

3,500 farm ponds to be dug in Tirunelveli district

Move to harvest rainwater under MGNREGS

: In an attempt at harvesting rainwater, the government has allowed digging of 3,500 ponds in private farms in the district under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Collector C.Samayamoorthy said in a press release that Dalits, small and marginal farmers, who have been selected by the gram sabhas as beneficiaries, will get Rs.1.50 lakh worth manpower for digging the farm ponds. Interested/selected farmers may contact the Assistant Agriculture Officer and the Block Development Officer concerned and submit their applications.

On receiving proposals from these officials, representatives from the Department of Rural Development will inspect the spot and prepare the estimate. After technical sanction, the Collector will give the administrative sanction for digging.

While the village panchayat president concerned will supervise the work, the Assistant Engineer from the Department of Agricultural Engineering, Supervisor from the Department of Rural Development and Assistant Agricultural Officer from the Department of Agriculture will monitor the work.

“Besides using the water stored in these ponds at the time of scarcity, farmers can also use this water bodies for pisciculture that will ensure additional revenue to them during non-farming seasons.”

'Farmers festivals are a waste of money'

Many farmers say they are struggling for survival and are in no mood to celebrate anything

When there is no water and no power to save the crops, what is the funda in indulgence and celebration? Ill-timed as they are, the much-touted farmers' festivals are just a waste of tax payers' money, farmers in Karur feel. The festivals that kicked off on April 14 are to go on till May 13 in the district.

Anguished that they are not in a position to save any of their standing crops — be it paddy, sugarcane, banana or betel vine, because of drought and shortage of power, farmers in Karur district are not exactly warming up to the idea of festivals conducted by the officials across the district. "Festivals mean celebration and mirth all around.

But do you find us in any such sort? Struggling as we are in saving our standing crops, with no water or rain or power to water the withering crops, we are more interested in officials understanding our dilemma and troubles rather than inviting us for the cheap melas," says a farmer S. Ponna Gounder of Pappayambadi village in Kadavur taluk of Karur district.

Drought has wrought havoc on banana crop in the region and whatever was left to stand was flattened by the gale that ravaged the fields a fortnight ago. "Officials knew that our region was very much affected but the high-level ministerial team that toured the district skipped our village as it did not fall in their route. But we are told that farmers' festivals are being conducted with much fan fare. We fail to understand the point completely," wryly smiles S. Thiagarajan of Thimmampatti.

“The festivals are mere waste of tax payers’ money. The timing of the festival, coinciding with Tamil New Year, is bad and could have been shifted to June or July. Absolutely, the festivals are of no benefit to farmers. Moreover, when we farmers are feeding the world where is the need to offer food and meals at the festival,” says Nachalur K. Anbalagan, president, Sugarcane Growers’ Welfare Association.

The participation of farmers has been poor in the festivals and even those who attend are not showing any enthusiasm.

It is said that around Rs. 20,000 is being spent on conducting the festival in one panchayat. That amount could be spent on a better note, farmers feel.

-
- *‘We don’t need melas, we need help in the wake of drought’*
 - *The response of the farmers is said to be poor to the festivals*
-

Training for farmers

The Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Vamban near here, will organise a day-long training programme on natural manure for the benefit of the farmers on its premises on April 30. Experts will explain the methods to be adopted for the preparation of manure in their farms themselves. Farmers interested in taking part in the programme could contact K. Vairavan, head, KVK, over ph: 04322290321.

Farmers to boycott TNERC hearing

In protest against the proposed revision of tariff on irrigation pumpsets



NO COMPROMISE:V. Periyasamy, a farmer, expressing his view at the grievances meeting in Tiruchi on Friday.— PHOTO: R.M. RAJARATHINAM

Tamilaga Vivasayigal Sangham has announced that it will boycott the public hearing of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission on tariff reversion scheduled to be held here on May 8. (The hearing is on May 10 in Madurai and on May 17 in Coimbatore)

Its State general secretary Rajachidambaram declared at the agriculturists' grievances day here on Friday in the presence of Collector Jayashree Muralidharan that there was no point in attending the hearing as the commission had not bothered to pay heed to the representations of the farmers last year.

He said the commission wanted to raise the tariff from Rs. 250 per HP (horse power) on irrigation pumpsets to Rs. 1,750 per HP last year. "We opposed it and suggested that there could be a revision of 10 per cent."

But, the commission went ahead with the proposed increase saying that farmers need not have any worry because it was the Tamil Nadu government that was bearing the brunt.

"This year, the commission has suggested that the tariff per HP be enhanced to Rs. 2,500. We are certain that it is not going to listen to our views and will raise the tariff unilaterally. Then why should we attend the hearing?" he asked.

Mr. Rajachidambaram told *The Hindu* that his major worry was that at some point or the other, farmers of Tamil Nadu would have to pay the tariff because the Union government had all along been complaining that the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco) was not settling its dues properly.

And the State government had been explaining that it was because of the poor finances that Tangedco had been unable to settle its dues.

Farmers to face the music

“Hence, the current situation of the State government footing the entire power bill for agriculture cannot go on forever and free power scheme will be scrapped irrespective of the party in power sometime later. Then it would be farmers who would be forced to face the music. That is why we have been opposing the tariff increase all along,” he said.

Next month I will waive your loans, Yeddyurappa tells Shimoga farmers



President of Karnataka Janata Party B.S. Yeddyurappa campaigning for party candidate S. Rudregowda in Shimoga on Friday.— Photo by VAIDYA

The former Chief Minister and president of Karnataka Janata Paksha B.S. Yeddyurappa on Friday urged farmers not to repay the crop loan they have borrowed from various banks.

Addressing an election meeting in Holalur village near here, Mr. Yeddyurappa said, "In the month of May, I will take initiatives to waive agricultural loans borrowed by farmers totalling up to Rs. 1 lakh."

The former Chief Minister, however, did not hazard any guess on the political party that would come to power in the State.

Criticism

Launching an attack on the Janata Dal (Secular) leaders, he said, "National president of the JD(S) H.D. Deve Gowda had opposed the decision I had taken as Finance Minister in the JD(S)-BJP coalition government to waive the interest on agriculture loan."

Mr. Yeddyurappa claimed that owing to the pressure exerted by him, the BJP government announced to waiver of loan up to Rs 25,000 borrowed by the farmers in the drought-affected region from the co-operative banks.

Pension scheme

He said that, if the KJP was voted to power, monthly pension scheme would be introduced for the elderly farmers. As the price of fertilizer was on the rise, a subsidy scheme will be introduced for the poor farmers to purchase it, he said.

KJP candidate from Shimoga Rural constituency G. Basavanyappa was present.

'Don't repay debts, farm loans up to

Rs. 1 lakh will be written off

It is a double whammy for farmers in the Delta region

Farmers of Thanjavur district have alleged malpractices in the co-operative elections being held in Thanjavur district and appealed to the district administration to ensure a free and fair poll. They demanded supply of three-phase power continuously for agricultural pumpsets and in villages so that drinking water could be pumped into overhead tanks.

Highlighting these two issues, they wore black badges and attended the monthly farmers grievances day meeting at the collectorate. They contested the statement of Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Company (Tangedco) that three-phase supply was being given for three hours during the day and for three hours at night in the district.

They said that this statement made at the meeting is contrary to truth as three-phase supply was not given even for two hours a day. However, Tangedco engineers admitted that there may be shortfall in three-phase supply whenever there was problem in wind energy generation.

K. Baskaran, Collector, who presided over the meeting, said that samba crop was raised on 1,02,939 hectares of land and thaladi on 19,003 hectares of land this year in the district. Harvest had been completed. Average yield was 4,511 kg a hectare. During this summer season, paddy was being cultivated on 4,834 hectares of land. It had been planned to build 5,000 farm ponds in the district. Beneficiaries had been selected for 4,998 farm ponds.

It had been planned to conduct “Uzhavar Vizhas” in 759 revenue villages. So far, these had been held in 223 villages. Blackgram seeds were now being distributed for cultivation. There was a stock of 160 tonnes of ADT 5 and ADT 3 blackgram seeds at the agriculture extension centres.

Fertilizer

There was a stock of 3,822 tonnes of urea, 6,323 tonnes of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and 1,484 tonnes of potash and 2,476 tonnes of complex fertilizers in the co-operative and private institutions.

The catch in mussel farming

Younger generation does not want to take up their family vocation



Old timer: A fisherman with his catch using traditional mussel fishery at Mulloor, near Vizhinjam, in Thiruvananthapuram.

Fifty-six-year old Natarajan looked tired after spending almost four hours diving into the sea, swimming underwater around the submerged rocks to collect the mussels carpeted on them. He was also keen to help a younger member from his neighbourhood to tie up the traditional raft used for mussel fishery.

“Mussel farming has been the source of our livelihood all these years, but this tradition is going to end with our generation,” he explained.

400 families

Around 400 families living on the coastline of Mulloor are engaged in manual mussel farming, but only a few are willing to pass on the tradition to the younger generation.

“My two sons are not interested in this. They have got better education and want to take up other jobs. While one has chosen to do business, the other has opened a workshop,” he said.

“Four hours of work fetches us Rs.200-Rs.500, if the collection is good. But these land structures are disappearing fast and are being filled up by sand. Mussels do not thrive in such places and we may soon have to look for other areas or give up the traditional fishing”, said his fellow member.

According to him, the rocky areas are gradually disappearing, which results in the destruction of sea beds on which the mussels grow.

Talking to *The Hindu*, M. Sreekandan, Assistant Director (Fisheries), Vizhinjam, said there was no scientific indication of destruction of sea beds in the Vizhijam area. At present, there are no initiatives to impart training in such traditional fishing. However, the department has taken up mussel farming in the area, he said.

“This kind of fishing requires good strength and an ability to swim underwater for long hours.

These are traditionally passed down to family members. There are no schemes to promote such fishery at present,” he said.

Though mussels form a major part of the culinary preference in this area, there is relatively less demand for them and they are priced low when compared to other sea food, which has affected the livelihood of these fishermen.

But they have not lost hope. The coming months are the peak season for mussel fishing, as the brown mussels spawn from the end of May with peak season during July-August at Vizhinjam.

And it is also the season when at least a few younger members of the family join the older ones to help them with their big catch.

Meedhu Miriyam Joseph

Spawning success stories through mushroom farming



Money-spinner: Shaju, a farmer based in Aloor in Thrissur. (Right) The room where he produces mushroom spawn.— Photo: By special arrangement



Mushroom cultivation and spawn production are boosting the income of farmers in the district, according to scientists with the Krishi Vigyan Bhavan of the Kerala Agricultural University.

Some farmers are reportedly earning more than Rs.1 lakh a month.

“Farmers in villages knew how to cultivate mushroom. But quality spawn was not available. The KVK intervened and trained farmers in spawn production,” said KAU Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran.

Edaththadan Shaju, an Aloor-based farmer, sells 350 packets of mushroom spawn a week.

“Apart from this, mushroom sale too boosts my income,” he said.

Raju, another farmer, has converted a room in his house to an air-conditioned spawn production centre. He also imparts training in spawn production.

Fathima of Kaippamangalam has found mushroom cultivation lucrative. She sells 25 kg of mushroom a week at an average price of Rs.350 a kg.

Mushrooms are a type of fungi. Cultivated mushrooms come in button, cup or flat shapes. Large flat (Portobello) mushrooms have more flavour than young buttons. Chestnut mushrooms have a slightly stronger taste and meatier texture.

Mushrooms are best used on the day of purchase.

Experts say mushrooms will keep for up to three days in the refrigerator. Mushrooms sweat if stored in plastic. They are to be kept in a paper bag or wrapped in kitchen paper.

Fish farming: Environment impact assessment mooted

District ranked first in aquaculture in the entire country, says Collector



Dos and don'ts:Collector Vanimohan making a power point presentation on the guidelines for regularisation of fishponds in Eluru on Friday.-Photo: A.V.G. Prasad

Subhani, Assistant Engineer from the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB) on Friday informed that the board is examining a proposal to carry out a study on the impact of fast-growing fisheries on the ecology in West Godavari district.

A proposal was submitted to the Member Secretary of the APPCB, requesting for an environment impact assessment in the face of divergent views on the effects of aquaculture on environment, he said at an awareness programme on regularisation of fish farms here.

The study was necessitated in the backdrop of complaints from agriculturists and environmentalists that the practice of unregulated aquaculture was polluting groundwater and surface water sources while adversely affecting the soil health.

The death of fish in ponds at times of extreme weather conditions for want of oxygen was a clear indication for water contamination, they argue.

Some official agencies, including the Fisheries Department, however, ruled out the possibility of fish farming in freshwaters having adverse impact on environment.

The district ranked first in aquaculture in the entire country with the fish worth Rs.1,500 crore getting exported annually, Collector G. Vanimohan said while underlining the need for regularisation of the whole extent of 1.5 lakh acres of fishponds to ensure a healthy growth. Venkateswara Rao, Superintending Engineer, Irrigation Department, lamented that 80 per cent of the ponds which came up nearby the irrigation and drainage channels had encroached upon the canal bunds.

Some aqua farmers were even found using the bunds of the drainage and irrigation canals as the bunds of their high-raised fishponds, he said. In the process, the pollutants were joining the irrigation canals, which were a source of drinking water for a number of villages downstream, by gravity from the fishponds, Mr. Venkateswara Rao complained.

Meanwhile, a similar workshop held in Bhimavaram on Thursday was confronted by a complaint from an agriculturist that his fields

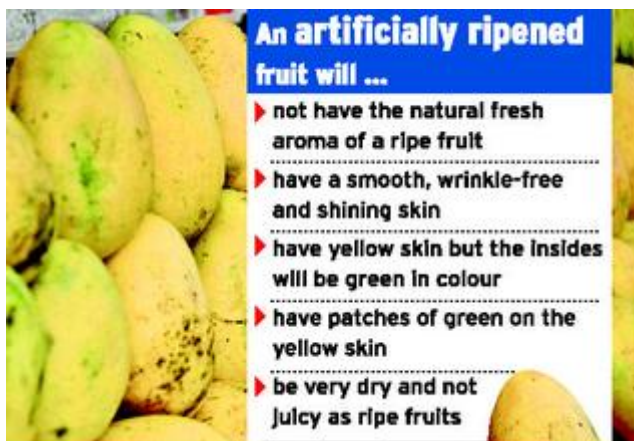
in Palacole area became victim of pollution caused by fishponds which came up illegally.

Salinity, water and land pollution allegedly caused by fishponds had made the agricultural fields in the neighbourhood unfit for cultivation, he said while appealing to the administration for a stringent action.

-
- *Official agencies rule out fish farming in fresh waters*
 - *'Fish worth Rs.1,500 crore getting exported annually'*
-

The fruit you eat may not be so sweet

As supply does not meet the demand, traders artificially ripen mangoes



Come summer and the sales of fruits, especially mangoes, increases exponentially. People see it as the safest and the tasty way to beat the intense heat of the season, and the dehydration that accompanies it.

A large district such as Coimbatore consumes, according to a conservative estimate, over 15 tonnes of mangoes every single day during peak summer.

However, the supply does not always meet this huge quantum of demand for a multitude of reasons and unscrupulous traders, intent on making a quick buck, resort to illegal measures to artificially ripen not only mangoes, but a whole gamut of fruits that sell well now.

More than 3.5 tonnes of artificially-ripened chikoo ('sapota') were seized from just two shops last year, indicating the scale of the problem, says R. Kathiravan, Designated Officer, Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration Department (Food Safety Wing).

Explaining the process behind artificial ripening, he says ethylene gas initiates the ripening process in a fruit. Normally, several other processes follow this step, including the conversion of starch to sugar, the crucial step which makes mangoes so mouth-wateringly tasty.

However, in an artificially ripened fruit, only the chlorophyll (green pigment) changes colour and none of the other natural processes take place. This results in a seemingly ripe fruit tasting very sour.

The process

Among the most common method for artificial ripening, he says, is the use of calcium carbide - primarily due to its easy availability and cheap cost - which emits acetylene gas when mixed with water. Calcium carbide is predominantly used in arc welding.

Just one kilogram of this substance, brought for as little as Rs. 30, can ripen around 10 tonnes of fruits. For example, he says raw fruits of the much-sought after Imam Pasand mango can be procured for half its market price, ripened using a kilogram of carbide and sold for the market price, resulting in a 100 per cent profit.

The calcium crystals, Dr. Kathiravan says, are kept among the stones for 12 hours, mostly during the nights making it difficult to catch the errant traders.

Other less-common methods include the use of Ethipon, a pesticide in liquid form which is diluted and sprayed on the fruits, and Oxytocin, a hormone injected into the fruits.

Health hazard

The major health hazard is the acetylene gas emitted by calcium carbide. This targets the neurological system and reduces the oxygen supply to the brain.

While short-term effects include sleeping disorders and headaches, he says the long term effects are memory loss, seizures, mouth ulcers, skin rashes, renal problems and possibly, even cancer.

Any one having information on artificial ripening of fruits could mail the information todoofssacbe@gmail.com. All information will be kept in confidence and action taken, assures Dr. Kathiravan.

All about sweet, sour and tangy fruits

Frutipedia.com catalogues over 445 types of edible fruits

The website is rudimentary, but the research is in-depth. From the humble banana to the Royal Mango to Louhan Guo, the world's sweetest fruit, frutipedia.com catalogues more than 445 types of edible fruits found across the world.

A one-man venture, the website was started five years ago by Chitranjit Parmar (74), a horticultural scientist from Himachal Pradesh, to educate netizens about his passion. It has now touched one million hits, with a chunk of them coming from the U.S., Europe and Australia.

“There are over 4,500 edible fruits, most found in the wild, while only 300 are commercially mass produced. My aim is to ensure there is enough information about these fruits,” he told *The Hindu* during a visit to the city recently to promote cultivation of apples in the tropical climes of the State.

The website was launched in May 2008, with a database of 200 fruits — with pictures, areas of cultivation, type of fruit, and some times even if its cultivation can be undertaken in India. Since then it has steadily grown in size, averaging one fruit per week. What makes the website unique is that it goes beyond basic nutritional information or description, and focuses on its cultivation and horticultural details — which will be beneficial to growers.

His professional and personal travels across the country and 32 other countries have given him exposure to many an exotic fruit. For example, one page lists the application of fertilizer to Mamon fruit, found in Tropical America, while another talks of the possible commercial exploitation of Galo fruit found mainly in East and South East Asia.

However, what disappoints him is the lack of user contributions, the foundation for websites like this. “When I started it, I had hoped that farmers across the world would contribute. I have not received even a single contribution so far,” he said.

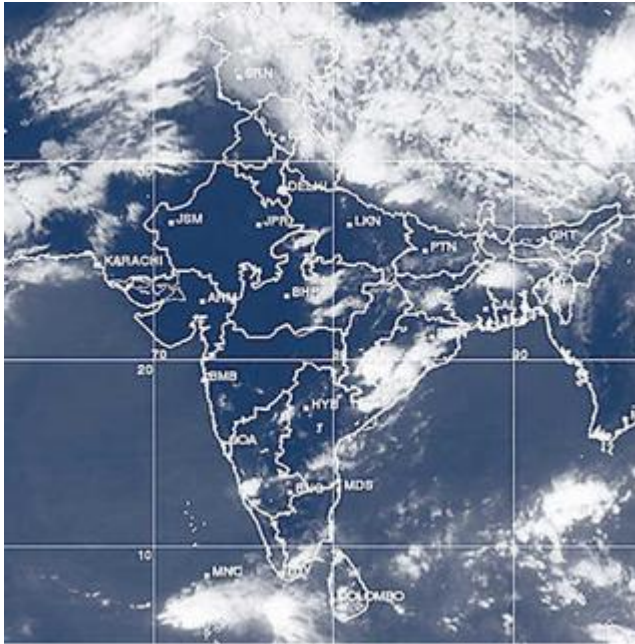
This does not stop the prolific writer, who spends around 16 hours a day collating and typing out facts from his home in Mandi, Himachal. Though dedication is never in deficit, funds usually are. He recalls the difficulties in getting web designers for the pay he was offering. Consequently, the layout of the website is patchy, and outdated, with numerous kinks. However, on this website, it is substance over style.

He is thrilled that after five years, the website is attracting advertisements. “I get around \$100 a month, which for a retired

person like me is good pocket money that allows me to travel the country and see various cultivations.”

The website was started by Parmar, a horticulturalist

Weather



INSAT PICTURE AT 14.00 hrs. Observations recorded at 8.30 a.m. on April 26th.

	Max	Min	R	TR
New Delhi (Plm)	40	25	0	26
New Delhi (Sfd)	39	24	0	22
Chandigarh	35	22	0	26
Hissar	37	22	0	41
Bhuntar	27	12	0	137
Shimla	23	14	0	109
Jammu	34	22	0	35
Srinagar	21	11	0	163
Amritsar	37	18	4	10
Patiala	37	23	0	24
Jaipur	38	24	2	14
Udaipur	38	26	0	15
Allahabad	43	25	0	11
Lucknow	39	23	0	1
Varanasi	41	25	0	21
Dehradun	33	20	0	37
Agartala	36	24	0	68
Ahmedabad	40	26	0	6
Bangalore	34	24	0	25
Bhubaneshwar	38	26	0	52

Bhopal	40	24	1	53
Chennai	35	27	0	32
Guwahati	35	21	0	76
Hyderabad	35	23	1	51
Kolkata	36	26	0	32
Mumbai	34	27	0	0
Nagpur	41	24	0	24
Patna	37	26	0	14
Pune	39	24	0	3
Thiruvananthapuram	36	26	0	105
Imphal	33	15	0	114
Shillong	22	14	9	82

The columns show maximum and minimum temperature in Celsius, rainfall during last 24 hours (tr-trace) and total rainfall in mm since 1st March.

RAIN AT FEW PLACES

RAINFALL: Rain/thundershowers have occurred at a few places over Jammu and Kashmir and at isolated places over Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, east Rajasthan and west Uttar Pradesh. Weather was mainly dry over rest of the region.

MAXIMUM TEMPERATURES: The maximum temperatures rose in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and changed little elsewhere. They were below normal in Jammu and Kashmir and west Rajasthan and normal in rest of the region. The highest maximum temperature in the region was 43.0°C recorded at Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh).

FORECAST VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 28th April 2013: Rain/thundershowers may occur at a few places over Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh during next 48 hours and at one or two places thereafter. Rain/thundershowers would occur at one or two places over Uttarakhand. Rain/thundershowers may also occur at one or two places over Punjab, Haryana, west Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan during next 24 hours and mainly dry weather thereafter. Weather would be mainly dry over rest of the region.

WARNING: Thunder squall may occur at one or two places over Jammu division of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and west Uttar Pradesh during next 24 hours.

FORECAST FOR DELHI AND NEIGHBOURHOOD VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 28th April 2013: Partly cloudy sky. Very light rain/thunderly development may occur intermittently in some areas.

Water level

: Water level in the Papanasam dam on Friday stood at 63.85 feet (the maximum level is 143 feet). The dam had an inflow of 135.26 cusecs and 394.75 cusecs is discharged from the dam. The level of Manimuthar dam stood at 84.47 feet (118 feet). The dam had an inflow of 9 cusecs and 5 cusecs is discharged.

Water level in Periyar dam was 112.50 feet (permissible level is 136 feet) with an inflow of 100 cusecs and discharge of 100 cusecs on Friday. The water level in Vaigai dam was 37.53 feet (71) with nil inflow and discharge was 810 cusecs.

Rainfall

The combined storage in Periyar credit was 1,985 mcft. The rainfall recorded in Periyar dam was 3.8 mm, Uthamapalayam 15, Veerapandi 2, Sothuparai 4, Madurai 22.4, Mettupatti 50.5, Kallanthiri 12 and Melur 1.

Palm oil imports drop on increased availability of other edible oils

During March, palm oil imports from Malaysia dropped to a two-year low



Palm oil imports to India have started declining, thanks to rising availability of alternative oils in the domestic markets. According to latest reports, during March, India's palm oil imports from Malaysia dropped to a two-year low on increased availability of domestic oilseeds for crushing.

A report from Rabobank Food & Agribusiness Research and Advisory noted that India's palm oil imports would remain weak during April due to rapeseed harvest. Palm oil export from Malaysia to India has dropped 46 per cent year-on-year in March to 64,202 tonnes.

"We forecast India's rapeseed crop will be up 22 per cent y-o-y, which will increase on the availability of domestic oilseeds for crushing during March and April. With crushing parity in place, rapeseed crushing will increase the oil supply in the country," the Rabobank report noted.

Notably, favourable weather has increased the prospect of growth in rapeseed/mustard production in India. According to estimates provided by the Solvent Extractors' Association of India, India's rapeseed production in 2012-

13 could rise 20.95 per cent to around 7.11 million tonnes against the estimated production of 5.88 million tonnes in 2011-12.

"Rapeseed production will increase in the country, this will improve the seed availability for crushing. This will help substitute palm imports with local oils to some extent," said an industry insider in Ahmedabad.

However, experts noted the relief for the edible oil industry was temporary, as imports would surge after May, when the supply of local oilseeds exhaust.

"Palm oil imports have reduced a bit in recent months. But that is likely to surge after May. In the current oil year (November-October), we expect palm oil imports to India to rise to around 8.5 million tonnes, up from 7.7 million tonnes last year," said Govindbhai G Patel, an industry analyst and edible oil expert.

In its report, Rabobank noted that once the domestic harvest was processed, the country's import demand would remain strong from May to June.

Reduced imports by India were reflected in palm oil prices in the international markets. The contract for July delivery had dropped to the lowest in a month at 2,294 ringgits (\$756) a tonne on the Bursa Malaysia Derivatives.

However, higher export data from Malaysia supported prices at the bottom levels. The bullish sentiment was also reflected on the Indian exchanges - crude palm oil (CPO) prices ended positive. The CPO for April contract ended at Rs 464.8 on the Multi-Commodity Exchange.

In the international markets, the contract for July delivery climbed as much as 1.1 per cent to 2,334 ringgits (\$769) a tonne on the Bursa Malaysia Derivatives.

THE HINDU Business Line

For now, Govt will not hike import duty on rubber

Industry says no need to raise as global prices are lower



New Delhi, April 26: The Centre has decided against increasing customs duty on natural rubber imports for now. This stance should come as a relief for the domestic tyre manufacturers who had been urging Finance Minister P. Chidambaram to retain the current import duty structure on natural rubber imports. Currently, import duty on natural rubber is pegged at 20 per cent or Rs 20 a kg, whichever is lower.

Since the second half of December 2012 and early January this year, the pitch was getting louder for review of import duty on natural rubber. Pressure was also mounted on the Finance Ministry to hike the specific duty component of import duty on natural rubber.

The Government was faced with the opposing demands made by the growers and domestic tyre manufacturers.

“Representations were received by the Government seeking enhancement of customs duty on natural rubber. Some representations also asked for reduction in duty on natural rubber. The matter was examined and it has been decided not to make any change in the duty on natural rubber at present,” Namo Narain Meena, Minister of State for Finance, said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

Rajiv Budhiraja, Director-General of Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association, welcomed the Government's decision.

"The decision is pragmatic and balanced," he said, pointing out that the prevailing domestic natural rubber prices were higher than international prices.

The proposal for natural rubber duty hike was mooted at a time when domestic rubber prices were lower than international by Rs 18-20 a kg.

At the current domestic-international price equation, the situation has not only changed but reversed, with domestic prices higher than international. Hence, the key concern of domestic natural rubber growers has ceased to exist, Budhiraja said.

Also, there are issues of shortfall in domestic availability, imperatives of import for reasons of quality of natural rubber required by the tyre sector and continuing tightness in domestic natural rubber supplies due to lean season, Budhiraja said.

The last few months saw some hectic parleys between certain Members of Parliament owing allegiance to Kerala and the different departments of the Central Government. A delegation of MPs from the ruling Congress-led United Democratic Front in Kerala had called on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seeking a hike in import duty.

After some meetings, the Commerce Ministry had recommended to the Finance Ministry that the specific component of import duty on natural rubber be revised to Rs 34 a kg, it is learnt.

Our Chennai Bureau reports: A trading source said that the Finance Ministry was right in not raising the duty.

"Why should the Government raise the duty when global prices are lower than domestic prices? It would make sense to raise the duty when the situation is vice-versa," said a trader, not wishing to be identified.

The price of RSS-4 (ribbed smoked sheet) on Friday was Rs 161 a kg, while its comparable quality in the global market (RSS-3) ruled at Rs 156.72 .

The domestic price of Rs 160 is reasonable, particularly during the current season when plenty of rubber is available, the trader said.

srivats.kr@thehindu.co.in

A SLIPPERY AFFAIR

- ***Domestic tyre makers heave a sigh of relief with the current decision.***
- ***There are issues of shortfall in domestic availability and continuing tightness in supplies.***

Drought saps sugar production in TN

Chennai, April 26: Drought conditions across Tamil Nadu have hit sugarcane output and sugar recovery in the current season ending September.

Sugar registrations for the coming season indicate a further drop in output next year.

According to official estimates, as of mid-April the mills are expected to crush about 215 lakh tonnes (lt) of sugarcane against early estimates of over 230 lt.

Sugar production will be around 19.50 lt against earlier estimates of 22 lt. This will be marginally higher than last year's production, say estimates.

recovery slips

Sugar recovery is also down as of April to about 9.80 per cent compared with 10.40 per cent in 2011-12.

Based on the ongoing sugarcane registrations in the field, the coming season could see a 15 per cent drop as farmers are as of now not too keen on expanding sugarcane areas.

If the dry spell continues farmers could divert the cane for 'gur' resulting in a further drop.

other reasons

Electricity shortage and ground water depletion due to drought have contributed to the lack of enthusiasm for the nearly year-long crop.

Tamil Nadu, for the first time, could go without the second season sugarcane crushing or maybe a 'truncated' season.

Sugarcane crushing recommences in mid-July after the peak summer and goes on up to September during the special season, said experts.

balaji.ar@thehindu.co.in

Orthodox tea prices rise at N. India sale

Kolkata, April 26: Average prices of the orthodox variety teas jumped, while that of CTC variety recorded a marginal drop at the Kolkata tea auctions this week.

Orthodox tea prices surged to Rs 207.15 over last week's Rs 182.52 a kg, while that of CTC dropped to Rs 154.08 (Rs 154.56), according to J Thomas & Company Pvt Ltd, the tea auctioneers.

An estimated 76.30 per cent (64.92 per cent) of Orthodox and 68.98 per cent (68.85 per cent) of CTC offerings were sold.

The total offerings (packages) this week at three North Indian tea auction centres at Kolkata, Guwahati and Siliguri were 1,37,742 compared with 92,649 in the corresponding sale (Sale 17) of last year.

This week the offerings at Kolkata comprised CTC/Dust 42,970 (20,453), Orthodox 5,689 (5,624) and Darjeeling 3,054 (333). The figures for two other centres, handling mainly CTC/Dust, were: Guwahati 30,493 (24,858) and Siliguri 55,536 (41,381).

Selected top liquoring Assam CTC teas sold well while the remainder were irregularly easier. Good Dooars medium broken met with export enquiry while the remainder eased in value. Tata Global operated only on the top liquoring dust grades.

There was selective support from Hindustan Unilever. Western India operated actively. There were good enquiries from other internal and local sections.

Orthodox whole leaf and larger broken grades were firm while the remainder was irregularly lower.

Continental exporters operated on the few tippy teas on offer. CIS and West Asian shippers operated actively. There was fair interest from local dealers.

Well-made Darjeeling first flush teas witnessed enquiries from traditional exporters. Similar broken and fannings also moved well owing to export enquiries.

santanu.sanyal@thehindu.co.in

Spot rubber gains with global cues

Kottayam, 26: Spot rubber improved further on Friday. The sentiments were driven by a firm closing in Bangkok spot and the prices strengthened mainly on covering purchases at lower levels.

According to sources, there were no fresh enquiries from the tyre sector though the market seemed to be suffering from acute short supplies.

Sheet rubber improved to Rs. 161 (160) a kg, according to traders and to Rs 160 (158) a kg at Kottayam and Kochi, as reported by the Rubber Board.

The May series weakened to Rs 158 (158.94), June to Rs 157 (157.40) and July to Rs 155 (155.09) while the August series improved to Rs 153.50 (152.79) a kg on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) closed firm at Rs 156.52 (155.79) a kg at Bangkok. The May futures weakened to ¥247 (Rs 136.09) from ¥250 during the day session but then recovered partially to ¥247.5 (Rs 136.37) in the night session on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rubber rates (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 161 (160); RSS-5: 156 (155) ; Ungraded: 152 (150); ISNR 20: 150 (148) and latex 60 per cent: 102 (102).

ugar output comfortable for next 3 years: Thomas



K. V. Thomas, Food Minister.

New Delhi, April 26: Sugar production should be satisfactory for the next three years with output expected to be higher than domestic demand, Food Minister K. V. Thomas said on Friday. “The next three years – 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16 – will be comfortable for sugar,” Thomas said, based on the recent review of the performance of the sector with industry officials.

He was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event organised by the Bureau of Indian Standards.

“The domestic requirement is about 22 lakh tonnes and we have enough sugar for exports,” Thomas said, adding that shipments would depend on the prices in the international markets.

At present, it is unviable for the Indian millers to export sugar as international prices are lower than domestic prices.

“However, going ahead sugar production and productivity, and value addition needs to be improved,” Thomas said. In this context, a draft paper has been prepared by the Food Ministry on the improvements needed in the sector. In the third week of May at the National Institute in Kanpur, we will chalk out the various projects to be taken up for the improvement of the sector, the Minister said.

Sugar production in the country is seen lower at 24.6 million tonnes in the current season ending September, down from the 26 million tonnes produced last year. However, in the next season starting October, the production may decline marginally due to the drought in key cane growing areas of Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Early this month, the Government partially decontrolled the sugar sector by giving mills the freedom to sell in the open market, unshackling them from the obligation of supplying the sweetener at subsidised rates for ration shops. India is the world’s second biggest sugar producer after Brazil, but is its largest consumer.

Vishwanath.kulkarni@thehindu.co.in

Cotton Corpn begins unloading its inventory



Rajkot, April 26: The Cotton Corporation of India began selling its stocks built through market intervention operations as part of the Government efforts to hold the natural fibre's price line. According to traders, with CCI, some exporters were also selling their stocks but ginneries were holding their long position due to lower arrivals.

CCI has started selling its stocks from Friday through e-auction.

It offered to sell 25,000 bales.

Out of which, 18,000 bales were from Andhra Pradesh, 2,500 bales from Maharashtra, 4,000 bales from Karnataka and 500 from Orissa.

CCI may sell more cotton in coming days through e-auction. According to trade sources, CCI may dispose of around 2,50,000 bales in first round.

However, the sale failed to have any impact as prices remained unchanged on the back of normal demand and limited arrival.

Gujarat Sankar-6 cotton was traded on Rs 37,500-37,700 for a candy of 356 kg, V 797 cotton A grade was offered at Rs 28,300-28,600.

Cotton 29 MM (3.8+ micronaire) traded at Rs 37,000-37,500, 29 MM (3.6 micronaire) cotton traded Rs 36,300-36,800 in Maharashtra.

About 22,000-23,000 bales of cotton arrived in Gujarat.

About 65,000 bales arrived in India.

Palmolein, soya oil rise, tracking global market



Mumbai, April 26: Edible oil prices ruled firm on Friday. Imported palmolein and soyabean oil rose by Rs 2 and Rs 10 each tracking firm foreign market and decline in soyabean arrivals in Madhya Pradesh.

Sunflower refined oil also increased by Rs 10 while cotton refined oil inched up by Rs 4 for 10 kg. Groundnut and rapeseed oils ruled unchanged.

Local refineries have raised palmolein rates and soyabean oil by Rs 3-5 tracking firm foreign markets. Due to slack demand, merely 150-200 tonnes palmolein were traded at Rs 508 in resale for ready delivery. Arrivals of soyabean in Madhya Pradesh declined to 10,000 bags. Mandi price increased by Rs 25 to Rs 3,900-3,950 and by Rs 50 to Rs 4,000-4,050. Mustard arrivals were 4.65 lakh bags and its prices were Rs 3,350-3,625. Liberty quoted palmolein Rs 513-516, super palmolein Rs 545 and sunflower refined oil Rs 775.

Ruchi quoted palmolein at Rs 517 ex-Patalganga, Rs 510 ex-JNPT and soyabean refined oil Rs 675.

Allana quoted super palmolein at Rs 545. Resellers quoted palmolein at Rs 508-509.

In Saurashtra – Rajkot, groundnut oil declined by Rs 30 to Rs 1,870 (Rs 1,900) for *telia* tin and by Rs 10 to Rs 1,220 (Rs 1,230) for loose (10 kg).

On National Commodities and Derivatives

Exchange, soyabean refined oil May futures were higher at Rs 723.35 (Rs 716.90); June Rs 693.10 (Rs 685.95) and July was Rs 675.70 (Rs 669.85).

In Malaysia BMD, crude palm oil's May futures settled lower at MYR 2,301 (MYR 2,310); June at MYR 2,335 (MYR 2,322) and July at MYR 2,316 (MYR 2,309) a tonne.

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg): Groundnut oil 1,210 (1,210), soya refined oil 675 (665), sunflower exp. ref. 680 (680), sunflower ref. 775 (765), rapeseed ref. oil 693 (693), rapeseed expeller ref. 663 (663) cottonseed ref. oil 648 (644) and palmolein 510 (508).

Pulses decline on sluggish buying



Indore, April 26: Sluggish trend continued in pulses and pulse seeds on slack buying support.

Masur prices have dropped by Rs 150 a quintal in the last one week with prices of masur (bold) being quoted at Rs 4,300 in local mandis, while masur (medium) ruled at Rs 4,000-4,100 (down Rs 150-200 from last week).

Two weeks ago masur prices had risen to Rs 4,500 on strong buying support and weak arrivals.

Thereafter, profit booking and decline in demand at higher rate dragged its prices.

Any major fall in masoor prices from its current level appears unlikely given the weak domestic crop prospects and depreciation of rupee against dollar, which has made masoor imports costlier.

Weak demand in spot masur dragged its dal by about Rs 100 in the past one week with masur dal (average) on Friday being quoted at Rs 4,750-75; masur dal (medium) at Rs 4,850-75; while masur dal (bold) ruled at Rs 4,925-75.

Moong also witnessed downtrend on slack demand.

Arrival of fresh lot of new moong in local mandis also lent strength to bearish sentiment.

On Friday, moong (bold) declined to Rs 5,600-5,700 (down Rs 200 from last week), while moong (medium) ruled at Rs 5,200-5,400.

Local mandis witnessed arrival of about 25 bags of new moong from Pipria line which were sold at Rs 5,300-5,500.

Moong dal remained unchanged with moong dal (medium) being quoted at Rs 6,900-7,000, moong dal (bold) at Rs 7,300-7,400, while moong mongar ruled at Rs 7,400-7,500.

Flour mills' buying holds up wheat



Karnal, April 26: After witnessing a fall earlier this week, dara wheat and flour prices remained unchanged on Friday. Steady domestic demand coupled with ample stocks kept dara wheat and flour prices unchanged, said Radhey Sham, a trade expert.

About 60,000 bags of dara wheat arrived at the Karnal grain market terminal. Government agencies procured most of the produce that arrived.

In the physical market, dara wheat quoted at Rs 1,410-1,415 a quintal.

Mill delivery was at Rs 1,410 while delivery at the chakki was Rs 1,415.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, wheat futures traded positive today.

Wheat for May contracts increased by Rs 3 at Rs 1,481 with an open interest of 11,300 lots. It had touched a high at Rs 1,484 earlier in the day.

June contracts went up by Rs 5 at Rs 1,506.

Wheat futures trade positive on account of stockists buying against restricted arrivals.

Fresh buying by flour mills to meet the current demand kept wheat prices at current levels.

According to the market experts, wheat futures are expected to rule lower next week.

Wheat spot prices improved at Rs 1,385.

Flour Prices

Following a steady trend in wheat, flour too remained unchanged at Rs 1,670. Similarly, Chokar ruled flat at Rs 1,250.

Procurement in Haryana

Government agencies and private millers procured more than 47.83 lakh tonnes of wheat till April 25.

Out of total procurement, 47.80 lakh tonnes wheat was procured by Government agencies at the minimum support price while 2,370 tonnes were purchased by the private millers and traders.

Slack demand pulls down sugar

Mumbai, April 26: The Vashi wholesale sugar market was closed again on Friday in support of call given by trade associations to protest against the State government's decision to implement the local body tax.

This week market re-opened on Thursday after four days close with bearish trend that continued on Friday also at upper levels.

Sugar prices dropped further by Rs 10-15 due to slack demand. Sugar futures prices were down by Rs 5 till noon, said sources.

At producing level, slack demand pulled down prices further by Rs 10-15. In the Vashi market, there were no local dispatches.



On Thursday evening, 14-15 mills offered tenders and sold 65,000-70,000 bags at Rs 2,900-2,990 (Rs 2,900-3,000) for S-grade and Rs 2,990- 3,090 (Rs 3,000 - 3,110) for M-grade.

On National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, sugar May futures were down by Rs 5 to Rs 2,918 (Rs 2,923); June was at Rs 2,964 (Rs 2,969) and July was Rs 2,997 (Rs 3,000) till noon.

On the Vashi market, prices were S-grade Rs 3,085-3,180 (Rs 3,096-Rs 3,191); M-grade Rs 3,165-3,370 (Rs 3,172- 3,381).

Naka delivery rates: S-grade Rs 3,010-3,030 (Rs 3,020-3,050) and M-grade Rs 3,090-3,190 (Rs 3,100-3,200).

Buying support lifts pepper futures a tad

Kochi, April 26: Pepper continued to rise, albeit marginally, on buying support.

There was some selling pressure fearing release of around 6,800 tonnes of pepper locked in the warehouses since last year-end, based on some reports.

However, a section of the trade said that samples will have to be drawn from each lot for testing and it would take more time.

Also, it is doubtful if all those holding stocks will sell.

On spot, 35 tonnes fresh pepper arrived and all were traded afloat at the average of Rs 344 a kg and some were sold at Rs 346, they said.



May contract on the NCDEX moved up marginally by Rs 30 to Rs 35,280.

Total turnover increased by 315 tonnes to 618 tonnes.

Total open interest decreased by 125 tonnes to 990 tonnes, indicating buy-back by short position holders.

spot prices

Spot prices remained unchanged at previous levels of Rs 34,200 (ungarbled) and Rs 35,700 (MG 1) a quintal on matching demand and supply.

Indian parity in the international market was at \$6,800 a tonne (c&f) for prompt shipments and \$6,700 a tonne (c&f) for May shipments.
