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# THE HINDU

## Sugar and spice and all that's nice



I like sugar in my mug of coffee. I can't bear the thought of drinking the brew unsweetened. Hence, I am always on the lookout for natural sugars to use in place of the refined ones. I usually use jaggery in my coffee. But recently, my mother came across an interesting alternative. She promptly delivered the find to my home. It was in a neat pouch made of rough brown paper and that appealed to my sense of eco awareness. It had the words 'Coconut Blossom Sugar' printed on it. I have heard of this sugar, but I was under the impression that it was a sweetener and not a natural sugar. The suggestions of use on the package were intriguing and I decided to try it out.

It resembles the Demerara sugar closely in colour and coarseness. The taste of it by itself is very clean and fresh, with an unmistakable sweetness of the elaneer. It is not overpoweringly sweet and when I added a little of it to my cold coffee, it tasted good. I noticed that it was free flowing and did not clump.

To my knowledge, the coconut blossom sugar is obtained from the sap of the coconut flower. A cut is made at the base of the flower for and the sap that oozes out is collected, allowed to evaporate and the residue from that is the natural sugar. This is the technique followed in many parts of the world.

However, at Farm Made, in Palladam, they do it differently. Ram Mohan and his family have been in the business of coconut breeding and due to their association with agricultural scientists, they came across a method for extracting coconut sugar, patented by Dr. Hebbler in Kerala. This resulted in a far purer extraction of this coconut blossom sugar.

After many trials Ram Mohan has refined a method to obtain the sap in a clean and fresh manner that brings down the risk of pollution. Ram Mohan also considers this a service to a society that wants to embrace healthier food options.

This sap or nectar is highly in demand in its liquid form and is referred to as neerah. It then undergoes a highly precise heating process before being dehydrated. The farm is proud of this product as there is no compromise in quality standards during the production process. This vegan sugar is free of preservatives and is completely organic. The vermicompost for the coconut trees is made in-house.

The farm does not believe in plundering what nature has to offer. It is a system of respectful give and take. Studies in the Philippines have proved that coconut blossom sugar rates only 34 on the glycemic index (GI). That makes it a much healthier sugar alternative.

A low GI means that there is a slow release of sugar into the blood and does not lead to spikes in the blood sugar, if taken in reasonable quantities. The calorific count however is the same to refined sugar.

I learnt that the sugar was also great for baking. I was initially sceptical as I thought the flavours of this sugar was too light, but decided to try it out nevertheless and added it to my dark chocolate cake batter.

I am happy to say that my apprehensions were misplaced. The dark chocolate cupcakes tasted every bit as delicious. My family was none the wiser until I enlightened them on the tiny change in that one important ingredient. Our cakes are most often made with wholemeal flour. Add a natural sugar with a low GI and we can change it to being a more nutritious indulgence. The coconut blossom sugar is available for sale at the local supermarkets. There are plans afoot to soon launch more varieties of it with vanilla and all spice flavours, also cultivated in the same farm. It is a great way to add nutritive value to food for all those on a quest for healthy and natural options.

## Mango plant back to reckoning



The mango treatment plant in Tirupati is back in the reckoning after showing not any semblance of progress for eight long years, with the Collector Siddharth Jain making a visit to it on Thursday evening. Sudden rush of officials made the otherwise-calm premises into a beehive of activity.

It was in 2007-08 that the Agricultural and Processed Foods Export Development Authority (APEDA) joined hands with the Andhra Pradesh State Agricultural Industries Development Corporation (AGROS) for establishing the Vapour Heat Treatment (VHT) plant in Tirupati, with the active support of then Union Minister Jairam Ramesh. The idea was to make the local mangoes export-ready by treating the fruits as per the global quarantine norms.

The Rs.13 crore-plant was then touted to be the largest in the country to treat mangoes, followed by the similar ones in Nuzvid and Saharanpur (UP). The first consignment of mangoes was flagged off to Japan, but the 'token step' ended there.

On Thursday, Mr. Jain went around the compound, with the horticulture officials in tow, to inspect the available infrastructure to treat mangoes and check the quality of the fruits. The plant will play a crucial role in taking around 2,000 tonnes from the mango-rich district to New Zealand, Japan and several European countries. The Collector spoke on the need to create awareness among mango farmers on growing bulkier and quality fruits, keeping the global demand in view.

## **‘Round-the-clock power supply to farmers soon’**



Rajahmundry MP M. Muralimohan has said that pump-sets will increase agriculture yield, besides helping farmers reduce investment costs.

Inaugurating a farmers’ awareness programme here on Thursday as part of the ‘Agriculture Demand Side Management (Ag DSM) project’, the MP said farmers would get large quantity of water by using new pump-sets rather than the existing ones.

He added that the government would ensure 24-hour power supply soon.

AP Energy Advisor K. Ranganatham, who delivered the key-note address, said Rajanagaram mandal would be the first in the State to use high energy pump-sets.

More than 2,500 pump-sets will be replaced under the project.

He added that the pump-sets, each worth Rs. 80,000, would be handed over to farmers free of cost. Maintenance of high energy pump-sets will be done free of cost for five years.

Power utilities will spend more than Rs. 20 crore for the pilot project.

Later on, the project will be rolled out to all consumers, wherein nearly 15 lakh pump-sets will be replaced with new ones.

Apart from giving utmost priority for implementation of energy efficiency (EE) programmes like DELP in the domestic sector and street light

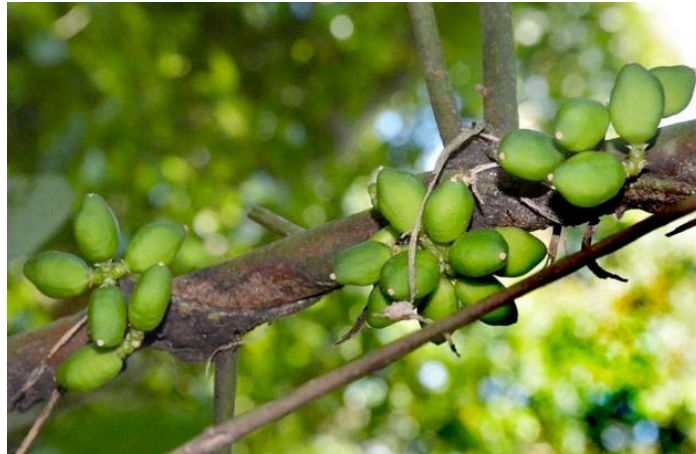
replacement in municipalities, the government will focus on the agriculture sector, wherein there is scope for 30 per cent energy savings.

Rajanagaram MLA Pendurthi Venkatesh thanked the Chief Minister for selecting his constituency for implementing the pilot project.

AP EPDCL MD R. Mutyala Raju said they had identified 14 villages in Kadiyam mandal and 1,085 nursery farmers for replacement of pump-sets.

He added that under EPDCL purview 92,000 street lights were replaced with LED in Vizag City, paving the way for saving of 44 per cent power.

### **Creeper offers cancer lifeline**



Deep within the forests of the Western Ghats, a team of city-based researchers have stumbled on a rare medicinal plant which is believed to have anti-cancer properties. However, it isn't the discovery of the creeper that holds potential. The researchers have developed a cultivation technique that enables large-scale use in the pharmaceutical sector.

The *Miquelia Dentata Bedd.* is a small creeper found sparsely in the mountainous regions around Kodagu. It is of special interest due to its production of anti-cancer alkaloid camptothecine (CPT). Its fruits produce the highest reported content of CPT, ranging from 0.8 to 1.2 per cent by dry weight, says a research paper published recently in the quarterly *Indian Journal of Biotechnology*.

“We came across this plant while exploring alternate sources of CPT, which is the third largest selling compound for the treatment of various cancers,” says G. Ravikanth, Fellow, Conservation Genetics Lab, Ashoka Trust for



Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), who is the lead author of the paper.

Currently, CPT is destructively harvested from other tree species, including the *Nothapodytes nimmoniana* (small trees found in the Western Ghats), in India which has pushed them towards extinction. In other words, harvesting the compound involves logging and destroying the tree itself.

### **Cultivating the plant**

The team, which apart from Mr. Ravikanth, comprised H N Thriveni and R Vasudeva from the College of Forestry, University of Agricultural Sciences, Sirsi; K.N. Ganeshiah and R. Uma Shaanker from University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, set about developing a procedure to cultivate the wild creeper in a nursery in Sirsi.

The results were encouraging: CPT production was recorded at 5.4 microgram per milligram of the sample. Researchers hope to increase extraction in the coming years.

“We plan to introduce this plant in coffee plantations and arecanut gardens. (With funding from Department of Biotechnology) we hope to have standardised techniques for cultivation of this species within three years,” said Mr. Ravikanth.

He hoped that once the challenge of mass cultivation of the plant is overcome, India’s production of the key anti-cancer compound will match that of China.

### **The goodness of sugar**



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The farm is proud of their product as there is no compromise in quality standards during the production process. This vegan sugar is free of

preservatives and is completely organic, with the vermicompost for the coconut trees being made in-house. Therefore, the land is enriched, making this a sustainable harvest.

Studies in the Phillipines have proved that coconut blossom sugar rates only 34 on the glycemic index (GI), making it a healthier sugar alternative. A low GI means that there is a slow release of sugar into the blood and does not lead to spikes in the blood sugar, if taken in reasonable quantities. The calorific count, however, is the same as refined sugar.

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### **GIS substation in two years: Minister**



Minister for Power Aryadan Mohammed inaugurated work on a 110-kV gas insulated switchgear (GIS) substation of the KSEB for the city at a function here on Thursday. The substation will come up in the Power House complex that houses the KSEB Kollam circle office.

In his inaugural address, the Minister said though the cost of constructing GIS substations was thrice that of conventional substations, it was the only option in cities owing to lack of space.



## **Early commissioning**

He said the KSEB hoped to commission the substation in two years. But, if the people cooperated, it could be commissioned in 16 to 18 months, he said.

Mr. Mohammed said the substation was designed to be fed by the 220-kV Ayathil substation through underground feeder lines. Cooperation of the people is required for this purpose as the feeder lines have to be laid for a distance of 5 km from Ayathil.

“In addition to being safe compared to overhead lines, the underground lines were also a guarantee against frequent power interruptions caused by storms, lightning, or falling of trees,” he said..

The Minister used the opportunity to call upon KSEB consumers to utilise the online facility to pay their electricity bills.

## **36 banks enlisted**

The services of 36 banks had been enlisted for the purpose, he said. The Minister also inaugurated the KSEB’s own section office building for Ayathil.

A.A. Azeez, MLA. Presided. P.K. Gurudasan, MLA, Mayor Honey Benjamin, former Minister for Power Kadavoor Sivadasan and District Collector A. Kowsigan were present.

KSEB chief engineer (transmission south) presented the report.

## **Farmers delighted at moderate rain**



The city and several parts of the district received spells of moderate rainfall for the fourth consecutive day on Thursday.

The current wet spell has come as relief right at the peak of the summer in May, when the mercury usually hovers around 40 degree Celsius mark, although it has brought along some attendant inconveniences such as inundated roads. Residents in a few low-lying areas in Subramaniapuram expressed their ire against the continued apathy of civic officials towards the frequent inundation of their residential colonies at the first sign of rain.

However, the spell of rain should considerably ease the drinking water supply situation.

Although the Tiruchirapalli City Corporation has not anticipated any problem after the commissioning of the new drinking water supply augmentation scheme, the wetting provided to the civic body's drinking water sources on the Cauvery riverbed has come as a big help. Otherwise, the corporation would have to bank on the water shored up at the Kambarasampettai check dam across the river, to provide a wetting for its main pumping station.

Farmers are happy that the standing crop such as banana would stand to benefit. "Apart from beneficial effect on standing crops, the widespread rain would help us tide over the shortage of fodder as grazing grounds sport a greener look now. In the absence of rain over the past few years, we have been facing a severe shortage of fodder and had to shell out big money to feed the cattle," said P. Ayyakannu, president, Desiya Thenindia Nadigal Inaippu Sangam.

The rain would help check outbreak of summer diseases among farmers and their cattle. However, the rain has been only moderate and would not be adequate to help improve the water table in the rainfed areas, he said.

## **Rainfall**

Navalur Kottapattu in the district recorded the maximum rainfall of 30.10 mm during the 24-hour period ending at 8.30 a.m. on Thursday. The following is the chief amount of rainfall recorded in other parts of the district during the same period (in mm): Ponnaniyar Dam 30, Kovilpatti 26, Thathaiyengarpet 20.50, Pulivam, 20, Manapparai 18.60, Marungapuri

15.20, Golden Rock 14.60, Tiruchi Town, Thenparanadu and Kuppampatti 13 each, Tiruchi Junction 12 and Devimangalam 11.80.

### **Aavin milk procurement goes up**

Milk procurement by Aavin has witnessed a rising trend with 86,000 litres being procured daily in Tuticorin and Tirunelveli districts. The increase in milk production gave rise to procurement. The procurement was up since the first week of May. Normally, the procurement was between 70,000 and 75,000 litres a day to cater to the needs of consumers of the two neighbouring districts, sources from Aavin, Tirunelveli, told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

Surplus production of milk owing to growth in fodder production resulted in increase in procurement by Aavin through milk producers of cooperative societies. Milk was being procured from 352 cooperative societies daily, the sources added.

The sale of milk processed by Aavin has also increased. Until last month, its sale was 42,000 litres a day and now it has gone up to 43,000 litres daily. Aavin has become the much sought-after name despite many private agencies in existence. Efforts were on to boost the sale of milk up to 50,000 litres a day with introduction of more vending agents. One litre of quality milk, which contained 12.5 total solid, had been procured at Rs. 28. If milk was tested sub-standard, it would not be procured under any circumstance. Aavin saw its maximum sale of 48,000 litres during 2012-13, the sources added.

After catering to the needs of consumers, the surplus milk had been converted into dairy products. Dairy products of Aavin also saw an upsurge in sales. About 20 to 25 per cent increase in production of by-products, including ghee, milk sweet and mysurpa, had boosted the market, the sources said.

S. Gengaraj, Joint Director of Animal Husbandry, Tirunelveli, said though this period was normally a lean one for milk production every year, milk production was high now due to unseasonal rains, which raised green fodder for cattle.

## **Farmers' grievances day meet on May 22**

The monthly district level agriculturists' grievances redressal day meeting for the month of May would be held under the presidentship of the District Collector at the Collectorate here at 10.30 a.m. on May 22.

Officials of the departments of agriculture, horticulture, agricultural engineering, agricultural marketing, sericulture, fisheries, animal husbandry, forest, transport, dairy development and cooperation, besides officials of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and cooperative sugar mills would participate in the meeting and reply to the grievances expressed by farmers and representatives of farmers' associations.

They would also inform the farmers on the action taken on the grievances expressed during the last month's meeting.

Collector R. Nanthagopal in a release appealed to the farmers to participate in the meeting.

## **Fisheries control room from today**

A round-the-clock control room will function at the Fisheries Station here from May 15 for handling monsoon time emergency situations at sea. An official press release informing this here on Thursday said that fishermen should comply with safety warnings during the monsoon season to avoid accidents at sea. Fishermen should also promptly inform the control room in case they notice incidents at sea that warranted rescue operations. Information should include type of fishing craft that is involved in mishap, its colour and the direction the boat is located, the release said. Owners of fishing crafts venturing out for fishing during the monsoon season should keep details of fishermen on board and provide the details to the control room if directed. The telephone numbers of the control room are 0497-2732487, 9447141193, 9496007039. - Special Correspondent

## Fishing during breeding season decried



With the monsoon setting in, key spots in major rivers and rivulets in the district are witnessing a new ‘festival’. This season small groups of people are seen casting their nets to fish for local species that throng these spots for the breeding season. In the local parlance, it is called ‘ootha pidutham’.

“It is neither traditional inland fishing nor angling by tourism purpose. This is blatant poaching,” said K.G. Padmakumar, former director of Regional Agriculture Research Station (RARS) who had pioneered a series of projects to revitalise the fish population in Kuttanad area. “We spend a lot of money for increasing the fish population in the inland waterways. Some of them have been highly successful. However, we have not been able to conserve the benefits of these successful campaigns,” he pointed out.

According to B. Sreekumar, president Kottayam Nature Society, it is high time that the government took a major decision to put an end to the practice, which has become a major festival attracting hundreds of people from far off places. “They are not traditional inland fishermen. Most of them have no knowledge about the life cycle of the fish varieties,” he said.

In Kottayam district, places like Elipulikadavu, Thazhathangadi and Cherpunkal, where the Meenachil River and the rivulets that drain into the river, serve as the most favoured poaching centres for the revellers. The polders in Puthuppally and Aymanam, too, have become favoured spots for ‘ootha pidutham’.



The poachers use the nets with very close mesh and most of the smaller fish and other creatures like snakes that get caught in the nets are allowed to die.

Says Jose Chathukulam, director Centre for Rural Management, the core reason for the recent unhealthy trend is a major deficit in awareness about the need for a ban on fishing during the breeding season. “Among the traditional inland fisherman community they had observed certain practices and ethics to ensure the healthy fish population. However, with the traditional practices gave way to modern ones, such ethics are also forgotten,” he said.

According to Dr. Padmakumar, if the current practice is allowed to continue, it will not be far when the fish population in the Kuttanad area, especially the Vembanad Lake and the rivers and rivulets that drain into it, go back to the pre-1990 state or even worse. The report prepared by C.P. Shaji for the Kerala State Bio Diversity Board has made some concrete proposals for the conservation of the inland fish varieties, in the backdrop of ootha. The most important one is for bringing in a complete ban on fishing during the breeding season, like the ban on trawling in the seas.

The report also calls for protecting the rivulets that drain into the rivers and lakes; conservation of the natural ecosystem of these rivulets; conservation of polders and launching of an awareness campaign among others.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

[Foodgrain production during 2014-15 crop year declines by 13.92 MT](#)



As per 3rd Advance Estimates for 2014-15, total production of rice is estimated at 102.54 MT which is lower by 4.11 MT than the last year's record production of 106.65 MT.

Deficit Monsoon of 2014 and unseasonal rains of February-March this year took its toll on overall food-grain production in the country, declining the total estimated output during 2014-15 crop year by nearly 5.5%.

The latest government estimate, released on Wednesday, put the figure of total food-grain production during 2014-15 crop year (July-June period) at 251.12 million tonnes (MT) which is lower by 13.92 MT than the last year's record food-grain production of 265.04 MT.

"Unseasonal rains/hailstorm during Feb-March 2015 had significant impact on production of Rabi crops. As a result of setback in Kharif as well as Rabi seasons, the production of most of the crops in the country has declined during 2014-15", said the ministry of agriculture while releasing the third advance estimated food-grain production data for the year 2014-15.

As per 3rd Advance Estimates for 2014-15, total production of rice is estimated at 102.54 MT which is lower by 4.11 MT than the last year's record production of 106.65 MT.

Production of wheat estimated at 90.78 MT which is lower by 5.07 MT than the record production of 95.85 MT achieved during 2013-14. Total production of Coarse Cereals estimated at 40.42 million tonnes is also lower by 2.87 million tonnes than their production during 2013-14.

Production of pulses estimated at 17.38 million tonnes is lower by 1.87 million tonnes than their production during the last year. With a decrease of 5.37 million tonnes over the last year, total production of oilseeds in the country is estimated at 27.38 million tonnes.

Production of sugarcane is estimated at 356.56 million tonnes which is higher by 4.42 million tonnes as compared to last year.

Total production of cotton estimated at 35.32 million bales (of 170 kgs each) is marginally lower than last year but higher by 2.85 million bales than the average production of last 5 years.

Production of jute & mesta is estimated at 11.49 million bales (of 180 kg each) which is marginally lower than their production during the last year.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### **Kerala sandalwood auction from May 20; 59,000 kg on offer**



About 59,000 kg of Marayoor sandalwood will go under the hammer at the e-auction to be held during May 20-21 at the government-owned Marayoor Sandal Reserve Forest office in Kerala's Idukki district.

The half-yearly auction is being conducted by the public-sector Metals and Scraps Trading Corporation.

The e-auction will begin at 11 am on May 20 and the bidders can register themselves until one hour before the start of the auction.

The Marayoor sandalwood plantation, owned by the Department of Forests, currently has around 60,000 sandal trees.

It is the largest natural sandalwood forest of the species *Santalum album* in the world.

The highest price fetched for the high quality Class 5 sandalwood at the auction held in August last year was Rs. 10,500 a kg.

This time, prices are expected to go higher.


Soap makers, managements of various temples and perfume manufacturers are the main customers for the top-quality Marayoor sandalwood.

## Pricey Arabicas to dent coffee exports

Indian shippers stare at threat of losing market share in northern Europe

<b>Sluggish export trend</b>			
	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Variation</b>
	<small>(Jan 1 - May 13)</small>		<small>(in %)</small>
Arabica Parchment	18,328	30,654	- 40
Arabica Cherry	6,340	8,570	- 26
Robusta Parchment	14,137	10,140	+ 39
Robusta Cherry	55,731	54,099	+ 3
Instant Coffee	7,339	17,112	- 57
Re-exports	27,875	18,016	+ 55
<b>Total*</b>	<b>1,29,886</b>	<b>1,38,729</b>	<b>- 6</b>

\* Includes roasted seeds; roasted and ground coffee Source: Coffee Board



Pricey Indian Arabicas are staring at the risk of losing market share in key consuming countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Benelux as roasters have started switching over to Colombian varieties. Indian arabicas are currently commanding a record premium of 70 cents per pound (lb) over the New York terminal price, while the premium for Colombian coffee is hovering around 10 cents/lb.

Trade sources attribute the high premium to a lower crop and also to the demand triggered from a section of exporters, who are short of washed arabicas. Also, the fact that a section of medium and large growers are unwilling to sell their produce anticipating higher prices is aiding the trend.

## High premiums

While the prices of arabicas on the New York terminal have dropped by about 40 per cent since October last year till now, local prices have not kept pace with the global decline. New York prices, which ruled at a high of around 227 cents per pound in October last year, are now hovering around 135 cents per pound. Similarly, the farm-gate price of arabica parchment, which ruled at around Rs. 12,500 per 50-kg bag is now hovering between Rs. 9,800 and Rs. 10,200, down 18-21 per cent.

“There is no way the high premium on Indian coffee can be justified. Our customers are switching over to the relatively cheaper Colombian milds,” said an official heading the exports division at multinational firm in Bengaluru. The firm sources coffee for the European roasters.

“Most big roasters from Northern Europe have stopped buying and are shifting to other cheaper origins. This has dented the demand mainly from Germany, Switzerland, Benelux and Scandinavian countries,” said Ramesh Rajah, President of Coffee Exporters Association. Europe accounts for close to half of India’s annual coffee shipments.

### **Shipments down**

The trend is reflected in lower shipments, so far, in the current calendar year. Arabica parchment shipments are down by 40 per cent at 18,328 tonnes during the January 1-May 13 period against 30,654 tonnes in the corresponding a year ago. Similarly, arabica cherry shipments are down 25 per cent (see table). The increase in robusta shipments and surge in imports for re-exports has minimised the impact on overall shipments, down 7 per cent for the period.

Rajah said even the growth in robusta shipments was not as per expectations, whereas re-exports were likely to increase this year. “When domestic prices are high, it is attractive to import for re-exports,” he said. Though some demand exists from traditional buyers for arabica in West Asia at these prices, they won’t be able to pick up the entire volume. Also, there’s some buying in small volumes from Italy, he said.

Trade sources said about 60-70 per cent of the Indian Arabicas has already been traded and most of the shipments were likely to be completed before the monsoon begins.

### **Post-monsoon estimates**

The timely arrival of pre-monsoon showers in the coffee growing regions has brightened the prospects for the 2015-16 crop starting October. “We expect Arabica output to be 20 per cent higher for 2015-16 over this season,” said Rajah.

For the current season, the Coffee Board – in its post-monsoon estimates – has pegged crop size at 3.31 lakh tonnes, some 8.7 per cent higher than last



year's final estimate of 3.04 lakh tonnes. Arabica output is pegged at 99,600 tonnes, while Robusta at 2.31 lakh tonnes.

### **Amul alarmed over duty-free import of dairy products**

The Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which crossed the annual turnover of Rs. 20,000 crore, has requested the Centre to control imports of dairy products from Europe, New Zealand and Australia to safeguard the dairy sector in the country.

Rs. Sodhi, Managing Director of GCMMF, which sells Amul brand of milk products, said that the milk producing nations were dumping their surplus dairy products in the Indian market amid falling international prices.

### **Global prices dip**

“In New Zealand alone, milk price to farmers has declined by 40 per cent in the last one year. Similarly, across Europe, farm-gate prices have declined by 18 per cent to 20 per cent. Dairy farmers in the US have also seen their prices drop by 15-19 per cent in the same period,” said Sodhi.

“In order to dump their surplus stocks of dairy commodities, these countries are lobbying hard for access to Indian dairy market through bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations,” Sodhi said, adding: “We request our policy makers to ensure that dairy products are completely kept out of the ambit of FTAs with major dairy exporting nations.”

### **Free imports**

Notably, in 2014-15 Amul's revenue growth rate took a beating from 32 per cent growth in 2013-14 to 14 per cent.

“We are not against imports, but we are against free imports. Irrespective of quantity, free imports will affect the sentiment leading us to reduce our prices. This will ultimately affect farmers, because unlike other nations, milk production is costly in India,” said Sodhi, adding that in the long term free imports would also harm consumer interest as it may lead to dependence on imports just like edible oils.

However, Sodhi said that milk products imports have been negligible except in 2013 when India imported about 100,000 tonnes of skimmed milk powder

(SMP) to tide over the domestic shortage. The other main import commodity is butter oil, which is normally imported from New Zealand or European nations. According to DGCIS, imports of dairy products grew 61 per cent to Rs. 375 crore in the year-ended March 2015 over Rs. 232.68 crore in 2013-14.

### **Slow growth**

Addressing the 41st annual general meeting of the milk federation, Chairman Jethabhai Patel said that GCMMF achieved a turnover of Rs. 20,733 crore for fiscal 2014-15 – up from Rs. 18,143 crore last year.

The growth in 2014-15 was slower than the compounded average growth rate (CAGR) of 21 per cent in last five years.

Fall in import demand for dairy products, especially in China, and higher production in major exporting countries caused a major meltdown in global prices of dairy commodities in last one year.

This was also reflected in milk procurement prices in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and EU nations, which are heavily dependent on dairy exports.

“No duty concessions and no GI protection on dairy products should be given to countries such as Australia, New Zealand and EU. These steps will go a long way towards ensuring that our nation’s self sufficiency in dairy sector is maintained in future and our food-security is safeguarded with respect to milk and dairy products,” Sodhi said.

### **Monsoon to set in two days early over Kerala on May 30**

The South-West monsoon is likely to set in over Kerala two days early on May 30, India Met Department announced this evening.

The prediction of the onset data assumes an error margin of plus or minus four days. The normal onset date is June 1. Importantly, the agency noted that the El Nino weather condition – a heating of ocean water in the eastern and central Pacific Ocean – is strengthening. Several international Met agencies in the US, Australia and Japan, have forecast a 70 per cent probability of an El Nino event in 2015.

The phenomenon is a cause for concern since it could lead to a second consecutive season of below-normal rainfall leading to drought conditions.

“El Nino conditions are concerning, they have been prevailing since March and is likely to strengthen during the monsoon and post-monsoon season. We will update the analysis for our forecast in June,” said an IMD official.

### **‘No El Nino worry’**

While its prediction for the date of the monsoon onset – May 27 with the same margin of error - is similar to the Met Department’s, private weather forecasting agency Skymet disputed the assertion of an evolving El Nino.

The agency had earlier predicted that rainfall in 2015 would be 102 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA) with an 82 per cent probability of normal-to-above-normal showers. It varied with IMD’s forecast of the South-West monsoon being below normal at 93 per cent of LPA, the average rainfall India received between 1951 and 2000 which stands at 89 cm.

“Analysing drought patterns through this and the last century, the year after the phenomenon is established has no drought. Last year, rainfall was 12 per cent below the LPA, it’s classified as a mild meteorological drought but the Government denied it. Our contention is that the El Nino episode is devolving this year,” said Jatin Singh, CEO, Skymet.

Skymet collates its information through 2,500 weather stations and satellite data and its computing model comprising 124 programs predicts no impact on the coming monsoon.

“The monsoon will be decent through June and will climb across the country. Our El Nino theorising is converging with our computing. The region is cooling off over the next 5-6 months,” said Singh.

Both agencies agreed that Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) conditions, which also impact the monsoon in conjunction with the El Nino, were neutral.

### **Andaman onset**

Earlier, the Met said that conditions are becoming favourable for the onset of monsoon at the extreme outpost of Andaman and Nicobar Islands over the next four days.

The islands at the extreme south-east are the first port of call for the monsoon.

Sri Lanka will be next, in a matter of 8-10 days followed by South West coast of India (Kerala) immediately thereafter.

The Thailand Meteorological Department said in its assessment that the winds are already south-westerly over the Andaman Sea clocking between 16- to 30 km/hr.

The wind speeds need to stabilise to around 30 km/hr for the monsoon onset to be declared in these parts.

### **‘Low’ delayed**

Over Sri Lanka, the surface wind was variable in direction (or calm) and the speed was much slower at about 5- to 20 km/hr.

The wind was from the sea during day time along the coastal areas.

But the positive signals here included high atmospheric water vapour content.

Atmospheric pressure values over are also below monthly averages (making it easier for monsoon winds to blow in).

These announcements came on a day when India Met also withdrew the outlook for a low-pressure area over Lakshadweep (Arabian Sea).

### **Buzz in bay**

Satellite maps showed a high-pressure area (dry air from the Arab desert) settling in over north and central Arabian Sea and delaying the genesis of the ‘low’ even as the parent cyclonic circulation persisted. According to the US National Centres for Environmental Prediction, the ‘low’ could materialise but would be pushed into the outer seas initially by north-easterly winds from the high-pressure area.

Meanwhile, the European Centre for Medium-Range Forecasts persisted with its outlook for a buzz developing over southwest Bay of Bengal off Tamil Nadu coast from this weekend.

It will undergo calibrated growth in the warm central Bay of Bengal and even could end up as a tropical cyclone over West Bengal coast with a projected landfall on May 23-24, the European agency said.

If this were to happen, the onset of monsoon is also likely to happen over the Kerala coast since the system is projected to travel all the way from off the south-east peninsula to the north-east.

### **Pacific typhoon**

The benign presence of a another strong typhoon building sufficiently far away into the central Pacific and going further away south of the Korean peninsula would also help pull in the monsoon as a whole.

The European Centre saw cross-equatorial flows of monsoon off the Somali coast picking up after Sunday, leading up to the initiation of the disturbance in Bay of Bengal.

### **Go short on MCX crude oil**

Crude oil futures traded on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) have found support at around Rs. 2,720/barrel in late-January and moved sideways forming a double bottom pattern with neckline at Rs. 3,300 levels. In mid-April, the contract decisively broke out of this bullish reversal pattern and continued to trend northwards. The contract achieved the pattern price target of Rs.3,900 last week and is currently hovering around this level. Moreover, the contract faces a key long-term resistance in the band between Rs. 4,000 and Rs. 4,150 which is crucial trend deciding level. An emphatic break out of this resistance band is required to strengthen the uptrend and take the contract northwards to Rs. 4,500 in the medium term.

As the contract's daily indicators and oscillators are loosing bullish momentum, there is a threat of a near-term corrective decline can happen. Such inability to break the key resistance band can pull the contract down to Rs. 3,700 and then to Rs. 3,500 levels. Traders with a short-term perspective with high risk appetite can initiate short position on such downward reversal with a stop-loss at Rs. 4,000.

**MCX natural gas** : MCX natural gas futures took support at Rs. 155 per mmBtu in early and late-April and started to trend upwards. Subsequently,



the contract breached its 21- and 50-day moving averages and a key resistance at Rs. 170. Short-term trend is up. The contract now hovers around Rs. 186. On going, the uptrend can extend and reach the price targets of Rs. 200 and then Rs. 205 in the short term. Traders can initiate long position with a stop-loss at Rs. 180. Significant support below Rs. 180 is at Rs. 170 and then in the band between Rs. 155-160.