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## SWA strikes back, causing worry among sugarcane farmers

M.K. Ananth

*The pest has already affected 50 percent crop in Namakkal and is fast spreading in Coimbatore, Erode districts*

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*If left untreated, one SWA could multiply in 221 crore nymphs and adults in one month*

*On early detection of the pest, the leaves should be burnt completely*

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NAMAKKAL: The re-emergence of the Sugarcane Woolly Aphid (SWA) pest after more than five years since its incidence was last reported in farms by the side of the River Cauvery, has alarmed farmers as they feared loss of the crop to an extent of 20 percent.

Sugarcane cultivation covers an expanse of more than 21,000 hectares in Namakkal district with largescale cultivation at Kabilamalai (3000 hectares), Paramathivelur (3000), Pallipalayam (2,500), Mohanur (2,000), Senthamangalam (1,500) and Tiruchengode (1,000).

Scientist (Agricultural Entomology) at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Sandhiyur B. Geetha who examined the damaged crops produced by farmers said that the pest, mistaken by farmers to be the "Mealy Bug," had affected nearly 50 percent of the crop in the district. She told The Hindu that if left untreated, it could consume the entire crop in a month.

According to her, SWA was first reported in Tamil Nadu about a decade ago and was brought under control by introducing biological predators. The pest attack began as a small patch in the plants under the shade of trees and destroyed the plants. In addition to direct contact with nearby crops, wind also acted as an active agent that supported the SWA's spread, the entomologist said. She noted that the pest could attack the crops at any stage of its life cycle and resulted in its stunted growth.

Besides giving a sickly appearance to the field, the pest also created discomfort to anyone who entered the field as numerous nymphs start crawling all over the body. Ms. Geetha suggested extensive and intensive surveillance with special attention to shaded and cooler areas on a weekly basis as infestation was likely to begin from those areas. She noted that the pest had also started spreading on a large scale in Coimbatore and Erode districts.

#### Preventive measures

Complete avoidance of transport of affected sugarcane was essential. If seed material was to be moved, the sets could be treated in malathion 0.1% solution for 15 minutes, packed in gunny bags and transported without using green or dry leaves as packing or cushioning material.

Practicing wide-row/paired-row planting, de-trashing the cane allowed for greater aeration and light which may discourage SWA establishment, Ms. Geetha said and added that these operations also made easy monitoring and facilitation of application of insecticides and minimised the spray area.

Depending on the activity of the predators, the management tactics differed. Farmers could spray 2g of acephate 75SP, 2ml of monocrotophos 40EC or dimethoate 30EC per litre of water to the lower surface of the leaves. Un-infested clumps in a radius of about three metres of the infested clumps should also be similarly treated with the insecticide, she added.

#### Biological control

*Dipha aphidivora*, *Micromus igorotus* and *Eupeode confrater* are the major predators of SWA that have long-lasting control over the crops. In-star larvae or cocoons of the predators could be released below the infested leaves. About 1000 larvae or cocoons may be released in two or three spots per hectare.

## Poor yield, lower prices push areca nut growers into deeper crisis

C.S. Narayanan Kutty

KASARAGOD: Areca nut growers in the district that is known for its high quality produce, are reeling under mounting cost of cultivation, acute shortage of labour and less remunerative prices.

The farmers continue to face severe shortage of traditional and semi-skilled labour force to tender farms and are facing a dismal situation with no improvement in prices, which continue to fluctuate in the range of Rs.60 and Rs.85 per kg for new 'supari' (areca nut).

While old supari rates range between Rs.90 and Rs.100, not many cultivators are able to store their produce for the minimum one-year period required.

Most of them cannot stock commodities anticipating better prices because of financial commitments, says M. Ranjith, a farmer in Kottodi near Kanhangad in the district.

Mr. Ranjith said the government decision to continue liberal imports of areca nut and a ban on spurious 'gutka' products resulted in a sharp decline in demand.

The government should impose cent per cent import duty on areca nut, which, to a certain extent, could improve the plight of the farmers, he said.

Considering the mounting labour costs coupled with the increasing costs for manure and pesticides for containing the 'Mahali' disease, the support price should be fixed at Rs.150 a kg, said Mr. Ranjith.

## Decline in paddy cultivation arrested

G. Prabhakaran

*Palakkad still has the largest acreage under paddy*

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*Good network of water sources cited as reason Group farming too helped it achieve distinction*

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PALAKKAD: Palakkad district known as the 'granary of Kerala' still has the largest acreage under paddy in the State though there has been an alarming decrease in the acreage under cultivation over the last four decades.

In 1970-71, the total area under paddy cultivation in Palakkad was 1,82,621 hectares, producing 3,18,925 tonnes. But in 2008-09, the total acreage fell to 96,190 hectares and production to 2,40,143 tonnes. Over the last 39 years, the area under paddy cultivation decreased to 52.69 per cent while production fell by 60 per cent. During this period, paddy production in the State fell below 26.78 per cent in area and 40 per cent in production.

According to T.M. Vamana Rao, retired statistical officer, the productivity is higher in Palakkad due to the higher percentage of irrigated land where paddy is mostly cultivated. Though rainfall is not evenly distributed in the district, the good network of water sources helped to continue paddy cultivation in vast areas of land.

The area under paddy cultivation in Palakkad district was 1,82,621 hectares in 1970-71 as against the State's 8,74,830 hectares. The production of paddy was 3,18,925 tonnes as against the State's 12,98,005 during this period.

But in 1990-81, the area of cultivation came down to 1,24,687 hectares and production 3,24,907 tonnes in Palakkad as against the State's total paddy area of 5,59,450 with production of 10,86,578 tonnes.

It further declined in 2001-01 both at the district and at the State level. The area under paddy cultivation in Palakkad fell to 1,18,701 hectares with production figure of 2,62,173 tonnes as against the State's total area of 3,47,455 hectares with production of 7,51,328 tonnes.

In 2008-09, there was further decline with only 96,190 hectares under paddy cultivation and a production of 2,40,143 tonnes in the district as against the State total area of 2,34,265 hectares and 5,90,241 tonne of paddy production. (Source: Department of Economics and Statistics).

The alarming decline in paddy cultivation has been arrested to an extent during the last one decade due to efforts taken by the Central and State governments and the local bodies.

The group farming system 'Galaza', hike in price to Rs.14 a kg. of procurement price for paddy and various other subsidies helped retain the paddy area and brought some barren land in the district under paddy cultivation. The interest-free loan scheme for paddy cultivation started in the district and now adopted for the whole State also helped to bring more area under paddy cultivation, said Muthalamthode Mani, general secretary, Deesheeya Karshaka Samajam.

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## **Areca growers told to take up alternative crops**

Staff Correspondent

Shimoga: As the prices of areca, the main crop of Malnad and coastal Karnataka regions have slumped, farmers should switch over to alternative crops such as cocoa, progressive farmer B.M. Sundaresh has said.

Cocoa has a good demand in the international market. As the crop will be ready for harvest in a short period, farmers can increase their income by cultivating it, he said after inaugurating a workshop on cultivation, processing and marketing of cocoa organised by Campco and Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project here recently.

Extension of area under cultivation also contributed to the fall in areca prices, he said.

It was unfortunate that farmers had replaced traditional crops with areca, he said.

Referring to the problem of shortage of workers in the Malnad region, he said that the expense towards labour could also be minimised if cocoa cultivation was taken up.

P. Sham Bhat of Campco said that the demand for cocoa used in chocolates and ice cream had increased.

Cocoa, being cultivated in areca and coconut plantations in South India, had proved to be profitable, he said.

Progressive farmer Suresh Agaradahalli and experts K.S. Sheshagiri and H. Narayanaswamy were present.

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## Call to check use of groundwater for irrigation

Special Correspondent

### *Community involvement in conservation stressed*

Thiruvananthapuram: Irrigation is emerging as the principal cause for over exploitation of groundwater resources in many areas across the State. Heavy extraction of groundwater by farmers has led to severe stress on the groundwater resources, according to Babu N. Joseph, Superintending Hydrologist, Groundwater Department, Kerala.

In a paper presented at a workshop organised by the Central Groundwater Board here last week, he said the 'energisation' of wells, drilling of bore wells, introduction of efficient pump sets and free electricity for farming had led to a gradual increase in extraction of groundwater for irrigation in the State over the last 30 years.

Mr. Joseph said the over exploitation of groundwater could be controlled, to some extent, by restricting the free supply of electricity to farmers, based on the area of cultivation and water requirement of crops. He also highlighted the need to make artificial recharge structures

mandatory in the case of farmers who are heavy users of groundwater. He proposed the construction of sub-surface dykes for conservation of groundwater.

#### Community role

Another paper authored by Shaji E. and Deepu T.R. of the Department of Geology, University of Kerala, said the governance and conservation of groundwater resources in the State required a new approach involving the participation of local people, non-governmental organisations, government departments, planners, developers, panchayat institutions, scientists and environmentalists.

Research institutions, university departments and other stakeholders also had a crucial role to play in water conservation, it said.

The authors argued the need for heavy engagement of users, substantial investments in modern water and agricultural technology, and the development of enabling policies and decision support systems for sustainable management of groundwater in the State.

They stressed the need to introduce appropriate frameworks and instruments. "The frontline challenge is not just supply side innovations but to put in place, a range of corrective mechanisms," the paper said.

#### Judicious use

A case study on groundwater management issues in the Thiruvananthapuram urban area by P. Nandakumaran, V.R. Rani and T.S. Anitha Shyam from the Central Ground Water Board pointed out that groundwater resources in the Venganoor panchayat and Athiyannoor block were stressed due to over exploitation while Nemom block was categorised as semi critical.

The study said the increase in the number of tube wells, pollution from municipal waste, water marketing, sand quarrying, land reclamation and construction activities were affecting the groundwater resources in the city and its suburbs.

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## Cucumber cultivation picking up

Staff Reporter

—Photo: A. Shaikmohideen



**QUICK HARVEST:**Cucumber from the first phase of cultivation have started flooding Palayamkottai market.

Tuticorin: Cucumber cultivation is picking up in some parts of the district. Since people are experiencing hot and humid weather condition, the intake of cucumbers will have a soothing effect.

Though cultivation of cucumbers is not being undertaken by farmers on a large scale here, they depend on seasonal cropping. Cucumber cultivation was being executed on fifty nine acres in parts of Seidhunganallur, Kayathar and other blocks.

Primarily, mass cultivation of cucumber was being taken up in Moolakarapatti and Munanjipatti, which are located on the border of Tuticorin and Tirunelveli districts.

“Cucumber grows well on irrigated lands. It cannot be expected to come up on sandy soil. Even with a minimum requirement of water, the crop will attain its growth. It is a short duration horticultural crop.



The summer season is conducive for this crop. Usually, seedlings will be planted by the end of January and, within two months, it could be harvested.

Some farmers would be engaged in the second phase of cultivation which commences from April.

Harvest could be done either in June or in July," M. Syed Ahmed Miranji, Deputy Director, Department of Horticulture, said here on Sunday.

#### Benefit

Asked about its significance for health, he said the consumption of cucumber would substitute loss of water in the body.

Most of farmers were engaged in exporting a top class variety of cucumber to countries abroad after processing it, Mr. Miranji added.

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#### **'Waive farm loans, provide support price for farm produce'**

Correspondent

*Shankar promises Congress support for the cause of farmers*

Sirsi: A large number of farmers participated in a rally organised here on Sunday seeking waiving of loans taken by farmers, minimum support price for farm produce, extension of betta land income-sharing, amendments to the Forest Act of 2006 (Recognition of Tribal and Traditional Dwellers Use), extension of time for developing an alternative packing material for "pan masala" and "gutkha" in the wake of the Supreme Court verdict, and an Ayurveda university in Uttara Kannada district.

Addressing the farmers, Gangadharendra Saraswati Swamiji of Swarnavalli Math said areca growers in the Malnad region and vanilla growers in the district suffered owing to crop loss following heavy rain. Because of the crop loss, they could not clear their loans.

About 43,529 families cultivating areca and 2.17 lakh families of workers and small traders who depended on areca were in distress.

He demanded that the Government fix Rs. 14,800 for a quintal of red areca and Rs. 11,800 for a quintal of white areca as recommended by the Areca Research Development Trust, Mangalore. He sought a minimum support price of Rs. 1,600 for a quintal of paddy.

On the use of betta land (minor forest), he said that the Government should restore the facilities under the Canara Privilege Act. About 90 per cent of minor produce from the betta land should be given to the farmers who maintained it.

Congress leader B.L. Shankar promised the Congress party's support for the cause of areca farmers.

Y.S.V. Datta, MLC, said that a political will was needed to convert areca farmers' loans into long-term development loans.

Anantkumar Hegde, MP, former Minister R.V. Deshpande, and the district in-charge Minister spoke.

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**<http://www.thehindu.com/2011/03/21/stories/2011032156280500.htm>**

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## **Goa facing milk shortage**

Special Correspondent

PANAJI: Goa is facing a shortage of milk and if no steps are taken to streamline the supply, it may turn into a serious problem at least in some urban areas of the State.

Chairman of Goa Dairy Madhav Sahakari, in an informal chat last week, admitted this fact and said that this was particularly owing to poor supply of milk from Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Goa's daily milk requirement is 2.8 lakh litres. Major part of this requirement is met by Goa

Dairy, while the rest by other private brands from neighbouring StatesMr. Sahakari said that Goa Dairy procured 41,000 litres of milk from Maharashtra and 15,000 litres from Karnataka in addition to its local procurement for its processing plant at Curti-Ponda. The shortage was a result of the recent crisis in Mumbai leading to diversion of milk from other parts of Maharashtra to Mumbai, he said. Only recently, Goa Dairy raised the prices of milk, followed by some of private brands.

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**Weather**

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Clear

**Monday, Mar 21**

Max Min  
32.9° | 22.7°

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 74%

Wind: Normal

Sunrise: 6:13

Sunset: 18:19

Barometer: 1007.0

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

**Tuesday, Mar 22**

Max Min  
33° | 23°

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday

**Mar 23**



33° | 24°

Cloudy

Thursday

**Mar 24**



31° | 22°

Cloudy

Friday

**Mar 25**



31° | 21°

Cloudy

Saturday

**Mar 26**



32° | 23°

Cloudy

Sunday

**Mar 27**



32° | 24°

Cloudy

**'Special farm zones to revitalise agriculture'**

CHENNAI: Special agriculture zones, boosting the farm production per acreage, need for post-harvest facilities and public-private partnership for sustainable agriculture will revitalise Indian agriculture, according to experts.

Speaking at a panel discussion on 'Food for Thought - Revitalising of Indian Agriculture', organised by the Madras Chamber of Commerce here on Saturday, Indira Gandhi National Open University professor and MS Swaminathan Research Foundation fellow P C Kesavan expressed concern that fertile lands meant for agriculture were being diverted to industry.

"Prof M S Swaminathan brought in Green Revolution using genetic technology. In Punjab, the production of wheat went up from 12 million tonnes to 18 million tonnes that year. Another good thing the Green Revolution did was that it overcame the population rate of growth. Today the rate of growth of population is 1.9 per cent per annum and the food production is 1.2 per cent," he said.

"Indian agriculture has always been a gamble with monsoons. With climate change, the monsoon pattern also has changed. Studies have revealed that even if there is slight increase in temperature, there will be reduction in the production of food grains," he added.

V Rajagopal, director of Central Plantation Crops Research Institute and founder of Hunger Elimination and You, said that the government was unprepared to face the challenges of drought and expressed concern over shrinking of farms.

He also said farming had become high risk in nature due to fluctuations in market prices. He also called for the need for special farm zones to promote agriculture and preserve the cultivable lands from the industries. Rajagopal said the government had urban poverty alleviation programmes but no rural poverty alleviation programmes.

S Vishwanathan, editor and publisher of Industrial Economist, stressed the need to enhance food production besides testing of soil regularly before sowing crops.

# Business Standard

Monday, Mar 21, 2011

## **Govt focuses on market linkages for farmers to boost pulses yield**

**Sanjeeb Mukherjee / New Delhi March 20, 2011, 0:31 IST**

Plans to set up 150 farmer-producer organisations in 11 states.

The government is planning to provide market linkages for farmers growing pulses as part of a programme announced in the Budget to improve their production, as scarcity of this essential item was one of the major contributors to food inflation a few years back.

“The share of pulses growers in the consumer price is very low on account of a lack of market linkages as most growers are disaggregated in distribution and the quantum of produce per unit is very low. To work out the economics of scale, it is necessary to organise pulses farmers in groups,” a senior government official said.

He said an assured market would also help in a sustainable improvement in the production of pulses.

To achieve this, the government plans to set up around 150 farmer-producer organisations, with 1,000 farmers in 11 states that contribute around 96 per cent of the country’s total annual production of pulses.

This would essentially be a grouping of farmers to collectively take decisions on the marketing of their produce, training and propagation of the best practices in farming.

The organisations would be given venture capital assistance of Rs 35 crore, which would help them leverage over Rs 300 crore through investment finance.

The proposals form part of the draft guidelines that have been framed to operationalise the programme for the development of 60,000 pulses-growing villages in rainfed areas. The scheme announced in the 2011-2012 Union Budget will be launched on April 1, 2011.

A sum of Rs 300 crore had been allocated by Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee for the programme. It will be part of the already existing Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).

The scheme will be implemented in states that have more than 500,000 hectares under pulses every year.

“Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu will be covered under the programme,” the official said. The highest share of the sum allocated in the Budget will be given to Madhya Pradesh, followed by Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Pulses like pea, moth and rajma (kidney beans), in addition to the pulses included in earlier programmes like the accelerated pulses development programme, would now form part of the new initiative. The states will have a choice to select the villages where they want the programme to be implemented.

“As the programme is for rainfed areas, those areas which don’t have any assured source of irrigation and which have not been part of earlier schemes of a similar nature, will be covered,” the official said. The Union agriculture secretary will regularly monitor the programme.

“We hope to improve pulses production significantly by the end of next year on the back of this scheme and also all other programmes,” the official said.

India’s pulses production for 2010-2011 is estimated to be 16.51 million tonnes, up 12.61 per cent from last year. The problem is that in times of scarcity, the prices of pulses skyrocket and not many countries produce the kind of pulses consumed in India. So, the government plans to improve their production.

21 Mar, 2011, 01.46AM IST, Sutanuka Ghosal,ET Bureau

## **Gorkha blockade to hit Darjeeling tea companies**

KOLKATA: Darjeeling tea companies can see losses brewing after the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) has put an embargo on movement of teas. The first flush tea, which is entirely exported and fetches the maximum revenue, cannot be shipped if the GJM embargo continues. This will be the second successive blow for the companies as last year poor rainfall withered away precious first flush production.

Ashok Lohia, chairman of Chamong Tee, the largest Darjeeling tea company, said: "Tea is being produced on our gardens and are being processed. But GJM is not allowing us to move these teas out of the garden. These are first flush teas, which command premium prices in the global market." Incidentally, the first flush teas fetch price anything between Rs 2,000 and Rs 12,000 per kg.

GJM's agitation in the Darjeeling hills took a new turn with its trade union wing in the tea sector calling for an embargo from March 4 on the despatch of manufactured orthodox tea from the gardens in the region. By calling for the embargo, the GJM leadership has added to its principal 'political' demand for the inclusion of the Terai and the Dooars regions in the north Bengal jurisdiction - for any future "interim" administrative arrangement for the hills - those related to the wage structure of tea workers in the region.

The GJM-affiliated Darjeeling, Terai, Dooars Plantation Labour Union is, among other things, demanding the introduction of variable dearness allowance for tea workers and an upward revision in their daily wages from the present Rs 67 to between Rs 120 and Rs 154.

Lohia pointed out that international enquiries have already started coming in. "The next 10 days is extremely crucial for Darjeeling tea companies and the agitation should come to an end within this period. If it doesn't, then we fear losing our international clients," he added.

Analysts say that first flush tea is generally used for gifting purpose during the Easter time. "This year, the Easter is on April 20. So the industry has time in its hand. They can wait for a week but anything beyond that will affect the exports," the analysts added.

Sanjay Bansal, chairman of Ambootia Group, the second-largest Darjeeling tea company, added: "The year 2010-11 had been a bad year for Darjeeling tea industry as we lost the premium first and second flush teas due to drought. There was a huge loss of revenue.

The production of Darjeeling tea, which generally hovers around 10 million kg, dwindled to 8 million kg. Overall, it was not a good year for Darjeeling tea companies. And this year too, if we fail to export premium first flush teas then the financial health of Darjeeling tea companies will take a beating."

Bansal, who is the chairman of Darjeeling Tea Association, said the industry is in constant dialogue with GJM to solve the crisis.

21 Mar, 2011, 01.30AM IST, PK Krishnakumar & S Sanandakumar,ET Bureau

### **Nutraceuticals now drive up global demand for spices**

KOCHI: Growing demand from the emerging segment of nutraceuticals is driving the global consumption of Indian spices further at a time when the country is straining to meet the needs of the traditional food sector.

Non-traditional use of spices including nutraceuticals now accounts for nearly 15% of spice production in the country estimated at 50 lakh tonne a year. The new lines of applications are



growing at a rate of 10%-12%, according to Spices Board officials.

"Our annual requirement of 40,000 tonne to 50,000 tonne of spices is increasing at a rate of 20% to 22%. And since supply is dwindling in India, we are looking at other countries for import," said Muhammed Majeed, managing director of `200-crore nutraceutical major Sami Labs based in Bangalore.

The pharma industry is discovering the use of turmeric in cancer medicine. "Earlier, they used just 500 mg to 1 gm of turmeric extract in such drugs. But now, researchers are suggesting up to even 12 gram to treat various types of cancer," he pointed out. Sami Labs has developed a new product called white turmeric which finds application as a skin lightener.

Apart from turmeric, which is the most sought after spice in the nutraceutical market, black pepper, ginger and cinnamon are the other spices that are in demand. "Recently, the new drug developed from capsicum extract for weight loss has been a rage in the US," Geemon Korah, chairman of All India Spices Exporters Forum and CEO of Kancor Ingredients, said.

"We require a large quantity of spices like turmeric, ginger, garcinia," PJ Kunjachan, managing director, Arjuna Natural Extracts, a player in nutraceutical industry with units in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. "For example, we need at least 1,000 tonne of turmeric every year," he pointed out. The company, which achieved a turnover of `60 crore last year, has targeted `100 crore this year.

Kunjachan said the requirement of spices by the industry is set to grow several fold in the coming years. This is not only because of the growing demand from existing operations but also due to the efforts to develop new product lines. For example, a spice like fenugreek is understood to have anti-diabetic properties. Research is going on to develop products from the spice, he said adding that the future demand for the spice would be huge.

The demand for nutraceutical products has gone up as more people are turning to natural

products for treating lifestyle diseases. The nutraceutical sector is growing at 12-14 % in the US, 8-10 % in Europe, 14% in china and almost 9% in Japan while it is still at a nascent stage in India. At the same time, the growth in the food industry globally, where spices are traditionally used, is 3-5 %, Geemon Korah said.

To meet the rising needs, the spice industry is going for more imports as the domestic production is becoming insufficient. According to Spices Board official, the country imported 18,000 tonne of pepper last year and around 4,000 tonne to 5,000 tonne of turmeric and another 4,500 tonne of dry ginger.

It is the discovery of anti-oxidant properties of spices that paved the way for more consumption by the nutraceutical sector. "Even commercially less popular spices like rosemary and basil are bought by the nutraceutical segment for the anti-oxidant properties," said George Paul, director of Synthite Industries.

Another major consumer of spices is the ayurveda industry. The increasing acceptance of ayurvedic remedies the world over has led to a higher consumption of spices by the industry. Says Dr Satheesh Namboodiri of Dhanwanthari Vaidyasala, a traditional ayurvedic institution from central Kerala, "We use spices in a wide range of applications."

He said pepper, cardamom, nutmeg, mace, turmeric, ginger, dry ginger, cumin and mint are some of the major spices that are used in the industry.

## Oil palm farmers pin hopes on Rs 300-cr Budget allocation



Business Line Workers weighing oil palm fresh fruit bunches at a collection centre near Peddapuram in Andhra Pradesh's East Godavari district. – M.R. Subramani

Recently in Kakinada:

A group of farmers at Dosakayalapalli village in Korukonda mandal of Andhra Pradesh's East Godavari district, on seeing a group of journalists visiting their oil palm plantation, wondered when the Government would clear dues to them under the Market Intervention System (MIS) announced in 2009.

“The Andhra Pradesh Government had announced the MIS in March 2009 to ensure remunerative payment for oil palm farmers. Funds were released by the State Government for March and April 2009. Since then, we are yet to get any payment due under the MIS,” said a farmer. Payments to the tune of Rs 40-45 crore are pending for 2009 and 2010. “It is likely that the Rs 40-45 crore dues could be cleared with the Rs 300 crore allocated in the Budget,” says Mr N.K. Arora, Corporate Head (Palm Business) of Ruchi Soya Industries Ltd's Oil Palm

Division. He was speaking to a group of journalists on a trip to the oil palm plantations sponsored by the company.

### **Utilising funds**

According to sources, the State Government had been pressing for release of the dues but the clearance got delayed. If that is one channel of utilising the allocation, there are other requirements on which the allocation could be spent, said sources. "One way could be to announce a minimum support price, say between Rs 6,000 and Rs 7,000 for a fresh fruit bunch (FFB). If prices fall below it, the Government can chip in," said Mr Arora.

According to sources, the Centre is considering increasing the maintenance payment from Rs 21,000 for four years to Rs 40,000. "The Government makes this maintenance payment since it takes four years before an oil palm plant can begin to yield. This helps farmers to provide nutrients and other inputs for the plant," said Mr Arora. There is another aspect to oil palm plantation. One reason for farmers to take to this is that the need for labour is low. But an oil palm tree grows some 60 cm a year, thus causing problems for growers in harvesting a FFB.

"Aged plantations need to go in for mechanised harvesting. Maybe, some allocation can be made for this," said Mr Arora. Then, oil palm companies supply seedlings to farmers who pay Rs 10 for a seedling. The Government pays Rs 60 for a seedling. The rest is footed by the oil palm firm that recovers it after two years only. "The basic cost for a seedling is Rs 90-100 though the landed cost is Rs 40. After importing the seedlings, companies have to keep in their nursery for 12 months and nurture them. Of this, at least 25 per cent goes waste," said Mr Arora.

### **More varieties**

Industry sources said if the Government can raise the payment, then companies in oil palm business could begin distributing varieties which can help more plants fit in a hectare. For example, in a hectare of land about 142 oil palm plants can be grown. But there are now varieties from Ivory Coast and Costa Rica that can help farmers cultivate over 170 plants. However, they cost around Rs 200 for a seedling.

Mr Arora said that the Government's plan to extend oil palm area by 60,000 hectares this year could also require good investment and a major chunk of the allocation could go towards meeting the target. Though industry sources say it would be hard to meet the target, they feel it could still go a long way to interest growers. "The money should go to the farmers in a judicious manner and benefit them properly," said Mr Arora.

### **Sericulture farmers take up Customs duty issue with Krishna**



Mr S M Krishna

Bangalore, March 20:

The External Affairs Minister, Mr S.M. Krishna, today assured agitating sericulture farmers, protesting the reduction of customs duty on raw silk, that he would take up their grievances with the Ministries concerned.

Scores of farmers today staged a dharna near the house of Mr Krishna, a former Karnataka Chief Minister, and protested the Central budget's proposal of lowering the basic customs duty on raw silk from 30 per cent to five per cent.

The farmers said the measure would hit them badly. The delegation submitted a memorandum to Mr Krishna, who promised that he would raise the issue with the Union Finance Minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, and the Textiles Minister, Mr Dayanidhi Maran.

The farmers wanted the Finance Minister to roll back the move during reply to general discussion on the budget.

A leader of the farmers also demanded that the State government buy cocoons at Rs 400 a kg. The farmers said they are in distress following a steep fall in the price of cocoons in recent days.

Karnataka accounts for about half of India's raw silk production, according to officials.

### **New mechanical coconut climbing device developed**



Business Line The coconut climbing machine is displayed at an agri trade fair in Thrissur. —

Photo: K. K. Mustafah

Kochi, March 20:

The Agricultural Research Station Mannuthy has successfully developed and tested a new version of mechanical coconut climbing device.

The total weight of the device is 8. 400 kg and can lift a maximum weight of 400 kg.

## **Objective**

The objective of the research team is to develop coconut palm tree climbing as a high-tech profession. ARS Mannuthy is planning to go in for large scale production of the device at the industrial level.

The climber unit consists of two parts — the seat unit and the pedal unit.

The entire unit is fitted on the coconut tree with seat unit above the pedal unit. By standing on the pedal unit, the seat unit can be slided up or down the tree.

Since the operator is safely held against the tree by the seat unit, there is practically no risk of falling down or accidents.

An operator takes about 40 seconds to safely climb a palm tree having a height of 12 metres.

Similarly, by sitting on the seat unit, the pedal unit can be slided up or down.

The operator can ascend or descend the tree by operating the seat and the pedal units alternately.

A lynch pin harnessing method is adopted here, which provides easy harnessing and dismantling within 26 and 10 seconds, respectively.

The device named KAU Kera Suraksha has been designed and developed by Dr U. Jaikumaran, Professor and Head of ARS Mannuthy, Ms Suma Nair, Dr V. R. Ramachandran, Ms Sakeena Beevi and Mr P. Ajith Kumar.

## **Overall cost**

The overall cost of the machine is approximately Rs 7,000, but it could be reduced if is produced at the industrial level.

The price of the safety harnessing unit is Rs 10,000. The ARS is also making use of an overall suit and safety harnessing belts for palm tree climbers.

This gives total safety and security to the climbers.

The ARS Mannuthy will also provide a one-week training programme for coconut palm tree climbing, cleaning the crowns, cross pollination techniques on crowns, developing of hybrid coconut nuts etc.

### **Nearly 33% tea unsold at Coonoor auctions**

Coonoor, March 20:

As much as 33 per cent of the 10.57 lakh kg on offer at Sale No: 11 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auction was withdrawn for want of buyers even after shedding Rs 3 a kg.

Teas worth Rs 2.53 crore remained unsold.

Vigneshwar Speciality topped the CTC market at Rs 171 a kg. Homedale Estate got Rs 155, Shanthi Supreme Rs 142, Hittakkal Estate Rs 137, Blue Mont Estate Special Rs 134, Darmona Estate and Professor Rs 131 each.

In all, 75 marks fetched Rs 100 and more.

Among orthodox teas from corporate sector, Chamraj got Rs 181, Curzon Rs 177, Highfield Estate Rs 166, Kairbetta and Havukal Rs 163 each and Quinshola clonal Rs 160. In all, 27 marks got Rs 100 and more.

### **Less demand**

“Generally, very less demand prevailed for orthodox leaf market and even after prices dropping Rs 2-5 a kg, substantial volumes remained unsold. High-priced CTC leaf lost Rs 2-4, mediums Rs 1-3 and plainers suffered withdrawal even after shedding Rs 3.

Primary orthodox dusts lost as much as Rs 10-15. CTC dusts, however, gained Rs 2-4 but plainers suffered withdrawal even after shedding Rs 1-3”, an auctioneer said.

### **Weak exports**

Export purchases continued to be weak. Pakistan bought very selectively for Rs 51-72 a kg and the CIS, Rs 60-75.



Internal unrest in West Asia and North Africa has restricted export purchases to those destinations.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs 48-54 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs 85-130 for brighter liquoring sorts.

They ranged Rs 50-55 for plain dusts and Rs 85-140 for brighter liquoring dusts.

### **Bullish sentiments, tight supply push up pepper**

Kochi, Mar 19:

The pepper market during the week witnessed mixed trend with bullish sentiments taking the lead. At the same time firm prices in other origins indicate that there exists a tight supply situation, probably because of holding back by growers in India and Vietnam.

Highly remunerative prices for rubber, coffee and cashew are appear to have strengthened the hands of the Vietnamese growers who could now afford to hold back their pepper and release in a regulated manner so as to keep the prices at higher levels.

Meanwhile, exports from Indonesia in Jan and Feb 2011 showed a decline from that of the same period the previous year, indicating a probable tight availability.

Where as, in India the growers who had liquidated old stocks at good prices were replenishing their stocks and were not ready to part with their produce now, market sources told Business Line

Thus, there has not been any aggressive selling in India and Vietnam so far. However, there were some selling pressure in Kerala's Idukki and Wayanad, of late, to meet the primary market dealers'/growers' financial commitments because of the financial year closing, market sources said adding "it might last till the March-end".

During the week there has been heavy liquidation in the futures market as the parties who had taken delivery of 2,500 tonnes in February were appeared to be weak and hence liquidated at thin margins, they said.

March position has gone for delivery whether those who took delivery would sell further or hold back is to be seen. Since it is valid stock there is a possibility that they might hold back. Exporters opted for delivery of March because it was valid and cheap, they said.

Indian parity in the international market was at \$5,300 a tonne (c&f) and said to be competitive with other origins and hence some orders for Malabar is likely, they claimed. "Some overseas buyers are looking for Malabar and hence some buying is likely to come to India also", they said.

Procedural delays coupled with delay in shipments due to alleged technical problems at the port are costing the exporters heavily, they said. Delay in shipments would fail the exporters in meeting their delivery schedule and that in turn would affect their credibility, the traders alleged.

Add to this is the high volatility in the futures market, resultant from the tug of war between the bulls and bears, which in turn has been pushing the buyers to sidelines.

April, May and June contracts during the week went up by Rs 633, Rs720 and Rs 687 respectively and closed at Rs 23,454, Rs 23,755 and Rs 24,030 a quintal on Saturday.

Total turn over during the week moved up by 5,728 tonnes to close at 57,945 tonnes. Net open interest dropped by 3,392 tonnes to close at 10,535 tonnes showing good liquidation during the week.

Spot prices in tandem with the futures market and some buying interest increased by Rs200 a quintal to close at Rs21,900 (ungarbled) and Rs22,700 (MG 1).

#### Overseas scenario

According to the International Pepper Community (IPC) the black pepper market focused on the development in India and Vietnam, since these two countries harvested their pepper in the first quarter. In India, the market was more active, particularly in the second half of the week. On Thursday, trade volume at the Commodity Exchange has experienced a significant movement, particularly for April contracts. Spot price of ungarbled black increased. In dollar terms however, the price was relatively stable, due to weakening of INR against the dollar.

There is no price reported from HCMC, Vietnam. In Daklak however, price of farm grade quality of black pepper increased by VND 1,000 per kg to VND 88,000 at the week's close.

In Lampung, prices were stable with limited activity. Local price of Sarawak black was also stable at MYR 12.2 per kg. In dollar terms however, the local price was lower by 1 per cent, while fob prices of Sarawak increased by 1 per cent. In Sri Lanka, pepper prices at growing areas increased by 1 per cent.

#### WHITE PEPPER

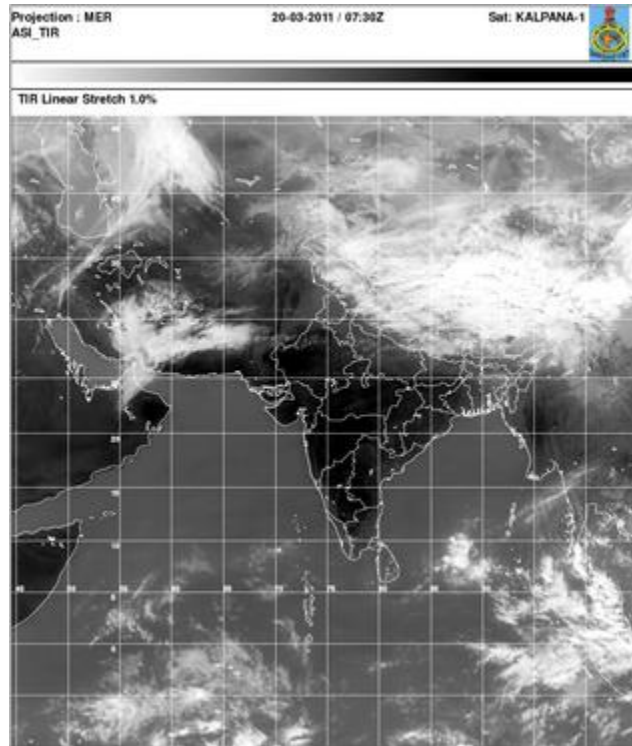
Local pepper price in Bangka decreased further by 2 per cent. In the last few weeks, the decrease was influenced by strengthening of local currency against USD. This week, tsunami disaster in Japan which is anticipated to affect demand has been used to press pepper price. Price increases were reported in Sarawak and Hainan by 1 and 2 per cent respectively.

#### INDONESIAN EXPORTS DECLINE

In February 2011, Indonesia exported black pepper from Lampung at around 1,545 tonnes registering a continuous decrease from July, with the exception of export in November 2010, IPC said. The decrease reflected tight availability of material in Lampung. During January – February 2011, total exports from Lampung was 4,037 tonnes valued at \$17.5 million.

In 2010, Indonesia exported around 48,000 tonnes of black pepper from Lampung valued at \$170 million, registering a significant increase of 31 per cent in quantity from around 37,000 tonnes exported in 2009.

## Heavy rains as thunder clouds explode over the Northeast States



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 20:

Fairly widespread rain or snowfall has been reported from Jammu and Kashmir until evening yesterday (Saturday) under the influence of the prevailing western disturbance.

The westerly system was traced to east Jammu and Kashmir and neighbourhood on Sunday morning, an India Meteorological department (IMD) update said.

Now on the exit mode, the system is expected to continue to affect the western Himalayan region for another day until Monday, it said.

The westerly effect also fired up a prevailing trough to the east of the country, precipitating fairly widespread rain or thundershower over Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh and isolated over sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim over the past couple of days.

The causative upper air cyclonic circulation over Assam and neighbourhood persisted in the lower levels on Sunday.

A weather warning valid until tomorrow (Monday) said that isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall would occur over Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.

Cherrapunji continued to be battered by some exceptionally heavy rains (32cm overnight on Friday) with 19 cm being recorded on Saturday.

Heat wave conditions have since abated from west Rajasthan, Saurashtra and Kutch. The heat has been compressed to central and east India.

Maximum temperatures are above normal by 3 to 5 deg Celsius over parts of Jharkhand and central India and by 2 to 4 deg Celsius over parts of Gujarat and the plains of northwest India.

For the first time this season, the highest maximum temperature of 43.2 deg Celsius was recorded at Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh.

But short-term forecasts pointed to a fall in maximum and minimum temperatures by 1 to 2 deg Celsius over many parts of northwest and adjoining central India until Wednesday.

Satellite pictures showed the presence of convective clouds over parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and southeast Bay of Bengal.

Meanwhile, another upper air cyclonic circulation has sprung up over Punjab and neighbourhood.

Forecasts valid until Wednesday said that fairly widespread rain or thundershowers would occur over sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim and the Northeastern States. It would be scattered over Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Scattered rain or snowfall has been forecast over Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand until Monday and decrease thereafter.

An extended forecast valid until Friday said that scattered rain or thundershowers would continue to occur over the Northeastern States and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.