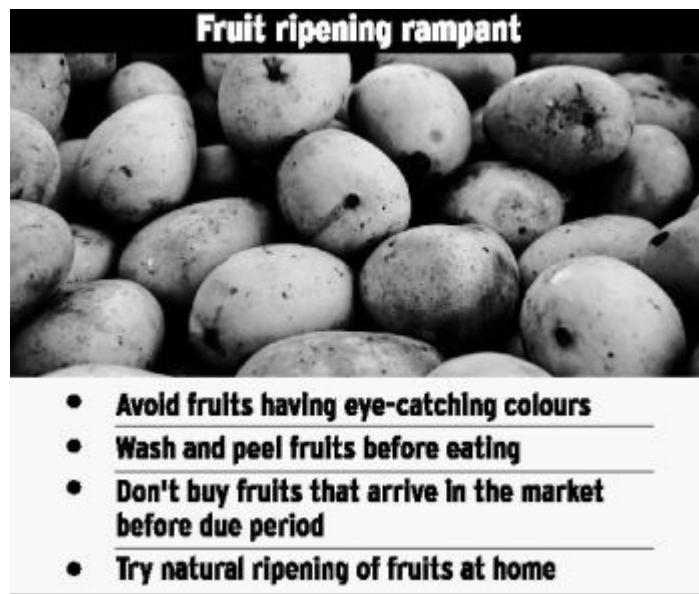


Flagrant use of chemicals to ripen fruits on the rise

Staff Reporter

Traders keep packets of calcium carbide near pile of fruits



KOCHI: Think twice before you pick a shining apple or a mango with good peel colour from the fruit market next time. The traders usually coat wax on apples and use calcium carbide to quicken the ripening of mangoes.

Unchecked use of chemicals for artificial ripening of fruits seems to be increasing at an alarming rate in the city thanks to the lack of a stringent monitoring system to check the menace.

Elaborating on the 'tricks' deployed by the fruit vendors to induce artificial ripening, V. N. Sivasankara Pillai, former Director of the School of Environmental Studies at Cochin University

of Science and Technology, said that traders keep small packets of calcium carbide near a pile or box of fruits.

“Calcium carbide produces acetylene gas when it reacts with water (because of the moisture content in the fruit) and it quickens the ripening process,” he said. Stating that one kilogram of calcium carbide could ripen 200kg of mangoes, Dr. Pillai said that the use of the chemical is rampant, as it is cheap (one kg costs Rs.25-Rs.30). Pointing out that fruits ripened with calcium carbide are overtly soft and less tasty, he said that they also have a shorter shelf-life. “The fruit might present a yellow outer skin but it would not be ripe,” Dr.Pillai said.

Explaining that the shine on the apple's surface comes from either petroleum wax or chemical spray that are harmful to the digestive system, S. Sitaraman, senior faculty at the Adi Shankara Institute of Engineering and Technology at Kalady, said that calcium carbide contains traces of arsenic and phosphorous hydride that causes several acute and chronic health effects. He said that eating artificially ripened mangoes causes stomach upset besides triggering numbness in the legs and hands and general weakness.

Listing out tips that would help the buyers, Prof. Sitaraman said that fruits that have a uniform colour are likely to have been artificially ripened. He said that naturally ripened fruits are not uniformly yellow. “We can be sure that calcium carbide may have been used if mangoes and papayas are uniformly orange or yellow. When tomatoes are uniformly red, think that chemicals have been used,” he said.

Date:31/03/2011 **URL:** <http://www.thehindu.com/2011/03/31/stories/2011033160700500.htm>

Juicy summer fruit tops the pecking order among buyers

K. A. Martin

About 10 tonnes of mangoes come into the Ernakulam market daily Mangoes are selling at Rs.40 and Rs.50 a kg

KOCHI: Mango continues to be the king and orange, the queen. But their place is constantly under siege from white and dark seedless grapes because the city appears to be switching loyalties as it prepares for a sweaty new summer.

'Krishna Sharad' and 'Sona,' black and white seedless grapes, proved to be a big hit with buyers in the recent months, said P. J. J. Jaison, a fruits wholesaler based at the European Union Market at Maradu. However, K. H. Shamsudheen of All Kerala Fruit Merchants' Association feels that the price is bit of a drag on the spreading popularity of black grapes. Mango is still the mass leader.

K. A. Ashraf, also of the association, said that black grapes are now being brought in crates of 10 kg directly from Sangli in Maharashtra and the price had come down slightly on account of this. The fruit used to be brought previously from Bangalore in two-kg packets. This had brought down transport cost significantly benefitting the end buyer. Amid the shift in loyalties, fruit-lovers in the city may brace up for a difficult summer with prices being held firm by reports of poor crop in some of the growing areas even as the new mango season has started with the arrival of locally grown 'Mooandan' and the local favourite 'Priur.'

'Priur' and 'Chandrakkaran' among mangoes continue to be the favourite with the city buyers. North Indian residents in the city, however, prefer 'Alphonso,' says Mr. Shamsudheen. There is also a big demand for others like 'Himayat,' 'Sindoor Payali,' 'Malgoa,' 'Gudadat,' 'Kalapadi' and 'Thottapuri.'

The arrival of oranges, apples and grapes from upcountry centres is at their fag end, the market now depending largely on imported apples and oranges. Apples from China and Washington are available in Kochi, though for a premium.

But the nature of the new summer market will be determined by mangoes, substantially from Tamil Nadu and to an extent from Palakkad.

Despite the hardening prices, demand does not appear to abate. Mangoes are selling Rs.40 and Rs.50 a kg in the retail market. Apples are selling between Rs.90 and Rs.100 a kg for some variety while others sell between Rs.125 and Rs.130 a kg. Oranges, at the fag end of the

season, is selling for Rs.50 a kg. Mr. Shamsudheen estimates that about 10 tonnes of mangoes come into the Ernakulam market daily.

Date:31/03/2011 URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/2011/03/31/stories/2011033159950400.htm>

Taking environmental science to the field

Amutha Kannan

Students' work taken as a project that is part of their curriculum



HANDS-ON: Students of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham at the experimental field used for the 'Campus Sustainable Agriculture' project - a part of the practical aspect of the environmental science paper - with the project co-ordinator Nikhil Kothurkar on the campus at Ettimadai near Coimbatore.

COIMBATORE: They till the soil, sow seeds, and apply manure to grow vegetables and greens organically. And they are on the way to becoming technical professionals. Though it may sound contradictory, students of the Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham are exactly doing this.

Though environmental science and engineering is a subject that students of all disciplines in engineering colleges and universities study in one semester, Amrita has ensured that the subject does not merely remain on paper.

Project

The University has taken the subject to the field through its 'Campus Sustainable Agriculture Project'. Separate pockets of land have been identified where real-time farming is done. Students from various disciplines who get to do the subject in a particular semester form groups and adopt small beds to cultivate for two to three months. With some professional support they choose the right type of vegetable or greens based on the time of the year.

Indigenous seeds are sowed in tilled soil, nurtured with organic manures and recycled water.

Students are also encouraged to try their hands at inter-cropping or polyculture in the adjoining field which has trees and bushes.

Sri Veena, a second year student of Computer Science and Information Technology, who is part of a team, says that they grow radish, turnips, beans, greens, and beetroot in turns in the time given to them.

Nikhil Kothurkar, co-ordinator of the project and Assistant Professor of Chemical Engineering, says the work of the students is taken as a project that is part of the environmental science (to be called environmental studies from the forthcoming academic year) paper.

"It is more of an educational experience and experimentation rather than a stringent project work. In the process they get to learn to produce food indigenously while ensuring that it is environment-friendly. They can adopt the same practices even elsewhere," Mr. Kothurkar says.

The effort is to prove that low-input sustainable organic farming on a small scale can provide long-term benefits to the nation's environment, society and economy. The project, one of the sustainability initiatives of the university, has involved students to give them the hands-on experience of producing food.

Food crisis being one of the chapters in the subject, Mr. Kothurkar says that this learning experience gives students a feel of the importance of good grains.

Rewarding experience

Students say it is a rewarding experience when they get to see their produce. They tend to their small patch after class hours or on Sundays to ensure that it is well cared for. The value-addition is that the project gives them additional credits to the environmental science paper.

Relaxation

Nevertheless, they vouch that it is certainly different from routine laboratory work and more relaxing.

Date:31/03/2011 **URL:** <http://www.thehindu.com/2011/03/31/stories/2011033161760900.htm>

'Climate change impacts all aspects of human life'

Staff Reporter

BANGALORE: Climate change is slow, irreversible, has long term effects and impacts every aspect of human life. The only way to address it is by adaptation and mitigation, said N.H. Ravindranath, Professor at Centre for Sustainable Technologies, Indian Institute of Science. He was speaking at the Southern Regional event of Pariyavaran Mitra, a programme for students that aims at creating eco-consciousness in schools across India.

Date:31/03/2011 **URL:** <http://www.thehindu.com/2011/03/31/stories/2011033152340800.htm>

Farmers block timber auction

A Correspondent

KALPETTA: A group of farmers under the aegis of the Thirunelly Panchayat Vanyamruga Pradhirodha Samiti, a farmers' action council against wildlife menace, and the Kerala Karshaka Sanghom (a feeder organisation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) blocked a teakwood auction held at the Begur timber depot of the Timber Sales Division of the Forest Department on Wednesday, in protest against the government move to declare the area a tiger reserve.

T.C. Joseph, chairman of the Sanghom, said that when the wildlife sanctuary was formed, the government had assured the farmers that all security measures, including construction of stone walls and other protection measures to prevent wildlife from entering the settlements, would be provided.

Auction postponed

He said that the government was yet to keep its word. Seventy people had been killed in animal attacks in the panchayat since 1885, he added.

The teakwood auction was postponed as traders could not participate in it owing to the farmers' protest.

Published: March 29, 2011 14:43 IST | Updated: March 29, 2011 14:43 IST New Delhi, March 29, 2011

Govt mulls permitting wheat exports



BL Wheat stocks from last year's crop piled up in Karnal mandi of Haryana, even as Government agencies confront a flood of arrivals from the newly harvested crop. Photo: Kamal Narang

The government today said it is mulling allowing wheat exports as the country is braced for a record wheat production this year.

“We are thinking about it (wheat exports). The decision may be taken by April-end or May,” Minister of State for Agriculture Arun S. Yadav told reporters on the sidelines of the north zone conference on agri-cooperatives.

The exports would be considered only after ensuring the domestic demand is fully met, he said.

As per the official estimates, the country’s wheat production is expected to be a record 81.4 million tonnes this year, as against 80.80 million tonnes in 2009-10 (July—June).

The wheat harvesting has begun in some States and even FCI, the nodal agency for procurement and distribution of foodgrains, has started buying wheat from farmers at a minimum support price (MSP), the minister said.

According to the FCI data, the arrivals of wheat crop so far in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have been only 2.4 lakh tonnes as compared to 4.93 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period.

Despite low arrival, the FCI has procured over 1.57 lakh tonnes of wheat largely from Madhya Pradesh and only 40 tonnes from Gujarat so far.

Wheat procurement is likely to begin in Punjab and Haryana from April 1, an FCI official said.

FCI has set a higher procurement target of 26.2 million tonnes for 2011-12 marketing year (April—March), as against 22.51 million tonnes last year.

The bulk of the procurement is being done between April and June. Wheat is grown in Rabi (winter) season.

On cotton, the minister said the country is heading for a bumper production in 2011-12.

“Cotton output in the next year will be 10 per cent more than 2010-11,” Mr. Yadav said.

Cotton production stood at 33.9 million bales (170 kg each) in 2010-11 crop year (July—June), as per the government’s second advance estimate released in February.

Date:31/03/2011 URL:

<http://www.thehindu.com/2011/03/31/stories/2011033152330802.htm>

Foodgrain prices


Mr. M. Bhaktavatsalam, Home Minister, made a statement in the Madras Legislative Assembly on March 30, holding that there had been only slight fluctuations in the prices of rice, wholesale and retail, during this month, as compared to February and that "in any event there has not been any sudden spurt in the price of rice." The Government were no doubt aware that the prices of rice now prevailing were comparatively higher than those, which prevailed during the corresponding period last year. In view of this, they had since ordered the continuance of fair-price shops up to the end of April in all the districts in which these were functioning.

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Weather

Chennai - INDIA


Today's Weather



Thursday, Mar 31
 Max Min
 35.6° | 24.5°






Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs Sunrise: 6:07
 Humidity: 84% Sunset: 18:20
 Wind: Normal Barometer: 1009.0

Tomorrow's Forecast



Friday, Apr 1
 Max Min
 36° | 25°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday Apr 2	Sunday Apr 3	Monday Apr 4	Tuesday Apr 5	Wednesday Apr 6
				
34° 23° Partly Cloudy	33° 22° Cloudy	32° 21° Cloudy	32° 21° Partly Cloudy	30° 24° Rainy



Grow moong after harvesting wheat during summer

March 31, 2011 10:49:52 AM

PNS | Hisar

The scientists of Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University (CCSHAU), Hisar have asked the State farmers to grow summer Moong in the irrigated areas after harvesting the wheat crop. It will not only benefit the farmers, but also boost production of pulses in the State.

The varsity's research director R P Narwal said: "Paddy-wheat crop cycle had always been favourite among the farmers of Northern India, especially those of Punjab and Haryana." The varsity's research director added: "80 per cent of pulses were grown in the rain fed areas. However, by growing pulses in the irrigated areas, the area under these crops could be increased without decreasing area under wheat-paddy crops." In the wheat-paddy areas, wheat crop was harvested by April 15 to 20 and paddy was planted after mid June. During this period of two-and-a-half months, summer Moong could be grown in the irrigated areas.

PUSA Baisakhi, PUSA Vishal, Muskan, K-851 and SML-668 varieties of Moong could be grown in the summer. These varieties get ready in 60 to 70 days and give yield three to four quintals per acre. The summer Moong should be sown as early as possible so that it might be harvested before the rainy season sets in.

Panjab University dispatches roll no (s): Panjab University authorities' have informed that the

students in particular appearing in annual examinations to be held from April 2 that Panjab University has dispatched all the roll numbers.

In case if any candidate does not get his roll number, he can visit the varsity to seek a duplicate one. Duplicate roll numbers shall be issued to them after they will show their identity cards by way of their recent attested passport size photograph proof of having submitted to the branch. Maharshi Dayanand University organises national conference: Professor of Information System with the Management Development Institute (MDI), Gurgaon, Prof N P Singh in his key note address in the inaugural session of national conference on 'Emerging Trends in Mobile Technology and Security System (ETMTS-2011)' organised at Maharshi Dayanand University (MDU) Rohtak said: "Mobile technology has improved the quality of life and mobile communication has become an integral part of life. However, effective security models for mobile technology need to be developed."

Prof N P Singh further added that multiplicity of regulatory authorities in telecom sector is a cause of problem. He called for universal standardisation of essential components of mobile technology, including developing universal charger for mobiles.

Executive Secretary, Indian Society for Technical Education, Dr Ranjit Singh in his address said that mobile technology will pave the way for digital ticketing in future. Dr Ranjit Singh further said that efforts must be made to make the society techno-oriented to facilitate change. Earlier Prof Nasib Singh Gill, Conference Director and Head, DCSA welcomed the guests and delegates.

Dr Ranjit Singh also emphasised that mobile Technology is now part and parcel of life. He suggested simplification of mobile technology and developing quality security measures for this technology. About 250 delegates participated in the conference and deliberated upon the issues related to the theme in three technical sessions.

Yellow rust damages 80% of wheat crop

March 31, 2011 10:50:06 AM

Anil Kimta | Shimla

Deadly disease of 'yellow rust' which has affected almost 80 per cent of the wheat crop of lower Himachal, echoed in the State Assembly here on Wednesday. The wheat crop of the lower Himachal is the main source of livelihood for this agrarian State.

The Congress MLA from wheat growing area of Kangra, Yograj Singh asked the Government whether they are doing something to check this deadly disease as it has badly affected the entire crop of wheat during the last few months. He also asked why was the affected seed of wheat distributed among the farmers when it had bad results in the past. Singh asked the house what effective steps Government is taking to check it so that further damage to the crop could be stopped.

While replying to this, the Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal told the house that it is a fact that a deadly disease known as "yellow rust" has badly damaged the wheat crop of our farmers which is matter of great concern.

He said the one of the main cause of this disease was the long winters and plenty of rains in the months of January and February. Dhumal said that it is not only Himachal but the entire north Indian States that are affected by the new seed of wheat known as (Race) 78, S84. Dhumal said that the State Agriculture Department has taken every possible step to help the farmers. Initially, our Agriculture officers also asked and educated the farmers not to buy the new seeds. He said: "We have distributed pesticides amounting to 20356 litre among the growers and 26559 liters of pesticides are available with the Department.

Dhumal said that through different medium of radio, TV, newspapers etc, we are educating the farmers how to deal with this disease. "Our Government is ready to help the farmers affected by this deadly disease at all levels so that they do not suffer throughout the year," he added.

Business Standard

Thursday, Mar 31, 2011

Futures trading in tur, urad soon: Khatua

BS Reporter / Mumbai March 31, 2011, 0:40 IST

Futures trading in urad and tur is likely to be restored after the monsoon session of the Parliament which is set to pass the much awaited Forward Contracts (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill 2010, said B C Khatua, chairman, Forward Markets Commission (FMC).

Speaking at a gathering of Commodity Participants Association of India in Delhi on Wednesday, Khatua said the Bill is likely to be passed in the forthcoming monsoon session, as almost all necessary consultation processes were complete. He hinted that with the smooth passage of the Bill in the monsoon session, the FMC would reintroduce futures in urad and tur.

Khatuasaid in 2007 when futures were banned in urad and tur, that respective prices were Rs 23 and Rs 25 a kg respectively and after futures were banned in these two commodities, there prices starting shooting up

FMC chairman strongly advocated that it is a misnomer that futures influence upward price rise and such a misnomer or perceived notion must be burried down.

Pulses, edible oil subsid

Anindita Dey / Mumbai March 31, 2011, 0:38 IST

The ministry of food and consumer affairs has extended the pulses subsidy for one more year, till March 31, 2012.

Officials said the edible oil subsidy will also be rolled out for one more year. However, final notification is yet to be issued. Both these subsidy schemes, for pulses and edible oil, expire tomorrow. Stock limits for another year have also been imposed on both commodities.

The food ministry has been subsidizing pulses and edible oil distribution under the public distribution system (PDS) by states to the extent of Rs 10 a kg and Rs 15 a litre, respectively. The difference between the market price and the price of PDS is compensated to states through these subsidy schemes.

“Since pulses and edible oil, are both essential commodities and India depends heavily on imports for both, the central government has also decided to impose stock limits for both in the states under the Essential Commodities Act,” said an highly placed official.

Imposing stock limits and monitoring these is under the purview of individual states while the “in principle” direction is given by the Centre.

“While the estimates of pulses production have been good, these measures are aimed at combating any unwanted blips resulting into high prices and therefore, continue with the scheme for PDS,” said an official.

Since edible oil imports are affected by the current high international prices, the food ministry in consultation with the finance ministry has also decided to maintain status quo on the duty structure for edible oil imports. Currently, there is zero import duty for crude edible oil and 7.5 per cent duty for importing processed edible palm oil.

The Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has also extended the ban on export of pulses for one more year, till March 31, 2012.

The scheme of subsidy for pulses and edible oil proposed in 2008-09 is meant for uninterrupted supply of these essential commodities under PDS, irrespective of ruling market prices or prices at which these are imported.

India is a net importer of edible oil, especially palm oil and soyoil. The agriculture ministry had indicated a record output for 2010-11. According to the second advance estimate, pulses output is likely to touch 16.51 million tonnes.

Under PDS, in 2009-10, the government had increased the amount of pulses to be distributed under PDS from 300,000 tonnes to 600,000 tonnes.

Last year, in order to check pulses prices, the ministry had recommended against raising the minimum support price (MSP) for pulses. MSP acts as a benchmark for the market prices. It had also recommended continuation of the ban on export of pulses and duty-free imports.

Starch makers wilt under stalk pressure

Rajesh Bhayani & Sharleen Dsouza / Mumbai March 31, 2011, 0:36 IST

Maize prices surge despite higher output, with rising demand abroad; processors try to redo sale contracts.

Starch manufacturers are having a rising problem in maintaining their margins, due to the seemingly unstoppable growth in the price of maize, their prime input.

It is four months since the kharif crop began arriving at the wholesale markets. The estimate for the current year's crop is 19 per cent more than last year (the maize year is October-September).

Yet, the price of maize is 40 per cent higher than last year, with 60 per cent of that rise having taken place in these four months (see table).

Starch makers have been trying to pass on the cost to their consumers; their prices have risen by 10 per cent in the past two months. A further eight to 10 per cent rise is on the cards, but there is resistance from user industries, such as textiles and pharmaceuticals.

Says Vishal Majithia, managing director, Sahyadri Starch and Industries: "It is impossible to pass on the whole rise in prices to consumers. We are contemplating increasing the price of starch from Rs 23 per kg to Rs 25 per kg.

BULLISH OUTLOOK			
Not much benefit of good crop due to higher exports			
Output	2009-10	2010-11E	% change
Kharif	12.29	15.71	27
Rabi	4.43	4.32	-2
Total	16.72	20.03	20
Export	0.7	2.7-2.8	285
<i>All figures in million tonnes</i>			
Price movement			
Maize prices	2010	2011	% change
NCDEX spot*	849.15	1,193.95	40
CBOT**	139.57	265.45	90
<i>*₹/quintal **\$/tonne</i>		<i>(Prices as on March 26)</i>	

Glucose is another by-product while making starch from maize and is used by the pharma industry. Starch makers usually sign one-year sale contracts, in January, for glucose. In early January, maize prices were Rs 950-1,100 per quintal. Now, these are near to Rs 1,200 a qtl and starch companies are going back to their buyers to renegotiate contracts.

Said an industry source: “We had to absorb up to a 10 per cent hike in maize prices during the contract period. Since prices have gone up by more than that in the first quarter of the contract, we have sent letters to the counter-parties to renegotiate the contracts.”

Increased demand abroad is a key reason why maize is only available at a higher price.

The total (kharif and rabi) crop is expected to be 20 million tonnes in 2010-11, compared with last year’s total of 16.7 mt. However, compared to last year’s 0.7 mt of export, it could be 2.7-2.8 mt this year. Corn (maize is mostly called corn in the developed world) prices in the international market have risen 17 per cent in the past four months and by 90 per cent over the past 12 months.

“Indian corn is possibly the cheapest in the world market on Wednesday,” said Amit Sachdev, Indian representative on the US Grain Council.

Industry sources also say there was some damage to the crop due to late rains, plus diversion for other uses, making less available for industrial use. In sum, the price outlook for maize is bullish for some more months.

Coffee prices may see near-term correction

Debasis Mohapatra / Bangalore March 31, 2011, 0:31 IST

Prices of forward coffee contracts for export delivery during July-September to Japan are expected to fall, due to a possible downward trend of consumption in that country in the aftermath of the earthquake. However, coffee contracts for April-June delivery will not come for renegotiation, according to exporters.

“Importers from Japan have already entered into delivery contract for April-June and there is less possibility of renegotiation of these contracts. However, forward contracts for delivery during July-September is expected to fall,” Ramesh Rajah, chairman of Coffee Exporters’ Association of India said. He said the extent of fall of these delivery contracts was difficult to predict as of now.

Japan is the third-largest global importer of coffee. It imports 1.3 million tonnes of green coffee and is the fourth-largest consumer of the commodity in the world. The country consumes the premium variety of arabica, most of which is imported from South American nations like Brazil and Colombia.

“We are getting reports that people are not coming out to departmental stores for fear of radiation exposure in some parts of the country. However, it is too early to ascertain the fall in demand at this point of time,” Rajah said.

Meanwhile, the Japanese crisis has had its reflection on arabica prices in the international exchanges. These were ruling at a 14-year high of 290-295 cents/lb at the New York Exchange and have seen a correction of around 10 per cent after the Japanese crisis. Prices are now 265-270 cents/lb for three-month delivery. “Though the Japanese crisis worked as a trigger, other factors like profit booking and less fund buying have also contributed towards the fall,” he said. Rajah added arabica prices were expected to be range-bound in the near term.

According to commodity analysts, the Japanese crisis will have little impact on Indian exports as our exposure is very small.

“Overall exports from India will not suffer despite a possible demand fall from Japan as we export only around 1,600 tonnes of premium coffee to that country,” Marvin Rodriguez, vice-president of Karnataka Planters’ Association (KPA) said. He, however, said arabica prices would remain subdued in the near-term on the back of this crisis.

Some analysts have a different opinion. “While it is too difficult to predict a demand fall in Japan in the aftermath of this crisis, supply constraints from producing nations like Brazil and Colombia will compensate for any demand-supply mismatch,” Biren Vakil, director of Paradigm commodities said. He also said the pricing trend of the commodity was expected to evolve in 30-40 days, as extent of damage in the Japanese economy would be fully ascertained during this period.

Agri ministry proposes further cut in onion MEP

BS Reporter / New Delhi March 31, 2011, 0:29 IST

With retail prices of onion falling due to bumper harvest, the agriculture ministry has proposed further lowering of the minimum export price (MEP) to \$175 a tonne from the current \$225 a tonne.

The MEP of onion has already been lowered by almost \$375 a tonne since the time exports were allowed in February. The earlier revision was done on March 23 when MEP was brought down from \$275 a tonne to \$225 a tonne. MEP of Bangalore Rose and Krishnapuram varieties of onions has also been reduced from \$1,400 a tonne to \$600 a tonne in the last one month.

However, despite the reduction in MEP, exports have not picked up because of poor demand from overseas markets and high MEP.

Last month, the government had lifted the ban on onion exports after farmers’ protests on crashing domestic prices. It, however, capped MEP at a higher level of \$600 a tonne as a precautionary measure to control retail prices, which had shot up to Rs 80-85 a kg in December last year. However, agriculture minister Sharad Pawar had subsequently indicated that MEP of

\$600 a tonne was almost double the prevailing rate in international markets, rendering exports uncompetitive.

Onion production in the country is likely to be around 10.5 million tonnes in 2010-11, down from 12 million tonnes last year. In 2010, India exported around 1.1 million tonnes of onions.

According to the department of consumer affairs data, the wholesale price of onion in Delhi has dropped by almost Rs 500 a quintal since February 1.

Cane growers' plight worsens

Mahesh Kulkarni / Chennai/ Bangalore March 31, 2011, 0:05 IST

Sugarcane growers from across the state are planning to stage a massive agitation against the state government for its failure to fulfill some of their demands including introduction of State Advisory Price (SAP) mechanism and payment of sugarcane dues to farmers for the present sugarcane year (2010-11).

"Farmers have supplied around 5 million tonnes of sugarcane to nearly 30 mills in northern districts of Belgaum, Bijapur and Bagalkot valued at Rs 10,000 crore. But none of these mills have paid the cane prices for four months, leaving farmers in deep distress. We strongly protest this anti-farmer stance of the state government," Kurubur Shanthkumar, president, Karnataka Sugarcane Growers' Association (KSGA), said.

The mills in northern districts had announced a cane price of Rs 1,800 per tonne as first advance. This is about 29 per cent higher than the fair and remunerative price (FRP) fixed by the Centre for the present sugarcane year.

However, the mills have not paid them despite reminders. When the state government's attention was drawn towards this issue, the government promised to look into it but has not taken any action, he said.

Apart from the cane price for the present sugarcane year, farmers are also due to get the second instalment for the previous year, which is about Rs 700 crore. The mills in northern parts of the state had committed to pay a second instalment of Rs 200 per tonne of cane, he said.

Shanthkumar said, the farmers would launch a massive dharna in front of the chief minister's residence, if the government fails to take a decision before April 10, 2011.

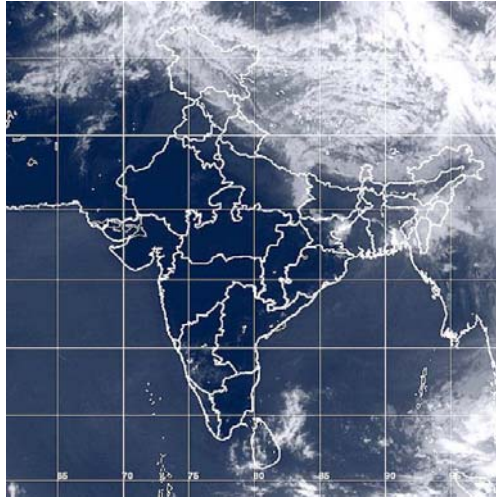
As regards the SAP mechanism in the state, the government was using delay tactic to avoid its introduction as it would be detrimental to the interests of the sugar mills, he charged. "One year ago, the state government had constituted a committee headed by agriculture expert S A Patil and fixed a timeframe of six months to work out the ways and means to introduce SAP system. But, the committee has met only once during the last one year and has not done any work in this regard," Shanthkumar, who is also a member of the committee, said. He said the government lacked the will to bring in an SAP Act and implement the system. The SAP Act will enable the state to fix cane price annually.

Presently, there is no SAP system in Karnataka and mills fix the cane price arbitrarily without consulting the government and farmers. However, the price is usually higher than the fair and remunerative price (FRP) announced by the Centre. The SAP system is presently followed in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

According to Shanthkumar, there is a provision for state governments to introduce the SAP Act which will help the government fix the cane price scientifically. For the present sugar season (October 2010-September 2011), the state government has not fixed the cane price despite several reminders from farmers, he said.

The sugarcane growers have also demanded a higher FRP for 2011-12 as the FRP of Rs 1,450 per tonne fixed by the Centre recently is barely sufficient to meet the cost of cultivation, Shanthkumar added.

Westerly systems to keep weather on a boil



Back-to-back western disturbances would keep the weather on a boil over northwest and east India

Thiruvananthapuram, March 30:

Back-to-back western disturbances would keep the weather on a boil over northwest and east India during the weekend.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said in an evening outlook that the fairly widespread rain or thundershowers over the Northeastern States would sustain until Monday.

Global models are of the view that an incoming western disturbance into northwest India may hold fort for an extended period into the next week.

It may also go on to fuel thunderstorm activity to the east of the country as well as the northeast by April 9, these forecasts said.

The IMD said that scattered rain or snowfall would occur over western Himalayan region and isolated dust storm or thunderstorms over the plains of northwest India until Monday.

A short-term warning said that isolated thunder squalls would break out over east Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand until Friday.

Meanwhile, an update of weather over the last 24 hours ending on Wednesday morning said that widespread rain or snowfall was reported from Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh.

It was fairly widespread over Uttarakhand and scattered over Haryana, west Uttar Pradesh, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, the Northeastern States, Kerala and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The rain was isolated over Punjab, east Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The seasonally unstable weather is generated from the passage of cooler westerly to northwesterly winds over heated up surface.

Minimum temperatures rose by 2 to 3 deg Celsius over parts of northwest India while they fell by 2 to 3 deg Celsius over parts of the Northeastern States.

They fell by a similar margin also over parts of western Himalayan region, south Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Marathawada and Telangana.

Global long-term forecasts had suggested that peninsular India might witness cooler than normal climes during the spring and pre-monsoon season.

Satellite pictures on Wednesday afternoon showed the presence of convective clouds over parts of southeast Andaman Sea from a persisting low-pressure.

Meanwhile, an upper air cyclonic circulation thrown up by the exiting western disturbance moved in over central Uttar Pradesh with a trough extending to north Orissa.

Short-term forecasts said that scattered rain or snow would occur over Jammu and Kashmir and isolated over Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand until Friday and increase thereafter.

Cashew rises on fresh buying support



Business Line Raw cashew nuts kept for sale in a shop in Kochi. File Photo: K. K. Mustafah.

Cashew prices rose by Rs 5 a kg in the national capital on Wednesday largely on pick up in buying activity on

New Delhi, March 30:

Cashew prices rose by Rs 5 a kg in the national capital on Wednesday largely on pick up in buying activity on firm domestic demand. Tight supplies from growing regions also supported the upside in prices.

Cashew kernel No 180, No 210, No 240 and No 320 rose by Rs 5 to settle at Rs 625-635 Rs 585-590, Rs 525-530 and Rs 440-460 a kg, respectively.

Market analysts said increased buying by retailers and stockists, supported by domestic demand mainly pushed up cashew prices.

Following are today's quotations in Rs for 40 kg: Almond (California) Rs 10,000 Almond (gurbandi-new) Rs 4,900-5,000 almond (girdhi) Rs 2,700-2,750 and Abjosh Afghani Rs 7,000-20,000. Almond kernel a kg (California) Rs 350-360, almond kernel (gurbandi-new) (kg) Rs 300-370.

Rubber output seen up 4% despite low productivity



A file photo of a rubber plantation.

Kochi, March 30:

Despite having large acreage under low-yielding aged trees and resultant stagnant levels of productivity, India's natural rubber output is slated to grow 3.9 per cent to 8.84 lakh tonnes this year. "It is noteworthy that despite high prices and commercial introduction of improved clones, average yield expected this year is considerably below the level achieved even five years before," the Association of Natural Rubber Producing Countries (ANRPC) has observed.

While the country had notched up productivity of 1,903 kg a hectare in 2008, the current year's productivity is expected to be 1,800 kg – a growth of 16 kg for a hectare over last year. The unprecedented growth in rubber prices in the last couple of years has been the primary cause for the low productivity. With ailing high prices prevailing in the market, farmers have been averse to re-planting aged trees with new and high yielding clones, sources in the Rubber Board said. Moreover, it will take seven years for newly-planted saplings to be start yielding.

It was in 1979 that the country first introduced a subsidy scheme for promoting rubber new-planting, was followed by a popular integrated scheme launched in 1980. Consequently, there was a planting boom in the country during the 1980's and an estimated 46 per cent of the yielding trees are now in the 20-28 year category and another 13 per cent in the 29-31 year age group.

Farmers' postponement of replanting during the last couple of years, in response to high prices, has aggravated the unfavourable age profile further, the ANRPC said. The increasing focus on non-traditional regions has also contributed to the relatively low yields.

Consumption of natural rubber in India has also been slow this year. Consumption has grown by only 0.6 per cent in January and by 3.4 per cent in February. It is expected to grow 1.9 per cent during the first quarter of the current year. The slow growth in consumption is reflected in the slow growth in the truck and bus tyre segment.

While the auto tyre production in the country grew by 15 per cent in January, it fell 0.4 per cent in the truck and bus tyre segment, according to data provided by the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association. It is the bus and truck tyre segment that accounts for the bulk of the natural rubber consumption in the country. Production of passenger cars rose by 25 per cent in January which was coupled with a fall in the production of truck and bus tyres. This is likely to bring down the consumption of natural rubber in the country and trigger a marked tilt in favour of consumption of synthetic rubber, ANRPC said.

Following the production trends of the last couple of years, global rubber production is slated to grow by 6.2 per cent to 10.06 million tonnes in 2011 as against 9.47 million tonnes in 2010. The growth last year was 6.4 per cent. The supply growth was mainly on account of expansion of yielding area by 2,03,000 hectares and productivity growth of 43 kg a hectare.

Tobacco Board imposes penalty on overgrown produce in Karnataka

The Tobacco Board, after marketing 100 million kg (crop size fixed for Karnataka), now has begun imposing a steep fine/penalty on growers who bring overgrown tobacco to the auction platforms.



Business Line Tobacco field near Ongole, Andhra Pradesh: (file photo): Komuri Srinivas Hubli, March 29:

The board has fixed Rs 2 a kg as penalty and in addition, is charging 15 per cent as service tax to growers who have grown more than the permitted crop size.

According to a senior Tobacco Board official, auctions will continue despite the board marketing the authorised quantity in record time. It is estimated that about 25 to 30 million kg of tobacco is still to be marketed. The balance crop would be sold in the subsequent weeks after imposing fine/penalty on the crop entering the auctions platforms.

At the end of the 142 days of auction (Monday), about 98.66 million kg (9.73 lakh bales) of FCV tobacco variety have been marketed in Karnataka, with an average price fetched Rs 95.10/kg.

Of the total quantity marketed, bright grades comprised of 20 million kg and were traded at an average price of Rs 118.80. Medium grades comprised of 50 million kg, were traded at an average price of Rs 102.05/kg. Low grades, of 29 million kg, sold at an average price of Rs 67.41/kg.

Following are platform-wise auction details, as on Tuesday: H.D.Kote 93,833 bales marketed (8.93 million kg), average price Rs 91.08/kg. Hunsur-1 60,062 bales (6.18 million kg), Rs 97.61/kg. Hunsur-2 81,212 bales (8.29 million kg), Rs 95.42/kg. Periyapatna-1 1.10 lakh bales

(11.14 million kg), Rs 95.95/kg. Periyapatna-2 1.03 lakh bales (10.64 million kg) Rs 99.37/kg. Periyapatna-3 96,070 bales (9.97 million kg) Rs 96.28/kg. Ramanathpura-1 98306 bales (9.82 million kg) Rs 91.92/kg. Kampalapura-1 94,845 bales (9.58 million kg) Rs 97.29/kg. Kampalapura-2 80,333 bales (8.09 million kg) Rs 95.87/kg. Ramanathpura-2 95,059 bales (9.85 million kg) Rs 90.48/kg. Hunsur-3 60,751 bales (6.12 million kg) Rs 95.16/kg.

Deepak Fertilisers mulls Australia plant



Pune, March 30:

Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd (DFPCL) plans to set up a Greenfield plant for the manufacture of Technical Ammonium Nitrate (TAN) in South Australia.

The proposed plant will have a capacity of 300 kpta, and involve an estimated investment of \$350 million, the company said in a statement.

This would be the first such plant in SA and provide TAN supplies primarily to the local market.

The Government of SA has identified a site near Port Bonython, Whyalla for the plant.

Detailed feasibility and environment impact assessment studies and other statutory clearances will be undertaken by DFPCL in the course of next 12-15 months. The project will be completed 24 months thereafter.

In India, DFPCL has about two decades of experience in the manufacturing and marketing of TAN, which is a critical input in the growing mining & construction industry.

It has three plants with a total capacity to manufacture nearly half a million tpa.

Chilli, turmeric up on stockists buying



THE HINDU A farm worker dries plucked chilli. File Photo: Kommuri Srinivas
New Delhi, March 30:

Red chilli and turmeric prices rose by Rs 100 a quintal in the national capital on Wednesday on fresh buying by stockists as well as exporters.

Red chilli prices rose by Rs 100 to settle at Rs 6,700-12,400 a quintal. Turmeric prices also traded higher at by Rs 11,600-16,100 against previous closing of Rs 11,500-16,000 a quintal.

Traders said sentiments turned better following rising domestic and export demand mainly pushed up chilli and turmeric prices on the wholesale kirana market here.

Following are today's quotations in Rs a quintal: Ajwain 16,000-22,000, black pepper common 23,800-24,000, betelnut (kg) 110-120, cardamom brown-Jhundiwali (kg) 1,000-1,010, and cardamom brown-Kanchicut (kg) 1,100-1,250.

Cardamom small (kg): Chitridar 900-970, cardamom (colour robin) 940-970, cardamom bold 955-965, cardamom extra (bold) 1,150-1,160 and cloves (kg) 500-525.

Potato up 3% on spot demand



Business Line Potato on sale. File Photo: Kamal Narang

New Delhi, Mar 30:

Potato prices rose by three per cent to Rs 563.90 a quintal in futures trade on Wednesday as traders enlarged their positions on pick-up in spot market demand. At the Multi Commodity Exchange, potato for delivery in June rose by Rs 16.40, or three per cent, to Rs 563.90 a quintal, with a business volume of 205 lots. Potato prices for delivery in May traded higher by Rs 16.20, or 2.92 per cent, to Rs 571.90 a quintal, with a business volume of 677 lots. Likewise, prices for delivery in April rose by Rs 15.50, or 2.65 per cent, to Rs 601.40 a quintal, with an open interest of 494 lots. Market analysts said increased buying by traders and speculators on pick-up in demand in the spot market mainly led to the rise in potato prices at futures trade. Restricted arrivals from producing belts in Agra and Haldwani also influenced the trading sentiment to some extent, they added.