

Plantain farms flattened



Farmers of Arikkulam panchayat the worst hit by winds

KOZHIKODE, April 22, 2014 - K. Abdulla surveys the destruction from a distance. He then heaves a long sigh and signals the agricultural assistant from Krishi Bhavan to follow him. The duo walk past the plantain trees, broken in half with half-ripe fruits lying twisted among the torn leaves, on Mr. Abdulla's 10 cents. The official has come to survey the

farmer's loss caused by the unexpected spate of heavy rains and winds which hit the district last week.

The land was taken on lease this year by him. The plantain trees were his maiden investment in agriculture. He had planted them in time for the festive season. But last week's heavy rains and strong winds had caught him by surprise.

The winds had flattened his trees, nipped his dreams in the bud. Mr. Abdulla's land stands on the 600-acre green spread of Veliyannur *chelli* (swamp). The swamp, located in Arikkulam panchayat in Koyilandy taluk, has been the traditional breadbasket for plantain cultivators, mostly small-time farmers. Investing in the *chelli* has always guaranteed them returns.

"With a perennial supply of water flowing in from the Chaliyar river and rich soil, the swamp offers ideal conditions for plantain cultivation. This has prompted farmers of Arikkulam to invest, year after year, their life savings here. The untimely rain and wind have rendered us penniless," Kaitheri Khader, a local farmer, says.

"On an average, hired manual help costs Rs.600 and manure, Rs.1,000 a month. The market rates of plantains have dipped from Rs.55 a kilo to Rs.30. We were already suffering loss when the winds struck last week," Poovalakandi Sreeshan says.

Mr. Sreeshan had 60 plantain trees, but after the winds, but very few have been left standing. But he is better off than his 65-year-old neighbour, Damodaran, a heart patient, who lost his entire crop.

Total crop loss

Farmers suffered losses of over Rs.1.15 crore across 13 panchayats in the district due to the rain, District Collector C.A. Latha says.

The district authorities say compensation packages will be soon distributed to farmers in the affected areas of Kavilumpara, Kattipara, Narikuni, Koorachundu, Ulliyeri, Maniyur, Balussery, Kottur, Unnikulam, Kodiyathur, Koyilandy, Madavoor, and Peruvayal.

But farmers say compensation is not paid on time. "They are still doling out the compensation package of 2012," Mr. Khader said.

Krishi Bhavan officials of Arikulam panchayat confirmed this and said that the panchayat had suffered crop losses to the tune of Rs.18 lakh in 2013 alone. Over 13,000 plantain trees were destroyed in the floods and drought of 2013.

Meagre damages

Again, the compensation distributed to farmers who have suffered agricultural loss due to natural forces is limited. The farmer is paid Rs.75 to Rs.100 for every plantain tree lost, Rs.4,000 for four acres of paddy loss, Rs.150 per arecanut tree and Rs.700 for a coconut tree.

"I am not going for plantains next year," Mr. Khader said.

Ryots go back to Basmati farming

Apart from being high yielding, it is also a short duration variety



Farmers with Basmati paddy crop ready for harvest at Mukhasakalavapalli in Krishna district. — Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

GUDIVADA, April 22, 2014 - Progressive farmers in the district have gone for Basmati cultivation again. The farmers, who faced hardship earlier, resumed cultivation in view of profits involved. There was a lull for two years as millers

shied away from buying Basmati rice.

The millers from Kakinada have guaranteed a price of Rs. 2,500 per quintal to the farmers. They expected to pocket an extra sum of Rs.900 per quintal. In addition, the cost of cultivation comes down by not less than Rs. 4,000.

Apart from being high yielding, it is also a short duration variety and takes less time for cultivation. Average expenses, including fertilisers, per acre are less than Rs. 15,000 per acre. "It is far less compared to the traditional varieties," says Potluri Rajaiah, a farmer from Mukhasa Kalavapalli village in Mandavailli mandal.

Kisan Service Organisation (KSO) secretary P.S.R. Das says that they encouraged farmers to cultivate the new variety as it can be exported. The Pusa 1509 variety has become popular among the farmers due to its high yield as compared to Pusa-1121. "The Pusa 1509 variety has all the qualities of Basmati in terms of elongation, aroma, non-stickiness, softness and fluffy texture," he says.

Earlier, farmers cultivated Pusa-1121 variety in 159 acre in 2010-11. The yield ranged between 20 and 25 bags per acre. Also, the cost of cultivation is just Rs.10, 000 per acre, while it is Rs.15, 000 per acre for the normal variety.

The farmers had a bitter experience in the past as the millers did not show interest in buying the rice. Mr. Das explains that the millers could not export Pusa 1121 as there were shortfalls in milling.

About 40 farmers cultivated Pusa 1509 variety in about 1,000 acre in the district. The farmers are expecting a yield of 30 bags (75 kg each) per acre.

The Basmati is being cultivated in mandals like Kaikaluru, Kalidindi, Agiripalli, Bapulapadu and Nagayalanka in the district.

The Pusa 1509 variety has all the qualities of Basmati in terms of elongation, aroma and non-stickiness. - Secretary, Kisan Service Organisation

Paddy farmers stage protest, seek MSP

NALGONDA, April 22, 2014 - Paddy farmers staged a protest at Valigonda Agriculture Market demanding that the government provide Minimum Support Price (MSP) for their produce by setting up sufficient procurement centres here on Monday.

Farmers led by Dairy Farmers' leader Kandala Bal Reddy, staged a *rasta roko* before submitting a memorandum to marketing officials, appealing to them to do justice.

Mr. Bal Reddy said millers were refusing to purchase paddy. He said marketing officials had displayed a notice asking farmers not to bring the produce to the market as the paddy piled up following millers' disinterest. Mr. Bal Reddy said that there was a visible nexus between

officials, millers and commission agents who were discouraging farmers from bringing paddy to the market in the name of high moisture content. Mr. Reddy said marketing officials are forcing them to sell the produce to middlemen who were offering about Rs. 200 less than the MSP (Rs. 1,345).

Water levels

The water level in Periyar dam stood at 109.80 feet (permissible level is 136 feet) on Monday with an inflow of 100 cusecs and discharge of 100 cusecs. The level in Vaigai dam was 25.20 feet (full level is 71 feet) with no inflow and a discharge of 40 cusecs.

The combined storage in Periyar credit was 461 mcft.

There was no rainfall recorded during the 24 hours ending at 8.30 a.m. on Monday, PWD officials here said.

The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 38.98 feet on Monday against its full reservoir level of 120 feet. The inflow was 136 cusecs and the discharge 6,000 cusecs.

The water level in the Papanasam dam on Monday stood at 37.60 feet (permissible level is 143 feet). The dam had an inflow of 4.17 cusecs and 104.75 cusecs of water is discharged. The level of Manimuthar dam stood at 66.62 feet (118 feet). The dam had an inflow of 6 cusecs and 200 cusecs of water was discharged.

Kanyakumari

The water level in Pechipparai dam stood at 14.10 feet, 36.90 feet in Perunchani, 2.92 feet in Chittar I, 3.02 feet in Chittar II, 1.90 feet in Poigai and 41.34 feet in Mambazathuraiyaru.

Stale fruits end up as juice in many stalls in Salem



SALEM, April 22, 2014 - With the soaring temperature and scorching heat, the demand for fresh juice is on the rise in Salem.-

PHOTO:P.GOUTHAM

If the fruit juice vendor offers you a discount next time, be cautious. The juice he gives may be prepared from partially-rotten fruits and those that were disposed of from fruit shops after found unfit for sale.

To beat the heat, people tend to consume fresh fruit juices. Due to the demand and soaring price of fruits, juice stalls have increased the price of juices. But a few stalls in the city sell juices on discount on any day.

Excess heat

The reason - the fruits kept for display at the stalls become stale due to excess heat. Since customers do not prefer such fruits, the vendors

use them for juices and sell at a discount price.

If the price of normal grape juice is Rs. 20 and the mango juice is Rs. 25, it is sold at Rs. 10 just to dispose of the available fruits at the earliest. Fruits should be stored at particular

temperature and skins should be peeled and cut for making fresh juices. But usually, vendors chop fruits and store them in the open. Consumption of these juices would lead to diarrhoea and viral infection, said T. Anuradha, District Designated Officer, Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration Department.

Fire destroys several acres of forest land



*Fire spreading across Nagaramalai Hill close to Salem city on Sunday night.—
PHOTO: E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN*

SALEM, April 22, 2014 - Several acres of forest land were destroyed in a sudden fire outbreak in four hills at Yercaud and Nagaramalai located close to Salem city on Sunday. However, Forest Department officials claimed that trees and animals

were not affected by the flames.

Assistant Conservator of Forests S. Kalanithi told *The Hindu* that officials and staff from the Forest Department and Fire and Rescue Services Department have been actively involved in fighting the flames from Sunday night.

“We have brought the fire under control in the major areas such as Nagaramalai. We are able to see some smoke in a few pockets at Yercaud and are trying to put it off,” he said. He expressed confidence that they would be able to completely put off the flames by Wednesday. Mr. Kalanithi said that no economic loss was caused by the fire as there were no valuable trees in the places where the fire spread. “There is a thick cultivation of sandalwood trees – aged between two and five years – grown in an area close to the place where the fire spread. All these young trees are intact,” he said and refused to disclose the location fearing smugglers.

Forest Department officials suspected that the fire could have been man-made. “We could confirm that the fire did not spread from the bamboo trees as it was not windy. We suspect that it could have spread quickly on the dry grass when someone threw away a cigarette butt or matchstick.”

The official also raised suspicion that people grazing cattle in the forest areas could have set the grass ablaze, so that fresh grass would grow well when the next shower (which is expected shortly) comes.

Green fest begins

KATTAPPANA, April 22, 2014 - Water Resources Minister P.J. Joseph opened the Green Fest organised by the Kerala Agricultural Development Society (KADS) in association with farmers’

organisations at St. Sebastian’s School ground, Thodupuzha, on Monday.

Mr. Joseph stressed the importance of developing a distribution network with the participation of farmers to make agriculture profitable.

The traditional crop varieties should be protected, he said.

Trash fishing eating up marine wealth

KOLLAM, April 22, 2014 - *Juvenile edible fish is being sold to fertilizer companies*

Destructive and trash fishing by some in the mechanical and traditional fishing sectors threatens to deplete marine wealth off the Kollam waters, say the district unit leaders of the Kerala Fisheries Coordination Council (KFCC).

Huge quantities of edible fish juveniles were being harvested and brought to the Neendakara-Shakthikulangara twin fishing harbours and the Azheekkal fishing harbour by the boats every day, leaders of the council said at a press conference here on Monday. Similarly, large quantities of fish that had no market value as human food were also being harvested and brought ashore.

District chairman of the council E. John and convener Iqbalkutty said several tonnes of trash and juvenile edible fish were being sold to the fertilizer manufacturing companies in Tamil Nadu each day from the twin fishing harbours here for nothing more than Rs.10 per kg.

The Fisheries Department was not at all bothered about this trend, they alleged.

The juvenile edible fish lost in this manner included ribbon fish, mackerels, sardines, and mullets. The trash fish were part of the food chain of many larger edible fish. The trend had led to depletion in mullets that formed food for docile marine animals called porpoises.

Earlier, huge shoals of mullets would enter the estuary to spawn during high tide, inviting large presence of porpoises to the area. But now the mullet inflow was scanty. As a consequence, porpoises were beginning to turn destructive, as could be gauged from the increasing attacks on fishing nets at the estuarine area of Shakthikulangara.

It was through the method of using surface and submersible lights for fishing that such edible juvenile and trash fishes were scooped and brought ashore, Mr. John said. While one mature ribbon fish could weigh a kilo gram, it would take more than 30 juveniles to attain that weight. Each day, more than 5 tonnes of ribbon fish juveniles alone were being taken to Tamil Nadu from the twin harbours, he said.

This was considerably depleting the marine wealth of the traditional fishing grounds off the Kollam waters. In turn, it was affecting the livelihood of bona fide fishermen. All this was happening at a time when the government was allocating huge funds for augmenting the marine wealth through various projects like sea ranching.

Mr. Iqbalkutty said if the Fisheries Department failed to take steps to stop the menace, the council would be compelled to launch strong agitations at all the three harbours.

📌 ***Fisheries Department not bothered: KFCC***

📌 ***Livelihood of fishermen being affected, it says***

Met forecasts cloudy skies, rain

HYDERABAD, April 22, 2014 - Although it drizzled in the city, there was no marked change in the temperature on Monday. According to the Meteorological Department, the city recorded maximum and minimum temperatures of 37.9 degree C and 25.4 degree C respectively. Relative humidity was 46 per cent.

The Met department has predicted partly cloudy sky with rain or thundershowers in parts of city on Tuesday. Maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 38 degree C and 25 degree C respectively. Rentachintala recorded the highest temperature of 42.3 degree C followed by Tirupati 42.1 degree C in the State on Monday.

Rain or thundershowers would occur at isolated places in coastal Andhra and Telangana region. Dry weather would prevail over Rayalaseema, a Met department bulletin said.

Bumper harvest



Make way for the tractor: Farmers on their way back from paddy fields after harvest at Naguluppala Padu in Prakasam district on Monday. —Photo: Kommuri Srinivas

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Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Rain: 0
Humidity: 70
Wind: normal

Tuesday, Apr 22

Max | Min
32° | 26°

Sunrise: 05:52
Sunset: 06:22
Barometer: 1012

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Wednesday, Apr 23

Max | Min
36° | 25°

Extended Forecast for a week

Thursday
Apr 24



35° | 24°
Partly Cloudy

Friday
Apr 25



31° | 27°
Cloudy

Saturday
Apr 26



32° | 27°
Overcast

Sunday
Apr 27



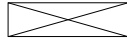
32° | 28°
Overcast

Monday
Apr 28



31° | 28°
Cloudy

Unseasonal showers leave farmers a worried lot

 RAJKOT: Farmers in Saurashtra are a worried lot following the unseasonal showers that were received on Sunday and Monday.

Major damage to the harvested crop of wheat, cotton, chilly and coriander has been reported from the agriculture produce committee markets (APMCs) across the region. The harvested crop lying in the open got spoilt by the rain and thunderstorm. The losses are estimated to be in crores. Even the standing sesame crop has been destroyed to a large extent.

The mango orchard owners are also worried a lot since the change in weather conditions at the time of ripening and harvest will have an impact on mango production and quality.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) officials have issued a rainfall warning for the next 24 hours in the region. They said light to moderate rain or thundershowers would occur at isolated places in Saurashtra region, including the Union Territory of Diu.

On Sunday, blistering heat throughout the afternoon gave way to sudden cyclonic conditions in the evening that brought rain and hailstorm at most places across Saurashtra, parts of north Gujarat and Kutch. Monsoon-like atmosphere prevailed in Rajkot city that was pounded by heavy rain and hail. Gushing winds, thundering and rain had lashed most parts of Amreli, Surendrangar, Bhavnagar districts along with Rapar in Kutch.

Sources said showers were reported in parts of Saurashtra region on Monday also. The weather suddenly turned chilled on Monday evening in Rajkot city as the city received showers amid thundering and lightening.

Weather department officials said 40 degrees celsius was the maximum temperature in the region recorded at a number of places, including Amreli and Surendranagar districts.

Sources said Rabi crops have been sown on 10, 21,600 hectares till March 31 which amounts to 75 per cent of sowing as compared to the last year.

Seeds of innovation flower for this farmer

SUMMARY

After winning an MSc in landscaping and floriculture from Punjab Agricultural University in 1979, the journey has been a bumpy ride for Dhindsa, who jumped from job to job in landscaping before taking up seeds production.

Despite growing opportunities and a rise in demand, flower cultivation is something Punjab farmers steer clear of. Few gather the courage to cultivate flowers because they are unconvinced by the prospects of good prices and note that the export demand is low. Only wealthy farmers who can afford it are going for flower cultivation.

What farmers consider even more risky is the cultivation of high-quality flower seeds which are in great demand in Europe and the US. Only 1,500 acres in Punjab is under flower seeds cultivation and the government does not provide any incentives or subsidies on their production and export.

Among the exceptions is Avtar Singh Dhindsa, who since 1986 has been exporting high-quality flower and vegetable seeds to various countries. Currently president of Asian and Pacific Seeds Association with its headquarters in Bangkok, and which has 48 countries as its members, he is the first Sikh to hold the position.

After winning an MSc in landscaping and floriculture from Punjab Agricultural University in 1979, the journey has been a bumpy ride for Dhindsa, who jumped from job to job in landscaping before taking up seeds production.

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“At that time there was very little awareness of landscaping among the public,” he told The Indian Express. “I tried my best to inculcate the idea of beautification of premises with plants and flowers. Because of a poor response to my activities from the public, I diversified to managerial assignment with Hero Fibres Ltd. After one year I switched to landscaping consultancy and later joined as landscape officer in Ludhiana Improvement Trust.”

The struggle continued until he visited the US in 1986 to explore opportunities in flower seed production, at that time an unexplored area in India. “I visited the US and Europe to get some business in the field of my specialisation,” he said. “I got a good response from a few well-known seed companies. Initial success with production of some varieties of flower seeds gave me confidence,”

Dhindsa started with a 3.5-acre farm of flower seeds and now owns 1,200 acres farmlands in various parts of the country. He exports seeds not only of flowers but also of various vegetables to countries such as Belgium, Netherlands, the US and Japan.

Crediting his professor, Dr A P S Gill of PAU, with his success, Dhindsa says, “We also have farms in Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Chandigarh and Delhi.”

His farms employ small farmers and also train them in production of flower seeds. The focus is on employing rural women, he says. “In our farms, rural women are given a sustained year-round opportunity to work in the flower seed collection and processing. It requires about six to 15 women workers per acre for the flower seed production.”

At present, 2,000 rural laborers, 80 per cent of them women, are employed on 750 acres of farms Dhindsa runs in Punjab.

He deals in more than 600 varieties of flower seeds and 25 varieties of vegetable seeds. The high-quality seeds exported include those of flowers such as gaillardia, bellis, petunia, viola and helichrysum, and of vegetable such as cauliflower, capsicum, squash and gourds.

Dhindsa says it is a highly labour-intensive job that involves various procedures and inspection.

“The overall market of flower seeds in world is of approximately \$50 million out of which India accounts for hardly \$2 to 3 million,” he said. “No doubt the procedure is tough: hiring labour for plucking high quality seeds, drying them and then packaging the best quality ones. But the Indian government has failed to help farmers in any way. Not more than 600 farmers are cultivating flower seeds in India. Even China is promoting flower seed farming because it leads to good profits. We face multiple problems with customs officials while exporting the seed.”

Delayed harvest holds up arrival

SUMMARY

The delayed harvesting, the agriculture department has indicated, will help increase the yield. It was around 51 quintals per hectare last year.

Punjab’s mandis are nearly empty at the moment as only 8.01 lakh tonnes wheat has arrived so far, 74 per cent less than the 30.73 lakh tonnes in the previous season. Harvesting has been delayed by over 15 days because of the weather, say agriculture experts. With only a handful of farmers having started harvesting, wheat can be still seen standing in the fields. And fresh showers in the past two days has further delayed harvesting.

The delayed harvesting, the agriculture department has indicated, will help increase the yield. It was around 51 quintals per hectare last year.

It rained heavily in winters and there were hailstorms too. “But it was favourable to our crops,” said Dr Mukhtiar Singh Bhullar, agriculture development officer, Muktsar. “The temperature remained cold and hence the grain ripened slowly. The weather is still pleasant even in April. So the grain ripened in mild sunlight in a slow and steady manner. And that is very good for the crop. The wheat grain is looking of a good size and I am sure the yield will increase.”

Dr Mangal Singh Sandhu, director for agriculture, too said the rains were very good for the wheat crop and the damage was insignificant. “The crops that had fallen due to heavy winds are once again standing to ripen, so there has not been much damage. Overall it was a good season for the wheat crop.”

In the previous year, 32.28 lakh hectares was under wheat in Punjab and as per the estimates of agriculture department, the area under wheat this year is 35 lakh hectares. The excessive rains caused initial damage on about 68,000 hectares in the Kandi and Malwa belts, but not more than 2 per cent of the wheat was damaged eventually, say agriculture experts. First the winter was delayed and then it rained in the winter, both events favouring the crop. In 2011-12, wheat production was 179.87 lakh metric tonnes; in 2012-13, it fell to 166.25 lakh tonnes. Going by the quality of the grain in the fields, agriculture experts are optimistic that Punjab will match the output of 2011-12.

Sales till now have been 5.36 lakh tonnes, 80 per cent less than the 26.75 lakh metric tonnes of the previous year. Out of this, only 0.36 lakh tonnes has been bought by private agencies with the rest by government agencies.

The minimum support price for this year is Rs 1,330 to Rs 1,415 per quintal and the crop has so far been sold in the range of Rs 1,400-1,415 per tonne.

Distressed farmers have also sold their produce with moisture at prices below the MSP to private agencies as the minimum price of sale was Rs 1,330 per quintal and the maximum of 1,415 per quintal while MSP is Rs 1400 per quintal. Lifting is a major problem in the mandis and hence the produce lying in a number of mandis got wet because of rainfall in the past two days.

Empty mandis, packed godowns

SUMMARY

When the wheat comes, Punjab won't have enough space.

Punjab has increased its capacity for covered storage of foodgrains but that is likely to take care of only 70 per cent of the procurement this year as the state anticipates a bumper crop. The remaining wheat will be kept either in the open or at sugar mills till the time covered space is available after some of the previous year's grain has moved to other states. This is expected to happen in the next couple of months. FCI officials are hoping for a fast outflow of the grain from the state under the new Food Security Act, 2013.

The targeted procurement of wheat is 115 lakh tonnes for the central pool. "The original target for the central pool was 120 lakh tonnes for 2013-2014 but was decreased. The 115 lakh tonnes is still 6 lakh tonnes more than last year's contribution of 109 lakh tonnes to the central pool from Punjab," said Nahar Singh, deputy general manager, FCI, Punjab, Nahar Singh.

The target was scaled down because of bad weather at the end of the harvesting season. Nahar Singh said if the arrival is high, however, agencies will purchase beyond the target. In the past two years, Punjab has increased its covered storage capacity from 100 lakh tonnes to 143 lakh tonnes. The state also has 114 lakh tonnes covered and plinth (CAP) storage. CAP storage involves placing gunny bags on a raised cement-and-brick plinth and covering them with tarpaulin.

As of April 1, 2014, covered storage space of nearly 121 lakh tonnes remains occupied by the previous year's foodgrains: 87 lakh tonnes rice and 34 lakh tonnes wheat. Space for around 20 lakh tonnes foodgrain will be cleared with movement out by June 30, but that will be offset by the fresh arrival of 27 lakh tonnes rice after final milling of the last year paddy crop in May and June. All that will leave only 15 of the 143-lakh-tonne space free. "We have to think ahead for the paddy season since paddy, unlike wheat, cannot be stored in the open," said an FCI official, adding rice takes up all covered space.

Of the 114 lakh tonnes CAP space, that for 40 lakh tonnes is occupied by last year's wheat stock, leaving space only for 75 lakh tonnes when 115 lakh tonnes is due to arrive. "Though we call CAP a scientific method, foodgrains stored in CAP are prone to damage from weather, rodents and pilferage, unlike when kept in covered spaces," said a senior FCI officer, adding wheat will need to be kept in CAP storage,

Even if space is created by an outflow of foodgrain, an estimated 15 to 20 lakh tonnes of the new wheat will have to be stored in an unscientific manner until CAP storage is available, and the rainy season is ahead.

FCI officials say, nevertheless, that they are ready for the challenge. They are optimistic that late harvesting due to rain and hailstorms will, by the time of ripening of the crop, have created some space for new wheat with an outflow of some grain every month.

At the moment, the state moves an average 20 lakh tonnes foodgrain out to other states every month, but the outflow is sometimes it low, sources said.

FCI officials said storage is being increased with every passing year and more space is being created in Tarn Taran and Patiala but at the moment around 70 per cent of the incoming wheat will be kept in CAP storage.

Fake pesticides a threat to Kashmir apples

SUMMARY

The government has formed a high-powered committee to probe allegations levelled by fruit growers.

Fruit growers in Kashmir say their crops are under threat from spurious pesticides in circulation. The government agrees it is a matter of concern but points out that its role in the pesticides market is not a direct one beyond checking and licensing; private players handle the import.

The Rs 4,000 crore apple industry is allegedly the worst hit. Abdul Qayoom, a grower in Pulwama, said all pesticides sold in Kashmir are substandard. "Pesticides or fungicides that are sold in the valley are stored in Jammu. No effort has been being made by the government to check the quality of pesticides and fungicides before it is sold in the market. We have often lost fruits after spraying fake pesticide in our orchards but the government has never taken any step to stop it."

Wani Sajad, a distributor, said they import pesticides from companies based outside the state. "Unfortunately officials blame us for all the fake products and take no action against the manufacturers."

The economic survey report of 2012-13 notes that the consumption of pesticides and fungicides has increased manifold. Horticulture and agriculture involve more than one million people directly or indirectly in Jammu and Kashmir; where 3.5 lakh hectares is under various crops.

Following the complaints by apple growers, the government had brought out a report that said weather fluctuations were responsible for deterioration in the quality of apples. The outcry that followed has prompted a fresh probe.

"Compared to other crops, apple orchards have pesticides used in large quantities," said director (agriculture) Mushtaq Ahmad Peerzada, also controller (pesticides). "To safeguard the Rs 400 crore apple industry, pesticides are kept available throughout the year as the apples are prone to various diseases," he said, citing the examples scab that affects apple and pear and blast that sometimes affects paddy. "Most of the pesticides and fungicides are used for safeguarding apples and pears," he said.

He said the size of the quantum of pesticide and fungicide business is around Rs 100 crore and everything is managed by local entrepreneurs. "We are only involved in checking and licensing," he said.

He agreed, however, that under the Pesticides Act, an insecticide board in collaboration with Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agriculture Science and Technology should keep a tab on what is being sold in the markets. "We keep a check on illegal sales and licensing through the insecticide board on SKAUST's recommendations," he said.

And the agriculture director accepted that the sale of spurious pesticide is a concern. "It is a serious concern and we are working to control it. We are discussing the matter with the divisional commissioner and seeking support from all departments. We also plan to take the excise department on board before initiating action to stop the supply of spurious pesticides and fungicides," he said.

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The government has formed a high-powered committee to probe allegations levelled by fruit growers. The committee, headed by the vice chancellor of SKAUST, is looking at the allegations afresh after farmers dismissed the earlier government report that had attributed the degradation of apples to weather fluctuations.

“The board has the authority to stop and prosecute the offenders and cancel their licences,” the director said.

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Kerala's First 'Sparrow Park' to be Launched on May 7

They are so tiny it's easy to miss them in the city's bustle, but now, one of the busiest spots in the capital is being dedicated to them. The Connemara Market, Palayam, will be designated the state's first 'Sparrow Park' as part of a campaign to conserve house sparrows.

The project, a joint initiative of the city-based Writers' and Nature Lovers' Forum and the Forest Department, will be launched at the market on May 7. Forest Minister Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan will be present.

The forum and the department also launched a two-day survey of sparrows in the city on Monday. “We have found that 43 of the 50 nests that we had installed at the Connemara Market back in 2011 are now occupied. That is one reason why the market is going to be declared a 'Sparrow Park,’” said C Rahim, convener of the Writers' and Nature Lovers' Forum. The project had received much support from the traders, who were enthusiastic in caring for the small birds.

On Monday, the survey also covered Attakulangara and the Chalai Market, where the Forest Department had, in association with the Travancore Natural History Association, installed some nests on March 20, World Sparrow Day. At Attakulangara, several natural habitats were found, and amusingly, most of them were built inside the housings of the rolling shutters of shops. “We have been encouraging the birds to nest here for the past five-six years,” said Anil, who runs at a grain and spices shop at Attakulangara.

The triangular nests installed by the department on March 20 doesn't seem to be attracting the birds, apparently as the floor is made of wire mesh. The department now plans to modify them.

Chalai market is one other hot spot. Here too, the traders and the headload workers have been supporting the initiative. Like Al Amin, who runs the Swad Fresh Juice at Chalai. He has three nests, two made of Aquafina and Frooty cartons and one, a triangular baseboard nest.

All Collectors Directed to Check Rising Potato Prices



With public is raising a hue and cry over spiralling prices of potato during election time, the Government directed the Collectors to monitor the prices of tuber.

Waking up from its slumber, the State Government on Monday directed all the district Collectors to take urgent measures to check rising prices of potato.

The Collectors have also been asked to keep a close watch on onion price which is likely to rise due to less production in major producing States.

“The price of potato is now showing rising trend in the market since last week and the present market rate is Rs 15-16 per kg all over the State. This upward trend in source markets in West Bengal is being reflected in the domestic market of Odisha. Taking advantage of the situation, unscrupulous traders may resort to unfair trade practices like hoarding and profiteering,” Food, Supplies and Consumer Welfare Secretary MS Padhi stated in a letter to the Collectors.

With public is raising a hue and cry over spiralling prices of potato during election time, the Government directed the Collectors to monitor the prices of tuber.

Padhi said the prices of potato will come down after supply from West Bengal goes up during the first week of May. Currently, potatoes produced in the State are sold in the market.

Since potato growing farmers sold their produce to local traders, there is no mechanism to regulate the price, said a tuber merchant of the city.

“Although the price of onion has almost remained steady in the market since last month, its price may increase due to less production this year in the source mandis like Nasik, Pune and Lasalgan in Maharashtra,” Padhi said.

The retail prices should be maximum Rs 2 per kg more than the wholesale price for potato and Rs 2 per kg for onion, Padhi said. He has further directed the civil supplies officers to ensure that the retailers display the rate charts prominently for consumer awareness.

THE HINDU Business Line

Sweets, desserts and snacks from small pelagic fishes

Kochi, April 21: Mackarels, anchovies, and sardines are widely accepted as highly nutritious fishes, but these have not been able to find a decent market because of their small size and presence of excess bones.

This has been proving a major hurdle for the fisher-folks in Kerala, where these fishes are predominantly available.

The Kerala State Coastal Area Development Corporation (KSCADC), in association with National Agricultural Innovation Project under Indian Council of Agricultural Research, has developed a food processing technology to convert these highly nutritious small pelagic fishes into sweets, desserts and snack-like dishes.

The products were tested successfully and marketed under the new brand name FISHMAID coined by the KSCADC. The brand is being introduced under its semi-commercial production units and sales outlets.

22% tea unsold at Coonoor sale

Coonoor, April 21: Easter holidays and elections in some parts of the country reduced the demand at sale number 16 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auction this week.

As a result, some 22 per cent of the 12.54 lakh kg tea offered remained unsold. Homedale Estate tea, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, and Hittakkal Speciality tea, auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing, topped CTC market at Rs. 180 a kg.

Among orthodox teas, Chamraj topped at Rs. 253 a kg, followed by Kairbetta Rs. 225, Havukal Rs. 210 and Kodanad Rs. 204.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs. 51-54 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs. 100-140 for brighter liquoring sorts.

They ranged Rs. 62-66 for plain dusts and Rs. 120-175 for brighter liquoring dusts.

Some teas were bought for Pakistan in wide range Rs. 52-77 a kg. Some teas were bought for European ports at Rs. 65-73.

With growers exhausting stocks, cardamom tops Rs. 800 a kg



Kochi, April 21: Cardamom gained flavour on strong demand amidst short supply on resumption of auction on Monday after five days of holidays last week.

At the Cardamom Planters Association (CPA) auction in Tamil Nadu's Bodinayakannur on Monday, the average

price shot up to a record Rs. 832 a kg.

Total arrivals on Monday were 29 tonnes and the entire quantity was sold out. The individual auction average on Thursday crossed Rs. 800 a kg to close at Rs. 809.50 a kg on good demand.

Dry spell

There is said to be an apprehension in the market because of the continuous dry spell in the growing areas. Summer rains, which have been active in the midlands of Kerala, have eluded the main growing areas in the high ranges, growers in Kumily told *Business Line*.

"We badly need one or two good rains now. The plants started withering in the dry spell," they claimed.

Arrivals have also started shrinking and aiding a bullish sentiment in the market, market sources said.

Export buying shrunk as no fresh orders were forthcoming following an upsurge in the prices here, exporters said. They attributed this to release of cardamom by Guatemala which was holding back its stocks for prices to move up. They continued to offer the commodity at competitive rates, about \$2 a kg below the Indian parity, market sources told *Business Line*. According to PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, Kumily, arrivals are expected to be around 50 tonnes per auction as stocks held by the growers have already been liquidated.

Supply
He said the supply of cardamom from the estates/farms has come to an end and whatever material arrives at present is from the stocks and those held by the primary market dealers who had bought earlier when the prices were lower.

During the current season to July, arrivals are 18,438 tonnes against 11,130 tonnes during the same period a year ago. Sales have been 17,923 tonnes against 10,604 tonnes. The weighted average price as on April 17 was Rs. 622.75 a kg against Rs. 743.13 a year ago. Prices of all graded varieties were up and their prices in Rs. /kg were: AGEB 1020-1030; AGB 860-870; AGS 830-840; and AGS -1: 810-820. Bulk prices ranged between Rs. 450 and Rs. 1,150.

Weather conditions were reportedly unfavourable as the major growing tracks have been experiencing severe drought conditions for more than a month now.

Only some pockets such as Nedumkandam, Elappara and Kattappana have received mild summer showers, farmers in Idukki said.

Sheet rubber drops to Rs. 140/kg

Kottayam, April 21: Rubber prices dropped sharply on Monday. Sharp declines in the global trendsetters to a 2009 low on concerns of a weak Chinese economy and global oversupply kept local prices under pressure during the day.

Sheet rubber declined to Rs. 140 (Rs. 144), according to traders and the Rubber Board. The grade dropped to Rs. 137 (Rs. 141) as quoted by the dealers. May futures slipped to Rs. 138.09 (Rs. 143.84), June to Rs. 140.51 (Rs. 146.36) and July to Rs. 140.76 (Rs. 146.62) while the Rubber Mini May futures dropped to Rs. 139.25 (Rs. 142.38) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) nosedived to Rs. 128.88 (Rs. 135.61) at Bangkok. April futures weakened to ¥201.7 (Rs. 118.82) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg): RSS-4: 140 (144); SS-5: 136 (140); Ungraded: 130 (135); ISNR 20: 130 (133) and Latex 60%: 114 (118).

Levy makes it tough for UP wheat to enter Punjab



Wheat being loaded onto a trolley from a combine harvester at a farm near Machrauli in Haryana. Kamal Narang

New Delhi, April 21: Flour millers in Punjab may no longer purchase wheat from Uttar Pradesh as the recent levy of 5 per cent advance tax on the cereal entering the State is proving to be expensive.

“It is no longer viable to bring in wheat from UP,” said Naresh Ghai, President of Punjab Roller Flour Millers Association. Also, the Punjab Government has waived taxes of around 3 per cent for millers buying wheat from the local market, he said.

Why millers flocked UP

The Punjab Government’s move is intended to curb inflow of wheat from other States. Earlier, Punjab millers flocked UP, where the prices were lower than the minimum support price, to source part of their requirement.

Also, high taxes of around 15 per cent, including the commission and market fee in Punjab over and above the minimum support price, made it cheaper for them to buy wheat from outside the State. Trade sources said the Punjab millers used to source about 2-2.5 lakh tonnes of wheat annually from UP, the largest producer of the cereal.

These millers consume about one lakh tonnes a month and their total annual consumption exceeds a million tonnes.

Wheat arrivals, on the other hand, continue to rise in various *mandis* in Punjab.

Arrivals, buying

So far, procurement by State agencies stands at 6.74 lakh tonnes (lt), while market arrivals are estimated at 7.02 lt.

During the same period a year ago, procurement in Punjab markets stood at 3.59 million tonnes (mt) against arrivals of 3.60 mt. Procurement in other States is also a tad lower than last year on delayed harvest.

State-owned Food Corporation of India and other agencies have so far procured 6.7 mt against arrivals of 7.97 mt.

Last year, procurement had exceeded 10.9 mt and arrivals exceeded 11.86 mt during the same period.

Punjab millers source about 2-2.5 lakh tonnes of wheat annually from Uttar Pradesh, the largest producer of the cereal.

Pepper sellers try to cash in on buyers' desperation



Kochi, April 21: SPOT PEPPER PRICES SHOOT UP

Spot pepper prices continued to seek new highs on strong demand amid tight supply. On the other hand, buyers on the national and regional exchange platforms are willing to pay higher prices, though there were no sellers. Primary market dealers in Idukki said Tamil Nadu-based dealers were buying at Rs. 675 a kg from the growers on cash and carry basis, market sources told *Business Line*. Farmers are hoping that the prices would touch Rs. 1,000 a kg. On the spot, prices shot up by Rs. 4,500 a quintal to close at Rs. 65,000 (ungarbled) and Rs. 67,000

(garbled) a quintal. Export prices soared to \$12,000 c&f for Europe and \$12,250 a tonne c&f for the US. Our Correspondent

Business Standard

Maharashtra's sugar revenue-sharing formula good for all states

Earlier this year, the government announced two policy measures to improve the working of the deep-in-the-red [sugar](#) sector. The moves were primarily designed to enable sugar factories to clear the longstanding dues of growers and address the unrest in cane-producing centres.

Expectedly, the announcement of subsidised [raw sugar exports](#) and interest-free loans to factories had a positive impact on sugar prices. Still, for most factories, production costs remain higher than ex-factory prices of sugar. Undoubtedly, prices would have improved further to the September-October 2012 levels, had the government been steadfast in ensuring effective implementation of the two policies.

BITTERSWEET

- As of now, [sugar companies](#) owe cane farmers about Rs 15,000 cr, including about Rs 10,000 cr in Uttar Pradesh alone
- Loans of about Rs 3,000 cr have been sanctioned, but disbursements remain much lower than the sanctioned amount
- Maharashtra and Karnataka have migrated to sharing revenue from sales of sugar and its by-products with growers

Cash flow of sugar companies has been under pressure. As of now, these owe cane farmers about Rs 15,000 crore, including about Rs 10,000 crore in Uttar Pradesh alone. To the dismay of the sector and the growers, the much trumpeted move to offer factories interest-free loans equal to the excise duty actually paid or payable during the last three sugar seasons has not as yet taken off in a meaningful way - 300 of the 530 working factories could make applications for duty-free loans. Loans amounting to about Rs 3,000 crore have been sanctioned, but disbursements remain much lower than the sanctioned amount. For the scheme, the government had estimated sugar factories would avail of Rs 6,600 crore of interest free loans to settle cane bills.

A bank official said the wide gap between what is proposed in the scheme and the sanctioned amount was because loan conditions related to factory viability and cash flow in the next five years were such that a large number of units weren't in a position to apply. The industry, however, contends when the government had to make a similar intervention in 2007, loans were virtually on-tap. In any case, if the state governments concerned come forward to offer guarantees for weak factories, many more units will be entitled to loans. The Indian Sugar Mills Association ([Isma](#)) has made a representation to the government for relaxation of some difficult loan conditions. Finance Minister P Chidambaram has promised to revisit the loan guidelines, based on the actual difficulties mills face availing of interest-free credit.

The problem, however, is due to the ongoing elections, the government is virtually on leave. Moreover, banks, smarting under rising non-performing assets, aren't inclined to entertain applications from groups. But why should states, responsible for the crisis in the sector, not be ready to stand guarantee for bank loans to factories? Had they not continuously raised cane prices to court growers without caring for the rates at which sugar was sold in the market and the health of the sector, factories wouldn't be in this sorry situation, said former Isma president Om Prakash Dhanuka.

All sugar-producing states must not, however, be painted with the same brush. This season, in a break with the past, Maharashtra and Karnataka, both recording high production and recovery of sugar from cane, have migrated to sharing the revenue from sales of sugar and its by-products such as electricity and alcohol/ethanol with growers. The [revenue-sharing formula](#) recommends itself for other cane-growing regions, too, as it rewards factories and growers equitably, depending on sugar price movements. Moreover, it eliminates the possibility of accumulation of unpaid cane bills. Is it finally dawning on Uttar Pradesh, the country's largest cane-growing state, that the only way to restore the health of the sugar sector lies in walking the path shown by Maharashtra and Karnataka? Perhaps, this will happen when a committee under the chairmanship of Uttar Pradesh chief secretary recommends a formula for the determination of cane prices in the future. "If UP embraces the revenue-sharing formula, expect Bihar and other northern states to fall in line," says Dhanuka.

In the meantime, the industry, which has responded enthusiastically to exporting raw sugar, aided by subsidy of Rs 3,300 a tonne, has to contend with the formula of recalibration of the

subsidy amount every two months, based on the rupee's exchange rate and world prices of raws. This will not disturb exports, provided the subsidy review is expeditious. However, this wasn't the case when subsidy for April-May came up for review. To partially relieve the industry of a massive inventory burden, the compulsion to export four million tonnes (mt) of sugar this season and the next is understandable.

ISMA continues to press the government to raise customs duty to 40 per cent from 15 per cent so that merchants aren't tempted to import sugar to avail of any price improvements here. As of March-end, India exported 1.75 mt of sugar, including 250,000 tonnes on account of advance licences. Net exports from domestic production stood at 1.5 mt. The industry should be enabled to export the remaining 500,000 tonnes for this season quickly.

Rasoya Proteins to enter into maize based ethanol production

After establishing its mettle in edible oil and processed soya products, [Rasoya Proteins](#) is planning to enter into [maize](#)-based [ethanol](#) production with a capital expenditure of Rs 400 crore.

The company plans to set up a large ethanol production unit for which orders for plants and machinery have already been placed. Rasoya Proteins plans to procure maize directly from local stockists in Nagpur and surrounding regions in Maharashtra.

"We are looking to set up a large rice milling unit for selling in packed form under 'Rasoya' brand in addition to a rice bran processing unit for producing health conscious edible oil. We are also considering setting up of two technology driven pulses processing units which will have no human intervention. All proposed expansion plans are estimated to entail total capital expenditure of Rs 400 crore," said Prashant Duchakke, Executive Director, Rasoya Proteins.

Modalities for funding these projects are being worked out but, preferably, fund arrangement will be a combination of debt and equity, he added.

Rasoya Proteins is looking to expand its horizon with diversified agri portfolio. The company currently has a wheat flour processing unit Yeotmal. Another wheat flour processing unit is proposed to be set up in Malakapur, Maharashtra. It is planning to sell its products especially wheat flour under "Mejwani" brand in 1 - 10 kgs pack.

The company currently produces and exports its products to several countries including Thailand, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Vietnam etc. The company claims to have several bulk orders for execution. The quality of soya de-meal is well accepted in international market especially on account of higher protein content.

Rasoya Proteins reported consolidated sales of Rs 672.69 crore for the quarter ended December 2013 as against Rs 452.13 crore in the same quarter previous year. The company's net profit stood at Rs 18.23 crore for December 2013 quarter versus Rs 5.71 crore in the corresponding quarter previous year.

Coriander up 1.1% on spot demand

[Coriander](#) prices rose by 1.18% to Rs 9,703 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators enlarged their positions on rising demand in the spot markets.

At the [National Commodity and Derivative Exchange](#), coriander for May delivery gained Rs 113, or 1.18%, to Rs 9,703 per quintal with an open interest of 40,590 lots.

Similarly, the spice for delivery in June traded higher by Rs 104, or 1.06%, to Rs 9,904 per

quintal, with an open interest of 27,920 lots.

Market analysts said increased buying by speculators on pick-up in spot market demand against restricted arrivals from producing belts led the rise in coriander prices at futures trade.

Chana down 0.9% on profit-booking

[Chana](#) prices fell by 0.92% to Rs 3,115 per quintal in futures trade today on profit-booking by speculators due to higher supplies and weak demand in the spot markets.

Marketmen said sentiment turned bearish on higher supplies from producing areas against weak demand in the spot markets which put pressure on chana futures prices.

At the National Commodity and Derivative Exchange, chana for May delivery declined by Rs 29, or 0.92%, to Rs 3,115 per quintal, with an open interest for 1,04,220 lots.

Similarly, chana for June delivery fell by Rs 26, or 0.81%, to Rs 3,176 per quintal with an open interest of 43,250 lots.

Cardamom up 2.4% on spot demand

[Cardamom](#) prices rose by 2.49% to Rs 936.30 per kg in futures trade today as speculators indulged in enlarging positions amid restricted arrivals.

Further, firm export demand in the spot market also supported the upside.

On the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), cardamom for May delivery surged by Rs 22.80, or 2.49%, to Rs 936.30 per kg in a business volume of 795 lots.

The spice for delivery in June gained Rs 21.10, or 2.24%, to Rs 962 per kg in a business volume of 140 lots.

Traders said besides restricted supplies from producing belts, strong export and domestic demand mainly influenced cardamom prices at futures trade.

Potato down 1.3% on weak demand

[Potato](#) futures fell by 1.39% to Rs 1,396 per quintal today as speculators offloaded their positions driven by low demand in spot markets.

At the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), potato prices for May contract fell by Rs 19.80, or 1.39%, to Rs 1,396 per quintal, with a business volume of 195 lots.

The potato for delivery in April declined by Rs 13.70, or 1.04%, to Rs 1,302.10 per quintal, with a trading volume of 5 lots.

Market experts said traders offloaded their holdings at existing higher levels, tracking a weak spot market trend on fresh supplies which pulled down potato prices.

Palm oil down 0.3% on subdued demand

[Crude palm oil](#) prices fell 0.38% to Rs 564.70 per 10 kg in futures trading today as speculators offloaded positions due to subdued demand in the spot market.

At the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), crude palm oil for delivery in April fell by Rs 2.20, or 0.38%, to Rs 564.70 per 10 kg in business turnover of 59 lots.

Likewise, the oil for delivery in May traded lower by Rs 1.80, or 0.31%, to Rs 561.90 per 10 kg in 42 lots.

Market analysts said offloading of positions by speculators due to subdued demand in the spot market against adequate supplies, mainly led to a fall in crude palm oil futures prices.
