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Banana variety's origin traced to Western Ghats

K. Raju

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:Hill banana grown inWestern Ghats in Theni district.

THENI: The Western Ghats is home to many endangered species of flora. Continuous research in Megamalai and forest surrounding Mangaladevi Kannagi Temple in Theni district has proved that southern parts of Western Ghats is the origin for ‘matti' bananas (Musa Accuminata), a variety predominantly grown only in Kanyakumari district in the State.

Researchers believe that this cultivable variety could have been evolved from continuous domestication of the ‘wild matti' present in the southern Western Ghats, said V. Ganesan, District Forest Officer.

Hill banana is a popular fruit in the country, known for its nutritional value. The origin of this species had been traced to the Indo-Malayan belt. Cultivatable banana evolved from two wild species — ‘ Musa acuminata' and ‘ Musa Balbisiana.' Though various varieties such as ‘Poovan,' ‘Rasthali,' red banana, Hill banana, Nendran, Monthan, dwarf Cavendish, Ney poovan and ‘matti' are famous in various part of the State, knowledge about wild species was very limited, Mr. Ganesan said.

A related genus of ‘kalvazhai' (Ensete Superbum), known to occur on Western Ghats, was found in Mangaladevi Kannagi Temple forest area recently.

Plant exploration and expeditions conducted by the forest officer in the rainforests abutting private estates in Megamalai, one of the biodiversity hotspots in Western Ghats, resulted in discovery of the wild banana, popularly known as ‘Channa vazhai.' After in-depth study of morphological characters of leaves, pseudo stem, flowers and fruits, the variety resembled to that of cultivated ones.

Similar study conducted on various parts of Western Ghats between Anamalai and Kanyakumari in the past decade confirmed the origin of ‘Matti' variety of the wild banana, Mr. Ganesan said.

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Green technology to tackle water pollution

Sarabjit Pandher

CHANDIGARH: Union Minister for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh has launched a “bioremediation technology” project to curb pollution caused by sewerage and industrial effluents in the Buddah Nallah of Ludhiana in Punjab.

The project is estimated to cost Rs. 16 crore in the initial phase and it will be borne by The National River Conservation Directorate of the Union government. It is expected to take one year for completion.

The project will provide relief to thousands living along the Sutlej river and canals off the Harike barrage in Punjab and Rajasthan. Water pollution has caused severe disorders among them.

Flowing parallel to the Sutlej, the 31-km-long Buddah Nallah, of which about 14 km falls in Ludhiana, has, for decades, been polluted by industrial effluents, sewage water, solid waste from dairies, leather and electroplating industries and dumping of garbage. It merges with the Sutlej near Moga, from where the polluted water is carried downstream.

In September last, on the invitation of Ludhiana MP Manish Tiwari, Mr Ramesh travelled along the Nallah to make an assessment of the pollution levels.

Fatal disorders

In March, The Hindu highlighted the plight of at least 40 villages of Ferozepur district, where children needed more wheelchairs than toys, as they are succumbing to disorders caused by high levels of toxicity in the Sutlez water that had seeped into the aquifers.

Talking to presspersons after laying the foundation for the project near Haibowal on Saturday, Mr. Ramesh expressed concern over the environmental degradation in Ludhiana district. “Ludhiana is among the richest districts of the country but it is not as clean as it should be.” He sought more attention to overall cleanliness of the city and its surrounding areas.

Detailing about the project, the Minister said temporary barricades, ‘Green bridges', fortified with microbial consortia would be erected at regular intervals depending upon the flow and quantum of water in the Nallah. There would be reduction in ‘biochemical oxygen demand' (BOD) and ‘chemical oxidation demand' (COD) levels in the water passing through the green bridges.

Through this completely green technology, the microbial consortia would chew away the organic load and industrial pollutants. The benefit of this technology would be visible within three months, Mr. Ramesh said, adding the micro-organisms deployed in this technology were harmless and indigenously found in nature. No genetically modified organisms would be used in the project, which would run on an environmentally benign process that had no harmful impact on the ecosystem and on human or animal health.

The project would be closely monitored not only by the Ministry but also by experts, public representatives and the media.

He hoped that the Punjab government would implement other projects too which were proposed by Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal when they met him in New Delhi recently.

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Severe power cut affecting farming operations: Sangam

Staff Reporter

Members of association to stage demonstration on April 27

Government urged to accord more importance to agriculture sector

Apply uniform load shedding schedule for all sectors

ERODE: The Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam has condemned the State Government for its failure to ensure adequate supply of power to the farming community. Most parts in the State were experiencing disruptions in power supply for 3 to 5 hours every day. The government had announced that the load shedding in all parts of the State except Chennai would be for two hours. But the duration of the announced and unannounced power cuts ranges from two to five hours every day. In the rural areas, the situation grew worse and people were experience power cuts for more than six hours a day, members of the association alleged.

This had severely affected the farming operations in the State. Farmers were finding it very difficult to water their crops due to the frequent disruptions in power supply.

But the government, instead of helping the agriculture sector, had ensured uninterrupted power to the industrial units of the multinational companies in Chennai and its suburbs.

Describing this as unfair, the association members urged the government to stop its discriminatory practices in the supply of power to the farming community.

The association urged the government to give more importance for the agriculture sector, which provide employment to thousands of people in the State. If the farming operations were hit, it would affect the food production in the State. The government should realise the seriousness of the situation and ensure uninterrupted three-phase supply of quality power to the farmers at least during the day time.If there is a power shortage, then the government should apply a uniform load shedding schedule for all the sectors including the agriculture, members stressed.

Members of the association also decided to stage a massive demonstration in front of the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation office in EVN Road here on April 27 in support of their demands.

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Inflation hurting the growth process

Continuing uncertainty about energy and commodity prices may vitiate the investment climate

— FILE PHOTOS

MAJOR CHALLENGE: A vendor waits for the customers at a wholesale vegetable market in Hyderabad. < inflation. domestic to risks upside heightened has which prices commodity global in rise sharp a been There shop. at displayed Pulses>

Inflation is a subject for discussion in the last several months. Even though taming rising inflation and inflationary pressures are concerns of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), inadequate fiscal measures would derail the goals of the central bank. It is for sure that the forthcoming Annual Policy 2011-12, which would be announced by the RBI in the first week of May, would seriously discuss the issue of inflation.

Demand-side pressures

The issue with inflation today is that it is going to hurt the growth momentum. The first time the central bank admitted that inflation is affecting the growth process was in its mid-quarter review of the policy on March 17, 2011, when it had stated “The underlying inflationary pressures have accentuated, even as risks to growth are emerging.” Rising global commodity prices, particularly oil, is a major contributor to these developments.

As domestic fuel prices are yet to adjust fully to global prices, risks to inflation remain clearly on the upside, reinforced by the persistence of demand-side pressures as reflected in non-food manufacturing inflation.

This was in continuation to the RBI's views in its third quarter review on January 25, 2011. In its guidance RBI Governor D. Subbarao stated: Current growth and inflation trends clearly warrant that we persist with the anti-inflationary monetary stance. Looking beyond 2010-11, the Reserve Bank had, however, expected that the domestic growth momentum to stabilise and inflation is expected to moderate from the first quarter of 2011-12, while admitting that “several upside risks are already visible.”

In January-end itself, the RBI knew that inflation is clearly the dominant concern. It also stated that “rate itself remains unacceptably high”. There were signs of food and fuel price increases spilling over into generalised inflation. There has been a sharp rise in global commodity prices which has heightened upside risks to domestic inflation.

But it was hopeful on growth rate. Again, in January-end, the RBI pointed out that “growth has moved close to its pre-crisis trajectory even in the face of an uncertain global recovery and the uncertainty with regard to global recovery has reduced.” It found a sound reasoning: The 8.9 per cent gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the first-half of 2010-11 suggests that the economy is operating close to its trend growth rate, powered mainly by domestic factors. The kharif harvest has been good and rabi prospects look promising. Good agricultural growth has boosted rural demand. The export performance in recent months has been encouraging.”

However, after a slight moderation in January, headline wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation reversed in February 2011 accompanied by a sharp increase in non-food manufactured products inflation. In its Third Quarter Review, the RBI had projected year-on-year WPI inflation for March 2011 at 7 per cent. However, further upside risks have stemmed from high international crude prices, their impact on freely priced petroleum products and the increase in administered coal prices and pick-up in non-food manufactured product prices. In its mid-quarter review on March 17, the RBI revised the March WPI inflation higher at around 8 per cent.

It was a fact that headline inflation has remained above 8 per cent since February 2010. Overall inflation in March stood at 8.98 per cent, much above the Reserve Bank's projection of 8 per cent. Food inflation remained in double digits for greater part of last fiscal. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh repeatedly admitted that inflation, especially of food items, is a matter of concern for the government. In March, the central bank expected that it would be able to rein in demand-side inflationary pressures while minimising risks to growth and manage inflationary expectations and contain the spill-over of food and commodity prices into more generalised inflation.

Earlier, the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) estimated the GDP growth at 8.6 per cent for 2010-11. While the central bank agreed to this projection in its third quarter review, it warned that continuing uncertainty about energy and commodity prices might vitiate the investment climate, posing a threat to the current growth trajectory. In particular, the weak performance of capital goods in the index of industrial production (IIP) suggested that investment momentum might be slowing down.

GDP forecast

Significantly, prior to the policy announcement of the RBI, a report on India by Goldman Sachs, a leading global investment bank, reduced the GDP growth forecast for 2011-12 to 7.8 per cent from 8.7 per cent due to the impact of higher rates, and a weaker capital expenditure cycle.

It has also raised the inflation forecast for 2011-12 to 7.5 per cent from 6.7 per cent due to the recent large upside surprise in core prices.

It stated that inflation was broad-based with a majority of inflation categories showing increases greater than 10 per cent year-on-year. It also expects the RBI to hike policy rates by another 125 basis points in 2011, significantly higher than market expectations. The investment bank's argument is that real interest rates have actually fallen by about 100 basis points since November 2010, as inflation expectations have risen by 150 basis points, but the repo rate has increased by only 50 basis points.

“Negative real rates, a higher-than-budgeted fiscal deficit, and the need to contain second round effects of the food and energy shocks will keep the central bank in a tightening mode.”

In a recent meeting (April 5) with industrialists RBI Deputy Governor Subir Gokarn observed that after a relatively long phase of benign, growth-friendly macroeconomic conditions, things have begun to look somewhat hostile on the macroeconomic front. The most significant manifestation of this is the acceleration of inflation, a trend that was visible even before the impact of the financial crisis was felt in late 2008, but which very quickly and strongly re-emerged as the economy began to recover in the second-half of 2009-10. Despite significant actions on policy rates and liquidity by the Reserve Bank, inflation remains high, giving rise to some very fundamental questions: is this high rate of inflation, previously believed to be unacceptable, now the new normal? Is it an unavoidable price to pay for sustaining the current growth trend? Or, will it actually work to undermine the sustainability of the current trend?

Vicious circle

Acceptance of a higher rate of inflation as the new normal, an inevitable consequence of rapid growth, will raise risks of accelerating inflation. The challenge for policy-makers is to prevent supply-side inflationary pressures from spilling over into more generalised inflation, both by managing expectations and by reining in demand. This needs to be done with minimal disruption to growth, particularly investment activity. The challenge for the government is to bring down the fiscal deficit, particularly on the revenue account. This needs to be done while ensuring both resource allocation and effective implementation of programmes dealing with critical supply constraints in food and elsewhere. Significantly, both sets of challenges have to be met amidst an uncertain global environment, both generally and with respect to oil prices.

Unlike Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who believes in achieving a high growth rate even at the cost of rising prices, Mr. Gokarn is having a different view: “The issue is not so much one of higher inflation for faster growth in the present. It is about the risks that higher inflation now poses for faster growth in the future. In other words, sustainability of growth over the long-term does require controlling inflation”.OOMMEN A. NINAN

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Rs. 5.39-crore crop loss in Pathanamthitta

Staff Reporter

Financial relief for farmers announced

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679 hectares of paddy crop lostHarvesters to be provided to farmers

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PATHANAMTHITTA: The crop loss in the recent wind and summer rain in Pathanamthitta district has been estimated at Rs.5.39 crore, said District Collector S. Raveendran.

Addressing a meeting at the Collectorate Conference Hall on Saturday, the Collector said paddy crop in an extent of 679 hectares have been lost in the natural calamity.

As per an official assessment, an estimated 8,637 rubber trees and 35,320 plantain trees have been lost, besides extensive damage to tapioca, coconut trees, vegetables and various other agriculture crops.

The Collector said steps have been taken to provide adequate number of combine harvesters from the neighbouring State of Tamil Nadu for paddy harvesting in the Upper Kuttanad villages of Peringara, Niranom, Kadapra, Kuttoor and Niranom.

He said Additional District Magistrate M.K. Kaladharan, V.K. Raju, Principal Agriculture Officer and K.M. Koshy, Deputy Director of Agriculture, have been directed to make necessary arrangements to address the problems for paddy harvest in the Upper Kuttanad region.

District Panchayat president Babu George said the panchayat would provide financial relief of Rs. 20 lakh to farmers who have lost their paddy crop in the summer rain in the Upper Kuttanad area.

The relief amount would be disbursed among the affected farmers after the district panchayat received clearance from the Election Commission, he added.

Mathew T. Thomas, MLA, P. Vijayamma, district panchayat vice-president, S. Haridas, member, Eapen Kurien, Pulikeezhu block panchayat president and the Upper Kuttanad Nelkarshaka Samiti president Sam Eapen were among those who attended the meeting.

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Prevent sale of artificially ripened fruits

TIRUCHI: The Federation of Consumer and Service Organisations has appealed to the Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection to take steps to prevent the sale of artificially ripened fruits in the markets in Tiruchi. In a representation to the Secretary of the department, M.Sekaran, president of the federation, said the fruits ripened using calcium carbide were sold by some traders.

He urged the department to take stringent action against the traders selling such fruits.

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Flower show organisers worried over rain

D.Radhakrishnan

Udhagamandalam: With the summer tourist season in this hill station about to enter its peak period and less than a month to go for its highlight, the Annual Floral Carnival, worries of a varied kind have become the order of the day.

The organisers of the floral carnival, mainly officials of the Horticulture Department, who have been looking forward to a wetting to help the flowers bloom, are now keeping their fingers crossed praying for a respite from the current wet spell.

Expressing the fear that the continuous heavy rain would affect the flower beds and the lawns, they said that the weather would also impede the arrangements for the show and discourage tourists from visiting the garden. A break would be most welcome and if steps were not initiated now to maintain the lawn, it would not wear a green carpet look on the days of the show, they added.

Meanwhile, regular visitors and citizens said that they were worried over the new features in the form of stone structures of animals being introduced in the garden. While appreciating the Horticulture Department for evolving schemes to develop gardens and parks, they opined that in popular tourist attractions such as the Government Botanical Garden, periodical value addition must be done. However, it should be ensured that such improvements do not have a jarring effect. Pointing out that its popularity lies in its natural beauty and unique features, they apprehended that the installation of structures of animals such as monkeys in prominent places would in course of time reduce the importance of the facility as a botanical garden and come to be referred to as a ‘Zoological Park'. A police source said that there was an acute shortage of local officers and men who were familiar with ground conditions.

hindustantimes

Mon,25 Apr 2011

Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather		Tomorrow's Forecast	
Partly Cloudy	**Monday, Apr 25** Max Min 33.7° | 23.5°	Rainy	**Tuesday, Apr 26** Max Min 32° | 24°
Rain: 2.0 mm in 24hrs	Sunrise: 5:51		
Humidity: 75%	Sunset: 18:22		
Wind: Normal	Barometer: 1006.0		

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Apr 27	**Apr 28**	**Apr 29**	**Apr 30**	**May 1**
33° | 26°	31° | 26°	32° | 26°	34° | 26°	34° | 26°
Rainy	Rainy	Rainy	Rainy	Rainy

THE ECONOMIC TIMES
Mon, Apr 25, 2011 | Updated 10.09AM IST

25 Apr, 2011, 03.58AM IST, Jayashree Bhosale,ET Bureau

Gur prices may stay firm in coming months

Prices firm up during end of season

The unorganised gur production industry in the country has witnessed a mixed price situation this year. As expected, the season started with low prices but they firmed up somewhat towards the end. Although this is an year of bumper sugar cane production, everyone involved with jaggery production have made reasonable profits. As the production season comes to an end in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh and gets over in Andhra Pradesh in another month, the industry has good hopes about the upcoming season too.

High labour costs hurt jaggery units

In the previous year, when sugar prices were ruling above Rs 40/kg, gur fetched historic high prices of Rs 30/kg to Rs 40/kg. The 2010-11 gur production season started with estimates of a bumper cane production, curtailing expectations of good prices. Gur prices were in the range of Rs 26-27/kg in Diwali and a downward trend started after Diwali and prices declined to Rs 18/kg. Jaggery prices have fallen by about 30% this year. The prices of top-quality jaggery were lower by about Rs 10/kg while the prices of medium-quality jaggery have dropped by Rs 5/kg from the previous year.

Production higher by 2 lakh lumps

The all-India production this year is higher by about two lakh lumps till date. The arrival of jaggery 'rave' (lumps of 30 kg each) at the Kolhapur APMC was higher by one lakh units as compared to the previous year. Total supplies this year to the Kolhapur market are at 28 lakh 'rave' as against 27 lakh 'rave' in the previous year. Supplies to the Anakapalli market in Andhra Pradesh too are higher by one lakh lumps till date. Total supplies to the Anakapalli market are 31 lakh lumps (of 15-17/kg each) from 30 lakh lumps last year. As the season will last for one more month, four lakh lumps are expected to arrive in this market. Gur production in Uttar Pradesh, which is usually in excess of the state's local demand, was less this year.

Prices to firm up by Rs 1-2 next month

Average all-India wholesale prices are ruling at Rs 25/kg. It is estimated that the gur inventory with the stockists, who burnt their fingers last year by stocking high-priced gur, are 15%-20% less than the previous year's. Prices are expected to firm up by Rs 1-2/kg by next month and stay there till the next crushing season begins in October 2011.

Gur prices not likely to cross sugar prices

But no major rally is expected in the next few months because gur prices are linked to sugar prices. If gur prices become higher than sugar prices, then consumers shift to sugar. As sugar prices are ruling at around Rs 30/kg, gur prices are not expected to go higher than this price range.

25 Apr, 2011, 03.42AM IST, Ram Sahgal, Omkar Sapre & Vijay Gurav,ET Bureau

Alphonso delay forces stocking of other mangoes, imported fruits

MUMBAI/PUNE: While mango lovers await the arrival of Alphonsos, retailers are showcasing imported fruits and other mango varieties to weather a not-so-sweet start to the summer season.

Mango production this year has taken a hit due to untimely rains in October-November and the cold wave that followed. However, arrivals of the prime mango variety, Alphonso, may firm up by the month end as weather conditions improve in the Konkan region, the main area of its cultivation in India.

The shortage of Alphonsos, which has the pride of place on retailers' shelves, has prompted organised retailers such as the Future Group, HyperCity Retail and Aditya Birla Retail to promote other mango varieties, melons or exotic fruits from Thailand. Even in smaller retail fruit bazaars, such as Mumbai's Crawford market, vendors are touting mangosteen and sweet tamarind, which are cheaper than the higher grades of Alphonso.

Alphonsos have a good demand in domestic and overseas markets, and it higher grades typically cost between Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 a dozen. The Future Group's head of integrated food strategy, Damodar Mall, did not want to be quoted, citing the listing of a group company next week, but some mid-level company executives said that in view of the shortage of Alphonsos, the retail giant, for the first time in 10 years, had started promoting melons last month at its super- and hyper-marts, christened Food Bazaar and Big Bazaar.

"The going has been good since we launched the 'Melon Mela' on March 10, with sales of the fruit having jumped 50% to date from a year ago," said a salesperson at a Big Bazaar store in Mumbai.

HyperCity Retail, which has three of its nine stores in Mumbai, has focused on selling smaller Alphonsos and other mango varieties such as Pairi, Badami and Totapari, at its Mango Mela launched two weeks ago. The retailer could not extend the mango mela to its marts in the north as mangoes were in short supply. Thomas Varghese, CEO of Aditya Birla Retail, which runs 551 super-marts and nine hyper-marts in the country under the 'More' brand, agreed that Alphonsos have been slow to appear despite half of the season having elapsed.

Data from the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee Yard in New Bombay shows arrivals last month were a tenth of the 49,944 tonne in March last year. "The temperature in Maharashtra and other mango belts remained below 17 degree Celsius for an extended span. This shocked the Alphonso trees and induced forced flowering. Most trees bloomed so much that leaves were hardly visible. The excess flowering sucked up nutrition needed for fruit bearing," said Subhash Chavan, associate director (research) with the Maharashtra government's Konkan Agricultural University.

The crop that survived faced two new species of the Thrips pest, for which no pesticide was available. With March came a second round of flowering, as the Konkan region warmed up, and the pest menace abated, leading to expectations that arrivals will begin to improve from the last week of April and continue till the onset of monsoons in June.

Question mark over plantation of Jatropha crop

April 25, 2011 12:26:06 PM

Jamal Ayub | Bhopal

The hope of Jatropha as an alternate fuel and a crop that was to enhance the lives of the rural poor, is turning out to be 'not an easy task' said Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihood Project (MPRLP) project coordinator Lalit Belwal.

It is also raising questions on the scheme funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) that funded in the plantation of this bio fuel crop which is poisoning children and using up valuable grazing land in Madhya Pradesh.

Belwal said that, the fact is earlier there was hope that jatropha would be used for biofuel but he now coincide that it is not an easy task. According to Belwal, the MPRLP was only involved in the first phase of the implementation as it is not in its mandate to promote Jatropha plantations.

Sanjay Sharma, State representative DFID, said that the role of DFID is limited to the funding of the project. Its partnership with the MPRLP was limited. However, Sharma refused to comment on the failure of the scheme. Senior officials of DFID in the

Delhi admit that its sponsorship of Jatropha has been an embarrassment.

The initial euphoria surrounding the plant claimed that 'Jatropha curcas' as one of the best candidates for future biodiesel production has been short-lived for the people who have given their land for its plantation. It was also suggested that the plant was resistant to drought and pests, and produces seeds containing 27-40 per cent oil.

The Adivasis in Barwani district who voted to plant the Jatropha in say that the plant stuff is a menace and its wood is useless. Cattle cannot eat it because it is highly poisonous and that means that after the monsoon, when these hills turn green, we have to keep our animals away from what used to be good grazing. The plants also spread very fast. The wind blows the seedpods and it creeps into the surrounding wheat fields.

Business Standard

Monday, Apr 25, 2011

Jeera prices plunge on higher arrivals

Rutam Vora / Mumbai/ Ahmedabad April 23, 2011, 0:56 IST

Jeera(cumin seed) seems to be on a slippery ground with prices plunging amid heavy arrivals and dismal export demand. The prices are ruling in the range of Rs 12,500 to Rs 14,000 per quintal at the spot market in Unjha after hitting a peak of Rs 18,000 per quintal in March.

In the futures market, jeera prices have tumbled to Rs 15,152 per quintal on NCDEX recently, after hitting the peak of Rs 17,461 per quintal on March 2, 2011. According to market insiders, the bearish trend may persist for a longer period as international crop outlook from Syria and Turkey is yet to come out.

Besides the international factors, the fall in prices was attributed to the increased arrivals and poor export demand. "The arrivals of jeera are high in the range of 25,000 to 28,000 bags of 60 kg each at Unjha mandi but the sentiment among the buyers is negative, hence prices are severely under pressure. Export demand is very low. Additionally, there is cash constraint for the traders too, which also adding pressure on the prices," said Gaurangbhai Patel, president, Unjha APMC.

Overseas buyers are believed to be refraining from placing fresh orders as the production data from Turkey and Syria are due to be announced in May-June. Since export demand stays low and arrivals continue to remain high at the mandis, traders fear a further crash in jeera prices.

On the technical grounds, analysts believe that jeera had already entered into the bearish zone. It is feared that if prices fail to recover from its current lower levels, they may fall further. According to analysts, jeera prices had witnessed a steep fall during past four trading sessions, breaching the technical trend-line for the year 2010.

"Technically, jeera has entered into the bearish zone. At the current price levels, the immediate delivery contract on NCDEX may find support near Rs 14,700 per quintal. If it breaches this level in next one week, the prices may slip below Rs 14,000 per quintal and may stay lower for a month more," said Jagdeep Garewal, a commodity analyst at Kunverji Commodities in Ahmedabad. However, Garewal also expressed a hope of revival in prices from a level of Rs 15,750 per quintal. But in absence of strong demand support, the possibility of prices falling further was believed to be more prominent than a possible revival.

Meanwhile, jeera production in the country is expected to remain at around 2.8-3 million bags (a bag=60 kg) or roughly around 150,000 tonnes for the current season. India is the largest producer and consumer of jeera (cumin seed) in the world. Northern part of Gujarat, Saurashtra and Rajasthan are the key regions producing jeera. The country exports the spice commodity to the countries like Brazil, Japan, Malaysia, UAE and the UK.

THE HINDU Business Line

Expert panel on Bt brinjal to meet on April 27

Chennai, April 24:

A newly-constituted expert group will review the moratorium on release of genetically modified or Bt Brinjal on April 27.

The expert group, set by the Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests, Mr Jairam Ramesh, included renowned agricultural scientist Dr M.S. Swaminathan; Prof Madav Gadgil of Bangalore-based Centre for Ecological Sciences; Nagpur-based Central Institute for Cotton Research Director Dr Keshav R Kranthi among the 18 appointed.

However, Dr Swaminathan and Dr Raghavendra Gadagkar of Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore expressed their inability to take part in the review.

Mr Jairam Ramesh announced a moratorium on the commercial release of the Bt Brinjal in January 2010. He also asked the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee to stipulate more safeguards to remove fears over Bt brinjal among the public.

Bt brinjal has been derived by injecting a crystal gene Cry1Ac from the soil bacterium called Bacillus thuringiensis. This is supposed to make the brinjal plant resistant to the fruit and shoot borer that is the major cause for damage to the crop.

Though field tests were held and Bt brinjal was approved for commercial cultivation in 2009, a hue and cry was raised over the safety of the transgenic plant. This led to Mr Jairam Ramesh holding public hearings.

Though Bt cotton has been in wide use for nearly 10 years now, Bt brinjal is the first food crop to be considered for commercial cultivation. Meanwhile, the Coalition for a GM-free India has criticised the review meet. In a statement, it said the expert group should look at the very need for Bt brinjal since there were many alternatives to chemical pesticides without resorting to genetically modified crops.

Data on toxicity and biosafety assessment were inadequate, it said and added that the expert panel should reject the biosafety dossier on Bt brinjal totally.

Tobacco Board to revive exports, targets 20% growth

Hyderabad, April 24:

With exports declining in 2010-11, the Tobacco Board has held a meeting with top exporters of tobacco products to revive and increase exports by 20 per cent as projected by the Union Ministry of Commerce.

Keeping in view the sensitivities involved, the Board discussed strategies to increase productivity from the existing area of production, while reviving and finding new markets abroad that give higher yields. “We are not going to issue any new licences. We would like to increase productivity from the existing acreage,” Mr G. Kamalavardhana Rao, Chairman of Tobacco Board, told *Business Line*.

Productivity in India was put at 1,500-1,700 kg a hectare as against 2,200 in some Western markets. With the help of CTRI, the Board would encourage new hybrids to improve productivity.

Egyptian offer

The trouble-hit Egypt had come out with a tender for 12 million kg. This almost looked a good opportunity for Indian exporters. The price offered by it, however, turned out to be a dampener. The Arab country offered only $3.5 a kg, while it would cost $3.3 a kg on average to process and make it export ready. “A price above $4 would give good returns. South East Asia, Russia, Iran and the Gulf countries offered a good price. We working opportunities to tap these markets more and in a concerted effort,” Mr Kamalavardhana Rao said.

Export rejections

Yet another issue that worried the tobacco industry was rejections under NTRM (Non-Tobacco Related Materials) norms. The fact that 10 crore kg of tobacco was rejected in 2010-11 showed how serious the problem was.

“This happens when farmers use sheets made of fertiliser bags. The leftover fertilisers creep into the tobacco bags when packed. Also, some do not employ professional graders, increasing the scope for sneak-in of non-tobacco materials. We have begun efforts to educate the farmers on,” he said.

The exporters asked the Board to set up a Task Force to ensure NTRMs were reduced this year. The total exports decreased by three per cent in the first 11 months to 2.23 lakh tonnes (lt) from 2.31 lt in the same period last year. However, there was an increase of 38 per cent in exports of tobacco products that went up to 36,874 tonnes from 26,752 tonnes.

Nearly 39% tea unsold at Coonoor auction

Business Line Sprinklers being used in a tea garden in Coonoor.

Coonoor, April 24:

Continuing the last one month's trend of huge volume remaining unsold in Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions, as much as 39 per cent of the 13.74 lakh kg on offer remained unsold at Sale No: 16.

Teas worth Rs 3.51 crore were withdrawn for want of buyers despite shedding Rs 3 a kg.

“Orthodox leaf market struggled to remain steady. High priced and better medium CTC leaf lost Rs 3-5 while plainers suffered heavy withdrawal despite easing Rs 5-7. Some primary orthodox dust eased Rs 5-10. High priced CTC dust lost Rs 2-4, better mediums Rs 2-5 with withdrawal and plainers suffered withdrawal despite shedding Rs 4-5.”, an auctioneer told *Business Line*.

Homedale Estate tea, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped CTC market at Rs 139 a kg. Vigneshwar Estate got Rs 135, Hittakkal Estate and Shanthi Supreme Rs 127 each, Professor and Deepika Supreme Rs 120 each. In all, 54 marks got Rs 100 and more.

Among orthodox teas from corporate sector, Chamraj got Rs 184, Curzon Rs 170, Havukal Rs 159, Kairbetta Rs 156, Quinshola clonal Rs 155 and Tiger Hill clonal Rs 150. In all, 29 marks got Rs 100 and more.

Weak exports

Export purchases continued to be weak. Pakistan bought very selectively in a wide range, Rs 50-71 and the CIS, Rs 50-56 a kg.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs 46-48 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs 80-125 for brighter liquoring sorts.

They ranged Rs 48-50 for plain dusts and Rs 85-126 for brighter liquoring dusts.

Poultry body seeks ban on maize exports, forward trading


Broiler chickens in a poultry farm

Hyderabad, April 24:

The poultry industry has asked the Andhra Pradesh Government to talk to the Union Government for banning exports and forward trading of maize to rescue the industry.

In a memorandum submitted to Mr N. Kiran Kumar Reddy, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, the Andhra Pradesh Poultry Federation said that maize exports were estimated to cross 50 lakh tonnes (lt) this year as against 16 lt during October 2009-September 2010.

"In the last six months, 20 lt maize has already been exported. It is estimated that exports could be in an order of 5 lt in the next six months. This is going to hit the poultry industry very hard," Mr D. Sudhakar, President of APPF, said.

The State, which produced 5.5 crore eggs or one-third of country's egg production a day, produced three crore broilers, comprising one-tenth of country's broiler production.

Abnormal increase in the feed, mainly maize and soyameal resulted in increase of cost of production.

The price of maize went up to Rs 1,350 a quintal this year from Rs 700-800 a quintal two years ago. Soya price increased to Rs 2,400 to Rs 2,600 a quintal from Rs 900 a quintal.

“This is in spite of good harvest of maize of 2 crore tonnes last year and substantial production of soya in the country,” he said.

As a result, cost of production of an egg had gone from Rs 2.25 to Rs 2.75 an egg and that of broilers from Rs 47-48 to Rs 58-60 a kg.

“In the absence of corresponding increase in the farm-gate prices for their produce, poultry farmers were making heavy losses. They are on the verge of closing their farms,” he said.

An end to endosulfan?

The current furore in Kerala over the pesticide endosulfan swings the spotlight on to the larger issue of persistent organic pollutants, the subject of the Stockholm Convention.

On 25 April, the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention, will begin at the Geneva International Conference Centre in Geneva, Switzerland. Far away, the citizens of Kerala will look to that meeting with more than mere anxiety — for at stake is the fate of a pesticide, endosulfan, now the bane of contention in this green State.

POPs

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), better known as the POPs treaty or the Stockholm Convention, is a legally binding international agreement finalised in 2001 to protect human health and the environment from some of the most dangerous chemicals on earth. Governments, party to the Stockholm Convention, have agreed to take action to reduce or eliminate the production, use, and/or release of certain of these pollutants.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), POPs are chemical substances that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate through the food web, and pose a risk of causing adverse effects to human health and the environment, including through long-range transport. The Stockholm Convention specifically lists 12 POPs under three Annexes. Billed the “Dirty Dozen,” these are classified differently. The nine POPs listed in Annex A are destined for elimination with specific, time-limited exemptions. They include the agricultural chemicals aldrin, chlordane, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, mirex, and toxaphene, as well as the industrial chemicals hexachlorobenzene (HCB), and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Those listed in Annex B are subject to restrictions on production and use, but are eligible for specific exemptions for acceptable purposes. Annex B contains just one substance, the pesticide DDT . Annex C contains POPs that are unintentionally produced, for example, as industrial byproducts and combustion processes. Four of the Dirty Dozen POPs are listed under Annex C: polychlorinated dioxins, polychlorinated furans, PCBs, and HCB.

POPs have been linked to various diseases or abnormalities in a number of wildlife species, including certain kinds of fish, birds, and mammals. Wildlife also often predict the course of human health: abnormalities or declines detected in wildlife populations can sound an early warning bell for people.

POPS have been known to affect the reproductive, developmental, behavioural, neurologic, endocrine, and immunologic parameters of human beings, mainly through exposure to contaminated foods. Other exposure routes include drinking contaminated water and direct contact with the chemicals. In people and other mammals alike, POPs can be transferred through the placenta and breast milk to developing offspring.

At its sixth meeting last year, the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee, a scientific body established under the Stockholm Convention on POPs, agreed to adopt the risk management evaluation for endosulfan and recommended listing endosulfan in Annex A of the Convention, with specific exemptions, a move that would lead to its elimination from the global market.

Given these global concerns — and the media exposure of the damage caused to lives in the northern parts of Kerala, where endosulfan was aerially sprayed on cashew plantations — there is little doubt that a good, hard second look is called for.

As pioneering conservationist Ms Rachel Carson said, “The current vogue for poisons has failed utterly to take into account these most fundamental considerations.

As crude a weapon as the cave man's club, the chemical barrage has been hurled against the fabric of life — a fabric on the one hand delicate and destructible, on the other miraculously tough and resilient, and capable of striking back in unexpected ways."

Kerala CM to lead protest for Endosulfan ban

A victim of endosulfan usage in Kasargod District in Kerala (file photo): Johney Thomas Thiruvananthapuram, Apr 24:

Pressing for a nationwide ban on Endosulfan and India advocating against the chemical's use at a Geneva convention, the Kerala Chief Minister, Mr V S Achuthanandan will lead a day-long sit-in here tomorrow.

The protest, to be staged at the Martyrs' Column in the city from 10 am to 5 pm, will demand that India advocate a global ban on Endosulfan at the international convention on pollutants beginning in Geneva tomorrow.

Rights activists, elected representatives, cultural leaders, politicians and victims will participate in the protest.

Endosulfan has been banned in Kerala in view of the ill-effects of its use in parts of the state, including nearly 400 human deaths and chronic health problems and stunting growth of hundreds of people, many of them children.

The state has been pressing for a countrywide ban on the pesticide. Though an all-party team from Kerala recently met the Prime Minister, Mr Manmohan Singh in New Delhi, no firm assurance could be obtained on banning the pesticide.

The state also wants the Centre to support the relief and rehabilitation package for the victims of Endosulfan, most of whom live in the northern district Kasargode.

Though Congress had extended its support to the demand for ban on the pesticide, the party has accused the ruling LDF of politicising the issue by seizing it as a weapon to attack the UPA Government at the Centre.

Palm oil may test support, rise

Malaysian crude palm oil (CPO) futures on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives exchange ended sharply higher on Friday lifted by strong technical buying. However, poor export demand and possibility of a tax cuts in exports could weigh on prices. A build-up in stocks as production outpaces lagging exports will continue to pressure prices lower. Indonesia will cut its export tax on crude palm oil in May to 17.5 per cent from 22.5 per cent this month as international prices have consistently fallen, a move that may shift orders away from Malaysia. Dollar weakness was also generally supportive of demand for palm oil products, which are priced in dollars, although it hurts margins for local refiners. Cargo surveyors Intertek Testing Services and Societe Generale de Surveillance will issue April 1-25 Malaysian palm oil exports on Monday.

CPO futures rose higher against our expectations. CPO futures have pulled back above 3,315-25 Malaysian ringgit (MYR) a tonne being an important support in the recent past. Though, we still favour the downside with the possibility of even a fall towards 3,025 MYR/tonne, we are getting wary of it in the very short-term. Price structures are slowly turning bullish and a direct close above 3,385 MYR/tonne (July) could be first sign that the market could be turning direction. A confirmation of a reversal in trend from bearish to bullish will be on a close above 3,450 MYR/tonne. Such a rise could increase the possibility of a move even up to 3,550/75

MYR/tonne or even higher to 3,600 MYR/tonne. However, even if such a rise were to happen, subsequently, a strong decline towards 3,025 MYR/tonne might still be possible.

We believe the impulse that began from 1,427 MYR/tonne, which hit 4,486 MYR/tonne ended and a prolonged corrective move has possibly ended at 1,335 MYR/tonne. In the big picture, a new impulse began from 1,335 MYR/tonne and the third wave with a projected objective of 3,900 MYR/tonne has been met. Most probably a wave “A” target has been met. A corrective wave “B” targeting 3,625-3,700 MYR/tonne has also materialised. The present fall could still be a wave “C” expecting to end near 3,025 MYR/tonne. Only a rise above 3,500 MYR/tonne will force us to review our counts again. RSI is in the neutral zone now indicating that it is neither overbought nor oversold. The averages in MACD are still below the zero line of the indicator still indicating bearishness to be intact. Only a cross-over above the zero line again could indicate a reversal in trend.

Therefore, look for palm oil futures to test the support levels initially and then rise higher.

Supports are at MYR 3,335, 3,250 and 3,165. Resistances are at MYR 3,385, 3,450 and 3,505.

Gnanasekaar .T

(The author is the Director of Commtrendz Research and also in the advisory panel of Multi Commodity Exchange of India Ltd (MCX). The views expressed in this column are his own and not that of MCX. This analysis is based on the historical price movements and there is risk of loss in trading. He can be reached at gnanasekar_thiagarajan@yahoo.com.)

Spot rubber remains steady

Kottayam, April 23:

Spot rubber was steady on Saturday. The market continued to be in a holiday mood prior to Easter.

Sheet rubber finished unchanged at Rs 240 a kg amidst scattered transactions.

The volumes were extremely dull as most of the traders had been on long holidays.

Futures improve

The May series improved to Rs 244.87 (243.68), June to Rs 249.74 (248.14), July to Rs 250.45 (248.55), August to Rs 242 (241) and September to Rs 233.05 (232.50) a kg for RSS 4 on the National Multi Commodity Exchange (NMCE).

Spot rates were (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 240 (240); RSS-5: 236 (236); ungraded: 222 (222); ISNR 20: 233 (233) and latex 60 per cent: 147 (147).