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THE HINDU

Crack in the carrots

Why are some carrots split or deeply cracked? Are they safe to eat?



What agricultural experts call growth cracks can originate during the growth period, typically when a period of little water in the soil is followed by a period of too much water.

The carrot, *Daucus carota*, subspecies *sativus*, prefers consistent moisture the whole time it is growing, according to the website for the World Carrot Museum. Moisture-sensitive during growth and storage, carrots can also crack if they dry out after harvest. Some cultivated varieties are more susceptible to cracks than others.

Other factors that can contribute to cracking include the overuse of certain fertilizers, high growth temperatures, heavy soil texture and the strength of the outer layer of the root.

Cracking is just one of the **blemishes** that can lead to rejection of edible and nutritious carrots. As to the safety of cracked carrots, common sense should be the rule, relying on careful cleaning and judicious paring.— New York Times News Service

Moisture-sensitive during growth and storage, carrots can also crack if they dry out after harvest.

Minister allays fears of farmers on agri zones

Municipal Administration Minister P. Narayana has allayed fears of farmers of the capital region regarding agricultural zones earmarked in the Master plan released by the AP Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA).

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, Mr. Narayana said that there was a difference between agricultural zones and green-belt.

The people need not have apprehensions that any type of developmental activities would not be allowed in agricultural zones. That rule was applicable only for green-belt areas, he asserted.

The government constituted a three-member committee to look into the demands and doubts of farmers in the capital city area.

The Roads and Buildings, Panchayat Raj Departments, etc. would assist in assessing the houses that would be damaged or affected due to the roads proposed by the CRDA, he said.

CRDA Act

The Minister suggested Congress leader K. Chiranjeevi to understand the CRDA Act before making a statement. The government was constructing the capital city in a most transparent manner.

The Act was duly followed in Land Pooling Scheme (LPS), master plan, etc., he asserted.

Increase social sector spending



Economic policies should aim to achieve growth and inclusive development. The budget also should reflect these objectives. The following three major issues should be addressed regarding budget and economy.

First, for raising growth investment has to be revived, particularly private investment. There is a debt problem for private sector. It may take some time for revival of private investment and the climate has to be created. The global economic situation is not in good shape. There has been a slowdown in Europe and BRICS countries with the exception of India. Particularly, the slowdown in China is worrying. Exports in India showed negative growth consecutively in the last 13 months. Therefore, one has to concentrate on the domestic economy. Public investment in infrastructure and other areas is crucial as a counter-cyclical measure to revive the economy. This can also raise private investment. The problem of large NPAs in public sector banks has to be resolved. One issue is whether we should deviate from the fiscal deficit targets while increasing public investment. There can be small deviation in the targets but one should stick to medium term announcements. Both the objectives of raising public investment and sticking to fiscal deficits can be achieved if non-merit subsidies are removed and disinvestment targets are achieved. Another objective should be to create productive employment through appropriate policies in industry and services. SME sector can be given focus. On corporate tax, reduction in the rate must be accompanied by reduction in exemptions, which are to the tune of Rs.5.8 lakh crore. This can be used for infrastructure and social sector development.

Second, a big push for rural and agriculture sector is needed in the forthcoming budget. Crash in global prices for agri commodities created problems for our farmers also. Two measures are needed for agriculture: raising productivity and measures for risk mitigation. Investment in irrigation and rural infrastructure, technology and extension can raise agricultural productivity. More focus can be given to rain-fed areas including the eastern region. For risks due to droughts, floods and price risks, measures such as water conservation and drought proofing are required. Announcement of new crop insurance scheme with good features is in the right direction. Some of the subsidies like fertilizers can be reformed to stimulate public investment. Agricultural growth is not commensurate with credit flows as many small and marginal farmers are benefiting less than others.

Third, budget should provide a medium term framework for social sector which is important for its own sake and raising growth. We need increase in expenditures in social sector. More importantly delivery systems have to be improved in health and education for better outcomes. MGNREGA is working better now than in the last few years and can create assets. China took a lead in promoting Millennium Development Goals. Now India should take a lead in achieving sustainable development goals in the next 15 years. The role of states is equally important particularly in infrastructure, agriculture and social sector.

The author is Director, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai

Collector, SP launch digging of ponds

Farmers told to dig ponds in their agriculture fields to store water



Collector Ch. Vijayamohan and Superintendent of Police A. Ravikrishna digging a pond at Kappatralla village in Kurnool district on Tuesday. -- PHOTO: U. SUBRAMANYAM

District Collector Ch. Vijayamohan and Superintendent of Police A. Ravikrishna launched digging of a farm pond in Kappatralla village in Devanakonda mandal in Kurnool district on Tuesday.

The officials, who spent Monday night in the village in “Rathri Basa” programme, interacted with farmers and persuaded them to dig farm ponds in their agricultural fields to store water.

The Collector pillion-ride a motorcycle, while the helmet-borne Superintendent of Police rode it from the village to the field of a farmer Surendra, about one-and-a-half a km away, to launch digging of a farm pond.

Mr. Vijayamohan advised officials to spend a night with farmers in a village every week and strive to resolve their problems.

Three hundred and eighty five farmers, who owned less than five acres of land each in Kappatralla must be encouraged to forward applications and deploy drip and sprinkler irrigation in about 1,000 acres in the village, he told the Project Director of A.P. Micro-Irrigation Project, Devamuni.

The drought-effect can be mitigated if drip irrigation was encouraged in about 500 acres in each village, the Collector said.

Farmers owning over five acres of land must be encouraged to dig farm ponds.

Farm ponds must be dug in 230 villages covered by watersheds.

The Collector and SP performed bhoomi pooja for a percolation tank and removed mud by operating a proclain.

Mr. Vijayamohan directed DWMA Project Director Ch. Pulla Reddy to take steps to dig 10,000 farm ponds in Kurnool district.

The Collector assured sanction for construction of check dams, if jungle clearance was done in the stream adjoining the fields. The SP said efforts were being made to develop Kappatralla village, which he adopted, into a model village.

Adoni Revenue Divisional Officer Obulesu, Panchayat Raj Superintending Engineer Surendranath, Devanakonda mandal president Ramachandra Naidu and others participated.

SKRDP to extend activities to more districts in HK, Mumbai Karnataka



H.L. Manjunath, executive director of Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project, addressing a press conference in Kalaburagi on Tuesday. —Photo: Arun Kulkarni

Sri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project (SKDRDP) has decided to extend its activities to the backward districts of Hyderabad Karnataka region and Vijayapura district in Mumbai Karnataka region.

L.H. Manjunath, executive director, SKRDP, told presspersons on Tuesday that offices had been inaugurated in Kalaburagi, Vijayapura, Yadgir and Bidar districts. “The SKRDP already has its presence in Raichur, Koppal and Ballari districts for the past four years,” he said.

Dr. Manjunath said their main objective was to ensure that the benefits extended by the government through different schemes reached the targeted sections.

He said that the SKDRDP would appoint a women empowerment officer, an agriculture officer and a coordinator for each village and act as a bridge between the government and the people to ensure effective implementation of different welfare measures.

Dr. Manjunath said that 10 representatives from the respective villages would be appointed for each of the hobli and one rural development officer would be appointed for each taluk to monitor the progress of the project. The SKDRDP would help the farmers to get loans and the team members would help them repay loans taken from banks.

He said that they had tied up with banks such as Union Bank of India, State Bank of India, IDBI, Corporation Bank and Pragati Krishna Grameena Bank to make the process of loan disbursement for farmers easy.

In Kalaburagi district, the SKRDP had tied up with SyndicateBank.

Dr. Manjunath said that they had helped over 3.2 lakh self-help groups (SHG) so far to organise themselves and get financial assistance of more than Rs. 20,000 crore. In Kalaburagi district, there were plans to organise 10,000 SHGs covering 1 lakh members and extend financial assistance to the tune of Rs. 100 crore.

“The SKRDP also funds construction of school buildings and hospitals,” he added.

SRI technique adopted by this teacher-farmer yields CM award

“In this pattern of cultivation, crop gets maximum amount of nutrients”



P. Prasanna in her field at Tiruppalai.—Photo: G. Moorthy

For P. Prasanna (32), who has bagged Tamil Nadu Chief Minister’s Special Award this year for high yield of paddy by adopting System of Rice Intensification (SRI) technique, her interest towards farming never wanes though she is a busy woman juggling time between managing her family and being a teacher in a private school.

“Born in an agricultural family, I was considered lucky by my parents. Right from childhood till my college, I was chosen to perform the rituals during

the sowing and harvest times every season. So, my bonding with farming is deep-rooted,” Ms. Prasanna said.

“During cultivation season, I spend a couple of hours in the early morning and all my weekends in the field,” she added.

The TRY 3 variety of rice, Ms. Prasanna cultivated in February 2015 gave 3,223 kilograms of rice, which converts to 16,115 kilograms per hectare, the highest yield in Tamil Nadu in the SRI during 2014-2015. The special award she received from Chief Minister Jayalalithaa included a cash price of Rs. 5 lakh and a medal.

Though it was Ms. Prasanna’s husband M. Padmanabhan who mainly looks after agriculture in their family-owned lands, it was Prasanna’s keen interest that made them participate in the yearly contest for which the land should be enrolled in advance by paying a fee of Rs. 150.

“All credit should go to her as she ensured that all the advice and guidelines by Agriculture Department officials were stringently followed,” said Mr. Padmanabhan. Ms. Prasanna said that though SRI cultivation involved tedious labour for the cultivators, the yield quality and consequently the income was much higher.

“More importantly, only a bare minimum of chemical fertilizer was used,” she said, adding that even water requirement was much lesser.

S. Kanagaraj, Joint Director (Agriculture), Madurai, pointed out that since the announcement of the award by the present government, this was the second time a farmer from Madurai had won.

“There are many misconceptions about SRI cultivation among farmers, particularly about the yield, as they think that a lot of area gets wasted due to the spacing between the plants. But that is how the crop gets maximum amount of nutrients. Now, Prasanna’s success story can be used as an example for others,” he added.

Needed, a comprehensive view of conservation of wetlands



The Pallikaranai marsh came into focus in December when large tracts were dry just a few days after the floods.— Photo: Shaju John

Environmentalists and naturalists decry a key-hole view of conserving wetlands. Protection of any major wetland is possible only if the health of buffer wetlands around it is taken into consideration.

Similarly, the pollution levels in the whole region and threat from encroachments have to be factored in.

“There is no point in calling a place like Pallikaranai a wetland if no cognizance is taken of the pollution the whole area is subjected to. Instead of simply focussing on the wetland alone, the buffer wetlands around it, which are 32 in number, need to be treated as ecological extensions with equal importance,” said Jayashree Vencatesan, founder of Care Earth Trust.

The Trust, which had worked on an adaptive management plan for the conservation of the marsh, stressed on the need for people to be a major part of the process.

Even though the northern side of the wetland has becoming a dumping spot for garbage, the southern side, which has fresh water flowing into it, has been a home for many rare migratory birds.

“From clearing out weeds to ensuring that there are no obstructions for the water which flows into the wetland, attention should be given to ensuring water retention in Pallikaranai. With several birds making the place their home, it is the best we can do to ensure that the ecosystem is protected,” said

K.V.R.K. Thirunaranan, founder of The Nature Trust, adding that the wetland attracted over 140 species of birds.

The area came into focus, when after being flooded in the first week of December, large tracts of the wetland were suddenly almost dry a few days later.

The tranquil Pulicat lake, which is the second largest brackish water lake in the country, has long been attracting people as well as winged visitors.

“Despite having all the necessary characteristics, the place has not been declared as a Ramsar Site. Such a declaration would have probably assisted efforts to protect it,” noted T. Murugavel, a naturalist. Stating that the at least 10 km of the area around Pulicat should be declared as a ‘No-development zone’, Mr. Murugavel pointed out that the Nellapattu channel as well as other surrounding tanks, which are breeding spots for birds, were being appropriated for other purposes.

“Many birds roost and nest in the surrounding wetlands and come to the lake for feeding. Many of these places are being earmarked for real estate and other development,” he said.

In a similar context, environmentalists pointed out that agricultural lands surrounding Vedanthangal, which are also considered wetlands, were being fast taken over for other purposes, robbing migratory birds of their food source, including insects and reptiles.

The southern side of the Pallikaranai wetland has been a home for many rare migratory birds

Inter-ministerial meet to discuss measures to increase exports

Move comes following exports dropping for 13th month in row

Inter-ministerial talks will begin soon to consider measures to boost exports and improve the ease of doing business.

The move comes in the backdrop of merchandise exports shrinking for the 13th consecutive month in December.

As part of the discussions, the government will also look into the likely impact of the proposed Goods and Services Tax (GST) on exports besides reviewing free trade agreements, including the one with Asean member-countries. Besides, the commerce ministry will soon approach the ministries of external affairs and finance on customs-related issues.

Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman held a meeting on Tuesday with Export Promotion Councils (EPCs) of various sectors.

Crop insurance scheme may leave out tenant farmers

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY), which the NDA government showcases as the shield against all risks faced by farmers, has failed to be universal because there is a need for a comprehensive crop and income insurance scheme covering income and yield risks for all farmers and all crops.

All India Kisan Sabha joint secretary Vijoo Krishnan said on Tuesday that farmer suicides had continued nationwide for more than two decades since the neo-liberal economic policies were put in place.

“However, the ruling classes have sought to underplay the unprecedented human tragedy and linked the plight of farmers to the weather. What Prime Minister Narendra Modi is proposing is to insure farmers from the vagaries of nature. What is actually required is to insure them from the adversities created by deliberate government policies,” he said.

He said the PMFBY continued the mandatory covering of loanee farmers. Non-loanee farmers, tenant farmers and share-croppers were likely to remain outside its ambit. “Dalits and Adivasis, socially and economically oppressed, will also be excluded from the scheme. To be truly inclusive, the Central and State governments must subsidise the entire premium for the poor, small and marginal farmers, tenant farmers, share-croppers as well as Adivasi and dalit farmers,” he said. The central committee of the All India Kisan Sabha met in Delhi and discussed the situation. Mr. Krishnan said members felt that trade liberalisation and free trade agreements exposed farmers to the volatility in world markets. An uncontrolled increase in input prices, coupled with a fall in the prices of farm goods, had become a regular phenomenon. MSP did not cover production cost, he pointed out.

Spicing up your chocolates!

Chocolates spiced with chilly, cinnamon, etc. will give a new kick to the taste buds

Next time when you get bored eating your regular chocolate having the same cliched flavour, how about spicing it up with a dash of chilly or cinnamon!

Yes, chocolates spiced up with chilly, cinnamon and cardamom are here to provide a new kick to your taste buds. People these days have started using various spice value products such as spice chocolates, spice teas and even cosmetic products like spice creams, shampoos, face washes etc, Spices Board of India Chairman Dr A. Jayathilak said.

'Flavourit', an initiative of the Spices Board to share and sustain the passion of spices, has come up with a variety of spice chocolates for food lovers and spice cosmetics for beauty conscious people. It has experimented with bringing out chocolates in six unique flavours of cardamom, chilly, cumin, cinnamon, clove and nutmeg.

The response to chocolates with chilly flavour has been really good and when it is put up at exhibitions in foreign countries, food enthusiasts even want to know how it is prepared, Jayathilak said.

Even in non—culinary segment, spice creams with tulsi, turmeric, saffron, etc and soaps and facewashes with clove, cardamom, pepper, cinnamon, green coffee bean and vanilla are being experimented, he said.

“It would be surprising to know that the ‘health conscious’ people are increasing the use of spices in their daily cuisine and have adopted it as part of their lifestyle,” Jayathilak said.

India commands a formidable position in the world spice trade with spice exports expected to touch US\$3 billion by 2016-17.

“In the past few years, the demand for value-added spice products has increased. The spice oils and oleoresin, spice tea, spice chocolates, cosmetics from spices such as spice creams, spice shampoos, spice face washes, etc, are becoming extremely popular with Indian,” Jayathilak said.

“Both spices and herbs go hand in hand, add excellent flavour to food, and contain disease fighting antioxidants than fruits and vegetables. They transform bland food into a delicacy and come with some health benefits,” he said.PTI

‘I’m prepared for drought’



Ravindra Shivajirao Patil in his tomato field at Honnikeri village in Bidar district.— Photo: Gopichand T.

Clever water management practices have helped a young farmer from Honnikeri village cultivate vegetables and spices when the district is suffering from a debilitating drought.

Ravindra Shivajirao Patil has been earning between Rs. 8 lakh and Rs. 10 lakh an acre every year, thanks to farsighted water management.

Having levelled fields to a gradient that directs all rainwater into a stream that runs through his farm, he has built two check dams at the two ends of the stream to impound water. He has created bunds and canals that feed the open well, and pits that recharge the borewell. Drip irrigation tubes wet every inch of his 20-acre farm. He carefully chooses crops that have stable prices and demand less water.

“I have reached a stage where half of my crops need zero maintenance,” says the 35-year-old farmer.

Behind this success is a story of untiring work. He inherited a patch of land that “looked like an undulating desert” in 1999. He was just in his teens then

and did not know what to do with it. He grew sugarcane, only to find it did not fetch much.

Then a friend told him about ginger. The cash crop brought good returns on just one acre of land and he decided to expand it. “For that, I had to level my land. But it demanded hard work as the mounds had to be razed and aligned to the slopes,” says Mr. Patil.

I took a loan from the district cooperative bank to buy a tractor and began levelling the land. I worked by myself for a few months to remove the rocks and bring up the mud. Silt from the nearby stream was spread over the first four acres.

Work on the next seven acres was even better planned for growing ginger. “We dug a huge cube with a 6 ft depth, 60-m length and 500 m in width. It was filled with boulders, pebbles and soft soil, to see that extra water is drained off. This water in turn runs into the stream. This water cycle has improved productivity and kept the soil wet for months, he says.

Mr. Patil is working on building a two-acre farm pond before summer.

Work on bunding and channelling the upper drainage area has started. “I will make sure that not a drop of rain water leaves my field, he says.

He plans to connect a bio-digester to the water tank so that the slurry flows through the drip irrigation tubes. This should start working before summer, he said. “I am concerned about drought. But, I am not worried. I am prepared for it,” he says.

Thanks to far-sighted water management, Ravindra Shivajirao Patil from Honnikeri village earns between Rs. 8 lakh and Rs. 10 lakh an acre annually

Farmers seek compensation for crop damage

The members of Tamil Nadu Farmers’ Association, affiliated to Communist Party of India (CPI), led by senior leader R. Nallakannu, laid siege to Kovilpatti Revenue Divisional Office on Tuesday, demanding adequate compensation for crop damage suffered by farmers.

While talking to presspersons, Mr. Nallakannu said farmers suffered heavy loss after their crops were damaged by heavy rains during the Northeast monsoon last year.

Farmers had taken up cultivation of rainfed crops such as black gram, green gram and maize anticipating rains. But excessive rainfall caused extensive damage to crops.

Hence, farmers were unhappy with the compensation declared by the government.

Citing this, he sought the government to provide compensation of Rs. 20,000 per acre of rainfed tracts.

Stating that there were about four lakh farmers in the district, he said compensation was given only to 60,000 farmers and sought benefits to all affected farmers.

A petition to this effect was given to Kovilpatti RDO S. Kannabiran.

DPCs to function at 26 places

Direct Purchase Centres (DPCs) would function at 26 places in the district from Wednesday to procure paddy from the farmers, Collector K.S.Palanisamy has said. The DPCs were functioning at Anbil, Komakudi, Mettupatti, Poovalur, Thinniyam, T.Kalvikudi, Nagar, Ariyur, Nathamankudi, Kattur, Vellanur, Punjai Sangenthi, L.Abishekapuram and Sembarai in Lalgudi taluk; Tiruverumbur and Melakalkandarkottai in Tiruverumbur taluk; Nochiyam in Manchanallur taluk; Musiri, Kattuputhur and Gunaseelam in Musiri taluk; Thottiyam in Thottiyam taluk; and B.Mettur and Alathudayanpatti in Thuraiyur taluk. Farmers would be paid Rs.1,520 a quintal for grade-A variety and Rs.1460 a quintal for common variety. Farmers can get the payment credited into their bank accounts or by cash, Mr.Palanisamy said.

Manish Sisodia asks Modi to say no to GM crop clearance



In his letter, the AAP leader also claimed that scientists are conducting tests of GM crops in D U labs without possessing a no-objection certificate from the Delhi government, which makes such tests illegal. (Sushil Kumar/HT)

The Delhi government on Tuesday urged the Centre not to give clearance to cultivation of genetically modified mustard as allowing the agriculture technique for growing a food crop could pose threat to environment, soil, farmers and consumers' health.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia demanded the Centre to reject the application, pending with the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, seeking approval on GM mustard.

While Sisodia said it was the duty of the Delhi government “to protect the rights of its citizens to cultivate crops of their choice”, the communication also holds political relevance as the issue of genetically modified crops is a burning issue in neighbouring Punjab.

Devastation of Bt cotton crop in Punjab due to a whitefly epidemic last year witnessed widespread protests by farmers.

The ineffectiveness of genetically modified (GM) cotton in light of epidemic raised concern among agricultural experts and farmers over the growing dependency on Bt cotton and their effectiveness. Assembly polls are scheduled to be held in Punjab early next year and the Aam Aadmi Party is eyeing the north Indian state as the next destination for political expansion.

In his letter, the AAP leader also claimed that scientists are conducting tests of GM crops in Delhi University labs without possessing a no-objection certificate from the Delhi government, which makes such tests illegal.

“The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture had raised concerns about such crops in 2012. The report of Technical Expert Committee, constituted by the Supreme Court, also raises concerns over it....We demand that government must make all reports and data related to GM crops in its possession public so that scientists, state governments, farmers and consumers could debate it,” Sisodia said in his letter.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Coconut traders seek Govt intervention to tackle price fall



Board urges farmers not to sell their produce at lesser price

KOCHI, FEBRUARY 2:

With the continuing downward movement in coconut oil and copra prices, Cochin Oil Merchants Association (COMA) has sought government intervention to arrest the price fall.

Thalath Mahmood, President of COMA, requested the State government to immediately entrust Nafed to re-start copra procurement, as the prices has come down to as low as ₹ 5,800 a quintal in Kerala and ₹ 5,400 in Tamil

Nadu. The current prices are close to the minimum support price fixed in 2015 for procurement at ₹ 5,550 for milling copra and ₹ 5,830 for ball copra.

The coconut oil market in both the States also started moving southwards with prices quoting at ₹ 8,400 in Kerala and ₹ 7,550 in Tamil Nadu.

Unless the government takes concrete measures, the prices will come down further affecting the prospects of millions of coconut farmers. With the starting of the New Year, he said the price fall was almost ₹ 500-600 a quintal both for copra and coconut oil.

According to him, good arrivals from all production centres following a better crop last year impacted the prices and it is likely to continue. Many of the corporate buyers are not venturing into the market and limited their purchase. This, coupled with the continuing winter in North India, also affected the prices.

However, the fall in prices benefited the ailing coconut oil market in Kerala, leading to a surge in local consumption vis-à-vis other edible oils, he added.

Bharat Khona, former Board Member, COMA, said the stability in prices at the present level may attract upcountry buyers to venture. However the price volatility is keeping the buyers away from the market. The drop in prices is also evident in the loose oil market price which has come down to ₹ 1,140 for 15 kg in Tamil Nadu.

Meanwhile, the Coconut Development Board has called upon farmers not to sell their produce at a throwaway price, given the decreasing trend in copra and coconut oil. The Board urged Farmer Producer Organisations to concentrate on primary processing of the produce for enabling them to hold the produce for extended time period. They should concentrate on making copra using quality driers and converting it to coconut oil and branding it.

Our Erode correspondent adds: The price of the coconut oil decreased by ₹ 100 per 15 kg in Kangeyam and Uthukuli markets here.

“During the middle of January coconut oil was sold at ₹ 1,240 for 15 kg . Within fifteen days the price came down by ₹ 100 due to the poor offtake,”

said RM Palanisamy, an oil trader. On Monday, copra fetched ₹ 5,400-5,500 a quintal.

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

El Nino remains strong but is on the mend, says Australian Met

Models suggest the neutral state is most likely for the second half of 2016, followed by La Nina

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEBRUARY 2:

El Nino conditions in the Equatorial and East Pacific continue to remain strong but are on the mend, according to the latest update from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

Based on the 26 El Nino events since 1900, around 50 per cent have been followed by a neutral year, and 40 per cent by La Nina (the alter ego of El Nino, with exactly opposite implications for regional weather).

Neutral state

Models suggest the neutral state is most likely for the second half of 2016, followed by La Nina, with a repeat El Nino assessed as very unlikely.

This would suggest that the 2016 Indian monsoon is likely to coincide with neutral conditions in the Equatorial Pacific, which is believed 'next best' to La Nina in terms of expected favourable impact.

La Nina has in the past been associated with normal to above normal monsoon, though not always. There is no direct cause-effect relationship between the two either.

Given this context, it would be interesting to watch how the 2016 summer pans out over North-West and adjoining Central India.

Heating pattern

Below-par heating of the plains has been viewed as coming in the way of normal play-out of the monsoon, thanks to its detrimental influence on wind strength and atmospheric pressure.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts says in earliest outlook that the northern-most parts of North-West India and adjoining Gangetic plains would see normal heating during February-March-April.

The Met subdivisions covered here are Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal and North-East India.

Excess heat will be confined to over Central India and Peninsular India with associated heat waves.

Even here, West Madhya Pradesh may prove relatively less hot, according to the European Centre.

Normal rain

March-April-May too is likely to see similar conditions panning out with top heat slowly invading the fringes of the Met subdivisions in North-West India and along the Gangetic plains.

April-May-June, which sees peak summer leading to the monsoon, might see the top heat revert to Central India and the South Peninsula.

As for rain forecast for the period referred above, the European Centre is of the view that most regions would witness normal rainfall right from February into June.

May-June-July, which witnesses the onset and progress of the monsoon, will normal to above normal rain over the South Peninsula with the Bay of Bengal driving excess rain.

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

Mixed trend in spot rubber

KOTTAYAM, FEBRUARY 2:

Spot rubber showed a mixed mood on Tuesday. The undercurrent was weak following the overall declines in domestic futures and global trendsetters.



The volumes continued to be low. RSS 4 was quoted steady at ₹ 93 a kg, by traders. The grade slipped to ₹ 93 (₹ 93.50) and ₹ 90 (₹ 90.50) respectively, according to the Rubber Board and the dealers. February futures declined to ₹ 92.15 (₹ 95.60), March to ₹ 94.40 (₹ 97.81), April to ₹ 97.33 (₹ 100.34) and May to ₹ 100 (₹ 101.34) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) dropped to ₹ 85.41 (₹ 86.38) at Bangkok. February futures closed at ¥150.5 (₹ 84.67) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates ₹ / kg follow: RSS-4: 93 (93); RSS-5: 89 (89.50); Ungraded: 81 (83); ISNR 20: 84(84) and Latex (60% drc): 79 (79).

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

Export demand keeps cardamom steady



KOCHI, FEBRUARY 2:

Strong export demand has kept the small cardamom markets last week steady/easier at auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Exporters are said to be holding good orders in hand, but they were not getting exportable variety capsules in required volumes, PC Punnoose, General Manager of CPMC told *BusinessLine*.

Exporters have bought at around 100 tonnes last week and that has, in fact, arrested the prices from falling, he said.

Meanwhile, upcountry buyers were slow as they said the markets in north Indian states are claimed to be holding good stocks of earlier purchases. But, the trade is expecting the demand to pick up once sales commenced for the ensuing wedding/festival season.

Traders in the main cardamom trading hub in the country, Bodinayakannur, said that second and inferior quality material was arriving in the market, at present, and “this phenomenon is pulling the prices down”. Total arrivals last week stood at 532 tonnes against 670 tonnes the previous week. The individual auction average ruled steady and vacillated between ₹ 540 and ₹ 600 a kg.

At the Cardamom Planters’ Association (CPA) Santhanpara auction on Monday in Bodinayakannur, arrivals moved up to 52.4 tonnes from to 44.4 tonnes the previous Monday and of this 46 tonnes were sold out. The auction average slipped to ₹ 542.95 a kg from ₹ 547.03.

Total arrivals during the season up to January 30 were at around 19,165 tonnes and sales were at 18,520 tonnes.

The individual auction average as on January 30 was at ₹ 616.75 a kg.

Prices of graded varieties (₹ /kg): 8mm bold good green colour 900-950; 7-8 mm 700-740; 6-7 mm 580-620; below 6 mm: 500-530.

Good bulk was being traded today at Rs. 620-650.

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

Imported oils rule higher

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 2:

Edible oils market ruled firm tracking bullish futures amid higher physical demand. Local refineries increased their rates in line with firm overseas markets and considering weak domestic currency which makes import costlier. Vikram global commodities quoted Malaysian super palmolein at ₹ 519. Liberty traded palmolein for ₹ 500, super palmolein ₹ 526 and soyabean refined ₹ 622. Ruchi's rates: palmolein ₹ 497, soyabean refined ₹ 617, sunflower refined oil ₹ 740.

In Saurashtra/Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin was flat at ₹ 1,430 and loose (10 kg) ₹ 910.

BCE spot rates (₹ /10 kg): groundnut oil 950 (940), soya ref. 617 (615), sunflower exp. ref. 675 (675), sunflower ref. 740 (740), rapeseed ref. 790 (790), rapeseed exp. ref. 760 (760), cottonseed ref. oil 590 (592) and palmolein 492 (480).

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

Demand for new turmeric increases



ERODE, FEBRUARY 2:

Prices of new turmeric increased at Erode markets increased on strong demand. “Though the new Mysore Number 8 variety turmeric has started trickling in, buyers were interested in new turmeric and procured all the 130 bags at a higher rate. Totally 2,700 bags arrived and 70 per cent stocks were

sold,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association. New crop: The finger variety was up ₹ 250 a quintal and the root variety by ₹ 650. Both varieties of old turmeric decreased by ₹ 200. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the new finger turmeric was sold at ₹ 8,890-9,889 a quintal; the root variety at ₹ 8,890-9,109.

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

Stockists' selling dissolves sugar



MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 2:

Sugar prices on the Vashi spot market slipped by ₹ 15-20 a quintal as stockists sold the commodity at lower rates to ease stock burden. While *naka* rates continued to rise in line with firm mill tender rates. Sources said arrivals to the Vashi market declined to 55-56 truck loads while local dispatches were at 60-61 loads. On Monday, about 9-10 mills offered tenders higher rates and sold negligible quantity up by ₹ 10-20.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade ₹ 3,150-3,252 (3,166-3,262) and M-grade ₹ 3,216-3,402 (3,242-3,402). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade ₹ 3,120-3,160 (3,105-3,150) and M-grade ₹ 3,200-3,250 (3,195-3,290).

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

Spot pepper continues to fall



KOCHI, FEBRUARY 2:

The spot pepper prices continued its fall despite having not much selling pressure today on the terminal market.

But, the trade told Business Line that, many of the primary market dealers in Kerala's Idukki and Wayanad districts have, of late, turned out to be interstate dealers and they were despatching the material directly to upcountry markets.

On the other hand, it is a high demand period and notwithstanding no buyers including those from the 'papad' industry were coming forward to buy. It is a surprise, the reasons are unknown, probably it might be because of the high prices of pulses, a veteran trader said.

Meanwhile, the arrival of pepper continued to stay much below the normal expected supply levels at this time of the season. It should be around 100 tonnes a day and, instead, it is dwindling between 30 and 50 tonnes, market sources pointed out.

On the terminal market 30 tonnes of pepper arrived and of this 10 tonnes were from the plains and 20 tonnes from the high ranges. The pepper from the plains were traded at Rs600 a kg while that from the high ranges were traded and at Rs605 and Rs610 a kg.

Spot prices declined by Rs300 a quintal to close at Rs60,300 (ungarbled) and Rs63,400 (garbled) a quintal.

February and March contracts on the IPSTA remained unchanged at Rs62,000 and Rs60,500 a quintal.

Indian export prices were at \$9,450 a tonne cf for Europe and \$9,700 a tonne cf for USA. e.o.m.

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

New crop arrivals pound pulses



INDORE, FEBRUARY 2:

Downtrend in chana continued amid sluggish demand in pulses and pressure of arrival of new crop with chana (kanta) declining to ₹ 4,150-75 (₹ 4,200). Similarly, chana (desi) declined to ₹ 4,000 a quintal. Chana dal (average) was being quoted at ₹ 4,700-5,100, chana dal (medium) at ₹ 5,200-5,600, while chana dal (bold) declined to ₹ 5,700-5,800. Dollar chana also traded lower at ₹ 6,000 a quintal (down ₹ 200) with about 4,000 bags of new dollar chana being offloaded in mandis across Madhya Pradesh today. In container, dollar chana (42/44 count) went for ₹ 6,800; 44/46 count at ₹ 6,600; 58/60 count at ₹ 5,850, while dollar chana (60/62 count) was quoted at ₹ 5,750 a quintal.

(This article was published on February 2, 2016)

Business Standard

Govt to shift Rs 500 crore Price Stabilisation Fund to Consumer



A farmer casts urea on her mustard field in Allahabad

Fund was created a year ago under the agriculture ministry to control price of essential commodities

Government will shift Rs 500-crore Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) to Consumer Affairs Ministry from Agriculture Ministry for effective control of price rise in essential commodities and provide relief to the consumers.

Last year, PSF was created with a corpus of Rs 500 crore under the Agriculture Ministry. The fund was to be used to support market interventions for managing prices of perishable agri-horticultural commodities by procuring directly from farmers and later supplying at reasonable rates to consumers.

"The purpose of PSF was to provide relief to consumers from price rise. So far, the fund has been used mostly with an aim to provide relief to farmers, who otherwise are covered under the minimum support price system. Hence, PSF is being shifted," according to sources.

An in-principle approval has already been given to move this fund to the Consumer Affairs Ministry, which faced difficulty in handling the pulses price issue last year in the absence of direct say in using the fund for timely market interventions, sources said.

Even Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan had raised this issue when retail pulses prices had shot up to Rs 200 per kg in most retail markets last year.

In the 2015-16 fiscal, the fund was being used for import of pulses as well as creation of buffer stock of lentils as the prices of these commodities were continuing to rule high.

It was also used to buy onion and potatoes to boost local supply and check rates.

So far, 20,000 tonnes of pulses has been procured from farmers from 2015 kharif crops. Tenders have been floated to buy more pulses from overseas market.

Improve varieties of medicinal plants to enhance farmer's income: Dr Harsh Vardhan

Minister urges scientists to take steps towards standardisation of ayurvedic drugs so that their use can be increased in health care



Dr Harsh Vardhan speaking at a Kisan Mela

Dr Harsh Vardhan, Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, has urged farmers to adopt cultivation of improved varieties of medicinal and aromatic plants to enhance their income. This would also help in production of quality raw material demanded by user industries, he said while speaking at a Kisan Mela organised by Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP), a frontier plant research laboratory of

Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), in Lucknow on January 31, 2016.

The minister said, “Medicinal and aromatic plants are the valuable green wealth of the country. These should be sustainably used for creating livelihood opportunities of poor people residing in rural areas. There are immense possibilities for promotion of production of medicinal and aromatic plants and industries by start-ups.”

Dr Harsh Vardhan called upon the scientists to develop improved technologies for conservation and cultivation of these plants keeping in view the changing climatic conditions and limited as well as diminishing agriculture resources. He said that farmers should be apprised regularly about the new developments being made in the research laboratories by organising awareness meets, workshops and farmers fairs in different parts of the country.

Minister further said that today people are inclined towards the use of drugs and cosmetics made from natural resources as ill effects have been reported from the use of synthetic drugs world over. “It is also necessary to make initiatives to improve trust of the people towards herbal drugs. Scientists should standardise the ayurvedic drugs so that their use can be increased in health care of the poor people. The need for development of such plant varieties which can withstand vagaries of nature and can be grown in stressed soils ensuring utilisation of large tracts of waste lands available in the country,” added Dr Harsh Vardhan.

Minister also inaugurated a unique pilot-scale herbal product manufacturing unit ‘Technology Business Incubator Centre (TBIC)’. In TBIC, various machines have been installed to facilitate manufacturing of creams, gels, shampoo, oils, face wash, floor mopping liquid in approximately 100 kg batch size. The TBIC will help the technology users and entrepreneurs to manufacture the herbal products based on CIMAP technology. This will also serve as an incubator centre for the start-ups.

‘Farmers must grow spices to boost output’

AJMER: With the changing climate, it is important for farmers to adopt spices crops to get benefit in production and also to pay their debts. A two-day national seminar was started from Tuesday at Bijiye Masala Anusandhan Kendra at Tabiji in Ajmer where scientists submitted reports showing that how spicy cultivation is easy and can come out as cash crop.

President of farmers' right and conservation authority of Central government R R Hanchnal said, more emphasise has been given on providing technology to farmers for the improvement of their economic condition. The soil check up program yielded good result and now, farmers know which crops they have to cultivate. It is good to have spices crops for organic diversion of the land.

Director of the centre Balraj Singh explained the importance of this topic and how important it is to use of spices cultivation for farmers. The importance of spices through worldwide demand for export and farmers can earn by this opportunity. Experts from different parts of the country also put their research papers in the program stating the change in climate effecting the cultivation cycle in India. More than 200 scholars also participated in the program and discussed scarcity of rains and change in weather cycle and their relation with cultivation.

Meanwhile, in Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati University, the World Wetland Day was celebrated in which chief forest conservator of Ajmer gave importance to the wetland. Head of the department of Environmental Science professor Praveen Mathur said that the importance of wetland is not only to get good crops but also useful for forests.

Fruits, veggies help in weight loss, study finds

Fruits, veggies help in weight loss, study finds (Getty Images)

Eating fruits and vegetables high in a compound called flavonoids can help prevent weight gain, a first of its kind research study by Harvard University

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Eating fruits and vegetables such as apples, pears, blueberries, strawberries, radishes and red peppers high in a compound called flavonoids can help prevent weight gain, a first of its kind research study by Harvard University and the University of East Anglia, published in British Medical Journal (BMJ), has found.

Flavonoids are naturally occurring bioactive compounds that represent a constituent of fruits and vegetables, beyond calorie and macronutrient content, that could potentially influence body weight. Flavonoids are also present in various other foods and drinks, like tea, chocolate, and wine.

The findings of the study showed that high levels of flavonoids could help people maintain healthy weight.

The research, which covered 1,24,086 women and men in the US who were monitored for up to 24 years, is the first to look at links between intake of various flavonoid subclasses and weight gain.

Past studies have suggested that flavonoids may play a role in weight loss.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

India could raise \$12.65 billion in overseas loans to boost irrigation: Reports



India could raise about 860 billion rupees (\$12.65 billion) in overseas loans to boost irrigation facilities, it was reported on Tuesday.

NEW DELHI: India could raise about 860 billion rupees (\$12.65 billion) in overseas loans to boost irrigation facilities, it was reported on Tuesday, citing a senior government official.

State-run National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development may steer the borrowing plan that is aimed at adding as much as 13 million hectares (32.1 million acres) of irrigated farmland, reports said, quoting Water Resources Secretary Shashi Shekhar.

Two consecutive droughts have clipped farm output in India, one of the world's biggest producers and consumers of a number of commodities, as only about half of the farmlands have irrigation facilities.

Price Stabilisation Fund to be shifted to Consumer Affairs Ministry

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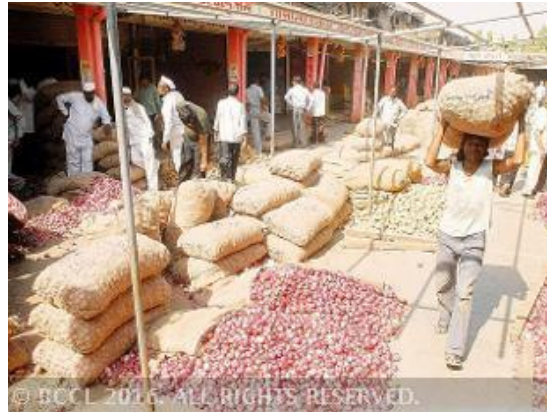
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Wholesale onion prices hit lowest level of FY16 at Rs 9.50



The prices of the kitchen staple at the Lasalgaon have fallen by more than 76 per cent to Rs 9.50 per kg in February from Rs 41.30 per kg in September.

NEW DELHI: Prices of onion have dipped below Rs 10 per kg, the lowest level in the fiscal so far, at the Lasalgaon wholesale market in Maharashtra.

The prices of the kitchen staple at the Lasalgaon have fallen by more than 76 per cent to Rs 9.50 per kg in February from Rs 41.30 per kg in September.

According to the data maintained by Nasik-based National Horticultural and Research Foundation (NHRDF), wholesale onion prices are being sold at minimum rates of Rs 7 per kg and maximum Rs 14.22 per kg.

"The onion prices have been continuously falling from October as there was spike in supplies with arrival of the lake kharif onion crop," NHRDF Director R P Gupta told PTI.

The prices have already touched the lowest level in the year so far and is expected to fall further by Rs 1-2 per kg as there has been a smooth flow of supplies of the edible bulb across the country, Gupta added.

Onion production is estimated to be lower at 189 lakh tonnes in 2014-15 crop year (July-June), slightly lower than 194 lakh tonnes a year ago.

In August this year, the retail onion prices had shot up to Rs 80 per kg in the national capital due to tight supply despite the government's efforts to keep a lid on prices.

During the year, the government had also imported the onions to keep a tab on the prices. At the same time it had also hiked the onion MEP to \$700 per tonne.

However, in December last year the MEP on Onion was scrapped.

The onion exports have declined by 18 per cent to 4.86 lakh tonnes in the first half of the fiscal due to governments steps to curb outbound shipments.

Sugar production up by 4.57% as on January 31: Indian Sugar Mills Association



Sugar mills in Maharashtra, the largest producer of sugar in the country, have slowly started closing down, with 13 mills already having stopped their operations.

PUNE: Indian sugar mills have produced 6.23 lakh tonne sugar as on January 31, 2016, up by 4.57 % 136.30 lakh tonne sugar produced on same date last year, informed industry body Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) through a release.

The representative of private sugar mills has said that the expected production of 26 million tonne sugar was sufficient to take care of the domestic requirement.

Sugar mills in Maharashtra, the largest producer of sugar in the country, have slowly started closing down, with 13 mills already having stopped their operations.

In Uttar Pradesh, 116 sugar mills have produced 36.15 lakh tonne of sugar till January 31, 2016, as compared to 33.75 lakh tonne produced by 117 sugar mills as on January 31, 2015.

In Maharashtra, 177 sugar mills operated during the current 2015-16 , of which 13 sugar mills have closed their crushing operations by 31st January 2016. Sugar production during the current season upto January 31 was 54.42 lakh tonne, as compared to 54.37 lakh tonne produced in 2014-15 till January 31 2015. As on date, 164 sugar mills are under operation in the state as compared to 176 mills operated last year on corresponding date.

In case of Karnataka, 64 sugar mills have produced 26.89 lakh tonne of sugar in 2015-16 , as compared to 23.13 lakh tonne produced by 63 sugar mills in 2014-15 as on January 31, 2015.

"During 2015-16 , sugar production is estimated to be about 260 lakh tons, which is sufficient to meet the domestic requirement," stated the release.

Rural demand to stay muted on poor rains, global agricultural price



The BofA-ML report said the Indian economy is likely to witness a consumption-led recovery rather than a turn in the capex cycle, which is not expected till 2017.

NEW DELHI: Demand in rural India is likely to stay under stress, largely on account of poor rains and weak global agricultural prices, says a report by Bank of America Merrill Lynch. According to the global financial services major, the only immediate trigger for a revival in rural demand is the gradual implementation of the Swaminathan formula by the government. The formula suggests raising minimum support prices of rice and wheat to above 50 per cent of cost before the April-May 2017 UP polls.

The BofA-ML report said the Indian economy is likely to witness a consumption-led recovery rather than a turn in the capex cycle, which is not expected till 2017.

It noted that pick-up in consumption of over 1 per cent of GDP in mid-2016 is likely to be driven by hike in Central government salaries due to the 7th Pay Commission award, lending rate cuts and household saving on lower oil prices.

"Note we have not factored in any significant turnaround in rural consumption demand," Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BofA-ML) said in a research note.

According to the global brokerage firm, the summer 2016 rabi harvest income will rise only 4.7 per cent, while the autumn 2015 kharif farm income would grow 3.8 per cent with delayed rains hurting the crop.

Moreover, income growth from horticulture and milk is also expected to decelerate to 5.7 per cent in this fiscal from 11.3 per cent last year.

The other factors that are likely to impact rural demand include global agricultural commodity prices and monsoon.

"Fed tightening has pulled down the global agricultural commodity prices to a five-year low, curtailing domestic power despite a double drought. Finally, there is a question mark on the 2016 south-west monsoon, although a third year El Nino is rare," the report noted.