

NEWS FLASH – 9th May, 2016

SUGAR

To beat drought, ICAR eyes GM sugarcane

As water-guzzling sugarcane is blamed for worsening the water crisis in parched areas of Maharashtra, the central government's premier research institution - Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) - has decided to join hands with former agriculture minister Sharad Pawar-led Vasantdada Sugar Institute (VSI) to develop drought-tolerant genetically modified (GM) sugarcane that will not need huge quantities of water.

The move is significant considering the government is treading cautiously on the path of genetically engineered crop amid strong opposition from anti-GM crop environmentalists and the RSS-linked Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM).

"It will, however, be a long-term project. Developing drought-tolerant (less water-consuming) GM sugarcane is not an end in itself. We know how difficult it is in India to go for commercial release of any transgenic crop," said an ICAR scientist.

Citing the recent example of GM mustard, sources claimed that even positive reports based on field trials and bio-safety examinations of the crop could not get this transgenic variety - developed by a Delhi University institution - green signal.

But the effects of back-to-back droughts, mounting rural distress and the sheer economic and ecological costs of water-intense crops might make planners keen to develop GM sugarcane. Authorities hope that once the benefits of the new crop become evident, its acceptance will grow.

The final call will be that of the central regulator - Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee - of the environment ministry. So far, GM brinjal hasn't been allowed commercial release even after the regulator's nod whereas a similar transgenic variety is being cultivated by Bangladesh.

But GM sugarcane in water-stressed areas can offer hope in Maharashtra and other parts of India. Already, extreme water shortages have turned the focus on how to use water judiciously with PM Narendra Modi calling for all out efforts to implement drip irrigation on a massive scale.

Referring to the urgency, an ICAR scientist said the GM route could be a long-term approach, keeping in mind the global demand scenario and India's role in it, whereas drip irrigation was the need of the hour.

The research body, nevertheless, appears to be preparing for the future. ICAR director general Trilochan Mohapatra had last month written to Pawar while apprising him of the work done by ICAR-Sugarcane Breeding Institute in Coimbatore in the field of GM sugarcane and how it could join hands with VSI, Pune. Pawar is chairman of the board of trustees that manages VSI.

(Source- <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/To-beat-drought-ICAR-eyes-GM-sugarcane/articleshow/52180722.cms>, published on 9th May, 2016)

Bihar: No end to woes of sugar mill workers

The government may have earned kudos from several quarters for its decision to either revive the closed sugar mills or establish other industrial units on the premises of these mills, but the people of Samastipur, especially those who were rendered jobless after the closure of these mills, are still a dejected lot.

The government has so far not been able to establish any industry on the closed Samastipur sugar mill premises. Even though the Bihar cabinet had decided to hand over the mill premises to a private party more than four years ago, no industry has come up so far on the sprawling mill campus which is located in the heart of the town.

Samastipur sugar mill became defunct in 1997. When Nitish Kumar assumed office as chief minister in alliance with BJP in 2005, the farmers of the district and the jobless workers became hopeful that the mill would be revived. In 2012, the government decided to hand over the mill premises to Kolkata-based Winsom International Limited on lease for 60 years for Rs 28.77 crore. The government also decided to clear the arrears of the mill workers from more than Rs 14 crore it received from the company. However, the mill premise is yet to be handed over to the company for unknown reasons. General secretary of Rajkiya Lok Upkram Karmachari Mahasangh, Bihar, Shashibhushan Sharma said the mill workers hardly benefited from the amount the government received from the Kolkata-based company.

He added that many mill workers have died prematurely due to lack of treatment.

CPI-ML (Liberation) leader Surendra Prasad Singh said instead of harping on prohibition, the government should realize the plight of poor mill workers and farmers and initiate welfare measures for them.

(Source- <http://sugarnews.in/no-end-to-woes-of-sugar-mill-workers/>, published on 6th May, 2016)

Government fixes maximum stock limits for sugar traders

To check rising sugar prices, the Centre has directed traders not to hold sugar stock of more than 10,000 quintals in Kolkata and 5,000 quintals in other parts of the country.

The Cabinet had on April 28 approved a Food Ministry's proposal to empower state governments to impose stock holding limits on sugar traders. The Ministry has now fixed the maximum stock limit through a notification.

As per the stock limit order, a dealer can stock up to 10,000 quintals of sugar in Kolkata, which is the largest trading centre for the commodity in the country. However, the limit is 5,000 quintals for rest of the country.

While the Centre has prescribed the maximum quantity a trader can keep, states are free to lower it. It also prescribed that a trader has to sell his stock within 30 days from the date of receiving the sugar.

Retail sugar prices have crossed Rs 40 per kg in most places due to likely fall in domestic production due to back-to-back drought.

Sugar production of India is likely to decline to 25 million tonnes in 2015-16 marketing year (October-September), as against 28.3 million tonnes in the previous year. So far, mills have manufactured over 24 million tonnes.

The closing stocks is expected to be 7 million tonnes despite fall in production as the country had bumper output in the last 5-6 years.

(Source- <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/markets/commodities/government-fixes-maximum-stock-limits-for-sugar-traders/articleshow/52166133.cms>, published on 7th May, 2016)

Co-gen/Power

Boosting PSUs: E-auction boosts Coal India sales by Rs 2500 cr in FY 16

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and power generators. The rise in e-auction sales boosted the company's annual sales by Rs 2,500 crore.

In FY16, CIL sold 58 million tonnes (mt) of coal under spot e-auction. While this was 11% higher compared to FY15, the company discovered 33% higher prices compared to the notified rate. The lower grade of coal, for example, is priced at Rs 800-1,000/tonne by the state-run miner for supplies to power developers with fuel supply agreement (FSA).

However, the same grade of coal gets sold at Rs 1,040-1,300 per tonne under the e-auction route.

Additionally, Coal India also started special forward e-auction mechanism for power generators last year. The company sold 13.8 mt of fuel under this scheme, pocketing 36% more revenue than notified price. While the auction route provides opportunities to procure coal for companies that do not have firm FSAs with the miner, some power developers with FSAs have argued that Coal India should first fulfill its coal supply commitment in entirety before diverting the fuel to the e-auction platform.

Domestic coal supply to power companies grew by 7% to 448 mt in FY16.

The country's coal production grew 4.8% to 639 mt last fiscal. The major contributors were Coal India (537 mt) and Singareni Collieries (60 mt). However, due to delay in clearances for newly auctioned captive mines, the coal production from such mines declined 32% to 43 mt during the last fiscal.

The production surge has had a positive impact on net coal imports in the country: imports declined by 7% to 221 mt, led by 13% fall in import of non-coking coal and 1% decline in import of coking coal.

The start of the new fiscal, however, saw CIL reducing production primarily due to subdued power demand that had led to thermal station running at 60% plant load factor. Total coal production in April 2016 was 47.7 MT, a decline of 2.7%. This decline came on the back of muted performance in March, when overall coal production grew just 1.7%.

India seeks to shut 12% of power capacity in anti-pollution move

Govt aims to shut aging coal-fired power plants with a combined capacity of 37 gigawatts to cut emissions and reduce the use of fuel and water

India plans to shut aging coal-fired power plants with a combined capacity of 37 gigawatts to cut emissions and reduce the use of fuel and water.

The plants are more than 25 years old and have turned uneconomical, said S.D. Dubey, chairman of the Central Electricity Authority, the planning wing of the power ministry. They

will be replaced by super-critical units, which are more efficient, at the same sites, he said, without giving a timeline.

“Our first concern is emissions,” Dubey said in New Delhi. “We also want plants to be more efficient in use of resources.”

The plan reflects Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attempt to balance energy security with the need to protect the environment. Coal, whose use is declining in several parts of the world because of emission concerns, accounts for about three-fourths of India's electricity generation and will probably remain the nation's dominant fuel for at least two decades, the government estimates.

In December, the environment ministry issued norms to curb emissions, such as particulate matter, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, from power plants amid rising concern over air pollution in Indian cities. The norms also capped the use of water by plants.

A majority of the old capacity—22 gigawatts—is controlled by provincial governments, while 13,000 megawatts belongs to companies of the central government, such as NTPC Ltd, Dubey said. About 2 gigawatts of capacity belonging to non-state producers is also being considered for shutdown, he said without naming the plant owners.

The Central Electricity Authority will hold talks with plant owners and electricity buyers to prepare a roadmap for phasing out the old capacity, he said.

Coal fires 62% of India's 298 gigawatts generation capacity, according to the government's data. The aging plants being considered for a shutdown account for about 12% of the country's total capacity.

(Source- <http://www.livemint.com/Industry/QkD9eo3lrSVj1sxV3ubB9K/India-seeks-to-shut-12-of-power-capacity-in-antipollution.html>, published on 8th May, 2016)

PIL against Torrent Power's recovery of regulatory charge

Gujarat high court has issued notice to Gujarat Electricity Regulatory Commission (GERC) and Torrent Power Ltd in response to a PIL against GERC's March 31 order whereby electricity tariffs in form of recovery of 'Regulatory Charges' have been levied.

The PIL has alleged that recovering such charge by Torrent months before the GERC order has resulted in illegal collection worth over Rs 500 crore from power consumers in Surat and Ahmadabad.

(Source- <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/PIL-against-Torrent-Powers-recovery-of-regulatory-charge/articleshow/52159807.cms>, published on 7th May, 2016)

Maharashtra to go Kochi way, run ports & jetties on solar and wind energy

In the first such model in India, the Maharashtra government is planning to meet operational requirements of its minor ports and jetties using power generated from sea waves and solar and wind energy.

This green energy thrust will be on the lines of the Kochi international airport, which runs entirely on solar power. Projects designed to convert the kinetic energy of sea waves into electricity have also been operationalised in Denmark and other countries.

The Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB) also plans to use coastal land, which is covered under CRZ norms and ports, coastal areas and creeks in its jurisdiction to erect and operationalise renewable energy projects like solar panels.

"We have a coastline of 720km. This can be used on a large scale to generate power from sea waves, wind and from solar panels on our land. This green energy can be used to run our... small ports and jetties," MMB CEO Atul Patne told dna, adding that this would be the first such model in the country.

"The surplus energy... can be fed into the local grid for the Maharashtra government or can even be provided to (nearby) villages," he said.

"We will create a network of tidal (energy projects)... such a large chain means that a greater amount of watts can be generated," noted Patne, adding that this could be linked to solar and wind energy projects which could be developed on the coast.

Patne said that in a meeting of the MMB, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had agreed to the green energy for ports project. This, along with the 'Nirmal Sagar Tat Abhiyan', has been sent to the Centre's Sagar Mala project for funding.

The Maharashtra Energy Development Agency (MEDA) had estimated that the state has around 500 MW potential for wave energy-based power plants. It had also identified some sites — Vengurla rocks, Malvan rocks, Redi, Pawas, Ratnagiri and Girye.

The MEDA had also begun work on a demonstration project at Budhal in Guhagar, Ratnagiri, and had also estimated that with its about 7,500km coastline, India had a potential of 40,000 MW with the western coast with its stable waves being more favourable for such projects.

In Denmark, floats which move upwards and downwards based on wave movements are used to power generators and generate electricity.

The MMB has allocated a portion of the seafront at Belapur for a pilot project to generate wave energy. The MMB also plans to use CRZ areas for erecting solar panels, said Patne. Otherwise, a minimum of four acre land is required to erect a solar power project with 1 MW capacity.

Patne said they had allocated land to an entrepreneur who wanted to construct manless vessels and pointed to how around 40 institutions had approached them for land on the waterfront for training purposes. The police too wanted to train their personnel in the sea instead of swimming pools. Hence, it has also consented for establishing a maritime research and training zone for start-ups and research. This will also help create trained manpower in the maritime sector.

The new and renewable energy policy approved by the state aims at creating 14,400 MW of fresh grid-connected installed capacity by 2019-20. This includes 7,500 MW from solar energy, and wind energy and baggase-based cogeneration will contribute 5,000 MW and 1,000 MW, respectively.

Small hydro power projects, with a capacity of 5 MW and less, will make up for 400 MW, and 300 MW is proposed to be generated from industrial waste and 200 MW from biomass.

(Source- <http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report-maharashtra-to-go-kochi-way-run-ports-jetties-on-solar-and-wind-energy-2210206>, published on 8th May, 2016)

Thought of the day

“God could not be everywhere, and therefore he made mothers. “- Rudyard Kipling