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### CPCRI issues red alert on invasive pests

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The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) has issued a red alert against the possibility of three invasive pests destroying coconut palms across the country.

The pests, hitherto restricted to Maldives, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines, are *Brontispa longissima*, *Aspidiotus rigidus* and *Wallacea sp.*, among others.

P. Chowdappa, Director, CPCRI, has, in a release, said that the pests could hit bio-security of the country if they entered India as there were no effective control measures, either through chemical treatment, available now. He asked the ports, airports, quarantine officials and departments of agriculture and horticulture to be on the alert and report spotting of any of them to the CPCRI.

“Any invasive pest entering a new habitat (introduced country) would be catastrophic as it breeds prolifically in a shorter period of time in the absence of its natural enemies,” he said in the release.

The release said that there should be strict quarantine procedures in place in all airports and seaports to check an accidental introduction of them through baggage of ornamental palms and other genetic resources. They might spread through the trans-boundary movement of ornamental palms and other planting material.

The release said that *Brontispa longissima* has caused tremendous yield loss in Maldives, Union of Myanmar, Indonesia, affecting the coconut-based tourism industry and livelihood security as well. Hard-scale insect, *Aspidiotus rigidus*, has ravaged the Philippines causing extensive damage.

“Intensive surveys conducted by ICAR-CPCRI at South and Little Andamans have revealed the occurrence of a new chrysomelid beetle, *Wallacea sp.* feeding on coconut seedlings in nursery. Though 80 per cent to 90 per cent of seedlings were infested by the pest damaging 40 per cent leaf area, seedling mortality was not observed. *Wallacea* could not be located from adult palms, but prevalent in abandoned, unattended and old nurseries. Invasive nature of *Wallacea sp.* is under scrutiny, as a close relative, *Wallaceana sp.* was reported from Indonesia,” the release said.

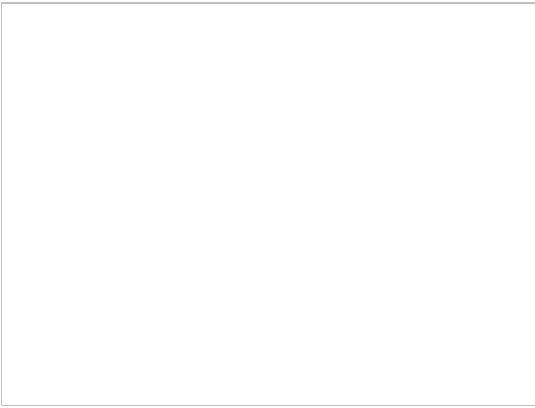
Mr. Chowdappa told *The Hindu* that if *Brontispa longissima* and *Aspidiotus rigidus* hit the palms, their leaves start drying up and the palms never recovered. When *Wallacea sp.* hit, leaves of seedlings turned yellow and never green said as of now no effective treatment to control them was available. If they hit the coconut plantations, there could be severe economic setback.

### Meeting next month

The CPCRI, functioning under the Indian Council for Agricultural Research, Delhi, will conduct a meeting of airports, seaports, farmers and scientists at its headquarters in Kasaragod, Kerala, in the first week of next month to create awareness among all on the possible threats by invasive pests to coconut palms.

CPCRI Director P. Chowdappa told *The Hindu* that the meeting would be conducted as a precautionary measure to alert all stakeholders in the country.

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