

ACFI NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2026

NEWS

Crystal Crop Protection launches fodder seed products for kharif 2026

Our Bureau

Mangaluru

Crystal Crop Protection Ltd, an integrated agri-input company, will offer a comprehensive range of fodder seed products to serve diverse agro-climatic needs in kharif 2026. These include 'SX17', 'SX17 Super', 'SX21' and 'Star'.

A statement said 'SX17' is a high-yielding sorghum-Sudan hybrid with robust stem, medium maturity and good re-growth, while 'SX17 Super' is an enhanced version of 'SX17' with improved drought tolerance and higher biomass per cut.

As per the statement, 'SX21' is a late-maturing high-biomass variety ideal for single-cut large volume harvests, and 'Star' is an

early-maturing dual-purpose sorghum, used as both green fodder and grain fodder.

Crystal Crop's '2026 Fodder Initiative' is anchored across Haryana, Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. These regions are dominated by the cultivation of crops such as sorghum (jowar), maize, bajra, be-seem and lucerne.

PURPOSE-ENGINEERED

The company's single-cut green fodder hybrid — 'Dairy Green' — has been purpose-engineered to address the nutritional requirements of high-yielding dairy cattle.

Developed through advanced plant breeding, 'Dairy Green' delivers consistently high biomass yield, superior crude protein content and excellent palatability, making it the preferred

choice for dairy farmers, it said.

Satyender Singh, Chief Executive Officer (Seeds), Crystal Crop Protection, said India's livestock sector is at an inflection point. The challenge is no longer just about milk productivity. It begins at the farm gate with the quality and availability of green fodder.

"At Crystal, we have invested over a decade in developing seed solutions that directly address this gap. 'Dairy Green' represents our finest effort, a seed that consistently delivers more nutrition per acre, enabling dairy farmers to achieve higher milk yields while reducing their feed cost burden. Our expanded portfolio for kharif 2026 ensures that India's farmers have the right tools for every condition," he said.

33% subsidy on cotton seeds to revive acreage

MOHIT KHANNA
TIBULINE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 11

In a bid to revive cotton cultivation, the Punjab Government has announced a 33 per cent subsidy on seeds for cultivating indigenous and Bt cotton.

The scheme, rolled out by the Agriculture Department, aims to encourage farmers to return to cotton, once considered “white gold”.

Farmers can apply on the government portal from April 20 to May 31 to avail subsidy, which will be offered for up to five acres. Subsidy will be given on the seed varieties approved by the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU).

Cotton acreage in Punjab has fallen drastically over the decades — from over 7 lakh hectares in the 1980s to just 1 lakh hectares in 2024, largely due to pink bollworm infestations, market price below MSP and erratic weather.

Although the area saw a slight increase to 1.19 lakh hectares in 2025 following government efforts, the target for this year has been set

at 1.26 lakh hectares.

Satbir Singh Gosal, Vice-Chancellor of the PAU, outlined a roadmap for revival. “We have stressed timely availability of high-quality seeds and subsidies on Bt cotton to encourage wider adoption among farmers,” he said, adding that canal water supply for pre-sowing irrigation and balanced fertilisation were critical for productivity.

Pointing to repeated whitefly and pink bollworm attacks, Sharanjit Singh of Bathinda said, “The losses are unbearable. Even after spraying multiple times, the yield is not assured.”

Director Agriculture Gurjeet Singh Brar attributed the decline to a shift towards paddy, driven by reliable irrigation and recurring pest attacks in cotton. He further emphasised on the need of timely sowing, deep ploughing and crop residue management as key interventions, while noting that an awareness campaign was underway in cotton-growing districts.

LNG disruption prompts 2.5 MT urea import plan

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, April 6

TO ENSURE ADEQUATE availability of fertiliser for the upcoming kharif season, Indian Potash Ltd has floated a tender to import 2.5 million tonnes (MT) of urea.

According to the tender document, 1.5 MT of urea will be imported through ports on the west coast, while the remaining volume will be shipped through ports on the east coast.

The move comes after domestic urea production was disrupted last month, as LNG supply—the key feedstock for fertiliser production—was affected due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

LNG imports from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are routed through the strait, which has been blocked amid the ongoing West Asia conflict.

The urea shipments are scheduled to leave ports by June 14, Indian Potash, which imports urea on behalf of the government, said.

The government on Saturday also extended the state trading enterprise (STE) status for Indian Potash for importing urea on government account until March 31, 2027.

The bid for imports will be opened on April 15 and remain valid until April 23, the company said.

Current fertiliser stocks stand at about 18 MT, including 6.19 MT of urea. The present urea stock is higher by around 1 MT compared to the previous year.

Urea consumption during the kharif season is projected at around 17 MT. Farmers typically begin applying urea for vegetative growth of paddy and other crops after sowing by the end of June.

Meanwhile, the government has increased LNG supply to urea plants to 90% of their average capacity from Monday, boosting output prospects. LNG supply had been curtailed last

RESCUE PLAN



1.5 MT

of urea will be imported through ports in west coast

- Rest volume of soil nutrients would be shipped through ports in east
- Move comes after domestic urea production was hit in March, as LNG supply, was hit due to closure of Strait of Hormuz
- Urea shipments scheduled to leave ports by June 14

month as urea plants underwent annual shutdowns.

Last month, the government invoked the Essential Commodities Act for the first time to ensure the supply of natural gas to fertiliser plants.

About 80% of urea production in the country uses LNG, while the rest relies on domestic gas. At present, 30 out of 32 urea units use natural gas as feedstock.

Out of the total fertiliser consumption of around 65–70 MT in FY 26, urea accounted for nearly 40 MT.

In the first ten months of the current fiscal, urea imports surged 83% to over 8.9 MT, while overall imports of fertilisers are estimated at around 10 MT for the last fiscal. To boost urea supplies for the forthcoming kharif season, the government has started buying LNG from spot markets.

State agencies' staff threaten to halt procurement over quality norms

RUCHIKA M KHANNA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 12

The joint coordination committee of state procurement agencies has threatened to shun wheat procurement at mandis until the Centre announces relaxation in procurement specifications.

If the staff of these agencies go ahead with the move, wheat procurement in the state could come to a halt. So far, 1,02,392.52 metric tonne (MT) wheat has arrived in mandis, of which only 30,279 MT has been procured, including 354.90 MT by private traders.

Officials of Punsup, Punjab, Markfed and the Punjab State Warehousing Corporation said they were being pressured by politicians and senior officials to procure wheat that did not meet the Centre's quality norms. They cited an incident in Patiala where a senior district official allegedly forced procurement of wheat with high moisture content and lustre loss. When the junior official objected, he



A farmer harvests his crop near Attari in Amritsar on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO: VISHAL KUMAR

was removed from duty.

"We want wheat to be declared under relaxed specifications (URS) and quality norms to be eased before we resume procurement," the officials said.

Director, Food and Supply, Varinder Kumar Sharma said he had spoken to committee members and assured them they would not be forced to buy substandard

wheat. He also urged them not to suspend procurement.

"Central teams have begun assessing the damage and we are hopeful of relaxation in specifications. At the same time, the state government has assured farmers that every grain will be procured," he said.

The Centre has constituted nine teams to assess rain damage to wheat crop due

to western disturbances. Four teams have already reached Punjab and collected samples from Bathinda, Patiala, Muktsar and Mohali. The remaining five teams are expected to arrive on Monday to collect samples from 12 districts. The samples will be tested in FCI laboratories and the report submitted to the Union Food Ministry.

More agri reforms needed; shortage of funds won't come in way of development: Rajnath

RAISEN, April 11: Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday called for more reforms in the agriculture sector, saying it is the backbone of the Indian economy, and that the shortage of funds would not come in the way of doing more for the farming community and rural India.

Addressing the three-day Unnat Krishi Mela here, Singh said the Narendra Modi government has launched several schemes - PM-Kisan, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Soil Health Card and an online network of wholesale mandis - to boost farmers' income and farm productivity.

"These efforts have transformed the lives of farmers. But I believe the change is not enough. There is a need to do even more for the agriculture sector and our villages," he said, adding, "We will



not be worried about funds. The shortage of funds will not be an obstacle. I want to assure you this."

Reflecting on his political journey, Singh said the farmer in him had never left despite holding several ministerial portfolios. "In my political life, I have been Agriculture Minister in the past. Wherever I have gone, the kisan in me has been alive," he said.

"Usually, people see a de-

fence minister as responsible for soldiers and the country's security, not agriculture. Our responsibility is to ensure the country's security, but the kisan in me has not gone away," he added.

Underlining his concern for farmers, Singh said the defence ministry had begun procuring organic fresh vegetables and fruits directly from farmers for cantonment areas.

"Vegetables, fruits and

other produce were earlier being brought from far away, losing freshness in transit. Now we are buying organic produce from farmers," he said, noting the move would fetch farmers better prices while also benefiting soldiers.

The defence ministry, he said, is also promoting millets - shree anna such as jowar and ragi, along with organic produce, through its Canteen Stores Department.

Singh said the government is acting on the 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan' slogan by promoting millet in the armed forces to strengthen farmers economically.

"Flours made from jowar, bajra and ragi have been introduced in the armed forces. By our efforts, we are again acting upon the slogan 'Jai Jawan-Jai Kisan'," said Singh, who was Union minister for agriculture in 2003-2004 in the Atal Bihari Vaj-

payee government.

These initiatives, he said, have helped raise farmers' income and given a fillip to organic farming.

Calling on the youth to engage with agriculture, Singh said the sector deserved the same importance as any other. "There is huge potential in agriculture. If youth engage in it, farmers' income and the farm economy can grow. Our government is always ready to support," he said.

Farming can be made smart through drones, sensors and mobile technology, Singh said, while asserting that the government remains committed to providing all possible support so that farming becomes a matter of pride and farmers live with dignity and honour.

Singh said Madhya Pradesh has grown at a fast pace and farmers of the state inspire everyone. - PTI

Amid war's lengthening shadows, the need to reform fertiliser policy



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
ASHOK GULATI

THE WORLD heaved a sigh of relief as a two-week ceasefire was announced by US President Donald Trump, just hours before his deadline, and after the threat that "A whole civilisation will die tonight, never to be brought back again". One can only hope that there is a lasting solution to the deadly conflict between Iran and the US-Israel, and civilians are spared from death and destruction.

What is the lesson for India from this conflict, as well as the one between Russia and Ukraine? The world is heading towards greater uncertainty and instability. Against this backdrop, the first and foremost task for the Indian government is to ensure food security for its people. But food security cannot be achieved unless India secures its fertiliser supplies. Natural farming, though desirable as a niche market, cannot feed India.

India's import dependence for chemical fertilisers (including their feedstocks) is to the tune of 70 per cent. Take the case of urea. India consumes roughly 40 million tonnes (MT) of urea, of which about 10MT is imported. But even what is produced at home is dependent on imported gas to the tune of almost 85 per cent. In the 40 days of the war, global urea prices were up by almost 65 per cent, from \$482/tonne at the end of February to \$795/tonne in the first week of April. Similarly, gas prices (Liquefied Natural Gas) went up from \$12/MMBtu to \$19.5/MMBtu over the same period, an increase of 63 per cent. This is the biggest hit to India, on top of not getting enough supplies from the Strait of Hormuz. Realising this, the Cabinet has already approved a higher subsidy on urea, indicating that the price of urea



ILLUSTRATION: CR SASIKUMAR

may not be increased for the farmers. Even prices of phosphatic fertilisers are increasing, although not to the same extent as urea and LNG. The price of DAP, for example, has gone up from \$627/tonne to \$720/tonne, an increase of about 15 per cent. But getting DAP or phosphate rock or phosphoric acid from the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, is becoming increasingly difficult.

What should Indian policy-makers do? Minister of Chemicals and Fertilisers J P Nadda is on record saying that we know a farmer needs two bags of urea for his crop, but is taking four bags. This clearly indicates that the government is aware that there is overuse of urea in relation to phosphatic and potassic fertilisers, and/or there is significant diversion of urea for non-agricultural uses or even to neighbouring countries. Given that urea in the country is being sold at less than \$70/tonne to the farmers when global prices are touching almost \$795/tonne, it leads to very inefficient use and opens up opportunities for large arbitrage in diversion. Why can't the government say to each state

that, given the difficulty in procuring gas and urea, and a major increase in their import prices, there will be a cut of 10 to 15 per cent in the supplies of urea for each state? And then ask the states to work out the modalities of how they want to allocate these restricted supplies to farmers based on their land records, crops grown, previous sales, and recommended doses by their state agriculture universities. This quantitative rationing of urea under the Essential Commodities Act is very much possible and desirable to ensure better usage of nitrogenous fertilisers. This exercise needs to be undertaken jointly by the Centre and the states.

It may be noted that granular urea, the way it is being applied in India, has a very low Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE), roughly 35 to 40 per cent. The plant does not consume more than 40 per cent of the nitrogen being applied. The rest is going into the environment as nitrous oxide, which is 273 times the carbon dioxide, or leaching into groundwater and increasing its nitrate content that causes blue baby syndrome, thyroid or

How about clubbing the PM-KISAN funds and the fertiliser subsidy and directly giving it to farmers (land owners and tenants) on a per-acre basis, and freeing up prices of fertilisers?

even diabetes. It is ironic that liquid urea (N) is not subsidised, whose NUE is almost 90 per cent through drip irrigation (fertigation). This speaks of a highly irrational urea pricing policy. The Prime Minister's efforts to promote natural farming can not really scale up unless fertiliser pricing or quantities are rationalised.

Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Shivraj Singh Chouhan says that they would like to do direct cash transfers to farmers equivalent to the fertiliser subsidy. But when will this happen? And how will they resolve the issue of tenants? The PM-KISAN scheme suffers from this lacuna, and the most vulnerable section of peasantry, the tenants, remains outside this scheme. How about clubbing the PM-KISAN funds and the fertiliser subsidy and directly giving it to farmers (land owners and tenants) on a per-acre basis, and freeing up prices of fertilisers? It can be done and would be most desirable. But it needs due preparation to identify real cultivators. The PM needs to put this issue on high priority as the gains would be very significant.

DAP supplies are another issue. If India is already using urea (N) in excess in relation to P and K fertilisers, why put 18 per cent N even in DAP with 46 per cent P? Why not simply use Triple Super Phosphate (TSP) with 46 per cent P? We have no plant in the country producing TSP, but we have more than 100 plants producing Single Super Phosphate (SSP) with only 16 per cent P. Why not incentivise the production of TSP at home or in collaboration with phosphatic-rich countries? The bottom line is that we need to increase the consumption of P in relation to N, and the best product for that would be TSP in place of DAP. It will also help the government to save at least 18 per cent N, and also cut down the subsidy bill on urea (N).

The government needs to reform its fertiliser policies, either through the DBT route or by rationing quantities. Only then can it reduce its misuse and diversion, and ensure food security.

Gulati is Distinguished Professor at ICRIER. Views are personal

CRUEL BETRAYAL

DASARI SRINIVASA RAO
VIJAYAWADA

MANY farmers and tenant farmers in parts of NTR district and adjoining areas of Telangana are facing severe financial distress after having cultivated allegedly spurious hybrid maize seeds that failed to deliver the promised yield.

The issue surfaced initially in A Konduru mandal, where farmers in Komatikunta, Ramachandrapuram and Cheemalapadu villages, along with those in Kachavaram village of Yerrupalem mandal of Telangana, cultivated hybrid

Spurious hybrid maize seeds leave ryots in distress

- ▶ Farmers cultivated hybrid maize seeds MM 9375 (Dhanya brand) marketed by a Tata-affiliated company
- ▶ While average plant height is typically around 4 feet; in the affected fields, the crop has grown as tall as 11 feet

maize seeds MM 9375 (Dhanya brand) reportedly marketed by a Tata-affiliated company.

Curiously, the maize plants exhibited bizarre



AP Tenant Farmers Association leaders, led by P Jamalaiah and Mekala David, inspecting the affected maize crop due to the use of allegedly substandard hybrid seeds in A Konduru mandal of NTR district

growth patterns. While the average plant height is typically around four feet; in the affected fields, the crop has grown as tall as 11 feet. Despite this excessive veg-

etative growth, productivity remains poor.

Under normal conditions, each plant produces one or two cobs per kanupu (the joint or knot on the stalk



from which leaves and ear shoots grow). However, in several instances, farmers observed three to four cobs emerging from a single kanupu, indicating irregular

development. Farmers said that though the plants appear tall and lush, the cobs are underdeveloped and unlikely to yield marketable produce, further adding to their losses.

Farmers said they were assured of yields up to 50 quintals per acre at the time of purchase. However, after nearly three months of cultivation, the crop condition indicates that the yield may not reach even 20 quintals per acre.

The seeds were reportedly cultivated in more than 150 acres across the affected villages.

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LPG quota hiked to 70% for pharma, food, agriculture

The allocation would be capped at 200 tonnes per day for each sector

SHUBHANGI MATHUR

New Delhi, 8 April

The government on Wednesday increased the allocation of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to 70 per cent for industrial units in the pharmaceutical, food, polymer, agriculture, and several other sectors. The allocation will be capped at 200 tonnes per day for each sector, according to a communication from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG).

“Industrial units in the sectors of pharmaceutical, food, polymer, agriculture, packaging, paint, uranium, heavy water, steel, seed, metal, ceramic, foundry, forging, glass, aerosol, etc.

shall receive 70 per cent of the units’ pre-March 2026 bulk non-domestic LPG consumption level, subject to an overall sectoral limit of 200 tonnes per day,” Neeraj Mittal, secretary, MoPNG, said in a letter to states.

Units will be required to register with state-run oil-marketing companies to be eligible for the additional allocation. Commercial users will also need to apply for piped natural gas (PNG) with the city gas distribution company and take steps to adopt PNG.

“However, if the indus-

tries mentioned above use LPG as an integral input in the manufacturing process or for specialised purposes that cannot be substituted by natural gas, the requirement relating to application for PNG shall stand waived,” the letter added.

In a media briefing on the West Asia crisis, the government also said it has increased overall natural gas allocation by 5 per cent for fertiliser plants to about 95 per cent of the units’ six-month average consumption.

In a relief to the petrochemical (petchem) sector, the government allowed 800 million tonnes (mt) per day of propane and butane to be diverted for petchem production.

Officials said that to ensure coal affordability, Coal India (CIL) has reduced the reserve price of coal by 20 per cent under e-auctions and increased supply through both e-auctions and the state-nominated agency mechanism.

CIL also increased the frequency of e-auctions in March 2026, offering 32.53 mt of coal, of which 13.32 mt was booked. For April 2026, 30 e-auctions have been planned, offering 25.8 mt, with 3.2 mt offered so far and 1.24 mt booked, the government said.



AHEAD OF KHARIF SEASON

Centre restores 90% gas supplies to fertiliser units

SANJEEB MUKHERJEE

New Delhi, 6 April

The Centre has stepped up efforts to augment fertiliser supplies ahead of the critical kharif planting season, stating that units are now getting about 90 per cent of their required natural gas supplies, up from 70-80 per cent earlier. State-run Indian Potash Ltd, meanwhile, has also started scouting for imports of 2.5 million tonnes (mt) of urea from global markets.

With the war in West Asia disrupting energy flows from the Gulf region, the Centre had initially restricted gas supply to fertiliser (urea) plants to about 60 per cent of the requirement. This was increased to 75-80 per cent through alternative arrangements.



Rerouting supply

- While LNG supplies from Qatar remain suspended, Indian firms are buying from alternate suppliers in the US, Australia and Russia
- These additional supplies have led to an increase in the quota for different sectors

Gas supply has been raised to 90 per cent of their six-month average consumption from April 6 using spot procurement, Sujata Sharma, joint secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, (MoPNG) said on Monday.

While LNG supplies from Qatar remain suspended, Indian firms are buying from alternate suppliers in the US, Australia and Russia.

These additional supplies have led to an increase in the quota for different sectors, Sharma said. Gas supplies to other industrial and commercial sectors, including city gas distribution (CGD) networks, will be increased by an additional 10 per cent from Monday, she added.

Priority sectors continue to receive protected supplies, including 100 per cent supply to domestic piped cooking gas and compressed natural gas (CNG) for transport.

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies from Gulf countries remain impacted, but supplies to domestic households for cooking are being fully met, said the MoPNG secretary. About 79,909 mt of commercial LPG (equivalent to over 42 lakh 19-kg cylinders) has been sold since March 14.

In a related development, state-run Indian Potash Ltd on Saturday issued a tender to import 1.5 mt of urea through the West Coast. The remaining 1 mt will arrive via the East coast, according to a document posted on the company’s website.

Shipments are expected to leave the load port by June 14, according to the document. Bids for the tender must be submitted by April 15, it added.

India routinely relies on global tenders to secure urea for domestic consumption. The imports are critical for planting of rice, corn, and soybean is scheduled to begin in June with the arrival of the monsoon.

A Mumbai-based industry official said local urea production dipped by about 600,000-700,000 tonnes per month, with imports expected to help offset some of the decline, *Reuters* reported earlier. “But global surplus is limited due to supply disruptions in the Middle East. It will be interesting to see who participates in the tender, as that will determine pricing,” the official added.

Govt stands with farmers during any crisis, says Agri Minister Chouhan at Unnat Krishi Mela

Prabhudatta Mishra
Raisen (M.P)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday inaugurated a three-day national level exhibition and conference — Unnat Krishi Mela — at Raisen, under Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's Vidisha Lok Sabha constituency in Madhya Pradesh. Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari is scheduled to join on Monday, the concluding day of the event.

Addressing the gathering of thousands of farmers from surrounding districts, Rajnath Singh said that the defence forces have been instructed to buy chemical-free fruits and vegetables directly from farmers in the vicinity of their bases so that growers do not have to travel long distance in search of buyers.

STRESSES RELEVANCE

When asked about the number of farmers to attend, Chouhan a day earlier tried to downplay it saying it is more relevant what farmers

take away from the conference. He appealed farmers to attend different sessions planned along with the exhibition as arrangements have been made to guide and help them with expert advice from scientists of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Shivraj, while defending the move to hold the conference at Raisen, said that farmers from hinterland are not able to reach Pusa Krishi Mela, a premier annual exhibition held in Delhi by ICAR's Indian Agriculture Research Institute.

The Raisen event is happening at a time when the rabi season crop on 2.49 lakh hectares (as of April 8) has been damaged due to unseasonal rains and hailstorms, according to latest compiled estimates by States. This area may increase as and when States finalise the assessment of damage.

"The Modi government stands firmly with farmers in this crisis," Chouhan said adding he has also consulted the Agriculture Minis-



Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses a press conference at his residence in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh *ANI*

ters of the impacted States.

FERTILIZER SUPPLIES

On Friday, the Minister had said that the government is ensuring smooth nutrient supplies to shield farmers against global price swings caused by the West Asia war. Farmers are gearing up for the kharif sowing, slated to begin from June with the arrival of South- West monsoon.

Chouhan also said that the pilot scheme on distribution of fertilizers on the basis of land records has

shown good results and it will be scaled up for a nationwide roll out once the targetted 13-crore farmer IDs are created. So far, 9.29 crore farmer IDs have been generated where all information such as land holding, crops pattern, yield, and input usage are recorded.

He also said that State-specific agriculture roadmaps based on agro-climate zones are in the works, with five zonal kharif conferences planned this year, one at Jaipur already held last week.

Green signal for procurement of pulses, oilseeds at MSP in UP: Farmers to receive increased support price

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow, 31 March

The Uttar Pradesh government has prepared a comprehensive strategy for the procurement of Rabi season crops. State Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi stated that with the additional exemptions received from the central government, large-scale procurement of pulses and oilseeds, along with wheat, will now be ensured in the state.

In a press conference, the Minister said the Centre has approved the procurement of 6.77 lakh metric tonnes of lentils, 2.24 lakh metric tonnes of gram, and 5.30 lakh metric tonnes of mustard. This will provide farmers with the opportunity to sell their produce at the Minimum Support Price (MSP).

The Agriculture Minister

stated that the MSP has been increased this year, with the price of gram fixed at Rs 5875 per quintal, which is Rs 225 more than last year.

He said that the MSP for lentils has been fixed at Rs 7000 per quintal, an increase of Rs 300, while the MSP for mustard has been fixed at Rs 6,200 per quintal, an increase of Rs 250 from last year.

The Agriculture Minister stated that the Minimum Support Price acts as a safety net for farmers, and the government is committed to strengthening this system.

He stated that central agencies NAFED and NCCF will be involved in the procurement process, while four agencies, including the PCF and UPSS, will handle the state procurement. Payments to farmers will be made directly into their bank accounts.

Shahi stated that before



2017, the procurement of pulses and oilseeds was neglected in the state, but the current government has taken effective steps in this direction.

He stated that the Agriculture Department has spent 829 per cent of its budget. Out of a total budget of Rs 7051 crore, Rs 5,788 crore has been spent, which is a remarkable

achievement so far.

Mr. Shahi stated that to provide relief to farmers, seeds were provided to 11.25 lakh farmers at a 50 per cent subsidy this year, with 34.31 crore transferred directly to their accounts. Additionally, 54,847 quintals of seeds were distributed free of charge to 12.73 lakh farmers.

IN A PRESS CONFERENCE, THE MINISTER SAID THE CENTRE HAS APPROVED THE PROCUREMENT OF 6.77 LAKH METRIC TONNES OF LENTILS, 2.24 LAKH METRIC TONNES OF GRAM, AND 5.30 LAKH METRIC TONNES OF MUSTARD. THIS WILL PROVIDE FARMERS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO SELL THEIR PRODUCE AT THE MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE (MSP).

He stated that farmers are also receiving relief under the Crop Insurance Scheme. The Minister stated that compensation of Rs 532.17 crore has been transferred to the accounts of 5.39 lakh farmers so far this Kharif season. The process is ongoing, and an additional Rs 150-160 crore will soon be disbursed to approximately 1.5 lakh more farmers.

Biotechnology can address challenges to traditional farming practices: experts

The Hindu Bureau

CHENNAI

With the agriculture industry projected to grow 2.5 times by 2033, biotech experts underscored the growing importance of agri-biotechnology in the coming years.

They were speaking at a webinar organised by the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) Chennai, in association with *The Hindu*, on 'Biotech for Sustainable Agriculture and Crop Productivity'.

This webinar was the last in the five-part webinar series on the topic – Biotechnology: Role in Industry 5.0 Sustainable Future Pathways.

G. Jayaraman, professor



and dean, School of Bio Sciences and Technology, VIT Chennai, said there were challenges to traditional farming practices which could be addressed through biotechnology. Gayatri Venkataraman, senior principal scientist at M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, warned that with every one degree Celsius increase in temperature, In-

dia's wheat yield could decline by 6% to 10%.

Dolly Wattal Dhar, dean of School of Agriculture Sciences, Sharda University, spoke about the scope of research, job opportunities, and how people could contribute to food security by learning about biotech tools.

Lipin Dev, director and partner, VT Ecogreen Technologies, spoke about the importance of secondary agriculture and the emerging opportunities therein. He explained how biotechnology was a value-addition to the primary agricultural produce once the crops were harvested.

The webinar can be viewed at <https://newsth.live/THVITSY>

Centre not taking away State's power on bonus price for agri produce, clarifies FM Nirmala Sitharaman

Shishir Sinha
New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman categorically stated that the Centre is not seizing States' powers on setting agricultural bonuses.

The Finance Ministry, in the meantime, clarified that the Expenditure Department's recent letter regarding the alignment of bonus policies with national interests serves as a non-binding advisory meant to streamline State policies with national goals.

In a social media post, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman dismissed Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin's allegations that the Union Government ordered the State to stop paddy cultivation incentives as "factually baseless, politically motivated and a deliberate



Union Minister
Nirmala Sitharaman

distortion" intended to mislead farmers.

Addressing a public meeting in Thanjavur, he said, "I have shocking news to share with you. Just as I returned to Chennai after campaigning in Srikazhi, Cuddalore and Villupuram, officials showed me the letter asking us to reconsider providing the incentive (given over and above the Minimum Support Price fixed by the

Sitharaman said the Tamil Nadu CM's accusation was factually baseless, politically motivated and a deliberate distortion

Centre). Can anyone even think of this? The letter has come from the Finance Ministry headed by Nirmala Sitharaman, who claims to be from Tamil Nadu. Will AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami come forward to condemn the BJP at least for this?" Stalin asked.

'ADVISORY ONLY'

The communication in question is a letter by the Expenditure Secretary, dated January 1, 2026, to the Chief Secretaries of States

to align their bonus policy to promote pulses, oilseeds and millets, in line with the national priorities for nutritional security, *Aatmanirbharta* (self-reliance) and sustainable agriculture. "The letter was an advisory to States and was not a directive," the Finance Ministry said in a statement.

CENTRE'S SUGGESTION

Adding to this, Sitharaman said that Centre's suggestion to States was rooted in a positive, forward-looking vision for encouraging crop diversification and attaining self-sufficiency in crops such as pulses, oilseeds, etc so that farmers can tap into better price realisation by cultivating crops where domestic demand far outstrips supply.

The declaration of a bonus over and above the Minimum Support Price (MSP) has been, and remains, en-

tirely the prerogative of State Governments. "No one has taken that power away," she said.

The Ministry highlighted that Centre has also consistently aligned MSP increases in favour of pulses and oilseeds to encourage farmers to shift away from over-concentration in a few crops.

The Economic Survey 2025-26 also said imported edible oil dependence had fallen from 63.2 per cent in 2015-16 to 56.25 per cent in 2023-24. Between 2014-15 and 2024-25, the area under oilseeds increased by over 18 per cent, production by nearly 55 per cent and productivity by about 31 per cent. It said that Centre's approach integrates research, improved seed dissemination, MSP-backed procurement support, processing infrastructure and value-chain development to ensure farmer profitability.

Goyal holds talks with Saudi trade minister on boosting supply chains

NEW DELHI: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday held discussions with Saudi Arabia's Trade Minister Majid bin Abdullah Al Qassabi on ways to strengthen supply chains disrupted due to the West Asia crisis, after holding talks with his counterparts from the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait.

All these countries are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) with which India is negotiating a free trade agreement.

The commerce ministry, in a statement, said that Goyal had a virtual call with Qassabi.

"The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral trade and expressed optimism for early progress in the India-GCC FTA negotiations," it said.

Both sides noted the strain



Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal

Goyal highlighted India's steps to support exports to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region

conflict has put on regional supply chains and stressed the need for an early recovery through coordinated efforts to ensure smooth trade flows, it said.

Goyal highlighted India's steps to support exports to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region.

The joint attack launched by the US and Israel on Iran had led to severe disruptions in the movement of ships in international waters, particularly to the West Asian nations.

The conflict has posed challenges for exporters to ship goods to the Gulf region, with which India had a bilateral trade of \$178 billion in 2024-25 (\$56.87 billion exports and \$121.67 billion imports).

The major sectors which are under stress include petroleum products, chemicals and plastics, engineering goods, rice, pharma and gems and jewellery. The six countries in this region are the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait. PTI

Special campaign to prepare farmer registry in UP

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA
Lucknow, 6 April

To ensure that farmers receive the benefits of government schemes in a transparent and convenient manner, the government led by Yogi Adityanath will launch a special campaign to prepare the Farmer Registry across the state.

The campaign will run until April 15, during which camps will be set up at every Gram Sachivalaya to register farmers, officials here on Monday disclosed. The main objective of this initiative is to connect a maximum number of farmers to the digital platform, enabling them to directly receive benefits of agricultural schemes, including the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana and other farming-related programs.

A large-scale awareness



drive will also be conducted at the Gram Panchayat level during the campaign.

Through these camps, registration of the remaining farmers will be ensured, and any name-related errors or discrepancies will also be resolved immediately.

Active participation of Gram Pradhans, Panchayat Sachiv

and Lekhpals has been directed, with Lekhpals instructed to attend at least one camp in each Gram Panchayat within their jurisdiction.

Gram Pradhan and Panchayat Sachiv have been assigned a crucial role in the special campaign. Public representatives and employees from all Gram Panchayats will be involved

THE CAMPAIGN WILL RUN UNTIL APRIL 15, DURING WHICH CAMPS WILL BE SET UP AT EVERY GRAM SACHIVALAYA TO REGISTER FARMERS, OFFICIALS HERE ON MONDAY DISCLOSED. THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THIS INITIATIVE IS TO CONNECT A MAXIMUM NUMBER OF FARMERS TO THE DIGITAL PLATFORM, ENABLING THEM TO DIRECTLY RECEIVE BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURAL SCHEMES, INCLUDING THE PRADHAN MANTRI KISAN SAMMAN NIDHI YOJANA AND OTHER FARMING-RELATED PROGRAMS.

in the process to ensure that every eligible farmer is registered.

Officials have been instructed to inform farmers about the required documents during the camps and complete the registration process on the spot. So far, 1,72,06,355 farmers in the state have been linked to the farmer registry under the PM Kisan Yojana. However, a large number of farmers are still yet to be registered, which is why this special campaign is being launched.

This initiative will not only

create an accurate database of farmers, but will also enhance transparency and efficiency in the implementation of agricultural schemes in the future. Additionally, the registry will play a crucial role in ensuring timely financial assistance and other benefits for farmers. The state government has directed all concerned officials to run the campaign in mission mode and ensure that the maximum number of farmers are registered within the stipulated timeframe.

Central teams deputed to assess rain, hail damage to wheat crop

RUCHIKA M KHANNA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 11

After the state government sought relaxation in wheat procurement, the Centre has dispatched a nine-member team to assess complaints of lustre and yield loss, shrivelled grain and higher than specified moisture content in wheat caused by untimely rains, hail and high-velocity winds between March 29 and April 8.

The team led by PK Singh, Deputy Director in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, will visit the rain-affected districts, collect samples along with officials of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and state government officials.

The samples will be analysed at regional or district laboratories of the FCI. Based on the findings, a consolidated report will be sent to the Union Ministry with recommendations and those of the India Meteorological Department.

The Punjab Government

Produce on 1.3L acres damaged in April 1st week

had sought the Centre's help in relaxing wheat procurement specifications to mitigate farmers' losses and ensure that their crop was not sold below the MSP (Rs 2,585 per quintal). In Punjab, standing wheat crop has been damaged on 1.30 lakh acres of land.

While the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has already relaxed the specifications for buying wheat in the BJP-ruled Rajasthan, which also faced similar weather patterns, the Punjab Government alleged that its concerns were "ignored".

Yesterday, the issue was reportedly taken up during a meeting between Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Union Food Minister Pralhad Joshi at Delhi.

Sources in the Food and Supply Department said as wheat matures early in

Rajasthan, as compared to Punjab, the central teams have already visited the neighbouring state, assessed the damage and announced relaxation in quality specifications.

It may be mentioned that farmers, commission agents and officials involved in the procurement process have been complaining that the wheat arriving in the mandis has higher than prescribed moisture content of 12 per cent (as high as 15 percent in certain areas), besides grain suffering from lustre loss. Farmers have also been complaining that the yield would be less by 4-5 quintals per acre.

It has been learnt that wheat samples collected recently by the state government, with the assistance of FCI, show a lustre loss of 60 per cent, besides broken and shrivelled grain.

Ravinder Cheema, chief patron of the Arhtiya Association, said the Centre should also relax moisture content.

Punjab stares at Iran war-induced price shock



NIRMAL SANDHU
SENIOR JOURNALIST

A FARMER in Tarn Taran or Rohtak or a migrant worker from Bihar or UP would never have thought that US President Donald Trump's military 'excursion' in Iran would one day impact his life so deeply and threaten his cost of living. Yet this is the stark reality he has to cope with. Even if Israel and the US stop dropping bombs on Iran, the situation could worsen if, after the state elections, oil prices are raised.

The Trump mission has disrupted the global economy and the heat is felt all over India, no matter how hard the government tries to paper over the economic damage. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has caused turbulence in oil and gas markets worldwide, leading to soaring inflation and food and fertiliser shortages.

The spectre of hunger looms. The crisis is not confined to the scramble for gas cylinders or long queues at petrol stations in one city or region, official assurances of sufficient supplies notwithstanding. The

larger threat is of countrywide economic slowdown, loss of work opportunities and shrinkage of incomes.

Ruling politicians in Punjab, Haryana and at the Centre are investing more of their time and energy in managing headlines than checking hoarding and profiteering, maintaining the supply chains and working out plans to rescue agriculture and industry in particular from the global fuel price onslaught.

India's ill-thought-out abandonment of its traditional well-wishers, Iran and Russia, and siding with the attackers, the US and Israel, have made matters worse.

The country is paying higher prices for not just importing oil and gas but also fertilisers, particularly the nitrogen-based urea, which is produced with imported natural gas. There is a likelihood of 30% decline in urea production. India is the world's second largest importer of fertilisers after China. Any cut in supplies means lower farm production and lower farmer incomes.

Many in Punjab and Haryana, the country's food baskets, may face survival issues. Debt repayments may become more difficult and cause more stress. The migrant labour's outflow due to the unavailability of cooking gas cylinders, if not checked effectively, could escalate and affect wheat harvest and paddy trans-

plantation operations in both states. Fertiliser shortages would result in underproduction of cereals, making food prices spiral.

This will particularly spell trouble for families living beyond the reach of welfare benefits. The government's food and fertiliser subsidy bills are set to balloon. Coupled with revenue loss due to slowing economic growth, this will result in a squeeze on welfare and infrastructure spending. Middle-class incomes will stagnate or decline. Employment opportunities for daily and contractual labour already lessening due to a clever tweak in the rozgar yojna, will become harder to find.

Foreign institutional investors are pulling out of the stock and commodity markets, which has led to the rupee



DISRUPTOR: The country is paying higher prices for importing fertilisers, particularly nitrogen-based urea. PH

touching new lows, which in turn makes imports, travel and education abroad more expensive. As living standards take a hit, income disparities and social anxieties will increase, which can be deeply troubling for peace.

The scary global and national scenario doesn't augur well for the predominantly agricultural states of Punjab and Haryana which are vulnerable to price shocks. Being a BJP-ruled state, Haryana may get some aid from the Centre and cope well, but Punjab is left to fend for itself. BJP leaders in Punjab selectively pick up issues to target the Bhagwant Mann government but skip those which require the Centre's attention.

The latest budget reveals that Punjab's growth rate at 6.1% is below the national

Unsurprisingly, the magnitude of the critical situation has not shaken politicians of all colours in the state out of their slumber.

average. If the economy keeps floundering, the state's fiscal stress could deteriorate. If the West Asian conflict drags on, many of the promised Rs 55,000 crore investment proposals made at the recent investor summit may remain on paper.

Punjab's exports of premium basmati rice and sports goods mostly pass through the Strait of Hormuz and consignments of some 60 lakh tonnes of basmati are stuck at ports. With insurance and shipping rates skyrocketing, there is a possibility of an estimated 50% decline in exports. Exporting textile and engineering enterprises are in dire straits due to delays in payments. Harried exporters want the Centre to urgently introduce the barter system of payments — basmati rice for crude oil.

Unsurprisingly, the magnitude of the critical situation has not shaken politicians of all colours in Punjab out of their slumber. Nurtured in opportunism and short-term electoral wins, they continue with their daily routine of politicking, blissfully oblivious to the gathering dark clouds.

It is during a crisis that the worth of a leader is judged. When Punjab had floods last year, BJP ministers visited some affected areas, gave assurances and over time, forgot everything. The Prime Minister's promised Rs 1,600 crore relief is still awaited. Now another crisis is in the making and BJP leaders in

Punjab are running away from it. Few have cared to reach out to exporters in their hour of need.

The problem is the BJP leadership in Delhi does not seem to take them seriously or invite their opinion on any issue. Punjab occupies a place somewhere near the bottom in the list of its priorities. BJP politicians, therefore, spend their time in other ways to stay in the media limelight. They choose to respond vociferously to the political demotion of an actress's husband. They allow themselves to explode over a blast outside their Chandigarh office, holding the Punjab government responsible and forgetting in the process that the blame for any disruption of peace in the union territory lies with their own Home Minister.

As for the Aam Aadmi Party, the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal, there is hardly a leader of substance whose intervention on behalf of farmers and exporters can extract any meaningful response from the Centre.

Responsibility, therefore, lies squarely with the BJP leadership's favourites like Hardeep Puri, Ramesh Singh Bittu, Taranjit Singh Sandhu and the latest catch, advocate HS Phoolka, to persuade the Prime Minister to try to look beyond the West Bengal elections and spare a thought for Punjab and at least try to get what is Punjab's legitimate due.

Portal raj hinders Haryana farmers' MSP access



BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA
LEADER OF OPPOSITION AND
EX-CM, HARYANA

THERE is a particular kind of cruelty that hides behind the portal and paperwork. It does not announce itself with a loud decree. It does not openly cancel the minimum support price (MSP) to farmers.

Instead, it builds — layer upon layer of procedure — a wall so high, so bureaucratically intricate, that the farmer cannot climb it. By the time he gives up and sells his crop at whatever price is offered in mandis, the government washes its hands. That is precisely what the Haryana government is doing in the current wheat procurement season, which started on April 1.

We must call it what it is: a back-door brick-by-brick dismantling of MSP — not through legislation, but through administrative suffocation. Consider what the government has euphemistically called vehicle identification.

Every farmer bringing wheat to mandis must display the tractor-trolley's vehicle number, have it photographed

at the mandi gate, upload that photo to the government portal and only then receive a gate pass to proceed.

On the surface, this sounds like reasonable digitalisation. In practice, it is a trap built on a single false assumption — that every Haryana farmer owns a tractor-trolley. Over 85% of India's farmers are small and marginal, holding less than two hectares.

In Haryana, where land fragmentation is accelerating, the vast majority do not own tractors, let alone trolleys. They hire them — from neighbours, from contractors — season after season, at market rates they can barely afford.

Now ask the question the government refuses to answer: if a farmer hires different tractor-trolleys at different times, as most farmers must and do, will the portal accept the same farmer appearing with different vehicle numbers on each visit? It will not. It has not been designed to do so. And there is a reason for that design choice.

There is, moreover, a second and even deeper contradiction. The Haryana government itself does not permit tractor-trolleys for commercial operations — meaning hiring them out for crop transportation is technically illegal under existing state regulations.

So the farmer who hires a trolley is arriving at the mandi gate in a 'commercially operated' vehicle that the law does



DIGITISATION WOES: The farmer who hires a tractor-trolley is arriving at the mandi gate in a 'commercially operated' vehicle that the law does not recognise. FILE PHOTO

not recognise. The hired trolley cannot get a transport permit. Without a transport permit, the vehicle number cannot be verified. Without verification, no gate pass. Without a gate pass, no entry. The farmer goes home. The trader waits outside the gate, cash in hand, ready to buy at Rs 400-500/quinatal below MSP.

The complications do not stop at the vehicle gate. Farmers must first register on the Meri Fasal Meri Byora portal — a prerequisite that excludes the tens of thousands of elderly, marginalised and digitally illiterate farmers who lack smartphone access.

Gate passes must be generated via the e-Kharid

When a farmer has no functional access to MSP purchase due to registration barriers and the intimidation of a system designed to exhaust him, he will sell to the trader at below MSP.

mobile app, which requires an unreliable Internet connection in the villages of Haryana's farming belt.

The mandis are geo-fenced, so any GPS discrepancy, network glitch, or server outage can prevent a farmer from entering, with no offline fallback or appeal. Biometric verification of the farmer or an authorised representative is mandatory at the time of bidding — a step that routinely fails when the fingerprints of farmers, worn by years of field work, do not register cleanly on scanners.

Each of these requirements, individually, might pass as a modernisation measure. Together, they form a deliberate gauntlet, and the

farmer at the end of it is not a beneficiary; he is the target.

Whole wheat procurement has received some attention; the government's abandonment of mustard farmers is the quieter, and in some ways more complete, betrayal. Mustard growers across Mahendragarh, Rewari, Bhiwani, Hisar and Fatehsbad are being forced to sell their crop to private traders at prices well below the MSP of Rs 3,550 per quintal. Procurement by government agencies under NAFED and state bodies has been either absent or tokenistic at most mandis this season.

When a farmer has no functional access to MSP procurement — due to registration barriers, lack of a trolley, the simple intimidation of a system designed to exhaust him — he will sell to whoever is standing in front of him. He times his arrival to coincide with the government's absence.

The most damning evidence of intent, however, is numerical and undeniable. The Haryana government has quietly revised its wheat procurement target downward — from 80 lakh metric tonnes to 72 lakh metric tonnes for the 2026-27 season.

That reduction of 8 lakh tonnes, at the current MSP of Rs 2,585 per quintal, amounts to approximately Rs 2,068 crore in MSP income that Haryana's farmers will not receive from gov-

ernment procurement.

That money does not evaporate. It transfers, as it does every year when procurement falls short, to private traders who absorb the surplus at prices Rs 400 to Rs 500 below MSP. This is not an administrative calibration. It is a state-engineered transfer of wealth — from the farmer to the trader — executed quietly, without announcement, by a state government.

The Central government has, for over a decade, refused to translate the Swaminathan Commission's landmark recommendation into law — that MSP be set at C2+50%, meaning a guaranteed 50% profit over the comprehensive cost of cultivation, including land rental.

Even the current MSP of Rs 2,585 per quintal for wheat falls short of this benchmark in most Haryana districts when input costs, labour, diesel and irrigation are accurately accounted. Even within this already limited framework, procurement targets are being cut.

The farmer who grows this country's food does not have the luxury of a portal, a gate pass timeline or a biometric scanner. The farmer has a field, a family, a loan and a harvest ripening right now under the April sun. Governance is not about building systems that protect the government itself from accountability, transparency and efficiency.

Wheat exports to resume after 4-yr ban, quotas soon

SANDIP DAS

New Delhi, April 12

SEVERAL COUNTRIES INCLUDING Egypt, Indonesia, Myanmar and Bangladesh have shown interest in importing wheat after India lifted a nearly four-year-old export ban. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) is likely to allocate wheat export quotas soon, sources said.

Trade sources said that due to supply disruptions caused by geopolitical factors, wheat export prospects look promising this year. This follows the government allowing shipments of 2.5 million tonne (MT) of grain and an additional 0.5 MT of processed wheat products in February 2026, citing surplus stocks and a prospect of a record harvest.

"With Indian wheat cost and freight (CFR) rates to Bangladesh hovering around \$ 275-280 per tonne, exports appear viable and competitive. While recent unseasonal rains raise minor quality concerns, the Government approvals signal strong potential for trade, supporting farmers alike," Navneet Chitlangia, president, Roller Flour Millers' Federation of India, told *FE*.

India, the world's second-largest wheat producer after China, imposed the ban on wheat and wheat-product

MARKET RESET

■ Export quotas expected soon by DGFT

■ Surplus stocks: FCI holds about **22 MT** vs **7.46 MT** buffer norm

■ Record output projected: **Around 120 MT** wheat in FY26

■ Retail prices stable: **₹ 30.8 per kg**, **3% y-o-y** decline



exports in May 2022 due to concerns over food security, a smaller harvest, and rising inflation.

At the beginning of April, FCI held over 22 MT of wheat stock against a buffer of 7.46 MT. Trade analysts say this comfortable stock position has contributed to price stability in retail markets.

The average retail price of wheat according to the

Department of Consumer Affairs, was Rs 30.81/kg, a marginal decline of 3% year-on-year.

Chitlangia also stated that recent unseasonal rains, hailstorms, and associated winds have impacted wheat crops across 9 states and 152 districts, affecting over 4.2 million hectares. "This has caused qualitative losses of 20-30% in affected areas—primarily grain discolouration, loss of lustre, and elevated moisture content—along with a quantitative loss of 2 MT," he said.

The Agriculture Ministry has projected a record 120 MT of wheat output in the 2025-2026 crop years (July-June), trade sources said this output is definitely higher than the 117 MT from the 2024-25 crop year.

The area under wheat this season has increased to 33.41 million hectares (mha), 3% higher than last year, exceeding the normal sown area of 31.2 mha. Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has stated that unseasonal rains and hailstorms have damaged standing rabi crops across 0.24 million hectares so far in several states, with the wheat crop being the most affected.

The government is aiming to buy over 30 MT of wheat from farmers in key producing states during the 2026-27.

Agrochem sector expects input cost benefits after Customs duty reduction

SANJEEB MUKHERJEE

New Delhi, 2 April

The almost ₹70,000 crore Indian agrochemical sector expects an 8-9 per cent drop in their input costs as the government lowered customs duty on major chemicals and petro-chemicals for three months in the wake of the West Asia crisis. But, this may not have an impact on kharif pricing, as inventories have already been built up, experts said.

The duty exemption will start from April 2 and continue till June 30, 2026, an official order said.

“The actual impact of this reduction in Customs duty would be felt in the second half of this fiscal (FY27), when new products will be produced, because for now, most companies have already produced their plant protection chemicals and even 40-50 per cent of them have been despatched to the dealers,” a senior industry official remarked.

Earlier on Thursday, the government lowered Customs duty on a host of chemicals and petro-chemical items like isopropyl alcohol, PVC, polypropylene,

polystyrene, MEG and also formaldehyde (a good stabiliser) that are used extensively in the manufacturing of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides.

Dr Kalyan Goswami, director general of Agro Chem Federation of India (ACFI), welcomed the duty cut, saying it will ensure that Indian farmers have an uninterrupted supply of vital agri inputs.

“ACFI would also strongly recommend the immediate inclusion of several essential chemicals, specifically acetone, acetonitrile xylene, ETFA, and heptane, in the relevant statutory list to ensure continued operational stability across the sector,” Goswami said.

Current industry inventory levels are projected to be exhausted by August-September 2026 and new inventory will be required soon after, he said.

“The situation is worsening as vessels are experiencing delays against their scheduled arrival in India. This necessitates extending the order to quarter (Q2) to mitigate the impact of these delays on material availability,” Goswami said.

Rabi procurement commences today; govt introduces tech-driven reforms

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 31

Haryana is set to roll out an upgraded, technology driven procurement system as the rabi marketing season 2026-27 begins on April 1, with the state government claiming full preparedness and announcing a series of measures to streamline operations and enhance transparency.

The procurement drive will continue till May 15 across mandis in the state. In a significant relief to farmers, the government has relaxed the requirement of their physical presence during the procurement process. While procurement will remain biometric-based, verification can now be completed either by the farmer or any one of the three nominees designated by him.

In a bid to curb irregularities, all mandi locations have been geo-fenced. This ensures that key activities such as issuance of gate passes, auctioning, generation of J-Forms (sale receipts) and lifting of produce are carried out strictly within mandi premises.

Minister of State for Food,

Biometric verification eased; geo-fencing to ensure transparency



KEY FEATURES

- **Procurement period:** April 1 to May 15
- **Biometric verification:** Farmer or one nominee allowed
- **Geo-fencing:** Must for mandis & storage points
- **Crop verification:** Satellite imagery + field inspection + HARSAC heat maps
- **Gate pass rules:** Vehicle photo and number mandatory
- **Eligibility:** Only registered farmers on Meri Fasal Mera Byora portal
- **Objective:** Transparency, authenticity, and streamlined procurement system

Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Rajesh Nagar said, "To achieve this, physical presence of farmer or any of his designated nominee within the geo-fenced

zone of the mandi would be verified, thereby preventing any unauthorised individual from fraudulently selling the produce in the farmer's name."

He added that procurement would be carried out only for farmers registered on the Meri Fasal Mera Byora portal.

To further strengthen

authenticity, the government has introduced a multi-layered crop verification system. "The crop verification will be done through a satellite imagery-based system to verify the crops grown on the land declared by the farmers, inspected by revenue, district agriculture officials, and heat maps generated by Haryana Space Application Centre (HARSAC) as a third layer of validation using," the minister said.

Strict norms have also been laid down for gate pass issuance. Uploading of vehicle photographs along with registration numbers has been made mandatory. "In case where vehicles do not have number plates, farmers will be allowed to display the number manually on paper or by paint, which will be treated as valid," he added.

Exit gate passes will be issued only when vehicles are physically present within geo-fenced mandi zones. Similar geo-fencing norms have been extended to storage locations to ensure that foodgrain is accepted in warehouses only upon verified physical presence.

Govt extends zero duty import of tur, urad; retains 30% levy on yellow peas

Vishwanath Kulkarni

Bengaluru

The Union government has extended the import policy for key pulses, such as tur, urad and yellow peas, by another year till March 31, 2027, to ensure adequate supplies.

Black matpe (urad) and pigeon pea (tur) imports will continue to remain duty-free, while yellow peas will continue to attract an import duty of 30 per cent. The current import policy for tur, urad and yellow peas ended on Tuesday.

"It's a good decision by the government to extend the import policy for another year as it will provide long

term visibility for the industry," said Bimal Kothari, Chairman, India Pulses and Grains Association.

DGFT NOTIFICATION

Kothari said with this policy extension, the pulses import volumes are likely to be over 5 million tonnes (mt) during 2026-27, similar to the current year's volumes.

Pulses import volumes are seen reducing to around 5.23 mt this fiscal from 7.3 mt a year ago, he said.

The DGFT, in separate notifications, said the free import policy of tur and urad stands extended up to March 31, 2027.

"Import of yellow peas is free without the MIP (minimum import price) condi-

tion and without port restriction, subject to the registration under online import monitoring with immediate effect, for all import consignments where Bill of lading is issue on or before March 31, 2027," it said.

The pulses trade was expecting the government to maintain a *status quo* on the current import policy for tur and urad amidst concerns of the emergence of El Nino, which may bring in lower-than-normal rain impacting the production of key kharif pulses.

Besides, the ongoing war in West Asia has disrupted the supply chain resulting in higher freight and insurance costs, and in likely higher imports.

Hailstorm hits standing crops, farmers fear loss of output

Growers seek special girdawari to assess crop losses

DEEPENDER DESWAL

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

HISAR/JIND, MARCH 31

A sudden spell of hailstorm coupled with rain has left farmers in several villages of Hisar and Jind districts worried, with standing rabi crops suffering damage just ahead of harvesting. Hail accompanied by strong winds flattened crops in many areas, damaging ripened grains of wheat and mustard and raising concerns over both yield and quality.

According to the India Meteorological Department, most districts in Haryana received light to moderate rainfall on Tuesday. Mahendragarh recorded the highest rainfall at 8 mm, followed by Hisar with 7.8 mm. The weather disturbance also led to a slight dip of 0.3°C in the average maximum temperature across the state.

In Hisar district, villages such as Kharia, Dobhi, Shahpur, Matrashyam, Kirtan, Siswala and Rawalwas witnessed intense hailstorm along with rain, resulting in damage to standing crops.

Farmers said wheat, mustard, barley, gram and fodder crops were among the worst affected. The flattening of crops due to hail and wind has heightened fears of significant losses. Though no official assessment has been conducted so far, farmers claimed that the damage was substantial and urged the state government to initiate a special girdawari for loss assessment and compensation.

Hailstorm and rainfall were also reported from villages, including Kharkari Khokha and Shahpur areas, as well as parts of the Sukhani region.

A farmer, Ram Prakash Bishnoi, said, "Hail can damage ripened wheat grains. However, there is no major impact in areas where the



Flattened wheat crop in a village in Hisar district. TRIBUNE PHOTO

AVERAGE MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE DIPS 0.3°C

- According to the India Meteorological Department, most districts in Haryana received light to moderate rainfall on Tuesday. Mahendragarh recorded the highest rainfall at 8 mm, followed by Hisar with 7.8 mm. The weather disturbance also led to a slight dip of 0.3°C in the average maximum temperature across the state.
- Experts attributed the sudden weather change to western disturbances. The Head of the Department of Agricultural Meteorology at Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University said such conditions are likely to persist till Wednesday.

size of hails is tiny".

Experts attributed the sudden weather change to western disturbances. The Head of the Department of Agricultural Meteorology at Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University said such conditions are likely to persist till Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the All India Kisan Sabha has demanded immediate government intervention, citing widespread crop damage. In a joint statement, district pres-

ident Kapoor Singh Bagla, district secretary Sarbat Singh Punia and district vice-president Shamsher Numberdar said farmers across several villages in Hisar had suffered losses to wheat, mustard and gram crops over the past two days.

The farmer leaders demanded that the compensation portal be opened at the earliest and that a special girdawari be conducted by the administration to assess the damage.

Cash crunch hits farm co-ops, govt plans interest rate hike

Sandeep.Moudgal
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Bengaluru: Mounting financial stress among primary agriculture cooperative societies (PACS) has pushed the govt to reconsider its decision to cut their loan profit margins, with a proposal now on the table to raise it from 1.75% to 3%.

The move comes amid declining financial support from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and growing concerns over the viability of grassroots cooperative institutions that play a key role in farm credit delivery.

The reduction in margins was introduced in 2024-25, but officials say the decision has strained PACS finances and many now face an "existential crisis" due to shrinking income streams. Many societies are struggling to meet basic operational costs such as salaries, office rent and even stationery purchases.

"Karnataka has about 50,000 PACS but about 14,000 are defunct," a senior cooperation department official said. "PACS are demanding an increase in interest share on govt-funded loans given to farmers at 0%. The cooperation department is seeking finance department approval to hike it back to 3%."

Responding during the recent budget session, chief minister Siddaramaiah said the state was reviewing the margin structure and is studying practices in other states.

"Considering profit mar-



FINANCIAL STRAIN: NABARD assistance dropped from Rs 5,600 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 3,236 crore in 2024-25, compounding the problem

gins of 0.75%, 1.25%, 1.8% and 2% in PACS in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra respectively, officials have sought more information to increase investments in local PACs," he said in a written reply.

Capacity to pay norms

Siddaramaiah also acknowledged operational challenges faced by PACS but indicated that diversification could provide some relief. "As per Prof Vaidyanathan Committee recommendations, PACs that fall under NABARD have been asked to introduce 'capacity to pay' norms and set aside 0.5% of profit margins for human resources," he said. "However, with profit margin reduced to 0.25% there has been a slight reduction in available resources. But this cannot be a reason for PACS to shut down."

To strengthen revenue streams, the govt is encourag-

ing PACS to expand into allied activities such as running Jan Aushadhi centres, multi-service outlets, Kisan Samridhhi Kendras, warehousing and fuel distribution.

The financial strain has been compounded by a sharp fall in NABARD assistance. Funding dropped from Rs 5,600 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 3,236 crore in 2024-25, impacting the interest subsidy pipeline to the cooperative sector. Allocations for 2025-26 are yet to be finalised. "NABARD has again not given any indication on the extent of funds it will release to the state this year," officials said. "It appears the state will have to step in to provide financial assistance to farmers and farming cooperatives."

The proposed revision in margins is now seen as a key step to stabilise the cooperative credit system as the state govt weighs a larger role in rural finance.

Fertilizer procurement faces 'too many ifs' for the rabi season, says FM

Our Bureau
New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday acknowledged that there are too many 'ifs' in purchasing fertilizer through tenders for the forthcoming rabi season.

However, she assured that there is an adequate stock of fertilizer available for the kharif season. She also highlighted that India has the fiscal space to support sectors impacted by the escalating West Asia crisis, while the Reserve Bank of India has room to cut interest rates to deal with global challenges.

"We should start tendering out for rabi season. There's excess buying, but we can't deny the farmer. Supplier is unclear on price insurance and logistics an issue insurers are refusing to insure certain shipments. This is uncertainty, even if we want to prep in advance, there are so many ifs," she said while speaking at an event organised by the Na-



Nirmala Sitharaman,
Finance Minister

tional Institute of Public Finance and Policy here.

ENOUGH FISCAL SPACE

She assured that there is enough fiscal space available to meet the challenges caused by the war in West Asia. "India has fiscal space, room to maintain our capex programme, room for the RBI to cut rates, room to offer targeted support to affected sectors," she said, while attributing this as a dividend of a decade of fiscal discipline. "This is the strategic value of fiscal prudence that pays dividends across decades. Therefore, we have

been able to reduce the excise duty on diesel and petrol; specific exemptions were given on critical petrochemical products and SEZs to operate in DTA," she said.

Observing that the current year is even more challenging than the previous one, Sitharaman said, "The escalation of Middle East conflict has evolved from a regional security concern into a systemic tremor threatening vital arteries of global energy, and hardening the lines of new multipolar world order."

She said the world economy is witnessing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, and that global public debt has surged.

According to the Minister, global public debt had surged to approximately \$106 trillion, exceeding 95 per cent of global GDP. As per the IMF, the US had a debt-to-GDP ratio of 125 per cent in 2025, with Japan at a staggering 235 per cent. Many advanced economies that spent decades running expansionary

fiscal policies now find themselves with constrained policy space precisely when they need it most.

DEBT-TO-GDP RATIO

Against this backdrop, India continues to stand out. "Our general government debt-to-GDP ratio (which includes States' debt), at approximately 81 per cent, is the lowest among major economies after Germany. More importantly, India is the only major economy where the IMF projects this ratio to fall significantly, to 75.8 per cent by 2030, while the debt outlook for the advanced economies such as US, China, Germany, and others is projected to worsen," she said.

Further, India's external debt-to-GDP ratio stands at just 19.1 per cent (as of September 2025), one of the lowest in the emerging market world.

India's forex reserves, at over \$688 billion (as of March 31), provide import cover of approximately 11 months, a substantial buffer.

Non-urea fertiliser subsidy hiked 11% for kharif season

● ₹41,533-crore outlay approved by Cabinet

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, April 8

TO PROTECT FARMERS from the volatility in global prices of soil nutrients, the Cabinet on Wednesday approved a subsidy of ₹41,533 crore for phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilisers for the kharif 2026-27 season (April-September) under the nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) mechanism.

The NBS allocation for the upcoming season has increased 11% (by ₹4,317 crore), compared to the previous kharif season (2025-26). This means prices of non-urea soil nutrients, largely used for paddy, pulses and oilseeds, will remain unchanged for the next kharif season. Farmers continue to get diammonium phosphate (DAP) at ₹1,350/50 kg bag despite global volatility in its price.

"Since Covid, global price fluctuations have not impacted the prices of fertiliser provided to farmers, although the subsidy burden has increased," Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said, adding that the West Asia war has impacted fertiliser supplies and prices.

With the increase in NBS, the fertiliser subsidy might cross the budget estimate (BE) of ₹1.7 lakh crore for 2026-27. Of the fertiliser subsidy bud-

SAFEGUARDING FARMERS

■ Fertiliser subsidy might cross the budget estimate (BE) of ₹1.7 lakh crore for 2026-27

■ Of the BE, ₹1.16 lakh crore has been earmarked for urea and ₹54,139 crore under NBS

■ Subsidies are paid directly to fertiliser companies



ASHWINI VAISHNAW, MINISTER,
INFORMATION & BROADCASTING

Since Covid, global price fluctuations have not impacted fertiliser prices, although the subsidy burden has increased

Cabinet okays draft Bill for Women Reservation Act amendments

THE UNION CABINET is learnt to have cleared on Wednesday the draft Bill for amendments to the Women's Reservation Act that will ensure an increase in the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 with 273 reserved for women, and its implementa-

tion in the 2029 general elections. Sources privy to the development said that a meeting of the Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the draft bill for the amendments to the law, Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam. **-PTI**

geted for the current fiscal, ₹1.16 lakh crore is for urea and ₹54,139 crore under NBS.

NBS is announced for both kharif and rabi seasons. Even though a policy of "fixed subsidy" has been in place for P&K fertilisers since 2010, in practice, the government has been adjusting the subsidies based on global prices in recent years

to help the farmers.

Subsidies are paid directly to fertiliser companies, enabling them to sell fertilisers to farmers at affordable prices using point-of-sale machines.

Usually, the BE is kept at a conservative level and subsequently hiked over the year based on demand and global prices.

Cabinet nod to ₹41,534 cr fertilizer subsidy ahead of monsoon sowing

NEW DELHI

THE government on Wednesday approved 12 per cent hike in subsidy for Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilisers for Kharif 2026 season to Rs 41,534 crore in order to insulate farmers from rising global prices amid the West Asia conflict. The subsidy for P&K fertilisers for Kharif 2025 season was Rs 37,216 crore. The decision, taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, fixed subsidy rates effective April 1 to September 30, 2026. For Kharif 2026, the government has set subsidy for nitrogen at Rs 47.32 per kg (up from Rs 43.02 per kg in rabi 2025-26), phosphate at Rs 52.76 per kg against Rs 47.96 per kg, and sulphur at Rs 3.16 per kg against Rs 2.87 per kg). The pot-



ash subsidy has been held steady at Rs 2.38 per kg. Subsidy is extended across 28 grades of P&K fertilisers under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme, in force since April 2010. "The subsidy has been increased by Rs 4,317 crore over Kharif 2025 season," Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters.

Despite a sharp increase in Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP) prices in international markets since the Covid years, the minister said the retail price for farmers has been held at Rs 1,350 for a 50-kg bag.

Gadkari sees farmers as future energy providers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Raisen (MP), April 13

ROAD TRANSPORT MINISTER

Nitin Gadkari said on Monday that farmers must evolve beyond their traditional role as food producers to become providers of energy, fuel and hydrogen, as the government seeks to diversify rural incomes and reduce the country's dependence on imports.

Speaking at the conclusion of a four-day national agriculture festival 'Unnat Krishi Mahotsav' in Raisen (Madhya Pradesh), Gadkari said agricultural residues, biomass, ethanol, compressed natural gas and hydrogen presented untapped income opportunities for India's farming community.

"Knowledge is the greatest power, and transforming this knowledge into wealth is the most pressing need of the agricultural sector today," Gadkari told hundreds of farmers gathered at the event.

The minister said artificial intelligence, satellite-based information systems, drones and nano urea were reshaping modern agriculture and urged farmers to embrace technology to drive down costs and boost productivity.

On water conservation, a critical issue for India's rain-dependent farming sector, Gadkari outlined a simple principle: slow fast-flowing water, stop slow-moving water and allow stagnant water to seep into the ground. "Just as money is deposited in a bank, water must be deposited into the ground," he said.

Gadkari also flagged the need for stronger post-harvest infrastructure, warning that surplus production without adequate cold storage, processing plants and value-addition facilities would depress farm prices. He identified dairy, fisheries and the blue economy as priority sectors for raising rural incomes.

Expert opinion divided over impact of below-normal monsoon on food inflation

Shishir Sinha

New Delhi

With the IMD's forecasts for below-normal rainfall, the debate on retail food inflation has begun. This year's situation is more critical, with a heatwave, energy price shocks and issues related to fertilisers also expected to play a key role in food prices. However, economic research appears to be divided on the impact of lower-than-normal rainfall on food inflation.

While the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has pegged the 2026 monsoon at 92 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), with a model error margin of ±5 per cent, private forecaster Skymet has projected rainfall at 94 per cent of LPA, also with a ±5 per cent margin. This places the season firmly in the "below-normal" category; a normal monsoon is defined as rainfall between 96 per cent and 104 per cent of the LPA. As Indian farmers are largely dependent on the South-West Monsoon for irrigation, a below-normal monsoon has added to the worries.

The possibility of lower productivity due to various factors, including a below-normal monsoon, will have an impact on food inflation and that will, in turn, push

Rainfall LPA vs food inflation

	Deviation from LPO (in %)	Food inflation (in %)	Food grain production (000 tonnes)
2017-18	95	7	2,85,010
2018-19	91	0	2,85,210
2019-20	110	1	2,97,500
2020-21	109	3	3,10,740
2021-22	99	9	3,15,616
2022-23	106	3	3,29,687
2023-24	94	8	3,32,298
2024-25	107	8	3,57,732
2025-26	108	(-)-1	3,48,657
2026-27	92*	5-5.5 [#]	TBA

*IMD Forecast, [#]SBI Forecast Source: SBI research, IMD

headline inflation. While the share of Food & Beverages (F&B) has declined in the new series (base year 2024), it remains the largest component of the CPI basket. The share in the previous series (base year 2012) was 45.86 per cent, against 36.75 per cent now.

FOOD PRICE OUTLOOK

Crisil said that in the coming months, while a low base will perk up food inflation, the adverse impact of heatwaves and increased risk from a below-normal South-West monsoon assign an upside to food inflation.

Nomura said while inflation has a patchy relationship with monsoon levels, an overly hot Summer and sub-normal rains could impact agricultural output and pose an upside risk to food prices.

"Potential shortages of fertilisers could increase input costs for farmers, even as prices are considerably subsidised by the government. Rising commodity prices could further add to imported food inflation, especially in items such as edible oils, where India is a net importer," the agency said, while adding that lower demand from restaurants and households coping with LPG shortages could temper some of the inflationary pressures. "We expect a gradual uptick in F&B inflation from 3 per cent in Q1 to close to 6 per cent by Q4," it said.

However, SBI Research has a slightly different take. Historical patterns suggest that the relationship (below-normal monsoon and food inflation) is not linear.

"Years with relatively comfortable rainfall have witnessed elevated food inflation such as 98 per cent rainfall with 8.43 per cent food inflation in FY09, 102 per cent with 15.2 per cent in FY11, while weaker rainfall years such as 93 per cent (FY13) and 91 per cent (FY19) were associated with much lower food inflation of 6.3 per cent and 0.09 per cent, respectively," it said.

Further, it emphasised that the implication is that the all-India monsoon average, by itself, is an insufficient guide to the food price outlook. What matters more is the spatial distribution of rainfall across major crop-producing regions and its timing during the sowing and crop-development phases.

Despite parties' poll promises, farmers fear for the future of agriculture

T. Ramakrishnan
CHENNAI

A joint family, owning about two dozen acres in a village near Sattur of Virudhunagar district, raised maize this year. The family spent around ₹9 lakh, but could earn only ₹4 lakh, suffering a loss of ₹5 lakh. "Our area is fit only for dry land farming, as there is no scope for irrigation through any river network. Of course, there is not much rain. This is why we have been raising crops such as maize, millet, or cotton, if possible. As an inter-crop, we sometimes opt for black gram," explains an elderly member of the family.

Speaking of the economic viability of farming, the elderly person says that though the family has the means to withstand the loss this year, it has decided not to carry on farming by itself hereafter, as the elders are quite sure that the younger members of the family are not keen on pursuing farming.

In the village of Mullukurichi, located at the foot of the Kollu Hills, and about 30 km from Rasipuram in Namakkal district, P. Balachander, 57, has been undertaking farming on 11 acres, passed down to him by his father about 35 years ago. Despite much of his land having been covered under dry land farming, the availability of free power supply for agriculture enables him to raise a mix of crops, including paddy. In Namakkal district, he is one of those chosen under a scheme of the Union government for reducing the consumption of chemical fertilizer. The idea is to cut consumption by 50% and encourage agriculturists to shift to natural and organic practices.

He has been able to make a modest gain, but his son and daughter-in-law, both well-placed in the IT sector in Bengaluru, have conveyed their disinterest in agriculture to him. "After me, no one in my family is going to take up farming," Mr. Balachander says, with a tinge of sadness.

These two examples are not confined to the southern or western districts of the State; similar stories can be heard in the fertile Cauvery delta region and northern districts such as Cuddalore and Villupuram. But a perusal of the manifestos of the principal Dravidian parties — the DMK and the AIADMK — reveals that they have not captured this issue. The same holds good for the NTK, which is contesting in all 234 constituencies on its own. Yet, all the parties have come up with various proposals in support of the farm sector, though they do not seem to enthuse the farmers, as the proposals are generally viewed as the extension of the existing schemes, and the ultimate test lies in their effective implementation.

Use of inputs

"Two issues need to be tackled on a war footing," says Mr. Balachander. Many farmers still do not have adequate knowledge of the use of inputs, be it seeds or manure. They need to be sensitised to their judicious use. Soil test has to be performed at regular intervals, he adds. Another problem is the absence of a vibrant agricultural marketing mechanism, he notes. The Virudhunagar agriculturist calls for a reliable procurement system for maize, millets, and other crops. Hassles in securing loans from agricultural cooperative societies have to be eliminated, he says.

Silver lining

But there is some room for cheer. M.G. Rajendran, a farmer of Malaiyeppankuttai village in Sendhamangalam taluk of Namakkal district, has two sons, both of whom have taken up farming despite having completed higher studies. "In my case, I am lucky, as my sons are deeply interested. They experiment with drip irrigation and organic farming. If the Union and State governments demonstrate that their policies and schemes yield moderate gains, it will build confidence among the youth to take up agriculture."

Govt assures adequate wheat, rice stocks; directs States to act against hoarding

Our Bureau
New Delhi

The Centre on Monday assured that buffer stocks of wheat and rice are sufficient to handle any supply exigencies. While affirming that West Asia's conflict had not caused "unusual volatility" in essential commodity prices despite disruptions to crude and LPG imports, the government directed the States to aggressively target hoarding and black marketing.

At an inter-ministerial briefing on recent developments in West Asia, Anupam Mishra, Additional Secretary in the Department of Consumer Affairs, said the department is keeping a close watch on the food security situation in the country. He said the department is monitoring the prices of food commodities, ensuring supply and also making efforts to prevent hoarding and black marketing.

C Shikha, Joint Secretary in the Department of Food and Public Distribution, said the Centre had adequate stock of foodgrains — 222 lakh tonnes (lt) of wheat and around 380 lt of rice — almost three times above the buffer norms.

The quarterly buffer norms prescribe the government to maintain minimum 74.6 lt of wheat and 135.8 lt of rice in the official reserve as on April 1.



KEEPING CLOSE WATCH. Anupam Mishra (right), Additional Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs, at an inter-ministerial briefing in New Delhi on Monday ANI

"This is quite enough to take care of PDS requirement as well as any emergency requirement," said Shikha. There is absolutely no hike in the prices of both wheat and rice in past year, she added.

EDIBLE OIL SITUATION

On edible oil, where India is import dependent to an extent as high as 55-60 per cent, she said that imports from key partners, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, Ukraine, Argentina and Brazil, are continuing steadily and domestic availability remains comfortable despite global uncertainties. Domestic mustard production had also strengthened the supply, she added.

However, the government will continue to monitor the edible oil situation closely and will intervene if required, she said without elaborating the kinds of interventions planned.

Though she said the retail

price of sugar is stable with inflation around 3 per cent over the past three years, she declined to comment on whether the government plans to restrict exports, amid reports of a move to allow higher ethanol blending with petrol from the current 20 per cent.

Mishra said the Consumer Affairs Department gathers data of wholesale and retail prices of 40 commodities on a daily basis from 528 centres across India through a mobile App.

"What we have seen so far, there has been no unusual volatility in prices of the essential commodities," he said.

Highlighting that the production of pulses this year is higher than the previous year and also currently 28 lt of buffer stock of pulses lie with the government, he said still imports of tur and urad had been allowed without quantitative restriction till March 2027.

MP's soymeal deal crushed by 50% amid West Asia jam

Drops From 93K Tonnes In Feb To 40-50K Now | SOPA cries foul

Meenakshi.Sharma
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Indore: India's soybean meal exports are set to drop sharply by nearly 50 percent in March compared to February, as the ongoing West Asia conflict disrupts shipping routes and weakens demand from key international buyers—dealing a significant blow to the agri economy of Madhya Pradesh, the country's leading soybean-producing state and a major trading hub.

Export volumes are expected to fall to 40,000-50,000 tonnes in March, down from about 93,000 tonnes in February. Exporters warn the situation could worsen in April due to a lack of fresh orders and a severe shortage of containers.

Madhya Pradesh, which dominates India's soybean production and trade, is among the worst affected by the disruption. The slowdown is already visible in local mandis, where traders report sluggish stock movement and weakening sentiment.



MANDI BLUES

According to DN Pathak, executive director of the Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA), logistical challenges have severely impacted export activity. Container shortages, disrupted vessel movement, and delays linked to the conflict have significantly reduced shipment volumes. Soybean meal, a key by-product used as a high-protein ingredient in poultry and livestock feed, is an important export commodity for India. Major markets include West Asia,

Europe, and East Africa. However, disruptions in shipping routes, rising war-risk insurance premiums, and higher freight costs have made exports increasingly unviable—especially in price-sensitive markets.

Key buyers such as Iran and other Middle Eastern countries have scaled back purchases, leading to a build-up of domestic stocks. Industry participants say uncertainty continues to weigh on the market, with little hope of near-term

recovery. "Uncertainty continues to weigh on the market and exports are unlikely to recover in the near term as shipments remain disrupted. The year had already begun on a weak note due to higher prices of Indian-origin meal, and ongoing geopolitical tensions are expected to keep demand subdued and delay fresh orders," said VK Jain, an Indore-based exporter who shipped a substantial quantity of soybean meal in Feb. Exporters said Indian-origin soybean meal is currently quoted at around \$500-\$505 per tonne for South East Asian countries compared with \$420 to \$430 per tonne offered by Brazil and Argentina for the same markets, making India less competitive globally. In MP, the export slowdown is starting to reflect in mandi sentiment with traders reporting slower stock lifting. In the 2024-25 oil year, soybean meal exports fell to 20.23 lakh tonnes compared to 22.75 lakh tonnes in the previous year, indicating sustained pressure on overseas demand.

'Region-specific plans to boost farm income on the anvil'

A three-day national level exhibition and conference — Umat Krishi Mahotsav — concluded at Raipur, Madhya Pradesh on Monday. Several private and government-owned firms, including fertiliser manufacturers, agri-equipment makers and seed companies participated in the event. Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan spoke to FE's Sandip Das on the sidelines of the meeting about the challenges facing the agriculture sector, and its prospects. Excerpt:



nutrients. Besides, efforts are being made to ensure that our ships (stuck at Strait of Hormuz) can get through. I think there will not be any big problem relating to fertiliser supplies in kharif season.

Current circumstances are extraordinary, we are attempting to address fertiliser supplies impacted by the West Asia conflict. What measures are being taken to boost agriculture gross value added (GVA)? Ensuring an efficient supply chain from seed to market is critical. We have sufficient production of rice and wheat while the output of oilseeds and pulses still remain inadequate thus we need to import. Attempt is to ensure that in the varied climatic zones taking into consideration climate, soil

and irrigation, we are preparing a roadmap of agricultural growth for various regions. We released a roadmap for Sehore, Dewas, Vidisha, and Raipur districts in Madhya Pradesh which focused on not only production but also on right crops and sustainable farming. Efforts have been made to prepare location-specific action plans at the block level so that agricultural development can be aligned with local needs and conditions. The need of the hour is for farmers to adopt scientific methods of cultivation based on their specific soil conditions, local climate, availability of water, and existing resources. Instead of focusing solely on



increasing production, farmers must give equal attention to selecting the right crops and ensuring sustainable farming practices. We need to focus on promoting integrated farming models through the promotion of fruits, vegetables, fisheries and other allied sector activities for boosting farm growth.

Do you think the current liberalised import policy, especially for pulses and oilseeds, has impacted farm gate prices?

There is an import policy to augment domestic supplies. However, whenever the prices of agricultural commodities drop, we intervene through the PM Asha scheme which has components of price support scheme, price stabilisation fund, price deficiency payment and market intervention to protect farmers. We do ensure that farmers get remunerative prices and don't resort to distress sales. At present it is to reduce wide difference between farm gate and retail prices, especially for perishables

like fruits and vegetables.

Frequent erratic weather conditions impact farm income. What are the steps being taken to address it?

About 23 states have rolled out the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and others are being encouraged to adopt the scheme. We have made several changes to the scheme to make it farmer-friendly. Satellite based remote sensing technology is being used to assess crop losses.

Since the launch of the crop insurance scheme in 2016, about ₹2 lakh crore claims have been paid to the farmers under the scheme. We are using all the latest technology to assess crop losses.

How do you assess agricultural growth in the

next few years?

Agricultural growth depends on several factors including performance of monsoon. Despite all efforts, the weather plays spoils. Despite these challenges, the agricultural sector including allied growth has increased by 9.23% annually over the past decade. Through various interventions, we are trying to ensure sustainable growth of the sector which also boosts farm income and positive impact on the economy. The focus is on promoting climate-resilient agriculture, increasing productivity, enhancing farmers' incomes, conserving water resources, crop diversification from water intensive rice and paddy to pulses, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables, and strengthening farmers' linkage with markets.

EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO PREPARE LOCATION-SPECIFIC ACTION PLANS AT THE BLOCK LEVEL

Taking a 'rain check' on agri output

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday forecast a below-normal monsoon for India in 2026 at 92 per cent of the long period average (LPA), the first such forecast in more than a decade. The forecast has raised concerns over the impact of low rains on India's agriculture output. However, historical data shows that over the



year, though the southwest monsoon has dipped below normal in a few years but foodgrain production has not dropped much in comparison to the previous crop year (July to June). This indicates low cumulative rainfall does not necessarily lead to drop in farm production if timeliness, spread and distribution of the showers is even. SANJEEB MUKHERJEE

Has farm sector become more resilient to below-normal rains?

Year	Monsoon*	Foodgrain production**	% change from previous year***
2012	-3.60	257.12	-0.84
2014	-10.1	252.03	-4.91
2015	-12.7	251.54	-0.19
2017	-2.6	285.01	3.6
2018	-7.4	285.21	0.07
2023	-6	332.3	0.79

Sources: IMD, Ministry of Agriculture

Note: Monsoon is on the basis of calendar year and foodgrains production is of the following crop year (July-June). So, for 2012 foodgrains production for 2012-13 crop year has been used and likewise
 *Percentage departure from Long Period Average (LPA), which is 87 cm
 **In million tonnes for the June to July crop year. Foodgrains production includes production of kharif, rabi and summer
 ***Previous year in this case refers to the previous crop year (July to June)

When rains falter

As El Niño builds and India braces for water and farm stress, the call is for urgent conservation and replenishment measures, both for now and the future



MO KAIFEE ALAM & SANJEEV MUKHERJEE
New Delhi, 30 April

As El Niño conditions strengthen over the Pacific this year, concerns are mounting over India's monsoon outlook. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the country could see a 'below normal' monsoon in 2025 for the first time in three years if its April forecast turns out to be accurate. It estimates that the southwest monsoon will likely be at 92 per cent of the long period average (LPA), marking the first below-normal season since 2023. (LPA, according to the IMD, is the average rainfall recorded over a particular region for a given interval, like a month or a season, over a long period, such as 30 or 50 years.)

The Met department has also indicated that most parts of the country, barring some areas in the Northeast, Northwest and the southern peninsula, are likely to receive below-normal rainfall this year.

Noida-headquartered private weather agency Skymet has echoed this outlook. In its 2026 forecast, it pegged rainfall at 94 per cent (plus/minus 5 per cent) of the long-period average of 868.6 mm for the June-September monsoon season.

While these figures may not appear drastically low on paper, experts caution that even a marginal shortfall — particularly when coupled with uneven spatial and temporal distribution — can have disproportionate consequences for India's already stressed water systems. India is among the most water-stressed countries in the world. If the forecast holds, it could trigger cascading effects on agriculture and drinking water supply, further straining an already fragile water security framework.

The lifeline called Monsoon

Nearly 45 per cent of India's rain-fed agriculture depends on the monsoon, with timing and adequacy of rainfall playing a critical role in crop outcomes. According to NITI Aayog's

Composite Water Management Index (CWMI) as in 2020, about 74 per cent of wheat-growing areas and 65 per cent of rice cultivation zones already face significant water stress.

CWMI estimates suggest that the demand-supply gap in agricultural water could reach 570 billion cubic metres (BCM) by 2030. Groundwater, which accounts for 62 per cent of irrigation, has been declining in over half of the monitored regions, pointing to a deep and persistent imbalance.

"Monsoon is the pran (life) of our water system," said water conservationist Rajendra Singh, a Ramon Magsaysay Awardee and Stockholm Water Prize winner. "A weak monsoon will have a very negative impact on crops and people's lives."

Singh argues that India's increasing shift towards commercial crops and industrial expansion has deepened its dependence on monsoon rainfall. "Our economic model has made us more vulnerable," he said.

Himanshu Thakkar, coordinator of the South Asia Network on Dams,

Rivers and People, echoed similar concerns: "It is worrying that rainfall may be deficient while temperatures are expected to be high. Higher temperatures will increase evaporation losses, and if rainfall is also deficient, that will create additional stress."

Experts stress that beyond the overall deficit, rainfall distribution will be critical, particularly for agriculture.

Thakkar emphasised the importance of timing. "What matters more is the distribution of rainfall. If rainfall is near normal during key crop stages, the situation may still be manageable," he said. However, if deficits occur during critical phases such as early growth or flowering, the impact on rain-fed agriculture can be severe, he added.

Reservoir levels currently offer a temporary cushion, though one that is already shrinking. The Central Water Commission (CWC) tracks the pre-storage of 166 major reservoirs, which together have a capacity of 183,565 BCM, about 71.20 per cent of India's estimated total reservoir capacity of 257,812 BCM.

According to a bulletin dated April 9, 2025, storage stood at 82,070 BCM, or 44.71 per cent of total capacity, at these reservoirs. This is higher than last year's level of 69,752 BCM and above the 10-year average of 64,688 BCM.

This indicates that current reservoir storage is about 11.66 per cent of last year's level and 12.01 per cent of the decadal average. However, reserves have been declining sharply in recent months. Storage dropped from 126,354 BCM (68.93 per cent of total capacity) on January 29 to 85,568 BCM (46.65 per cent) on April 2, and further to 82,070 BCM by April 9.

Experts attribute the relatively comfortable levels to a strong monsoon in 2025 and subsequent rainfall. But weak pre-monsoon showers and a subdued monsoon outlook could quickly erode this buffer.

Tap into the ground, too

What makes the situation more precarious is not just the prospect of lower rainfall, but the declining effectiveness of natural recharge systems.

Groundwater aquifers, which serve as India's largest freshwater reserves, depend on steady, well-distributed rainfall for replenishment. However, shifting rainfall patterns, marked by short, intense bursts

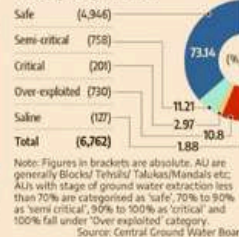
Running dry

Demand and supply of water in India (in BCM*)



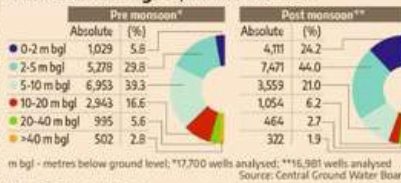
*Billion cubic metre; **Forecast Source: NITI Aayog's Composite Water Management Index

Categorisation of assessment units (AUs) in India



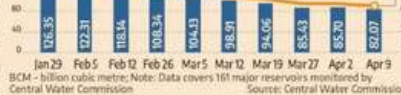
Note: Figures in brackets are absolute. AU are generally Blocks/ Tehsil/ Talukas/Mandals etc. AUs with stage of groundwater extraction less than 70% are categorised as 'safe', 70% to 90% as 'semi-critical', 90% to 100% as 'critical' and 100% fall under 'Over-exploited' category. Source: Central Ground Water Board

Monsoon recharge Depth to water level in 2024



m bgl - metres below ground level; **17,700 wells analysed; ***16,981 wells analysed Source: Central Ground Water Board

Declining storage Reservoir level in 2026



BCM - billion cubic metre; Note: Data covers 161 major reservoirs monitored by Central Water Commission Source: Central Water Commission

rather than sustained moderate showers, are reducing the amount of water that seeps into the ground. "There used to be water bodies such as lakes in every village that acted as water banks, but we have failed to build storage infrastructure in line with rising demand, leading to both drought and floods," Singh said. "Water banks help recharge aquifers and reduce the loss of water through evaporation."

Lower rainfall is likely to intensify pressure on groundwater, as extraction rises to meet agricultural and domestic demand even as replenishment slows.

"Most of the water we use is groundwater, but levels are falling, (2.97 per cent) are 'critical', 758 (11.21 per cent) are 'semicritical' and 4,946 (73.14 per cent) are 'safe'. Besides these, 127 (1.88 per cent) units have saline groundwater."

However, national averages mask sharp regional stress. States such as Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu have more than a quarter of their units in over-exploited or critical categories.

Experts emphasise that rainfall alone is not enough. How effectively it translates into groundwater recharge is equally crucial. More than 75 per cent of India's annual rainfall occurs during the four monsoon months, (June to September) leading to sharp seasonal imbalances. Rainfall remains the primary source of groundwater recharge.

"Much of the rainwater that could be stored for later use simply flows away. This is one of the country's biggest losses," Singh said. "Data shows that rainfall contributes 269.17 BCM (about 60 per cent) to total groundwater recharge: 54.7 per cent during the monsoon and 5.3 per cent in the non-monsoon period. The remaining 40 per cent comes from sources such as canal seepage, irrigation return flows, and recharge through tanks, ponds and water conservation structures."

"Rainfall is the most important source of recharge, but how it translates into groundwater depends on the systems we maintain," Thakkar said, pointing to ponds, tanks, lakes, wetlands, forests, rivers and streams as critical recharge structures.

"All of these systems need to be protected and strengthened. Desilting local water bodies, for instance, improves both storage capacity and recharge," he said, adding, "The problem is we are not doing enough. If groundwater is our primary source, we need far greater efforts to ensure its sustainability."

He outlined two key solutions: Reducing groundwater use through better governance, and significantly enhancing recharge.

Singh offered a stark warning: "If we do not recharge our aquifers, how will we meet future needs? If India is to become drought- and flood-resilient, we must learn to capture and store rainwater."

Even as reservoir levels offer a temporary buffer, the outlook makes a case for more resilient water management as India heads into an uncertain monsoon season.

West Asia conflict: Fuel, fertiliser prices may remain high for prolonged period

SAURAV ANAND
New Delhi, April 14

FUELAND FERTILISER prices may remain elevated for an extended period as disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and damage to critical infrastructure continue to delay a recovery in global supplies, the International Energy Agency, International Monetary Fund and World Bank Group said.

In a joint statement issued after a coordination meeting ahead of key global reports, the three institutions highlighted persistent risks to energy and food markets amid ongoing uncertainty in West Asia.

"The situation remains highly uncertain, and shipping through the Strait of Hormuz has yet to fully normalise," the statement said, underscoring continued strain on one of

WAR IMPACT

■ Even if shipping flows stabilise, fuel supply recovery will be gradual

■ The disruption already has broader economic consequences

■ The impact, however, is uneven across economies



■ The conflict has displaced populations, disrupted service sectors

the world's most vital energy transit routes.

The agencies cautioned that even if shipping flows stabilise, supply recovery will be gradual. "Even after a resumption of regular shipping flows through the Strait, it will take time for global supplies of key commodities to return to their pre-conflict levels — and fuel and fertiliser

prices may remain elevated for a prolonged period given the extent of infrastructure damage," they said.

The disruption has already driven up oil, gas and fertiliser prices, with broader economic consequences. "The shock has led to higher oil, gas and fertiliser prices, triggering concerns about food security and

job losses," the statement said.

The impact is uneven across economies, with energy importers bearing the brunt. "The impact of the war is substantial, global, and highly asymmetric, disproportionately affecting energy importers, particularly low-income countries," the institutions said.

Supply disruptions are also rippling across production chains beyond energy. "Due to supply disruptions, shortages of key inputs are likely to have implications for energy, food, and other industries," the statement said.

The conflict has further dampened economic activity, displacing populations and disrupting service sectors. "The war has also forcibly displaced people, impacted jobs, and reduced travel and tourism, which may take time to recover," it added.

Include maize under PSS, state to Centre

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Hyderabad: Agriculture minister **Tummala Nageswara Rao** requested Union minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan to include maize under the Price Support Scheme



(PSS), seeking central procurement support for a major crop in Telangana. In a letter to the

Union minister, Tummala said maize is widely cultivated in Telangana during both kharif and rabi seasons, with about 11,21,494 acres under cultivation this season. He said favourable weather conditions have resulted in an average yield of 26.57 quintals per acre, with an estimated production of around 29.7 lakh metric tonnes.

The minister said that since the third week of March, there has been a significant inflow of maize into market yards. However, the current average price is Rs 1,759 per quintal, which is Rs 641 below the MSP of Rs 2,400 announced by the central

Tummala seeks cooperation for procurement of about 50% of total production, around 14.89 lakh metric tonnes, stating that the estimated cost would be about ₹4,000 crore

govt. He further stated that the Telangana govt has opened 92 purchase centres to prevent losses to farmers and has purchased 65,000 metric tonnes of maize so far.

Recalling the last kharif season, he said that although the Centre did not procure maize then, the state govt purchased 3.76 lakh metric tonnes at MSP, spending about ₹902.8 crore. He added that prices are declining further this season due to higher production and market uncertainties, worsening the difficulties faced by farmers.

The minister urged the central govt to intervene immediately, include maize under the PSS, and undertake procurement through central nodal agencies, adding that a similar request had been made during the last kharif season.

Digital tracking of urea, coming soon to a mobile app

FROM PAGE 1

inventory management and distribution. These initiatives have enabled authorities to better align supply with demand and curb diversion," the first person cited above said.

The platform will streamline access to key nutrients such as urea and DAP, by enabling farmers to place advance orders through their mobile phones. Farmers may be able to select nearby retailers, check real-time availability and receive booking confirmations or delivery timelines. The move is expected to reduce last-mile bottlenecks, long queues at retail outlets and panic buying during peak sowing seasons.

Haryana's Meri Fazal Mera Byora system is among the leading state-level models for fertilizer regulation. Farmers register their Aadhaar details along with land and crop information, which is then used to fix fertilizer entitlement based on acreage and crop type.

The government also plans to integrate the digital tracking system with the existing direct benefit transfer (DBT) system, in which subsidies are directly transferred to the farmer after authentication using Aadhaar or mobile OTPs.

Queries emailed to the ministries of chemicals and fertilizers and of agriculture remained unanswered.

"The idea is to bring predictability in fertilizer availability and empower farmers with information before they reach the outlet. The app is at an advanced stage of development and may be piloted ahead of the kharif sowing cycle. The farmer's land records, crop details, and fer-



India imported 5.6 million tonnes of urea in FY25. **MINT**

tilizer requirements based on landholding will be integrated at a later stage," the second person added. The kharif sowing cycle starts in June.

India imported 5.6 million tonnes urea in FY25, out of its total consumption of 38.79 mt. India also imports 60% of its DAP needs, and 15% of urea and NPK demand.

"The move will ensure judicious allocation of fertilizers and also will help in mapping

the commodity. Overall, online fertilizer booking can bring predictability, transparency and efficiency—key factors in improving farm productivity and farmer convenience," said

Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda.

"I believe this is a step in the right direction and should have a lasting impact. Fertilizer is heavily subsidized compared to open market prices, so this will improve traceability and ensure more equitable distribution to operational farmers," said Shweta Saini, founder and CEO, Arcus Policy Research, Delhi.

For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](https://www.livemint.com)

The platform will streamline access to key nutrients like urea and DAP, enable farmers to place advance orders

India, Oman discuss ways to boost trade, investment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, April 13

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday held talks with his Omani counterpart Anwar bin Hilal bin Hamdoun Al Jabri on ways to promote bilateral trade and investment.

In the last few days, Goyal has held discussions with the trade ministers of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait.

"Held a telecall with HE Anwar bin Hilal bin Hamdoun Al Jabri, Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. Discussed unlocking opportunities under the India-Oman CEPA to



boost bilateral trade and investment ties for the mutual growth of both nations," Goyal said in a social media post.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed in Muscat in December 2025.

The pact will provide duty free access to 98% of India's exports, including textiles, agri and leather goods in Oman.

On the other hand, India

will reduce tariffs on Omani products such as dates, marbles and petrochemical items.

India-Oman bilateral trade was about \$10.5 billion (exports \$4 billion and imports \$6.54 billion) in 2024-25.

The joint attack launched by the US and Israel on Iran had led to severe disruptions in the movement of ships in international waters, particularly to the West Asian nations.

The conflict has posed challenges for exporters to ship goods to the Gulf region, with which India had a bilateral trade of \$178 billion in 2024-25 (\$56.87 billion exports and \$121.67 billion imports).

India must cut fertiliser import dependence, leverage AI and precision tech: ICAR chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

A comprehensive approach spanning short, medium and long-term strategies is needed to reduce India's dependence on fertiliser imports, ICAR Director General ML Jat said on Tuesday, calling for greater use of artificial intelligence, precision nutrient management and sensor-based systems to optimise fertiliser use.

Addressing media persons after a brainstorming session to develop a roadmap for achieving 'Atmanirbharta' (self-reliance) in fertilisers, organised by the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS) here, Jat



said fertilisers were instrumental during the Green Revolution in boosting production, but the current challenge lies in declining fertiliser use efficiency and their indiscriminate application.

He said strengthening initiatives like the Soil Health Card scheme, promoting

balanced and need-based fertiliser application, and enhancing awareness among farmers are important steps in the right direction.

Jat said crop diversification towards pulses and oilseeds, recycling organic waste under the Waste-to-Wealth initiative, and increasing the use of biological sources would further contribute to reducing dependence on chemical fertilisers.

The session was attended by representatives from concerned government departments, academia, the fertiliser industry and farmers, who unanimously stressed the necessity of self-reliance in the critical sector.

A Kerala exporter's ordeal highlights depth of West Asian crisis

Dhinesh Kallungal
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

As tensions escalate over the U.S.'s blockade of maritime traffic to and from Iran's ports, along with Iran's counter-threat to shut down ports of its West Asian neighbours, the story of an exporter who shipped a container load of watermelon and muskmelon from Kerala to Jebel Ali in the UAE via a port in Maharashtra on the eve of the West Asian war highlights the depth of the crisis faced by the export-import community, both within and outside the country.

Shaiju K., export manager at City Fresh, Thiruvananthapuram, loaded a 40-foot reefer container with watermelon and

muskmelon from Nhava Sheva port in Maharashtra to Jebel Ali on February 26. The shipping agent, Sri Sri Navigation Shipping, provided a timeline indicating departure by February 28 and expected arrival at Jebel Ali on March 2. He paid a shipping charge of ₹2.32 lakh to transport the consignment, which was valued at ₹8.5 lakh and comprised perishable cargo.

Left with no options

A day after the goods were loaded onto the vessel, the war began, and the exporter had no information about the consignment until March 10. Later, the agent informed him that the cargo would be offloaded at Sohar Port in Oman instead of Jebel Ali due to the escalating conflict.

With no other option, the exporter consented. However, the agent subsequently informed him that the container would instead be transported to Jebel Ali on March 11.

However, nothing materialised, and the agent issued an additional bill of ₹14,000 towards shipping charges. In addition, the exporter was asked to pay a war-risk surcharge of \$4,000 and a mandatory 5% surcharge amounting to \$1,000. "I was not in a position to pay these charges, as the total value of the commodity was less than the war-risk surcharge and other shipping costs. So, I requested them to release the cargo without the extra bills, as there was no certainty regarding the quality of the perish-



Tainted goods: The consignment shipped from Kerala found to be damaged after a delay in reaching UAE. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ble goods," said Mr. Shaiju.

However, the request was denied, and he had to pay ₹6.89 lakh to clear the cargo. The ordeal did not end there as the goods were found to be completely rotten upon offloading. The exporter had to pay an additional ₹2 lakh to the local municipal author-

ities to dispose of the rotten melon. "In short, I had to bear a liability of around ₹22 lakh-₹23 lakh for reasons beyond my control," Mr. Shaiju added.

Air cargo

According to K. Suresh Kumar, chairman of the Air Cargo Agents Association

of India (ACAIA), the lack of certainty in timely delivery of goods shipped by sea has led exporters to turn to air cargo, where freight charges have increased two to threefold.

Moreover, exporters often pay advances to various parties well before such crises. In such situations, they are left with the choice of either forfeiting the advance or taking the risk of proceeding with shipments to sustain their business.

Increase in price

However, air cargo offers relatively better prospects, as consignments reach their destinations with minimal delay, albeit at significantly higher costs.

The price of transporting 1 kg of cargo to Europe

has risen from ₹170 to ₹340, while rates for various West Asian destinations have increased from ₹60 to around ₹150 per kg, according to K. Suresh Kumar, chairman of the ACAIA.

Kerala typically exports around 600 tonnes of perishable cargo daily destinations across the globe. This has now dropped to less than 400 tonnes a day, Mr. Kumar said.

Munshid Ali, secretary of the Kerala Exporters' Forum, said it was high time for the Union government to establish a statutory freight regulatory authority to curb illegal practices in the sector and protect the export-import community from the adverse effects of global geopolitical developments.

Monsoons even more important today



MADAN SABNAVIS

Chief economist, Bank of Baroda

Monsoon defines the kharif output as well as FMCG and consumer goods demand in the rural areas, making it relevant even now

AGRICULTURE HAS WITNESSED a decline in share in GDP by ~8% over the last two decades, mainly due to higher growth in the services sector. There have been limits to agricultural growth given the area under cultivation and the productivity levels. Yet, it is the fulcrum for overall growth prospects.

This is because it dominates in terms of employment. Thus, income generated in this sector would be critical for defining the consumption and savings patterns in the coming months. The sector is still heavily dependent on rainfall with around 70% of the kharif output being exposed to irrigation facilities. More importantly, the spread is uneven across crops—rice has higher access with around 35% being covered, with pulses at the other end with less than 30-35%, and oilseeds and cotton in the middle with around 55% and 50% respectively. The latter will be more vulnerable as traditionally, production falls when rainfall is sub-optimal.

Two issues have come up recently which are presently potential red flags that could be raised post June, when the monsoon arrives—the first being the possibility of El Nino or winds that typically herald a weaker monsoon. May-July would need to be monitored to keep a check, and the second half of the year could be vulnerable if this occurs. The second is the initial Skymet forecast which expects monsoon to be 94% of normal. While it is too early to get the right picture, the fact that it is lower than

normal requires close monitoring.

In fact, any forecast of the monsoon at present is just too preliminary; however, having such forecasts is necessary to prepare the farm economy. In fact, a normal monsoon is often a necessary though not sufficient condition for a good kharif crop. While the aggregate number is important for a macro picture, the spread is more important. This can be gauged from the rather diverse access to irrigation for different crops, making the spread across regions and crops vital.

Crops grown along rivers, especially in the north, tend to be less dependent on rains. The same may hold largely for crops grown in the coastal areas as the south west monsoon winds blow across this region before moving to the interiors. Hence, shortfall in rains in states like Punjab and UP may not really matter for the rice crop. However, the interiors become vulnerable and the Deccan Plateau region is always the area of focus as crops ranging from cotton (Gujarat, Maharashtra and Telangana) to oilseeds (MP, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan) and pulses (Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Rajasthan) are grown here. Further, some of these crops are grown in the rain shadow area, where weak south west monsoon winds could result in the rainfall losing intensity as

they cross the mountains and move to the interiors. Here, states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and parts of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh would be affected.

The kharif crops account for roughly 50% of overall agricultural output—they determine growth the sector accordingly. However, monsoon deficiency of any significant magnitude has a bearing on the reservoir levels. This is an important indicator of water levels required for drinking (humans and animals) besides

Aggregate rainfall, though a good indicator, does not tell the entire story. The arrival is much important as much as the progress

defining prospects for the rabi crop, which though less dependent on winter rains does use the resources from these reservoirs. This does not consider other erratic conditions such as excess monsoons which has in the past affected the horticulture output in states like Maharashtra, AP, Karnataka and Telangana,

causing spikes in inflation. Hence, monsoon's progress is carefully studied and tracked for monetary policy. Interestingly, the monsoon pattern has tended to change due to climate variations with the traditional June-September season being extended to July-October. This has been a slow process and several farmers have not yet adjusted to this transformation—thus, the sowing pattern tends to get skewed on account of the late monsoon. It's progress is also important as

crops require different levels of precipitation at different stages of flowering.

All this means is that the aggregate rainfall, though a good indicator, does not tell the entire story. The arrival is important as much as the progress. Next, the spread across states is important, followed by the coverage of various crops. But excess rainfall or late withdrawal can damage crops. This position is normally known by October, where other perspectives come to the fore.

The kharif crop, which is harvested from September onwards until November, provides a clue on the rural income generated. While there are no official numbers on the rural economy, it is believed that roughly 50% would be coming from the farm sector. This income is important for supporting rural demand, which tends to peak in this period—the harvest cum festival season. Rural demand has supported the FMCG and consumer goods industries in the last two years when urban demand has tended to be weak. Therefore, monsoon is critical for companies planning their output as well as investment.

The war has already led to prices of oil-related products going up, in turn possibly affecting pesticide and fertiliser prices. Here, the government can help. But when it comes to rainfall, it is beyond the purview of any authority, making the progress of monsoon even more important.

Views are personal

Jasjeev Gandhi and Paras Singh

http://reporters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Perched atop a truck under the bright afternoon sun, 50-year-old Pramod Mandal moves swiftly, stacking freshly harvested cauliflowers one over the other as workers below pass up basket after basket. The 20-acre field in southwest Delhi's Dichaon Kalan operates with a quiet efficiency—a ladder propped against the truck, men climbing up and down in rapid succession, the vehicle gradually filling up with what will soon be nearly 30 quintals of produce bound for mandis in Keshopur or Azadpur. Just beyond the field, the Mungeshpur drain—a supplementary channel of the Najafgarh drain snakes past in a near-pitch-black stream, its surface heavy with industrial effluents. While Mandal is reliant on groundwater, there are plenty of farms in the area which are using water directly from this drain to irrigate their fields.

Mandal, who has been cultivating cauliflower here for nearly three decades, says the crop has become the backbone of farming in the area. Paying ₹70,000 annually to lease the land, he earns around ₹15,000 per truck, managing profits of close to ₹5 lakh a year. "Cauliflower grows easily. It is hardy and can survive even in tough conditions. The yield is good too," he said.

While borewells remain the primary source of irrigation, the proximity of the drain offers a fallback—albeit a troubling one.

"The water in the drain is terrible so we try not to use it. However, some farmers are forced to use it in areas where the groundwater is saline," he said.

Across the drain, 40-year-old Meena Kumari tends to her patch of spinach and cauliflower, recounting how a breach in the drain during heavy rains in January inundated her fields. "The produce ended up growing in this water. We were able to salvage most of it, but the water is terrible and it stinks," she said.

Dichaon Kalan has in the past 15 to 20 years witnessed an agricultural push, emerging as a cauliflower hub supplying vegetables across Delhi. Krishan Kumar, who has run a dairy here for 11 years, describes the shift as organic but sweeping. "They used to be grown here even when I started my dairy, but it is like a domino effect. More and more farmers have seen and adopted the same crop. Truck-

Hardy crop thrives near toxic water

Cauliflower farming has flourished in Dichaon Kalan, however, concern persists as some farmers are forced to use polluted drain water for irrigation, raising questions over safety



Cauliflowers being grown in southwest Delhi's Dichaon Kalan in Najafgarh, New Delhi

RAJ KRAJ/HT PHOTO



The polluted Mungeshpur drain, a subsidiary of Najafgarh drain, is often used by farmers to irrigate their fields

RAJ KRAJ/HT PHOTO

loads of cauliflowers go from Dichaon Kalan to all parts of Delhi—Najafgarh, Okhla, Azadpur—you name it," he said.

But the transformation carries an environmental cost that runs just alongside these fields. A short drive away in neighbouring Jharoda Kalan, the pattern repeats itself—stretches of cauliflower fields interrupted occasionally by cabbage, all lining the dark, sluggish drain. "There are parts of Jharoda Kalan, like across this road where salinity is so high, that farmers only use

water from the drain," Babloo Kumar, 25, said.

While the drain here is a darker shade of brown, sure enough, HT was able to spot multiple pipes entering the drain, with the sound of motor pumps running. In small 50-metre stretch, over 10 pipes from different fields could be seen entering the drain—pumping out this highly polluted water into the fields. These pipes pull put drain water at one end, run under the road and emerge again in the field located on both



sides to feed with constant supply of water. HT saw dozens of instances of fields being irrigated using the untreated drain water along this belt.

Scientific assessments, however, paint a stark picture of the risks involved.

Multiple studies conducted over the past decade by IIT-Delhi researchers across five locations along the Najafgarh drain have detected heavy metals—chromium (Cr), copper (Cu), cadmium (Cd), zinc (Zn), nickel (Ni) and lead (Pb)—in concentrations

ranging up to 50 times the permissible limits set by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), rendering the water unsuitable for irrigation.

A 2020 study titled "Assessment of Drain Water Used for Irrigation in the Delhi Region" in JH&P journal concluded that consumption of heavy metal-contaminated agricultural products can cause deleterious human health effects, leading to further health problems.

Experts said agriculture along the Najafgarh drain is being

watered with untreated mix of industrial and domestic wastewater. "This is likely causing long term accumulation of heavy metals and lead in soils and eventually the crops," Priti Mahesh, an independent environment and public health researcher said.

Farmers have demanded an alternative clean sources of water, either through canals or other outlets.

Experts point to a structural gap driving this dependence. "There are several farmers that are using water from the drain, as unlike Haryana or Uttar Pradesh, we do not have proper irrigation channels or canals. If the farmer cannot use groundwater, he will end up using this highly polluted water," said Paras Tyagi, an activist with NGO CYCLE India.

Bhim Singh Rawat, Yamuna activist and member of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People said if only sewage was used to irrigate fields, it does act as manure to an extent, however, Delhi's drains, including the Najafgarh drain are carrying a mix of sewage and effluents.

Govt adopts crop-specific approach to boost high-value agriculture

AGENCIES

New Delhi, 19 April

The Union Budget 2026-27 marked a strategic shift towards crop-specific and regionally aligned strategies for promoting high value agriculture in India, the government said on Sunday.

India's agricultural sector showed record growth in the last decade at 4.45 per cent, an official statement said, adding that the country ranks second in the world in coconut production.

The coconut production sector supports the livelihoods of about 30 million people, including nearly 10 million farmers, the statement said.

India's cashew exports stood at \$369.17 million in 2024-25 and cocoa exports reached \$295.58 million in the same year.

TARGETED INTERVENTIONS HAVE BEEN PROPOSED IN THE RECENT BUDGET FOR COCONUT, SANDALWOOD, COCOA, AND CASHEW IN COASTAL REGIONS; AGARWOOD CULTIVATION IN THE NORTH EASTERN STATES; AND PREMIUM NUTS SUCH AS ALMONDS, WALNUTS, AND PINE NUTS IN HILLY AREAS.

India's walnut exports were valued at \$7.8 million in FY 2024-25, with key markets including the UAE, Turkey, Iraq, Singapore, Algeria, Qatar, Bhutan, Kuwait, Seychelles and Nigeria.

Targeted interventions have been proposed in the recent budget for coconut, sandalwood, cocoa, and cashew in coastal regions; agarwood cultivation in the North Eastern States; and premium nuts such as almonds, walnuts, and pine



nuts in hilly areas.

Over the past decade, horticultural production has increased substantially from 277.35 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 370.74 million tonnes in 2024-25.

The country ranks second worldwide in the production of vegetables, fruits and potatoes. Fruits

account for 9.18 per cent and vegetables account for 8.18 percent of global production.

Further, India is the world's largest producer of onions and shallots (dry excluding dehydrated), contributing close to 22.42 per cent of global production.

As of January 2026, India has around 150 million agarwood trees, with nearly 90 per cent located in the North Eastern states under plantation and agroforestry systems.

Tamil Nadu leads in overall coconut production, while Andhra Pradesh records the highest productivity, followed by West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

These regional variations highlight the diverse production strengths across India's coconut-growing states, the statement noted.

Beyond primary production, the coconut sector has emerged as an increasingly important contributor to agricultural exports, in line with the government's vision of achieving \$2 trillion in exports by 2030 and \$21 trillion by 2047.

ESSENTIALS MOVE; ENGINEERING GOODS, ELECTRONICS TAKE BIG HIT

New routes, vessels kept West Asia exports going

MUKESH JAGOTA
New Delhi, April 19

WITH THE SHIPPING routes in West Asia disrupted and global carriers pulling back, India swiftly rerouted trade to keep essential exports flowing, even as the overall shipments to the region plunged sharply amid the crisis.

Another factor that helped was the urgent need for food and agricultural products in the region, which also led authorities there to create special facilities for receiving cargo and ensuring its quick movement.

While essentials have gone through, the absence of regular shipping channels has resulted in exports of engineering goods, electronics, petroleum products and some other heavy items coming to a complete halt.

India's monthly exports to the region are around \$6 billion. However, in March, only \$2.5 billion could go through, a decline of 58% year-on-year.

"Measures taken by different departments and agencies have ensured uninterrupted supply of perishable products to the West Asia region. It has also resulted in significantly diversified routing options and reduced dependency on congested ports," a commerce ministry official said.

Within a week of the war, a

GOING WITH THE FLOW

IMPACT ON INDIA'S EXPORTS

Usual monthly exports	March exports	Drop
~\$6 billion	\$2.5 billion	~58% y-o-y

STILL MOVING

Food & agri products (rice, meat, fruits, vegetables)

Perishables (high urgency)



COMPLETELY HIT

Engineering goods

Electronics

Petroleum products

Heavy cargo

logistics WhatsApp group connecting all major agri exporters with air cargo operators and shippers was set up. The Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Promotion Authority coordinated with Lulu Group and DP World to facilitate movement of stuck cargo to countries in the region during the Ramadan period.

Khorfakkan Port in the UAE was operationalised in the first week of March. A priority docking and bonded corridor to Jebel Ali—one of the largest logistics hubs in the world—was established, the official said.

Khorfakkan, on the east coast of the UAE, is acting as a strategic alternative to the Strait

of Hormuz. It is roughly 120-140 km from major UAE hubs like Dubai and Sharjah. While outside the tightest choke point, it saw some attacks by Iran in the early stages of the war.

To move goods to West Asia, exporters are also using feeder vessels to transport cargo from India's west coast—Mundra and Nhava Sheva—to safer alternative ports such as Khorfakkan, Jeddah in Saudi Arabia and Aqaba in Jordan. The Oman-UAE Green Corridor has been activated for smoother cargo movement to markets of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the official said.

As of mid-April 2026, major Omani ports are opera-

tional, with the Port of Salalah resuming operations following a temporary closure due to a drone strike in March. Other ports like Sohar and Duqm are functioning normally.

Apart from shipping routes, air cargo services and commercial passenger carriers are being used to transport goods to the region. A typical passenger plane can carry up to 20 tonne in its cargo hold, while dedicated freighters have a capacity of 40-150 tonne. "Air cargo coordination with Air India, Spicejet and Emirates have been established

Regular meetings with exporters of rice, meat, poultry, eggs and fresh fruits and vegetables are being held," the official said.

Govt to source 2.5 MT of urea bypassing Hormuz

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, April 21

THE GOVERNMENT IS aiming to import 2.5 million tonne (MT) of urea bypassing the Strait of Hormuz over the next two months to boost supplies ahead of the kharif season, Indian Potash Managing Director P S Gahlaut said on Tuesday.

Gahlaut said that the supplies, for which a tender was floated on April 4, would come from countries including Russia, Algeria, Nigeria and Oman.

Indian Potash, one of the three agencies authorised by the government for urea import along with National Fertilisers (NFL) and Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers (RCF), has received supply offers for about 6 MT against the tender for 2.5 MT. The prices

offered by suppliers are in the range of \$935-959/tonne, far higher than that in February.

Indian Potash has made its recommendation to the government after analysing the bids, Gahlaut said, adding that the government is expected to give its approval soon.



The supply challenges in urea emerged as the West Asia conflict hit six key production centres—the UAE, Kuwait, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain. These countries account for 30-40% of global urea trade.

"As urea consignment would not come through the Strait of Hormuz, we have found an alternative route to bring urea via the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa," Gahlaut told FE.

With the closure of the

P. S. GAHLAUT,
MD, INDIAN POTASH

Due to supply disruption in LNG—a key feedstock—we lost around 1-1.2 MT of urea production during March and April

Strait of Hormuz, LNG supplies from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were disrupted leading to a drop in domestic urea production in March and the first half of April. With the government approving spot purchase of LNG, the production has commenced. "Due to supply disruption in LNG—a key feedstock—we lost around 1-1.2 MT of urea production during March and April. With the latest tender, the production gap has been bridged," he said. Since April 6, the overall LNG allocation for the fertiliser units has been increased to around 95% of their six-month average consumption, thus boosting output prospects, he added.

Gahlaut said urea prices "are not that high" compared to the prices prevailing in October-November 2021 amid the Russia-Ukraine war. Urea prices increased to over \$980/tonne then and other

fertiliser variants also rose sharply, leading to a spike in the urea subsidy to over ₹2.5 lakh crore in 2022-23.

The demand for urea would initially come from the southern region with the onset of monsoon over Kerala. The consumption of urea in the kharif season is projected at around 17 MT against the current stock of around 6.6 MT. Farmers start applying urea for vegetative growth of paddy and other crops after sowing by the end of June.

Urea production in the current month, according to sources, is likely to be around 2.1 MT. It had dipped to 1.8 MT in March because of LNG supply constraints.

Retail prices of urea for farmers have been notified at ₹242 a 45-kg bag since March 2018, while DAP is supplied to farmers at ₹1,350/bag. Urea subsidy stood at over 90% and DAP subsidy at over 50%.

Fertilisers see first output drop in 13 yrs



HIMANSHI BHARDWAJ & SANJEEB MUKHERJEE
New Delhi, 21 April

India's fertiliser production within the Index of Eight Core Industries recorded its weakest annual growth in 13 years in 2025-26 (FY26), contracting 0.1 per cent year-on-year (Y-o-Y). This marks the first negative print since the 3.3 per cent plunge in 2012-13 (FY13) — the first full year under the current series.

The slump caps a decelerating trend, with growth slowing from 3.7 per cent in 2023-24 to 2.9 per cent in 2024-25, in contrast to the sector's average annual expansion of over 2.1 per cent since FY13.

The FY26 downturn intensified with a sharp 24.6 per cent contraction in March 2026 — the steepest single-month drop since monthly tracking began in April 2012.

Earlier March declines, including pandemic-era dips, pale in comparison, with no instance exceeding a 15 per cent fall over the past 14 years.

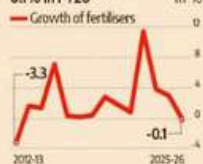
This March plunge dragged full-year growth into negative territory, despite gains in earlier months. "March production dipped sharply as most urea plants underwent premature annual maintenance shutdowns due to drying liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies. As a result, actual urea output in March 2026 was nearly 27 per cent lower Y-o-Y at around 1.8 million tonnes (mt)," a senior industry executive said.

In March 2026, India also produced around 900,000 tonnes to 1 mt of phosphorus and potassium fertilisers, down 16-24 per cent from March 2025, as raw material supplies tightened.

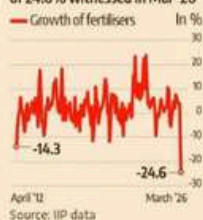
The executive said that India typically produces 2-2.5 mt of urea each month, but output fell sharply in March. A closer look at the data shows that domestic fertiliser production also declined in the first quarter (April-June/Q1) of FY26, which may have contributed

On a downturn

Full-year production shrank 0.1% in FY26



Deepest monthly contraction of 24.6% witnessed in Mar '26



to the overall dip.

"In April, a large urea plant in North India shut down operations, leading to an immediate loss of 500,000-600,000 tonnes of production," another senior executive said. He added that while output improved in subsequent months, the March slowdown offset earlier gains.

For complex fertilisers — largely diammonium phosphate (DAP) and nitrogen-phosphorus (NP)/nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium-sulphur (NPKS) — data shows that until January 2026, domestic DAP production was down about 1.6 per cent. This was offset by a nearly 12 per cent rise in NP/NPKS output, which is considered a better alternative due to its balanced nutrient profile.

Official sources expect domestic urea production in April to recover to around 2 mt, aided by improved LNG availability. While this would be about 11 per cent higher than March levels, it would still fall short of April 2025 output of 2.18 mt.

CURBING DEPENDENCE ON IMPORTS

Fert Output Slump Spurs Push for Alternatives

Targets 100 districts with heaviest use

Digging Deep

India looks to cut chemical fertiliser dependence

Targets top 100 high-use districts

To push organics, biofertilisers, water-soluble inputs

Aims 5% cut in 2026-27 & 25% reduction by 2030 via ICAR



West Asia crisis disrupted urea, DAP & raw material supplies

Subsidy bill may rise by ₹20,000-₹25,000 cr: Crisil

Shambhavi Anand

New Delhi: India is rushing to curb reliance on chemical fertilisers after a 24.6% slump in local output in March, which triggered a push to scale up alternatives such as water-soluble nutrients, organics and biofertilisers.

The government is rolling out a targeted campaign in the top 100 districts with the heaviest use of bulk fertilisers like urea and DAP, aiming for quick, measurable results. An action plan with defined roles and timelines is being finalised to accelerate adoption and stabilise supplies, a senior official familiar with the matter said.

The government through the Indian Council of Agricultural Research has already introduced a roadmap aimed at lowering the use of chemical fertilisers, targeting a reduction of 5% in the 2026-2027 season and 25% by 2030.

Supply of critical fertilisers—urea, di-ammonium phosphate and their raw materials used for domestic manufacturing—has been dis-

rupted due to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a key trade route connecting the West Asia and India, since the Iran war began in late February.

Manufacturing of urea and other soil nutrients also took a hit with several manufacturers shuttering factories, as supply of LNG, a critical input, has been severely disrupted after India's largest supplier, Qatar, called force majeure.

The government has since purchased gas on spot several times at higher prices, increasing allocation to fertiliser companies. However, that has come at a higher cost.

The disruption has taken place just ahead of India's kharif season. Staple crops such as oilseeds, pulses, rice, cotton, maize, and sugarcane are sown during the season, making it vital for food inflation.

The fertiliser sector still relies on imports, keeping subsidy costs high. This year, the fertiliser subsidy bill could climb by ₹20,000-25,000 crore, or 12-15%, even as annual domestic production of both complex fertilisers and urea could dip 10-15%, according to Crisil Ratings.

China suspends import licences of 3 Indian rice exporters

Prabhudatta Mishra
New Delhi

A month after rejecting consignments from three Indian rice exporters due to traces of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), China has cancelled the import licences of these companies, effective April 17, according to sources.

The Indian Embassy in China communicated the matter to Apeda, India's official agricultural export promotion body, which subsequently informed the companies.

RECIPROCAL STEPS?

The companies involved are NM FoodImpex Pvt Ltd, Shriram Food Industry Ltd and Sponge Enterprises Pvt Ltd. Industry sources said the government may take reciprocal steps if China continues with the suspension as the grounds on which the decision was taken are not legally valid.

The companies have re-



STRATEGIC RETORT. The government may take reciprocal steps if China continues with the suspension as the ground on which the decision was taken is not legally valid, sources said

portedly approached Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, Apeda and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) to take up the matter with China on a priority basis, the sources said.

They added that the effective date of the Chinese Customs Department's new order was determined based on the timing of the initial consignment rejections.

businessline had reported in March on instances of rejection of Indian non-basmati rice consignments by

China, citing traces of GMO, even though the non-basmati rice was tested by China Certification and Inspection Group (CCIC), a state-owned company. India is yet to permit the commercial cultivation of GM crops, other than cotton.

Industry sources said China grows GM rice, and in 2006, the European Union flagged the issue of GM contamination in Chinese rice.

India exported 1,80,805 tonnes of non-basmati rice to China in 2024-25, worth

\$79.43 million, and in April-January of the last fiscal, it was already higher at 1,86,013 tonnes, though in value terms it was lower at \$65.59 million.

As China had restrictions on Indian rice through non-tariff barriers, the export was very low till 2019-20, with only 567 tonnes shipped in 2019-20, but it surged to 3,31,571 tonnes in 2020-21 after Beijing removed those curbs.

RISING IMPORTS

According to USDA data, in 2025-26, China's rice imports are estimated to rise to 3.1 mt from 2.3 mt in 2024-25. Its exports are also pegged to increase to 1.9 mt from 1.2 mt and production to 146.3 mt from 145.3 mt, the data show.

When China allowed Indian rice imports, initially its own team recognised 16 mills in India, but later it accepted India's official recognition and cleared over 100 mills to export rice, trade sources said.

FIR filed against seed company on farmers' complaint in Madhya Pradesh

Our Bureau
New Delhi

An FIR has been registered at the Manawar police station in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh against the Hyderabad-based seed company Nunhems India Pvt Ltd, after farmers complained about financial loss after buying substandard bitter gourd seeds and seedlings from the company.

According to a statement released by the Agriculture Ministry on Friday, farmers from Dhar and Khargone districts met Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Delhi, claiming that they underwent heavy losses in their bitter gourd crop due to the



substandard seeds and seedlings. Following their complaint, officials were directed to ensure compensation for the affected farmers and take legal action.

'NOT AS EXPECTED'

As per the complaint, farmers bought seeds and seedlings from nurseries and agricultural service centres in November 2025, but the crop

failed to perform as 'expected'. The fruits allegedly shrank, turned yellow and fell off, leading to major losses.

The FIR has been lodged under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Essential Commodities Act and the Seeds Act. Agricultural scientists and department officials found that substandard seeds and seedlings were sold to farmers under the pretext of being certified, causing financial damage.

Chouhan said the matter was not just about crop failure but also about the loss of farmers' trust, hard work and capital. He ordered a ban on the substandard bitter gourd seed variety Rubasata, the statement said.

NEGOTIATORS TO BE IN WASHINGTON FROM APRIL 20-22

India to seek better terms in trade negotiations with US

MUKESH JAGOTA
New Delhi, April 15

A GROUP OF Indian negotiators will travel to the US from April 20-22 to finalise the legal agreement based on the February 7 bilateral joint statement, while seeking to preserve the country's comparative tariff advantage in American market.

"As a follow-up to the joint statement, an agreement needs to be finalised. If the (reciprocal) tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers (IEEPA) are removed, we need to see what commitments we will receive that grant us a comparative advantage in the US market," a senior official said.

"India and the US will work together to finalise timelines and next steps as part of the ongoing engagement," Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal told reporters. The Indian team will be led by chief negotiator Darpan Jain, additional secretary in the Department of Commerce. He will be accompanied by officials leading various tracts of the deal.

After the joint statement on the interim trade deal, the US Supreme Court invalidated the reciprocal tariffs announced on April 2 last year on February 20. Following the Supreme Court order the US government imposed 10% duties on all imports under Section 122 of the Trade Act by executive order.

It also initiated two investigations under the Section 301 of Trade Act on excess capacities in its 16 economies and forced labour issues against 60 economies to retain the leverage in trade negotiations. Both these investigations covered India. Under Section 301 there is no limit on the level of tariffs that the US can impose. "The government of India has submitted its

PRESERVING TARIFF ADVANTAGE

■ If the reciprocal tariffs are removed, it needs to be seen what commitments will be received that grants India a comparative advantage in US market, says an official

■ Following the SC order the US govt imposed **10% duties** on all imports under Section 122 of the Trade Act by executive order

■ After the joint statement the US had removed 25% tariffs on Indian goods that were imposed for buying crude oil from Russia

■ USTR Jamieson Greer has stated that the US "expects to stand by" its trade deals



response to the request for consultations by the US Trade Representative (USTR) on the investigations," Agrawal said.

"Both sides will meet to discuss how these issues need to be structured and addressed," he added. Agrawal said that since the joint statement there have been virtual discussions with the US, but no physical meetings. "Every country is now calibrating its earlier deal with the US. So we are also moving in that direction. Looking at what will be a legal agreement and the trade-offs. We like to hear the trade-off from the other side," the official quoted earlier said.

After the joint statement the US removed 25% tariffs on Indian goods that were imposed for buying crude oil from Russia. It was to reduce reciprocal tariffs on India from 25% to 18%, but the US SC verdict intervened. The interim deal between India and US is a stepping stone to a wider Bilateral Trade Agreement.

The verdict did not cancel the formal trade agreements that the US had signed. USTR Jamieson Greer has stated that the US "expects to stand by" its trade deals.

India-EU FTA to come into force in later part of FY27

MUKESH JAGOTA
New Delhi, April 15

INDIA'S TRADE AGREEMENT with the European Union is likely to come into force in the later part of this financial year, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Wednesday.

Besides, India and Oman are aiming to operationalise their Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) from June 1, he added.

"We are working up on the tentative date of 1st of June for entry into force of the CEPA with Oman. The free trade agreement with the EU will be signed by the end of this calendar year and operationalised in this financial year," he told reporters.

The FTA with New Zealand would be signed on April 29th and is expected to become operational in October, he added.

India and Oman had signed CEPA on 18th December last year while with New Zealand

the negotiations on the FTA were concluded on December 22, 2025. The FTA with the European Union was concluded on February 27 this year.

The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) signed with the UK last year in July is expected to be operationalised in the latter half of May. "In this financial year we will be much better in terms of trade with many of the FTAs signed last year becoming operational," Agrawal said.

After signing the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the CEPA with Canada, both sides held the first round of negotiations from March 9-20 in the virtual mode. The first physical meeting of the negotiators will be held in New Delhi in May, the commerce secretary said. On the review of the Asean-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) the 12th meeting of the Joint Committee (JC) was held on 30-31 March.

India-UK FTA likely to come into force from May: Commerce Secy

'FTA with NZ may be signed on Apr 27'

MPOST BUREAU

NEW DELHI: India and the UK Free Trade agreement (FTA), signed in July last year, is likely to come into force from May, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Wednesday.

India and the UK signed the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), under which 99 per cent of Indian exports will enter the British market at zero duty, while tariffs on British products, such as cars and whisky, will be reduced in India.

"We expect the free trade agreement related to UK to come into operation in May sometime. We are yet to finalize the date because there are certain discussions on their (UK) side also," he told reporters here.

He also expressed hope that FTA with Oman would come into force by June 1.

India and Oman signed an FTA in December last year. It will provide duty-free access to 98 per cent of India's exports including textiles, agri and leather goods in Oman.

On the other hand, India will reduce tariffs on Omani products such as dates, marbles and petrochemical items.

"We also expect our FTA with New Zealand to be signed on April 27," he said.

The two countries had announced the conclusion of negotiations for the trade deal on December 22 last year, with

INSIGHT

» He also expressed hope that FTA with Oman, signed in December last year would come into force by June 1

» Under the pact, Oman will provide duty-free access to 98 per cent of India's exports

» India will reduce tariffs on Omani products such as dates, marbles and petrochemical items

the goal of doubling bilateral trade to USD 5 billion over the next five years.

The pact would provide tariff-free access for Indian goods in the New Zealand market and attract up to USD 20 billion in investment over the next 15 years.

Further, he said that the "mother of all trade deals" - the India-EU FTA - is expected to be signed within this calendar year.

"We will try to get it into operation before the end of this financial year. That is the ambition with which we are working," the secretary said.

Once all these pacts come into operation, Indian businesses will see an increased opportunity for exports.

On the proposed trade pact with Canada, the secretary said the next round of negotiations will be held here in May.

NHC Foods acquires Hong Kong-based Conquer Enterprises

MUMBAI: NHC Foods on Tuesday said it has completed the acquisition of Hong Kong-based Conquer Enterprises, which will help strengthen its presence in key global markets.

The acquisition, through its wholly owned overseas subsidiary, NHC International LLC-FZ (Dubai), is expected to enhance international trading capabilities, strengthen its presence in key global markets, and diversify its product portfolio across high-demand sectors such as metals, steel, and agro commodities, a company statement said.

Agrochemicals sector to see 6-8% growth in FY27

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

The Indian agrochemicals industry (excluding fertilisers) is expected to witness stable growth of approximately 6-8 per cent in FY27, supported by steady domestic demand, improving crop intensity and expanding distribution reach, according to a report by CareEdge Ratings.

The Indian agrochemicals sector continues to benefit from strong underlying agricultural fundamentals, with domestic demand providing a stable base for sustained growth. Despite global volatility, India remains a structurally growing market, supported by increasing agricultural activity and improving farm economics, the report explains. It said agrochemical demand in India continued to be

India, UK deepen industrial ties, sign MoU with T-Works



NEW DELHI:

IN a bid to deepen business partnerships between the UK and India across innovation, manufacturing and technology-led sectors, the UK India Business Council (UKIBC) and T-Works Foundation signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Tuesday.

The MoU was signed in Hyderabad in the presence of Gareth Wynn Owen, British Deputy High Commissioner to Telangana, aimed at creating a streamlined pathway for UK companies to ideate, prototype and scale products within India's fast-growing manufacturing ecosystem.

The UKIBC said the partnership brings together its expertise in policy advocacy, market entry and bilateral trade facilitation with T-Works' advanced prototyping infrastructure and manufacturing capabilities.

Telangana government-backed T-Works is positioned as India's largest prototyping centre, supporting startups and MSMEs across sectors such as electronics, aerospace, defence, agriculture, healthcare, environment and textiles.

Under the MoU, UK businesses will gain access to T-Works' state-of-the-art facilities to test, validate and manufacture products locally.

In turn, startups and MSMEs within the T-Works ecosystem will benefit from UKIBC's global network of businesses, investors and policy stakeholders, enabling

The MoU was signed in Hyderabad in the presence of Gareth Wynn Owen, British Deputy High Commissioner to Telangana, aimed at creating a streamlined pathway for UK companies to ideate, prototype and scale products within India's fast-growing manufacturing ecosystem

international collaboration and market expansion.

Dr Kishore Jayaraman, Group CEO at UK India Business Council, said the partnership would act as a bridge between UK innovation and India's manufacturing strengths, allowing companies to move beyond market entry towards co-development and scalable production.

Joginder Tanikella, CEO of T-Works Foundation, said the pact would help innovators convert ideas into manufacturable products while enabling UK firms to develop and localise solutions in India.

The initiative is expected to strengthen the broader UK-India innovation ecosystem by fostering deeper industry linkages and supporting product development through advanced manufacturing infrastructure.

In October 2025, the UKIBC hailed the outcome of UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to India, which saw announcements including 1.3 billion pounds in new Indian investments into the UK and agreements to expand British university campuses in India.

ICAR plans to cut fertiliser use after NGT rap on uneven usage

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has decided to cut the use of chemical fertilisers by 25 per cent by 2030 with increased focus on bio-inputs, precision and the Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav (MGMG) programme, without any yield loss.

The move, however, comes after the Ministry of Agriculture acknowledged before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) that skewed fertiliser application by farmers in various regions across the country negatively affects overall soil health.

It told the court that it is actively endorsing a range of scientifically-supported practices aimed at improving and sustaining soil organic carbon levels throughout different states and Union territories.

"India has set a target of achieving Atmanirbhar Bharat by 2047, and the agricultural sector will play a pivotal role in this journey. While fertilizers were instrumental during the Green Revolution in boosting production, the current chal-

Ministry had said skewed application in various regions negatively affects soil health

lenge lies in declining fertilizer use efficiency and their indiscriminate application," ICAR Director General M.L. Jat said during a brainstorming session to develop a roadmap for achieving Atmanirbharta (self-reliance) in fertilizers recently.

He had said with the country consuming nearly 33 million tonnes of fertilizers annually, a significant share of which is imported, reducing import dependency has become imperative. He said addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach spanning short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategies.

The official noted that strengthening initiatives like soil health, promoting balanced and need-based fertilizer application, and enhancing awareness among farmers, are important steps in this direction.

"The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is working on developing a concrete roadmap on reducing the

dependency of farmers on chemical fertilizers. The West Asia conflict and the increased harm caused by fertilizers to soil health have encouraged the ministry to look for green alternatives. We are confident to design many meaningful interventions in this matter and also take the farmers into confidence," Hemalata Kapil, Assistant Chief Technical Officer, ICAR, told The Tribune.

The ministry also told the green tribunal that it is implementing numerous schemes and policies aimed at promoting balanced use of fertilizers, enhancing soil organic carbon and ensuring the long-term sustainability of Indian agriculture.

It also pointed that issues of soil degradation and the impact of imbalanced fertilizer use are complex, and multifaceted challenges that require a coordinated approach involving the Centre, state governments, research institutions, and the farming community.

Strategies to enhance fertilizer security

Mixed feedstock use and green ammonia can make a difference over time

Sachchida Nand

India is heavily dependent on the Gulf region for import of inputs for production of fertilizers — namely, LNG, ammonia and sulphur and finished products urea and DAP. There should be a strategy beyond fire fighting for self-sufficiency.

Let us focus on supply and demand of nitrogen. More than 80 per cent of nitrogen application in India is through urea. Other nitrogen products are hardly used. Abnormal growth in demand for urea and decline in production widened the deficit from 4.4 million tonnes (mt) in 2023-24 to almost 10 mt in 2025-26. Import of urea is estimated to be nearly 10 mt in 2025-26 compared with 5.6 mt in 2024-25, an increase of almost 80 per cent.

Natural gas is the basic input required for production of urea. Domestic production is dependent on imported LNG to the extent of 85 per cent of total gas requirement.

In case of gas shortage, urea units should be encouraged to use mixed feed, or a mix of gas and naphtha. In early 2000s, a number of units had created facilities to use mixed feed before these were bypassed when imported gas became available in 2005.

Second, urea units using coal for utilities should be allowed to continue to use coal. This also works out to be cheaper than gas used for steam and power generation in spite higher energy consumption.

However, these units should be reimbursed adequately based on realistic energy consumption norms. Third, old units should be incentivised to modernise, to improve efficiency and increase production.

Fourth, it is time feasibility of producing green urea is explored, which will do away with the use of LNG. According to a recent PIB release, contracts for 7.24 lakh tonnes of green ammonia have been signed between green ammonia and fertilizer producers. This will reduce dependence on imported ammonia for production of non-urea fertilizers. There are techno-economic issues in production of urea with green ammonia.

GREEN AMMONIA

The best way forward will be to construct a demonstration plant at the site of green ammonia production to find the gaps in technology and logistics and their solution before construction of full-scale plant.

Also, to what extent grey ammonia can be replaced with green ammonia in



GREEN UREA. Feasibility of producing it must be explored

existing urea plants must be explored. It will be a realistic target to produce 20-25 per cent nitrogenous fertilizers using green ammonia in the next five years.

There are alternative products to urea for supply of nitrogen. Enhanced share of NP/NPK complex fertilizers in nitrogen use from the present 18 per cent can reduce dependence on urea. These fertilizers not only offer an opportunity for balanced fertilization but also the promise to be produced entirely with green ammonia.

Ammonium sulphate (AS) is another promising product. It has 20.5 per cent nitrogen and 23 per cent sulphur. It is especially suitable for sulphur deficient soils and oilseed crops.

It can also be produced using green

ammonia and indigenous sulphur. Its present consumption is less than one million tonnes. But the real bottleneck in expanding use of AS is its treatment under subsidy policies.

In addition to very low subsidy both for nitrogen and sulphur under nutrient based subsidy (NBS) scheme, AS does not attract full subsidy as per NBS because it has been artificially capped at ₹9,479 per tonne.

Subsidy on AS works out to about a third of its cost in normal times compared to 85-90 per cent subsidy on urea without any cap. With the present subsidy structure, the selling price of AS has to be more than four times that of urea on per kg basis.

Amongst other factors, increase in nitrogen use efficiency (NUE) can hardly be over emphasised. Site specific integrated nutrient management with inclusion of organic fertilizers and soil amendment agents like bio-char can easily increase NUE by 10 percentage points.

Thus, action is required on correction in relative subsidy rates of fertilizer products, helping hand to urea units to realise their full potential for production of more and more green fertilizers.

The writer is Visiting Professor at ICRIER. Views are personal

Maize rules below MSP in Telangana on higher crop

KV Kurmanath
Hyderabad

With maize prices falling by one-third below the minimum support price (MSP), farmers in Telangana are seeking intervention from the State government. They want the government to open purchase centres to procure the produce at the MSP level to bail them out.

Trade analysts said that maize prices had turned soft globally because of large production projections in the US and Brazil, resulting in increased domestic availability. Farmers alleged that prices of the commodity fell to ₹1,600-1,800 per quintal in most markets, against the MSP of ₹2,400. This, they argued, would push them to losses.

A group of farmers held protests at Khammam, one of the biggest maize-growing areas in the State, demanding that the government establish procurement centres to procure the commodity.

"The government should set up a procurement centre in every village to help farmers clear the stocks. It should also lift the procurement limit of 26 quintals an acre," Bonthu Rambabu, Secretary of the Telangana Rythu Sangham in Khammam, told *businessline*.

SEEK ASSISTANCE

In a letter to Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Telangana Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao asked the Centre to include maize in the Price Support Scheme and purchase the produce from farmers in the State.

He wanted the Centre to provide an assistance of ₹4,000 crore to the State to purchase at least 50 per cent of the output (about 15 lakh tonnes (lt)).

Stating that the average price stood at ₹1,759 per quintal, which is ₹641 below the MSP for the commodity,



he said this could leave farmers with huge losses. Reminding him that the State purchased 3.76 lt last year by spending ₹900 crore, Rao said this year's output was higher than last year's.

Meanwhile, "export challenges to West Asia may lead to higher domestic availability, indirectly supporting local maize prices in the near term," according to the latest assessment by the Marketing Intelligence Department of Prof Jayashankar Telangana Agricultural University (PJTU).

The rabi maize acreage in the country went up to about 29.16 lakh hectares (lh) this year against last year's 27.80 lh. According to the second advance estimates for 2025-26, maize production is projected at 461.49 lt, with Madhya Pradesh leading with 99.17 lt, followed by Karnataka with 63.51 lt, Maharashtra (57.25 lt), Bihar (45.77 lt) and Telangana with 42.24 lt.

During the rabi season, Telangana recorded a record acreage of 4.99 lh, up from 3.38 lh, the PJTU report said. "Strong demand from the feed, starch and ethanol sectors continues to support the market despite rising rabi arrivals and short-term volatility. Domestic consumption from poultry, livestock and ethanol industries is steadily increasing, with buyers adopting cautious and tactical procurement strategies," it said in its latest report for April 2026.

It estimated that maize could trade in a price range of ₹1,850-2,200/quintal during this month.

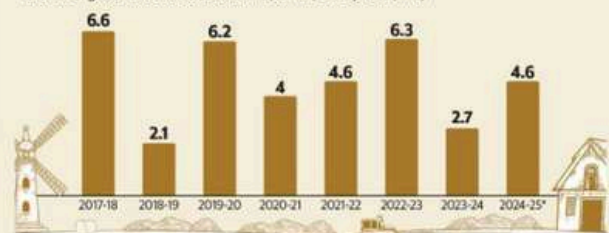
Why India wants to tailor farming plans for states

BY VIJAY C. ROY

India is reworking its farm policy playbook by implementing state-specific road maps. The approach replaces one-size-fits-all national policies with targeted interventions aimed at raising productivity, improving climate resilience, and boosting incomes. *Mint* explains.

Uneven output

Performance of the agriculture and allied sector has swung wildly in recent years. Growth of gross value added at constant (2011-12) basic prices (In %)



*Second Advance Estimates
Source: National Statistical Office

MANU CHOUDHARY/MINT

1 How significant is the agriculture sector?

Agriculture and allied activities are estimated to have contributed about 15.6% to India's national income at current prices in 2025-26, while employing nearly 46.1% of the workforce, underlining the importance of sustained growth for economic resilience and rural prosperity. Over the past five years, the sector has grown at an average 4.4% annually at constant prices. In Q2FY26, it recorded growth of 3.5%. Over FY16-FY25, it grew at 4.45%, with gains driven by livestock (7.1%) and fisheries (8.8%), while crops expanded at 3.5%. Sustaining growth and rural incomes now hinges on improving output per worker and per acre.

HT

2 Why are state-specific plans needed?

Climate change is disrupting crop cycles, while water scarcity is worsening in monsoon-dependent regions. Cropping patterns and input use are often misaligned with local agroclimatic conditions. These challenges are difficult to address through uniform national policies. Region-specific strategies, such as climate-resilient irrigation and diversification towards drought-resistant crops, are increasingly necessary. "Such policies should be tailored to local conditions while also strengthening market linkages to ensure better returns for farmers," said A.K. Singh, former director and vice chancellor, ICAR-IARI.



3 What will be states' role and responsibility?

States will be central to design and execution, identifying priorities, providing granular data on soils, water and cropping patterns, and shaping region-specific interventions. They will handle implementation, coordination and monitoring outcomes. For farmers, it could mean better planning, access to inputs, higher yields and stable incomes.

4 How would these road maps work?

State-specific road maps aim to align crop choices, irrigation practices and input use with each region's agro-climatic profile and resource base, with a focus on improving productivity by promoting the "right crops" for local conditions. In Madhya Pradesh, for instance, the Centre has rolled out district-level road maps, focusing on efficient water use, crop diversification, climate-resilient practices and stronger market linkages. The plans prioritize water conservation and resource optimization.

5 What are the expected challenges?

Execution will be critical. A lack of reliable, granular data on soils, water resources and cropping patterns could limit planning, while funding constraints may affect the rollout of irrigation, diversification and technology adoption. Farmer adoption remains another hurdle, given risks and market uncertainties. Weak market linkages, including storage and procurement systems, could undermine diversification efforts. The success of these road maps will hinge on how effectively these challenges are managed.

Industries urge GST Council to allow inverted duty refunds on input services

Shishir Sinha
New Delhi

Ahead of the next GST Council meeting, industry leaders are pushing for a significant policy shift — allowing input tax credit (ITC) refunds on input services under the inverted duty structure (IDS). Currently, manufacturers can often only claim refunds on raw materials (inputs), leaving tax paid on services (like legal, consulting, or logistics) trapped as a cost.

Experts feel that absence of such a mechanism creates structural disadvantage for manufacturers.

BASIC PROBLEMS

IDS refers to a system where tax on inputs is higher while that on output is lower. This results in two basic problems. First, it could result in accumulated ITC and blocked working capital. Though there is provision of refund, it is available only for input goods and not for input services. Second, IDS pushes the production cost making affecting competitiveness of domestic manufacturer and thus makes imported goods cheaper.

In a representation to the

Cost for manufacturers due to non-allowance of inverted duty refunds on input services

Particulars	Amount (Assuming total turnover at ₹ 100)	As % of sales
ITC goods	6.06	6.06
ITC services	4.06	4.06
Total ITC	10.12	10.12
Turnover	100.00	100.00
GST@5%	5.00	5.00
Excess ITC	5.12	5.12
Refund	2.86	2.86
Balance (Cost to manufacturers)	2.26	2.26

Source: BCCI

Central Board of Indirect Taxes (CBIC), the Bengal Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCCI) said: “While the rate reduction in GST 2.0 has helped trade and industry too by supporting the output supply part, yet for manufacturers it has deepened the inverted duty structure and hence increased the cost.”

It may be noted that with effect from September 22, GST rates were restructured with two basic rate slab (5 per cent and 18 per cent) along with 40 per cent rate slab for demerit and high-end goods.

KEY ISSUES

The chamber highlighted the problem of fast moving con-

sumer goods (FMCG) manufacturers. As a part of rate revision, GST on many such goods was lowered to 5 per cent from 18 per cent. “As a consequence of this downward revision, the rate of tax applicable to outward supplies were reduced by 13 per cent; however, the rate of tax applicable to input services remained as 18 per cent,” it said. This deepened the IDS on account of input services to a large extent.

Further, due to the legal provisions under section 54 of CGST/SGST Act and Rule 89 and as confirmed by the courts also, inverted duty refunds are not eligible on input services. This leaves the ITC earned on input services as a wasteful asset in the bal-

ance sheet and a resultant cost to the manufacturers.

“This also goes against the very object of GST to eliminate ‘cascading impact of tax,’” the chamber said while making the plea for appropriate recommendations for the amendment of the statutory provisions for correcting this anomaly.

COST STRUCTURE

According to Rahul Shekhar, Partner at Nangia Global, in practice, manufacturers incur substantial input services costs, such as information technology, rentals, advertising, royalty/technical fees on acquisition of technology, management cost if it is a subsidiary of global MNC etc, which form an integral part of their overall cost structure.

The exclusion of input services from the refund mechanism results in the accumulation of unutilised ITC, thereby blocking working capital and increasing the cost of operations.

“This creates a structural disadvantage for manufacturers operating under an inverted duty regime, ultimately affecting liquidity and business efficiency,” he said.

CM Mann continues global outreach to promote investment & deepen international partnerships

MPOST BUREAU

CHANDIGARH: Continuing global outreach to promote investment and deepen international partnerships, the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann undertook a series of engagements to further strengthen economic cooperation and fostering people-to-people connect.

During strategic interaction with the Netherlands India Chamber of Commerce & Trade, led by its Chairperson, Edith Nordmann, the Chief Minister batted for enhancing bilateral business linkages and promoting investment flows between Punjab and the Netherlands.

He also highlighted Punjab's strategic focus on value addition, export-led growth, and integration with global supply chains, particularly in



sectors such as food processing and manufacturing. Mann invited NICCT to play a proactive role in connecting Punjab with Dutch enterprises and facilitating sector-specific engagements and business delegations.

Meanwhile, during the investment Road show in The Hague, the Chief Minister further showcased the state's industrial strengths and emerging opportunities in the event, which witnessed partic-

ipation from industry leaders, business representatives and stakeholders from across the Netherlands. Bhagwant Mann highlighted Punjab's transition towards value-added manufacturing, industrial growth, and export-led development.

He also showcased the state's strong fundamentals, including its robust manufacturing ecosystem, skilled workforce, progressive policies, and investor-friendly governance framework.

The Chief Minister also underlined the strong historical and cultural ties between Punjab and the Netherlands, reflecting shared values of resilience, openness and innovation.

He also underscored the state government's proactive and reform-oriented approach towards investment promotion and ease of doing business adding that the Industrial & Business Development Policy 2026 is one of the most competitive in the country. Mann also apprised them about the effectiveness of the Fast Track Punjab Portal in ensuring single-window clearances and time-bound approvals.

The CM invited global investors to “come, invest and grow in Punjab,” while appreciating the shared cultural values and entrepreneurial spirit between Punjab and the Netherlands.

Procurement norms for wheat eased for Punjab

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, April 17

IN A MOVE aimed to boost wheat procurement drive for the current season, the food ministry on Friday relaxed the norms for Punjab, the biggest contributor to the central pool stock, for the harvested crop hit by unseasonal rains.

Ministry of Food Processing Industries, in a communication to Punjab, stated that norms for procurement are being relaxed as the wheat crop got affected due to untimely rainfall in all the districts of Punjab, including districts bordering Chandigarh.

"This decision will help reduce hardship for farmers and prevent any distress sale of wheat," Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Pralhad Joshi said.

Earlier in the week, the ministry relaxed norms for Haryana and Rajasthan. Under the revised rules, the limit for luster loss wheat has been relaxed up to 70% and the limit for shriveled or broken grain has been increased to 15%, from the existing limit of 6%.



The ministry has directed the procuring agencies — Food Corporation of India (FCI) and state agencies— to liquidate the wheat procured under the relaxed norms on a priority basis. The procurement volumes are expected to rise sharply in the coming weeks.

The procurement of wheat in the 2026-27 marketing season (April-June) has been sluggish so far, with the procurement declining 39% year-on-year to 5.13 million tonne (MT). The minimum support price (MSP) purchase is against arrivals of

over 8.75 MT of grain in the mandi in the market.

This season, the purchase in Punjab has been rather slow, with only 0.5 MT of wheat purchased so far. Over 1.5 MT of grain has arrived in the markets across the state. Punjab contributed 12.2 MT to the central pool in the 2025-26 marketing season, out of the total purchase of over 30 MT of wheat. The agencies are aiming to buy over 30 MT of wheat during 2026-27 marketing year to bolster stock and ensure supplies under the public distribution system.

Exporters' body flags rising freight costs, seeks liquidity help from RBI

ANJALI SINGH
Mumbai, 17 April

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) has urged the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to provide liquidity support to exporters, amid a sharp rise in freight costs due to the ongoing West Asia conflict. The disruption has led to delays in shipments and an elongation of payment cycles, putting pressure on exporters' working capital requirements.

"Logistic disruption has resulted in freight (rates) going up. In fact, freight (rate) to some of the Middle East countries has gone up to 300-400 per cent. It has brought pressure on air shipments also. Since logistics have been disrupted, the supply of goods has been delayed. Earlier, my ships were reaching the US coast in 50 days. Now, they are reaching in 90 days. The payment cycle to the exporter, which used to be 30-60 days, has elongated to 90-120 days," said Ajay Sahai, director general and chief executive officer, FIEO. "We require much more credit and that is why we are requesting the RBI to provide some liquidity. The cost of credit is also an issue. We expect the government to



- Pain points**
- Freight costs have risen sharply; to some West Asian countries, they have gone up by 300-400%
 - Delays in shipments and elongation of payment cycles have pressured capital needs
 - Cost of credit also an issue; exporters want removal of cap on interest subvention

remove the cap that it has brought on interest subvention," he added. Recently, RBI decided to continue key trade relief measures introduced in November 2025 to support exporters amid ongoing geopolitical and logistical disruptions. Sahai highlighted that India's free trade agreement (FTA) strategy has become more focused, targeting complementary economies and key export markets. Separately, Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic advisor at State Bank of India, said India's export sector

has held up well despite a year marked by geopolitical tensions, tariff volatility, and supply chain disruptions, even as he cautioned that ongoing disturbances in West Asia pose fresh risks to growth and trade.

"I think it is actually a significant coincidence... I saw a tweet (post on social media platform X) that the Strait of Hormuz has been opened and crude prices have dropped to below \$90 per barrel," Ghosh said, adding that the latest export data also offered encouraging signs. "It does not seem that there was any war last year because the exports of goods and services have actually expanded," he noted.

Ghosh expressed optimism that India could move towards the \$1 trillion exports milestone. "The good thing is that I think we ended the year quite well, and I hope that this year will be even better," he said. However, he flagged rising geopolitical risks, particularly from the escalating conflict in West Asia. This episode, he said, has evolved into a broader regional conflict, with implications for global energy markets and supply chains. Ghosh said India entered the uncertainty triggered by the West Asia conflict from a position of relative strength, with growth around 7.6 per cent, compared with weaker starting points during past crises.

List of export destinations expanded under RELIEF

The Centre on Friday expanded the list of eligible destinations under RELIEF scheme for exporters amid the West Asia crisis.

On March 19, the government launched a ₹497 crore RELIEF (Resilience and Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation) scheme to assist exporters facing disruptions due to the conflict.

"With this expansion, Egypt and Jordan have been added to the list of eligible countries for shipments meant for delivery or transshipment, under the relevant provisions of the RELIEF framework," the commerce ministry said. It clarified that exporters obtaining a fresh ECGC whole turnover policy on or after March 16, would be eligible for support. The intervention provides calibrated support across the export cycle, including for shipments already undertaken during the disruption period as well as prospective exports.

In a separate statement, the ministry said it has undertaken a series of targeted reforms to strengthen the functioning of Norms Committees under the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT). These measures are aimed at improving turnaround time, enabling early approvals and enhancing transparency and predictability under the Advance Authorisation (AA) Scheme. DGFT administers the AA Scheme and the Duty-Free Import Authorisation (DFIA) Scheme under the Foreign Trade Policy.

Super El Niño: A brewing climate shock

There is a high probability of El Niño forming later this year. With global temperatures already near record highs, this evolving pattern could disrupt monsoons, strain agriculture, and trigger extreme weather worldwide—placing economies on edge.



BK SINGH

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on April 9, has predicted that there is 61% chance that El Niño will be formed in late summer and fall towards the end of this year and there is 33% chance that it would be a strong one, typically known as "Super El Niño". There have been only 5 such El Niño have been registered since 1950 and the last one was formed in 2015-16. The Copernicus Climate Change Service has also confirmed that 2026 March has registered second highest Sea Surface temperature, which points towards the possibility of El Niño conditions forming later in summer this year.

April 9, advisory of NOAA has confirmed that an eventful La Niña winter, when powerful storms have disrupted the lives of the people on American and European continents, is concluded and Pacific Ocean has shifted into a neutral pattern such that Sea surface temperature in central and east-central tropical Pacific has become average.

La Niña, neutral and El Niño are three phases of El-Niño southern oscillation (ENSO) cycle formed on account of natural changes in Pacific Ocean temperature and atmospheric circulation. El Niño typically means less activity in Atlantic basin and more activity in central and eastern equatorial Pacific. During El Niño cycle more tropical cyclones is experienced in Pacific and lower than the average in Atlantic. A super El Niño acts as a shield bringing higher pressure and vertical wind shear that suppresses hurricane formation in Atlantic. The weather pattern in this cycle in the equatorial Pacific region experiences droughts, floods, extreme heat, hurricanes and declining Sea ice. The sea surface temperature rises by more than 2 degrees Celsius, resulting in hotter than average summer in Western United States, parts of Africa, Europe and India. Further, the tropical countries like Caribbean islands and Indonesia may experience severe drought and extreme heat.

The atmosphere is likely to trap more greenhouse gases and increase the concentration of carbon dioxide and 2027 is set to register record rise in average global temperature. So far 2024 has been the warmest, and now 2027 is likely to breach this. The experts have also forecasted that the super El Niño of 2026-27 is likely to disperse more heat than what three earlier super El Niño events in 1982-83, 1997-98 and 2015-16 have dispersed. The unusual heat and humidity may intensify the flow of atmospheric moisture. As the warmer atmosphere has huge amount of moisture carrying capacity, it will bring excessive rains and flash floods in the



EL NIÑO EVENTS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH RAINFALL DEFICIT IN CENTRAL AMERICA, WHICH MAY DIRECTLY IMPACT WATER LEVELS IN GATUN LAKE - A FRESH WATER RESERVOIR THAT POWERS THE LOCK SYSTEM OF PANAMA CANAL

region. Also the heat released in super El Niño event remains trapped in the atmosphere due to increasing concentration of greenhouse gases, and thus every cycle of El Niño stair-steps the global rise in temperature.

The above average summer temperature and humidity may bring downpours in hills and a thunderstorm season in the plains of Western United States. Along with Central Africa, Australia, Indonesia, Philippines, central America, Brazil and south Pacific islands, the central and northern part of India is likely to have monsoon suppressed causing a severe impact on agriculture production.

Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has also issued advisory confirming the prediction of NOAA and the strong link between Pacific Ocean condition and India's June to September rainfall. It has suggested the weakening of monsoon this year, as 7 out of 10 El Niño years have registered poor monsoon. Besides the human health in the region will be impacted, the El Niño cycle has potential to disrupt the lives and livelihood of the people in the region. Unpredictable disruptions are also expected in global travel.

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) may turn favorable in August, which may counter the impact of El Niño in second half of monsoon season. However, IOD is generally unpredictable, but the loss of snow covers in 2026 (January to March) in northern hemisphere may brighten the chances of southwest monsoon.

Historically El Niño brings lower GDP growth due to a contraction in agricultural output, affecting overall economy. The 2023-24 El Niño, which was not a super El Niño, had caused a drop of 6.1% in agriculture production of the country. Promoting drought resistant crops and sustainable farming practices as well as soil and water conservation measures are the basic mitigation measures suggested for farming communities. IMD must continue to predict rainfall trends as well as issue of early warning.

Keeping a check on the water levels of the reservoirs and managing it for urban water supply, irrigation and power projects will have to be monitored by central and state governments till Pacific attains a neutral conditions and El Niño conditions vanish in later part of 2027.

Some urban and rural areas may encounter drinking water problem, which has to be managed by agencies judiciously. A cap on the rent of the water tankers may be imposed to ensure that water-tanker mafias are not allowed to take advantage of the situation and the population is not put further into the hardships.

The rising temperature of the planet can lead to devastating wildfire in different regions. While the burning of forests of California, Boreal and Amazon forests can damage the global lung spaces by reducing the capacity of Carbon dioxide sequestration, the continued fire can disrupt the lives and livelihood of the communities' dependent on forest resources.

Strait of Hormuz is already a choke point, where 20% of oil and gas from GCC countries flows to the world market. A sizable proportion of fertilizer and helium also flow through this point. Many economies have taken a hit owing to the trade disruption at the strait. El Niño is predicted to create another choke point at Panama Canal.

El Niño events are associated with rainfall deficit in Central America, which may directly impact water levels in Gatun lake - a fresh water reservoir that powers the lock system of Panama Canal. During El Niño driven drought experienced in 2023-24, the transit of ships through it was slashed down to 24 vessels per day. It also faced a shipping draft restriction of 44 feet, permitting vessels navigating shallower ports. These vessels transported reduced cargo due to fallen water level in Gatun lake.

The prolonged disruption had ripple effect in global supply chains, driving congestion, higher transit cost and several re-routing of the cargo vessels. However, a shift to La Niña and a sustained rainfall restored water level in Gatun reservoir and the Canal could transport nearly 36 vessels with full 50 feet draft. NOAA has forecasted that 2026-27 El Niño could again reduce water level in Gatun reservoir and bring down the daily transit slots as well as the cargo loads.

Once the number of vessels are restricted, the powerful countries defy the order and attempt to control the canal. Trump in his second term has already expressed once to take over Panama Canal. This was to counter China - the country which booked maximum number of slots for its vessels to transport cargo during the water stress period in 2023-24. The catchments for Gatun lake spreads over 2313 sq km and is fed by Chagres, Trinidad, Ciri Grande Rivers. Since US is a dominant force in the region, it must add Indio River to water supply system to counteract low water levels during drought. World leaders should also protect the tropical rain forests included in Soberania National Park, Barro Colorado Island and Chagres National Park. If these forests are continued to be plundered by local communities for expanding agriculture and beef production, El Niño can disrupt the global trade and damage the economy considerably.

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B K Singh ex Head of Forest Force, Karnataka and teach "Economics" in Karnataka Forest Academy

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Weather and war: Indian farming faces twin storms

BY SAYANTAN BERA

With a parched monsoon forecast and a fertilizer supply chain hit by the West Asia war, Indian agriculture is caught between two raging storms. *Mint* examines whether the El Niño threat and tightening urea imports will drive a spike in food prices or dent farmers' incomes.

Monsoon blues

India is expected to receive below-normal rainfall in 2026.

South-west monsoon rainfall (Jun-Sep) as % of long-period average



*First long-range forecast issued on 13 April

Long-period average (the average for 1971-2020), is 87 cm. Source: IMD

mint

1 What is the monsoon forecast?

The June-September season is critical for two reasons: India receives about 70% of its annual rainfall during these months, and nearly 45% of its farmland depends on these rains for irrigation. The India Meteorological Department has forecast the monsoon to be below normal at 92% of the long-period (50-year) average (LPA). Because of the emergence of El Niño—in which unusual warming of Pacific Ocean waters can lead to lower precipitation over the Indian subcontinent—the second half of the monsoon is likely to be drier. Private forecaster Skymet has also forecast a below-normal monsoon at 94% of the LPA.

2 Could this reduce crop yields?

Rainfall distribution across time and geography is critical. Long dry spells during the grain formation stage can affect yields, particularly for crops grown in marginal, unirrigated lands, such as pulses and oilseeds. But the resilience of food production to deficient rain has improved. In 2023, monsoon rains were at 94% of the LPA but Kharif foodgrain production was unaffected at 156 million tonnes. Similarly, production improved marginally on-year to 141 million tonnes in 2018, despite monsoon rains at 91% of the LPA. In 2015, when the monsoon was just 86% of the LPA, Kharif foodgrain production fell 2.3%.

PH



3 Is a fertilizer shortage imminent?

The West Asian war has affected imports of urea and diammonium phosphate, while also disrupting the supply of raw materials—natural gas and sulphur—needed to make them in India. At the end of March, India's total fertilizer stock was 18 million tonnes versus a requirement of 39 million tonnes for the Kharif season. A shortfall is likely.

4 What about food prices?

Food inflation firmed up to 3.9% in March. Current prices of cooking oils are 4-15% higher on-year. Prices of pulses and cereals are either stagnant or lower. But this stability may be short-lived, as deficient rainfall threatens to drive up the cost of pulses and oils. Prices of cereals for which India has excess stock, such as rice, are unlikely to rise. But the increase in global crude prices could push countries to convert cooking oils into biofuels, which would likely raise global edible oil (palm, soy, etc.) prices, impacting India.

5 So, what's the outlook on farmers' incomes?

Farmers have been enduring low crop prices and reduced profitability for several months, and deficient rains could worsen the distress. If farmers spend more to water their crops using diesel pumps, cultivation costs will rise. Lower production of pulses and oilseeds, and damage to perishable produce from heatwaves may hurt incomes. It is still unclear how the fertilizer shortage will pan out. Here, too, farmers may have to shell out extra money to buy subsidized fertilizers if the shortage becomes acute.

Need-based fertiliser subsidy in the works

Zia Haq

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The government is likely to switch to a system of providing subsidized fertilisers based on how much farmers actually need, hoping to roll it out in at least two to three states in the summer-planting cycle, part of a countrywide plan to curb overuse and save costs, according to people familiar with the matter.

Imbalanced use of cheap crop nutrients, a long-standing problem, ruins soil and crop quality, impacts the environment and bloats government spending. India relies on imports to meet its domestic demand for fertilisers and the Strait of Hormuz crisis has choked off supplies of raw materials and gas, a critical feedstock for the agro-chemical industry.

An interministerial meeting last week, overseen by the Cabinet secretary, decided to rationalise fertiliser distribution by linking it to farm data contained in a state-created national digital database, known as Agristack, one of the persons said.

Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Haryana could be the first states where the new system would be rolled out. The agriculture ministry is working on the rollout, which will provide cheap fertilisers to cultivators based on how much land they have and what they grow.

The idea is to optimise usage also based on soil quality, a second person said. For instance, farmers tend to apply urea, the



India relies on imports to meet its domestic demand for fertilisers.

PTI

cheapest chemical, even in soils that are rich in nitrogen, which is a waste, he said.

The Agristack platform has now made targeted supplies possible and pilots for optimised use linked to the biometric details known as Aadhaar has already been done in some states by the fertiliser ministry. The trials showed rational use can cut fertiliser consumption by up to 15-17% and save nearly ₹500 crore in a typical foodbowl state.

The goal is to prevent misuse, overuse or diversion of subsidized agro-chemicals toward illegal non-farm industrial use, according to the first official.

The full-stack platform, where states have integrated their own repositories, has approximately 92.4 million digital farmers' IDs. With such a large database, it will be useful to "accurately estimate demand and direct crop nutrients efficiently to farmers by mapping requirements and sowing patterns, *HT* reported on April 1.

Farmers struggle to secure urea supply

RUCHIKA M KHANNA
TRAINING NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 21

The shortage of urea in Punjab has left farmers struggling to secure supplies ahead of the kharif season raising concerns over crop yield.

Harjinder Singh of Saidwan village in Kapurthala is facing difficulty in obtaining urea for his maize crop. "I had never realised that getting a bag of urea would be such an ordeal, when paddy cultivation is still over a month away. Generally, the time after wheat harvesting is for celebrations. This year, the days preceding the harvest were filled with anguish because of the quality of grains. Post-harvest, we are grappling with urea shortage," he said.

The West Asia conflict has not only squeezed the supply of fertilisers and raw material, it has also led to a sharp hike in prices for the government, though the retail price for the farmers remains unchanged. Sellers are once again offering urea on the black market or as bundled packages with pesticides, says a cross-section of farmers.

The urea supply that came to Punjab till mid-March was



A farmer awaits procurement of his produce at a Jalandhar mandi.

around 4.8 lakh metric tonne (LMT) and the DAP made available to the state was 31,000 MT. Out of that, the government has supplied 2 LMT urea to the primary agriculture cooperative societies (PACS), while IFFCO has supplied 150 LMT urea to these societies. The DAP available with these societies is between 12,000 and 15,000 MT.

Darshan Singh Kularan of the Kularan Kakan Cooperative Society, near Samana, said very little fertiliser was made available to each society and these stocks were depleting fast.

In all, around 16 LMT urea and 2 LMT DAP is required for

the upcoming kharif marketing season (paddy season).

A number of farmers had already started hoarding fertilisers. The state Agriculture Department was stunned at the hike in sales during March. It wrote to all chief agriculture officers asking them to ensure judicious use of fertilisers.

Officials admit there might be a shortage if the global geopolitical situation did not improve. They, however, say many farmers have been making excessive use of fertilisers and they will perhaps now follow the expert advice on judicious use of urea.

Punjab to seek waiver of grain weight norm

RISHIKA KRITI
TRAINING NEWS SERVICE

JALANDHAR, APRIL 21

Punjab is set to approach the Centre seeking a waiver of the "storage gain" condition for the ongoing wheat procurement season, citing severe weather effect that has significantly impacted the crop quality.

The move follows a letter by the joint coordination committee (JCC) of state procurement agencies that said the current produce fell "under relaxed specifications" (URS) and posed serious storage risks.

In its letter to the Secretary, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Punjab, the committee flagged a sharp deterioration in wheat quality due to unusually high temperatures, followed by rain and hailstorms during harvesting. These conditions, it said, adversely affected grain development, leading to shrivelling, discolouration, sprouting, structural damage and loss of endosperm.

Despite the Centre relaxing the fair average quality (FAQ) norms by increasing the permissible limit for shrivelled and broken grains, the procured wheat remained of "very low quality" with high moisture content, the committee said.

The committee said freshly harvested grain initially retained moisture due to poor aeration in mandis, but subsequently it lost moisture, resulting in weight loss rather than any "storage gain".

Citing the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), the committee said the existing storage gain formula (29.10) was based on FAQ wheat stored under ideal conditions. Applying it to the current URS wheat, marked by poor grain health and structural damage, was "neither natural nor scientifically justified".

A senior official of the department said, "We are writing to the Centre and preparing the draft that will be issued in a day or two."

Industries urge GST Council to allow inverted duty refunds on input services

Shishir Sinha
 New Delhi

Ahead of the next GST Council meeting, industry leaders are pushing for a significant policy shift — allowing input tax credit (ITC) refunds on input services under the inverted duty structure (IDS). Currently, manufacturers can often only claim refunds on raw materials (inputs), leaving tax paid on services (like legal, consulting, or logistics) trapped as a cost.

Experts feel that absence of such a mechanism creates structural disadvantage for manufacturers.

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sumer goods (FMCG) manufacturers. As a part of rate revision, GST on many such goods was lowered to 5 per cent from 18 per cent. "As a consequence of this downward revision, the rate of tax applicable to outward supplies were reduced by 13 per cent; however, the rate of tax applicable for input services remained as 18 per cent," it said. This deepened the IDS on account of input services to a large extent.

Further, due to the legal provisions under section 54 of CGST/SGST Act and Rule 89 and as confirmed by the courts also, inverted duty refunds are not eligible on input services. This leaves the ITC earned on input services as a wasteful asset in the bal-

ance sheet and a resultant cost to the manufacturers.

"This also goes against the very object of GST to eliminate 'cascading impact of tax,'" the chamber said while making the plea for appropriate recommendations for the amendment of the statutory provisions for correcting this anomaly.

COST STRUCTURE

According to Rahul Shekhar, Partner at Nangia Global, in practice, manufacturers incur substantial input services costs, such as information technology, rentals, advertising, royalty/technical fees on acquisition of technology, management cost if it is a subsidiary of global MNC etc, which form an integral part of their overall cost structure.

The exclusion of input services from the refund mechanism results in the accumulation of unutilised ITC, thereby blocking working capital and increasing the cost of operations.

"This creates a structural disadvantage for manufacturers operating under an inverted duty regime, ultimately affecting liquidity and business efficiency," he said.

Rabi crop cultivation in Telangana reaches record level this year

B. Chandrashekhara
HYDERABAD

Favourable weather conditions coupled with the availability of ample water in most of the major projects and energy for pump-sets and lift irrigation schemes have enabled cultivation of Rabi crops to a record extent in Telangana this year (2025-26).

The cultivation in 89.41 lakh acres is labelled as "unprecedented", and it includes cultivation of paddy - 64.11 lakh acres, maize - (14.99) and jowar (4) crops in record extents.

Cultivation of Rabi crops this year is almost three times compared to the extent covered in the first year (2014-15 Rabi) after formation of Telangana, and that of paddy is nearly six times higher compared to 2014-15. Despite some ups and downs, the Rabi crop has been on the steady rise, particularly after the introduction of 24x7 free power supply to agricultural pump-sets from December 2018.

Making available the inputs timely by the government, sans some problems in urea supply at times, along with the provision of ₹500 per quintal bonus for

Rabi cultivation over the years in Telangana



Year	Total	Paddy	Maize	Jowar	B'gram	G'nut
2025-26	89.41	64.11	14.99	4.00	2.16	2.01
2024-25	80.05	59.92	9.14	3.68	2.23	2.51
2023-24	67.83	51.92	6.69	2.33	2.55	2.10
2022-23	72.64	56.55	6.49	1.27	3.64	2.43
2021-22	54.05	35.84	5.49	1.27	3.83	3.59
2020-21	68.15	52.79	4.66	1.20	3.54	2.78
2019-20	53.82	39.31	6.25	0.76	3.29	2.29
2018-19	29.36	17.30	3.19	0.47	2.72	2.77
2017-18	32.07	18.98	3.66	0.57	2.52	3.58
2016-17	37.96	21.40	4.40	0.69	2.89	3.51
2015-16	16.85	05.51	2.29	0.79	2.92	2.69
2014-15	30.12	11.05	3.85	NA	1.46	3.48

(Extent in lakh acres; B'gram - Bengalgram; G'nut - Groundnut)

- This year's (2025-26) rabi extent is highest-ever along with the extent of paddy and maize
- It's nearly three times higher compared the extent sown in the first rabi season (2014-15) after formation of Telangana
- Cultivation of maize and jowar too is in a record extent this rabi (2025-26) season

Procurement of paddy in rabi season

Year	Procurement
2024-25	72.42
2023-24	48.00
2022-23	64.52
2021-22	50.90
2020-21	90.01
2019-20	64.18
2018-19	37.05
2017-18	35.74
2016-17	37.21
2015-16	8.42
2014-15	13.24

(Procurement in lakh tonnes - LT)

- This rabi (2025-26), the government has plans to procure 90 LT
- Production of paddy this rabi (2025-26) season is estimated to be at over 160 LT

the fine (A Grade) varieties of paddy, has also played a key role.

Telangana has already surpassed Punjab as the top producer of paddy in the country last year (2024-25) itself and the estimated bumper yield is expected to consolidate its position further in enhancing the country's food security. Production of paddy is expected to be over 160 lakh

tonnes this season.

This Rabi season, the government is planning to procure about 90 lakh tonnes of paddy, including 60 lakh tonnes of common varieties and 30 lakh tonnes of fine varieties at the minimum support price fixed by the Centre for the grain matching the fair average quality norms, by opening 8,251 procurement centres.

Minister for Civil Supplies N. Uttam Kumar Reddy said the increase was due to the proactive policies of the government. He noted that procurement of fine varieties of paddy had outshone the purchase of common varieties in the recent Kharif season with 38.37 lakh tonnes of fine varieties procured against 32.45 lakh tonnes of common varieties.

India's rice exports down 7.5 pct to \$11.53bn due to W. Asia crisis



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi, 23 April

Amid the ongoing West Asia crisis, leading to global supply disruption, India's rice exports dipped 7.5 per cent to \$11.53 billion in 2025-26. The dip is primarily led by the contraction

in shipments to major destinations including the middle east countries

As per the commerce ministry data, the exports in March declined 15.36 per cent to \$997.53 million.

Shipments to Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman have

been impacted due to the war between US-Israel and Iran.

Notably, Iran is India's top basmati rice export destination. The shipments are witnessing growing stress on order flows, payment cycles, and ship schedules due to the prevailing instability.

India is one of the world's largest producers and exporters of rice producing around 150 million tonnes of rice in 2024-25 from nearly 47 million hectares, accounting for about 28 per cent of global output.

In 2024-25, India exported 20.1 million tonnes of rice valued at \$12.5 billion, reaching more than 172 countries.

Average yields have improved from 2.72 tonnes per hectare in 2014-15 to about 3.2 tonnes per hectare in 2024-25, driven by improved seed varieties, better agronomic practices,

and expanded irrigation coverage.

As per reports, importers have conveyed their inability to honour existing commitments and remit payments to India, creating uncertainty for exporters.

In terms of overall exports, India exported goods worth \$62.4 billion to economies linked to the Strait of Hormuz in 2024. Of this, only around \$5.3 billion, or less than 10 percent, may face significant challenges in being redirected elsewhere.

Recently, India has allowed exports of basmati and non-basmati rice to some European countries without an otherwise mandatory certificate of inspection by its export inspection agency for six months.

USgovt begins \$166 billion tariff refunds; Indian exporters lack direct claim route



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi, 21 April

The United States government has initiated the long-awaited process of refunding billions of dollars in tariffs after the US Supreme Court struck down duties imposed under former President Donald Trump earlier this year.

While the move unlocks an estimated \$166 billion in refunds, Indian exporters impacted by the tariff regime are unlikely to benefit directly.

According to the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), Indian exporters do not have a legal mechanism to claim refunds from US authorities. The refunded duties are payable only to US-based importers who originally bore the tariff burden at the time of entry.

GTRI has advised Indian exporters to proactively engage with their American buyers to negotiate a share of the refunded amounts. "There will flow only to US importers, making commercial negotiations critical for exporters seeking compensation," the think tank noted.

The tariffs, introduced on 2 April 2025, targeted multiple countries, including India, and significantly impacted outbound shipments. Of the total \$166 billion eligible for refunds, nearly \$12 billion is estimated to be linked to imports of Indian-origin goods. Tariffs

on Indian exports began at 10 per cent and were subsequently raised in phases - touching 25 per cent by 7 August and escalating further to 50 per cent by 28 August, where they remained until early February 2026. The sweeping tariff framework was eventually invalidated by the US Supreme Court on 20 February, rendering the duties legally void. The refund process, however, comes with procedural constraints. As per reports, US importers must file detailed claims through an online system, including shipment-level data, tariff classifications, and proof of duty payments.

Initial eligibility is restricted to certain 'unliquidated' entries or shipments still within 90 days of final customs accounting. Data from the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) shows that over 330,000 importers paid duties across more than 53 million shipments, but only around 56,500 had completed mandatory registration for electronic refunds by mid-April.

The impact on Indian exports was substantial, with nearly 53 per cent of shipments to the US, primarily textiles and apparel, falling under the elevated tariff bracket. These sectors are now expected to account for a significant share of the refund pool, though actual gains for Indian exporters will depend on bilateral negotiations with US buyers.

[RELIEF FOR FARMERS]

Centre relaxes wheat quality norms to counter rain damage

Grains with up to 70% lustre loss, 15% shrivelled and broken, and 6% damage to be procured without any value cut

Gurpreet Singh Nibber
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CHANDIGARH: The Centre on Friday relaxed norms for the procurement of wheat in Punjab damaged by unseasonal rainfall in March and April, when the crop was in its final stage of maturity.

The state officially kick-started the procurement on April 1. The state has received the cash credit limit to the tune of ₹35,000 crore for procuring 122 lakh tonnes of wheat.

Making an announcement on micro-blogging site X, the Union minister of consumer affairs, food and public distribution, Pralhad Joshi, said the relaxations are without value cut, offering a minimum support price of ₹2,585 per quintal.

According to the official communication received by Punjab, the loss of lustre in the wheat crop has been allowed up to 70% against the existing norm of zero, shrivelled and broken grain up to 15% against the norm of up to 6% and damaged and slightly damaged to 6% against the norm of 2%.

The relaxed specifications are applicable with immediate effect and are retroactive to the start of this rabi season, providing a much-needed safety net for the region's agricultural economy. As per the communication, these relaxations are uniform for the entire state.

"The request for relaxation in wheat procurement due to untimely rainfall was received on April 9. Promptly thereafter, teams were deputed on 10 April to assess the situation across all districts. Based on field inputs, the Centre has approved relaxations for wheat procurement under the Rabi Marketing Season (RMS) 2026-27 in all districts of Punjab and the Union Territory of Chandigarh," Joshi wrote in a post on X.

The six teams of the Union ministry of food and public distribution collected nearly 300 samples from 78 mandis in 22 districts.



Labourers fill wheat into sacks at the grain market in Patiala on Friday.

The Centre's decision to relax norms came after the teams submitted their findings.

The Food Corporation of India (FCI), which manages distribution of food grains from producing states to consumer states, had on Thursday recommended relaxing quality norms for wheat procurement in the current season, following a parallel investigation carried out by it.

The Union minister said that this decision will help reduce hardship for farmers and prevent any distress sale of wheat, and the relaxations will be applicable from the commencement of the rabi season. Due to late rainfall, harvest and procurement were delayed, and it began this week.

The state government had opened 1872 mandis for procurement on April 1. So far, nearly 17 lakh tonnes of freshly harvested wheat has arrived in the mandis, with 7 lakh tonnes arriving on Friday alone.

The procurement was stalled by the staff of four state procurement agencies - Punsup, Pungrain, Marfed and the state warehousing corporation (PSWC) alleging that they are being pressured to procure damaged grain on par with good quality grain. However, they had resumed purchase after assurance from the state's food and civil supplies that damaged produce would not be procured until relaxation is allowed.

Following the announcement,

PROCUREMENT STATS

122 lakh tonnes Total wheat arrivals expected in mandis	1.5 lakh acres Crop damaged as per state govt estimates (*Girdawari on to assess exact damage)	17 lakh tonnes Wheat arrivals in mandis to date
1872 Mandis opened		₹35,000 crore Cash credit limit for crop purchase

the farmer unions deferred their planned 'rail roko' protest by three days. Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader Sarwan Singh Pandher announced the decision after an online meeting with the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) and Azad Kisan Morcha (AKM).

Damaged grain to be stored separately

The relaxation has come with the conditions that wheat procured under the relaxed specifications shall be stacked and accounted for separately.

"Any deterioration in the quality of wheat stocks procured under relaxed norms during the storage shall be the responsibility of the state government, and these stocks will be liquidated on a priority basis," said the communication, adding that any financial or operational implications due to this relaxation will be the responsibility of the state government.

Full godowns pose fresh challenge

The state is also grappling with paucity storage space as nearly 155 lakh tonnes of grain stock, procured during previous seasons, haven't been evacuated to consumer states.

Earlier this week, chief minis-

ter Bhagwant Mann met Union minister Joshi in New Delhi to highlight the "storage crisis" in the state and sought immediate evacuation to create space to store freshly procured wheat this season.

Ensure timely payments: Kataruchak to officials

Punjab food, civil supplies and consumer affairs minister Lal Chand Kataruchak on Friday held a virtual meeting with district food supply controllers (DFSCs) and senior officials to ensure a smooth and hassle-free procurement of produce at mandis.

Kataruchak said that with the Centre relaxing quality norms for wheat, the officials should ensure efficiency, transparency and strict monitoring at all levels during the procurement process.

"The procured wheat should be lifted within 72 hours to avoid congestion in mandis. Timely payments to farmers, within 48 hours, should be ensured. The entire process must be carried out in a transparent and time-bound manner," he said.

Kataruchak further asked DFSCs to conduct regular field visits to mandis to oversee arrangements and address issues on the spot.

FARM UNIONS DEFER RAIL BLOCKADE, GIVE 3-DAY ULTIMATUM

Vishal Joshi
letterschd@hindustantimes.com

BATHINDA: Farmer unions have postponed their planned 'rail roko' protest by three days following official assurances that wheat procurement will be streamlined.

Sarwan Singh Pandher of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) announced the decision after an online meeting with the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) and Azad Kisan Morcha (AKM), noting that the 72-hour grace period serves as a final ultimatum to both state and central governments.

The agitation, originally triggered by slow grain lifting following crop damage from untimely rains, remains on standby should the administrative response falter.

In a move that addresses the core of the farmers' grievances, the Union ministry of consumer affairs, food and public distribution on Friday approved a retroactive relaxation of procurement specifications for the current rabi season.

Despite this federal relief, Pandher maintained pressure on chief minister Bhagwant Mann, accusing him of delaying the request to central agencies while focusing on political rallies.

The KMM leader said while neighbouring states secured these relaxations earlier, Punjab's delay exacerbated the crisis at the mandis. While the unions acknowledged reports that procurement has finally begun in several markets, they warned that any failure to expedite the operation within the next three days will lead to an immediate resumption of the statewide rail agitation.

The farmer unions had earlier announced a three-hour blockade from 12 noon to 3 pm on Friday if procurement operations didn't start immediately with relaxed quality norms. The blockade was expected to take place at multiple locations across districts, including Amritsar, Sangrur, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala, Barnala and Tarn Taran, Moga, Patiala, Ferozepur, Malerkotla, Pathankot, Jalandhar, Bathinda and Ludhiana.

State caps weight of agri-produce sacks at 50 kg to protect workers

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Mumbai: The state govt has capped the weight of sacks carrying agricultural produce at 50 kg to protect workers involved in loading, unloading and transporting them. The decision has been taken keeping in view the safety and health of workers who handle the sacks.

In a directive to all Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs), the marketing department said sacks of onions, potatoes and other farm produce must not exceed 50 kg.

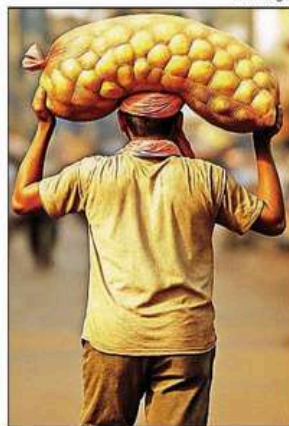
Officials said such bags currently often weigh more than 60 kg, depending on the region, the type of packaging such as jute or mesh, and local market practices.

Officials said the move follows International Labour Organisation norms that workers handling goods should not be required to lift more than 50 kg.

The Centre had informed the state about implementing this standard,

following which the labour commissioner issued a circular in 2000 setting the weight limit. In 2010, the industries, energy and labour departments also instructed Mathadi Boards to enforce it. Labour organisa-

AI image



tions had repeatedly urged the govt to implement the rule, which had remained largely unaddressed.

The decision was taken at a meeting held last week under the chairmanship of state's marketing minister Jaykumar Rawal. The meeting was attended by traders'

unions, labour department officials, and representatives of the Kirana Bazaar and Shops Board.

A govt resolution (GR) said all APMCs must spread awareness among farmers about the 50 kg cap and direct traders to comply with it. It also called for wide publicity across market committees.

"The agricultural produce market committees, must ensure that agricultural produce is not moved in bags weighing more than 50 kg, including onions and potatoes, and this should be strictly implemented, the GR said.

The GR said that the rule must be enforced strictly under official supervision

However, the GR said, authorities should ensure that the functioning of APMCs is not affected by the implementation of this circular and that their functioning continues unaffected.

The director of marketing should submit reports from time to time regarding the implementation of this circular, the GR added

Natural farming boosts AP yields, incomes by 30%: UNEP report

- Govt-UNEP-backed initiative reaches over 30 lakh farmers, with plans to double coverage and scale globally
- Chemical-free farming using bio-stimulants improves soil fertility, cuts input costs, and raises farmer earnings
- Market linkages, certification, and farmer-led outreach driving wider adoption across Andhra Pradesh

NEW DELHI

A project run by government and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) promoting natural farming in Andhra Pradesh caused at least 30 per cent increase in productivity and farmer incomes, a new report has said.



The initiative has already reached over 30 lakh farmers, with plans to double that number and share lessons globally, the report from the UNEP said.

The project namely Andhra Pradesh Community Managed Natural Farming initiative (APCNFI), which evolved from a 2004 Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture programme, forgoes use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides for natural bio-stimulants made from ingredients such as cow urine

and dung. The bio-stimulant will revive soil microbes which will bolster soil fertility by breaking down organic matter and minerals, releasing nutrients.

"Small quantities of bio-stimulants will trigger the soil microbes. After some years, we will not even need them when the soil becomes fertile," Dinesh Kumar, a local government official said.

Diverse plants will feed the soil, and the soil will remain healthy, feeding the plants in turn without

any need for external fertilisers, the report explained the philosophy of the program.

Andhra Pradesh has suffered from declining soil fertility due to erratic rainfall and rapidly declining biodiversity due to monocropping.

Madhuri Nanda, director for South Asia at Rainforest Alliance said monocropping causes soil erosion, water runoff and leaching of nutrients. Burudi Kumari, a five-year local practitioner of natural farming said that the quality of soil has improved, and she spends less money on fertiliser, increasing his earnings. Kumari is now a lead farmer in her self-help group, helping others make the transition. "I was very proud to be elected as a lead farmer introducing others to natural farming," she said.

Sustainable food cultivation also depends on sufficient earnings for farmers and so the initiative has been engaging with the private sector, connecting farmers to markets, and increasing consumer confidence through certification and traceability. (03/00)

India may slash sulphur imports from Gulf due to soaring prices

Reuters

Toronto/New Delhi

India is considering a proposal to restrict sulphur exports after industry lobby groups raised concerns about soaring prices and disruption to supplies from the Gulf, three sources aware of the development said.

Export restrictions could add to upward pressure on global sulphur prices, as supplies from West Asia are disrupted by the Iran war and with China also set to restrict sulphuric acid exports from next month.

FALLING IMPORTS

"Sulphur supplies are tightening due to falling imports from West Asia," a senior



government official with knowledge of the proposed restrictions told *Reuters*.

"Allowing exports could further pressure availability, so discussions are under way on whether exports should be limited."

Sulphur is used to produce fertilizers such as ammonium sulphate and single super phosphate, both

widely used in India.

India meets more than half of its sulphur requirement through imports of around 2 million tonnes a year, with nearly half sourced from West Asia.

GLOBAL LINK

It also exports around 800,000 tonne of sulphur a year, with more than 90 per cent going to China.

Industry lobby groups asked the government in New Delhi to ban these exports, according to a company executive aware of the development.

India has already directed oil refineries, which account for most domestic sulphur output, to supply adequate amounts to local fertiliser companies.

India's wheat output stable despite heat stress: Centre

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, 26 April

India's wheat production outlook for the 2025-26 crop year remains "mixed but resilient", with weather-related disruptions likely to be offset by higher acreage, early sowing and improved crop practices, according to an official clarification issued in response to recent media reports.

The Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare said wheat crops sown on an estimated 334 million hectares witnessed no incidence of insect pests or diseases during the season. Early and timely sowing of wheat led to an increase in the cultivated area compared to last year.

Late in the season, unusually high temperatures in February exposed the crop to heat stress, reducing grain filling duration and yield. Further, untimely rainfall and hailstorms



at maturity in a few areas likely caused localised damage to grain quality and yield, it added.

There has been no report of yield losses due to any diseases or insect pests in the wheat crop. Also, weed infestation remained low during the crop growth stages. Early and timely sowing increased significantly, enabling

the crop to escape terminal heat during grain filling, the ministry said.

The additional 0.6 million hectares planted during 2025-26 is expected to partially offset localised losses. Additionally, the enhanced varietal replacement rate (VRR) has accelerated the adoption of high-yielding, climate-resilient, and disease-resistant varieties,

which are better equipped to withstand heat and biotic stresses.

Procurement data further indicates robust production levels in key states.

Wheat arrivals in Haryana mandis have surpassed the 75 LMT government procurement target, with 56.13 LMT already purchased. Procurement has increased by roughly 9 LMT compared to the same period last year. In Madhya Pradesh, the initial procurement goal was 78 LMT, but it has been officially raised to 100 LMT following requests from the state government due to high production estimates.

Maharashtra's wheat production for 2025-26 is estimated at around 22.90 lakh tonnes, reflecting a steady increase in recent years. As of late April 2026, the state is seeing steady inflows, particularly from the Marathwada and Vidarbha regions.

Nod to 2.5 MT of urea import at double the pre-war price

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, April 22

THE GOVERNMENT HAS approved 2.5 million tonne (MT) of urea imports by Indian Potash at \$935-959 per tonne — nearly double the price that prevailed before the war in West Asia. The imports from countries such as Russia, Algeria, Nigeria and Oman, bypassing the Strait of Hormuz, are expected to boost supplies in the coming kharif season.

Indian Potash, the agency authorised for sourcing soil nutrients, will get 1.5 MT of delivery on the west coast at \$935 per tonne and another 1 MT on the east coast at \$959 per tonne. In February, before the war, urea prices were around \$550 per tonne.

Urea supplies have been severely hit due to the virtual closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The war hit six key production centres — the UAE, Kuwait, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain — that account for 30-40% of global urea trade.

In an interview with *FE* this week, Indian Potash Managing Director P S Gahlaut said urea prices “are not that high” compared to the prices prevailing in October-November 2021 amid the Russia-Ukraine war. Urea prices increased to over \$980/tonne then and other fertiliser variants also rose sharply, he added.

India's first women-led FTA is win for exports, shield for farmers



PIYUSH GOYAL

THE INDIA-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA), being signed on Monday, marks a defining milestone in India's engagement with the developed world. It reflects a decisive advancement in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of transforming global economic partnerships into tangible gains for farmers, women, youth, and job-creating industries.

The FTA follows a series of landmark trade pacts with major developed economies, including the United Kingdom and EU. These agreements strengthen India's position in global markets and provide exporters with a competitive edge in some of the world's most lucrative economies, even amid ongoing global uncertainty and volatility. At the core of the win-win agreement is New Zealand's commitment to immediately eliminate tariffs on all Indian products, removing a significant barrier in a market where our key exports currently face duties of 10 per cent.

This is a major boost for labour-intensive sectors such as garments, carpets, yarn, fabrics, footwear, bags, belts, automobile components, machinery, tools, gems and jewellery, and handicrafts. These job-creating industries form the backbone of India's MSME ecosystem and will benefit from price competitiveness and market access. This will boost exports and trigger large-scale employment generation across manufacturing clusters, artisan communities, and small enterprises. This reflects the broader philosophy guiding India's trade policy since the Modi government was formed in 2014. It is rooted in inclusivity, empowerment, and shared prosperity.

A defining feature of this agreement is that it is India's first women-led FTA. Notably the entire negotiating team comprised women. This milestone reflects the growing importance of women in the Modi government. It aligns with broader efforts to enhance women's participation in governance, leadership, and decision-making across sectors, reinforcing the idea of *nari shakti* as a driver of national development.

The FTA has been carefully structured to enhance agricultural productivity. New Zealand will support agriculture productivity action plans for kiwi, apples, and honey. These initiatives include improved planting material, research collaboration, capacity building for growers, post-harvest improvements, food safety systems, and the establishment of centres of excellence. Projects for apple cultivators and sustainable beekeeping practices will enhance production and quality standards, which will increase farm prosperity.

At the same time, India has firmly protected its core agricultural interests. Sensitive products such as dairy (including milk, cream, whey, yogurt, and cheese), vegetables (like onions, chana, peas, corn, almonds, sugar, and certain oils and fats) have been excluded from tariff concessions. This ensures that domestic farmers remain insulated from disruptive import competition. Protecting the interests of farmers and fishermen has been central to India's approach in all trade negotiations.

A major pillar of the agreement is enhanced mobility for students and skilled professionals. For the first time in any bilateral trade agreement, New Zealand has introduced a structured framework for Indian student mobility and post-study work opportunities. There are no numerical caps on Indian students. Students will be allowed to work at least 20 hours per week during studies, while post-study work rights extend up to three years for STEM graduates and up to four years for doctoral scholars.

The agreement introduces a Temporary Employment Entry Visa pathway for up to 5,000 Indian professionals at any given time, allowing stays of up to three years in sectors such as IT, engineering, healthcare, education, construction, and select traditional fields like yoga, Ayurveda, Indian cuisine, and music. In addition, a Working Holiday Visa scheme will allow 1,000 young Indians annually to live and work in New Zealand for up to 12 months, strengthening cultural exchange and global exposure.

New Zealand has committed to facilitating \$20 billion of investment into India. This is expected to support manufacturing, infrastructure, renewable energy, digital services, innovation ecosystems, and employment generation. A rebalancing clause has been incorporated to ensure accountability. The agreement also encourages collaboration in research, technology transfer, skill development, and innovation-driven sectors, ensuring that trade is complemented by long-term developmental partnerships.

The India-New Zealand FTA reflects a clear and confident trade strategy of partnering with developed economies that open meaningful market access for India's labour-intensive sectors while respecting domestic sensitivities. India today negotiates from a position of strength and credibility. Unlike earlier decades, when trade agreements often exposed vulnerable sectors without adequate safeguards, current negotiations ensure that agriculture, dairy, and other sensitive areas remain fully protected.

As India deepens its engagement with advanced economies, trade agreements with the developed world stand as a powerful example of how trade policy can be aligned with national development goals, ensuring inclusive growth and long-term economic resilience on the path to *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

India, Qatar Talk Ways to Boost Trade & Supply Chain Resilience

Our Bureau

New Delhi: India and Qatar on Thursday held discussions on ways to boost bilateral trade and strengthen supply chain resilience amid disruptions caused by the West Asia crisis. The virtual meeting was held between commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal and Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Sayed.

“We discussed ways to further enhance our bilateral trade and investment ties while strengthening supply chain resilience. Looking forward to deepening our strategic partnership in the times ahead,” Goyal said in a social media post on X.

The two sides are in talks for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Qatar is also part of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) with which India is negotiating a trade deal.

The West Asian bloc is the largest trading partner of India with bilateral goods trade of \$178.56 in FY25.

Almost two weeks ago, Goyal discussed supply chain challenges faced for essential food items with the GCC as well as some of its members.

Maha Agri Input Bodies Call for Strike on April 27

Pune: The Maharashtra Fertilizers, Pesticides, and Seeds Dealers Association (MAFDA) and the All India Dealer Association (AIDA) have called for a strike on April 27 in Maharashtra.

The dealers, distributors, and manufacturers have alleged excessive oversight and concerns about ease of business. “According to a new Government Resolution, 23 different level officials have been designated as quality control inspectors,” said Vinit Kasliwal, general secretary, MAFDA.

Maharashtra is one of the top consumers of fertilisers, pesticides and other inputs, as it is a leading producer of horticulture and other commercial crops like cotton and sugarcane. “Increasing the number of inspectors for agri inputs will hurt ease of business as it will lead to repeated sampling at company and dealer levels,” said a senior industry executive, who requested not to be identified.—**Our Bureau**



Sitharaman hints at Covid-like fertiliser subsidy for farmers

ASIT RANJAN MISHRA &
SANJEEB MUKHERJEE
New Delhi, 26 April

Amid an already mounting fertiliser subsidy burden due to the West Asia crisis, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday indicated that the government may keep retail fertiliser prices unchanged for farmers, as it did during Covid.

“Didn’t we do that during Covid? When fertiliser prices abroad shot through the roof, we still procured them at those prices and ensured there were no supply disruptions. Above all, prices were not passed on to farmers. Farmers paid the same price as before. We never shifted the burden to them,” Sitharaman said at an event organised by the *Economic Times* in Mumbai.

Since early March, global urea prices have risen from \$460 per tonne to nearly \$850 per tonne—an increase of about 85 per cent — while diammonium phosphate (DAP) prices have climbed 25-50 per cent to around \$850-1,000 per tonne.

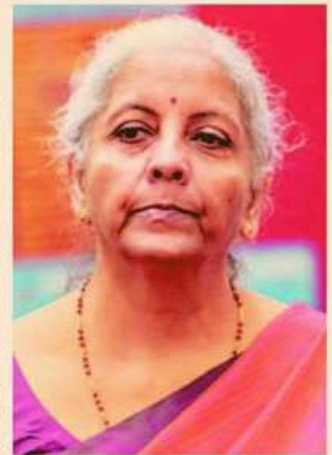
Urea and DAP are the two most widely consumed fertilisers in India.

With fertiliser prices rising sharply due to the West Asia crisis, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a 10-21 per cent increase in per-kg subsidy rates for non-urea fertilisers for kharif 2026 under the nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) regime, compared with kharif 2025.

The move is estimated to cost the exchequer about ₹41,534 crore, around 12 per cent more than the previous season.

West Asia accounts for 20-30 per cent of India’s urea requirement and 30 per cent of DAP imports, while supplying nearly half of the country’s LNG imports, a key feedstock for urea production.

Supplies of key raw materials such as ammonia, sulphur and sulphuric acid used in domestic production of phosphatic and potassic fertilisers have also been affected by the conflict.



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in the FY27 Union Budget, pegged the fertiliser subsidy at ₹1.7 trillion, 8.4% lower than the FY26 revised estimate of ₹1.86 trn

India’s fertiliser subsidy for FY27 could come under pressure if global prices continue to rise, even though stocks are currently adequate to meet immediate demand, traders and market participants have said.

In the FY27 Union Budget, the government pegged fertiliser subsidy at ₹1.7 trillion, 8.4 per cent lower than the FY26 revised estimate of ₹1.86 trillion.

The FY26 revised estimate itself was over 11 per cent higher than the budget estimate, reflecting record consumption of urea and DAP at elevated prices.

Data shows that by February 2026, fertiliser subsidy spending had already exceeded the FY26 revised estimate at ₹1.88 trillion. Domestic production has also weakened.

Fertiliser output fell 24.6 per cent in March, a 13-year low. Urea output fell nearly 27 per cent year-on-year to around 1.8 million tonnes, while production of phosphatic and potassic fertilisers declined 16-24 per cent to about 0.9-1 million tonnes.

India's China strategy: Boost exports, cut import dependence

Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) set up to monitor exports and imports regularly to take corrective measures

NEW DELHI

INDIA is following a diversified strategy to boost exports to China by strengthening domestic capacities while reducing import dependence through diversification of its supplier base, as complete decoupling from Beijing is difficult since Chinese inputs support the country's industrial growth, a senior official said.

"While India may not have hard decoupling from China, it is creating its own capacity both in terms of having resilient supply chain and also in terms of increasing our own exports capacity," the official said.

The senior government official added that India primarily imports raw materials, intermediate and capital goods, such as auto components, electronic parts and assemblies, mobile phone components, machinery and related parts, and active pharmaceutical ingredients, which are used to produce finished goods for export and support domestic manufacturing.

"Whatever China is supplying is the backbone of India's production. Some consumer durables are also coming but are less in numbers," the official said.

India's exports to China rose about 37 per cent to \$19.47 billion in 2025-26 from \$14.25 billion in 2024-25. The exports stood at \$0.71 billion in 1997-98. On the other hand, imports from Beijing increased 16 per cent to \$131.63 billion in 2025-26 from \$113.44 billion in 2024-25.

The trade deficit has risen from \$99.2 billion in 2024-25 to \$112.6 billion in 2025-26. Imports were just \$1.11 billion in 1997-98. The main export sectors where India has recorded health growth in exports during the last fiscal year include printed



India primarily imports raw materials, intermediate and capital goods, such as auto components, electronic parts and assemblies, mobile phone components, machinery and related parts, and active pharmaceutical ingredients, which are used to produce finished goods for export and support domestic manufacturing

circuit boards, electrical appliances, telephone systems, shrimp, aluminium ingots, black tiger shrimp, vessels, and certain agri commodities.

However, there is a need to further widen the export basket to increase India's share in China's imports. The import surge is in electronics, electrical machinery, pharmaceuticals ingredients, APIs, auto parts, telecom instruments, industrial machinery, computer hardware peripherals, organic chemicals, accumulator and batteries, plastic raw materials, re-

sidual chemicals, and bulk drugs. "These all goods are ultimately going into our industrial process, as we are industrialising, imports will increase naturally," the official added.

The government is taking a series of measures to boost domestic manufacturing and the production-linked incentive scheme is a key step in that direction. The boost in manufacturing going ahead will help cut imports and increase exports.

The scheme is helping domestic businesses to create value chains and

for that the industry needs capital goods and intermediate parts. Further, to reduce import dependence on China, the government is in the process of identifying goods that are China-intensive and cost-competitive, and is examining whether Indian companies can source them from countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and the European Union.

An Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) is there to monitor exports and imports regularly and it takes corrective measures in consultation with various stakeholders.

The composition of the IMC includes representatives from Department of Commerce, Department of Revenue, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Directorate General of Foreign Trade and Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics.

Defining El Nino signature may emerge as season evolves, says Japan-based scientist

Vinson Kurian
Thiruvananthapuram

The defining signature of an El Nino, in which ocean and atmosphere enter into an intricate coupling, may emerge next month as atmospheric pressure patterns begin to respond to warming of waters in the equatorial Pacific.

As sea-surface temperatures (SSTs) climb, pressure correspondingly dips over the crucial Nino 3.4 region (equatorial Pacific). In sea-sawing action, pressure builds towards the west near Darwin, Australia.

INDIA FACES HEAT

The resulting redistribution of heat is already being felt far afield, including over India, nearly 6,300 km to the north-west, though a modest



SUNNY DAYS AHEAD. Should current projections hold, there is a prospect of 2026 and 2027 being ranked among the hottest years ever recorded

span in terms of atmospheric circulation. Imprint of this coupling is expected to become more pronounced in SST anomalies next month, said a Japan-based scientist.

Swadhin Behera, Director at the Application Research Laboratory, Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology and visiting professor at the University of

Tokyo, noted that the evolving signal bears close watch.

"Our SINTEX-F forecasts point to a strong El Nino event, in the order of two to three standard deviations in the Nino3 index, though not of the 'Godzilla' magnitude suggested by some other models," Behera said.

He cautioned, however,

that the assessment may yet evolve as the season advances. While there is no formal definition, an El Nino is typically accorded a 'super' label when peak SSTs cross +2°C above seasonal average.

For October, nearly half of the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts ensemble projects SST anomalies in the Nino 3.4 region exceeding 2.5°C above the seasonal average.

BIG IMPLICATIONS

Should current projections hold, there is a prospect of 2026 and 2027 being ranked among the hottest years ever recorded.

On the India Meteorological Department's projection of a deficient monsoon, Behera said the SINTEX-F model, too, points to below-normal rainfall.

मांग एग्रीकल्चर और उर्वरक कंपनियों ने सरकार से कहा-पुरानी निरीक्षण व्यवस्था से प्रदेश में घटेगा निवेश
महाराष्ट्र में 'इंस्पेक्टर राज' की वापसी से बढ़ेगा भ्रष्टाचार

महाराष्ट्र के एग्रीकल्चर और उर्वरक उद्योग से जुड़े कई संगठनों ने राज्य सरकार को चेतावनी दी है कि 'इंस्पेक्टर राज' जैसे पुरानी व्यवस्था को वापस लाना उद्योगों के लिए नुकसानदायक होगा। इससे भ्रष्टाचार को बढ़ावा मिलेगा और औद्योगिक निवेश घटेगा।



कई बड़े संगठनों ने जताया विरोध

इन औद्योगिक संगठनों में मुख्यमंत्री देवेंद्र फडणवीस से अपील की है कि इंस्पेक्टर-फ्री सिस्टम को जारि रखा जाए और नए निरीक्षण-आधारित प्रस्तावों पर दोबारा विचार किया जाए।

इंडियन माइक्रो फर्टिलाइजर्स मैन्युफैक्चरर्स एसोसिएशन (आईएमएफएम), सॉल्यूबल फर्टिलाइजर इंडस्ट्री एसोसिएशन (एसएफआईए), फेडरल फर्टिलाइजर्स एसोसिएशन ऑफ इंडिया (फोएफएआई), ऑर्गेनिक एण्ड मैन्युफैक्चरर्स एसोसिएशन (ओएएमए), महाराष्ट्र बायोकेमिकल मैन्युफैक्चरर्स एसोसिएशन (एमबीएमए) और इंडियन एग्री इनपुट्स मैन्युफैक्चरर्स एसोसिएशन (आईएआईएम) सहित कई बड़े संगठन इस मुद्दे पर एकजुट हैं। उनका कहना है कि सरकार फिर से निरीक्षण-आधारित सिस्टम लाने पर विचार कर रही है, जिससे उद्योग क्षेत्र में अनिश्चितता बढ़ रही है।

इंस्पेक्टर-फ्री रेगुलेटरी सिस्टम से कारोबार करना आसान हुआ

संगठनों ने बताया कि 19 जून 2025 को महाराष्ट्र ने इंस्पेक्टर-फ्री रेगुलेटरी सिस्टम लागू किया था। इससे कारोबार करना आसान हुआ और छोटे उद्योगों को फायदा मिला। इस व्यवस्था में कर्पणवीरों पर भरोसा किया जाता है और उन्हें जिम्मेदारों से काम करने के लिए प्रोत्साहित किया जाता है। ओएएमए के प्रतिनिधि विजय ठाकुर ने कहा कि अगर पुरानी व्यवस्था वापस आई तो भ्रष्टाचार और वस्तु की बढ़ सकती है। इससे इमानदार कंपनियों को परेशानी होगी, जबकि गलत काम करने वालों को फायदा मिल सकता है।

उद्योगों के पलायन की आशंका

आईपीएनएम एसपीसी के डॉ. सुखस बुद्धे ने कहा कि उद्योग पहले दो लाइन और कच्चे नाल की समस्याओं से जूझ रहा है। ऐसे में ज्यादा निरीक्षण होने से कंपनियां गुजरात जैसे दूसरे राज्यों में जा सकती हैं। संगठनों का कहना है कि इससे नुकसान होगा और कृषि क्षेत्र पर भी बुरा असर पड़ेगा। उन्होंने सरकार को भरोसा दिलाया कि वे सितकर किसानों की अग्र बढ़ाने और कृषि उत्पादन सुधारने के लिए काम करना चाहते हैं। सॉल्यूबल फर्टिलाइजर इंडस्ट्री एसोसिएशन (एसएफआईए) के अध्यक्ष वातासालेब ठोंकर ने कहा कि सरकार को ऐसे सभी प्रस्तावों को खारिज करना चाहिए जो निरीक्षण-आधारित व्यवस्था को फिर से लागू करते हैं। साथ ही, मौजूदा पारदर्शी और उद्योग-अनुकूल नीतियों को जारी रखना चाहिए।

WHAT INDIA-NEW ZEALAND FTA HOLDS

THE INDIA-NEW ZEALAND Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to be signed today involves deep tariff cuts, easing of standards and dispute settlement and a commitment from the island country to invest \$20 billion in India over 15 years. The pact could only be concluded on the second attempt. The first comprised 10 rounds of negotiations between 2010 and 2015, but was abandoned over the issue of opening up India's dairy sector.

India's gains
 New Zealand to eliminate duties on imports from India as soon as the FTA becomes operational. At present, it maintains duties of around 10% on 450 items of Indian exports like textile and apparel products, leather, ceramics, carpets, automotive components and vehicle assembly. Agriculture and plantation products like tea, coffee and spices also to benefit.



India's services exports to New Zealand grew 13% to \$634 mn in 2024. Services imports from New Zealand grew 7% to \$611 mn in 2024.

Key items of trade

India's exports	Imports
Pharmaceuticals and medications, mechanical machinery, made up textile articles and pearls, precious stones and metals	Wool, iron and steel, fruit and nuts, aluminium



India's offer to New Zealand
 India has offered market access in 70% of the tariff lines while excluding 30%. Immediate elimination on 30%, phased reduction in 35.6%, tariff reduction in 4.4% and Tariff Rate Quotas or limits on the quantity that can be imported at lower duties has been offered for a small number of tariff lines.

Key products under Tariff Rate Quotas
 Apples, kiwifruit and manuka honey are under TRQs. New Zealand will also help India in improving productivity and quality of these crops, with cooperation in the establishment of Centres of Excellence, improved planting material & training growers.

Products excluded
 Dairy items like milk, cream, whey, yoghurt and cheese are kept out. Animal products other than sheep meat, vegetable products, sugar, artificial honey, animal, vegetable or microbial fats and oils, gems & jewellery, copper & its articles, aluminium and its products are also excluded.

Services liberalisation for India
 New Zealand has offered to open up 118 services sectors and sub-sectors and give Most Favoured nation treatment in 139 services sectors and sub-sectors.

Services liberalisation for New Zealand
 India to open up 106 services sectors and sub-sectors and provide MFN treatment in 45 services sectors & sub-sectors.

Mobility
 No numerical cap on number of students from India. Post-study work visas for students of science, technology and mathematics. Quota of 5,000 visas at any time for Indians in skilled occupations for stay up to 3 years in the sectors like IT, engineering, healthcare, education, and construction, AYUSH practitioners, yoga instructors, Indian chefs, and music teachers.

Process left
 The FTA will have to be ratified by both countries before it can be implemented. In India it is an executive process while in New Zealand it will require the approval of Parliament. Coalition partner of New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon's New Zealand National Party - New Zealand First - has opposed the deal. Luxon has, however, managed to get the support of the Labour Party for the deal. Ratification process can go on for up to a year.

India-Kenya bilateral trade jumps by 25% to \$4.31 bn in FY26

NEW DELHI

INDIA has emerged as a key trading partner for Kenya as bilateral trade grew to \$4.31 billion in FY26, while both the countries aim to further strengthen trade and economic cooperation, the government said on Wednesday.

Total trade between India and Kenya stood at \$4.31 billion in 2025–26, reflecting an increase of 24.91 per cent from \$3.45 billion in 2024–25.

The 10th session of the India–Kenya Joint Trade Committee (JTC) in Nairobi reviewed the trade ties, which was co-chaired by Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal and Principal Secretary, State Department for Trade, Republic of Kenya, Regina Akotah Ombam.

Discussions focused on enhancing trade diversifi-



cation, addressing market access issues and leveraging complementarities in sectors such as engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and electronics, according to a Commerce Ministry statement.

The Committee reviewed progress on ongoing trade facilitation initiatives, including the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) to promote cooperation in standardisation and conformity assessment.

92% monsoon forecast, 35% deficit risk cloud FY27 farm outlook

Buffer stocks remain above norms, offering policy flexibility

NEW DELHI
INDIA's agricultural outlook for FY27 likely to remain uneven despite underlying stability, with a 92 per cent monsoon forecast and a 35 per cent probability of deficient rainfall emerging as key risks, though strong government support is expected to provide some cushion, a report said on Wednesday.

According to a report by smallcase, while aggregate farm output remains supported by strong production of staple crops, underlying stress points persist due to weakness in pulses and oilseeds, rising input costs and

global uncertainties. However, government-backed welfare schemes such as PM-KISAN disbursements of over Rs1.09 lakh crore and agri credit growth of Rs28.69 lakh crore, along with reservoir levels at 127 per cent of the 10-year average expected to provide a cushion, it said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has projected the 2026 south-west monsoon at 92 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), with possible El Nino conditions, raising concerns over kharif sowing, particularly for pulses and oilseeds.

The current agricultural cycle is not a broad-based re-

covery story, but it is a selective and highly conditional one," said Robin Arya, small-case manager and Founder at GoalFi.

"For investors and industry stakeholders, this is a year that demands precision, understanding regional income trends, policy responses, and supply dynamics will be far more important than relying on aggregate production data," he said.

While wheat and rice production are higher, ensuring food security and limiting inflation risks, total foodgrain output has declined 2.2 per cent year-on-year due to lower pulses and oilseeds



production. Buffer stocks remain above norms, offering policy flexibility, the report said.

Meanwhile, sugarcane output has risen around 10 per cent year-on-year, supporting the sugar and etha-

low Minimum Support Price (MSP), signalling income stress and weighing on rural consumption.

Sectorally, the outlook remains mixed, with agro-chemicals dependent on monsoon, tractor sales likely to normalise, and rural FMCG demand uneven.

Mustard arrivals have also declined sharply, which indicates farmers holding back supply in anticipation of better prices.

According to the report, FY27 is expected to be marked by divergence and selectivity rather than uniform growth. While parts of the agricultural sector remain supported by strong fundamentals, challenges persist in several segments.

Nano-urea 'coercion': 15,000 fertiliser shops shut in Punjab

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Patiala: Nearly 15,000 seed and fertiliser dealers across Punjab suspended operations on Monday in a nationwide protest against being coerced into "mandatory bundling" practices and held liable unfairly for the failure of govt-supplied seeds.

The Agri Inputs Dealers Association alleged that fertiliser companies are conditioning the supply of essential diammonium phosphate (DAP) on the mandatory purchase of nano urea and nano DAP. Association president Birinder Singh Kapoor in

Nabha said: "We are compelled to sell these additional products, yet the dealers face the brunt of the backlash from farmer unions.

A primary grievance involves the "disproportionate" accountability framework in the current Seed Bill. Dealers argue that when seeds fail, punitive actions like licence cancellations target the traders, while govt institutions and producers often escape liability for supplying the same batches. Even when courts grant relief, dealers report prolonged administrative harassment.

On the economic front,

the trade remains at a standstill over stagnant profit margins. Under the current subsidy regime, dealers operate on a 1.5% to 2% margin, which the association wants increased to at least 8%, arguing that the current rate is unsustainable due to rising operational costs. Kapoor alleged that the govt had refused to adjust these margins to avoid increasing the subsidy burden on the treasury and private corporations.

Monday's strike spanned 18 states, with Maharashtra dealers embarking on an indefinite shutdown. Punjab's protest was for one day.

Export outlook for April positive despite West Asia crisis: Goyal

LOOKING UPBEAT. Free trade pacts to drive growth, says Commerce Minister

Our Bureau
New Delhi

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has said India's goods exports in the first three weeks of April have increased despite the West Asia crisis noting that the recent free trade agreements (FTAs) signed by India and an additional dozen being negotiated would give a big boost to the domestic industry.

The Minister also chaired a high-level review meeting on Wednesday to deliberate on the plan of action for achieving India's \$2 trillion export target by 2030-31 and to review the implementation of the Export Promotion Mission (EPM), per an official statement.

"Despite the war in West Asia, there is tremendous enthusiasm among Indian exporters. If we look at the April figures, our exports have increased significantly in the first three weeks of April compared to last April. As new trade agreements are coming into effect, the possibilities are also increasing... Now, with great confidence,



Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal

India will take its next steps in world trade," Goyal told reporters at an event on Wednesday.

SLEW OF FTAs

New Delhi is currently engaged in negotiating FTAs with about a dozen partners, including Peru, Chile, Canada, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Brazil and Russia, even as it has recently concluded or advanced major pacts with the UK, the EU, the UAE, Australia, Oman and New Zealand, Goyal said.

This signals New Delhi's push to rapidly expand its FTA network to hedge

against rising protectionism and geopolitical disruptions by securing preferential access to as many markets as possible.

The ongoing conflict in West Asia, fuelled by persistent tensions between the US-Israel, and Iran, dealt a severe blow to Indian exports with outbound shipments falling 7.44 per cent year-on-year this March to \$38.92 billion.

Goods exports in FY 2025-26 posted a marginal 0.93 per cent increase to \$441.78 billion.

Trade data for April 2026 is being compiled and will be shared by the Commerce De-

partment on May 15. Simultaneous disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea, driven by the ongoing conflict, have bottlenecked Indian exports and hampered global shipping logistics.

Goyal said Indian consignments are going through different routes because the Strait of Hormuz still remained a challenge.

FOCUS AREAS

In the export review meeting, the Minister emphasised that agricultural exports and micro and small enterprises should remain a key focus across all components of the EPM.

"He further directed that market access support should be extended beyond export promotion councils (EPCs) to include other field-level organisations engaged in promoting exports. In addition, he emphasised the need to develop a rolling three-year calendar of trade fairs, buyer-seller meets, reverse buyer-seller meets and trade delegations to provide greater predictability to exporters and EPCs," the statement added.

Navigating India-EU deal

Indian exporters must improve on compliance

S Chandramohan

The proposed India-EU free trade agreement (FTA) is a significant partnership in a fragmented multi polar world.

The country's India's exports to EU have logged an annual compounded growth rate of 9.24 per cent in the past 10 years to reach \$ 78.7 billion in 2024. For Indian businesses, the FTA has the potential to reshape export markets, supply chains, and competitive dynamics. But challenges remain.

At its core, the FTA promises improved market access. A substantial proportion of Indian exports to Europe could benefit from reduced or eliminated tariffs, which currently range across sectors such as textiles, leather goods, marine products, and gems and jewellery.

This would immediately enhance price competitiveness for Indian exporters, especially when compared to countries like Vietnam or Bangladesh that already enjoy preferential access.

European markets tend to offer higher margins, longer-term contracts, and greater stability. However, tapping this opportunity will require Indian firms to invest in regulatory compliance, data protection frameworks, and local presence within Europe.

ACCESS TO EUROPE

India is seeking association with the world's largest public research programme (Horizon Europe), enabling Indian startups to co-develop next generation technologies in AI, semiconductors, and green hydrogen. The pact is a launching pad for joint products on platforms such as maritime security systems. The agreement includes a Digital Trade Chapter and establishes common standards for data protection and secure online commerce.

Another important dimension is supply chain realignment. Global companies are increasingly diversifying away from over-dependence on a single geography. In this context, India can position itself as a reliable manufacturing and sourcing alternative. The FTA could accelerate this shift by making it easier for European companies to integrate Indian suppliers into their value chains. Indian firms that can demonstrate reliability, scalability, and compliance will be well placed to benefit.

The trade deal includes a \$500-million-dollar support to



FTA. Opportunities, challenges ISTOCK

decarbonise supply chains with MSMEs as key beneficiaries, enabling their integration into sustainable global trade networks. The FTA will also open the Indian market more widely to European products. This could intensify competition in sectors such as automobiles, processed foods, and premium consumer goods. European firms often compete on quality, technology, and brand strength.

In case of textiles, the FTA will provide a level playing field for India's apparel exports. It will benefit exporters who have invested in sustainable and responsible practices such as end-to-end traceability, eco-friendly chemical use, zero liquid discharge systems, renewable energy, and credible labour policies. Agriculture remains a sensitive area. Differences in standards, subsidies, and market structures make this a complex domain. Key processed food items such as frozen sea food and pulse flour, coffee extracts, fresh grapes, castor oil, turmeric offer good potential while rice, wheat, black tea offer limited gains as the demand is modest and the tariff is already nothing. In these areas, growth will depend upon non-tariff factors such as standards compliance, quality upgrading, branding, and market linkages.

In the case of pharma, the reduction of tariff will reduce the cost of imported active pharmaceutical ingredients which in turn will lead to reduction in cost of manufacturing bulk drug formulations and biosimilars in India. However, non-tariff barriers and environmental regulations pose challenges, requiring investments in quality systems. Steel, aluminium, and chemicals sectors will also need to decarbonise processes.

The writer is Director & Group President (Finance & Investment), TAFE Ltd. Views expressed are personal

DATANOMICS

India-NZ FTA to boost trade and mobility

YASH KUMAR SINGHAL



A free-trade agreement (FTA) signed by New Delhi and Wellington on Monday is expected to boost India's exports, particularly labour-intensive sectors that suffered due to tariffs imposed by the United States last year.

Trade remains small

Engineering goods and agricultural products dominated India's exports to New Zealand in FY26 (Apr-Feb). However, exports to New Zealand accounted for a minuscule 0.13 per cent of India's total outbound shipments. Similarly, India's imports from the island country accounted for just 0.07 per cent of its total imports in FY26 (Apr-Feb).

Product-wise exports from India to New Zealand



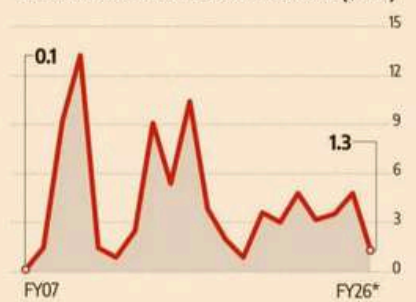
*Includes footwear; Note: Data is for FY26 (Apr-Feb) Source: CMIE, Department of Commerce

NZ pledges big investments

Under the FTA, New Zealand has committed to facilitating \$20 billion in investments into India over the next 15 years – a significant jump compared to cumulative foreign direct investment of just \$83.4 million between FY07 and FY25

Note: *Apr-Dec Source: CMIE

FDI flows from New Zealand to India (\$ mn)



New visa pathway opens

New Zealand will create a dedicated pathway with India for student mobility and post-study work visas for the first time under the agreement. This comes after a decline in the number of student and work visas issued by New Zealand to Indians in 2025, as compared to the figures in 2023 and 2024.

Note: Figures for student visas denote first-time or new students getting the visas Source: New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Student and work visas issued to Indians by New Zealand

Year	Student Visas	Work Visas
2016	8,223	34,611
2017	7,689	37,581
2018	7,878	41,037
2019	9,951	41,922
2020	2,670	26,652
2021	873	32,625
2022	3,171	23,184
2023	9,954	42,018
2024	9,321	32,055
2025	6,432	29,598

Fertiliser firms asked to source collectively from global mkts

SANJEEB MUKHERJEE
New Delhi, 28 April

Amid the ongoing West Asia crisis, the government has urged fertiliser companies to collectively procure finished fertilisers and key raw materials from global markets, instead of purchasing individually, a strategy that has already been in practice for urea for some time.

Sources said the idea behind this move is that prices of finished fertilisers, such as urea, ammonium phosphate (DAP), muriate of potash (MoP), and NPKS, or their key raw materials like rock phosphate, phosphoric acid, ammonia, and sulphur, have risen by 50-60 per cent due to supply constraints. Collective buying is expected to help negotiate better rates and deals.

Traders said the step in this direction was taken last week, when Indian Potash Limited (IPL) issued a tender to import 1.6 million tonnes (mt) of DAP and triple super phosphate (TSP) on behalf of the industry.

On Monday, Additional Secretary in the Department of Fertilisers, Aparna S Sharma, said India plans to import over 8 mt of fertilisers, including 6.4 mt of urea and 1.9 mt of other fertilisers, ahead of the kharif season at current high prices to



Centre considering reduction in cotton import duty

The government is looking at the elimination or reduction of the Customs duty levied on cotton imports, an official said on Tuesday, stressing that concerned ministries would make a decision in this regard.

The textile industry has been urging the government to remove 11 per cent Customs duty on imports of raw cotton amid rising prices to mitigate the cost pressure on domestic companies and protect the sector.

Addressing an inter-ministerial briefing on the developments in West Asia, Bipin Menon, trade advisor to Ministry of Textiles, said: "We are working with the revenue department to see whether a reduction can happen."

He said all three related ministries, including agriculture, textile, and finance are looking at Customs duty reduction or elimination on cotton. The ministry is also seeking the removal of the 2.5 per cent Customs duty on rayon-grade wood pulp, an input for the viscose chain. **PTI**

ensure adequate availability.

India recently placed an order to import 2.5 mt of urea at nearly \$950 per tonne — almost double the price paid two months earlier — as the Iran conflict disrupts global supplies and pushes up prices. In February, a tender for 1.3 mt of urea had been issued at rates close to \$530-550 per tonne.

Due to rising prices of fertilisers, the government on Monday said it expected its FY27 fertiliser subsidy bill to rise by around 20 per cent to over ₹2 trillion. This is

attributed to the spike in global fertiliser rates because of the West Asia crisis.

The Centre had initially budgeted ₹1.71 trillion for fertiliser subsidies in FY27 in the Union Budget presented in February, before the escalation of the West Asia crisis. This was about 8.4 per cent lower than the revised estimate of ₹1.86 trillion for FY26, which itself was 11.06 per cent higher than the FY26 Budget estimate. In FY26, actual fertiliser subsidy expenditure had already crossed ₹2.17 trillion due to higher purchase of urea and DAP.

No proposal to hike fuel prices after state elections: Govt

SHUBHANGI MATHUR
New Delhi, 28 April

The government currently has no proposal to increase retail prices of petrol and diesel, a senior official of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) said on Tuesday, dismissing speculation of a hike after polling in West Bengal ends on April 29.

India has sufficient stock available for petrol and diesel for domestic requirements, said Sujata Sharma, joint secretary at MoPNG, at an inter-ministerial briefing on the evolving situation in West Asia.

Regarding availability of fuel for commercial users, the government clarified that India's textiles and handicraft industry falls under priority sector III and IV, which implies that the sector would be allocated 80 per cent of its total natural gas consumption in the past six months.

Amid supply shortage triggered by the West Asia crisis, the government had reduced natural gas allocation for commercial users to ensure availability for domestic consumers.

In case of supply disruptions, state-run Gail is intermittently sourcing supplies from the spot market for the industry, said Bipin Menon, trade advisor to the Ministry of Textiles.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday warned that fuel prices would be increased after the Assembly elections conclude on April 29. He also attacked the government for allegedly profiteering from low global crude oil prices and said it will now put burden on the public as the prices are rising.

PADDY CROP TO BE UNAFFECTED; JURY STILL OUT ON PULSES, COTTON

Moderate impact on crops from weak monsoon

● Farmers in rainfed areas may be hit

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, April 28

IF THE INDIA Meteorological Department's (IMD) forecast of "below normal" southwest monsoon rainfall for June-September this year proves true, it may still not significantly reduce the country's foodgrain production.

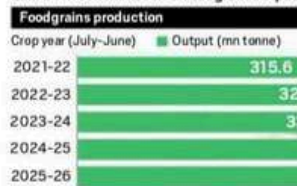
This is due to the rise in irrigated area but experts warned that farm income in the rainfed regions could still be hit.

"Irrigation coverage has now reached 56% of net sown area, up from 49% in 2014-15 when the country had faced severe back-to-back drought years. This has made cultivation relatively more resilient to such volatility (in monsoon activity)," Pushan Sharma, director, Crisis Intelligence, said.

According to Ajay Vir Jarkhar,

MARGINAL HIT

Link between monsoon & foodgrain output



Source: IMD, agriculture ministry. *benchmark—Long Period Average (LPA). LPA is average annual rainfall (89 cm) recorded between 1951 and 2000. 96%-104% of LPA is considered 'Normal' range. '95%-90%' below normal'. '<90%' is 'deficient'. '>104%' is 'above normal'.



Monsoon performance

% change from the normal benchmark*



chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj, around 15% of the country's kharif crops output depends on the rainfed regions.

Sharma said while parts of northeast, northwest, and south peninsular India are expected to see normal to above-normal rains — which should aid the paddy crop — any shortfall in rainfall during vegetative and flowering stages could raise downside risks for pulses, oilseeds, and cotton. However, the critical factor will be rainfall distribu-

tion from July to September.

According to the Meteorological Department, the monsoon core zone, where major rain-fed agriculture is practised is located in central India and spans the region, including parts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Bihar. Rainfall spread during the monsoon across these regions will be crucial for foodgrain production.

IMD, in its first long-range forecast, stated that monsoon rainfall this year is likely to be

92% of the benchmark long period average (LPA), with a high 66% chance that the rains will fall in the "deficient to below normal" range. In 2023, when overall monsoon rainfall was in the "below normal" range at 94% of the LPA, foodgrain production grew marginally to 332 million tonne (MT) in the 2023-24 crop year from 329 MT in the previous crop year. Two back-to-back "deficient" monsoon rains of 88% and 86% of the LPA in 2014 and 2015, respectively, saw foodgrain production stag-

nate at around 252 MT.

Currently, 166 major reservoirs according to the Central Water Commission, have water filled up to 41% of their capacities. The water level is 14.7% higher than last year and over 26% more than the last 10 years' average, which may help boost irrigation. Overall kharif foodgrain — rice, pulses and coarse cereals — production constitutes about 55% of the total annual production.

"Although irrigation facilities in the country have improved, there are large areas of some states that depend heavily on rains. Their production and farmers' income would be at stake, if rainfall is low at 92% of LPA. The country has to prepare how to compensate farmers through the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, if the need arises," Ashok Gulati, agricultural economist, said.

Gulati said that for vulnerable consumers, rice and wheat are not a problem, as they get them even for free through a public distribution system.

Bayer Foundation anchors evergreen fund to boost healthcare, climate and agriculture

Our Bureau

Bengaluru

Bayer Foundation has anchored the establishment of the AWE Evergreen Philanthropic Fund (EPF) to support the scaling of technology-driven solutions across healthcare, climate resilience, and sustainable agriculture, which impact underserved and climate-vulnerable communities primarily in India.

The funding will be deployed through an evergreen pooling vehicle created by AWE Foundation, a US-based non-profit organisation, to provide long-term catalytic capital to support social impact-related investments, according to a statement.

Designed to address the persistent “missing middle” financing gap, the Evergreen Philanthropic Fund will back enterprises that are building



Chitkala Kalidas, Executive Director, Bayer Foundation

gender-equitable, scalable solutions to improve livelihood and health outcomes for women, smallholder farmers and healthcare workers, especially in smaller towns and villages across India.

SHARED MISSION

This collaboration reflects a strong alignment between the Bayer Foundation’s mission of accelerating trans-

formative social innovations in health and agriculture to build effective and resilient local ecosystems that benefit health access and food security, and AWE Foundation’s focus on women’s economic empowerment, climate action, and community resilience. Through this partnership, AWE Foundation aims to strengthen women’s agency as entrepreneurs, workers, suppliers, and consumers, while enabling improved access to healthcare, climate adaptation solutions, and sustainable income opportunities in rural and small towns in India, the statement said.

Through the EPF, AWE Foundation will focus on measurable impact outcomes, including improving access to healthcare in underserved regions, strengthening the capacity of community health workers through di-

gital tools, increasing income and productivity for smallholder farmers, reducing food and agricultural waste, and supporting climate-smart agricultural practices. Impact will be tracked using clearly defined key performance indicators.

With Bayer Foundation’s funding support, the EPF has set the goal of improving the Health Outcomes of 1 million lives, promoting gender equity by helping 1.5 million women gain agency, and improving the Livelihoods of 0.5 million rural, small-town populations, including farmers. The EPF will achieve these impact targets by investing in gender-equitable, impact-focused businesses through its partners. All investments made through the EPF will be subject to independent governance oversight and conflict-of-interest protocols.

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