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Copra procurement in Kerala moves at snail's pace with only three months remaining

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Vadakara: Although the Centre gave its nod to procure copra at subsidised rates on March 9, Kerala began collection only by June 24. It has been able to collect only 165 tonnes of copra in the past two months.

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The state is consecutively wasting the situation where it could have offered support to the farmers by procuring 50,000 tonnes of copra at a rate of Rs 10,860 per quintal for the second year now.

As per the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) calculations, there are three months and 18 days left for collecting Copra from farmers. The deadline will end on December 24. The possibility of amassing 50,000 tonnes of copra within this period seems slim.

Presently, only four groups under Marketfed are engaged in collecting copra. These centres are located in Kannur, Kasaragod and Malappuram. The major challenge for collection last year was the shortage of collection centres. To resolve this, the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council Keralam (VFPCCK) was made into a state nodal agency in May this year. For this, VFPCCK was exempted from procuring fresh coconut for KERAFED and the order for this was passed by the government in July. It was decided that VFPCCK would collect fresh coconut from the private farmers under it, convert into copra and hand it over to the central agency NAFED.

41 committees are registered under NAFED for copra procurement. The registration for collection began towards the end of July and over 2000 farmers have registered themselves. However, even a month after registration, the farmers have been unable to sell their copra. VFPCCK had invited tenders for a drying machine required for processing coconut. Even so, it was able to close the open tender only after an entire month due to some complaints regarding the company that quoted the lowest price. The agency earlier promised that collection would begin before Onam and then changed it to after Onam. When the procurement will begin still remains unclear.

The agencies that were promised to NAFED for copra collection are still involved in collecting fresh coconut for KERAFED. Since they have not received functioning costs from KERAFED for over a year, collection has been stalled in places including Kozhikode. They can be allotted to copra procurement only after a resolution is found for these issues.

All this will take time. Since revised subsidized rates will be announced in January, no collection will be done after December 24.

Tamil Nadu was given approval for collecting 55,000 tonnes of copra and the state was able to complete the collection before the prescribed deadline. They had procured 47,000 tonnes within three months. Following this, T.N Chief Minister M.K Stalin sent a letter to the Chief Minister requesting the approval for collecting 90,000 tonnes of copra. Karnataka was also able to complete its target of collecting 55,000 tonnes of ball copra.

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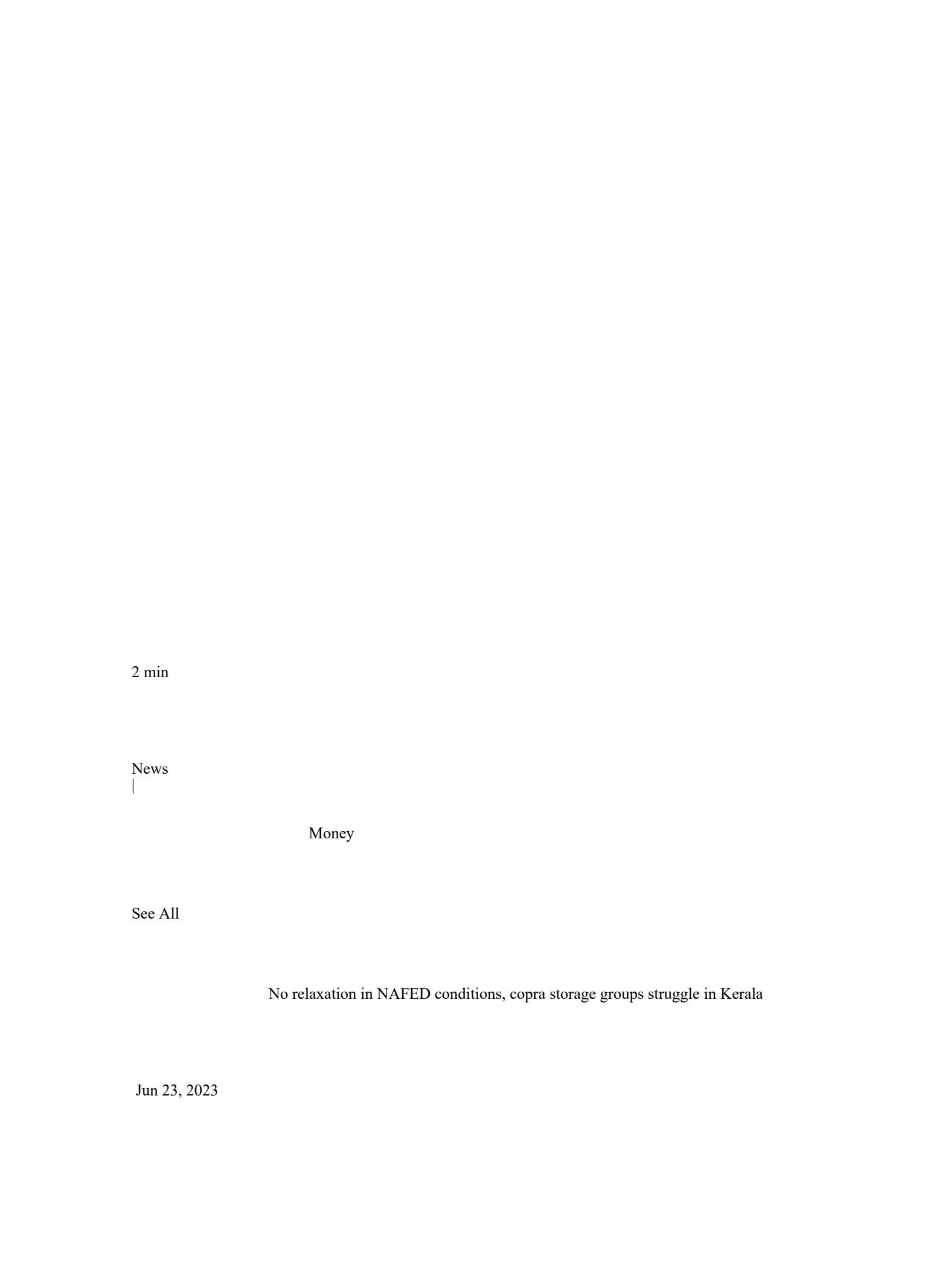
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