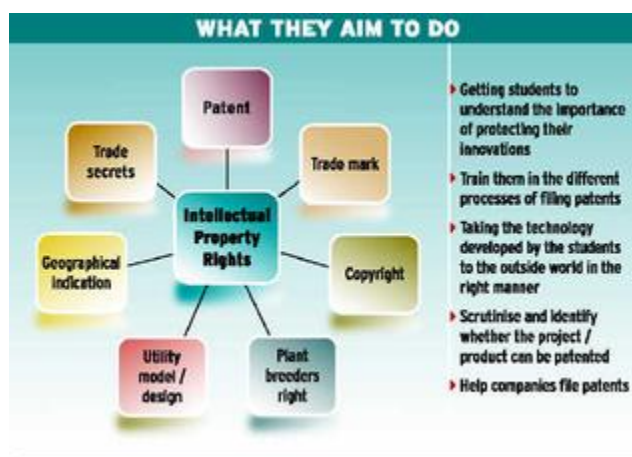


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Making them aware of the worth of their inventions

Amutha Kannan

A few universities in Coimbatore have IPR Cells to disseminate the need for protecting inventions



With the premise that it is not enough to be the creator of an innovation or knowledge, but essential to protect that innovation, there is heightened eagerness among the academia to take this information forward.

The discerning few who see this as an urgent need are taking steps to disseminate the need for protecting inventions, not only among students and research scholars, but also among companies. The efforts are getting transformed into reality in the form of Intellectual Property Rights' (IPR) Cells in universities and colleges.

Though Anna University of Technology, Coimbatore, started a cell in 2007 that catered to its own students and also those belonging to affiliated colleges, the ones that followed much later only make a short list.

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Karunya University, and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) are among the universities and the latest addition and most likely the first in the college category is the Rathinam Institute of Technology.

There are other institutions that have Entrepreneur Development Cell, Career Development Cell, or e-Cell, focussed on motivating and helping students begin start-ups while in college, or an entrepreneurial venture on completion of their course. But these, according to the faculty, do not concentrate much on information on protecting the 'property'.

Main focus

The main focus of the IPR Cells is to take up projects and proposals that involve creating awareness about the various aspects of IP Rights.

The cells in Rathinam Tech Zone and Karunya University are both three months old. The latter is involved in conducting various awareness programmes to students and faculty to enable them to identify their innovative work that can be patented, according to S. Darius Gnanaraj, Director, IPR.

According to S. Balasubramanian, former Director of Centre for IPR, Anna University of Technology, Coimbatore, and principal of Rathinam Institute of Technology, the university centre has filed nearly 60 patents so far.

About the Rathinam Cell, he says: "The response so far has been tremendous. Companies have come forward to seek our assistance to file patents. This saves them the effort of travelling to The Patent Office in Chennai and also getting all the work done with a Patent Attorney. Two IPR experts, who have cleared the Patent Attorney examination, co-ordinate patent filing work and also the awareness programmes."

Students from all those disciplines that have opportunity in creating new knowledge are encouraged to learn the filing / drafting processes. They also get to learn whether the new knowledge is qualified to be patented or not.

P. Venkat Rangan, Vice-Chancellor of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, says that the cell was set up two years ago in response to the demand of the industry that many projects of students get converted into Intellectual Property.

"The university has a vision to take the technology of the students to the community. The technology business incubator we have provides the seed money to students and faculty to develop products. Many are ignorant of patents, copyrights and other IP Rights. The cell has proved to be a good learning opportunity for the students. Patent writers / attorneys and other IPR experts guide the functioning of the cell," the Vice-Chancellor says.

While the above pertain to science and technology-related patenting, the Department of Trade and Intellectual Property at TNAU, started last year, also takes on the function of an advanced centre for promoting patent services from inventors in agriculture. This, it is striving to do by developing an “Agricultural Patent System”.

K.M. Selvaraj, Head of the Department, says the services are extended to drafting patents and copyrights for crop varieties, traditional knowledge for protection, and agricultural products of farmers, scientists, and also inventions of private agricultural companies.

Separate programmes

Separate awareness and capacity building programmes on IPR are held for postgraduate and doctoral students. All the services will be incorporated into a course capsule and offered as part of the syllabus for certain undergraduate programmes in the next academic year, he adds.

In the face of stiff global competition, it is believed that infringement leading to nil or inadequate returns to the creators of new knowledge will be a cause of worry in the future. Spreading awareness about the various IP Rights even before students get into development of products is seen as the only way to make them aware of the worth of their inventions.

It is believed that infringement leading to nil or inadequate returns to the creators of new knowledge will be a cause of worry in the future

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Contest to add files to Tamil Wikipedia gathers steam

Renuka Phadnis

The Tamil Wikimedia community has organised an international contest to get more photos, videos and audios related to Tamil, Tamilians and Tamil culture to the Tamil Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons.

The aim of the contest (themed “Eluthu mattum arivanru” or “Knowledge beyond text”) is “to increase the quality media content related to Tamil and Tamilians in Wikimedia projects, to attract non-text contributors such as photographers, graphic artists, animators, mapmakers and videographers to Tamil Wiki projects and to create a model precedent for cooperation with

Wikimedia Foundation [WMF] in organising projects,” according to Bala Jeyaraman, Wikipedia volunteer and lead co-ordinator for the contest.

People may send photos of places where Tamils reside, Tamil people themselves, studies, heritage symbols, institutions, species (plants and animals) and Diaspora; temples, places of worship and buildings. They can send educational resources such as files used to teach in Tamil. Also invited are maps, graphs, illustrations, diagrams, charts, audio and video files that contain explanations in Tamil, pronunciation files for Tamil words and phrases, audio recordings of literary works; audio and video recordings of Tamil cultural practices, arts, dances or sports.

Foreign contribution

Contributions were coming in from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Norway, America, Canada, Germany and India, Mr. Jeyaraman said.

Kalaiarasy Kugarajh, who lives in Norway, is one of five persons co-ordinating the project. She said she was delighted to know that a Tamil Wikipedia existed. Using an encyclopaedia online was convenient and, being of Tamil origin, she found getting information in Tamil very useful.

She initially began contributing to the Tamil Wikipedia and then added to Tamil Wiktionary and other projects. She thought that contributing to Tamil content online could help Tamil people with limited knowledge of English or other languages. “Especially, when we live in a foreign country, we lack the printed version of books, and dictionaries, encyclopaedias in Tamil. To people who want to refer to something in Tamil or who want the Tamil meaning for something, or want some old Tamil writings, the Tamil Wikipedia and the sister projects are much helpful. The Tamil Diaspora can gain a lot from Tamil Wiki projects,” she said. Besides, storing information online was necessary and efficient.

Categorisation

“We are categorising the uploads and checking for any copyright violations. We have already started to make use of the suitable uploads in Wiki projects continuously too. Finally, we will evaluate the uploads to select the winners.” The contest, while increasing the media files on Tamil, would increase awareness among people of the Tamil Wiki as a source of information and get contributions from them to Tamil Wiki projects in future.

Chennai student Surya Prakash S, who suggested the theme name of the contest, has uploaded more than 120 images taken on his campus (Anna University), photos of film stars and Chennai monuments.

He said: "I just capture images using my cell phone and camera for this contest. I haven't chosen any subject at all. I just captured images that are useful for knowledge such as orchids and 'bonsai' trees in the "Semmozhi Poonga" [botanical gardens] and some rare herbs from my native [home]."

He was adding files as he "knows well the status of Tamil content in Internet." The Tamil Nadu government should support such initiatives in its academic institutions to increase the student community's activity in the free, collaborative encyclopaedia-building project, he said.

Prize money

The Tamil Wikipedia Community and the WMF have sponsored a prize money of \$850 (with nine prizes) for winners. (The first, second and third prizes are \$200, \$100 and \$50. Three prizes of \$100 each are for those uploading the maximum number of quality entries.

A special prize of \$150 is for media files on traditional Tamil arts and crafts.

Winners would be announced on March 15, 2012 and they would get certificates with their entries displayed on the front pages of Tamil Wiki projects, said the invitation to contributors.

The contest (<http://ta.wikipedia.org/wiki/contest>, November 15, 2011 to February 29, 2012) is open to all and is on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/tawmc>).

· *People may send photos of places where Tamils reside, heritage symbols, institutions, plants and animals*

· *'Tamil Diaspora can gain a lot from Tamil Wiki projects'*

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Food inflation down to 4-year low

A sharp fall in vegetable prices brought food inflation to a near four-year low of 4.35 per cent for the week ended December 3, raising hopes that the RBI will halt the rate hikes in the monetary policy review on Friday.

Buoyed by the steep decline in food prices, Chief Economic Advisor Kaushik Basu said food inflation may go down below 3 per cent in a month's time. "I expect by the first week of January food inflation will go down below 3 per cent."

The latest weekly food inflation number is the lowest since the week ended February 23, 2008, when it was 4.28 per cent.

Food inflation stood at 6.6 per cent in the previous week and 10.78 per cent in the corresponding period last year.

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Food inflation slips to 4.35 %

Special Correspondent

In a much-needed relief to consumers and comfort for the government, which has been battling the price spiral for over 18 months, food inflation slumped to nearly a four-year low at 4.35 per week ended December 3 following a significant fall in prices of wheat and vegetable owing to seasonal factors.

Coming a day ahead of the Reserve Bank's monetary policy review on Friday, the marked moderation in WPI (wholesale price index) food inflation from 6.6 per cent in the previous week has raised hopes of at least a pause, if not an easing, in key rate hikes, as indicated by the apex bank earlier, so as to catalyse investor sentiment and spur industrial growth. The shift in sentiments towards pro-growth measures, however, is despite the fact that the latest WPI data have the cushion of a favourable base — food inflation was at 10.78 per cent in the like week of 2010 — and headline inflation in November still remains unacceptably high at 9.11 per cent.

Exuding confidence over a further decline in food prices, Chief Economic Advisor Kaushik Basu, who also chairs the Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) on tackling the price spiral, reiterated that food inflation would go down to 3 per cent by early January as the slew of policy measures had begun to show effect.

Commenting on the sharp decline — the lowest since the week ended February 23, 2008, when it was 4.28 per cent — while speaking at a Delhi Economics Conclave session here, Dr. Basu

said: "...we have been fighting a long battle against inflation. Over the last year and half there have been a slew of measures...We were expecting by November-December we will begin to see full impact of these policies. We do expect this problem to ease off...It is beginning to wind down. I expect by first week of January food inflation will go down below three per cent."

As per the weekly WPI data, while vegetables, on the whole turned cheaper by 12.28 per cent, prices of kitchen staples such as onions and potatoes slumped by 46.03 per cent and 33.28 per cent on a year-on-year basis. What prices also eased by 4.43 per cent.

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TN calls upon Kerala to raise water level

Special Correspondent

Resolution moved by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa unanimously adopted in Assembly

The Tamil Nadu Assembly on Thursday, in a special sitting, adopted a unanimous resolution, calling upon the Kerala government to make suitable amendments to the Kerala Irrigation and Water Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2006 to enable the water level of the 116-year-old Mullaperiyar dam to be raised to 142 feet.

"Don't create hurdles"

Moved by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, the resolution also asked the Kerala government not to create hurdles to the execution of the remaining strengthening measures for facilitating the water level to be raised to 152 ft eventually.

Under no circumstances would the State give up its rights.

The Central government should deploy Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) for the protection of the dam in view of the tense situation prevailing in Tamil Nadu and Kerala and as the Kerala government was carrying on a "false campaign" on the dam issue.

Though it was condemnable that the Kerala government had a resolution adopted in the Kerala Assembly on December 9 to demand that the water level be lowered to 120 ft, it would not be a proper approach to condemn the Kerala legislature, which had been created under the Constitution.

Instead, the sense of regret of Tamil Nadu's people was expressed through the motion, according to the text of the resolution.

Ms Jayalalithaa, who initiated the debate on the resolution, also wrapped it up.

In her initial and concluding speeches, she explained the historical account of the Mullaperiyar dam issue and the works carried out by the State government to strengthen the dam during 1980-1994.

Suspicious

A suspicion had arisen that the Kerala government was carrying on the "mischievous campaign" regarding the dam safety possibly for producing more hydropower.

The original plan of the Kerala government was to produce 780 megawatt through the Idukki dam, located 50 km downstream of the Mullaperiyar dam. But, as the dam was not getting enough water, the planned power production could not be achieved.

"If there is no Mullaperiyar dam, the entire water will reach Idukki," she added.

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Subsidy for micro irrigation

Staff Reporter

Collector V. Shobana has called upon farmers to fully utilise the subsidy for micro irrigation systems such as sprinkler irrigation and drip irrigation.

Pointing out that Chief Minister M Jayalalithaa was intent on ushering in the second green revolution and empowering farmers by raising their revenue generation capabilities, Ms. Shobana has noted that the CMannouncement on extending 100 per cent subsidy to small and marginal farmers who go in for micro irrigation systems would be of great help to the farming community in the district.

Besides ensuring better water management, the micro irrigation techniques would lead to increased productivity.

Awareness must be created among farmers for implementing the micro irrigation system in the fields, she has further noted.

While small and marginal farmers could get 100 per cent subsidy to establish the systems, other farmers were eligible for 75 per cent.

While 900 acres being cultivated by small and marginal farmers in the district would get 100 per cent subsidy , 225 acres would get 75 per cent subsidy, Ms. Shobana said.

Preference would be accorded to women, adi dravidars, ex-servicemen farmers. Two or more farmers could join hands to establish micro irrigation systems, the Collector observes.

Tenant farmers could seek the subsidy by adducing proof for 10 years cultivation tenancy of the field in question. The details can be had from the respective tahsildars and the relevant documents such as citta, patta and adangal must be attached with the application.

The maximum subsidy the farmers could get is Rs. 43,816.

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Sugarcane farmers of Tuticorin bitter over non-payment of dues

Staff Reporter

“Sugar factories are renegeing on the agreement signed with farmers”



Grouses heard: Collector Ashish kumar addressing the farmers' grievances day meeting in Tuticorin on Thursday. - Photo: N. Rajesh

At the farmers' grievances day meet, which was held here on Thursday, sugarcane farmers expressed their anguish over non payment of dues from sugar factories that had entered into agreements with the farmers to procure sugarcane.

Farmers from Sathankulam and Vilathikulam aired their grievances and sought the intervention of officials concerned to redress it.

Natarajan, an official from a sugar factory based in Tirunelveli said that the amount was paid towards eleven farmers, who had sold their produce. K.P. Perumal, a farmer from Tuticorin, said

a sum of Rs.20 lakh was yet to be given to eleven farmers and rued the fact that the sugarcane procured was not measured properly. S.K. Sethuraj of Vilathikulam, charged that sugar factories were reneging on the agreement signed . Collector Ashish Kumar, who presided over the meeting, asked the officials to verify the grievances .

M. Murugesan of Iruvappapuram, complained about the non availability of urea. T. Ranjitsingh Dhanraj, Joint Director of Agriculture (in –charge), replied that urea had been provided to farmers who raised crops on dry land and it would soon be given to those cultivating in wetlands .

Mr. Perumal also informed that there was no technician to operate the X-ray machine at the veterinary hospital . To this, the Collector replied that a staff would be deputed.

Responding to another grievance aired by Mr. Perumal regarding dumping of industrial effluents on cultivable lands at Saminatham, Sillanatham and Nainarpuram, a Pollution Control Board official said that these effluents would in no way affect agriculture. Subsequently, the Collector asked the official to examine the quality of water, which the farmer had alleged had turned green.

Farmers of Sathankulam raised strong objections to a check dam that has been built across Karumeniyar. S. Gangadharan, Assistant Executive Engineer, PWD (Tamirabarani River Basin) said that possibilities were remote to bring down the height of the dam .

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Reopen paddy procurement centres: JD(S) leader

Staff Correspondent

In the wake of the State Government announcing a market intervention scheme on Wednesday to pay farmers Rs. 250 more for a quintal of paddy than the price fixed by the Centre, the local unit of the Janata Dal (Secular) has urged the district administration to immediately set up procurement centres in different parts of the district.

Led by B.M. Sathish, working president of the unit, the party workers on Thursday submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner in this regard.

In the memorandum, they said that the paddy procurement centres opened some time ago in different parts of the State were practically closed as no farmer was willing to sell his paddy at the old rate. The market rate was higher than the support price.

Since the Government had now announced an additional Rs. 250 a quintal, the district administration should reopen the procurement centres, they said.

Mr. Sathish claimed that more than 60 per cent of the paddy produced in the district this season had already been sold in the open market. As a result, they had been deprived of the incentive, he said and urged the Government to announce such schemes well in advance.

Bathi Shankar, Goniwad Manjunath, Sanganagowdru, Shafiulla and Mukthiyar were present.

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- *Many of the centres opened earlier are practically closed: JD(S)*
 - *'Over 60 per cent of paddy produced in district has been sold in the open market'*
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Compensation for crop loss may be increased

Special Correspondent

The Union Government is considering revising norms and the quantum of compensation to farmers who lose their crops in natural calamities.

D. Rajashekar, Deputy Adviser (PHE), Department of Drinking Water Supply in the Union Government, said here on Thursday that the Centre was planning to give more compensation than the present Rs. 2,000 an hectare for rainfed areas, Rs. 4,000 for irrigated areas, and Rs. 6,000 for perennial crops.

Mr. Rajashekar was replying to a plea by Deputy Commissioner Vishal R. to revise the rates that were fixed in 2003.

Grim situation

Dr. Vishal painted a grim picture of the drought situation in the district.

The district required Rs. 57.05 crore to provide compensation to farmers who lost their crops, as well as to tackle the fodder shortage and provide drinking water in summer, he said.

Crops were damaged on over 2.13 lakh ha of the total sown area of 5.2 lakh ha in the kharif season owing to scanty rainfall.

Red gram yield would be less than half the normal. In a majority of the areas, it would be only 20 per cent of the normal yield. Of the 3.72 lakh ha under red gram cultivation, crop on 1.79 lakh ha had been seriously affected, causing loss of Rs. 365.41 crore, he said.

The Deputy Commissioner said the district required at least Rs. 20 crore to cover the compensation provided to small and marginal farmers who lost their crops. Another Rs. 7 crore was required to compensate other eligible farmers.

Horticultural crops on nearly 11,000 ha were affected by the scanty rainfall, making these growers also eligible for compensation under the perennial crop category, he added.

According to Dr. Vishal, Rs. 19.69 crore was required to tackle the drinking water shortage and Rs. 11.26 crore for opening 'goshalas' and setting up fodder banks in the district during summer.

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- *Centre considering revision of compensation for farmers who lose crops in natural calamities*
 - *'We need Rs. 57.05 crore to provide compensation, tackle food and water shortage'*
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Team finds 'extensive' crop loss in Gulbarga

Special Correspondent

Three-member Central team begins tour of drought-hit areas



Inspection: K. Manoharan of the Central study team looking at red gram plants at Jewargi (K) in Gulbarga district on Thursday. — Photo: Arun Kulkarni

A Central study team, which began a tour of the drought-affected Gulbarga district on Thursday, said crop loss was “extensive”.

The three-member team, comprising D. Rajashekar, Deputy Adviser (PHE), Department of Drinking Water Supply; K. Manoharan, Director, Directorate of Tobacco Development; and Neeraj Shreevastav, economic officer in the Union Government, said they had come to assess the situation on the ground and help red gram growers who had suffered crop loss owing to poor rainfall.

Four teams

Mr. Rajashekar and Dr. Manoharan said the 11-member team divided itself into four groups to simultaneously tour all the affected districts in the State. On December 18, they would meet the Chief Secretary and assess the situation.

Interaction

The team interacted with Deputy Commissioner Vishal R. and senior officials on the drought situation. The members then visited the worst-affected villages in the district. Sirnur Gram Panchayat members Pavankumar Valkeri and Shivasharanappa Chinmalli told the team that if adequate compensation was not given, they would have “no other alternative but to either commit suicide or sell our lands and cattle to repay the loans taken from moneylenders and banks”.

At Jewargi (K), Bhimaraya Valikar and his wife Mallamma said they had taken 32 acres on lease, into which they had invested more than Rs. 1.5 lakh in fertilizer and pesticides. But, they didn't hope to recover even 5 per cent of their investment.

Yeshwant Reddy, a farmer from Mandewal, told the team that he invested over Rs. 2 lakh on his 16-acre plot for cultivating red gram. But, there was nothing to harvest. “I have left my cattle to graze in the field as investing more money for harvesting the crop would further increase my loan burden,” he said.

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- *Experts interact with farmers in the district who have suffered losses*
 - *Team members to meet Chief Secretary*
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Take up organic farming: Mohanan

Special Correspondent

Farmers should take up organic farming as poor soil health is adding to the crisis in the sector, Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan has said.

Inaugurating the State-level distribution of soil health cards at Panur here on Thursday, the Minister said the government would take steps to ensure the uplift of the farming community. The farmers and the soil they tilled formed the foundation of society, he said.

He asked farmers to prepare manure themselves to restore soil health. The cattle in possession of the household were adequate to make organic manure required for 30 acres of land. There should be a blend of agriculture and animal husbandry to ensure vegetable and milk self-sufficiency, he said.

The Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Programme would be utilised in the agriculture and animal husbandry sectors. The Agriculture Department was planning to offer training in the use of agricultural implements, he said.

Decentralised waste disposal was the only answer to the garbage problem facing the State. Efforts should be taken to dispose and treat garbage at source, he added.

Additional Director of Agriculture C.R. Ramesh, Panur block panchayhat president K.P. Vasanthakumari, Koothuparamba municipal chairperson Padmaja Padmanabhan, and Panur panchayat president Kuniyil Leela were among those present at the function.

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Interest-free loans for Kudumbasree farming

Special Correspondent

The State government will make available interest-free loans to collective farming units of the Kudumbasree, Minister for Panchayats and Social Welfare M.K. Muneer has said.

He was addressing a two-day State-level workshop on collective farming that began here on Thursday.

The workshop is being held as part of the first phase of the implementation of the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP).

“Collective farming can go a long way in ensuring food security. An integrated approach will be adopted, in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, to solve problems,” he said.

He said that loans at low interest rates were not available for farmers. “Hence, the government will arrange zero-interest loans for farmers. Farming implements will also be given.

Kudumbasree offers a subsidy of 5 per cent for farming,” he added.

He refuted the allegations made against Kudumbasree in connection with the reported farmer suicides in Wayanad. “The government will fight such baseless allegations.”

With the infusion of scientific knowledge, the MKSP will emerge as a model at the international level, Sarada Muraleedharan, executive director of Kudumbasree, said.

Women involved in collective farming shared their experiences.

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Paddy farmers face problems at procurement centres

S. Harpal Singh

Complain of unprofessional management by procurement agency



Hard times: Farmers at Morigudem procurement centre at Jannaram in Adilabad district are made to wait for days before their produce is purchased. — PHOTO: S. HARPAL SINGH

Paddy procurement in Adilabad through the DRDA-IKP centres is dogged by problems for the second season running. Farmers complain of hardships being thrust upon them owing to unprofessional management by the procurement agency.

77 centres opened

The DRDA-IKP and Integrated Tribal Development Agency, Utnoor, have opened 77 paddy procurement centres mostly in the mandals in the Godavari belt. Though the yield has been affected by drought, about 2 lakh tonnes of the produce is likely to arrive at the centres in the next few weeks.

The main problem faced by farmers at these centres is the lack of gunny bags and tarpaulins.

The circumstances force them to wait for days before the gunny bags arrive and the paddy is purchased.

Farmer Nallapu Krishnamurthy's predicament at the Morigudem paddy procurement centre in Jannaram mandal did not end on Thursday though he waited for six days to sell his produce.

"The officials refuse to purchase due to the moisture content," he says.

"While I dry the crop during day time, it absorbs moisture during the cold nights. I would not have faced the problem if the paddy had been purchased on day one," he said explaining the difficulty he is facing at the purchase centres.

Tarpaulins being essential for the activity, farmers cannot help but acquire on rent. "The delay in purchase by one day means a charge of Rs. 50 per day for the tarpaulin that I have brought," says Kasaru Chandra Goud.

No preparation

Sources say the governmental agencies have done little preparation for procurement of paddy.

They should have readied tarpaulins, gunny bags and moisture meters at every purchase centre before the start of the activity, a source says.

The lack of coordination between the DRDA-IKP and the office of the District Manager, Civil Supplies, is also evident. None of the procurement centre has been allotted gunny bags as per requirement.

Food inflation falls to 4.35%, lowest in four years

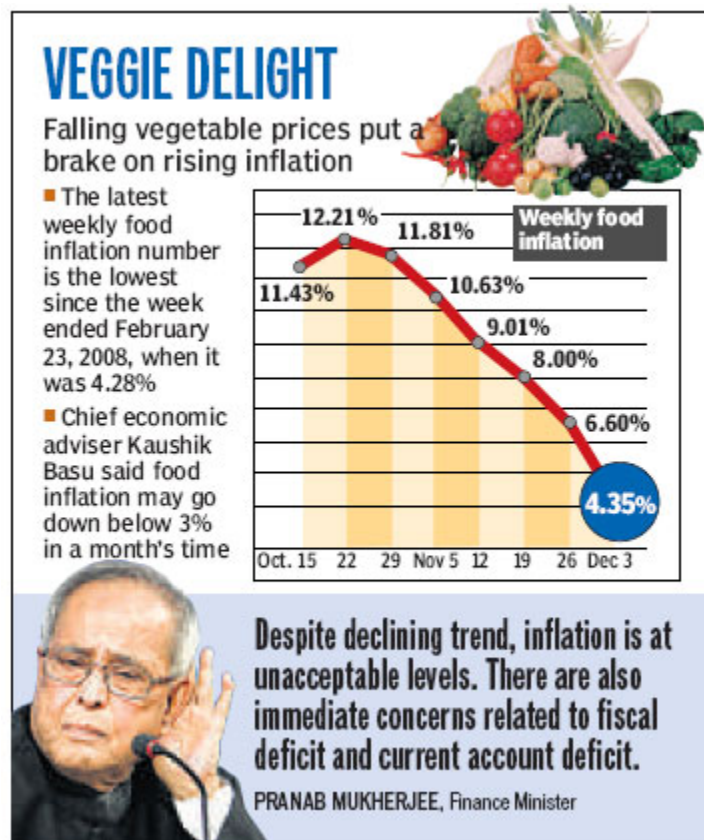
A fall in vegetable prices brought food inflation to a near four-year low of 4.35% for the week ended December 3 against 6.60% in the previous week, bringing some cheer for the government. The RBI, however, may not decide to reduce interest rates in its review on Friday. Indications are that the RBI would only press the pause button after increasing interest rates for 13 times in the last 20 months.

The drop in food prices is primarily due to the seasonal effect — arrival of fresh winter vegetables. While onion prices fell by 46.03%, potato prices dropped by 33.38% year-on-year during the period.

Prices of other food products became dearer on an annual basis. While prices of pulses rose by 11.76%, milk became dearer by 11.08%. Prices of eggs, meat and fish rose by 9.26%.

"Domestically, the struggle against inflation and tightening of the interest rate regime has contributed to the lowering of growth in demand and investment," finance minister Pranab Mukherjee said at a CII function.

"Inflation is headed downward and that is a huge relief and we feel that RBI must be ahead of the curve and reduce policy



rates," said Rajiv Kumar, secretary-general, FICCI.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/782655.aspx>

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Food inflation eases to nearly four-year low of 4.35%

PTI | Dec 15, 2011, 12.51PM IST

NEW DELHI: Food inflation fell to a nearly four-year low of 4.35% during the week ended December 3, reflecting a decline in prices of essential items like vegetables, onions, potatoes and wheat.

This is the lowest rate of food inflation since the week ended February 23, 2008, when it stood at 4.28%.

Food inflation, as measured by the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), stood at 6.6% in the previous week. It was recorded at 10.78% in the corresponding period last year.

Experts feel the moderation in the rate of price rise of food items below the psychological 5%-mark will bring relief to the government, which has been battling high inflation for almost two years now.

According to data released by the government today, onions became cheaper by 46.03% year-on-year during the week under review, while potato prices were down by 33.28%. Prices of wheat also fell by 4.43%.

Overall, vegetables became cheaper by 12.28%. However, other food products grew more

expensive on an annual basis, led by protein-based items.

Pulses became 11.76% costlier during the week under review, while milk grew dearer by 11.08% and eggs, meat and fish by 9.26%.

Fruits also became 9.37% more expensive on an annual basis, while cereal prices were up by 1.85%.

Inflation in the overall primary articles category stood at 5.48% during the week ended December 3, as against 6.92% in the previous week. Primary articles have over 20% weight in the wholesale price index.

16 DEC, 2011, 06.20AM IST, ET BUREAU

Low basmati prices may boost sale of packaged rice

PUNE: As basmati prices rule low, the organised players in the basmati market are trying to push more consumers to the branded commodity.

"Packaged rice market is growing at about 35% per annum. This growth is not aided by addition of new rice eaters but by the consumers' shift from the loose rice market to the packaged segment," said Ayushman Gupta, director of Best Foods.

"There is less of brand recall and brand loyalty in case of rice. We want it to increase," said Gupta. Founded in 1998, Best Foods has a turnover of Rs 1,400 crore of which 70% comes from exports. It has recently opened 30 exclusive company-owned stores to sell its branded rice and wellness products.

The company intends to open 1,000 such exclusive stores in the next two years and exploring the franchisee route too.

16 DEC, 2011, 06.19AM IST, ET BUREAU

Heavy selling by UP sugar mills led to plunge in sugar prices

PUNE: Heavy selling by the UP sugar mills in order to make cane payments within the stipulated period of 14-days has led to a plunge in sugar prices, both in spot and futures market in last two days.

The UP government has started filing FIRs against those mills who do not make cane payment within the stipulated period of 14 days. As a result, the mills are selling heavily, bringing down the prices.

Shyamlal Gupta, secretary of the Uttar Pradesh Sugar Mills Association, said: "There is a pressure on the UP mills to sell sugar as they have to make cane payments quickly. The sugar mills in UP are in worst financial position. With 8.2% sugar recovery, the production cost is about Rs 36 a kg while the mills are selling the sugar at Rs 29 a kg."

There was a downward trend in sugar prices for the last ten days. In Maharashtra, ex-mill sugar prices have declined by Rs 250/quintal while in UP, the decline was Rs 150/quintal during the same period. The mills were holding on to stocks in the hope of improvement in prices.

Now, they feel pressure to sell the quota requirement. "We were selling very less in the first half of December in the hope that the prices may improve. Today, we have not been able to sell even half of the current month's quota. So, naturally, there is a pressure to sell the quota requirement," said the chairman of a Maharashtra-based sugar co-operative. Sugar production in Maharashtra is likely to miss the government estimate of 9.3 million tonne.

"The supply situation is very comfortable. We have good carry-forward stocks, and now supplies are rising from new season crushing, but demand is weak," said Badruddin Khan, associate vice-president (research) at Angel Commodities Broking.

16 DEC, 2011, 06.17AM IST, BLOOMBERG

Global coffee prepares for record Espresso-bean jolt

SINGAPORE: Record robusta harvests in Vietnam and Brazil and potentially the biggest jump in Indonesian output in 16 years are boosting supplies of the coffee used in instant drinks and espressos as slowing economic growth threatens demand.

Production may climb for a fourth year, gaining 2.3% to 55.98 million bags (3.36 million tonne) in 2011-2012, Rabobank International predicts. More supply will create the biggest glut in at least four years, according to Macquarie Group.

Prices that already fell 9% this year will drop a further 8.5% to \$1,750 a tonne by June 30, the lowest level since October 2010. Robusta surged 62% in London trading in 2010 as record demand created the first shortages in at least three years, according to Macquarie.

Supply is now expanding amid mounting concern that Europe's debt crisis will derail the global economy. Coffee sales fell for the first time in seven years in 2009 as nations contended with recessions, according to Euro monitor International, a London-based research group.

"We have record world production and I'm not optimistic on demand," said Judith Ganes-Chase, a former Merrill Lynch analyst who is now the president of Katonah, New York-based J. Ganes Consulting. "We'll probably need to say goodbye to the bull market for a while."

16 DEC, 2011, 06.15AM IST, PK KRISHNAKUMAR,ET BUREAU

Higher output and poor export demand hit spices

KOCHI: Prices of major spices such as chillies, jeera, turmeric and cardamom are being driven to the ground by higher production, poor export earnings and a lack of working capital with traders to hold the stocks.

Last December, all these spices were at record highs. With the prices ruling high last year, the acreage of most of the spices has increased this year, indicating excess production. The chilli acreage has increased by 15% to 20% while the land under jeera crop is estimated to have gone up by over 26%.

The turmeric production is heading for a historic high of 82 lakh bags (each bag of 70 kg) and cardamom is having a bumper harvest. The chilli prices are ruling in the range of Rs 45-50 per kg, nearly half of the rate that existed in the previous season, and is predicted to fall further as supply increases in the next couple of months.

"We are expecting 10-15% higher output. It could have been more but for lack of rains and an

insect attack," said Ravipati Peraiah, managing director, Vijayakrishna Spice Farms. The growers and traders have reduced their inventory as the costs have surged.

"With interest rates shooting up, the holding capacity of the traders and growers has gone down. The fall in rupee value in a short period hasn't helped the spice industry," said Shailesh Shah, director, Jabs International. After a year of heady returns, the turmeric growers are facing bleak prospects.

The prices, after shooting up to Rs 160-170 per kg last season, have plunged to the Rs 50-55 level, with prediction of further drop. The jeera prices have also dropped on indication of a bumper crop expected in February. In fact, the overseas spice buyers, particularly from the Europe, have reduced their quantum of purchases. "Instead of four months' requirement, they go for one-month inventory and the frequency of buying has come down. Moreover, they have trimmed the quantity too," said Geemon Korah, chairman of the All India Spices Exporters Forum.

Cardamom trade has been on a standstill for over a week due to the row over the Mullaperiyar dam. Though the cardamom plantations are located mostly in Kerala, half of the owners are from Tamil Nadu.

The vehicle transport between the two states through the cardamom belt of Idukki has stopped for a week. Cardamom prices, which used to rule above Rs 1,000 per kg till a few months ago, have dropped to half of its level.



Food inflation at four-year low of 4.35%

Agencies Posted online: Thu Dec 15 2011, 11:48 hrs

New Delhi : Food inflation fell to a nearly four-year low of 4.35 per cent during the week ended December 3, reflecting a decline in prices of essential items like vegetables, onions, potatoes and wheat.

This is the lowest rate of food inflation since the week ended February 23, 2008, when it stood at 4.28 per cent.

Food inflation, as measured by the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), stood at 6.6 per cent in the previous week. It was recorded at 10.78 per cent in the corresponding period last year.

Experts feel the moderation in the rate of price rise of food items below the psychological 5 per cent-mark will bring relief to the government, which has been battling high inflation for almost two years now.

According to data released by the government on Thursday, onions became cheaper by 46.03 per cent year-on-year during the week under review, while potato prices were down by 33.28 per cent. Prices of wheat also fell by 4.43 per cent.

Overall, vegetables became cheaper by 12.28 per cent.

However, other food products grew more expensive on an annual basis, led by protein-based items.

Pulses became 11.76 per cent costlier during the week under review, while milk grew dearer by 11.08 per cent and eggs, meat and fish by 9.26 per cent.

Fruits also became 9.37 per cent more expensive on an annual basis, while cereal prices were up by 1.85 per cent.

Inflation in the overall primary articles category stood at 5.48 per cent during the week ended December 3, as against 6.92 per cent in the previous week. Primary articles have over 20 per cent weight in the wholesale price index.

Inflation in the non-food segment, which includes fibres and oilseeds, was recorded at 2.12 per cent during the week under review, as against 1.37 per cent in the week ended November 26.

Fuel and power inflation stood at 15.24 per cent during the week ended December 3, compared to 15.53 per cent in the previous week.

The decline in the rate of price rise in food items, which was in double digits till early November, is likely to give some relief to the government and the Reserve Bank, which have been facing flak from all quarters for persistently high prices.

Yesterday, Chief Economic Adviser Kaushik Basu had expressed hope that food inflation may fall below 3 per cent in a month's time.

The fall in food inflation comes as a silver lining for the government at a time when the economy is experiencing a slowdown, with GDP growth dipping to 6.9 per cent in the second quarter, the lowest rate of expansion in over two years.

Industrial production has also witnessed a contraction, with output shrinking by 5.1 per cent in October.

Headline inflation, which also factors in manufactured items, has been above the 9 per cent-mark since December, 2010. It stood at 9.11 per cent in November this year.

The RBI has hiked interest rates 13 times since March, 2010, to tame demand and curb inflation.

In its second quarterly review of the monetary policy last month, the central bank had said it expects inflation to remain elevated till December on account of the demand-supply mismatch before moderating to 7 per cent by March, 2012.

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By ENS Economic Bureau

16 Dec 2011 03:40:31 AM IST

Food Inflation down to 4-year low of 4.35 pc

NEW DELHI: Aided by a decline in prices of vegetables, onions, potatoes and wheat, food inflation fell to a near four-year low of 4.35 per cent during the week ended December 3. This is the lowest rate of food inflation since the week ended February 23, 2008 when it stood at 4.28 per cent.

Food inflation as measured by the wholesale price index was at 6.6 per cent in the previous week and 10.78 per cent in the corresponding period last year.

According to data released by the government on Thursday, onion prices fell by 46.03 per cent year-on-year during the week under review while potato and vegetable prices declined by 33.28 per cent and 12.28 per cent respectively.

However, prices of protein-based food items such as pulses, milk, eggs, meat and fish became expensive on an annual basis. While prices of pulses increased 11.76 per cent during the week under review, milk became dearer by 11.08 per cent. There was good news on the primary articles inflation front too as it slipped to a new 29-month low of 5.48 per cent compared with 6.92 per cent a week ago mainly due to a sharp fall in prices of food articles and on statistical impact of a high base.

Primary articles have over 20 per cent weight in the wholesale price index. Inflation in the non-food segment, which includes fibres and oilseeds stood at 2.12 per cent compared to 1.37 per cent in the week ended November 26. Fuel and power inflation stood at 15.24 per cent during the week under review compared to 15.53 per cent in the previous week.

16 Dec 2011 02:55:12 AM IST

Food technology, the next big thing: V S Acharya

BANGALORE: "With ever increasing population and enhanced consumer awareness about healthy food, it is evident that food technology will grow soon in the nation," said Minister for Higher Education Dr V S Acharya on Thursday.

Inaugurating a national conference on 'Recent Trends in Food Science and Nutrition Research' organised by Dr P Sadananda Maiya, he said: "With sudden transformation in the lifestyle of Indians, particularly of those in urban areas, there is a dramatic increase in the demand for processed food."

Dr Acharya stressed the need for innovation in the field of food technology.

"India is the 3rd largest producer of food grains and the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables," said Dr Acharya, while adding that processing and preservation was not remarkable in the country.

16 Dec 2011 04:33:31 AM IST

Irrigation tanks to be focus of CM's development

HYDERABAD: The state government intends to strengthen the irrigation tanks in eight districts at a cost of Rs 10,000 crore and has sought proposals from the district collectors concerned. Chief minister N Kiran Kumar Reddy made the announcement on the second and final day of the collectors conference held at Jubilee Hall here on Thursday.

The chief minister said that most of the agricultural lands in Medak, Chittoor, Anantapur, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Adilabad and Ranga Reddy districts were depending on water from irrigation tanks, and improvement of the tanks there would be taken up as part of a project to be funded by the World Bank.

Reddy also asked the collectors to make arrangements for conduct of local body elections and to hold 'grievances day' once in a month, specially for SC and ST people to settle their problems at the district level. The programme, introduced in Anantapur district, was running successfully, he said. The chief minister also instructed the collectors to concentrate on drought relief measures and see that all villages got drinking water.

The government would release funds to all schools in the state for providing drinking water to students and staff, he said.

He also directed the collectors to take steps to protect government, endowment and municipal lands in all districts from encroachments.

"With a view to encouraging sports in all villages, the government is going to construct sports complexes in all mandals," he said and asked the collectors to identify 5 to 10 acres of land in each mandal for the purpose. Mee Seva centres for citizen's services, such as issuance of birth/death, income/residential certificates, will be set up in all districts by the end of March. A centre, established in Chittoor district on an experimental basis, has been running successfully. Kiran Kumar Reddy asked the collectors to complete land acquisition for completing irrigation projects and called for quickening of work on the modernisation of Krishna and Godavari canals. He also directed the collectors to issue notices to those who are not using the lands allotted to them by the government.

15 Dec 2011 08:54:44 PM IST

Mullaiperiyar row: TN against PM's intervention

NEW DELHI: Kerala Thursday assured the Supreme Court that it would protect the Mullaperiyar Dam from any attacks by protesters while Tamil Nadu opposed Kerala's suggestion that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh convene a meeting of the two states for resolving the dispute.

Stating that it was the constitutional responsibility of the central government to intervene for the resolution of dispute between the two states, the apex court's constitution bench of Justice D.K. Jain, Justice R.M. Lodha, Justice Deepak Verma, Justice C.K. Prasad and Justice Anil R. Dave expressed its inability to suggest to the prime minister to convene a meeting of the two states in the face of stiff opposition from Tamil Nadu.

"This may not be possible," the court told senior counsel Harish Salve who had appeared for Kerala.

"Very scheme of the federal structure mandates the Union of India to take steps to resolve disputes between two States," the court said adding that "it is constitutional scheme".

It further said that "Union of India must take a lead role and not be a mute spectator".

The court's pronouncement came when senior counsel Raju Ramachandran appearing for Tamil Nadu opposed the suggestion by Salve that the court should ask the prime minister to convene the meeting of the two states.

Salve said that "water disputes are resolved and not adjudicated" and cited the instance of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi asking the chief ministers of Punjab and Haryana to sign the water sharing accord way back in the 1970s.

At this, Ramachandran told the court not to make such a suggestion as it was premature. He told the court there was not sufficient scientific data for the prime minister to convene such a meeting. Let the high-powered empowered committee that is visiting the dam complete its work first and collect the data, he suggested.

In the face of persistence opposition by Ramachandran, the court asked him: "Shall we take that State of Tamil Nadu is not interested in the intervention by the prime minister."

As Salve witnessed his suggestion being sunk by Tamil Nadu, he told the court that no award of any tribunal has ever solved the water dispute. In the instant case, if the verdict goes in the favour of Kerala, then Tamil Nadu would move an appeal and if Tamil Nadu succeeds then Kerala will challenge it, the senior counsel said.

At the outset of the hearing Salve told the court that Kerala would provide full security to the

dam and other facilities and infrastructure being manned by Tamil Nadu. He said that if some thing happens to the dam, Tamil Nadu will not only not get water but the area of the dam in Kerala will get inundated.

Earlier, in response to Tamil Nadu's plea for central forces to protect the dam and its installations, the central government told the court that it could deploy the central forces, including the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to protect the dam, provided there was direction of the apex court or a request by the state government to that affect.

Meanwhile, earlier in the day, the court pulled up a Kerala-based NGO which sought to know what National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was doing to deal with the situation in the event of a crisis. The petitioner NGO also wanted the drying up of the dam.

The court said that the NDMA was headed by the prime minister and what made the petitioner think that the authority and the prime minister were not alive to the situation.

When counsel for the NGO said: "We do not know what discussions are taking place", the court asked him if he was aware of what is transpiring between the PMO and the NDMA, and dismissed the plea describing it "misconceived" and saying: "It (these discussions) can't be made public for making political mileage."

The 115-year-old dam is located in Kerala but its waters serve Tamil Nadu, which also manages the dam's affairs.

Tamil Nadu wants the dam's storage capacity to be increased from the current 136 feet (41.5 metres) to 142 feet (43 metres) as per a Supreme Court order, while Kerala wants a new dam in its place.

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Food inflation down to 4-yr low of 4.35%; all eyes on RBI meet

THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2011 21:45

PNS | NEW DELHI

Reflecting a decline in prices of essential items like vegetables, onions, potatoes and wheat, food inflation fell to a nearly four-year low of 4.35 per cent during the week ended December 3.

A sharp fall in vegetable prices brought food inflation to a near four-year low of 4.35 per cent for the week ended December 3, raising hopes that RBI may halt the rate hikes in the monetary policy review tomorrow.

Buoyed by the steep decline in food prices, Chief Economic Advisor Kaushik Basu said food inflation may go down below 3 per cent in a month's time.

"I expect by the first week of January food inflation will go down below 3 per cent." The latest weekly food inflation number is the lowest since the week ended February 23, 2008, when it was 4.28 per cent.

Food inflation stood at 6.6 per cent in the previous week and 10.78 per cent in the corresponding period last year.

Experts hope that the softening food prices, along with moderation in headline inflation, will have a sobering effect on the Reserve Bank of India, which has adopted a tight monetary policy stance since March 2010 to check price rise.

"Headline inflation is expected to moderate further to around 8 per cent in December, from 9.1 per cent in November, as easing food price inflation would offset the impact of the recent rupee depreciation," ICRA Economist Aditi Nayar said.

"The RBI is expected to leave the repo rate and the CRR unchanged in the upcoming mid-quarter policy to continue to dampen inflationary expectations," Nayar said.

In its October review, RBI had hinted that it may not hike rates if inflation situation does not worsen. According to the official data released today, onion became cheaper by 46.03 per cent year-on-year during the week under review, while potato prices were down by 33.28 per cent. Prices of wheat also fell by 4.43 per cent.

Overall, vegetables became cheaper by 12.28 per cent. While inflation in vegetables and wheat segments eased, it soared in protein rich item, like egg, milk and pulses. Inflation in fruits at 9.37 per cent was also comparatively high on annual basis.

"We think the below 3 per cent food inflation by early January is possible. Farm production in the kharif season has been good and we expect vegetables prices to remain moderate," Crisil Chief Economist D K Joshi said.

Inflation in the overall primary articles category stood at 5.48 per cent during the week ended December 3, as against 6.92 per cent in the previous week.

Sugar recovery low this season, UP may miss production target

THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2011 21:30

PNS | LUCKNOW

The low recovery of sugar from cane has raised fears that Uttar Pradesh may fail to achieve its estimated production target of 66 lakh ton sugar this year.

In the ongoing crushing season, sugar recovery from cane has remained around 8.22 per cent against the average of 9 per cent and above. According to sources in UP Sugar Mills Association (UPSMA), the low recovery of sugar is adding to the burden on private sugar mills which, under pressure of state government, are paying substantially hiked state advisory price (SAP) of Rs 235-250 per quintal for cane. Even in western UP districts, traditionally known for producing varieties of cane that give higher sugar yield, sugar recovery is being reported around 8 per cent this season and it is a matter of concern for sugar experts. According to Cane Development department officials, at some places like Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Bulandshahar and Terai region, sugar recovery has been reported to be lower than eastern districts of the state, a thing that is very uncommon. CDD officials say if the sugar recovery continues to remain low in the month of January, the state may miss its target of 66 lakh ton sugar production, which is seven lakh ton more than the production of last year.

Cane experts are blaming excessive rainfall in the previous monsoon for the low recovery of sugar as excessive water thinned the cane juice. They are of the view that prolonged waterlogging in sugarcane fields slowed down sugar crystallisation in the plants.

However, the cane growers hold climatic change, visible in late start of winter this year, responsible for low sugar recovery. According to farmers, sugar recovery could become normal as the weather becomes more cold in January.

Meanwhile, 122.70 lakh quintal sugar was produced by crushing around 1,500 lakh quintals of cane till Thursday in 120 sugar mills across the state.

Business Standard

Friday, Dec 16, 2011

Guarseed hits daily upper limit for second day

Press Trust of India / New Delhi December 15, 2011, 12:30 IST

Guarseed futures prices today hit the daily upper limit for second straight day by rising 4% to Rs 6,552 per quintal, on sustained buying by speculators on strong export demand amid low inventories.

Marketmen said despite imposing a special 10% margin, guarseed prices hit the upper circuit for the second day as speculators remained net buyers.

Strong export demand driven by weak rupee against dollar, the guarseed prices firmed up in domestic as well as futures markets.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, December guarseed surged to hit a daily upper limit of 4%, or Rs.252 at Rs 6,552 per quintal, with an open interest of 40,150 lots.

The January contract shot up by Rs 260, or 4%, to Rs 6,754 per quintal, with an open interest of 1,83,950 lots.

Crude palm oil falls on weak global cues

Press Trust of India / New Delhi December 15, 2011, 11:53 IST

Tracking a weakening global trend, crude palm oil prices fell by Rs 3 to Rs 528.50 per 10 kg in futures trade today after speculators offloaded their positions. At the Multi Commodity Exchange, February crude palm oil fell by Rs 3, or 0.56%, to Rs 528.50 per 10 kg, with a business turnover of five lots.

The December delivery shed Rs 1.50, or 0.29%, to Rs 517 per 10 kg, with a trade volume of 64 lots.

Traders said offloading of positions by speculators on the back of a weakening global trend mainly led to the fall in crude palm oil prices in futures trade.

Meanwhile, palm oil for February contract dropped by 2.2% to \$934 per tonne on the

Malaysia Derivatives Exchange.

Mentha oil sheds 0.66% on profit-booking

Press Trust of India / New Delhi December 15, 2011, 11:49 IST

Mentha oil prices declined by Rs 8.60 to Rs 1,300 per kg in futures trading today as speculators booked profits after two days of gains. The adequate stocks position following increased arrivals from Chandausi, in Uttar Pradesh, also weighed on mentha oil prices in futures trade. At the Multi Commodity Exchange, February mentha oil fell by Rs 8.60, or 0.66%, to Rs 1,300 per kg in 17 lots. The December contract shed Rs 6.80, or 0.51%, to Rs 1,317.60 per kg in 400 lots.

Market analysts said the fall in mentha oil prices was mostly due to profit-booking by speculators amid a weak trend in the spot market following a fall in demand.

THE HINDU **Business Line**

Food inflation falls sharply to 4.35% on base effect, vegetables

Anil Sasi



Food inflation fell to a nearly four-year low of 4.35 per cent during the week ended December 3 due to a dip in prices of vegetables, onions, potatoes and wheat.

New Delhi, Dec 15:

A combination of the post-harvest cooling of food prices combined with a favourable base effect ensured that food inflation eased to its lowest in well over three years in early December.

Apart from the base effect, the dip in the wholesale price index-based food inflation rate to 4.35 per cent during the week ended December 3, down from the preceding week's 6.6 per cent, was aided by a decline in the year-on-year inflation levels of essential items, including cereals such as wheat and vegetables such as onions and potatoes, Government data showed on Thursday.

This was the sixth successive weekly fall in the inflation rate and the reading is the lowest since February 23, 2008, analysts said. The favourable base effect is expected to continue in the remaining months of December, which would ensure a further slide in food inflation levels. The Chief Economic Adviser, Dr Kaushik Basu, said food inflation is expected to ease to 3 per cent by early January. However, the gradual easing would be due to seasonal factors and a comparison with high index levels last year, he added. According to data for the latest week, onions were down over 46 per cent year-on-year, while potatoes eased by over 33 per cent, due to which the vegetables sub-group dipped by over 12 per cent. Wheat too dipped over 4 per cent. However, other food products turned more expensive on an annual basis, led by protein-based items. Pulses were up nearly 12 per cent during the week under review, while milk was up over 11 per cent and eggs, meat and fish by over 9 per cent. Economists expect food inflation to ease to around 3 per cent in December 2011 while headline inflation is expected to moderate further to around 8 per cent.

Peeling valuations



Price dip: A glut of onion at the Mahboob Mansion Agricultural Market in Hyderabad. With not many takers, the Nashik variety of onions was quoted in the wholesale market between Rs 350 and Rs 400 a quintal. During the same time last year, prices were three times higher. — P.V. Sivakumar

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated December 16, 2011)

Spot rubber turns weak on global cues

Our Correspondent

Kottayam, Dec. 15:

Spot rubber turned weak on Thursday. The market lost on buyer resistance following another weak closing in the trend setting international futures. According to observers, there was no panic selling from dealers or growers yet. The transactions were low.

Sheet rubber moved down to Rs198.50 (200) a kg according to traders. The grade dropped to Rs 198 (200.50) a kg both at Kottayam and Kochi as quoted by the Rubber Board.

The December series expired steady at Rs 199 a kg while the January series closed at Rs 199.50 (199.18), February at Rs 202.05 (201.87), March at Rs 206.40 (205.08), April at Rs 210.48 (209.20) and May at Rs 208.50 (210.60) a kg for RSS 4 on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) slipped to Rs 180.28 (181.77) a kg at Bangkok. The December futures for the grade declined to ₹252 (Rs 173.53) from ₹260 a kg during the day session and then to ₹250 (Rs 172.14) in the night session on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rates were (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 198.50 (200); RSS-5: 196 (197); ungraded: 188 (190); ISNR 20: 187 (188.50) and latex 60 per cent: 109 (110).

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated December 16, 2011)

African nations turn to India for seeds, farm inputs

K.V. Kurmanath

Hyderabad, Dec. 15:

Mr Dellings Phiri, Managing Director of the Malawian Seed Co Malawi Ltd, along with the company's Commercial Manager, Mr R. Chiwa, was busy taking down notes, receiving

brochures from Indian seed, agri-input and agri-tech firms at the India-Africa Economic mission meet. They are part of a delegation that represented eight countries in Africa.

None of these delegates wants Indian investors to come there and buy land.

In the last few years, a trend had virtually emerged in most of the 54 countries in Africa that made the dark continent a happy hunting ground for rich countries and foreign companies with deep pockets to buy land, grow crops and export produce back home.

This delegation, however, is not interested in selling lands in Africa.

It is interested in forging alliances and setting up units in the tiny African countries to improve productivity using better seeds, inputs and technologies.

Ask Mr Chiwa, who is in his early 30s. He replies in flawless English: “We have realised that there is no need for re-inventing the wheel. We see similarities in agro-climatic conditions between India and Malawi. So, it makes sense for us to look at what can be replicated,” Mr Chiwa told *Business Line*, taking time off from busy interactions with Indian agro-biotech firms here.

Mr Phiri, who represents the agricultural arm of the \$200-million group, says realisation is slowly dawning on Africa on the importance of growing the native industry rather than selling land.

Ms Idit Miller, Vice-President and Managing Director of EMRC, subscribes to this view.

The Brussels-based non-governmental organisation that exclusively focuses on helping African countries forge alliances abroad for its growth. “Large tracts of land still remain untapped in Africa, particularly in the poor sub-Saharan region. Africa needs technological inputs to develop this land. India can step in and help,” she said.

EMRC is leading the five-day initiative in India, its second here. About 60 Indian companies have sent their representatives. ITC, Jain Irrigation, Nuziveedu Seeds, Vibha Seeds, Advanta, Nandan Bio and Sri Biotech are some of the companies that took part.

The African Governments too, seem to have shifted their focus to development of knowledge and manufacturing units in their respective countries. Mr Nurallah Abubakar, Executive Director in Nigerian Ministry of Agriculture, says that his country would like to build sustainable ecosystem for agriculture.

“We are looking at partnerships to take back good agricultural practices,” he said.

Icrisat (International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) are coordinating the field visits by African countries and interactions.

Mr Abdul Rahman Ilyas, Chief Operating Officer of Agribusiness and Innovation Platform (AIP) at Icrisat, says that he has plans to organise this event twice a year.

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(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated December 16, 2011)

Areca nut sector yet to crack mechanisation nut

Our Bureau



Mangalore, Dec. 15:

Like other crops in agriculture, areca nut, too, is faced with the problem of labour shortage.

Small land holdings are also common in the sector as in other crops. So, even if mechanisation is taken up, there are related problems to be tackled by growers.

The issues were dealt in detail at a seminar on 'Mechanisation in areca nut farming and processing' organised by the Mangalore-based Areca nut Research and Development Foundation (ARDF) here on Thursday.

Initiating the discussions, Dr D.C. Chowta, farm scientist and a grower from Kasaragod district in Kerala, said, though mechanisation has begun in areca nut farming and processing, many growers with small holdings find it difficult to implement them due to the cost involved in their implementation.

Speaking on the problems of small growers, Mr M. Srinivasa Achar, President of All-India Areca Growers Association, said that arecanut mills could be set up at village level.

SUGGESTED MODEL

Such mills should be modelled on the lines of rice mills and should take up processing activities related to arecanut sector for a fee.

The shortage of labour problems can be tackled with this and small growers can make best use of such a model, he said.

Dr Chowta said that quite a few machineries in the farm sector are based on the western model. Suggesting the need for designing machineries that can meet the local requirements, he said stress should be on machineries that can be handled by a single person.

Mr P. Ramakrishna Shastri, an arecanut grower from Dakshina Kannada district, said that servicing of machines is important.

Manufacturers should have a strong team to service the machines, he said.

Mr K. Padmanabha, President of Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative (Campco) Ltd and Managing Trustee of ARDF, said that the foundation would conduct an exhibition on mechanisation in arecanut sector, in the coming months.

Touching upon farm labour costs, Dr Chowta said that there is a view among a section of growers that the farm labourers are seeking higher wages.

Giving an example of a tree climber in arecanut plantations, he said the work of that particular person involves high risk. Though that person performs a highly skilled job, it is not taken into consideration by many farmers.

Their technical expertise should be considered in such works, he said.

MANPOWER

Mr Shastri said that labour shortage in arecanut sector is leading to decline in the technical skills for various operational works in plantations.

Referring to the recent ARDF report on production cost of arecanut, he said that the maintenance of an acre of white arecanut plantation requires at least 150 farm workers a year.

He wondered if the arecanut growing region has manpower to meet the requirements of the sector.

Delegates at the seminar also opined that mechanisation in arecanut sector should help growers with small holdings to improve productivity.

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Edible oils bullish on plunging rupee

Our Correspondent



Mumbai, Dec. 15:

Edible oils remained bullish on a weak rupee against the dollar on Thursday despite weak demand on the physical market.

Groundnut oil rose by Rs 10 for 10 kg; rapeseed oil by Rs 19; cotton oil increased Rs 5 and palmolein by Rs 3 for 10 kg. Soya oil and sunflower oil were unchanged. Crude palm oil (CPO) futures on the Bursa Malaysia Derivatives (BMD) Exchange fell on renewed selling pressure as Malaysia's palm oil exports fell by 19 per cent during December 1-15.

Palmolein volumes were thin as resellers booked profits, said a Mumbai-based wholesale trader. About 250-300 tonnes of palmolein were traded at Rs. 586-587. Liberty quoted palmolein at Rs 690 and super palmolein at Rs 610. Ruchi offered palmolein at Rs 588, soya refined oil at Rs 655 and sunflower refined oil at Rs 710. Allana offered palmolein at Rs 590. In Saurashtra and Rajkot, groundnut oil was unchanged at Rs 1,380 for a *telia* tin and at Rs 900 for loose (10 kg).

Malaysia's BMD CPO's January contracts settled at MYR2,972 (MYR3,048) and February at MYR2,971 (MYR3,052) a tonne. Soya oil for January delivery declined to Rs 671.40 (Rs 679.90) and for February to Rs 680 (Rs 682) on the National Board of Trade in Indore.

Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg): groundnut oil — 910 (900), soya refined oil — 650 (650), sunflower exp. ref. — 665 (665), sunflower ref. — 720 (720), rapeseed ref. oil — 751 (732), rapeseed expeller ref. — 721 (702), cotton ref. oil — 625 (620), and palmolein — 587 (584).

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Weak rupee may lift jeera exports

Our Correspondent



Rajkot, Dec. 15:

Jeera rose on local and export demand on the spot market on Thursday, while futures fell as investors booked profits. The weakening of the rupee against the dollar and lower output in Syria and Turkey may boost Indian exports, said a report from Kedia Commodity.

The December contract declined by Rs 185 to Rs 13,757 a quintal with an open interest of 3,309 lots on the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), January was down Rs 177 at Rs 14,050 with an open interest of 15,528 lots, and February shaved off Rs 159 at Rs 14,361 with an open interest of 6,360 lots. Spot jeera gained Rs 20-25 a kg on enquiries from Bangladesh and local markets on the exchange.

In Unjha, rough quality sold at Rs 1,420-1,520 for 20 kg, foreign quality at Rs 2,420-2,520 for 20 kg and NCDEX quality at Rs 2,650-2,750 for 20 kg. While 2,500-3,000 bags arrived, 5,000 bags were traded. About 300-350 bags arrived here and fetched Rs 2,500-2,700 for 20 kg.

In the international markets, Syrian and Turkish jeera was offered at \$3,300 a tonne (f.o.b.), while Indian jeera was quoted at \$2,900 a tonne (c&f).

As on November 21, jeera was sown on 1,13,100 hectares in Gujarat, up 56 per cent from last year's 72,500 hectares.

Indian production is expected at 28-30 lakh bags, or more than 1.5 lakh tonnes. Latest estimates from the Spice Board of India indicate spices exports during April-September have fallen by 19 per cent to 2,37,585 tonnes from 2,94,925 tonnes in 2010. Jeera exports fell by 15 per cent to 16,000 tonnes from 18,800 tonnes last year during the same period.

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Soya oil futures weaken on global cues

Our Correspondent



Indore, Dec. 15:

Soya oil prices remained firm on Thursday despite scattered buying interest.

Soya refined on the spot and delivery markets sold at Rs 630-635 for 10 kg. Buying interest was weak at these levels. In contrast, resellers sold soya refined at Rs 628-630 for 10 kg. Soya solvent was firm at Rs 600-605 for 10 kg, even as buying remained weak.

With the dollar gaining against the rupee, soya oil in the past two days has risen by about Rs 20 for 10 kg. Soya refined rose to Rs 630-635 for 10 kg (Rs 610-612 on Tuesday). Soya solvent

rose to Rs 600-605 for 10 kg (Rs 584-585). Soya refined's January contract on the National Board of Trade closed Rs 7.60 lower at Rs 671.50 for 10 kg (Rs 679.90) on weak global cues. Weak buying support also dragged down soya oil's December and January contracts at Rs 662.40 (down Rs 7.60) and at Rs 672.30 (down Rs 5.70) for 10 kg.

Soya seeds, in contrast, were flat at Rs 2,270-2,330 a quintal (Rs 2,250-23,00) on weak foreign markets. Plant deliveries of soyabean sold at Rs 2,330-2,390, up Rs 30. Soyabean arrivals in State *mandis* were weak at about 1.5-1.75 lakh bags, including 9,000 bags in Indore *mandis*. Dewas *mandis* were closed on Thursday, while 7,000 bags arrived in Ujjain *mandis*. A weak rupee also perked up soya de-oiled cake in the port at Rs 17,900 a quintal against Rs 16,800 a quintal in the local market.

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Wary buyers pound sugar

Our Correspondent



Mumbai, Dec. 15:

The plunge in sugar prices continued on Thursday in sympathy with the bearish trend in global market. Buyers, too, kept away since they were not ready to make purchases in a falling market.

“Buyers run away from a falling market but queue up in a rising market. We are seeing that effect now. The pipeline is dry and once the market looks up, we can see demand emerging,” said a trading source from Uttar Pradesh.

In central Uttar Pradesh, sugar produced last season that ended in September was quoted at Rs 2,920 a quintal, while the one produced this season ruled at Rs 2,950-60. “Some local demand is there and mills are selling some 500-1,000 bags,” the source said.

In Maharashtra's Vashi spot market prices for S-grade sugar dropped by Rs 20-35 a quintal, while for M-grade fell by Rs 30 a quintal. Prices have declined by about Rs 200 a quintal this month. Naka rates for S-grade fell by Rs 50, while absence of resale selling kept M-grade steady.

Sugar futures price declined by over Rs 50 till noon, forcing mill tender rates to drop by Rs 30-40, said traders. *On Wednesday, 18-20 mills offered tenders and sold 80,000-85,000 bags in the range of Rs 2,820-2,900 (Rs 2,850-2,910) for S-grade and Rs 2,920-3,010 (Rs 2,950-3,040) for M-grade. Arrivals in Vashi market eased to 44-45 truckloads and local dispatches were around 38-40 truckloads leading to increase in market inventory. Freight rates ruled steady.*

Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates : S-grade Rs 2,991-3,045 (Rs 3,001-3,081) and M-grade Rs 3,076- 3,182 (Rs 3,076-3,212).

Naka delivery rates : S-grade Rs 2,940-2,980 (Rs 2,960-3,030) and M-grade Rs 3,040-3,140 (Rs 3,040-3,140).

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Turmeric pales on restricted buying

Our Correspondent



Erode, Dec. 15:

Spot turmeric prices decreased by Rs 100 a quintal on Thursday as buying remained limited on lack of orders from North India.

“Buyers quoted lower price for both varieties of turmeric on Thursday, as they purchased only for masala firms. No fresh orders were received from north Indian towns. Bulk buyers

(exporters) purchased 40 per cent of the 11,500 bags that arrived,” said Mr R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

He said prices in the futures market decreased to about Rs 4,500 a quintal on Thursday. In the regulated market, turmeric farmers brought more than 3,000 bags.

Meanwhile, due to the arrival of poor quality of hybrid finger variety (Salem crop), prices decreased by Rs 550 a and a limited quantity was sold. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger variety was sold at Rs 3,403-4,215 a quintal, the root variety Rs 3,369-4,139.

Salem Crop

The finger variety was sold at Rs 3,519-4,960; the root variety Rs 3,459-4,369. Of 2,819 bags that arrived, 610 were sold.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 3,299-4,109, the root variety Rs 3,219-3,939. All the 416 bags were sold. At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 3,691-4,222, the root variety Rs 3,569-4,089; 1,116 bags were sold against 1,128 that arrived. At the Regulated Marketing Committee, the finger variety fetched Rs 3,659-4,109, the root variety Rs 3,636-4,189 a quintal. Of 1,762 bags that arrived, 1,473 were sold.

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FCI delays releasing wheat for flour mills

Our Correspondent



Karnal, Dec. 15:

The wheat market continued to rule firm with the prices of the dara and desi wheat varieties moving up further by Rs 5-15 a quintal on Thursday.

The Food Corporation of India hasn't released its stocks for the flour mills yet and with no other stocks available in the market except arrivals from Uttar Pradesh, wheat prices have been ruling firm, said Mr Sewa Ram, a wheat trader.

In the physical market, dara prices increased further by Rs 5 and quoted between Rs 1,160-1,170 a quintal. A mere 70 tonnes of dara variety arrived from Uttar Pradesh and the stocks were directly offloaded at the mills. Mill delivery was at Rs 1,160-1,165 a quintal, while delivery at the chakki was at Rs 1,170 a quintal.

Dara prices have gone up by Rs 20-25 a quintal over the last four days.

Low availability pushed the desi wheat varieties marginally up by Rs 10-15 a quintal. Samrat increased by Rs 15 and quoted at Rs 1,885, while Tohfa and Lok-1 moved up by Rs 10 each and quoted at Rs 2,040 and Rs 1,830 a quintal respectively.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, wheat for December delivery decreased by Rs 10 to Rs 1,146 a quintal — it had touched a high at Rs 1,152 a quintal earlier on Thursday. While wheat for January delivery decreased by Rs 4 to Rs 1,197 a quintal

Flour prices: Despite an uptrend in wheat, flour prices remained almost unchanged and quoted at Rs 1,160-1,170 for a 90-kg bag. On the other hand, some buying pushed Chokar prices marginally up by Rs 5, selling at Rs 650-655 for a 49-kg bag.

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