

THE HINDU

Fish landing centre for Vellapallam

NAGAPATTINAM, May 5, 2012

A fish landing centre is to be set up at Vellapallam to facilitate Vedaranyam fishermen to launch or land their boats with ease. A long-standing demand of fisherfolk in this region, the landing centre would be constructed on the mouth of river Nallar which is swampy for most of the year thus rendering launching and landing of boats difficult.

The marshy condition worsens during monsoon, making navigation of boats difficult for a distance of 600 metres. The fish landing centre will have a wharf, diaphragm wall, and a canyon for few hundred metres into the sea. According to an official source, fisherfolk found it easy to go in during the high tide while they are unable to return ashore during low tide.

The project envisages deepening the mouth of Nallar and channelising the backwaters to enable berthing of boats. Work on preparing a detailed feasibility report of the project is to be handed over to a premier institution. According to the official, the swampy stretch would be preserved, except for a small area as it provided for faunal diversity.

MUMBAI, May 5, 2012

Irrigation in deep water, Chavan calls for White Paper

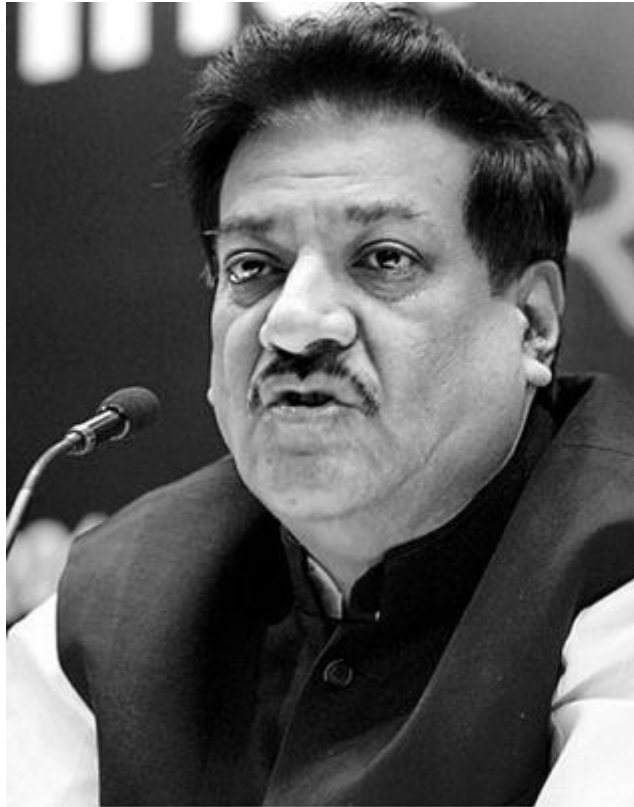
Adivasis up in arms against 'unauthorised dams'

Faced with mounting criticism of the irrigation sector, Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan on Friday ordered that a White Paper be brought out by the department, headed by Nationalist Congress Party Minister Sunil Tatkare.

Speaking at the symposium on 'Maharashtra – Kal, Aaj ani Udyā' (Maharashtra Yesterday Today and Tomorrow) on the occasion of the birth centenary of Y.B. Chavan here, the Chief Minister admitted that irrigation potential had grown only by 0.1 per cent in the last decade in the State and said he would ask the department to examine the spending.

For some time mass organisations and Adivasis in Raigad and Thane districts have been fighting a battle against "unauthorised dams."

On Thursday, a delegation met the Chief Minister to demand a stay on many dams coming up in the two adjoining districts of Mumbai, ostensibly to supply water to the city and other special industrial and housing projects.



Opposition too demands probe

The Opposition too has been demanding an inquiry into the irrigation “scams’ involving huge cost overruns. It was pointed out to Mr. Chavan during the symposium that Rs. 70,000 crore was spent in the last decade with little results in terms of enhancing irrigation potential. While other States had increased their irrigation capacity, in Maharashtra it was around 17.9 per cent.

Brian Lobo of the Kashtakari Sanghatana said the delegation had demanded stopping all 15 or so dams which were coming up very fast without proper permission, and an inquiry into the irregularities.

India Against Corruption (IAC), which was part of the delegation, organised a meeting on dams and corruption on Friday.

IAC member Anjali Damania has filed a petition against the construction of the Kondane dam in Karjat, which has no proper approval, a fact she came to know thanks to the Right to Information Act.

In another instance, she said, the Balganga dam in Pen taluk of Raigad district started out with a budget of Rs. 488 crore, which is now hiked to Rs. 1,120 crore. A single contractor was in charge of constructing more than 10 of these projects, she said.

Bhaskar Dondre, one of the affected persons, said the government was going ahead with the Balganga dam construction without proper land acquisition in 13 villages, even though the people had got a stay from court. This was in violation of all laws of resettlement and rehabilitation which specified that displaced people be resettled first, said Ms. Damania.

In the case of the Kondane dam, work on which has been going at breakneck speed, the cost was first supposed to be Rs. 57 crore but this year the budget went up to Rs. 435 crore, she pointed

out. Ms. Damania, who owns land near the project, said even getting information through RTI was difficult as no replies came within the stipulated 30 days.

Later, the replies revealed that only 25 per cent of water from the project was for drinking purposes and the remaining quantum was for special economic zones, industries and large housing projects in the region.

Indavi Tulpule of the Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, which works in Murbad taluk of Thane district, said there was a proposal to build dams across the Shahi and Kalu rivers, submerging 52 villages and 3,040 hectares of land. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), which was building the Shahi dam, said it could not fund the resettlement as the cost was too high, Ms. Tulpule pointed out.

However, the dam got past the first stage of clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, based on the claim that the area had no forests or wild animals which, however, was not true, she added. Local villagers are planning to stop the construction. Authorities have imposed an order Section 144 of the Cr. PC in the area to prevent any agitation.

In the case of Kalu, villagers approached the Bombay High Court for a stay on the construction and the plea was granted.

Ms. Damania said there were seven dams coming up in Raigad, to be built by the Konkan Industrial Development Corporation, 20 in Thane and 26 in Nashik. Some of the dams near Mumbai are being built by the MMRDA and the Balganga dam by the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO).

In most cases there was no land acquisition or proper permission but work goes ahead and in Kondane, about half of it is already over, she says.

KOLLAM, May 5, 2012

Cashew workers on the warpath

STAFF REPORTER

To launch indefinite mass fast from May 9

V. Sathyaseelan, general secretary of the INTUC-affiliated Kerala Cashew Workers Congress (KCWC), will go on an indefinite fast from May 9 at the Press Club Maidan here to press for various demands of cashew workers.

At a press conference here on Friday, he said cashew workers would stage a mass fast at the venue.

KPCC president Ramesh Chennithala would inaugurate the programme while INTUC State president R. Chandrasekharan would preside over it.

UDF convener P.P. Thankachan and Congress leaders V.M. Sudheeran, C.V. Padmarajan, Thennala Balakrishna Pillai, and K. Muraleedharan, MLA, among others would speak.

Mr. Sathyaseelan said that in 2008 and 2009 the then Left Democratic Front government had created some bonus dues to the workers of the cashew factories of the cooperative sector Capex.

The main demand through the fast was to release those dues to the more than 6,000 cashew workers. During the LDF rule the KCWC had organised agitations in two phases to get the dues released. But the then government did not budge.

When the present United Democratic Front government came to power, the KCWC launched the third phase agitation for the purpose as a result of which the dues of 2009 were given. But the dues of 2008 were pending.

Another demand was to raise the pension of the cashew workers to Rs.3,000 and to take steps to clear the pension dues to the cashew workers.

He wanted the Union and State governments to come out with a comprehensive economic package to improve the living standards of the more than 2.5 lakh cashew workers.

He alleged that there was rampant denial of statutory benefits to the workers of the private sector cashew factories and strong measures should be taken to end the same. It was high time a Cashew Board based in Kollam was established. The demand for a Cashew Board had been pending since years, he said.

AMBUR, May 5, 2012

Sugar mill staff block National Highway

STAFF REPORTER

Employees of the cooperative sugar mills at Vadapudupet in Ambur and Kethandapatti in Tirupattur blocked the National Highway-46 for a few minutes on Friday morning. Police arrested the protesting employees and released them later. The strike of the sugar mill employees entered the 31st day. They have been demanding parity in salary with government employees since April 4. General Secretary of Tamil Nadu Sugar Mill Employees Federation, AITUC K. Manoharan said about 50 employees staged a road blockade on the NH near the Ambur cooperative sugar mill for a few minutes. "We have been expecting some kind of announcement from the government but nothing has come through so far. We are planning to hold a discussion with all the trade unions participating in the ongoing strike to decide on the further course of action," he said.

At the cooperative sugar mill at Kethandapatti in Tirupattur, nearly 300 employees along with few of their family members staged a road blockade on the NH for a few minutes. Police arrested 48 persons at Ambur and 150 persons at Kethandapatti for staging the road blockade on the NH and later released them.

District joint president of CITU and former MLA of Gudiyatham G. Latha, who participated in the protest, said the employees were demanding salary on par with government employees. Currently, there existed two categories of pay scale in the mill and workers employed for several years were receiving low payment.

COIMBATORE, May 5, 2012

Fresh fruits are nutritious, but artificial ripening poses health hazards

NILEENA M.S.

Fruits should be thoroughly washed with fresh/salt water to remove pesticides and other chemicals



SAFETY FACTOR:The immense nutritional value of fruits is negated by artificial ripening, which poses serious health hazards.—File Photo: M. Periasamy

Consuming seasonal fruits is one of the best ways to stay healthy when braving scorching summer days.

Doctors and dieticians say that fruits provided necessary nutrients while keeping diseases away. But, there is concern over carcinogenic (cancer-causing) agents being used to ripen the fruits quickly for higher volume of sales. Generally, Indian families prefer carbohydrate-rich food and do not include adequate quantity of raw vegetables and fruits in their diet. Fruits like water melon, mangoes, plums, musk melon and jackfruit should be included in our diet during summer, doctors and nutritionists point out.

Water melon is rich in fibre and prevents dehydration while mango serves as a source of nutrition which could replace diet supplements. Plum is rich in minerals and iron.

Fruits contain plenty of fibre, which cleanse our system by getting rid of waste and toxins, keep bowel movements regular and prevent diseases like cholesterol, bowel cancer and diverticulosis, says Priya Narasimhan, chief dietician at K.G Hospital. As for the nutritional content, the experts say that it is best to consume fruits in raw form which prevents loss of nutrients. Adding preservatives in fruits drinks is not advised, Ms. Narasimhan points out.

She adds that oranges, raspberries, plums, grape, apples, prune, raisins, blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, and pears can also be consumed during summer.

Risk of cancer

The antioxidants found in fruits help eliminate free radicals, carcinogenic by-products from metabolic processes, thereby reducing the risk of cancer.

Even while emphasising the importance of seasonal fruits in diet, the experts point out that it was important to ensure they are safe for consumption.

Fruits should be thoroughly washed with fresh/salt water to remove pesticides and other chemicals.

Chemicals used for artificial ripening of fruits can cause cancer. So can chemical pesticides that are used to boost production, says P. Guhan, Director of Sri Ramakrishna Institute of Oncology and Research.

The International Agency for Research of Cancer has listed a number of chemical agents/pesticides that can cause various types of cancer, he says. People should be aware of the risks of consuming fruits that are artificially ripened. Public health authorities should look at more stringent enforcement of rules to prevent the hazardous practice of artificial ripening of mangoes using calcium carbide.

Food inspectors caution against certain illegal practices followed by fruit vendors to artificially ripen fruits. According to R. Kathiravan, designated officer, Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration Department, Coimbatore, chemicals like calcium carbide crystals which react with water to form acetylene gas or acetylene in gas form are used by vendors to artificially ripen fruits. "Ethephone, an insecticide, is another chemical used for the purpose. Some vendors also resort to burning kerosene stove or incense sticks in closed rooms to quicken the process of ripening," Dr. Kathiravan adds.

According to him, artificial ripening of mango and sapota were commonly reported in the district. All kind of fruits including guava, apples, pineapple, papaya and banana are artificially ripened.

He points out that though safer methods of ripening fruits are allowed in other countries, the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (Rules 2011) totally bans the practice of ripening of fruits in India.

He says that the road-side vendors in the district are sensitised on hygiene aspects and are also directed to keep food covered and to supply them in closed containers.

It is also important to ensure that the equipment used by fruits and fruits juice vendors are kept clean and maintained well, Dr. Kathiravan added. Dr. Guhan explains that fruit ripened using calcium carbide will be uniformly coloured and appear flawless. It is better to avoid fruits with polished appearance.

According to Ms. Narasimhan, carbide gas acts as a neurotoxic agent which can cause neurological disorders. It is hazardous to pregnant women and child.

Though used in small amounts, the chemicals used for artificial ripening contain carcinogens, arsenic and phosphorus.

Symptoms of poisoning include vomiting, diarrhoea, burning or tingling sensation, numbness, headache and dizziness, she adds.

COIMBATORE, May 5, 2012

Paddy Breeding Station of TNAU bags award

STAFF REPORTER



Honour: S. Robin, Head, Paddy Breeding Station of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, receiving the 'Best Plant Breeding Centre for Rice Award' for its overall performance in development of rice varieties from Swapan K. Datta, Deputy Director General (Crop Science), ICAR, in Hyderabad.

The Paddy Breeding Station of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University has been conferred the 'Best Plant Breeding Centre for Rice Award' for its overall performance in development of rice varieties by the Directorate of Rice Research, Hyderabad.

The station has been selected for the award from among the 107 stations in the country. It is noteworthy that the award has been conferred when the station is celebrating its centenary year, according to TNAU Vice-Chancellor P. Murugesu Boopathy.

“The landmark varieties that have been developed through Pure Line Selection by this station triggered the growth of rice production in the State. The first variety – GEB 24 (Kichili Samba) – released during 1921 played a significant role in the development of rice cultivars over the years, not only in India, but world-wide,” he said.

GEB 24 became very popular with wide coverage and thereby attained world-wide recognition and since then had been used in several national and international breeding programmes as progenitor for their varieties. Other noteworthy rice varieties responsible for transforming rice cultivation in the State were CO4 and CO25, CO37, CO38, CO40, CO43, CO47, etc.

The recently released CO (R) 48 and CO (R) 49 are the fine grain varieties that cater to the current market demands.

K. Thiagarajan, Director, Centre for Plant Breeding and Genetics, TNAU, said the station was functioning with the objective of breeding improved new rice varieties and hybrids for irrigated, drought and aerobic situations. It had so far released 50 varieties. It possessed the state-of-the-art facilities to enable the rice scientists for conducting high quality research in rice cultivar development.

MADURAI, May 5, 2012

Farming has its charm

S. ANNAMALAI

For the three young engineers of Keezhavellur hamlet, located about 15 km deep inside from the national highway off Tiruppuvanam in Sivaganga district, it is a successful return to farm from their lucrative jobs in posh cities.

They have not only overcome the shortage of skilled farm hands but also attempted to provide a solution to a nagging problem of the copra industry.

Coconut de-husking, even at home, is not a pleasant exercise. At the farm level, workers toil hard throughout the day to de-husk a few hundreds of coconuts. In the process, many complain of breathlessness and chest pain, not to talk about the quantity of husk they inhale.

Shortage of skilled labour has not only made coconut farming less lucrative but also the available workers disinterested, says M. Kadhar, who has fabricated a high-speed coconut de-husker in association with his brother M. Jamal. The third person in the endeavour is V. Sheik and all of them are engineering graduates.

They are assisted in the farm by their uncle, Sett. While Kadhar has returned from Boston to work in Chennai so that he can visit the village during weekends, the other two have left their jobs to be full-time farmers.

“A person can de-husk 1200 to 1500 coconuts per day manually. But the two-week-old machine installed in our farm de-husks 2200 coconuts per hour,” says Mr. Kadhar.

With power being a problem (this village gets electricity for eight to nine hours in a day), they are able to de-husk about 16, 000 to 18, 000 coconuts per day.

The machine, which can de-husk coconuts of any size, also has an option to retain the coconut's tail. For making copra, the tail of the coconut is removed.

At present, the de-husked coconuts are sent to copra making units in Kangeyam and other places, where they are processed and sent for oil extraction. The ordeal to find a solution to non-availability of farm workers started when the brothers decided to give up farming and concentrate in their profession. They formed a 'Google Coconut Group' to share the problems faced in coconut farming and possible solution. “Coconut de-husking is an industry problem, prevailing even in countries like Sri Lanka and Indonesia,” says Mr. Kadhar.

With the available information in the web, they designed their own de-husker, taking into consideration pollution aspects and quality of husk produced. The machine was fabricated in industrial units in Namakkal and Coimbatore districts.

The machine is in three parts. The first part is a lift that feeds coconut into the cutter from a pit.

The cutter separates the husk and feeds it into a tail remover.

On the other side, the husk is safely lifted to a nearby area, where it can be processed and utilised for several applications. “There is a huge demand for coco peat (coir pith), which is a soil additive. It can improve the soil quality,” says Mr. Jamal.

According to Mr. Kadhar, the prime objective of their endeavour was to minimise manual intervention and also utilise every part of the coconut. The new machine has encouraged many farmers in the Tiruppuvanam panchayat union to take to coconut farming.

Many have taken coconut groves on lease. Mr. Kadhar's objective is to make mobile units that can be used by even small farmers.

“My dream is to create an integrated coconut complex in the village.”

NAGAPATTINAM, May 5, 2012

Sugar mill staff strike threatens to affect harvest

STAFF REPORTER

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The continuing impasse between the government and employees of sugar mills reached a naught, with the strike touching over a month and jeopardising prospects of sugarcane harvest.

On Friday, the sugar mill employees of NPKRR Cooperative sugar mill here at Thalainayar, arrived at completing a month-long state-wide strike demanding pay on par with government employees, among other peripheral demands.

The sugar mills functioned under two categories of workforce, common cadre workers and wage board workers. The common cadre workers were being paid an increment and dearness allowances on par with the government pay scale. The wage board workers were demanding a unified cadre system instead of the present dual system of work force, and a common pay scale on par with the government employees. According to Rajendran, member of INTUC, of NPKRR Cooperative Sugar Mill, the present impasse was brought upon itself by the government after it retracted from its earlier commitment.

The demand was to unify the two under single nomenclature, and bring them on par with the government pay scale. There has been no hike in the pay scale since 2008. However, after series of protests and representations, the government had given an assurance that a moderate hike would be considered. However, the government had midway backed out of its commitment, says Mr.Rajendran.

“A committee was formed under the previous government to look into our demands, but the submissions of the Committee were never made public. Today, we stand to lose.”

In the meantime, the Staff Union of mill employees had also moved the court for a legal recourse that was still pending.

Today, the prolonged strike has had an adverse impact on productivity of the sugar mills and sugarcane growers in the area. Sugarcane growers stood the worst hit in the current impasse.

Sugarcane is sourced from 10 divisions, to the sugar mill, which includes Thirupunandal, Manalmedu, Pander, Ilanthopu, Kuthalam, Mayiladuthurai, Thiruvengadu, and Sirkazhi. Together, sugarcane is sourced from over 11,500 acres in the area.

According to the District Revenue Officer of NPKRR Cooperative Sugar Mill, the targeted crushing for the sugarcane season was about 2,20,000 metric tonnes. As of date, over 1,10,000 metric tonnes of cane has been crushed, prior to the commencement of the strike.

In a bid to salvage the recovery loss of stocked cane, over 20,000 metric tonnes of cane that was already in the keep of the mill for crushing has been transported to couple of private sugar mills in Thugili and Thirumanakudi, as per the directions from the official administration.

Under the current scheme of affairs, over 1,00,000 metric tonnes of cane was waiting to be cut on the fields. With the lock down persisting, the cane crossing over its harvest period stand the risk of loss of sugar content, weight loss, and eventual recovery loss. For the hundreds of cane growers in the areas surrounding Mayiladuthurai, this is a worst crisis that could hit them at the time of the harvest. The NPKRR cooperative sugar mill has also been incurring a loss of over Rs.1 lakh per day, with a production loss of over 2,000 metric tonnes per day, according to an official.

“We are clueless about the government's plan of action. The strike has been continuing and it does not look like the government was serious about seeking a solution,” says a source.

PERAMBALUR, May 5, 2012

Farmers' festivals

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Collector Darez Ahmed has asked farmers to take part in the farmers' festivals being organised in the district to learn ways to boost their income and pick up latest agriculture-related technologies. The festivals have been organised every day in four panchayat unions in the district since April 13 by roping in officials from agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, agriculture marketing, and seed certification department besides those from Krishi Vigyan Kendra, lead bank, NABARD, Watershed Development Agency, and private and cooperative sugar mills. Ways of increasing income and productivity are being explained to the farmers through demonstrations and interactions. Lunch is being served to the farmers. Documentaries on agriculture-related technological developments are being screened in addition to cultural programmes.

SALEM, May 5, 2012

Elephants destroy sugarcane crop

STAFF REPORTER

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Five elephants that have been wandering in Karumandurai forest area in Attur Forest Range moved towards Arur forest area in Dharmapuri district on Friday.

Four days

The elephants, including a pregnant female, had strayed from Andhra Pradesh through Javadu Hills and have been staying in the area for the past four days.

Forest officials from three districts – Salem, Dharmapuri and Villupuram – were closely monitoring the herd movements round-the-clock.

Villagers were warned not to venture into the forest during night hours nor involve themselves in activities to drive the animals away.

But panic prevailed among villagers, as the herd started to destroy a sugarcane field on Thursday night. However no major damage to human life and property was reported. Teams led by Conservator of Forests A. Venkatesh, District Forest Officer, Attur Range V. Naganathan and about 100 forest officials were involved in monitoring the movement of the herd on Friday.

Long distance

A forest official said that though it is not an elephant corridor, they could have travelled a long distance in search of food.

TIRUCHI, May 5, 2012

Mettur level

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The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 78.71 feet on Friday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 1,912 cusecs and the discharge, 997 cusecs.

IRUVARUR, May 5, 2012

Rat eradication camp on May 6

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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A rat eradication camp would be conducted in the district on May 6.

Training on identification of rat holes and preparation of poisonous food was given to farmers with a committee of village panchayat president, VAOs and agriculture assistants from April 23 to May 2, according to a release issued by S. Natarajan, Collector. Rat kill poison is being supplied at full subsidy at the rate of half a kg for a village from May 3 to May 5.

This should be mixed with coconut oil, jaggery and broken rice, and put near rat holes. Those who mix the poison should cover their mouths and hands with clothes and gloves.

Rats that consume the poisonous food will die within two or three days. The camp is in response to the pleas made by farmers.

TUTICORIN, May 5, 2012

Fishermen strife: peace committee meeting today

STAFF REPORTER

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To resume fishing operations by country crafts in the wake of infighting among fishermen at Threspuram, a coastal hamlet in Tuticorin, over constituting an elected body, authorities should intervene and find a solution at the earliest, according to F. Robert, President, Country Boat Fishermen's Association, Threspuram.

Since the rift between a majority group and the rest on the other side is widening after the arrest of five fishermen, possibilities of resuming fishing activities are remote. Even the lives of those willing to venture into the sea in spite of the growing animosity are at stake.

He said that some miscreants had threatened him of dire consequences once the arrested fishermen were released. Hence, police personnel should provide adequate security and closely monitor the activities of those, who have the money and the muscle to unleash violence anytime, Mr. Robert said.

“I am ready to hand over funds generated during my tenure as president to the ensuing elected body. But election should be conducted in a free and fair manner as expected by the majority of fisher folks. Since they are scared of facing defeat in the election, an element of reluctance has been exposed,” he said.

There is also a political conspiracy behind the ongoing hitch to sink the growing popularity of the existing president, many fishermen at Threspuram averred.

When contacted, T. Veemaraj, Inspector of Police, Tuticorin North, said peace committee meeting involving fishermen of both groups has been scheduled on Saturday.

The meeting would be chaired by Tuticorin Tahsildar to reconcile the problem and get them engaged in fishing activities as usual.

So far, five cases have been booked.

HASSAN, May 5, 2012

Growers ready to sell seed potato at Rs. 14 a kg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

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Growers from Punjab have agreed to sell seed potato at Rs. 14 a kg to farmers in Hassan district.

The district administration is yet to respond to their offer.

At a meeting held at the Deputy Commissioner's office here on Friday, representatives of the Jalandhar Potato Growers' Association said they could not sell seed potato at the price proposed by the district administration (Rs. 10 a kg).

They said they could sell the produce at not less than Rs. 14 a kg.

A meeting convened by the Deputy Commissioner here last week to fix the price of seed potato remained inconclusive as there was no consensus between the district administration and the growers. The growers had maintained that they would suffer losses if they sold the produce for less than Rs. 16 a kg.

Now, they have agreed to sell seed potato at Rs. 14.

Deputy Commissioner K.P. Mohan Raj told the growers that he would inform the higher authorities in the State government about their latest offer and take a final decision on the issue in four or five days.

JD(S) MLA H.D. Revanna was among those who attended the meeting.

Deputy Commissioner to take final decision in four or five days

MANGALORE, May 5, 2012

Fishermen may get social security cover

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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Labour Department has forwarded a proposal to the Cabinet

Fishermen in Karnataka may soon get benefits such as pension, assistance for education of their children, and easy access to healthcare, under the Unorganised Sector Social Security Act, 2008.

Fishermen are among the 39 sections of society that could get these benefits, according to General Secretary of the Committee Vasudev Bolloor. He said the Commissioner of Labour S.R.

Umashankar had recently informed him that a Cabinet approval was pending in this regard. The Labour Department had forwarded a proposal including the fishermen as beneficiaries of the social security scheme of the State and Union Governments.

In Karnataka, seven groups of unorganised sectors such as construction workers, tailors, roadside vendors, and beedi workers had been covered under the Act. But groups such as fishermen were yet to reap the benefit of this piece of legislation. Fish workers are one of the 129 unorganised sectors identified for the purpose of implementation of the Act.

The Act received the Presidential assent on December 30, 2008.

The legislation aims at providing social security to the unorganised groups such as fishermen to avail much needed extension of schemes. A key benefit, according to Mr. Bolor, is that fishermen and women who market fish would be able to contribute Rs. 100 a month with the State and the Union Governments investing matching amounts in the co-contributory pension scheme. Depending on the number of years of contribution the fish workers would get pension when they attain the age of 60, he said.

However, he said that only the fish workers, not those owning fishing boats, would benefit from the Act. About 4 lakh families were expected to benefit from it in Karnataka, according to Mr. Bolor.

Besides getting benefits from different schemes such as Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana for healthcare and National Scheme for Welfare of Fishermen and Training and Extension, the fishermen would be linked to many welfare measures of the governments.

Mr. Bolor said he had urged Commissioner for Labour to constitute a welfare board for the unorganised sector as mandated by the 2008 Act.

The board would make the necessary recommendations to the Government for the implementation of the Act. Mr. Bolor said he had met the officer during a three-day meeting on the Act in Bangalore recently. He said the Action Committee was planning to meet Chief Minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda in this regard soon.

- ***Fishermen and women can contribute Rs. 100 a month to a fund***
- ***About four lakh families expected to benefit from this scheme in State***

KOCHI, May 5, 2012

Fertilizer bagging unit to be commissioned soon

STAFF REPORTER

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Cochin Port Trust and labour unions have thrashed out issues related to the installation of a fertilizer bagging unit at the port's cargo handling premises ahead of the commissioning of the automated unit, procured by the port authority here.

The trial runs were held on Friday. The bagging unit was procured as an answer to the inordinate delay in evacuation of imported fertilizers and fertilizer inputs from the port's premises.

The problem had become acute towards the end of last calendar year with consignments being held up at the port premises for more than a month. Port Trust sources said that the fertilizer bagging unit was expected to be commissioned shortly, and the meeting convened by the labour commissioner some time ago had discussed the issues related to the commissioning of the unit.

The discussions were held in view of the opposition, from some of the trade unions, to the installation of automated bagging units. It had been decided at the meeting convened by the Labour Commissioner that trial runs on the bagging unit would begin soon with deployment of four workers, two each from two of the trade unions which opposed the installation of the new equipment.

The port authority had approached the State government to intervene as trade unions opposed the installation of the bagging unit, which had arrived here in March.

The bagging units are expected to considerably reduce the evacuation time for fertilizers and fertilizer inputs as each of the units can handle up to 140 tonnes per hour or 2,800 bags of 50 kgs each. The new facility is expected to completely overcome the shortage of hands, of which the port authority complained to the Kerala Headload Workers' Welfare Fund Board.

A discussion among the port authority, trade unions and officials from the Welfare Board had decided to allot more workers although evacuation of fertilizer cargo continued to be slow.

The unit was procured as an answer to the in evacuation of imported fertilizers and fertilizer inputs from the port's premises



India emerges as world's top rice exporter

Sanjeeb Mukherjee / New Delhi May 05, 2012, 00:14



India, a leading exporter of rice before a slew of domestic curbs came in the way, returned with a bang in the global markets in 2011-12, toppling traditional leaders like Vietnam and Thailand to emerge as the biggest exporter.

However, sustaining this performance might be difficult. For, exporters have started raising prices. Last year, they had huge stocks because of a ban imposed on non-basmati rice since 2007. Even then, India will continue to be a big player in global rice markets, albeit not as big as it was in 2011-12, say those in the trade.

According to sector officials, aided by a much-awaited decision to open export of non-basmati rice in September 2011 (a ban was imposed in 2007 to ease domestic supply), India managed to export more rice in six-seven months than Vietnam and Thailand could do in all of 2011-12.

Guar price-rig report names Ruchi Soya, Betul

Dilip Kumar Jha / Mumbai May 05, 2012, 00:42

The Forward Markets Commission (FMC) has found 4,490 entities were involved in guar gum price manipulation. In a report submitted to the ministry of consumer affairs (MCA) on Friday, the commodity market regulator has said these entities made profits of Rs 1,291 crore by way of price manipulation.

The report also names listed entities Ruchi Soya and Betul Oil. The report is significant as many traders had earlier said the price of guar gum had risen abnormally because of a shortage.

However, the commodity was cornered through other channels, including margin funding and booking of huge stocks under various fake names, as was divulged by the FMC earlier.

Confirming the receipt of the report, Rajiv Agarwal, secretary, MCA, said, "We are examining the issue. We would take appropriate action in future." While Ruchi Soya's managing director Dinesh Shakra did not respond to calls by Business Standard, Betul Oil's spokesperson said, "We are trading in various commodities in the physical as well as futures markets as the routine course of operations. We have complied with all the extant rules, regulations and provisions governing the markets and any directives issued by the exchanges and/or the Forward Markets Commission from time to time."

Meanwhile, a senior FMC official said the regulator had primarily focused on two major factors in the report. First, banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) are currently lending to small and marginal traders who take positions in the futures exchange, apart from adequate stock holding in the spot market. Hence, these banks and NBFCs should be restricted from funding small and marginal traders.

Second, large physical traders should be asked to reveal stock holding in each commodity in their godowns.

The official argued that these two factors might help bring some transparency into the trading system, thereby preventing players from cornering agri commodities.

Earlier, the FMC had banned Vinod Commodities, Shresth Commodity & Financial Services and Hindustan Technosol from taking any position in futures exchanges early this year. Although, Hindustan Technosol got a reprieve from the Jaipur high court, the other two traders continue to remain suspended from trading in commodity exchanges.

A recent report by Assocham said guar gum and guar seed prices jumped almost 70 per cent since January this year, despite several measures such as high margins, lower position limits, suspension of traders, etc taken by the regulator. The prices of these commodities have risen tenfold in the past year on low stocks. The normal price of guar bean in the season is Rs 10 a kg, while guar seed is traded at Rs 25 a kg and guar gum at Rs 50 a kg.

The prices had increased to Rs 291 a kg for guar seed and Rs 959 a kg for guar gum on March 21. "It is unbelievable that the fodder for animals is priced at Rs 291 a kg—much more than the price of cereals and pulses being used for human consumption," said the Assocham investment committee's chairman S K Jindal.

"The prices for guar have gone up 120 per cent in the past month, 700 per cent in the past four months, 875 per cent in the past 12 months and 1,300 per cent in the past 18 months," the report said.

The FMC has suspended futures trading in both guar seed and gum until September 2012, with room to review in October. Guar gum is used as a thickening and binding agent in the food, textile, paper and pharmaceutical industries and for drilling crude oil from wells. Demand from the oil exploration industry is currently very strong.

Against the total estimated output of 1.5 million tonnes last year, the guar seed crop size is forecast to remain at 1.25 million tonnes this year. With estimated exports of 500,000 tonnes, the total requirement of guar seed stands at a minimum of 1.55 million tonnes. This means the market is expected to remain in a deficit of nearly 20 per cent.

THE HINDU Business Line

Meet to promote coconut development activities

V. SAJEEV KUMAR



KOCHI, MAY 5: COCOTECH, a meeting of the Asian and Pacific Coconut Community (APCC), will be held in Kochi from July 2 to 6. The meeting is being organised by the Coconut Development Board.

The APCC, headquartered in Jakarta, Indonesia is an inter-governmental organisation established with the objective of promoting coconut development activities of the region.

A permanent panel on coconut technology will discuss issues pertaining to farming, processing and export of the commodity.

The APCC has 16 regular members including Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vanuatu and Vietnam.

The theme of the meeting is 'Inclusive growth and sustainable development of the coconut industry'.

Along with the meeting, a coconut festival will also be organised wherein various value-added products, technologies and machineries from member countries will be showcased.

25-foot tall Eiffel tower made of drumsticks at vegetable show

UDHAGAMANDALAM, MAY 5:

A 25-foot tall replica of the Eiffel Tower made of drumsticks is drawing huge crowds at the Fifth Edition of Vegetable show, which began today at Kothagiri, about 20 km from here.

The 750-kg tower was made with over 9,000 drumsticks by the Horticulture Board of Tamil Nadu for the show, which is the first among different festivals during the summer season to attract tourists to Nilgiris district.

Other major attractions include a Dragon made of carrot, a brinjal peacock and domestic and wild animals such as squirrel and rabbit.

The show was inaugurated by the District Collector, Ms Archana Patnaik, in the presence of Mr Santosh Babu, Director, Horticulture, Tamil Nadu.

Vegetable carvings of political leaders, spiritual heads and other prominent personalities also find place in the 16 stalls put up by various districts of the state.
