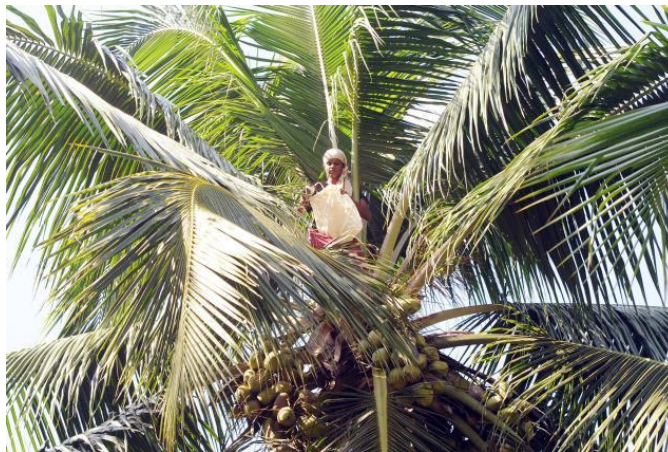


Women coconut pollinators scale new heights



The coconut pollination (technically referred to as hybridisation) sector, once a men's monopoly in Kerala, is today being conquered successfully by women also. Seed-nuts of hybrid coconut palms are produced through artificial pollination.

In Kasaragod district, the friends of coconut trees programme (FoCT) for training women in coconut pollination organized by the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), evoked good response from enterprising women.

Thirty-four ladies, mostly house-wives, underwent training in pollination techniques, an area all along dominated by men. In addition, 207 unemployed rural youth were also trained in the techniques.

Considered a tough job

Earlier women were not much interested in climbing the trees it was always considered a tough job and a male bastion. But today they want to prove they are also capable and on par with men in farm work.

Feedback studies show that the training programme in artificial pollination done by women is a big hit among rural women in the region as it helps in their financial empowerment. Among the five groups functioning in the district now, two groups comprise only women.

“From the usual women dominated leaf plating, broom making, and copra drying for instance, women started climbing the trees, harvesting nuts, cleaning the crown, carrying out plant protection methods, and today they are happy that our institute has played a major role in making them pollinators,” says Dr. V. George, Director, CPCRI. The programme is funded by the Coconut Development Board (CDB).

Coconut pollination technique is a highly skilled activity which has to be done on newly opened inflorescence located on the crown of the tree. It takes only 5-10 minutes to pollinate a bunch on the tree.

Different steps

The different steps in this technique are pollen collection and processing, removal of male flowers from the inflorescence, tying a bag on the inflorescence, dusting of pollen, confirming the receptive stage of female flowers, repeating the same procedures till the last flower comes to receptivity, and removal of the cloth bag after ensuring that the last button is also pollinated.

These laborious steps demand expertise, sound knowledge on floral biology of coconut trees, and good skill.

Climbing the tree and sitting on top of the crown to pollinate is a difficult job since the trees keep swaying during heavy winds. Also the height of the tree creates a scare in some climbers.

Number of times

The pollinator needs to climb a tree at least 5-6 times to pollinate a bunch. On the first day he/she has to remove the male flowers from the opened inflorescence and cover the bunch with a bag.

From the second day onwards (some times alternative days) they need to pollinate according to the receptive stage of the female flower.

There are two parts in procedure one the lab scientists keep the pollen (processed male flowers ready) and the women climbers take it with them to be sprayed on matured female flowers in the crown.

At present a private contractor selected through the institute pays Rs.600 a day for each woman climber who pollinates 20-22 trees in a day. “Though the main objective of the programme was to address the problem of labour shortage, it has changed the social status of coconut climbers as they are known today, as skilled professionals in the sector.

“Their services are highly valued by the coconut farmers of the locality and nearby panchayaths because of their dedication and sincerity towards their profession,” says Dr. George.

Daily labourers

Before attending this training programme the women worked as daily labourers, able to earn hardly Rs. 100 per day. But after attending the training and doing it as a full time work their income has improved.

“The women are doing an excellent job in a professional manner. Unlike some male coconut climbers, women are not addicted to alcohol and do not absent themselves from work.

“Once they commit they are on the job. It is heartening to see them comfortably sitting on top of the coconut tree carrying out with ease the different operations,” says Chethan, a coconut garden owner, who has made use of the women training skills in his farm.

It takes only 5-10 minutes for these women to do the pollination work for a tree. The process needs to be repeated 4-5 times for ensuring good yield and the workers are engaged on a contract.

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Onion prices will come down in next few days: Pawar

The spiralling onion prices in parts of north India will be arrested in the next few days on improved supplies from Gujarat, Rajasthan and parts of Maharashtra, Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said here on Wednesday.

He said there were adequate stocks in the country. The current problem was because of the delay in transporting stocks from Nashik in Maharashtra, he told journalists on the sidelines of a conference of ministers from States.

“I have received a communication from Nashik and spoken to some traders. They complain that they are not getting railway wagons to transport onion to northern parts of the country.

Corrective action

In fact, they are worried about a fall in the [wholesale] prices of onions if stocks are not lifted.”

“This was discussed with the Cabinet Secretary on Tuesday. I hope they will initiate corrective action. If wagons are made available, I am sure the situation will improve in another 4 to 5 days,” he told journalists.

In the last few days, onion prices have gone up in Delhi to over Rs.30 a kg compared to about Rs.12 to Rs.13 a kg in the corresponding period last year. This is a serious cause for concern for the Congress government in Delhi which faces election at the end of the year.

Effects of drought

Mr. Pawar said the drought in Maharashtra had affected onion production but stocks were adequate to meet the demand. Moreover, fresh supplies from Gujarat, Rajasthan and other parts of Maharashtra from mid-February would ease the situation and bring down domestic prices.

The National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation has said that the overall onion output in the country this year is expected to be at last year's level of 174 lakh tonnes despite a slight fall in area owing to drought in Maharashtra.

Asked about the impact of current spell of rain on crops, he said the moisture will be good for rabi wheat although not so for minor oilseeds.

Karnataka ban on fodder sale

The Karnataka Government has put a ban on sale of fodder to other States owing to the severe drought in several parts of Karnataka, which has resulted in shortage of fodder, Deputy Chief Minister K.S. Eshwarappa, who is also the Revenue Minister, told the Legislative Assembly.

Use RKVY funds to empower livestock, fisheries, Pawar tells States

Bemoaning the under-utilisation of funds in the livestock and fisheries sector, Union Minister for Agriculture Sharad Pawar on Wednesday called upon States to allocate at least 25 per cent of the resources available under the “flexible” Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna for this crucial sector.

In eleven States, the share of the livestock and fisheries sector in the Centrally-funded RKVY was only 15 per cent, the Minister observed, while addressing the Conference of State Ministers of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries. “I would urge State governments to allocate at least 25 per cent of the RKVY funds for this crucial sector.”

The Minister said he would soon write to Chief Ministers and State Finance Ministers to allocate more funds for the sector in dire need.

Mr. Pawar asked States to formulate plans for the integrated development of the sector to address major challenges such as shortage of feed and fodder, effective control of animal diseases and skill development of farmers.

“Launching of RKVY during the 11th Five-Year Plan has resulted in flow of additional resources for farm and allied sectors, while empowering and providing flexibility to the States,” he said.

In the current fiscal, the projects, amounting to Rs. 1,165 crore, have been sanctioned under the scheme for animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries sector.

Noting that there was much potential for growth in the sector, he said with output of 128 million tonnes of milk, India was the largest dairy producer and the second-largest producer of fish with an annual output of 8.6 million tonnes. “We have the world’s largest livestock population and

last year we achieved a phenomenal growth of over 13 per cent in meat production. Overall, the sector contributes to more than 32 per cent of agricultural GDP and has the potential to grow faster.”

During the meeting, State Ministers were told to pay particular attention to the development of feed and fodder and to support growth of green fodder as a “commercial crop”. The drop in feed and fodder is the biggest challenge being faced by small and marginal farmers today. The conference also discussed the draft National Livestock Policy but it is likely that the Centre will convene another meeting on it, as it has not received the views of all the States on it “in writing”, Mr. Pawar said.

Development projects being undertaken in Tuticorin reviewed

At a District Planning Committee meeting convened here on Wednesday, N. Chinnadurai, Chairman, District Panchayat, reviewed progress in development projects launched through various departments.

Medicinal plants

He said a sum of Rs. 16.80 lakh was allotted under the National Mission on Medicinal Plants for raising medicinal plants in the district. Farmers should utilise this opportunity and derive maximum benefits from the scheme.

Road infrastructure developments would be established between Ottapidaram and Puthiyamputhur, he said. After reviewing the progress of development works, he appealed to officials to expedite tasks assigned to them.

The meeting was held in the presence of Collector Ashish Kumar.

Support for sericulture in 5 Blocks

Sericulture and growing of mulberry will be taken up in five Blocks of the district by organising farmers, district panchayat president T.N. Khandamuthan has said.

He told mediapersons here on Thursday that marketing was a major problem faced by farmers. Now, the Khadi and Village Industries Board was marketing the cocoon produced. Awareness

seminars for farmers will be held at Chittur (February 12); Nemmara (14); Kollengode (13); Kuzhalmannam (15); and Attappady. The Central Silk Board and Serifed Society were extending technical assistance to the project. Serifed Project Director T.V. George said farmers were being given a subsidy of Rs.1.74 lakh to grow mulberry on one acre.

The entire cocoon produced by farmers would be collected from the producing centres, he said.

Farmers stage demonstration; seek compensation for crop failure

They want Sankarankovil taluk to be declared 'drought-hit'



Seeing red:CPI(M) cadre staging dharna in front of Sankarankovil taluk office on Wednesday.—
Photo: A. Shaikmohideen

Urging the district administration to declare the entire Sankarankovil taluk 'drought-hit' after two farmers committed suicide reportedly due to crop failure, the farmers backed by Communist Party of India (Marxist) staged a dharna in front of the Sankarankovil taluk office on Wednesday.

As weak monsoons have resulted in crop failure across Sankarankovil taluk, farmers Chendurpandian of Vellappaneri and Jeganathan of Varaganur, who had taken substantial loans from cooperative banks and local moneylenders for farming operations, allegedly committed suicide recently.

Demanding a solatium of Rs. 10 lakh for the families of the two farmers, the CPI (M) has urged the State Government to pay compensation of Rs. 25,000 per acre towards crop loss. They also demanded waiver of the farmers' debt with the banks. Protestors led by State secretary of Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association, Shanmugam, took out a march from Swamin Sannidhi to the taluk office, where they were stopped by the police. As the farmers were prevented from entering the

taluk office premises, the protestors sat on the road and continued their dharna before dispersing.

Tirunelveli district CPI (M) secretary K.G. Bhaskaran, heads of 19 village panchayats and a large number of farmers participated in the agitation, which is likely to continue till the demands are met.

Cooperative society lends helping hand to ryots



Measuring up:Paddy being procured at Cooperative Marketing Society in Thirumayam.

The Cooperative Marketing Society at Thirumayam has come to the rescue of paddy farmers who have raised samba this season, by purchasing paddy ever since the harvest of the crop commenced in January. Farmers from about 30 villages in and around Thirumayam benefit through the initiative which has come as an alternative measure, in the wake of non-opening of the direct procurement centres by the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation.

One bag (60 kg) of BPT 5204 is being purchased at Rs.1,225; ADT 37 and CR 1009 for Rs. 825 and ADT 39 for Rs. 850.

According to official sources, the Marketing Society has come in handy for the farmers to market their produce.

Farmers say that the yield was very poor. One of the farmers Adaikalam of Kannanur said he could harvest just one half of the normal yield this season. Against 50 to 60 bags an acre, he could get just 25 bags.

Storage facility utilised

Official sources said that the storage godown at Thirumayam constructed under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund scheme of NABARD benefited farmers most.

Farmers can stock their produce at this godown, till they get attractive price for the produce. “Its capacity of 1,000 tonnes is being fully utilised”, source said.

‘Tamil Nadu needs only 2.44 tmcft water’

The three-member expert team which visited the Cauvery delta region on Tuesday has informed the Supreme Court that the total water requirement for the standing crops in Tamil Nadu is only 2.44 tmcft as against 9 tmcft demanded by the State.

In its report submitted to the Court, the team, comprising Chief Engineer of Central Water Commission, Coimbatore, A. Mahendran; Chief Engineer, CWC, Bangalore, K.S. Jacob, and Deputy Commissioner (Crops) in Union Agriculture Ministry Dr. Pradip Kumar, said “water requirement for one wetting for 45000 acres is 0.71 tmcft and for two wettings for 55,000 acres 1.73 tmcft”.

The team visited Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts as per the directions of the Supreme Court during the course of hearing of Tamil Nadu’s application seeking release of 12 tmcft. During arguments the quantum was restricted to 9 tmcft.

The report said the team conducted field visits in the districts to assess the extent and stage of the standing crop. The team along with State officials travelled about 375 km covering Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts and visited 14 locations. At each location it interacted with farmers and discussed stage/condition of the crop and requirement of water.

According to the report, the farmers said that they were getting very low yields due to inadequate supply. If adequate water was provided they could get better yields for standing crop.

Women in villages were worried about requirements for cattle and domestic purposes.

Farmers float producers' company to market turmeric

In an attempt to improve the marketing of agricultural produces, a group of farmers in the district have floated a producers' company that will initially market the turmeric.

The company, Ulavan Producers Company Limited, will be launched officially on February 10 and it will comprise farmers as shareholders.

Marketing channels

“The primary objective is to enhance the marketing channels for various agricultural produce and help farmers realise a better price. We will commence our operations by providing an effective marketing platform for the turmeric farmers in Erode,” its president P. Nallasamy says.

Auction

process

Presently, the yellow spice is auctioned at four markets in Erode, one of largest turmeric producing regions in the country.

Only 40 to 50 traders participate in the auction process and the turmeric is not graded or processed effectively.

As a result, the farmers often end up getting low price for their produce.

“We have planned to enhance this system. The turmeric brought to our company will be cleaned, polished, graded and sorted using machines and auctioned online. The e-auction platform will attract a large number of buyers across the country and help farmers to get a better price.

Since the turmeric is graded, traders can buy large quantities via online and don't have to be present to inspect the quality of the spice,” explains vice-president of the company D. Venkateshwaran.

Warehouse

The company, which is incorporated under the Companies Act, has established a warehouse with a 5,000-tonne storage capacity for turmeric.

“Farmers can store their turmeric in the warehouse and get produce pledge loans,” he says.

Apart from turmeric, the company also plans to market gingely, groundnut, banana and a few other produces. It will also conduct training programmes for farmers on best and sustainable cultivation practices, learning sessions on harvest technologies, share market intelligence and offer farm inputs.

Kerala strike not to affect TN poultry sector

The strike by Kerala traders, vendors, and restaurants from Thursday to protest against the high broiler prices will not have much impact on the broiler sector in the State, says president of the Broiler Co-ordination Committee R. Lakshmanan.

He told *The Hindu* on Wednesday that Palladam and nearby areas produced about 80 lakh birds a week and just about 10 lakh birds go to Kerala. The Value Added Tax (VAT) on broiler was 13.5 per cent in Kerala. The trade there had sought reduction of the duty to zero per cent or five per cent. Protesting against the high prices they had decided not to lift birds from the local producers and those in Tamil Nadu who sold to Kerala. Though Kerala was a major market earlier for poultry birds produced here, most of the farmers in Tamil Nadu now sold in the local market.

Further, following the slump in demand and prices during the last seven months, the poultry farmers here had reduced broiler production by 20 per cent from January. Production costs were high because of the increase in feed costs.

Hence, if sales to the neighbouring State would not be there at least for two or three days, it would not have much impact on the sector here, he said.

The farmgate price of broiler here on Wednesday was Rs. 80 a kg and the production cost was Rs. 60 a kg. The retail price was higher.

Training on farming systems

To double the productivity in the existing land area, the present conventional agriculture has to be converted into commercial agriculture, Registrar of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University said here on Wednesday.

He was speaking at a training on 'Farming systems for the Future: Approaches and Applications.'

He said ecological access to food was becoming the most important concern due to damages done to land, water, flora, fauna, and the atmosphere. So, diversification of agriculture had to be adopted as a strategy for enhancing the income of farmers.

Self sufficient

"India is self sufficient in food production with the advent of new varieties and advanced production techniques. However, the food demand is increasing due to increasing population. By 2025, we need 340 to 350 tonnes and another 100 tonnes in the next 10 years. Farming system approach can ensure better land use and afford sustained productivity," he said.

K. Velayutham, Director in-charge, Crop Management, said that small and marginal farmers were the major producers of food grains. Farming system approach was a vertical cultivation method.

Tirupur village to promote veterinary care

To foster holistic veterinary care and improve awareness on vaccinations, the Veterinary University Training and Research Centre here under Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University is set to adopt a village in Tirupur district on a pilot basis.

For the pilot project P. Aandipalayam has been identified.

"Through the village adoption programme, we wanted to ensure implementation of scientific animal healthcare management and rearing techniques in each of the households that either own farm animals like cow and goat, pet animals like dog and cat, or having backyard poultry," said R. Selvaraj, head of the research centre.

Under healthcare segment, the officials of the centre along with veterinarians from animal husbandry department will administer free vaccinations to entire animals in the village.

In the case of farm animals, the methodical preventive and curative health care practices will help increase the milk and meat production which, in turn, enhance the earnings of farmers.

A livestock census will be taken at first and will identify houses that have pet animals. Stray animals in the village too will be enumerated. "This will help us watch the health records of every animal, including those in the streets and keep track of their vaccination schedules effectively," said Dr. Selvaraj.

Officials at the centre said that the model set at P. Aandiplayam would be implemented at other villages too in a phased manner.

"Besides this, people from other villages will be encouraged to replicate the health management system by themselves so that the concept of animal healthcare in totality is spread at a faster pace," Dr. Selvaraj added.

T.N. requires only 2.44 tmcft, says expert team

A three-member experts team that visited the Cauvery delta region on February 5 has informed the Supreme Court that the total water requirement of water for the standing crops in Tamil Nadu is only 2.44 tmcft, against 9 tmcft demanded by the State.

In a report, the team comprising Chief Engineer of the Central Water Commission, Coimbatore, A. Mahendran; Chief Engineer, CWC, Bangalore, K.S. Jacob; and Deputy Commissioner (Crops) in the Agriculture Ministry Pradip Kumar said: "water requirement for one wetting for 45,000 acres: 0.71 tmcft and water requirement for two wettings for 55,000 acres: 1.73 tmcft."

The team visited Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts as per the directions of the court on February 4 during the course of hearing Tamil Nadu's application seeking release of 12 tmcft.

During arguments, the quantum was restricted to 9 tmcft.

The report said the team conducted a field visit in the three districts. It, along with State officials, travelled about 375 km, covering Tiruchi, Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts and visited 14 locations.

At each location, the team interacted with farmers and discussions were held on stage/condition of the crop and requirement of water.

According to the report, farmers stated that due to inadequate supply they were getting very less yield. If water was provided, they could get better yields for standing crops.

Women of the villages were worried about requirements for cattle and domestic requirements. “The experts committee also agrees to the views of farmers and public.”

The team said, “In one-day visit, limited locations, and only by visible examination, it is not feasible to arrive at the exact figures regarding the area harvested, withered and areas requiring one or two wettings. However, the Central team is of the view that a large area [50 per cent] has already been harvested and about 40 per cent of the area is ready for harvest or harvesting process is on. This leaves about 10 per cent of the area, i.e. about one lakh acres needs watering.” Accordingly, the team recommended that the total requirement for wetting of the one lakh crops would be 2.74 tmcft, the report said.

Food processing sector to get major thrust

A comprehensive plan promising sops to the industry on the anvil



Karan Chechi of TechSci giving a presentation at the summit on “Cold chain: emerging trends and market challenges” in Hyderabad on Wednesday.- Photo: Mohammed Yousuf

The Industries Department is preparing a comprehensive plan for giving a major thrust to the food processing sector as it promises immense potential for growth.

Several incentives are being planned including subsidies for small and medium businesses opting for purchase/operation of refrigerated vehicles to transport fruits/vegetables in the department's five-year plan. "We have to balance production and avoid wastage. This can be possible only through chain of cold storage facilities," Industries (food processing) Secretary Sabyasachi Ghosh said.

Mr. Ghosh who inaugurated a summit on "Cold chain: emerging trends and market challenges" here on Wednesday said the policy involved setting up mega and mini food parks along with processing facilities and cold chains. "Storage in cold chains involves cost to farmers, but it will add value giving more returns," he said. The draft policy would be submitted to Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy in a couple of weeks and would be implemented from next financial year.

Given the concerns about power supply expressed by the industry, the Government was mulling harnessing renewable energy for cold chains as also setting up of ripening chambers. "Over 20 per cent wastage is reported on an average if fruits are allowed to ripen in the natural course," he said.

Earlier, Assocham Southern Regional Council Chairman Ravi Sannareddy said cold chains reported business to the tune of US \$ 3 billion in the previous fiscal. This was set to cross US \$ 8 billion by 2015 with more than 20 per cent growth. Fapcci president Devendra Surana stressed the need to evolve a mechanism to ensure viability of cold chains that were capital intensive. Power had become the major bottleneck in the State and the Government need to work out modalities to ensure uninterrupted supply.

TechSci Research Director Karan Chechi lamented that though the country was among the largest producers of fruits and vegetables, its contribution to global business was 0.5 per cent and 1.7 per cent respectively.

Tender coconut, the next big thing?



Philippine farmer Liezl Balmaceda has never heard of Madonna, but the U.S. pop star's endorsement of coconut water may help change her impoverished life for the better.

After centuries of replenishing Filipinos, the mineral-rich liquid has become a must-have health drink thanks to aggressive marketing by a beverage industry looking to offset soda sales that have lost their fizz.

Balmaceda, 33, and her husband process truckloads of coconuts at their backyard each week to get the meat that is turned into vegetable oil. The arduous labour earns the family of five about \$9 a day, barely enough get by.

"We just throw the water away when we extract the copra (coconut meat). But if you tell me people actually pay money to drink it, we could use the extra cash," she told AFP in rural Mulanay town, four hours' drive south of Manila.

In his most recent state of the nation address, President Benigno Aquino hailed coconut water as one of the country's most promising new export opportunities.

He cited industry figures showing exports jumping more than nine-fold to 16.76 million litres in 2011.

Manila-based Fruits of Life is one local business to have started profiting from the growing appreciation in the West for coconut water as an alternative to sugar-laden carbonated drinks.

"People have become more health-conscious in general," said Phoebe de la Cruz, sales manager for Fruits of Life.

"Athletic types have taken to coco water for its natural electrolytes."

Fruits of Life, which began exporting its own branded product in 2006, now exports about 240 tonnes in cans and tetra packs a year directly to supermarket chains in the United States and Canada.

Cashing in on the Western craze

The Philippines is already the world's biggest exporter of coconut products.

Big Philippine mills have for years processed desiccated coconut meat and turned it into powder for baking biscuits, snack bars, cakes and pastries.

Coconut flesh is also turned into vegetable oil used for cooking and in a range of common household products, including bath soap.

Supply is not a problem in the Philippines with 350 million coconut trees growing from the beaches up to its hills and yielding 15 billion fruits a year, according to industry regulator the Philippine Coconut Authority.

In the Philippines, coconut water remains a popular, cheap drink, with stalls selling it straight from the fruit, a common site throughout the big cities as well as the countryside.

However, because of a lack of demand as well as the costs required to process and preserve it, the water had never been profitable enough to sell overseas, Philippine Coconut Authority chief Euclides Forbes told AFP.

The demand is huge. The only problem is how to bring the liquid to the processing centres before it spoils, since most coconut farms are in hilly areas without good roads," Alcala said.

Meanwhile, some farmers remain skeptical that they will cash in on the Western craze, citing the fact they have remained poor for decades while big business has profited from other coconut exports.AFP

Ban on sale of fodder to other States

The State government has put a ban on the sale of fodder to other States owing to the severe drought in several parts of Karnataka, which has resulted in shortage of fodder.

Replying to a discussion on the severe drought, Deputy Chief Minister K.S. Eshwarappa, who is also the Revenue Minister, told the Legislative Assembly that Rs. 460 crore would be provided to all the districts to combat drought. Of this, Rs. 250 crore would be released in March and April for drinking water supply.

He said, it has also been decided to grow fodder on a larger scale in the State and nearly 10,000 acres of government land would be set apart for it. "We will do our best to provide relief to farmers and there need not be any anxiety," he said.

Janata Dal (Secular) floor leader H.D. Revanna on Wednesday urged the State government to appeal to the Centre to provide appropriate assistance to the State for drought relief.

Unequal proportion

Speaking in the Legislative Assembly on the drinking water shortage, Mr. Revanna said while the Centre has so far provided Rs. 195 crore to the State, it had provided Rs. 320 crore to Gujarat, Rs. 424 crore to Rajasthan and Rs. 501 crore to Maharashtra, although the drought in Karnataka too was quite severe. Nearly 140 taluks here have been declared drought-affected and the State government has so far submitted three memoranda to the Centre on this.

He said farmers in several parts of the State were facing distress and cattle were being sold owing to fodder shortage. So far, the government has allocated only Rs. 5 crore for the purchase of fodder, which is paltry given the shortage. Most taluks were yet to receive government fodder although the authorities have stated that nearly 24,000 tonnes of fodder had been purchased. The government should release at least Rs. 1 crore for every district towards the purchase of fodder.

Gopal Bhandari (Congress) representing the Karkala constituency in the Legislative Assembly said although Dakshin Kannada district has not been declared drought-hit, the shortage of drinking water in most taluks was quite severe. The government should provide adequate funds

to the district administration for drinking water supply and roadworks and at least Rs. 2 crore should be provided to each Assembly constituency.

The former Minister Amare Gowda Bayyapure (Congress) said the government should cover the costs for transporting fodder similar to the arrangement made by the former Janata Dal government headed by Ramakrishna Hegde. Further, fodder should be purchased in adequate quantities from neighbouring States and electricity supply should be stepped up for pumping drinking water.

Nearly 20 members spoke during the two-day discussion on the drinking water shortage owing to drought and felt that the administration should do its best to provide quick relief to the rural people. Most of the members who spoke represented rural constituencies in the Legislative Assembly.

Splash of colours at flower show



The Calicut Flower Show, which was inaugurated on Wednesday, pulled in a sizeable crowd on the first day itself. The event, being organised by the Calicut Agri-Horticultural Society in the Kerala Soaps ground here, sports a wide variety of plants — flowering, non-flowering, medicinal, and vegetable. The visitor is greeted by an array of arrangements using native and foreign flowers. The plants are set in patterns based on colours and textures. Around 30 stalls have been set up by nurseries, governmental, and semi-governmental agencies.

One stall has a wide range of foliage plants, while another specialises in medicinal ones. Flowering plants include euphorbia, anthurium, orchid, bougainvillea, shoe flowers, roses, adenias, chrysanthemum, begonia, vinca, senia, astra, dahlia, hydrangea, daisy, and gardenia. Traditional varieties such as jasmine, oleander, lantana, thechi, pathu mani, and kakkappoo too get their due. A wide range of bonsai and bushy plants such as lavanda are displayed prominently.

The 'District Agricultural Farm' of the Kozhikode district panchayat has set up a stall featuring saplings of fruit-bearing trees and vegetables. However, its highlight is the coconut and areca varieties. Kerala Soaps, Farm Information Bureau, Harithanagari project and the directorate of Areca and Spices Development are among the other major agencies to set up stalls.

In connection with the flower show, classes and training programmes will be held at the venue.

Free class on spices cultivation will be held from 10 a.m. on Thursday while the class on medicinal plants and home remedies will be held on 10 a.m. and on 2 p.m. respectively on Friday. A class on floral arrangement will be given at a charge of Rs.50 at 10 a.m. on Saturday, while the class on organic farming, at 2 p.m., will be free. Interested shall register their names on 2366661.

Flower arrangement competitions have been organised at the venue on Thursday. Competition for Japanese-style arrangement will be at 10 a.m. and that for mass arrangement at 11.15 a.m. Dry flower arrangement competition will be at 2 p.m.

Control of moths in stored grains

The Angoumois grain moth is the most serious pest injurious to rice, both in the field and storage.

This moth also attacks other cereals like maize, wheat and sorghum.

The infestation may reach serious levels before the grains are transported to the storage godowns resulting in around 25 per cent loss in weight and seed viability. Internal pest

The larva is an internal borer of the whole grain, feeding on the starchy part. Severely infested material emits an unpleasant smell and looks unhealthy in appearance.

Grains are often covered with scales shed by the moths. The grains are practically hollow and filled with larval excreta and other refuse making it unfit for consumption.

The adult is a small, straw coloured moth. The female can lay an average of 150 eggs on unhusked paddy grains.

They hatch in a week's period. Newly hatched caterpillar is yellowish white in colour with a brown head capsule. It soon bores into the grain and feeds on its contents.

Larval stage lasts for about three weeks. Before pupation, the larva constructs a silken cocoon in the cavity made during feeding and turns into reddish brown pupa.

After a period of 4-7 days, the adult emerges. Entire life cycle is completed in 30-35 days.

Several generations are completed in a year. Adults are short-lived and can be seen flying about in large numbers in storage bags and on the surface of grains.

Management

— Drying the grains under sun for three days to reduce moisture content below 12 per cent is suggested.

— The jute bags to be used for storing grains have to be dipped in insecticidal solution of fenitrothion 50EC at 5ml/20 liters of water.

— Application of dichlorvos (DDVP) 76SC is recommended on the surface of stored jute bags by dissolving 7ml/lit. of water and the spray solution is sprayed at three lit/100 sq.m.

— Male moths can also be caught in sticky traps baited with female sex pheromone.

(J. Jayaraj, Prof and R.K. Murali Baskaran, Professor and Head, Dept. of Agriculture Entomology, Agricultural College and Research Institute, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Madurai 625 104, email: muralibaskaran2007@rediffmail.com, mobile: 9655677669.)

'More funds for PAU'

Punjab Finance Minister Parminder Singh Dhillon said on Wednesday that the State Government will consider providing additional financial help to Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) for carrying out new research projects and training of scientists in advanced laboratories.

The Minister also promised financial support for payment of due arrears to the university's employees and an increase of about 10 per cent in its budget for the year 2013-14.

These decisions were announced by PAU Vice-Chancellor B.S. Dhillon after a meeting with the Finance Minister on Wednesday, to discuss the university's budgetary requirements for 2013-14.

He said the Punjab Government made an unprecedented increase in the non-Plan and Plan budget of the university, from Rs. 103.6 crore to Rs. 190 crore, besides Rs. 80 crore from the Rural Development Fund.

The Vice-Chancellor, however, acknowledged that the university faced a shortage of funds till the financial year of 2011-12. - PTI

weather

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Thursday, Feb 7

Max Min

28° | 22°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 89

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:34

Sunset: 06:12

Barometer: 1014

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Friday, Feb 8

Max Min

30° | 22°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday Feb 9	Sunday Feb 10	Monday Feb 11	Tuesday Feb 12	Wednesday Feb 13
30° 22° Partly Cloudy	24° 22° Overcast	24° 22° Overcast	27° 22° Overcast	27° 22° Overcast

Airport Weather

Delhi

Delhi

Rain: 0

Humidity: 94

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 07:06

Sunset: 06:05

Barometer: 1020



THE HINDU Business Line

TODAY FARM NEWS

07.02.2013 A.M

6th jan 2013

Poultry feed falls on cheaper inputs



Lower input cost pulled prices of poultry feed products down by Rs 20 for a 50 kg bag. Subhash Sharma, Financial Head, Sarvottam Poultry Feed Supply Centre Pvt Ltd, told *Business Line* that the cost of production has decreased marginally over the last couple of weeks.

On Wednesday soyameal went up by Rs 10 at Rs 2,830 a quintal; bajra at Rs 1,380 and maize at Rs 1,550. Di-calcium phosphate sold at Rs 35.50 a kg, rice bran oil at Rs 57 a kg and mustard de-oiled cake was at Rs 1,500.

After ruling flat for almost 20 days, prices of poultry feed products went down by Rs 20 for a 50 kg bag; broiler concentrates at Rs 1,780 while broiler starter mash was at Rs 1,420. 'Layer concentrate 25 per cent' sold at Rs 1,385; layer concentrate 35% at Rs 1,070; pre-lay mash at Rs 990 and broiler finisher at Rs 1,400.

Meanwhile, an increase in demand pushed egg, broiler and chick prices up, on Wednesday.

Egg went up by 10 paisa and sold at Rs 3.22. Broiler went up by Rs 19 and quoted at Rs 97 a kg, while chicken sold Rs 10 up at Rs 32.

Demand for broiler and chick has increased and chick prices are likely to increase further in near future, said market experts.

Millers sell old sugar stocks cheap



Sugar prices at producing levels dropped by Rs 10-20 a quintal on slack demand while at naka and spot levels, it ruled steady on Wednesday.

Pressure to sell old stocks forced millers to cut prices further by Rs 10-20.

The volume remained subdued as retail demand is also expected to decline in the coming days.

The Vashi wholesale market carries sufficient stocks, so there is no inventory buying among the traders, said sources.

“In the physical market, routine demand from local retailers and absence of bulk consumers put pressure”.

A leading broker said: “Sugar production is at the peak at national level and producers are forced to sell at prevailing rates. “Despite having a liberal export policy, there is no support from export markets. “Cold weather in producing centres has increased the prospects of better sugar output, ” he said.

In the Vashi markets, arrivals were 62-63 truck loads (each of 100 bags) and local dispatches were 60-61 truck loads.

On Tuesday evening, about 15-16 mills offered tenders and sold 48,000-50,000bags (each of 100 kg) in the lower range of Rs 3,080-3,120 (Rs 3,100-3,140) for S-grade and Rs 3,180-3,260 (Rs 3,190-3,260) for M-grade.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, sugar prices for March was up by Rs 12 to Rs 3,133 (Rs 3,121) and April was higher by Rs 10 to Rs 3,189 (Rs 3,179) till noon.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade Rs 3,232- 3,302 (Rs 3,232-3,301) and M-grade Rs 3,302-3,432 (Rs 3,292-3,441).

Naka delivery rates were: S-grade Rs 3,180-3,220 (Rs 3,180 -3,220) and M-grade Rs 3,240-3,370 (Rs 3,240-3,370).

Castor futures drop on profit booking



Castor future prices dropped on the back of weak demand in spot and profit booking by market participants.

Castor prices have increased during the past few days as weather was not good in Gujarat, but demand declined at higher levels.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), castor February contract moved down by Rs 48 to Rs 3,508 a quintal with an open interest of 6,810 lots.

NCDEX castor for March declined by Rs 47 to Rs 3,630 with an open interest of 125,810 lots.

At the Rajkot Commodity Exchange, castor March decreased by Rs 32 to Rs 3,699. RCX spot castor dropped by Rs 25 to Rs 3,525 for 100 kg.

About 35,000-40,000 bags of castor arrived in Gujarat at Rs 695-705 for 20 kg. Around 2,600-2,700 bags in Saurashtrawas quoted at Rs 680-699.

PTI reports: In Mumbai, castorseed bold and castor oil commercial ruled steady due to lack of large scale buying. In the futures market, castorseeds slipped on speculative selling pressure following reduced export enquiries.

Castorseed March contract settled at Rs 3,721 against Rs 3,751 previously.

However, castorseed bold and castor oil closed unchanged at Rs 3,550 and Rs 740, respectively.

Spot rubber stays flat



Spot rubber continued to rule unchanged on Wednesday. According to sources, the market activities were in an extremely low pace following a weak closing on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. Sheet rubber finished flat at Rs 157.50 a kg, according to traders. The grade increased to Rs 157.50 (157) a kg at Kottayam and Kochi as reported by the Rubber Board. The trend was partially mixed as ungraded rubber improved marginally on comparatively better demand.

The February series weakened to Rs 157.67 (158.78), March to Rs 159.99 (161.18), April to Rs 162.75 (164.04) and May to Rs 166 (166.80), while the June series inched up to Rs 169.90 (169.64) a kg on the NMCE.

RSS 3 (spot) firmed up to Rs 178.52 (176.93) at Bangkok. The February futures increased to ¥311 (Rs 176.61) from ¥309.2 during the day session, but then slipped to ¥310.2 (Rs 176.18) in the night session on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rates were (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 157.50 (157.50); RSS-5: 152.50 (152.50); ungraded: 148 (147.50); ISNR 20: 153 (153) and latex 60 per cent: 103.50 (103.50).

Cashew market likely to see uptrend in H2



The cashew market, after remaining very quiet the week before last, witnessed reasonable activity last week with the prices of several grades moving up. But the rise in W240 and W320 was relatively more with hardly any offers at the lower end of the range.

Indian domestic market was steady with not much change in the price of broken grades.

Prices during the week were W240 at \$3.90-4.00; W320 at \$3.35-3.50; W450 at \$3.15-3.25; SW320 at \$3.00-3.15; SW360 at \$2.80-2.90; SSW at \$2.40-2.50; splits at \$2.00-2.20 and pieces at \$1.40-1.55 for a lb (f.o.b.).

On the demand side, there are reports that offtake in the last quarter was decent, Pankaj S. Sampat, a Mumbai-based dealer told *Business Line*.

Beginning of the year has seen reasonable activities from all markets, except the US, which was less active than others. There is a strong feeling that if there are no major surprises on the supply side and prices remain within a reasonable range, there could be growth in usage in all

markets. And this could lead to a gradual rise in prices in the second half of the year. On the other hand, downside from current range is limited because processing costs will not go down; not much chance of a big decline in raw cashew nut (RCN) prices even if the 2013 crops are normal in view of 2011-12 shortages; prices of almost all nuts have been on gradual uptrend, except for almonds which have risen sharply and recent weakness in the dollar should help buying decisions in most markets.

During the next few months, “we can expect some volatility depending on crop “news”.

Hopefully, things will not go out of hand like 2012 when the jump in April/May sent wrong signals and higher prices could not be sustained. Another thing that the industry needs is liquidity in lower grades and narrowing of price differentials.

REASONABLE RCN ACTIVITY

There was reasonable activity in RCN market as well during January. Stocks of 2012 crop are being picked up briskly in the range of \$850-1,100 a tonne depending on quality. Tanzania is steady at around \$1,325-1,350 with rumours of lower quality trading \$50-75 lower. Mozambique is trading at around \$900.

Over all, the feeling of the trade is that prices will move in current range with bias towards the higher end of the range with a strong possibility of a gradual increase in the second half, he added.

Increased selling pressure, weak futures cool down edible oils

Edible oils prices dropped on Wednesday tracking bearish futures markets.

Imported palmolein and soyabean refined oil declined by Rs 2 and Rs 7 each. Groundnut and sunflower oils dropped by Rs 5 and Rs 10 each. Cotton and rapeseed oils weakened by Rs 3 each.

Increased selling pressure on expectation of start of new arrivals of rabi crop soon and weak futures cooled down overall moral said a leading broker.

Sources said local refineries have lowered palmolein and soya oil rates tracking bearish foreign markets and slack demand.

During the day about 1,000-1,100 tonnes of palmolein changed hands.

Ruchi sold about 800-900 tonnes of palmolein at Rs 510 for delivery up to February end while 150-200 tonnes were traded in resale at Rs 507-508.

Towards the end of the day, Liberty was quoting palmolein at Rs 515, super palmolein Rs 561 and sunflower refined oil Rs 800.

Ruchi quoted palmolein at Rs 510, soyabean refined oil at Rs 711 and sunflower refined oil Rs 790.

Allana's rate for palmolein was Rs 512 and super palmolein Rs 560.

In Saurashtra – Rajkot, groundnut oil dropped to Rs 1,920 (Rs 1,925) for *telia tin* and Rs 1,250 (Rs 1,260) for loose 10 kg.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, soyabean refined oil's March futures dropped to Rs 707.85 (Rs 715.95) and April was down to Rs 703.30 (Rs 706.55).

Malaysia's crude palm oil's March contracts settled at MYR 2,526 (MYR 2,528), April at MYR 2,542 (MYR 2,548) and May at MYR 2563 (MYR 2564) a tonne.

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg): Groundnut oil 1,255 (1,260), soya refined oil 711(718), sunflower exp. ref. 720 (720), sunflower ref. 790 (800), rapeseed ref. oil 800 (803), rapeseed expeller ref. 770 (773) cottonseed ref. oil 615 (618) and palmolein 510 (512).

Vikram Global Commodities, Chennai, quoted Rs 568 for 10kg Malaysian super palmolein.

Pepper falls on selling pressure

The pepper market witnessed high volatility and dropped on selling pressure on Wednesday. All active contracts closed much below the previous day's closing.

There emerged some selling pressure on the spot following rise in the prices to above Rs400 a kg while the futures were ruling much below the spot prices. Cued by this trend, the futures market fell today.

“More and more people were selling while there was good buying also,” market sources told *Business Line*.

A total of 57 tonnes of fresh pepper arrived and that were traded at Rs 385, Rs 395 and Rs 405 a kg depending upon the quality such as bulk density, moisture content and area of production.

On the futures market, there was some liquidation in February while some additional buying was seen in March. The total open interest moved up marginally while the turnover showed significant decrease, they said.

February contract on the NCDEX decreased by Rs 345 a quintal to close at Rs 38,965 a quintal. March and April dropped by Rs 460 and Rs 525 respectively to close at Rs 36,590 and Rs 35,090 a quintal.

Turnover

Total turnover dropped by 391 tonnes to 1,386 tonnes. Total open interest moved up by 7 tonnes to close at 3,651 tonnes.

February open interest fell by 62 tonnes to 733 tonnes while that of Mar increased by 63 tonnes to 3,115 tonnes. April remained unchanged at 546 tonnes.

Spot prices in tandem with the futures market trend dropped by Rs200 a quintal to close at Rs39,800 (ungrbled) and Rs41,300 (MG 1) a quintal.

Indian parity in the international market was at around \$8,200 a tonne (c&f) prompt shipment while February was at around \$7,350 a tonne (c&f) and March at \$7,250 a tonne (c&f).

Govt notifies law allowing export of coconut oil from all ports



The Coconut Development Board has called upon existing and new exporters to utilise the opportunity allowing coconut oil exports through major ports.

If coconut oil is exported through all-weather ports of the neighbouring States, India can grab a good portion of coconut oil demand in the Gulf countries and it will help improve prices, senior Board officials said here.

The demand in the West Asia has been peaking and this market has been serviced by coconut oil from the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Kochi is the only port currently allowed to export coconut oil. However, the Union Government has now permitted exports from all 13 EDI ports and Land Custom Stations through a gazetted notification.

Export push

The Government decision, according to officials, is expected to help the coconut oil industry which is reeling under price fall. The officials pointed out that the thinning of stocks in the adjoining States would create a price push which would percolate to the coconut sector bringing in higher prices for the nuts.

The Board has also plans to hike the exports during the current oil year to touch 1,50,000 tonnes, in which Kerala oil companies should contribute at least 50,000 tonnes and other States led by Tamil Nadu should contribute 1 lakh tonnes.

India which was predominant coconut oil producing country stands eight in the list of coconut oil exports after Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Netherlands, United States, Fiji . The country's exports were just 0.33 per cent (8,441 tonnes) of the total 25 lakh tonnes of exports.

According to officials, coconuts and coconut oil industry has been reeling under heavy fall in prices due to slackness in demand. Taking out of the situation, the Board has conceived a three pronged strategy to address the problems that hit the industry.

With the availability of export benefit of 2 per cent duty drawback, the Board was of the view that exporters around 500 who have registered under Coconut Product exporters' category with CDB could easily find external markets.

This would not only ameliorate the problems of the farmers and enable entry of new entrepreneurs to manufacture value added products, the officials added.

Govt to reconstitute body to regulate GM crops soon



Having relented on the requirement to seek relevant Gram Sabha approval for building of roads, canals and other 'linear' projects involving diversion of forest land, the Environment Ministry is now set to act on another contentious area: Genetically Modified (GM) crops.

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), which is the official body for approving commercial release as well as field trials of GM products, will be formally reconstituted "in the

next one or two weeks”, the Union Minister for Environment and Forests Jayanthi Natarajan told *Business Line*.

The three-year term of the last GEAC technically ended on June 8 last year, with its last meeting to screen applications held on April 11. Since then, neither has it been reconstituted, leave alone met.

Files get stacked

In the meantime, there are about 50 applications currently before the biotech regulator, seeking permission for undertaking confined fields trials or extending these to new locations.

These include not only those from multinationals such as DuPont/Pioneer (9 applications), Bayer CropScience (5), Monsanto (3), Syngenta/Devgen (3), and BASF (1), but even domestic private players such as Mahyco (4) and DCM Shriram Consolidated (2).

Apart from these, trials for some important GM crop events developed by public sector research entities – especially the hybrid mustards developed by a team under Delhi University’s former Vice-Chancellor Deepak Pental, the transgenic Bt cottons of the Central Institute for Cotton Research at Nagpur, and a late blight virus-resistant potato of the Shimla-based Central Potato Research Institute – are also now stuck for want of regulatory go-ahead.

moratorium

Incidentally, February 9 would mark three years since the then Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh announced a ‘moratorium’ on the commercial release of India’s first ever GM food crop – the Bt brinjal developed by Mahyco.

“Since then, forget commercialisation, the Government has practically declared a moratorium on even GM research. What research can you do if even field trials are not allowed, and the body that is supposed to approve these has ceased to exist for the last eight months”, an industry official pointed out.

Interestingly, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture had, in August, recommended that all field trials in GM crops be “discontinued forthwith”.

This was followed two months later by a Supreme Court-appointed Technical Expert Committee, which called for 10-year ban, extending the precautionary principle invoked earlier vis-à-vis commercial cultivation to field trials as well.

Oilmeal exports jump 40% on improved demand

Oilmeal exports in January increased 40 per cent to 767,646 tonnes compared to 549,716 tonnes in the same period last year.

This was largely due to good demand on the back of a drop in prices.

However, in the first 10 months of this fiscal, oilmeal exports dipped 18 per cent to 3,678,861 tonnes (4,485,197 tonnes) as the global economic slowdown depressed demand, said the Solvent Extractors' Association.

Soyameal shipments were priced at \$517 a tonne against \$531 in December, while rapeseed meal was down at \$293 from \$324 in the previous month.

The appreciation of the rupee against the dollar to 54.24 in January from 54.65 in December, also aided the fall in prices.

S. KOREA LEADS

The major demand for oilmeal in January emerged from South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam. There was also marked improvement in demand from West Asia led by Iran and Turkey.

Overall exports to West Asia more than doubled in January to 122,609 tonnes (49,998 tonnes).

Between April and January, shipments to South Korea increased 26 per cent to 765,635 tonnes (609,883 tonnes). It consisted of 142,068 tonnes of soyameal, 303,533 tonnes of castor meal and 320,034 tonnes of rapeseed meal.

Demand from Vietnam, another major market, was lower by 31 per cent at 538,863 tonnes (786,595 tonnes) consisting of 309,660 tonnes of soyameal, 27,889 tonnes of rapeseed meal, 1,412 tonnes of groundnut meal, 502 tonnes of castor meal and 199,400 tonnes of rice bran extraction.

Japan imported 463,222 tonnes (1,067,207 tonnes), while Thailand and Indonesia shipped in 395,228 tonnes (382,890 tonnes) and 165,590 tonnes (238,566 tonnes).

Iran marked up its imports to 554,758 tonnes (190,962 tonnes) and Europe and others have imported 366,795 tonnes (259,568 tonnes).

Coonoor tea auction volume slips



A volume of 14.02 lakh kg will be offered at Sale No: 6 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions to be held on Thursday and Friday has risen, reveals an analysis of the brokers' listing.

It is as much as 1.67 lakh kg less than last week's offer but 1.28 lakh kg more than the offer this time last year.

Of the 14.02 lakh kg on offer, 10.41 lakh kg belongs to the leaf grades and 3.61 lakh kg belongs to the dust grades. As much as 13.30 lakh kg belongs to CTC variety and only 0.72 lakh kg, orthodox variety. In the leaf counter, only 0.43 lakh kg belongs to orthodox while 9.98 lakh kg, CTC. Among the dusts, only 0.29 lakh kg belongs to orthodox while 3.32 lakh kg, CTC.

Fresh tea accounts for 13.03 lakh kg while about 99,000 kg comprises teas which had remained unsold in previous auctions. Last week, Cross Hill Tea Factory fetched Rs 250 a kg for its Broken Pekoe leaf grade and Vigneshwar Tea Factory fetched Rs 209 for its Broken Orange Pekoe Small leaf grade.

Soyameal exports up 28% in January

Soyabean meal exports rose by 28 per cent to 6.20 lakh tonnes in January this year, industry body, Soyabean Processors Association of India (SOPA) said on Wednesday.

The country exported 4.84 lakh tonnes of soyameal, that is mainly used in feeding animals and poultry, in January, 2012.

Soyameal exports, however, fell by 18 per cent to 25.36 lakh tonnes in April-January this fiscal from 30.82 lakh tonnes in the same period of 2011-12 fiscal, Indore-based SOPA said in a statement.

Japan has been the major importer of Indian soyameal with imports of 3.70 lakh tonnes followed by Thailand at 2.43 lakh tonnes in April-January of 2012-13 fiscal.

In the current soyabean year (October-September), the exports of soyameal decreased by 13 per cent to 16.99 lakh tonnes during October 2012 to January 2013 as against 19.53 lakh tonnes in the same period.

CCEA may hike copra MSP by Rs 250/quintal



The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) is likely to consider a proposal to increase the minimum support price (MSP) of copra by up to Rs 250 to Rs 5,600 per quintal for the current year.

For 2012, the Centre had fixed the MSP of milling copra at Rs 5,100 per quintal and ball copra at Rs 5,350 per quintal.

“CCEA is scheduled to meet tomorrow. The proposal related to copra MSP is on the agenda list,” sources said.

In the CCEA note, the Agriculture Ministry has proposed a Rs 250 per quintal increase in the MSP of ball copra at Rs 5,600 per quintal and a Rs 200 per quintal hike in the MSP of milling copra at Rs 5,350 per quintal for 2013 season, they said.

The Ministry has proposed the hike despite the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) recommendation to the Government to keep it unchanged for the current year in view of stagnant acreage and sluggish prices.

CACP is a statutory body that advises the Government on pricing policy for major farm produce.

In the CCEA note, the Agriculture Ministry has also proposed that the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) must continue its price support operations for 2013 season.

The area under the crop is little over 19 lakh hectares, while the production is around 14,745 million nuts.

Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are major coconut producing states in the country. The crop is also grown in Assam, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal, Goa, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

Private investment needed to develop dairy sector, says Pawar



Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar today emphasised on the need for private sector investments to develop the dairy sector even as the country aims to enhance milk output to 180 million tonnes over the next 10 years.

"It is necessary to expand milk chilling and processing capacities for which private sector investment may be required in addition to co-operatives," Pawar said inaugurating the State Ministers' conference on the animal husbandry, dairy and fisheries sector.

Attributing the rapid expansion of India's dairy sector to the co-operative movement, Pawar said "there was a need for cooperatives to be financially stronger and professionally managed so as to be less dependent on financial support from the Government."

To meet the rising demand, milk production has to go up by 6 million tonnes annually over the next 10-12 years as against the average of 3.5 mt in the past 10 years. India, the largest producer of milk, is eyeing a production of 180 mt by 2021-22 from the present 130 mt.

"In the past five years, we have been achieving a production of 5 to 5.5 mt and the target is definitely achievable," Pawar said.

The animal husbandry and dairy sector faces challenges such as shortage of feed and fodder, effective control of animal disease, skill development of farmers, breed improvement and institutional credit, among others.

Pawar urged the State Governments to allocate a higher share of resources allocated under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) to develop the livestock and fisheries sector.

The Centre has formulated a draft National Livestock Policy that aims to develop the livestock sector and has circulated it among the States for their views.

Heavy rain, snow as westerly prepares to exit Northwest India

The 'western depression' embedded in the weather-causing western disturbance has since weakened twice over in strength over Rajasthan on Wednesday.

The system wound down to a low-pressure area and lately as a cyclonic circulation in the morning, India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in an update.

SHIFTS A TAD

It has shifted position a tad east from West Rajasthan to North Rajasthan in line with the track of the parent western disturbance.

The IMD said that the western disturbance was moving quickly to the east, which means that the heavy weather brought on by it over Northwest India would lift soon.

Heavy to very heavy rain, snowfall and hailstorm have been reported from many parts of the region over the last two days.

The 'western depression' was one of a kind of weather systems and has not been recorded as having developed over the Indian region in the recent past.

This is the continental 'counterpart' of conventional low-pressure area-turned-depression developing over the familiar breeding grounds of ocean waters.

RAIN IN SOUTH

Meanwhile, the deep western disturbance seemed to have 'touched off' an away-going easterly wave to activity over extreme south peninsula.

The wave was headed towards Sri Lanka, but the massive sweep of winds from the western disturbance has caused it to part with moisture to the benefit of extreme south peninsular India as well.

Clouds have since developed over the region and a usually sun-battered Thiruvananthapuram woke up to scattered clouds this morning.

IMD is of the view that the easterly wave, though weak in strength, would hold on for the next three days, triggering thundershowers over parts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Lakshadweep.

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In the current soyabean year (October-September), the exports of soyameal decreased by 13 per cent to 16.99 lakh tonnes during October 2012 to January 2013 as against 19.53 lakh tonnes in the same period.

Nabard cuts RIDF interest rate

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) has reduced interest rate on RIDF (rural infrastructure development fund) loans extended to State Government from 7.50 per cent to 7.25 per cent with immediate effect.

Vinod Chandrasekharan, assistant general manager (public relations) at the regional office of Nabard here said that the apex bank has sanctioned Rs 5,223 crore under RIDF to Government of Kerala during 2012-13.

As per the phasing of the ongoing schemes, the State Government can draw up to Rs 818 crore during the rest of year 2012-13.

Business Standard

TODAY FARM NEWS

07.02.2013 A.M

Bt cotton losing steam, productivity at 5-yr low



The revolutionary *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) cotton crop in India has started losing steam steadily due to lack of innovation and diversified pest attacks emerging from frequent changes in climatic conditions.

As is evident from the data collated by the Cotton Advisory Board (CAB) under the Union Ministry of Textiles, cotton yield has started falling gradually after the four years of revolution between 2002 and 2006 when bollworm-resistant Bt cotton seed changed farmers' economy. After that, however, farmers have witnessed a sustained decline in yield from a peak

level of 554.39 kg per hectare (ha) in the cotton year 2006-07 (October – September) to an estimated 488.89 kg per ha in 2012-13.

COTTON WATCH

Cotton balance sheet (October–September)

Year	Acreage (lakh ha)	Production (lakh bales)	Yield (kgs/ha)
2007-08	94.14	307	554.39
2008-09	94.06	290	524.13
2009-10	103.1	305	502.91
2010-11	112.35	339.1	513.1
2011-12	121.78	353	492.77
2012-13*	116.14	334	488.89

1 bale = 170 kgs, *provisional
Source : Ministry of textiles

The remarkable increase in output, therefore, is attributed to farmers' rapid adoption of Bt technology resulting in higher acreage. The fall in area under cultivation resulted in lower cotton output in the past few years.

Although, the innovator of Bt technology, the US-headquartered Monsanto claims to have introduced an update of bollworm resistant Bt cotton, the technology failed to help raise India's per hectare yield.

"The average Bt cotton yield declines are possibly due to the expansion of the crop to non-optimal areas of cultivation. In addition, yield losses due to other factors, including sucking pests, have also made an impact in the past few years," said Raju Barwale, managing director,

Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company (Mahyco), an agri-biotechnology company and an associate of the Indian arm of Monsanto.

However, India's current average cotton productivity is 474 kg/ha for the post-Bt cotton launch period 2002-11, an increase of 158 per cent from pre-Bt cotton period of 1993-2001 when productivity was 300 kg/ha.

Barwale said the estimated yield of cotton during kharif 2012 was lower due to the drought in major growing areas, such as Saurashtra, Vidarbha and North Karnataka. The drought impacted yields of other crops in these regions as well.

Bt technology is intended to protect the cotton crop against bollworm attacks, thereby helping to minimise insect-related crop losses. Bt cotton's resistance towards bollworms remains intact with Bollgard II technology. There is no scientific evidence indicating resistance being developed by the insect to Bollgard II cotton.

"During field monitoring of the cotton crop in 2009 in Gujarat, Monsanto and Mahyco scientists detected unusual survival of the pink bollworm (PBW) to the first-generation single-protein bollgard cotton. Laboratory testing confirmed resistance in PBW populations to Bt protein in bollgard cotton in Gujarat. This was reported to the Indian Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC). However, the second-generation Bt cotton containing two Bt proteins (Bollgard IITM) continued to be effective in controlling pink bollworms and the resistance issue could be quickly overcome with adoption of Bollgard II," a Monsanto India spokesperson said.

Resistance is natural and expected, so measures to delay resistance are important. Among the factors that may have contributed to pink bollworm resistance to the Cry1Ac protein in Gujarat are limited refuge planting and early use of unapproved Bt cotton seed, planted prior to GEAC approval of Cry1Ac cotton, which may have had lower Bt protein expression levels, he added.

Meanwhile, Barwale pointed out that crop yield depends on many other factors, including availability of water, nutrients, soil fertility, agronomic practices, regular and efficient management of weeds, insect protection and labour.

There is a growing need and significant opportunity ahead. With increasing population and

income and the textile industry's vision to triple in value by 2020, it is important for farmers to increase their cotton production. Safe and proven technology such as GM crops and Bt cotton will play an important role in enhancing yield and profitability at their farms.

Both Monsanto and Mahyco have defended the new technology - Bollgard II - which they claim have capability to resist PWB.

Monsanto advised farmers to regularly monitor the fields under Bt cotton cultivation. Planting non-Bt cotton refuge is the most important practice the farmers should adopt.

Furthermore, farmers have been constantly educated to adopt measures such as need-based application of insecticide sprays during the crop season and adoption of cultural practices like keeping the field clean of cotton stubble and crop-leftovers, ploughing of land after harvest so that the resting stages of the insects in the soil could be destroyed.

Meanwhile, continuous R&D and innovation to develop new value-added technologies is imperative to stay ahead of insect resistance. To support such innovation, Monsanto demanded government policies' support to encourage investment in R&D which will result in Indian farmers having a wider choice of better and advanced technologies translating thereby, higher yield.

Rubber prices fall below Rs 160/kg after 3 years

After three years, natural rubber prices have dropped below Rs 160 a kg, owing to a slowdown in production in the automobile segment, especially trucks and buses. An increase in natural rubber production in the last three months also led to the fall in prices.

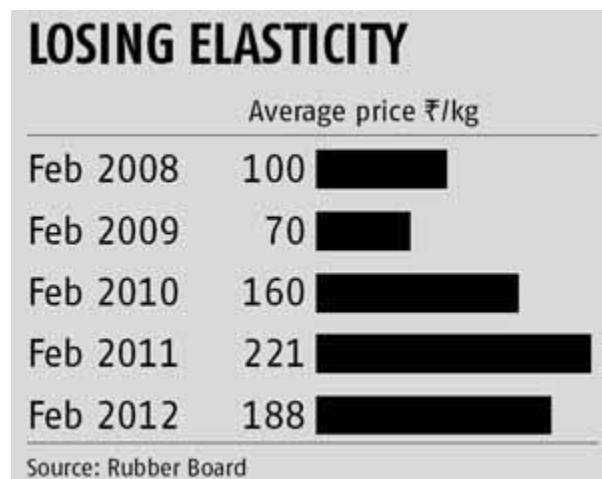
Today, the price of the benchmark RSS-4 grade fell to Rs 157 a kg at the local market. However, international prices were much higher than the Indian counters. In the Bangkok market, the commodity was traded at Rs 178 a kg. A year earlier, RSS-4 was quoted at Rs 188 a kg at the Kottayam market. The average price in February 2011 was Rs 221; in February 2010, it was Rs 160.

According to an International Rubber Study Group (IRSG) report, global production in the April-December period rose 3.2 per cent, while consumption fell 1.1 per cent. Consumption in the US

and EU declined considerably, while consumption growth in China was low. IRSG estimates 2012 global production and consumption of natural rubber at 11.41 and 10.95 million tonnes, respectively, with a surplus of 4,60,000 tonnes. In 2013, production and consumption would stand at 11.77 and 11.59 million tonnes, respectively, with a surplus of 1,79,000 tonnes. As the overall trend in the global market is bearish, prices would remain low in the next couple of years, experts say.

Domestic production of natural rubber in April-December is estimated at 6,93,200 tonnes; consumption is estimated at 7,42,330 tonnes, a rise of 3.2 over the corresponding period of the previous year. Consumption in November and December fell four and eight per cent, respectively, said Sheela Thomas, chairman, Rubber Board.

She added apart from demand-supply, prices were also influenced by factors such as weather, currency exchange rates, oil prices, policy changes in major countries and speculative factors.



The volatile futures market is a major concern for stakeholders, especially growers; they see an orchestrated effort to manipulate prices in favour of consumers. Rajiv Budhraja, director general, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association told Business Standard volatility in futures trading was a critical factor. “When the price increased heavily, we had pointed to the bad influence of futures trading, nobody cared about that. Now, the new phase is in favour of consuming

industries,” he said.

The gap between global prices and Indian ones have widened, as Indian counters are much below the international benchmark. A few weeks earlier, local prices were much higher. The reversal may hit rubber imports, as the price of standard Malaysian rubber (SMR-20) is more than the price of RSS-4 grade in India. In Bangkok, SMR-20 is quoted at Rs 165 a kg. Local importers, including tyre companies, prefer to import the SMR-20 variety; though its quality is similar to that of the benchmark RSS-4 grade, its price is much lower. This is the most important factor behind the sharp rise in imports this financial year.

Till November 2012, international prices were lower than prices in the Kochi and Kottayam markets by Rs 15-18 a kg, owing to which industries chose the duty-free channel for imports. The SMR-20 grade was traded at Rs 150-155 a kg, and this attracted imports to India.

According to N Radhakrishnan, former president, Cochin Rubber Merchants Association, excess supply in the local market is the main reason behind the sharp fall in domestic prices. Local rubber-based industries now have substantial inventory, as they imported huge volumes when they had a price advantage in the international market. Now, local demand is low, and this has hit prices. He added now, production was good, as tapping was underway in plantations in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. As this might continue till the end of this month, RSS-4 prices might drop to below Rs 150 a kg, he said.

Sugar companies' stocks up on decontrol buzz

Share prices of sugar companies jumped as much as seven per cent on Wednesday on the back of a government move to decontrol this sector.

Since the government control on sugar sector affects Uttar Pradesh-based crushing units the most, mills in India's second largest sweetener producing state cheered the most on Wednesday with share price of Balrampur Chini surging seven per cent to close at Rs 49.25. Similarly, Bajaj Hindustan rose 5.47 per cent at Rs 24.10.

India's largest sugar refiner with its crushing and refinery units in Karnataka — Shree Renuka Sugars — followed suit to close at Rs 29.75, a gain of 4.94 per cent from the previous day. According to existing norms, the government allocates monthly release of quota which prohibits sugar mills from adjusting quantity of release in respect to demand.

Sometimes, the government exceeds demand through its release quota, which results in the price falling much below the cost of production. The government mandates sale of released quota during a specified time, which results in a huge loss for sugar mills, said an analyst.

SWEET CHEER			
(in ₹)	May 2, '13	Jun 2, '13	% chg
Balrampur Chini	46.00	49.25	7.07
Bajaj Hind	22.85	24.10	5.47
Shree Renuka Sugars	28.35	29.75	4.94
Triveni Engineering	16.60	17.30	4.22
Ugar Sugar	12.61	13.07	3.65
Dharani Sugars	35.10	35.95	2.42

On Tuesday, the government had almost prepared a Cabinet note to abolish the release

order mechanism for sugar industries. A second note is also under preparation to remove a mechanism under which millers have to set aside a specific portion of their annual output for selling through the public distribution system.

Abolishing the periodic release order, through which government determines the quantum of sugar that each mill can sell in the open market in a specified period, is one of the major bottlenecks in faster growth of the Indian sugar sector. The government-constituted panel, headed by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council Chairman C Rangarajan, had also favoured abolishing the release order mechanism.

In the second phase, another Cabinet note will be moved, which will do away with the levy sugar obligation. Under this obligation, mills have to earmark a certain portion of their annual production for sale through ration shops at cheap rates.

Govt lifts restrictions on coconut oil exports

The Union government has allowed export of coconut oil through Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) ports. The Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) had issued a notification in this regard on Tuesday. Earlier, coconut oil export was allowed only through Cochin port only. Now, it is permitted from all the 13 EDI ports and land custom stations.

In October 2012, the DGFT had allowed export of branded edible oils up to 5 kg packs with a ceiling of 20,000 tonne. Though the government has now removed the ceiling, it insists that the branded pack must be up to 5 kg. The minimum export price for such exports has been fixed at \$1500 a tonne.

Coconut farming and oil industry are reeling under a heavy fall in prices due to slackness in demand, affecting 10 million small and marginal farmers directly and an equal number of workers indirectly. Besides, lack of movement in supplies and heavy influx of supply from states like Tamil Nadu were having an adverse impact.

In view of this, the Coconut Development Board has conceived a three-pronged strategy. The board found that the demand for coconut oil was on the rise in the West Asia region, and a major chunk of this demand is now serviced by Philippines and Sri Lanka. If coconut oil is

exported through all-weather ports, India can grab a good portion of the global demand and it will also help improve price. Nepal is a large buyer of coconut oil, and at present, the market is supplied by other exporting countries. The Indian ethnic population in the US, Europe, Australia and South Africa would definitely boost demand, and this need to be taken advantage of. An export benefit of 2 per cent duty drawback is also available.

Farmers call off 3-day stir

ROURKELA: Farmers ended their three-day demonstration in front of Tangerpalli block office on Wednesday. They were up in arms against the district administration following suspension of paddy procurement through LAMPS.

The [LAMPS](#) stopped procurement two weeks ago though most farmers of the locality had not sold their produce. This led the farmers to stage a demonstration in front of the block office last week. When things did not work out they started an indefinite demonstration from Monday.

The farmers were also demanding withdrawal of suspension of managing director of local LAMPS Jhasketan Pradhan. They said Pradhan was suspended due to mismanagement by LAMPS marketing inspector A P Biswal and demanded his suspension instead. The demonstration affected work at Tangerpalli block office. Several attempts by officials, including sub-collector Bimalendu Roy, to resolve the issue failed.

On Wednesday, farmers threatened to stage a road blockade on the Sundargarh-Vasundhara MCL road on Thursday, if their demands were not fulfilled. Civil supplies officer of Sundargarh Sarat [Chandra Dash](#) and Sundargarh MLA Jogesh Singh discussed the issue with the farmers. "Since the main demand of the farmers was to resume paddy procurement through LAMPS, we proposed to procure the produce through the civil supplies corporation instead of local LAMPS, to which the farmers agreed," said Dash.

"Regarding the demand to revoke suspension of Pradhan and to suspend Biswal, the lawmaker assured the farmers that he will take up the issues with [Sundargarh collector](#). After that the

farmers had agreed to withdraw their agitation," Dash added.

"Hundreds of farmers returned from LAMPS for last four days since the paddy procurement was stopped," said Damburudhar Kisan, president of Bonei Krusak Sangha. Similar reports were also received from several other areas of the district.

State farmers hit as Kerala hotels strike against chicken prices

Namakkal: Poultry farmers, especially those with vested interest in the broiler chicken business, from Namakkal district and Palladam in Tirupur district, are taken aback over the decision of Kerala hotels to stop serving chicken dishes, to protest its rising prices. Hotel owners blame the Kerala government for the present situation.

Starting Thursday, restaurants affiliated to the [Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association](#) (KHRA) will stop serving chicken dishes in protest against its rising prices. The prices have gone up from 45 per kg two months ago to 130 and above. It has even touched 180 per kilo in some parts of the state.

"KHRA members allege that a Tamil Nadu-based lobby is behind the present price hike. But such allegations are baseless," said Dr P V Senthil, Secretary, Livestock and Agri Farmers Trade Association (LIFT). "Following the bird flu outbreak in Bengaluru, the Kerala government imposed a ban on all poultry products, including egg and chicken, which were being sourced from Tamil Nadu, especially Namakkal and Palladam. During the ban period, the stock of egg and chicken began piling up, leading to heavy losses," Senthil said. To cut down on losses, farmers reduced production, which led to a shortage of eggs and chicken, he added.

Close to six lakh chicken were being sold to Kerala before the imposition of the ban. To minimize the shortage, the [Broiler Coordination Committee](#) (BCC) decided to increase the price of broiler chicken, Senthil said.

"The rising prices of poultry feed has also contributed to the chicken price hike," said a poultry farmer from Palladam who wished to remain anonymous. Poultry feed prices have increased by 80% mainly due to poor rainfall and higher global rates. Consequently, chicken and egg have also become more expensive, he said. According to him, the price hike of soya meal and maize over the past two months has crippled the poultry farming industry. The price of soya meal has increased from 2,000 per quintal to 4,200 per quintal while that of maize has gone up from 1,000 per quintal to 2,500 per quintal. "In the case of broiler chicken, the production cost has increased from 45 to 75 per kg. Poultry farmers hardly make any profit," he added.

Meanwhile, poultry farmers in Namakkal district are monitoring the situation in Kerala closely. "So far, the impact on business has been minimal, but we are monitoring the situation closely," said P Nallathambi, President of the [Tamil Nadu Poultry Farmers Association](#). "As per the announcement, restaurants in Kerala will not serve chicken dishes for five days. So our business will not be affected badly. We will not send bird meat to Kerala during those five days. Business will resume as usual on the sixth day," he added.

Selaulim farmers' wait for water gets longer

MARGAO: The farmers' wait for release of water through the Selaulim irrigation canal just got longer. The abrupt change in decision by the [water resources department](#) (WRD) to lay MS pipelines along the damaged canal, instead of the earlier choice of using [RCC](#) ones has led to the further delay in the resumption of the water supply.

"The work of laying RCC pipelines had begun on Monday but it was found that laying RCC pipelines was time-consuming and using MS pipelines was a better option. MS pipelines have already arrived at the site and the work of laying them along the canal has started today (Wednesday) morning," executive engineer, WRD, S I Pattan, who is monitoring the situation, told TOI.

"The RCC pipes that were available were 5m in length and with a diameter of 1,400m, while the MS pipelines that are now being used are 12m long and of 1,600m diameter. The RCC pipelines were old and used ones, so we decided to go in for new MS pipelines so as to avoid any further problem as it is a high embankment canal of 9m in height. In terms of laying the pipes too, the work will get done faster as the pipes just need to be welded together," Pattan added.

Sources said that the MS pipelines are being laid in three rows along the 60m stretch of the canal that has been damaged. Work is likely to be completed and water supply resumed in the next 2-3 days, it is learnt.

The WRD had to shut water supply through the Salaulim irrigation canal on February 3, just a day after the supply was resumed, as the engineers monitoring the restoration work observed settlement of the canal bed and the cracks in the embankments.

Following the development, WRD decided to lay RCC pipelines along the canal so as to facilitate supply of water to the fields for irrigation without further delay. The decision was changed to lay MS pipelines instead.

Sources said that the water to be supplied through the MS pipelines along the damaged canal until the monsoon after which they will be removed once the canal bed and the embankments are restored.

"The settlement (sinking) in the canal bed and cracks in the plastered surface occurred because of shrinkage of concrete, and it will get entirely restored by the monsoon," sources said.

A 60m stretch of the canal was breached at Bethamoddi near Cacora on the night of January 23, following which water supply through the canal was shut.

As per rough estimates, sources said, hundreds of farmers have already sustained loss to their paddy and sugarcane crops on account of unavailability of water. The irrigation department is yet to submit its report about an assessment of loss caused to farmers to the South Goa district magistrate.

Farmers' group demands rakes for onion transport, warns of agitation

NASHIK: Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana, a farmers' group, on Wednesday, gave the government eight days to provide rakes to carry onions.

They warned of a statewide 'rail roko' agitation if sufficient rakes are not made available. The lack of rakes has led to a dip in onion prices in the wholesale markets, causing losses to farmers, they said.

A delegation of the sanghatana, led by [Nashik](#) district president Govind Pagar, gave district collector [Vilas Patil](#) a memorandum of their demands.

"The central government is planning to ban onion export. As a result, traders' associations had brought down onion prices from Rs 2,600 a quintal to Rs 1,200 per quintal. The prices will decline further if the government imposes a ban on the export. This will cause heavy financial loss to the farmers and they will not be able to manage their production cost. Hence, the government should not take such anti-farmer decisions," the sanghatana said in a memorandum submitted to the collector.

The memorandum added, "The railway administration has stopped providing rakes for transportation of onions to [the onion](#) traders for 10 days on the pretext of the ongoing Kumbh mela in Allahabad. As a result, onion traders are unable to send their consignments to Delhi and other parts of the country. It is not economical to send consignments by road. As a result, onion auction in agriculture produce market committees have been badly affected. We want rakes for

transportation of onion."

Speaking to TOI, district president of the sanghatana [Govind Pagar](#) said, "We have given an ultimatum of eight days to make rakes available for onion transportation. Otherwise, we will state rasta rook agitations across the state."

Price rises in APMC

The average wholesale prices of onions in Lasalgaon agriculture produce market committee (APMCs), the largest onion market in the country, on Wednesday increased by Rs 190 per quintal to Rs 1,825 per quintal as against Rs 1,635 per quintal on Tuesday. Around 17,000 quintals of onions were auctioned at Lasalgaon APMC on Wednesday.

New policy needed to make agriculture education more attractive: Expert

BHUBANESWAR: There are few takers for agriculture as a career option of late. So it is high time proper policies were formulated to make agriculture education more attractive and contemporary, said R B Singh, president of [National Academy of Agricultural Sciences](#) (NAAS) here on Wednesday on the eve of XIth National Agricultural Science Congress. The theme of the [congress](#) is 'Agricultural education: shaping India's future'. It will be held at Orissa [University of Agriculture](#) and Technology (OUAT) here.

"You name a challenge, it is there in the agriculture education sector. The first career choice of any bright student is either medicine or engineering or management. Agriculture rarely figures in the top five. This has resulted in shortage of human resources in the field. We need to address this problem on a priority basis," Singh said while addressing the media.

Other major challenges faced by the agricultural education are lack of commitment of government towards the subject, growing level of depression among agri-professionals, fragmentation of universities and shortage of faculties, he maintained.

Former vice chancellor of OUAT and convener of the congress D P Ray echoed the same views.

The three-day congress will chalk out a road map to meet challenges relating to food and nutritional security, livelihood to rural people, profitability and sustainability of agriculture in globally-competitive scenario.

As many as 655 scientists from India and countries like the US, France, Brazil, Japan, and Netherlands will participate in the annual meet.

"NAAS is the apex body of scientists and think tanks in the agriculture sector in the country, whose suggestions are very important for policy making. So the discussions in the congress are very important for the country, especially Odisha which has an agriculture university," Singh added.

There will also be an exhibition of scientific developments in agriculture sector and interactions with farmers during the conference.

"This is probably for the first time in Odisha that so many institutes of [Indian Council of Agriculture Research](#) (ICAR) are putting up stalls to display growth and development of agricultural science and technology," said Ray.

University of Agricultural Sciences will organize international workshop

HUBLI: The University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad is organizing International workshop on 'Promoting Small Millets for Improved Rural [Economy](#) and Food Security' in collaboration with M S Swamynathan Research Foundation of Chennai and McGill University of Canada on February 8 & 9.

The International workshop will be inaugurated on February 8 in the new auditorium of UAS, Dharwad by Dr. Alagusundaram, Director, IICPT, Tanjavur and Dr R R Hanchinal, Vice Chancellor, UAS, Dharwad will preside over the function.

Dr Sara Ahmed, Senior Programme Specialist, IDRC, New Delhi and Prof. G.S. Vijay Raghavan, Professor, McGill University, Canada are also participating as guest of honors. About 150 scientists, subject matter specialists, representatives of NGO's, students, millet growers and rural women entrepreneurs from different states of the country will be participating in this workshop. During these two days of workshop oral and poster presentation of scientific papers, Exhibition cum sale of value added products of millet will be organized. The workshop involves group discussion with experts, millet growers and women entrepreneurs to formulate new guidelines for millet production and promotion.

Onion prices to decline in next few days: Sharad Pawar

Onion prices will come down in the next few days on improved supply from Gujarat, Rajasthan and some parts of Maharashtra, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said today.

"The onion issue will be addressed in the next few days. The stock is adequate in the country. Supply is expected to improve in the coming days," Pawar said on the sidelines of a function here.

Arrival of new crop from Gujarat, Rajasthan and some parts of Maharashtra will start after February 15, he said.

Onion prices have increased significantly in the last few weeks fearing a fall in production. In the national capital, the retail price has gone up by more than two-fold to Rs 31 per kg compared to Rs 13 per kg in the same period last year, as per the official data.

On reasons for rise in onion prices in North India, Pawar said, "I have received communications from Nasik and talked to some traders. They complain that they are not getting railway wagons to transport onion to northern parts of the country."

"This particular point was discussed with the Cabinet Secretary yesterday. I hope they will initiate corrective action. If wagons are made available, I am sure the situation will change dramatically," he said.

There is last year's stock lying in Nasik and traders are eager to offload that stock in north India and get better price, he added.

On onion production in 2012-13, Pawar said the onion belt in Maharashtra has been affected due to severe drought. But the situation has substantially improved in other growing regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat and other states.

"That's why, the country as a whole, there should not be any problem about availability of onion," the minister said.

According to National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF), onion production this year is expected to be close to last year's level of 174 lakh tonnes despite 10 per cent fall in the area.