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# THE HINDU

## Mission to protect seed sovereignty



In a major initiative to get back the rights of the farmers to cross-pollinate, sell or exchange seeds, the Karnataka chapter of Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch was launched with a network of nearly 600 farmers from across the State on Monday.

The manch intends to bring all seed savers under a platform and help fight for their rights, and help them share conservation techniques. It is part of an all-India network of individuals engaged in conservation, and includes small farmers who practise selection and breeding of new varieties of crops. The office-bearers of the organisation said it would give them a forum to fight for their rights to cultivate, save, cross-breed and sell seeds, which has been appropriated by the companies through Intellectual Property Rights.

The launch coincided with the Badanavalu Satyagraha to highlight the imperatives of pursuing an alternative economic and development model.

G. Krishnaprasad of Sahaja Samruddha, an organisation propagating the concept of seed sovereignty of farmers, told *The Hindu* that the movement gained traction due to growing awareness among farmers.

The decline in farm income, coupled with the growth of agricultural input costs, have brought farmers to the brink, said Mr. Krishnaprasad.

“Seed sovereignty not only encourages farmers to opt for indigenous species or variety of crops but frees them from their dependency on companies and the government for seeds,” said Mr. Krishnaprasad.

Farmers said that cultivating indigenous crops not only eliminates the cost of buying seeds (because they are saved by growers and can be freely used, unlike company seeds which are patented), but reduced the need to use chemical fertilizers extensively.

### **State announces special package for rain-hit areas**



The State government on Monday announced a special package for farmers affected by untimely rain and hailstorm in north Karnataka. In a prolonged debate in the Legislative Council on the issue of crop loss suffered by farmers of eight districts due to unseasonal rain and hailstorm, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said he will shortly announce the package details.

“The crop loss this time is unprecedented and severe. I am waiting for the joint survey report from the agriculture, horticulture and revenue departments to announce the package,” he said.

Revenue Minister V. Srinivas Prasad said the State will also be presenting a memorandum to the Centre urging for a special package for the losses suffered by the farmers, apart from that which is given under the National Disaster Relief Fund and the State Disaster Relief Fund.

He said preliminary reports suggested as many as 14 persons, 90 cattle heads, 774 homes, 55,405.88 hectares of agriculture land and 1,433.85 hectares of horticulture crops have been destroyed. The value of damaged agriculture land, due to heavy rain, is estimated to be Rs. 350 crore. Similarly, the value of horticulture crops lost due to the same rain is Rs. 15 crore.

### **Walkout**

The combined Opposition of the Janata Dal (Secular) and the Bharatiya Janata Party, however, staged a walkout for not waiving loans of farmers who have lost their crops in the heavy rain and hailstorm. However, Mr. Siddaramaiah said it was impossible to waive the loans.

### **Horticulture crops to get a boost with establishment of knowledge centre**



Grape and pomegranate, which are popular horticulture crops of the district, are expected to get a boost with the University of Agriculture Sciences — Dharwad (UAS) setting up an Agriculture Business Export Knowledge Centre at the Agriculture Research Station here.

The centre which was functioning in the UAS, Dharwad, since 2007, will have its operation expanded to the district with an objective to improve the quality of the horticulture produces to international standards in order to increase the export.

N.R. Mamledesai, head of the centre here, told *The Hindu* that the objective is to spread awareness among the farmers to produce quality agricultural products.

“The grape and pomegranate of the district has enormous potential in gaining international reputation. But owing to lack of knowledge the farmers are unable to enhance its quality to meet the exports stands,” Dr. Mamledesai said.

The centre primarily does the job of training and educating the farmers on improving the quality of the crop.

He said that it is crucial to meet the exports standard based on the parameters set up Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), a statutory body that sets parameters for exporting the agriculture products.

“Those farmers who wish to export products should not only meet the parameters but also obtain approval from APEDA either under Good Agriculture Practice system or under organic farming system. The parameters are set based on the quality, size, colour and permissible level of chemical residue in the fruit,” he said.

Dr. Mamledesai said that centre also encourages the formation of farmers produces company which helps in the collection of produces by a single agency for exporting at is difficult for every individual farmer to export the produces.

The formation of the company provides farmers the bargaining power for the produces which multiplies the revenue.

Sharing the experience of Dharwad, Dr. Mamledesai said that with the help of the centre, the prices of mango in the retail market went from Rs. 20/kg to Rs. 110 kg. In Bagalkot district, pomegranate cost increased by Rs. 60, he said.



“I am confident that in Vijayapura also we will give fillip to grape and pomegranate for making farmers earn a higher profit,” he said and added that changes would be visible in next two to three years after the centre begins its operation shortly.

### **Only organic fare at this supermarket**



An exclusive organic supermarket was opened by Agrico, a cooperative agriculture produce marketing society in Kozhikode taluk, near the Urban Agriculture Wholesale Market at Thadampattuthazham on Monday.

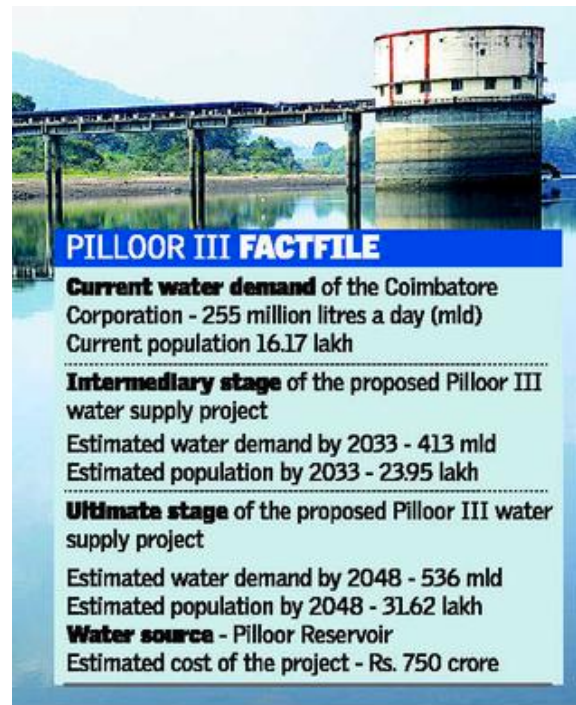
Principal Agriculture Officer K. Ranjini inaugurated the new venture, which was opened with an initial investment of Rs.5 lakh. K.K. Chandrahasan, president of Agrico, presided over the function.

### **Fair price**

Office-bearers of the society said fair price would be the highlight of the venture, which would also fetch its direct benefits to large number of farmers specialised in the sector. “Vegetables will be procured directly from the farmers and supplied at a very reasonable rate,” they added.

Agrico — a society formed with the support of 49 members — will also strive to form a network of organic farmers and ensure regular supply of produce to the supermarket. Office-bearers of the society said they had already given training to several farmers in the city for setting up organic vegetable gardens.

## Pilloor-III will meet water needs up to 2048



Five-hundred-and-thirty-six million litres a day (mld) drinking water is what the city will need in the next couple of decades.

This estimation has come out in study conducted to arrive at the needs for implementing the Coimbatore Corporation's Pilloor III drinking water supply scheme.

The corporation will draw the water from the Pilloor Reservoir to meet the needs of the city, which then will have a population of over 31 lakh people, say sources familiar with the study, which was conducted based on a proposal the corporation made to meet its increasing water needs.

At present the civic body gets over 255 mld from Siruvani, Pilloor II, Kavundampalayam-Vadavalli and Aliyar drinking water schemes.

### Well

To implement the Pilloor III project, the corporation will have to dig intake well in the reservoir, dig a tunnel through the Periyacombai hillock to lay pipeline to take the raw water to a treatment plant in Velliangadu and then

dig another tunnel to lay pipeline across the Kattan hillock to take the treated water to the city.

The treated water will first arrive at a 66 lakh-litre reservoir to be built near Pannimadai and from there reach distribution tanks to be built across the city, the sources say and add that from the treatment plant the water will have to be pumped to the reservoir and from there the distribution will be without pumping by using natural gradient of the terrain.

The study also suggests for not laying pipeline along the Mettupalayam Road as too many water supply pipelines are passing along the road on both sides.

To ensure adequate maintenance the study has suggested an alternative route, the sources say.

To lay the pipeline on the alternative route, build the treatment plant and reservoir the corporation will have to go in for land acquisition, they point and add that it may not be a difficulty as the route suggested has been done taking into account all these factors.

Once the study report is complete, the corporation will take it up with the State Government or any of its funding agency for funds and then implement the project.

### **Tea industry launches pilot scheme with Israeli company to tackle drought**



Drip irrigation technology offered by the Indian subsidiary of an Israeli company was being harnessed on a pilot basis in a few gardens in north and south India amid growing concern over crop loss due to paucity of rainfall.

The Indian tea industry, especially the gardens in the north Indian tea estates in Assam and West Bengal, has suffered two consecutive years of crop loss due to drought like conditions in the first three months of the year. These two States account for 75 per cent of Indian's annual tea output, which averages at around 1,000 million kg.

The impact was severe in 2013, when nearly half the crop (amounting to nearly 20 million kg.) of the first quarter was lost to adverse weather conditions. This year, the impact is perhaps less but "what is worrisome is that it is a decline on a decline.. the trend is persisting and early estimates reveal that over a million tonne has been lost in March 2015 over the same month in 2014," Monojit Dasgupta, Secretary General of the Indian Tea Association, the apex body of the north Indian tea industry told *The Hindu*.

He said that drip irrigation was being tried out on an experimental basis at certain tea estates with different agro-climatic conditions. He said that this was part of ITA's initiative towards establishing sustainable farm practices at the tea gardens. "We have recently associated with the Netherlands (Utrecht) based Solidaridad for this," he said.

The organisation supports a network of nine regional centres, which pioneers, innovates and are transition managers in sustainable farm practices. The thrust really is on water-conservation and water-harvesting, Mr. Dasgupta said, adding that practices such as creation of water bodies, collecting water on roof tops of tea factories and ground water recharging would be addressed.

While the January to March period was not one of high production, but the tea-season commences from March.

And the production of some of the priciest teas commence during this period. Weather uncertainties worry the industry which has tried out methods such as 'canopy irrigation', which often leads to over irrigation of the plant leading to stunting and retarding of the root-system.



## **Promoting indigenous varieties**

Among the farmers who have taken up conservation of indigenous rice on a massive scale is Srinivas of T. Narsipur in Mysuru district.

The seed bank he has built up over the years has 250 indigenous and exotic varieties of rice, some of which are rarely cultivated and hence not available in the market, such as Navara, Rajamudi, Rathnachoodi, Jeerge Sanna, Gandha Saale, and Kerala Sundari.

Welcoming the launch of Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch, Mr. Srinivas said it would not only provide a forum for like-minded farmers to exchange seeds and propagate indigenous varieties of crops, but would encourage them to fight for their rights and prevent them from being appropriated by companies.

Mr. Srinivas, a conservator of indigenous varieties of rice, acquired some of the more exotic species from like-minded farmers in different parts of the country. “I toured parts of India and collected indigenous varieties from local farmers from West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Odisha, apart from Karnataka,” he said. He has improved upon several rice varieties. Not one of the local varieties have failed so far, he claims. “Indigenous variety of crops adapt well to our soil and the yield is good. While the medicinal variety yields about 8 to 10 quintals per acre, the normal variety of rice yields about 16 to 20 quintals per acre,” said Mr. Srinivas. He avoids hi-breed varieties patented by companies.

## **Sugar industry crisis hits farmers hard**



The area under sugarcane cultivation is expected to shrink substantially in Erode district during 2015-16 to 19,000 hectares from over 22,000 hectares last year.

Due to the crisis confronting the sugar industry caused by the Centre's pricing policy, the area under sugarcane cultivation fell to 3.5 lakh acres during 2014-15 from five lakh acres in the previous year.

Both the mills and the farmers in the country have been subjected to sufferings due to the downslide in the wholesale price of sugar in the open market that now rules at Rs. 24 per kg.

But, the situation in Tamil Nadu is precarious due to levy of purchase tax, due to which surplus sugar is reportedly dumped from neighbouring Karnataka.

Mills in Tamil Nadu that owe farmers Rs. 600 crore dues have apparently chosen not to comply with the State Administered Price.

In addition to the Fair and Remunerative Price of Rs. 2,200 per quintal fixed by the Centre, Tamil Nadu has fixed the State Advisory Price at Rs. 350 per quintal.

But, unlike other States in the country, Tamil Nadu Government has not enforced the SAP. The approach of the State Government that professes support to farmers is confounding, the cultivators complain.

For the last two years, the State Government has not convened tripartite meetings involving representatives of mills and farmers for fixing or enforcing SAP.

“Mills have the luxury of enjoying profits when the situations are conducive and passing on losses to the farmers by withholding payment of dues at times of crisis. It is always the farmers who are at the receiving end,” says K.V. Ponnaiyan, president of Tamil Nadu Swadeshi Farmers' Association.

The farmers have called for a multi-pronged strategy by the Central Government to address the glut situation caused by easing import restrictions despite accumulation of surplus production.

Against the requirement of 230 lakh tonnes, India's sugar production has been 250 lakh tonnes in the last four years. Despite there being an accumulation of 80 lakh tonnes, sugar is freely imported at cheaper costs.

The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices determines the remunerative price for sugarcane based on the base price of Rs. 32 per kg sugar.

The Central Government has subjected the farmers to sufferings by subjecting sugar price to vagaries of globalisation. There is no reason why the Centre should hesitate to emulate the practice in USA where the Government fixes the cost of both sugarcane and sugar, Mr. Ponnaiyan explains.

Sugarcane farmers will be doomed if the Centre fails to take decisive actions by way of calibrating import duty to suit domestic production on the one hand, and prevailing upon mills across the country to settle the Rs. 20,000 crore of dues to farmers on the other.

“The Centre has the option of extending financial assistance as soft loans to the mills out of the Sugar Development Fund for settling the dues of farmers. Making farmers alone the ultimate sufferers in the crisis situation is outrageous,” Mr. Ponnaiyan says.



[Broccoli might save you from oral cancer](#)



A [\*new\*](#) therapy containing broccoli sprout extract has been found to protect not only mice against oral cancer but also tolerable in a small group of healthy [\*human\*](#) volunteers, says a new study.

“People who are cured of head and neck cancer are still at very high risk for a second cancer in their mouth or throat, and, unfortunately, these second cancers are commonly fatal,” explained lead author Julie Bauman from University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute in the US.

“So we are developing a safe, natural molecule found in cruciferous vegetables to protect the oral lining, where these cancers form,” Bauman noted.

Previous studies have shown that cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage and garden cress — which have a high concentration of sulforaphane — help mitigate the effects of environmental carcinogens.

For the new study, mice predisposed to oral cancer were given sulforaphane for several months and the team found that it significantly reduced the incidence and number of tumours.

The researchers then treated 10 healthy human volunteers with fruit juice mixed with sulforaphane-rich broccoli sprout extract.



The volunteers had no ill-effects from the extract and protective changes were detectable in the lining of their mouths, meaning it was absorbed and directed to at-risk tissue.

The researchers now plan to conduct a clinical trial that will recruit 40 volunteers, who have been curatively treated for head and neck cancer.

The participants will regularly take capsules containing broccoli seed powder to determine if they can tolerate the regimen and whether it has enough of an impact on their oral lining to prevent cancer. From there, larger clinical trials could be warranted, the researchers noted.

“We call this ‘green chemoprevention,’ where simple seed preparations or plant extracts are used to prevent disease,” Bauman noted.

“Green chemoprevention requires less money and fewer resources than a traditional pharmaceutical study and could be more easily disseminated in developing countries where head and neck cancer is a significant problem,” Bauman said.

The findings were presented at the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) annual meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**What to do when you are dehydrated: Guzzling huge amounts of water can be risky**



This is the third and the last [article](#) from the water-sweat series. As I have written in my previous two articles, [our cells](#), collectively, are our biggest reservoirs of water. But when we [need sweat to cool us](#), our body first takes water to manufacture the sweat from our blood.

[Maintenance](#) of blood volume is vital, so the loss of blood-water is quickly taken care of by drawing water out from the tissues and tissues in turn pull the water out from our cells. The same process happens when we take fluids – water first reaches the blood, then the tissues and then our cells. The fact is water in our body is not stagnant, but it is a forever moving substance – from blood to the tissues to the cells and vice versa. How does water move in our body from one compartment to another? Who or what pushes it, and what we must do to keep it moving to remain hydrated and healthy?

Like we need transport, let us say a car, truck, train or a plane to move faster and be more active, similarly many substances in our body must be transported across the body at the right places where they are used. We have carrier proteins that have affinity for specific substances like amino acids, salts, sugars and other nutrients that are taken by the carrier proteins in and out of our cells. Unfortunately water gets no such help; it is not actively transported into or from our cells. What then helps the water to travel across, how does it move in and out of our cells?

The answer is that it moves by osmosis, where sodium, potassium and some other minerals play an important role. These minerals (Sodium chloride, higher concentration outside the cells, and potassium chloride, higher concentration inside the cells, are most important for water transport) exist as ions. An ion is a mineral or element that has a positive or negative charge. This unstable ionic state allows the element to bond readily with water, making it possible for the body to absorb it. In this state, an element has specific positive or negative electrical signatures that cause a dynamic equilibrium to take place. The body can then facilitate changes to move

water to the areas that need them. Water can directly pass through membranes of the cell in response to changes in ion concentration. In other words, water movement is indirectly controlled by pumping sodium and potassium across our cell membranes. It is therefore vital that we have a balanced concentration of these ions in our body-water. They make us osmotically fit.



# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## **Task forces set up on farming, poverty eradication**

The state government constituted two task forces on agriculture and poverty eradication to address these grave issues at planning level. The decision to set them up was taken at a meeting of National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog on February 5 under the chairmanship of prime minister Narendra Modi. Each state government has been asked to set up such task forces. They will be headed by the vice-chairman of NITI Aayog. Presently, renowned economist Arvind Pangariya holds the post.

A source in chief minister's office said that both the task forces would have 12 members. "The task force on agriculture will be headed by additional chief secretary (agriculture and marketing) while that on poverty eradication will be headed by principal secretary (social justice and special assistance)," he said.

The other members of task force on agriculture are: additional chief

secretary (planning), development commissioner, principal secretary (rural development and panchayat raj), principal secretary (cooperation), secretary (CADA), secretary (ADF), secretary (forest), secretary (water conservation), director of economics and statistics, agriculture commissioner, joint secretary (planning) and deputy secretary (planning).

The other members of task force on poverty eradication are: principal secretary or secretary of finance department, principal secretary (rural development and panchayati raj), principal secretary (housing), principal secretary (urban development I), principal secretary (labour), principal secretary (public health), development commissioner, secretary (tribal development), director of economics and statistics, joint secretary (planning) and deputy secretary (planning).

The official said that the two subjects had been chosen as they were grave issues. "In spite of best efforts by the government, farmer suicides and agrarian distress shows no sign of abating. The Congress-NCP government had tried to train farmers for taking up side businesses but was not successful. There were several reasons but one of major reasons one was the callous attitude of the government machinery at field level. Therefore, this problem has to be studied in detail after taking views of experts and then come up out with solutions," he said.

On poverty eradication, the source said that there were a large number of welfare schemes for the poor run by several ministries but there was no integration, which deprived the poor of many benefits.



## **With summer rain across Tamil Nadu, university issues alert to farmers**

With the city witnessing heavy showers over the last five days, the centre for plant protection studies at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) has predicted crops may be affected by pests and some diseases due to the abnormal weather. The university alerted farmers about four types of pests that could be found in rice.

With the recent abnormality in the weather and depression seen in different districts of Tamil Nadu, there risk of an outbreak of diseases and pests in rice crops seems imminent . The Centre for Plant Protection Studies has done a special forecast to monitor and manage insect pests and diseases on rice crop in major rice growing areas of Tamil Nadu.

According to the university, rice crops could be affected with blast disease in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu. The symptoms of the disease are spindle-shaped lesions with white to grey-green borders. "Farmers are advised to delay the application of nitrogenous fertilizer. If the farmers spot the symptoms, then they should spray carbendazim (50 WP @ 500g/ha) or metominostrobin (20 SC @ 500ml/ha) or azoxystrobin (25 SC @ 500ml/ha)," officials from the centre said.

The centre has also predicted brown spot disease in rice plant.

The centre for plant production protection studies has identified five pests brown planthopper, rice leaffolder, rice stem borer, rice army worm, rice

fallow pulses. "Rice planthopper is a problem in rice growing areas where there is drainage problem. The insects multiply rapidly and suck the sap from the base of the plants," said the press release issued by the university. To manage the pest, the farmers could spray the nitrogenous fertilizers in three to four doses. And, pesticides should be sprayed in the stem section.

The continuous rain and cloudy weather have supported the incidence of rice leaffolder and could become severe in rice. Scientists at the centre for plant protection studies found around 1,000ha in the rice fields of Tiruppur district recently. The affected leaves will dry and in severe cases plants will wilt.

There is a possibility for rice army worm also to attack crops. Farmers can monitor the caterpillar feeding on the rice plants and if needed they can spray dichlorvos 76% SC 470g/ha.

### **Food processors flock to Gujarat**

Gujarat, the home to some of the leading food brands, is slowly emerging as a sought after destination for food processing too.

If the data compiled by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) is anything to go by, Gujarat attracted maximum investment in this sector among all states from April to December 2014.

Of the total investment of Rs 82,940 crore in the country, Rs 16,570 crore flowed into Gujarat. The investments include those from both government and private firms.

Barring some home-grown brands, Gujarat has not been a traditionally favoured place for food processors. However, industry experts believe that the increasing demand for packaged foods in the West is driving many firms to set up shops in the state.

Piruz Khambatta, chairman, of CII's national committee on food processing said, "Besides marketing by the state government through the Vibrant Gujarat events, there have been positive steps taken to give push to this sector." "Setting of food parks is a big magnet," he added.

According to Khambatta, the potential of packaged food exports is very high given the demand of Indian vegetables and fruits by NRI community in the Middle-East and Europe.

The analysis of the data also shows that Gujarat accounted for highest share (21.5%) from private sector.

Besides Gujarat, other states that attracted investments are Andhra Pradesh (14 per cent), Karnataka (13 per cent), Maharashtra (nine per cent) and West Bengal (six per cent).

D S Rawat, national general secretary, Assocham, said, "Ensuring a more efficient supply-chain network to boost linkages between food processing industries and farmers, promoting crop planning, developing robust cold storage infrastructure and other related factors can help drive growth and development of food processing industry both in Gujarat and India

# THE HINDU BusinessLine

## TN rice farmers asked to watch out for pest attacks



The Centre for Plant Protection Studies at the Farm Varsity here has cautioned rice farmers about the possible outbreak of pests and diseases due to abnormal weather and rains in different parts of Tamil Nadu.

### **Rice Blast**

The possibility for the outbreak of rice blast and brown leaf spots in paddy is particularly high in the coastal rice growing belt. The blast symptoms appear as spindle-shaped lesions with white to grey-green darker borders. The older lesions will be whitish with necrotic borders. Delayed application of nitrogenous fertiliser and immediate spray of carbendazim or tricyclazole or metominostrobin would help control the infestation, the University has, in a statement said.

For control of brown spot disease, farmers are advised to spray mancozeb 2 to 3 times at 10 to 15 days interval based on the intensity of the disease.

### **Brown Planthopper**



This sucking pest can be serious in areas where drainage problem is more. The insects multiply rapidly and suck the sap from plant base. The field will appear burnt up and the typical damage symptom in plants called “hopper burn” will be noticed

While advising farmers to avoid resurgence causing and synthetic pyrethroid group of insecticides, the farmer Varsity urges farmers to drain the water from the field before spraying chemicals at the base of the stem for management of brown planthopper.

### **Rice Leaffolder**

Leaffolder can be severe in the rice crop at the vegetative stage. The incidence, according to the Directorate of Plant Protection Studies, has already been recorded in around 1000 hec (of rice fields) in Tirupur district

Highlighting the symptoms of leaffolder infestation, the scientists point out that the larvae feeds on the leaves of rice by rolling the leaves. The affected leaves will dry and in severe cases, the plant would wilt. While advising farmers to apply chemical insecticides such as cartop hydrochloride or flubendiamide, the Varsity experts say that light traps would help attract adult moth.

### **Rice Stemborer**

The stem borer incidence would be more prevalent in the samba season crop and could occur during the dry spell after the rains.

The incidence can be noticed by the dead heart in young crops and white ear in matured crops. The central shoot turns dry and the plant dies in the early stage of the crop. The grains become chaffy.

Farmers are advised to monitor the adult activity and egg mass in the crop. At the time of transplanting, the leaf tips can be clipped to remove egg mass and the transplanted fields monitored periodically to avoid further incidence.

The other incidences could be the Rice army worm – a gregarious caterpillar feeding on the rice plant and Rice Fallow pulses, which is a wet root rot, generally affecting the crop in low lying area.

## **Fund houses trying to capitalise on ‘Make in India’ theme with new launches**

The Make in India theme is ubiquitous now — in the daily headlines, in official government tweets or an advertisement in YouTube videos. Now another platform you will find this on is with investments, especially new mutual fund schemes riding on the publicity given to the government’s favourite catchphrase.

### **Make in India-centred plans**

In the last three to four months, several asset management companies have launched equity schemes or have filed scheme information documents with capital market regulator SEBI with either Make in India explicit in their scheme names or as part of their sales pitch.

On Wednesday, Tata AMC filed draft documents for the open-ended Tata Twenty Equity Fund. According to draft documents, the fund’s focus “would be on a selection of stocks from those sectors, which are likely to be benefited in medium- to long-term from the current economic policy of Government.” Sectors in focus include transportation, agriculture and food processing, urban infrastructure, energy, manufacturing, PSUs and technology.

The same day, Indiabulls submitted documents for its Make in India-Target Return Fund, which will invest predominantly in companies that are direct or indirect beneficiaries of the government’s ‘Make in India’ initiatives.

### **Thematic or plain vanilla?**

ICICI Prudential is launching a new series to its close-ended India Recovery Fund, while Sundaram recently launched two close-ended funds, the Sundaram Long-Term Tax Advantage Fund -Series I and Sundaram Top 100-Series IV & V—both focusing on Make in India stocks. JP Morgan has launched an India Economic Resurgence Fund and Pramerica has a Build In India Fund while Birla Sun Life launched its Manufacturing Equity Fund in late January.

The question arises if this trend indicates a return of thematic or sectoral funds, which have an unimpressive track record, or if these are plain vanilla funds riding on free government advertising. For instance, infrastructure

funds were all the rage in 2007 but ranked worse than the stock markets did the following year. Also, the investment objective of these funds is highly diversified and sport the usual debt-equity mix. The equity focus itself is extremely generic, with anything from software to manufacturing to tourism coming under their purview.

Milind Barve, Managing Director, HDFC AMC, however, denies that the trend is a sales gimmick. “This is a sensible strategy for fund houses since Make in India, as a concept, is going to manifest itself in a number of sectors, which will stand to benefit. It is okay to define a large universe, but managers will pick stocks with the right investment opportunity.”

B Gopkumar, Head of Broking, Kotak Securities, has a contrarian view. “We are still to see any traction in the Make In India concept. Everybody is talking about creating capacity, but there is no large money coming in, more indigenous plants, but the ground reality is different.”

Trends can be deceptive, he says, referring to thematic funds of the past. “In 2003-05, consumerism was the buzzword and several lifestyle funds were launched. But they did poorly and had to eventually be merged with large equity funds.”

### **Beijing may soon lift ban on Indian rapemeal**



Exporters are hopeful of resumption of rapeseed meal shipments to China over the next few months with Beijing expected to lift a three-year-old ban on its imports soon.

China had imposed a ban on the import of Indian rapeseed meal in January 2012 after it was found that some consignments were contaminated with ‘malachite green’ – a dyestuff used for marking jute bags.

Malachite green is feared to cause cancer if the level exceeds stipulated norms.

Following the Chinese ban, rapeseed meal exports took a major hit in 2012-13. Both countries have since then been engaged in talks over to resolve this issue. Before the ban, China was a large buyer of the Indian rapeseed meal.

“We are at the fag end of resolving this issue. China should open up its market in a month or two,” said BV Mehta, Executive Director, Solvent Extractors Association of India, the apex trade body.

A memorandum of understanding is likely to be reached between both the countries.

### **Canadian meal**

Following the ban on Indian imports, Chinese buyers had switched over to Canadian supplies. However, the Canadian meal is expensive by about \$50-60 a tonne due to higher freight costs.

Also Indian exporters have diversified their markets to countries such as South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam among others.

### **Rapemeal shipments up**

“If the Chinese open up their market, it would result in a bigger demand for the Indian rapeseed meal,” Raju Choksi, Vice-President at Anil Nutrients, an exporter of oilmeals.

However, the recent price rise on concerns of unseasonal rains impacting the crop and short covering by exporters could impact shipments.

India’s rapeseed meal exports increased 16 per cent during financial year 2014-15 at 10.67 lakh tonnes over 9.16 lakh tonnes (lt) in the previous year.

South Korea was the largest importer at 5.12 lt, followed by Thailand at 2.04 lt. Iran was the third largest buyer at 1.41 lt followed by Vietnam at 68,824 tonnes.

The rapeseed meal exports, which touched a high of 12.48 lt in 2011-12, plunged 37 per cent the subsequent year to 7.86 lt.

### **Imports trigger concern**

Meanwhile, surging imports of rapeseed oil has triggered concerns among the solvent extractors, who claim it would impact the domestic farmers. “The large scale cheaper import is hurting the domestic growers,” Mehta said.

Imports during the November-March shot up to 1.68 lt over 64,000 tonnes in the year-ago period. In oil year 2013-14, rapeseed oil imports were 2 lt.

In the current oil year ending October, rapeseed oil imports are expected to touch 4 lt, Mehta said.

Further, Mehta said the recent unseasonal rain has had mixed impact on the rapeseed crop with the late sown areas in Bikaner and Sri Ganganagar benefitting from the rain.

He said the crop size could shrink by 5 per cent to around 56 lt against an earlier projection of 58 lt.

### **Cardamom eases as demand from exporters slows**



Cardamom prices ruled easy last week on slow demand at auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Arrivals also showed a marginal increase last week. This phenomenon, coupled with the intermittent rains in the growing areas in recent weeks, has created a bearish sentiment, market sources told *BusinessLine*.

Harvesting has come to an end and now the material arriving is the crop harvested earlier. Buyers, both domestic and export, on anticipation of an early good crop given the comparatively better weather conditions have slowed down buying, said PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC.

The trade in Bodi, the main trading hub for cardamom (small), is of the opinion that the market might stay at the current levels with chances of a marginal improvement when Ramzan buying is expected to begin this month. But so far there are no such signs of buying. He said the trade expected that reduction in VAT by Tamil Nadu government for inter-State trade to 2 per cent from 5 per cent would promote the trade. Export buying continued to remain slow and an estimated 20-25 tonnes might have been bought by exporters, trade said.

Arrivals last week were at around 430 tonnes against 176 tonnes during the same week of the previous season, trade sources claimed.

The market slipped around Rs. 25-30 a kg at today's auction conducted in Bodinayakkanur by Cardamom Planters, Association, they said.

Arrivals stood at 33.4 tonnes and of this 31.3 tonnes were traded. The auction average dropped to around Rs. 670 a kg. The individual auction average last week vacillated between Rs. 710 and Rs. 750 a kg.

Total arrivals during the season up to April 18 stood at 16,973 tonnes against 18,522 tonnes during the same period last year. The sales were at 16,571 tonnes and 17,923 tonnes respectively.

The auction average as on April 18 was at around Rs. 735 a kg against Rs. 795 on the same date last year.

Prices of graded varieties ( Rs. /kg): 8mm bold green 1,000-20; 7-8 mm 850-900; 6-7 mm 750-770; below 6 mm: 680-720.



## Poppy seeds prices to stabilise at current rates



The poppy seeds prices are expected to stabilise at the current levels in the coming days.

However, the trend would be known once import permits are issued from mid-May and when the new crop details are available from other growing countries. International market prices are currently ruling in the range of \$2,600-2,800 a tonne while that in the local markets are at ₹280-300 a kg, market sources told *BusinessLine*.

They said the crop in Turkey is estimated to be at 35,000 tonnes this year. Indian crop is reportedly small because of damages and reduction in area for the crop, they said. India is a net importer of this commodity and the annual imports are estimated at around 35,000 tonnes, mainly from Turkey. The indigenous production used to be at around 20,000 tonnes. But, of late, the crop has been very low due to unfavourable weather conditions and reduction in area for growing poppy seeds from Narcotic Control Board, Gwalior.

Poppy seeds are imported from Turkey, China and some other European countries.

## Improved sale at Coonoor tea auction

It was a better market at Sale No: 16 Coonoor Tea Trade Association auction with as much as 82 per cent – the highest sale percentage in many weeks – of the year's second highest offer of 14.05 lakh kg being absorbed at 28 paise more per kg over the previous week.

Darmona Estate tea, auctioned by J Thomas and Co P Ltd., topped the CTC market and the Leaf auction fetching ₹204 a kg.

Homedale estate tea, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped the Dust auction at ₹201.

These two were the only teas to fetch over ₹200/kg.

Hittakkal Estate got ₹167, Shanthi Supreme and Vigneshwar Estate ₹166 each. \

In all, 61 marks got ₹125 and more. Kairbetta topped orthodox teas from corporate sector fetching ₹248 followed by Chamraj ₹240, Havukal ₹234 and Glendale ₹186. In all, 37 marks got ₹125 and more.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging ₹47-52 a kg for plain leaf grades and ₹100-150 for brighter liquoring sorts.

They ranged ₹51-62 for plain dusts and ₹110-165 for brighter liquoring dusts.

There was some purchase for Pakistan in range ₹58-68 a kg.

# Business Standard

## Keeping a weather eye on climate

*Rabi* crops, which looked robust to begin with, were ransacked by freakish weather in the second half of the growing season, dimming hopes of a

bumper output. Unseasonal spells of rain, hail and gusty winds from February-end onwards ravaged not only the main rabi crops such as wheat, gram and mustard but also many vegetables and fruit crops. This year, March has been abnormally cool besides being the rainiest in the past several decades. The all-India weighted average rainfall between March 1 and April 15 was more than twice the normal precipitation during this period. Worse still, over 80 per cent of the country received excess rainfall, with over one-third of the total area recording five times the normal rainfall.

Considering the frequency with which odd climatic conditions have been noticed in the past several years, it may not be impertinent to attribute them to climate change. The Solapur region in Maharashtra, for instance, was lashed by hailstorms in February-end last year also. The northern wheat belt, now extending right up to Madhya Pradesh, has often been pounded by rain when the crop is almost ripe or is being harvested. There have been umpteen occasions when the temperature tended to rise abruptly in March to cause premature ripening and shrivelling of grains, thereby, lowering the crop yield. In the 2003-04 *rabi* season, the mean night temperature in February and March in Haryana remained around three degrees Celsius above normal. This caused the average wheat productivity to plunge sharply from over 41 quintals a hectare to just 39.3 quintals.

The consequences of this year's inclement weather have received relatively higher media and political attention because of the extent of the affected area and the nature of damage it inflicted on crops. Besides flattening crop plants and hindering grain development, which resulted in quantitative loss, the wet bouts in quick succession also lowered the grain quality due to their

discolouration and shrivelling, thus, affecting their market value. In worst cases, the seeds began to sprout before harvest.

Luckily, farm scientists are now keeping such weather abnormalities in view while crafting technologies to combat climate change-related challenges to agriculture. Incidents like the pre-harvest sprouting (PHS) of grains need special technological interventions, says Indu Sharma, head of the Karnal-based Directorate of Wheat Research. "Breeding PHS-tolerant cultivars is highly desirable for areas where long periods of wet weather occur frequently at harvest time," Sharma said in a research paper published in a recent issue of *The Indian Journal of Agricultural Sciences*.

This paper, authored by Sharma and four other wheat scientists, has also stressed the need to evolve technology to mitigate the effect of drought and heat on crops, which are also fairly common during the *rabi* season. This will require developing crop plants having genes that can make them more efficient users of available water and nutrients. Biotechnological tools are now available - and also extensively used - to breed wheat strains with genes that enable the plants to withstand various kinds of stresses. The mapping of the wheat genome, thanks to an international collaborative project in which India played a significant role, has opened up new opportunities for suitably restructuring the wheat plant on the targeted lines.

The genetic map of wheat (genome sequence) is now available in the public domain to let the scientists access the required genes to evolve genetically-modified (GM) plants. A large number of genes have already been isolated for gainful use. Numerous GM products have been field-tested and about a

dozen of them have even been approved for commercial use in different countries. However, no transgenic wheat strain - containing a gene borrowed from a non-plant source, as in the case of Bt-cotton - has yet been released anywhere in the world. Once the resistance to GM crops from environment activists wanes and the tailor-made crops having the need-based genetic make-up are made available to farmers, the losses in output due to unseasonal weather aberrations would, hopefully, be curbed to a considerable extent.

### **Policy for agri technical training institutes needed: Gopalakrishnan**



At a time when 'Make in India' and 'Skills India' are being discussed, R Gopalakrishnan, Director, Tata Sons has proposed promoting 'Food in India' through setting up of agriculture technical training institutes (ATTIs) to promote skilling and modernisation of agriculture in the country.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA) Annual Awards, Gopalakrishnan said, "There is a lot of talk on 'Make in India' and technical skills but nobody is talking about 'Food in India' and food or agricultural skills. If we can have ITIs, then why not ATTIs? Government should have a policy to promote ATTIs."

Elaborating on the ATTI model, Gopalakrishnan said that the same could be set up based on factors like government policy, entrepreneurial approach and market demand.

"If private entrepreneurs can open ATTIs, it can generate lot of employment in agriculture sector with young people encouraged to stay back in rural areas for jobs. The opportunity to train in agriculture and food is very large," he stated while adding that the subject would generally fall between the skills ministry and agriculture ministry in the government.

According to Gopalakrishnan, private entrepreneurs can set up state-of-the-art training institutes to impart training to rural youth in modern agricultural, food production, marketing and other skills to be deployed across the food value chain.

Among the suggested areas of training include that of seed technology, pest management, nutrient management, best practices, packaging, processing, and transportation, among others.