

No alternative crops feasible in delta, Central team told



Central team members inspecting the soil in one of the villages in Nagapattinam district on Sunday.

The Central team that visited the tail-end delta region on Sunday was given a graphic account on “why alternative crops in the delta region are not feasible and what are the lurking dangers of resorting to direct sowing”.

Rm. Kathiresan, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture, Annamalai University, made this observation while giving a scientific overview on the present crop situation in the terminal areas of the delta region, including Kattumannaroil and Chidambaram blocks, to the team led by R. K. Gupta, Chief Engineer of the Central Water Commission, at Chidambaram.

Mr. Kathiresan pointed out that the delta region was a predominantly rice growing area because of the soil and climatic conditions.

The south-west monsoon during normal times provided suitable conditions for raising the 105-day-long kuruvai crop. Of the average rainfall of 1,500 mm a year received by the delta region,

south-west monsoon contributed only about 250–300 mm of rain and north-east monsoon the major chunk of 1,100–1,200 mm of rain.

Therefore, the south-west monsoon period was an ideal season for the paddy crops to attain full growth as ample amount of sunshine would also be available for inducing photosynthesis for the formation of grains.

Mr. Kathiresan said the research conducted by his faculty had clearly established the fact that in the region only paddy crop could be raised with such traceable rainfall during the south-west monsoon and none other crops.

He said as the region was situated close to the sea, the sub-surface water salinity was high. Moreover, the clayey soil too was not conducive for raising any other crop during the season.

The Dean said that during the north-east monsoon, there would be sumptuous rainfall and this would greatly affect the standing crops due to water-logging. Therefore the south-west monsoon was the ideal season for the paddy crops in terms of productivity, and suggesting any alternative crops for the region was futile.

Mr. Kathiresan warned of a lurking danger in resorting to direct sowing. He said the undesired fallout of such a practice would be proliferation of the “weedy rice” in the farms.

The weedy rice was a wild relative of the cultivated rice (*oryza sativa*) that would flourish in the farms but would not bear any grains.

Since the weedy rice would consume all the nutrients and suppress the growth of the cultivated rice there would be drastic decline of up to 80 per cent in the yield level of the cultivated rice.

Traces of weedy rice had started appearing in the delta region and it did not augur well for the farming community. Therefore, to get rid of such a menace, the countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia had totally given up the practice of direct sowing.

Mr. Kathiresan decried the notion that the paddy farmers were indiscriminately using water. For transplantation standing water in the farm would be required.

It had another advantage too: for, the weedy rice would not germinate in standing water. Therefore, for getting unfailing paddy crops water management had become vital, Mr Kathiresan added.

P.V. Srividya writes:

NAGAPATTINAM: Dry PWD channels, parched fields, broadcast seeds and the wilted grass of the occasional germinated field greeted the team members.

In Anandhamangalam, farmers showed mud strewn with seeds that had failed to germinate due to absence of rains. The team visited directly-sown fields in Sellur, Erukattancherry, Kazhiyappanallur and Annanperumalkoil and mapping fields from Velankanni up to Kollidam.

Against the normal cultivable area of 35,000 hectares in the Nagapattinam district for kuruvai, the area covered this year was 13,318 ha. Normally, the coverage under samba is 1.02 lakh ha. However, only 36,408 ha have been brought under the crop. The expected production loss due to non-release of water was placed at 6.6 lakh metric tonnes, amounting to Rs.85.8 crore.

According to the figures of the Agricultural Department, about 1.39 lakh marginal farmers cultivate 55,598 hectares and over 27,759 small farmers cultivate 38,789 hectares. The department has placed the district's water requirement for samba at 38.40 TMC from October 1 to second week of February.

Develop farmer-friendly technology

The 92nd farmers' fair-cum-agro-industrial exhibition, popularly known as *Kisan Mela*, concluded at the G. B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, on Sunday with Kichcha MLA Rajesh Shukla calling upon the varsity to rewrite history by developing farmer-friendly policies and practices so that benefits of research reached the smallest farmer of Uttarakhand.

He said that the University should once again script history by developing user-friendly technologies where even the small and marginal farmers could hope to get good returns through intensive and mixed farming techniques, Mr. Shukla said. He wanted the varsity to use information technology to spread knowledge among the masses.

Y.P.S. Dabas, Director, Extension Education, and chief coordinator of the *Kisan mela* said that about one lakh farmers visited the fair and actively interacted with the scientists and representatives of seeds, fertilizers and farming machinery companies who had put up stalls on the campus. Of these, 18,000 farmers had registered themselves for easy follow-ups with experts, he said.

Kumaon Division Commissioner Hemlata Dhaundiya congratulated the farmers for having turned out in large numbers to seek latest farm knowledge and good seeds and fertilizers. She hoped they would spread the knowledge gained in their respective villages.

Kolar growers encouraged to cultivate



sandalwood

Providing an alternative: Cultivation of eucalyptus, a water-intensive species, has adversely affected groundwater level in Kolar.— File photo

An initiative taken up by the district administration along with other departments aims to discourage farmers from cultivating eucalyptus, a water-intensive species, which has adversely affected groundwater level in the region.

Deputy Commissioner D.S. Vishwanath has formulated a plan to encourage farmers to cultivate sandalwood instead of eucalyptus, which would fetch a fair amount of money for the growers. The move would also conserve groundwater in the perennial drought-hit region.

The district administration, zilla panchayat, Department of Forests, Horticulture Department and Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Ltd. (KSDL) have joined hands to implement this project, named 'Siritana', or prosperity. After consultations, it was decided that sandalwood would be the ideal alternative for eucalyptus as the dry conditions in the region were suitable for its cultivation, and it would prove to be lucrative for growers too.

It is estimated that about 500 sandalwood trees would be cultivated in one hectare. This would be worth about Rs. 1.7 crore in 15 to 20 years, Mr. Vishwanath said.

In the meantime, farmers could cultivate cashew and other crops through intercropping to reap regular income, he said.

The authorities have already made arrangements to supply saplings to those who want to grow sandalwood. For this they need to fill and submit a registration form and get the saplings.

A token amount of Re. 1 would be collected from buyers in order to make their involvement felt in the project, Mr. Vishwanath told *The Hindu*.

"It's a three-dimensional project. Firstly, it intends to convince the people about the ills of growing eucalyptus; secondly, it helps the ecology [as it is not hard on groundwater]; and thirdly, it fetches more income," he said.

As the regulations on sandalwood cultivation have been relaxed, people can easily grow it and earn well.

Marketing of sandalwood too has become easy as the KSDL would liaise with growers to purchase it. Sandalwood has much demand in the international market as it is used to manufacture perfumes and soaps.

Move aims to arrest depleting water table

At last, Tamil Nadu gets Biodiversity Board

After a prolonged delay, the State Biodiversity Board was, at last, formed in Tamil Nadu. An order to this effect was issued by the State government on August 17.

A senior Forest official concedes that while Tamil Nadu has just begun its journey, other southern States — Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka — have gone one step further by notifying Biodiversity Rules. Besides, they, which have formed hundreds of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC), are maintaining numerous registers of people engaged in biodiversity conservation.

The delay in forming the Board and the BMCs in the State had an adverse bearing on the implementation of access and benefit sharing (ABS) programme, as stipulated under the National Biodiversity Act 2002. For example, effective conservation of biodiversity, especially outside forest areas, was not carried out. In the absence of these bodies, it would not be possible to regulate rising of medicinal plants, the official points out.

Asked for reaction, Ravikant Upadhyay, Chief Conservator of Forest (Biodiversity), said four Biodiversity Management Committees have been formed in the district of Ramanathapuram. The government has allocated Rs. 7.5 lakh for the State Biodiversity Board, which has distributed 618 solar lanterns to local communities in Ramanathapuram, he adds.

A sweet tale of how neem trees yield money

Implementation of National Biodiversity Act enables people in two villages in Andhra to earn additional revenue



Rich canopy: The agreed procurement price of neem leaves is Rs. 100 per kg for the top quality leaf.— Photo: K.V. Srinivasan

Some hundred neem trees have changed the lives of people in two villages, Amarchintha in Mahabubnagar district and Revalli in Nalgonda, both in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh.

They have helped them earn additional revenue of few thousand rupees, thanks to the implementation of access and benefit sharing (ABS) mandated under the National Biodiversity Act 2002.

Success story

Sharing this success story with *The Hindu*, Sriram Gangadhar of Bio-India Biological Corporation (BIB), Hyderabad, said that a couple of years ago, a Japanese company approached him for developing a food ingredient from neem to be mixed with water.

Generally, Japanese do not drink plain water. Instead, they prefer green tea water, energy water or medicated water. It is because of this habit that he received a proposal from the Japanese firm for developing neem-based water, which can be easily soluble and which gives a typical taste with its medicinal benefits.

Based on the Japanese inputs, BIB decided to work with local communities for collecting the neem leaves without involving any middle men, brokers or traders and under the National Biodiversity Act principles.

The company has identified two Neem rich villages and entered into an agreement with local communities, providing them five per cent on procurement price of leaves.

It is the Biodiversity Monitoring Committee in the Andhra Pradesh State Biodiversity Board that takes care of processes including signing pacts with local communities and collecting leaves.

Mr. Gangadhar says the agreed procurement price is Rs. 100 per kg for the top quality leaf. The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), which has concluded an agreement with the BIB, gets a royalty of five per cent on the sale of the leaves.

About 2,100 kg of leaf was, so far, exported to Japan. The Indian company is keen on working with many communities on sustainable harvesting methods to meet bulk needs of Japanese firms which are for increasing the quantity of production and expanding the project to a bigger scale with a lot of investment and research.

Similarly, the Neem water has proved to be good for overall health and it is a hit. "This is one of the successful case studies on ABS," Mr. Gangadhar says, adding that the proceeds of revenue, meant for the villagers, are immediately passed on to them.

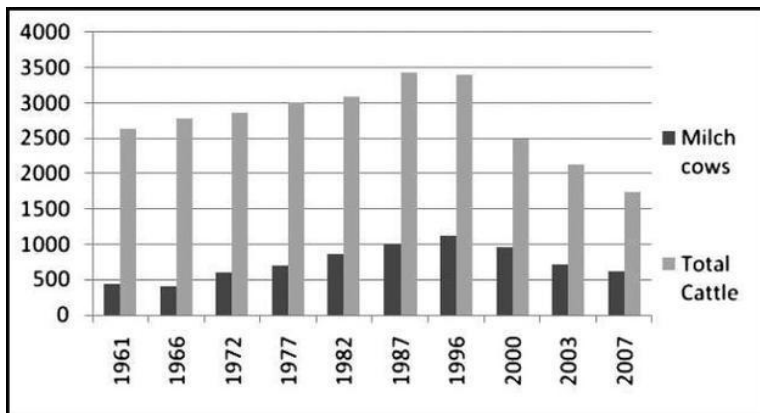
Different forms

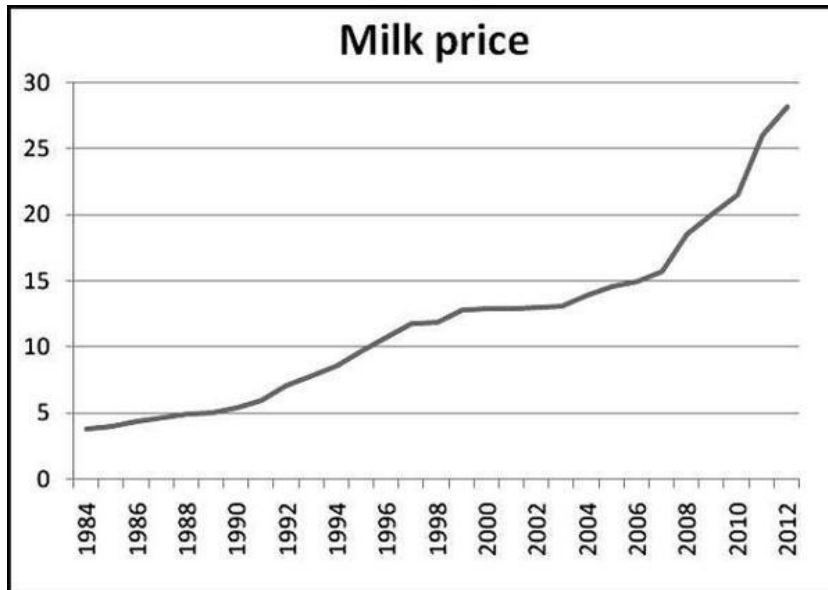
Balakrishna Pisupati, NBA Chairman, said that in order to implement the ABS system, there are four different types of forms: Form I — application for access to biological resources and/or Associated Traditional Knowledge; Form II — transferring the results of research to foreign nationals, companies, Non-resident Indian for commercial purposes or otherwise; Form III — intellectual property rights and Form IV — third party transfer of the accessed biological resources and associated traditional knowledge.

The NBA, which till now received over 600 applications, has cleared around 100 applications, Dr. Pisupati said, adding the maximum number of applications, coming under Form III, relate to prior approval for patents.

In respect of the third party transfer of biological resources accessed and associated knowledge, the Authority has signed agreements with 17 applicants.

Rising feed prices churn dairy sector in State





Government role sought to check milk production costs in the State

Experts have called for urgent government intervention in checking the spiralling costs of milk production in the State, mainly owing to the rising prices of cattle feed.

Experts at Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) say cattle feed accounts for 75 per cent of the cost of dairying. Kerala relies on neighbouring States for 90 per cent of the raw material it requires for cattle feed production. Food inflation and increase in prices of raw material, such as maize and soya, have jacked up the price of cattle feed.

On an average, one kg cattle feed costs Rs.17 in the State. The cost of production of one litre of milk was Rs.26 in 2010. Following a hike in cattle feed price, the cost of production of one litre of milk is currently Rs.28.20. Farmers are reportedly compelled to sell milk around Rs.24 a litre, bearing a loss of around 25 per cent.

“Correlation and regression analyses reveal that for every one rupee increase in cattle feed price, milk price has to go up at Rs.1.70 a litre to make the system viable. Hence, without increasing the price of milk, dairy farming cannot be viable. Moreover, recent cattle census reports reveal that the cattle population in the State is decreasing at 7.5 per cent a year. It will further increase the scarcity of milk,” says T.P. Sethumadhavan, Academic Consultant and Officer on Special Duty, Directorate of Entrepreneurship, KVASU.

Breeding, feeding, management, disease control, and marketing are the major domains of dairying. Even though the State could achieve substantial results through cross breeding, recent findings reveal that the productivity of cattle is going down.

“Without increasing productivity, the system cannot be made viable. A scientific breeding programme must ensure increased productivity of cross-bred cattle. Farmers should follow scientific feeding and management practices to augment production. Scientific disease-control aspects must ensure vaccination against contagious diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and haemorrhagic septicaemia. Thanks to the Goraksha scheme of the Animal Husbandry Department, there has been commendable improvement in disease management. Yet, more efforts are needed in this direction. Take the case of mastitis. It causes an annual loss of Rs.1,200 crore to the country’s milk production,” says Dr. Sethumadhavan.

Kerala has the highest number of cross-bred cattle in the country. Nearly 92 per cent of its cattle is cross-bred. There is a huge gap in requirement and availability of milk in the State. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, per capita requirement of milk a day is 280 gm, whereas availability is around 240 gm a day. Kerala has 11 lakh dairy farmers, nearly 3.34 per cent of its total population. Scarcity of land for fodder cultivation is a major constraint in dairying.

Strategies

“Strategies to reduce the cost of milk production, and value addition to milk and milk products are the need of the hour. In developed countries, the dairy sector derives the bulk of its profits through value addition. Cattle manure can be converted into dried organic manure for cultivation of vegetables and spices, and gardening. Milk cooperatives and local bodies may set up feed-mixing units as part of group farming practices,” Dr. Sethumadhavan says.

B. Ashok, Vice-Chancellor of KVASU, says the dairy farmers should have a major role in fixing the price of milk. “The pricing commission should formulate a feed price index. Milk price has to be revised on the basis of the index,” he says.

Farmers explain to team how they are in deep water



A Central team led by R.K. Gupta inspecting farm lands in Cuddalore district on Sunday.—

Photo: C. Venkatachalapathy

The Central team led by R.K. Gupta, Chief Engineer of Central Water Commission, was greeted by swathes of parched and fallow lands in the tail-end delta region comprising Chidambaram and Kattumannarkoil blocks on Sunday.

After a great deal of persistence Mr. Gupta told the presspersons that the team had come to estimate the irrigation requirement in Tamil Nadu for the remaining south-west monsoon period. The team was collecting data in this regard, he said.

The farmers related their tales of woes to the team by giving an elaborate account of how they could not raise kuruvai crop for want of water and how the prospects of raising samba crop on over 1.80 lakh acres too remain bleak owing to inadequate storage in the Stanley Reservoir at Mettur.

The overcast sky reflected the gloominess of the farmers. They also narrated to the team that since agriculture was the mainstay of the majority of the people in the region, the loss of kuruvai crop had already landed them in deep financial crisis. Now there is also an apprehension that with uncertainty looming large over the availability of the Cauvery waters their hopes of raising the samba crops too have belied.

The distraught farmers also told the team that going by the direction of the State government they had resorted to direct sowing.

However, for the seeds to sprout it requires spells of rains. But in the absence of any worthwhile precipitation seeds have simply become sterile or non-productive.

Even the direct sowing for the second time too has not yielded the desired results. Therefore, it is the fervent plea of the farmers that adequate quantum of the Cauvery water should be made available till the onset of the north-east monsoon to raise even a semblance of samba crop.

District Collector Rajendra Ratnoo apprised the team on how the 18,000 hectares taken up for direct sowing and nurseries on 1,500 ha meant for raising the samba crop on another 20,000 ha were craving for water.

The crops needed intermittent wetting either by rain or through irrigation but with the present water position none of this proposition was immediately feasible, the Collector said.

Taking up the cause of the farmers Chidambaram constituency MLA K. Balakrishnan (CPI-M) told the team that since the last leg of the delta region was located closer to the sea the sub surface water could not be used because of its salinity.

Therefore, the crops totally depended upon either rain or surface water but both had become a rarity. Only release of right quantum of the Cauvery water could save the farmers from losing the samba crops too.

Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association vice-president K.V. Kannan told the team that during normal time the farmers would start raising samba crop in July but this year Mettur water was released only on September 17 and it was yet to reach the tail-end region.

If the prospects of the samba crops were not to go the way of the kuruvai crops 2 tmc ft of water should be released, he said.

President of the Paasimuthan Odai Irrigation Small Farmers Association P. Ravindhiran said the failure of the kuruvai crop had ruined the economy of the farming community and the loss of samba crop would deal a mortal blow on them.

President of the Veeranam Paasana Vivasayigal Sangam K.V. Elankeeran said drying up of the irrigation canal would sound a death knell to the farmers who had already incurred losses running into several crore.

As the agriculture activities were now severely curtailed, lakh of farm hands too were finding it difficult to subsist. The situation could look up only when adequate quantum of the Cauvery water flows into the delta region, Mr. Elankeeran said.

Fight for farmers and traders

Teachers urged to wage a war against privatisation of higher education



Clarion call: T. K. Rangarajan, MP, speaking at the 21st general conference of MUTA in Madurai on Sunday. Photo: G. Moorthy

An appeal has been made to the teaching fraternity - college and university teachers - to launch an ideological struggle against the Manmohan Singh Government's move to allow Foreign Direct Investment in retail and insurance sectors.

Launching a tirade against the Centre's neo-liberal economic policies, CPI (M) MP T. K. Rangarajan said that liberalisation will lead to loot of India by multi-national companies thereby pushing Indian farmers to the brink of disaster.

"I am afraid whether the Parliament and 120 crore people of this country have any role in deciding the fate of India. Democracy has become a mockery as several crucial Bills get passed

amidst pandemonium in Parliament. We have to launch an ideological struggle to save our farmers, villagers, traders and common man,” he said.

Mr. Rangarajan, who is also the vice-president of CITU, made this appeal while speaking at the 21st general conference of Madurai Kamaraj, Manonmaniam Sundaranar, Mother Teresa and Alagappa University Teachers’ Association (MUTA), here on Sunday.

“This is the time for teachers to become ambassadors like what they did for Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom movement. MUTA has to expand its role and should not confine itself to just raising issues of teachers and education alone,” he said.

Stating that university and college teachers have been drawing very good salary, the MP asked them to feel for the country’s farmers and small traders who are running from pillar to post for meagre income.

“In several countries, people from various sections are leading protests against their regimes. A similar movement must come in India through teachers to prevent the entry of MNCs or else the Indian retail sector will be badly affected leading to unemployment,” he cautioned.

James William, former president, All India Federation of University and College Teachers’ Organisations (AIFUCTO), urged the teachers to wage a war against privatisation of higher education and entry of foreign universities into India.

“We need an alliance of resistance in this country right now. The reforms in retail, insurance and higher education will benefit only one per cent of population while the rest will have to bear the consequences. The theme of this conference ‘neo-liberal policies: negation of people’s rights’ is absolutely right,” he said.

He found fault with the Central Government’s explanation justifying the reasons for allowing foreign universities into India.

“The total allocation for higher education in India in 2011-12 was Rs.15,445 crore whereas the budget of Harvard University was Rs.18,000 crore. Nearly 40 per cent of teaching posts are lying vacant in our universities and colleges. So, we cannot talk of quality and compare with

foreign universities. We must work together through national platform to protect the field of education,” he added.

Siddharth Varadarajan, Editor, *The Hindu*, in his keynote address, said that a sense of proportion and balance will have to be borne in mind while carrying out reforms. “There are attempts for turning higher education into a commodity. What is alarming is the Government that rules us in India embraces the final form of commoditising by allowing entry of foreign universities and foreign funds without intermediate steps,” he expressed.

He called upon the State Governments to get latest books/ academic texts of significance which are available in English for various subjects translated into their local languages for the benefit of students.

“It should be understood that majority of children in the US study in government schools. America is the nerve centre of free market but their finest universities are in public sector. When capitalist countries are having their best institutions in public sector, India wants to leave its higher education to private sector. Aspirations and affordability of millions of Indians are more important than allowing private/ foreign universities,” he added.

Kalyani Mathivanan, Vice-Chancellor, Madurai Kamaraj University, after releasing the general conference souvenir said that MUTA grew in stature and gained prominence due to the work of its members.

S.Vivekanandan, president, MUTA, opposed privatisation, commercialisation and globalisation of education as several children in India are still out of school education and only 12 per cent are going for higher education.

T. Manohar Justus, general secretary, MUTA, read out the various resolutions passed in the two-day conference on issues pertaining to students, teachers, colleges and universities.

Poultry farmers incur a loss of more than 70 paise per egg

Wholesale egg rate has dropped by 45 paise in the last three days – at 15 paise everyday from Thursday to Saturday – due to drop in consumption as many consumers turn vegetarians during

this season. While egg rate is expected to drop further in the next few days, poultry farmers have more reasons to worry as they incur a loss of more than 70 paise per egg.

“Increasing feed rate has increased the cost of production of an egg to more than Rs. 3.40. While the board rate announced by the NECC is Rs. 3.10 (on Saturday), farmers are getting only Rs. 2.70 per egg as cash in hand as traders deduct 40 paise per egg towards packing and handling charges.

This is 15 paise more than the packing and handling charges fixed by the National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC) Namakkal Zone,” poultry farmers here said.

Deducted

Till two months ago traders deducted 20 paise per egg from the board rate that is announced by the NECC – as packing and transportation charges.

Following allegations from farmers that traders deducted upto 50 paise per egg for packing and transportation when there was not much demand for egg, forcing farmers to incur heavy loss in tough times, NECC Namakkal Zone Chairman Dr. P. Selvaraj officially announced revision in the deduction from 20 paise to 25 paise per egg.

He also warned traders that the NECC will take a tough stand of putting an end to deduction if traders deducted more than 25 paise per egg.

Doing so the traders will have to take the eggs at the rate announced by the NECC and add the packing and handling charge to the NECC’s board rate.

Talking about the present scenario where traders are deducting 40 paise per egg, the NECC Chairman told *The Hindu* that the deduction has been more for the last two weeks, due to drop in demand for egg. Dr. Selvaraj said that this scenario has been permitted for one more week till the stagnated eggs – more than 12 crore eggs – are cleared.

We expect the stagnated eggs to be cleared in a week and traders will once again start deducting 25 paise per egg from October 15,” he added. On the other hand the NECC has announced that there will be no further revision in egg rate till Wednesday, as the price fixed on

Saturday (Rs. 3.10) will be maintained till then. The next rate fixation committee meeting of the NECC will be held on Thursday.

A cake of jaggery, fish can make plants healthy

It is not available in the market and is homemade



Billampadavu Narayana Bhat has preserved seeds of many local varieties of vegetables such as that of Mangalore okra.—PHOTO: RAVIPRASAD KAMILA

A cake made out of jaggery and fish can make plants healthier, according to an agriculturist. The cake should be dissolved in the prescribed quantity of water by making thick and light solution. Thick solution should be applied to weak plants and light one to others, he said.

Billampadavu Narayana Bhat, a prominent vegetable grower and seed collector near Vitla in Dakshina Kannada, said that he was applying the solution for the past three years for getting better yield. People in urban area can apply the solution to vegetables grown in terraces or on the premises of homes. The cake is not available in market. One has to prepare it at home easily.

How to make the cake?

It is simple. Mix 2 kg of jaggery to 2 kg of fish in a vessel or in a plastic jar. Close it in an airtight container and keep it for 22 days. Open it only on the 23rd day. The cake is ready.

“Can you imagine the cake will smell like jasmine. If you think it will emanate foul smell you are wrong,” he said. Mr. Bhat said that if plants were weak then mix the cake with 100 litres of water

and apply the solution. If plants were not weak, then mix the cake in 200 litres of water and apply the solution. It would make weak plants healthier and healthy plants to yield more. "The solution works like a tonic," he said. The solution could be applied to any crop. Fish catch in the city which would go waste and rot could be used for making the cake. He spells out the secret of sowing seeds. Seeds should not be sown on the full moon day or days closer to the full moon day. As there would be moonlight, grasshoppers will be active. When seeds sprout, insects attack and destroy the seeds. Mr. Bhat said that seeds should be sown closer to the new moon day when there is no moonlight.

Referring to terrace gardening, Rajendra Hegde, Director, Garden City Farmers' Association, Bangalore, went on record at a workshop recently that coconut water acted as a rich nutrient to plants. They did attract ants.

If people could tolerate ants, they could feed plants with coconut water.

Farmers told to register names

The Agriculture Department has asked all farmers to register themselves with its data base before November 14.

Henceforth, various subsidies, benefits, and incentives would be extended only to those who have registered themselves with the department. Farmers should also enter their bank account numbers in the registration forms.

Improve infrastructure for food processing: workshop

Setting up of small-scale rice mills mooted



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: Scientists at a workshop on 'Value addition: tool for food security,' organised by the Kerala Agricultural University, at Tavanur on Saturday. —Photo: By special arrangement

A workshop on 'Value addition: tool for food security', organised by the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology, Union Ministry of Food Processing Industries, and All-India Coordinated Research Project on Post Harvest Technology on Saturday, called for policies to improve infrastructure for food processing and measures to ensure food safety and quality standards.

A press release issued by the KAU here on Sunday stated that T. R. Gopalakrishnan, Director of Research, had inaugurated the workshop held at the Kelappaji College of Agricultural Engineering and Technology at Tavanur in Malappuram district.

"Quality evaluation using the HACCP (Hazard analysis and critical control points) system is needed," said the workshop. The workshop recommended setting up of small scale rice mills and creation of value-added rice products to help small and medium entrepreneurs. Value addition will boost the economy, raising agricultural yields, enhancing productivity, creating employment and improving the lives of a large number of people, especially those in rural areas, it said.

The workshop observed that the potential of food technology should be unlocked to promote nutrition security. Establishment of small and medium scale processing units based on underutilized fruits/ vegetables was suggested. Representatives of various institutions for food science, agricultural processing and food engineering, scientists and researchers presented papers

M. Sivaswami, Dean, Faculty of Agricultural Engineering, KAU, presided. Those present on the occasion included V. R. Sinija of the Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology; George Mathew, Principal Investigator of AICRP on Post-harvest Technology; and Associate Professor K. P. Sudheer.

Tribal farmers throng expo on modern farm implements

Farmers from the remote tribal pockets of Bhadrachalam Agency gained first-hand knowledge on the utility and operation of various modern farm implements at an exhibition organised by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) under Yanthra Laxmi scheme in Bhadrachalam on Sunday.

The Tobacco Board grounds, venue of the exhibition, virtually turned into a mini-jatara as the curious farmers predominantly tribal farmers thronged the exhibition from distant places in the Agency. An extensive range of farm implements comprising paddy transplanters, drum seeders, hand and power operated sprayers and brush cutters were kept on display.

Bhadrachalam MLA K Satyavati inaugurated the exhibition in the presence of Pinapaka MLA R Kantha Rao, ITDA Project Officer G Veerapandian and others.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Veerapandian said 1,132 applications had been received from farmers, including 672 tribal farmers, for sanction of agriculture implements on subsidy. While, the non-tribal farmers are eligible for 50 per cent subsidy, the tribal farmers are entitled for 75 per cent subsidy towards purchase of farm implements. The tribal farmers can avail 90 per cent subsidy; he said adding that the procedures for sanction of the farm implements have been simplified as per the directions of Collector Siddharth Jain to enable the tribal farmers obtain the vital tools of their choice expeditiously. He exhorted the tribal farmers to make best use of the Yanthra Laxmi scheme.

Hindustan Times

TODAY FARM NEWS

08.10.2012 A.M

Weather

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Sunny

Monday, Oct 8

Max Min

34.2° | 25.3°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 70

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 05:58

Sunset: 05:53

Barometer: 1010.0

Tomorrow's Forecast



Rainy

Tuesday, Oct 9

Max Min

31° | 25°

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday
Oct 10



32° | 25°
Cloudy

Thursday
Oct 11



33° | 26°
Rainy

Friday
Oct 12



31° | 26°
Rainy

Saturday
Oct 13



29° | 26°
Rainy

Sunday
Oct 14



31° | 26°
Rainy

Airport Weather

Delhi

Delhi

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 06:18

Humidity: 48

Sunset: 05:58

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1011.9



THE HINDU Business Line

TODAY FARM NEWS

07.10.2012 P.M

86% of teas sold at Coonoor auction

Unlike the previous two weeks when as much as 30 per cent remained unsold, this week at Sale No: 40 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions, 86 per cent of the offer of 13.03 lakh kg was sold. Homedale Estate tea, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped the CTC market when Mittal Tea Co bought it for Rs 156 a kg. Among orthodox teas from corporate sector, Chamraj got Rs 236.

“Orthodox leaf market eased Rs 2-4 a kg. High-priced CTC leaf lost Rs 2-3, better mediums Rs 3-4 and plainers Rs 2-5. Orthodox dusts managed to gain Rs 2-3. CTC dusts eased up to Rs 3”, an auctioneer told *Business Line*. Export demand was weak for Pakistan for Rs 77-90 a kg, the CIS Rs 70-93 and Egypt Rs 79-88.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs 69-72 a kg for plain leaf grades; Rs 95-120 for brighter liquoring sorts; Rs 76-80 for plain dusts and Rs 100-135 for brighter liquoring dusts.

Agri-business, one of the key areas for sustainable economic growth



The President of the Federation of Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FKCCI), K. Shiva Shanmugham, said the agri-business is one of the key areas for sustainable economic growth and provides a wide range of business opportunities for entrepreneurs.

Speaking after inaugurating the Hedgers and Prospective Hedgers Awareness and Education Seminar on Agri-business and Commodities Price Risk Management, organised jointly by *The Hindu Business Line*, NCDEX, FKCCI, HKCCI and SBM here, Shanmugham said with the agri-industry being identified as one of the priority sectors for expansion and growth in India and considered a sunrise industry, the opportunities for sustainable growth of agri-business are tremendous.

Shanmugham said both time and spatial price uncertainty pose challenges to all stakeholders in the agriculture sector. He said there is enough evidence to suggest that price uncertainty and volatility has resulted in several companies going bankrupt while farmers had come to the brink of poverty.

Commodities trading

He said commodities trading in India, with globalisation and liberalisation, has witnessed a massive resurgence, turning itself into one a rapidly growing area in the financial sector. “Planned and sustained growth of any sector depended on prudent demand and supply management.” We need to evolve a system which not only yields adequate return to its producers, but also ensures timely supply at desired prices to the consumers .

Shanmugham said the derivatives markets stabilises the intensity of the price variations, brings a balance between demand and supply and act as a price regulator to farmers and traders and also encourages competition. He also demanded the Union Government to lift the ban on export of red gram.

Lauding the initiative taken by *The Hindu Business Line* for holding seminars on agri-business in different parts of the State, Shanmugham said already two seminars have been held in Bangalore and Mysore, and one each would be held in Hassan, Shimoga, Mangalore and Belgaum

The Deputy General Manager of SBM, N. V. L. Ratan, gave an insight into the role of the banks in agri-business and also various loans extended to the agriculture sector. He appealed to the farmers to repay loans in time to enable banks to recycle the repaid amount into the agriculture sector for its growth.

HKCCI President, Umakant Nigudgi, welcomed and Secretary, Basavaraj Hadgil, proposed vote of thanks.

Link failure hits Kolkata tea auction

Online sale of Orthodox teas suffered a setback owing to “link failure” this week (Sale Number 40) at Kolkata auction while there was partial sale of CTC, according to tea brokers’ sources.

However, normal sales took place at Guwahati and Siliguri, it is learnt. Inquiries reveal that the pending sales would be carried forward to next week.

This week at Sale 40, the total offerings (packages) at three North Indian auction centres were 4,50,873. There were no sales in the corresponding period of last year.

This week at Kolkata, the offerings comprised CTC/Dust 1,56, 423 (nil), Orthodox 32,888 (nil) and Darjeeling 9,258 (nil). The corresponding figures for two other centres were: Guwahati 1,39,281 (nil) and Siliguri 1,13,023(nil).

Liquoring Assam CTCs sold irregularly around last levels while the remainder was lower. Dooars was irregularly easier.

Tata Global was the mainstay and there was fair support from Hindustan Unilever on the leaf teas and active enquiry for the Dusts. Western India dealers operated on the liquoring sorts. North India and local sections were selective.

Exporters operated on the larger brokens and fannings. Darjeeling whole leaf varieties witnessed improved enquiry and prices were firm with selected lines selling at attractive levels.

Brokens and fannings also maintained levels. Tata Global, Hindustan Unilever and traditional exporters were the mainstay. Local dealers were active for cheaper brokens and fannings.

Tea Buyers' Association wants auction system strengthened

Tea Buyers Association has called for efforts to offer maximum quantity of teas through auction system which provides more transparency and better price recovery.

Addressing the annual meeting, the association president Dharmendra D.Vora pointed out that there is no alternative to auction system, as it confers many benefits on buyers, growers as well as the government.

Buyers have the widest selection of quality, all available at a single point, regular supply guaranteeing delivery, wide array of services at low cost and transparency in tracking purchases by competitors, he said.

Producers benefit from maximum exposure of the produce to a wide spectrum of buyers, timely and safe payments, reliable pricing, quality control, benchmarking against others.

The government too stands to gain from assured collection of taxes, instant availability of up to date data and infrastructure development creating employment opportunities, he added.

Comparision

The association pointed out that currently an estimated 54 per cent of the tea produced is offered in auction in India against 88 per cent in Mombassa, 91 per cent in Chittagong and 96 per cent in Colombo. The auction in these countries ensures proper price discovery particularly for bulk tea, he said.

According to Vora, south Indian gardens participate more in the auction (65 per cent of production) than the north Indian gardens (45 per cent). However, the total volume of the tea handled in three southern auction centres is about 132 million kg out of the total auction sales of 534 million kg in the country.

The association also expressed concern over the declining tea production in the country by 30 million kg in the last five years. Simultaneously China's production increased by 335 million kg, he said adding that the age profile of the country's tea bushes is also a matter of concern.

“We have the highest percentage of tea bushes more than 50 years compared to other tea producing countries, which is younger ranging from 10 to 30 years,” Vora said.

Award for Spices Board chief

Jayathilak, chairman, Spices Board, has been presented the Niryat Bandhu Award for the Board's performance in spice exports.

The award was presented by President Pranab Mukherjee at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi.

The spice export from India is on the rise and in the financial year 2011-12, it has registered an all time high and crossed the \$2-billion mark.

Govt aims to procure 40 mn tonnes of rice

The government aims to procure a record 40 million tonnes of rice from farmers in the ongoing 2012-13 marketing year that started this month, even as the summer kharif output is estimated to be lower.

In the 2011-12 marketing year (October-September), the government had targeted to procure 35 million tonnes of rice and has nearly reached that level.

“We have kept a target of a record 40 million tonnes of rice procurement for the 2012-13 marketing year after consulting state governments,” Food Corporation of India (FCI) Chairman and Managing Director Amar Singh told PTI.

Paddy procurement, which started from October 1, has reached around 5,00,000 tonnes in the first week and is expected to pick up in the coming days, he said, adding that paddy is being purchased at present from Punjab and Haryana.

Singh said higher minimum support price (MSP) announced for paddy earlier this year will help meet the procurement target despite an estimated 6.5 per cent decline in kharif rice output to 85.59 million tonnes due to poor rains.

“Procurement is expected to be higher because there is growing awareness among farmers about the MSP. They realise selling rice to traders will fetch them lower than the MSP. So, we

see more number of farmers especially in Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh selling rice to FCI,” he said.

The government has fixed MSP of common grade paddy at Rs 1,250 per quintal, while ‘A’ grade variety of paddy is at Rs 1,280 per quintal for this year.

FCI is the government’s nodal agency that undertakes procurement operation to ensure farmers get a minimum support price (MSP) for the produce. It also stores and distributes the grain to meet demand under various social schemes.

Singh said maximum quantity of rice would be procured from Punjab, followed by Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, among others.

Paddy cultivation: Central team visits Cuddalore district



A report would be submitted to the Centre within three days about the water scarcity and difficulties in raising ‘samba’ (long-term) paddy crop, leader of the central team, currently touring Cauvery delta districts of Tamil Nadu to assess the water-situation, today said.

Chief Engineer R K Gupta was talking to reporters after meeting farmers at Thoraiapadi, Natarajapuram, Vallampadugai, Kodipallam villages in Chidambaram Taluk.

Earlier, the four-member team assessed the water-situation in Nagapattinam district for the second day.

The farmers showed the team the dry condition of the paddy fields and conveyed that only if Karnataka released water in Cauvery immediately, samba crops could be saved.

Representatives of the Federation of Farmers Association led by its General Secretary Arupathy Kalyanam submitted a memorandum urging the Union Government to monitor all reservoirs and connected irrigation tanks in Karnataka as the state was releasing water into such tanks also.

Stating that Cauvery was the only source of irrigation for over two crore farmers in Tamil Nadu, Kalyanam appealed to the Centre to ensure release of a minimum of 2 tmcft for 40 days to complete the transplantation and to wet the direct sown paddy fields.

The Mettur reservoir this year was opened only on September 17 and so far, water has not reached the tail-end areas. Transplantation could be completed around mid-November and water is needed up to second week of February, he added.

Besides Gupta, other members of the team are P K Sivarajan, Director, Monitoring, Central Water Commission, Veerendra Sharma, CWC Superintending Engineer, and Pradeep Thakur, Deputy Director, Irrigation and Planning.

Pepper market sees high volatility



The pepper market continues to witness 'squeezing and cornering' and consequently high volatility last week.

Those who were keeping the market artificially high are said to be liquidating now. Switching over and additional buying was also taking place last week.

There was no domestic demand as the upcountry demand was being met by Rajasthan-based stockists, who were liquidating at Rs 400-405 a kg and on an average 2-4 tonnes of black pepper were thus being reportedly moved out to other centres in north India.

The enthusiasm shown by the buyers sends out the impression that inventories with the dealers in other States are empty as they all were not maintaining any stocks because of the high cost involved due to prevailing high prices.

As the stocks in Rajasthan are getting depleted, demand for the winter season could be expected in the coming weeks, market sources told *Business Line*.

The new Indian crop is expected to trickle in from mid-December.

But, there have been conflicting reports about the Indian output.

Some have claimed that it would be a bumper crop with around 65,000 tonnes while some others put it at somewhere between 55,000 and 60,000 tonnes. Actual position is yet to emerge.

Growers in some districts said the number of spikes are less per vine but each spike is full of berries giving the indication of more pepper per vine.

However, in certain areas it is not claimed to be encouraging. Anyway, general impression is that the next crop is going to be better than that of the previous season, primary market dealers told *Business Line*.

At present, the total availability, according to the trade, is estimated at around 10,000 tonnes and the requirement till mid-Dec, at the requirement rate of 3,000 tonnes a month would come to 7,500 tonnes.

Of the total availability, 4,000 tonnes are on the exchange platform and of this an estimated 3,000 tonnes are held by a bullish cartel, the trade sources alleged.

The carry forward stock for 2013 would be very thin, the trade claimed.

Some 459 tonnes have been marked for staggered delivery as on Saturday, they said.

At the same time, those who are holding the commodity anticipating the prices to touch Rs 500 or for any special purpose might not release it till their objective is achieved.

In the international market, Malabar remained totally out-priced at around \$8,500 a tonne (c&f), where as, other origins are ruling below \$7,000 a tonne. Reports of bumper Indian crop have also influenced other origins making them easier.

Brazil was reportedly aggressive while Indonesia and Vietnam have brought down their prices for Asta grade to below \$7,000 a tonne.

The futures market witnessed a mixed trend last week. The activities were limited. Liquidation of good quantity has taken place. Spot prices remained unchanged during the week on matching demand and supply.

Oct contract during the week decreased by Rs 295 a quintal to Rs 43,100. Nov contract moved up by Rs 65 to Rs 43,100 while the Dec contract decreased by Rs 520 to Rs 41,815 a quintal.

Total turn over increased by 653 tonnes to 12,272 tonnes.

Total open interest decreased by 699 tonnes to 7,469 tonnes.

Spot prices were flat at Rs 40,000 (ungarbled) and Rs 41,500 (garbled) a quintal.

Panel moot modern farming practices in Ernakulam dist

A government-appointed committee has recommended modern agricultural practices to meet the increasing food demand in Ernakulam district.

The committee constituted to formulate the State's agricultural policy also suggested a rapid increase in the production of rice, egg and meat. Farmers can even seek foreign technology to achieve the target, it said.

R. Hali, agricultural expert, who participated in the meeting here, pointed out the need to notify special zones in the district to promote pokkali farming. The advantages of pokkali rice, which

enjoyed the protection of Geographical Indication certificate, should be explored to promote the farming.

He said vegetable and fruit farming could be extensively done in the eastern region of the district, while promoting coconut farming on the western side. Value-addition of agricultural produce also held a lot of potential here.

Suggesting that every family could be encouraged to take up agricultural activities, Hali said that many people would come into the field, if it helped in improving their earnings. The panchayat-level samithis for development of agriculture should be provided financial support, he added

Former MLA K. Krishnankutty, who is heading the committee, said that export-oriented agriculture should be promoted in the district by utilising the facilities available at the Cochin International Airport.

Various types of vegetables and fruits could be produced here after assessing the seasonal demand in the Gulf and other countries. Fruits and vegetables could also be taken to various parts of the country through refrigerated railway wagons and containers.

R. Ajith Kumar, director of the Department of Agriculture, stressed the need for diversification as traditional coconut farming was not yielding profits for the farmers.

Sugar mills fear tight supplies during year-end



Higher sugar releases for October and November festival season has pushed millers into a corner, even as they have warned of a supply squeeze and spike in prices in December.

Last week, the Government allocated 40 lakh tonnes for October and November to meet higher demand and to keep prices under control during the peak festive months.

The allocation is higher by 5 lakh tonnes each for October and November.

The higher release has resulted in a price decline of about 10 per cent at the factory level. The ex-factory prices are now ruling at Rs 32-33 a kg as against Rs 36 a fortnight ago.

However, the drop in prices for the end consumer may take some more time.

“The non-levy quota is normally announced for three months, but the Government has done it only for two months. This indicates that they may not have enough sugar to allocate for December,” sources said.

By ensuring higher sugar releases, it looks like the Government has sought to compensate for the rise in other commodity prices such as pulses and wheat.

Balance sheet

The sugar opening balance for new sugar season starting October is pegged at 6 million tonne (mt) by the Indian Sugar Mills Association.

The sugar situation is delicately poised as production is expected to be lower in 2012-13 with scanty rains hurting cane crop in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The Government estimates sugar production to drop to 23 mt in 2012-13 from 26 mt last year, while ISMA has pegged the output at 24 mt.

The crushing for the 2012-13 season has started in States such as Karnataka, where some mills in the southern part have started operations.

However, millers in the main producing States of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra were expected to start by the middle of November.

Imports

A section of the industry believes that the country will have sufficient sugar to meet the December demand while downplaying the need to go in for imports.

However, millers in Maharashtra and the South feel that it is the right time to decide on imports.

Sugar production from the new season will start flowing by early December.

“UP has traditionally diverted cane to gur and khandsari. We will have to see how much sugarcane gets diverted this year,” sources said.

Govt must ensure proper pricing for farm produce'



A leading farm educationist has said that the Government should draw up a robust pricing policy for agriculture produce.

Dr B. T. Pujari, Dean (Agriculture), University of Agriculture Sciences, Raichur, said crop holidays is a dangerous trend and the Government should ensure proper pricing policy for farm produce. He said stabilisation of the market is a crucial factor for sustainable agriculture.

Dr Pujari was speaking at the 'Hedgers and Prospective Hedgers Awareness and Education Seminar on Agriculture Business and Commodities Price Risk Management' jointly organised by *The Hindu Business Line*, National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), Federation of Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Hyderabad, Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and State Bank of Mysore, here on Friday.

Dr Pujari said to ensure food security to the ever-growing population, it has become imperative for the Government to tread cautiously on its EXIM policy as far as agriculture commodities are concerned.

Export, import policies

He said the export and import policies of the agriculture commodities should be under the Agriculture Ministry, and the import and export of agriculture commodities should be based on supply and demand.

Lauding the intervention of the NCDEX in the market in Gulbarga in the past two years, Dr Pujari said the entry of NCDEX in the market has helped stabilise the prices of red gram .

G. Chandrasekhar of *The Hindu Business Line* in his presentation stressed the importance of achieving at least 4 per cent growth in the agriculture sector to achieve 9 per cent GDP growth during the 12th Plan period.

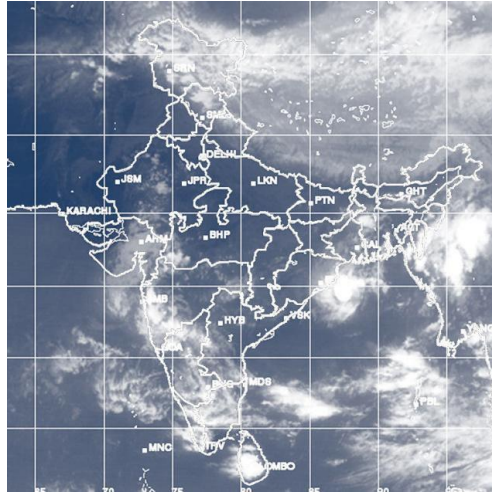
“We will not be able to lift the people out of poverty unless we achieve a 4 per cent growth in agriculture sector....our growth in agriculture field had remained constant at 2.5 per cent, which was not sufficient to push the country forward in the path of development.”

He blamed the lopsided policies for the slow growth rate of agriculture sector and said the present policies are not growth oriented and do not give stress on agriculture development, irrigation development and improving rural infrastructures.

He said agriculture should become a source of strength and not a burden and planners should use the information technology, biotechnology, nuclear technology and nano technology to help agriculture to achieve the much-desired growth rate. The Deputy Manager of NCDEX, Deepak Sayana, in his presentation, gave an insight into the functioning of the spot, future and forward markets, and how it helps farmers get better prices for their produce.

The business in the agriculture futures market has witnessed a record growth from Rs 5.71 lakh crore in 2004 to Rs 119.48 lakh crore in 2010-11.

Rain forecast for peninsula, eastern parts



Western flanks of the peninsula continued to receive rains as the causative circulation persisted over coastal areas of Maharashtra.

An India Meteorological Department (IMD) update said on Sunday evening that many places over Konkan, Goa and Madhya Maharashtra received overnight rain.

'LOW' FORMS

A few places over north interior Karnataka, south Gujarat region and Marathwada, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu also witnessed rain.

Meanwhile, true to forecasts, a rain-driving low-pressure area has formed over northwest Bay of Bengal.

The IMD has warned of heavy rainfall at one or two places over Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh during next three days.

To the west, Konkan and Goa might see heavy rains on Monday.

Model predictions indicate the possibility of another low-pressure area forming in the Bay of Bengal around Wednesday.

Wind pattern over peninsular India has already gone into a transition period from southwest to northeast.

WIND PATTERN

This is what is causing sporadic rains over parts of the peninsula, which would continue for a couple of days more.

Winds from a north-east direction are expected to push the circulation over Maharashtra further back west into the Arabian Sea.

This would help the north-easterly flows to establish their presence over land except the extreme-most south of the peninsula by the weekend. From here, the setting of the North-East monsoon should be a matter of time, according to weather experts. Meanwhile, conditions have become favourable for further withdrawal of South-West monsoon from Uttar Pradesh, some more parts of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

WITHDRAWAL LINE

The withdrawal line was unmoved from the Kheri, Kanpur, Guna, Ratlam, Vallabh Vidhyanagar and Porbandar alignment for quite sometime now.

Forecast valid until Wednesday said that thundershowers are likely at many places over Konkan and Goa, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

Rain or thundershowers may break out over Assam, Meghalaya and the eastern states on Monday and increase thereafter. Thundershowers have been forecast for Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, east Gujarat, south peninsula and Lakshadweep.

Rangarajan Panel moots sugar industry decontrol; asks government to scrap regulations in local market

Doing Away with Controls

• If the report is accepted, sugar could be traded like any other commodity such as wheat and rice without government intervention

₹1,000cr

Money the industry can save if jute packaging is not a must

₹2,000cr

Money the industry will get if it can sell sugar to govt at production cost



The pricing, supply, export and import will be driven by domestic and international market dynamics

At present, the government decides mill-wise quantity to be released every quarter into the open market

The report advocates freedom for farmers to sell cane to any mill irrespective of distance

At present, farmers have to sell their crop to a designated mill located within a distance of 15-25 km

The [Rangarajan committee](#), set up to examine issues related to [sugar decontrol](#), has recommended complete decontrol of the sugar industry. In its report, the committee has asked the government to remove levy sugar obligation (sugar for ration shops) and to do away with the regulated release mechanism besides freeing up the commodity's export and import.

If the recommendations are implemented, sugar could be traded like any other commodity like wheat and rice without any government intervention.

The pricing, supply, export and import will all be driven by domestic and international markets.

At present, the government decides mill-wise quantity to be released every quarter into the open market.

The committee has recommended the abolition of state advised price (SAP) - the selling price of cane as fixed by state governments - and the introduction of a profit-sharing mechanism to

arrive at a uniform pricing for cane farmers.

It has suggested a dynamic twostage payment. Mills would have to pay farmers the fair and remunerative price fixed by the central government at the onset of every crop season.

Thereafter, farmers would be paid 75% of prices that mills realise for selling sugar and its byproducts to be calculated every quarter. This will link farmers' remuneration to market prices.

The report also advocates freedom for farmers to sell cane to any mill irrespective of distance.

At present, farmers have to sell their crop to a designated mill located within a distance of 15-25 km. This will improve the bargaining power of the farmer and create a competitive environment among sugar mills.

It has also suggested the minimum distance criteria between two mills to make the industry more competitive.

"It is unlikely that farmers would sell their crop to far-away mills for better returns. They will still prefer to sell to nearby mills," said a mill owner.

The report also suggests doing away with the compulsory jute packaging. The government insists that mills use jute to support the jute industry.

"This will help the industry save Rs 1,000 crore annually by using high-density polyethylene bags which cost a third of jute bags," said an industry official.

The removal of the levy obligation on sugar mills would be a great relief to the industry. Under the obligation, mills have to sell 10% of their output to the government at Rs 19,050 a tonne - much lower than the average production cost of Rs 32,000 a tonne.

"If this recommendation is approved, the industry will get an additional liquidity of around Rs 2,000 crore, which would ensure better realisation," said an industry official, who did not want to be named.

However, the removal of the levy obligation will add a burden of Rs 1,800 crore to the food subsidy bill which has already crossed Rs 80,000 crore.

A fair deal for farmers

FDI in retail could give them a share of higher consumer prices

The Bharat bandh called by various parties to protest against FDI and other reforms found no response in villages. Speaking to small shopkeepers in villages after the bandh, I found that most of them had not answered the call to close shops. They were not agitated. In fact, they looked forward to the prospect of more prosperous farms. The rural grocer understands that an increase in the purchasing power of farmers is directly proportional to an increase in business opportunities.

Of my personal experience, I can speak without fear of being contradicted. I live on my farm and grow kinnow, a citrus fruit. I sell the fruit in wholesale markets or sabzi mandis, like those in Delhi. The kinnow tree yields a saleable amount of fruit only after six years of obsessive, devoted care. Last year, I sold my kinnow at Rs 9 per kg, factoring in the cost of grading, waxing, packaging and transportation to the mandi.

After an overnight truck journey, the kinnow was sold by street vendors to consumers at Rs 25 per kg. Now this mammoth 300 per cent margin is preposterous and certainly worth fighting for. That is exactly what the middlemen are doing. Traders are reacting to the possibility of economic loss due to increased competition and I do not blame them for that. But it is unacceptable that the farmer puts in the hard work and takes all the risks of value addition while traders make all the money.

'Nagoya Protocol can halt biodiversity loss by 2020'

Recalling the last Nagoya Protocol, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), an NGO focused on nature conservation, expressed concern and disappointment with the non-implementation of strategies that were listed down at the last convention.

“An overwhelming 91 per cent of parties to the Conference of Biodiversity CBD have developed strategies and plans for their approach to protect nature and biodiversity, but only 14 of the 193 countries updated their national strategies in sync with the the strategic plan agreed in Nagoya,” political advisor of WWF international Rolf Hogan said. India is also one among the 193 countries and though it had given its nod for the Nagoya protocol, it still has a long way to go.

The organization called on all the nations gathered at the conference to urgently start implementing the previously agreed targets. “What was agreed in Nagoya has the power to halt the dramatic loss of biodiversity across the globe by 2020 and address the main drivers of destruction. But now, governments must prove that Nagoya was not just a platform for empty promises. They need to start taking real steps and implement the targets they agreed on,” executive director for conservation at WWF Lasse Gustavsson said.

“Governments can only be serious about these targets if they are prepared to invest in achieving them. We need to see richer countries helping poorer countries. All countries must increase their domestic budgets,” Hogan added. Some nations that started working on the commitments are Indonesia, Guyana and European countries.

“The state of biodiversity in India is bad. We lost a lot of our forest area. Only four per cent is considered as protected forest area,” programme director of WWF India Sejal Worah added.

On AP, Farida Tampa from WWF Hyderabad said AP has a rich patch of biodiversity which is unexplored. “We have a huge patch of the Eastern Ghats which is rich in biodiversity. We have

conducted many studies and have discovered new species of scorpions, a new form of weed and many such interesting facts. Apart from this, there are also a lot of lakes that need to be rehabilitated and the best method of implementing strategies is by involving political leaders and increasing funding,” she said.