

THE HINDU

January 30, 2012

Water release

The Chief Minister on Sunday ordered release of water from Sattanur Dam in Tiruvannamalai district following request from farmers.

Coconut trees to be souped up

A.V.RAGUNATHAN

Expert group to devise strategy for trees that survived cyclone



looking forward:Coconut tree growers hope good harvest post 'Thane' in Cuddalore.— Photo: C. Venkatachalapathy

An expert group, comprising senior officials drawn from various departments, including the Coconut Development Board, has been constituted to devise a suitable strategy to rejuvenate coconut trees that have survived the onslaught of cyclone 'Thane' and also to raise new plantations where trees have been fully damaged.

The group consists of Additional Director of Agriculture Elangovan, Deputy Director of Agriculture Manoharan, Deputy Director of Coconut Development Board Hemachandra, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Professor P.Natarajan, and, Joint Directors of Agriculture from Cuddalore and Villupuram districts.

Official sources told *The Hindu* that as per the study conducted by the group coconuts were being grown on 3,291 hectares in Cuddalore and Villupuram districts. The area under coconut cultivation in Cuddalore was 2,743 ha and in Villupuram 548 ha. While coconut trees on 2,424 ha, including Cuddalore – 1,918 ha and Villupuram –506 ha, were totally destroyed, trees on 867 ha, including Cuddalore – 825 ha and Villupuram – 42 ha, were partially damaged.

The sources said while the immediate concern of the group is to remove the several lakh fallen trees and to rejuvenate the surviving ones. Re-plantation should begin by May–June.

Action plan

An elaborate action plan was being prepared by the group outlining the details of the rejuvenation measures. The report would soon be submitted to the State government and the Board for follow-up measures.

The sources noted that after the government approves the recommendations it would sanction funds to the Board to implement the rejuvenation scheme, providing for nutritional management and other agro-techniques to make the young trees attain productive stage.

In this respect, it is hoped that the Andhra Pradesh pattern is likely to be followed.

Under the pattern an immediate relief of Rs. 500 per ha was given for cutting and removing the coconut trees uprooted by the natural disaster in 1996 and Rs. 7,500 per ha for rejuvenation.

The sources expressed surprise that coconut growers in Cuddalore, Villupuram and Nagapattinam districts were remaining out of the purview of crop insurance. Had they opted for the insurance cover their losses would have been minimised to a large extent.

The insurance scheme being jointly implemented through the Agriculture Insurance Company of India and the Coconut Development Board provides for an insurance cover of Rs. 600 each for four to 15-year-old trees and Rs. 1,150 each for 16 to 60-year-old trees. The formula for sharing the insurance premium is as follows: farmers – 25 per cent, State government – 25 per cent and the Coconut Development Board – 50 per cent.

As far re-plantation, farmers would be advised to go either for dwarf or hybrid varieties that would start bearing nuts from the fourth year.

They would also be directed to go for intercropping such as banana that would bear fruits within a short duration to supplement their income.

The sources suggested that coconut growers in Cuddalore and Villupuram districts emulate their counterparts in Coimbatore, Tirupur, Vellore, Thanjavur, Dindigul, Sivaganga and Theni to adopt the cluster approach.

Already 288 such clusters had come into being, with each consisting of 25 farmers. These clusters could also effectively influence the policy decisions, the source added.

Cyclone-affected farmers float new forum

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

A group of farmers have joined hands to float a forum called the Association of Thane Cyclone-Affected Coconut Farmers of Cuddalore District.

Association president G.Ramalingam told *The Hindu* that coconut growers had suffered unprecedented losses. According to a preliminary estimate 10 lakh coconut trees were uprooted and survival of five lakh trees was doubtful.

These plantations were the source of livelihood not only for the coconut growers but also for several thousands of labourers. Besides producing nuts, coconut trees provided raw material to the coir industry and allied enterprises.

Most of the damaged trees were fully matured in highly productive stage, nurtured over generations. Therefore, the association had submitted a memorandum to the Central team on cyclone damage assessment, when it visited Cuddalore, seeking monetary assistance of Rs 15,000 per acre for the removal of uprooted trees and a compensation of Rs 3,000 per damaged or destroyed tree.

For rejuvenation of the coconut plantations the association sought saplings, farm implements and irrigation equipment free of cost. It also called for waiver of loans of coconut growers, even for loans obtained from private financiers.

At the same time, the government should give interest-free fresh loans to coconut farmers for raising new plantations. It called upon the government to freely give hand-held power-cutting machines and chain blocks for lifting the fallen trees.

The coconut growers are a worried lot because the present crisis situation would displace the labourers to the neighbouring districts in search of jobs. It calls for a “mission mode” approach to rejuvenate and revive the coconut plantations.

Goat distribution scheme ensures balanced growth: Minister

STAFF REPORTER



Path of development: Transport Minister V. Senthil Balaji giving away free goats to beneficiaries in Karur district.

The State government is charting the path to ensure equitable and balanced socio-economic development in the State so that both the urban and rural sections benefit from welfare schemes. Distribution of free goats is a step in that direction, Transport Minister V. Senthil Balaji said here on Sunday.

Addressing a series of government functions organised here to distribute free goats and declare open new projects in the district, Mr. Senthil Balaji pointed out that Chief Minister Jayalalithaa had promised to enhance the income of farming community. Towards that end schemes have been drafted and were being implemented in various spheres of agricultural activity.

Backward sections of society are being given 30 per cent of the benefits in those schemes, he said.

The Minister gave away a total of 50 goats to beneficiaries at Appipalayam village and another 70 goats to beneficiaries at Govindampalayam village at a total cost of Rs. 15.06 lakh. Steps would be made to address drinking water needs of the people of Andankoil East and West panchayats, and Pallapalayam panchayat by implementing a drinking water scheme from the Cauvery soon, Mr. Senthil Balaji assured the area people.

The Minister declared open a high level over head tank constructed at a cost of Rs. 6.10 lakh at Govindampalayam under the MLA Local Area Development Fund.

Seaweed cultivation thrives in Ramanathapuram

C. JAISHANKAR

1373 tonnes of seaweed have been produced in 2010-11



Harvest from the sea: Workers working at a sea weed cultivation spot at Munaikadu in Mandapam.- Photo: L. Balachandar

In spite of numerous hurdles, the State has registered a considerable growth in seaweed cultivation, raising hope for consolidation of seaweed farming in coming years.

Though the collection of naturally grown seaweed has been going on for several decades, it was in 2000, the Central Salt Marine Chemical Research Institute (CSMCRI), a lab of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), developed a technology for Kappaphycus cultivation, an imported seaweed, and also for harvesting and manufacturing of semi refined carageenan. It then transferred the technology to a private company that began the commercial cultivation of Kappaphycus along the shore of Palk Bay in Mandapam. It roped in several Self Help Groups in Ramanathapuram, Tuticorin, Kanyakumari, Nagapattinam and other districts and engaged them in the cultivation of Kappaphycus, which has a huge demand worldwide.

However, the campaign to propagate Kappaphycus received a big jolt when a few scientists came up with a revelation that the seaweed, an exotic species, has spread to the nearby Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park and engulfed a group of coral reefs thereby preventing their growth.

Though it dented the seaweed cultivation for some time, available statistics suggest that it has recorded good growth rate . It reveals that the propagators of seaweed particularly the scientists of CSMCRI have been able to circumvent most of the problems that seem to be haunting the development of seaweed sector.

In 2007-08, the Self Help Groups, which followed the raft technology of CSMCRI in Tamil Nadu produced 558 tonnes of dried seaweed. It went up to 858.55 tonnes in 2008-09 and 962 tonnes in 2009-10. It has gone up to 1373 tonnes in 2010-11.

C.R.K. Reddy, Senior Principal Scientist, CSMCRI, Bhav Nagar, Gujarat told The Hindu that the technology transferred by it had made strong inroad among the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. It had encouraged the scientists to take concrete steps to spread the concept to other States in the country.

K. Eswaran, Scientist-In-Charge and M. Ganesan, Scientist, CSMCRI, Mandapam said that research and development institutions, TNDof (Tamil Nadu Department of Fisheries), commercial banks and a few private investors have been encouraging seaweed cultivation.

Theni district sees a boom in sericulture activities

K. RAJU

Bi-voltine cocoon production and area under mulberry cultivation have increased sharply in the district, thanks to growing demand, less volatility in procurement prices and steady expansion of market for white cocoons.

Another specialty is that almost all silkworm rearers have shifted to bi-voltine white cocoons from the traditional yellow cocoons which failed to attract buyers.

Even as potential market for cocoons is in Coimbatore, more and more farmers have taken up sericulture as prime agriculture activity owing to technological advancement and simplification of mulberry worms rearing methods.

Condition of soil, water availability and early onset of monsoon help farmers develop mulberry farms and get better yield.

Renovation of rural tanks by the Public Works Department in dry areas of Bodi block also has encouraged many farmers take up sericulture and cultivating mulberry plants to feed silk worms.

Besides sufficient water and fertile soil, simplification of silk worm rearing method is godsend for sericulturists.

Earlier, farmers had to buy eggs and protect the worms from its birth to cocoon stage. The first two stages are termed as difficult ones and this was daunting to the farmers.

Now, with a private unit at Sanarpatti taking the responsibility of protecting the worms in the first two stages, the farmers receive stable and healthy 12-day-old worms at their door step under safe condition.

“We spend Rs. 450 for procuring eggs and Rs. 500 for rearing worms till completion of two stages. Level of risk taking has scaled down”, say farmers. Another positive factor is a stable procurement price for white cocoons. Prices of white cocoon have been hovering between Rs. 410 a kg to Rs. 600 a kg. But the prices of yellow cocoons are now at Rs. 195 or Rs. 200 a kg.

Assistant Director of Sericulture, M. B. Mohan said that nearly cent per cent of farmers taking up sericulture have shifted to white cocoon production from yellow cocoons.

Prices of white cocoon have been hovering between Rs. 410 a kg to Rs. 600 a kg

Area under cultivation has gone up

Delta farmers exposed to mechanisation benefits

STAFF REPORTER

Exhibition displays ongoing students projects and machinery



AID FOR BUMPER CROP:P. Murugesha Boopathi, centre, Vice Chancellor, TNAU, inspecting farm equipment at the farmers expo organised by Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute at Kumulur.PHOTO:R.M. RAJARATHINAM

Over 600 farmers from the delta region were introduced to the latest techniques in farm mechanisation at an expo organised by the Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute at Kumulur near here on Sunday.

Organised in the backdrop of severe shortage of agricultural labourers and the rise in cultivation costs, the exhibition displayed a few ongoing student projects, besides the machinery already available in market.

“Agricultural labourers migrate to urban areas, to work as construction labourers and get paid Rs.400 per day, whereas agricultural labour can fetch them only Rs.120 a day,” said P. Murugesha Boopathi, Vice Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, addressing the media.

“If the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme could be implemented during the lean season (February to May) alone, then farm labourers can work on farms the rest of the year, when agricultural activity is in full swing.

This will ensure that labourers are occupied throughout the year,” he said, adding that they could be made to work on the 38,000 tanks in the state to de-silt, deepen and strengthen bunds, he added.

The stalls at the expo, set up by agriculture-related companies, displayed a range of products such as tractors, agricultural implements, organic fertilizers, pesticides and seed varieties. The farmers were taken through the machinery, explained how to operate them and told from where they could be purchased.

“Mechanisation of agriculture will not only save money but also time for the Indian farmer and the Tamil Nadu government has offered a 50 per cent subsidy on the machinery costs to help them,” said Mr. Boopathi. The day-long expo also included

demonstrations of food processing techniques by the Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology, Thanjavur.

“Today, with the existing farm machineries, it is possible to sow, transplant, weed, harvest and segregate straw from the grains- in other words, we can now have 100 per cent mechanised paddy farms,” said Dr. A Tajuddin, Dean, Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute.

However, mechanisation is still not possible with other crops, like cotton, maize and sugarcane, where the machinery and technology required are still under development.

Every year the college submits a set of farm equipments that were devised in-house by students and faculty members, to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) in Coimbatore. After being screened by experts at TNAU, the selected projects are sent to the government for approval.

“This year, the college sent 12 models for approval among which the Improved Coconut Tree Climber and the Tractor-operated Multipurpose Hoist have been approved for commercial release,” said R. Thyagarajan, Assistant Professor, Department of Farm Machinery. The other models will be brought back to the college for improvisation.

Irrigation farm set up at agriculture college

ARUNA V. IYER



BETTER REACH: A rain gun installed at Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute at Kumulur. PHOTO: R.M. RAJARATHINAM

With global warming and the burgeoning population placing a tremendous pressure on the amount of water available for agriculture, students and faculty members of the Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute in Kumulur have set up a demonstrative irrigation farm on their campus.

Spread over two and a half acres, the irrigation farm is used exclusively for the purposes of education, training and research. Set up about five months ago by the

students and faculty members of the Department of Soil Water Conservation, the farm displays a variety of irrigation methods along with the crops that can benefit from particular models.

“The farm has demarcated portions of land that are irrigated by micro sprinklers, sprinklers, rain guns, drip irrigators and sub-surface irrigators,” said S. Somasundaram, Assistant Professor, Agronomy. The concept behind the farm is based on a course that Mr.Somasundaram completed in Israel recently.

Some of the advantages of using these irrigation methods include conservation of water up to 50- 60 percent, economic usage of fertilizers, suitability to all soil types and usage of salt water for irrigation among others.

Talking about the crops that each of the irrigation method supports, the faculty members K. Nagarajan and Mr. Somasundaram said: “Micro sprinklers can be used on fields where small crops like groundnut, onion and radish are grown; sprinklers (which can be used on lawns too) are used for black gram, green gram, groundnut and vegetables; rain guns can irrigate crops like sugarcane, vegetables, black gram, green gram and fodder crops; drip irrigation can be used along with vegetables, sunflower, all gourds, maize and watermelon and sub-surface drip irrigation can be used to water banana plantations.”

The farm hopes to be a model using which students of agriculture, farmers, irrigation engineers and the concerned government department officials can be trained.

Mettur level

The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 85.97 feet on Sunday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 671 cusecs and the discharge 5,000 cusecs.

Farmers seek separate budget for agriculture

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT



free talk:A farmer raising a point at the monthly farmers' grievances day meeting in Tiruvarur.

Farmers representatives who participated in the monthly farmers' grievances day meeting held at the Collectorate on Friday urged the State government to come out with a separate budget for agriculture.

They said the government of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka have been presenting separate budget for farm sector since 2011. D. Thiagarajan, senior regional manager, Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC), presided over the meeting.

They urged the government to announce a minimum support price of Rs.2,000 per quintal of paddy. Some of the farmers pointed out that heads of various government departments were holding charge of both Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam district.

Due to this many officials could not participate in important meetings being held in Tiruvarur district.

They pleaded for conducting the farmers' grievances day meeting in separate days in both the districts.

They also demanded that the government do away with its proposal of extracting methane gas from the Mannargudi coal beds.

Many farmers thanked Food Minister R. Kamaraj for ordering opening of 50 direct procurement centres at one stroke following the demand made by the farmers.

Mr. Thiagarajan assured to bring all the demands of the farmers to the notice of the higher authorities.

K. Mylvaganan, joint director of agriculture, Kabilan, deputy director of agriculture, Sathyanarayanan, executive engineer, TANGEDCO, and V. Duraisamy, executive engineer, Agricultural Engineering Department, participated in the meeting.

Samiti seeks irrigation facilities for Jagalur taluk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It has called for a bandh today to highlight the issue

The Jagalur Taluk Bhadra Neeravari Horata Samiti has called for Jagalur bandh on Monday seeking comprehensive irrigation facility to the taluk.

At a meeting held on Sunday at Jagalur, Thippeswamy, chairman of the samiti, alleged that despite repeated appeals, the Government had failed to provide irrigation facilities to the taluk. Farmers were reluctant to take up cultivation, and hence, Jagalur taluk remained backward. The samiti had, therefore, decided to call for Jagalur bandh on Monday, he said, claiming that merchants' association, some political parties, and different organisations and educational institutions, had expressed their support to the bandh.

S.V. Ramachandra, MLA and chairman of Hutti Gold Mines, suggested that a delegation of elected representatives from the taluk, apprise Chief Minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda of the situation prevailing in the taluk. "We will urge Mr. Gowda to initiate steps to provide irrigation facilities to Jagalur taluk, immediately," he said. However, he disapproved the call for the bandh.

H.P. Rajesh, Congress leader, said that Jagalur was a chronically drought-hit taluk and the Government was meting out step-motherly treatment to it. He said the bandh was aimed at drawing the attention of the Government to their long-standing demand for irrigation facilities. Gurusiddappa, president of the Jagalur unit of Janata Dal (Secular), also supported the bandh call.

S.K. Manjunath, BJP taluk unit president, opposed the bandh call and urged the organisers not to politicise the issue. A systematic approach was essential to get any facility from the Government, he said and termed the Jagalur bandh politically motivated.

□ ***'Owing to perennial drought conditions, farmers unable to take up cultivation'***

□ ***Congress and Janata Dal (S) extend support***

to bandh call

Adopt soil, water conservation methods, farmers told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Horticulture Minister inaugurates watershed mela in Hebbal

Farmers should lay emphasis on comprehensive watershed activities to survive drought conditions, said S.A. Ravindranath, Minister for Horticulture and in charge of the district.

Inaugurating a watershed mela at Hebbal village, about 16 km from here, on Sunday, Mr. Ravindranath called upon farmers to adopt water and soil conservation methods for long-standing agricultural activities. Citing the examples of Anna Hazare, who had developed different methods of water and soil conservation in Maharashtra, and Rajendra Verma, who had developed different watershed methods in Rajasthan, Mr. Ravindranath instructed Sadashiva, officer at the district Watershed Development Department, to take the farmers and members of the Krishik Samaj to Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and educate them about the methods of water and soil conservation being followed there.

Mr. Ravindranath expressed dismay over what he described as many farmers, instead of thinking on developmental lines, were indulging in settling scores with the fellow farmers. They were resorting to sinking borewells close to the ones already sunk by others. There was a definite norm to sink borewells and a specific distance had to be maintained between two borewells. However, many farmers were sinking

borewells whimsically, which had resulted in failure of most of the borewells, he said, and urged the farmers to adopt different methods of recharging groundwater, before planning to sink a borewell.

Mr. Ravindranath called upon the farmers to grow pulses as an intercrop, as it would preserve the fertility of soil, besides helping them earn additional income. He advised the farmers to plant mango and jack fruit seedlings on the bunds of their fields, which, he said, would start yielding good revenue after a couple of years.

M. Basavaraj Naik, chairman of the Thanda Abivrudhdhi Nigama, said that if the farmers failed to develop watershed methods and conserve water, they might have to struggle to get even a pot of drinking water in future. He advocated adoption of various techniques to recharge the groundwater.

Sowbhagyamma, president of the taluk panchayat, spoke.

Mahanta Rudreshwara Swami of Rudreshwara Viraktha Math, and Ambika Rajappa, chairman of the Standing Committee, Agriculture and Industries, Zilla Panchayat, were present.

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- ***Need to maintain a specific distance between borewells stressed***
 - ***Farmers advised to grow mango and jack fruit trees on the bunds of their agricultural fields***
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Fishermen to get weather information in Kannada

RENUKA PHADNIS

The electronic display board installed at the Fisheries Department in Mangalore's Bunder area will soon display information on weather conditions in Kannada.

Muralidhar, Project Engineer, Webstar Software Private Limited, the Bangalore-based company that has created the software and the hardware for the electronic display board, said that the company was making the regional language the default language on all the installed display boards, including in some other States, based on feedback from users.

He was speaking to *The Hindu* at an exhibition held as part of a meeting on 'Science and Technology: New Opportunities and Challenges' organised by Karnataka Science and Technology Academy, Science and Technology Department, Government of Karnataka, in Mangalore University on Sunday. The company would service the display boards that had already been installed beginning with those that are close to the Bangalore-based company, he said.

The system would be updated initially in Karnataka, Kerala, Goa and Andhra Pradesh. The work of updating the systems with the regional language software would be done within three months, he said.

The existing software would have to be updated with a newer version. The operating system was Microsoft and the application built upon that is by the company, he said.

Information

The display board shows information that is sent from the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad.

Nagaraj Kumar, Scientist in-charge, Potential Fishing Zone Mission, INCOIS, said fishermen and NGOs in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh had said getting the information in the local language was time-consuming as it followed English and Hindi on the display board.

So it was decided to retain information in the local language to enable the users to get information quickly.

In Karnataka, such a system was installed at Karwar, Honnavar, Bhatkal, Tadadi, and Mangalore, said Mr. Muralidhar.

Farm sector hit by land conversion, rising costs

RADHAKRISHNAN KUTTOOR

5 lakh hectares of paddy fields lost between 1980 and 2007



: The dispute between Kerala and Tamil Nadu over the Mullaperiyar dam and the related problems in food supply chain from Tamil Nadu, coupled with the fast diminishing acreage under cultivation owing to rampant land conversion, are posing a threat to the State's farm sector.

The high cost of cultivation has put in distress peasants in Upper Kuttanad, which is considered to be the paddy bowl of Central Travancore. Studies conducted by various agencies show that paddy cultivation in the State has come down by 60 per cent during the period 1975 to 2005.

Data available with the State Planning Board show that Kerala lost over 5,00,000 hectares of paddy fields between 1980 and 2007. It is also a fact that the government could bring as much as 15,000 ha of paddy land kept fallow for two to three decades under cultivation through effective intervention two years ago.

Violation of rules

Though the State has enacted laws to check conversion of paddy fields and wetlands, there has been blatant violation of the prevailing rules and laws mainly due to alleged official and political patronage enjoyed by the so-called land 'sharks' in the name of 'development', said M. Sukumara Pillai, Communist Party of India (CPI) State council member and former Kerafed chairman.

Mr. Pillai said it was high time the government and our political leadership took pragmatic and earnest efforts to revive the State's farm sector, especially the paddy sector. Instead of namesake announcements through the media, the State and the political leadership should take strict measures to check conversion of paddy fields and wetlands and launch cultivation on land that has been fallow since the past several years, he said.

Wanton conversion

Thomas P. Thomas, environmentalist and Botany professor at St. Thomas, Kozhencherry, said the government should resolve not to permit any more conversion of paddy field or wetlands. Bulk density and water-holding capacity of soil are more in paddy fields and less on barren lands. The major functions of wetlands and paddy fields are maintenance of fertility, productivity, recharge of ground water, and purification. The wanton conversion of wetlands and paddy fields taking place in the name of 'development' at Aranmula and Chumatra, near Thiruvalla, should be stopped and the government should take over all illegally converted land for agriculture purposes, Dr. Thomas said.

Upper Kuttanad Nelkarshaka Samiti (UKNS) president Sam Eapen said paddy cultivation had become costly owing to rising fertilizer price and labour cost.

Fertilizer prices

According to him, the price of Factomphos (20X20), which was Rs. 369 a 50-kg bag a year ago had gone up to Rs.573. Pottassium price too had gone up to Rs.528 from its previous year's price of Rs. 310, he said. Factomphos and Pottassium are the two commonly used fertilizers in the paddy fields of Upper Kuttanad.

It is also a fact that the price of urea, which is a more popular fertilizer in various other States, remains unchanged at Rs.267, said Mr. Eapen.

Wage structure

Mr. Eapen said the headload workers charged Rs.75 to Rs.100 to transport a quintal (100 kg) of paddy from the field to the boat or vehicle parked nearby in Upper Kuttanad in sharp contrast to the rate of Rs.3 to Rs.5 for loading a 50-kg bag of cement from the store to a vehicle.

Though the wage structure in Kuttanad has been closely monitored and reviewed by the Kuttanad Industrial Regulatory Committee, absence of any such mechanism in

the Upper Kuttanad has been leading to exorbitant claims of daily wages by farm workers in the region, Mr Eapen alleged.

'Poor way of promoting horticulture'

SWATHI.V

Exhibitors at the Horticulture Expo-2012 complain of mismanagement and official apathy



Myriad hues:Visitors going round the horticulture expo at Necklace Road on Sunday.— PHOTO: NAGARA GOPAL

Even while the stream of holiday visitors swelled towards evening, not all the exhibitors were happy on the penultimate day of the five-day Horticulture Expo-2012 presently on at the People's Plaza, Necklace Road.

It is altogether a different matter that patronage was overwhelming, but for the stall-owners, trouble began right from day one.

First, it was lack of power supply to the stalls, and then it was goof-ups by the authorities in allotments which had them fuming "We have been to shows in Bangalore and Pune and they were much better in terms of proper arrangements as officials would be available throughout to address any problem. Here they rarely visit stalls and do not take calls either," complained a dealer of garden artefacts.

Though the expo began on January 26, power supply was provided only the next day, after heated arguments with officials, she alleged. Allotment of stalls was another aspect where exhibitors alleged sloppy management. Stall locations were changed in the last moment and those who paid for prime slots had to make do with less visible ones.

"I found my stall changed to a non-prime location after coming here. Despite the hike in charges from Rs.14, 000 to Rs.17, 500, only four poles and a roofing sheet is what they provided for outdoor displays. Last year, there were at least walls separating the stalls," another dealer complained, refusing to be identified for the fear of being denied space next time round.

The annual event was fraught with mismanagement and totally out of proportion with the funds garnered by the department, exhibitors alleged, stating that it was no way to promote horticulture.

Fifteen regular visitors, including a few floriculturists from Kadiyam, did not turn up due to lack of information about the expo, sources from Nurserymen's Association informed.

With Nursery Mela not happening last year, this was the event which plant lovers looked forward to and it was the duty of the officials to plan it without an eye for profit, they pointed out.

However, these factors were of no consequence to visitors who flocked to the much-awaited show.

Adenium hybrids brought from Peda Muktevi village, Krishna District, were a huge draw, as also the exotic grown-ups displayed by Unique Aesthetics, Banjara Hills.

A 90-year-old multi-stem Ficus was sold by the latter at Rs.2.7 lakh, perhaps the highest sum garnered by a single tree.

Garden equipment, furniture, decorative items, and micro-irrigation systems were exhibited apart from plants, media and farm produce. Plant germplasm was kept on display by Biotechnology firms.

Farmers in tears as onion price crashes

STAFF REPORTER



DISTRESSED: A farmer looking at onion bags after filling the produce in the field at Undavalli on the borders of Krishna and Guntur.— PHOTO: RAJU. V

Even as the onion farmers claim that there is no demand for their produce, arrival of huge quantities from neighbouring states has resulted in further fall of price of onions.

Farmers, who sold one kg of onions at Rs.30 in January last year, are now selling it for Rs.2.50 and the second and third quality produce at Rs.2 per kg at the 'kallams' (fields) in Krishna and Guntur districts.

Farmers cultivate onion mostly in Guntur, Krishna, Kurnool and other districts in the State.

The growers raised onion in about 5,000 acres in Penumaka, Kistaipalem, Vundavalli, Venkatapalem, Yerrapalem, Mandadam, Nidamarru and in some villages in Krishna district.

"The wholesale traders and commission agents buy the produce from the farmers at 'kallams' and market it in Tamil Nadu, Nellore, Visakhapatnam, Jangareddygudem and other places at higher price. But, there were no takers in the market this year," said a commission agent Muppera Srinivasa Rao of Vundavalli village.

"As there was no ban on export of onions within the country, farmers from Karnataka and Maharashtra are marketing their produce in Andhra Pradesh. Some thousands of quintals of onions are arriving from Hubli and Bagdal regularly," said onion farmer Palagani Krishna.

"Maharashtra and Karnataka governments are procuring the produce through MARKFED and shifting the stocks to Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and other states, which is one of the reasons for fall in prices," said Mr. Krishna. "We have to invest about Rs.70,000 per one acre for purchasing seed, fertilizers, pesticides, labour and other charges. We are getting 5 to 7 tonnes yield per acre, and if we sell onions at Rs.2 per kg, how can we sustain," said farmer P. Sambasiva Rao of Penumaka village.

"This year, the cost of fine quality onion has not even touched Rs.5 per kg. As we can't stock onions like paddy and commercial crops, we request the government to procure the produce directly and provide MSP for onion farmers," said Mr. Rao.

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Monday, Jan 30

Max Min

30.5° | 19.8°

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 53%

Wind: Normal

Sunrise: 6:35

Sunset: 18:03

Barometer: 1002

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Tuesday, Jan 31

Max Min

28° | 20°

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday Feb 1	Thursday Feb 2	Friday Feb 3	Saturday Feb 4	Sunday Feb 5
25° 20° Cloudy	27° 21° Cloudy	28° 22° Cloudy	27° 24° Rainy	28° 23° Rainy

Airport Weather

Delhi

Delhi

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 81%

Wind: Normal

Sunrise: 7:14

Sunset: 17:48

Barometer: NA



THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Coffee output may decline to 2.95 lakh tonne in 2011-12

NEW DELHI: India's [coffee production](#) is expected to decline to around 2.95 lakh tonne in the current coffee year on account of lower robusta output, according to industry experts.

The country had produced 3.02 lakh tonne of the brew in the 2010-11 coffee year (October-September), which included 94,140 tonne of arabica and 2.07 lakh tonne of robusta, according to the Coffee Board data.

"We expect coffee output to decline in the current crop year due to an expected decline in robusta production on account of heavy rains and also as the current year

is an 'off-year'," [All India Coffee Exporters Association](#) President [Ramesh Rajah](#) told reporters.

Arabica output, however is expected to be around one lakh tonne, give or take 5,000 tonne, he added.

The coffee crop has a bi-annual cycle, where the crop production peaks every alternate year.

Agreeing with Rajah's views, [Karnataka Planters Association](#) Chairman Marvin Rodrigues said that initial trends suggest that robusta production could be lower on account of inclement weather.

"We expect robusta production to be around 2 lakh tonne, while arabica would be about 95,000 tonne," Rodrigues, who is also a large coffee grower said.

According to the government-run Coffee Board of India's post-blossom (initial) estimate, the country will produce 3.22 lakh tonne of the brew, with arabica at 1.04 lakh tonne and robusta output at 2.17 lakh tonne.

Coffee Board does not expect any significant change in the post-monsoon production estimates.

"Finalisation of the post-monsoon estimation is in progress and preliminary results indicate that there may not be significant changes," Coffee Board Chairman Jawaid Akhtar said.

Soyabean prices rise, corn pares gains

Soyabeans rose to a two-week high on speculation that commodity demand will increase as low interest rates bolster prospects for economies. [Corn](#) pared gains as US farmers increased sales.

The S&P's GSCI Spot Index of 24 raw materials climbed as much as 1.5%. On Thursday, the Federal Reserve said its benchmark rate probably will stay close to zero percent at least until late 2014.

Brazil's central bank said that there is a "high" chance its key rate will decline. [Soyabean](#) futures for March delivery rose 0.8% to close at \$12.2275 a bushel at 1:15 pm on the [Chicago Board of Trade](#).

Earlier, the price reached \$12.31, the highest for a most-active contract since

January 11. Corn futures for March delivery were unchanged at \$6.345 a bushel. Farmers boosted sales from inventories after the grain climbed as much as 1.8% to a two-week high of \$6.4575.

Drumsticks beat chicken price in Tirupati

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The sudden development left the housewives shocked and the traders found absolutely no buyers for the vegetable till the evening.

With the market hours coming to a close, the merchants were forced to clear the stocks at prices ranging between Rs.80 and Rs.60. However, this price too was met with stiff opposition from the consumers.

During the last three days, the hotels too have completely stopped using drumsticks in making sambar, substituting it with vegetables procured at cheaper rates. A majority of the consumers openly expressed their anger at the inaccessibility to drumsticks, saying that they could better go in for chicken that was available at Rs.110 per kg on Sunday.

Almost all vegetables, including dondakaya, kakarakaya, vankaya, sorakaya and others, were sold at higher rates compared to the last few days. For instance, vankaya was sold at Rs.28 per kg as against the normal price of Rs.10 per kg. The fast-food centres also avoided making Gobi Manchurian as a small-sized flower cost Rs.25.

Interestingly, the sellers of green leaves had a field day, with the consumers thronging their zones. Much to their relief, the green leaves were priced considerably lower compared to the last couple of days.

The tomato prices that had plummeted to Rs.4 per kg last week, surged ahead again with Rs.12 per kg.

Marking the Radha Saphthami festival on Monday, the prices of fruits and flowers also went high, putting the consumers in a quandary. The chamanthi flowers were sold at Rs.160 per kg as against the regular price of Rs.60 per kg. Similarly, the price of a dozen bananas had touched Rs.40 as against the normal Rs.25. The traders maintained that the situation would continue for the next one week.



Mills likely to consume more cotton

At a meeting on Tuesday, the Cotton Advisory Board (CAB) said textile mills were likely to consume more cotton than estimated earlier this year. Mills' consumption estimate for the current cotton year (October to September) has been revised marginally upwards from 21 million bales to 21.6 million bales (1 bale equals 170 kg).

Chinese govt to inspect processing units in wake of ban on Indian oilmeal

After ordering suspension of import from India of rapeseed and oilmeal, after detecting traces of malachite green contamination in shipments, a team from the Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) is set to inspect vegetable oil processing units in this country next month.

Over the past six months, Chinese authorities have discovered 0.5-1 parts per billion of such contamination (equivalent to around one seed in every 1,000 million) in consignments.

“Acting on the complaints by the Chinese authority, we discovered its source as the green ink used for marking on jute bags. We immediately directed all players in the industry to avoid using jute bags and to not accept any parcel marked with green ink,” said B V Mehta, executive director, the Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA), the apex trade body with 850 members.

DRAGON ALERT			
Imports during Oct- Sept (in'000 tonnes)			
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12 (E)
Rapeseed meal			
Overall imports in China	993	1,460	1,490
India's exports	260	405	62*
India's contribution (%)	26	28	–
Soybean meal			
Overall imports in China	80	290	362
India's exports	65	118	65*
India's contribution (%)	81	41	–
<i>*For the period between October-December 2011, E-Estimates</i>			

SEA and the Export Inspection Council of India had jointly conducted a survey last month to determine the probable source of the malachite green contamination. The Chinese authority is not satisfied with the response, Mehta added. Surprised over the ban decision, an Indian exporter said, "It has no basis at all. The oilmeal import ban by China is a response to India's decision to suspend milk and milk products' import from China." China withdrew permission for rapeseed meal and soybean meal import from India from this month. Japan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Russia, Canada and Australia are likely to grab the Indian share of these exports.

Malachite green is a synthetic dye used to colour silk, wool, jute and leather and is not permissible for any directly consumable commodities. Ideally, one needs Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points-certification. This indicates the food processing unit is maintaining all safety standards required to produce world-class products or ingredients.

However, say industry sources, none of the 1,500 units in the entire value chain, including crushing, processing and solvent extraction plants, are certified by HACCP. Since oilmeal is not consumed directly by any human being, no such certification is

required, said an analyst. Indian traders supply rapeseed meal and soybean meal worth Rs 600 crore annually for export.
