season, situation got normalised and that was why growers were urged to encourage their friends to ensure regular supplies of cane. "We will hold a meeting of the PSMA and you will hear in the next few days that sugar mills start announcing dates for restarting crushing," he disclosed.

His thrust was that 12 sugar mills suspended the process when farmers declined to supply cane. But growers rejected his contention. According to Nabi Bux Sathio, sugar mills themselves jacked up the rate at Rs240 and then reduced it to Rs192/40kg in one go. He said that to some extent, this step might have disappointed growers.

He said sugar cane production had been on lower side this season and growers were slowly and gradually ensuring supplies because part of crop (vegetation along with stick of sugar cane) was used for livestock's fodder. "In view of lesser crop production, farmers were cautiously harvesting it so that fodder supplies also remained intact for a longer period," he said.

He said the sugar cane growers could not harvest crop unless mills issued 'indents' that made it clear that cane was to be supplied to mills now. Mr Sathio disagreed with Dr Tara's view that upper Sindh's mills were not paying over Rs200/40kg rate to growers and referred to Sukkur's Kiran sugar factory that the PSMA chief himself conceded was paying between Rs200/40kg to Rs216/40kg.

SAB's Haji Nadeem Shah said that the PSMA chairman also undertook to hold a meeting of mill owners in the PSMA and then each mill would announce resuming crushing while paying the notified price of Rs192/40kg to growers. "It is, indeed, good that things have started moving in the right direction," he observed.

According to Cane Commissioner Javed Sibghatullah Mahar, millers' contention was that once mills' boilers stopped working, they needed a few days to restart them. He confirmed that the PSMA chairman had himself said that 12 mills had stopped crushing now. He said that according to growers and agriculture department's assessment, lower Sindh region was having lower sugar cane production now.

"There is a point of some trust deficit between the two sides — millers and growers — as well and I tried to bridge this gap," he said. Now, he said, growers wanted mills to issue indents to them to mark beginning of the harvesting again.

Mr Sathio said that initially millers insisted that they would start crushing from Jan 10, 2020, which growers did not agree to. He said that even in Thursday's proceedings regarding payment of quality premium (in view of Supreme Court's judgment in favour of growers) before Sindh High Court, when growers raised the issue of suspension of crushing, the judge asked the cane commissioner to take action against those mills which had stopped the process.

Published in Dawn, December 21st, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1523371/growers-sugar-millers-meet-to-help-resume-crushing

SUNFLOWER TO BE CULTIVATED ON 260,000 ACRES IN PUNJAB

By RECORDER REPORT on December 21, 2019

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 cultivate on more than 2.60 lakh acres of land in different areas of the Province.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Friday 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 compare to other oil seed crops.

Sunflower would be cultivated on 4680 acres of land in four tehsils of Sialkot district. In Sialkot tehsil 550 acres, Daska 800 acres, Pasrur 2780 acres and 550 acres in tehsil Sambrial would 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.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/21/555244/sunflower-to-be-cultivated-on-260000-acres-in-punjab/

CLIMATE-SMART FARMING - A SOLUTION TO RISING TEMPERATURE

By Shahram Haq Published: December 21, 2019

LAHORE: In the context of climate change, feeding a growing population will remain a constant challenge for the world in the foreseeable future.

The changing climatic patterns will exert an adverse impact on the productive resources, shorten the agriculture growing periods, increase the risk of pests and diseases, in extreme circumstances, result in floods, droughts and heat waves and ultimately reduce agricultural productivity.

According to a research conducted by Germanwatch, Pakistan is predicted to be one of the countries to be affected the most by the rapidly rising temperatures.

To make matters worse, Pakistan, with the world's sixth-largest population at present, is projected to add nearly 100 million people to its population by 2050, according to the UN World Population Prospects 2019.

"With an ever-increasing population, scarce resources and a changing climate, farmers face unrivalled risk and uncertainty," said Bayer Regional Head for Asia Pacific Jens Hartmann while talking to The Express Tribune.

"Agriculture must become highly efficient and sustainable if it has to provide ample food for the growing world population," he added.

Hartmann held the belief that new solutions were needed to help the farmers face the growing challenges. He listed digital innovation and data science as the areas that had the potential to change agriculture for good.

"These modern tools help farmers collect farm-related data, observe and respond to inter and intra-field variability and minimise wastage of resources, thus enhancing productivity and efficiency," he said.

"Drones, in particular, can be a game changer in this sector," Hartmann stressed. "Equipped with sensors having advanced data analytic capabilities, drones can accurately manage variations in crop fields, optimally plant seeds and apply crop protection while minimising the exposure to risks for farmers," he said.

"Use of agricultural drones is growing rapidly due to their increasing applications such as aerial mapping, plant health monitoring, soil analysis and weed detection."

Giving the example of China, he said the number of agricultural drones used in the country had more than doubled within a year.

Hartmann added that public and private-sector institutions in Pakistan were also working on developing technologies and innovations that could contribute to a climate-smart agriculture.

The use of technologies such as laser land levelling, solar-powered high-efficiency irrigation systems and smart water grids is on the rise.

"In limited cases, even unmanned drones are being used to monitor crops," he said. "The rising shortage of labour is one of the major factors driving the growth of drones."

According to the World Bank, the share of total employment in agriculture has dropped from 43.25% in 1991 to 26% in 2018.

The increasing urbanisation taking place in Pakistan was creating labour shortage in the farming industry, Hartmann pointed out. He called for embracing digital tools and drone technology, which could significantly help the farmers improve crop yield while utilising fewer resources.

"We, as a company, are playing our part for the adoption of this technology by fostering global partnerships with manufacturers and service providers while also conducting trials for crop protection product formulations and developing digital tools that complement the drone technology," he added.

However, weak regulatory frameworks and intellectual property rights could dissuade businesses from investing in local markets, he said while voicing concern.

He stressed that focused policies and regulations would prove to be instrumental in defining the future use of new technologies.

"Policymakers need to ensure that their prevailing policies evolve with new technologies and innovations. For instance, a robust regulatory and legal framework will greatly facilitate widespread adoption of the drone technology," said Hartmann.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2122141/2-climate-smart-farming-solution-rising-temperature/

WOMEN FARM WORKERS

By Editorial Published: December 21, 2019

The Sindh Assembly has recently enacted a legislation named the Sindh Women Agriculture Workers law providing rights hitherto denied to women labourers in the farm, livestock and fisheries sectors. It concerns their remuneration and ensures measures for protection of their rights. The new law says women workers shall get the same remuneration for the same work as their male counterparts. The working day of a woman worker shall not exceed eight working hours, and shall not commence until one hour after daybreak, or continue beyond one hour prior to sunset; women workers shall take time off work due to sickness or for antenatal and postnatal care and routine check-ups; they are entitled to 120 days of maternity leave and Iddat leave; they shall have the right to breastfeed their children of up to two years in hygienic conditons; “they should have the right to access government agricultural, livestock, fisheries and other services, credit, social security, subsidies, and asset transfers in their own individual rights, or in association with other women agriculture workers.” Each of these workers shall perform work free from all forms of harassment. A woman agriculture worker shall have the right to receive a written contract of employment. The law allows these workers the right to form unions or associations. The law shall ensure that women workers are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, religion, caste and residential basis. It makes it mandatory for the government to maintain a register of women agriculture workers at every union council. The registered workers would be issued a Benazir Woman Agriculture Workers Card entitling them to receive certain benefits.

We have many laws but their implementation is weak. As for remuneration and paid leaves farmers might start calculating their financial implications and try to circumvent the law. A jurist has famously or notoriously said, “Laws are like cobwebs: too weak for the strong, and too strong for the weak.”

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2122052/6-women-farm-workers/

AGRICULTURAL CHALLENGES: DECLINING SOIL FERTILITY THREATENS CROP PRODUCTION

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 22, 2019

LAHORE: Owing to the unbalanced and insufficient use of fertilisers, the natural reserves of organic matter in the land has dropped down to alarming levels to reduce soil fertility, a technical survey by the Punjab agriculture department has revealed.

Per the survey, the soil has become extremely deficient in potassium and other minerals because of which the productivity of crops is not increasing.

A laboratory testing of two million terrestrial samples collected from throughout the province has proved that nitrogen levels in the soil have gone down to 98%, phosphorus deficiency has touched 90%, deficiency of potassium has reached 53% while zinc levels have gone down to 70%. Moreover, out of one million agricultural tube wells surveyed, water from 66% of them was found to be unfit for agricultural use.

Considering the seriousness of the matter, the provincial government has ordered the agricultural department to conduct a “soil series survey.” Soil series refers to a group of soils with similar profiles developed from similar parent materials under comparable climatic and vegetational conditions.

Punjab was divided into 105 series in the survey conducted in 1972. Per a survey conducted in 2018, the number of soil series had reached 800. Owing to the growing deficiency of organic compounds, it is expected that the number of series will exceed 1,000 under the current conditions.

The Punjab agricultural department has built a website, to be launched within the next few days, pertaining to the organic audit of the underground land in the province. Every agriculturist in the province will have access to details related to the use of proposed fertilisers and crops and the condition of organic underground matter.

During the zoning conducted in Punjab after 40 years, the agriculture ecological zones of the province have increased from eight to 13. A strong recommendation has also been made to stop sugarcane cultivation in the cotton area and to limit rice cultivation in the middle area between Mandi Bahauddin and Nankana.

The Punjab agricultural department's soil and water testing examined soils of lands owned by the farmers as well as the government. In total, 2.8 million samples will be collected out of which two million samples have already been obtained and sent to the lab for testing. Results showed that organic matter in the lands of Punjab was 0.75 in 2000 which has now reached 0.60. Phosphorus has reduced from 9.85 to 8.6 peat mineral soil mix (PMM), while the average quantity of potassium has dropped from 236 PPM to 90 PPM.

Agriculture experts say that over the past century, farmers did not use fertilisers in adequate quantities for the cultivation of crops because of which the natural organic matter in the land had been used for increasing the productivity of crops and the reserves have been hit by mining.

All governments initiated projects for increasing agricultural production without looking for a long-term solution. For instance, there have been talks about increasing the production of wheat on average by 30 tons per acre. The latest scientific research, however, has proved that by using two sacks of urea, a sack of diammonium phosphate (DAP) and a sack of potash on one-acre land can yield up to 45 tons of wheat per acre. Since potash and DAP are costly fertilisers, costing up to Rs 23,000 per sack, most farmers are unable to afford it.

Munawwar Mehdi, senior officer of the soil and water testing department from the agricultural department told The Express Tribune that at present, the entire land of Punjab is divided into 800 soil series, out of which 16 series cover 80% of the land.

"Unfortunately, farmers tried to get what we desired from the land, but we did not recharge it, due to which underground organic matter reserves have now been critically reduced and we are unable to get good yields," he said.

He shared that a soil survey is also being launched which is anticipated to further increase the soil series.

"We have initiated the collection of 2.8 million soil samples through our department and nearly two million have already been collected, while 1.8 million have gone through a laboratory test," he said. "On average, the soil has 99% deficiency of nitrogen, 90% phosphorus, 40% potash and 70% zinc."

Mehdi further explained that each crop has to obtain 13 types of organic elements. Farmers, however, are unable to use the required quantity of fertilisers on their lands because they cannot afford it. He said that Okara has the best terrestrial land while Chakwal has the weakest.

Zoning project head and professor at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad Ashfaq Chatha said that after 40 years, agriculture ecological zoning with the latest method has been carried out in Punjab.

"After the ecological survey, we have divided Punjab into 13 agricultural ecological zones, while all weather conditions and terrestrial potentials have been considered in the new zoning for optimal results," he said.

Chatha added that his department has made the prime recommendation of stopping sugarcane cultivation in the cotton area since it is the basic reason behind the destruction of the cotton crop.

"We have also suggested the area for cultivation of oilseeds as well as the areas for the cultivation of lentils," he said.

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https://tribune.com.pk/story/2122676/1-agricultural-challenges-declining-soil-fertility-threatens-crop-production/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DEC 23rd TO DEC 29th 2019

FRUITFUL YEAR FOR WHEAT, MAIZE VARIETIES

Amin Ahmed December 23, 2019

IT has been a successful year for grain crops in Pakistan, as the country has released 20 new high-yielding, disease-resistant and climate change–resilient wheat and maize varieties during the year so far.

The achievement came mainly on the back of a partnership between the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) and the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) with support from the US development agency USAID.

Being the apex federal institution, PARC approved 10 new varieties of wheat for commercial cultivation, while provincial the provincial seed councils of Punjab and Balochistan approved four and six new open-pollinated varieties (OPVs) of maize.

These OPVs have been developed mainly for small-scale farmers to reduce the cost of seed without compromising the average yield. For the first time, the seed council of Balochistan approved any maize variety in the province.

According to the CIMMYT's representative in Pakistan, Dr Muhammad Imtiaz, all the approved wheat and maize varieties have been tested vigorously by federal and provincial research organisations.

The production of high-yielding and disease-resistant varieties has come at a time when the government has launched the agriculture emergency programme

Initially, the introduced germplasm was distributed to research institutes across the country for performance evaluation and screening against diseases and climate challenges.

After the initial testing, the selected candidate lines were evaluated through National Uniform Yield Trial for two more years across Pakistan. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, four new wheat varieties were developed by Cereal Crops Research Institute, Nuclear Institute for Food and Agriculture and Barani Agricultural Research Stations of Kohat.

The Wheat Research Institute of Faisalabad, Arid Zone Research Institute of Bhakkar, and Regional Research Institute of Bahawalpur have released three new wheat varieties for Punjab farmers.

Additionally, the National Agriculture Research Centre has released one wheat variety for rain-fed areas of Punjab. Furthermore, the Maize and Millets Research Institute in Sahiwal came up with four new maize OPVs for resource-limited, small-scale farmers in the maize-growing regions of Pakistan.

In Balochistan, the Agriculture Research Institute of Quetta has released two wheat and six maize varieties, which are more yielding and resistant to droughts. All these varieties can produce ten to 20 per cent more yield and would be instrumental for food security.

PARC Chairman Dr Muhammad Azeem said the varietal diversity has enhanced the crop productivity and saved wheat and maize crops from rust. The last year's crop debacle though resulted in grain loss, but the effects of rust were minimised.

The production of high-yielding and disease-resistant varieties has come at a time when the government has launched the agriculture emergency programme. Public-Private participation now needs to be strengthened for the availability of certified seeds to farmers, he said.

Dr Imtiaz of the CIMMYT said that the research partnership between Pakistan, the United States, and the CIMMYT has played a vital role in improving food security in the country. More than 70pc of current wheat varieties grown in Pakistan come either directly from CIMMYT selections or Pakistani cross-breeding programmes and at least 50pc of improved maize varieties are derived from joint research from the CIMMYT and Pakistan.

In Pakistan, about 65pc population depends on agriculture, and the sector makes up 24pc of GDP. Among major crops, wheat, rice and maize are the three most important cereal crops and contribute 63pc share in value-added agriculture. Developing genetically improved and stress-tolerant crop varieties ensures sustainability and food and nutritional security.

The USAID-funded Agricultural Innovation Programme has also helped Pakistan's national partners to have access to improved rice and vegetable varieties. More than 1,172 advanced rice lines having various traits were introduced and distributed to 11 institutions throughout the country in public and private sectors for evaluation against important rice disease like bacterial blight and abiotic stresses (such as submergence, drought, salinity, low and high temperatures), tolerance, yield potential and grain quality.

Of these germplasm, four bacterial leaf blight–resistant basmati varieties have been approved by the provincial seed council and the variety evaluation committee of PARC.

Bacterial blight disease–resistant super basmati, BR1 and BR2 were selected and developed by the National Institute for Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering in Faisalabad while varieties Super Basmati 2019 and Super Gold were selected and developed by the Rice Research Institute in Kala Shah Kaku.

All advanced super basmati rice varieties are resistant to bacterial blight disease, a major yield-limiting factor of basmati in Punjab, and producing 10pc to 12pc higher yields and better grain quality than traditional super basmati. Besides, super gold variety is also tolerant to flooding.

Similarly, the Nuclear Institute for Agriculture and Biology (NIAB) of Faisalabad has released two tomato hybrids, namely Niab Gohar and Niab Jauher, for commercial cultivation. All these and many other innovations like Zero-Till Happy Seeder and the Direct Seed Rice technology would only become possible due to close partnership between national and international stakeholders.

The CIMMYT is one of the 15 non-profit, research and training institutions affiliated with the CGIAR, a global partnership that unites international organizations engaged in research for a food-secured future. In addition to Pakistan, it has a strong presence in South and West Asian countries like Afghanistan, India, China, Turkey, Bangladesh and Nepal. Some of these countries provided support from their own resources while others are helped with donor support.

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$275M IRRIGATION PROJECT

Amjad Mahmood December 23, 2019

WITH Pakistan's population projected to cross 221 million in the next five years, the country will have to take on some serious challenges, including a jump of nearly 50 per cent in national food demand.

This additional food demand can be met by increasing crop yield and expanding irrigated area, wherever opportunities exist.

Punjab fulfils about 80pc of the country's food requirements, and irrigated agriculture accounts for 28pc of the provincial GDP. It manages an existing irrigation system serving 8.4m hectares (around 21m acres) of irrigated land.

To meet the increasing food demand of the country, Punjab needs to further exploit its untapped natural resources, particularly in the arid lands of the province.

The project will help address the challenge of food insecurity, improve economic growth and alleviate poverty in affected areas

Provincial authorities are going to execute the Jalalpur Irrigation Project (JIP), located along the right bank of Jhelum river and conceived more than a century ago.

The groundbreaking ceremony was scheduled to be held on Dec 13, but it had to be postponed to Dec 28 because no one from the senior political leadership was available or interested in joining the inauguration.

Costing around $275m and funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the JIP will create non-perennial irrigation services to increase agricultural production on 200,000 acres in Pind Dadan Khan tehsil of Jhelum district situated in the foothills of the famous Salt Range and part of the adjacent Khushab district.

Starting from the right bank of Rasul barrage, at least 200km new irrigation canals will be constructed for the Jalalpur canal command area with the ADB loan facility to be paid back in 20 years, including a five-year grace period. The funds will also be used for introducing institutional reforms and establishing farmers' organisations as well as building their capacity.

Proponents argue the Jalalpur project will increase Kharif crop's intensity in its command area by 50pc, improve crop yield and reduce land degradation, thus directly benefiting about 300,000 rural people. Moreover, drinking water will also be supplied to 26 villages, including the Khewra town and a nearby cement factory.

The project will help address the challenge of food insecurity, improve economic growth and alleviate poverty in areas affected where the continuous use of brackish water for agricultural and drinking purposes has led to human health problems and low crop yield. Through the new irrigation canals and their related structures, the JIP will have a positive impact on the agricultural production and health of the area people.

The JIP "will be a real game-changer for the mostly poor population of the arid area like the Kachhi canal in Balochistan", says Punjab Irrigation Minister Mohsin Leghari. "Every drop of water will add to the income of poor farming families as well as contribute to both provincial and national GDP."

The project was conceived more than a century ago. Irrigation department's archives show that the project was on the cards since 1898, when construction work of the Rasul headworks on Jhelum river was executed. The divide wall of the headworks was built at that time for future construction of Jalalpur canal.

The provision for constructing Jalalpur canal was again made during the reconstruction of Rasul barrage in 1967 under the Indus Water Treaty, and a bridge for crossing the so-far-unconstructed canal was made available to the traffic using M-II portion of the motorway near the Lillah interchange in Jhelum district.

The JIP was approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council in February 2018 by the PML-N government. Mr Leghari says the PTI-led government has expedited the project's execution.

He points out that other than improving agriculture and potable water supplies, the project will also cast other socio-economic impacts on the area. "The real estate value of the lands will increase manifold when the area will be fed from canals instead of rains. Moreover, construction activities for the Jalalpur canal and its distributaries and watercourses will also create jobs and small-time side businesses for the locals," he says.

The government also plans to establish 664 demonstration farms on selected pieces of land with the help of the agriculture department, and provide advisory services and training to at least 6,000 farm households about high-value agriculture, Mr Leghari adds.

The Punjab government is also planning to execute second and third phases of the Thal Canal Project soon to irrigate 294,110 acres of desert areas, mainly in Bhakkar and Layyah districts. The first phase of the project has already been completed by the Water and Power Development Authority.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1523806/275m-irrigation-project

RRI-KSK CLAIMS TO HAVEDEVELOPED NEW BASMATI VARIETY

By RECORDER REPORT on December 23, 2019

Rice Research Institute Kala Shah Kaku (RRI-KSK) has claimed to develop a new Basmati variety called ‘Super Basmati 2019' having over 10 per cent more per acre yield against the existing varieties and Average Grain Length (AGL) of 7.6 mm.

RRI Kala Shah Kaku officials shared this with stakeholders of Rice value chain at the 14th meeting of the Rice Research & Development Board held at its facility the other day with the Board Chairman Sarfraz Ahmed Khan in the chair, sources privy to the meeting told Business Recorder here on Saturday.

Director RRI-KSK Dr Muhammad Sabar while sharing various activities of the facility disclosed that two new basmati varieties – ‘Super Basmati 2019 and Basmati Gold' – developed by the institute have got approval while three spot lines are under pipeline for approval. He also shared the samples of Super Basmati 2019 with the participants for tests & trials.

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) Chairman Shahjahan Malik shared the international rice trade statistics with the participants of the meeting. He said that the rice export is showing upward trend during last two years and informed the meeting that basmati export quantity wise registered 28 per cent increase during the year 2018-19 as compared to corresponding period and hoped that it will go further up in the current year.

The agenda of the meeting was to discuss the current scenario of rice crop and Director Rice RRI-KSK Muhammad Sabar informed the house that according to the Crop Reporting data, area under rice cultivation was even higher than the projected target.

Area under rice in 2019-20 remained 5,014 thousand acres, which is about 9 per cent higher than the set target of 4,618 thousand acres.

He further briefed the house that rice crop particularly in Sindh and Southern Punjab is affected due to the climate change and increase in day/ night temperature at flowering stage this year, which caused sterility/low grain formation in rice. He also disclosed that research and development activities regarding heat stress resilient varieties development is already in the progress. However, he said that high temperature affect spikelet fertility at the time of anthesis which also deteriorates quality of the grain. To combat this issue, farmers are advised to follow variety specific sowing time and avoid early sowing, because it has been observed in early sown varieties which flower before 20th September show more sterility due to higher temperature than timely shown varieties.

The meeting also discussed stubble management of rice crop through mechanization i.e., rice harvester, paddy straw chopper and happy seeder. While Seed Association of Pakistan (SAP) representative shared that aflatoxin issue arises when crop is harvested with combine harvester and moisture level is also high. The meeting noticed that no serious threat and issues were pointed out this year as far as pest and disease situation of rice crop is concerned.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/23/555622/rri-ksk-claims-to-havedeveloped-new-basmati-variety/

AGP DETECTS RS 1.45 BILLION LOSSES IN KP AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT

By RECORDER REPORT on December 23, 2019

The Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) has detected losses to the tune of Rs 1.448 billion in the Agriculture Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during financial year 2015-16, said audit report on the accounts of KP Department.

The report of the audit conducted during financial year 2016-17 has been presented to the provincial assembly that had referred it to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the house. The KP Assembly PAC comprising representatives of all parliamentary parties is headed by the Speaker of the house.

A total of ten cases of losses have been noticed by the AGP and the highest loss to the tune of Rs.1320.527 million was detected during the financial year 2014-15 in various offices of Agriculture Department.

On Farm Water Management, it was noticed that construction of water courses worth Rs 1,320,527,132 was executed on the higher rates rather than assessing the water course construction material rates, without fixing ceiling on six month/annual basis in accordance with the specifications prescribed in the On Farm Water Management (OFWM) Field Manuals.

The rates analysis was not approved by the competent forum, but the bills were entertained at higher rates. The public exchequer sustained loss due to weak internal controls and financial indiscipline.

In the Departmental Accounts Committee (DAC) meeting held in December 2016, the department replied that cost estimates of all OFWM schemes are based on local market rates, assessed by the designated committee, wherein there is a representative of farmers.

According to PC-1 of the project, rates assessment committee carries out the exercise twice a year subject to a significant change in the material rates. As there was not considerable change in the material rates, hence, the rates were kept same during the whole year.

This reply of the department was not satisfactory, as no rate analysis, duly signed and approved by District Rate Committee Assessment (DRAC), was carried out either annually or biannually. DAC directed that rates analysis committee be constituted, so that comparison of the market rates and those applied by the department in the purchase of materials be properly ascertained. However, no progress was intimated till finalization of the report.

Audit has recommended that the rates applied be analyzed and the DAC directives be implemented in letter and spirit.

In second case a loss of Rs.32.254 million has been noticed during the financial year 2014-15, in the offices of Agriculture Department, OFWM that Rs.189,731,489 was paid to suppliers/manufacturers for construction of various schemes of water courses, its lining and improvement, however, sales tax of Rs.32,254,353 @ 17 percent was not deducted from their bills and the amount was overpaid that inflicted loss to the public exchequer.

In the DAC meeting, the department replied that 1/5th of 17 percent sales tax was deducted from all the payments to Water User Associations (WUAs) , and the record is available, which can be verified any time. However, no evidence regarding deduction of sales tax, either 17 percent or 1/5th was produced. The DAC directed for production of record for verification, but no record was produced for verification.

The audit beside recovery of the loss has also recommended inquiry and fixing responsibility against those responsible.

In third case, a loss of Rs.29.493 million was noticed in Agriculture Department, OFWM due to non-deduction of income tax. During financial year 2014-15 it was noticed that an amount of Rs.444,251,483 was paid to the Chairman of Water User Association. The amount was spent by the representative Chairmen on the purchase of various items, however, income tax of Rs.29,493,000 @ 4.5 percent was not deducted from the bills of suppliers.

In DAC meeting, the department replied that income tax was deducted from the bills according to rules. But, the reply was not based on facts, as income tax @ 4.5 percent was not deducted from the suppliers' bill at the time of payment by the chairmen. The DAC directed for production of original challans for verification, however, no record was produced for verification of recovery of income tax.

The audit has recommended the recovery of the income tax.

In fourth case, a loss to the tune of Rs.15.334 million was detected on the construction /installation of substandard high roof in the province.

In the office of the Director General (DG) Agriculture (Extension) it was noticed that 68 high roof tunnels were approved at a total cost of Rs.15,334,000 in the PC-1 of the Project ‘Sustainable Agriculture Development for Food Security through Integrated Approach in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa'.

The work was awarded to M/s Spinkai Builders, Mardan. The supplier was required to complete the work upto 25th June 2016 and severe irregularities were noticed in the implementation of the project.

The contractor was to pay a penalty, @ 10 percent of the contract value, for failure to supply the implements/equipments to the requisite quantity, quality and specifications within the specified time, and to provide warranty certificate for the structure as 10 years, authorization certificate from the manufacturer/importer and indemnity bond. But, no penalty was imposed and no security was obtained. The audit has recommended conducting of fact finding inquiry, fix responsibility and the loss be made good.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/23/555623/agp-detects-rs-145-billion-losses-in-kp-agriculture-department/

THREAT TO FOOD BASKET

By Editorial Published: December 23, 2019

Some disturbing results about Punjab's soil fertility have come to light in a survey commissioned by the provincial government, stirring concerns about future of crop yields. The technical survey has found that, because of unbalanced and insufficient use of fertilizer, the natural reserves of organic matter in the land have dropped to alarming levels. As a consequence, the soil has become extremely deficient in potassium and other minerals because of which the productivity of crops is not increasing.

A laboratory testing of two million terrestrial samples collected from across the province has proved that nitrogen levels in the soil have gone down to 98%, phosphorus deficiency has hit 90%, potassium scarcity has reached 53% while zinc levels have dipped to 70%. Besides, out of one million agricultural tube wells surveyed, water from 66% of them was found to be unfit for agricultural use.

The soil fertility situation in a province called food basket of Pakistan is certainly a matter of grave concern. In a fitting response, the provincial government has ordered the agricultural department to conduct what is known as a 'soil series survey'. It refers to a group of soils with similar profiles developed from similar parent materials under comparable climatic and vegetational conditions.

When one such survey was conducted in 1972, Punjab was divided into 105 series. The one carried out in 2018, the number of soil series had reached 800. Because of the growing deficiency of organic compounds, it is expected that the number of series will exceed 1,000 under the current conditions.

Experts believe that the downgrading ecological situation, depleting groundwater levels and declining fertility of soil make it ever more essential to go for crop diversification. The government needs to promote growing of less water consuming crops.

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ECC REVIEWS TAX EXEMPTION ON COTTON SEED

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated December 24, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coord-ination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Monday asked the Finance Division to review a proposal seeking five per cent sales tax exemption on cotton seed cake.

The meeting, chaired by Finance Adviser Dr Hafeez Shaikh, referred the matter to the Finance Division for examination and asked it to submit a report the next ECC meeting.

The ECC approved a technical supplementary grant of Rs4.05 billion lapsed during the FY2018-19 under the Sustainable Development Goals Achievement Programme (SAP).

The re-allocated funds would be used under the SAP to make specific interventions as per demand of the community across the country in line with the UN Conventions.

The ECC also granted ex-post facto approval to a technical supplementary grant amounting to Rs100 million on making security arrangements in the federal capital in October. However, the ECC expressed its concern at the manner in which costly and disruptive ad hoc arrangements were made.

The ECC asked the capital administration to find a permanent solution to deal with the issue in future.

The ECC also approved a proposal for utilisation of the subsidy involving grant of Rs6bn for the Utility Stores Corporation (USC) for subsidy and procurement of essential commodities, including flour, sugar, ghee/oil, pulses and rice.

The ECC also constituted a committee headed by PM's Adviser Razak Dawood to monitor the disbursement of subsidy and provision of commodities at a fair price

to the poor segment of the society through a transparent and effective mechanism and report back to the ECC in its next meeting.

The ECC also approved a proposal by the Finance Division for submission of supplementary budget statement (addendum) amounting to Rs170.418bn from the Federal Consolidated Fund for the FY2018-19 to the National Assembly.

The ECC also approved another proposal from the Finance Division for submission of supplementary demands for grants and appropriations for the financial year 2018-19 before the National Assembly.

The ECC approved the proposal of a technical supplementary grant of Rs7.904bn of the International Narcotics & Law Enforcement Affairs, US Embassy Islamabad for operational cost of Anti-Narcotics Force.

However, the ECC approved the proposal with instructions that such proposals involving transfer of money from external sources should be taken up by the finance ministry itself instead of the ECC and release of money be ensured through a smooth manner.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1524104

FARMERS PROTEST AGAINST SALINITY

A Correspondent December 24, 2019

MIRPURKHAS: Landowners and peasants held a demonstration on Monday at Dumbalo in protest against increasing waterlogging and salinity in the area.

Protest leaders told local reporters that saline water had accumulated in large areas, damaging villages and fertile lands.

They alleged that it was due to delinquency of the relevant executive engineer and other officers of the drainage division Mirpurkhas that saline water had damaged their fertile lands. The officials had failed to drain out the saline water, they added.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1523948/farmers-protest-against-salinity

OGRA PROPOSES INCREASE IN GAS PRICES: UREA FERTILIZER PRICES LIKELY TO INCREASE BY RS 600 PER 50-KG BAG

By MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN on December 24, 2019

The prices of urea fertilizer are likely to increase by Rs 600 per 50kg bag if OGRA's proposed increase in gas prices is notified, which would hit badly the already dwindling agriculture sector.

This assumption has been shared with the government's decision-makers who are evaluating different ways and means to reduce urea prices in the light of directions issued by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) carries out the natural gas price determination for Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL), in the light of next fiscal year's revenue requirements. It is well within the ambit of the government of Pakistan (GoP) to advise OGRA of any concessions/special price regimes for specific sectors to be considered while determining the sale price.

The latest OGRA gas price determination issued on December 10, 2019 is under active consideration by the Ministry of Energy. This recommendation is for increase in natural gas prices for the consumers all across the spectrum.

The purported increase in the fertilizer feedstock price is over 236% from Rs 300/MMBTU to over Rs 706/MMBTU.

Fertilizer industry is of the view that the latest agreement between GoP and International Monetary Fund (IMF) necessitates that GoP fulfills this obligation. The price impact works out to be roughly Rs 600 per 50kg bag of urea. This translates into a new price of Rs 2,600 per 50kg bag of urea.

“If such a price determination is to see the light of the day, the agriculture sector would be hit hard. The country would witness unparalleled turmoil in it and undoubtedly it would become the worst performing sector of the already fragile economy that is reeling from recent input energy price hikes," said one of the stakeholders.

The sources said that over the years, the GoP has raised the raw material cost in such a way that the gas component of the urea produced has gone up historically from roughly 30% to 55% at present.

“This would further escalate to 85% of the total urea bag price if the new prices are implemented as proposed and producers are not allowed to raise prices impacted due to this unjust gas price increase," said a fertilizer sector representative.

The impact of fertilizer use on the yield of major crops, wheat and rice, has been to the tune of 250% and 160% respectively in the last fifty years.

“There is a way out of this situation, a win-win solution for all the stakeholders. One plausible solution is to make the fertilizer fuel price adjustments (increase) so as to minimize or no feedstock price increase," he added.

Fertilizer industry was of the view that to maintain a certain level of revenue for the gas companies, only the fuel prices may be increased. This would have the following benefits: (i) minimal increase in the fertilizer prices; (ii) promotion of healthy competition among the fertilizer industry; (iii) and instead of windfall profits for the new fertilizer plants – that enjoy a fixed dollarized feed price for 10 years – the relatively less price increase would benefit the farming community at large having low negative impact on farm economics.

The government has also been suggested to settle the long outstanding Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC). Fertilizer sector has been subjected to the highest rate of Rs 300/MMBTU GIDC on the feedstock and Rs 150/MMBTU for the fuel gas. If the GoP wants to improve the farm economics, it should implement the already agreed formula of reduction in feedstock and fuel GIDC to 50%. This too would be a win-win solution for all the stakeholders.

Mari Petroleum Company Limited (MPCL) based fertilizer plants have spent billions of rupees on developing their gas infrastructure just to sustain the current production levels. In an ideal world, the gas suppliers/GoP should have footed the bill for such infrastructure development.

Fertilizer industry claims that on one hand, the government is contemplating unjust increase in gas feedstock prices and on the other, a high-powered ministerial committee has been formed to negotiate with the fertilizer manufacturers to bring down the existing urea prices, which are already substantially lower than international prices.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/24/555967/ogra-proposes-increase-in-gas-prices-urea-fertilizer-prices-likely-to-increase-by-rs-600-per-50-kg-bag/

SINDH GOVERNMENT URGED TO ESTABLISH AGRO-BASED INDUSTRY & GRAIN MARKETS

By RECORDER REPORT on December 24, 2019

The Chairman Hyderabad SITE Association of Trade and Industry Mazhar-ul-Haq Choudhry has demanded Sindh Government to establish agro-based industry and grain markets in order to utilize available stuff in right direction not only for promotion of agriculture sector but also the industrial zones of the province.

In a statement issued here on Monday, he said the agriculture sector is one of the key components of the economy of country and the province and setting up agro-based industries cannot only be helpful for rapid industrial development but it will also help in resolving the issue of unemployment and increasing rate of influx from rural to urban localities. The agro-based industries could provide job opportunities to jobless persons at their doorstep, he added.

Similarly, he said that setting up grain markets in all districts of the province can discourage the middlemen mafia and provide opportunity to growers to gain maximum profits of their produces.

It is middlemen mafia, which disallowing the growers to get reasonable profit of their produces and improve their socio-economic conditions, he said and added that with establishment of grain markets, the growers will be able to directly sale their produces and not only get reasonable earnings from their produces but also improve their socio-economic conditions, he added.

He said that the provincial government fully aware of the problems being faced by the growers community due to middlemen mafia therefore, it should review the project of establishment of grain markets in all districts of province at the pattern of Punjab so that trend of middlemen commission could be discouraged and the agriculture produces could be sold on government fixed rates.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/24/555955/sindh-government-urged-to-establish-agro-based-industry-grain-markets/

GROWERS ADVISED TO PROPERLY USE PESTICIDES

By RECORDER REPORT on December 24, 2019

The Met Office on Monday asked the farmers to use pesticides in a bid to avoid pest attacks on standing crops in line with the agriculture department's guidelines.

It also wanted the farmers to step up efforts to protect their nurseries from severe frost. In the next 10 days, it said that daytime temperature may remain be below normal but nighttime slightly below normal in the most of the agricultural plains. Generally, it said, a normal wind pattern may prevail in the most of the agricultural plains of the country.

In Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A dry and cold weather is the expected with a severe frost in a few plains of both provinces until Dec 31. In Sindh and Balochistan, a dry and cold weather is the expected. Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir are expected to witness a dry and cold weather until Dec 25 while snow may fall after Dec 26 onwards.

In the next 24 hours: Dense fog is likely to prevail in most plain areas of Punjab and upper Sindh while in few districts of KP during morning and night hours. Frost is also likely to be observed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Potohar region during the period. Cold and dry weather is expected elsewhere in the country while very cold in upper areas.

“Dry continental air is prevailing over most parts of the country. A shallow westerly wave is affecting extreme northern parts of the country," the Met said. In the past 24 hours: Weather remained dry and cold in the most parts of the country while very cold in upper areas. The coldest place in country was Skardu with minus 11 degrees Celsius. Weather in Karachi is expected to remain cool and dry on Tuesday with a minimum temperature 13 degrees Celsius and 30 percent humidity.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/24/555956/growers-advised-to-properly-use-pesticides/

SMART CHOICE? PUNJAB OPTS OUT OF WB SCHEME TO MITIGATE WHEAT CRISIS

By Rizwan Asif Published: December 24, 2019

LAHORE: In a bid to relieve some pressure on consumers and prevent flour prices from rising further, the Punjab government has decided to suspend a five-year programme to reduce its wheat procurement, The Express Tribune has learnt.

The officials familiar with the development revealed that the Punjab Food Department will be putting the $310 million Strengthening Markets for Agriculture and Rural Transformation (SMART) Programme on hold, which was launched under an agreement with the World Bank (WB).

Under the five-year contract signed with the global lender in 2018, the Punjab Food Department was to reduce official wheat purchases to not more than two million tonnes among other agricultural reform measures. In return, the WB would loan $150 million to the agriculture department, $76 million to the department and the rest to between the livestock and irrigation departments.

The decision to put a hold on SMART was taken at a high-level meeting held at the Chief Minister House recently, the officials said. According to them, the meeting was attended by all provincial ministers, senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders including Jahangir Tareen and WB representatives among other senior figures.

"In the meeting, Chief Minister Usman Buzdar informed WB officials that it is simply not possible for the government to reduce wheat purchases by the food department while keeping consumer and farmer interests in mind," an official said. "Government representatives also told their WB counterparts that the food department has avoided a flour market crash due to Punjab Food Department's sizable wheat deposits," he added.

When contacted, Punjab Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry confirmed the government has decided to opt out of the SMART

programme for the time being.

Over the next few days, the Punjab government will send a formal letter to WB to notify its intension to suspend SMART with regards to wheat procurement, officials said. At the same time, it has set a 4.5 million tonne wheat procurement target, they added. To prevent flour prices from rising by Rs50 per 20kg bag – presently, a bag costs Rs250 – the government also aims to maintain Rs400-450 subsidy next year as well.

According to officials, the Punjab Food Department will ask the Punjab government to provide Rs40 billion so that it can pay off the loans it has incurred. The latter, meanwhile, will approach the federal government to increase the limits it has set on borrowing by provincial governments. For the food department, the centre has set a Rs466 billion debt limit, Rs377 billion of which it has already utilised. In order to arrange money for wheat procurement, the federal finance ministry has asked all provincial government to borrow from banks against sovereign guarantees.

The sources revealed that in the province's flour and wheat industry, this arrangement threatens to exacerbate a rapidly worsening crisis as the Punjab Food Department only has a carry-forward stock of between three and four million tonnes. One way or the other, the federal government will have to help out to keep the wheat crisis from spiraling out of control, they said.

"If the government restricts flour subsidies, a 20kg bag of flour will cost Rs300, inflicting a huge burden on consumers," warned Pakistan Flour Mills Association Chairman Asim Raza.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 24th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2123826/1-smart-choice-punjab-opts-wb-scheme-mitigate-wheat-crisis/

MOONG PULSE PRICE HITS ALL-TIME HIGH

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated December 25, 2019

KARACHI: The price of moong pulse has hit an all-time record of Rs220-260 per kg in retail markets from Rs180-200 per kg in the last few days, while flour prices in Sindh have failed to show any signs of easing despite start of releasing of wheat stocks by Passco to the province on the direction of the federal government.

A wholesaler in Dandia Bazaar said moong price hovered between Rs210-225 per kg as compared to Rs170-185 per kg last month. He, however, said that the pulse hit an all-time high of Rs7,500 per 40 kg from Rs6,800 in Punjab.

"Traders in Punjab have resorted to hoarding as a result moong daal is not easily available," he added.

Meanwhile, flour price in Sindh stayed on the higher side despite provincial food minister Hari Ram Kishori Lal's assurance on Dec 13 that price would reach Rs43 per kg within a week.

Lal hinted at drop in wheat flour price by Rs3 per kg to Rs43 within a week following signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Sindh Food Department with the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) for the procurement of 300,000 tonnes of wheat.

The provincial food department had earlier received 100,000 tonnes wheat from Passco which was being supplied to flour mills. Sindh had 800,000 tonnes of wheat stocks in its godowns which were sufficient for its needs and could last till the harvest of next crop; that's why the government did not procure wheat last year from growers, the minister claimed.

The wheat being procured from Passco was supplied to flour mills at subsidised rate with 50 per cent cost shared by federal and provincial governments, but they were not passing on the benefit to consumers, Lal further said.

Chairman Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA), Sindh Zone, Khalid Masood attributed the delay in price cut to delay in transportation of wheat and improper planning of the food department. "Some 75 operating flour mills in Karachi have received only 22,500 tonnes of wheat from the department between Dec 1-24 as against an allocation of 92,000 tonnes," he said.

Karachi needs 7,000-8,000 tonnes of wheat per day but in the last three weeks only around 1,000 tonnes per day of the grain had arrived at the mills, the PFMA chief said.

In November, mills had arranged transport on their own to bring 46,000 tonnes out of total supply of 137,000 tonnes, he said. "It is not clear when the mills will get 300,000 tonnes of wheat in view of no reports of any transport arrangement so far," he added.

Wheat price in open market has soared to Rs4,800 per 100 kg bag from Rs4,600-4,650 per 100kg bag prevailing in second week of December. The food department was providing wheat at Rs3,450 per 100kg. "We have not increased prices as the mills are utilising old wheat stocks," Khalid said.

Meanwhile, consumers are paying Rs160 per kg for gram pulse at retailers' end as its wholesale price had risen to Rs125-132 per kg from Rs110-120 per kg last month.

Masoor's wholesale price is now tagged at Rs105 per kg as compared to Rs90-95 per kg while retail price is pegged at Rs120 per kg. Mash's wholesale rate rose by Rs10 per kg to Rs180 per kg but retailers are demanding Rs180-200 per kg depending on locality.

Sugar price in wholesale market is now Rs69 per kg, up by Rs2-3 per kg from last week due to the closure of sugar mills. In retail markets, the sweetener is being sold at Rs75 per kg.

Patron-in-Chief Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association (KWGA), Anis Majeed said moong imports from Burma and Thailand have gone down due to low crop while world market rates stand at $900-1,025 per tonne.

Published in Dawn, December 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524231/moong-pulse-price-hits-all-time-high

GOVT TO CUT TARIFF FOR TUBE WELLS

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 25, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government is considering a plan to reduce electricity rates for agriculture tube wells to ensure sufficient quantity of water for irrigation especially in Balochistan.

PM's Finance Adviser Hafeez Sheikh on Tuesday held meeting regarding the enforcement of fuel price adjustment for agricultural tube wells.

Since Jan 1, government is providing electricity to agricultural tube wells at a cost of Rs5.35 per unit during peak and off-peak hours to ensure provision of adequate water to crops.

In the past, Rs10.35 per unit was charged during peak hours.

During the meeting, various suggestions for promotion of agriculture sector including further reduction in electricity rates on agriculture tube wells, and provision of sufficient quantity of water for irrigation were discussed.

Published in Dawn, December 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524229/govt-to-cut-tariff-for-tube-wells

SPINNERS BACK ON COTTON MARKET

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter December 25, 2019

KARACHI: Steady conditions were witnessed on the cotton market on Tuesday as needy spinners replenished their stocks actively.

Buyers remained focused on quality cotton which is currently in short supply.

Talking to Dawn, cotton analyst Naseem Usman said that with the passage of time demand for cotton would rise as lint stocks are fast depleting in the country. Cotton prices may increase after January 2020, he added.

Another positive development is related to removal of 5 per cent sales tax on cotton seed oil cake, brokers said. The issues of ginning units with huge cotton stocks would also be over in coming days, they added.

World leading cotton market gave mixed trend. New York cotton moved higher to touch US68-69 cents per lb. Chinese cotton closed steady while Indian cotton was mix.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were firm at Rs8,800 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,400 bales, station Ghotki, at Rs8,950-9,100; 1,600 bales, Rohri, at Rs8,000-8,050; 1,000 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs8,000-8,200; 1,000 bales, Sadiqabad, at Rs8,200-8,900; 800 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs8,900; 400 bales, Faqirwali, at Rs8,250; and 400 bales, Fort Abbas, at Rs8,400.

Published in Dawn, December 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524224

CANE GROWERS NOT PAID LAST YEAR’S DUES BY TWO MILLS, FARMERS CLAIM

The Newspaper's Correspondent Updated December 25, 2019

MIRPURKHAS: Hundreds of sugar cane growers were deprived of their last year’s outstanding dues from Al Abbas sugar mill and Tharparkar sugar mill in clear violation of an order of the Sindh High Court, growers have said.

Affected sugar cane growers complained to the local media that last year (2018-19) they had supplied their cane crop to the sugar mills but the mills had paid them less than official rate of Rs182 per 40 kilograms.

The farmers went to the SHC to get justice after which the court passed an order in their favour and directed the mills to pay their outstanding dues.

The Sindh cane commissioner on Dec 18 issued show-cause notices to the Al Abbas and Tharparkar sugar mills to ensure outstanding dues’ payment to the growers within three days and warned that legal action under the Sugar Factories Control Act 1950 will be taken against them in case of non-payment.

President of Sindh Abadgar Ittehad Saifullah Gill lamented that the two sugar mills had violated the directives of the SHC as they had failed to pay official price of cane at Rs182 per 40kg to growers last year. Three days since the show-cause notices of the cane commissioner had passed, but still the affected growers had not been paid their dues, they said.

When queried, an officer of the Al Abbas sugar mill refused to comment.

An official of the Tharparkar sugar mill claimed upon contact that payments were being made to the affected growers.

Published in Dawn, December 25th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524145/cane-growers-not-paid-last-years-dues-by-two-mills-farmers-claim

PARLIAMENTARY PANEL ASKS BANKS TO LAY FOCUS ON FARMERS OF BACKWARD AREAS

By ABDUL RASHEED AZAD on December 25, 2019

A parliamentary panel has asked the public sector and private banks, especially Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL), to disburse more agricultural loans to the farmers of the backwards areas in a bid to increase the productivity and bring them at par with the farmers of the developed areas.

These directions were given by the Senate Functional Committee on Problems of Less Developed Areas in its meeting held here on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Senator Usman Khan Kakar. The participants were given a briefing on bank loans granted, recovered, waived off and outstanding for all the less developed areas of the country.

The meeting was attended among others by senators Nighat Mirza, Sardar Shafiq Tareen, Haji Momin Khan Afridi and Moulvi Faiz Muhammad, joint secretary finance and representatives from Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited.

Officials while giving the details of the ZTBL loans extended to the farmers of less developed areas in 2019 in Punjab province said that a total 33,461 borrowers were given agricultural loans worth Rs 6.166 billion in four districts of Punjab including Layyah, Lodhran, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur. They said that 10 percent of the total agricultural loans disbursed in Punjab during 2019. In Sindh ZTBL provided Rs 2.11 billion loans among 7,144 borrowers in 9 districts of the province including Badin, Dadu, Jaccobabad, Kamber Shahdad Kot, Kashmore, Sanghar, Tharparkar and Umerkot.

The bank provided Rs 746.336 million agricultural loans to 3,287 farmers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in 11 districts which included Bannu, Battagram, Bunair, Chitral, DI Khan, Dir, Kohistan, Lakki Marwat, Shangla and Tank. In Balochistan 281 borrowers were given Rs 86.98 million agricultural loans in districts Barkhan, Bolan, Jaffarabad, Kalat, Khuzdar, Kohlu, and Lasbela. In Azad Jammu and Kashmir, 2,659 borrowers were disbursed Rs 3777.264 million in Bagh, Bhimber, Hattian, Haveli, Kotli, Mirpur, Muzaffarabad, Poonch and Sudhnoti. In Gilgit-Baltistan 1,421 borrowers were given Rs 328.547 million in Astore, Diamer, Gilgit, Ghizer and Skardu.

The committee observed that the comparative analysis can be carried out only when figures of loans for developed areas are also provided province-wise and asked to submit the same in the next meeting.

Against the agricultural loans in Punjab, Rs 7.977 billion have been recovered, Rs 16.72 million were remitted and Rs 6.715 billion are outstanding. In Sindh loans recovered are of Rs 2.23 billion, Rs 6.17 million loans were remitted and Rs 3.1 billion are outstanding. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Rs 956.28 million have been recovered, Rs 1.91 million are written off, and Rs 221 million are outstanding. In Balochistan, Rs 129.48 million have been recovered and Rs 100.37 million are outstanding. In Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Rs 468.6 million have been recovered, Rs 0.77 million are written off and Rs 163.57 million are outstanding. In Gilgit-Baltistan, Rs 409.76 million have been recovered, Rs 1.08 million are written off and Rs 273.23 million are outstanding.

The committee observed that small farmers shouldn't be harshly treated and punished if they are unable to return loans due to some natural calamity or some other issue of resources.

The committee was told that a total of 966 people from less developed areas are currently working in ZTBL out of them 236 are from Punjab, 213 from Sindh, 154 from KPK, 32 from ex-FATA, 185 from Balochistan, 76 from AJK and 70 are from GB.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/25/556230/parliamentary-panel-asks-banks-to-lay-focus-on-farmers-of-backward-areas/

CCP SEEKS BAN ON USE OF WHEAT STRAW AS FUEL

By Shahram Haq Published: December 25, 2019

LAHORE: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has recommended that provincial governments should ban the burning of wheat straw in fields and as a fuel.

Wheat straw – a byproduct of wheat – is the main raw material in the production of pulp and paper and constitutes approximately 85% of the total cost of low-quality paper.

“Since wheat straw has become a common raw material, its burning for alternative fuel has caused an acute shortage and driven up prices for this commodity, adversely affecting prices of meat and dairy products and also creating the issue of survival for the pulp and paper industry,” according to an analysis released by the CCP on Tuesday.

The commission, after receiving a number of complaints relating to the shortage of wheat straw in the market, conducted an open hearing on November 7 in Lahore. Various stakeholders associated with different industries such as paper manufacturing, livestock, dairy milk and fertiliser attended the hearing.

The wheat byproduct is used by the livestock and dairy industry as an essential component of fodder for cattle and is also being increasingly used as an alternative source of fuel for power generation. As per estimates, 50% of wheat straw is used for animal consumption and 40% is used by other sectors which include exports. Of this 40%, nearly 5% is used by the pulp and paper industry.

In the past three years, the price of wheat straw has jumped from Rs250 per ton to Rs480 per ton and can even reach around Rs1,000 per ton in off-season. During the hearing, a few small livestock farmers revealed that since they were not purchasing in bulk, like the paper mills, they had to pay around Rs650 to Rs680 per ton for the wheat straw.

Owing to its unavailability and high prices, the pulp and paper mills either faced closure or were forced to increase paper prices. The CCP analysed that in the short term, there appeared to be no readily available alternative to the wheat straw.

Moreover, the rise in prices and shortage of this commodity have had a more pronounced impact on the smaller players in the livestock, dairy and paper sectors since they are not able to reap the benefit of economies of scale. The unavailability of wheat straw has led to the closure of seven paper mills.

"This is an alarming situation since it not only affects the livelihood of persons associated with these units, it also has repercussions for competition in the sector since only two mills producing good-quality paper from imported wood pulp remain operational," the report said.

"There will also be a profound impact on the public procurement and education budgets as provincial textbook boards procure mostly from the local industry, which produces low-quality paper for the printing of coursebooks for students of government schools."

The commission was of the view that given the importance and economic potential of wheat straw, the farmers may be incentivised to reduce its wastage. Furthermore, it may be taken into consideration during the calculation of wheat support price.

"We are cognisant of the fact that the government under the Alternative Energy Development Board's Policy for the Development of Renewable Energy for Power Generation, 2006 encourages the generation of power through the use of renewable energy sources to bring energy security and improve the energy mix.

"However, we are of the opinion that this should not be at the cost of depriving the essential sectors of an important input ie wheat straw without which their survival is at stake," the CCP said.

It emphasised that for the purpose of biofuel/bioenergy, various alternatives to the wheat straw should be utilised. These residues are in surplus and are equivalent to or have a higher energy potential than the wheat straw which include rice straw, cotton stalk, bagasse, sugar trash, maize stalk, etc.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 25th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2124368/2-ccp-seeks-ban-use-wheat-straw-fuel/

PFA SEIZES 12,000KG SUBSTANDARD CHOCOLATES, CHIPS

From the Newspaper Updated December 26, 2019

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) claims to have confiscated 12,000kg unwholesome chocolates and snacks from a production unit on Kasur Road.

DG Irfan Memon said the authority took action against the company for not mentioning the manufacturing date on products and failing to produce a record. Meanwhile, chocolates and chips were preserved in the open storage area for packing, he said.

He said it's compulsory for any food business operator (FBO) to discard the expired edibles instead of the store as per the PFA Act. He further said the PFA was impartially dealing with all FBOs and its action would continue against violators without any discrimination.

The director general further said detailed guidelines were available on the PFA website for FBOs' guidance. He directed the FBOs and manufacturing companies to follow the rules and regulations along with ensuring the manufacturing process as per the hygiene principles defined in the law, he added.

Published in Dawn, December 26th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524420/pfa-seizes-12000kg-substandard-chocolates-chips

HIT BY CLIMATE CHANGE, AGRICULTURE CONTINUES TO SUFFER

By Salman Siddiqui Published: December 26, 2019

KARACHI: Sounding cautious, Pakistan-based economists had dismissed a further slowdown in the national economy months ago, expecting that better water availability would lend much-needed support to the agriculture sector – a key component of the economy.

However, a massive surge in fertiliser prices, impact of climate change and locust attack played havoc with the optimism. These factors are set to turn the economists' little doubt into a major worry.

"A study suggests that the agriculture sector performance has continued to decline for the past 19 years. The sector is feared to continue the downward trend in the 20th straight year – FY20," Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) Senior Vice President Mahmood Nawaz Shah told The Express Tribune.

The share of agriculture sector – crops and livestock – in the gross domestic product (GDP) was around 21-22% in recent years. "It (agriculture sector) may hardly retain a share of 18-19% in GDP this year (FY20)," said Agri Forum Pakistan Chairman Ibrahim Mughal.

Acute shortage of water did not let the agriculture sector perform well last year – FY19. This year, the availability of water was not an issue but a "massive increase in fertiliser (urea and DAP) prices by up to 25% has badly hit agricultural (crops) output as high prices discouraged farmers from using a good quantity of fertiliser."

The country's annual requirement stands at around 150 million bags of urea and 130 million bags of DAP.

He estimated that production of almost all major crops of the 2019 Kharif (summer) season including cotton, sugarcane, paddy and maize "has dropped 30% on an average compared to last year." Giving the breakdown, he said the production of food crops, including wheat, rice, maize, sorghum and millet, decreased 10-20%. "This is the reason why the price of wheat flour (No 2.5) has shot up 30% to Rs52 per kg this year compared to Rs40 per kg last year."

He expressed fear that a wheat and wheat flour crisis was brewing. Last year, the government did not procure the required amount of wheat for its buffer stock, which was necessary to stabilise prices in the market.

"That's why the wheat price has shot above Rs40 per kg against the support price determined by the government of Rs32.50 per kg last year."

The government has set the new support price at Rs34.12 per kg for FY20. Cash crops, including cotton and sugarcane, have underperformed this fiscal year too. Cotton harvest is estimated to have touched a multi-year low in FY20 compared to 9.86 million bales – one bale is equal to 170 kg – in the last fiscal year. It was 17.5% lower than the 11.94 million bales harvested in FY18.

The country's total cotton requirement stands at around 14 to 15 million bales, which was achieved about five years ago.

Same is the case with sugarcane. Its production is estimated to have dropped further this year. The output fell 19.4% to 67.17 million tons in FY19 compared to FY18.

Production of pulses and oilseeds has dropped 25-30%. “Not a single type of pulse is available for less than Rs150 per kg in retail, though the government has spent over Rs30 billion on their imports in the first five months (Jul-Nov) of FY20.”

Rice production is estimated to have decreased 15-20% in FY20 compared to 7.20 million tons in FY19, he said.

He held provinces responsible for the continued poor performance of the agriculture sector since farming had become a provincial subject under the 18th Constitution Amendment in 2010.

“No agriculture policy, no planning and a lack of will at the provincial levels were behind the pathetic performance. Provincial authorities have given the agriculture sector in the hands of inexperienced people,” Mughal said.

Shah added that climate change had badly hurt two major summer crops – cotton and paddy.

Temperature was extensively high, especially in northern Sindh districts of Dadu, Larkana, Qambar Shahdadkot, Shikarpur and Sukkur. “This has damaged 20-25% of paddy crop in such areas.”

Secondly, the torrential rains just before the first round of cotton picking hit the standing crop in fields in September.

Farmers used to make three to five cotton picking in one season. However, the rains in the range of 11 to 15 inches in a 40 to 45-day period in some districts damaged a significant portion of the crop. Besides, high temperature in the cotton-growing areas in Punjab also did not let farmers harvest a good crop. “The situation did not allow achievement of the cotton output target for the season,” he said.

“The high temperature has also widely impacted the maize crop in Punjab,” he said.

Only sugarcane crop has managed to perform better this year. Its harvesting has started in recent days and weeks. “Torrential rains have positively impacted the sugarcane output (in Sindh) as the crop is rain-resilient (all over the world),” he said.

The current year has seen tomato and onion crisis as well. Their prices hit historic highs of Rs400 per kg and Rs100 per kg in retail, respectively, in the year. “Rains have affected about 30-40% of the early crop of onion and damaged the entire crop of tomato, which is a very sensitive food crop.”

Apart from these, the arrival of locusts in Sindh and a few adjoining areas in lower Punjab has sparked fears among the farmers.

“Locust attack has damaged the chilli crop, has added to the miseries of cotton growers and has the potential to impact the wheat crop, which is in the last stages of sowing these days,” he said. Citing anecdotal evidence, he believes the locust attack may not badly impact the wheat crop on a wide scale. “However, whenever and wherever they attack, they completely destroy the crop. I know the farmers who planted wheat three times this season, but the locust attack devastated the crop on all occasions.”

For instance, if the locust attack damages 2% of the area cultivated with the wheat crop, it may appear small on the macro scale, but it will be huge for the farmers who suffer. Farmers have planted the crop over 2-2.2 million hectares of land in Sindh.

"If the wheat crop fails to find favourable weather, the locust attack may hit its production over a wide area like it did in the case of cotton."

Both the federal and provincial governments have done virtually nothing to stave off the threat from the insect.

"There is no damage assessment after the locust attack. However, when you will pass through Mirpurkhas district, you will find locusts both at your right and left …and in Nawabshah and Sukkur towards border areas (with India)."

"In a nutshell, I don't see any improvement in the agriculture production this year too, but a further decline. Poor output of cotton and maize will contribute substantially to the overall decline."
Economist Dr Ashfaque Hasan Khan said months ago if the agriculture sector failed to perform this year too, the GDP growth may slip below 3%.

Economist Dr Hafiz Pasha said if the sector continued to underperform, it would be hard for the country to achieve GDP growth of 2.4% anticipated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for FY20.

The country recorded a nine-year low GDP growth of 3.3% in FY19.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 26th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2125061/2-hit-climate-change-agriculture-continues-suffer/

FISHERIES IN GWADAR: BALOCHISTAN PA FOR PROVIDING FACILITIES

By RECORDER REPORT on December 27, 2019

Balochistan Assembly unanimously approved resolution for supply of water, electricity and other provision of facilities to fisheries in Gwadar on Thursday. Deputy Speaker Sardar Babar Khan Musakhel chaired a session of Balochistan Assembly.

Member of provincial assembly (MPA) Mir Hamal Kalmati tabled a resolution and demanded that practical measures would be taken to address problems of Gwadar. The sense of deprivation was being increased among public in the area after reading it during session, he said and added people would record their protest if problems of Gwadar were not resolved at earliest.

Provincial Agriculture minister said on point of order that entire Gwadar affairs were under authority of federal government, saying it was significant that stakeholders of Balochistan should also be taken into confidence in matters of Gwadar for durable solution of problems.

Lawmakers also approved resolutions regarding legal trade with Afghanistan and provision of basic amenities to people of Sariab Road Quetta. The report 2016 and 2017 of Auditor General Pakistan was presented in provincial assembly. Deputy Speaker Sardar Babar Khan Muskhel adjourned the session of Balochistan Assembly indefinitely.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/27/556746/fisheries-in-gwadar-balochistan-pa-for-providing-facilities/

10 NEW VARIETIES OF DIFFERENT AGRICULTURE COMMODITIES APPROVED

By RECORDER REPORT on December 27, 2019

The Punjab Seed Council (PSC) in its 53rd meeting on Thursday approved 10 new varieties of different agricultural commodities including nine varieties of Olive and one BT cotton namely FH-444.

In all 25 new varieties were introduced in the meeting which was chaired by the Punjab Minister for Agriculture Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial. The meeting was convened by the Council in line with the Prime Minister's Agricultural Emergency Program, aimed at approving new varieties of crops which can withstand severe weather conditions and have strong immunity against diseases, said Malik Nauman Ahmad Langrial.

The Minister congratulated the agricultural scientists on the preparation of new varieties.

https://www.brecorder.com/2019/12/27/556712/one-0-new-varieties-of-different-agriculture-commodities-approved/

IMRAN'S GOVT MULLS PAYING UREA SUBSIDY DIRECTLY TO FARMERS

By Zafar Bhutta Published: December 27, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The government is working on a plan to bring fertiliser prices in the domestic market on a par with the international market in a bid to generate additional revenues and provide direct subsidy for farmers.

Sources told The Express Tribune that a ministerial committee, constituted to negotiate fertiliser prices with the local industry, discussed a proposal to increase fertiliser prices in the domestic market in order to bring them in line with international rates.

The proposal was aimed at generating additional revenues for offering direct subsidy to the farmers, but would also keep prices at current levels for the growers. It would help remove inefficiency, if any, in the transfer of subsidy from fertiliser manufacturers to the farmers.

The proposal was taken up by the ministerial committee in a meeting held on Monday. In the huddle, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar along with Minister for National Food Security and Research Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar met with representatives of the fertiliser industry to discuss matters related to urea supply and pricing.

Committee members recommended matching domestic fertiliser prices with those in the international market by bringing gas tariffs for the industry on a par with global gas prices.

The committee proposed that the additional revenue generated could be used to provide direct subsidy for the farmers to keep fertiliser prices at current levels, which would also remove any inefficiency in the transfer of subsidy from the manufacturers to the farmers.

However, fertiliser industry sources say the proposal is a knee-jerk and discriminatory solution when compared to the incentives provided to the industry players under the Fertiliser Policy 2001.

It would widen the production cost gap between the old and new fertiliser manufacturers to the tune of over Rs1,000 per bag, they said.

Under the 2001 policy, the government provides gas to local manufacturers at the regional basket price of gas and to the new players at a fixed rate of $0.7 per million British thermal units (mmbtu) for a period of 10 years.

Such a wide difference may lead to serious market distortions and the closure of old plants, they said.

It must be realised that there was no direct correlation between LNG and urea prices as nowhere in the world urea manufacturing through LNG made economic sense, said market sources.

The officials added that there was also a psychological aspect of high prices, which would discourage the farmers from consuming urea, hence impacting the agricultural produce.

The subsidy directly transferred to the farmers may not be available to the poor ones at the time of urea purchase, considering their financial burden.

Therefore, the direct subsidy would be a complicated issue, industry sources said, adding that realisation of the Punjab government's subsidy was just 15-20% so far in spite of a simple token system.

"If the government has to switch over to direct and targeted subsidy, then Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) must be done away with and the issue be settled out of court," an official said.

A gradual increase in gas prices combined with the proportionate subsidy tokens may be more workable to take away the onus of passing subsidy through the industry to the direct benefit scheme, they said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2125591/2-imrans-govt-mulls-paying-urea-subsidy-directly-farmers/

COTTON PRODUCTION ESTIMATED AT 9.451M BALES

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Updated December 28, 2019

ISLAMABAD: The Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) on Friday estimated local crop output season at 9.451 million bales as against the set production targets of 12m bales.

Sharing details, Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said a meeting to assess the current crop volume was chaired by Minister for National Food Security and Research Makhdum Khusro Bakhtyar.

Dr Abdullah briefed the meeting that cotton output in Punjab province was expected to reach 6.671m bales and in Sindh it was assessed at 2.68m bales. Crop output of Balochistan was estimated at 0.098m bales, he added.

The commissioner noted that the crop faced extraordinary temperature increases during the critical stages of crop development followed by an unexpected rise in temperature by 2 to 5 degrees Celsius during September.

“Such harsh temperature affected the plant nutrition development capability and puts the plant under stress, thereby hampering late season fruit development,” he added.

Similarly, he said irrigation water shortage in Sindh, especially during critical stages of crop development, was another major issue. “Severe attack of pink bollworm both in Punjab and Sindh, white fly attack, lower seed cotton prices with rising input costs remained the key elements affecting cotton production,” he said.

Representatives of provincial government of Punjab, Plant Protection Department, Trading Corporation of Pakistan , Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department , Pakistan Central Cotton Committee and All Pakistan Textile Mills Association attended the meeting.—APP

KARACHI: Amid slow trading, the cotton market on Friday remained steady as lint prices generally remained fixed around overnight structure. Overall the underlying sentiment remains weak and outlook uncertain.

Trading remained focused around quality cotton and some leading textile spinning groups managed to get hold of big lot deals of quality lint.

According to market sources, the nearing of bank closing date on Dec 31, 2019 has slowed down trading activity and money circulation in the markets has declined.

Cotton analysts believe that in coming days lint prices would surge on higher demand but in case the government reduces or withdraws duty and taxes on import of cotton it would bring rates under pressure.

Ginners are strongly opposing withdrawal of duty and taxes on import of cotton and demand that till such time domestic stocks do not get exhausted the government should not withdraw these levies. On the global front New York cotton market gave mixed to steady trend while Chinese cotton was firm and Indian cotton moved further down.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) spot rates were firm at overnight level at Rs8,800 per maund.

The following deals were reported to have changed hands on ready counter: 1,600 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs8,700; 1,200 bales, Rahim Yar Khan, at Rs9,000; 1,400 bales, Fort Abbas, at Rs8,500; 1,000 bales, Taunsa Shareef, at Rs8,150; 400 bales, Kahror Pakka, at Rs7,850; and 200 bales, Chichawatni, at Rs7,550.

Published in Dawn, December 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524823

LOCUST INVASION RUINS CROPS IN INDIA

AFP December 28, 2019

AHMEDABAD: A massive locust invasion has destroyed thousands of hectares of crops in northwest India, authorities said, with some experts on Friday terming it the worst such attack in 25 years.

While officials have attempted to tackle the swarm with pesticides, farmers have deployed drums to drive away the insects, with videos showing schoolgirls banging on steel plates — due to local beliefs that loud noise repels locusts.

The invasion has damaged crops in half a dozen districts in the northwestern state of Gujarat, local government official Punamchand Parmar said.

More than 12,000 acres have been devastated in one district alone, Parmar said.

"Nearly 25 per cent of the locusts had been destroyed using pesticide. However, it will take another 4-5 days to exterminate the insects completely," he added.

"Their flight path was initially towards Pakistan but due to change in wind direction and moisture, they landed in ... north Gujarat," he said.

The head of the entomology department at Gujarat's Anand Agriculture University, P. K. Borad, said: "This is the worst locust attack witnessed in Gujarat in over two decades or so."

"Such a huge swarm of locust was last seen in 1994," he added.

The state's agriculture minister R. C. Faldu said that from Friday onwards, 100 tractors carrying pesticides would be sent to the affected villages to get rid of the insects.

But villagers were not leaving anything to chance, with many walking around the affected farms and banging drums to chase away the insects.

"We have lost everything in our village," said one man.

Published in Dawn, December 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524845/locust-invasion-ruins-crops-in-india

MIRPURKHAS MILLS STOP CRUSHING FOR LACK OF SUGAR CANE SUPPLY

The Newspaper's Correspondent December 28, 2019

MIRPURKHAS: All the sugar mills in the district were forced to halt crushing of sugar cane after they received dismally low amount of cane as compared to last year's cane supply mainly because most farmers had ceased sowing the cane and opted for other crops.

Sources said that mill owners were disturbed at lower supply of cane as compared to last year's. The mills could not keep the boilers running because it burned costly furnace oil and cost them more dearly to continue crushing without getting satisfactory amount of cane, said the sources.

The sources said that the mills managements were crushing the cane only for a few hours a day over the past few weeks and finally they decided to close the crushing.

The sources said the situation had forced the mills' managements to compete with each other for getting more cane and were offering higher than official rate to growers in secret offers so that they could ensure continuous crushing without interval during the season.

On the other hand, farmers said, that they had become so fed up with mills attitude last year that they preferred to sow other crops instead of sugar cane which occupied their fields the whole year and in the end fetched them little benefit.

They said that they often faced huge losses if mills stopped crushing because their cane crop started losing weight by each day.

Published in Dawn, December 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524736/mirpurkhas-mills-stop-crushing-for-lack-of-sugar-cane-supply

SCOURGE OF LOCUSTS REFUSES TO GO AWAY, REAPPEARS IN THAR, BADIN, MIRPURKHAS

Dawn Report Updated December 28, 2019

MITHI: Massive swarms of locusts appeared once again in the skies of Tharparkar, Badin and Mirpurkhas districts and invaded cultivated fields, trees and vegetation, eating away green leaves, bark and grass.

The insects attacked vast areas in Mithi, Dilpo and Kaloi talukas as farmers watched helplessly the trees and standing crops being denuded of green leaves and bark. They also ate away bushes and grass, which was fodder for animals.

Peoples in Badin district told journalists that the insects in their millions attacked standing crops in Tando Bago, Shadi Large, Pangrio, Khoski, Malkani Sharif and other areas of the district.

Local farmers told this reporter that they posed serious threat to the remaining crops on vast areas in the district and demanded high-ups send teams to carry out an effective anti-locust spray through aircrafts and save them from further devastation.

They said that in the absence of anti-locust spray, they had no other option but to fall back on old, traditional methods to try to scare away the insects. They beat drums and played audio cassettes at high volume in order to fly away the insects but to little avail, they said.

The deadly insects have been attacking and damaging the crops in eastern parts of Sindh for the past six months but no serious and coordinated measures have so far been taken by the provincial or federal governments to exterminate them.

MIRPURKHAS: Huge swarm of locusts resumed attacks on cultivated land and orchards in different parts of the district, causing resentment and trepidation among farmers.

Farmers complained that the insects had once again attacked their crops in different parts of Kot Ghulam Mohammad taluka, Dambalo, Tando Jan Mohammad, Digri, Jhuddo and Sindhri taluka.

They said that the unabating attacks by the insects had put a question mark on the efficiency of the plant protection department, Mirpurkhas region, and agriculture extension department which had utterly failed in eliminating locusts and thwarting their attacks.

The insects had destroyed wheat and other crops in different parts of the district over the past six months and the departments concerned had been doing only lip service, making hollow claims without any visible work on ground. They claimed to have carried out anti-locust spray in affected areas but to no avail, the insects were as free as they were before the pesticide spray to fly unhindered to anywhere they wanted and damage the crops at their whim causing further losses to farmers.

The officers concerned were not available for comment. They had mostly kept their cell phone numbers turned off.

Published in Dawn, December 28th, 2019

https://www.dawn.com/news/1524734/scourge-of-locusts-refuses-to-go-away-reappears-in-thar-badin-mirpurkhas

INCREASING HEAT IMPACTING HEALTH OF WOMEN COTTON PICKERS, MOOT TOLD

The Newspaper's Staff Correspondent December 28, 2019

HYDERABAD: Increasing temperature is casting damaging impacts on the livelihoods and health of women cotton pickers who have to cut down on their time in fields due to increasing heat.

It was discussed by participants of a consultative workshop. Diffe-rent issues confronting women cotton pickers also came under discussion.

Women from three villages of Matiari district attended the workshop organised on Friday by the Sindh Community Foundation (SCF) in collaboration with Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

SCF head Javed Soz said the increased temperature had affected health of women as during picking, they did not have access to safe drinking water or time to take break in fields and they also suffered from dehydration, heat stroke etc. He said that no measures were taken by growers and cotton pickers and neither they were not provided health compensation.

He lauded Sindh government's legislation of Sindh Women Agri-culture Workers Bill, 2019 and demanded its implementation to protect cotton pickers, calling for serious consideration to their health.

A cotton picker, Ms Quershan, from the village of Jamal Dahri, said that increased temperature reduced their picking time as they were unable to pick cotton during peak summer season or less picking was done which led to lesser wages given the quantum of cotton picked.

Another Ms Moomal from the village of Yameen Apan said that a decade ago, they were be able to pick one maund in a day and now they picked 20kg to 30kg due to rising temperature in fields.

Women pickers observed that new kind of insects were always evident which they had never seen before. SCF manager Aisha Agha said the climate change was slowly impacting bio-diversity and human life and if serious measures were not taken, those women cotton pickers would lose their livelihoods. She said there was an urgent need to seek attention of policymakers and stakeholders in this regard.

A researcher Ms Ramsha Kalhoro said that it was evident that climate change was affecting all sectors, including water, agriculture.

The participants demanded measures to protect women's health by providing drinking water and sheds as well as compensation during working hours.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1524733/increasing-heat-impacting-health-of-women-cotton-pickers-moot-told

NO RESPITE IN GHEE, PULSES, TEA PRICES

Aamir Shafaat Khan Updated December 29, 2019

KARACHI: Despite the rupee strengthening against the dollar and a decline in world price of various commodities, prices of ghee, cooking oil, tea, pulses and dry fruits continue to stay on the higher side for consumers.

One dollar now sells at Rs155 as against Rs164 in June 2019 and therefore should be making imports cheaper.

According to the data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the average per tonne price of palm oil came down to $550 per tonne in 5MFY20 from $631 per tonne in same period last fiscal. However, consumers are left with no choice but to buy ghee and cooking oil at higher prices. Good quality ghee and cooking oil sells at Rs200-230 per kg/litre, showing a jump of Rs20-30 per litre in the current year.

Total palm oil imports in 5MFY20 stood at 1.230 million tonnes, costing $676m as compared to 1.246m tonnes valuing $786m in same period last fiscal.

Soybean oil's average per tonne price plummeted to $689 per tonne from $747 per tonne. Soybean oil imports in terms of quantity and value were 57,553 tonnes and $39m as compared to 54,895 tonnes and $41m.

Talking to Dawn, Member Pakistan Vanaspati Manufacturers Association (PVMA) Atif Rasheed said the price of palm oil in world market has surged to $810 per tonne from $550 per tonne in the last three to four months.

Ghee and cooking oil industry is 95 per cent reliant on imported items including palm oil, palm olienn, soybean oil, vitamins, tin plates, chemicals, etc on which government has imposed duties and taxes. Previous governments used to increase import duty on ghee and cooking raw materials when palm oil in world market used to hover at low prices to avert any revenue shortfall.

"The situation is now different. As world markets are soaring high, the government should cut import duties and taxes on imported raw materials to bring down prices of ghee and cooking oil," Atif said, adding that sales are depressed now as compared to last year owing to high domestic prices. "People are purchasing ghee and cooking oil as per their demand instead of purchasing in bulk," he said.

Consumers witnessed a jump of Rs 100 per kg in tea prices in the last six months. However, the average per tonne price of tea stood lower at $2,335 per tonne versus $2,679 per tonne but blenders and importers keep tea prices higher. The import bill of tea was $184m on arrival of 78,922 tonnes during the last five months versus 93,444 tonnes valuing $250m.

Prices of dry fruits and nuts are hitting the roof despite the fact that average import price of these items came down to $1,625 per tonne in the last five months from $1,817 per tonne. Total imports in 5MFY20 were 8,989 tonnes ($14m) as compared to 8,656 tonnes ($15m).

A total of $196m were spent to import 415,061 tonnes of pulses as compared to 452,552 tonnes valuing $247m in 5MFY19. The average per tonne price had dropped to $474 per tonne from $547 per tonne.

Price of moong recently hit a record high of Rs260 per kg. Interestingly, all good quality pulses are selling for over Rs100 per kg.

A leading commodity importer and former president Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Haroon Agar said pulses rates in world markets have been going up since November. "Mash price rose to $900 per tonne from $450 followed by increase in masoor pulse to $450 from $370. Local chickpeas and yellow peas prices surged to $600 and $450 from $480 and $370 per tonne in the last two months," he said.

Moong import is being managed from Burma and Thailand due to low crop while world market rates stand at $900-1,025 per tonne. Gram pulse is also being imported from Australia while local crop is also available. Masoor imports are being made from Canada and Australia while mash pulse is arriving from Burma. He said increasing world price had offset the impact of exchange rate.

According to Economic Survey FY19, gram pulse production had recorded 35.6pc jump to 438,000 tonnes on account of higher yield due to favorable weather condition prevalent at the time of sowing. Masoor stayed unchanged at 64,000 tonnes while moong production fell by 3.4pc to 117,000 tonnes. Mash production dropped by 5.5pc.

In dry fruits and nuts category, legal importers have taken a back seat since almost total arrivals have been finding way into the markets via smuggling.

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https://www.dawn.com/news/1525036

RDA ENGAGES TURKISH NGO TO HELP PEOPLE GROW VEGETABLES AT HOMES

By Our Correspondent Published: December 29, 2019

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) and a Turkish non-profit organisation, the Helpine, on Saturday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a pilot project of kitchen gardening.

The RDA Chairman Tariq Mehmood Murtaza, and the Helpine President Saleemi Yukosel signed the MoU at the RDA office. The Helpine Secretary Ikhlaqur Rehman was also present on the occasion.

Under the pilot project, as many as 50 households have been provided with the necessary equipment including pot stands and pots for growing vegetables inside their houses.

Apart from monitoring the project, the RDA will also provide services of gardeners while the Punjab agricultural department would provide seeds and technical assistance.

Speaking on the occasion, the RDA chairman said the project was a revolutionary step and thanked the Turkish non-profit organisation for support in this regard.

He said that the relations between the two countries were exemplary as both had been supporting each other.

The RDA chief said that the present government was working hard to improve the lives of the people.

The President Helpline Saleemi Yukosel said that the Turkish nation highly regarded Pakistan and its people and wanted to help it every sphere of life.

Explaining the nature of the cooperation, Yukosel said that the kitchen gardening project was the first step and they were working on numerous big projects which would be started soon.

He added that relations between Pakistan and Turkey were based on the values of brotherhood and fraternity.

“We consider Pakistani people pure and I feel happy whenever I visit here”, he expressed and added that Allama Iqbal, apart from being the national poet of Pakistan was considered a reforming leader in Turkey as well.

He said that the organisation, Helpline was working in various sectors including education, health, water supply, and agriculture.

By helping Pakistan in the agricultural sector, he added, they wanted to empower the youth in rural areas so that they earn bread and butter.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 29th, 2019.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2126777/1-rda-engages-turkish-ngo-help-people-grow-vegetables-homes/