

Kolam farmers fall back on their ancient wisdom



Kolam wage seekers digging an open well at Birsaijet Kolamguda in Adilabad district on Sunday. Photo: S. Harpal Singh

Many in the field are viewing it as a retro step but, the aboriginal Kolam farmers of Birsaijet-Kolamguda in Utnoor mandal in Adilabad opted to fall back on their ancient wisdom with regard to irrigating crops. Instead of going in for the individualistic bore well as a source of irrigation, the 35 Kolam families in this village decided to dig five open wells to collectively irrigate the 250 acres of their fields.

“Irrigating fields from open wells is a time tested method in these parts. We are sure these open wells will succeed where the bore wells failed,” says Kumra Raju, a young farmer, who also pointed out the failure of bore wells in providing sufficient water for irrigating the fields.

“The opportunity to dig open wells came our way through the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). We asked for five wells to be allotted to

us and have already found good water sources in three of the four wells dug so far,” he adds.

The phenomenal success rate of locating water sources is also attributed to the ancient tribal wisdom in the field of agriculture and water dowsing. The Kolams did not depend upon the services of a geologist but used the ancient coconut method of dowsing water.

“A person is made to squat on a coconut placed on a steel plate like the roti making pan or griddle. If there is a good water source in the ground below him, the coconut and the person balanced on it will rotate rapidly,” explains Atram Sone Rao, of the traditional dowsing method of tribal people.

“The sources found through this method rarely go dry even in the peak of a summer. Some of the old open wells located on higher altitudes are still functional and yield water even in the harshest of summers,” claims Kumra Jangu, an elder from the tribe who guided the villagers in their endeavour.

The Kolams have not yet decided whether to pump water manually or mechanically from the new wells. “It will be discussed in the village soon,” reveals Raju.

Government's new scheme leaves bankers confused

As per the guidelines, the government will bear the interest portion on crop loans

The new government scheme to bear the interest portion on crop loans, a scheme aimed at favouring the farmers, might well end up with quite a quantum of unhappy farmers.

The Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy announced recently that the farmers need not pay interest on crop loans as the government had decided to bear it provided the farmers repay the loans within a year.

Meanwhile, new directions pertaining to the scheme and its implementation have just been sent to all the banks, which has left many a banker confused on how to wriggle out of the new situation.

Close to six lakh farmers are given crop loans in the district under Kisan Credit Card Scheme where interest of seven per cent is levied by the banks. If a farmer pays back the crop loan or renews the account within a year of taking the loan, the Central government provides an interest subvention of three per cent. Meanwhile, the Government of Andhra Pradesh had taken on itself to bear the remaining four per cent after the Central government's interest subvention under similar conditions, but has given the guidelines only a few days ago pertaining to settling of claims for the uncharged interest by the respective banks.

“As per the directions sent to the bankers, the AP government shall bear the remaining portion of the interest for all those promptly paying farmers who have paid back their loans or renewed it since the start of the financial year. But the catch here is that the directions only speak of those loans which turn one year old in April, while leaving in balance all those loans cleared before April,” said a banker in the know of the issue. Taking into consideration all those farmers who had taken loans during last rabi in the district, which translates to around 1.75 lakh farmers, the disgruntled lot might well be close to a lakh farmers if the directions issued by the State government as per the new scheme were to stay unmodified. Close to 1.75 lakh farmers take to crops in around 1.6 lakh hectares during rabi in the district primarily under the Tunga Bhadra High Level Canal. Meanwhile, the bankers at the rural level have started facing the heat from the farmers who had settled their loans earlier but are denied an opportunity to encash their promptness in repayment of loan now.

CMFRI to become agro-eco tourism centre

The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) at Mandapam near here would soon become an agro-eco tourism centre, S.Ayyappan, Secretary, Department of

Agriculture Research and Education (DARE) and Director General of Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), has said.

Interacting with reporters after inaugurating various facilities at the Mandapam Regional Centre of the CMFRI on Sunday, Mr.Ayyappan said the CMFRI would be made an agro-eco tourism centre and would be provided with additional facilities under the 12th Five Year Plan for upgrading.

G.Gopakumar, scientist in-charge, MRC of the CMFRI, said now students and the public were allowed inside the Museum and Research Aquarium, which had more than 60 ornamental and other fish species. The centre could be developed into agro-eco tourism centre, he said.

Mr.Ayyappan, who inaugurated the National Marine Finfish Broodstock Bank, suggested that the CMFRI should get the Bank certified with a diagnostic facility.

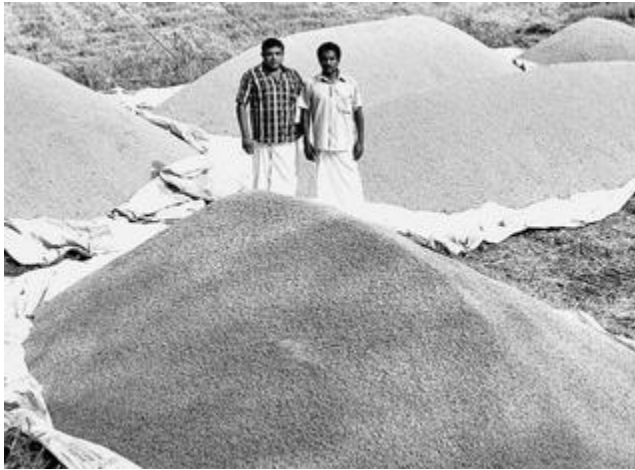
He said 15-million-tonne fish production in 2020 would not be a tall order if the cage farming, marine culture and brood bank facilities reached out to the fish farming community.

Speaking on the occasion, B.Meenakumari, Deputy Director General (Fisheries), Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR), said Indian marine sector was making a steady growth. "Thanks to extensive research, we are breeding 15 species and we are soon going to breed tuna as well," she said. During the 12th Five Year Plan, the department would promote a mega seed plan and put in place a network programme in disease management, she added.

Collector K.Nanthakumar said any research facility would be of no use if it did not benefit the fishermen. The research activities carried out in the CMFRI should help the fishing farmers to increase their income, he said, and added that the district administration would function as a bridge between the CMFRI and the fishermen in transferring the technologies and findings.

H.H.More, Commanding Officer of Mandapam Station, Indian Coast Guard, expressed hope that the CMFRI would wean away the fishermen from the existing fishing practice, thereby retaining them within the International Maritime Boundary Line.

Cultivating their way to success



BLAZING A TRAIL:Litto Tom and Tomcy Antony with the harvested paddy, in Cheriyamad.— Photo: By Special Arrangement

For Tomcy Antony, an MBA graduate and Litto Tom, a B.Pharm. graduate, paddy cultivation is no low-profile job, but a passion.

Tomcy Antony, who was born in a farmer family, left his job in a private new generation bank to take up paddy cultivation on lease in Cheriyamad near Mavelikkara in the district.

The paddy field was 35 kms away from his home in Thayankari near Edathua and was remaining fallow for the last 13 years. But that did not deter him.

Antony along with his friend Tom cultivated paddy in 80 acres of the 120 acre Idamuri paddy polder at Koppayi in Cheriyamad.

“Since I was born in a farmer family and my father owned paddy field in Edathua, I knew a little bit of paddy cultivation, but the rest I learned on the job. We sowed the seeds in

early January this year and now reaping the harvest. I invested around Rs. 10 lakh,” he said.

The passionate friends got support from the local grama panchayat president, Vilasini Karunakaran, agricultural officer, C.G.Prasad and many others. “We had to face opposition also from some people who discouraged us”.

Braving the challenge

However, we managed to get farm hands, which are in shortage and rented out the combine harvester machines from Kerala Agro Industries Corporation Limited,” he said.

The friends are planning to expand the cultivation from next year.

“The satisfaction that the cultivation gives me is the most rewarding of all. When I see the paddy field ready for harvest, my mind fills with joy,” said Antony.

Farmers’ body demands NCF report implementation

Says no meeting was conducted to discuss the National Policy on Farmers

The Andhra Pradesh Farmers’ Federation (APFF) has demanded that the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the Centre discuss and implement the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) report submitted by M.S. Swaminathan in October 2006.

In a statement, the Federation president Y. Nagendra Nath alleged that both the government and the Opposition, who were in a race to project themselves as the champions of the farmers’ cause, had little concern for the farming community.

He pointed out that in 2007, the National Advisory Council (NAC) had approved a National Policy on Farmers but not a single meeting was conducted to discuss it.

Mr. Nath said the UPA was upbeat over a record agricultural output of 252 million tonnes of food grains and 352 lakh bales of cotton this year. “On the other hand, the farmer is unhappy over sharp increase in input costs such as fertilizer, diesel and labour. Deprived of minimum support price, he is forced into distress sale. Drought in interior Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra and the impact of Neelam cyclone on coastal Andhra Pradesh caused huge crop losses to farmer this year. In the absence of marketing facilities, he is forced to sell his crop at a very low price. Mounting debts have been forcing an increasing number of farmers to commit suicide,” he lamented.

At this juncture, he said, the UPA government decided to allow FDI in retail sector and was ‘touting it as a panacea to the farmers’ ills’. The Opposition parties expressed their strong reservations against FDI in retail sector and stalled Parliament proceedings over the issue.

Mr. Nath said while both the Government and the Opposition made tall claims on the farmers’ welfare, they did not reflect in their actions.

The main recommendations of the NCF were to change the Terms of Trade for fixing the MSP of agricultural products to benefit farmers and rectification of the methodology used by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) to fix MSP. He said the terms of trade for fixing the MSP by the CACP were outdated and must be changed.

The eight out of 12 factors that were against the interests of the farming community and needed to be changed included: trends in market price, effect on industrial cost structure, effect on cost of living, effect on general price level, international price situation, effect on issue prices and implications for subsidy, inter-crop price parity and demand and supply.

The four factors that were in the favour of farmers were cost of production, change in input price, input-output price parity and parity between prices paid and received by farmers, he added.

TRICOR scheme creating permanent assets for tribal farmers

Pydathalli's one hectre of land in Anthriguda village in Dumbriguda mandal remained barren for some years. Lack of guidance and resources reduced her field to a waste land and she has resigned herself to live the life of a daily wage labourer. However, The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Tribes Finance Corporation (TRICOR) initiative to make the tribal farm lands productive brought relief to her. She has planted mango and cashew on her land last year and the plants are now two metres tall and are expected to bear fruits in another year to 18 months. Meanwhile to keep her family going she had been growing vegetables as an inter crop which is fetching good amount of money.

About 20,000 tribal families like Pydithalli had been covered in the 11 tribal mandals in the district under an economic uplifting programme involving horticulture plantations in a minimum of 1 hectare plantation per family promoted by TRICOR in cooperation with the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), in the just concluded 2012-13 financial year.

In another one year to two years, the tribal farmers will be creating economic assets which will generate a permanent income to them on a seasonal basis. Until the completion of gestation period of 2-3 years, the farmers are sustaining themselves by raising inter-crops like vegetables, pepper or turmeric.

The horticulture scheme aims at reaching out to one lakh tribal families in a four-year period. Mathsyaraju from Mimumuluru village in Paderu mandal said that a fairly good rainfall last year helped the coffee and silver oak he planted on his one hectare of land to grow well. Clusters of farmers in selected villagers have undertaken plantation like Mathsyaraju and are hopeful of experiencing a turn around in two years.

As an intercrop he is growing pepper and turmeric which is sustaining his family of four. Mathsyaraju says that TRICOR scheme has turned the plantation programme into a family enterprise and all the family members are working on the plantation.

TRICOR is extending financial assistance of Rs.20,000 per acre and the Department of Tribal Welfare will pass on 100 percent subsidy on the loan component. The beneficiaries of the scheme can develop their own farm lands using the NREGS component of wages for farm labour for three years. Under the scheme the beneficiaries are eligible for payment of 3-year maintenance costs. The beneficiaries are supplied plant material, grafts and organic manure making the total scheme 100 percent financed by the government. In the first year Rs.20,000 will be given towards maintenance followed by Rs 7,000 and Rs.8000 for the subsequent second and third years. Horticulture Officer Ramanjaneyulu told *The Hindu* that during 2013-14 year 30,000 hectares will be covered and by 2014-15 year the remaining 50,000 hectares.

Drought triggers shortage of fodder for cattle

The monsoon failure and the consequent crop loss have caused a severe shortage of paddy straw, the staple fodder for cattle, across the district.

Farmers say the shortage of straw has been compounded by the drought condition which has rendered grazing areas dry and triggered a drinking water shortage.

The situation is particularly bad in non-delta areas of the district where many farmers have preferred to leave their fields fallow. "There is a severe shortage of paddy straw across the district. We used to buy paddy straw of an acre for about Rs.5,000 locally.

Now we have to go in search of straw. Recently, I had to shell out Rs. 27,000 for two lorry loads of paddy straw procured from Allithurai near Tiruchi, which includes labour and transportation charges," said N.Ganesan from Jadamangalam at Thathaiyengarpet in Tiruchi district.

Mr.Ganesan, who owns about 10 milch animals, said that the price of complex cattle feed has been increased to Rs.1,350 for a bag of 60 kg. The same feed was selling at Rs.950 in January, he said.

“With the steep rise in the price of feed and shortage of straw, we have to ration them to our cattle,” he says.

Some farmers’ representatives say that they are facing a crisis situation and some farmers have started resorting to distress sale of their milch animals at low rates.

“Farmers who have a few milch animals are selling a couple of them to tide over the situation. But there are not many buyers at the shandies too. Hence, the animals are being sold at very low rates,” he said.

The price of straw varies from place to place. Usually, prices are much lower in areas with assured irrigation. But farmers report a shortage even in these places.

“We are facing a severe shortage of fodder and even water to feed the animals. Previously, paddy straw raised in an acre was available for just Rs. 500. Now we have to pay Rs. 5,000,” said M.Ramaiyan, a young farmer from Vengur.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Sugar industry wants import duty to be increased to 30 pc

After achieving success in getting the sugar market decontrolled, sugar industry will now pursue the government to increase the import duty on sugar to 30 per cent from current 10 per cent.

Sugar production in the country has reached 24.5 million tonne and the industry feels that the domestic market will be in a comfortable condition this sugar season (October 2012-September 2013) and the next as well.

Assuming a domestic consumption of 22.5 million tonne this season, industry experts cite a surplus of 2 million tonne in the current season. The carry over stock of sugar from last season would be 34 lakh tonne as on 1st October 2013, if it's not exported by the mills.

"There is more than enough sugar in the country so there is no need for imports. Even if Maharashtra gives lower production in the next season (due to drought condition), the opening balance will be so good that there will be enough sugar in the next season also," Abinash Verma, director general, Indian Sugar Manufacturers Association, (ISMA).

Sugar import in the country for the past two seasons has been nil. In the current season though, the country imported 4 lakh tonne of raw sugar (including the expectations in May). This season also witnessed 14,000 ton of white sugar coming from Pakistan.

Superwheat' may increase yield by 30%

Cambridge-based scientists claim to have developed a new type of 'superwheat' which could boost productivity by 30%. Scientists at [the National](#) Institute of Agricultural Botany have combined an ancient ancestor of wheat with a modern variety to produce a new strain.

In early trials, the resulting crop seemed bigger and stronger than the current modern wheat varieties. Researchers said it will take at least five years of tests and regulatory approval before the wheat is harvested by farmers. Despite steady improvement in the late 20th century, the last 15 years have seen little growth in the average wheat harvest from each acre in Britain. The scientists say they may have found the answer to increasing productivity.

Around 10,000 years ago, wheat evolved from goat grass and other grains. Scientists used cross-pollination and seed embryo transfer to impart some of the resilience of the ancient ancestor of wheat into modern varieties.

Vegetables see steep increase in prices

Vegetable prices are reaching an all-time high in Madurai and surrounding districts over the past few days, following the failure of crops and lack of rainfall. In fact, vendors say that if the districts do not get a good rainfall in the coming days, the prices may shoot up further and some vegetables may even become scarce.

Usually, prices of vegetables go up during the marriage seasons in Madurai and the southern districts. Even though there is an increase, it is somewhere around Rs 10 or slightly higher than its normal pricing. However, on Sunday, the prices were even higher than that of the previous weeks, as the Central Market, one of the biggest markets in the district was closed for its monthly day off. For example, one of the most commonly used vegetable - tomatoes - were priced at about Rs 50 a kg in the city, with a quarter kg costing even more.

Meenakshi, a construction worker said that she had planned to cook tomato rice for her four children as her eldest daughter, who had completed her nursing training was going to Trichy on Monday. "But the shopkeeper told me that it was Rs 58 a kg, so I bought 500g of chicken instead," she said.

Ginger, which could be bought for Rs 2 for a tiny piece was sold only by the weighing scale on Sunday for Rs 20 per 100g. Potatoes also went up to Rs 40 per kg and the same amount of carrots and beans cost Rs 80 each. Butterbeans and green peas were sold at Rs 120 a kg in the retail market.

Only, ladies fingers, brinjal, cabbage, Bombay onions and drumsticks hovered in the affordable range between Rs 20 to 30. However, shallots (small onions) retailed at Rs 60, while green chillies were sold at Rs 55 per kg. Curry leaves and coriander, which usually come as freebies in the retail vegetable market shot up to Rs 200 a kg, forcing the vendors to stay away from them. "I stopped buying these two items because customers refuse to pay for them and demand that they be given freely," said

Mohamed, a vegetable vendor in Anna Nagar.

Selvaraj, a wholesale merchant said that the prices are unlikely to dip in the near future unless it rains. "It has to rain really well, so that the prices come down in about three months. Otherwise, even tomatoes may become rare, as some of them we sold today (Sunday) were thrown away as waste, two months ago," he said.

Meanwhile, Shankar, a marketing executive said that he found the vegetarian meals in restaurants much cheaper than cooking at home. "I took my family of four to a restaurant and we had vegetarian lunch at Rs 60 a meal, which worked out cheaper than buying vegetables," he said.

Farmers distressed as market for emu eggs drops

Emu, the largest wild bird from Down Under, is domesticated by many [farmers](#) in the [coastal region](#). Farmers in some regions in Kundapur taluk took up rearing of emus as an alternative means of livelihood due to shortage of labourers for agriculture and horticulture.

Farmers in areas like Kambadakone, Salwady, Hangalooru and Barkur and few parts of Udupi district rear emus domestically.

An [emu](#) starts laying eggs once it is three years old and lays 30 to 35 eggs in a year. Each egg costs Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 in the international market. Newborn emus are sold for Rs 4,000 each. But of late, traders are not procuring eggs as storage units in Tamil Nadu have stopped functioning. This has put farmers in a dilemma as they do not have any other market for the eggs and there are no local buyers.

Cicily Kotian, a farmer, told TOI that most farmers are finding it difficult to continue rearing emus as traders are not coming forward to buy the eggs.

"I have domesticated eight emu birds but am now considering selling it off," Cicily said. Another farmer, who is disappointed by the sudden fall in the demand for emu eggs, has shifted the eggs to a hatching center in Bangalore.

Many farmers, who had taken a loan from the bank, are a worried lot.

However, another farmer, K K Naik from Kundapur, who has 30 emu birds, believes that the market for both emu birds and eggs will improve in the days to come as there are traders in states like [Andhra Pradesh](#) and Kerala who are procuring emu birds and eggs frequently.

Emu birds have a life span of about 35 years and for 25 years they lay eggs. The size of an emu egg is 15 times bigger than that of hens and is emerald in colour. Each egg weighs 500 to 750 grams. Emus grow about 5 to 6 feet in tall. The birds need to be fenced. Rearing them is a costly affair as one incurs an average expenditure of Rs 3,000 per emu every month.

HindustanTimes

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Rainy

Monday, May 13

Max Min

34° | 28°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:44

Humidity: 84

Sunset: 06:26

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Tuesday, May 14






Max Min

37° | 29°

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1005

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday May 15	Thursday May 16	Friday May 17	Saturday May 18	Sunday May 19
				
38° 29°	39° 29°	40° 29°	39° 29°	38° 29°
Partly Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast

Airport Weather

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:44

Humidity: 84

Sunset: 06:26

Chennai

Wind: normal Barometer: 1005



Tea-coffee war brewing, national drink tag at stake

An intense rivalry brewing between India's tea and coffee sectors, as each vied for national drink status, has been simmered by the commerce ministry as it took the decision to not promote one drink over the other.

Tea promoters were left with an especially bad aftertaste as a parliamentary standing committee on commerce had recommended national status for tea. The panel had said the recognition would help the export market for the beverage.

The tea industry, concentrated in Assam and West Bengal, had got minister for development of the northeastern region, Paban Singh Ghatowar, to back its quest for national status.

But, commerce minister Anand Sharma wrote to Ghatowar: "...being competing beverages having respective market shares, declaration of one as a national drink is likely to hurt the interest of the other and raise an avoidable controversy."

Meanwhile, coffee retailers like Bangalore-based Café Coffee Day, have been aggressively promoting the drink across the country with coffee consumption rising at an annual 5% in recent years.

Although tea remains a popular drink, its consumption has risen by a mere 2% annually, as per the commerce ministry.

The North Eastern Tea Association chairman Bidyananda Barkakoty is distraught, "Did people stop eating bananas or oranges because mango was declared the national fruit?" he said, vowing to keep the struggle going.



Cotton could bloom on Chinese demand

Since the start of this year, cotton prices have recovered their earlier losses on demand from the top consumer, China, and hopes of a drop in acreage in the world's third-largest producer, United States.

MCX Cotton futures have gained almost 19 per cent taking prices to their highest level in more than a year. Preceding the recent surge, cotton prices posted back to back losses for two years as cheaper synthetic alternatives battered the fibre demand and on a global glut.

Lower acreage

Easing demand and fragile prices of cotton has led to many US farmers shifting to more remunerative crops, leading to a lower acreage. According to the USDA forecast, the acreage in cotton would drop by 19 per cent to 4.1 million hectares this season. Escalating fears of delay in planting due to heavy rains in the major growing areas in the country and recent upbeat economic releases are likely to support prices.

China, India and US are the major players in the cotton market and usually the demand-supply situation is the key factor behind the price fluctuations. China is the key market driver being the top consumer, producer and importer of the commodity. China produces 27 per cent of the total global production and consumes almost 40 per cent of the world offtake. Also, China accounts for almost 38 per cent.

China has been purchasing and stockpiling domestic cotton to boost the country's output and importing to meet textile companies' demand. The country bought 5.14 million tonnes of cotton from the global market in 2012.

China started stock-building programme in 2011, providing more than global prices to support domestic farmers that created a tightening global supply outside China and this action supported prices and pushed it higher during the first quarter of this year.

According to the China Cotton Association, the country will pursue the policy of purchasing and stockpiling domestic cotton to urge farmers to produce more cotton. To meet domestic demand, the Chinese government issued import quotas.

Another hot name among the international participants is India as it is the second largest producer of cotton and exports a significant part. According to the USDA report, India's cotton output in the new marketing year beginning October is seen at 34.5 million bales.

Cotton sowing begins in April and continues till September. India accounts for about a third of the global cotton area.

According to the Cotton Advisory Board, the country had a surplus of 8 million bales after exporting a record 12.95 million bales last year.

surge in domestic production

In the past 10 years, Indian cotton production has surged 153 per cent due to high yield after the introduction of genetically modified seed called Bt cotton in 2002-03 which made it a net exporter.

Looking forward, the outlook of cotton is not too gloomy. Despite a forecast of record supplies by the end of this crop year, prices could possibly trade in a range of Rs 17,200-19,500/bale levels on the MCX.

Major rallies are anticipated only on a close above Rs 20,000/bale levels.

Demand may improve for tomatoes



Tomato arrivals may increase in the coming days and demand may also improve, said market experts.

Fall in arrivals coupled with good domestic demand pushed tomato prices up by Rs 100-200 a quintal on Sunday.

Vikas Sachdeva, a trade expert, told *Business Line* that lower arrivals mainly pushed tomato prices back into positive territory.

Arrivals from Rajasthan have dropped and that was the prime reason behind the fall in arrivals.

Around 1,000 crates (a crate is 25 kg) of different varieties of tomato arrived at the Karnal vegetable market and were quoted between Rs 600-2,000 a quintal.

Around 1,800 crates of varieties such as Anoop, Himsona and Trishul were received in the markets of Karnal district.

Out of total arrivals, about 35 per cent was of low quality, 40 per cent medium while 25 per cent was of superior quality.

Prices of superior quality increased by Rs 200 a quintal at Rs 1,600-2,000.

Medium quality prices went up by Rs 150 at Rs 1,100-1,600 while low quality was up Rs 100 at Rs 600-1,000.

Traders expect that market may witness some good buying on account of upcoming season demand.

On Sunday, not a single crate remained unsold because of low stocks.

Quality issue may lead to uncertainty over pepper futures



If the present situation is any indication, an uncertainty is likely following the maturity of the May contract on the national exchange and with it futures trading in pepper might come to an end as the June, July and August contracts have not been listed on the exchange so far.

As a result, many in the trade here are of the opinion that revival of the regional commodity-specific exchange is the only solution to get over the problem. The main reason attributed is non-compliance of the quality parameters required by the food security authorities.

Meanwhile, food security officials are said to have started taking samples from the stocks estimated at around 6,800 tonnes held in the warehouses from December last.

Pepper futures continued to show an upward trend last week.

Market remained volatile as usual but the turnover dropped significantly indicating that the people are losing interest, market sources told *Business Line*.

Short position holders were trying their best to buy back but they could get only very little as the long position holders were squeezing the sellers, they pointed out. Selling pressure in Karnataka has declined after the elections and the sellers are said to be waiting for the upcountry buyers to purchase on cash-and-carry basis, they said.

However, earlier in the week, on the spot market, Karnataka pepper was being traded and the low bulk density material has arrived in almost all the districts of Kerala.

Pepper having bulk density ranging from 510 GL and 525 GL was being traded at Rs 330-335 a kg while that of 500 GL and below was traded at Rs 320-325, they said.

May contract on the NCDEX increased by Rs 510 a quintal at Rs 36,395.

Total turnover decreased by 638 tonnes to 703 tonnes. Total open interest dropped by 392 tonnes to 330 tonnes.

Spot prices moved up by Rs 100 on limited activities at Rs 34,200 (ungarbled) and Rs 35,700 (garbled).

Indian parity in the international market was at \$6,750 a tonne (c&f) for May and June shipments.

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Rubber Board, skill development centre in pact for upgrading plantation segment



To provide certified and trained manpower to rubber plantation sector.

The Rubber Skill Development Centre (RSDC) and the Rubber Board have joined together to collaborate in skill development and developing quality training standards for rubber plantation segment.

A memorandum of understanding in this regard has been signed between Vinod Simon, Chairman, RSDC, and Sheela Thomas, Chairperson, Rubber Board.

According to Simon, RSDC would conduct research activities jointly with the Rubber Board for listing gaps with regard to skills available vs required and will prepare competency standards for the sector.

He said the Rubber Board wanted the RSDC to conduct skill development activities for the natural rubber (plantation) sector as being done for the rubber manufacturing sector. Asked what exactly RSDC will do for the planters, Simon said that all the programmes currently being offered would be revamped in accordance with the standards for bridging the skill gaps in the rubber sector.

To a specific question on whether it will impart training in tapping also, he said this would be conducted in some States, especially in Tripura and Orissa.

Referring to other skills provided by the RSDC, he said the centre and the Rubber Board would also introduce programmes on rubber processing and quality control, rubber sheet preparation and grading, processing of block rubber etc.

He said about 10 lakh planters are involved in the rubber plantation.

Though the productivity is the highest in India, a large potential remains untapped as skilled manpower is not available adequately. The MoU will not only augment the existing relationship between rubber industry, plantation sector and the RSDC but will also help provide certified and trained manpower to the entire ecosystem of the rubber sector he added.

Sheela Thomas said that this collaboration would be of great benefit to the entire sector in building quality trained workforce.

Under the MoU, all the activities being performed by the RSDC for the manufacturing segment, such as developing National Occupations Standards, conducting Skill Gap Analysis, developing Labour Market Information System, quality assurance and improving training delivery mechanism will be jointly carried out by the Rubber Board and RSDC.

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has formed Sector Skills Councils in association with specific industries.

RSDC is one such Sector Skill Council, set up by All India Rubber Industries Association (AIRIA) and the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA) in collaboration with NSDC.