

05-06-2015

THE HINDU

World Environment Day celebrated

The World Environment Day was celebrated by various organisations in Coimbatore and the Nilgiris. It is observed annually on June 5 by the United Nations to stimulate worldwide awareness of environment issues.

Environment Conservation Group (ECG), a Coimbatore-based NGO, joined hands with Pumpuhar Residents Welfare Association in Idayarpalayam to plant 70 saplings.

Global warming

The objective is to mitigate the impact of global warming. The ECG also expressed its willingness to work with schools to raise awareness among students.

Interested schools can contact the organisation at 97878 78910, email id: ecgwild@gmail.com.

The organisation also suggested a host of ways in which the common man can reduce waste consumption and make a positive contribution to the environment.

They include purchasing locally-manufactured goods, using products with minimal packaging, recycling and reusing as much as possible.

The Nilgiris

The Nilgiri Documentation Centre will observe the World Environment Day by celebrating the success of the Save Nilgiris Campaign

Centre's director Dharmalingam Venugopal said that the campaign successfully fought to scrap a 6 MW hydro-electric project proposed at Kallarpallam near Kotagiri, which would have had a watershed area extending to 6,000 ha.

A grassroots campaign ensured that this project was shelved.

The Centre will celebrate World Environment Day at Catherine Water Falls near Kotagiri on Friday to observe the 20th anniversary of stopping the Kallarpallam Dam.

Awareness

The Nilgiri Environment and Cultural Service Trust will create awareness on traditional agricultural methods.

Its founder V. Sivadas said that the district had a lot of agricultural activities ranging from tea to carrots. However, it was dominated by modern farming, which was heavily reliant on fertilizers and pesticide.

The Trust hopes to reverse this trend and will use the World Environment Day to create awareness about the traditional methods.

Latest developments in row over Maggi's food safety



After samples of “Maggi” noodles manufactured in March 2014 were reportedly found to contain high lead content and Monosodium Glutamate (MSG), the instant noodles brand is under scrutiny by various state governments and Union Consumer Affairs Ministry.

Nestle withdraws Maggi

Nestle India has withdrawn Maggi noodles from sale in India due to “an environment of confusion for consumers”, but continued to maintain it was safe and that it would be back on store shelves soon.

What is MSG?

Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is a popular preservative and flavour enhancer, often the star ingredient in many a restaurant-style Chinese meal. "MSG is also found in most packaged foods, from potato chips to soups and canned meats," says Dr Nupur Krishnan.

"But it's not always listed as MSG. It can be disguised as 'natural flavoring' or 'glutamic acid'."

MSG can cause many adverse reactions. Headaches, flushing, sweating, fluttering heartbeats, chest pain, nausea and weakness are all common reactions often known as the MSG symptom complex.

Researchers have established that MSG is often linked with rising obesity rates and inflammation within the body, particularly the liver.

In April, the food regulator of Uttar Pradesh, UP FDA had ordered recall of a batch of about 2 lakh packs of the Maggi instant noodles due to higher than permitted levels of lead and food additives.

After Uttar Pradesh, 14 states conducted tests on samples of Maggi for food safety. Five states, including Delhi, have banned it.

On May 29, taking a "serious" note of quality issues related to global giant Nestle's famous noodle brand Maggi, the government asked the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India to look into the matter. The FSSAI has collected more samples of Maggi from different states for testing.

Meanwhile, Hindi actors Madhuri Dixit, Amitabh Bachchan and Preity Zinta, who endorse Maggi were served legal notice on the claims made in the advertisement. A complaint was filed in the court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Barabanki, on May 30, by lawyer Santosh Kumar Singh, saying that by endorsing Maggi the film stars have misled people. The Consumer Affairs Ministry Additional Secretary G Gurucharan says "brand ambassadors would be liable for action if advertisements are found to be misleading."

On May 30, Madhuri Dixit tweeted that she met officials of Nestle and the company has reassured that "they adhere to stringent testing for quality and safety and are working with the authorities closely."

The same day, the Food Safety and Drug Administration of the U.P. government filed a case against the manufacturing company, Nestle India Ltd., and five others, including the Barabanki store from where samples with excess lead were seized.

The Uttarakhand Food Safety Department too collected samples of the noodle brand from the company's plant at Pantnagar in the State. Confirming the presence of MSG, the state banned Maggi.

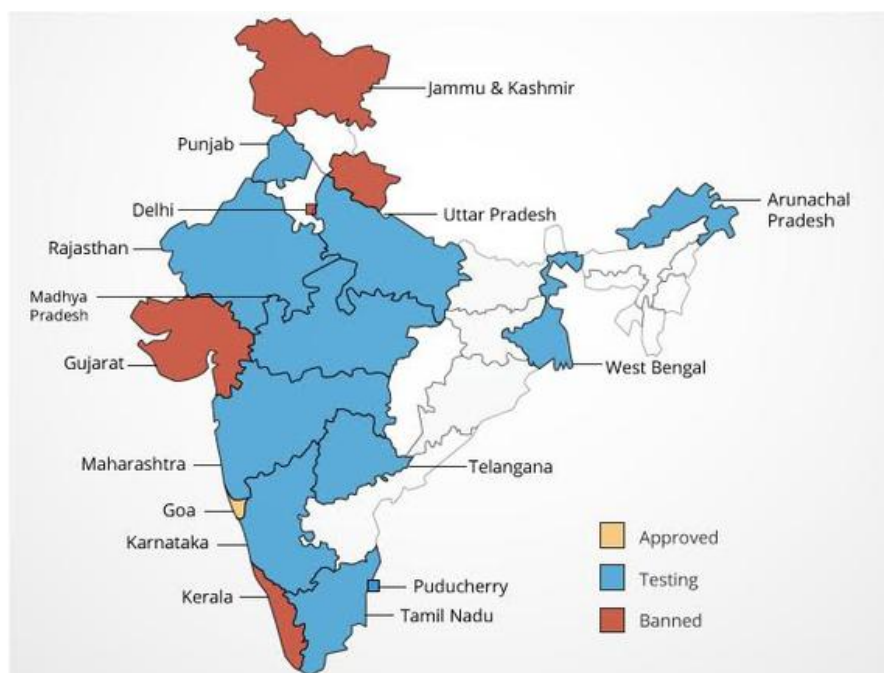
Nestle India said it has got tested samples of the noodle brand in an external laboratory as well as in-house and the product has been found "safe to eat" with lead levels within the permissible levels for consumption. The company was, however, silent on presence of the taste enhancer monosodium glutamate (MSG).

Nestle India's stocks continued to slump amid growing concerns about safety standards of its popular Maggi noodles. In a BSE filing, the company said it has not received any order from the central or any state FDA authority for recall of its Maggi noodle

State-owned retail outlets in Kerala and Delhi have banned the sale of Maggi. Leading retail chain Big Bazaar has also reportedly taken them off from its shelves.

Army has issued advisory to its personnel asking them not to eat Maggi noodles and directed its canteens not to sell them till further orders.

States that have banned Maggi



Nestle withdraws Maggi noodles from stores

The company continues to maintain the noodles was safe and that it would be back on store shelves soon.

Nestle India early on Friday said it was withdrawing Maggi noodles in the country amid nation-wide scrutiny over more-than-permissible limits of lead, but continued to maintain it was safe and that it would be back on store shelves soon.

“Maggi noodles are completely safe and have been trusted in India for over 30 years. The trust of our consumers and the safety of our products is our first priority,” the company said in a statement in the early hours of Friday.



“Unfortunately, recent developments and concerns about the product have led to an environment of confusion for the consumer, to such an extent that we have decided to withdraw the product off the shelves, despite the product being safe,” it said.

“We promise that the trusted Maggi Noodles will be back in the market as soon as the current situation is clarified.”

Some governments like in Gujarat, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir had banned Maggi for 15-30 days and several others had called for tests on the popular noodles after a batch in a small town in Uttar Pradesh was allegedly found to contain higher-than-permissible levels of lead.

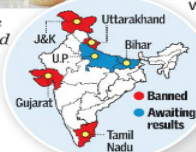
Following the concerns, a host of retailers — from neighbourhood shops to larger ones like Big Bazaar and WalMart — withdrew it from their shelves.

MORE STATES EMPTY THE SHELVES

Nestlé India's shares at the Bombay Stock Exchange fell by nearly 3% on Thursday



Maggi samples being examined at the Assam State Public Health Laboratory on Thursday.
— PHOTO: PTI



Walmart and Metro AG have withdrawn Maggi from their wholesale stores across the country

Of the 13 samples lifted by authorities in Delhi last week, 10 were found to be unsafe

BRAND AMBASSADORS' LIABILITY

The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 does not specify the extent of liability of those who endorse food products

OTHER PRODUCTS UNDER SCRUTINY

Gujarat also tested samples of noodles of Sunfeast and S.K. Foods, banning the latter for high lead content

Kerala has also brought food products of other brands under the scanner

CM promises 12-hour three-phase power supply

Like in three previous years, the farmers in the delta region will be provided with three-phase power for 12 hours.

Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, who announced a Rs. 41-crore package for delta farmers to encourage them to take up kuruvai crop as the State government was not in a position to release water from Mettur dam, said to encourage delta farmers to take up mechanisation in agriculture, they will be encouraged to use transplanters under the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method.

Renting transplanters from primary agricultural societies, sowing will be taken up in farm lands on a priority basis. Farmers need not pay anything. The government will spend Rs. 25 crore for the purpose.

The government will also provide Rs. 315 as subsidy per acre for farmers to use mineral mixture and improve the yield during kuruvai cultivation. On this account, the government funding will be Rs 7.87 crore. As fertilizers will have to be applied based on the soil quality, the government has given a hand book to farmers after taking up soil tests. Based on this data, soil fertility has to be enhanced in 50,000 acres in delta. The required gypsum will be supplied free of cost.

In Vennar, the tail end of the delta, kuruvai cultivation can't be taken up due to salinity of the groundwater. Making use of the moisture in the soil, farmers are being encouraged to take up green gram, black gram or green manure seeds with the yield expected in 60 days, say agriculture officials. For this programme, the government has allocated Rs. 5.10 crore.

Stating that the kuruvai packages to farmers had helped the State to sustain the foodgrain output above 100 lakh tonnes for the past two years, agricultural officials say the short-term cultivation would cover two lakh acres in the delta region.

Monsoon to hit Kerala anytime now: IMD

The southwest monsoon is expected to hit the Kerala coast in the next 48 hours after a delay of four days, the India Meteorological Department said on Thursday.

In a statement, the department said the monsoon could hit Kerala anytime now as rainfall activity had increased over the State.

The start of the monsoon in Kerala marks the official onset of the rainy season in the country. The usual date of onset is June 1.

The department had initially said the rains would hit the southern State on May 30, but revised the forecast to June 5.

“The trough of low pressure over the southeast Arabian Sea and adjoining Lakshadweep is more marked on Thursday. Under its influence, rainfall activity over Kerala has increased. Wind flows over the southeast Arabian Sea are also becoming favourable,” the IMD said in a statement.

Intense rain

Private forecasting agency Skymet said rain was likely to get intense in the next two days.

“While the rain remained minimal in the last couple of days over Kerala, it picked up in the last 24 hours. Rainfall activity is likely to get intense in the next two days and more showers are expected over the State and adjoining parts. As we move ahead, more parts of Kerala are likely to be bathed by good pre-monsoon rain, ushering in monsoon in India,” Skymet said.

TN announces Rs. 40 crore sops for Delta farmers

Tamil Nadu government on Thursday said water from the Mettur dam for *kuruvai* crops in Cauvery Delta districts cannot be released on June 12 due to lower storage levels, but announced a slew of schemes at over Rs 40 crore for taking up the short-term crop based on groundwater.

The announcement came from Chief Minister Jayalalithaa who said she had reviewed the situation with her senior cabinet colleagues and officials, including Finance Minister O. Panneerselvam and Chief Secretary K Gnanadesikan on June 2.

The storage at Mettur dam, the lifeline of Cauvery Delta districts, was at 72.64 feet and even if Karnataka releases Tamil Nadu’s share of Cauvey water for June under a Tribunal’s final award, the storage will still stand at 79 feet, she said in a statement here.

“Therefore, water cannot be released for *kuruvai* (short-term) crops on June 12,” she said.

Water from the 120 feet capacity Mettur Dam is generally released on the June 12 of every year for *kuruvai* crop plantation. Discharge was possible only when the storage was at least 90 feet, she added.

Ms. Jayalalithaa however said that with excess summer rainfall, groundwater level has “increased significantly,” following which she announced a series of sops to the farmers in this background to take up *kuruvai* plantation.

This includes supply of 12 hours of three-phase power, increased mechanisation of plantation and promoting the use of organic fertilizers, she said, adding government departments and cooperative unions would be roped in for this purpose.

Farmers need not pay for any of the efforts, she said adding that the said measure, totalling Rs 40.97 crore, would help enhance the acreage of *kuruvai* plantation and upgradation of quality of soil, she said.

CM announces Rs. 41-cr. package for delta ryots

With no chance of opening the Mettur dam for *kuruvai* crop, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Thursday announced a Rs 41-crore package benefitting farmers in the delta region.

According to an official release, the storage level at Mettur dam stood at 72.64 feet and the inflow was 7,058 cusecs. Even if Karnataka releases 10 tmcft of water as per the Cauvery tribunal's final award, the storage will only be 79 feet at the end of June.

For opening the dam on the scheduled date of June 12, a minimum storage of 90 feet was required, the Chief Minister said ruling out such a possibility this year. However, she announced a package to motivate farmers to take up *kuruvai* cultivation as the rainfall this summer has been good. As against the average rainfall of 128 mm during summer, the State has received 241.3 mm enhancing the groundwater table waiting to be tapped.

The package includes five programmes. Like in three previous years, the farmers in the delta region will be provided three-phase power for 12 hours.

In a bid to encourage delta farmers to take up mechanisation in agriculture, they will be encouraged to use transplanters under the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method. Renting transplanters from primary agricultural societies, sowing will be taken up on farmlands on a priority basis. Farmers need not pay anything. The government will spend Rs. 25 crore for the purpose.

The government will also provide Rs. 315 as subsidy per acre for farmers to use mineral mixture and improve the yield during *kuruvai* cultivation. On this account, the government funding will be Rs. 7.87 crore.

As fertilizers will have to be applied based on soil quality, the government has given a handbook to 67.46 lakh farmers after taking up soil tests. Based on this data, soil fertility has to be enhanced on 50,000 acres in the delta region. The required Gypsum will be supplied free of cost.

In Vennar, the tail end of the delta region, *kuruvai* cultivation can't be taken up owing to salinity of groundwater. Making use of the moisture in the soil, the farmers are being encouraged to take up cultivation of green gram, black gram or green manure seeds with the yield expected in 60 days, say agriculture officials.

Food Safety Act does not specify liability of celebrities

One of the primary statutory objectives of the 2006 Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA) is to "ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption" and it makes the promoter, manufacturer, packer, wholesaler, distributor, seller and even

the ‘manager’ of a food business outlet liable for violations including ‘unfair trade practice’ in several instances.

But there is no specific word in the Act about the extent or lack of liability or duty of care of the brand ambassador, who signs on to promote the brand as its ‘face’ and takes on the role of a marketing representative.

Wide definition

The Act affords a comprehensive definition of the term ‘advertisement’ in Section 3 (1) (b) to mean “any audio or visual publicity, representation or pronouncement made by means of any light, sound, smoke, gas, print, electronic media, internet or website and includes through any notice, circular, label, wrapper, invoice or other documents.”

Two sections — Section 24 and Section 53 — in the 2006 Act deal specifically with advertisements.

Section 24 (1) says in general terms that “no advertisement shall be made of any food which is misleading or deceiving or contravenes the provisions of this Act, the rules and regulations made there under.” Here, it does not explain whether the term “made” is only confined to commissioning the advertisement or the actual making of it. In the latter case, a brand ambassador does play a part.

Sub-section (2) of the same section says “no person shall engage himself in any unfair trade practice for purpose of promoting the sale...” This clause does not specify who the “person” mentioned in it is, thus, making the ambit of the provision pliable.

Clauses (a) (b) and (c) of Sub-section (2) holds this “person” legally responsible for falsely representing the standard and quality of the food product, its need and usefulness and also for giving the public “any guarantee of the efficacy that is not based on an adequate or scientific justification.”

Defence

If any defence of such guarantee is raised in a court of law, the burden of proof lies on the person doing so. If the definition of the term ‘person’ used in this provision includes a brand ambassador, he has to provide the scientific justification in his defence. Besides, it is reasonably assumed that a person must have applied his mind about the quality and standard of a brand before agreeing to promote it.

Whether this means brand ambassadors will be held responsible for every single thing that goes into the making of the product they endorse is not spelt out but it is this very ambiguity that has left actors Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit and Preity Zinta in the dock.

Consumers’ claim

“Brand ambassadors have a duty of care. They are paid in crores to use their persona or voice to make the public purchase a brand. Consumers enjoy a tortious claim against them for using their highly commercially exploitative rights to mislead the public,” Madhavi Gorakhia Divan, senior Supreme Court advocate and media law expert, said.

Vipul Mudgal, rights activist and Director of NGO Common Cause, however, said a brand ambassador cannot be culpable for promoting a brand if it is done in good faith.

How they green the city



Think globally, act locally is the mantra for sustainable development.

As another World Environment Day is being observed today, *MetroPlus* catches up with some individuals and organisations who have invested their time and money to protect the environment.

Group and individual initiatives, by making a difference to the way we live, are trying to keep the city green.

BIOTIPS

Are you in search of an indigenous plant/tree? Then team Biotips might help you. This group of farming enthusiasts has taken it up as a mission to protect and propagate rare plants and trees. In addition, the group acts as guide and facilitator for people who want to take up farming, by providing them raw materials, tools and even labour. They also take land on a contract basis and cultivate it.

“Over the last one year, we have planted over 2,700 trees in different parts of the capital city. We keep getting enquiries for plants that are on the verge of extinction. For instance, an individual wanted a Vlanga sapling and we found it in Krishnapuram in Palakkad,” says Sanjeev S. J., one of the members of Biotips.

The focus is on zero budget farming, which allows plants to grow in a natural ecosystem. The seven core members of the group who were brought together by their common interest in farming started out with bee keeping and have diversified into vegetable farming, poultry rearing and cultivation of rare plant varieties.

Registered in February last year, they also market different products, mostly honey, dairy products and fruits and its by-products. Of late, the team has taken up horticulture therapy on a larger scale. “We are doing it in 10 schools where we help with layout, design and selection of plants for the children who are differently abled. This is being done with the support of Centre for Disability Studies,” says Sanjeev. Contact: 9847878502, www.facebook.com/biotipsagro

SANCHI

‘Eco-friendly and economical’. Sanchi, the start-up in Technopark that manufactures eco-friendly bags, sticks to this tagline. Brainchild of Zafer Ameer, an engineering graduate, Sanchi brings jute and cloth bags to the market. It all started with Zafer’s “craze for ‘thol sanchi’ or the sling bag made of cloth” right from his school days.

Even when the world around switched over to stylish bags and backpacks of other material, Zafer took the trouble to stitch cloth bags and popularise it. The entrepreneur in him decided to sell it at the International Film Festival of Kerala (2013) and they became an instant hit. He started getting bulk orders and thus started the journey of Sanchi. “We’ve a three-pronged approach: promoting eco-friendly products, women’s empowerment since our products are manufactured by trained Kudumbashree workers, and inspiring youngsters to go green,” says Zafer. Ipad bags, laptop bags, bags for college and office-goers, certificate holders, customised bags...the Sanchi product portfolio is expanding.

While the raw material is bought from different parts of Tamil Nadu, the stitching is done in units in Venjaramoodu in the city and Chelakkara in Thrissur. Excess orders are handled by units in Tamil Nadu. While Sanchi has a huge clientele in Technopark itself, the bags have found takers in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Very soon, the brand will start selling online. Log on to <http://sanchibags.com/>

BLUE TRIANGLE

Scraps of cloth sewn together proved to be a lifeline for women in economic distress. Begun as part of an outreach initiative of the local chapter of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), Blue Triangle blended two programmes of theirs conceptualised by the YWCA – ‘Neighbour to the victimised’ and ‘Green ambassadors’. Under the leadership of Prabha Joshua and Rani Sarah Thomas, the YWCA began

running a tailoring centre at its Community Welfare Centre at Vazhayila. Women in financial distress were taught tailoring and embroidery. They began stitching home linen and pouches from cloth scraps collected from boutiques in the city.

To reduce the use of plastic bags, the group designed shopping bags, sling bags, vanity bags and pouches for different uses. The finished products are available for sale at the YWCA office at Spencer Junction. Contact: 2463690.

PAPERMAN

Swathy Nair's desire to do voluntary work did not remain a dream on paper. Instead she, along with Aravind Karthikeyan joined hands with Gopikrishnan Nair, to begin the city chapter of 'Paperman', on the lines of the Chennai-based organisation, 'Paperman'.

That was in 2012. The friends did some exemplary work to promote recycling among students and used the money gathered by selling paper to help children from economically backward families. But the activities of Paperman became dormant once the core group of friends left the city for jobs and higher education.

However, Swathy, a lawyer, says she plans to quit her job to revive the city unit of Paperman. Volunteers of Paperman go to schools, offices and houses to encourage people to collect old newspapers and used office stationery and drop it at a collection point. The paper thus collected is sold and the money is used to educate children.

Carmel Girls Higher Secondary School and St. Thomas Schools were some of the schools involved in the activity. "By the end of June, we hope to revive the chapter. We are looking for volunteers to help us kick start the activities," say Swathy and Arvind.

THANAL

Harvesting the fruits of labour is this dedicated group of environmentalists. To protect the environment and prevent a silent spring, the volunteers have spearheaded many campaigns in the city and in Kerala to make the people conscious of the environment and promote sustainable means of agriculture. In the third week of June, they plan to launch 'Rethink disposables', a campaign against the single-use-and-throw culture that is prevalent now. This is to cut down the heap of waste that is causing problems in composting. Thanal's experts will support and help people launch this movement and switch to non-disposable options using paper, cloth or coconut shell.

The weekly organic bazaar that was being organised by Thanal became an outlet and now it will be a seven-day affair at Thanal's office in Jawahar Nagar. The bazaar is open from 10 a.m. to 7.30 p.m. every day. "In addition, Thanal encourages its customers to turn producers themselves and if they harvest a crop, they are welcome to sell the produce at the outlet. We do keep an eye to ensure that the method is organic. In addition, we have a help desk manned by Deepak R. (9496998640)," says Jayakumar, founder member of Thanal.

‘Down to Earth’, a new programme, is aimed to encourage and teach students and youngsters to revive the soil. In the meantime, the group’s ‘Save our rice campaign’ continues to win supporters and farmers. As a result of the campaign, local groups and farmers have set up a paddy supply chain for organic traditional rice. It also focusses on reviving traditional seeds.

Boost to mango production



They were called “Salem” mangoes, a prefix to the king of fruits dating to the time when the district was part of the unified Salem region.

Today, Krishnagiri has come to stake its place and ownership in creating a brand Mango, ranking first in the production of mangoes in the State, followed by neighbouring Dharmapuri.

Of the 40,000 hectares (1 lakh acres) under mango cultivation here, 80 per cent is rainfed and 20 per cent is irrigated area. This year’s production has received a boost, by the opening up of an export market in raw fruits, with India lifting the ban on export of fruits.

This season, over 30 tonnes of mangoes have been exported to Malaysia and Singapore. The export mangoes were ripened in a ripening chamber in Pochampalli here, says P. Kaliappan, Deputy Director of Agricultural Marketing.

Major varieties produced from here are Bangalura or Thothapuri variety (which is cultivated in 60 per cent of the area), followed by Senthura, Neelam, Humayudin, Malcova, and Malliga in the remaining area. Yet, the mango production here hinges largely on and is sustained by the pulp industry, considering the entire Bangalura mangoes are produced solely for the pulp industry.

According to the Agricultural Marketing Department figures, of the annual mango production of 3 lakh metric tonnes, 2.5 lakh metric tonnes goes to pulp industry. Remaining .5 lakh metric tonnes are used for domestic sales. There are 71 pulp units in the district. The pulp industry here sustains a labour force of one lakh members starting from May up to August, says Mr. Kaliappan.

Mango production is largely concentrated on the eastern part of the district for its affable climate well-suited for producing fruits with sweet flavour. Hence, the major producers are Krishnagiri, Veapanapalli, Bargur, Mathur, and Kaveripattinam known for its sweet varieties.

As of date, the pulp concentrates are exported primarily to the Gulf countries.

On the production front, subsidy is issued under the area expansion scheme for drip irrigation. A subsidy of Rs. 9,500 per ha is given as planting subsidy.

On value addition front, a capital subsidy of 50 per cent is given for pulp industry under the National Fruit Processing Mission. Now, the State Horticulture department has signed an MoU with Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority for setting up a cold storage for freezing of mangoes through the Individual Quick Frozen technology. “The peel of the mango is removed and is then frozen under minus 30 degrees, and is used as and when required. The Rs. 10 crore project is being set up at Genur, a farm in Veapanapalli. Tenders have been floated for the project,” says Mr. Kaliappan.

Fragile ecosystem tipping over

More than one-third of the forests in the Western Ghats region, which form the ecological backbone of Karnataka and for most of South India, is highly vulnerable, says a study, which warns of dire consequences owing to overuse and over-exploitation of the lush ecosystem.

For perhaps the first time, researchers from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc.) mapped the entire stretch of the Western Ghats in Karnataka that spans 44,900 sq km to find out the “vulnerability” of the forest chain.

The results show a distressing trend.

Overall, 34 per cent of the forests were found to be highly vulnerable. Of this, nearly half of dry deciduous forests (found on the Eastern-sloped) and two-thirds of “plantations”,

which are done by the Forest Department to reclaim degraded stretches, were found to be highly vulnerable.

“In layman’s term, vulnerability is part of the forest that is in danger. By showing the areas that are vulnerable, forest policy can be tweaked to focus on these areas,” said Jagamohan Sharma, Chief Conservator of Forests, Water Resources Department, the author of the paper.

Areas such as Shivamogga, Chikkamagalur, Kodagu and fringes of Mysuru district see high human activity, lower rainfall that stunts the forest’s ability to regenerate, and highly fragmented forests make the region prone to degradation.

Measures in place for crop-specific soil test

Agriculture officers of soil testing laboratories and mobile soil testing laboratories who have been entrusted with the task of implementing ‘Mission Soil Health Card’ in the district have been instructed to carry out crop-specific testing of soil, warranting analysis of soil at varying depths, official sources said.

For fibrous crops, soil at a depth of 15 cm has to be taken and for crops such as maize, cotton and tapioca, soil for testing is taken from 45 cm depth.

As for orchard crops such as mango, sapota and coconut, soil at three feet depth is taken, to make sure sub-strata is not rocky.

At places of assured irrigation, soil sampling is conducted for every individual unit of two hectares and in rain-fed fields, sampling is conducted for every individual unit of 10 hectares.

The National Mission coincides with declaration of 2015 as the International Year of Soils by the 68th UN General Assembly with the aim of spreading awareness and understanding importance of soil for food security and essential ecosystem functions.

The officials engaged in the task have been asked to view soil as a living medium, serving as a natural nutrient source for growth of plants. Variations in the proportions of soil components: mineral, organic matter, water and air warrant study and classification of soils according to their use. Soil surveys conducted for determining fertilizer use helps in natural resource management, officials said.

Analysis

Soil samples are collected in representative areas or grids for analysis of physical and chemical properties.

The fertilizer not suitable to a soil type is called incorrect fertilizer and in this case fertilizer consumption ceases to be efficient for the crop production, R. Savithri, Assistant

Agriculture Officer, Kodumudi Block, and Nodal Officer of the Soil Health Card Mission in Erode district, said.

All brands of noodles to be tested

The Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration Department (Food Safety Wing) on Thursday initiated steps to take samples of all brands of noodles being sold in the State.

The move follows the controversy over Maggi noodles, which was found by the Uttar Pradesh government to contain Mono Sodium Glutamate (MSG) and lead in levels excess of the limits permitted under the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA).

Highly placed sources told *The Hindu* on Thursday that at least four major brands, manufactured by multinational companies, have been identified. This included Nestle India's Maggi, whose samples have already been lifted across the State.

Apart from the MNC's products, Food Safety Officers have also been instructed to take samples of locally-manufactured noodles. The FSSA mandated norms for food products sold at all levels ranging from road-side shops to supermarkets.

The samples would be taken within the next couple of days. In Coimbatore district, which has 26 Food Safety Officers, 10 brands, including six local brands, have been identified.

The samples would be tested at the Government Food Safety Laboratories that have been accredited. Tamil Nadu has six food analysis laboratories that are notified under the FSSA. They are in Coimbatore, Chennai, Salem, Thanjavur, Tirunelveli and Madurai. The results can be expected in a couple of weeks.

Misuse of subsidised fertilizers will attract action: Collector

Using subsidised fertilizer for non-agricultural purposes will attract stringent action, warned Collector Sajjansingh R.Chavan.

In a release issued here, Mr. Chavan said that it was a crime under Section 25 of the Fertilizer Control Order to use subsidised fertilizers meant for agricultural use for other purposes.

Technical grade urea, DAP and potash could be bought from industrial dealers at market rates for other uses, the Collector said. Licensed dealers should not sell fertilizers without valid bill and it should not be sold over Maximum Retail Price (MRP). He also warned against transportation of VAT-exempted fertilizers to other States, where the prices were high.

Smuggling to other States and application of subsidised fertilizers for industrial purposes would attract imprisonment for seven years under the Essential Commodities Act, he said.

Water released from Gadana dam



Water from Gadana Dam on the foothills of the Western Ghats beyond Alwarkurichi in the district was released to enable farmers to take up 'kar' paddy cultivation.

After brief prayers, M.G. Kulandaivel, District Revenue Officer, released 125 cusecs of water from the dam on Thursday even as the reservoir had 59 feet of water against its maximum capacity of 85 feet.

Speaking to reporters after releasing the water, Mr. Kulandaivel said water being released from the reservoir would enable the farmers having their ranches at Araspathu, Vadakurvapathukal, Alwarkurichi Thenkal, Ambur Perungal, Manjampulikal, Kakkanallurkal and Kangeyankal to take up 'kar' paddy cultivation on 3,987.57 acres. Release of 125 cusecs of water would be sustained for 120 days, i.e. till October 1.

“If the dam receives copious influx of water due to active precipitation in the catchment areas during the southwest monsoon, the quantum of water being released from the reservoir will be increased. If the expectation is belied, the available quantity of water will be released on turn basis and the farmers should use the water judiciously,” Mr. Kulandaivel said.

Executive Engineer, Chittar Basin, R. Kaliraj, Assistant Executive Engineers S. Mariappan, N. Gnanasekaran and P. Shankar Raj and farmers' association representatives were present.

As the southwest monsoon is expected to begin in Kerala within a week and become active before June 15, Ramanadhi (41 feet), Karuppanadhi (44 feet) and Adavinainarkovil (40 feet) dams, all situated near the Western Ghats, are likely to get good inflow in the days to come.

If the expectations are realised, the farmers, who had bumper yield in the last 'pisanam' season thanks to the active northeast monsoon, will be once again blessed with a decent yield during the 'kar' season too.

2.69 lakh hectares fixed for kharif sowing season

The Agriculture Department has fixed 2.69 lakh hectares of land for sowing during the kharif season in Yadgir.

The area to sow cereals has been fixed at 81,250 hectares, for pulses it is 92,550 hectares, for oil seeds 36,980 hectares and commercial crops 58,412 hectares, Chetana Patil, Joint Director of Agriculture Department, said here on Thursday.

Green gram

Green gram will be sown on 31,000 hectares of land, red gram on 57,600 hectares, black gram on 2,000 hectares and paddy on 55,000 hectares, cotton on 55,000 hectares and sugarcane on 3,412 hectares, she said.

Dr. Patil said that the district requires 33,141 quintals of sowing seeds for the area fixed.

There is a need for 3,652 quintal of pulses seeds followed by 4,489 quintals of oil seeds, 14,000 quintals of cereals and 11,000 quintals of commercial crop seeds.

Requisition

She also added that a requisition to the Karnataka State Seeds Corporation had been sent to supply the required sowing seeds and the corporation has assured to supply them at the earliest. The district also requires 29,200 metric tonnes of fertilizer and a requisition has been sent to the Karnataka State Marketing Federation for the same.

The department has taken all initiatives to supply fertilizer to the farmers through the Raitha Samparka Kendra on demand, she said.

Farmers in some parts of the district, who experienced pre-monsoon showers, were preparing the fields to sow green gram, Dr. Patil said.

Paddy procurement centres to be set up in seven districts

Owing to crash in paddy prices following hailstorm and heavy rain, the government has decided to open procurement centres in seven districts.

They will be opened at Davangere, Shivamogga, Raichur, Koppal, Ballari, Yadgir, and Kalaburagi to procure the commodity at Rs. 1,360 a quintal. Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs T.B. Jayachandra told presspersons that the summer paddy crop was damaged owing to hailstorm and strong winds. The crop planted in more than a lakh hectare was damaged in April and May. A sum of Rs. 216.35 crore has already been released to the Deputy Commissioners for payment of compensation to farmers. The compensation amount had been fixed at Rs. 25,000 per hectare, he said. Mr. Jayachandra said a team from the Centre would visit the State soon to assess the damage to agricultural and horticultural crops. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had urged the Centre to permit the State to establish procurement centres, he said.

Subsidised soyabean seeds distributed

The Agriculture Department in Adilabad distributed subsidised soyabean seeds to farmers on Thursday. The seeds will be supplied to farmers at a cost of Rs. 1,341 per 30 kg bag which actually costs Rs. 6,700 per quintal in the open market, according to Joint Director Agriculture, C. Rose Leela.

Adilabad District Cooperative Central Bank Chairman M. Damodar Reddy distributed the bags to farmers during a simple function at Hyderabad Agriculture Cooperative Association. Adilabad Mandal Praja Parishad president Naitham Lakshmi also attended.

Agri-business investors camp for start-ups

All agribusiness innovators and budding entrepreneurs will get an opportunity to present their ideas/ prototypes for individual advice. Whether a farmer with an idea, a businessperson or a student —anyone can bring their ideas for help in scaling-up.

The Agri-business Investors Camp will be held on June 12 at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) by Agri- Business Incubation (ABI) Programme. The camp is oriented around three themes: Agri-Technology, Agri-Engineering and Food Processing.

The aim is to identify and invest in innovative, early-stage start-ups that have the potential to become scalable and competitive food and agribusiness ventures. “The camp is targeted at the Indian start-up entrepreneurs and innovators in the agricultural sector and will serve as an ideal platform to present business ideas and models to secure additional funding support of up to Rs. 1 Crore (USD 156, 000) and to scale-up,” said Mr. S.M. Karuppanchetty, Chief Operating Officer of the Agri-Business Incubation (ABI) Programme.

“As part of the ICRISAT-ABI program, we will offer incubation support to selected entrepreneurs with innovative ideas,” he added. Interested can send plans/ ideas to: Divya

Nancy at d.nancy@cgiar.org , +91-40-3071-3451 or Rahul Joshi at rahuljoshi3079@gmail.com, +91-9985020108.

UNESCO concerned over farming around Hampi



After having chastised authorities for constructing a bridge close to the Hampi monuments in the past, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) has now raised concerns over irrigation and water-intensive agricultural practices that “pose a threat” to the World Heritage Site.

In the recently-released ‘State of Conservation’ report — which analyses the progress made by local authorities in preserving important historic sites — the issue of water-intensive agriculture was raised for the first time. Similar concerns were reported to UNESCO by the Hampi World Heritage Area Management Authority (HWHAMA) in February.

“The irrigation for water-intensive agriculture in the area poses a threat, especially to heritage structures located in agricultural fields, which could cause future conservation issues,” says UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee.

Crops such as paddy and sugarcane involve water-logged fields that may weaken the foundations of monuments, said HWHAMA.

However, the report adds that the topic is “sensitive” as the local economy depends on farming. “A strategy for managing this issue should be elaborated in close consultation with local stakeholders,” it adds.

R. Gopal, former Commissioner of HWHAMA, under whose tenure the status report was submitted, says that there “had been cases of minor monuments” being affected by farming in the region. “Some smaller monuments are on private land. Farming there has led to sinking of monuments...repairs have also been made due to dampness and wetness caused,” he said. Major monuments such as the Virupaksha temple and Ranganathaswamy temple were in “no danger” as they were surrounded by barren land up to “at least 300 metres.”

The authority contended that it would be “impossible” to stop agriculture near these monuments unless costly land acquisition is done. “Agriculture has been done for centuries as shown in inscriptions of agricultural canals in the region. Farming is part of the cultural ethos of the place,” said Mr. Gopal.

However, HWHAMA has chalked out a broad plan of dealing with the damages. These include prevention of wet crops from being cultivated where buried monuments are suspected; diversification of agriculture to include income from tourism; regulation of groundwater exploitation, and creating awareness about sustainable agriculture, among others.

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List 1986

Selected under the criteria: Represents a masterpiece of human creative genius; exceptional testimony to cultural tradition, and outstanding example of architectural ensemble that illustrates a significant stage in human history

* Construction of bridge across Tungabhadra saw the site being listed as “in danger” between 1999 and 2006

* Covers 26 sq. km.

* At least 78 monuments of significance

Cheers for Hampi

The UNESCO report commended the Hampi World Heritage Area Management Authority for:

* Clearing debris from collapsed bridged in Anegundi

* Adoption of Integrated Management Plan and developing Comprehensive Conservation Plan

* Removal of encroachments at Hampi Bazaar

* Implementation of solid waste management plan

Concerns raised

- * Water-intensive agriculture near monuments can create conservation issues
- * Traffic on State Highway passes close to monuments
- * Seasonal flooding due to release from Tungabhadra Dam
- * Purandara Mantapa, Rama and Lakshmana temple, Kudre Gombe Mantapa, Varaha Temple and Vijaya Vittala been inundated multiple times; particularly bad in 2014, 2013, 2009
- * Time till December 2016 to show progress

Flooding, traffic a concern

The seasonal release of water from the Tungabhadra dam as well as traffic movement close to the monuments are other concerns raised by UNESCO. The group of monuments are regularly inundated in June or July, raising concern over safety of the site. However, authorities say flooding has been a regular feature for the past 500 years, and monuments close to the river are built to withstand inundation.

The road over Kamalapura Lake in the region is another matter of concern. M. Pavan Kumar, Assistant Commissioner (Hospet), said alternative routes proposed had been met with objection from the Archaeological Society. “The matter has been forwarded to the State Advisory Committee headed by the Chief Minister to suggest locations for shifting of the road,” he said.

Hampi by night yet to see the light of day

Investigations into allegations of financial discrepancies in the Rs. 9-crore Hampi by Night project, which has been in the news for all the wrong reasons, will be taken up once the gram panchayat elections are over, said Mr. Pavan Kumar.

Not only has the project missed its deadline set for early 2013, allegations of substandard work in lighting for 18 out of 23 monuments have dogged the ambitious project. “Until the inquiry is complete, the contract will not be cancelled. However, we may launch the light and sound shows for the completed monuments soon,” said Mr. Kumar. Other plans in the pipeline include introduction of world-class signages, booklets and an app cataloguing the history of the sites, providing pedestrian access to the pre-historic cave paintings in Anegundi, among others.

QUOTE

“The priority will be to increase co-ordination between Archaeological Society of India, Hampi World Heritage Area Management Authority, district administration, and

Tungabhadra Dam Board to ensure conservation is done," M. Pavan Kumar, Assistant Commissioner (Hospet) and Commissioner HWHAMA.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Onion price jump 24% in a week at Lasalgaon

The average wholesale onion price went up by a staggering 24% in a week due to the rise in demand compared with the supply at the country's largest market at the Lasalgaon Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC).

The average wholesale onion price was Rs 1,550 per quintal on Thursday at Lasalgaon as against Rs 1,250 a quintal on May 28. In the other district APMCs, the average wholesale onion prices were recorded in the range of Rs 1,400 to Rs 1,450 a quintal on Thursday against the range of Rs 1,150 to Rs 1,250 a quintal on May 28.

"The average wholesale onion prices have increased by around 25% in a week at Lasalgaon APMC due to rise in demand as compared with the supply. The average prices have stabilised in the range of Rs 1,400 to Rs 1,450 a quintal and are expected to remain in the same range for the next couple of weeks," an official from Lasalgaon APMC told TOI.

The rise in demand is also being attributed to the National Agricultural Co-operative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) procuring onions. As a result, the average wholesale onion prices have increased by Rs 300 a quintal in a week, APMC officials said.

Officials said the onion crop currently arriving in the market is of medium quality. This may be because the farmers prefer to store good quality onions of the summer crop with a hope of getting better prices later. The summer crop has a shelf life of six to seven months.

The average wholesale onion price at Lasalgaon was recorded at Rs 1,550 a quintal on Thursday. The minimum and maximum prices were recorded at Rs 800 and Rs 1,990 a quintal, respectively. Around 16,000 quintals of onions were auctioned at Lasalgaon APMC on Thursday.

In Pimpalgaon, the average wholesale onion price was recorded at Rs 1,450 a quintal on Thursday against Rs 1,150 a quintal on May 28. The minimum and maximum prices were recorded at Rs 700 and Rs 1,450 a quintal, respectively. Around 16,500 quintals of onions were auctioned at Pimpalgaon on Thursday.

In Yeola, the average wholesale onion price was recorded at Rs 1,400 a quintal on Thursday against Rs 1,250 a quintal on May 28. The minimum and maximum prices were recorded at Rs 400 and Rs 1,926 a quintal, respectively. Around 7,565 quintals of onions were auctioned at Yeola on Thursday.

For 4th year, farmers may lose out on 1 crop in Chennai

For the fourth year in succession, poor rain has dashed delta farmers' hopes of carrying out short-term kuruvai cultivation. Out of four lakh acres normally covered under kuruvai, about three lakh acres will be affected if water release from Mettur dam gets delayed. About one lakh acres dependent on groundwater could be cultivated and farmers are involved in preparing fields in such areas.

Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalithaa has announced that water would not be released on the annual scheduled date of June 12 as there isn't adequate storage in Stanley reservoir in Mettur. As against a required level of 90ft, the dam has less than 73ft water as on date. About 50tmcft water is required to irrigate kuruvai crop in delta districts of Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam.

The reservoir has an inflow of 7,000cusecs at present owing to rain in catchment areas of Dharmapuri district, but this flow could stop in a day or two. Water is not flowing into the reservoir from Karnataka and unless there is substantial rain in Wayanad district in Kerala and catchment areas in Karnataka, the situation in the lower riparian state of Tamil Nadu could get worse. Farmers are staring at yet another drought.

Farmers feel the government's decision not to release water for now is justified as the available water in Mettur is insufficient to sustain irrigation for the entire crop season. Cauvery Delta Farmers' Association secretary S Ranganathan said, "Last four years southwest monsoon has been erratic and farmers have realized it is risky to depend on Cauvery for kuruvai cultivation. Wherever borewells and open wells are available, people carry out agricultural operations using groundwater. Interestingly, this year, farmers did even summer cultivation on about one lakh acres using groundwater, because last year northeast monsoon was good and it helped recharge underground aquifers. They started operations in February and harvest is going on at present."

Failure of kuruvai could result in a production loss of more than 15 lakh tonnes of paddy, equivalent to 2,250 crore, said Cauvery Farmers' Protection Association general secretary V Dhanapalan. Loss on account of lack of employment opportunity could be in the region of 1,200 crore, he said.

Dhanapalan blamed diversion of Cauvery water to Veeranam lake to cater to the drinking water needs of Chennai city as the primary reason for drop in water level in Mettur. "Water release from Mettur is normally stopped on January 28. But this year it was delayed to divert about 10tmcft water to Veeranam, because Chennai did not get adequate Krishna water from Andhra Pradesh."

Mineral exploitation area rises to 1.5% in new policy in Rajasthan

In sync with the aim to lure investments to the state, chief minister Vasundhara Raje on Thursday unveiled the Rajasthan Mineral Policy 2015, which raises the mineral exploitation area in the state to 1.5% from the existing 0.54% (which is approximately 1,846km).

The policy, which along with the Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy 2015 was unveiled at the Ambassadors' Roundtable Conference in New Delhi, aims at encouraging the investors in the sector and was drafted and redrafted to address the gap holes which hurt the mine owners and those dependant on mining activities.

The new policy also states that mining lease for sand stone would now be issued on agriculture land as well. At present, mining lease is available for minimum 4 hectare while the new policy will lease out areas of 1 hectare too for mining. The policy aims at involvement of small businesses too in the sector. The lease period has been raised to 50 years.

Principal secretary, mines & petroleum, Ashok Singhvi said the period of mining lease will be 50 years from the date of initial grant, which can be subsequently extended twice for a 20-year period, subject to a maximum lease period of 90 years.

"Benefits under the Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme shall be extended to encourage value addition and setting up of industry. International prospecting companies shall also be invited to identify mineral resources for development," he said.

Despite weak monsoon forecast, farmers in Bathinda, Muktsar opting for paddy

Lower returns from cotton and basmati have made farmers in the two key cotton-growing districts of Punjab Bathinda and Muktsar sow more paddy this kharif season, despite fears of a deficient monsoon rainfall for the second consecutive year. Punjab had received only 50% of the normal monsoon rainfall in June-September in 2014.

India Meteorological Department has forecast 85% of the normal rainfall from June to September in northwest region of the country, including Punjab. Without paying heed to the IMD forecast of deficient rainfall (below 90% of the normal), farmers in Bathinda and Muktsar are opting for water-guzzling paddy, even at the cost of straining the fast-depleting groundwater.

In 2014, paddy was grown over 59,000 hectares (ha) in Muktsar and is likely to jump by 35.6% to 80,000 ha this season. Acreage under basmati is likely to drop by 32.4% to 50,000 ha from 74,000 ha last year. Farmers are opting for paddy, moong (green gram) and maize over basmati. Estimated area under cotton in the district has also gone down by about 4,000 ha to 70,000 ha this season.

In Bathinda too, area under basmati is likely to shrink by 5,000 ha to 12,000 ha as compared to last year. Area under paddy is likely to marginally go up to 90,000 ha from 89,000 ha in 2014. Cotton acreage is also seen going up by 2,000 ha to 1.40 lakh ha.

Bathinda chief agriculture officer Rajinder Singh said, "As Basmati fetched lower prices in 2014 as compared to the previous year, more farmers are opting for paddy and other crops. Acreage under basmati is expected to go down in the district."

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Cotton acreage to bloom on drought

Low water requirement could draw growers in central and southern India



Cotton, a drought and heat tolerant crop, is set to emerge as the preferred choice of farmers in parts of central and southern India this kharif season as the arrival of monsoon has been delayed amidst the Government's revised forecast that rains would be deficient this year.

“Going by the previous experience, cotton acreage has gained whenever the monsoon has been erratic or delayed. It does not require water on a weekly basis. We are hoping that the acreage would gain, but it all depends on the arrival of monsoon and the spatial distribution of rains,” said M Ramasami, Chairman and Managing Director of Rasi Seeds.

The onset of monsoon this year has been delayed by about five days and is expected to hit the coast of Kerala on Friday.

The Indian Metrological Department (IMD), in its latest forecast last week said that rains will be deficient by about 12 per cent over the long period average of 89 cm.

Low prices

“Drought is positive for cotton. However, prices have been low last year and that may be a deterrent,” said Dhiren Seth, President, Cotton Association of India.

The Government procured 90 lakh bales (of 170 kg each) at the minimum support price.

“Prices were bad during the peak season but have recovered during the end season and that may change the farmers’ perception,” Sheth said.

CICR propaganda

“Farmers are aware of a deficient monsoon and are looking at planting cotton. The acreage may gain, but it is too early to predict. Cotton may emerge as the preferred choice for farmers, because it offers relatively better returns when compared to other competing kharif crops,” said KR Kranthi, Director, Central Institute for Cotton Research (CICR).

In fact, a cost and profitability analysis of kharif crops during 2009-10 and 2011-12 by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) has revealed that the rate of gross return and net return was the highest for cotton when compared with pulses, oilseeds and cereals.

CICR has begun gearing up as part of the contingency plan to deal with the projected deficient rains advising farmers in the Centre and South to go in for early maturing varieties and that are resistant to sap sucking pests.

Kranthi expects overall acreage to be around 12 million hectares. Last year, the cotton acreage had touched an all time high of 12.97 million hectares.

Inter cropping

Also with the prices of pulses ruling high, farmers are expected to take up the cultivation of red gram (tur) even though if there is a delay in sowing by few weeks. Kranthi expects

that intercropping of red-gram with cotton to make a come back this year, particularly in Maharashtra and Karnataka. Red gram was a popular intercrop with cotton till the advent of Bt hybrids in 2002-03.

Meanwhile, planting of cotton in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, which got delayed due to the late harvest of wheat, got extended this year by a couple of weeks. “It has just come to an end and we are expecting the acreage figures from the states by early July,” Kranthi said.

However, the seed companies feel that acreage is lower in North India because of poor prices that the fibre crop fetched last year. “We feel that the acreage is lower by about 25 per cent this year,” said Rasi Seed’s Ramasami. Cotton was planted on about 1.5 million hectare in North India last year. In Karnataka and Tamil Nadu cotton should see good demand, Ramasami said adding that planting has already begun in some parts of these States that have received good pre-monsoon rains.

‘Global warming affecting rubber output’

Research report says the trend is worrying



Kottayam, June 4:

A study conducted by Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII) has found out that extreme temperatures are becoming more frequent in recent years in Kottayam, Kerala’s major rubber growing area.

An analysis of the data of daily maximum and minimum temperatures from 1970 to 2010, conducted by the Climate Change and Ecosystem Studies Division of RRII showed clear indications of the warming trend.

Yield to be affected

The production of latex in rubber trees is closely related to the ambient temperature. The productivity of the crop decreases as the temperature goes up beyond a threshold level.

Earlier studies clearly showed that the increase in atmospheric temperature would affect rubber production in India's traditional rubber growing regions. Thus the impact of changing climate in this region may seriously affect rubber cultivation, if the present warming trend continues.

Temperature stress

Since the socio-economic sustainability of the region is highly dependent on rubber cultivation, proper precautions and climate resilient measures may have to be adopted by the farmers to overcome the adverse effects of temperature stress.

The diurnal temperature range (difference between monthly mean maximum and minimum temperatures) increased from 7.800 C during 1970s to 9.20 C in recent years. Frequency of occurrence of warming days (with temperature above 32 C) also increased at a rate of 0.56 per cent a year.

The number of days with minimum temperature decreased significantly, indicating the warming nights are becoming more in Kottayam during recent years.

The monthly highest temperature showed an increase of 0.0380 C per year during 1970 to 2010.

Persistence of high temperature consecutively for six days or more represents a warm spell. The number of such warm spells increased and the gaps between warm spells became shorter in recent years.

The impact of such phenomenon in the production and productivity of agricultural crops in South East Asia and Europe have already been reported.

Extreme temperature events in the form of heat wave and cold wave in the northern states of India impacts severely on crop production and quality of grains leading to serious socio-economic consequences.

The results of the study by RRII were presented in the recent Kerala Environment Congress-2015 held at Kottayam during May 2015

Campaign to promote carbide-free mangoes in Vizag

Farmers believe use of carbide is more economical



Buyers picking up naturally ripened mangoes put up for sale at the Mango Mela at Rythu Bazaar in Visakhapatnam CV Subrahmanyam

Visakhapatnam, June 4:

The sight and taste of a fully ripened mango is one of the joys of summer, but there also lurks danger, as the fruits are ripened by farmers using calcium carbide.

The Horticulture Department has taken up a drive to educate the farmers and the public about the health hazard and the necessity for cultivating and consuming carbide-free mangoes.

A three-day mango mela is being organised at the MVP Colony rythu bazar here from Thursday to sell naturally ripened mangoes and to spread awareness about the need for shunning carbide.

Mostly, farmers from Nakkapalli mandal have brought the fruit to the rythu bazar and the response of the public on the first day was lacklustre.

The department has fixed the prices for different varieties – Banganapalli (Rs. 40/kg), Suvarnarekha (Rs.40), Rasalu (Rs. 45), Imam Pasand (Rs. 50) and Kottapalli Kobbari (Rs. 80).

“We have come from far, nearly a 100 km, and these rates are not remunerative for us,” said P Siva and S Ramesh, farmers.

They said it was much easier and economical for them to sell the fruit using carbide and “the people are also used to it, as they like the colour and the taste of the fruit. Unless the consumer preferences are changed, this will only be a token exercise.”

Venkateswara Rao, selling carbide mangoes outside the rythu bazar, said his business would be hit for three days and then it would be back to normal. He said carbide-free mangoes would be slightly costlier, “but that is not the main factor. We have all grown used to carbide – the farmers, vendors and the public.”

The horticulture department officials, however, are making efforts to wean the farmers away from carbide by offering subsidies to use ethylene gas for ripening the fruits.

Badam makes a re-entry in kitchens as Indians savour it



Almond, or *badam*, as it is known in most parts of the country, is making a come back into kitchens.

India has just pushed Germany to fourth place to become the third largest importer of almonds from the US last year.

With more and more Indians developing a liking for almonds, imports are set to grow by 26 per cent over the last year's figure of 102 million pounds (about 46,000 tonnes). The Almonds Board of California, which takes care of interests of almond growers and handlers in the US, expects a further increase in the demand in the next few years.

Known for its medicinal properties for long, almonds has its origin in the Gulf and South Asia.

“We expect the import figures to grow significantly in the next few years.

We see a demand for 166 million pounds (about 75,296 tonnes) of almonds in 2016,” Sudarshan Mazumdar, Regional Director of Almond Board of California, told *BusinessLine*. “The middle-class is becoming health conscious and realising the importance of almonds in their regular food intake,” he said.

The US is a leader in production of almonds. The western State of California produces two billion pounds (about 9.07 lakh tonnes) or 83 per cent of the world's production, says the Board.

Set up in 1950s as a quasi-government entity, the Board takes care of the interests of the growers and handlers. It, however, neither procures nor sells almonds. It funds research on finding nutritional and medical attributes of almonds.

Besides doing research on development of marketing and production technologies, the board takes up promotional activities in various global markets in order to create more demand for the produce.

“Californian almonds are exported to 90 global markets, main importers being Spain, China, India and Germany,” he said.

Scope for exports

The scope for increased exports to India is immense as the current per capita consumption is very low at 0.09 pounds.

Weaker global cues weigh on imported cooking oils

Imported palmolein and soya oil declined by ₹2 and ₹5 for 10 kg each as local refineries cut their rates in line with weak opening of Malaysian palm oil and domestic soya oil futures.

Groundnut and rapeseed oil rose by ₹20 and ₹2 each.

During the day about 300-400 tonnes of palmolein were resold at ₹508-512 in spot market



Demand for indigenous edible oils was lacking on report of arrivals of monsoon rain in some parts of the country.

Liberty was quoting palmolein at ₹518 JNPT, super palmolein ₹546 and soyabean refined oil ₹612. Ruchi traded palmolein for ₹518 JNPT, soyabean refined oil ₹608, sunflower refined oil ₹701. Allana's rates: palmolein ₹518, super palmolein ₹551, soyabean refined oil ₹610 and sunflower oil ₹705.

In Saurashtra-Rajkot, groundnut oil *Telia* tin jumped to ₹1,510 (1,470) and loose (10 kg) at ₹975 (950).

BCE spot rates (₹/10 kg): groundnut oil 950 (930), soya ref. oil 605 (610), sunflower exp. ref. 655 (650), sunflower ref. 700 (700), rapeseed ref. oil 887 (885), rapeseed exp. ref. 857 (855), cottonseed ref. oil 615 (615) and palmolein 510 (512).

Business Standard

Agri commodities' price rise on deficient monsoon forecast

Prices of agricultural [commodities](#) have started spiralling in the spot market, ahead of kharif sowing, due to the lower production estimates following a deficient [monsoon](#) forecast by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) this year.



A little over 60 per cent of the country's cultivable land is only rain-fed and 70 per cent of the annual rainfall takes place during the monsoon.

The firmness in [agri](#) commodity prices began mid-April, when [IMD](#) first came out with a rainfall forecast of 93 per cent of the long-period average (LPA). In May, prices rose up to 30 per cent in wholesale markets. The rise has been more in the past three weeks.

According to the Union government's department of consumer affairs, [wheat](#) rose 30 per cent in May to trade currently at Rs 2,138 a quintal as against Rs 1,650 a qtl on May 1. There has been a lower percentage of increase in pulses, potatoes and edible oils.

“The price rise is only because of lower production fear. A further rally in the short term looks unlikely. Future movement would depend on the progress of actual rainfall. The government's response to deficient rain would also have a significant bearing on commodity prices,” said Jagdeep Grewal, vice-president (commodities and research), Kunvarji Commodities.

IMD's current forecast is 88 per cent of the LPA and this has worried all, including the government, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), farmers, traders and consumers. The RBI governor has already raised concern over inflationary pressure due to less rain.

Union finance minister Arun Jaitley has sought to reassure on these concerns. Addressing journalists in Delhi on Thursday, he said, “The forecast rainfall pattern is similar to last year. Hence, foodgrain production might not have a significant impact. We have an abundance of foodgrain and our management was efficient last year, with no inflationary pressure (on this count).”

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the [United Nations](#) has lowered India's milled [rice](#) production forecast by 1.4 per cent to 94.5 million tonnes this year, as against 95.8 mt last year. However, added FAO, in a report issued on Thursday,

“[Cereal](#) production is forecast to remain close to the record outputs of the previous year. Favourable weather and sufficient input supplies in India, including irrigated water and fertiliser, are expected to contribute to average yields in 2015, negating a small reduction in the area planted.”

Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at CARE Ratings, believes monsoon failure will definitely impact kharif output. “However, the effect on prices was not sharp last year. Pulses' prices have already moved up and will get impacted. Rice can be stabilised through use of buffer stocks. Edible oil prices can be moderated by imports, given low global prices. But, sustained imports of high magnitude can push up global prices, given the quantum of demand. Therefore, the government might have to hike the minimum support price of kharif crops, which will be inflationary,” he said.

An ASSOCHAM study shows pulses' prices have been spiralling since last year, due to lower production, followed by crop damage on unseasonal rain and hail early this year.

Global commodity prices at 6-year low

Major food commodity prices declined again in May, hitting an almost six-year low as cereal prices fell substantially, amid a favourable outlook for this year's harvests globally.

The Food Price Index compiled by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations averaged 166.8 points in May, down 1.4 per cent from April and as much as 20.7 per cent from a year earlier. Cereals and dairy products were responsible for much of last month's decline, although meat quotations also fell. By contrast, the oils and sugar markets firmed up. The May average puts the [FAO](#) Food Price Index at its lowest level since September 2009.

The agency has revised upwards its global cereal production outlook for 2015, to 2,524 million tonnes (including rice in milled terms), almost 15 mt higher than reported in May. At this level, world production would be one per cent or 25.6 mt lower than the record in 2014.

MP to cover 5 million hectares under irrigation

Buoyed with a substantial increase in area under irrigation, the [Madhya Pradesh](#) government now has plans to take this to five million hectares.

Existing irrigated area currently stands at 3.6 million hectares, and has risen almost five fold from 750,000 hectares during the past decade.



During his recent visit to state, Union Finance Minister [Arun Jaitley](#) had appreciated efforts in attracting investments in irrigation and said that he had learnt from Madhya Pradesh that there was a need to make further investments in irrigation sector across the country.

"We plan to augment our irrigation cover to five million hectares instead of four million hectares, as was targeted in our Vision Document 2018," MP Chief Minister [Shivraj Singh Chouhan](#) had recently told *Business Standard*. The major focus would be on minor and micro irrigation projects, he had said.'

The state has so far completed 254 minor irrigation projects and 700 more are to be completed by 2018. The Vision 2018 document also mandates that state has to raise micro-irrigation projects five fold.

"The micro-irrigation project network alone envisages covering an additional area of 700,00 hectares," a well-placed government official said. "All major and medium irrigation projects would also have 10 per cent cover from micro-irrigation."

As many as 229 irrigation projects in Chambal, Betwa, Sindh, Ken, Banganga and Tons rivers have covered major irrigation area in 30 districts through World Bank-assisted water restricting projects, with an approximate investment of Rs 3,000 crore, the official said.

Farm sector growth at 0.02%; rural-urban divide widens

India's [agriculture](#) growth rate dropped to 0.02% in the last quarter of 2014-15, according to the latest government data, compounding predictions of a bad [monsoon](#) ahead.

The meteorological department on June 2, 2015, lowered its rainfall projections, predicting the monsoon rainfall would be 88% of normal. If this prediction pans out, 2015 will officially be a [drought](#) year, declared when monsoon rainfall shortfall exceeds 10%.



Unseasonal rains caused crop damage and a farm crisis this year, forcing wheat imports from Australia.

While agriculture—which supports 600 million Indians—faces significant distress, the warning signs have been evident for many years. Over the past 20 years, the farm sector has experienced negative growth during five years, three of those being drought years.

Two indicators of India's struggle to keep its people fed are foodgrain production and per capita availability of foodgrain.

Although foodgrain production increased 32% over the past two decades, the population has increased by roughly 42% over this period. Per capita availability of food grains has increased marginally, from 471 gm in 1994-95 to 511 gm in 2013-14.

With final figures for the financial year 2014-15 awaited, here is a look at India's agriculture sector over the past 20 years.

Agriculture in India is mostly weather dependent, and that is a major reason for the fluctuations in farm growth.

The year 2014-15 has not been a good year for agriculture and productivity. Our recent report shows how hunger and malnourishment are growing in India, and why agriculture needs a boost in innovation for better productivity.

Instead, India's farmers are sinking deeper into distress.

Why farmers are becoming workers

Data gleaned over last three census periods—1991, 2001 and 2011—indicate that the population of cultivators has declined and farm labourers have increased.

This indicates that more people engaged in agriculture are landless and work on other people's land for wages.

The census defines two categories of workers engaged in farming: cultivators and agricultural labourers. While cultivators own land, agricultural labourers work on farms.

People engaged in the farm sector are mostly unskilled workers.

Meanwhile, India's urban-rural divide appears to have widened between 1993-94 and 2011-12, according to this IIM Ahmedabad study, which indicated two trends over this period:

- Per capita GDP for rural India increased 7 times and for [urban](#) India by 8 times.
- Urban per capita GDP was 2.3 times more than rural in 1993-94; this difference was 2.5 times in 2011-12

The increasing gap shows that instead of moving towards greater economic productivity, rural India is engaged in low wage-earning activity on farms.