

Shortfall in kharif output expected

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 22. After holding out for a day, the Union Ministry of Agriculture today released the estimates for kharif crops, which have been hit by erratic rainfall and inequitable distribution of monsoon. The estimates were finalised at the two-day National Conference for Rabi Campaign for 1999-2000, which concluded here on Tuesday.

The overall kharif production is expected to be 102.7 million tonnes (about 5 million tonnes less than the target set) as against 102.67 million tonnes last year. Sharp decline in production is likely in pulses, coarse cereals, oilseeds and even cotton due to inequitable distribution of rainfall. Groundnut and soyabean cultivation were hit on account of dry spells in parts of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Record rice production

However, there is expected to be a record production of kharif rice at 74.9 million tonnes, about three million tonnes more than last year. Rice output makes up for the decline

in other seasonal crops in the overall expectations for total output. The Union Agriculture Secretary, Mr. Bhaskar Barua, had urged the State Governments participating in the campaign to formulate policies to make good the kharif shortfall in the rabi crop.

The total kharif oilseeds output is estimated at 12 million tonnes, about 26 per cent less than the record production last year of 16.3 million tonnes. Oilseed production in kharif has been hit by dry spell in parts of western India. Groundnut crop is likely to be severely affected with its production likely to fall to 4.5 million tonnes as against 7 million tonnes last year.

In the case of soyabean, the output is likely to be a million tonnes lower than last year's record level of 5.9 million tonnes.

The production of coarse cereals this year is expected to be 22.3 million tonnes, about 2.3 million tonnes less than last year due to shrinkage of area under cereals. However, in pulses despite expansion of area under cultivation this year, the productivity is likely to be 5.57 million tonnes, about half-a-million lower than last year's level due to moisture stress.

Toor dal, however, is expected to maintain last year's output of 2.7 million tonnes.

Cotton production this year is expected to be 12.5 million bales against 12.8 million bales produced last year. Production of jute and mesta is also expected to be marginally lower at 9.4 million bales, as compared to 9.8 million bales produced last year.

Sugarcane production is expected to be promising at 305 million tonnes, as against 291 million tonnes last year.

According to Ministry sources, this information is subject to revision when results of the recent heavy rainfall in parts of North India are known. The second crop assessment will be made in January 2000, with more precise information on kharif and preliminary data on rabi. The third update will coincide with the National Conference on Kharif Campaign in mid-April, while the fourth assessment would be done at the time of National Workshop on Improvement of Agriculture Statistics in early June as rabi crops are harvested by may-end. The final estimates are prepared during October-November.

France-India 2000 exhibition in Dec.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 22. The French Government agency for international promotion of technology and trade, CFME ACTIM, is organising an exhibition here in December to showcase the latest developments in technology and equipment from as many as 160 French companies.

The expo, envisioned by the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac, during his visit here last year, would cover a wide range of sectors, from energy and telecommunications to environment, aeronautics, space, transport and agro-industrial equipment.

A 400-strong delegation of French businessmen would also be present during the exhibition, titled France-India 2000, to look for opportunities for tie-ups with Indian partners. The expo is being held at Pragati Maidan from December 6 to 10.

Exposed to non-tribals, Jarawas contract disease

By Kalpana Sharma

MUMBAI, SEPT. 22. Thirty members of the virtually extinct Jarawa tribe in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands — who number only 300 in all — have been admitted to the GB Pant Hospital at Port Blair with measles. Although their condition is reported to be stable, environmental groups point out that this is the inevitable consequence of policies that have allowed non-tribals access to areas where the Jarawa live.

According to a press release issued by The Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology (SANE) and the Pune-based environmental group, Kalpavriksh, this bout of disease is a consequence of the "inadvertant contact with outsiders who have settled all along

the Andaman Trunk Road which was built all along the Jarawa reserve. There have been several recent reports of the Jarawas coming out of their reserve, ostensibly to obtain food and other items that the administration and the settlers offer to them."

the Jarawa tribe is one of the most ancient in India. They live in Kadamtulp (Middle Andaman). They have remained remote from the outside world. However, recently the Andamans administration has tried to establish contact with them. It has also permitted the development of the Trunk Road near the Jarawa Reserve.

Anticipating such problems, SANE had filed an intervention in a writ petition which asked for the "rehabilitation" of the Jara-

was. The organisation argues that such a step would expose the Jarawas to disease and other problems. Kalpavriksh and the Indian Centre for Human Rights and Law had supported SANE. These organisations had also asked for the Andaman Trunk Road to be closed or re-aligned so that it did not touch the Jarawa territory.

In the past, contact with outsiders has affected many other tribes in the Andamans. The Great Andamanese, for instance, according to SANE, "were reduced from a population of 5,000 in the last century, to less than 100 now, by a combination of disease, massacre by colonial power and shrinkage of their habitat settlements." Environmental groups fear that the Jarawa tribe could meet the same fate.

Need for regulatory mechanism in biotechnology

By P. Sunderarajan

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 22. The Nobel laureate, Dr. Richard R. Ernst, has come out strongly against calls to ban research in the area of biotechnology saying it would be criminal to

white and said that what was needed was a regulatory mechanism that was both stringent and flexible — stringent enough to prevent any misuse of the technology, and adequately flexible to ensure that the developments in the area of science was not unduly fettered.

organised under the auspices of the International Union of Pure and Applied Biophysics also emphasised the need for contingency plans to take care of any accidental problem. "Biotechnology is more unpredictable than earthquakes," he added.