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THE HINDU

Organic farmers' meet on Thursday

The Karnataka Krishik Sangh has convened a meeting of organic farmers in Belagavi district and adjoining areas at Gandhi Ghar in Devgiri village of Belgaum taluk on June 4. The meeting, to start at 10 a.m., would be presided over by veteran Gandhian and Sarvodaya worker Sadashiv Bhonsale.

Achievers in organic farming and experts, including Narayan Reddy, Suresh Desai, Abhay Mutalik Desai, Shankar Langati and Kallappa Neginal, will address and share their experiences with the participants. For more information, call KKS State president Mallikarjun Jakati on Ph: 8123416816, 7406260940 or 9448632917.

Producing seeds to enrich soil fertility



Summer showers have facilitated the prospects of production of green manure seeds this season at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University's Anbil Dharmalingam Agricultural College and Research Institute at Navalur Kuttapattu near here.

A sprawling area of 20 acres had been brought under the seed cultivation technique under the National Agriculture Development Programme (NADP) with a view to supplying green manure seeds to needy farmers.

The institute has cultivated daincha on its fields and is all ready for supplying daincha seeds to farmers in course of time. “Nitrogen fixation is the main advantage of the daincha in its root nodules,” says P. Pandiyarajan, Dean of the Institute, showing sharp nodules at the end of the roots of the plant where nitrogen has been fixed. The utilisation of the daincha seeds minimises the use of chemical fertiliser to a great extent.

On the advantages of the seeds, T. Eevera, Assistant Professor of Seeds Science Technology of the Institute, says that the use of daincha seeds would enrich soil fertility.

The growth of earthworm would be further strengthened through the seeds. The recent showers have stabilised the growth of the plants on the campus of the institute.

S.K. Ganesh, Professor and Head of Plant Breeding and Genetics, said that the duration of the plant to produce seeds was 110 days.

The Dean said that the institute would supply the seeds to the needy farmers during the middle of June. On an average, the production would be 200 kg an acre. Farmers would require about 8 kg an acre.

Turmeric auctioned

Turmeric was auctioned for Rs. 1.4 crore at the weekly auction at the Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers Cooperative Society recently.

Farmers had brought turmeric from Attur, Gangavalli, Koogaiyur, Kallakurichi, Bommidi, Harur, Jedarpalayam, Paramathi Velur, Namakkal, Mettur, Poolampatti for the weekly auction.

While ‘Virali’ variety fetched a price ranging between Rs. 6,309 a quintal and 8,299 a quintal; ‘Kizhangu’ variety fetched a price between Rs. 5,555 and Rs. 7,269 a quintal. More than 2,500 bags were auctioned on the occasion, according to cooperative society sources.

1,000 saplings to be planted in Kannur

Various environment conservation campaign programmes will be held here on June 4 and 5 under the aegis of the Kerala Initiative to Save Agriculture and Nature (KISAN) on the occasion of World Environment Day.

KISAN chairman and Kannur municipal vice-chairman T.O. Mohanan said at a press conference here on Monday that 1,000 saplings would be planted in the municipality's landfill at Chelora as part of the World Environment Day programme. This was in continuation of the drive to make the dump a land of greenery that could attract birds and butterflies, he said. The drive had been started in 2013 with the planting of 500 saplings, he said adding that 1,000 saplings had been planted last year.

Minister for Agriculture K.P. Mohanan would inaugurate the tree planting drive at 10 a.m. on June 4, he informed. Chief Forest Conservator D. Jayaprasad would inaugurate the distribution of the saplings for planting.

On the World Environment Day on June 5, an environment and health seminar would be held at 5 p.m. in association with the Police AR Camp Quarters Residents Association. Deputy Inspector General of Police Dinendra Kashyap would inaugurate the programme.

Mr. Mohanan said that KISAN has been actively involved in garbage-free initiatives in association with the municipality. The 'Susthira-2014' programme launched with the objective of making the town garbage-free has yielded results as the plastic collection centre opened at the Stadium complex was able to collect four tonnes of plastic waste every month for recycling. KISAN also has plans to start a collection centre for e-waste, Mr. Mohanan added.

KISAN vice-chairman K. Balachandran and secretary M. Rathnakaran were among those present at the press meet.

Afforestation drive

The Social Forestry wing of the Forest and Wildlife Department here will launch a tree planting drive on World Environment Day on June 5 in collaboration with organisations and institutions.

Assistant Conservator of Forest (Social Forestry) P. Biju said at a press conference here on Monday that the afforestation drive would be inaugurated by Rural Development Minister K.C. Joseph by planting a sapling in the Collectorate compound in the morning. At the inaugural function, District Collector P. Bala Kiran would present 'Prakrithi Mithra' awards to panchayats selected for their best environment-friendly activities in the district.

Mr. Biju said that a cycle rally to mobilise public involvement in environment protection activities would be taken out by students of the Kannapuram Higher Secondary School here at 10 a.m. on that day. He said that two lakh saplings would be planted through institutions.

Water release from Periyar dam today

Water will be released from the Periyar Dam for the first crop in the double cropping area of Cumbum valley on June 2, according to PWD sources.

The State Government has been releasing water in the first week of June for the second consecutive year.

Even as the PWD recommended for release of water on June 1, it did not receive any order till May 31 to release water from the dam on June 1.

Storage level in the dam this June was more comfortable when compared to last year.

Even as the storage level was just 113.8 feet, water was released on June 1 in 2014.

Before that, water was released as per schedule (June 1) only in 2008. After that, water was released only during the second and third week of June owing to poor storage.

Heavy summer showers and early onset of South West monsoon had increased the storage level of the dam substantially this year.

Water level stood at 117 feet. Entire inflow of 100 cusecs was discharged into the Periyar river.

Storage was 2,087 mcft. Water level stood at 45.8 feet in Vaigai dam and the inflow was 92 cusecs. The discharge was 60 cusecs. Storage was 1,489 mcft.

Underweight urea bags standardized

Having completed the standardizing of underweight urea bags, the Department of Agriculture has lifted the ban imposed on the sale of these urea bags to farmers.

As most of the manually packed 50 kg urea bags were found to be underweight, *The Hindu* recently carried a story on the issue.

Collector M. Karunakaran asked Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, C. Chandrasekaran to convene a meeting of his subordinates, representatives of Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited (KRIBHCO), an Indian cooperative society that imported the fertilizer from Sultanate of Oman and packed it in 50 kg bags through outsourcing, and Tamil Nadu Cooperative Marketing Federation (TANFED), which was selling the imported chemical nutrient, to solve the problem.

Special fertilizer checking squads, headed by Assistant Director of Agriculture (Quality Control) R. Kajendra Pandian and Agricultural Officers of all 19 blocks, inspected all Primary Co-operative Credit Societies and private dealers of the district to identify the discrepant urea bags.

When the inspection teams confirmed the scam, 'stop sales' order for 355.35 tonnes of KRIBHCO urea was issued by the Department of Agriculture.

It included 75.30 tonnes of underweight KRIBHCO urea bags with 17 private dealers and 87.60 tonnes with 36 Primary Agricultural Co-operative Credit Societies. 'Stop sales' orders were also issued to 192.45 tonnes stocked in the TANFED fertilizer godown.

Subsequent raids by the inspection team took the quantum of discrepant urea bags to 739 tonnes that included 192.45 tonnes with TANFED, 390.65 tonnes with Primary Agricultural Co-operative Credit Societies and 155.90 tonnes with private dealers.

When the KRIBHCO Sales Officer assured to standardize underweight urea bags within a week, the exercise was undertaken under the watchful eyes of the Agricultural Officers in every block of the district.

Moreover, the Joint Director of Agriculture, C. Chandrasekaran also inspected the standardized bags

“Based on the verification done by our officials after standardization, the ‘stop sales’ of urea bags is revoked in the interest of the farmers going in for ‘kar’ paddy cultivation in the district,” Mr. Chandrasekaran said.

Red gram sale

The Visakhapatnam Cooperative Central Stores (Super Bazaar) will sell red gram (kandipappu) at the rate of Rs. 100 a kg at its counters in every Rytu Bazaar from Tuesday at the direction of District Collector to provide some relief to the consumers who are forced to buy the commodity at a high price in the open market.



Tech lag: India's opium finds few takers



With India yet to adopt the advanced method of extracting opium from poppy seeds, the US has informally told the [government](#) that it will not be importing raw opium from India in the current fiscal, a development that is likely to adversely impact the country's overall production and export of opium.

With opium-producing countries including France, Australia and Hungary adopting the advanced [technology](#) of opium extraction — concentrate of poppy straw (CPS) — long back, opium exports from India as such have come down sharply from around 480 metric tonne in 2007-08 to 170 metric tonne 2014-15. The US cut down its import from India from 375.76 metric tonne in 2007-08 to 69.50 metric tonne in the last fiscal, according to the data maintained by the government. It stood at 421.32 metric tonne in 2008-09, 336.43 metric tonne in 2009-10, 392.158 metric tonne in 2010-11, further declining to 339.85 metric tonne in 2013-14.

India and Turkey are the traditional suppliers of raw opium to the world, but while Turkey moved to CPS in 1974, India is yet to adopt the new technology. “If it will not buy from India, it is likely that the US will source its opium requirement from Turkey,” official sources told [The Indian Express](#). Under the resolution 471 adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council, importing countries are bound to import 80 per cent of their requirement from traditional suppliers like India and Turkey and 20 per cent from other countries such as France, Australia and Spain.

While India had set up the first committee on CPS in 1969, it is yet to see the light of the day. In July 2010, the country had issued tender inviting bids for implementing CPS but the process could not be completed. “The Centre is again trying to invite bids to introduce the CPS and curb diversion of opium,” the sources added. Production of CPS is preferred by countries like the US because, apart from economies of scale, it also limits the opportunities for diversion to the illicit market and involves less residual waste than raw opium, thereby reducing environmental hazards.

Australia, France and Spain were the pioneers in CPS and have been developing new genetic varieties to provide increased alkaloid content for which demand has been increasing in the US.

“Declining demand would mean less cultivation of the crop, to check abuse. However, a reduction in production may lead to a surge in import for meeting the domestic demand for palliative care,” the sources added. Due to the decline in opium export, the number of licensed farmers and the area under cultivation has also come down. From 60,787 licensed farmers and 23,425 hectares in 2009-10, the number reduced to 38,460 farmers and over 5,000 hectares in 2014-15. However, the decline has not deterred politicians from asking for a hike in number of licensed farmers for poppy cultivation.

Politicians from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have been making representations to the finance ministry for a reduction in 2015-16 minimum qualifying yield (MQY), the minimum amount poppy farmers have to give to the government to be eligible for a licence. Last year, due to intense lobbying by members of Parliament of the two states (along with Uttar Pradesh these are the only states where poppy cultivation is allowed), the BJP-ruled government had reduced the MQY from 56 kg to 51 kg. Sudhir Gupta, BJP MP from Mandasour, Madhya Pradesh, said that the demand for MQY reduction is justified given the unseasonal rains and hailstorm earlier during the year. “We have asked for compensation. The NDA government in 1998 had licensed 1,59,000 farmers. The UPA government was not sympathetic,” Gupta said. Similarly, BJP MPs from Chittorgarh and Jhalawar — CP Joshi and Dushyant Singh — in Rajasthan, have also raised a similar demand with the government. “The licensing will be done in September and the representations have been coming in. Most came in during March-April when there was unseasonal rain and hailstorm,” the official said.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Tribal farmers go for coffee, pepper, apples



Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) is now changing focus to commercial crops like coffee, pepper and even apples as they feel the climate is better suited for these.

VISAKHAPATNAM: After propagating mixed plantations of mango, cashew and jackfruit in the Agency areas, where Podu (shifting cultivation) is practiced extensively, the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) is now changing focus to commercial crops like coffee, pepper and even apples as they feel the climate is better suited for these.

ITDA sources said that the whole idea of introducing mixed plantation crops on Podu land was to primarily serve two purposes -to ensure that the land is not deprived of the top soil and to familiarise people living in the Agency area with horticulture.

In many areas, the ITDA, with the help of the horticulture department, introduced mixed plantations of mango, cashew and jackfruit. However, mango and cashew yields have not been at par with jackfruit. ITDA project officer Hari Narayanan said, "It is true that mango has been introduced in many areas as part of mixed plantations. However, we have stopped focussing on mango. Our main focus is now coffee."

The ITDA is now introducing coffee with reasonable success in many parts of the Agency , even as the Regional Agriculture Research Station at Chintapalli is carrying out research on the viability of cultivating apples in the Visakha Agency , he said.

Currently , coffee, primarily the Robusta variety , is being cultivated in over 94,000 acres in Visakhapatnam, East Godavari and Srikakulam Agency areas along with pepper. Nearly 60% of these plantations are found in the 11 mandals of the Visakhapatnam Agency . The government is now keen to take the acreage under coffee past the 1 lakh-acre mark.

"Coffee and pepper are game changers. They are grown together and will soon turn the Agency area prosperous with more tribals taking to cultivating them. However, we are also trying to focus on promoting apple cultivation, especially in the Visakhapatnam Agency ," Ch Ayyanna Patrudu, state minister for panchayat raj and rural and water supply , said.

SN Sarma, a former employee of the Soil Conservation of India, said, "Mango and cashew plantations do not do well in the Agency areas as the region is a heavy rain zone and the dew factor works against these two crops. This is why horticulture department is not too keen on growing them."

Papaya reaps rich dividends in Kabirdham

Local farmers of villages in Kabirdham district are opting for the soil test before cultivation of suitable vegetable and fruit-bearing plants. A local farmer doubled his income by growing papaya after testing soil on his land.

Parasram of village Bundeli in Sahaspur Lohara Development Block has grown papayas on his one and half hectare acre of plot and reaped rich dividends by breaking all records. He used modern methods of farming and people are talking high of the quality of his fruits.

In 2011, Parasram took the plunge to grow cash crops and horticulture produces, moving away from traditional farm products. A training programme by National Horticulture Mission helped him sail through.

Under the guidance of officers, he grew the fruit and earned about Rs 3,50,000 in the first year itself.

Horticulture department officer MP Chauhan said that the average under cultivation for horticulture farming is increasing.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Centre plans MSP push to boost oilseeds, pulses output

The Centre is planning to procure oilseeds and pulses at minimum support prices (MSP) in order to increase coverage under the crops to meet domestic demand and rein in prices.

“Farmers need to be encouraged to increase pulses and oilseeds production. The Food Corporation of India is working on a procurement plan for these crops at MSP,” said Ram Vilas Paswan, the Union Food Minister, at a press conference here on Monday.

The Minister stated only these two crops had seen price increases over the last with the cost of rice, wheat and sugar stable.

“There needs to be a permanent solution to increase domestic output of oilseeds and pulses or the issue of high prices will continue,” he said. India produces 18-19 million tonnes (mt) of pulses each year and imports up to 4 mt. The prices of pulses have risen almost 64 per cent over the last year. Around 12 mt of edible oils are also imported.

Focus on East India

Paswan also stated that the FCI was also finalising an action plan to better support farmers in eastern India – particularly in Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam and eastern Uttar Pradesh – where extant procurement agencies had poor outreach services which led to distress sales.

“Improved MSP coverage will encourage farmers in these areas to adopt technology and improve yield of paddy. Productivity levels in these States at present are below the national average,” he said. He added that the sugar industry’s demand of buffer stock is not being considered by the Centre at present.

Cane arrears stood at Rs. 21,000 crore as of Monday, and the Minister said the States could take action against errant millers. Wheat procurement by the FCI is likely to be around 27.3 million tonnes (mt) for the 2015-16 marketing year.

According to data available on the agency’s website, it is estimated that FCI and State agencies have procured about 26.99 mt of the foodgrain, as of June 1.

Wheat procurement

“We have procured about 27 mt so far, this should go up to 27.3 mt by the time procurement finishes,” said a senior FCI official here on Monday.

Among the States, Punjab led the way with 9.95 mt of wheat lifted, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 7.26 mt, Haryana at 6.76 mt and Uttar Pradesh where 1.71 mt has been procured.

Substandard quality cereals

Data for shrivelled, broken and lustre-lost grain, after unseasonal rain and hailstorms damaged the standing crop in key wheat-growing States, will be released this week, reported by *BusinessLine* earlier.

While millers have pointed to poor quality grain affecting their operations, the official said,

“There is no problem with lustre-lost or shrivelled grain. Nutritionally, there is no difference and the taste is the same.”

He said the direct benefit transfers mechanism for the National Food Security Act (NFSA), which has faced constant delays in implementation since being ratified in 2013, was being rolled out on a pilot basis in the Union Territories of Puducherry, Chandigarh and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

NFSA update

Only 11 States and UTs have so far implemented the NFSA, the deadline for which was July 5, 2014. The Act entitles two-thirds of the population access to rice at Rs. 3/kg, wheat at Rs. 2/kg and coarse grains at Rs.1/kg.

“We are constantly sending reminders to States that are yet to implement the Act. The two biggest impediments have been end-to-end computerisation and putting up an accurate list of beneficiaries online,” said Paswan.

Global black tea output dips 11%

Global black tea production so far this calendar has fallen by 11.12 per cent over the same period of last year.

Global black tea production has fallen to 303.98 million kg (mkg) from 342.03 mkg last year.

This fall of 38.05 mkg marked a decline of 11.12 per cent. Kenya has lost the highest volume of 30.51 mkg to produce 81.57 mkg.

Indian production

“India is also heading for a lower output this calendar. It has posted the second highest loss of 10.80 mkg to produce 80.63 mkg.

Here, North India lost 9.63 mkg to produce 33.25 mkg and South India 1.17 mkg to produce 47.38 mkg”, Rajesh Gupta, compiler of annual *Global Tea Digest*, said.

Malawi’s output declined by 3.24 mkg to 24.90 mkg.

Sri Lanka up

Sri Lanka is the only major producer which has posted a higher output.

Till April, its production has increased by 8.35 mkg to reach 110.77 mkg.

Cardamom gains flavour on strong demand

Cardamom (small) prices continued to rise despite higher arrivals at the auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Even though traders are expecting the fresh capsules to arrive by mid-June, they were absorbing whatever material arrived at the market. Therefore, the prices were showing a steady/firmer trend, PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC told *BusinessLine*.

According to him, there is definitely a growth in consumption in the country, which itself is a huge market. “The change in the food habits and the economic growth is appears to have contributed to a positive demand growth for the spice. Besides, fixing of a price for imported material has made imports of cardamom from other sources unattractive. These factors have also aided the demand growth,” he said.

Export buying continued to remain slow because of non-availability of exportable variety of cardamom, Ranganathan, a dealer in Bodinayakannur, said.

Exporters might have bought an estimated 20 tonnes.

The individual auction average has moved up and it was vacillating between Rs. 650 and Rs. 700 a kg last week whereas, during this week last year the average price was at around Rs. 760 a kg.

Total arrivals during the season up to May 30 stood at 19,585 tonnes against 20,368 tonnes during the same period last year. The sales were at 19,023 tonnes and 19,674 tonnes respectively.

The auction average as on May 30 was at Rs. 675 a kg (Rs. 745).

Prices of graded varieties (Rs. /kg): 8mm bold green 980-1,020; 7-8mm 840-860; below 6 mm: 630-650

Carbide-free, branded mangoes from Telangana hit the shelves



The popular golden yellow Banganapalli mango, known for its typical taste and aroma, has now got its first brand called Omang. It will also be the first branded mango variety grown in Telangana to hit the market this summer.

eFresh Portal, supported by Nabard, has sourced the variety grown in orchards of Jagtiyal of Karimnagar district on a pilot basis.

The company has tied up with farmer producer organisations (FPOs) for this venture, says Srihari Kotela, its Managing Director.

“We will also be extending this initiative on a larger scale to Prakasam, Kurnool and Chittoor districts in Andhra Pradesh which grow these mangoes,” he told *BusinessLine* .

The initial marketing has been done through 15 sales points in the hi-tech city, gated communities and large institutions in the capital.

Demand from corporates

“We have also started offering online through Big Basket. With repeated requests coming for the 2-kg boxes priced at Rs. 150/box, plans are there to increase the sales points and meet the demand coming from corporates such as Infosys,” Srihari said

This week will see a big push with 4.5 tonnes of mango procured from Jagtiyal farmers. Consumers are showing interest in gifting besides own consumption.

Preserving identity, taste

“For farmers, the benefit is a higher price they get than what they get from the local mandi. The fruits are tested for residues and directly marketed by us. The consumer gets carbide residue-free, better taste and value-for-money product,” he claimed.

“The idea is to bring back the trust of the consumers and preserve the taste and smell. For best results, the Banganapalli mango should be plucked from early May. However, in efforts to reach markets in New Delhi, Mumbai and earn a good rate, it is being harvested in April itself,” Srihari explained.

Once the venture grows, next summer season, more FPOs will be involved in the process as key stakeholders.

The Banganapalli mango, originally introduced by the Nawabs of Banganapalli in Kurnool district is also in race for the geographical indication tag.

The variety occupies nearly 70 per cent of the total mango area of four lakh hectares in Telangana and AP. It is cultivated in Krishna, West Godavari, Kurnool, Chittoor, Khammam, Adilabad, Karimnagar and Medak districts.