

## LEAF BLIGHT OF COCONUT CAUSED BY *PESTALOSPHAERIA ELAEIDIS* (BOOTH & ROBERTSON) VANDER AA - A NEW RECORD

During 1984, a hitherto undescribed disease causing leaf blight of coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L) cv WCT was noticed in a farmer's field at Balal, Kasargod District. Subsequently the disease was found prevalent in many parts of the northern Kerala. Apart from WCT, other cultivars and hybrids were also prone to the attack.

The symptoms of the disease are confined to the leaves of the outer whorl and spreads to the inner leaves. Young leaves do not show up the disease. The symptoms appear usually near the tip of the leaflets as watersoaked lesions. Rarely it initiates from the margin or any other part of the leaflet. The lesions gradually enlarge and result in blighting and progressive drying and necrosis of a large portion of the lamina. The infected tissues turn brown to grey. Small black pinheads like acervuli of the fungus are seen in the blighted portion. They are more on the ventral surface of the leaf. A characteristic zonation develops in the affected area by successive bands of dark brown margins and lighter inner areas. Usually the spread of the disease is not restricted by the midrib of the leaflets. The midrib is also attacked and killed. As the disease advances the size of the leaves is reduced and production of female flowers is lessened. Sometimes the pathogen attacked buttons and immature nuts, produced characteristic lesions and led to their shedding.

Though the disease is not lethal to the palms, it inflicts a serious set back in the health of the palm. Under favourable conditions the disease spreads fast and results in blighting of a large area of the foliage. Usually the disease is severe during the summer months. In a severely affected tree, 17 leaves succumbed to the disease. More than 75 per cent of the leaf area was damaged. In severely affected palms 58.3% reduction in the yield of nuts was observed.

The pathogen was isolated from the diseased portions and cultured on potato dextrose agar medium. Inoculation experiments were conducted and established the pathogenicity of the organism. Microscopic studies were carried out. The fungus was identified as *Pestalotia elaeidis* (Booth & Robertson) Vander Aa (IMI 321032).

Leaf blight of coconut caused by *Pestalotia palmarum* (Copeland, 1931) and *Botryodiplodia* (Filho *et al.*, 1979) has been reported. But this is the first report of *Pestalotia elaeidis* (Booth & Robertson Vander Aa) causing a serious leaf blight disease of coconut.

The spread of the disease was brought under control by cutting and burning the severely infected leaves and spraying Bavistin(0.1%) or Bordeaux mixture(1%).

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