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# THE HINDU

## **Awareness up for organic products**

Mohan Kumar (39), a farmer at Gobichettipalayam, cultivates sugarcane and paddy on about six acres. This includes organic cultivation on nearly four acres, which he started almost a decade ago.

“For the first four years, I struggled to improve soil fertility because I had used chemical fertilizers in excess. Now, the soil has become fertile,” he says.

Though he has not gone in for organic certification, Mr. Kumar says he is struggling to market the produce. There are not many retail outlets to sell organic products.

Hence, farmers sell in the regular market and the price for the organic produce is the same as for other produce coming to the daily market, he explains.

Shantha Ramasamy, who runs an organic outlet in Coimbatore for the last 11 years, sources organic- cultivated vegetables, rice, and pulses from farmers in nearby areas and also from Madurai and Kodaikanal.

## **Registration**

An official of the Department of Agriculture says that about 5,100 farmers (29,677 acres) have registered their farms for organic certification with the department.

This includes over 50 farmers from Coimbatore and Erode districts and about 25 from Tirupur district.

## **“Transform agriculture into successful entrepreneurship”**

Agriculture provides adequate opportunities with good returns and youths should be sensitised to water-saving irrigation strategy, latest farm technology, export-based avenues and post-harvest treatment as part of

value-addition for transforming agriculture into a successful entrepreneurship, said speakers at the inaugural of the two-day workshop organised by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Horticultural College and Research Institute for Women, Anbil Dharmalingam Agricultural College and Research Institute and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, here on Saturday.

Inaugurating the workshop, Collector K.S. Palanisamy said agriculture has assumed a new trend with growing awareness among the masses of the need for consuming healthy and fresh fruits and vegetables. He appealed to young agricultural scientists to ensure value addition in products.

He urged farmers to utilise various subsidy-based schemes such as drip irrigation, which would go a long way in minimising water.

M. Rajendran, Director of Agriculture, said although total cultivable area was on the decline, schemes were being implemented to sustain productivity.

### **70,000 ponds**

As many as 2,500 solar units and 70,000 farm ponds had been set up in the State last financial year enabling higher productivity. He exhorted agriculturists to ascertain marketing avenues and processing techniques to earn more returns.

K. Ramasamy, Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, underlined the importance of integrated farming as a key to achieving sustained growth in agriculture.

M.M. Mustaffa, Director of National Research Centre for Banana, said post-harvest techniques suggested by NRCB had gone down well in minimising the waste from 30 per cent to 10 per cent in the recent few years. It had encouraged 1,500 entrepreneurs, most of them youths, to take to banana-allied business in the last five years.

M. Jawaharlal, Special Officer, Horticultural College and Research Institute for Women, and Ajay K. Parida, Executive Director of the Foundation, spoke on the objective of the workshop, which was the third in the series.

The recommendations of the delegates would be taken to the notice of the policy makers at the State and national levels, they said.

### **Centre of excellence for flowers, fruits planned**



The Horticulture Department will establish two Centres of Excellence, one for export-based flowers in Krishnagiri district, and another for cultivating quality vegetables in Dindigul district, each at an estimate of Rs.9.70 crore.

Speaking at the inaugural of a workshop on ‘Attracting and retaining youth in agriculture’ here on Saturday, L. Sitherasenan, Director of Horticulture, said the flower centre would come up at Thali with Israel technological collaboration. The focus would be on production of export-based cut rose flowers. “Farmers would be trained in immediate cultivation of flowers, steps for pre-cooling and the procedure to be followed for its export within the stipulated time to meet export norms. Seven poly houses were under construction. The other infrastructure included Farmers Training Centre, pre-cooling centre besides shade nets for open cultivation.”

He said about 3,600 flower growers would benefit from the programme which would be opened in a couple of months. The price per flower would be between Rs.15 and Rs. 20 for export-quality flowers and between Rs.3 and Rs.7.50 for non-export quality flowers. Mr. Sitherasenan said the centre of excellence for vegetables in Dindigul district would focus on producing tomato, brinjal, chillies and capsicum. While the yellow and red capsicum would be export-based, the green capsicum would be for domestic

consumption, he added. This centre would be inaugurated within three months and civil works are currently in progress.

### **Support for use of coconut oil**

The propaganda spearheaded by vested interest groups against the use of some natural resources like coconut oil is compelling people to embrace the products of multi-national companies and thus risk their health, Minister for Agriculture K.P. Mohanan has said.

He was speaking after launching the activities of the Nature Conservation Movement, a newly formed environmental organisation, here, on Sunday.

Mr. Mohanan said the propagation against the use of coconut oil was one of such incidents. People were misled with the info that it would cause high cholesterol.

Many households had stopped using coconut oil following this propaganda and opted other unhealthy alternatives, he said.

Former Karnataka Minister B.T. Lalitha Naik chaired the inaugural function.

### **Research institute begins trials on fungicides for 'kole roga'**

With monsoon setting in, the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) has begun testing through field trials the reliability of 13 fungicides sold in the market as controllers of 'kole roga' (fruit rot disease) in arecanut palms.

It has begun field trials in its arecanut plantations at Vitla and Kidu (near Kukke Subrahmanya) in Dakshina Kannada on demand from farmers.

P. Chowdappa, Director, CPCRI, under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Kasaragod, told *The Hindu* that the field trials would go on till the end of October.

### **Thrice in rainy season**

Each of the 13 fungicides would be sprayed on 90 palms each, thrice during the rainy season as is the regular practice of the farmers. A total of 1,170

arecanut palms are involved in this experiment. One round of spraying on the palms is already complete.

Earlier, farmers in contact programmes with the CPCRI at Vitla had told the scientists that as different brands of fungicides were available in market claiming to be able to control the kole roga, farmers were not sure about their side effects on the health of the palms. Trial spray by some farmers has revealed contradictory results.

While some said the fungicides had helped in controlling the disease, others said that palms had lost their health by turning yellow.

The CPCRI and the Department of Horticulture have clarified that they had not recommended any new brands of spray other than the traditional mixture of copper sulphate and lime to control the disease.

### **Compensation announced in 2013**

Kole roga hitting vast tracts of arecanut plantations made the headlines in the monsoon of 2013, forcing the government to declare a Rs. 30-crore compensation to the farmers.

Referring to the control of yellow leaf disease (YLD) in arecanut palms, Mr. Chowdappa said the CPCRI had planted YLD-resistant tissue-cultured seedlings of arecanut near Sullia four years ago on a pilot basis. So far they had not been affected by the YLD. The institute would have to wait for another six years before drawing a conclusion and recommend the tissue-cultured seedlings for planting.

The CPCRI scientists recently held an interaction with farmers in Koppa and Sringeri whose plantations were affected by the YLD.

## “Ensure benefits of package reach delta farmers in time”



Ensure that the special package announced by the State Government for the delta farmers reached the intended beneficiaries in time, Information Secretary and Monitoring Officer for Thanjavur district M. Rajaram told officials during a review meeting here.

With storage in Mettur Dam inadequate for opening on June 12 for kuruvai cultivation in delta districts, the government came up with a special package to those who were in a position to take up cultivation through auxiliary irrigation sources. Officials in various departments such as revenue, agriculture, PWD, TANGEDCO, cooperatives and animal husbandry must coordinate and take benefits to needy farmers in time, he said.

The senior official pointed out that the PWD must dredge and desilt irrigation channels ahead of the season and intended water release so that the flow reaches even the tail end areas. At a time when there was no power shortage, the TANGEDCO authorities must be prepared for emergency situations and help farmers tide over any critical situation by addressing faults immediately.

The Department of Animal Husbandry must visit the households that have benefited from cattle distribution scheme and ensure the well being of cattle given to them. Likewise, the Department of Cooperatives must keep ready adequate seeds and agricultural inputs in primary agricultural cooperative societies besides taking steps to extend enough credit as farm loans to farmers, the officer said.



Collector N. Subbaiyan and District Revenue Officer P. Chandrasekaran participated in the deliberations.

Earlier, Mr. Rajaram inspected the construction of new buildings on the Tamil University campus at a cost of Rs. 4.58 crore, individual toilets under construction at Pillayarpatti and development works on the Thanjavur Medical College campus.

At the Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Saraswati Mahal Library, he inaugurated a Telugu workshop and recalled that Telugu was the court language during the reign of Nayaks and there were hundreds of Telugu manuscripts and palm leaf manuscripts in the library. He gave away certificates to those who had completed the workshop session in the previous batch.

### **Fishermen look forward to good catch post ban**

Fishermen from Andhra coast are raring to go from midnight of June 14 on culmination of extended annual fishing holiday period for 61 days. They are confident that the decision by the Ministry of Agriculture to extend the ban period from 45-47 days to 61 days on their request would fetch them a bumper harvest. A ban observed in 2009-10 for two months had ensured them an impressive catch.

“We have been fighting for a longer fishing holiday period to allow the fish to multiply its numbers,” says Dolphin Boat Operators' Welfare Association president Ch. Satyanarayana Murthy.

Owing to good pre-summer showers and prediction of a near normal monsoon, fishermen are expecting that they will get a good catch post-ban period. They are pinning high hopes on getting export-oriented pink brown shrimp (rate pre-ban period Rs.470 per kg), white shrimp Rs.550 to Rs.600 and tiger (with head) Rs.1130 per kg.

Visakhapatnam is an important fish landing centre of India. While India's fish exports have registered a turnover of Rs.30,000 crore, AP, mostly Visakhapatnam, accounted for Rs.12,000 crore.

“Observing uniform fishing holiday for a long period is always considered a good conservation effort,” says Vizag MP K. Haribabu.

## **Demand for ice**

As the date for resumption of fishing season is nearing, the fishing harbour has become a beehive of activity. There is heavy demand for ice, which is being sold at Rs.1200 per tonne. Each boat needs 10 to 20 tonne depending on their number of days of voyage. Boat owners have already started procuring their requirement in advance.

Around 60 per cent of 650 mechanised boats being operated from the city will go for fishing on day-one. Half of the boats have completed overhauling, painting and insurance renewal works to start the post-ban season with renewed enthusiasm.

## **Rice cultivation method shows the way**

System for Rice Intensification (SRI), a technique of paddy cultivation, is being successfully used for cultivation of other crops including vegetables by small farmers in Ganjam district of Odisha.

Typically, the SRI is used for paddy cultivation to increase yield. But for the past few years the same technique is being used to increase the harvest of millet, maize, ragi and vegetables like brinjal, beans, green chilly in Ganjam district.

“The SRI method has reduced the use of chemical fertilisers, synthetic pesticides. They also use fewer seeds. Increased adoption of the SRI has improved awareness about organic farming among peasants,” said social activist Mangaraj Panda of ‘United Artists’ Association (UAA).

At present some farmers like Kailash Nahak have started experimenting spacing between plants in SRI method for cultivation of vegetable crops of the creeper variety. Some female peasants, like Prabhasini of Panibandha, have also started to persuade their in-laws and spouse to try out the SRI method.

“My success in increasing harvest of different crops through the SRI could change several farmers including my father-in-law and husband,” Prabhasini said.



## **Palatable**

According to her, the brinjal grown through the SRI method is tastier. In the traditional method, each brinjal plant yields at best two-and-a-half kg which has increased to about four kg with the application of the SRI method.

More than a decade ago, UAA and , ‘Swosti’, women’s organisation, had started promoting the SRI method among small and marginal farmers of Ganjam district, to increase their yield and income.

According to Mini Mohapatra, a social activist involved in promoting the SRI, initially farmers were sceptical about the new technique but with time they realised its high profitability in comparison to the traditional method.

After paddy, these organisations as well as farmers being trained by them started experimenting with SRI for cultivation of other crops.

“In the cultivation of millet, maize and ragi, the SRI method doubled the harvest,” said Ms Mini. Confidence gathered through these successes prompted cultivation of maize, ragi, brinjal, green chilly and beans through the SRI technique.

*Grains and vegetables are being grown with the technique used for paddy farming*

## **Central team to assess crop damage in State from today**



A six-member official team of the Centre will tour districts of north and south Karnataka for three days from Monday to assess the damage to crops owing to hailstorm and heavy rains in April and May.

Standing crops worth more than Rs. 600 crore, including summer paddy crop, on more than a lakh hectares, were damaged owing to untimely rains in the State. Members in two teams will visit Kalaburagi, Raichur, Ballari, Bidar, Chickballapur, Kolar and Bengaluru Rural districts. After inspecting

the damaged crops, team members will hold discussions with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Revenue Minister V. Srinivas Prasad, Agriculture Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, and Horticulture Minister Shyamanur Shivashankarappa in Bengaluru on Wednesday, officials in the Revenue Department said.

### **Team members**

Staff Correspondent from Raichur reports: The Central team that will visit Raichur, Koppal and Ballari districts on Tuesday comprises B.R. Sinha, Joint Secretary, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC), Anil Pratap Singh (DAC), and Rajendra, Deputy Director, Ministry of Power.

The team will visit flood-hit villages in Sindhanur taluk and interact with affected farmers. After visiting Sirguppa, Gangavati and Hosepet in the afternoon, it will leave for Bengaluru.

### **Procurement centres**

Meanwhile, the government has opened centres in Davangere, Shivamogga, Raichur, Koppal, Ballari, Yadgir, and Kalaburagi to procure damaged paddy at Rs. 1,360 per quintal. The State has already released Rs. 216.35 crore to Deputy Commissioners for payment of the compensation to farmers whose paddy crop was damaged. The compensation amount has been fixed at Rs. 25,000 per hectare.

***Rs. 600 crore worth of standing crops on one lakh hectares in the State is said to have been destroyed***

### **New barter system**



Sumithra collects dry flowers and leaves that have fallen from trees and plants at the temple she visits. She also collects the heaps of dry leaves that crown the roofs of the badminton court at the Mylapore Club. Yes, she would go to any length to get her organic waste. Can you believe this? She has given her neighbours bins and requested them to place their degradable waste in those bins and hand them over to her.

With the dry leaves and flowers, she does composting and produces manure for her kitchen garden.

“As I go asking for waste, I am made fun of. I don’t mind the ridicule,” says Sumithra. She has been into kitchen gardening for nearly 10 years. She has a garden around her house and a terrace garden that occupies three levels of her house. On the terrace garden, she grows green leaves, cucumbers, tomatoes, plantains, brinjal, lady’s finger, pumpkins, chillies, lemon, drumstick, bitter gourds, bottle gourd and cherry tomatoes, all of them organically grown. “Over the years, my dependence on the markets have reduced. I prepare most of the dishes with vegetables from my garden,” she says.

Sumithra gives away some of the vegetables to her neighbours, friends and relatives. “It is often a small token of gratitude towards those who have given me the organic waste. I don’t have plans to sell my vegetables,” she says. Sumithra is now trying her hand at cultivating a whole range of other crops, including sugarcane, turmeric, capsicum, pear tomatoes, yam, strawberry, broccoli, pineapple, cocoyam, pink lady’s-finger, Thai ginger and a few pulses.

### **Over 30 mango varieties on display at festival**

A festival showcasing different varieties of mangoes grown by farmers across the State and from nearby States began at Government Boys Higher Secondary School grounds here recently.

Inaugurated by Collector T.P. Rajesh in the presence of Superintendent of Police P. Kannammal and other officials, the 23<sup>rd</sup> All India Mango Festival, would give visitors a chance to see over 30 varieties of mangoes.

Popular varieties including Alphonso, Senthura, Neelam, Malcova were on display.

More than 250 farmers from various districts in the State and farmers from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh displayed their products.

Organised by the Horticulture Department, galleries made of mangoes attracted huge crowd.

Also, a demonstration on producing value-added mango food products, pulp production and other food varieties out of mango during the 22-day festival would be held. Cultural competitions will be held every day and farmers exhibiting the best mango would be awarded. Various government department stalls explaining the schemes being implemented were part of the festival.

Organisers said the district leads in mango production in the State as it is cultivated in over 40,000 hectares. Hence to encourage farmers, the festival is held every year, they added.

Also for the first time, Police Department was allotted a stall. Visitors thronged the stall in large numbers as personnel explained to them the application of each weapons.

### **Value-addition**

Farmers were encouraged to go for value-addition of the product so as to reap the huge export market. They were also asked to go for processing mangoes into jams, pickles and canned fruit that were also kept on display.

Officials from various government departments, farmers and the public participated in large numbers.

## PAPSCO holds mango, jackfruit mela



Mangoes being arranged at the Mela on Wednesday. -Photo: S.S. Kumar  
In a bid to offer residents fruits at subsidised rates, the Puducherry Agro Products, Food and Civil Supplies Corporation (PAPSCO) has organised a Mango and Jackfruit Mela at the ground near the Rajiv Gandhi statue.

A press release from PAPSCO said that nine varieties of mangoes including Mulgoa and Raspuri among others are available at the mela.

### **Organic cultivation**

The release added that the mangoes have been procured directly from the farmers, and have been organically cultivated, without the use of chemical pesticides.

The mela is open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. and will continue till the end of the mango season.



## Mango brings prosperity to school



A government school in Srinivasapur taluk, the mango bowl of Karnataka, in Kolar district has fetched a fair amount of money from the mango crop grown on the land belonging to the school.

The auction of the mango orchard belonging to the Government Kannada Lower Primary School at Avalakuppa village took place a couple of days before the beginning of the new academic year and it fetched more than Rs. 4 lakh.

Avalakuppa falls under Hodali gram panchayat limits. The 10-acre land had been donated to the school by Munivenkatappa, a good Samaritan farmer, way back in 1959.

The mango orchard on the land started to yield fruit about eight years ago and the yield is being auctioned since then, Block Education Officer K.T. Raghavendra told *The Hindu*. This time around when the bid was called for the yield, it was finalised for Rs. 4,26,500 by J. Shankar, beating another bidder Athaullah. The auction process took place in the presence of the School Development and Monitoring Committee office-bearers and the village residents. The amount earned is maintained in a SDMC joint account.

Two-thirds of it will be given for the maintenance of the orchard, school headmaster M. Ravindra Singh said.



The remaining amount will be spent for the maintenance and development of the school.

The students of the school will also be supplied uniforms, ties, shoes and stationeries after taking permission from the BEO.

### **A fishing gear to reduce by-catch, cut environmental pollution**



As the world celebrates World Oceans Day on Monday, scientists at the Marine Products Export Development Authority's (MPEDA) extension wing, NETFISH, are ready to make bottom trawling more environment friendly and less destructive.

“Bottom trawling is the most destructive method of fishing ever invented,” said an MPEDA scientist on Sunday. But, the new fishing gear promises to considerably reduce by-catch and cut environmental pollution.

Experiments with the new fishing net off the coast of Munambam showed considerable reduction in the catch of juvenile fish and other marine animals.

The new gear also helped reduce diesel consumption by two litres per trawling hour.

The new fishing gear, which was tested over two days on March 18 and 19, comprised a trawl net cod-end of 25-mm square mesh instead of the conventional diamond-shaped cod-end of the same mesh size. It was found that the square shape of the cod-end helped juveniles escape easily once they were trapped in the net, said the scientist.

“The substantial reduction in by-catch saves time for the fishermen, who otherwise spend a lot of time on sorting the fish catch,” said the scientist. The conventional method of bottom trawling traps even sand from the bottom of the seas along with marine organisms and juveniles of fish, squid and cuttlefish.

It is estimated that by-catches and juveniles make up between 50 and 70 per cent of the total catch when the conventional trawling net is used.

The new fishing gear, first developed by the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology in Kochi for trawl boats, will be introduced to trawl boat operators on Monday at a function at the Munambam fishing harbour.

The trawl boat that was used for the experiments had a 450-hp engine and a 100-metre long net. The cod-end of the net was seven metres long.

The MPEDA scientists are set to experiment the same net for shrimp trawling after the monsoon trawl ban.

### **Maggi ban makes Chinese detainees grumpy**

Children are not the only people unhappy with the ban on Maggi noodles. The detectives investigating the red sanders racket in Chittoor district are complaining that the ban has come as a hiccup to their interrogation of two Chinese men in their custody on suspicion of being smugglers of the contraband wood.

Even since their detention, police have struggled to break through the language barrier to extract information from Chen Yi Fian and Yang Ping. As for the food problem, police found Maggi noodles handy in keeping the detainees well fed.

But, with the ban now in force, they have had to turn to a local make of noodles, which isn't quite kosher for the Chinese men, police officials say.

Of the two, Chen has been more discomfited by the sudden removal of Maggi from his menu. Unlike Yang, he has had little time to adjust to prison rations, and Maggi became his staple food. Chen was arrested by the Chittoor police in New Delhi on May 30 and is currently being interrogated at Chittoor and Madanapalle.

Since Andhra Pradesh imposed a ban on Maggi, Chen's minders had to requisition noodles from a local hotel in Chittoor, which made the prisoner dizzy. "Noodles form the main part of the menu of the Chinese. We are getting him used to South Indian items like dosa, puri and idli, but Chen's preference is noodles," the official said.

Chen came to India as a tourist and, fearful of a Delhi Belly, developed a taste for Maggi noodles. But since the ban on Maggi, Chen has been off colour. "He finds the local noodles sticky. We are going to try some other brands," an officer said.

The other Chinese detainee, Yang, has had more time to adjust to prison food, although he too turned to Maggi to get by.

***Detectives probing red sanders racket complain the ban has come as a hiccup to their interrogation of two Chinese men in their custody***

### **State too bans Maggi noodles**

Kerala has joined the Union government in banning Maggi noodles, the popular snack by Nestle. The ban has been enforced in all the 14 districts as per the guidelines of the Central Food Safety Authority.

Health Minister V.S. Sivakumar said here on Sunday that instructions had been issued to food safety commissioners to ensure that the banned product was not sold in the districts.

He said that 90 per cent of the product had been removed from the shelves. He wanted the public to inform the respective assistant food safety commissioners in the event of any such sale taking place either directly or through the food safety establishment's toll-free number 1800 4251125.

### **Moringa seeds exported to Hong Kong from Tiruchi**

The Tiruchi international airport, which was sending an array of perishable commodities to various overseas destinations every other day, saw export of dried moringa seeds to Hong Kong very recently.

Around 750 kilograms of moringa seeds were exported to the South-East Asian country by a Madurai exporter through an Air Asia flight to Hong Kong via Kuala Lumpur. The consignment was dispatched after obtaining clearances from plant quarantine and customs authorities.

Although moringa (drumstick) seeds had been exported to certain West Asian countries and Japan in the past, they had been dispatched to Hong Kong from the international airport here for the first time. Assorted vegetables, flowers and fruits account for 90 per cent of the export cargo with remaining 10 per cent being other goods such as garments, food stuff and leather goods. Sources say cargo was being exported to different destinations through Sri Lankan Airlines, Tiger Airways, Air Asia, Air India and Malindo Air.

Singapore is a major overseas market for exporters from Tiruchi and other districts. In the absence of dedicated cargo freighters, consignments were being dispatched in the belly space available in the overseas passenger flights operating from Tiruchi. Ever since the dedicated export cargo terminal was commissioned in 2011, the volume of air cargo exports had been on the upswing. The volume of cargo exported during 2014-15 was over 4,900 metric tonnes. For the current fiscal, an internal target of 6,000 metric tonnes had been set.

### **Water supply improvement scheme for Ooty**

The Udhagai Municipality will soon embark upon a new water supply improvement scheme to meet the growing water needs of the town's residents.

According to sources, the civic body will again tap the Parsons Valley Hydel Reservoir for the third scheme, to draw five million litres a day (MLD). At present the civic body, from the First MGD (million gallons a day) and Second MGD schemes drew close to 11 million litres a day.

The present water supply level was insufficient to meet the needs of the town's residents as the demand stood at 13.5 MLD. With the 11 MLD the civic body supplied water once in three days. With the new scheme it will be able to draw five MLD and increase the water supply to alternate days, taking the total water supplied to 16 MLD. And, this will meet the needs for the next 10 – 15 years. The municipality supplied water to 10,893 houses and commercial establishments.

The sources say that the civic body will lay a new main supply line and also improve upon the distribution lines within the town. The main supply line from the reservoir will be for nearly 14 km and the distribution lines will criss-cross the city for 40 km.

The new project also includes a water purifying plant.

### **Flower festival gets under way at Yercaud**



The floral replica of India Gate and rhinoceros, vegetable and fruit carvings of birds and animals and flowers grown in Shevaroyan Hills were the main attractions at the 40th Flower Festival that began at Anna Park in Yercaud on Saturday.

Inaugurated by District Collector K. Maharabushanam in the presence of Superintendent of Police G. Subbulakshmi, Yercaud MLA P. Saroja and other officials, the two-day festival organised by Horticulture Department was a visual treat to the tourists who thronged from nearby districts and other States.

About one tonne of vegetables and fruits have been used at the welcome gallery of the park and over 50 varieties of cut flowers were on display. The replica of India Gate made using 18,000 roses, rhinoceros – 12,000 roses and white crane – 8,000 roses were the cynosure of all eyes. The 150-kg dragon made of vegetables, 100-kg crocodile made of bitter gourd and eight-ft-high parrot made of grass were the other attractions. Visitors can also buy plant saplings from the stall organised by the Tamil Nadu Horticulture Development Agency.

Preparations for the festival lasted till 11 a.m. on Saturday after which the tourists were allowed inside the park.



Special buses from Salem and other places helped tourists reach the destination easily. The police patrolled the 22-km Ghat Road from the foothills of Yercaud.

The tourists were disappointed as there was no boat race and other events that were usually organised during the festival. The organisers had also failed to provide protected drinking water and quality food atop the hills that caused inconvenience to the tourists.

### **Organic farmers warn of unbridled use of chemical fertilizers**



Activists promoting organic farming have drawn attention to the dangers of the intensive use of chemical fertilizers that are polluting water bodies and entering the food chain.

While welcoming the nation-wide attention to the presence of lead and other chemicals beyond permissible limits in Maggi noodles, they said that this was only one aspect of food contamination.

“But there is a far greater threat from chemically intensive agriculture which the public remains oblivious to,” they said. They highlighted the intensive application of chemicals and herbicides to cultivate ginger in H.D. Kote and other places in Mysuru.



Vivek Cariappa, an organic farmer based in Sargur, said that huge quantities of chemical fertilizers and herbicides are used and the run-off from the soil enters water bodies.

“The chemically-rich water enters lakes and the Kabini or the Cauvery and is harmful to aquatic creatures. The same water is the major source of drinking water for both Bengaluru and Mysuru and poses health hazards, unless there is strict monitoring and regulation of ginger cultivation close to water bodies and forest boundaries,” said Mr. Cariappa.

“While the current outrage over lead in Maggi noodles is understandable, it should also be an eye-opener to the kind of poison that is entering the human food chain through chemical-intensive agricultural practices,” said Krishnaprasad of Sahaja Samrudha, an organisation promoting organic and natural farming.

There is unbridled use of synthetic chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides in the Mysuru-Mandya belt and the run-off from fields are contributing to the eutrophication of water bodies. “But no study has been done to assess the chemical content in them or aquatic creatures that are consumed as food and this could be more dangerous,” he added.

### **Bt Cotton**

Besides Bt Cotton, which requires extensive application of chemical fertilizers, tobacco and ginger are also cultivated in Mysuru district. Along with paddy, sugarcane and maize, they require generous use of chemicals and fertilizers.

The vegetable growth facilitated by the diversion of sewage water also needs to be tested in laboratory for contamination, said Mr. Krishnaprasad.

In H.D. Kote, once a bastion for organic cotton, the introduction of Bt cotton virtually killed the former and contaminated organic farms as there was no buffer between them and agricultural farms promoting genetically modified crops. The introduction of ginger cultivation a few years ago has only aggravated the contamination level of the existing few organic farms, according to Mr. Cariappa.

## **Fertilizers, seeds ready for distribution in Theni**

*Farmers prepare field and raise nurseries in Cumbum valley*

With the release of water for irrigation of first crop in the double-cropping areas of Cumbum valley, farmers near the head works areas have started preparing the field and started raising nurseries. Farm activities are in full swing.

Meanwhile, farmers in other areas too have started preparing the field to raise small grains, pulses and oil seeds.

To meet the growing demand for fertilizers and seeds, the agriculture as well as cooperative departments have taken all measures to stock sufficient fertilizers and also to ensure availability of fertilizers and seeds to all farmers.

Sufficient stock of fertilizers and seeds was kept at 13 primary agriculture cooperative societies each in Theni and in Periyakulam blocks, 11 societies in Bodi, nine each in Chinnamanur and Uuthamapalayam blocks, seven societies in Cumbum and four in Kadamalaigundu blocks.

At present, 911 tonnes of urea was with the cooperative societies and 506 tonnes with the private agencies. Coop societies have 222 tonnes of DAP and private agencies have 203 tonnes. Societies have 476 tonnes of potash and private parties have 301 tonnes. Similarly, coop societies have 533 tonnes of complex fertilizers and private parties have 1,004 tonnes.

Agriculture extension counters have sufficient stock of certified seeds for distribution to farmers. They have 165 tonnes of seeds of ADT 45, ADT 39 and NLR 34449 varieties of paddy. Besides, 7.6 tonnes of small grains, 25.2 tonnes of pulses and 5 tonnes of oil seeds were with the agriculture office, according to agriculture officials.

All efforts were made to expand pulses, small grains and oil seeds area under cultivation in other places. Summer rain had encouraged farmers in rain-fed areas to raise at least one crop this season.

Storage in rural tanks and irrigation wells was comfortable and groundwater table too improved well owing to sharp showers during summer.

Capitalising on the summer rain, farmers in rainfed areas had sown tuar dhal. With the onset of southwest monsoon, more rain-fed areas would be brought under cultivation, hoped agriculture officials.

*Agriculture as well as cooperative departments have taken all measures to stock sufficient fertilizers*



### **Maggi imported into Canada comes under scanner**



After being hit by a recall order in India, [Maggi](#) Noodles has come under the scanner of Health Canada as the product imported into the country is being investigated by Canadian Food Inspection Authority (CFIA). According to a statement by the Health Canada, it may issue a recall if the imported Maggi brand noodles are found to have discrepancies.

### [From Plate to Plough: Modi sarkar's toughest test](#)

“The CFIA is aware of the recent incident in India involving Maggi brand noodles, including Nestle’s removal of products from the Indian marketplace.

“The CFIA is conducting a food safety investigation for the possible presence of lead in Maggi brand noodle products imported into Canada by various firms. If affected products are identified as part of the Agency’s ongoing investigation, a food recall warning will be issued,” the Canadian health regulator said in a statement.

The CFIA takes food safety concerns very seriously. More [information](#) will be shared with the public as it becomes available, it added.

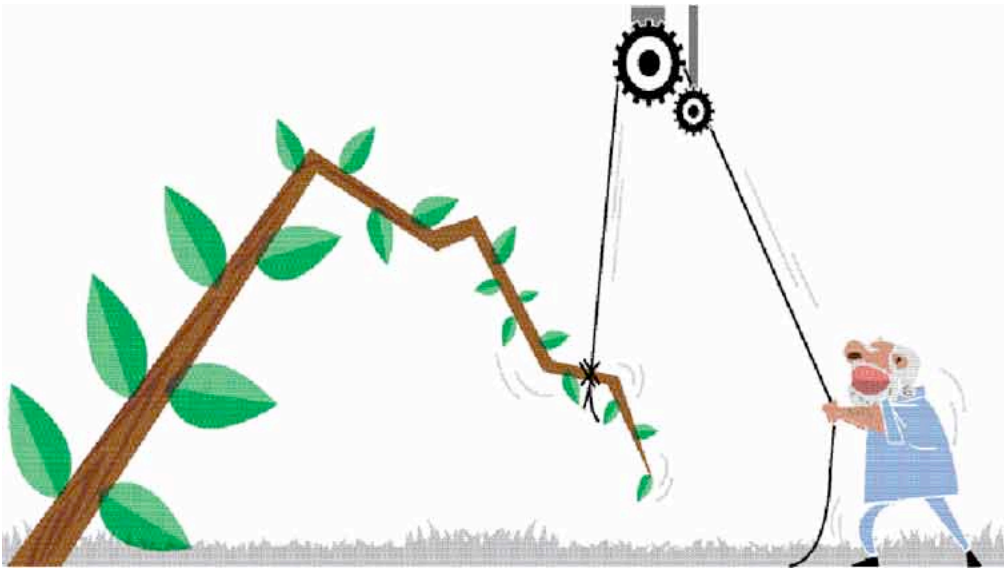
In India, several states including Delhi, Uttarakhand, Jammu and [Kashmir](#), Punjab, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Goa have banned sale of Maggi noodles. Cracking down on Swiss giant Nestle, central health regulator FSSAI on Friday banned all variants of Maggi noodles terming them as “unsafe and hazardous” for human consumption.



When the provisional estimates of GDP growth for FY15 were released last week, showing an overall GDP growth of 7.3 per cent but agri-GDP at 0.2 per cent, one wondered whether one should celebrate or cry, or do both simultaneously. The reason is simple: agriculture still absorbs about 49 per cent of the workforce, and an average household still spends about 45 per cent of its expenditure on food. And it is not just in FY15, but during the first three years of the abandoned 12th Plan, the average agri-GDP growth works out to a paltry 1.7 per cent, less than half of its target of 4 per cent. So, if agriculture is limping and farmers are facing deep stress, how could one realise the grand vision of “sabka saath, sabka vikas”?

Now, the official Met (IMD) has revised its forecast for the current monsoon to 88 per cent of the long period average (LPA), down from 93 per cent in the first forecast. Twelve per cent below the LPA could mean an impending drought, almost the same as experienced during the monsoon of 2014, although the [government](#) did not officially declare it a drought for reasons best known to itself. This back-to-back drought, technically a deficit of more than 10 per cent rainfall compared to the LPA, has happened only thrice since 1900 — in 1904, 1905; 1965, 1966; and 1986, 1987. This surely does not auger well for the Modi government, and could be its mega challenge.

What is it that the Modi sarkar can do in the short run, and also for the medium to long run, to put agriculture back on track and bring smiles on the faces of our farmers? The standard drill in the [government](#) is to prepare a contingency plan, asking state governments to ensure ample supply of seeds, fertilisers and fodder, and give some subsidy on seeds, diesel, fodder, etc, if need be. How much of it reaches the millions of farmers varies from state to state, but the overall situation remains grim, although the Central government says it is fully geared to face any problem resulting from drought.



The current system of crop insurance is also patchy, time consuming and corrupt. It needs a major overhaul, from raising the sum insured to at least 80 per cent of expected income to using latest technologies, from digitisation of land records to satellites, drones and all-weather stations to assess damages, and Aadhaar-based bank accounts, where compensation can be

wired within days of the damage, and not six to 12 months, which is the current practice. The prime minister will have to lead this transformation of crop insurance with high priority, as he did for the Jan Dhan Yojana and social security schemes. Else, this will remain in limbo for years and farmers will keep suffering. But the real answer to droughts is developing our water resources and learning to manage them well. In reality, however, the water sector is already in deep crisis, and this crisis is going to deepen unless bold and urgent steps are taken to reform it.

The culture of free (or highly subsidised) water and power is depleting our groundwater fast, and surface irrigation schemes are embroiled in long delays, with a thin spreading of resources due to the paucity of funds. And whatever funds are allocated, a substantial part of that simply disappears like water disappears in sand, without any tangible increase in irrigated area.

No wonder, even after spending lakhs of crores of rupees on irrigation, more than half of India's cropped area is still rain-fed. With climate change and erratic rainfall, this rain-fed area is exposed to high risk, and this risk is going to become increasingly more intense. But despite being water-stressed, India is a net exporter of water.

One kilogram of rice uses 3,000 to 5,000 litres of water for irrigation, depending upon where it is being grown. In the Punjab-Haryana belt, it inches towards the upper limit of about 5,000 litres of water for every kilogram of rice. In FY15, India exported more than 10 million tonnes of rice, which means anywhere from 30 to 50 billion cubic metres of water. It is almost a similar story for sugar, where one kilogram of sugar uses about 2,000 litres of water. If we have to learn to use water more rationally, there has to be economic pricing of water and power.

But none of the state governments will be willing to touch it, with it being a politically sensitive issue, especially in a drought year. The alternative for the Centre is to put, say, a 5 per cent tax on exports of common rice and sugar to recover a part of the subsidy that flows to these crops, and discourage exports of water-guzzler crops, in a way restricting exports of "virtual water". But our policies are perverse, subsidising exports of sugar (read water).

Another key issue in a drought year is what happens to food inflation, and how consumers can be protected from spikes in food prices. The



fundamental principle for that is to create an all-India market for all food products, keep the taxes and levies on food items to less than 5 per cent, compress the value chains by allowing direct buying from farmers, and have a liberal import policy to augment domestic supplies wherever there are shortfalls. Currently, there are ample stocks of wheat, rice and sugar. The problem is likely to emerge in the case of pulses, oilseeds and fruits and vegetables. In the short run, liberal imports can help, but in the medium to long run, we need to invest in raising the productivity of these on a per unit of land and water basis.

This is a huge agenda for reforms in agriculture. It requires massive resources, from resurrecting crop insurance to stepping up irrigation to investing in markets and value chains. And time is running out. How will the Modi *government* garner enough resources to accomplish these?

Humongous food and fertiliser subsidies (more than Rs 2,00,000 crore a year) hold the key to this puzzle. The management of food and fertilisers hides massive inefficiencies and leakages in the system. Streamlining these through direct cash transfers can unlock at least Rs 40,000 to 50,000 crore a year, without giving up on the objective of helping consumers and farmers. It is these savings that can be used to overcome various bottlenecks in agriculture.

Will the Modi sarkar have the time to focus and undertake these bold reforms? Only time will tell.

*Gulati is Infosys chair for agriculture and Saini is consultant, Icrier*



### [Agrochemical companies cut planned production time](#)

After the crop damage due to unseasonal rains in March and April this year, the forecasts of a weak monsoon is having a telling impact on the agrochemicals industry forcing companies to start scaling down their expansion plans and shortening planned production period to two months instead of the regular 3-4 months. Rajesh Aggarwal, managing director of

Insecticides (India) Ltd (IIL), said the industry is keeping its finger crossed and very cautious about the demand outlook.

"Companies have reduced the planned production period to 30-60 days against the normal practice of 3-4 months factoring in the monsoon forecasts that can hit the farm sector hard if it actually pans out in the predicted lines. IIL is also watchful," said Agarwal, who was here to launch IIL Foundation, an initiative to educate farmers on the benefits of adopting green gram in crop rotation.

However he said if the rainfall is deficient by 10%, the impact may not be very significant which can result in an acute shortage of supplies. The company also introduced Prime Gold, a new plant growth regulator product for all crops.

# THE HINDU BusinessLine

## **Kharif sowing down 5%**



According to the data released by the Agriculture Ministry on Friday, the total area under Kharif crops stands at 61.27 lakh hectares (lh) – about 5.4 per cent lower than during the corresponding period the previous year when it touched 64.75 lh.

Reports from States indicated that rice sowing and transplanting had taken place in 3.46 lh for 2015-16 kharif season, 13.4 per cent higher than the 3.05 lh registered at the same time last year.

Oilseeds have been sown over 0.53 lh (0.58 lh). Sugarcane acreage is down a little more than 5 per cent with 41.01 lh while cotton acreage is 14.5 per cent lower with 9.32 lh sown so far. Sowing of jute and mesta have taken place over 6.95 lh (10.90 lh).

### **Higher cotton stocks will put India in comfortable position**

Cotton inventory, estimated at around 70 lakh bales at the close of 2014-15 season is expected to be the highest ever cotton stock carried by India after 2008-09.

This huge volume of carry forward cotton stock would place the country in a comfortable position, the Chairman of The southern India Mills' Association T Rajkumar said.

### **Selling policy drag**

He said the predominantly cotton-based textile industry in the country was subjected to crisis due to volatility in the price of the white fibre.

“There was some respite during the current season as the prices had remained comparatively stable due to reduced imports by China and the over supply in the global market,” Rajkumar added.

As international prices were ruling lower than Indian prices, CCI (Cotton Corporation of India) had to venture into MSP operations; CCI procured around 87 lakh bales during 2014-15 season. But their selling policy affected the domestic market as also the mills that used certain varieties of cotton (grown in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh) as the cotton was not released on time.

The global area under cotton is expected to drop by 7 per cent to 31.3 million hectares in 2015-16 and the production by 9 per cent to 23.9 million tonnes.

Yet, the supply position in 2015-16, industry sources say, “is expected to be comfortable as China would continue to reduce imports and downsize its reserves.”

### **Offloading woes**

“The cotton spinning mills, which hitherto carried 3-6 months’ cotton stock to tide over price volatility, can now reduce the inventory to 1-2 months and the mill sector can leverage the current situation by strengthening on the export front, particularly in the garments and made-up segments,” the SIMA Chief said.

He further pointed out that the CCI could sell only 12 lakh bales against 25 lakh bales offered during the last couple of months as the Corporation’s rates were high.

“By not offloading the fibre procured from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh till end-April, the Corporation gave mills a tough time, resulting in flaring up of prices.”

### **CAB rejig**

The industry has been pleading with the Centre to restructure the Cotton Advisory Board (CAB) by inducting industry stakeholders for better adoption of strategies and policies, Rajkumar said.

Reverting to CAB’s export estimate of 70 lakh bales during the current season, the SIMA Chief said “only around 45 lakh bales have been exported so far. It may not exceed 55 lakh bales this season as China has stopped imports.”

Voicing concern over purported rumours of Government attempting a G2G (Government to Government) arrangement to export definite cotton volumes to countries such as Thailand, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Vietnam, the SIMA Chief appealed to the Centre to desist from such a policy and leave the cotton market without any government interference.

## **Ruchi Soya in pact with Solidaridad to boost palm oil production**

Soya food major Ruchi Soya and international civil society organisation Solidaridad have entered into an agreement to scale up palm oil production in the country.

The agreement worth €4.5 million was signed in the presence of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Friday.

According to the agreement, Ruchi Soya will share 55 per cent of the investment and Solidaridad the rest. India consumes 19.65 million tonnes of edible oil, of which 13.5 million tonnes are imported; palm constitutes 8.8 million tonnes of the total import. The five-year project envisions making palm oil available and sustainable for the Indian market, saving at least 1.5 trillion litres of water in palm oil production .

Solidaridad has in a release said that the project will work on the principle of Make in India and More Crop per Drop. The Founder and Managing Director of Ruchi Soya Industries Dinesh Shahra said, “Our endeavour is to ensure that the Indian farmers get the best quality of inputs and modern technology that can help them scale their productivity to global standards”.

## **Increased arrivals lift tea prices at Kochi auction**





Increased arrivals lifted prices of some varieties of tea at the Kochi auctions. The market for good liquoring teas was steady to firm and sometimes dearer.

Major blenders, especially from the regional centres, were active on good liquoring varieties, while exporters and upcountry buyers lent fair support, the auctioneers Forbes, Ewart & Figgis said.

The demand was good in CTC dust in sale no 23 and the quantity on offer was 12,88,000 kg, showing an increase compared to last week. However, other categories were irregular and lower by ₹2 to ₹4 and sometimes more as the sale progressed.

With good arrivals on orthodox grades at 18,500 kg, the market for primary grades remained steady. Other categories witnessed some withdrawals. A small quantity of orthodox dust was absorbed by exporters.

In the Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties fetched ₹90-132, mediums quoted ₹62-94, and plain grades stood at ₹50-61.

The leaf sale also witnessed increased arrivals with 174,500 kg on offer in the Orthodox grades. The market for Highgrown Broken, Whole Leaf, and Fannings were steady to firm. CIS countries and other exporters were active.

In CTC leaf, the quantity on offer was 66,000 kg and the market for Good Liquoring teas was steady to firm.

In dust varieties, Waterfall SFD quoted the best prices of ₹133 followed by Monca SFD at ₹132. In the leaf grades, Chamraj FOP-Sup green tea fetched the best prices of ₹307, followed by Chamraj FOP at ₹231.

Meanwhile, the Association of Planters of Kerala has called upon the State Government to encourage Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation to buy a minimum one lakh kg per week of teas produced in the state from the Kochi auction market.

This is because the producer is suffering a loss of ₹25 per kg for every kg of Kerala tea sold in the auction market. The average auction price realised by tea produced from Kerala is ₹95.59 per kg whereas the production cost is around ₹120 per kg, APK said.

## Pre-monsoon showers hit Nashik, adjoining areas



Nashik city and its adjoining areas experienced pre-monsoon showers, accompanied by stormy winds, Nashik Municipal Corporation (NMC) sources said here today.

Pre-monsoon showers also lashed Trimbakeshwar, Igatpuri and Yeola tehsils of the district yesterday, in which two farm labourers, including a woman were killed.

The police identified the deceased as Gauri Shravan Waghmare (35) and Titav Kashinath Valhekar (40) of Mahalkheda village.

The Yeola rural police also identified Ankusha Gabhale (15) and Swati Gabhale (15) as two girls who were injured due to lightning.