

Don't force farmers to repay loans, HC tells Maharashtra government

MUMBAI, March 22, 2014 - The Bombay High Court on Friday directed the Maharashtra government to stop forcible recovery of electricity bills and bank loans from farmers affected by severe unseasonal rains and hailstorm. The court also directed the State to restore the electricity supply of farmers whose connections were cut after the hailstorm due to non-payment of bills.

The court told the State government to put on record the method used for surveying the damaged crops after a Public Interest Litigation plea alleged that the government's methodology was non-transparent and was causing anxiety among farmers.

"The government has been surveying only those fields where there is 100 per cent damage. All those farmers who have suffered less than 100 per cent damage, have been excluded from the survey," petitioner Prashant Hiray, a farmer from Nashik, claimed.

Three PILs have been filed in the Bombay High Court by farmers seeking swift and adequate relief measures for those affected in the calamity. The petitioners have alleged that the government failed to provide the account of damage to homes, cattle, livestock, due to the hailstorm. "They have given information only about the fields, even that is incomplete," said advocate Ashish Gaikwad.

Rs. 260 crore released

The State government told the court that it had already surveyed 20,000 hectares of land in the State and had finished 80 per cent of the survey work. It said it had released Rs. 260 crore for the farmers on Friday, and would release another Rs. 600 crore in the next two days.

"As per the Government Resolution we issued on Thursday night, we have announced a Rs. 4000-crore package for the farmers. Of that, Rs. 2,000 crore will be given as assistance, while Rs. 2,000 crore will be used for waiving off electricity bills, restructuring of agricultural loans and for input subsidy," government pleader Milind More said. He added that the package was mere assistance and not compensation for the farmers.

Green signal

The Election Commission (EC) told the court that it had given conditional approval to the State government's relief package in the wake of the model code of conduct. The EC has barred the Chief Minister or any other Minister from making any announcement on the issue. "Observe maximum transparency in distribution of relief such as publishing the list of beneficiaries in villages," the EC letter submitted before the court stated.

"Cheques should be issued to the affected families only by government officials, and not by any politicians," Pradeep Rajagopal, who appeared for the EC, said.

The Union Ministry of Agriculture told the division bench headed by Chief Justice Mohit Shah that it was considering granting compensation to three States affected by the hailstorm.

The Election Commission has given conditional approval to the government's relief package

Compensate for our loss: Farmers

KRISHNAGIRI, March 22, 2014 - The Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission (TNERC) should give compensation of Rs. 60,000 to the farmers affected by the Dharmapuri-

Thiruvallam power line project, members of Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam said here on Thursday.

In a statement issued here, K.M. Ramagoundar, General Secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam said that the TNERC is undertaking laying of a 2000 MV overhead HT power line from Adhiyamaankottam in Dharmapuri to Thiruvallam in Vellore district above some farm land. Due to this project, the farmers on whose land the project is being implemented would be affected badly. TNERC had asked the farmers to undertake only paddy, tomato and other crops. The farmers had to cut down the mango and coconut trees for this project. Hence the compensation for these should be taken into account. Thus the TNERC should compensate Rs. 60,000 per mango and coconut trees to the farmers, they said. They demanded the TNERC to compensate Rs. 10,000 per acre per month as rent for the overhead line, as farming was not possible.

Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam decided to stage an agitation in front of the Office of the Superintending Engineer, TANGEDCO on March 26, the statement added.

Focus on promoting oyster, clam farming

Workshop on business opportunities



BASICS OF PREPPING: Chef Jose Varkey giving a demonstration on oyster and clam cuisine at a workshop in Kollam.

KOLLAM, March 22, 2014 - The Quilon Social Service Society (QSSS), in association with the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) and the Casino Group of Hotels (CGH), organised a workshop on "Emerging business opportunities in oyster and clam cuisine" at Chavara, near here, for

chefs.

The workshop, organised under a project funded by the World Bank, was aimed at creating awareness on the nutritional benefits of oysters and clams. The programme was held at the National Institute of Fisheries Post Harvest Technology and Training managed by the QSSS. The workshop was led by corporate chef Jose Varkey from the CGH.

QSSS director Pious Mallier said that clams and oysters harvested from the Ashtamudi Lake are being hygienically and scientifically processed and marketed by the institute under the brand name Samrudhi.

A group of 10 women from the neighbourhood was involved in the process.

But the products were not capturing the markets in a befitting manner, both among the people of the State and foreign tourists, Fr. Mallier said. Apart from cuisine, oysters could also be consumed live and the CMFRI in collaboration with CGH had tapped a small but sustained interest in live oyster consumption among gourmets in Kochi.

K.K. Appukuttan, former head, Molluscan Fisheries Division, CMFRI, who addressed the workshop, said the promotion of the two products would considerably improve the livelihood enhancement of women SHG members involved in the process. Through the workshop, chefs were given demonstrations on cooking oyster and clam dishes.

The CMFRI had developed a technology for farming oysters in the backwaters and had promoted this farming technique among women SHGs at Vembanad, Kayamkulam, and Ashtamudi lakes in the State. At present, the production through farming is over 4,000 tonnes annually.

Hi-tech farming at ashram

KOLLAM, March 22, 2014 - The Santhigiri Ashram, in cooperation with the State Horticulture Mission, has started an open precision vegetable farming project at its Kottarakara branch. Precision farming requires very little water, fertilizer and land area. The initial step is to prepare the land in multiple layers of 60 cm width and 45 cm height. Then bio-fertilizer is added, which is made from dried cow dung, coconut husk, earthworm compost and rock sand.

Drip irrigation

Pipelines are laid for drip irrigation and the area is covered with mulching sheet made of less than 30 micron plastic sheet. This will keep the temperature and moisture of the farm controlled. There will be no problem of weeds in this farming method.

According to a press release, initially the ashram is cultivating beans.

In connection with the project, the ashram is organising a training programme in hi-tech farming for famers on March 23.

K. Pratapan, Managing Director, Horticulture Mission, will inaugurate the programme.

Include promise in manifesto: hill farmers

KOZHIKODE, March 22, 2014 - An action committee of hill farmers has demanded that the UDF include in its election manifesto its promise to keep out densely populated villages and farmlands from Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) ambit.

Committee chairman O.D. Thomas said on Friday that the 112-page draft notification issued by Ministry of Environment had not assuaged the worries of farmers about the recommendations made in the K. Kasturirangan and Madhav Gadgil reports on Western Ghats conservation. He said the notification was aimed at misleading farmers.

He said the draft notification would be meaningless since the notification of November 13 had not been withdrawn. It had also been made known a decision on the matter would be in line with the court's verdict.

Call for developing farming models to suit women

THRISSUR, March 22, 2014 - A workshop on "Opportunities and challenges for women in Kerala agriculture" has stressed developing successful integrated farming models to ensure sustainable income generation for women in agriculture.

Addressing the workshop at the College of Forestry here, Kerala Agricultural University Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran said that the concept of agriculture has changed with the invention of women-friendly agricultural implements and technology.

"The drudgery and hardship of agricultural operations is considerably reduced through the development of lightweight machinery and easy-to-operate implements. At present, 40 per cent of rural household income is generated by women in agriculture and many women self help groups have created success stories," he said.

These developments have come after a series of research inputs including ergonomic analyses. However, more attention has to be paid to enhance the profitability of women

entrepreneurs through innovative strategies on credit systems and marketing networks, he said. B. Ashok, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University Vice-Chancellor in his key note address, highlighted the role paid by women in the food processing industry. "The success of women even in unorganised sectors triggers thought about empowering them through training and forming a network to produce, process and market food products. The role of Kudumbasree in inspiring and providing structural strength to women groups is phenomenal. The possibilities are aplenty and the three universities in agriculture and allied fields can do wonders in this area," he said.

Panel reapproves GM food crop field trials

NEW DELHI, March 22, 2014 - *Appraisal committee will vet the nearly 50 new proposals in April*

Field trials for ten varieties of GM (genetically modified) food and other crops were revalidated by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the statutory appraisal arm of the Environment Ministry. These included field trials for rice, wheat, maize, cotton and sorghum.

Companies applied for revalidation after their earlier permits lapsed following opposition from States. The revalidations would have to be first approved by the Union Environment and Forests Minister and then the promoter companies would have to go back to the States for a final nod as agriculture is a State subject under constitutional provisions.

The committee, sources said, did not clear any fresh proposals at this meeting and is likely to take up the new cases in the last week of April. There are nearly 50 applications pending before the GEAC for first-time appraisal of GM crops, including several food crops.

The move came after the Union Environment Minister Veerappa Moily did a u-turn on the views of his predecessor Jayanthi Natarajan and approved several trials that the GEAC had given the nod for in its earlier meetings. Ms. Natarajan had taken the view that it was not prudent to go ahead with the trials while the Supreme Court was hearing a case on the subject of field trials and the regulatory regime for GM technology in India. She had put the decision in abeyance while writing to the Prime Minister, expressing her views against immediately going ahead with trials of food crops. But Mr. Moily held, upon taking over, that the apex court had not explicitly ordered any stay against clearing field trials while the case went on.

The move to go ahead with GM technology — especially food crops — has been a subject of hot debate among the scientific community and evoked concerns among civil society groups. It had also created divisions in the government — the Agriculture Ministry, the department of Biotechnology and the PMO on one side and the Environment Ministry on the other. This had also delayed the government's deciding on its stance on the Technical Expert Committee's report in the case before the Supreme Court.

The government concurs with Mr. Moily's view and has been working on putting forth a joint position before the apex court — something Ms. Natarajan had expressed the reluctance to do. More than 100 food crop trials are in the pipeline, in various stages of development, and the UPA's Biotechnology Regulatory Bill is set to lapse with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha. Thus, the green light for trials, which comes just ahead of the elections, provides hope to major promoters — multinational and Indian — of GM crop technology.

🔗 ***Jayanthi felt trials must wait till Supreme Court verdict on case***

🔗 ***GM debate has pitted Environment and Agriculture Ministries***

It is likely to take up the new cases in the last week of April

Water level

The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 48.82 feet on Friday against its full reservoir level of 120 feet. The inflow was 390 cusecs and the discharge 600 cusecs.

Water level in the Papanasam dam on Friday stood at 49.30 feet (maximum level is 143 feet).

The dam had an inflow of 42.71 cusecs and 204.75 cusecs of water was discharged from the dam. The level of Manimuthar dam stood at 79.72 feet (118 feet).

The dam had an inflow of 26 cusecs and 100 cusecs of water was discharged.

Kanyakumari - The water level in Pechipparai dam stood at 7.95 feet, 37.05 feet in Perunchani, 3.05 feet in Chittar I, 3.15 feet in Chittar II, 2.90 feet in Poigai and 42.08 feet in Mamabazhathuraiyaru.

Puducherry cattle owners face the music

They have been booked under IPC for letting the animals on road



detained: Stray cattle ending up on the Old Jail premises, in Puducherry. Photo: S.S. Kumar

PUDUCHERRY, March 22, 2014 - A case has been booked against Rajamanickam, a cattle owner, for letting his cattle stray on the road in Lawspet. The case, instead of being booked under the Municipality Act, was booked under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code for violation of orders issued by a government official.

A month ago the Puducherry Collector has issued an order under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code banning straying of cattle on the road.

In the past couple of months, there have been a number of orders issued under Section 144 to prevent the entry of anti-social elements into certain areas.

Now, this order covers the owner of cattle, pets and domestic animals as well. According to the order, owners of these animals are prohibited from allowing their animals to stray on roads and if they fail to comply with the regulations, penal action will be taken against them.

The presence of "stray cattle, pets and domestic animals" on the roads of Puducherry causes disturbance and injuries to commuters and common public. It also obstructs the traffic, causing accidents, says the order.

The order further directs the sub-divisional magistrates, North and South, the Director of Local Administration, commissioners of the Puducherry, Oulgaret, Ariyankuppam, Villianur, Bahour and Mannadipet municipalities and communes to strictly enforce the order issued on February 14.

The Puducherry Municipality on Thursday took a decision to enforce this order and detained six cattle that strayed on Nehru Street. Cows and buffaloes were impounded on the Old Jail premises all day.

The owners of the cattle arrived at the jail and were told that a case would be booked against them for violating orders.

According to an official of the Municipality, though the order was issued, not much was done in terms of its enforcement. There are a number of accidents caused by these animals that stray on the road.

“I have not heard of this rule before, but it is a good thing if enforced. Last month, I met with an accident when I hit a stray buffalo and I had to shell out quite a sum towards my medical expenses,” said Sudhakar, a resident of Rainbow Nagar.

Stray cattle are obstructing traffic and causing accidents, says an order

Forest Day

PUDUKOTTAI, March 22, 2014 - World Forest Day was observed at the panchayat union school in Thailanagar here on Friday. N. Thangaraj, District Forest Officer, Usharani, headmistress of the school, M. Kumar, forest ranger, and Sadasivam, forester, spoke. — Special Correspondent

Niravu veggies get a clean chit

KOZHIKODE, March 22, 2014 - The Pesticide Residue Research and Analytical Laboratory under the College of Agriculture, Vellayanai, Thiruvananthapuram, has given a zero-pesticide certificate to the vegetable samples collected from the vegetable gardens of Niravu Residential Forum at Vengeri in Kozhikode.

Last month, researchers from the lab had randomly collected samples of seven varieties of vegetables from seven of the 101 residents of the forum for testing their pesticide content. The principal investigator of the lab has certified that no residues of pesticides were detected in any of the samples collected from the forum.

Researchers had directly collected samples of bindi (lady's finger), baby tomato, ivy gourd, tomato, cluster beans, brinjal cowpea, and green chilly for the test. Though it was an expensive test costing over Rs.6,000 for each sample, the laboratory authorities completed the test for free-of-cost for the forum as part of its initiative to promote organic vegetable cultivation, said Babu Parambath, an office-bearer of the forum.

Marketing

Besides cultivating vegetables for their domestic use, members of the forum would give their excess produce to different agencies that market organic vegetables in the city.

“With the clean chit from the concerned authorities, it could be said that the Niravu vegetables are 100 per cent organic now,” said Mr. Babu.

Bio-diversity meet on Tuesday

SHIMOGA, March 22, 2014 - The Department of Study and Research in Applied Zoology of Kuvempu University has organised a conference on ‘Bio-diversity conservation and sustainable management’ at Jnana Sahyadri campus in Shankaraghatta near here on March 25.

The programme will begin at 10 a.m. Ramakantha V., director of Institute of Wood Science and Technology, Bangalore, and Abraham Varghese, director of National Bureau of

Andhra Pradesh to release 7 tmcft of Krishna water

CHENNAI, March 22, 2014 - *As per 1983 agreement, Tamil Nadu is to get 12 tmc ft from Andhra Pradesh*

The Andhra Pradesh government has agreed to release two thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft) each of Krishna water to Tamil Nadu for three months, starting from April.

By the end of June, Tamil Nadu will get six tmc ft totally. In July, one tmc ft will be supplied.

This is how the Andhra Pradesh government has planned to provide seven tmc ft to Tamil Nadu so that the drinking water supply in Chennai can be maintained comfortably at the level of around 640 million litres a day (MLD).

As per the 1983 agreement, Tamil Nadu is to get 12 tmc ft from Andhra Pradesh and this can be given in two spells. The Kandaleru reservoir, the terminal storage point of the Krishna river system in Andhra Pradesh, has storage of about 24 tmc ft.

Giving details of the discussion held last week between the teams of the two States, a senior official said that Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary P.K. Mohanty, made it clear to the Tamil Nadu team that his administration, to be on safer side, would seek the Election Commission's clearance for the proposed water supply arrangement.

As per the proposal, once the Commission's clearance was obtained, the supply would begin on March 25.

THE HINDU Business Line

TNAU steps up drive to digitise rare documents

Coimbatore, March 21: Tamil Nadu Agricultural University is in the process of digitising rare documents and publications dating back to the 15th century, in order to serve as valuable reference material for users.

The University has already digitised around 7.8 lakh pages comprising thesis, back volumes, books, annual reports, compendium etc within a short span of three months thanks to the ICAR-NAIP project on e-Granth.

The project envisages digitisation of contents in the century-old TNAU library to facilitate quick reference of needed documents, provide an idea of the documents/publications that available in the constituent libraries of TNAU and making it available across states.

Sugar rules steady despite higher arrivals

Mumbai, March 21: SUGAR STEADY DESPITE HIGHER ARRIVALS

Sugar prices on the Vashi wholesale spot market ruled steady on routine demand-supply. Prices for M-grade fine variety went up by Rs. 5-10 while S-grade was unchanged. Naka prices were unchanged. Producers continued selling at prevailing rates as demand eased. Arrivals at Vashi market were about 62-63 truckloads (100 bags each) and local dispatches were 59-60 loads. On Thursday, 19-20 mills offered tenders and sold about 68,000 - 70,000 bags at Rs. 2,820-2,940 (Rs. 2,820-2,940) for S-grade and Rs. 2,980-3,060 (Rs. 2,980-3,060) for M-grade. Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates were: S-grade Rs. 2,932-3,035 (Rs. 2,932-3,035) and M-grade was Rs. 3,031-3,156 (Rs. 3,016-3,152).Our Bureau

Business Standard

Palm oil down 0.7% on subdued demand



[Crude palm oil](#) prices fell by 0.79% to Rs 589.30 per 10 kg in futures trading today as speculators offloaded their positions due to subdued demand in the spot market against sufficient supplies.

At the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), crude palm oil for delivery in March fell by Rs 4.70, or 0.79%, to Rs 589.30 per 10 kg in business turnover of 53 lots.

Likewise, the oil for delivery in April traded lower by Rs 4.70, or 0.78%, to Rs 591 per 10 kg in 164 lots.

Market analysts said offloading 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.

Cardamom down 0.9% on comfortable stocks



[Cardamom](#) futures prices fell today by 0.90% to Rs 864.30 per kg as speculators reduced their positions amid adequate stocks position in the physical market following higher supply from producing belts.

At the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), cardamom for delivery in May declined by Rs 7.90, or 0.90%, to Rs 864.30 per kg in business turnover of 37 lots.

Similarly, the spice for delivery in April traded lower by Rs 5.80, or 0.68%, to Rs 838 per kg in 384 lots.

Market analysts said offloading of positions by participants due to a weak trend at spot market on subdued demand, mainly put pressure on cardamom prices at futures trade.

Coriander down 1.5% on profit-booking



[Coriander](#) prices fell by 1.58% to Rs 9,329 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators booked profits at existing higher levels amid fall in demand at spot markets.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, coriander prices for delivery in May fell by Rs 150, or 1.58%, to Rs 9,329 per quintal with open interest of 40,890 lots.

The price for April delivery declined by Rs 138, or 1.49% to Rs 9,154 per quintal with open interest of 34,050 lots.

Market analysts said besides profit-booking by speculators at existing higher levels, sluggish demand in the spot market led to the fall in coriander futures prices.

Potato up 1.3% on spot demand



[Potato](#) prices edged higher by 1.39% to Rs 1,236 per quintal in futures market today as speculators increased their positions supported by a firming trend at spot markets on rising demand.

At the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), potato for delivery in April surged by Rs 17, or 1.39%, to Rs 1,236 per quintal with a business turnover of 54 lots.

Potato prices for delivery in March also jumped up by Rs 14.80, or 1.23%, to Rs 1,215 per quintal, with trading volume of 13 lots.

Analysts said improved demand against restricted arrivals from producing regions mainly supported the upside in potato prices at futures trade.
