

ACFI NEWSLETTER

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Moth infestation: Farmers in many Malwa dists re-sow wheat

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PATIALA: Already reeling under losses due to poor paddy yield, farmers in several Punjab districts are faced with a new challenge in the wheat-sowing season — moth infestation.

Farmers from Patiala, Barnala, Mansa, Bathinda, Sangrur and other Malwa districts have reported “pink stem borer” infestation in their fields, adding that they had to re-sow wheat because of this.

They demanded that the government compensate them for the losses, as they had to buy wheat seeds and DAP fertiliser again.

Several farmers claimed that the infestation was seen in fields where paddy residue was not burnt.

Ajaib Singh, a farmer of Patiala's Balbera village, said, “I had to re-sow wheat on eight acres after the pink stem borer attack. I had sown wheat with super-seeder to manage stubble without burning it, as per the directions of agriculture department and Punjab Pollution Control Board.”

Another farmer, Satnam Singh of Qila Bharian village in



A field inspection being carried out by state agriculture department officials at Ajrawar village in Patiala, and (inset) pink stem borer.

HT PHOTO

Sangrur, said, “Moth infestation was found only in those fields where in-situ management of paddy stubble was done. In fields where stubble was burnt before wheat sowing, no moth attacks were reported. On the government's persuasion, I had used happy seeder for in-situ management of stubble. But now, I am facing losses.”

Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) vice-chancellor Dr SS Gosal said there was nothing to worry as the growth and devel-

opment of the pest is expected to decline once the temperature drops further. He added that pink stem borer was usually seen in rice fields but now it is being seen on wheat crop as well.

Dr Manmeet Brar Bhullar, head of the department of entomology, PAU, said the pink stem borer attacks the central shoot. “It starts with the infested tillers of wheat going pale brown before ultimately drying up,” she added.

Agriculture department officials are already carrying out field inspections to assess the crop damage.

Chief agriculture officer Dr Jaswinder Singh advised farmers to use insecticides instead of re-sowing the crop. “The temperature was high during sowing which resulted in the spread of pink stem borer. As soon as the temperature drops further, the spread will decline. Instead of re-sowing, farmers should spray insecticide,” he said.

Commerce Ministry reviewing India-US trade relations amid Trump statements

NEW DELHI: The Commerce Ministry is reviewing various aspects of India-US trade relations focusing on implications of statements made by US President-elect Donald Trump during his election campaign and after the results, an official said.

The official added that there are no irritants in the relations between the two countries that can lead to discriminatory tariffs against India.

Trump, during his election campaign, has called India an "abuser" of import tariffs, a claim that echoed his October 2020 statement labelling India the "Tariff King".

Trump on Saturday also warned BRICS countries against



any move to replace the US dollar and has sought a commitment from the nine-member group that includes India, Russia, China, and Brazil.

In the wake of such statements, brainstorming is fundamental to discuss the trade relations as the US is the largest trading partner of India.

Trade experts have time and again stated that Trump's

claim that India is an "abuser" of import tariffs is unfair as many nations including America protect their domestic industries by imposing high customs duties on certain products.

According to WTO's World Tariff Profiles 2023, the US also imposes high duties on items like dairy products (188 per cent), fruits and vegetables (132 per cent), coffee, tea, cocoa and spices (53 per cent), cereals and food preparations (193 per cent), oilseeds, fats and oils (164 per cent), beverages and tobacco (150 per cent), fish and fish products (35 per cent), minerals and metals (187 per cent), and chemicals (56 per cent).

An expert said that if the

US would seek a cut in customs duties for some of their products, India should also demand a similar reduction to get greater market access for domestic items.

The US was the largest trading partner of India in 2023-24. India's exports stood at \$77.51 billion, while imports aggregated at \$42.2 billion in the last fiscal.

India's trade relations with the US will continue to grow irrespective of the change in regime in America and according to the commerce ministry data, India's exports to the US jumped to \$39.2 billion in October against \$21.46 billion in October 2015. PTI

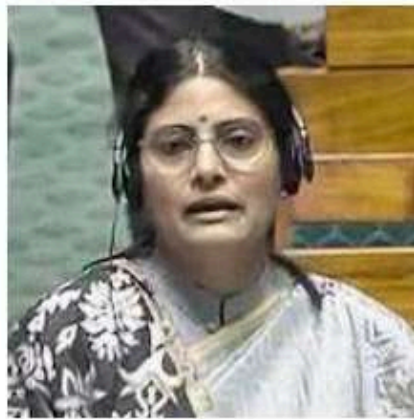
Govt faced challenges in DAP supplies due to geopolitical crisis: Anupriya Patel

Our Bureau
New Delhi

The government on Wednesday said India faced challenges in the availability of chemical fertilizer di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) this year due to geopolitical disturbances and asked stakeholders to continue working in cohesion in ensuring healthy food for all.

Addressing the annual seminar of the Fertilizer Association of India in New Delhi, Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilizers Anupriya Patel praised her own department amid farmers reporting a huge shortage of DAP during key months of September-October when they need to prepare the field for the next crop.

Further, she said: "We are all aware that India's agricul-



Anupriya Patel, Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilizers

tural sector depends significantly on the import of some of the critical fertilizers like DAP, MOP, NPKs and partially even urea. This year, there have been some geopolitical disturbances, which led to supply chain disruption and that had an impact on the availability of fertilizers, especially of DAP, in the country."

The measures taken by the

government included procurement of fertilizers through long-term agreements with supplier countries and focus on promoting the use of alternatives such as nano-fertilizers like nano-DAP and nano-Urea.

SOIL HEALTH

Besides, the Department of Fertilizers had regular co-ordination with the States, port authorities, Ministry of Railways and fertilizer companies to ensure responsible dispatch of fertilizers to the demand-intensive regions.

The Minister also touched upon the issue of soil health, which resonates the government's focus on natural farming. "I would like to request all the stakeholders in this sector to continue working in cohesion in the interest of our larger goal, which is to ensure healthy food for all," she said.

• Three-year push for PLI scheme

Just three sectors, food processing, pharmaceuticals and mobile phones (large scale electronics manufacturing), accounted for over 75 per cent (or 4.47 lakh) of the total jobs created (5.84 lakh). The government had said that the PLI scheme for the food processing sector, to be implemented over six years (2021-22 to 2026-27), would create 2.5 lakh jobs; till June 2024, it created 2.45 lakh.

Under the PLI scheme, which aims to catalyse private investments and enhance manufacturing capacities, the government provides incentives to companies based on incremental sales. Since the scheme was first announced in April 2020, it covers as on date to 14 sectors: textiles, advanced chemical cell (ACC), solar modules, auto and auto components, IT hardware, specialty steel, mobile phones, telecom, medical devices, white goods, pharmaceuticals, food processing, drones, and drug intermediates and active pharmaceutical ingredients.

Till March 2024, the PLI outlay for these 14 sectors added up to Rs 1.97 lakh crore, and the scheme attracted as many as 755 successful applicants including micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and private investments of Rs 1.23 lakh crore.

If food processing and mobile phones have done very well, textiles and ACC battery have hardly taken off. The PLI scheme for textiles, notified in September 2021, initially set a target of creating 7.5 lakh jobs, but the Cabinet approved a job target of just 2.5 lakh. The sector has created only 12,607 jobs over the last two years and three months till June 2024, ac-

cording to an RTI reply by the Ministry of Textiles. The scheme has another five years till 2028-29 to generate more jobs, and is running a stiff target. It also offered companies a gestation period of two years (2022-23 and 2023-24), to set up operations, even though stakeholders have complained that some eligibility criteria laid down in the scheme could be difficult to meet for smaller entities.

Similarly, the PLI scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) battery storage aimed at setting up giga-scale ACC battery facilities is yet to fully take off. Launched in May 2021, the scheme envisages creating manufacturing facilities over the next two years i.e., 2022-23 and 2023-24. So far, only 802 jobs have been created since production has not yet commenced. In 2022, three bidders were selected under the scheme, including Ola and Reliance Industries, and in September 2024, Reliance was selected again for additional capacity.

Just like ACC battery, most PLI schemes are in the first few years of implementation and it is possible they would meet the employment targets by the time their performance periods come to an end.

Of the 14 sectoral PLI schemes, 13 were launched in 2020, and one in 2021, but faced initial delays due to the coronavirus pandemic.

While some schemes like mobile phones were extended by a year during the pandemic, some others such as textiles, solar PV modules, bulk drugs, and pharmaceuticals entail a 1-3 year gestation period. The support period in the PLI scheme for 13 sectors is

India dominant player in global exports segment

FC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC 3

India is eyeing to be a global economic powerhouse with its remarkable achievements in the export landscape.

However, the government claimed that the country has witnessed significant progress in diverse sectors, ranging from petroleum oils and agrochemicals to semiconductors and precious stones. This growth reflects India's ability to leverage advanced technology, innovative practices, and competitive manufacturing to meet global demands, the commerce ministry said on Tuesday.

Supported by robust government initiatives, the ministry also said that the country is not only expanding its export base but also strengthening its position as a reliable global supplier. "India's export performance in several key product categories has shown notable success, with the country maintaining or improving its rank among the top 10



global suppliers, all with export values exceeding \$1 billion in 2023," the ministry said.

It further said that India has emerged as a dominant player in the global export market, showcasing remarkable growth across various sectors. "The petroleum sector has seen a dramatic rise, with export values increasing from \$60.84 billion in 2014 to \$84.96 billion in 2023, capturing a global market share of 12.59 per cent. This significant leap has propelled India to the position of the second-largest global exporter, driven by advanced refining infrastructure and increased production capacity," it added.

In the agrochemical sector, it said, India has achieved notable success.

Min: 126 rice varieties developed by NARS

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Bathinda: Since Jan, National Agricultural Research System (NARS), including ICAR Institutes and State/Central Agricultural Universities (CAU/SAU) under the aegis of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), has developed 524 new varieties/hybrids of field crops and 167 of horticultural crops.

Field crop varieties include 246 of cereals, which includes 126 varieties of rice, 22 of wheat, 51 of maize, 12 of sorghum, 13 of pearl millet, 21 small millets and 1 barley; 55 of oilseeds which includes 8 of Indian mustard, 2 yellow sarson, 8 groundnut, 12 soybean, 9 linseed, 4 safflower; 5 sesame, 3 sunflower; and 2 each of Niger and Castor; 69 of pul-

Chemical fertiliser use per hectare in Pb more than national average: Govt

New Delhi: The use of chemical fertilisers per hectare in Punjab is around 77% more than the national average, the govt informed Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. In a written reply, the fertiliser ministry said in 2023-24, the "total nutrient per hectare" consumption in Punjab was 247.6 kg compared to the national average of 139.8 kg. It said the fertiliser used per hectare in Punjab during 2021-22 and 2022-23 was 251.4 kg and 238.8 kg, respectively, compared to around 136 kg and 136.2 kg at the all-India level. The ministry also said under the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojna, Rs 26.7 crore has been released to Punjab since 2015-16 and the total area covered under organic farming is 6,981 hectare and 6,676 farmers have benefited under the scheme.

ses including 19 chickpea, 4 pigeonpea, 7 lentil, 6 fieldpea, 6 urdbean, among others, stated Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in a

written reply to a question by MP Naveen Jindal.

The minister stated the horticultural crop varieties include perennial spices (19), seed

spices (8), potato and tropical tuber crops (8), Plantation crops (6), fruits crops (40), vegetable crops (70) and flowers and other ornamental plants (16). Out of these 109 trait specific varieties of 34 field and 27 horticultural crops were released on Aug 11.

While developing these varieties, focus was given on adaptation to climate change and improved nutrition quality traits. As a result, 455 varieties have tolerance to one or more biotic and/or abiotic stresses; amongst them 92 have been bred for extreme resilience against abiotic stresses (rainfed, drought, flood, waterlogging, terminal heat, low temperature, salinity, low phosphorus) and 32 are biofortified with improved nutritional qualities.

₹592cr aid boosts natural farming

Govt Plans To Cover 25% Of Cultivable Land By 2047

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Gandhinagar: With global demand for natural farming products growing amid increased awareness of health hazards caused by chemical fertilisers, Gujarat govt has set an ambitious target of increasing the area under natural farming to at least 10% from the present 3% by 2030 and 25% by 2047.

Sources in the state govt said that apart from conducting educational programmes to encourage farmers to adopt natural farming techniques, govt aims to use technologies like GPS, the Internet of



Natural farming integrates five main principles — bijamrut (seed treatment), jivamrut/ghanjivamrut (natural liquid fertiliser), mulching, waaphasa (soil aeration) and symbiosis. Indigenous cows and their dung play a vital role in this method

Things (IoT), artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML), drones and more. "This approach aims to improve the use of resources, enhance crop productivity and promote increased sustainability in farming practices," a source said.

In addition to providing a

conducive environment to adopt natural farming, the state govt is working on a holistic and sustainable approach, where agri produce through natural farming methods is more readily available to consumers.

Natural farming integrates five main principles — bi-

jamrut (seed treatment), jivamrut/ghanjivamrut (natural liquid fertiliser), mulching, waaphasa (soil aeration) and symbiosis. Indigenous cows and their dung play a vital role in this method. "The state govt has implemented a scheme providing Rs 900 per month, amounting to Rs 10,800 annually to each farmer to promote natural farming. So far, 1.86 lakh farmers have benefitted and received around Rs 592 crore in assistance," sources said.

South Gujarat's Dang district has been declared a completely chemical-free district. The local administration provides financial support of Rs 20,000 annually to farmers, capped at two hectares, to encourage natural farming practices. A total of 16,188 farmers have received this benefit. An organic certification drive has also been initiated for Dang's farmers,

with an investment exceeding Rs 10 crore.

According to the agriculture department officials, 82 farmers' produce organisations (FPOs) are dedicated to natural farming to ensure market support and value addition. In all, 56.17 lakh farmers have been trained in natural farming and 9.85 lakh farmers are practising natural farming on 8.45 lakh acres of land in the state.

Sources said the network of 224 agriculture produce market committees (APMCs) and 10,477 primary agricultural credit societies (PACs) will also be used to promote natural farming.

Despite these efforts, the state's processing capabilities remain limited. Current processing rates stand at merely 2% for fruits and vegetables, 8% for marine products, 35% for milk and 6% for poultry products.

India lags competitors in capitalising on China Plus One opportunities

● Trump tariffs could be an opportunity for India: Niti CEO

FE BUREAU

New Delhi, December 4

VIETNAM, THAILAND, CAMBODIA and Malaysia have beaten India to corner maxim benefits out of the worldwide China Plus One strategy to diversify supply chains by locating manufacturing capabilities at multiple locations.

The country now should prepare to tap into opportunities thrown up by tariff rejigs announced by incoming US President Donald Trump, a Niti Aayog report and its chief executive officer BVR Subrahmanyam said.

Last week, Trump announced additional tariffs on its biggest trading partners — 25% on Canada and Mexico and 10% on China if they fail to check illegal immigration and drug trade. He has also threatened 100% tariffs on Brics countries if they try to undermine the US dollar.

"Whatever Trump has announced so far...I think there are

CAUSE OF CONCERN



■ A big challenge identified by the Niti report is Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

■ The European Union is India's second-largest trading partner with exports of \$75.9 bn in FY24 and imports of \$61.4 billion



opportunities for India. We are a man at first slip, the ball is coming in our direction. Are we going to hold it or drop the catch, it's for us to see...and I think, you will see some steps in next few months," Niti Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam told reporters.

The US is already India's biggest trading partner with bilateral merchandise trade in 2023-

24 of \$119 billion. India's exports were \$77.5 billion and imports \$42.1 billion. There is also a substantial services trade between the two countries.

By virtue of the US being the biggest importer in the world at \$3.5 trillion in 2023, the opportunities are immense. China, the key target of Trump tariffs, is the biggest exporter to the US and

biggest competitor of India in several key product categories.

There are going to be huge disruptions and diversion because of the announcements and it would open up "huge" opportunities for India. If the country prepares well it can lead to a massive boom, he said at the release of the report "Trade Watch" prepared by the think tank.

The report will be released quarterly from hereon.

"The question is if we actually prepare ourselves, it can lead to a massive boom... because there is going to be trade diversion," Subrahmanyam added.

"Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia have become bigger beneficiaries of the strategy. Factors such as cheaper labour, simplified tax laws, lower tariffs and proactiveness in signing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have played a critical role in helping these countries expand their export shares," the report by Niti said.

While India is also negotiating FTAs with key economic blocs and countries, the pace is very slow.

Be wary of China dumping products in India: Niti report

The US is India's largest trading partner and top export destination, as well as its fourth-largest source of imports. That apart, India's economic integration with the US has been growing for more than two decades.

US demand for Indian goods has risen steadily, with imports growing from \$9.7 billion in 2001— just 0.9 per cent of US global imports — to \$87.3 billion in 2023, representing 2.8 per cent of America's total imports.

Meanwhile, the trade war between the US and China has disrupted global supply chains. Washington's tighter export controls and higher tariffs on Chinese goods are aimed at curbing Beijing's technological

ambitions. "This has led to a fragmentation of global supply chains, prompting multinational corporations to seek alternatives to Chinese manufacturing. The trade war has caused increased costs and production delays, impacting global markets," noted a recent Niti Aayog report.

According to the report, this situation presents both challenges and opportunities. "On the one hand, India has to navigate the disruptions in the global supply chain, and be wary of China dumping its products in Indian markets. On the other hand, India is seen as an attractive destination for companies looking to shift their manufacturing bases out of China," the report added.



**WHEAT
SOWING
MAINTAINS
MOMENTUM,
MUSTARD
STILL DOWN**

After a delayed start, sowing of rabi crops seems to have picked up pace. Till December 6, rabi crops stood on around 49.36 million hectares, 1.50 per cent more than for the same period last year. Acreage of most crops except mustard was more than the corresponding last year. Mustard acreage was down as farmers seem to be shifting towards other crops due to better returns.

However, going forward, most experts said that weather will play key role in determining the final output as after a delayed start any more unusual rise in temperature might impact final yield, particularly in crops such as wheat.

The IMD had also said that winters might be warmer than normal this year. **SANJEEB MUKHERJEE**

TRACKING THE FIELDS

Rabi sowing as on December 6 (in million hectares)

Crops	Normal area	2023-24	2024-25	% change*
Wheat	31.23	23.41	23.94	2.26
Rice	4.2	1.09	1.11	1.83
Pulses	14.04	11.57	12.06	4.24
Gram	10.09	8.03	8.6	7.10
Lentil (masur)	1.51	1.45	1.47	1.38
Coarse Cereals	5.38	3.5	3.57	2.00
Maize	7.91	8.47	8.1	-4.37
Mustard	7.91	8.47	8.1	-4.37
Total	63.56	48.63	49.36	1.50

Notes: The normal area is average area covered in the past five years in case of most crops. Total might not match as it is a sum of broad heads. *Change is between 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Source: Government of India

ICAR nod for 2 cotton research centres in T, ops begins next FY

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has sanctioned creation of two All India Coordinated Research Project Centres on cotton (AICRP) in Telangana.

The decision comes following a recent meeting of Professor Jayashankar Telangana Agricultural University (PJTU) vice chancellor professor Aldas Janaiyah with ICAR director general Himanshu Pathak and deputy DG TP Sharma in New Delhi where he high-



lighted the critical role of cotton research in Telangana.

He advocated PJTAU's inclusion in the national cotton research coordination initiative and proposed the establishment of two centres in the state: a primary centre in Warangal and a secondary

centre in Adilabad.

After the formation of a separate Telangana in 2014, the state had witnessed a reduced representation within the national cotton research coordination centres. Consequently, PJTAU was unable to engage in national cotton research framework for the past 10 years, said officials.

ICAR consented to the establishment of these two centres and will allocate staff and funding to bolster cotton research at PJTAU. Research at the centres will begin in the next financial year, officials said.

Policy targets ₹1.5 trn goods exports by 2029

ANIL SHARMA

Jaipur, 11 December

The Rajasthan Export Promotion Policy aims to increase goods exports to ₹1.5 trillion by 2029, an official of the state industries department has said.

The policy, recently announced by the state government, will help boost exports by expanding and diversifying the portfolio through strategic administrative, institutional, fiscal, and infrastructural initiatives. It will also focus on encouraging research and development for technological upgradation and market research.

"The goods exports stood at over ₹83,704 crore as of FY24. The move will promote initiatives to elevate product quality and facilitate certification of exported goods," the official said.

A key feature of the policy includes increasing the workforce by promoting sector-specific skill development and capacity building according to the needs of the industries. "Imparting need-based training to stakeholders, including

exporting units and officials, and support and mentor entrepreneurs are other main points of the policy," the official said.

The policy looks to promote diversification by identifying high-potential sectors like agro and food processing, engineering goods, and pharmaceuticals. For this, the government will provide targeted incentives and infrastructure support. The Bhajan Lal Sharma government will help in facilitating linkages between producers and exporters for efficient supply chains.

The policy also seeks to simplify regulatory procedures and provide online platforms for obtaining clearances and permits and implementation of financial incentives to support exporters, particularly SMEs.

Rajasthan's key export sectors include engineering goods, gem & jewellery, textiles, metals, handicrafts, agro-food products, and chemicals and allied products, which collectively account for over 70 per cent of the state's total exports, government data showed.

ICAR-IISR releases new ginger variety 'Surasa'



Kochi: ICAR-Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR) has released its new ginger variety for commercial applications. Named 'IISR Surasa', the variety has been developed through a farmers participatory breeding programme. Surasa is a non-pungent variety and can yield up to 24.33 tonnes per hectare, said a press release.

OUR BUREAU

Post-monsoon rain deficit, fungal diseases weigh on tur crop in Karnataka

Vishwanath Kulkarni
Bengaluru

Post-monsoon rainfall deficiency, coupled with fungal diseases, are likely to weigh on the tur (redgram) crop in Kalaburagi district, the key producing region in the South, raising concerns among a section of farmers in the area.

Farmers had expanded the area under tur in Karnataka to 15.94 lakh hectares (lh) this kharif cropping season — up from 13.64 lh. In Kalaburagi alone, the tur acreage stood at 6.27 lh (5.87 lh).

Karnataka Agriculture Department officials said Kalaburagi witnessed a rainfall deficit of 71 per cent during November, which is crucial time for flowering and



RAIN WOES. Kalaburagi witnessed rainfall deficit of 71% during November, which is crucial time for flowering and pod formation

pod formation. Against a normal of 19.5 mm, the district received only 5.6 mm rain.

IMPACT ON SOIL

"The lack of soil moisture during the crucial stages of flowering and pod formation impacted the crop in patches in the shallow soil regions of

the district. Lack of adequate soil moisture triggered fungal disease, such as macrophomina and phytophthora root rot, which led to drying up of the tur crop in patches in the shallow soil areas."

"A survey to assess the crop damage is in progress and it may take some time to quantify the impact. How-

ever, the crop is intact in the traditional black soil belt," an official said.

The vegetative growth in tur crop was good during the monsoon months on widespread rain.

Scientists said the crop in areas bordering Telangana is relatively in a better condition.

Basavaraj Ingin, President, Karnataka Pradesh Red Gram Growers Association, said the rot disease is spreading gradually. Moreover, the tur crop had seen more vertical growth, which also was a concern this year as it would impact the yields, he said.

Sharanabasappa Mamshetty of the Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha said the crop on about 2 lakh hectares had been impacted.

Tariffs Announced by Trump may have a Positive Effect on India: Ficci Chief

Twesh Mishra & Kirtika Suneja

New Delhi: The domestic industry must develop resilient supply chains to weather any disruptions due to geopolitical risks and protectionist tariffs and become competitive, said Harsha Vardhan Agarwal, president of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (Ficci).

In an interview with ET, he said that the tariffs announced by US president-elect Donald Trump may have a positive effect on Indian industries but issues like tariffs are "beyond our control".

Agarwal also said that the consumption growth slowdown that India is witnessing at present is likely to reverse in the coming quarters.

Private final consumption expenditure moderated to 6% in the second quarter of FY25 from 7.4% in the trailing quarter amid concerns around slow urban demand, high food inflation and muted real wage growth.

Highlighting that a slowdown in consumption is led by food infla-



We have to increase our competitiveness. But at the same time, I think we need to wait and watch as to what Trump administration does
HARSHA VARDHAN AGARWAL
President, Ficci

tion because Indians spend a higher share of their earnings on food and grocery, he said: "On an average, 75% of the spend in India goes into food and grocery, balance 25% is discretionary. Comparably in co-

untries like the US and China, the grocery and food spend is only around 40% of total expenditure". Retail inflation was 5.5% in November and food inflation was 9.04%. "There are some challenges of inflation, particularly vegetables and oils... Going forward, we see consumption picking up with improvements visible from November itself," Agarwal said.

TARIFF WAR ADVANTAGE

On the impact of Trump's plan to impose tariffs, Agarwal said: "We are also hopeful that maybe some of the measures, because he is not only talking about tariffs for China... might have a positive effect for industries in India as well".

However, the Ficci president cautioned that measures like tariffs are beyond the control of the industry, so resilient supply chains need to be established. "We have to increase our competitiveness. But at the same time, I think we need to wait and watch as to what Trump administration does."

MANUFACTURING, CAPEX

Commenting on the impact of production-linked incentives (PLIs), Agarwal said, "Some sectors like electronics and mobile phones have done quite well. The government is considering extending PLIs in a few more strategic areas. We need to wait and see which are they".

India has rolled out ₹1.97 lakh crore worth of PLI schemes for 14 sectors, including white goods, electronics, pharmaceuticals and food processing.

Spelling out his budget wish list, the Ficci president said: "Government has been very consistent in their budget policies over the years. As an industry, we have also given our recommendations".

According to Agarwal, the industry is expecting a 15% higher spend on capital expenditure to develop crucial infrastructure. "Apart from that, we have recommended a few things on ease of doing business, tax reforms and simplification of tax deducted at source rates," he said.

Agri dept's licence fee hike hits retailers

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T'puram: In a move that has raised eyebrows, the agriculture department announced a staggering increase in licence fees for fertiliser retail sales, wholesale, and mixing licences, following a directive from the state govt to hike service charges across all departments. The fee hike, which ranges from 500% to an astonishing 2,500%, is expected to significantly impact both retailers and consumers.

Under the new regulations, the fee for a fresh licence for retail sales of fertilisers skyrocketed from Rs 38 to Rs 1,000, marking a jaw-dropping increase of 2,531%. Similarly,

the renewal fee for retail licences was raised from Rs 38 to Rs 500, an increase of 1,215%. The wholesale sector is not spared either, with fresh licences now costing Rs 10,000, up from Rs 450, a 2,122% hike. Renewals for wholesale licences also saw a substantial increase, rising from Rs 450 to Rs 5,000 — a

jump of 1,011.11%. Additional increases have been applied to fertilizer mixing licences, late fees, and amendments to existing licences.

This decision follows a cabinet meeting on July 11 where the govt sought to bolster its finances amid ongoing economic challenges. The finance department granted indi-

vidual departments unprecedented authority to adjust fees and service charges, a move that critics argue violates established governance protocols. Rule 37(5) of the rules of business stipulates that only the finance department can approve changes to taxes, duties, and fees, raising questions about the legality of the current fee hikes.

The agriculture department's fee increases are part of a broader trend, with the police department also implementing steep hikes ranging from 100% to 400% for its services earlier in Sept.

Govt defends the fee hikes as a necessary step to improve state finances and enhance infrastructure development. "We must explore all avenues

for revenue generation to ensure economic stability, especially under the present circumstances," a finance department official said. However, they also agree with the arguments that potential repercussions of these increases would reflect on food prices and farmers' livelihoods.

The govt's decision to hike fees comes in the wake of a significant revenue mobilisation effort in the 2023-24 budget, which anticipated an additional Rs 4,500cr through tax and permit fee increases. However, the projected additional resource mobilisation for the current fiscal year has dropped to just Rs 1,067cr, indicating that the govt is again turning to fee hikes as a solution to its financial woes.



Shah: Govt has taken concrete steps to boost organic farming

'Forest produce of tribals will be sold at reasonable price'

Raipur, Dec. 16: Union home minister Amit Shah on Monday said the Narendra Modi government has taken concrete steps to promote organic farming, as organic products are not only beneficial for health but also favourable for the environment and fertility of land. He was speaking at the signing of memorandums of understanding (MoU) between National Cooperatives Organic Ltd (NCOL), the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and Chhattisgarh government here.

The Chhattisgarh government signed an MoU with NDDB for development of the dairy sector, while Chhattisgarh state minor forest produce cooperative federation Limited inked an agreement with NCOL for the growth of minor forest produce sector.

The entire world has understood that due to the increasing use of chemical fertilisers in farming, diseases like cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and thyroid are spreading rapidly. Mr Shah said.

"The Union government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken concrete steps towards promoting organic farming. Organic farming is not only benefi-



Union home minister Amit Shah interacts with residents of Naxal-affected villages of Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Monday.

cial for health, but also good for the environment and fertility of land," he said.

"There were two basic problems with organic products. One was trust deficit, as several products were available in the market claiming to be organic and there was no certification system. The other problem was that farmers were not getting better returns for their produce as people had doubts over the quality of product. So we set up National Cooperative Organic Limited to support organic farming," he said.

Now, two leading cooperative brands, namely the "Bharat" brand of NCOL

can supply organic products with credibility, he said.

"In the next four years, after soil testing and organic food testing in every district, certified organic grains will be introduced in Indian markets. Currently, 16 organic products are available online. Whenever you buy a product from the "Bharat" or "Amul" brand, you can be assured it is tested and certified. This MoU has been signed to uplift Adivasi farmers," the minister asserted.

Forest produce of the tribal community, which was earlier sold at a very low price, will now be sold at a reasonable price through certification, Mr Shah said. — PTI

Exports contract deficit widens to

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: After recording double-digit growth in October, India's exports in November contracted by 4.85 per cent year-on-year to USD 32.11 billion, while the trade deficit widened to an all-time high of USD 37.84 billion due to record surge in gold imports.

According to the commerce ministry data, imports rose by 27 per cent year-on-year to a record USD 69.95 billion in November due to high inbound shipments of vegetable oil, fertiliser, and silver. Gold imports during the month soared to an all-time high of USD 14.8 billion as against USD 3.5 billion in November 2023.

Cumulatively, during April-November this fiscal, exports increased by 2.17 per cent to USD 284.31 billion and imports by 8.35 per cent to USD 486.73 billion.

Trade deficit, the difference between imports and exports, during April-November widened to USD 202.42 billion from USD 170.98 billion during April-November 2023.

Briefing on the data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said that fluctuations in oil prices are impacting the exports. Petroleum product shipments have declined by about 50 per cent to USD 3.71 billion last month. During the first 8 months of this fiscal also, these exports contracted by 19 per cent year-on-

year to USD 44.6 billion. Barthwal added that non-oil exports are still recording healthy growth, and this along with services sector would help the country cross USD 800 billion of total exports by end of this fiscal.

On high trade deficit and imports, the Secretary said one should not be concerned about this as the country is growing. "Therefore, our demand for imports will be higher. As long as our exports and foreign direct investments are growing, it will finance our imports," he said.

He also said that the ministry is focusing on 20 countries and six services and manufacturing sectors including IT/ITeS to further boost the shipments. In these 20 nations, there are huge potential to increase exports and to tap into that, the ministry is in touch with the Indian missions abroad.

The ministry is calling a meeting with these missions in January next year and "we will be devising a strategy on how to improve exports in the 20 countries", he said.

As per estimates, services export in November 2024 increased to USD 35.67 billion as compared to USD 28.11 billion in November 2023. These exports reached an all-time high of USD 34.31 billion in October, registering an increase of 22.3 per cent year-on-year. — PTI

Godrej Agrovet crop protection biz unit chalks out 4-pronged strategy to tackle climate change

Subramani Ra Mancombu
Chennai

Godrej Agrovet's crop protection business unit has chalked out a four-pronged strategy that will help the company innovate constantly and meet the needs of climate change and global warming, the unit's Chief Executive Officer NK Rajavelu has said.

The first strategy would be to innovate constantly to bring in new products through collaboration. The second is to bring in biological solutions, such as pheromones. The third strategy is that it is looking at adjacencies, including drones, and the fourth is digital intervention, Rajavelu told *business-line* in an online interaction.

"I think in the crop protection business we have been doing well for the last two years because of 3-4 things. One is obviously the growth in our cotton herbicides. We



Innovation is going to be the constant thing every year. We promised ourselves and the farming community that we will launch one new product every year

NK RAJAVELU

CEO, Godrej Agrovet Crop Protection Biz



are now a leading company in the cotton herbicides," he said.

The company has introduced two products from Japan — Gracia and Rashinban — which helped it get into the chilli market. "We have our portfolio... We have grown significantly in terms of the top line as well as the bottom line," the Godrej arm's CEO said.

Godrej Agrovet's crop protection business is looking at future opportunities

and is getting into different new products.

"Innovation is going to be the constant thing that we are going to look at every year. We have promised ourselves and the farming community that we will launch one new product every year," Rajavelu said.

The company is working on collaborations for biological solutions. As part of this, last month, it began a collaboration with US-based firm Provivi, a provider of

pheromone-based crop protection solutions. The biological solutions will likely be available by 2028, he said.

NEW JAPAN MOLECULES

The company is also getting new molecules from Japan, "which is the house of new active ingredients". "I think we are on a track to continue growth both in top line and bottom line for the next few years," he said.

On its Project Sankalp, a retailer programme, Rajavelu said it had been launched pan-India, and the response was "overwhelming".

About 22,000 retailers had been enrolled in the programme, and it will help the company control its business to the last mile. It is on track to onboard 40,000 retailers. The company is in touch with a drone service firm experienced in military services and is looking to engage it in spraying pesticides and crop inputs.

Pink stem borer infests wheat crop on 10,000 acres in Malwa

Agri department experts claim insecticide use has controlled the infestation and there will be no major impact on the crop

Vishal Joshi

Vishal.joshi@htlive.com

BATHINDA: Bathinda, Mansa and Barnala districts have emerged as the worst hit by the pink stem borer in the wheat fields even as the state agriculture authorities say the infestation has been contained due to a gradual drop in temperature and use of recommended insecticides.

Information gathered from the official sources on Monday stated that the wheat crop on nearly 10,000 acres was impacted by the pest attack but most of it was revived.

Scores of farmers in the Malwa districts had to re-sow wheat on nearly 1,000 acres while the crop on more than 2,000 acres is still being treated



A team of agriculture department at Mansa's Bhaini Bagha village in Bathinda district during an inspection of pink stem borer in a wheat field.

HT PHOTO

with the use of insecticides, officials said.

There was hardly any fresh incident of pest infestation in the last 25 days, officials said.

Experts say the infestation of pink borer in wheat is not common but the main rabi crop was found infested in several areas of the Malwa belt.

Officials attribute infestation to early sown wheat that witnessed the pest attack due to

high temperatures when the crop was at the germination stage.

But the timely pest management helped in controlling the attack, say the officials.

Bathinda chief agriculture officer (CAO) Jagsir Singh said that Nathana and Rampura blocks were worst hit with the pink borer as wheat fields on about 4,000 acres were found infested with it.

"Nearly 1,500-acre area was revived due to intervention of the pesticides. Farmers in various villages had to re-sow wheat. Initial input suggests nearly 500 acres have been re-sown and more acreage may be added to it as the data collection is underway," said the official.

According to the Mansa CAO Harpreet Pal Kaur, out of 2,300 acres of area found affected by the pest attack, wheat on 1,565

acres has revived till Friday.

"Our field teams are guiding wheat growers to use the recommended insecticides. Chemical sprays on another 1,000 acres will show results in another 2-3 days and we do not apprehend any major loss of production as the pest has gone inactive due to low temperature," she added.

Kaur said the survey has revealed that the required insecticides are in ample amounts in the market.

In Barnala, farmers had to use insecticide after the infestation affected about 2,000 acres.

CAO Jagdish Singh said after November 15 there was hardly any report of fresh pest attack, and the situation is completely under control.

"Our teams are regularly sensitising farmers and the wheat growers have been advised to contact the agriculture officials for pest management. There is no need to panic, and pink stem borer pest tends to hibernate in the lower temperatures and we are not apprehending any serious threat to the rabi crop," he added.

The pest attack was also spotted at a few places in Moga, Muktsar and Fazilka.

Pesticides are poisoning the Punjab soil



AS MITTAL

Punjab's agriculture is facing a harrowing reality—its lifeblood, the soil, is being contaminated by toxic pesticide residues at alarmingly high levels



It's time to face the disturbing truth about Punjab's agriculture—and it's a nightmare. In districts like Bathinda, Mansa, and Ludhiana, up to 60 per cent of farm soil samples are infested with toxic pesticide residues—including the deadly chemicals endosulfan and carbofuran—at levels far beyond what's even remotely safe. This isn't just a warning; it's a full-blown crisis, a ticking time bomb, the result of irresponsible, reckless pesticide and fertiliser abuse running rampant in our fields.

On World Soil Day—December 5th—we're forced to confront the cold reality of a rapidly disintegrating agriculture system, while the world's been talking about "Caring for Soils: Measure, Monitor, and Manage"! The consequences of this madness are devastating. Our once fertile land is transforming into a barren wasteland, and that's only the beginning. These toxic chemicals aren't just staying in the soil. They're seeping into our food chain—contaminating every bite we take and slowly poisoning us all. But it doesn't stop there. These toxic residues are embedding themselves into our very DNA, passing down a legacy of genetic mutations to our children and grandchildren. We are breeding a future full of compromised health and genetic decay. This is a catastrophe that will echo across generations. We're not just destroying our present health; we're condemning our children to inherit the consequences of our stupidity and greed. The survival of future generations is at risk, and the clock is ticking—every moment of inaction is a moment closer to irreversible genetic damage. It's time to wake up, stop burying our heads in the sand, and confront this crisis head-on before it's too late for the survival of future generations.

The Pesticide Management Bill, 2020: India's regulatory framework for pesticides, established in 1968, is woefully outdated and incapable of addressing the modern-day challenges posed by the rampant overuse of agrochemicals. Although efforts to amend this framework have been ongoing since 2008, significant gaps remain in safeguarding farmers, consumers, and the environment. The legislation—still governed by the Insecticides Act of 1968 and the Insecticides Rules of 1971—requires comprehensive reforms to address the multifaceted risks associated with pesticide overuse. The Pesticide



**INDIA'S
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AGROCHEMICALS**

Management Bill (PMB) 2020 was introduced to replace outdated legislation, but critical concerns must be addressed. While the bill outlines pesticide registration and licensing procedures, it must protect farmers more adequately from hazardous exposure. Statistics from Pesticide Action Network (PAN) International paint a grim picture: approximately 11,000 deaths globally are attributed to accidental pesticide poisoning annually, with India accounting for a staggering 6,600 fatalities. These numbers highlight critical deficiencies in pesticide usage protocols and safety measures.

Farmers and rural communities often bear the brunt of chemical exposures, especially in agriculturally intensive regions. For instance, Punjab, which heavily depends on rice and wheat cultivation, reports alarming pesticide consumption rates. With an average usage of 77 kg/hectare, significantly above the national average of 62 kg/hectare, Punjab ranks third in India after UP and Maharashtra for pesticide consumption.

A study by the Central Soil Salinity Research Institute (CSSRI) revealed that 6.74 million hectares of land in India are affected by salinity, a condition exacerbated by the overuse of agrochemicals. Persistent pesticide application has been found to reduce microbial biomass by 30-50 per cent, compromising soil fertility and diminishing the land's ability to provide essential nutrients to crops.

A Call for Robust Regulation Pesticides—insecticides, fungicides, or herbicides—play a vital role in modern agriculture. However, their toxic nature necessitates stringent oversight throughout their lifecycle, from production to disposal. The current regulatory framework lacks provisions for periodic review of registered pesticides based on emerging toxicological data. This oversight exposes the public to significant health risks, particularly in a country where improper handling of pesticides is widespread.

Training and Awareness: A Neglected Imperative Over the past three decades, the indiscriminate use of pesticides has surged, often driven by aggressive marketing strategies that portray chemical inputs as indispensable for high crop yields.

The limited scale of training initiatives highlights the need for more current efforts. Between 1994-95 and 2021-22, the Plant Protection Department of Agriculture and Farming Welfare Ministry trained only 585,000 farmers in Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a dismal figure in a nation with over 150 million farmers. According to the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management, governments and industry stakeholders must provide comprehensive training and information to farmers and retailers. Yet, the implementation of these guidelines still needs to be more robust. Retailers often serve as farmers' sole point of contact, and in many cases, they disseminate misleading or incomplete information. Data Collection: Bridging Critical Gaps The absence of robust data collection mechanisms further undermines India's regulatory ecosystem.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) documents pesticide poisoning deaths only if they are registered as medico-legal cases, excluding countless instances of non-institutional exposure and chronic health effects. This data void impedes effective policymaking and perpetuates a lack of accountability among stakeholders.

Addressing Weak Grievance Mechanisms: One of the most glaring deficiencies in India's pesticide regulation is the lack of accessible grievance redressal systems. Farmers and agricultural workers exposed to pesticides face prohibitive costs and lengthy procedures when seeking justice. Meanwhile, state governments can impose only temporary bans on hazardous pesticides, typically lasting 60 days, exposing vulnerable communities to ongoing risks.

Personal Protective Equipment: A

Forgotten Necessity The Pesticide Management Bill 2020 neglects the safety of small-scale farmers, who often lack access to affordable, climate-appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Farm workers face heightened health risks without mandatory provisions requiring them to supply adequate protective gear, especially in hot and humid agricultural regions. Labelling and Consumer Protection India's pesticide labelling standards fall short of both domestic and international norms. Safety information is frequently crammed into illegible leaflets, leaving farmers ill-informed about risks and proper usage.

Although the Consumer Protection Act theoretically covers farmers, legal recourse against manufacturers for misleading labels or substandard products is rarely pursued. The Way Forward India can no longer afford to ignore the human and environmental toll of unsafe pesticide practices.

Establishing a robust, farmer-centric legal framework aligned with international standards is the only way forward to ensure safe and sustainable agriculture. A gradual shift towards agro-ecological farming methods that emphasise non-chemical pest management is imperative. The government must phase out hazardous pesticides and promote environmentally friendly alternatives to safeguard farmers' health and ensure consumer food safety. Addressing the gaps in the Pesticide Management Bill 2020 and adopting proactive measures, such as mandatory training and the provision of accurate information on pesticide usage and risks, are critical steps towards securing safe and healthier future generations.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonabika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanization Association. Views expressed are personal)

Coromandel Int'l Mahindra Krish-e to offer drones

Agri-solutions provider Coromandel International and Mahindra and Mahindra's farm equipment sector business vertical, Krish-e, on Tuesday announced a partnership to extend Coromandel's drone spraying services, Gromor Drive. Currently Gromor operates in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh — using RPTO-trained pilots.

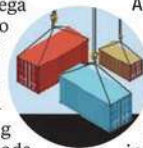
India to make a big export pitch in Jan

Mega meet to stress 6 categories bound for 20 nations

SHREYA NANDI
New Delhi, 19 December

TARGETED APPROACH

The commerce department is working on a mega meet in January to devise a concrete strategy to push exports of six key product categories, including engineering goods and electronics, to 20 "focus countries" including the United States, Australia, France, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and



■ 20 focus countries, including the US, Australia, France, China, Russia, the UK, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Indonesia
■ 60% share these 20 countries have in global imports

■ 6 focus sectors, include engineering goods and electronics; chemicals and plastics; drugs and pharmaceuticals; agriculture and allied products; and textiles.
■ 67% share these 6 sectors have in global imports

► INDIA, US NEED TO LOWER TARIFFS: GARCETTI ◄

Indonesia, two senior government officials aware of the matter said. Indian missions in these

countries have been tapped and the ambassadors have been invited.

Turn to Page 5 ►

Trump threatens to impose reciprocal tariffs on India

LALIT K JHA
Washington, December 18

US PRESIDENT-ELECT DONALD Trump has said that India charges "a lot" of tariffs, reiterating his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for what New Delhi will impose on the import of certain American products. Making these remarks on Tuesday, Trump also said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

"Reciprocal. If they tax us, we tax them the same amount. They tax us. We tax them. And they tax us. Almost in all cases, they're taxing us, and we haven't been taxing them," Trump told reporters on Monday.

Continued on Page 11

IMPORT DUTY COMPARISON

(in %)	USA			India		
MFN applied duty	Total	Agri	Non-agri	Total	Agri	Non-agri
Simple average	3.3	5.0	3.1	17	39	13.5
Trade weightage avg	2.2	4.0	2.1	12	65	9.0

ITEMS WITH HIGHEST IMPORT TARIFFS (%)

USA		INDIA	
Tobacco	350	Whiskey & wines	150
Footwear	48	Automobiles	125
Tunas	35	Coffee, tea, cane sugar	100
T-Shirts	32	Black pepper	70
Trousers	28.2	Toys	70

Source: GTRI

DONALD TRUMP,
US PRESIDENT-ELECT

If India charges us 100%, do we charge them nothing for the same?



Budget for agriculture, health, education on a decline

Our Bureau
New Delhi

The Budget allocation for agriculture, education and health, against the total Central Plan, has been on a decline. But for urban housing it is on the rise, according to data published by a parliamentary panel.

The Demand for Grants report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food Processing has shown that the share of the Department of Agriculture, and Farmers' Welfare against the total Central Plan has been reduced to 2.54 per cent in 2024-25 from 3.53 per cent in 2021-22.

Similarly, the share of the



FARMERS FIRST. The Parliamentary panel said that seasonal incentives given to farmers may also be extended to tenant farmers and farm labourers

Department of School Education and Literacy against the total Central Plan has been reduced to 1.51 per cent in 2024-25 from 1.57 per cent in 2021-22 and that of the Department of Health and Family Welfare to 1.82 per cent from 2.04 per cent.

On the other hand, the

share of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in the total Central Plan has increased to 1.71 per cent in 2024-25 from 1.56 per cent in 2021-22.

PANEL'S CONCERN

"In view of the decline in the growth rate of agriculture in

2023-24 (provisional estimates) to just 1.4 per cent, lowest in the last seven years, as against average annual growth rate of 4.18 per cent over the past four years, the continuous decline in allocation to agriculture as a percentage of total central plan may further accentuate the decline in the growth rate of agriculture," the committee said.

MSP GUARANTEE

The panel has also suggested the nomenclature of the "Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare" should be changed to "Department of Agriculture, Farmers & Farm Labourers Welfare".

Recommending the support under the PM-KISAN

scheme be doubled to ₹12,000/year, it has said that seasonal incentives given to farmers may also be extended to tenant farmers and farm labourers.

The panel has also favoured a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for crops and said: "Implementing a legally binding MSP is essential not only for safeguarding farmers' livelihoods but also for promoting rural economic growth and enhancing national food security. The benefits and advantages of the implementation of MSP as a legal guarantee far outweigh its challenges. This would stimulate economic activity in these areas, benefiting local businesses and economies."

ECTA utilisation by Indian exporters at 79%: Commerce dept

When the ECTA was signed, it was decided that the larger idea would be to use the foundation of the interim deal to resume negotiations on the deeper and more ambitious trade deal—the CECA. Since it was only an interim trade deal, several aspects of a comprehensive trade agreement, including new-age trade issues, did not make it to the ECTA.

The utilisation of the ECTA by Indian exporters stands at 79 per cent since its implementation, while the import utilisation is at 84 per cent, the commerce department said on Sunday.

In trade agreements, utilisation rate is one of the key parameters to assess how the pact is faring - whether it is being used to export or import goods.

"This landmark agreement has brought with it

increased market access for Indian exporters, expanded opportunities for MSMEs and farmers, and generated several employment avenues. It has also enabled growth in exports by 14 per cent in 2023-24, a notable boost in IT/ITeS, business & travel services, post-study work & Work Holiday visas," commerce and industry ministry Piyush Goyal said on microblogging site X on Sunday.

Sectors such as textiles, chemicals, and agriculture have witnessed substantial growth in outbound shipments from India, besides exports of new products, including gold studded with diamonds and turbojets, indicating diversification of exported products enabled by the ECTA.

"Imports of essential raw materials, such as metalliferous ores, cotton, wood, and

wood products have fuelled India's industries, contributing to the win-win nature of this partnership. Sectors such as electronics and engineering have room for growth," the commerce department statement said, adding that both countries aim to achieve Australian dollar (AUD) 100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030.

However, the commerce department data showed that in the current financial year, bilateral trade declined. During the first seven months of the current financial year, merchandise exports to Australia contracted 10 per cent year-on-year (Y-o-Y) to \$4.9 billion.

According to the data, imports also contracted nearly 14 per cent to \$8.4 billion. Total trade stood at \$13.3 billion in the April-October period against \$24 billion in FY24.

Pesticide use in farming: regulatory overhaul needed

AS Mittal

It's time to face the disturbing truth about Punjab's agriculture — and it's a nightmare. In districts like Bathinda, Mansa, and Ludhiana, up to 60 per cent of farm soil samples are infested with toxic pesticide residues — including the deadly chemicals endosulfan and carbosulfan — at levels far beyond what's even remotely safe.

Farmers and rural communities often bear the brunt of chemical exposures, especially in agriculturally intensive regions like Punjab, which heavily depends on rice and wheat cultivation. With an average usage of 77 kg/hectare, significantly above the national average of 62 kg/hectare, Punjab ranks third in India after UP and Maharashtra for pesticide consumption. These toxic chemicals are embedding themselves into our very DNA, passing down a legacy of genetic mutations to our children and grandchildren.

India's regulatory framework for pesticides, established in 1968, is woefully outdated and incapable of addressing the modern-day challenges posed by the rampant overuse of agrochemicals. Although efforts to amend this framework have been ongoing since 2008, significant gaps

remain in safeguarding farmers, consumers, and the environment. The legislation — still governed by the Insecticides Act of 1968 and the Insecticides Rules of 1971 — requires comprehensive reforms.

GRIM PICTURE

The Pesticide Management Bill (PMB) 2020 was introduced to replace outdated legislation, but critical concerns must be addressed. While the Bill outlines pesticide registration and licensing procedures, it must protect farmers more adequately from hazardous exposure. Statistics from Pesticide Action Network (PAN) International paint a grim picture: approximately 11,000 deaths globally are attributed to accidental pesticide poisoning annually, with India accounting for a staggering 6,600 fatalities.

A study by the Central Soil Salinity Research Institute (CSSRI) revealed that 6.74 million hectares of land in India are affected by salinity, a condition exacerbated by the overuse of agrochemicals. Persistent pesticide application has been found to reduce microbial biomass by 30-50 per cent.

The current regulatory framework lacks provisions for periodic review of registered pesticides based on



OF CONCERN. Farmers' health

emerging toxicological data. Over the past three decades, the indiscriminate use of pesticides has surged, often driven by aggressive marketing strategies that portray chemical inputs as indispensable for high crop yields. The limited scale of training initiatives highlights the need for more current efforts.

The National Crime Records Bureau documents pesticide poisoning deaths only if they are registered as medico-legal cases, excluding countless instances of non-institutional exposure and chronic health effects. This data void impedes effective policymaking and perpetuates a lack of accountability among stakeholders.

One of the most glaring deficiencies in India's pesticide regulation is the

lack of accessible grievance redressal systems. Farmers and agricultural workers exposed to pesticides face prohibitive costs and lengthy procedures when seeking justice. Meanwhile, State governments can impose only temporary bans on hazardous pesticides, typically lasting 60 days, exposing vulnerable communities to ongoing risks.

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India's pesticide labelling standards fall short of both domestic and international norms. Safety information is frequently crammed into illegible leaflets, leaving farmers ill-informed about risks and proper usage. Although the Consumer Protection Act theoretically covers farmers, legal recourse against manufacturers for misleading labels or substandard products is rarely pursued.

A gradual shift towards agro-ecological farming methods that emphasise non-chemical pest management is imperative.

The writer is Vice Chairman, Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board. Views are personal

Trump tariffs and the making of a trade war

Before targeting the US's two neighbours and rival China, Donald Trump should bear in mind that there will be no winners in this war

Merely weeks before his inauguration as the United States (US) President for a second term, Donald Trump announced that he would implement his campaign promise of raising tariffs immediately after assuming charge. In two posts on his social media platform Truth Social, Trump stated that he would "sign all necessary documents to charge Mexico and Canada a 25% Tariff on ALL products coming into the United States, and its ridiculous Open Borders". He added, "This Tariff will remain in effect until such time as Drugs, in particular Fentanyl, and all Illegal Aliens stop this Invasion of our Country!" Trump also accused Beijing of not taking strong enough action to stop the flow of illicit drugs into the US, stating that the US "will be charging China an additional 10% Tariff, above any additional Tariffs, on all of their many products" imported by the US.

Through these announcements, the president-elect targeted two sets of problems affecting the US he has consistently highlighted — the flow of illegal migrants and the opioid crisis.

The former issue was among the central planks of Trump's election campaign, while the latter was also given considerable space. Over the past several years, the opioid crisis emerged as a major problem for the US due to a steep rise in the number of deaths from drug overdose, according to the US Drug Enforcement Administration. Synthetic opioids, including fentanyl (illegally produced in China, contributed to the spurt in opioid deaths over the past decade.

Trump's announcement is his unique way of using unilateral measures to force targeted countries to fall in line with his agenda. But it raises two sets of questions. One, would the Trump tariffs sufficiently disrupt the exports of the three countries to the US, forcing their governments to clamp down on illegal immigration and trafficking of illicit drugs? Two, if the US acts unilaterally, as the president-elect has proposed, wouldn't the target countries retaliate, setting off a trade war?

Trade data shows that the Trump tariffs could significantly affect overall exports of Canada and Mexico to the US, as the two North American countries are overwhelmingly dependent on their neighbour for their export business. In 2023, Canada's dependence was 78%, and Mexico's was almost 80%. Interestingly, both countries have become more dependent on the US after Trump renegotiated the North Amer-

ican Free Trade Agreement in 2018, replacing it with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

Sectoral trade data provides a better view of the extent of Canada and Mexico's dependence on the US market. Several major manufacturing sectors of Canada, including transport equipment and metal fabrication, rely heavily on the US market, accounting for more than 90% of total exports. Mexico's largest manufacturing sectors are almost as dependent on the US market. In 2023, more than 93% of Mexico's garment exports and 90% of electrical and electronics exports ended up across the country's northern border. And 83% of Mexico's automobile industry exports, which have emerged as one of the largest globally, were to the US.

On the other hand, China's exports would be much less impacted by the Trump tariffs. Although the US has remained its largest export market, China's large presence in almost all regions never made it too dependent on a single country's market. The US accounted for over 21% of China's exports in the early years of the millennium, but since the 2008 economic recession, this figure stood at 17-19%. However, after the Covid pandemic, China's exports to the US declined further to below 15% of the total in 2023. This is the lowest level since 1993, the early phase of China's forays into the global economy.

Unlike the US's two neighbours,



Trade data shows that the Trump tariffs could significantly affect overall exports of Canada and Mexico to the US.

AFP

none of the major manufacturing sectors of the Chinese economy are too dependent on the world's largest economy. In fact, relatively more technologically-intensive sectors, especially electronics and other machinery producers exported only around 15% of their total exports to the US in 2023. Pharmaceutical and organic chemicals producers did similarly. On the other hand, the automobile industry, which is already being targeted by the Joe Biden administration using high tariffs, exported less than 10% to the US in 2023.

Political leaderships of the targeted countries have responded to the threat of Trump tariffs in varied ways. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum contacted the US President-elect immediately to stave off the immediate economic turmoil their countries could face if the tariffs were imposed. Sheinbaum sounded a note of warning in her response: "If there are US tariffs, Mexico would also raise tariffs". This was a clear signal that her government could take retaliatory actions against its largest trade partner. Trudeau made initial efforts to negotiate with Donald Trump, but premiers of British Columbia and Ontario have spoken of

stronger Canadian responses such as imposing retaliatory tariffs and cutting off electricity exports to some US states.

China, on the other hand, is a study in contrast. While there has been no official response thus far on the measures it could adopt to counter Trump tariffs, a few voices from the policy community have provided some indications of China's likely response. For instance, a former head of the People's Bank of China argued that Beijing may be forced to retaliate to "give the public an account" of what is being done in response.

Trump seems to have made it a habit to threaten the imposition of higher tariffs on countries he feels are acting against his plans of "making America great again". However, reactions from the three countries suggest that the US's unilateral actions will be retaliated against, making trade war a distinct possibility.

Before he signs the executive orders authorising tariff hikes, Trump will do well to recognise that in a trade war, there are no winners.

Biswajit Dhar is distinguished professor, Council for Social Development. The views expressed are personal



Biswajit Dhar

Revolutionizing Agriculture: How CFCL and TERI Are Pioneering Sustainable Solutions

In a groundbreaking partnership, Chambal Fertilisers and Chemicals Limited (CFCL) and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) have joined forces to establish the "CFCL-TERI Centre of Excellence for Advanced and Sustainable Agriculture Solutions." This initiative aims to revolutionize Indian agriculture by promoting eco-friendly, biogenic solutions that address key challenges such as soil health degradation, inefficient nutrient use, and the negative impact of excessive synthetic inputs on the environment and human health. With a grant-in-aid spanning five years, this partnership highlights a shared commitment to advancing sustainable agricultural practices through research and innovation.



*Interview with **Mr. Abhay Baijal**, Managing Director, Chambal Fertilisers & Chemicals Ltd.*

What inspired CFCL to partner with TERI for this Centre of Excellence?

At CFCL, we have always believed in promoting sustainable agricultural practices. The success of our products like Uttam Superphos and Uttam Pranaam Bio-Phosphorous reinforced the importance of bio-based solutions in improving agricultural outcomes. By partnering with TERI, a pioneer in biogenic innovations, we aim to address critical challenges in Indian agriculture, such as stagnating productivity and environmental impact. This collaboration is an opportunity to leverage TERI's research expertise alongside our market presence to bring cutting-edge solutions to farmers.

What role will this Centre of Excellence play in transforming agricul-

ture in India?

The Centre will focus on developing innovative biogenic products like bio-fertilizers, bio-stimulants, and biopesticides. These solutions will complement traditional chemical fertilizers, improving nutrient use efficiency, reducing reliance on synthetic inputs, and promoting soil and environmental health. By addressing issues such as crop resistance to chemicals and the negative environmental impact of synthetic inputs, the Centre aligns with the Government of India's initiatives like PM PRANAAM and BioE3, which emphasize sustainable agriculture.

Can you elaborate on the research approach and key focus areas?

TERI will undertake end-to-end research supported by CFCL's grant-in-aid. The focus will be on developing nano-biotechnology-based fertilizers and biological control agents that are effective yet environmentally safe. Additionally, biannual reviews will ensure our research remains aligned with the evolving needs of farmers and market demands. The ultimate goal is to deliver solutions that not only enhance crop productivity but also provide a favourable benefit-to-cost ratio for farmers.

How does this partnership align with CFCL's long-term vision?

This initiative is a natural extension of our mission to support sustainable agriculture and food security in India. For over two decades, CFCL has been a key contributor to India's agricultural growth through our state-of-the-art fertilizer plants and the 'Uttam' brand. The partnership with TERI allows us to expand our portfolio with bio-based solutions that address emerging challenges like climate resilience and environmental impact. It strengthens our long-term commitment to building a future where agriculture thrives sustainably.



What challenges do you foresee in implementing these solutions at scale?

Scaling biogenic solutions comes with its own set of challenges, particularly in creating awareness among farmers and ensuring widespread adoption. However, with TERI's research capabilities and CFCL's extensive distribution network across 14 states, we are confident about overcoming these hurdles. Farmer education and field demonstrations will play a crucial role in driving acceptance of these new technologies.

How will this partnership impact farmers and the broader agricultural community?

Farmers stand to benefit significantly from this initiative. Our solutions aim to enhance soil health, improve crop yields, and reduce dependency on costly synthetic inputs. Moreover, by mitigating the environmental impact of agricultural practices, we are contributing to a more sustainable ecosystem. This partnership has the potential to transform farming practices, ensuring long-term benefits for farmers and society as a whole.

The CFCL-TERI Centre of Excellence represents a significant step forward in addressing India's agricultural challenges through innovation and collaboration. By focusing on sustainable, biogenic solutions, the partnership aims to enhance soil and crop health, improve productivity, and reduce environmental impact. This initiative not only aligns with national policies promoting eco-friendly agriculture but also demonstrates how industry-academia partnerships can drive meaningful change.

With CFCL's market expertise and TERI's research capabilities, the Centre is well-positioned to deliver impactful solutions that benefit farmers, strengthen food security, and promote a healthier environment. As this collaboration unfolds, it promises to set a benchmark for sustainable agriculture practices in India and beyond.



Scientists, farmers stress on role of biopesticides in farming

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Indian Council of Agricultural Research-National Bureau of Agricultural Insect Resources (ICAR-NBAIR), Bengaluru, celebrated Kisan Diwas on Monday, with the participation of 100 farmers, 50 each from Kolar and Hassan Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs).

NS Govindaraju, controller, Human Space Flight Centre, ISRO, Bengaluru, who inaugurated the event at ICAR-NBAIR in Hebbal, highlighted the role of bio-control technologies in managing insect pests and diseases effectively and sustainably.

He also distributed bio-control agents, pheromone traps with lures and other essential inputs, along with battery-operated sprayers, to the 100 farmers from Kolar and Hassan.

In a technical session, senior scientists at ICAR-NBAIR Kesavan Subaharan and Sunil Joshi, along with other scientists of the bureau, educated farmers on the use of bio-control agents, slow-release pheromone formulations and bio-pesticides for eco-friendly pest management.

B S Gotyal, senior scientist, conducted a workshop on the theme of 'Swachh Bharat: Bio-control Agents'. He elaborated how maintaining cleanliness and using bio-control agents align with sustainable agricultural practices.

Dhanuka Agritech hosts Farmers' Day programme to honour farmers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

To honour farmers of the country on the occasion of Kisan Diwas, Dhanuka Agritech Limited successfully hosted a Farmers' Day program at the Dhanuka Agricultural Research and Technology Centre (DART) at Palwal.

The event aimed to provide insights into modern farming techniques to facilitate knowledge sharing and to discuss the future of Indian agriculture with leading scientists.

The event showcased Dhanuka's unwavering and continuous commitment to empowering farmers and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. It



included demonstrations and training sessions focused specifically on Rabi crops such as wheat, vegetables, and mustard. Farmers had the unique opportunity to learn advanced techniques and engage with experts in the agriculture field.

Speaking on the occasion, Vipul Goyal, Minister for Revenue & Disaster Management, Urban Local Bodies & Civil Aviation,

Cabinet Minister, Haryana inaugurated the program. The Guest of Honour Dr. P.K. Singh, Agriculture

Commissioner, Deptt. Of Agri & Farmers' Welfare, Govt. of India was elated to see the huge gathering of farmers and their willingness to learn new techniques. Their presence highlighted the significance of initiatives like these in supporting the agricultural community by making farmers aware of new and advanced farming practices.

This program also encouraged practical solutions that contribute to the growth and sustainability in agriculture, ultimately benefiting farmers and the broader farming ecosystem.

Shipment costs of oil, LNG, coal, fertilisers and smartphones to surge

A weak rupee may jack up key import bills



**ARUNIMA BHARDWAJ,
JATIN GROVER & SANDIP DAS**
New Delhi, December 26

IF THE RUPEE'S average exchange value stays around the current level for over a year, India's aggregate import bill could rise by \$15 billion, ceteris paribus. However, in the near term, low oil prices will largely offset the rupee impact on the cost of energy imports.

A weak currency will inflate the import prices of two key agricultural commodities—edible oil and pulses. A spike in the cost of imported fertilisers such as urea and DAP could have adverse fiscal implications.

Analysts said if the depreciation of

KEY NUMBERS

Imports (Apr-Nov, FY25, \$ bn)

Petroleum

123.2

% rise (y-o-y)

7.15

Electronics

63.9

10.5

Coal

-22.1

14.3

Edible oil

12.2

15.9

■ Major impact to be on India's \$100-billion worth industrial goods imports from China

■ Prices of electronic items such as smartphones will shoot up, if rupee continues to fall

■ Low oil prices may largely offset the impact on energy import costs in near term

the local currency continues unabated, it would make electronic items such as smartphones costlier, with higher impact on entry-level products. Currently, smartphones assembled in India have 80-90% of imported content.

However, the most significant effect of the rupee's fall will be on India's \$100-billion worth industrial goods imports from China. "Since both

the rupee and yuan have weakened against the US dollar, the resultant high cost could further strain trade balance," Ajay Srivastava, founder of Delhi-based trade research firm, GTRI, said.

The rupee ended at 85.26 against the dollar on Wednesday, the third straight session where it plunged to record lows.

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Trump tariff threats to open market access talks

MUKESH JAGOTA
New Delhi, December 18

AS US PRESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump on Wednesday asserted that the world's largest economy would charge taxes (import tariffs) on India on a strictly reciprocal basis, experts here said the move would force open negotiations for greater market access between the two countries.

While Trump talked of reciprocity, product-to-product parity on tariffs is not possible because items of export for both countries are not the same as imports, they pointed out. One form the US action could take is matching the tariffs that India imposes on some US products with a similar burden on some other products that India sells to the US.

Trump's comments that India imposes tariffs of 100% are also misleading, they noted. Only in some select products like automobiles and wines and spirits that the tariffs reach that level. Even the US has over 100% tariffs.

The outgoing Biden administration has imposed 100% tax on Chinese electric vehicles. India's average tariff stands at 17%, significantly

higher than the US's 3.3%, but comparable to countries like South Korea (13.4%) and China (7.5%)," according to an analysis by the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI).

While the incoming US President singles out countries for warnings on tariffs, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules do not allow for country-specific import duties. Behind the talk on tariffs the intent of the US will be to seek greater market access for products of interest to them, director general and chief executive officer of Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Ajay Sahai said. "India has to be ready for negotiations on some products of interest to the US."

The US is not a big exporter of manufactured products to India. Within manufacturing, the largest imports by India are of aircraft parts. The US's largest exports to India are crude oil, coal, natural gas and diamonds. The areas where the US might seek more openness is in agriculture products.

"The US is the world's largest agricultural products exporter. Barring rice it has surplus which it might want to sell to India like wheat,

TAX & TREATIES

Highest import tariffs across major countries



■ India and the US had agreed in June 2023 to terminate six outstanding disputes at the World Trade Organization

■ India removed retaliatory tariffs on chickpeas, lentils, almonds, walnuts, apples, boric acids and diagnostic reagents imported from the US



maize, groundnuts, soya, poultry and some other products," trade expert, acting president and distinguished professor, Council for Social Development, Biswajit Dhar said. He said there is speculation that the US might increase its crude oil production which it might be keen to sell to India. Crude oil is already the biggest item of import from the US. Last financial year, it stood at \$5 billion, down from \$10 billion in 2022-23.

Concessions in agriculture could hit at the very base of India's agriculture self-sufficiency as the US gives very high subsidies to capture export markets, Dhar said.

Retaliation on tariffs by the US could come in areas of manufacturing like electric vehicles, semiconductors where it is trying to build local capacity, Sahai said.

In the past three years, smartphones manufactured in India by

Apple have emerged as one of the biggest exports to the US. Experts do not expect duties there as the phone assembly is not a focus area of the US administration to revitalise manufacturing.

"Even though Trump's claims about Indian tariffs may be overstated, India can seize this moment to strategically review its tariff structure. A targeted reduction in tariffs could be advantageous for

India, aligning with its goal of boosting low-cost, value-added manufacturing and trade," GTRI's founder Ajay Srivastava said. "With 8.9% of tariff revenue generated by fewer than 10% of tariff lines, and 60% of lines contributing under 3% to revenue, India could lower its average tariff to around 10% without major revenue losses," he added.

If the Trump administration gets aggressive on tariffs, India has an option to retaliate as it did earlier in 2018, Srivastava said.

In 2018, when the US imposed tariffs on Indian steel and aluminium, India retaliated by increasing tariffs on 29 specific American products. This well-calibrated response ensured that India collected equivalent revenue from US imports. This dispute that was fought in WTO also was laid to rest along with six others after bilateral consultations in 2023.

"At this point we need to be aware of the threat Trump's moves can pose to the US and prepare ourselves to counter it. Given the relations between the two leaders (Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi), there is a possibility of better engagement," Dhar added.

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