

THE HINDU

When paddy fails, millet wins



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Janaki is among a group of 15 farmers in Vinayagampet village in Mannadipet commune in Puducherry, who have taken up millets cultivation, after years of dealing with the highs and lows of paddy farming.

Vinayagampet, which has 409 families, was adopted by the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in October last year as a pilot project under its ‘Biovillage Programme.’ The promotion of small millets is a component under this programme. The programme also encourages sustainable practices in dairy farming, floriculture, cultivation of pulses, mushroom and fodder, using bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides.

Like many other villages surrounding Puducherry, agriculture was on the decline in Vinayagampet, with the young leaving to the towns and cities for employment. The Biovillage Programme here has helped revive the cultivation of what used to be a staple of this region, the Foxtail millet (thinai in Tamil) and other small millets. The current project involves 15 farmers with around 16 acres, and in their maiden harvest they have produced around 10,000 kilograms. The farmers have been using an

organic fertiliser mixture.

“The production of millets requires only one tenth of water needed for paddy, which I was sowing earlier,” says Bhoopathy, one of the farmers in the project. Subramaninan, another farmer, adds, “I spent Rs.5000 on farm inputs and got 1000 kg. For the same area, I had spent up to Rs.20,000 for paddy earlier. Paddy also requires a good quantity of urea fertiliser. My profits have certainly doubled.”

Farmers have also noticed fewer instances of pest attacks. “The millets have, in fact, attracted some sparrows and parrots which have not been seen in a while,” says Shanmugam, Janaki’s husband. P. Santamurthy, training coordinator and C. Devaraj, a former agricultural officer, who have been helping the farmers in the project, say that growing awareness of health benefits of millets has helped fetch good prices for the farmers, of around Rs2800 for 100 kilograms.

The Biovillage Programme by MSSRF which was initiated in Puducherry in 1991 is now present in seven States across India. The programme follows a human centred model of development which has a holistic approach, says Dr. Vidyaa Ramkumar, Project Coordinator, Biovillage Resource Centre, Pillaiyarkuppam.

Different components of the programme include community administration with representation of women and scheduled castes, health and sanitation, education and a Village Knowledge Centre for information dissemination, says Ms. Ramkumar. Rain water harvesting, biogas and waste management are promoted. Farmers are given training and taken on exposure visits. Agriculture and animal clinics are other components in the programme, apart from civic components like renovation of the local temple, building community toilets and installing street lights.

College develops device for transplantation of paddy seedlings



The Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute has designed a farmer-friendly PVC marker for transplanting nurseries in place of the conventional heavy iron roller marker. The PVC marker is important farm application, particularly for those who adopt the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method. The PVC marker contains a set of three PVC pipes attached to one another and can be rolled in the fields for making the markings. The labourers can immediately transplant the nurseries by identifying the markings.

The main advantage of the PVC marker is that the markings are quite visible even in damp soil where water is stagnant. The markings would not be so distinct in the conventional iron rollers, said G.Kathiresan, professor and head, Department of Agricultural Sciences of the college. The new equipment needs less manpower for transplanting the nurseries. Just eight workers would be needed for an acre against 18 workers under the old method. The new roller costs just Rs.200 against the Rs.1,100 for iron markers.

With a view to popularise the new marker among farmers, a demonstration programme was organised on the college premises recently in which farmers from Pullampadi and Lalgudi blocks took part. Manivannan, Assistant Director of Agriculture, appealed to the farmers to make the most of the device.

Turmeric fetches good price at auction

FESTIVAL TIME FOR TURMERIC FARMERS



- Turmeric auction fetches Rs. 70 lakh to farmers on a single day
- Traders from Erode, Rasipuram, Salem and Namagiripettai participated in the auction
- The Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers Cooperative Marketing Society disbursed the payment to the farmers instantly
- Copra auction at the Mallasamuthiram branch fetched Rs. six lakh

The regular auction of turmeric at the Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers Cooperative Marketing Society registered a new high with 1,800 quintals of turmeric auctioned for Rs. 70 lakh on a single day on Saturday.

More than the reasonable price fetched at the auction, what brought much joy to the farmers is the decision of the society to disburse the money to the farmers instantly itself taking the festival season into consideration.

The farmers of Attur, Gengavalli, Koogaiyur, Harur, Bommidi, Jaderpalayam, Paramathi Velur, Mettur, Poolampatti, Namakkal etc brought their produce to the Tiruchengode society for action.

More than 25 traders from Erode, Rasipuram, Managiripettai, Salem etc participated in the auctioning.

While a quintal of 'Virali' turmeric variety was auctioned for a price ranging between Rs. 5,649 and Rs. 8,150; the 'Kizhangu' variety fetched between Rs. 4,798 and Rs. 6,389 and 'Panangali' variety between Rs. 8,500 and Rs. 11,809.

The farmers are happy that they got Rs. 500 more per quintal at the Tiruchengode society, compared to Erode Market, a major market for turmeric in the State.

Similarly, Rs. 6 lakh worth copra was auctioned at Mallasamuthiram branch of the Tiruchengode society.

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Good demand for hybrid coconut seedlings



Good yield and manageable height of trees has turned the attention of farmers to hybrid coconut cultivation in Vellore district.

Officials said there is good demand for these hybrid coconut seedlings, particularly the tall x dwarf crossing variety. “This year, the Agriculture Department is planning to distribute 1.6 lakh seedlings of the tall x dwarf cross variety, 3,000 seedlings of dwarf x tall variety, 7,500 seedlings of the Chowghat Orange variety and 15,000 seedlings of tall varieties to the farmers,” R. Jayasundar, joint director, Agriculture, Vellore, said.

With the hybrid varieties being cultivated for several years, the area of cultivation of coconut trees has increased in the district.

In tall x dwarf, hybridisation technique involves crossing a tall coconut variety with a dwarf variety. “This way, the height of the tree is medium — about 30 to 40 feet. It makes climbing easy a normal coconut tree grows at least double this height,” he said.

Cultivating the hybrid varieties requires less manpower and is a boon to the farmers. At the Government Coconut Hybrid Seed Farm, Navlock, tree climbers do the crossing manually.

It involves a process called emasculation in which the male flowers are removed from the female parent tree in the flowering stage. In the tall x dwarf crossing, the tall tree is the female parent tree. The female flowers are covered with bags.

“The pollen is collected from the male parent tree (dwarf), dried, powdered and stored two days before pollination. Fifteen days after removing the male flowers from the female parent tree, the climbers will take up pollen dusting on the female flowers,” A. Leelavathi, Crossing Agriculture Officer at the farm explained.

The female flowers have a honey dew secretion. They are receptive during the early morning hours and pollen dusting is done then.

It takes a year to harvest seed nuts from the trees. These nuts undergo air curing till the husk becomes dry. They are then arranged in sand beds and later raised in nursery. The seedlings are certified for distribution after six months.

“Climbing tall coconut trees to pluck coconuts is an impossible task nowadays owing to the lack of adequate climbers. While the normal trees take seven to eight years for flowering, the cross varieties start bearing flowers in four years. This is a huge advantage to the farmers,” an official said.

With Vellore being a dry region, the tall x dwarf variety can easily survive and withstand drought to a good extent, officials said.

Rain helps farmers begin preliminary farm work

Slight and intermittent showers ensured pleasant weather in the city on Thursday.

The rain, which resumed after a respite for about couple of days ahead of Deepavali, resumed on Wednesday evening.

Though the rain has still not been adequate to begin agriculture operations in rain-fed areas, farmers said preliminary works such as preparation of the field could be taken up utilising the showers.

Thenparanadu recorded the maximum of 17 mm of rainfall during the 24-hour period ending at 8.30 a.m. on Thursday. The following is the chief amount of rainfall recorded in other parts of the district (in mm): Tiruchi

Airport 9; Thuvakudi 8; Pullampadi and Golden Rock 7.40, and Kuppampatti 7.

Coconut prices hit an all-time high in Tiruchi



Prices of coconuts have skyrocketed in Tiruchi due to fall in arrivals at the market.

The price of a good quality (above average size) nut was Rs.28 in the retail market on the day before Deepavali.

Though high demand for coconuts on account of festivals such as Deepavali, *Gowri Nonbu*, and new account opening day by a section of north Indian businessmen are cited as temporary and secondary reasons, traders cite low production due to continuous drought as the primary reason for the high price .

Market sources said that arrivals have gone down by 60 to 70 per cent at the Gandhi Market, which catered to the need of places in and around Tiruchi city. As against the normal requirement of about 1 lakh coconuts, the market has been receiving about 70,000 nuts during the last few weeks. Demand has almost doubled due to heavy buying on account of the festival season. However, despite their best efforts, traders couldn't get more than one lakh coconuts from Peravurani and Cumbum in the days prior to the festival, leading to a spurt in retail prices.

"I shelled out Rs.28 per unit of coconut on Wednesday. Though the coconut prices were ruling high during the past few weeks, I have never

brought a coconut for such a high price,” said a homemaker in Cantonment.

There was no real change in the prices of the nut even after Deepavali. In the Gandhi market, a big-sized coconut was priced anywhere between Rs.20 and Rs.25, while an average-sized nut cost between Rs.15 and 20. The customers, who bought the coconuts at grocery and retail vegetable shops, had to shell out at least Rs. 4 more than the Gandhi Market price.

While agreeing that the prices of coconut had shot up to an all-time high, A.Ugin, a wholesale trader at Gandhi Market, said that it was due to a variety of reasons. The ongoing rain was the temporary reason for the dwindling arrival as the farmers and merchants couldn't remove the husk. The market had not been oversupplied during the last six months. Price rise was primarily due to the heavy drought during the last three years in the procurement centres such as Peravurani and Cumbum, which are the main supplying centres to Tiruchi market.

He said that the price would stabilise in the weeks to come. However, it would again shoot up from December due to the Sabarimala season.

Promoting cutting-edge bamboo technology

Here is a plant species to bamboozle you.

Hailed as among the fastest-growing plants on the planet, the bamboo is eco-friendly and simultaneously endowed with a tensile strength mightier than steel. The bamboo also provides fibre for fabric and its reeds evoke soulful music while its shoots are popular health food.

“We’ve more than a hundred products derived from bamboo,” says Elumalai S, one of the key members of the Auroville Bamboo Research Centre, or simply the ABC team at Auroville.

Founded in 2009, the ABRC’s vision statement is to turn into a global research institution for cutting-edge bamboo products and technology.

Cultivation strategies are in the works to experiment with different species of bamboo and understand the intricacies of the bamboo life cycle.

The ABRC also conducts research in an effort to expand the centre's product line, including the development of new styles of furniture and buildings.

"A recent spinoff of research with bamboo is the bamboo charcoal soap," says Elimalai.

The soap is one of the most popular bamboo products on the ABRC showcase which boasts of bamboo giraffes and elephant toys for children, flutes and dress materials.

The team even put on display the prototype of a bamboo bicycle during last month's World Bamboo Day celebrations.

ABRC's partnership with sister concern the Lively Boutique has created a diverse line of bamboo utilities — dinette sets, lounge chairs and couches, lampshades, flower vases and serving trays. Auroville already has a thriving bamboo jewellery line featuring earrings and necklaces since 2010.

"The entire bamboo cottage industry is driven by local villagers," says an ARBC coordinator.

About 45 villagers, including 20 women, are engaged in making bamboo products.

With Auroville currently having only a few acres (between 2 to 5 acres) of bamboo cultivation, the team sources raw materials from farmers in nearby villages.

ABRC initiative

In fact, one of the major initiatives undertaken at the ABRC is spreading awareness about the commercial potential of bamboo cultivation among the farmer community.

"As part of a tie-up with the Tamil Nadu government, we encourage farmers to turn to bamboo cultivation. As a fast growing grass, the yield starts to come in after five years," a coordinator said. And, with an eye on

building a bamboo-friendly future generation, the team also focuses on creating awareness among school children. On most weeks, batches of school children arrive at Auroville for field trips on the bamboo experience.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Chop and shop: online veg shopping gets easier

BANGALORE/MUMBAI, OCTOBER 23:

From offering cut vegetables to using ozone technology in cleaning greens, ensuring minimal human intervention while packaging to express deliveries, online retailers are innovating to reach increasingly harried consumers.

Bigbasket.com has recently introduced cut vegetables as part of its product offerings. The veggies are cleaned using ozone technology that removes not only the dirt but also residual pesticides and micro-organisms. The vegetables are then cut and sliced and packed using machines developed by the Mysore-based Central Food Technological Research Institute .

Nutrition factor

Enthused by the response, *Bigbasket* now plans to sell whole vegetables and fruits that are ozonated, and is installing machines for this at its centralised warehouses in Bangalore, Mumbai and Hyderabad. Similarly, *vegwala.com*, which operates largely in East Bangalore, is selling assorted veggies in a box that takes care of a family's weekly nutritional requirements. *Vegwala* offers free delivery and there's no minimum quantity for an order. *Tradus.com* too is betting on faster deliveries. From building a marketplace model to carving out differentiated product offerings, online retailers are constantly innovating as more people log on to the Net to source their daily bread, cheese, veggies and fruits. The brands, on their part, are looking for brand stickiness and modifying their offering as online grocery shopping picks up pace.

“Fresh products now account for about 20 per cent of our business and this is growing at a healthy 30-40 per cent every quarter,” said Vipul Parekh, CFO and marketing head at *Bigbasket.com*.

It is easy to start, but difficult to scale and sustain, Parekh says, adding that the company has been focussing on value addition and expanding its product range. *Bigbasket* has streamlined its sourcing of perishables through a chain of suppliers as part of its backward linkage. “If you offer better quality products, customers will stay with you,” said Parekh, adding that customer retention at *Bigbasket* is very high at 60 per cent.

Rajiv Tevitiya, Founder, Greencart Ventures, says: “The backward linkage of a farmers’ network gives us a huge sourcing advantage. Besides, we also grade our products on quality and offer consumers a choice”.

The angel-funded company said that 75-80 per cent of its orders were repeat buys, with the minimum order standing at ₹400.

The fresh produce market in India is estimated at \$20 billion a year, and is dominated by the unorganised sector. This sector is witnessing a marked transformation. More and more consumers are becoming conscious of quality, looking for standardisation of products and beginning to enjoy the convenience of online shopping.

“We have used the inputs of a nutritionist in designing boxes that take care of a family’s nutritional requirements,” says *Vegwala’s* Santosh Patil, a techie turned online veggie retailer, who’s looking to expand to other parts of Bangalore.

Quality levels

The proliferation of online retailers seemed to have also raised the quality levels as the produce sold through online platforms is largely graded at the farm level.

“In addition to the guaranteed freshness, almost all our fruits and vegetables are graded as export quality, premium or standard, etc. This helps the consumers understand the difference across products in the same category. Accurate grading helps consumers to derive full value from their purchase,” adds Tevitiya.

Greencart offers a wide range of products, including exotic items such as asparagus, blueberries and kumquat nagamis (a SE Asian fruit), apart from domestic fruits and vegetables, international and gourmet food items, groceries and imported packaged food, and oils and vinegars, among others.

According to a US Department of Agriculture report the number of online food and grocery retail outlets has increased to 44 so far this year from 14 in 2013, with growing Internet users in the country.

Domestic products dominate but most retailers carry some imported items. Given the complexity of importing food products, the retailers currently rely on local distributors, it said.

AaramShop, meanwhile, is working on a marketplace model where it ties up with FMCG companies and local retailers.

“Neighbourhood stores also have good discounts but the shopping experience is not particularly enjoyable. We have developed a mobile app that will give you the best deals of all the retailers near your home, thereby offering the best shopping experience,” Vijay Singh, Founder, *AaramShop* said.

Localbanya too has tied up with a slew of local sellers.

The company said that order can be fulfilled in a matter of hours. The company has a warehouse in Goregaon, in Mumbai, and buys products in bulk.

McLeod to buy Rwandan tea estate for \$19.5 m

McLeod Russel India Ltd is set to acquire a Rwandan tea plantation, the biggest one in the African nation that produces 2.45 million kg of CTC tea a year, for \$19.5 million.

Borelli Tea Holdings Ltd, the wholly owned subsidiary of the McLeod, will buyout LAB International Ltd of UK, which has 90 per cent stake in the plantation firm Pfunda Tea Company SARL.

The remaining 10 per cent stake will be with farmers and workers’ cooperative, said a top official of the company.

Pfunda owns and operates the tea estates at Gisenyi in Western Province of the central African nation.

The plantation is at an altitude of between 1,700 and 3,100 metres.

Pfunda's geographical position enables it to produce some of the finest CTC teas in Africa. The BM Khaitan family-owned McLeod Russel, the largest tea planter of the world, has a tea estate through Gisovu Tea Co.

After the acquisition of Pfunda, McLeod Russel will account for around 25 per cent of the Rwanda's tea production.

McLeod Russel already has interests in the tea sector in Africa through the purchase of Rwenzori Tea Investments for \$25 million (Rs 117 crore) in 2009.

The Ugandan plantation was bought from UK's James Finlay Ltd and James Finlay International Holdings.

Met Dept puts out cyclone watch in Arabian Sea

The India Meteorological Department has declared a cyclone watch in the Arabian Sea as a well-marked low-pressure area in the South-East awaited calibration into a monsoon depression by Friday.

There is emerging unanimity in model projections that the depression could spin up into a powerful cyclone and approach the Oman coast, but only just.

U-turn likely

What the cyclone would do is pause briefly menacingly off Oman, only to take a U-turn over the north-east Arabian Sea and take aim towards the south-west Gujarat coast.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts was the first to suggest this track, picked up later by the Global Forecast System of the US National Centres for Environmental Prediction.

They are now being joined by a bevy of other models suggesting that a powerful cyclone could strike the Jamnagar-Porbandar-Amreli-Bhavnagar-Bharuch-Surat belt around October 29-30.

The European Centre sees the anticipated arrival of the western

disturbance, transiting the Arabian Gulf en route to India, as the game-changer.

Moving east

It would stop the cyclone on its track, scoop it up, and fix it to its underbelly in a mid-air operation over mid-northeast Arabian Sea.

The caravan would keep moving east, and it will be a matter of time before the cyclone touches ground and erupts in a landfall over Gujarat.

It is not as if India Met Department is not aware. The wind field profile projections associated with the cyclone as depicted by it suggests a similar track for the cyclone.

The Met too has factored in the arrival of the western disturbance, which would use the 'long handle' to bring the cyclonic system under its control.

Once this happens, the cyclone can move only where the westerly system would take it. It is east-bound towards India, and hence the possibility of the cyclone being yanked towards Gujarat, the nearest coast.

Heavy rain

But the Met shows the cyclone still embedded within the western disturbance by October 30, and lying over the northeast Arabian Sea, equidistant from Oman and Gujarat coasts.

Meanwhile, parts of coastal and south Tamil Nadu and adjoining Kerala have received heavy to very heavy rainfall during the 24 hours ending on Thursday morning.

The south-west Bay of Bengal off the Sri Lanka coast has come to life thanks to the presence of an upper air cyclonic circulation.

Satellite pictures in the evening showed that convective (rain-generating) clouds had massed up along the Kerala coast as well as Chennai and Nagapattinam on the Tamil Nadu coast.

How commodity bourses can survive

In commodity, like any other trading one does not mind paying a transaction fee as long as profits are made. However, once an entity starts making losses, the concern on the high transaction fee becomes multi-fold.

On the other hand, when commodity exchanges start making losses, they may be forced to increase transaction fee camouflaged under some other name to boost the revenue. This often causes narrowing of participation and alienation of new participation on the exchange platform.

Comexes, which till a few years ago were embarking on global ambitions, are now struggling for survival. Of the first three national exchanges that were granted license, one continues to make profit due to low cost of operation, the other is showing signs of operating losses while the third continues to struggle.

Of the three new exchanges that were granted licences, two have already closed down. The other is on the verge of closure unless it is merged with the most profitable exchange in future, considering that a common group of shareholder have significant minority stake in both. Since its inception, Indian commodity futures market had pursued a cash-carry arbitrage model for agricultural commodities and momentum trading for the globally-linked commodities. With markets maturing, the cash-carry arbitrage has shrunk for agricultural commodities and with global commodity market entering a bearish phase, participation has become a casualty on exchange that has global commodity linkage.

The exchange which has kept costs under control still has a fair chance of survival, whereas the other with high manpower and outsourced technology cost is limping for operating profit.

These developments throw a very important question - what happens to shareholders' value in these "financial infrastructures" of the country. Doesn't it mean that erosion of the value of exchanges is causing an erosion of shareholders' value? Is it not a provocation enough for those governing exchanges to do a deeper soul searching for the revival?

While some PE investors as shareholders of exchanges maybe demanding active performance improvement from the management, they are often short of foresight, vision and definitive roadmap to revive the exchange as governors.

In such situations, it is important that the corporate and shareholder governors of the exchanges are actively engaged by the regulators and the Ministry for its survival plans.

However, the buck should not stop with mere profitability plans for commodity exchange's survival. The larger objective of the commodity exchanges are to strengthen the price discovery mechanism and risk management for commodities in the economy for which the futures trading were allowed in the middle of last decade.

If the exchanges are to be taken more seriously by the policymakers, over the next few years those governing the exchanges have to be more contributory to the broader economic objective, similar to what Leo Melamed had done to CME in the seventies.

To inject more liquidity, commodity market regulator raises position cap

Commodity markets regulator Forward Markets Commission (FMC) has decided to allow hedgers, brokers and investors to take higher positions in futures contracts as part of its efforts to ensure more liquidity in the market.

In order to usher in more transparency in the market, the commission has asked the exchanges to display details of top traders on their websites. The revised norms, issued on Wednesday, have come into effect immediately.

A hedger, who deposits his/her commodity early or pays in early, is exempted from consideration of position limits. Also, if a person hedging on the commodity exchange has positions that will square off his or her exposure, then it will be considered as not having any position limit. In short, this means a trader who could have a buy contract for a particular month and a sell contract of the same quality for another month will be

treated as having zero position.

For considering position limit, an investor's position will be taken in net and that of a broker in gross. For agricultural produce, the overall position in each exchange will be capped at 50 per cent of the estimated production and imports. The estimates will be derived from agencies and government departments.

The FMC has also doubled the position limit for brokers to 10 times of their clients' position limit or 20 per cent of the open interest position across the market, whichever is higher.

Client level position for agricultural produce will be one per cent of the estimated production plus import. The decision on clients' position will be taken from time to time, including a five per cent limit of the open interest across the market.

Again with regard to farm produce, the client position for a contract nearing delivery will be 50 per cent of his/her overall position in agricultural commodities.

Near-month limit will be reviewed after six months to ensure that it moves to 100 per cent of overall position limits along with growth of liquidity and volume. The FMC will decide on this on a year-to-year basis and display it on the exchanges' website regularly.

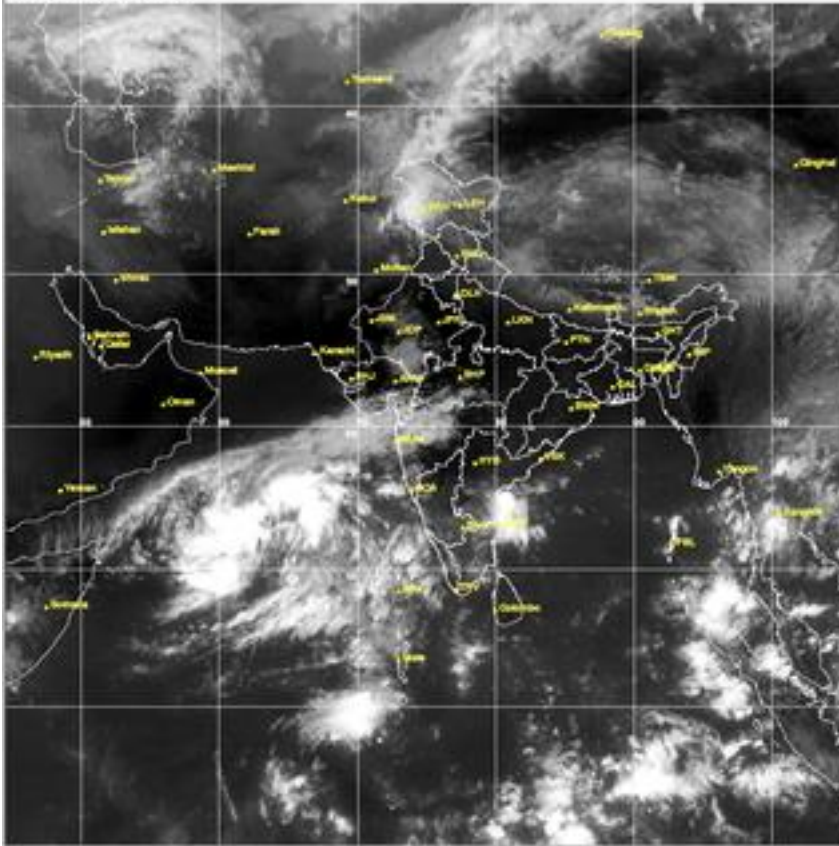
The disclosure on top 10 traders besides the pay-in and pay-out details of the top 10 should be made 10 days after the completion of the settlement, the FMC said.

Exchanges have also been directed to disclose the open interest of top 10 trading clients on buy and sell side without disclosing their names. They have also been asked to give details of the pay-in and pay-out of commodities made by top 10 clients including hedgers on their website 10 days after completion of settlement.

Gujarat is likely target for powerful cyclone, say weather models



TIR Linear Stretch 1.0%



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, OCT 24:

The very large and 'well-marked' area of low pressure in the southeast and east-central Arabian Sea has become a bit disorganised, says the latest US Naval Observatory model update.

Weak and fragmented convective banding broadly wrapped into the system with a weaker low-level circulation centre (storm centre), the US update said.

Extends window

Located 1,277 km southwest of Mumbai, it represented a poorly defined system but not entirely without the attributes needed for steady intensification.

Back home, India Met Department seemed to concur this morning and extended the window for strengthening of the system as a depression by another day to tomorrow.

Significantly, it said that the depression would move 'initially' to the northwest and subsequently may intensify into a cyclonic storm.

This would go to suggest that the Met suspects, as do global peer models, that the prospective cyclone could deviate from its northwest track towards Yemen-Oman.

Target Gujarat?

An emerging consensus tends to suggest that the storm would be forced to make a detour to the east-northeast under the influence of an overarching western disturbance.

Western disturbances transit from west to east over the northern latitudes and pass over the Arabian Gulf en route to northwest India and east and northeast India.

The cyclonic storm would be picked up off the Oman coast by a transiting westerly wave, to be deposited over Gujarat coast by October-end.

Wind field projections by India Met too now suggest that the cyclone could hit northwest Gujarat coast by October 30-31.

Lately, other models are also pointing to Bhuj in northwest Gujarat as a likely landfall area. Earlier, some had suggested the Porbandar-Surat coastline in southwest Gujarat.

Strong cyclone

Still, there are a few among them which continue to indicate that the storm would not take the detour and instead head straight towards either Yemen or Oman.

But these are in a minority. Two facts about which the models are unanimous are that (i) the cyclone would be a powerful one that matches

Hudhud that had hit the Gujarat coast on October 12 and (ii) the cyclone would make a detour off the Oman coast, meaning that the Arabian Gulf sultanate would bear some brunt of the storm (iii) the most likely area of landfall could be northwest Gujarat.

Meanwhile, many parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu continued to receive heavy to very showers during the last 24 hours ending this morning.

These two States have received surplus rainfall until now during the northeast monsoon, while the rest of the peninsula is in deficit.

India's first fish hospital to come up in Kolkata

KOLKATA, OCT 24:

The country's first hospital to treat abnormalities and diseases in fish is set to come up in Kolkata by mid-2015.

Senior scientist T J Abraham, who is spearheading the project, told PTI that the work has already started on the project.

He said that nearly 60-65 kinds of disease and abnormality were found in fish in India and one reason why West Bengal slipped from the number one position in fish production was due to the fact that 10-20 per cent of them died of diseases.

"Such hospitals are quite common in foreign countries," Abraham, a senior fish microbiologist with the West Bengal University of Animal and Fishery Sciences, said.

The institute will not only help fish farmers increase yield by reducing the number of fish deaths, but will also ensure that people will consume healthy fish, he pointed out.

According to Abraham, the hospital will have 50 glass aquariums, 25 circular water tanks, each with a capacity of 500 litres, to admit and treat diseased fish.

The hospital will also have a separate well-equipped pathological lab to diagnose various fish diseases.

Asked when fish growers should approach the hospital, he said, "In such cases as abnormality, sudden death, change in colour or drastic reduction of weight, they may either contact the hospital or visit it with fish and water samples."

He said that the diseased fish would be kept in aquariums for observation and after ascertaining the disease/abnormality, medicines and tips would be provided to the growers.

The fish hospital, which is funded by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, under the Union Ministry of Agriculture, will be set up at a cost of Rs. five crore.

"Nearly Rs. 1.7 crore will be spent on hospital construction and the rest on creating infrastructure and lab facilities," Abraham said.

Apart from Abraham, who is heading the project, there will be another scientist and both will be assisted by 4-6 research scholars initially.

Abraham said that the hospital would document the diseases affecting fish in Bengal, which will be forwarded to the World Animal Health Organisation, Paris, of which India is a member.

Business Standard

Adverse market conditions forcing closure of oilseed crushers



The [oilseed crushing industry](#) is going through a rough patch, with 20-25 per cent of the units having shut down in the past two years, say observers. Those who continue are operating much below capacity. "Many crushers have shut on a permanent basis due to low-to-nil margins in the business. Also, low availability of soybean for crushing," said Sandeep Bajoria, past president of the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA). Two years earlier, India's crushing capacity was 33 million tonnes a year. It is now estimated at 25 mt, with about 40 per cent of the capacity in use. Quite a few crushers are looking for avenues to exit the business. Others have switched to import of edible oils. "It is not a profitable business any more. Also, adulteration has had an adverse impact on serious players," said Rajesh Agarwal, coordinator at the Soybean Processors' Association. There is also rising imports. Refiners prefer to import crude [palm oil](#) from Malaysia and Indonesia (the two countries' combined produce is 85 per cent of global production), finding this cheaper than local crushing. Production is also rising in both these countries, leading to a glut at times. Malaysia's January-June output this year was about eight per cent more than last year, at about 9.1 mt. Indonesia's estimate is 6.3 per cent more, to about 29.5 mt for the entire year. "Crushers have shut down over the years due to the low margins and financial losses. Many are even looking to get acquired," said B V Mehta, secretary general of SEA.

[Govt to aid coffee growers in fight against pest attacks](#)



The [commerce ministry](#) is waking up to [white stem borer](#) (WSB) pest attacks, which hits arabica [coffee production](#) year after year. The ministry has decided to set up an experts committee to help find a solution on the problem. Earlier this week, Commerce Minister [Nirmala Sitharaman](#) assured growers that concerted efforts would be made to find a solution to the problem. She said the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) was being involved to help identify experts in this regard. "At the moment, I am searching for a solution... We are forming a small group, with participants from the planters and industry, to understand the problem. With the help of ICAR, we will identify domain experts and give them a time-frame later. Before the next crop, they should at least give us the prevailing knowledge in this area and share it with growers," Sitharaman said. She added arabica was very unique to India, as was the WSB problem. Growers in other countries weren't adversely affected because they were growing the robusta variety, she said. "Arabica has its own excellent value. We will look at it from the point of view of how to sustain and allow it to flourish," she said. Through the years, widespread WSB attacks have led to planters in south India rapidly shifting from arabica to robusta plantation. Of the overall coffee acreage, 73 per cent was accounted for by arabica in 1950-51 (67,613 hectares out of 92,523 hectares); in 2012-13, this fell to 49.5 per cent (205,775 hectares out of 415,341 hectares). In 1950-51, arabica accounted for 15,511 tonnes of the overall coffee production of 18,893 tonnes; in 2013-14, it stood at 102,200 tonnes of the total production of 304,500 tonnes.

ARABICA-ROBUSTA TREND

| | ARABICA | | ROBUSTA | |
|---------|--------------------|------|--------------------|------|
| | Area (ha) | %* | Area (ha) | %* |
| 1950-51 | 67,613 | 73.1 | 24,910 | 26.9 |
| 2012-13 | 205,775 | 49.5 | 209,566 | 50.5 |
| | Production (tonne) | %** | Production (tonne) | %** |
| 1950-51 | 15,511 | 82.1 | 3,382 | 17.9 |
| 2013-14 | 102,200 | 33.6 | 202,300 | 66.4 |

* of total area under production; ** of total output

Source: Coffee Board

"The rapid pace at which arabica is being taken over by robusta will continue unless there is some drastic and decisive intervention. This is important, as traditional [arabica coffee](#) cultivation practices have ensured protection of biodiversity and ecosystem in the ecologically sensitive Western and Eastern Ghats. This needs to be reinstated through an adequate incentive mechanism," said Vijayan Rajes, president, United Planters' Association of Southern India.

The severity of WSB attacks has been such that many estates have resorted to uprooting arabica plants to avoid further damage. It is said the dry weather between October 2013 and April this year, as well as the high temperatures during the summer, aided the WSB attacks.

Rajes said it took five-six years to bring coffee estates hit by WSB back to shape. As growers required substantial capital for this, special packages should be provided for replanting and infilling, distinct from the current replanting scheme, he added.

DECCAN Chronicle

Wells to manage floods



Chennai: The state government has asked the Chennai corporation to capitalise on the ongoing monsoon by identifying the hot spots that are prone to flooding and explore the idea of establishing wells.

The newly dug up wells will enhance the capacity to hold storm water in greater Chennai. Under the new cost-effective pilot project, for which documentation has begun, newly dug up wells will come up on identified government and private lands, sources said.

“The corporation has informed that there are about 300 hot spots in Chennai that get inundated and we are exploring other avenues to reduce the stress on the existing storm water drains,” said K Phanindra Reddy, secretary, municipal administration and water supply department.

The engineering and the present design of storm water drains are conducive only for intermittent rains and any downpour beyond 10 cm plays havoc, affecting the roads. The documentation will get compiled by the end of December and the officials will have about eight months to execute the initiative in a phased manner. The proposed new wells will be properly covered and will enhance the storm water holding capacity, leaving the surplus to drain into the canals.

The project will help reduce the wear and tear of roads, increase the groundwater table and also enhance the efficiency of drains, the official said. “This is a welcome move and the option of going for new wells will have many advantages for a congested city like Chennai,” said Mr S. Santhanam, former chief urban planner of CMDA.

The Saidapet Karaneeswarar temple tank is now full due to storm water collection. More such tanks and wells are the need of the hour, he added.

“The corporation data base had over 60,000 wells within city, and later, with the real estate picking up, the wells were closed down. The revival of wells and shifting back to the traditional system will help,” said a field engineer with corporation. All you have to do is divert funds set aside for drains and can be executed if not interrupted, he said.

Eco-friendly LED lights could be a bigger issue



LED lights are soon replacing CFL lamps. CFL, once considered the most energy-saving forms of electric lightings in homes and outdoors, will soon be on the verge of extinction. Though CFL lamps are power-saving as compared to regular bulbs and tubes, they still have a shorter life and do consume a particular amount of electricity.

To cut down on the power consumption, many companies are now adopting to LED lighting. LEDs have a smaller size, use ridiculously lower amounts of power and more importantly, have a longer life span.

However, though LED lightings at home can save on power, they can be an additional problem when used outdoors.

Scientists in New Zealand have testes the blue-light LED against regular yellow-hued sodium-vapor streetlights to find out that the LED lights are

attracting almost 50% more insects and moths as compared to the regular lights.

These could interfere with the food chain and also draw invasive species such as gypsy moths.

So if you are thinking of using an LED lamp outdoors, we suggest you experiment before you go full scale.



FARMERS STAGE PROTEST AGAINST TARDY PADDY PROCUREMENT

Paddy farmers, supported by Congress activists, on Wednesday burnt the effigy of Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal for alleged tardy paddy procurement by Government agencies and lower prices of basmati crop.

The protesters also staged sit-in outside the main gate of grain market on Phagwara-Hoshiarpur road and raised anti-Government slogans.

Addressing them, Punjab Congress general secretary and former Punjab Minister Joginder Singh Mann alleged that farmers were being given lower prices for basmati crop.

“Basmati crop is selling at just `2,000-`2,500 per quintal while during Congress regime it was fetching `4,500-6,000 per quintal,” he claimed.