

Farmers anxiously wait for monsoon revival



Lull in monsoon activity causing concern in Kolar district

Farmers in Kolar district, which is facing drought for the last four years, are preparing their land for sowing.

A large number of farmers have ploughed their land expecting rain. However, the lull in monsoon activity is causing concern among them. Several parts of the district received rain in the first week of June raising the hopes of the farmers. But that didn't last long.

The intermittent spells of rain have not been of much help for sowing.

Farmers are expecting that monsoon may revive towards the end of the month.

Although scanty rainfall has triggered apprehensions among the people that drought may continue, the authorities have allayed such fears.

Farmers took up ploughing in April and May last year in expectation of rain in June. That did not happen, and a similar situation is being seen this year too making farmers a worried lot.

Rain received till June 3 last year was 161.8 mm. This year, it was 159.4 mm. Though there was not much difference in the quantity of rainfall, farmers continue to suffer due to lack of water.

According to sources in the Agriculture Department, sowing has been completed only in 640 hectares of land in the district so far against the season target of 1.02 lakh hectares. However, it has been better than last year when sowing was taken up only in 225 hectares till June 15, they added.

Among the five taluks in the district, sowing is yet to happen in Srinivasapur taluk where the target is 18,009 hectares.

The target and actual sowing in other taluks is: Bangarpet 23,730 hectares (46 hectares), Kolar 19,200 hectares (185 hectares), Malur 16,350 hectares (185 hectares) and Mulbagal 22,713 hectares (224 hectares).

Sowing should have been take place in at least 10,000 hectares by now.

Unattractive

Venkatesh, a retired teacher and farmer from Mulbagal, who came to the Kannada Sahitya Sammelan in Mulbagal on Wednesday, told *The Hindu* that agriculture is losing attraction as an occupation due to lack of rain, among other reasons.

Seeds

The season requires 8,917 quintals of seeds and orders have been placed with the Karnataka State Seeds Corporation and the National Seeds Corporation, Joint Director of Agriculture Department C. Chikkanna said.

There was a stock of 2,954 quintals of seeds, he added.

No water for irrigation now'

PWD sources say storage level in Periyar and Vaigai dams precarious

Brushing aside the demands of farmers, Public Works Department (PWD) engineers have ruled out the immediate release of water for irrigation of first crop in the double cropping areas, spread over 14,500 acres in the Cumbum valley, citing precarious storage level in Periyar and Vaigai dams.

This decision was announced at a meeting held at the PWD office here on Thursday.

Copious rain in the catchment areas and at the dam site and a comfortable storage level in Periyar dam alone will decide the release of water. Till then farmers will have to wait, said Uthamapalayam PWD Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) N. Anbuselvan.

Water level should touch at least 114 feet to consider water release.

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One of them, O.R. Narayanan, said that the PWD had released water for irrigation many times in the past when the level was 112 or 113 feet in Periyar dam. In 2012 and 2013, water was released even as the level stood at 112.5 feet, he recalled.

At present, 100 cusecs had been released from Periyar dam for drinking water needs. The Sub-Divisional Officer appealed to the farmers not to tap this water for irrigation and farmers agreed to this.

The PWD sources said the situation was precarious in Vaigai dam, the level of which was depleting rapidly. Now, it has 30.86 foot of water that will be adequate for drinking water supply for the next 20 to 25 days.

Water level should be raised to 40 feet to maintain drinking water supply throughout the year, failing which southern districts will face acute drinking water crisis. The PWD has decided to draw maximum quantum of water

from Periyar water to improve Vaigai dam storage. It was decided to keep the level at 113 feet in Periyar dam and withdraw the entire future inflow.

Every rose has its thorn. Not this one



The Himalayan Wonder developed in Palampur.— Photo: Special Arrangement

A rose without thorns is like love without heartbreak. It doesn't make sense, said a wag. Perhaps. But in the modern day business of commercial rose cultivation, a thornless rose makes a lot of business sense and is a desirable attribute.

This has led a team of scientists led by Markandey Singh of the Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT) in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh, to develop the country's first thornless rose called the Himalayan Wonder.

A deep red purple in colour, the rose is a cultivar of First Red, one of the most widely sold varieties in the world, which is extensively grown for commercial purposes in India too. Its nearest rival is the Grand Gala developed by the Netherlands, but IHBT director P.S. Ahuja claims that the

Himalayan Wonder is superior to the Gala in many respects. For one, it has a sturdier stem, has no leaves close to the flower and has a shelf life of seven days. “The Grand Gala is droopy and has a short shelf life,” he said.

Dr. Singh stumbled on this unusual type while conducting some other experiments and isolated it to see how it would maintain this trait. Five years later, when they found that the selected plant maintained the stability of trait expression and did not revert to a thorny state, they named it. The rose is presently growing profusely in the Institute’s polyhouses in Palampur.

Said Dr. Ahuja: “We have grown it at a height of 4,200 ft and hope it will sustain its other characteristics like colour and strength of stalk when grown at lower elevations. Its DNA is well known and can be easily identified.”

The institute is already getting queries from Pune and Bangalore, where roses are grown commercially. The length of the flowering shoot on an average is 78 cm and the diameter of flowers is 10 cm.

Worldwide, some varieties of thornless roses of the floribunda type are prevalent, but among the cut flower tradable varieties, so far it was the Dutch Grand Gala that was much sought after. “Now the Indian Himalayan Wonder is ready to be propagated in other parts of the country,” said Dr. Ahuja.

Its nearest rival is the Grand Gala developed by the Netherlands

Farmers happy with success of cassava bio-pesticide



A demonstration plot at Pallichal where the cassava bio-pesticide was applied to get rid of banana pseudo-stem weevil pests.— Photo: Kaavya Pradeep Kumar

A tiny black bug had caused much grief to banana farmers in the State but a successful trial has kindled hope that cultivation can be carried out without fear of pests or of the cost or side-effects of hazardous chemical pesticides.

Named 'Nanma' by researchers at the Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI), this substance has proved to be effective. Testifying to its worth are the farmers near Pallichal, who agreed to its application.

K. Shibu, a farmer, said the result of the bio-pesticide had come as a welcome relief. At his plantation, a tract of land had been labelled as a

demonstration plot for the management of the banana pseudo-stem weevil using cassava bio-pesticide.

The careful application of the trial was evident with each row treated with different concentrations and as 'controls' to ascertain the qualities of the substance through comparison.

"This was a 100 per cent effective, as there are no casualties and even the yield is higher by a couple of kilos per tree. Because of how damaging the weevil is, we were forced to hunt for pesticides. All that was available were not effective and had harmful side-effects as well," said Shibu. Itchiness of the skin and stinging pain in the eyes were to be expected after a brief application of those chemicals, he added.

Another farmer from the neighbouring plot, Selvarajan supported Shibu's claims and even described the trees as more healthy-looking and even greener. "It is a bio-pesticide intended to preserve the tree from slow death by the pests but they seem to have a clear impact on the yield of fruit and even nature of the leaves," he said.

Principal Scientist (Entomology) CTCRI C.A. Jayaprakas said they would be studying whether the substance had an effect on the chlorophyll production as well.

Against other pests

Moreover, while CTCRI prescribed the substance solely to be used against the pseudostem weevil, farmers experimented on their own and found that it could be used against other pests as well.

Input subsidy through bearer cheques mooted

Tribal Welfare Minister P. Balaraju has suggested to the Chief Minister to consider issuing 'bearer cheques' to tribal farmers to avail input subsidy given to those who have suffered heavy losses during Nilam cyclone.

Mr. Balaraju said that crops in five lakh hectares were damaged and 1.47 lakh farmers suffered heavy losses in Visakhapatnam district, including 49,000 tribal farmers in 11 mandals of notified scheduled area.

Improper assessment led to seed crisis: Geeta Reddy

Major Industries Minister J. Geeta Reddy has said that improper assessment by authorities on the requirement of soya bean seed has led to the farmers facing shortage. She has urged the officials to meet the requirement by speeding up the process of securing seed from Madhya Pradesh.

Presiding over a review meeting on seed supply held here on Thursday along with Women and Child Welfare Minister V. Sunitha Lakshma Reddy, the Minister said that ground-level survey should be conducted by the officials so that the exact indent could be put before the government to meet the demand. She also directed the officials to prepare to meet the demand of paddy seedling by getting them from Karimnagar, Warangal and Nizamabad.

Ms. Sunitha said that the sowing area of cotton, paddy and soya bean had been increased in the district in view of sufficient rain in June .

Participating in the discussion, legislators Ch. Muthyam Reddy (Dubbak), P. Kishta Reddy (Naryanakhed) and T. Narsa Reddy (Gajwel) said that there was need to create awareness among the farmers about the use of fertilizer and they should be counselled to use complex fertilizers instead of urea, which would spoil the soil health. Stating that farmers were using excess fertilizer, Mr. Muthyam Reddy said that it should be supplied at village level so that there would be no problem for farmers.

DCCB chairman M. Jaipal Reddy urged the authorities to supply fertilizer to PACS so that they could supply the same to farmers locally.

Bhoochetana scheme being replicated in the Philippines

Karnataka implemented it in 2009-10 to improve farm yield



According to the Department of Agriculture, farm yield under the Bhoochetana scheme has gone up from 21 per cent to 50 per cent in the last four years.— Photo: M.A. Sriram

The success of the Bhoochetana, a scheme to boost agricultural productivity in the State, is being replicated by the Philippines government under the same name.

Confirming the Philippines experiment, Assistant Research Programme Director of the Hyderabad-based ICRISAT (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics), Suhas P. Wani, told *The Hindu* from Hyderabad that Bhoochetana is being implemented in the Philippines. ICRISAT is providing information on technical inputs and training to Filipinos. Bhoochetana is being implemented in three different benchmark localities in the Philippines, each covering 10,000 hectares of land. Mr. Wani expressed confidence that the scheme would be successful and would help boost production, which in turn will help alleviate poverty and end malnutrition.

Mr. Wani said that the three areas chosen for the scheme in the Philippines belong to different agro-ecological regions involving about 8,000 farmers in each of the areas. Mr. Wani said he had visited the Philippines four times during which time the Bhoochetana scheme was conceptualised, finalised and introduced.

The ICRISAT also has a Philippines connection with its Director-General, William D. Dar, being a Filipino.

The consortium partners from the Philippines would be imparted training in India. The consortium partners in Karnataka are the Department of Agriculture, Watershed Development Department, University of Agricultural Sciences in Bangalore, Dharwad and Raichur, community based organisations and the ICRISAT.

Scheme in State

The Bhoochetana scheme was introduced by the Karnataka government during 2009-10, initially involving rain-fed areas and later extended to irrigated areas as well with a view to enhance agricultural productivity. According to the Department of Agriculture, yield in the farmland under the Bhoochetana has gone up from 21 per cent to 50 per cent in the last four years.

Under the scheme, soil at the farmland is tested and micro-nutrients are supplied to farmers depending on the requirement to boost the strength of the soil. They include nutrients such as zinc sulphate, gypsum, borax, potassium, nitrogen, phosphorous, sulfur and the like. The ICRISAT would provide all technical inputs such as the quantum of micro-nutrients required by a particular type of soil.

African countries

The Government of India has held talks with the western, central and east African countries and seven countries have been chosen identified for the implementation of the Bhoochetana scheme. "We (ICRISAT) could take up pilot projects in one or two places initially.

"The Government of India will fund part of the project and the rest of funding will be from institutions in the respective countries, , Mr. Wani added.

Following the success, Andhra Pradesh also adopted the Bhoochetana model one and a half years ago in 22 districts, Mr. Wani said.

70 farmers, 11 students trained in mushroom farming

Seventy farmers and 11 final year (B.Sc-Agri) students of Anbil Dharmalingam Agricultural College and Research Institute of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Tiruchi, underwent a training programme on edible mushroom cultivation at Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Needamangalam recently.

The students had come to attend the Rural Agriculture Week Experience (RAWE) at the office of the Assistant Director of Needamangalam.

K. Cholan, Professor and Head of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, inaugurated the training.

S. Ananthakrishnaveni, assistant professor, agronomy, spoke on mushroom production technology. T. Damodaran, assistant professor, agri-extension, spoke on marketing of mushroom.

A demonstration was organised on bedding process in mushroom production for the benefit of farmers and students, said a KVK press release issued here on Wednesday.

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from Periyar water to improve Vaigai dam storage. It was decided to keep the level at 113 feet in Periyar dam and withdraw the entire future inflow.

Buy fertilizer only at MRP rate, farmers told

'They are available in 50-kg bags at all raitha sampark kendras'

Warning of strict action against those selling fertilizer at rates higher than the maximum retail price (MRP), Joint Director of Agriculture V.J. Patil said here on Thursday that farmers should buy them at the rates mentioned on the bags.

He said urea, muriate of potash, di-ammonium phosphate and other grades were available in the market. As of now, 2,23,940 tonnes of fertilizer had been allotted to the district for distribution for kharif and rabi crops this year.

The requirement for June was 1,05,210 tonnes, of which 30,803 tonnes was available in the district. A buffer stock of 49,646 tonnes was also available, he said.

Mr. Patil said the remaining stock would be procured for distribution on time and there would be no delay in distribution of fertilizer this year.

Fertilizer of various brands was available in 50-kg bags at all the 35 raitha sampark kendras (RSKs) and at the 79 additional counters that were opened all over the district. Of the 16 main grades of fertilizer, the commonly used in the district was urea that costs anywhere between Rs. 278.78 and Rs. 285.65 for a 50-kg bag, he said.

Good rainfall

Mr. Patil said since monsoon had arrived on time, farmers had started sowing. So far, against the normal rainfall of 126.7 mm for June, the district had received 63.4 mm.

Seeds

He said as of now, 49,463 quintals of various seeds had been procured from registered suppliers for distribution among farmers.

Of this, 920 quintals of paddy, 70 quintals of jowar, 2,400 quintals of maize, 79 quintals of bajra and 24,074 quintals of sunflower seeds had been sold to farmers.

The Agriculture Department had taken steps to stock adequate quantity of seeds for distribution among farmers, he said.

Notice

Mr. Patil said notice had been issued to 15 seed traders, 17 fertilizer traders, and 16 pesticide traders for selling spurious products in the district.

He said if traders were found selling spurious seeds, fertilizers or pesticides, farmers could inform the Assistant Directors of Agriculture on the following numbers: Athani (08289-251374); Bailhongal (08288-236685); Belgaum (0831-266645); Chikkodi (08338-272182); Gokak (08332-225184); Hukkeri (08333-265333); Khanapur (08336-222251); Raibag

(08331-225301); Ramdurg (08335-242881); and Saundatti (08330-223419).

Kollam gets respite from drought

Copious rain during the past fortnight has brought respite to residents of Kollam district, which was reeling under severe drought conditions since October last. Land that remained parched for months is gradually getting water-logged. Wells that have run dry in many areas since February-March have been filled and provide a source of drinking water.

The climatic changes have eased the effects of the prolonged drought situation. Septuagenarian Janardhanan, a resident of the city, said the onset of the monsoon this year was vastly different from the last couple of years.

“The rain during the past 10 days were reminiscent of my childhood,” he said hoping that the monsoon tempo would continue till close to Onam.

Farmer’s delight

Shibu Pachayil, a traditional farmer from the Kulathupuzha sector said this year’s monsoon takeoff had triggered in him an urge to cultivate. “The rain appears to have a fertile aura about it and it keeps tempting the farmers,” he said.

Compared to the past four or five years, there is something special about the arrival of the monsoon this time, said G. Thomaskutty who resides in Thenmala, which falls under a belt that bore the brunt of the drought.

Mr. Thomaskutty said experiencing rain after severe drought was a wonderful experience.

“At least now the people should realise the value of water and dedicate themselves to conserving water sources,” he said.

A cruel label

Yet with the onset of the monsoon, complaints of the spread of epidemic diseases are widespread.

But environment activists say it is cruel to label the monsoon as a sponsor of epidemics.

To sum it up with the words of American writer Barbara Delinsky “the rains didn’t make things messy. People did all that on their own.”

Rain raises levels; brings cheer to farmers in Kanyakumari

The low-lying areas were flooded with rain water in Eraniel, Kaliyakkavilai, Kurunthencode, Thiruvattar, Kottaram, Myladi, Aralvoimozhi and Nagercoil due to the heavy rain that lashed different parts of the district on Thursday.

The water level in all dams including Pechipparai, Perunchani, Chittar I, Chittar II, Poigai and Mambazathuraiyaru dams is rapidly increasing bringing cheer to the farming community as they have already begun agriculture operations across the district.

In the meantime, students as well as office goers were put to untold hardship due to frequent and heavy downpour.

The people of Pallivilai had a miraculous escape after a live electric wire fell across the road due to heavy wind and rain. However a dog, that came in contact with the wire died. On information from the public the employees of Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation rushed to the spot, removed the live wire and restored power supply.

Tourists thronged Thirparappu falls after hearing about the good flow. A few stretches of the roads at Mullurthurai were washed away due to rain affecting road connectivity to a few fishermen hamlets. The district administration had already taken steps to restore the traffic in this area.

A maximum rainfall of 43 mm was recorded at Mukkadal dam. The rainfall recorded in various places in different parts of the district was 14.2 mm in Pechipparai, 11.8 mm in Perunchani, 27.6 mm in Chittar I, 15.6 mm in Chittar II, 18 mm in Anaikidangu, 18.6 mm in Colachel, 33 mm in Thiruvattar, 11.2 mm in Kottaram, 9.4 mm in Myladi, 29.8 mm in Balamore, 17.4 mm in Kannimar, 16 mm in Surulode, 10.8 mm in Puthen dam, 9.2 mm in Nagercoil and 5.2 mm in Boothapandi. The inflow of water into Pechipparai dam was 387 cusecs and 502 cusecs at Perunchani dam.

The MLA of Vilavancode Assembly segment, S. Vijayadharani, has urged the officials of Health Department to take up pre-monsoon cleaning operation across the district. The timely onset of monsoon in Kerala has brought cheers to the farmers in the district as they had also witnessed heavy and moderate rain. It will help them undertake agriculture operation before water was released from Pechipparai and Perunchani dams.

However the overcrowding of hospitals in Thiruvananthapuram due to dengue fever has been a cause for concern. The officials of both the health department and local bodies are yet to initiate any precautionary steps to clean the drainages or to remove garbage dumped in various parts of the district.

Hence Ms. Vijayadharani has appealed to the officials to check the mosquito menace.

The water from Pechipparai and Perunchani dams were released every year in the first week of June. However it was expected to be released between June 15 to 19 this year, citing inadequate storage in dams. A proposal had already been sent to the Government and once permission was obtained, the water would be released for irrigation purposes following good inflow of water in to these dams, said A. Vins Anto, chairman of Kodayaru Irrigation Project of Water Resources Organisation (PWD).

Prices of wet cocoa beans slump as stocks arrive

Cocoa growers are getting Rs. 5 to Rs. 7 less per kg of the produce compared to last year even as the new harvest season began a fortnight ago.

The procurement price of wet beans from farmers now varies from Rs. 35 to Rs. 38 a kg against Rs. 42 a kg to Rs. 43 a kg during the same season last year. Prices of dry beans fell from Rs. 148-Rs. 152 a kg to Rs. 128-Rs.132 a kg.

Cocoa beans are the key ingredients for chocolates and some cosmetic products. Cocoa is grown as an inter-crop in arecanut and coconut plantations in coastal and Malnad districts.

M. Suresh Bhandary, managing director, Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative Ltd. (Campco), hoped that the price might stabilise at Rs. 33 a kg. Campco is one of the principal purchasers of cocoa.

Mr. Bhandary attributed the fall in price this season to a 20 per cent drop in demand for cocoa powder and cocoa butter in the domestic market this season. Of cocoa beans 70 per cent went for making cocoa powder and cocoa butter and the remainder for manufacturing chocolates.

He said that due to the recent change in import duty structure, importers preferred importing cocoa powder and cocoa butter than purchasing from the domestic market as it worked out cheaper this season. As a result the cooperative was finding it difficult to compete. It has resulted in a low price for the beans in this season than last year.

Mr. Bhandary said that the cooperative was not distributing cocoa saplings to farmers this year as the horticulture department was distributing the saplings to farmers in its nurseries and promoting clusters.

An official of the Horticulture Department here said that the department was promoting two cocoa clusters in the district since 2012. Cocoa cultivation was being promoted in Nelyadi cluster in Belthangady taluk on 64 hectares and at Markanja cluster in Sullia taluk on 30 hectares of land.

More than 100 farmers were cultivating cocoa in these clusters under a government scheme. The department has planned to promote at least two more cocoa clusters this year, he said.

500 cusecs is too little, say farmers

Water from the Godavari released for irrigation in western delta for kharif season

Authorities of the Irrigation Department on Thursday released Godavari waters from the Dowleswaram Barrage for irrigation in the western delta during the kharif season.

With this, 500 cusecs started trickling into the canals in two spells on the first day after a gap of nearly 60 days during their closure.

The official measure, however, drew lukewarm response from farmers. Godavari Delta Parirakshana Samiti leader M.V. Suryanarayana Raju criticised that the release of a mere 500 cusecs was a piecemeal measure on the part of the officials, which would hardly help the farmers in the tail-end areas to go in for raising the seedbeds.

The onset of monsoon and release of the Godavari waters in time will keep the Delta farmers busy with the kharif operations. However, the bad condition of the canal and the drainage systems dampens the spirit of the farmers. The Rs.1,300-crore modernisation programme failed to gain momentum in the western delta. The modernisation works were under execution in only four irrigation canals and it failed to take off in the

remaining seven canals because of the reported poor response from contractors. According to information, the works costing only Rs.250 crore were executed as part of the modernisation programme in the last five years since inception.

Canals were subjected to two long-term closures for a period of six months each and several short-term closures, forcing the farmers to forego crops during the periods. K. Venkateswarlu, Superintending Engineer, in an informal chat with reporters favoured one more long-term closure to accelerate the project works. But his move failed to muster support from the farmers and public representatives either.

What is worrying the farmers the most is the pitiable condition of the canals, aggravating the risk of floods, a common phenomenon at the fag-end of every kharif season. "There is a plenty of water in the Godavari and the nature has showered its blessings on the farmers by way of timely arrival of monsoon this time. Yet, the canals clogged with high-rise hyacinth," says Mr. Suryanarayana Raju. The weed removal was supposed to have been taken up with the O&M grants during the closure of the canals. But it failed to happen as the government released the grants just at the time of reopening of canals.

Villagers' agitation saves irrigation project in Ganjam

Officials swing into action to ensure free flow of water

Agitation by villagers could stop diversion of water source of an irrigation project in Sanakhemundi tehsil of Ganjam district.

Following agitation by agitating villagers administrative officials from Wednesday have started removal of an obstruction on a mountain stream which had been put by another group of persons to divert the water flowing in it. Along with it the canal dug up from the point of illegal diversion on the upstream is also being filled up.

Binay Subuddhi, executive engineer of the Minor Irrigation Division I of Ganjam district, said the irrigation project which was the apple of discord was a diversion weir near Pudamari on a natural stream named Taptapani Nala.

The stream emerged from Taptapani hot spring area. As per Mr Subuddhi, it was an old project which had been renovated a few years ago. After renovation this diversion weir irrigation project was providing irrigation to 450 hectares near Pudamari.

But a few months back inhabitants living around eight km upstream of the project near Sriramnagar had tried to divert the water of the stream for their own use. For it they had blocked the flow of water by putting up large boulders in the path of the stream. They had also tried to divert the water of the stream from the spot by digging up an unauthorised canal from the spot.

Due to it water flow to the diversion weir project near Pudamari stopped affecting scope of irrigation downstream.

The unauthorised diversion of water of the stream at the upstream was opposed by the beneficiaries of the project especially from Kansamari,

Dharmapur, Chhanameri, Singapur etc. They had got panicked that this may lead to drought like situation in their area.

Farmers of the area approached the administration and irrigation department protesting against the illegal obstruction of the stream upstream.

They also resorted to road blockade near Dengaosta on June 11. On that day the local tehsildar, police and irrigation officials promised to remove obstruction on the upstream of the mountain stream within three days. And the process of removal of obstruction was started a day after that.

State vice-president of peasants' organisation Odisha Kushak Sabha (OKS) Kailash Sadangi blamed the administration and irrigation department for this whole issue.

According to him the administrative officials and irrigation department should have stopped construction of obstruction of the stream when this illegal attempt was being made.

The delay in action led to tension in the area, he alleged.

Similar allegation was also made by the Ganjam district unit of the CPI (M) which said irrigation department should learn from this event and nip similar unauthorised attempts at initial stages in future.

Making strides in organic farming

When a farmer spoke about organic farming, particularly on vermicomposting 18 years ago in this fertile delta area, no one came forward to support his idea or methodology including some agriculture officials. But, he was determined and went ahead to convince the farmers who invest more than Rs.10,000 to 14,000 on fertilizers and chemicals per acre on each crop.

Addala Gopalakrishna, a farmer and a post-graduate with specialisation in organic manures, has set up 'Rythu Mitra Rural Technology Park' (RM RTP) in a small way here and extended it to the entire Konaseema region in course of time. Now, the RM RTP reached to the stage of receiving the prestigious Dr. M.S. Swaminathan Foundation's National Virtual Academy Fellowship for the year 2012 from Andhra Pradesh in Organic Farming.

The Rastriya Krishi Vikas Yojna, a unit of Union Agriculture Department came forward to support the RM RTP in extending 90 per cent subsidy to those farmers who take up organic farming under the guidance and direct supervision of the RM RTP. Of late, the State government is also supporting the project by setting up a target of converting 35,000 acres in entire Konaseema into organic farming in the present kharif season (2013-14).

According to Mr. Gopalakrishna, about 380 vermicompost units have been set up in the region and farmers are not only saving their input expenditure, but also getting higher returns from their crops for the last one decade.

“In this methodology, farmer should have patience. He should not expect results overnight,” he says. Mr. Gopalakrishna has explained that the best combination of organic manure with bio-fertilizers in organic farming is suited in the delta area.

He has said that per each acre the farmer has to spend Rs. 2,300 on 100 kg of vermicompost, one bag of neem cake, two litres of neem seed oil, azospirillum bio-fertilizer, Phosphate solubilizing Bacteria (PSB), potash mobilizer and Pseudomonas fluorescens as seed treatment material. The government gives 90 per cent of the total Rs.2300 which comes around Rs.2070 and the farmer has to spend only Rs.230 per acre from his pocket. Mr. Gopalakrishna, who is a bachelor, dedicated his life for organic farming and he hails from Tatikalyalapalem village in P. Gannavaram mandal in Konaseema and settled in Amalapuram.

Farmers to porters

“I still want to go back to being a farmer,” said Rajan, a Muduga tribal from Kattaikad settlement in Chittur, Agali. Rajan, like many other fellow tribals, works as a porter.

There is an obsession with agriculture among the tribals here; they save money to get back to farming every two to three years. But the transition in labour culture in the Attappady region in Kerala’s Palakkad district seems to have left them with the only option of going back to work as porters.

A major reason behind this phenomenon is higher daily wages. “We earn more working as porters,” said Kumaran, another tribal from the area. As

porters, men and women tribals earn around Rs. 300 and Rs. 200 per day respectively — almost double of their farm income.

The region, that had extensive agricultural activities till some years ago, now grows only small quantities of vegetables, pepper, *areca nut*, coconut and coffee. Ragi, *chana*, and *toor dal* is grown by some tribals for self-consumption. Around a decade back, they used to grow *ganja* (cannabis) as it fetched more money than growing regular food items. Frequent excise department raids, however, has brought that down as well.

Meanwhile, lack of rainfall and irrigation facilities in Attappady has deteriorated soil quality, making agriculture even more difficult. Apart from the rivers Bhawani and Siruvani, borewells are the only source of water for irrigation, according to Rejimol, field assistant at the State's Agriculture Department.

In spite of the Agriculture Department organising campaigns and forming farmers' groups to encourage agriculture, more than half of the tribal population continues to work as porters. Krishnakumar, a Scheduled Caste Development Department official, explained the reason: "Due to the lack of proper documentation of tribal land, farming has received a major setback."

Alcoholism, too, exacerbates the situation. Valliamma, an Irula tribal from Nakkupadhi, said, "Men drink to the extent that they never work. Farming is beyond their capability now."

However, District Collector P.M. Ali Asgar Pasha said that measures were being taken to address these issues. "We have the Attappady Farmers'

Cooperative Society among other societies to re-establish agricultural practices.”

But micro-level State policies seem to do no good to the perishing agriculture. Vast barren stretches have replaced much of the agricultural land. According to a report of the Attappady Hills Area Development Society (AHADS), there is more fallow land (157 sq km) than agricultural land (130 sq km) in Attappady now.

In this scenario, the Attappady Valley Irrigation Project (AVIP), which proposes to irrigate 49 sq km of agricultural land, seems to be the government’s answer to reviving the dying agricultural practices. This project, which was proposed in 1970 by the Kerala Government, has not yet seen the light of the day. Acquiring land for the project is in progress. According to the AVIP report, land occupied by five Muduga settlements near the Siruvani river will be acquired for the project.

Residents of these settlements had vacated the area in the 1980s. While the Irrigation Department report states that 51 tribal families have already been rehabilitated and “there is no other impact on the population in the surrounding human settlement”, the displaced Mudugas have a different story to tell. They were offered alternative land, but only for constructing houses. Agricultural land, a means of livelihood, was ignored.

For all these years, the Mudugas were staying in makeshift premises, waiting to return to their own land. Some residents did return to one such settlement in April 2011, following an agitation.

Tribals in Kerala's Attappady region are being forced to shift from farming to 'better-paying' porter jobs

A conservation model to emulate

Project to scientifically harvest rainwater for use in water-scarce months



Harvesting rainwater:Residents of Niravu Vengeri in Kozhikode city bunding a field as part of the Jalasree water conservation project launched by them.— Photo: S. Ramesh Kurup

After a series of eco-friendly initiatives, the award-winning residential forum 'Niravu Vengeri' here has embarked on yet another important project.

Titled 'Jalasree,' the venture is primarily aimed at scientifically harvesting rainwater to use in the water-scarce months of summer.

One hundred and one residents, with land areas ranging from two cents to one acre under their possession, have already started various measures to ensure water harvesting.

The steps include bunding the field and trenching around the trees especially coconut palms as well as making rain pits to store water.

“We had started the preparations in a very effective manner even before the monsoon arrived,” said P.P. Mohanan, president of Niravu. The members of the forum had undergone a special training programme in homestead water management by the Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM) a few months ago.

Besides taking different measures to ensure recharge of the ground water-table, steps have also been taken to redirect the run-off water from the colony lanes to nearby fields.

Babu Parambath, project coordinator for Jalasree, said that the Agriculture Department and the CWRDM have already come forward to collaborate with the project. While the CWRDM has promised all the technical support for the project, the Agriculture Department has agreed to support the forum in different ways including by providing fertilizers for the coconut trees free of cost and by refunding the labour charges incurred for trenching around the coconut trees.

The forum has also decided to experiment with the upland paddy cultivation in selected areas to complement their water-conservation project. “The Krishibhavan has also promised to provide the required seeds for the cultivation free of cost,” said Mr. Babu.

Talking to *The Hindu*, N. B. Narasimha Prasad, Executive Director of CWRDM, Kozhikode, said that it was heartening to see a residential forum

coming forward with a clear plan to do something about water conservation in their respective areas. “Usually people forget about the drought and the need for conserving water at the fall of first rain, but this forum (Niravu) seems to be an exception,” said Dr. Prasad.

A few officials from the CWRDM have already visited the area to analyse the scope of intervention for the project from the centre’s side. K.R. Prasannakumar, technical officer, CWRDM, said, “It will be a learning experience for us as well.”

The Jalasree project according to Abdul Hameed, another technical officer from CWRDM, will serve two vital purposes. While it ensures water recharging in the respective area, it also act as a flood mitigation measure as it redirects the runoff water into the individual fields. “If the project works well, it can be developed as a model for the entire State to emulate,” said Dr. Hameed.

The residential forum has recorded the groundwater level at the individual wells of the member residents during the last summer. They will compare the water-levels in the wells during the next summer after implementing the conservation initiative to assess the impact of the project. “Its result is certain to be reflected in the regional scale though not in the individual scale,” said Dr. Hameed.

Review of project that promotes use of biomass based fuels

Need for producing ethanol blended petro-fuels stressed

A joint project of India and the U.S., the review meeting of which was held in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, will deliver a working model for production of bio-fuels with minimal environmental impact and overall sustainability, besides other advantages.

According to a release, the review of the Indo-U.S. collaborative project for development of Sustainable Advanced Lignocellulosic Biofuel was held at the Department of Bioenergy of TNAU, in Udhagamandalam. The cost of the project is Rs. 25.78 crore.

Nearly 35 representatives from the research and academic institutes involved in the project from India and the U.S. attended the review meeting.

The project also focussed on delivering a working model for feed stock production and supply, and biochemical conversion approaches and technologies.

Vice-Chancellor of TNAU K. Ramasamy stressed the need for producing ethanol blended petro-fuels. He believed that the consortium involving Indian and U.S. partners would address the important challenges the world was facing in the field of lignocellulosic biomass. Sustainable production and tapping of biofuels from non-food based feed stocks could increase energy independence, reduce green house gas emissions, and promote

healthier land use while providing additional jobs and income to rural communities.

“Environmental and energy security concerns are forcing countries to shift to alternatives in the form of bio-ethanol, bio-diesel, etc. At present, bio-fuel production is minimal, accounting only for one per cent of global production.

Policy support, technological breakthroughs, and cost-effective feedstock production, are some measures that will help augment bio-fuel production,” he said.

Technologies for ethanol production from lignocellulosic biomass were under preliminary stage of development that required extensive research and development, the Vice-Chancellor added.

Funds allotted to strengthen veterinary services

To strengthen veterinary care services in the district, 11 new operation theatres are to be set up in as many number of government veterinary dispensaries and modern outpatient buildings to be constructed in 21 government veterinary dispensaries shortly at a total outlay of Rs. 3.73 crore.

This apart, repair and minor renovation works will be carried out in 16 veterinary dispensaries under government sector in Udumalpet, Dharapuram and Tirupur divisions.

The Department of Animal Husbandry will be meeting the expenditure for the projects from the different corpuses created by the Central and State Governments for the development of animal husbandry and dairy activities.

Joint Director of Animal Husbandry K.M. Sivaprakasam told *The Hindu* that the major allocation of funds to the tune of Rs. 2.12 crore would be from Rural Infrastructure Development Fund, a corpus created by the Union Government from the shortfalls in agriculture lending of commercial banks and been kept under the custody of National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard).

“The amount will be utilised to create new facilities like operation theatres, medical storage room and treatment sheds for large animals in eight veterinary dispensaries spread across the district,” he said.

A total of Rs 1.16 crore, allocated from Establishment and Strengthening of Veterinary Hospitals and Dispensaries Scheme, will be utilised to set up new buildings which include a doctor’s room, store room for vaccines/medicines and facilities for treating small animals at veterinary dispensaries situated in Samalapuram, Pooluvapatti, K.N. Palayam, Peruntholvu, Vedampatti, Thungavi and four other places.

Places identified

“We have identified places for the construction of new infrastructure for these dispensaries,” Dr. Sivaprakasam said.

For the development of veterinary dispensaries situated at Mudalipalayam, Olapalayam and Kolathupalayam, it has been planned to spend Rs. 45 lakh

from the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, a Central Government-sponsored scheme, he added

Sowing completed in 1.96 lakh ha in Mysore

Sowing has been completed in 1,96,485 hectares (ha) in Mysore district.

The Department of Agriculture has set a target of cultivating kharif crops in 4,20,195 ha in the district this year.

Sowing has been completed in 1,93,074 ha (64 per cent) in rain-fed areas where kharif cultivation is expected to be taken up in 3,01,960 ha of land, Joint Director of Agriculture, Mysore district, K.R. Krishnaiah, said in a release here on Thursday.

In irrigated areas, 1,18,235 ha is proposed to be covered and cultivation has been completed in 3,411 ha so far. Fields are being readied for sowing in areas that have received rain, he said. Tobacco cultivation has taken place in 67,296 ha and sugarcane in 254 ha.

The target for kharif cultivation in H.D. Kote taluk is 69,100 ha, of which 49,858 ha has been covered (72 per cent). The target for Hunsur taluk is 95,000 ha, of which 51,461 ha has been covered (38 per cent). The target for K.R. Nagar taluk is 11,095 ha and 57,700 ha has been covered so far (19 per cent). Out of a target of 34,500 ha for Mysore taluk, 12,093 ha (35 per cent) has been covered. Nanjangud taluk would have a total coverage of 70,200 ha, of which 38,951 ha has been covered (55 per cent).

In Periyapatna, of the target of 52,450 ha, 29,492 ha (56 per cent) has been covered. The target for T. Narsipur taluk is 41,245 ha, of which only 3,536 ha (9 per cent) has been covered so far.

Sowing of jowar, ragi, maize, groundnut, cotton and castor has been taken up.

Rainfall

Till May-end, except H.D. Kote taluk, the other six taluks received less than normal rainfall.

Against the normal rainfall of 235.5 mm, the district received 202.8 mm rainfall till June 10.

Seeds

The department hopes to distribute 30,421 quintals of certified seeds for sowing this kharif season. It has supplied 2,783 quintals of seeds of hybrid jowar and pulses. Of this, 1,709 quintals have been supplied through Raitha Samparka Kendras (RSK).

As far as distribution of fertilizer is concerned, the target for the season is 96,300 tonnes. The department has a stock of 46,523 tonnes of fertilizer supplied by the Karnataka State Cooperative Marketing Federation and private companies.

Kharif target set at 4,20,195 hectares in the district

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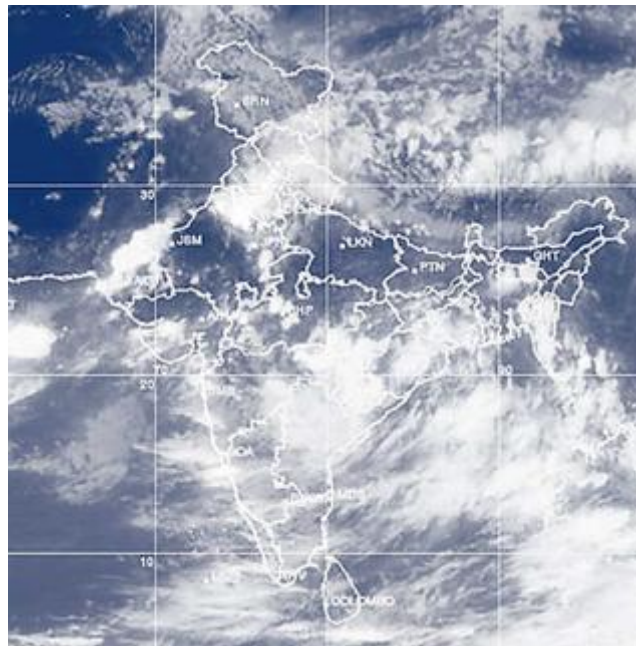
13 women SHGs sanctioned loan

The Kurumbalur Primary Agricultural Cooperative Credit Society sanctioned Rs. 38.10 lakh as direct loan assistance to 13 women self-help

groups. Loan were distributed to women SHGs by V. Selvaraj, president of society at a function held at Kurumbalur on Tuesday.

While Rs. 5 lakh each was sanctioned to the TANUVA Pannai SHG and TANUVA Roja SHG , both of Palaiyam village.

weather



INSAT PICTURE AT 14.00 hrs. Observations recorded at 8.30 a.m. on June 13th.

	Max	Min	R	TR
New Delhi (Plm)	41	31	0	1
New Delhi (Sfd)	39	30	0	15
Chandigarh	37	28	0	15
Hissar	39	30	0	0
Bhuntar	27	19	9	50
Shimla	23	18	3	56

Jammu	34	27	0	13
Srinagar	25	20	1	16
Amritsar	33	24	2778	
Patiala	38	27	3	10
Jaipur	34	27	0	52
Udaipur	29	25	1536	
Allahabad	41	30	0	23
Lucknow	38	27	0	56
Varanasi	42	29	0	1
Dehradun	35	25	7	79
Agartala	37	25	1561	
Ahmedabad	35	26	tr	17
Bangalore	27	20	0	122
Bhubaneshwar	29	24	2863	
Bhopal	34	22	2268	
Chennai	32	28	0	123
Guwahati	39	25	0	69
Hyderabad	29	23	1	150
Kolkata	31	25	2755	
Mumbai	30	27	29348	
Nagpur	35	25	7	38
Patna	38	28	0	29
Pune	30	22	1	99
Thiruvananthapuram	26	23	15153	
Imphal	33	19	0	27
Shillong	29	18	0	117

The columns show maximum and minimum temperature in Celsius, rainfall during last 24 hours (tr-trace) and total rainfall in mm since 1st June.

THUNDERSHOWERS

RAINFALL: Rain/thundershowers have occurred at many places over Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab, at few places over Rajasthan and Uttarakhand and at isolated places over rest of the region. The chief amounts of rainfall in cm are: (3 cm and above) HARYANA: Nilokheri 7 and Guhla and Dadupur 4 each, HIMACHAL PRADESH: Ghamroor 6, Dharamsala and Una 5 each, Guler and Jubbal 4 each and Kheri and Bangana 3 each, JAMMU AND KASHMIR: Kathua and Shalimar 3 each, PUNJAB: Kapurthala 13, Mukerian and Ludhiana 7 each, Samrala 5, Jalandhar and Khanna 4 each and Amritsar and Anandpur Sahib 3 each, EAST RAJASTHAN: Gayangarh 7, Sambhugarh 6, Viratnagar and Hurda 5 each and Mandawar, Jamwaramgarh and Gangrar 3 each, WEST RAJASTHAN: Shergarh 9, Luni 4 and Sendwa and Sojet 3 each and UTTARAKHAND: Rudraprayag 6, Karanaprayag 5, Uttarkashi 4 and Pithoragarh 3.

MAXIMUM TEMPERATURES: The maximum temperatures rose markedly in Haryana and Uttarakhand, rose appreciably in Uttar Pradesh, fell largely in Jammu and Kashmir, fell markedly in Punjab, fell appreciably in west Rajasthan and changed little elsewhere. They were markedly below normal in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and east Rajasthan, appreciably below normal in Himachal Pradesh, west Rajasthan and west Uttar Pradesh and

normal in rest of the region. The highest maximum temperature in the region was 42.0°C recorded at Varanasi Airport (Uttar Pradesh).

FORECAST VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 15th June

2013: Rain/thundershowers may occur at a few places over Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. Rain/thundershowers may occur at one or two places over rest of the region .

FORECAST FOR DELHI AND NEIGHBOURHOOD VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 15th June 2013: Generally cloudy sky. Rain/thundershower may occur in some areas.

Steady inflow into reservoirs

Catchments continue to receive rain

Showers in the catchments of Parambikulam — Aliyar Project (PAP) is providing a steady inflow into reservoirs in the region.

Coimbatore district in the last 24 hours that ended at 8.30 a.m. on Wednesday recorded a rainfall of 113.70 mm and the average rainfall stood at 9.48 mm.

Highest of 30 mm was recorded at Chinnakallar and the lowest of 0.40 mm was recorded at TNAU in Coimbatore City.

Rainfall in mm in other places; Pollachi 14.30 mm, Cincona 24, Valparai PAP 22, Valparai taluk office 22.

Siruvani reservoir, which caters to the drinking water needs of a part of Coimbatore City and a number of wayside habitations, recorded as much as 35 mm at the dam site but only 6 mm at the foothills.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Traditional coir products face value erosion

Amid soaring production costs and lower productivity, the contribution of value-added coir products to the country's overall coir exports has come down drastically over the last few years.

Traditional value-added products like coir mats and mattings, which had accounted for 80% of the country's coir export earnings during the 2004-2005 period, could fetch only 52% in 2012 - 2013. Quantity wise, it fell to 14% from 50%.

N C J John, senior director of exporting firm N C John & Sons Pvt Ltd, attributed this decline to increasing cost of production and lower productivity. "We had to revise the sourcing price of handloom mats and mattings four times over the last five years, each time increasing prices by 15% to 30%. There is a slight decrease in productivity too," he said.

High cost of production is due to growing prices of coir fibre, he noted. "With China buying up our fibre, the price in the domestic markets have gone up considerably," John said.

According to G Balachandran, chairman of the Coir Board, the traditional products are competing with replacement products made from other fibres like jute, sisal and Chinese grass. Plastic products which are easy to handle and maintain also pose a threat, he said.

He, however, shared an optimistic view, saying the value-added products will regain the leading position in few years' time. "Introduction of products like school bags, women's bags, chappals, conference bags and gift items will help this segment to grow," he added.

Monsoon arrives early but no water for Krishna delta ryots

The monsoon which arrived in the state early had kindled the farmers' hopes for a good Khariff season. But with the government remaining silent on releasing water to the region, the farmers are in a Catch-22 situation as they cannot venture into the nurseries without a back-up plan.

The state government is yet to come up with an action plan on release of water for irrigation in Krishna and Guntur districts as major reservoirs in the Krishna basin - Srisaillam and Nagarjunasagar - are yet to receive good inflows.

Srisaillam and Nagarjunasagar get heavy inflows once Karnataka releases water from Almatti and Tungabhadra dams. Though parts of Karnataka received heavy rains in the past two weeks, the inflows into the Almatti dam have not been encouraging.

The state government releases water to the Krishna delta by the second week of June if monsoon arrives on time. Though the monsoon arrived a week in advance this time the catchment areas of the river Krishna did not get enough rainfall. With rains lashing most of the Krishna delta for the past 10 days, the region has received more than the normal rainfall so far during

June. The early onset of monsoon had rekindled the hopes of the farmers in the delta of getting good crop during the present Khariff season. They are eager to go for plantation of nurseries.

Farmers fear that in the absence of irrigation water from Nagarjunasagar they would be in trouble if the monsoon plays truant in the days ahead. The present rainfall is sufficient to take up seeding operations, but sustained supply of water from irrigation canals is needed if the crop has to be maintained.

Srisailem project received just around 1,900 cusecs of water from upstream region and Nagarjunasagar received around 2,000 cusecs on Thursday. The water level in both the dams remained almost constant at dead storage level of 520 ft at Nagarjunasagar and 815.9 ft at Srisailem. Srisailem reservoir has poor reserves with total available water dipping to 37 tmc against the gross storage capacity 215 tmc. Similarly, reserves at Nagarjunasagar too nosedived to 150 tmc against the total capacity of 312 tmc.

The state government did not release water for crops in both Krishna delta and Nagarjunasagar ayacut last year following a high court directive to maintain dead storage level in response to petitions filed by some Telangana activists. With the protagonists of Telangana now on a warpath with the state government once again, the chances of water release schedule for delta region are meek unless the reservoirs get heavy inflows.

"We are waiting for some more good rains particularly in the upper stream of the Krishna river. We are hopeful of releasing water to the delta by second week of July if everything goes on well," observed a senior irrigation engineer on condition of anonymity. While paddy is being cultivated in about 10 lakh acres in the delta region, cotton is sown in another five lakh acres of upland regions.

Pre-monsoons shower relief on farmers in Punjab, Haryana

Pre-monsoon showers in many parts of Punjab and Haryana on Thursday are likely to ease transplanting of paddy and also help in growth of other kharif (summer sown) crops, say farmers and experts. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast more rainfall in the region in the next four days, which is likely to provide relief to crops sown in areas which are either rain-fed or irrigated by canals in both the states.

Welcoming the pre-monsoon rainfall, Punjab director of agriculture Mangal Singh Sandhu said, "These showers have come as a big relief for farmers. Paddy transplantation commenced on June 10 in the state, which is likely to gather pace now as farmers and labourers will not have to work in scorching conditions since the temperatures have dropped considerably. Moreover, these rains are likely to benefit the crops sown last month like cotton, sugarcane and pulses."

With light to moderate rainfall forecast over the next few days, it will also reduce dependence on electricity and diesel to run pumpsets for drawing groundwater to flood the paddy fields, thereby reducing the input cost of

farmers. "Last year we had no rains till the first week of July. Besides, there was poor availability of electricity so we had to spend a lot of money on diesel to run the pumpsets for irrigating the paddy fields," said Balwinder Singh from Mehraj village in Bathinda district.

Monsoons were delayed by a week in both Punjab and Haryana in 2012, which hurt prospects of paddy and other crops. While farmers had to spend more on irrigating the paddy, less rainfall also hurt other crops like cotton, oilseed and pulses in the rain-fed areas.

Even farmers in Haryana will be pleased with the pre-monsoon showers as paddy transplantation begins in the state on June 15. "Monsoon was late and weak in 2012 so the yield of paddy crop suffered in our area. However, these rains augur well this time," said Pawan Poonia from Sonti village in Kurukshetra district.

Apart from stepping up the pace for paddy transplantation, pre-monsoon rains are also seen beneficial for cotton crop in both states as there were reports of burning of cotton leaves due to higher temperatures. "Cotton and other summer crops sown in sandy soils will get a boost from these showers," said Paramvir Singh, a progressive farmer with postgraduate degree in agriculture science, from Muktsar district.

Punjab and Haryana have set the target area under paddy crop, including basmati, at 27.50 lakh hectares and 12 lakh hectares respectively this kharif season. In 2012, paddy acreage was 28.45 lakh hectares in Punjab,

and in Haryana it was 12.15 lakh hectares in 2012. Together these states contribute between 30-35% of the total paddy bought by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) for the national foodgrain buffer stock. As per FCI data, total paddy procured from Punjab for the 2012-13 kharif marketing season was 88.70 lakh tonnes and 26.37 lakh tonnes from Haryana out of total 327.89 lakh tonnes.

Blue-eyed breed among buffaloes



One of the Neeli Ravis at the site of the university breeding project; not all of them are purebred Gurmeet Singh

Dark as any other buffalo but distinct because of its blue eyes, a white tuft on its tail and five white patches, one each on its forehead and feet, the Neeli Raavi used to thrive in undivided Punjab. Today, the bulk of its remaining population is in Pakistan while a few lakh survive on the Indian side, all in pockets of the border districts of Ferozepur, Taran Tarn, Gurdaspur, and only a few thousand of them purebreds.

Veterinary scientists looking to revive the lost population had their hopes boosted some weeks ago, when five purebred Neeli Raavis from Pakistan crossed the border and reached the farm of Punjab deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal. They would like the government to get such imports cleared for their research, too.

For the past two years, the Guru Angad Dev Veterinary Animal Sciences University has been working on a national project to save the rare, high-mulching breed. The Centre's Open Nucleus Breeding System to Improve Sahiwal Cattle and Neeli Raavi Buffaloes in the State of Punjab, with a budget of Rs 2 crore, aims to rear at least 100 purebred Neeli Raavi buffaloes on a farm at Tarn Taran, from where semen can be supplied to Punjab farmers and exported to other states. The university is hoping for permission either for direct imports or for an exchange programme with Murrah buffaloes, which are found abundantly in Punjab.

Experts say the declining numbers, unless checked, will lead to the extinction of the Neeli Ravi, whose natural habitat has been in Punjab for more than 5,000 years. "Punjab can play a key role if we are allowed to get purebreds from Pakistan," says Dr V K Taneja, vice chancellor of the university.

"Why we have not been able to complete the farm in Tarn Taran, despite land having been acquired two years earlier, is only because we are not getting the purebred. There are too few," Taneja says. "Now when the deputy CM has called for some purebreds (four females and a male) from Pakistan, we will request him not only to grant us permission to import animals for our farm, but also maybe give us access to his animals for the time being, so that pure semen from the male can be used for research." Sukhbir has already promised the university a heifer brought from Pakistan as a gift, Taneja says.

Herbal Hit

To counter the toxic effect of chemicals being used as acaricides – a drug/preparation to kill ticks – on dairy and meat animals, the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) in Izatnagar, Bareilly, and the Lucknow-based National Botanical Research Institute (CSIR-NBRI) have jointly developed a novel herbal formulation.

Eco-friendly and non-toxic, the preparation claims it has no side-effects unlike many of its chemical counterparts, some of which have been linked to cancer in humans as well as reduced productivity in animals. Once commercialised, the herbal formulation hopes to play a significant role in bringing down the losses to Indian cattle farmers from tick-borne diseases, estimated at around Rs 3,000 crore annually.

The Indian dairy and meat industry faces two kinds of problems due to the presence of ticks and the use of chemicals to kill them.

"Tick infestation leads to direct and indirect harm to animals in the form of blood loss, general stress and irritation, decrease in productivity, weakened immune system, damage to hides etc.," said Dr A K S Rawat, principal investigator of the project at NBRI.

"Even our dairy and meat market is limited to a select number of countries because of its quality," said Dr Srikanta Ghosh of IVRI, chief principal investigator of the project. According to NBRI, almost all types of dairy and meat animals in the country suffer from tick infestation and they are mainly

controlled through the use of synthetic chemicals. But chemical usage has itself become a major problem.

"Due to the indiscriminate use of drugs, ticks have developed resistance to almost all available acaricides/insecticides," Rawat said. "Moreover, overuse of acaricides and insecticides has led to contamination of dairy products, which enters the human body and leads to a host of diseases, including cancer," he said, citing the 'cancer train' in Punjab which has reported the extensive use of chemical acaricides and insecticides.

Beet rather than cane

A sweet change is gradually entering the farms of Bathinda. Farmers are commercially testing a crop they have hitherto known as not-a-very-popular ingredient at their dinner table, the sugar beet.

It is being raised by about 40 farmers, particularly in Jodhpur Romana in Bathinda district, for supply to a factory in Tarn Taran that extracts sugar from the sugar beet and not sugarcane.

The farmers say transportation cost of sugar beet is less than that of sugarcane. They say sugarcane is more prone to disease. The returns they get from sugar beet, Rs 145 a quintal, is almost as much they would get for sugarcane. The latest FRP for sugarcane was Rs 170 a quintal. They can have possibly two beet crops a year and double their income, because sugar beet is ready for harvest in six months as compared to the 10 months sugarcane would take.

The yield of sugar per quintal is also higher for sugar beet. Agriculture development officer Dr Baljit Singh said, "A quintal of sugar beet yields about 40 per cent sugar as compared to 15-17 per cent from sugarcane. Abroad, sugar beet is used for making sugar. In Punjab the first factory was set up only last year."

Harwinder Singh, a farmer in Jodhpur Romana, has set aside an acre for sugar beet. He has a tie-up with the Tarn taran factory. Darshan Singh of Rampura village and Gurmeet Singh of Maiserkhana too have started raising sugar beet on their farms.

Harwinder Singh said, "Sowing is done in mid-October or early November and harvesting is done in April-end, on the same pattern as wheat. The sugar mill gives us Rs 145 a quintal. If it works well, we will bring a larger area under sugar beet next season."

Dr Baljit Singh said, "In sandy areas of Bathinda, sugar beet farming succeeds because it needs less water. It is a good option to come out of the paddy-wheat cycle. All farmers have been given pick-up facilities by the mill, so they don't have to bother about transport. We got this farm diversification done on trial after supplying seeds, and are hopeful that in the coming year, the area under sugar beet will increase."

Land of milk and plenty

Milk is the what sustains farmers in the rain-fed hills of Namhol in Himachal Pradesh. An initiative of six or seven families taken in 2001, when they

pooled 37 litres every day for supply to 15-odd consumers, has spread across 26 panchayats today.

Their milk producers' cooperative society, Kamdhenu Krishak Avam Upbhokta Hitkari Manch, collects 8,150 litres daily from 141 villages. More than 1,500 farmers are directly involved in milk production. Most of them own very little land, there is no irrigation, and monkeys would destroy whatever crop they tried to grow.

"Milk has become my family's bread and butter," says Sita Rani, whose two cows supply 10 litres a day for Kamdhenu Manch. "I earn Rs 8,000 to Rs 9,000 a month. Earlier, it was tough to sustain the family of five with our small, rain-fed land yielding nothing. Now I can even save a little after meeting our needs. Twelve or 13 families in my village followed my initiative to switch to milk."

Milk collection is done twice, in the morning and evening, almost house to house. Depending on quality, families are paid Rs 20.50 to Rs 29 a litre, the payments made on the seventh of the month. Some 5,000 consumers get 'Kamdhenu' milk at its outlets in towns like Bilaspur, Barmana, Ghumerwin, Sundernagar and Daralaghat, besides Shimla.

The cooperative has invested Rs 12 lakh in setting up a 1,000-litre milk cooling system and packing line, besides a milk testing lab and cold storage. "Surplus milk is used to make paneer and ghee," says Jeet Ram Kaundal, secretary of Kamdhenu Manch.

Historically, too, Namhol has been a milk producing area of Bilaspur, a mid-hills district where small holdings and lack of irrigation made agriculture unviable, unlike districts such as Shimla, Kullu and Solan that are known for apple and off-season vegetables. Recently, however, Namhol has seen some innovative farmers switching over to cash crops and vegetables in polyhouses.

hindustantimes

weather

Chennai – INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Friday, Jun 14

Max Min

35° | 28°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:42

Humidity: 55

Sunset: 06:35

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1000

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

Saturday, Jun 15

Max Min

37° | 28°

Extended Forecast for a week

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Jun 16

Jun 17

Jun 18

Jun 19

Jun 20



38° | 28°

38° | 28°

38° | 28°

38° | 28°

38° | 28°

Cloudy

Overcast

Overcast

Overcast

Overcast

Truant weather may impact second flush tea crop

Cropping delayed due to skewed climate in growing States



Rising temperature: The weather was good in April but bad during the greater part of May when there was a setback in cropping pattern. As a result, the second flush cropping was delayed, slightly though.

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Kolkata, June 13:

Erratic weather for over a week now has been a matter of concern to a large number of growers of North Indian tea.

“The temperature in wide areas of Assam and Dooars in the past 10 days has been incredibly high, ranging between 35 and 40 degree centigrade,

and north bank of the river Brahmaputra is experiencing virtually a heat wave,” according to tea industry sources.

What is causing concern is that it is also the peak quality period. If the present situation persists, there will be a setback in second flush cropping that produces high quality tea, it is feared.

The fear may not be totally unfounded. The daily leaf intake has already dropped and there has been a temporary suppression of growth.

The second flush accounts for roughly 25 per cent of the total annual crop.

Skewed Climate

Explaining the erratic nature of the weather, the sources point out that it was good in April but bad during the greater part of May when there was a setback in cropping pattern.

In end May and early June, the weather was good only to turn bad in past 10 days. As a result, the second flush cropping was delayed, slightly though.

For the past few years, the weather, it is pointed out, has been playing truant, deviating from the set pattern – a balance between moisture and sunshine – that had persisted for centuries, rendering Assam and Dooars the major tea producing regions of the world.

It is not that the total quantity of rain has sharply declined now. The distribution of rain has become unpredictable even as total quantity remains the same.

“The concentrated dry spell will alternate with concentrated wet spell,” the sources observe. Another interesting feature of skewed distribution is micro raining.

Darjeeling unaffected

Wide variations in rain in areas which are only a few kms apart have been reported. Fortunately for Darjeeling growers, the crop remains unaffected so far thanks to good rainfall matched with adequate sunshine.

The total Darjeeling production however accounts for less than 10 million kgs annually or less than even one per cent of the country’s total tea production.

As for prices, ordinary CTC varieties are attracting lower prices than last year while good quality CTC is selling at a premium. If the second flush crop turns out to be not-so-satisfactory, then the good quality CTC will continue to command high prices.

Interestingly, Orthodox prices are ruling higher despite larger production this year . There is good export demand for Orthodox, particularly from Iran, the sources added.

Spot rubber rules flat

Physical rubber prices finished unchanged despite a firm closing in domestic futures on Thursday.

According to sources, the market lost its direction on buyer resistance following the declines in the international trend setters. Major manufacturers, stayed back possibly on import hopes as the gap between the domestic and global rates widened further.

Sheet rubber closed steady at Rs 175 a kg both at Kottayam and Kochi, according to traders and the Rubber Board. The volumes were low.

June futures improved to Rs 177.25 (Rs 175.64), July to Rs 173.20 (Rs 172.65), August to Rs 170.22 (Rs 169.52), and September to Rs 167.80 (Rs 167.38) while the October futures dropped to Rs 63.85 (Rs 165.13) and November to Rs 163.51 (Rs 165.01) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) fell sharply to Rs 162.76 (Rs 167.39) at Bangkok. June futures recovered marginally to ¥ 228.8 (Rs 140.73) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rubber rates Rs/kg : RSS-4: 175 (175); RSS-5: 170 (170); Ungraded: 160 (160); SNR 20: 161 (161) and Latex 60 per cent: 111 (111).

'Traditional foods of N. Karnataka offer export potential'

Efforts should be made to develop Bijapur industrially, mainly in agriculture sector as THE district is known for vegetables, resins and pomegranate.

Speaking at the seminar on agribusiness and commodities price risk management organised by The Hindu Business Line in association with Forward Market Commission, National Commodities Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), Bijapur District Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture and Bijapur District MerchantS' Association, D. S. Guddodagi, President of the district chamber said that there are business opportunities in Bijapur provided the Government creates required infrastructure.

He said these days, traditional foods of North Karnataka such as jowar roti and groundnut chutney are being exported.

“Bijapur has great potential to be developed industrially, however, investment opportunities should be provided to people by ensure required facilities,” Guddodagi explained. Earlier, G. Chandrashekhar, Consultant, The Hindu Business Line, has lamented that despite India being the highest producer of milk, and second highest producer of wheat, rice, sugar, cotton and vegetable in the world, the Indian policy makers have failed to use this achievement to link it with the economic growth of the country.

Delivering lecture on commodities as critical driver of India's economic growth, he said that enormous scope for the growth in agriculture sector

exists in India which will boost the economic growth the country, if the potential was properly used.

Though he expressed happiness over the increasing Gross Domestic Product of the country in the last a decade, he regretted that compared to China, India was still lagging behind.

Sandeep Dubey, Product and Business Development Executive of NCDEX, explained the functions of NCDEX and price risk management. B. M. Rao, Deputy General Manager of Canara Bank, assured to provide all support to the business community of Bijapur district for growth of agribusiness. Ravindra Bijjaragi, President, Merchants' Association was present. The programme was also supported by Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industries, Bangalore.

Palm oil imports at record high on parity in import duty

Imports of refined palmolein hit a record 373,837 tonnes in May compared to the previous high of 253,489 tonnes recorded in March.

Shipments hit a nine-year peak as the reduction in import duty difference between crude and refined palmolein and favourable duty for refined palmolein fixed by the exporting countries pushed up imports.

Vegetable oil imports increased two per cent in May to 917,964 tonnes against 896,921 tonnes in the same period last year, according to the Solvent Extractors' Association data.

Edible oil imports were at 892,066 tonnes and that of non-edible oil at 25,898 tonnes.

The overall import of vegetable oil in the last seven months was up seven per cent at 6,197,469 tonnes.

Overall import of refined oil in the last seven months was at 1,248,024 tonnes (1,084,933 tonnes).

In the last two months, the share of refined oil has jumped to over 40 per cent of overall imports.

In the last one year, RBD palmolein prices (free on board) have fallen 24 per cent to \$261 a tonne (Rs 15,138), crude palmoil was down 23 per cent \$253 (Rs 14,670), crude soyabean oil dipped 13 per cent \$157 (Rs 9,100) and crude sunflower oil fell four per cent to \$46 (Rs 2,668).

However, the sudden fall of the rupee has put pressure on vegetable oil imports.

Positive outlook for sugar on hopes of festival demand

Sugar prices in spot ruled steady while at upper mill-level extended gains by Rs 10-15 a quintal on Thursday on good buying support. Prices in futures market dropped by Rs15-20 on profit booking.

Supply is ample but expectation of higher festivals off take in the coming months kept sentiment positive, said sources. A Vashi-based wholesaler

said “Morale of the market is positive as producers are now not very keen to sell at lower rates. They are getting good buying support from stockists. There are chances of hike in import duty on sugar, possible lower sugar production next season and expectations of higher retailers demand in the coming festivals season starting from July with Ramadan and Ashadhi Ekadashi; all this factors are supporting the sentiment.”

In the Vashi wholesale market, arrivals were 65-66 truck loads (each of 100 bags) but local dispatches were about 63-64 truck loads. On Wednesday, about 10-12 mills offered tenders and sold about 38,000-40,000 bags at Rs 2,950-3,010 (Rs 2,940-3,010) for S-grade and Rs 3,020-3,120 (Rs 3,000-3,110) for M-grade.

On the NCDEX, sugar July futures dropped by Rs 14 to Rs 3,112 , August was down by Rs 14 to Rs 3,166 and September lower by Rs 13 to Rs 3,214 till noon.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association’s spot rates were: S-grade Rs 3,062-3,135 (Rs 3,062-3,141) and M-grade Rs 3,172-3,331 (Rs 3,172-3,331). **Naka delivery rates were:** S-grade Rs 3,020-3,080 (Rs 3,020-3,080) and M-grade Rs 3,130-3,200 (Rs 3,130-3,200).

Volatile currency tempers bullish trend in edible oils

Volatile currency market and lower Malaysian palm oil closing arrested bullish sentiments in edible oils market on Thursday.

Ease in demand at higher price kept activities limited during the day.

Analyst said, Malaysian palm oil futures were almost flat intraday but later declined sharply.

During the day, stockists have covered about 150-200 tonnes of palmolein for ready delivery at Rs 527 and about 180-200 tonnes at Rs 535 for July delivery in resale. In direct trade,

Liberty sold about 150-170 tonnes super palmolein at Rs 580, said sources.

Soyabean arrivals were 85,000-87,000 bags including 37,000 from Madhya Pradesh at Rs 3,850 ex-mandi and Rs 3,900 for plant delivery.

Mustard seeds arrivals were 1.80 lakh-1.85 lakh bags and the prices were Rs 3,150-3,600.

At the end of the day, Liberty was quoting palmolein Rs 555, super palmolein Rs 588 and super deluxe Rs 608.

Ruchi quoted palmolein Rs 555 for June, soyabean refined oil Rs 675 for June and sunflower refined oil Rs 790 for June-July.

In Rajkot, groundnut oil was steady at Rs 1,630 (Rs 1,630) for *telia* tin and Rs1,050 (Rs1,050) for loose 10 kg on the third consecutive day.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, soyabean refined oil July futures were down by Rs 1.70 to Rs 693.25 (Rs 694.95), August declined by Rs 2.45 to Rs 687.70 (Rs 690.15) and September lower by Rs 2.80 to Rs 681 (Rs 683.80).

Malaysia BMD crude palm oil July contracts settled at MYR 2,418 (MYR 2,449), August at MYR 2,424 (MYR 2,451) and September at MYR 2,422 (MYR 2,451) a tonnee.

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg) were: Groundnut oil 1,060 (1,060), soya refined oil 670 (670), sunflower exp. ref. 730 (685), sunflower ref. 790 (785), rapeseed ref. oil 705 (705), rapeseed expeller ref. 675 (675), cottonseed ref. oil 665 (660) and palmolein 530 (528).

Vikram Global Commodities, Chennai, quoted Rs 580 ex-Chennai for Malaysian super palmolein for delivery 15 days.

Spot jeera gains, futures fall on profit booking

Jeera gained in spot market on good export enquiries and average domestic demand while jeera future prices declined on profit booking.

Jeera arrivals were around 9,000-10,000 bags, while traded around 12,000-13,000 bags at Unjha mandi of Gujarat (each bag of 55 kg).

Prices gained by Rs 10-15 to Rs 2,100-2,200 for 20 kg for rough quality and best quality jeera was traded on Rs 2,325-2,425.

In Singapore, Indian jeera was offered at \$2,450 a tonne f.o.b. Mumbai.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), jeera July contract decreased by Rs 40 to Rs 13,140 a quintal, with an open interest of 16,776 lots.

August contract lost by Rs 52.5 to Rs 13,480, with an open interest of 5,961 lots. NCDEX-accredited warehouses jeera stocks dropped by one tonne to 8,216 tonnes.

According to traders, export demand is expected to increase ahead of the Ramadan festival.

Demand from hedgers are likely to pick up at the lower levels.

Good supplies and good progress of monsoon capped the gains.

Traders are expecting the total production of Jeera in the current year at 34 lakh-35 lakh bags, up one lakh from last year.

This is mainly due to better crop productivity in some areas of Gujarat.

Mustard oil sizzles on improved buying support

Improved demand from wholesalers, retailers and pickle manufacturers lifted mustard oil prices in mandis across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

In Indore, mustard oil on Thursday ruled at Rs 646 for 10 kg (up Rs 9 from last week). Similarly in Neemuch, it was quoted at Rs 640 (up Rs 10), while it ruled at Rs 642 in Moorena (up Rs 7).

In Rajasthan mandis also, mustard oil prices in the past week have gone up with its prices in Kota and Ganga Nagar being quoted at Rs 645 for 10 kg each (up Rs 5), while it rose to Rs 660 in Jaipur (up Rs 10).

In Gujarat, mustard oil prices have gone up by Rs 25 to Rs 645. Given further rise in demand in mustard in the coming monsoon season, mustard oil prices in mandis across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat are expected to rule higher in the coming days, more so due to rise in demand from pickle manufacturers.

Mustard seeds on the other hand ruled firm at Rs 4,200-4,300 a quintal, while raida ruled at Rs 3,200.

Compared to last week, mustard seeds prices in Indore mandis are ruling stable. Plant deliveries in mustard seeds for Jaipur line ruled at Rs 3,505-3,510 a quintal (up Rs 5).

Mustard seeds futures showed a mixed trend with its June and July contracts on the NCEDX closing at Rs 3,485 (down Rs 2) and Rs 3,523 (up Re 1).

With decline in arrivals and improved buying support in the coming days, future of mustard seeds appears to be bullish in the coming days.

Arrival of mustard seeds was recorded at 1.85 lakh bags

From Madhya Pradesh 18,000 bags; Uttar Pradesh 17,000; Punjab/Haryana 20,000; Rajasthan 95,000, Gujarat 15,000 while 20,000 bags were offloaded from the remaining parts of the country.

Rice may rule range-bound

With not much trading taking place in the market, prices of aromatic and non-basmati rice varieties remained unchanged on Thursday.

Amit Chandna, proprietor of Hanuman Rice Trading Company, told *Business Line* that rice varieties managed to maintain their previous quoted levels despite slack trading. The market is moving at snail's pace and a steady trend prevailed, he added. Trading had been lukewarm over the last few days, not only the buyers but also the sellers were not participating actively in the market, said Amit Chandna. Demand is not picking up and prices may rule range-bound for the next few days, he added. In the physical market, Pusa-1121 (steam) sold at Rs 7,730 a quintal, while Pusa-1121 (sela) quoted at Rs 7,150. Pure basmati (raw) quoted at Rs 8,800. Duplicate basmati (steam) was at Rs 6,780. For the brokens of Pusa-1121, Dubar quoted at Rs 4,000, Tibar sold at Rs 4,500 while Mongra was at Rs 3,000.

In the non-basmati section, Sharbati (Steam) sold at Rs 4,850-4,870 while Sharbati (Sela) quoted at Rs 4,480.

Permal (raw) sold at Rs 2,250 while Permal (sela) went for Rs 2,350 . PR-11 (sela) sold at Rs 3,100-3,150 while PR-11 (Raw) quoted at Rs 2,780. PR14 (steam) sold at Rs 3,350.

Spot turmeric drops by Rs 100 a quintal

The price of the finger variety turmeric dropped by Rs 100 a quintal on Thursday.

“Though the arrival of turmeric bags have increased to 2,480 on Thursday, the prices decreased by Rs 100. But for want of upcountry demand, the traders have purchased only 450 bags; remaining 980 were procured by the stockists.

Only medium variety hybrid turmeric arrived for sale, so the prices are stable for the hybrid finger and the root varieties”, said R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

He said the prevailing price in Nizamabad and Warrangal are almost equal to Erode market, so the buying has affected in the two northern markets also.

The prices in the turmeric futures also remain static for the past two or three days. About 40 bags in the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society fetched increased price of Rs 6,669 due to quality.

Remaining 194 bags were sold for decreased price.

Similarly due to arrival of fine variety, the price increased by Rs 500 for 35 bags.

Remaining 105 bags were sold for decreased price.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,144-6,437, root variety Rs 4,094-5,618.

Salem hybrid crop: The finger variety was sold at Rs 6,167-7,099, the root variety Rs 5,706-6,034.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,416-6,506, the root variety Rs 5,390-6,006.

Of the arrival of 200 bags, 197 were sold.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,461-6,669, the root variety Rs 5,399-5,919.

All the 234 bags were sold.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,242-7,029, the root variety Rs 5,269-5,900.

Out of 214 bags, 140 were sold.

Pepper futures mixed on thin arrivals

Pepper futures on Thursday declined on the NMCE while on IPSTA, they showed an upward swing for active contracts.

Small and medium farmers are said to have sold out their stocks while the rich are not interested to sell on the anticipation that the prices would move up further, they said.

There was no arrival of physical pepper and, hence, no business has taken place on the spot market today, they said.

On the NMCE, July contract decreased by Rs 452 a quintal to close at Rs 35,910; Aug dropped by Rs 101 at Rs 36,680; Sept increased by Rs 444 to close at Rs 37,200.

Total open interest moved up by five tonnes to 32 tonnes. Total turnover increased by 27 tonnes to 35 tonnes.

On the IPSTA platform, June and July contracts increased by Rs 130 each to close at Rs 35,909 and Rs 35,805 respectively while Aug declined by Rs 69 at Rs 36,006.

Spot prices remained unchanged at Rs 34,200 (ungarbled) and Rs 35,700 (MG 1) on limited activities in a lacklustre market, they said.

Indian parity in the international market moved up marginally as the Rupee gained against the dollar today to \$6,300 a tonne (f.o.b.) for June shipments for Europe and about \$6,450 (f.o.b.) for the US.

Business Standard

Rice crop seen at record as early rains spur sowing

Rice output in India, the world's second-largest grower, is set to climb to a record as early arrival of monsoon over the biggest growing regions spurs planting, potentially boosting exports.

The monsoon crop might increase 2.4 per cent to 95 million tonnes from 92.75 million tonnes a year earlier, said P Chengal Reddy, secretary general of the Consortium of Indian Farmers Associations. The crop is planted from June and harvested from October and accounts for 90 per cent of the nation's total production.

A bigger harvest might help India retain its position as the top exporter and further lower global food costs tracked by the United Nations' Food & Agriculture Organization, which fell in May for the first time in four months. While rice prices are poised for a third year of gains in Chicago, corn and wheat have tumbled into bear markets after surging last year. when the worst drought since the 1930s wilted crops in the US.

"Given the forecast for a normal monsoon, the area under rice will certainly be more than last year," Trilochan Mohapatra, director of the Central Rice Research Institute, said in a phone interview from Delhi. "The production of rice is going to exceed" last season's levels, he said.