

KRISHAK SAMACHAR

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EDITORIAL

Tractors may be Cheaper—Needs National Policy

The Government is considering reduction of levies on tractors. Recently there has been undue hike in tractor prices after decontrol. The manufactures say that direct and indirect taxes accounted for 40 to 42 per cent of the cost of a tractor which has risen by 250 per cent during the last five years. In any case the farmer is very badly affected by these high prices and as a result the demand for tractors has also been on the decline. The country has about 140 million hectares of cultivated land and the power available is only one-third of that required to cultivate this land efficiently. It will be difficult to fill up this gap solely by bullocks and manual labour which makes the mechanization of agriculture desirable. However, with the accent on redistribution of land holdings, more and more cultivators will find it uneconomical to go in for tractors and power tillers. The cost of tractors and their operational and maintenance costs will be prohibitive and beyond the reach of the small farmers. Cooperative or collective efforts to own the tractors need to be persuaded. The farmers need to be educated in the efficient use of tractors to prevent large-scale break-downs besides the countryside will have to be provided with sufficiently well equipped workshops for standard spare parts, repairing and servicing of tractors and other small machines. Easy credit facilities for purchasing agricultural machinery and cheaper diesel oil facilities will have to be provided. Unless such a broadbased comprehensive national policy is evolved, it will not be automatically possible to have greater mechanization of agriculture. In the absense of efficient cultivation of our large cultivated land it will be difficult to harness the productivity potential of our farm land to the maximum national interests.

—Dr. D.A. Bholay

13.55 Crore Cane Price Arrears to Growers

Despite all government's efforts, the arrears, of sugarcane price to the growers stood at Rs. 13.55 crores on April 15 last. Of this, Rs. 11.13 crore were arrears relating the crushing season just ended and Rs. 2.42 crore of the previous season, according to an official spokesman.

But the arrears of cane price relating to the crushing season 1974-75 was much more—Rs. 33 crore—on May 1, 1975.

The area under sugarcane cultivation in 1975-76 was about a lakh acres less than in the previous year. Thus the cane area was against 30.97 lakh areas in the previous year.

Apple Grading Machine Developed

A simple machine for grading apples has been developed by two students of G. B. Pant University of Agriculture and Engineering in Uttar Pradesh. The students, Mr. Visweswar Raju and Mr. K. M. Singh, of the Department of Agriculture Engineering, took up the work as part of their undergraduate dissertation project.

The machine, estimated to cost about Rs. 2,500 can sort out 20 to 35 quintals of fruit in one hour according to various sizes.

The principle of the grading machine is simple. The grading is done by progressively varying belt pitch which form the grading bed. The belts help in conveying the fruits and grading them simultaneously into required sizes. The essential parts of the grader are: The conveying unit, the grading unit and transmission unit. The machine can be operated both by power and by hand. Two

men can do the entire operation if necessary.

Urea Fortified with Neem Works Better

Agronomists at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute have found that urea becomes a more efficient fertiliser once it is blended with neem cake.

The neem cake treated urea maintains a steady supply of nitrogen to the crop plants for a longer time than plain urea, it is claimed.

The finding is said to be of a great significance considering that several million rupee worth of urea is produced in the country, but one-fourth of it is lost from the soil within a few days after application because of leaching and microbial action which frees the nitrogen into the air.

Extensive trials in paddy fields at the I.A.R.I. have shown that neem cake treated urea is retained in the soil for up to six weeks increasing the yield by as much as 600 kg. per hectare. Hundreds of field trials with neem cake treated urea have been conducted by the khadi and village industries commission in Pune with similar results, the IARI scientists said.

Russia Buys Grain From U.S.A.

Washington :—The Soviet Union has bought another 625,000 tonnes of U.S. grain, raising the total of new purchases reported in the last week to nearly five million tonnes, reports Reuter.

The latest sale, 500,000 tonnes of maize and 125,000 tonnes of wheat, was announced yesterday by the New York based Louis Dreyfus Company.

This increased the total grain sold to the Soviet Union from this year's crop to

16.5 million tonnes, 500,000 tonnes short of the limit imposed last October when the tonnage on sales to the USSR.

Onion Export to Continue

The Government has decided to continue the policy of canalisation of export of onions through the National Agricultural Co-operative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) during 1976-77.

Export of onions to Singapore and Malaysia had been canalised through NAFED in November 1974. During the period October-December 1975 the onion prices in India had risen considerably as a result of the crop in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra having been adversely affected. Consequently, on its own initiative, NAFED had stopped offering onions to Singapore and Malaysia from the middle of November 1975.

As a precaution, the Government had decided to extend the scheme of canalisation of exports to all destinations. Simultaneously a temporary ban was imposed on all exports, which was later lifted.

Job Guarantee Scheme may be Extended

The Centre is considering a proposal for extending the Maharashtra-model employment guarantee scheme to other States to provide additional employment and credit to agricultural labourers.

A Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. R.N. Azad, Joint Secretary, Department of Rural Development, in its report had recommended suitable expansion of this scheme to other States. The scheme had been working well in Maharashtra for the last two years.

The expansion of the scheme is being considered especially in the context of providing production as well as consump-

tion credit to agricultural workers, marginal farmers and other sections of the rural poor.

The Sivaraman Committee, which had recently gone into the problem of consumption credit for the rural poor, had pointed out that these sections could benefit greatly by controlled employment scheme. The Committee was of the view that to solve the twin problems of provision of employment and collection of consumption loans, such people should be put on to an employment scheme worked by a Government Department.

As wages would be paid by the Government on the basis of work done on a weekly or a daily basis, it would be easy to make provisions for collecting back a percentage of the wage as repayment of the consumption loan taken.

There were several production schemes in the States where such persons could be employed. The States have been requested to identify such programmes and ensure the linking up of the loanees from the weaker sections in rural areas with such production schemes.

It had also been suggested that States also consider the possibility of imposing a special tax as the Maharashtra Government had done for financing its employment guarantee scheme. The Centre was also discussing with States the question of raising resources for financing the credit needs of the rural poor.

Cost Study of Pesticides

The Government has asked the Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices (BICP) to conduct a cost study of all the major pesticides now being manufactured in the country.

The cost study is aimed at ensuring that the prices are kept at reasonable levels, according to Chemical and Fertiliser Ministry sources. There is no control on the prices or distribution of pesticides at present.

However, the Government is keen to ensure equitable distribution of pesticides to the farmers at reasonable prices. A scheme is now being implemented under which 50 per cent of the technical grade pesticides required to be supplied by the manufacturers to non-associated formulators would have to be distributed on the recommendations of the State Governments. They ensure the supply of formulated pesticides to the farmers at reasonable prices.

With a view to attaining self-reliance in pesticides technology, the Chemicals and Fertilisers Ministry has also asked the national laboratories of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to develop indigenous technology for various types of pesticides. The CSIR is expected to develop technology for about 10 items of pesticides shortly.

Technology for the manufacture of sophisticated pesticides is now available only from limited foreign sources. The Government is, therefore, permitting foreign collaboration on merits for the setting up of pesticide units.

The indigenous production of pesticides now meets about 70 per cent of the country's requirements. The import of pesticides now accounts for a foreign exchange outflow of about Rs. 25 crore per year.

The production of pesticides improved substantially during 1975 when the industry achieved a record production of 35,000 tonnes of various pesticides.

World Sugar Estimate Reduced

Sugar statistician F. O. Licht estimated world production in 1975-76 at 81,727,000 tonnes, compared with 82,756,000 estimated in December and 79,52,800 in 1974-75. The estimates, Licht's third for 1975-76 comprises beet sugar production of 32,596,000 (29,838,000 in 1974-75) and cane production of 49,131,000 (49,710,000).

Cotton Output Falls By 3 p.c.

Cotton production in the 1975-76 season is now estimated to be 68.48 lakh bales against the earlier estimated of 75 lakh bales. The production this year will thus be three per cent less than the final official estimate of 70.80 lakh bales for the 1974-75 season. The production was 16.54 lakh bales in 1974-75 in Maharashtra, the production in the current season is estimated to be 12.89 lakh bales. There has been lower production of cotton in Punjab, Haryana and Karnataka. The production in Punjab is estimated at 10.58 lakh bales against 9.3 lakh bales last year. Haryana 3.7 lakh bales against 4.50 lakh bales against in Karnataka 6.14 lakh bales against 7.37 lakh bales.

Foodgrain Target

The Planning Commission and the Agriculture Ministry have developed differences over the revised Fifth Plan target foodgrains production. While the Agriculture Ministry wants to stick to the original target of 140 million tonnes, proposed in the draft Fifth Plan, the Commission considers 132 million tonnes as the outset limit. The Commission's argument is that the projection of 140 million tonnes was based on an achievement of 114 million tonnes in 1973-74. But actual production in that year was only 104.66 million tonnes and it came

further down to 101 million tonnes in 1974-75. Although the Agriculture Ministry claims that the 1975-76 target of 114 million tonnes would be achieved, the Commission has its own reservation in this regards.

Industrialists Urged to Take Interest in Agriculture

The Union Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation, Mr. Jagjivan Ram, urged industrialists to take interest in agriculture which was responsible for about 50 per cent of the gross national product and provided employment to 82 per cent of the country's population.

Addressing the members of the Bihar Industries Association, Mr. Ram deplored that the industrialists of the country "have so far taken, and are still taking an indifferent attitude towards agricul-

ture and have left the task of improving and modernising agriculture entirely on the Government and the illiterate agriculturists of the country". This type of attitude would not have been tolerated in any other country, he said.

Zonal system will Stay

The Centre is not in favour of doing away with the zonal system of food grain movement as "it is in the best interest of both the farmer and consumers". He ruled out complete stoppage of the import of food grain for "it is linked with the maintenance of international trade relations".

He said the problem of storage of wheat this year could be solved by stocking it in Government, semi-Government and private houses. He said the rate of food grain production in this country was now higher than the population growth rate.

Fertiliser Prices Further Reduced

New Delhi : The Union Government has announced a further reduction in prices of phosphatic and complex fertilisers on April 29.

Only on March 17 prices of these fertiliser were reduced and the present reduction has been made not only to keep up the upward trend in offtake witnessed in recent months, but also to stimulate greater consumption.

The present price reduction will apply to di-ammonium-phosphate, NPK (17-17-17), NPK (15-15-15) and ANP (24-24-24).

The retail price of di-ammonium phosphate has been reduced from Rs. 2,600 per tonne to Rs. 2,210 per tonne. Last year during this period, this was priced at Rs. 3,000 per tonne.

The price of NPK (15-15-15) will now sell at Rs. 1,570 per tonne compared

to the prevailing price of Rs. 1,645 per tonne. Last year the price ruled at Rs. 1,700 per tonne.

In the case of NPK (17-17-17) the price has been brought down from Rs. 2,125 to Rs. 1,970 per tonne. Last year, the price was Rs. 2,590 per tonne.

The price of ANP (24-24-24) has been reduced from Rs. 2,295 to Rs. 2,270 per tonne. Last year the price was Rs. 3,080 per tonne.

A review of fertiliser consumption in the country in 1975-76 has shown an offtake of over 2.9 million tonne of nutrients against 2.57 million tonnes in the previous year, which is regarded as one of the factors responsible for a bumper rabi crop, now being harvested. The 1975-76 offtake, in fact, exceeds the previous record of 2.8 million tonnes in 1973-74.

After a series of discussions with the State Governments the Union Ministry of Agriculture has fixed a target of 3.6 million tonnes of nutrient offtake in 1976-77 and has drawn up a strategy to achieve the target.

The offtake for the kharif 1975-76 was higher than last year in the case of nitrogen which went up from 739,000 tonnes in 1974-75 to 742,000 tonnes. The offtake of phosphates and potash, however, reached only a level of 162,000 tonnes and 101,000 tonnes respectively, which was lower than in the previous year.

The upward trend in nitrogen continued in rabi which also witnessed an increase in the offtake of phosphates and potassium. The rabi offtake of nitrogen reached an all-time high of 1.4 million tonnes against 1.02 million tonnes in 1974-75. The offtake of phosphates and potash went up from 243,000 tonnes and 165,000 tonnes respectively in 1974-75

to 304,000 tonnes and 176,000 in 1975-76. This is attributed both to the price reduction made earlier and to the greater promotional efforts.

The year ended with a total offtake of 2.14 million tonnes of nitrogen against 1.7 million tonnes in 1974-75. The offtake of phosphates was marginally less than last year-466,000 tonnes in 1974-75. The offtake of potash was 278,000 tonnes in 1975-76 against 336,000 tonnes in the previous year.

The trend shows that while there has been an increase in the offtake of nitrogen, the steep reduction in that of potassium and phosphates has not only been arrested but also showing an upward trend. It is pointed out that the application of nitrogen gives immediate results whereas phosphatic fertilisers and potash have long-term utility which is not always understood. Yet these nutrients are not used adequately the impact of nitrogen itself would be substantially reduced after a few years.

World Fund for Farm Sector a Reality

An international fund for agricultural development to increase the flow of resources to the agriculture sector in developing countries has become a reality, Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Deputy Executive Director of the World Food Council announced at UNCTAD-IV.

The \$1 billion fund is made up of \$500 million pledged by developing nations (including \$200 million by the United States) and \$400 million by the organisation of petroleum exporting countries. The remaining \$100 million is likely to be contributed by Iran and Saudi Arabia equally.

A conference of plenipotentiaries has been called by the UN Secretary General,

Dr. Kurt Waldheim in Rome on June 10 and 11 to inaugurate a new UN agency to tackle more effectively the most basic problem of food.

Mr. Aziz told Samachar that the agreement to bring into operation the new fund is expected to be ratified by all countries before the end of this year.

Mr. Aziz told the UNCTAD session that the World Food Council would meet next month and take stock of the progress towards a global food security system on which there was divergence of views.

An international arrangement on food was more urgent than the integrated

programme for other commodities now before UNCTAD as every year many human beings die of hunger and malnutrition, he said.

The current proposals are for a half-million-ton international reserve for emergencies and a national reserve for food aid and emergencies which each donor country could earmark together with a food security reserve of 15 to 20 million tons as an insurance programme but not as a buffer stock or price stabilisation reserve.

Mr. Aziz warned that the dependence

of developing countries—which imported 50 million tonnes of grain almost entirely from the US and Canada last year—on only one region for such critical commodity and the absence of grain stocks could spell disaster and starvation for millions of human beings in the event of a major crop failure in that region.

A statement by the International Wheat Council presented to UNCTAD indicated the possibility of a new international agreement including a two-tier price system which would allow developing importing countries to purchase at concessional prices.

New Strategy to Boost Rice Output

New Delhi: A strategy to boost rice production in the coming kharif season, mainly by maximising yield from the existing varieties, was announced here.

The new strategy, which has been evolved by the Centre after detailed discussions with experts is based upon a thorough reappraisal of the rice programme in the country and massive campaign for community nurseries programme which would ensure timely supply of seedlings to farmers who do not have irrigation sources of their own.

The campaign for community nurseries has already been launched all over the country, a spokesman of the agriculture ministry said,

The strategy, which lays emphasis on simple technologies, is expected to bring half million more hectares under high yielding varieties. More rice growing areas will also be brought under multiple cropping.

The official assessment of the strategy is that it will augment production of rice from estimated 48 million tonnes during

1975-76 to over 50 million tonnes this year. The production of rice during 1974-75 was about 40 million tonnes.

The key to the new strategy lies in changing farm practices and adjusting these to micro-level requirements.

There has been a considerable spurt in production of rice in non-traditional areas such as Punjab, Haryana and Western U.P. and also a substantial improvement in traditional rice-growing are characterised by clear summer-winter differentiation as distinct from the traditional rice-growing states in the south.

In order to ensure satisfactory progress in these seven states also, Union Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation, Jagjivan Ram, has particularly commended the new strategy to them. He has written a letter on this subject to Chief Minister of all these seven states.

A massive campaign has, therefore, been undertaken to advance the planting of nurseries. For this purpose a community nursery scheme has been launched under which farmers having their own

source of irrigation will be given monetary and other incentives to raise nurseries not only for their own needs but also for sale to other farmers who do not have their own source of irrigation and, therefore, usually wait for the monsoon to raise their own nurseries.

As a result of the community nurseries programme, farmers who do not have irrigation source of their own need not raise own nurseries at all. Since the seedlings in community nurseries will be ready before the monsoon, the farmers can go over straight to transplantation as soon as the monsoon breaks. By the time monsoon gathers momentum, the plants would have acquired sufficient strength to withstand flooding and water logging of fields.

A breakthrough in rice production in these seven states is considered essential to meet the needs of the growing population on a sustained basis.

One of the main problems in these states is that the setting up of nurseries is usually taken up only when the monsoon breaks and transplantation thereafter with

the result that the grain matures late at a time when temperatures begin to fall.

When temperatures fall, the grain yield-potential is not only realised and the maturity period is also prolonged. This in turn delays harvesting and consequently the sowing of rabi also.

Since the attempt is to advance several agricultural operations, the credit and inputs organisation is being geared up. Action has been taken to stockpile buffer stocks of fertilisers at the district level. In respect of credit, a programme has been launched to get the credit applications filled in by individual farmers in advance. The scrutiny and examination of these forms will be completed beforehand so that there is no gap between the need for credit and its actual availability.

Mobile pest surveillance and control teams are being set up to ensure that the rice crop in the coming season is kept free from pests especially in the states in which paddy is particularly susceptible to the stem borer.

Government Help to Punjab Farmers Affected by Hailstorm

Farmers in Punjab suffered a loss of Rs. 40 crores due to recent hailstorm. The Government of Punjab has for the first time in the history has distributed about Rs. 12 crores as a good gesture of compensation to the farmers affected by hailstorm at the rate of Rs. 300/- per acre. The Punjab Government also requested the Central Government to extend generous help to the hailstorm effected

farmers which is under active consideration. In the meanwhile, the Government of Punjab with the help of Agricultural Marketing Committee decided to create a "Relief Fund against Natural Calamities" to which the farmers will also contribute a nominal amount. This will go a long way in restoring confidence and a sense of securities among the farmers