

Farmers warned of crop diseases

• STAFF REPORTER

CPCRI devises ways to ward off diseases caused by pests during monsoon

With monsoon projected to remain erratic this season, the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) has called upon farmers to check rain-related diseases of coconut, areca nut and cocoa, caused by invasive pests.

The Centre has asked agricultural research institutes to alert farmers to possible crop loss, CPCRI director P. Chowdappa told a press conference here on Monday. The CPCRI has come out with timely and effective pest-control measures and manure applications to arrest the loss, he said.

Fungi attack

Areca nut, coconut, and cocoa crops could be affected by 'mahali' (fruit rot), bud rot, and black pod respectively because the atmosphere is ideal for fungi multiplication during monsoon. To protect coconut palms from fungi attack, the damaged spindle has to be removed and the wound should be swabbed with fungicide — mancozeb 5 gm in 300 ml water — and covered with a polythene sheet till new bud emerges.

Preventive measures

Dead palms should be destroyed. Immediate control measures are needed to save affected palms as they succumb to the disease very fast. The diseases are mostly prevalent in hilly hamlets where the CPCRI has begun preventive measures to ward off threat from the fungi *Phytophthora palmivora* that causes bud rot.

To contain 'mahali' in areca, Bordeaux mixture should be sprayed well before rain picks up momentum. The pesticide could be used to check black pod in cocoa too, Dr. Chowdappa said. Expressing concern over the shortfall of rain in June, he called for adopting water harvesting within farms.