

Regularisation of fishponds: farmers seek amendment to GO



K. Praveen Kumar, Commissioner, Department of Fisheries, speaking at a programme in Eluru.
Photo A.V.G. Prasad

Aqua farmers on Tuesday sought an amendment to the 'harsh' GO Ms. No 7 which insists on regularisation of the haphazard growth in aquaculture. In a late-night interaction with K. Praveen Kumar, Commissioner, Fisheries department here on Tuesday, the fish growers from the Krishna and West Godavari districts made a plea to this effect.

A farmer from Krishna district emphasised the need to phase out the provision in the GO for imposing a penal action against the farmers who failed to get their ponds regularised in time. The GO envisages that the ponds shall be demolished with the cost to be borne by their unauthorised owners if the latter who failed to apply for regularisation before June 16 besides collection of Rs 5,000 per acre as penalty by the authorities. Bapineedu, another farmer from the Krishna district, pleaded for extension of the deadline for regularisation.

"In our district, hardly 21 applications for regularisation were cleared so far and hundreds of pleas for regularisation are pending with the district administration and that it is quite unlikely for the farmers to comply with the GO within the stipulated time," he said.

K. Sivaji Raju, a fish farmer from West Godavari district, said the cultivation cost was shooting up year after year because of the deadly diseases caused due to lack of freshwater. Each farmer was constrained to spend Rs 25,000-30,000 on medicines per acre to save the fish.

The poor pond hygiene was reported in almost all the coastal tracts due to the lack of freshwater, he said while appealing to the government to ensure supply of canal water for

aquaculture at least once in two years. Manga Venkataratnam, a fisherman from the Scheduled Castes from Akiveedu, said all the fishermen from his community living on fishing in the Kolleru lake lost their livelihood with the Operation Kolleru programme.

A. Challa Rao, president of the West District Fishermen Cooperative Society, appealed to the district administration to save the Y-Drain from pollution. The heavy loads of harmful pollutants released by industries upstream into the drain resulted in death of fish and the other species. Consequently, the fishermen, who were eking out their living on fishing in the drain, lost their habitant and turned as agricultural workers, he said.

The Commissioner sought to allay the fears of farmers over the GO, saying that the administration would not go ahead with demolishing the ponds if their owners applied for regularisation in time as long as their applications were pending approval with the District Level Committee.

Plant a garden



Having a kitchen garden reduces the carbon footprint, says organic farmer P. Vincent.

Once you start growing your vegetables, and use kitchen waste as fuel, you cut down on expenses on gas and it directly brings down the carbon footprint. Generate bio-gas using kitchen waste.

Use waste water from kitchen for gardening. The slurry that comes from the bio-gas tank can be used as manure for the kitchen garden.

Bio-degradable wastes, including dry leaves and cartons, can be used as mulching material for the kitchen garden.

Reduce the use of chemicals in your household. Use Effective Microbes (EM) solution to clean your bathroom, kitchen table top, and to wash floors.

Tell the shopkeeper to pack products in paper and not in plastic covers.

Add greenery to your neighbourhood. Plant and nurture saplings especially that of Areca Palm and Money Plant that absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Thought for food

Initiative In a world where we waste more than we consume, the theme for World Environment Day, 2013 is apt. Read on



Spare a thought Before wasting food Photo: S. Subramaniam

Most of us don't even spare a thought for the time, energy, and resources it takes to produce our food. We generate mammoth amounts of food waste — according to the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) website, "Roughly one third of the food produced in the world for human consumption every year — approximately 1.3 billion tonnes — gets lost or wasted." To drive home the message of sustainable consumption and the need to prevent food waste, the UNEP celebrates this year's World Environment Day (June 5) with the theme 'Think. Eat. Save'.

"People do not think about what goes into the food on their table," says G. Sivaraman of Poovulagin Nanbargal. Embedded inside every agricultural produce, is a hidden quantity of 'virtual water' that was used to raise it. "To grow 1 kg of rice, we require over 2,500 litres of water. But for millets, we would need only five to 10 litres." Why not eat locally produced mangoes instead of kiwis from New Zealand or oranges from Madagascar, asks Dr. Sivaraman. Eating fresh produce from our homeland will support our farmers. The UNEP states that in developing countries, "Food waste and losses occur mainly at early stages of the food value chain." Cold-storage can prevent fruits and vegetables from decaying before they reach the market.

Food wastage is a major problem in India. Weddings, canteens, hotels and households spew out so much food. To see the extent of damage, all you have to do is peek into a street-corner garbage bin. "Spend some time with me and you can see how much food people throw away everyday," says Esther, a road maintenance worker. "It's heart-breaking. I see people dump

sackfuls of rice and grains. And vegetables too...they let them decay in the fridge for days and dump them.”

The simplest method to prevent food waste, says Sivaraman, is to cook limited quantities. Tender coconut seller Senthil offers another solution. “Give away what you don’t eat to those who need it,” he says.

Kiran asks banks not to recover dues from input subsidy

Chief Minister releases Rs. 1,33,074 crore annual credit plan for 2013-14

Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy has emphatically asked the bankers not to adjust input subsidy given by the government to the farmers towards crop loan recovery.

“The input subsidy substantially increased to Rs.10,000 per hectare is given to those farmers who suffered losses due to Nilam cyclone and drought last year and is meant as capital for fresh crops. As the amount is transferred online, banks should expedite opening no frills accounts for farmers”, he said while addressing the State level Bankers Committee meeting here on Tuesday.

Even in the case of interest free loans given to farmers, some banks were demanding interest from farmers against the norms, he observed. The government had already released Rs.118 crore towards interest on loans that were repaid by farmers on time.

Seeking greater cooperation from bankers, Mr. Kiran Reddy said they should gear up to support the government planning to extend direct subsidies to the tune of Rs.22,000 crore to priority groups like farmers, licensed cultivators, youth, Self Help Groups, fair price shop dealers under various schemes. A meeting would be convened with bankers next month to chalk out how to go about it, he added.

The Chief Minister released the Rs.1,33,074 crore annual credit plan for the year 2013-14 with Rs.99,894 crore target lending for priority sector. The total priority sector outlay – Rs.67,224 crore for the farm sector and Rs.11,316 crore for the non-farm sector (SMEs, housing etc.), was projected with an increase of Rs.17,727 crore over that of last year’s target.

Last year against the target of Rs. 82,167 crore advances to the priority sector, Rs.99,534 was achieved, registering 121 per cent increase. “Our achievement this year will be even more,” he said.

Revenue Minister N. Raghuveera Reddy said banks should expedite giving loans to licensed cultivators and a day in a week dedicated as loan day for licensed cultivators.

Finance Minister Anam Ramanarayana Reddy asked bankers to finance godown capacity expansion, solar power based pumpsets for farmers. Insurance coverage should also be given to non-loanee farmers.

B. A. Prabhakar, CMD, Andhra Bank and president, SLBC, asked for integration of land records with banking system and sought government help in seeding of bank accounts with Aadhar numbers in a campaign mode.

Early monsoon gets farmers' hopes up

Widespread rains across Kurnool trigger agriculture activity at once



Sunny side: Farmers planting paddy crop at Nidjur village near Kurnool on Tuesday.— PHOTO: U. SUBRAMANYAM

Farming community is buoyant about the prospects of the crops this year. The widespread rains across the district triggered agriculture activity at once. Cultivators of rain-fed crops took up sowing while farmers of other crops started land preparation and other operations.

According to agriculture scientists, cropping pattern is likely to change this year due to the early monsoon which was reported after a gap of ten years.

Dr. G. Narasimha Rao, retired scientist of Agriculture University, is of the view that groundnut, maize and paddy are likely to increase in size this year. Groundnut will support red gram, which is cultivated as popular intercrop in the district.

Cotton will remain more or less the same or display some improvement due to stable prices and less pest problem last year. The pest-resistant BT cotton occupied more than 90 per cent of the total cropped area now.

Dr. Narasimha Rao said more than the early monsoon, there should be no incidence of dry spells during the crop cycle for bumper crops. Dry spells cause more harm than the late monsoon.

Meanwhile, castor is likely to be less patronised this year due to unstable prices and falling yields last year. Maize or cotton will benefit from the unpopularity of the castor.

Farmers took up sowing of cotton in Yemmiganur, Adoni and Gonegandla areas making use of the recent rain.

The moderate flood to Tungabhadra river and filling of Sunkesula reservoir lifted the hopes of paddy farmers under KC canal.

Early transplantation would pave the way for accommodating the second crop.

Sowing completed in 11,563 hectares

Target for cultivation in Chitradurga district is 3,52,200 hectares

Agricultural activities have gained momentum in all the six taluks of the district with the arrival of the monsoon in the south Karnataka region. Farmers are busy purchasing seeds, fertilizers and other materials for cultivation.

Till May-end, the district received 167 mm of rainfall against the normal 144 mm. Challakere taluk received 169.6 mm rainfall against the normal of 114.4 mm, followed by 284.6 mm (normal 170.9 mm) in Chitradurga, 220 mm (normal 176 mm) in Holalkere, 129.5 mm (normal 135 mm) in Hiriya, 102 mm (normal 130 mm) in Hosadurga and 95.5 mm (normal 115.1 mm) in Molakalmuru.

Rainfall

Rainfall in the district till May-end in 2011 was 140 mm and 187 mm in 2012, with 67 mm being the normal. Owing to adverse climatic conditions, farmers sustained huge losses in the past two years. The district recorded a total of 264 mm in 2011 and 524 mm in 2012 against the normal of 443 mm.

According to official sources, the district has fixed a target of cultivating 3,52,200 hectares of land, comprising 99,200 hectares in Challakere, 66,500 hectares in Chitradurga, 49,200 hectares in Hiriya, 54,900 hectares in Holalkere, 60,500 hectares in Hosadurga and 28,200 hectares in Molakalmuru taluk.

Till May-end, sowing has been completed in 11,563 hectares in the district. This included 491 hectares in Challakere, 2,255 hectares in Chitradurga, 1,337 hectares in Hiriya, 4,609 hectares in Holalkere, 2,494 hectares in Hosadurga and 375 hectares land in Molakalmuru taluk, according to sources.

The Agriculture Department has taken steps to distribute adequate quantity of seeds and fertilizers to farmers through 22 Raith Samparka Kendras, 10 cooperative societies and 10 outlets of Karnataka State Seeds Corporation, sources said.

Agricultural operations begin in Bellary

District received 72.5 mm of rain in May, 41.9 mm till June 3



ENTHUSIASM:The good spells of rain have encouraged farmers in Bellary district to take up kharif cultivation.

Good spells of rain during May and incessant and widespread rainfall in the beginning of June has set in motion agricultural operations for the kharif season in Bellary district.

As against the average normal rainfall of 65.3 mm for June, the district has already received 41.9 mm, sources in the Agricultural Department told *The Hindu* .

With the district receiving 72.5 mm rain in May, which was in excess of the normal of 63.2 mm, farmers were able to start agricultural operations.

Sowing has commenced in the district from June 1.

The target for kharif cultivation has been fixed at 3.74 lakh hectares — 2.26 lakh hectares of rainfed land and 1.47 lakh hectares of irrigated land.

Paddy, jowar, maize, groundnut, sunflower and cotton are the major kharif crops. Sowing has been completed in 3,698 hectares.

As against the demand for 59,642 quintals of seeds of various crops, the district has a stock of 60,633 quintals, including 20,923 quintals with the Karnataka State Seeds Corporation, the National Seeds Corporation and the Karnataka Oil Federation and 40,710 quintals with private dealers.

The total demand for chemical fertilizers in the district is about 1.55 lakh tonnes. As against a requirement of 37,420 tonnes till May-end, 15,600 tonnes has been supplied.

Fire in cold storage unit put out



ARDUOUS TASK:After nearly 60 hours, the Fire and Emergency Services personnel put out the fire in the cold storage unit in Bellary.

Fire and Emergency Services personnel, after relentless efforts for nearly 60 hours, put out the fire in the cold storage unit in the industrial area here.

Fire broke out in the early hours of Sunday and destroyed hundreds of tonnes of agricultural produce including paddy, wheat, jowar, maize, groundnut, Bengal gram, tamarind and chilli belonging to farmers and traders. The fire-fighters had a tough time in dousing the fire because the building had only one entry and exit point. Portions of walls had to be demolished to put off the fire. A portion of the five-storey building collapsed on Monday.

Preliminary estimates have put the loss at more than Rs. 20 crore.

Farmers want methane project scrapped

Members of Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, affiliated to the CPI (M), staged a demonstration in front of the Panagal Building here on Tuesday urging the Tamil Nadu Government to drop the methane extraction project in the Cauvery basin.

Tamil Nadu has signed an MoU with Great Eastern Energy Corporation Ltd. in 2009 for extraction of methane in Thanjavur and Tiruvarur districts. Groundwater would be exploited and polluted by the methane extraction process from the delta districts. This would affect the livelihood of lakhs of farmers. Methane is extracted by drilling borewells to a depth of 500 ft to 1,650 ft and draining the groundwater. It is estimated that 1,66,210 acres of cultivable land may be affected by the project. Hence, the protesters urged the government to scrap the project.

Sami Nadarajan, district secretary of the sangam, led the agitation. P. Shanmugham, state general secretary of the sangam, spoke. K. Kamaraj, district president, and A. Govindasamy, district treasurer of the sangam, were present.

Fall in output, export demand push up price of small onions

Smaller volumes of the commodity are arriving in markets

The price of small onions has skyrocketed in the last three weeks, pushing the commodity beyond the reach of common people.

The commodity, an essential ingredient in every kitchen, is being sold from Rs. 90 to Rs. 110 by the retailers at the markets and the neighbourhood stores.

The price of the commodity stood at around Rs. 45 three weeks ago.

The drastic fall in the production due to drought and heavy demand for export contributed to the sharp increase in the price of small onions, traders point out. The wholesale markets here used to receive around 50 tonnes of small onions every day from Udumalpet, Mysore and Tiruchi.

“This has come down to 25 to 30 tonnes now. Since there is a huge export demand, farmers are selling significant amount of the commodity to large traders,” vendors said.

Drought-hit farmers to get improved varieties of seeds

To help rejuvenate farmers in the district following a drought-hit 2012-13 fiscal, the Department of Agriculture is getting ready to begin an ambitious programme to augment yield at an estimated cost of Rs 22.1 lakh.

Under the project, the farmers planning to raise paddy, millet, pulses and oil seeds will be given high quality/improved varieties of seeds at subsidised rates and training will be imparted to them on latest farming practices as well as effective methods to control pests.

“Certified seeds will be given at 50 per cent discounted prices to the farmers which itself is a big booster considering that high quality seeds increases the yield by about 10 to 15 per cent as it provides better germination,” Joint Director of Agriculture Mohammed Kalimullah Sherif told *The Hindu*.

As per the plan, a total of 15 tonnes of paddy seeds, four tonnes of millet seeds, 15 tonnes of seeds of pulses varieties like black gram, green gram, cow pea and Bengal gram, and 35 tonnes of seeds of oil seed varieties like gingelly, sunflower and groundnut will be distributed for cultivation to farmers spread over 13 blocks in the district.

“The certified seeds required for the supply under the scheme are being produced from the foundation seeds procured from various farms,” Mr. Sherif said.

To extract the full benefits of the improved varieties of the seeds distributed, the beneficiary farmers will be given training on technique pertaining to cultivation, nutrient and pest management, assessment of soil health and weed removal.

The officials said that a total of 22 training sessions were planned in the district to achieve the said objectives.

Land row: farmers to hold meet after House session ends

The farmers from Gokul village, who have sought the Chief Minister’s help to get their farmlands back, have planned to hold a meeting to decide their next course of action after the ongoing legislature session ends.

The farmers are upset that their farmland, which was acquired for expansion of the Hubli airport, has been allotted to private organisations and individuals.

While the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) has clarified that it had allotted the excess land, the farmers want their farmland back as it has not been used for the airport expansion, the reason for which they had given their consent.

Congress leader Rajashekhar Menasinakai, who along with Hanumanthappa Unakal and others of the farmers' struggle committee met the Chief Minister in Bangalore recently, said that Mr. Siddaramaiah had responded positively to their plea.

Mr. Menasinakai said the Chief Minister had promised to take up the issue on priority.

He said that the farmers were planning to take legal action, but would take a final decision only after the meeting.

Bharatiya Janata Party State president Pralhad Joshi had also opposed the KIADB's move of acquiring excess land and allotting it to private organisations.

City-based organic food firm exploring new markets

People need to realise that by paying a little bit more, they could have organic food sans fertilisers and pesticides and thus remain healthy, said Rajshekhar Reddy Seelam, founder and Managing Director of city-based Sresta Natural Bioproducts.

Rs. 200 crore

Mr. Seelam told reporters here on Tuesday that by adopting organic foods, the ecological balance could be maintained and soil fertility retained. The organic food market — in the organised sector in India — was estimated at about Rs. 200 crore, with an annual growth of 30 to 40 per cent annually.

With the launch of their '24 Mantra Organic' flakes and juices range of products, the company planned to expand to newer markets in the country, he said, adding that less than one per cent of the country's population had taken to adopting an organic food-driven lifestyle.

Sresta currently works with 12,000 farmers on 50,000 acres of land, spread over 15 States.

Sresta CEO N. Balasubramanian said the company now had about 200 products that could be used for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks.

These were available at 1,000 outlets in the country. About 50 per cent of the produce was exported to Australia, Canada, Europe, Middle East and the US, he said.

Agent Cassava effective

In 2010, when scientists at the Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI) here developed a bio-pesticide from cassava leaves, it opened up a window of hope for farmers who have had to rely on hazardous chemical pesticides for the management of borer pests, such as the pseudo stem weevil (*Odoiporus longicollis*) in banana and red palm weevil (*Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*) in coconut, that have ravaged crops.

Today, as farmers in Thiruvananthapuram, Malappuram and Kasaragod prepare to reap a rich harvest from their banana plantations, the bio-pesticide named Nanma has demonstrated its efficacy in controlling pseudo stem weevil.

As many as 30,000 banana plants in the farms taken up for the pilot project have thrived with treatment of the eco-friendly pesticide solution, with no reports of pest incidence.

“There have been heavy casualties in the case of the plants that were not treated with the bio-pesticide,” says C.A. Jayaprakas, Principal Scientist (Entomology), CTCRI, who headed the research team that developed Nanma.

Dr. Jayaprakas says a large quantity of biomass, including leaves and tuber rinds, are discarded after the harvest of tapioca.

The research team isolated the bioactive molecules from the biomass.

A kilogram of tapioca leaf yields up to eight litres of the bio-pesticide. Field-trials had proved that Nanma was more effective than chemical pesticides such as Furidan, yet devoid of the health hazards associated with exposure to chemical insecticides.

Dr. Jayaprakas and his team have developed a technology to utilise the waste gases from the process to produce a bio-fumigant for use in godowns where foodgrains are stored.

A bio-pesticide from cassava leaves developed by CTCRI has come in handy for coconut and banana farmers.

Puthukkad or new forest

The Puthukkad Assembly constituency in Thrissur district is set to sport a rich green cover.

Monday marked the launch of a unique ecological restoration programme aimed at reviving the dwindling biodiversity in the region. The Puthukkad Sustainable Development Project has been taken up under a programme launched by C. Raveendranath, MLA. More than 25,000 schoolchildren will join hands with teachers and parents to prepare biodiversity registers and implement micro-level eco-restoration plans. “With this project, we hope to establish the concept of biodiversity as a parameter of development. To achieve this, we are focussing on expanding the diversity of species,” Prof. Raveendranath says. As many as 3,00,000 saplings are to be planted across the constituency in the first phase of the project.

The Vallachira panchayat will be converted into a Robusta village, with 1.5 lakh saplings of the green plantain to be distributed to farmers. As many as 32 species of trees and plants are proposed to be planted on 100 premises, including schools and colleges and places of worship, this year.

With the help of the micro-level biodiversity registers, volunteers will assess the biodiversity density of a particular region and work out an action plan to enhance the number of species to the desired level. One of the major components of the programme is the establishment of a germplasm nursery on the Mannuthy campus of Kerala Agricultural University.

The project has been taken up with the support of the Agriculture Department, Kerala Agricultural University, the Forest Department, the Kudumbasree Mission, the Kerala State Biodiversity Board, the Kerala Medicinal Plants Board and the National Horticultural Mission.

Schoolchildren will prepare biodiversity registers and implement micro-level eco-restoration plans.

Coconut growers are a dejected lot

Caterpillar infestation and continuous drought have hit coconut yield



The black-headed caterpillar disease has hit coconut trees on 3,000 hectares in Ramanagaram district.

The precarious groundwater situation and the black-headed caterpillar infestation have hit coconut growers in Ramanagaram district.

Coconut is grown on nearly 12,000 hectares in the district, with growers here supplying at least four crore tender coconuts annually to various parts of the country.

This year, however, they have been forced to axe thousands of dying trees over the past two months.

Along the Bangalore-Mysore State Highway between Ramanagaram and Channapatna, are hundreds of coconut trees, looking as if they are burnt. The black-headed caterpillar has the tendency to spread quickly from one tree to another, causing nuts to shrink or fall from the tree before they fully develop.

“Nearly 25 per cent of the crop has been hit by the disease,” Krishna, Deputy Director of Horticulture (Ramanagaram), told *The Hindu* over phone on Monday.

Besides, scanty rainfall and depleting groundwater levels had taken a toll on growers, he said. According to K. Puttaswamy, former State secretary of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha and a coconut grower, the KRRS had found that at least four lakh coconut trees had stopped yielding because of the caterpillar infestation and continuous drought.

Saving the crop

The department had taken steps to educate farmers on saving their crops, including through classes conducted at farms, Dr. Krishna said.

According to another officer, growers have been advised to use neem-based pesticides, take up root-feeding method, spray bio-agents that eat away the caterpillar onto affected trees, and follow proper irrigation methods.

Not enough

However, Mr. Puttaswamy alleged that the departments concerned were not doing enough to save the coconut trees.

Officials were advising growers to spray pesticides, but this was not possible on tall trees, said Beereshwara, a farmer near Maluru Patna in Channapatna. Mr. Puttaswamy urged officials of the Coconut Development Board and the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute to visit the affected farms and take up research.

“When the State government can offer subsidy for fishermen to purchase diesel for their boats, why can't it lend a helping hand to coconut growers here,” he asked, calling for compensation for growers.

Distribution of cotton seed begins

Special cell set up to monitor seed distribution

Distribution of cotton seed has begun across Krishna District in the wake of rainfall predicted in early June.

A special monitoring cell has been set up at District Agriculture Department office, Machilipatnam to address the farmers' queries and complaints.

“Farmers mostly prefer B.T. cotton seed and almost 30 to 40 per cent of the seed has been distributed so far in 22 mandals,” said Krishna District Agriculture Department

In-Charge Director Balu Naik. Measures have been taken on a war-footing to crack a whip on dealers who sell poor quality of cotton seed varieties.

“The cell is working closely with the farmers, agricultural officers and police and revenue officials to crack the whip on the dealers of fake seeds and other agencies which come up with poor quality seed varieties,” said Mr. Balu Naik.

He also submitted an action plan to the Joint Collector P. Usha Rani on how the department would tackle the distribution and making availability of seed in kharif.

As per the kharif action plan, cotton is grown in about 64,000 hectares in Krishna district.

CM urged not to repeal Self-Help Cooperative Act

Activists and advocates of self-help groups have urged Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik not to repeal Self Help Cooperative Act- 2001 as decided by the State Cabinet.

A delegation recently met Finance Minister Prasanna Acharya and submitted a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister.

“Repealing of the Act would adversely impact livelihood of millions of poor communities who have been empowered and economically benefitted from the cooperatives established under this Act,” they said

“Under the previous, Odisha Cooperative Societies Act 1962, government institution had control over societies. So farmers or general public were not taking advantage of the Act. Subsequently, the Act was replaced by a liberal act - Self Help Cooperative Act- 2001. Under the new Act, women and marginalised sections have started to be benefitted,” said Amulya Kumar Mohanty, Vice President of ACCESS Development Services that recently organized a discussion on consequences of repealing of the Act.

Mr. Mohanty said a poor-friendly Act should not be repealed as some swindlers took advantage of the liberal Act. The delegation was of the view the government could consider bringing in reforms in the Act in order to prevent tricksters from misusing the Act.

Subsidy for setting up farm ponds

The State government would extend financial assistance to the maximum of Rs 1.50 lakh per farmer for setting up farm ponds in Villupuram district, according to Collector V. Sampath.

In a release, he said they could also make use of the workforce being employed under MGNREGS.

Fresh norms stifle aqua farmers

District-level panels given powers to destroy tanks that have no valid licences



A fish tank at Anathavaram village in East Godavari district. —Photo: Special Arrangement

At a time when the paddy fields turning into fish tanks in huge extents and posing a challenge to the paddy output in East Godavari district, the new guidelines on freshwater fish tanks are tightening the noose around those who are shifting from agriculture to aquaculture without following any norms.

With the State government issuing orders empowering the district-level committees even to destroy the tanks that have no valid licences, the aqua farmers are literally chasing the officials to obtain the permissions.

As per the official statistics, freshwater fishing is going on in the district in an extent of 2,055 hectares by 1,450 aqua farmers, permissions have been obtained by only 1,181 farmers who have developed fish tanks in 1,118 hectares. However, experts in the aqua field feel that the exact extent is much higher than the official figures.

Besides the farmers who wish to take up freshwater fishing afresh, the existing farmers too must apply for the regularisation of their tanks on or before June 15. “We have already received 72 applications from both the new and existing aqua farmers. Plans are afoot to conduct joint inspections from June 6,” says D. Govindaiah, Deputy Director of the Fisheries department.

More and more applications are expected from farmers in the days to come, as a good number of paddy farmers are complaining that agriculture is not viable due to the huge input costs.

Officials of the ground water, agriculture, irrigation, pollution control, revenue and fisheries departments, along with progressive farmers will conduct the joint inspection before according permissions for the freshwater tanks.

“We are wondering why the government has not mentioned about assured water supply to the freshwater tanks in its orders. When they are regularising the tanks and collecting fee, why not

they assure water supply on the lines of industry,” asks T. Rajyalakshmi, former Director of the Central Brackish Water Aquaculture Institute and president of Society for Promotion of Integrated Coastal Areas Management (SPICAM). She also expressed doubts over the parameters that decide whether the land is fertile and not, as the new guidelines specified that fertile lands should not be converted into fish tanks.

ITDA develops satellite nurseries

ITDA has been providing self-employment to tribal farmers through cashew plantation in seven Agency mandals. It had developed 27 satellite nurseries, said C. Nagarani, Project Officer, ITDA, Rampachodvaram.

Speaking to mediapersons after visiting Gurumamidi, Tadepalli, Pedduru and Denduluru villages in Maredumilli mandal on Tuesday, she said ITDA had sanctioned one satellite nursery unit for six to eight villages and provided material and inputs to farmers at subsidy rate.

The PO said under NREGS they had given Rs.30, 24 towards wage and Rs.55,246 as material components. The total working days provided to the farmers under NREGS was 202 days. Horticulture APO Sarma, field consultant B. Srinivasa Rao, plant supervisor R. Srinivas, Horticulture technical assistant Jayalakshmi and others accompanied the PO.

Fish kill by industries rampant in Kerala

Environmentalists and guardians of the Kerala's biodiversity have reasons to worry on this World Environment Day as massive fish kills continue to be reported from various parts of the State.

Incidents of dead fishes washing up on the banks of Chalakudy River on two successive days from May 29 are the latest in the list. It has raised alarm among the public about pollution and its effect on marine wealth.

A hartal in protest against fish kills was held in seven panchayats — four panchayats in Thrissur and three in Ernakulam— that share the banks of the Chalakudy River on Tuesday.

“Pollution of water bodies caused by pollutants, including sewage, has led to the decline of oxygen level. Our district coordinator has reported that this was supposed to be the reason behind fish kills reported from Chalakudy River as well. We will be writing to the agencies concerned besides holding a study into the reasons for fish-kills reported in the State,” K.P. Laladas, member-secretary, Kerala State Bio-diversity Board, told *The Hindu*.

K.G. Padmakumar, former Assistant Director of the Regional Research Centre, Kumarakom, Kerala Agriculture University, said the initial days of the monsoon were crucial for maintaining fish wealth.

“It is the breeding period for fish species and as they come up to the surface of the water they will be exposed to all sorts of pollutants that will be flushed into the river in rain. The monsoon after a severe drought-like condition, as the one experienced by the State this year, when rivers go dry is all the more critical. Besides, unscientific and outright dangerous methods of fishing like passing electric current and poisoning the water also affect the fish wealth,” he said.

Repeated pleas to authorities concerned to be extra vigilant during the start of the monsoon to protect fish species have fallen on deaf ears. “What we need is dedicated environmental policing and courts to settle environmental issues.

The NGIL Action Council that had called for the hartal has alleged that discharge of toxic industrial waste by the Nitta Gelatin India Limited (NGIL), an Indo-Japanese industrial venture along the banks of the Chalakudy River in Kadukutty panchayat in Thrissur, was behind fish kills.

“We have been demanding the closure of the company for polluting river. About five tonnes of fishes were dead in recent incidents and many species are likely to become extinct in the river. The company, which has been using up lakhs of litres of water from the river for its production purposes was polluting the same river by discharging industrial effluents,” said K.M. Anil Kumar, convener of the Action Council, while warning sustained campaign for the closure of the company.

G. Susheelan, managing director, NGIL, however, refuted this allegation. He said that the company had been discharging treated water to the river for the last 35 years of its operations and cannot be held responsible for the recent isolated incidents.

“Fish kills were reported four-and-a-half kilometre and seven kilometres downstream of the company’s discharge point. Fish-kills, however, were concentrated in two points and not all along the stretch of the river from the discharge point, which should have been the case if we were responsible. So something has happened at those two points and there should be a thorough investigation to reveal it,” he said.

Meanwhile, the Ernakulam district fisheries department, which had collected water samples from within the limits of the district and got it tested at the fisheries college at Panangad, has found high pH and ammonia content level that could prove toxic to the flora and fauna. “Besides, the nitrate level also was on the higher side. We have submitted reports to Thrissur and Ernakulam district collectors,” said M.S. Saju, Deputy Director, Fisheries, Ernakulam.

Interestingly, the Pollution Control Board officials in Thrissur have found the pH and biochemical oxygen demand level in the water samples collected from the district within permissible limits. Neither was the ammonia content alarming.

But a senior official admitted that the sample was collected a considerable period of time after fish-kills were reported. "The findings can vary based on the timings of sample collection, he said.

The trade unions of NGIL have come out in support of the company stating that there was no basis to the allegation that the discharge of effluent was behind fish-kills in Chalakudy River. A release issued jointly by CITU, INTUC, and BMS said this was the first such allegation against the company in its 35 years of existence.

Villupuram gears up to tackle monsoon woes

As the south-west monsoon would remain vigorous during the period from July to September, the Villupuram district administration has initiated efforts to deal with exigencies. Collector V. Sampath on Tuesday gave instructions to officials drawn from various departments on the precautionary measures to be taken to deal with floods, inundation and eviction.

Mr. Sampath said that the revenue officials in the coastal areas would be trained by the police personnel on handling the VHF (very high frequency) and HF (high frequency) radios, fail-safe communication devices during emergency situations.

The cyclone centres, schools, community halls and marriage halls situated close to the flood-prone areas would be kept ready to accommodate people, in case of evacuation from low-lying areas.

The Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation and the cooperative societies-run fair price shops would maintain adequate food grain stocks.

A control room with a toll free number 1077 would be functional round-the-clock at the Collectorate, the Collector said.

District Revenue Officer R. Brindadevi; PWD Executive Engineer K. Ilamparithi; Deputy Director (Agriculture) T. Sekar, Public Relations Officer R. Singaram and others participated.

Think green

Ten per cent of your home area should be left free for soil. Raise fruit trees or vegetables, says Osai Chella, who runs the Low-impact Farmstay Experiment in Varakampadi.

Reuse old garments as wiping cloth. It takes a lot of energy to create metal utensils and recycle them into other products. Use them as planters.

Use traditional/herbal bathing solutions such as soapnut and arappu. This way, chemicals don't enter waste water and the water can be used for gardening.

Use pedestal fans; they mimic natural horizontal air flow, and cool better.

Buy locally produced clothing or agro-products. You help develop a new market. This also reduces transportation costs, and our dependence on fossil fuels.

Gas from kitchen wastes

Sanjeev Kumar's family used to order a gas cylinder a month. Now, they book a cylinder only once in two months. This is because their bio-gas plant provides them cooking gas. "With just two kg of waste, we get enough gas to last us two hours, every day."

The first time, pour cow dung and water into the plant. This initiates microbial activity, which facilitates bio-gas generation. From the 11th day, start feeding kitchen wastes.

What to use

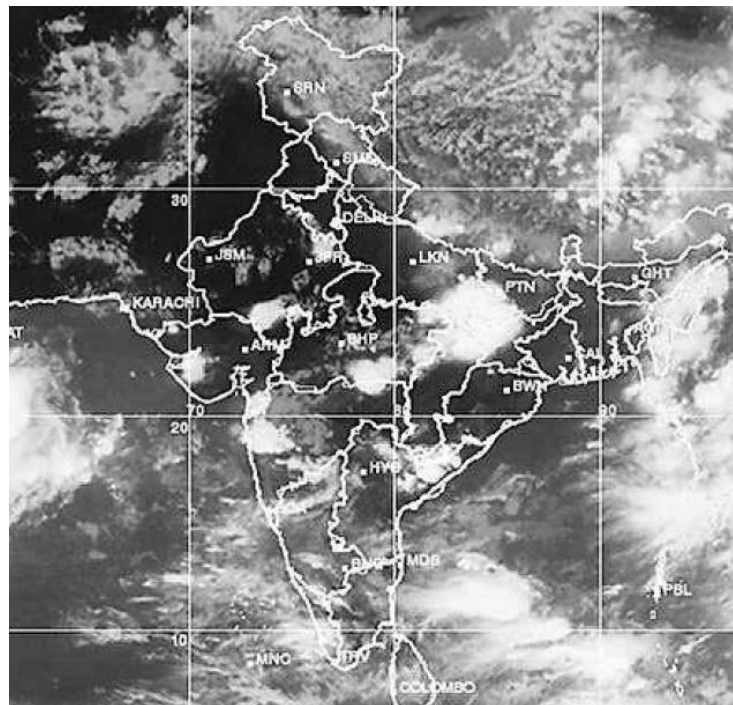
Any leftover food (except bones; they take longer to decompose)

Water leftover from cleaning rice and dals

Fruits, especially papaya, jack fruit and water melon. Ensure that seeds do not get in, as they may germinate inside the plant and lead to complications.

Discarded flowers

Weather





THE TIMES OF INDIA

Welfare schemes key to saving ecosystems

Marginal farmers in Maharashtra are battling another cruel drought. In Vidarbha, droughts have become an annual feature. Absence of irrigation and efficient watershed management make small farmers even more vulnerable.

Although schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana or the Indira Awaas Yojana are not viewed as adaptation policies, many agree they play an important role in making communities climate-resilient.

Recent reports by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and others have found that the five states where MGNREGA is effective — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, MP, Rajasthan and Sikkim — have seen improvements in ground water levels, soil erosion and soil organic carbon. The parameters were compared with 'control states' where the scheme is not implemented. Apart from ensuring basic pay, ground water levels and drinking water availability improved in the areas studied.

Prices of vegetables & spices crash upto 20% due to the brisk start to monsoon

Prices of vegetables and spices have dropped up to 20% in the past month and are likely to remain low as higher output along with the brisk start to the monsoon has calmed the market.

The drop in vegetable prices, on top of the global fall in various commodities from aluminium to zinc, is good news for policymakers as stubbornly high inflation has hindered moves to cut interest rates. Expectations of higher farm output after last year's slump would also boost overall economic growth, economists said.

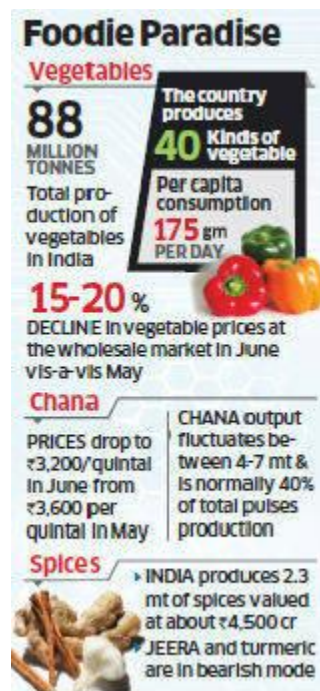
The fall in vegetable prices in the past month has been the steepest in recent times. Prices had shot up in previous years because of erratic rainfall, particularly in 2012 when rainfall was 30% below normal in June.

"Prices of most vegetables have fallen because productivity has increased this year. Most farmers in south India and Maharashtra have used low-cost drip irrigation, raising the moisture

level of the soil by 50-75%. Prices are not expected to go up this month. And if monsoon remains normal, we do not foresee prices to climb," said Shriram Gadhave, president of the All India Vegetable Growers Association.

In the wholesale market, vegetable, chana, spices and poultry feed fell 15-20% over the last weekend.

At the retail end, prices have dropped 8-10%. In Delhi's Azadpur mandi , Asia's largest wholesale market, prices of vegetables have declined as arrivals have improved from neighbouring states. "Production has been good in the adjoining areas of Delhi and arrivals have improved. Prices at the wholesale level are down 15-20%," said Subash Chugh, owner of Subash Vegetable Trading.



In Delhi's wholesale market, prices of vegetables ranged from Rs5-8/kg for cucumber to Rs3-6/kg for pumpkin and Rs6-7/kg for onion. In Kerala, where the monsoon arrived on June 1, prices of farm commodities have started moving downwards. Jitin Raj, owner of vegetable trading firm Amal Traders, said: "Vegetable prices have gone down at least 10-15%. The cooling-off effect will continue if the monsoon remains good."

In Bengal, prices of most vegetables have come down except tomato. Soumen Manna, a vegetable trader from Kolkata, said tomato prices are high as the local crop has dwindled. With the Met department declaring onset of monsoon in Kerala as per schedule, it had a notable effect on chana prices, which fell from Rs3,600 per quintal to Rs3,200 per quintal in a month.

If monsoon's here, can sowing preparations be far behind?

Preparations for the sowing of paddy, soyabean, pulses and cotton are on full swing with the timely arrival of the monsoon, raising hopes of a bigger harvest of grains this year. Deficient and erratic rains in the previous season is expected to impact grain production in the 2012-13 crop year (July-June) to 252.36 million tonne from 259.32 million tonne in 2011-12.

"Rains will be a big relief to farmers, people and government," said Ashish Bahuguna, secretary, department of agriculture and cooperation. He said the timely arrival of rains will help

Maharashtra farmers to plant cotton, groundnut, millets, soya and pulses by the month-end. "We have reviewed the preparations for kharif sowing," he said.

Till May 31, farmers planted rice, cotton and other kharif crops on over 6.48 million hectare according to the agriculture ministry's data. On June 4, the southwest monsoon further advanced towards parts of central Arabian Sea, Goa, parts of south Konkan, south central Maharashtra, Telangana, south coastal AP, south interior Karnataka, Rayalaseema, north interior Karnataka and some parts of central Bay of Bengal.

Farmers have started preparing the land for paddy sowing and raising nurseries across the south. In Maharashtra and parts of Karnataka, farmers have started preparing the land for seeding sorghum, bajra, ragi and black gram. "Our focus is to increase oilseed and pulses sowing. Acreage under moong, urad and arhar should rise across Karnataka, Maharashtra, AP, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh," said Bahuguna.

In the irrigated belts of Punjab and Haryana, farmers have raised nurseries and will take up transplanting by the second week of June. Ramesh Chand, director, National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy Research, said a good monsoon would largely benefit paddy growers. "Over 42% of the area under paddy is rainfed across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal," he said.

With nearly two-thirds of farms dependent on rain, a good monsoon is the lifeline for farmers and food security of the country. The country saw below-normal monsoon in 2002, 2004, 2009 and 2012, which impacted sowing pattern, yield and production. After paddy, soyabean is the second largest cultivable crop followed by cotton and arhar and moong. Millets or coarse cereals like bajra and jowar are also sown in rain-fed areas of Maharashtra and Karnataka.

"Acreage will definitely increase by 5-7% if the rains are on time and are equally distributed," said Rajesh Agrawal, chief coordinator for Soyabean Processors Association of India. Sowing will begin by June end across Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, AP, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The area under cotton is also expected to rise, largely in Gujarat this season, according to Dhiren Sheth, president of the Cotton Association of India.

India, the world's second largest cotton exporter and producer, plants on an average 11-12 million hectares during the early to late kharif season across nine states.

Prices of vegetables & spices crash upto 20% due to the brisk start to monsoon

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The drop in vegetable prices, on top of the global fall in various commodities from aluminium to zinc, is good news for policymakers as stubbornly high inflation has hindered moves to cut interest rates. Expectations of higher farm output after last year's slump would also boost overall economic growth, economists said.

The fall in vegetable prices in the past month has been the steepest in recent times. Prices had shot up in previous years because of erratic rainfall, particularly in 2012 when rainfall was 30% below normal in June.

Monsoon stalls, but may keep its date

The Southwest Monsoon hit south Maharashtra on Tuesday, but there is still time before it hits the city, the weather department has said.

According to the evening bulletin of the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), the monsoon had covered entire Goa, some parts of south Konkan and south-Madhya Maharashtra, Telangana and south coastal Andhra Pradesh, remaining parts of south interior Karnataka and Rayalaseema; most parts of north interior Karnataka and some more parts of central Bay of Bengal.

Technically, the monsoon should have advanced over Mumbai in the next two days. However, owing to certain weather conditions over Arabian Sea, the monsoon is not likely to advance much in the next few days.

"There is an active circulation over the Arabian Sea. Because of its influence, the monsoon is likely to stall for a few days. It will only advance further from the current position after 3-4 days," said Dr Medha Khole, deputy director general of meteorology (weather forecast), IMD, Pune.

The monsoon has already been stalled once this year in the Andaman Sea, when it had not

even hit the Indian subcontinent. "The monsoon had hit the Andaman Sea on May 17—three days before the normal date of onset. It was stuck at the Andaman Sea and moved only a little further in the Bay of Bengal till May 30. It moved in leaps thereafter," said Khole.

While the monsoon should ideally hit Mumbai on June 10 after hitting Kerala on June 1, it generally reaches the city after the second week of June. While in 2011, the monsoon had hit Mumbai on June 5, last year, it had arrived on June 17.

The city can still keep their fingers crossed for an early monsoon. Ideally, the monsoon should hit the Karnataka coast by June 5. But this time, not only did the monsoon hit Karnataka on June 1, it also covered the entire Karnataka coast by June 3. By this calculation, the monsoon can hit the city in the next five days.

The met department has said that the monsoon is likely to keep its date with both Pune and Mumbai this time. "The normal date for the onset of the monsoon is June 7 in Pune and June 10 in Mumbai. In both the cities, the monsoon is likely to hit near the normal dates," she said.

Kitchen water for the greens

The C-9 resident welfare association of Vasant Kunj has joined a handful of sectors in the area to install kitchen waste water system. Residents will be collecting, treating and using waste water from 12 flats to water the central park.

The project, inaugurated by chief minister Sheila Dikshit, was launched on Monday. AK Upadhyay, vice-president of the RWA, said each flat in the sector is generating 200-300 litres of kitchen waste daily. "In an effort to keep our colony parks green without using groundwater, the RWA has installed the zero energy kitchen waste water system. Through a series of filter screens, settlement tanks and grease traps, impurities will be removed from the waste water. Up to 3,000 litres of treated waste water will be generated each day," he said.

Tree count up, but plantation dips

While driving on highways, one would have noticed that the tree cover along roads and canals has thinned. Indeed, plantation along roads has gone down by nearly 15-20% owing to road-widening and infrastructure projects.

Officials of the forest department said that the tree count taken up in the 2008-09 period

revealed that there were 26.9 crore trees in the state. And a recent count suggested that the count had crossed the 30 crore mark, an increase of 11.52%. But, interestingly, the 2011 report of the Forest Survey of India revealed that there was a fall in the tree count outside forest areas. However, the forest department said that data for 12 districts had reflected an increase of 12-15%.

Officials in the forest department said that the Gujarat data was more reliable than the Forest Survey of India's data. "Satellites can't study trees lined along roads, canals, and scattered in fields, which should be looked at as well to understand the total tree count," an official said. "The forest department carried out field sampling and used statistical analysis by dividing the state into zones and type of vegetation."

The official said that the increase in tree cover was mainly along fields because farmers had linked economics with tree plantation. "Several farmers are now growing trees on the boundary of their fields and then selling them at regular intervals," the official said. "This helps them earn some extra money and also increases the tree cover."

World Environment Day 2013: TOI green seminar today

The Times of India will organize a World Environment Day forum on Wednesday, where experts from different fields will discuss environment issues in context of Odisha. The event also aims at spreading awareness on Think.Eat.Save, an anti-food waste campaign, of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for this year.

Odisha forest and environment minister Bijayshree Routray will be chief guest at the inaugural function while Nalco CMD Ansuman Das and JSPL MD and state head Subrat Ratho will be the guests of honour.

There would be two sessions. Prominent personalities such as principal of Swosti School of Social Science Hemant Suar, state head of UNDP Ambika Prasad Nanda, vice-president of Mayfair Group Pooja Ray and Sanghmitra Nayak from SOA University will analyse the UNEP sustainable consumption theme, in the first session. In the second, former forest and environment secretary Arabind Behera, Nalco's Jiban Mohapatra and former Odisha State Pollution Control Board chairman C R Dash will analyse environment in Odisha context.

World Environment Day 2013: Nurseries see brisk sale as environment awareness rises

On the eve of World Environment Day on Tuesday, an upsurge was witnessed in the number of visitors at the private nurseries for saplings and plants of different varieties. The enhanced awareness about the green cover and its advantages brought many people to the city nurseries for buying various seasonal flowering plants like 'Naurang', Sunflower, 'Kochia' to name a few.

Interestingly, the demand for indoor plants was more as most people wanted plants which could be kept inside their drawing rooms. At the same time, those having lawns and some open space at their home bought saplings of seasonal plants.

The view behind the increase in the sale of saplings was that only flowering plants and trees can save the environment and human generation from getting extinct. Though this part of the year is tough to maintain greenery in the garden or in park due to scorching heat, however, with a little extra care it was possible to plant saplings, said nursery owners.

Talking to TOI, one Suman, who was buying a number of seasonal flowering plants and flower pots along with her mother said she had come to the nursery to buy plants on the occasion of World Environment Day on June 5. "At a time when there is a sharp decline in the forest cover and greenery, there is a need to maintain the ecological balance and plant saplings. Keeping this concept in mind I have come here to buy some saplings to plant in my lawn at home," she said.

Suman's mother said that they were nature lovers and realised the importance of plants and trees. They bought six large flower pots and a number of saplings.

Speaking on the similar lines, another buyer at this nursery in Saket Nagar said trees are lifelines for humans and cannot be ignored. "For me everyday is World Environment Day. I am a frequent visitor at the nursery and come here to buy saplings, flower pots or fertilisers. I have a small garden which I maintain as it gives me extreme pleasure."

Shatrughan Singh Bihari, the nursery owner, who had been in this business for last 18 years, told TOI, "The demand for the seasonal plants is high these days. The people are becoming aware about the importance of plants and trees and therefore, a number of people come to my nursery each day. The nursery business in the city is rising only because people have good

knowledge about plants these days."

He added that people visit nurseries round the year as there are several flowering plants which can be planted anytime during the year. "The flowering plants like Genda, Chandani, Bela remain in demand throughout the year. People having open space or a lawn shop for such flowering plants. The low cost of the saplings is also responsible for the rise in their sale. Most saplings are available for Rs 5 to 10," said Shatrughan further.

He added that the visitor strength increases during the rainy and the winter season but for the past few years, rush remains high during the summers also. He said people know well how to take care of the saplings as they want to make their surroundings beautiful.

Green enthusiasts starts helpline for plantation in Gujarat's Jamnagar

Planting a tree is just a phone call away in Jamnagar! In a unique initiative, Go Green, a group of young environment enthusiasts, has decided to enhance the green cover by starting a dedicated helpline for plantation. Those wanting to plant trees but don't have the time or know-how have to simply dial the helpline. On getting the call, Go Green members come and plant the trees.

In the last year or so, the group has planted around 500 trees in the city, which is not exactly known for its green cover. A recent study by state forest department showed that the green cover in Jamnagar was very poor and needs to be improved at least three times the present numbers which is around 12.9 per hectare. Also, the city has just 8.7 trees per 100 persons.

Go Green consists of 20 members, mostly into various businesses including logistics, shipping and brass parts.

"As soon as we receive a call, our team reaches the area and inspects the site where the sapling could be planted. We also take care that the plantation is not done by the roadside, lest it increases the chances of damage," said Manoj Goyal, vice-president of group.

Go Green members also design special tree guards made from bamboo to protect the saplings.

Interestingly, though it costs around Rs 450 to plant a sapling, the group does not charge for the work. "However, if someone wants to pay, we do collect the money and use it for the same purpose," said Dipen Shah, president of the group.

Their team regularly visits the areas where they have planted trees to ensure that people are taking adequate care.

"Some days ago, we got to know that nobody was watering around 25 saplings we had planted, about 22 km from the city. We started water supply through a mini water tanker immediately," he added.

Rajkot: Planting a tree is just a phone call away in Jamnagar! In a unique initiative, Go Green, a group of young environment enthusiasts, has decided to enhance the green cover by starting a dedicated helpline for plantation. Those wanting to plant trees but don't have the time or know-how have to simply dial the helpline. On getting the call, Go Green members come and plant the trees.

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After white revolution, dairy cooperatives aim for green cover

After being the vanguard of India's white revolution, dairy cooperatives of Gujarat have been engaged in the green revolution. Both the major dairies of north Gujarat - Banas Dairy of Palanpur and Dudhsagar Dairy of Mehsana - have shown the way in greening a desolate landscape.

"We have over 2,000 trees on a land that was barren a few years back," says Sanjay Karamchandani, the managing director of Banas Dairy, the biggest dairy in Asia. "Of the 5,370 trees we planted, 2,000 have come up over the past few years. Banas Dairy has grown 992 neem trees on its open land."

Deputy manager (civil) Dudhsagar Dairy, Mehsana, Nagajibhai Chaudhary, said: "We have 3,000 trees on our premises including neem trees that have come up over the past couple of years."

The dairy cooperatives are concerned about environmental imbalances, Chaudhary said. "The cooperatives observe the Environment Day on June 5 every year and plant trees," he said. "Yet hardly 15 per cent survive in the long run."

Both dairies have been growing trees for the past 30 years and now the trees have turned into massive shade-giving structures, says Karmchandani. "Once you enter the dairy's compound, you feel a tinge of a hill station with a difference of 5 degrees celsius from the outside temperature."

Banaskantha falls in the desert zone and tree planting needs special care, said Satish

Pansuriya in charge of training centre at Banas Dairy. "We have to work in a hostile climate," he said. One can hear the chirping sounds of the different birds within the thick groves of trees."

Besides neem, Asoka, Borsali Chiku and Jamun are common at both dairies.

hindustantimes

Chennai – INDIA

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Wednesday, Jun 5

Max Min

36° | 27°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:41

Humidity: 62

Sunset: 06:33

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1006

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

Thursday, Jun 6

Max Min

36° | 27°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Jun 7

Jun 8

Jun 9

Jun 10

Jun 11



33° | 26°

Cloudy



35° | 26°

Overcast



35° | 26°

Overcast



34° | 25°

Overcast



32° | 25°

Overcast

Airport Weather

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:41

Humidity: 62

Sunset: 06:33

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1006

Sowing the seeds of activity with gardening in Mumbai

Deonar resident Sugosh Vardarajan, 35, was looking for ways to give a new lease of life to a long-forgotten hobby as frequent travelling for business left him little time for his garden. At HT's No TV Day kitchen gardening workshop and nature trail, Vardarajan found just what he wanted along with 20 other participants — the simplest ways to maintain a garden.

At Bombay Natural History Society's (BNHS) Conservation Education Centre (CEC) in Goregaon, participants explored deciduous forests abutting Sanjay Gandhi National Park and learnt tricks of kitchen gardening.

Participants listened with rapt attention as CEC's senior education officer Priti Chogale introduced them to a variety of medicinal plants, herbs and quirky trees such as the 'Ghost Tree'. "Visiting the CEC centre was a novel experience. My daughter Ananya was thrilled to see various insects and butterflies," said Vardarajan, a software engineer.

For Dina Hiranandani and wife Vandana, this was their first visit to CEC. "We have been to tiger reserves and sanctuaries, but never to CEC. The serenity of the place is great and thanks to No TV Day, we stepped out of our home for this activity," said Vandana.

Chana rises as buyers show interest

Improved buying support at lower rate perked up chana prices marginally to Rs 3,350 a quintal. Chana (desi) ruled at Rs 3,000-Rs 3,100 a quintal, chana (mausmi) at Rs 3,300 and Kabuli Bitki ruled at Rs 3,000-Rs 3,100 a quintal. Weak demand and rise in arrivals had dragged chana prices to as low as Rs 3,250 a quintal on Monday. However, with the rise in futures later in the evening on Tuesday, chana prices climbed up to Rs 3,300 a quintal.

Compared to last week, however, chana is ruling lower by Rs 125 a quintal.

Due to poor demand in pulses on account of the marriage season, buying support in chana from the millers had declined in the past few weeks, leading to sharp fall in prices. However, in the past one week, improved buying support has lifted prices by over Rs 100 a quintal.

Decline in spot chana also dragged its dal down by Rs 25 with chana dal (average) in local mandis on Tuesday being quoted at Rs 3900-Rs 3925 a quintal, chana dal (average) at Rs 4,000-Rs 4,025 a quintal, while chana dal (bold) declined to Rs 4,175-Rs 4,200. Compared to last week, chana dal is up Rs 50-Rs 75 a quintal.

On the other hand, dollar chana continued to trade low on sluggish domestic demand. In local mandis, dollar chana on Tuesday ruled at Rs 3,500-Rs 3,800 a quintal amid arrival of 9,000-10,000 bags in Indore mandis.

Compared to last week, dollar chana is down Rs 200 a quintal.

In container also, dollar chana declined by Rs 100 on slack export demand with dollar chana (42/44 count) in container on Tuesday being quoted at Rs 4,950-75 a quintal, dollar chana (44/46 count) at Rs 4,725-50, 46/48 count ruled at Rs 4,525-50, while 58/60 count ruled at Rs 3,625-50 a quintal. Compared to last week, dollar chana is down by Rs 200 a quintal in the container.

Total arrival of dollar chana in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday was recorded at 36,000- 38,000 bags.

Groundnut oil falls on poor demand

Groundnut oil took a hit on Tuesday because of weak retail demand at the higher levels.

According to traders, prices may decline further as buyers are also not willing to buy at the current level.

Groundnut oil new tin for 15 kg decreased by Rs 15 to Rs 1,855-1,860, *teliya* tin traded at Rs 1,617-1,618 for 15 kg and loose stood at Rs 1,050-1,055 for 10 kg. About four to five tankers were traded in Saurashtra's mills.

Rajkot-based edible oil trader said that demand declined after the price rise last weekend. Cotton oil remained unchanged. Cotton oil wash traded at Rs 617-620 for 10 kg and cotton oil new tin 15 kg was Rs 1,090-1,100. About 25-30 tankers of cotton oil were traded.

HPS Saurashtra origin bold 50-60 count was offered at Rs 73,500 a tonne and Rajasthan origin 50-60 count at 72,500 (ex-mill) and Tamil Nadu origin 80-90 count HPS at Rs 68,000-68,500 (Chennai and Mumbai port delivery).

Supply 15 lakh cottonseed packets, AP tells Mahyco

State pegs seed demand at 1.31 crore packets

The Andhra Pradesh Government has asked Mahyco to ensure supply of 15 lakh packets (of 450 grams each) of cottonseed for the ensuing kharif season.

Besides, it has decided to take up a State-wide campaign to tell farmers that seeds from other companies are as good and not to excessively depend on Mahyco's seeds.

Keeping in view huge demand for the seeds of this company last year, the Government had discussed the issue with Mahyco's representatives recently. "We have strictly told them that the quantity should not fall short of 15 lakh packets. Last year, we could manage to get six lakh packets from them as against their promise of four lakh packets," Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Minister Kanna Lakshminarayana told *Business Line*.

Cotton farmers, particularly in Telangana region, sought to sow certain hybrid varieties of Mahyco, creating a huge pressure on the seed sellers.

The State sowed cotton in 22 lakh hectares as against the average acreage of 15 lakh ha last year. It even exceeded paddy acreage for the first time in the history the State. The State expects a demand for 1.31 crore packets of Bt cottonseed in the kharif. But the availability is put 87 lakh packets only, leaving a shortfall of about 40 lakh packets. The Government, however, is confident of meeting the shortfall.

The country is saddled with about eight crore packets stock as against the expected demand of four crore packets. But the problem is, the demand is high for a handful of varieties.

"We have asked the university (Acharya N.G. Ranga Agriculture University) to study the efficacy of different varieties. It found that there are several other varieties too perform well. We are going to tell the farmers not to bet their lot only on one variety," the Minister said.

Meanwhile, Mahyco said it was well prepared to meet the target set by the State Government.

“We need to supply a minimum of 14.54 lakh packets in the State as against the last year’s kharif supply of 6. 21 lakh packets. As of June 1, we have already supplied 15.70 lakh packets, far more than the quantities mentioned in the sales plan submitted to the government,” a Mahyco spokesperson said.

Kerala planters’ body seeks curbs on rubber imports



Concerned over rising natural rubber imports, the Association of Planters of Kerala has urged the Centre to allow duty free import of only the actual quantity of the raw material that goes into an exported product.

In a statement, the association said that in reality, the actual usage of natural rubber in a product has been cut drastically with the advancement in technology.

Therefore, the Government should revise the standard input-output norms to reflect the actual usage of rubber in an exported product.

The association said that it was high time the Government looked into revising the tariff structure for importing rubber.

“The existing tariff structure was derived by keeping RSS 3 Bangkok price as reference. But almost eight per cent of the total exports are in the form of technically specified rubber from Indonesia and Vietnam,” association Chairman Y. Raghavan said.

Technically-specified rubber is cheaper quality rubber and even after payment of import duty, it works out to be lower than domestic rubber prices, he said.

Though the Government plans to increase import duty on rubber to Rs 34.20 a kg from Rs 20, growers are unlikely to benefit as over 85 per cent of the imports are made through the advance licensing route. Under this route, imports are made duty-free against export of rubber products.

Raghavan said that rubber growers in Kerala, which accounts for over 90 per cent of the total output in the country, were facing crisis since prices have dropped by nearly 50 per cent in the last two years.

“At the same time, labour wages have increased 61 per cent and costs of other raw materials have increased by 40-50 per cent,” he said, adding that this called for support from the Union and State Governments.

The association denied that there was any short-supply in rubber since over two lakh tonnes stocks were available.

On Tuesday, prices of RSS4 were up marginally at Rs 170. Its equivalent RSS3 at Bangkok was quoted at around Rs 165.

The user industry says that imports have been made since there was short-supply. The problem, according the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers’ Association, is that though statistics show huge stocks being available in the country, they are actually not available.

Rubber dealers also say that stocks are not available either with the growers or with the users.

Keep latex collection cups inverted: Rubber Board

The Rubber Board has asked all rubber growers to take steps to keep the latex collection cups in the inverted position after collecting latex, during the monsoon period.

This is because rainwater getting collected in the cups is a good medium for breeding of mosquitoes.

When tapping is carried out uninterruptedly, there is no chance for the water to remain in the cups for long. But as the monsoon has set in, tapping operations may be disturbed for weeks or months together, thereby, leading to proliferation of mosquitoes in rubber plantations. Rainwater may also get collected in the folds of plastic rain guards fixed on the trees and, in the old and damaged collection cups left discarded in the plantations.

Spot rubber firm on supply concerns

Physical rubber prices were firm on Tuesday. Prices improved mainly on supply concerns though the reports from the futures markets were not so impressive. “There is a visible decline in arrivals as we are passing through the initial days of the South-West monsoon,” sources said. Meanwhile, the key Tokyo rubber futures improved on bargain hunting at lower levels but a strong yen limited the gains during late trades.

In spot, sheet rubber increased to Rs 170 (Rs 169) a kg at Kottayam and Kochi, according to traders and the Rubber Board. The trend was partially mixed and volume low.

June futures inched up to Rs 169.87 (Rs 169.45) while the July futures weakened to Rs 167.07 (Rs 167.39), August to Rs 164.30 (Rs 164.63), September to Rs 161.71 (Rs 162.25), October to Rs 161.71 (Rs 163.57) and November to Rs 159.28 (Rs 164) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. June futures closed to ¥ 250.0 (Rs 141.08) on Tokyo Commodity Exchange

Spot rubber rates Rs/kg were: RSS-4: 170 (169); RSS-5: 166 (165); Ungraded: 156.50 (156); ISNR 20: 157 (156) and Latex 60%: 108 (108).

Cashew kernels rule firm

Activities in the cashew market for most of May were limited. However, during the middle of the month, some processors, mainly from Vietnam and some from India, reduced prices significantly.

Reasonable volume was traded for June-July shipments at \$3.70-3.80 for W240 and \$3.15-3.25 for W320. China is reported to have bought reasonable quantities in Vietnam, trade sources in Mumbai said. After the decline in middle of May, kernel prices have stabilised and the undertone is steady. Last week, prices were W240: \$3.75-3.85; W320: \$3.20-3.40; W450: \$3.00-3.10; SW320: \$2.90-3.00; SW360: \$2.80-2.90; Butts: \$2.30-2.40; Splits: \$2.20-2.30 and Pieces: \$1.50-1.60 a lb (f.o.b.).

At the International Nut Council recently in Barcelona, the mood of the cashew sector was 'cautious optimism'.

There are indications of slight revival in retail off take in the US and the EU in the last few weeks, Pankaj N. Sampat, a dealer, told *Business Line*.

Raw cashew nuts (RCN) prices have also come off in May due to lack of buying interest from shellers and coupled with funding constraints and lower quality of RCN. Current prices are \$700-750 a tonne for Ivory Coast (IVC) and \$900-950 for Bissau/Senegal/Gambia. "We expect that market will continue to move in the current \$3.20-3.40 range for the next month or two".

Fresh monsoon pulse to bring rain to West Coast this week

The forecast phase of expansive monsoon from the weekend is very much in the making, with a fresh wave of rains projected to approach the West Coast soon. A long-persisting low-pressure area off Oman coast flared up on Tuesday, taking away clouds and moisture and holding back intensity of rain over India's West Coast.

Fresh rain-maker 'low's are expected to spring up over both Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, international weather models indicated.

CYCLONIC WHIRLS

India Met Department said on Tuesday that preparatory upper air cyclonic circulations have formed over South Bay and West-central Arabian Sea.

Rains over the West Coast and adjoining interior would prosper despite even the fresh Arabian Sea 'low' moving away yet again to Oman coast.

European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting showed another system parked over North Arabian Sea off the Gujarat coast next week.

Australian Bureau of Meteorology said that the monsoon onset over the Kerala coast was facilitated by a weak Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) wave.

NEGATIVE PHASE

The MJO wave passes high periodically over the Indian Ocean from west to east and sets off clouding, rain and storms, apart from monsoon onsets.

This wave may now be developing and gaining in strength, which explains the fresh wave of expected rain across South Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.

The Australian bureau also said that a negative phase of Indian Ocean Dipole was developing, which has already led Japanese counterparts to doubt the health and prospects of the monsoon.

Four of the five models surveyed point to a negative Indian Ocean Dipole, the bureau said.

This phase of the dipole represents rapid warming of the East Indian Ocean off Sumatra, prompting monsoon flows to stream in and rain out moisture at India's expense.

WEAK LA NINA

The Japanese agency suspected that even June rains could take a hit.

The Australian bureau also concurred with the view that a mild La Nina, a warming trend in the Pacific normally favourable to Indian monsoon, may be evolving.

India Met Department said on Tuesday that the offshore trough, an elongated area of low pressure that acts as a receptacle for monsoon moisture, ran down from Konkan coast to North Kerala coast.

Presence of the trough indicates 'active' monsoon conditions along the West Coast.

Quality turmeric gains colour



With orders likely to flow in only by the end of this month, turmeric sales continued to be tardy in Erode markets on Tuesday.

Though arrivals increased to over 3,500 bags, only 50 per cent was sold. “Local traders procured about 1,000 bags of quality turmeric to fulfil their local orders. The remaining was purchased by stockists. But prices continue to be lower, hovering around Rs 7,000 a quintal,” said R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchant Association.

He said that one or two upcountry orders were received by exporters, but these turned out unfeasible. They are expecting fresh orders only by the end of this month.

To date, no sowing has been made in Kalingarayan and Lower Bhavani Project ayacut areas due to non-release of water in the canals. The groundwater level in all these areas has fallen sharply.

Because of the arrival of fine variety turmeric in the regulated market, the price of some offers increased by Rs 400 a quintal.

Similarly, the rate of quality hybrid turmeric increased by Rs 200. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,586-6844 a quintal and the root variety at Rs 4,391-6,285 a quintal.

Salem Hybrid Crop: The finger variety sold at Rs 5,606-7,809 a quintal and the root variety at Rs 5,316-6,441. Of the 1,325 bags that arrived, only 40 per cent was sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger variety went for Rs 6,351-7,230, and the root variety for Rs 5,199-6,169. Of the 306 bags on offer, 258 got sold.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety sold at Rs 5,691-7,036, and the root variety at Rs 5,528-6,230.

Of the 576 bags put up on sale, 416 found takers.

Edible oils seen cooling on timely monsoon



The edible oils market turned weak trend on Tuesday, tracking bearish futures markets and need-based physical demand. Groundnut oil dropped by Rs 25 for 10 kg on bearish reports from Saurashtra, where it declined by Rs 20-25 as sales increased on hopes of a timely

monsoon. Imported palmolein and soyabean refined oil declined by Rs 2 each due to lack of demand. An observer said: "Malaysian palm oil futures fell on Tuesday, tracking weaker soyabean oil, although losses were contained by expectations that inventories would drop further in Malaysia. Soyabean fell for the first time in three sessions on profit-booking, pulling down both soyabean oil and competing palm oil.

During the day, about 150–200 tonnes of palmolein were traded in resale at Rs 507-508. Local refineries kept their rates unchanged. About 78,000- 80,000 soyabean bags arrived, including 35,000 bags in Madhya Pradesh. Prices were Rs 3,700- Rs 3,720 ex-mandi and Rs 3,810-Rs 3,820 for plant delivery. Mustard seed arrivals were 2.10 lakh bags and the prices were Rs 3,100 – Rs3,590. Malaysia crude palm oil July contracts settled lower at MYR 2,366 (MYR 2,390), August at MYR 2,375 (MYR 2,396) and September at MYR 2,376 (MYR 2,397) a tonne.

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg): groundnut oil 1,075 (1,100), soya refined oil 666 (668), sunflower exp. ref. 675 (675), sunflower ref. 765 (765), rapeseed ref. oil 695 (695), rapeseed expeller ref. 665 (665) cottonseed ref. oil 643 (643) and palmolein 508 (510). Vikram Global Commodities, Chennai quoted Malaysian super palmolein at Rs 568 ex-Chennai.

Long-term contracts in pepper gain



The pepper market witnessed a mixed trend following a decline in the running contract (June that is nearing its maturity, while other active contracts showed an uptrend on Tuesday. The supply has been affected due to rain in several growing areas of Kerala. Arrivals from Karnataka also slowed down. There was good demand for both high and low grade pepper from exporters and processors, market sources told *Business Line*.

High bulk density Rajakumari pepper of Idukki district was offered at Rs 350 a kg, while buyers were willing to buy it only at Rs 347 a kg. Growers said that there were buyers offering Rs 345 a

kg (on cash and carry basis), which would work out to Rs 350 a kg when the material is taken to the terminal market. Following reports of the South-West monsoon hitting Kerala, major upcountry dealers have become active and consequently inquiries have started coming in, they said. On the spot, around 22 tonnes of pepper arrived and 25 tonnes of the material were traded afloat. Due to the showers in the pepper regions, stocks have a high moisture content of up to 13.5 per cent, traders said. June contracts decreased by Rs 230 to Rs 35,470 a quintal. July contracts moved up by Rs 320 a quintal to Rs 36,220 and August went up by Rs 100 a quintal to Rs 36,100. Total open interest dropped by 15 tonnes. Total turnover decreased by 7 tonnes to 62 tonnes.

Spot prices remained unchanged at Rs 33,700 (ungarbled) and Rs 35,200 (MG 1) a quintal on matching demand and supply. Indian parity in the international market was at \$6,450 a tonne (c&f) for June shipments for Europe and \$6,650 a tonne (c&f) for the US.

Higher supply could keep sugar on leash



Sugar prices on the Vashi wholesale were mixed trend on Tuesday even as the undercurrent was firm, sources said. Prices for S- grade increased by Rs 35 at the lower end, while it declined by Rs 21 a quintal at the higher end. The M-grade dropped by Rs 10.

Naka rates increased by Rs 10 for S-grade and ruled unchanged for the M-grade. Mill tender rates were steady as producers continued selling on routine demand.

A wholesaler said that as long as supply outstripped demand, sugar prices will remain under pressure. Demand at the beginning of the month improved but continuous supply from producers and sufficient inventory (more than 100 truckloads in the market) kept stockists away from fresh bulk bets. Due to the higher production, sugar prices have declined by over Rs 200 in

Vashi since January this year. In the Vashi market on Tuesday, arrivals were about 63-64 truckloads (each 100 bags) and local dispatches were around 62-63 loads.

On Monday, about 18- 20 mills offered tenders and sold 68,000-70,000 bags to local traders at Rs 2,930-2,990 (Rs.2,920-Rs2,990) for S-grade and Rs 3,000-Rs 3,090 (Rs 3,000- 3,090) for M-grade.

In the domestic futures market, sugar prices extended gains for the third consecutive day on expectations of higher festival demand in the coming months.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, July futures were higher at Rs 3,089 (Rs 3,088), August by Rs 4 at Rs 3,139 (Rs 3,135) and September inched up by Rs 8 at Rs 3,181 (Rs 3,173) till noon.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates : S-grade Rs 3,080– Rs 3,130 (Rs 3,046– Rs 3,151) and M-grade Rs 3,152-3,331 (Rs 3,162- 3,341).

Naka delivery rates: S-grade Rs 3,030 -3,070 (Rs 3,020-3,060) and M-grade Rs 3,100-3,200 (Rs 3,100-3,200).

Wheat likely to rule firm on low inventories



Dara wheat prices are likely to rule firm around current levels in the coming days. Low availability of stocks coupled with good domestic demand pushed dara wheat further up on Tuesday.

Around 1,000 bags of wheat arrived at the Karnal Grain Market Terminal on Tuesday for procurement by private traders.

In the physical market, dara wheat went further up by Rs 10 and sold at Rs 1,485-1,490 a quintal. Mill deliveries were at Rs 1,475 a quintal, while delivery at chakkis was at Rs 1,480 a quintal. Desi wheat variety sold at Rs 2,300 a quintal.

Radhey Sham, a trade expert, told *Business Line* that fresh buying by flour mills helped dal prices climb up. Wheat and flour prices are likely to rule around current levels without much fluctuation this week, he said, as domestic demand props up the market.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, wheat for June contracts decreased by Rs 7 and traded at 1,594 a quintal with an open interest of 15,310 lots. The grain had hit a low at Rs 1,590 a quintal earlier in the day.

July contracts went down by Rs 2 to Rs 1,620 a quintal, while wheat spot prices on the exchange traded at Rs 1,450 a quintal.

Flour Prices

Despite an uptrend in wheat, flour continued to rule flat and quoted at Rs 1,700 a quintal. Similarly, Chokar ruled flat and sold at Rs 1,250-1,275 a quintal.

Coconut oil up on lower copra arrivals



Coconut oil prices continued to firm up this week in Kerala and Tamil Nadu with the onset of monsoon.

Prices in Kerala are ruling at Rs 64 a kg (Rs 63) and in Tamil Nadu, they were Rs 61 a kg against Rs 60 quoted in the previous week.

Copra prices also shot up by Rs 200 a quintal, touching Rs 4,600 in Kerala and Rs 4,450 in Tamil Nadu.

Prakash B. Rao, Vice-President, Cochin Oil Merchants Association, said that despite prices firming up, local sales have come down in Kerala due to rains. Prices of other edible oils have also gone up, with palm oil touching Rs 54 a kg and palm kernel oil, Rs 56 a kg.

Few enquiries

There are few enquiries from upcountry buyers, a major concern for the industry. Rao said that prices are likely to sustain if Government agencies start copra procurement in Tamil Nadu soon,

as the season has already started in the State. The market may witness a reversal if there is no proper support from Government agencies, he said.

Thalath Mahamood, former President of the same association, said the onset of monsoon has affected copra arrivals from terminal markets and this has led to a price rise.

However, the market has been buoyed by the decision of some leading corporates to procure copra by paying an additional amount of Rs 100 a quintal, he said.

Sudden spurt

Bharat N. Khona, former Board Member of the association, said that though there is a sudden spurt in the market, there is no upcountry demand at higher levels.

There is a slight improvement in the market due to an increase in edible oil prices.

The market, according to him, is witnessing a speculative mood with prices of loose oil now ruling at Rs 940 for 15 kg against Rs 860 quoted last week.

Business Standard

Meghalaya farmers to get benefit from central project

The Centre plans to link over 5000 farmers with experts directly using their mobile phones

Over 5000 farmers in Meghalaya's three districts -Ri-bhoi, East Khasi Hills and West Garo Hills - are all set to benefit from a pilot project of the Centre in which farmers would be linked with experts directly using their mobile phones, officials said.

The pilot project, an outcome of the comprehensive need assessment study among 1381 farmers across 12 states and 26 major Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) initiatives, is aimed at empowering farmers by providing right information through a mobile-based agro advisory system.

Advisory on agricultural and Horticultural produces such as rice, Khasi mandarin, pineapple, ginger, vegetables and other crops would be made available in the system which is set to be formally launched on June 8.

In the first phase, 25 villages in Ri-Bhoi district have been selected while in the second phase about 20 villages in East Khasi Hills and five in West Garo Hills have been selected, V K Bhatia, project director said.

Implemented by the College of Post Graduate Studies, Umiam of the Central Agricultural University, the project will be assisted by the Media lab Asia as IT partner.

The system allows transmitting data through voice, text and images between the farmers and the experts, a senior research associate of the project said.

One of the basic advantages of the system is that it would have a centralized database of farmers and their historical data including the type of farming and previous interactions, he said.

Among the important component of the project is one where there is a facility to refer critical problems to relevant crop specialists available virtually and live interaction with scientists, an ICAR official said.

Based on the success of the project in Meghalaya, it is likely that the Centre would extend similar services to farmers in other states in the north east as well, they said.