

DATE:06.02.2015

THE HINDU

Growing population exerting pressure on Sunderbans



Indian villagers cross a river on a country boat in the Sunderbans, some 125 kms south east of Kolkata on February 10, 2008. The delta of Sunderbans, the world's largest mangrove forest covering 26,000 square kilometres in India and neighbouring Bangladesh, is under threat of rising sea levels of some 3 mm per year. Environmentalists says that the planting of mangroves can protect the unique forest which is also the habitat of Royal Bengal Tigers. AFP PHOTO/Deshakalyan CHOWDHURY/AFP

The population of the Sunderbans - the world's largest mangrove forests - is growing and exerting "even greater" pressure on the fragile ecosystem, a World Bank report said.

The report "Building Resilience For Sustainable Development of the Sunderbans" was presented by the organisation at the conclusion of a three-day international workshop in West Bengal recently.

The findings of the study were made available to the press last Monday.

The workshop was organised by the West Bengal Disaster Management department in collaboration with WWF—India and EnGIO.

The study highlighted the prevalence of poor environmental conditions, deterioration of the region's natural resource base and adverse impact of climate change.

It said: “Despite these dismal conditions and endemic poverty, the population is growing and exerting even greater pressure on fragile and recovering natural systems.”

As a result of high birth rates and migration inflows, population density is high and growing, according to the Non-Lending Technical Assistance (NLTA) household survey, which was part of the study.

The labour force in the Sundarbans has continued to increase and the current population density is estimated to be 1,000 per km square.

Open access to forest and fishery resources attracts poor migrants to the region, as a meal can often be gleaned from local resources, even by people with few skills.

“Population growth, increased degradation of natural resources and widespread prevalence of inefficient practices will likely result in an increasing gap between the local food needs and supply, which could exacerbate malnourishment, particularly in children,” it said.

Rice supply will decrease below the required per capita amount if the current population growth rates and agricultural yields continue in the future.

Moreover, assuming continuation of the current diversion of agricultural land towards aquaculture, the gap would widen significantly over the coming years, the study said.

Sunderbans is home to numerous threatened species such as the Royal Bengal tiger and several species of river dolphin.

Salinisation is posing threat

Accumulation of salts in the soil leading to reduced fertility (salinisation) is a "poorly understood" process and is a "silent" threat to the Sunderbans mangrove forests, a World Bank report said.

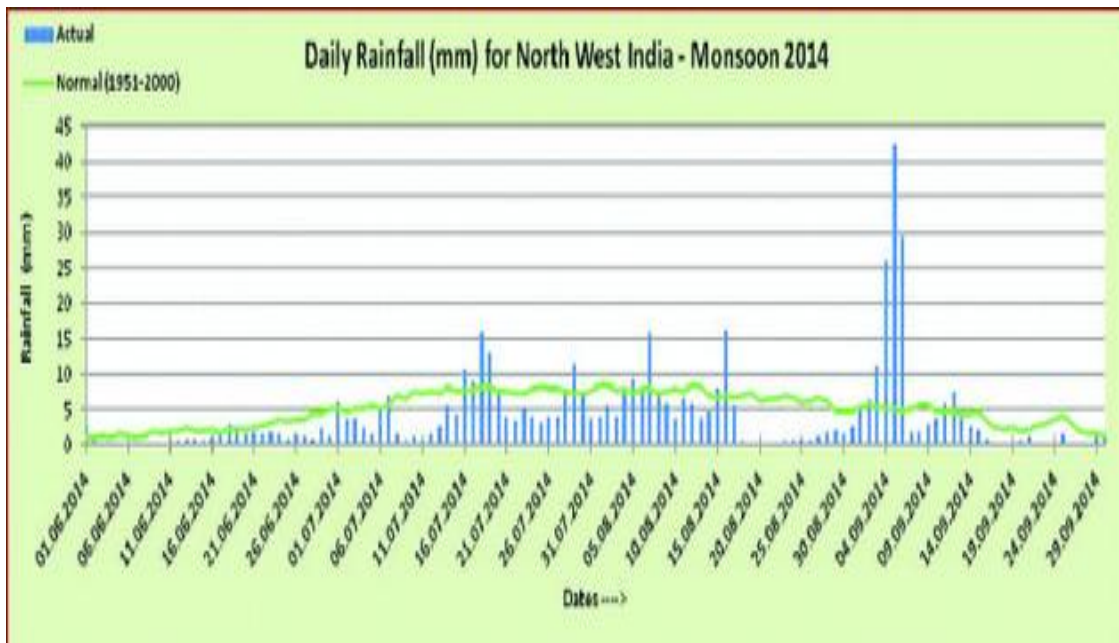
The report said the role of future climate change adaptation is less urgent in comparison to current challenges, but climate change casts a long shadow over ongoing degradation of the resource base.

The findings highlight the adverse impact of increasing salinity on agriculture and biodiversity.

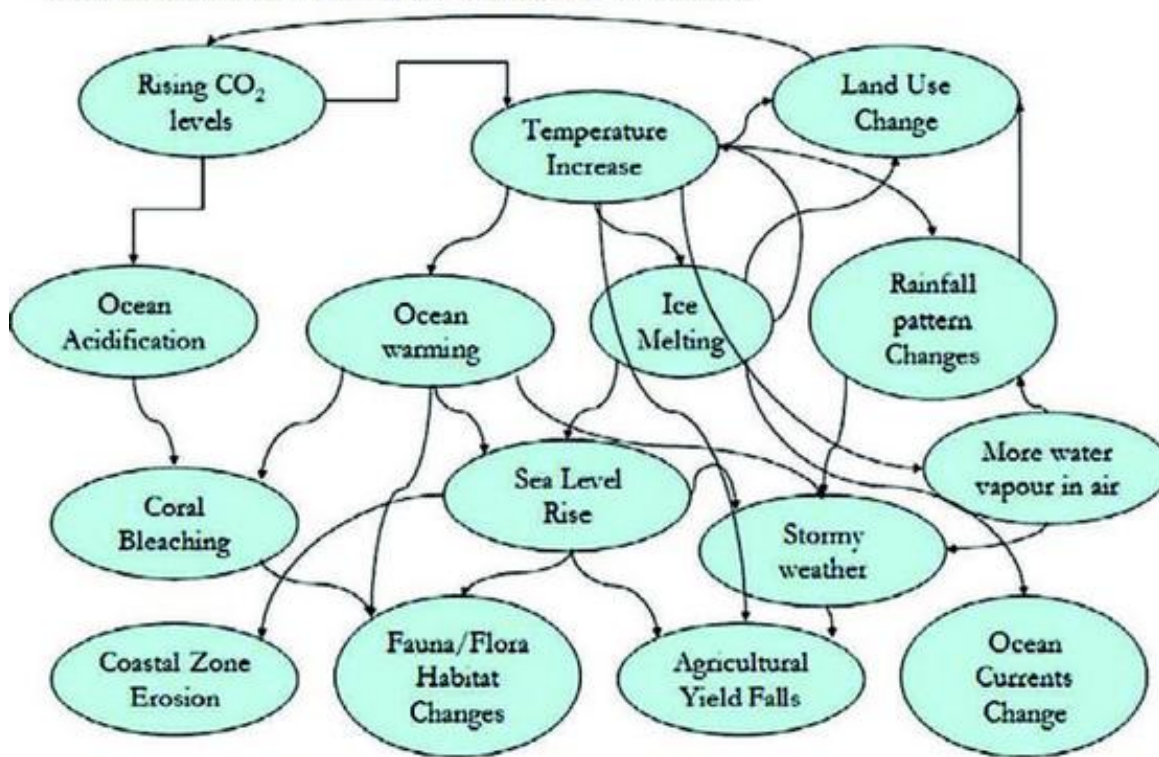
The study also noted that nearly 70 percent of the residents have no access to safe drinking water and stressed on enhancing the resilience of the region given its crucial protective role. IANS

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The many avatars of climate change



CASCADING EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



Mridula Ramesh ©2014

Too much rain at once is also not good for charging our groundwater as much of it either will evaporate or flow into rivers rather than percolating into the ground.

Let us revisit the floods that ravaged Jammu and Kashmir last September. While the IMD map shows historical rainfall in a smooth green line across the entire monsoon, the actual rainfall in 2014 is episodic. The September rainfall peaks, while somewhat bridging the cumulative rainfall deficit and leading to the J&K floods.

Episodic rainfall is not good for agriculture. Indeed, one of climate change's most tragic impacts for India is the triple whammy on agriculture: rising temperatures causes falling yields, water shortages make the yields worse and lastly, when water does come, much of it likely to come in stormy intense rainfall, damages crops. Some models claim that rising CO2 levels cause plant productivity to rise. True – if the rise happened in isolation. But the rise doesn't happen in isolation – it happens with rising temperatures, falling water availability, increasing short term pollutants like black soot, changing pest attack patterns with a strong dash of extreme events thrown in.

The IPCC projects steep falls in the yield of wheat and many other crops in India post 2030. That's bad news for a poor country with a billion mouths to feed.

Today we are acting with impunity, leaning on the world and tilting it, thinking it will rebalance. We provide free power and water thinking we are doing favours for the farmers, when indeed they are the ones most likely to be hit in the warmer planet that is coming. We build on river flood plains and over water bodies disrupting the natural water flow and paying a price when floods do come. What we need now is granular data– rain/ temperature data at the village level – that will help our scientists predict and understand the future and bring out solutions that will work. Battling climate change is both a high level war involving carbon taxes and UN summit agreements, as well as a battle fought in the trenches encompassing farmer retraining, LED adoption, and changes in what we eat.

For Raja and his friends, adapting to climate change may involve a different way of farming, using less water and more resilient seeds. It is striking that what they really wanted was awareness and training.

Climaction is a fortnightly column published in MetroPlus Weekend on alternate Fridays. The next article in this series will appear on February 20. Feedback and questions may be e-mailed to climaction2015@gmail.com

Vanishing wetlands

They recharge groundwater, act as a drain during floods, recycle nutrients, purify water, provide livelihood and are a haven for naturalists. A look at the wetlands on February 2.



February 2 is celebrated as World Wetlands Day. It marks the signing of the Convention of Wetlands at Ramsar. This is an international treaty for sustainable utilisation and conservation of wetlands keeping in mind their ecological functions. India's ecological diversity is unparalleled. But today, it is being destroyed at an alarming rate. One of the ecosystems that has been ravaged today is the wetlands. These are complex ecosystems that are mostly covered with water permanently, or sometimes, after rains. They include diverse habitats like lakes, swamps, floodplains and salt marshes. Wetlands support bird life ranging from painted storks, purple moorhens to herons. Many decades ago, numerous patches of wetlands were present around Indian towns and villages. Today, one-third of the country's wetlands are already wiped out or severely degraded because of habitat destruction and encroachment. Most landfills around cities and towns would have been thriving wetlands once upon a time.

Winds of change

This is a disturbing scenario because wetlands play an important role by providing ecological security. They perform extraordinary functions like recharging ground water, acting as a drain during floods, recycling nutrients and purifying water. When protected, these wetlands can bounce back to life like Odisha's Chilika Lake.

It is the second largest salt water lagoon in the world and is the largest winter ground for migratory birds in the Indian sub-continent. Apart from the lakhs of birds that come during winter, Chilika also supports around 1, 50,000 fishermen who are dependent on the lake for their livelihood. It is also one of the last homes of the endangered Irrawady dolphins.

The reason for such diversity is the influence of the salt water from the Bay of Bengal and the freshwater that comes from numerous river channels and rivers like the Mahanadhi.

This thriving lake was close to dying in the late 1990s. The seawater inflow reduced it to a trickle as the sea inlets became choked with silt. So, freshwater inflow increased and altered the lake's ecosystem. Commercial aquaculture and prawn cultivation caused drastic decline in the lake's fish and bird population.

Meticulous research and immediate conservation measures implemented by the Odisha Government brought the lake back to life. A new sea mouth was opened to allow constant inflow of seawater. Sustainable monitoring of the lake increased the fish population and migratory birds started returning in large numbers.

Today, Chilika Lake is one of the few thriving wetland ecosystems in our country and it remains an inspiring success story for conserving wetlands. We must ensure that the ecosystems that support our livelihoods are conserved for eternity and not destroyed in the process of economic progress.

Watch those birds

You could spend hours at a wetland watching birds. There are fair chances that you will find a wetland around your locality. Here are five pointers to get started!

Field Guide: A must. It contains information on different birds, with appropriate illustrations to aid identification of species. *Book of Indian Birds* by Salim Ali is an ideal choice.

Binoculars: Many birds are seen at a distance or in low-light conditions. So, binoculars will enable you to identify the bird easily.

A field notebook and pen: Watching birds becomes interesting when you note down important information about birds such as location, time and season and your observations during birding.

Proper research and planning can make a wetland birding trip productive. Know the birds in the area you are visiting, the habitats they occupy and the time of the day they prefer to be active.

You should be quiet at all times and wear dull-coloured clothing to increase your chances of blending with the background.

In danger

Vembanad on the wane: Declared as a Ramsar Site in 2002, the Vembanad Kol Lake is South India's largest wetland ecosystem. Home to more than 20,000 waterfowl, and a variety of fin and shell fish, Vembanad is a hotbed for livelihood activities including fishing, agriculture, tourism, and lime shell collection among others. Unrestrained shell mining from the lake and effluents pose a threat to the eco-system and are responsible for dwindling levels of the water's dissolved oxygen content.

Kolleru calling : One of India's largest freshwater lakes, Kolleru, in Andhra Pradesh, is located between Krishna and Godavari districts and is also a Ramsar site. Encroachments, unauthorised constructions and silt deposits have resulted in a decline in the variety of birds including painted storks, pelicans, glossy ibises, teals, pintails and others. What's more, the lake has also lost its original shape.

Kanjia's woes: Kanjia Lake, on the northern outskirts of Bhubaneswar, covers an area of 105 hectares and also has a scuba diving facility. Rich in biodiversity, it consists of various species of birds, reptiles, fish and prawns. Various illegal activities like uncontrolled quarrying and dumping of solid waste pose a threat to this wetland.

Other wetland ecosystems include the Pallikaranai wetland in Chennai, Punjab's Harike, Pong Dam Lake in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan's Sambhar Lake, and Bhoj Wetland in Madhya Pradesh.

Inputs by

MADHUVANTI S. KRISHNAN

Rs.98,679 cr. for priority sector lending in A.P.

Growth rate of 20-25 p.c. fixed for agriculture, allied sectors

NABARD CREDIT PLAN

- ▶ **Pan estimate** unveiled at a State-level credit seminar
- ▶ **Vredit potential** includes crop loans at **Rs.50,979 cr.**
- ▶ **Agriculture term loans** **Rs. 18, 570 cr.**, MSME sector at **Rs. 11,997 cr.**
- ▶ **Loans to other priority sector** **Rs.17,133 crore.**

91 per cent of farmers in the State are facing debt crisis as against 51 per cent of national average

N. CHANDRABABU NAIDU, Chief Minister

The credit plan estimate for 2015-16 for priority sector lending in Andhra Pradesh has been put at Rs.98,679 crore by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, 27 per cent higher than State's credit plan for 2014-15.

The plan estimate was unveiled here on Thursday at a State Credit Seminar, which was attended by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Agriculture Minister P. Pulla Rao and Chief Secretary I.Y.R. Krishna Rao, among others.

Chief General Manager, NABARD, Jiji Mammen said the credit potential includes crop loans at Rs.50,979 crore, agricultural term loans at Rs.18, 570 crore, loans to micro small and medium enterprises sector at Rs.11,997 crore and loans to other priority sector at Rs.17,133 crore. He called for focus on investment credit leading to capital formation for sustainable agricultural growth.

Mr. Chandrababu Naidu said the government fixed a growth rate of 20-25 per cent for agriculture and allied sectors for 2015-16 as against 11.32 per cent for this year and national average of 3.55 per cent.

He expressed confidence that the growth rate could be achieved by improving productivity and irrigation.

Referring to the problem of debt crisis among farmers, he urged bankers to come out with suggestions.

Quoting National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data, he said 91 per cent of farmers in the State were facing debt crisis as against 51 per cent of national average. Mr. Chandrababu Naidu stressed the need to study the reasons behind the debt crisis and address them.

The focus for the current year's credit projections is "Accelerating the pace of capital formation in agriculture and allied sectors" with the objective of giving thrust to investment credit for sustainable agriculture development in the State.

The thrust areas for development include minor irrigation, dairy, poultry, investment in marine and inland fisheries, horticulture, floriculture and cold storage among others.

'Kongu Nattu Kalnadai Thiruvizha' from today

Kongu Nattu Kalnadai Thiruvizha — 2015 (cattle fest), a two-day event, has been organised at Samathur on Pollachi- Valparai Road here on Friday and Saturday (February 6 and 7) by the Vanavarayar Foundation to promote agrarian economy.

The programme was expected to serve as a platform for farmers and traders to build new partnerships and generate new business opportunities.

Programme adviser K. Baskarasethupathy told reporters here on Thursday that hundreds of cows, including the indigenous breeds such as Kangeyam, Ongole, Tharparker and Gir would be on display in the exhibition. "Varieties of cross bred cows, buffaloes, rams and horses will also be exhibited," he said.

He said experts in various domains would speak on topics that would address needs of farmers of this region.

Stalls would be put up by feed, medicine and farm equipment manufacturers, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Science University on the latest farm machinery, breeding, production, nutrition and product technology, health management, disease control in dairy and livestock farming and dairy equipment.

Organisers said that they have created awareness among farmers through Aavin and a few private dairies and through feed manufacturers to take part in the event.

Credit access made easy for poultry farming

State government and NABARD providing subsidy to farmers



Collector E. Saravanelraj inspecting a poultry farm in Ariyalur.—
PHOTO: M. SRINATH

Poultry farming is fast catching up in the district with thrust given for Scheme for Poultry Development (SPD) by the government.

The target under SPD for 2014-15 is 50 farms with 5,000 broiler chicken each. Ten farmers have so far put up farms and chicks have been delivered to them.

Ashok Kumar of Karaivetti Parathur village in Thirumanur panchayat union is one of the beneficiary under the SPD scheme. First batch of 5,189 chicks were delivered to his farm in July by Shanthi Feeds Ltd. of Coimbatore. In 45 days, he turned out 5,002 chicken each weighing 2.144 kg (total 10,723 kg). He is now rearing second batch of chicks.

“I got a loan of Rs. 8.25 lakh for the farm. The State government has given a subsidy of Rs 2.06 lakh and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has provided a backend subsidy of Rs. 2.06 lakh. I earned Rs. 65,000 profit in the first batch,” he told District Collector E. Saravanelraj who visited his farm on Wednesday.

“I find broiler chicken farming profitable,” he said. Mr. Ashok Kumar has been practising integrated farming with fish pond, poultry farm, paddy, and horticulture. “I am planning to put up a dairy farm,” he told the Collector, who appreciated his efforts.

“Ashok Kumar and his wife, who are not graduates, have evinced interest in integrated farming and is successfully doing it. This proves that there is no need to be an agriculture or veterinary graduate to do integrated farming. Only need is enthusiasm, commitment, and confidence. Broiler chicken farming is a boon to farmers of Ariyalur district which is a backward district,” Mr. Saravanelraj said.

Annamalai, son of Perumal of Venganur village in Thirumanur panchayat union, got 5,270 chicks in the first batch. He supplied 5,005 birds (white leghorn variety) to Shanthi Feeds Ltd. “I got loan from Primary Agriculture Co-operative Credit Society (PACCS) and subsidy from Tamil Nadu Government and NABARD,” Annamalai said.

G. Selva Perumal, Joint Director of Animal Husbandry, Ariyalur district, said there had not been any incidence of bird flu in the district so far and steps had been taken to prevent its outbreak.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS,

FUNDING PATTERN

G. Selva Perumal, Joint Director of Animal Husbandry, Ariyalur district, says 5,000 sq. ft. area was needed for putting up a broiler chicken farm of 5,000 birds each.

At the rate of Rs. 200 expense per sq. ft., a sum of Rs. 10 lakh was required. Another Rs. 75,000 was required for feed and putting up water equipment.

The State government was extending a front end subsidy of Rs. 2,68,750.

This amount was given as soon as the farm was ready. NABARD provided a back end subsidy amount of Rs. 2,68,750. Of Rs. 10.75 lakh cost of the unit, Rs. 9,67,500 came in the form of bank loan.

Remaining 10 per cent was the beneficiary share. Loan and subsidy amount vary depending up the unit cost.

Agricultural summit from Feb. 21

‘Agrovision’, a three-day agricultural summit, will be held at the Exhibition Complex at Autonagar here from February 21.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will inaugurate the event and Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium enterprises Kalraj Mishra and Gerardine Mukeshimana, Agriculture and Animal Resources Minister of Republic of Rwanda will be present.

The summit is being organised by the Karnataka Small Scale Industries Association (KASSIA) and MM Activ Sci-Tech Communications on the theme ‘Building sustainable livelihoods and increasing farmers’ income’.

KASSIA president and organising secretary Chidananda M. Rajamane told presspersons here on Wednesday that over 150 delegates would participate. Around 21 workshops would be held. The focus would be to lay a foundation for a more progressive and sustainable rural economy with thrust on agro-food processing, besides educating, encouraging and empowering farmers in the north Karnataka region.

‘Innovation key to agricultural growth’

Three-day national workshop showcases low-cost technologies for farmers

A gadget that helps a farmer apply/spray pesticide in a focussed manner on cotton crop without wastage, developed by a senior scientist Mallikarjun at the Prof. Jayashankar Agricultural University and other such innovations attracted attention at a three-day national workshop-cum-exhibition here.

Another piece of equipment, a multi-purpose drum seeder that can also be used as fertilizer and weedicide dispenser, developed by D. Babu Rao, an innovative farmer from Vizianagaram also had people queuing up at the stall in the exhibition. Costing Rs. 32,000, it is ideal for planting corn, groundnut, rice and pulses and helps lay a row of eight lines simultaneously, saving on costs and labour. It only needs two people to use it.

The workshop-cum-exhibition on ‘Popularisation and commercialisation of low-cost agricultural technologies’ attracted innovator scientists and farmers, ‘agripreneurs’, agricultural officers from different States and more such people. In all, there were 40 stalls and there was a steady stream of visitors involved in agriculture who came to see the technologies on display.

K. Satya Gopal, Director-General of the National Institute for Plant Health Management said they had ensured that only technologies that cost less than Rs. 60,000 were on display. Innovation was the key that would drive growth, increased productivity and lesser input costs, he said. Among the priorities that they were focussing on were the fact that pest regulation was most important and motivate farmers to use more of bio-pesticides like neem, custard apple and pongamia oil and less of chemicals. “Use of chemical pesticides should be the last resort. We are trying to generate awareness among the farming community on ecological engineering for pest management,” Mr. Satya Gopal, an IAS officer of the Tamil Nadu cadre said, summing up.

Pesticide worth Rs. 5.15 lakh seized

Sleuths of Vigilance and Enforcement (V&E) department conducted a raid on an unauthorised pesticide shop at Maanikonda village in Krishna district on Thursday. They seized stocks worth about Rs. 5.15 lakh.

According to Krishna District Regional Vigilance and Enforcement Officer (RVEO) Y.T. Naidu, the team led by CI P. Rajesh raided on the outlet and seized pesticides of various brands, which were being marketed without any license.

Assistant Director (Agriculture) of V&E Ch. Srinivas Rao said one K. Suresh Kumar Reddy was doing the unauthorised business. He was booked under Insecticide Act, 1968 for resorting to the illegal trade. “The accused stored the pesticide stocks without permission and documents. He was selling them to the local farmers. We are trying to find out since how long the illegal business was being done,” said Mr. Srinivas Rao.

Farmers urged to adopt modern methods

Dharmadhikari of Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala, Dr. Veerendra Heggade called upon farmers to carry out planned and systematic agricultural activities to get good yield and profit.

After inaugurating “Krishi Mela” at Kalpataru grounds in Tiptur town in the district here on Thursday, Mr.Heggade said that farmers must adopt technology in their agricultural activities which will help them financially. He said farmers have to adopt scientific methods and must not stick to the old methods in agriculture. He said one more ‘Green revolution’ must

happen to promote and encourage farmers to carry out agricultural activities scientifically.

Mr.Heggade said people should give importance for small savings and must not neglect as it will help them and their families during difficult times. Self-Help Groups are helping the women and women farmers to become economically empowered.

Water release from Mettur stopped



The sluices of Stanley Reservoir were closed for delta irrigation on Thursday.— PHOTO: E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

After 180 days of water release for delta irrigation that benefited over 15 lakh acres, discharge from the Stanley reservoir in Mettur dam was stopped at 6 p.m. on Thursday.

Though it is customary to release water on June 12 every year, the water level stood at 44.38 feet on the day and hence the release was scheduled for August 15, 2014. But due to heavy rainfall and increase in discharge from the dams in Karnataka, the level crossed the 109-feet, prompting the government to release water for samba paddy crop on August 10, 2014.

At 6 p.m. on Thursday, the level stood at 77.12 feet against the Full Reservoir Level of 120 feet.

Also, the storage was around 39 tmcft against the dam's capacity of 93.47 tmcft, while the inflow was 203 cusecs.

According to Public Works Department officials, about 149 tmcft was released from August 10 to February 5, 2015 for irrigation and drinking

water needs. Also, the discharge was halted for many days due to heavy rain in the delta regions.

“As per the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal final award, Karnataka should release 182 tmcft as Tamil Nadu’s share between June 1, 2014 and February 4, 2015. But we have received 198 tmcft in the above period,” an official said.

The PWD officials said that based on a governments order, water would be released for drinking water purpose in the coming months.

With the discharge having stopped, power generation of 85 MW through the Tunnel Power House and five barrages also came to a halt.

With the water level dropping below 78 feet, the twin towers of St. Lourdes Church that was submerged in the water spread area in Pannavadi, started to emerge.

Farmers want NCCF to procure paddy

Farmers have urged the National Cooperative Consumers’ Federation of India (NCCF) to initiate action to procure paddy in non-delta districts for ensuring a fair price to paddy cultivators.

Although the State government has, a year ago, permitted the federation to procure paddy, the federation was yet to take any initiative, said A. Nagarajan, State president, Tamil Nadu Horticulture Crop Producers Association. This delay was affecting farmers who have to market the paddy at a throwaway price.

Minimum support price and incentive should also be sanctioned to farmers.

He said a delegation of farmers from Tamil Nadu called on Ramachandra Paswan, a member of the Standing Committee for Food and Consumer Affairs, and submitted a memorandum pleading for quick action by the federation. The memorandum insisted that the federation should ensure disbursement of money, instead of cheque so that farmers could get cash immediately and meet the expenditure involved for cultivating the paddy.

Pointing out that much time has been lost in starting the procurement process, Mr. Nagarajan demanded early action.

Last month, the federation had called for tenders from agencies or societies desirous of becoming its business associates for procuring paddy in non-delta districts.

The tenders should be finalised at once so that procurement could start during the current kharif season, he said.

University to set up feed mill

Karnataka Veterinary, Animal and Fisheries University plans to set up a feed mill on its Bidar campus to provide hands-on experience to students and train farmers.

The important thing is that it will demonstrate to farmers how nutritious feed can be made in their backyard at low cost using available crop residue, C. Renuka Prasad, Vice-Chancellor, told *The Hindu* .

The centre will teach farmers how to make feed bricks or pellets using crop waste like sugarcane tops, red gram sticks, grain husk, jaggery, straw and leaves. “Most of these are mechanical processes. But some varieties can also be made at home, with little technical training,” he said.

After harvest, sugarcane growers usually slash and burn the left over crop. We are trying to reason with farmers to discontinue this practice and use the waste to make feed blocks. “The unit will also be used to provide on hands training to graduate and postgraduate students. It will also have a research and extension wing where students can try newer methods of develop nutritious feed varieties at lower costs,” he said.

Keeping birds away from orchards, the ecofriendly way



Crop saver: Anti-bird net used in a farm at Krishnapuram in Tirunelveli District.

Farmers advised to avail subsidy to erect anti-bird nets

Farmers cultivating fruits like grapes on ‘pandal’ are advised to erect anti-bird nets with subsidy under the National Horticulture Mission to protect the fruits from birds, squirrels, owls, etc., as the netting protects the crops from extensive damage to fruits and vegetables.

Anti-bird netting is an effective method for preventing crop loss usually caused by birds that invade the vineyards in flocks. Anti-bird netting can be done manually or mechanically depending upon the need. The anti-bird nets can also be used for holding animals in an enclosure, thus preventing any pillaging by birds and in some instances for keeping wild animals out and preventing consequent damage. With regard to aviary protection, wide-meshed nets are recommended.

Plastic anti-bird netting is a light weight but strong netting that will protect soft fruits and vegetables from bird attacks and browsing animals. Anti-bird netting can be used for fruit cages, protection of crops from birds, rabbits, squirrels and other similar pests, he added.

The plastic bird netting is lightweight, easy to handle and simple to install over fruit cages, directly over fruit trees and on vegetable or fruit growing areas.

The netting apertures allow smaller essential pollinating insects through and smaller butterflies while preventing birds. Anti-bird nets have a rectangular structure which creates a strong plastic mesh structure, making it easier to install and long lasting than the diamond mesh structured plastic bird netting.

Inspecting a field with anti-bird netting protection at Krishnapuram in the district, S. Raja Mohamed, Deputy Director of Horticulture, said 50 percent subsidy at the rate of Rs. 17.50 per sq.m. limited to 5,000 sq.m. per beneficiary was being given under the NHM to the farmers, who needed anti-bird nets.

As a promotional measure during the current fiscal, 1,000 sq.m. had been allotted to P. Ravichandran of Krishnapuram under this component with an allocation of Rs. 17,500.

“Farmers cultivating fruits like grapes and vegetables grown on ‘pandal’ may go for anti-bird netting with the NHM subsidy. While this effort fetches sizable assistance, the yield is also increased substantially by preventing invading birds and smaller animals,” Mr. Raja Mohamed said.

Ambootia group gets set to revive three tea estates

The new promoters face a wage liability on account of the ongoing tripartite talks to increase tea industry wages.

The Ambootia group, which emerged as the highest bidder in the auction held by the West Bengal Government to sell its tea estates in Darjeeling, is now awaiting physical handover of the three gardens so that it can implement its revival plan.

Group Chairman Sanjay Bansal told *The Hindu*, the group was now awaiting the transfer of the estates. “We are people in a hurry... securitising the workforce is our foremost task. Our plan is to raise the farm practices to global standards and convert it to organic...we want to cash in on the first flush crop.”

The Mamata Banerjee government recently privatised five tea gardens, owned by the West Bengal Tea Development Corporation Ltd. The Ambootia Group emerged as the highest bidder for the three Darjeeling gardens.

The three gardens together have a grant area of 1,232.5 acres, of which 635 hectares is under tea cultivation. Rungmook–Cedars is the largest with a grant area of 708.3 hectares and a workforce of 1,931. Altogether 2,409 are on the rolls at these gardens. Gratuity and wages are in arrears at these government-run gardens.

Mr. Bansal said that securitising the workforce and clearing their arrears upfront topped the new management's agenda. While a payment of Rs.21 crore would be made in phases for the transfer of lease of the tea estates, another Rs.4.50 crore is the gratuity arrears till March 31, 2014.

The new promoters face a wage liability on account of the ongoing tripartite talks to increase tea industry wages. The last pact expired on March 31, 2014.

Chilli mela from tomorrow

The three-day annual chilli mela will begin at the Moorusavir Mutt grounds here from Saturday.

Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry chairman Vasant Ladava told presspersons here on Thursday that chilli growers from Dharwad, Haveri and Gadag districts would sell their produce directly to the customers during the event.

The main objective of the mela was to help the farmers market their produce directly without the help of middle-men and to introduce different varieties of chillies to the customers.

Growers from any region could take part in the mela but middle-men would not be allowed to take part in the event. The farmers sold nearly 110 tones of chillies in last year's mela and this year sales of 150 tonnes of chillies were expected, Mr. Ladava added.

Deputy Director of Horticulture I. K. Doddamani said this year chillies had been grown in 27,000 hectares of land in Dharwad district alone. Therefore,

more number of chilli growers are expected to take part in this year's mela, he said.

Beneficial algal species discovered



Dr. Felix Bast

Two new bloom-forming algal species were discovered recently off the west coast of India. These two species have excellent carbon capture properties — ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and reduce global warming — and are also promising candidates for use as bio fuels.

Currently, a number of research groups are working on using algae as a potential candidate for carbon sequestration because they grow at very high rates and can absorb atmospheric CO₂.

Both of the newly discovered species are endemic and bloom-forming.

As they are endemic, their cultivation is not going to cause any environmental harm; had it been a species of Atlantic or Mediterranean origin, it might overgrow local flora and might wreak havoc on the local habitats — the so-called bio invasion.

Bloom forming indicates spontaneous growth. There is no need for fertilizers/pesticides or any expensive cultivation systems such as photobioreactors for their cultivation. These can grow sporadically at shorelines and can sequester CO₂.

The algae species named *Ulva paschima* Bast, and *Cladophora goensis* Bast were discovered by Dr. Felix Bast and two research students working with him, Mr. Satej Bhushan and Mr. Aijaz Ahmad John, from the Central University of Punjab, Bhatinda. The findings were reported in the journals *PLoS ONE* and *Indian Journal of Marine Sciences*.

The main criteria used for determining these species as newly discovered is a mix of morphological as well as molecular characteristics. Molecular evidence is especially strong; as nearest match is less than 90 per cent sequence identity.

For example, *Cladophora goensis* Vs. *Cladophora glomerata* — its nearest match — is 17.7 per cent differences.

“Compare it with human Vs. chimp. Our sequence identity is 98 per cent and 2 per cent difference makes us what we are. These newly discovered algae have profound sequence differences from previously discovered algae. Morphology is not reliable; as algae can change its morphology to suit its environment. Ours is the first molecular study on Indian algae, and first algal species discovery for last 40 years,” notes Dr. Bast in an email to this correspondent.

Pharmaceutical products from algae are under the realms of another project by Dr. Bast.

A number of active substances are isolated from algae including some algae of genera *Cladophora* and *Ulva*. Probably most famous is Kahalalide-F, which is now being used in clinical trials against prostate and breast cancers.

Kahalalide-F is isolated from *Bryopsis* — a closely related green algae to *Cladophora* as well as *Ulva* and it is very probable that same or related chemical is present in newly discovered endemic algae.

He intends to work on this. *Cladophora goensis* and *Ulva paschima* — recently discovered species — have had no chemical/pharmaceutical studies conducted on them yet.

Express recipe: How to make Chatpata Haryali Paneer



Chatpata Haryali Paneer (Source: Nita Mehta)

Chatpata Haryali Paneer is made with cottage cheese and flavoured by a fragrant green paste. Here's how to make it.

Makes 12-15 pieces

Ingredients

300 gms paneer

2-3 tbsp oil

4 tbsp gram flour (besan), 1 tbsp oil

2 cubes cheddar cheese – finely grated (8 tbsp)

Green paste (haryali Paste)

½ cup green coriander

½ raw mango – grated (¼ cup)

3 green chillies
1 tbsp chopped ginger
½ tsp cumin seeds (jeera), 3-4 cloves (laung)
3-4 pepper corns (saboot kali mirchi)
1 tsp ground cinnamon (dalchini powder)
½ tsp rock salt (kala namak)
1 tsp chaat masala

For

garnish

2 onions – cut into rings, a few mint leaves

Method

- * Cut paneer into slightly thick (½” thick) triangular pieces. Cut a slit from one tip almost till the end, but keep the piece whole.
- * Heat 1 tbsp oil in a non stick pan. Add gram flour and roast for 2 minutes on low heat till fragrant.
- * Grind all the ingredients of the green paste to a thick paste. Remove to a flat bowl. Fill some paste in the slit of the paneer triangles.
- * To the remaining paste, add roasted gram flour and grated cheese. Check salt.
- * Marinate paneer in the prepared paste for 10-15 minutes.
- * At the time of serving, heat 2 tbsp oil in a non stick pan, roll the pan to spread the oil evenly in the pan. Place 4-5 pieces of paneer and shallow fry on medium heat till the paste sticks to the paneer.
- * Place on a serving dish. Saute onions rings in 1 tbsp oil till golden. Add mint leaves. Sprinkle chaat masala and remove from fire. Garnish paneer with golden onion rings and mint leaves. Serve hot.

Red wine, peanuts prevent memory loss



Red wine can improve your memory

A compound found in red grapes, red wine, peanuts and some berries may help prevent age-related decline in memory, says a study led by an Indian-origin scientist.

ALSO READ: [Red wine can prevent head, neck cancer](#)

Resveratrol is an antioxidant that may have positive effects on the hippocampus, an area of the brain that is critical to functions such as memory, learning and mood, the researchers said.

“The results of the study were striking,” said Ashok Shetty, professor at Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine.

Because both humans and animals show a decline in cognitive capacity after middle age, the findings may have implications for treating memory loss in the elderly.

ALSO READ: [Red wine can protect human cells against damage](#)

Resveratrol may even be able to help people afflicted with severe neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer’s disease, the study suggested.

“The study provides novel evidence that resveratrol treatment in late middle age can help improve memory and mood function in old age,” said Shetty who obtained his Ph D degree in neuroscience from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi in 1990.

Treatment with resveratrol had apparent benefits in terms of learning, memory and mood function in aged rats.

ALSO READ: [A glass of red wine worth an hour of exercise](#)

The growth and development of neurons approximately doubled in the rats given resveratrol compared to the control rats, Shetty said.

“Both spatial learning and memory improved in the resveratrol-treated rats,” he noted.

The study appeared in the journal Scientific Reports.



[Recipe: Chinese Bhel](#)



We are savour Chinese food; especially the Chinese bhel that has become a hot favourite among youngsters and has replaced their plates of vada pav and bhel puri is a must learn. Here are two recipes that will help you serve a Chinese platter at home, with a twist.

Ingredients:

Noodles- 1 cup
Onion finely chopped- 1 cup
Shredded cabbage- 1 cup
Capsicum cut in thin slices- 1/2
Carrot shredded- 1 cup
Cornflour- 2 tbsp
Soy sauce- 1 tbsp
Red chilli sauce- 1 tbsp
Ajinomoto- 1 tsp
Ginger Garlic Paste- 1 tsp
Black pepper powder- 1 tsp
salt to taste
Oil- 2 tbsp
Tomato sauce- 1 tsp
Oil to deep fry noodles

Method:

Boil noodles in hot water adding ½ tsp oil to it
Once it's boiled put it under cold water so that the noodles don't stick to each other.
Once it cools down dust corn flour over it and mix well & deep fry them.
Take another pan and pour some oil and saute the onion
Add Ginger garlic paste then add Carrot , cabbage & capsicum and turn your gas on high flame.
Now add Ajinomto, salt, black pepper powder, chilli sauce ,tomato sauce and soy sauce
Now mix Fried Noodles and mix well
Garnish with Coriander leaves and green onions (optional) serve immediately

Soyabean and Baby corn fried rice**Ingredients:**

Rice- 2 cups
Oil- 3 tbsp
Soya chunks- 200 gms

Baby corn- About 10 pieces cut in four equals

Beans Finely Chopped- 100 gms
Carrot Finely Chopped- 2
Onion sliced- 1
Cabbage Finely Chopped- 100 gms
Spring Onions Finely Chopped- 2
Green Chillies finely chopped- 2-3
Ginger Chopped Finely- 1 tsp
Garlic Finely Chopped- 1 tsp
Soya Sauce- 2 tbsp
Vinegar (optional)- 2 tbsp
Salt & pepper to taste

Method:

Wash and soak the soya chunks for a while, and bring them to a slight boil till they become soft, drain them and keep it aside

Cut the baby corns in four equals, and boil them for a while, later shallow fry them and keep aside

Wash and soak the rice in enough water for 10-15 minutes and drain.

Boil water, add rice and little salt.

Cook uncovered on low heat till rice is tender.

Take care not to overcook the rice. Each grain of rice should be separate.

When rice is done, drain and add some cold water

Heat oil in a kadhai / large pan

Saute onion ,then add garlic, ginger and green chillies

Add and stir fry all the chopped vegetables, along with the soya chunks and baby corn

Cook for 3-4 minutes.

Take care that vegetables are not overdone, they should be crisp.

Mix salt and pepper to taste.

Add the cooked rice and mix well. Now mix the soya sauce to it.

Cook for 2-3 minutes and serve hot.

Garnish with spring onion

P. S. Non vegetarians can add shredded chicken and scrambled egg

[Recipe: Cold cucumber soup](#)



A cucumber is a very healthy option, as far as vegetables are concerned.

Besides keeping you hydrated, it supplies skin friendly minerals like potassium, magnesium and silicon. It's also healthy for the eyes and flushes out toxin. A tasty way to go about consuming cucumbers, if you don't want them in a salad, is to have them as soup. And here's how you can make an easy cold cucumber soup.

Ingredients

1 cup plain yogurt, 1 cup sour cream, 1 minced clove of garlic, 1/2 cup chopped mint leaves, 1/2 cup chopped dill or shepu 2 cumpers, large. Peeled, seeded and diced.

Method

Mix cucumber, yogurt, sour cream, garlic and vegetable broth in a large bowl. Blend them all using a blender until the mix is smooth. After that, put in the mint and shepu and blend. Keep it in a refrigerator for an hour. Serve chilled.

Recipe: Date Cheesecake



If eating plain dates is boring, you can also add this juicy fruit to different recipes. Chef Parag Joglekar tells you how to make date cheesecake.

For the dough:

4 cups all-purpose flour
¼ cup sugar
2 tablespoons yeast
½ teaspoon salt
2/3 cups of water
1/3 cup butter or margarine — cut into pieces
3 eggs

For the filling:

6 tablespoons cream cheese
1/3 cup of sugar
1 egg white
1 cup chopped dates
2 teaspoons all-purpose flour
1 ½ teaspoons grated lemon peel

For the topping:

½ cup all-purpose flour
3 tablespoons sugar
3 tablespoons butter or margarine

- For the dough, combine 1 cup of flour, sugar, yeast and salt. Heat water and butter until very warm (120o to 130oF) and add to these ingredients while beating them together. Add 2 eggs and stir in enough remaining flour to make soft dough. Knead the dough until smooth and elastic.
- For the date cheese filling, beat 12 ounces cream cheese, add sugar and egg white and beat until smooth. Stir in chopped dates, all-purpose flour and grated lemon peel.
- Divide the dough in half and roll each portion into 12 x 7 inch rectangle. Place it on two greased baking sheets. Spread half of date cheese filling over the centre of each rectangle and fold the dough at an angle across filling. Cover and let it rise in a warm place for about 30 to 45 minutes.
- Beat the remaining egg and brush it on dough.
- If desired, sprinkle crumb topping prepared by combining flour, sugar and stirring it in butter or margarine.
- Bake at 375oF for 30 to 35 minutes.

[Recipe: Kokum fish curry Kerala](#)



Fish tamarind flavored fish cooked the Keralite way.

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 45 minutes

Serves: 4

Recipe Ingredients:

5 pieces kokum (fish tamarind)

500g monkfish

½tsp salt

1tsp turmeric powder

½tsp fenugreek seeds

2tbsp red chili paste

400ml water

2tbsp refined vegetable oil

1/2tsp mustard seeds

10-12 curry leaves

2 medium onions, grated

1tbsp peeled and finely sliced garlic

Recipe Method:

Wash the kokum and leave it to soak in 50ml warm water.

Cut the fish into 12 pieces. Rinse the fish, pat dry and rub in ½tsp turmeric and ½tsp salt. Set aside to marinate.

Dry-roast the fenugreek seeds for a few seconds in a small frying pan till fragrant, then grind. Be careful not to over-roast the seeds as this will make them bitter.

Mix the fenugreek, chili paste and half a teaspoon of turmeric together with 50ml of water, forming a paste.

Heat the oil in a deep heavy-based frying pan. Add the mustard seeds; when they pop after a few seconds, add the curry leaves, onion and garlic and fry until the onion is translucent (about 3-4 minutes), then add the remaining salt.

Add the fenugreek paste and fry, stirring, for a further 3-4 minutes. Add the remaining water, bring to the boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes.

Add the soaked kokum plus its soaking water. Simmer for a further 10 minutes, until the mixture thickens a little.

Add the monkfish and simmer gently for 10 minutes. Serve with plain boiled rice.

[Drinks recipe: Tango Punch](#)

The citrus combo is jazzed up with the dash of Vodka in this punch!

Preparation time: 30 mins

Ingredients

1 litre orange juice
1 litre Sweet lime juice
1 litre Sprite
100 ml Vodka
1 cup melon balls

Method:

Scoop out melon balls from a melon. In a punch bowl add chilled orange juice, sweet lime juice, vodka and the melon balls. Serve chilled.

Simple ways to add cinnamon to your diet



Cinnamon has several health benefits, and one of the prominent ones is its ability to aid weight loss.

Here are three easy ways to add this spice to your every day diet:

Sprinkle on drinks Finely grind the cinnamon sticks and sprinkle the powder on your drinks — tea, coffees, shakes, fruit juices.

Use as flavouring agent This spice can be used to heighten the taste of sweet and savoury dishes. Add coarsely ground cinnamon paste to dishes while cooking. This powder can also be mixed with dough, yoghurt or butter.

Have it as it is Drinking a concoction made out of cinnamon powder, honey and warm water in the mornings boosts weight loss.

Unreal celebrity diets to achieve perfect figure!

For you, a diet is boiled food and no sugar. But for larger-than-life Hollywood, nothing less than bizarre will do -ice cubes, purple food, even air! Take a look at some of these unreal celebrity diets

When your livelihood depends on how you look, it's obvious that you'll go to great lengths to stay fit. But since tinsel town wouldn't be complete without some eyebrow raising behavior, its residents naturally take to some bizarre methods to lose weight. Like Lindsay Lohan who recently revealed that she practices erotic yoga (because Hollywood isn't sexual enough,

apparently) to stay fit. We take a look at some other stars who achieve their perfect figure through questionable means.

Nude-food diet

Gwyneth Paltrow's peculiar eating habits are enough to fill a list of their own since she's written an entire book filled with recipes that will keep your body slim and your taste buds perpetually tortured. Apart from only eating gluten-free food, Gwyneth had also revealed in the past that she used to have dinner naked, in front of a mirror, to help her eat smaller portions. Is it any surprise that Jennifer Lawrence recently labelled Gwyneth's habits as an "eating disorder"?

Coloured foods diets

For some, achieving that hourglass figure (and finally fitting into those skinny jeans you'd tucked away in the corner of your closet) is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. For Christina Aguilera, the diet is the rainbow, as she follows a 'seven-day colour diet' - where you eat white foods on Monday, red on Tuesday, and continuing with green, orange, purple and yellow foods till Saturday, all culminating into a mixed, rainbow-coloured dish on Sunday. Well, at least it seems to be working for the singer, she's come out of the diet with flying colours. Mariah Carey, on the other hand, seems to only have eyes for all things purple like eggplants or plums - part of the "purple diet", which is high in antioxidants and zilch in taste.

Eating air

Fans around the world think Madonna's a musical genius, but if you think the singer's just full of hot air, her diet might prove you right. It begins in a normal enough manner with the preparation of the food, but things get weird when she's only allowed to bring the food to her mouth and "inhale" the taste, after which, she puts it back into her plate. On a similar vein, actress Michelle Pfeiffer follows the breatharian diet, where the body is supposed to sustain itself on air (and we thought oxygen-deprivation caused crazy thoughts!).

Ice cube diet

What better way to cope with those midday hunger pangs than a nice, big helping of... ice cubes? At least that's how Renee Zellweger likes it. "As long as I get that 'constant feed' feeling, it's semi-tolerable," the actress

explained. We know celebrities want to be frozen in time, but we think you're going about it the wrong way , Renee.

Oh baby...

Reese Witherspoon has credited her youthful appearance to adhering to a strict diet of baby food (you are what you eat, apparently).

Apart from eating her regular meals, she downs 14 jars of baby food during breakfast and lunch. However, this pales in comparison to X Men: First Class actress January Jones, who revealed that she shed her pregnancy weight by eating capsules that contained her dried and crushed placenta (we thought the strange cravings happened during the pregnancy , not after it).

Grapefruit oil diet

Grapefruits are known for suppressing a person's appetite and burning fat. Sounds normal enough. But since it's Jennifer Lopez and Victoria's Secret Model Adriana Lima following it, there has to be a twist - carrying around bottles of grapefruit oil and sniffing it from time to time to burn fat just by inhaling the smell. For the record, no study has proven this technique to be effective.

No pigs please!

While Nicolas Cage doesn't follow his particular diet for weight loss, he has admitted that it's an animal's mating habits that determine whether it's included in his meals. "I think fish are very dignified with sex. So are birds. But pigs, not so much. So I don't eat pig meat or things like that. I eat fish and fowl," the actor revealed.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Kochi tea prices gather steam on lower arrivals

Kochi, February 5:

CTC dust varieties moved up at Kochi Tea auction on lower arrivals and good demand. The quantity on offer in sale no 6 was 10,32,500 kg and the market opened at Rs. 2-4 a kg dearer. Regional blenders and Kerala State Civil Supplies continued to be active on good liquoring varieties. Exporters confined to medium and plainer varieties, auctioneers Forbes, Ewart and Figgis said.

However, orthodox grades registered good arrivals and the quantity on offer was 11,500 kg. Though primary grades remained steady, others were irregular and lower, witnessing some withdrawals. In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties quoted Rs. 91-151, mediums fetched Rs. 73-114 and plain grades stood at Rs. 59-72.

Prices of leaf varieties also moved northwards with orthodox grades quoting 145,000 kg on offer. In the CTC leaf, the quantity on offer was 93,000 kg and the market for Good Liquoring teas firm to dearer.

In the dust category, Injipara (Prm) SFD fetched Rs. 152/kg. In leaf grades, PS Woodlands Hyson Green Tea topped at Rs. 339.

Tackling aflatoxin in groundnut

Consumer awareness can lead to demand for toxin-free produce; farmers will also stand to gain



Poor harvesting and storage conditions can lead to rapid development of the fungi and thus high toxin can be produced

The permitted level of aflatoxin in groundnut for human consumption, according to international standards, is 4 parts per billion (ppb) in the European Union and 20 ppb in the US.

India, being second-largest producer of groundnut, faces difficulties in accessing these markets as the level of aflatoxin on Indian groundnut is high and is considered unfit for human consumption. In accordance with Agmark standards, the permitted level of aflatoxin in India is 30ppb.

Owing to high food safety and animal and plant health concerns, many SPS (sanitary and phyto-sanitary) notifications have been issued against India by several countries over the last few years. This has resulted in exports of groundnut oil to many developed and developing countries shrinking.

Focus on the issue

Being dependent on imported oils for domestic consumption, augmented with increasing demand for edible oil in India, the lack of market access due to aflatoxin in groundnut has not been given due importance.

The question which remains in the mind of an aware consumer that if the level of aflatoxin in groundnut is so high that it is unfit for human

consumption in many countries, then how come it is fit for Indian consumers?

According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)-Lucknow, 21 per cent of groundnut in India is unfit for human consumption due to aflatoxin. Another study conducted by Icrisat reveals that the level of aflatoxin in Indian groundnut is 40 times more than permissible limits.

What is aflatoxin?

Aflatoxin is a sort of poison produced by the mould *Aspergillus flavus* which leads to severe health effects on humans and animals alike. *Aspergillus flavus* is the most common specie in Africa and Asia, highly toxic group of mycotoxins.

Aflatoxin accumulating fungi can infect groundnut during the production season as well as during post-harvest handling. Pre-harvest infection by *Aspergillus flavus* and consequent Aflatoxin contamination is more important in the semi-arid tropics, especially when drought occurs just before harvest.

Drought-stressed plants lose moisture from pods and seeds; physiological activity is greatly reduced. Both factors increase susceptibility to fungal invasion. Poor harvesting and storage conditions can lead to rapid development of the fungi and thus high toxin can be produced.

Effective solutions

India has now developed agricultural practices and technologies which can reduce the extent of aflatoxin to permitted levels.

Mere adoption of good varieties and good agricultural practices (GAPs) can help reduce the level of aflatoxin to 20 ppb. Breeding efforts have focused on reducing groundnut maturity periods to escape end-of-season drought, and the emphasis has been on the identification of short-duration farmer preferred lines with resistance to or tolerance of *Aspergillus*.

Among the recommended practice at production stage, applications of lime alone can reduce aflatoxin contamination by 72 per cent, while application of farm yard manure reduces aflatoxins by 42 per cent under field conditions. When combined, aflatoxin contamination can be reduced by up

to 84 per cent. Harvesting at appropriate stage, adoption of proper drying method, reducing kernel moisture to the level of 8 per cent, etc prevents the accumulation of aflatoxin significantly.

The Directorate of Groundnut (Junagarh) recommends some of the measures such as crop rotation with onion or garlic, selection of short- and medium-term varieties, advanced sowing, supplemental irrigation during end of the season, etc to reduce aflatoxin.

Way forward

The response of farmers towards adoption of these practices, however, has been poor. Farmers are even not aware of the health issues related to aflatoxin consumption and are reluctant to take a serious note of it due to unavailability of premium price for aflatoxin-free groundnut.

Lack of awareness about the recommended GAPS has also been a major factor inhibiting the probability of adoption of the recommended practices. There is need for conducting mass level sensitisation programme for farmers as well as consumers to tackle the issue right from farm level to till processing and consumption.

Consumers' awareness about aflatoxin can lead to demand for aflatoxin-free (permissible limit) groundnut and thus farmers may also fetch better price for taking the pain of improving their field and storage level practices.

The writers are associated with National Institute of Agricultural Marketing, Jaipur. Views are personal.

Cooking oil refiners want duty on imports raised further

Govt can generate Rs. 7,000 cr more, says solvent extractors body

Mumbai, February 5:

With cooking oil prices dropping six per cent December, when the Centre raised import duty on vegetable oils import, there is demand for raising the Customs levy further.

Led by the Solvent Extractors' Association of India, oil millers have appealed to the Government to increase the import duty on cooking oils with the steady fall in international prices hurting the domestic industry.

Additional duty can help the Government generate a revenue of Rs. 6,500-7,000 crore. The duty on crude vegetable oil should be raised to 10 per cent from 7.5 per cent and on refined vegetable oil to 25 per cent from 15 per cent, said the Solvent Extractors' Association in a statement.

The duty difference of 15 per cent between crude and refined vegetable oils will protect the margins of domestic refiners.

The hike in duty will not impact consumers as edible oil prices are at a five-year low and the future quotes for next six months show no sign of any surge in prices, it said.

Prices skid

Last December, the Government revised the duty structure but it has neither helped the farmers nor the oil mills as the duty difference between crude and refined oil was less than 15 per cent. Prices in the international markets have fallen by 6-8 per cent since the duty was revised.

Refined palm oil prices have dropped by eight per cent to \$645 a tonne in January, while crude palm oil dipped seven per cent to \$625 in the same period. Soyabean and sunflower oil prices have also come down by similar percentage points to \$800 (\$856) and \$815 (\$880), respectively.

Imports surge

Import of edible oils in the first two months (November and December) of oil year 2014-15 was up 15 per cent at 23.3 lakh tonnes against 20.1 lt in the same period last year. Shipments are expected to increase eight per cent to 125 lt this year against 116 lt valued at Rs. 60,000 crore last year.

Large edible oil imports were primarily due to lower prices in the international market and low import duty, said SEA.

Ocean science meet to discuss resource exploitation

Kochi, February 5:

Rapid commercialisation of the ocean sector with little regard to ecology is a major threat to marine ecosystem and the very existence of mankind, said Kerala Governor P Sathasivam .

Inaugurating the maiden World Ocean Science Congress (WOSC) here on Thursday, he said that increased commercialisation had affected the livelihood of the fishing community, who have even been forced to move out of their habitat of late.

“Commercialisation is also a threat to maritime culture and traditions,” he said, lamenting that the Indian Ocean remains “the least understood and managed oceans in the world” despite it being the most productive of all.

“Effective management of the ocean and its resources is a challenging task due to lack of regional co-operation, increasing population in coastal areas and socio-economic conditions,” he added.

The Governor said that the four-day Congress would be a “perfect platform” for various stakeholders to come together to discuss issues related to protection of marine life and changing environment patterns.

Kerala Fisheries Minister K Babu said the recent report on deep-sea fishing policy would impact the livelihood of fishing community, especially for those in Kerala. The Centre should review the policy, he said while delivering the presidential address.

The WOSC, jointly organised by Swadeshi Science Movement, Vijnana Bharati-Kerala chapter and Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies will discuss ways and means to use ocean resources for improving our economic growth without disrupting the ocean life and environment.

AP targets 25% agri growth

Nabard pegs credit potential for 2015-16 at Rs. 98,678 crore; bulk goes to crop loans



(from left) Jiji Mammen, CGM of NABARD; Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu; P Pulla Rao, Minister for Agriculture; C Kutamba Rao, Advisor; and IYR Krishna Rao, Chief Secretary PV Sivakumar

Hyderabad, February 5:

Andhra Pradesh has set a target of 20-25 per cent growth rate in agriculture and allied sectors for 2015-16. The sector grew at 11.32 per cent as against the national average of 3.55 per cent.

Addressing the Nabard meeting on State Focus paper for Andhra Pradesh here on Thursday, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said the state achieved a growth rate of 11.32 p.c. despite getting 36 per cent less rainfall last year.

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) Focus Paper has pegged the credit potential at Rs. 98,678 crore for the primary sector in the new State.

This is the first estimation of credit potential for the State after the bifurcation in June 2014.

Drawing attention to the debt crisis in the farm sector in Andhra, Naidu asked bankers and officials to study the problems and come out with suggestions on how to solve them.

“According to the National Sample Survey Organisation 91 per cent of all farmers in the State are in a debt crisis as against the national average of 51 per cent. We need to study the reasons and address them,” he said.

He said the high growth rate could be achieved by improving irrigation and productivity.

“If you can increase ayacut by 10 per cent that require small investments, you can solve problems of several thousands of farmers,” he said.

Credit requirements

Earlier presenting the credit potential for the State, Nabard Chief General Manager (AP and Telangana) said that the focus paper pegged 27 per cent higher credit requirements than last year. The Focus Paper acts as a guide to the State Government and banks as they prepare their respective targets for the sector. The theme of this year’s paper is ‘Accelerating the pace of capital formation in agriculture and allied sectors’.

Half of the targeted credit (would go to crop loans and Rs. 18,750 crore for agricultural term loans. The micro, small and medium enterprises would require Rs. 12,000 crore, the CGM said.

The important areas for credit outflow are: animal husbandry (Rs. 6,691 crore); and farm mechanisation (Rs. 2,152 crore).

‘Differences on climate change can be resolved

French Foreign Minister Fabius discusses agenda for Paris summit

New Delhi, February 5:

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius expressed confidence that differences on climate change between various countries, especially between developed and developing nations, can be resolved.

Addressing India's concern on the climate negotiations later this year, Fabius said: "If we want to have success, questions of finance and technology have to be resolved."

"We need to have transfer of technology (for developing countries). It is important for both developed and developing countries," he said.

Some developing countries, especially the US, have not been forthcoming on the issue of green technology transfer for developing countries — a key demand by India.

Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar added that France and India have agreed to "discuss issues where there are different opinions. We should be able to iron out differences if any".

The two leaders met on Thursday to discuss the pathway to the Paris COP 21 — the United Nations Climate Change Conference.

Earlier in the day, while addressing the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit, Fabius also asked private companies to join to help cut emissions.

Business Standard

[Global food prices down on record high output, inventory](#)

[Global food prices](#) declined in January on ample supply aided by record production and [inventory](#) in the ongoing harvesting season.

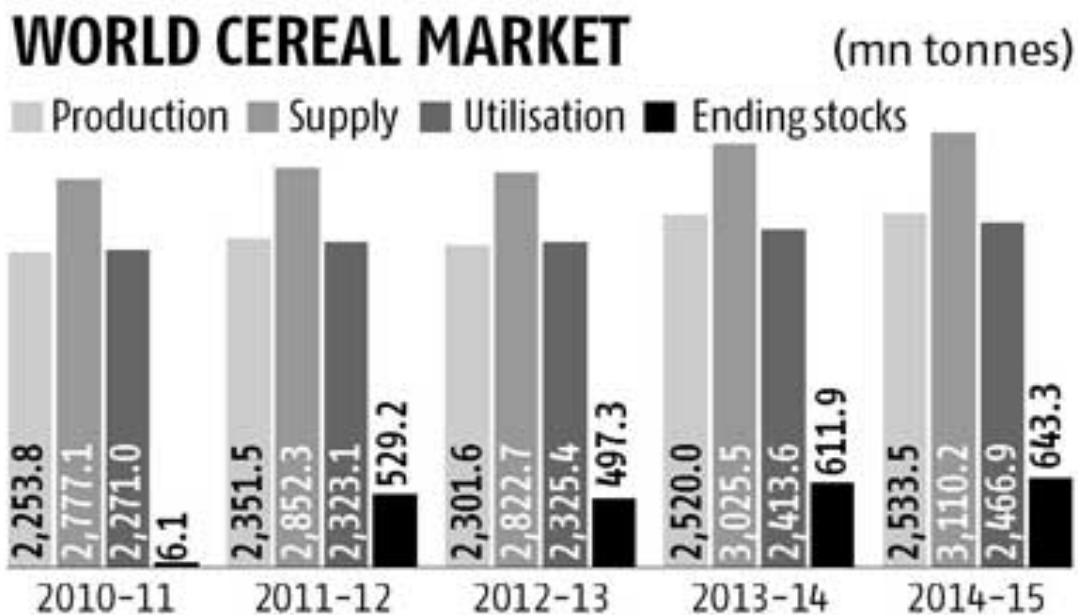
Data compiled by the [Food and Agricultural Organization](#)(FAO) of the United Nations reported a 1.9 per cent decline in the food price index at 182.7 points for January. Lower prices reflect record high global [cereal](#) production in 2015.

World cereal production is estimated at around 2.5 billion tonnes. Early indications for 2015 crops are favourable. Plantings of the 2015 winter [wheat](#) crops in the northern hemisphere were generally completed under propitious weather conditions with larger plantings in North America and the Near East, outweighing decreases in the Russian Federation and parts of Far East Asia.

The 2015 [maize](#) crop conditions in the southern hemisphere are also satisfactory although lower prices resulted in some reductions in plantings in South America. As for rice, plantings of the 2015 crops have been hindered by excessive rains in South America and in Sri Lanka, while drought curbed the area under rice in Australia, the [FAO](#) study said.

Total utilisation of world cereal in 2014-15 is estimated at 2.4 billion tonnes, 2.2 per cent (53 million tonnes) higher than in 2013-14. This means, global cereal stocks by the close of seasons in 2015 are forecast at 623 million tonnes, 46 million tonnes or eight per cent above the volume carried over from 2014.

The food index, meanwhile, has been on a downward path since April 2014. The decline in January was partly influenced by robust inventories, continued strength in the [US dollar](#) and weak crude oil prices. The food price index is a trade-weighted index that tracks prices of five major food commodity groups on international markets. It aggregates price sub-indices of cereals, meat, dairy products, vegetable oils and sugar.



Source : Food and Agricultural Organisation of United Nations

The global food stocks and situation monitoring agency reported cereal price index down 3.6 per cent to average at 177.4 points in January, a massive 34 per cent below its June 2008 peak. International wheat prices fell seven per

cent from December, reflecting ample supply conditions. Also, Vegetable Oil Index also fell significantly to 156.0 points, down 2.9 per cent from the previous month and is now at its lowest level since October 2009. The decline was driven largely by ample supplies of soy oil and lower crude oil prices, which erode the attractiveness of using vegetable oils for biodiesel.

However, the Dairy Price Index was stable in January, averaging 173.8 points as rising butter prices offset a decline in prices for cheese and skimmed milk powders. Also, Sugar Price Index averaged 217.7 points, virtually unchanged from December 2014.