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TODAY FARM NEWS

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Rice scheme to be named 'Mana Beeyam'

The State government has decided to supply rice from January 2013 onwards to the white ration card holders under the brand name of 'Mana Beeyam' (our rice).

The State government recently launched the ambitious decentralised procurement of paddy and rice scheme in Karimnagar, Warangal and Nalgonda districts. This scheme would be extended to Chittoor, Prakasam, Nellore and Guntur districts in the first phase and to all the districts by the next kharif season.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, Andhra Pradesh State Civil Supplies Corporation Limited Managing Director Vara Prasad said the supply of rice procured under the decentralised procurement scheme would be started from January 2013 in Karimnagar, Warangal and Nalgonda districts where the process had already begun. He said tentatively the brand name of the rice has been decided as 'Mana Beeyam' and the final nod would be given by Minister for Civil Supplies D. Sridhar Babu very soon.

Supply of quality rice

He said the government has decided to launch the decentralised procurement scheme of paddy and rice to benefit the farmers as well as the consumers by providing quality and local rice for their palate. Similarly, the government has also been planning to provide fine quality rice for the benefit of middle and upper middle classes by procuring sona masuri or BPT variety rice, he added.

Stating that the Civil Supplies Corporation was according top priority for maintaining quality of products, he said they have also decided to supply dal, oil and flour in packets from January 2013.

In the next phase, salt, sugar, wheat, chilli powder, tamarind and turmeric powder would also be distributed from the coming Ugadi festival in the State through Public Distribution System (PDS), he maintained.

Procurement rate

On the decentralised procurement of paddy and rice scheme in the three districts, he said they had so far procured 62,000 metric tonnes of rice in Karimnagar, Warangal and Nalgonda districts. He said they were also taking measures to increase storage capacity of food grains by increasing the number of godowns.

He hoped that the procurement of fine quality (BPT variety) rice would pick up from the next kharif season. Joint Collector H. Arun Kumar and others were also present.

CPI's plea to Kiran on sugarcane dues

The CPI State secretary K. Narayana has requested Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy to take steps for payment of dues pertaining to the last crushing season to sugarcane farmers in the State.

In a letter to the Chief Minister on Tuesday, Dr. Narayana stated that sugar factories did not pay about Rs. 40 crore to farmers in lieu of sugarcane supplied by them.

Such a situation would force farmers into distress as they were not a position to bear the cost of cultivation for two successive crops without any income, the CPI leader said.

Karnataka has exceeded irrigation area permitted by tribunal, says Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu on Tuesday accused Karnataka in the Supreme Court of irrigating 11.685 lakh acres of land, as against 8.47 lakh acres permitted by the Cauvery Tribunal, and depleting the entire available water in the four reservoirs in the State.

Making this submission before a Bench of Justices D.K. Jain and Madan B. Lokur, senior counsel C.S. Vaidyanathan, appearing for Tamil Nadu, said: "During 2012-13, Tamil Nadu has so far received only 23.9 per cent inflows at Biligundlu, which works out to 73.49 tmcft out of total availability of 307.81 tmcft, with the remaining 234.32 tmcft (76.1 per cent) fully utilised by Karnataka.

He said even during the 2002-2003, which was another comparable deficit year, Tamil Nadu received 39.2 per cent share, but this year the attitude of Karnataka seemed to be that whatever water available in Karnataka belonged to that State and “we will not share it”.

He said notwithstanding the deficit rainfall, Karnataka had not suffered any distress. Karnataka had sown crops in 11.685 lakh acres. “It has already drawn more than 102 tmcft of water (up to November 30) as against about 102 tmcft, which is the average drawal in the four major reservoirs up to end of November. Thus, it has not suffered any reduction either in the irrigated area, or in the quantity of water. Karnataka cannot claim and seek to retain any water for the rabi crop, when Tamil Nadu could not have even one crop.”

Mr. Vaidyanathan said while the tribunal had permitted irrigation only in 8.47 lakh acres, the Central government had allowed irrigation in over nine lakh acres and it seems whatever the State had submitted to them had been accepted. He said: “This is shocking. My [Tamil Nadu’s] crops are withering away, they [Karnataka] are allowing to grow more and more crops and store water for the third crop. Obviously, they cannot have any water for us if they overreach themselves. Their contention that distress is to be borne only by Tamil Nadu and not by them is really shocking and to deny the legitimate rights of the people of Tamil Nadu enjoyed for over centuries.”

He argued that while Tamil Nadu was suffering to salvage even a single samba crop, the claim made by Karnataka either for the second rabi crop or for the crops in new areas was wholly unjustified. Further the claim of 23 tmcft made by Karnataka for drinking water supply, including the requirement of Bangalore city from December to May was highly exaggerated and not realistic as the actual requirement was only 4.4 tmcft. He wanted the court to direct Karnataka to release 30 tmcft of water to save the standing samba crop.

Senior counsel Anil Divan, appearing for Karnataka, said Tamil Nadu’s application was not maintainable. Raising technical objections, Mr. Divan said once the Cauvery River Authority had passed an order after considering all aspects, including deficit, the present application was not maintainable. He said the court should not be carried away by emotional appeal or sympathy since farmers of both the States were involved. He will continue his arguments on Wednesday.

Mamata visits troubled Loba village to assure farmers

"Trinamool Government will not acquire land forcibly"

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee talking to Loba villagers in Dubrajpur during her visit to the troubled area on Tuesday.– PHOTO: PTI

Four weeks after more than thirty people including six villagers were injured at Loba village in the Dubrajpur area of the State's Birbhum district over land acquisition issue, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited the area on Tuesday and assured the villagers that the Trinamool Congress government will not acquire their land forcibly.

"Be assured. You can sleep in peace. No one is going to take your land forcibly," Ms Banerjee told the villagers. Ms Banerjee made a sudden deviation in her ongoing tour of Bankura and Purulia to visit the village.

Violence erupted at Loba village on November 6, when a huge contingent of police tried to take possession of heavy earth-moving equipments of DVC-EMTA Coal Mines Pvt Ltd, which the villagers had seized in December 2011. There was a dispute between the villagers and the company over the compensation offered for the land, which the company was trying to acquire for an opencast mining project.

Referring to the protests against forcible land acquisition, which she had led at Singur and Nandigram, Ms Banerjee, said that unlike the previous Left front government her government will not forcibly occupy land.

“Do you trust me ? I always keep my word. I can sacrifice my life for it,” she said, adding that the State government will award a compensation of Rs 25,000 to each of the six villagers injured in the violence.

Ms Banerjee urged the villagers not to allow land-agents to trade off their land adding that if they want to sell their land they should directly talk to the company. She said that the problem of land acquisition in the area started in 2009 during the previous government.

“What happened that day (November 6) was a mistake,” she said, adding that all the police officers responsible for the incident have been removed.

“Though we are waiting for the Centre to finalise its policy on land acquisition, we have decided in-principle that there will be no forcible land acquisition in the State,” Ms Banerjee said.

Addressing a public gathering in the State’s Bankura district earlier during the day, she pledged to provide basic amenities like drinking water, schools and health facilities to the people.

Ms Banerjee inaugurated a piped-water supply project that will benefit 14 drought -prone blocks of the district.

Milk producers threaten strike in February

Farmers belonging to the Tamil Nadu Milk Producers’ Association (TNMPA) will stop production across the State in February next year, if the State Government did not meet their demands, including higher procurement price, association State president K. Mohammed Ali said here on Tuesday.

After the association’s fourth State conference, he told presspersons that the main demand was to increase the procurement price of milk to match the price of fodder, which was constantly on the rise.

In the last three months alone the price of different types of fodder had increased by 30 to 50 per cent. “We want the procurement price of cow milk to be increased from the present Rs.20 a litre to Rs.25 a litre. The price of buffalo milk should be raised from Rs.28 to Rs. 35, a litre,” he said. “The State government should also give farmers an incentive of Rs.2 a litre, on par with the incentives given to milk producers in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The Government should also ensure availability of adequate feed to the cattle of farmers who are attached to the Cooperative Milk Producers Societies across the State, at a subsidy of 50 per cent," he said.

The milk producers also asked the government to ensure fair conduct of the societies' election, by revoking the relaxation in the membership norms.

Red gram cultivation reintroduced in Ramnad

MIXED CROP:Farmers transplanting red gram seedlings at RS Mangalam block in Ramanathapuram.— Photo: L. Balachandar

The Agriculture Department has reintroduced the cultivation of red gram, one of the major pulses, in this drought prone district after a gap of more than two decades.

Red gram was cultivated in the district as a mixed crop with paddy in rain fed areas about 25 years ago and farmers gave up the cultivation after finding it non-remunerative. Since then, the cultivation of the pulse came to a nil, with farmers settling down for paddy cultivation.

As production of Red gram was witnessing a fall in recent years, Collector K. Nanthakumar had suggested the reintroduction of the crop, after which, the department has selected progressive farmers to cultivate the pulse as a pilot project on about 20 hectares, scattered in all the blocks in the district, Joint Director of Agriculture Ka. Sakthimohan told 'The Hindu.'

"We have taken up Red gram cultivation on an experimental basis on two hectares each in the blocks, using latest technology and practice of raising nurseries and transplanting under the National Agriculture Development Programme (NADP)," he said.

Discarding the direct sowing practice, the farmers have transplanted 35 to 40 days-old seedlings with a planting spacing of 5X3, significantly reducing the seed cost in the new method of cultivation. If 5 kg of seeds were required for direct sowing for a hectare, 2.2 kg of seeds were enough under the seedling transplantation method, he said.

The farmers have been advised to follow integrated nutrient, pest and water management for better yield, he said adding farmers are expected to get a yield of about 1.5 tonnes per hectare. Unlike the paddy crops, which required more water, three to four irrigation during the critical periods of growth-transplanting, flowering and pod-filling stages would be enough for Red gram, he said.

For achieving a good yield, the farmers have been asked to follow “earthing up” for supporting the plants and to avoid weeds. The farmers have also been asked to do nipping after 20 to 30 days after transplanting, which results in sprouting of secondary and tertiary branches, he said.

A farmer in R. S. Mangalam block, who started Red gram cultivation, assisted by the Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) said he has transplanted 500 seedlings in a hectare and expected a yield of 1 to 3 kg per plant and an overall yield of 1 to 1.5 tonnes per hectare.

Z Kamaldeen, Assistant Director of Agriculture, R.S.Mangalam block, described Red gram as an apt crop for rain-fed areas and best suited for this district. Unlike the ‘water loving’ paddy, Red gram consumed minimum water. The crop would also require only minimum fertilizer and the farmers could earn more revenue with less investment, he said.

More farmers would be encouraged to take up Red gram cultivation in this block as they could rotate the crop throughout the year and ensure sustainable income, he said. Self Help Groups would be involved in raising seedlings, he added. The foliage could be used to feed cattle, he added.

Use drum seeder to cut costs, scientists tell paddy farmers

Helpful tips:Scientists from UAS, Bangalore, and V.C. Farm with farmers at a live crop demonstration of KRH-4, a hybrid variety of paddy, at Katte Doddi village in Mandya on Tuesday.

Farmers facing the problem of labour shortage should use drum seeder to sow paddy, scientists from the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Bangalore, and Zonal Agricultural Research Station, V.C. Farm, Mandya, have said.

Live crop demonstration

They were addressing farmers at a live crop demonstration of KRH-4, a hybrid variety of paddy developed by the UAS-B, at Katte Doddi village in Mandya taluk on Tuesday. Farmers from nearby villages attended the programme.

The scientists said that drum seeders were best suited for farmers with small and marginal landholdings. Farmers could cut costs by directly sowing paddy using the drum seeders instead of the traditional way of raising a nursery and then transplanting the seedlings, they said.

They urged farmers to cultivate the KRH-4 paddy variety using the innovative and water saving method of System of Rice Intensification as it gives good yield.

Joint Director, Agriculture, K. Sangaiah, paddy breeder N. Shivakumar and experts P.R. Krishna Prasad, V.B. Sanath Kumar, B.G. Shekar, P. Prakash, Raje Gowda, Gangadharaiah, H.M. Mahesh and Manasa were present.

This farmer's 'beeja siri' is 10 years old

He collects seeds of vegetables he grows and sells them at krishi melas

Billampadavu Narayana Bhat with vegetables kept for seeds.— PHOTO: RAVIPRASAD KAMILA

"Vegetable cultivation saved my family when arecanut prices fell steeply a decade ago," said Billampadavu Narayana Bhat, a farmer near Vitla in Dakshina Kannada.

It was in 2001, said Mr. Bhat, prices of arecanut fell steeply by Rs. 130 a kg. The prices fell from Rs. 165 a kg in 2000 to Rs. 35 a kg in 2001.

"Adikeyalli sothaga badukisiddu tarakari," Mr. Bhat said.

He said since then he had been cultivating vegetables on a large scale though he began on a small scale in 1998. What is special in it?

Mr. Bhat said that he had been preserving the seeds of different varieties of vegetables grown organically since 2002.

According to him, they are not hybrid varieties. The bank of seeds as named by him "beeja siri" has completed a decade now.

He said that he had been preserving the seeds of 30 to 35 varieties of vegetables grown by him.

They include balli badane, gonchalu here, kariyala harive, gidda paduvala, midi southe, alasande, and the like. He has five varieties of bende (okra) — red, green, white, Sri Lanka and bahu varshika. The four varieties of alasande (cowpea) include red, smaller one and longer one and Katpady bagade.

Mr. Bhat sells them to farmers in krishi melas and other fairs.

“Kariyala harive grows up to nine feet. Tasty bonda can be made from this. About 250 bondas can be made from a stem,” he said.

Mr. Bhat said that healthy seeds could be obtained from the first crop of vegetables harvested.

He said during moratorium on deep sea fishing for two months during monsoon, there would be a good demand for vegetables in the district.

Farmers could make use of this for marketing of vegetables.

Mr. Bhat propagates cultivation of vegetables on terraces.

He said that he had been guiding 25 people in Mangalore who had been growing vegetables on their terraces.

The Dakshina Kannada Zilla Panchayat invites him as a resource person for workshops on terrace gardening and cultivating vegetables.

Billampadavu is 10 km from Vitla and 5 km from Adyanadkka on Vitla-Kasaragod road.

RAVIPRASAD KAMILA

Cotton farmers allege denial of MSP for their produce

The cotton farmers narrated about their “unabated exploitation” by the greedy traders at the cotton market yard here when a team of revenue officials led by Revenue Divisional Officer V. Venkateshwarlu visited the yard on Tuesday to take stock of the situation.

Some of the aggrieved farmers expressed their anguish over the sorry state of affairs at the market yard and alleged denial of minimum support price to their cotton produce.

They bitterly complained against the “greedy traders” accusing them of colluding with some errant staff of the cotton purchase centre of Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) at the yard.

They further alleged that the errant employees manning the CCI centre were depriving them of remunerative price for their produce on the pretext of “poor quality”.

A young farmer explained about the “modus operandi” of the errant traders whom he charged with purchasing cotton from the gullible cotton growers by exploiting their vulnerable situation at prices much below the MSP of 3,900 per quintal.

The errant traders would then sell the same cotton to the CCI at the MSP by pretending themselves as farmers, he pointed out hinting at an unholy nexus between the greedy traders and errant staff members at the yard. Some representatives of the farmers associations have apprised the officials of the purchase of only 1.03 lakh quintals of cotton by the CCI as against the 4.25 lakh quintals of cotton by the traders at the yard so far in this current season.

Detailed report

A detailed report on the prevailing situation at the yard will be submitted to the higher authorities, said the RDO Venkateshwarlu.

A team of revenue employees will be deputed to the market yard to oversee the transactions at the yard and ensure MSP to all the farmers, he said.

Lack of market facility a bane to farmers

No access to agricultural markets force farmers to sell their produce at a reduced price

Sad state of affairs:Farmers selling cotton to unlicensed traders in Koutala mandal.— PHOTO: S. HARPAL SINGH

One of the most important but least attended reason for Adilabad's backwardness and poverty is its dire lack of marketing facility for its agriculture produce coming from remote and interior areas. Hundreds of unscrupulous traders and businessmen have made their millions taking advantage of this fact and hundreds more are in the process of making their way into such business.

Crops underweighted

The difficulty in accessing agricultural markets forces small and marginal farmers from far-flung areas to sell their produce, cotton included, at a reduced price to unlicensed traders. The farmers, who invariably go throughgreater odds to raise crops, also get cheated as their crops are underweighted by traders who use scales that may be of dubious calibration.

Cotton, the minimum support price for which is Rs.3,900 per quintal, is being purchased at Rs.3,500 to Rs.3,600. This may not seem much considering the saving made on transportation but the produce being underweighted, usually by about 5 kg, could inflict huge loss on the helpless farmers.

Impractical scheme

There are 17 Agriculture Market Committee (AMC) yards in the district which are supposed to cover all the 52 mandals. The scheme looks practical on paper but is impractical in actuality.

For example, the catchment area of Kagaznagar AMC yard comprises of Kagaznagar, Sirpur (T), Koutala, Bejjur and Dahegaon mandals. Bejjur, the farthest of mandals, is over 70 km away and the utterly bad condition of roads certainly deters farmers from directly accessing the Kagaznagar AMC.

This AMC, like others situated in Asifabad, Wankidi, Narnoor, Khanapur, Chennur, Jainoor, Hasnapur etc, witnesses transactions only in cotton. Even this cotton is brought to the market yard by petty traders who purchase it from the poor farmers in faraway villages.

The most disadvantaged among the poor farmers are the ones who cultivate food grains and pulses. Though the pulses and food grains like jowar and maize are sown in about 90,000 hectares, not even one kilogram is traded in the market yards.

Among food grains, only paddy is traded in AMCs and that too when government agencies are making the purchases. The government has opened a purchase centre at Bhainsa AMC for black gram this season, but the performance leaves much to be desired.

Paddy dues not paid

The State government is yet to pay Rs. 153.78 crore out of the Rs. 213.88 crore for the paddy procured from farmers in the State during the harvest season that ended in November.

Statistics show that as on December 2, the Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation (Supplyco) procured nearly 12.58 lakh quintals of paddy. But the farmers had been paid only Rs. 60.1 crore.

The highest quantity of paddy was procured from Palakkad, where the harvest closed by September. The highest dues have to be paid to the farmers in Palakkad and Alappuzha.

In Alappuzha, nearly four lakh quintals of paddy from 12,500 hectares of land under the crop had been procured. The total amount to be paid was Rs. 68 crore, but only Rs. 16.5 crore has been disbursed till October 15.

This has made many farmers abandon the next round of paddy cultivation known as Puncha in Kuttanad. For instance, cultivation on 80 hectares in the Kandamkari Padathuvarambu and 48 hectares in the Manamkari Ilampadam paddy polders in the Champakulam grama panchayat in Kuttanad has been abandoned.

Kerala Karshaka Sangham secretary K.V. Ramakrishnan told *The Hindu* that this approach of the State government was “the cruellest act to the farmers.”

The farmers had even pawned the wedding chains of their wives for finding money for paddy cultivation and were reeling under the increase in prices of chemical fertilizers.

He said the State government was saying that Central assistance had been sought to pay the farmers. But not a single paisa had been allocated in the State budget for paddy procurement. The farmers of Palakkad and Alappuzha were the worst affected.

He said the sangham would soon launch an agitation on the issue.

Renovate dams speedily, farmers appeal to CM

Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association has appealed to Chief Minister Jayalalithaa to renovate dams in the State on a war-footing as it would help conserve precious water for irrigation.

Uncertain monsoon

In a statement here, working president of the association Mahadhanapuram V.Rajaram said the practice of Tamil Nadu going to Karnataka with a begging bowl for Cauvery water had become a routine. Northeast monsoon too has become quite uncertain leaving farmers in the lurch.

"It is because Karnataka is treating Tamil Nadu as drainage and allows water into the Cauvery (which it is unable to store) that the lower riparian State is able to carry on some agriculture."

Construct new dams

Mr.Rajaram pointed out that his association has been urging the State government to renovate old dams, construct new dams and barrages to conserve water.

The news that water would be conserved using 104 dams at a total estimate of Rs.745 crore was a welcome move, though belated.

Accordingly, Rs.474 crore would be spent for renovating dams used for irrigation, Rs.260 crore for renovating dams that are under the control of Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (formerly Tamil Nadu Electricity Board) and Rs.15.41 crore for renovating those under the control of Agricultural Engineering Department.

Water saved

Mr.Rajaram was confident that at least 18 thousand million cubic feet (tmcft) of water from various rivers that is getting wasted would be saved once these works are completed.

Such schemes would provide some oxygen to Tamil Nadu agriculture which is on its last legs, he added.

Cancel licence given to companies for tapping groundwater: forum

The Suryiur Grama Ayacutdar Padhukappu Sangham has urged Collector Jayashree Muralidharan to cancel the licence given to two companies for tapping groundwater from their village as it would cause incalculable harm to people.

In a memorandum to the Collector, the association said Suriyur panchayat consists of Periya Suriyur, Chinna Suriyur, Veerampatti Pattaveli and Oonavayal.

Agriculture in this region is dependent upon rains and groundwater and more than 1,100 acres of land is cultivated using more than 200 wells. As many as 700 farm families and 1,000 agricultural labourers are dependent on this land which is used for two crops.

All these families get potable water only from groundwater.

The memorandum pointed out that two companies have established their units here — one producing beverages and the other mineral water - and both of them have sunk giant borewells and tap several lakh litres of groundwater every day. It alleged that the effluents discharged from one of the units would seriously affect the groundwater and also the soil.

The people apprehend that groundwater in seven kilometre radius of the company would be polluted.

They alleged that the company had been exploiting groundwater for commercial purposes hurting farmers dependent on the water for their livelihood. Hence, they appealed to the Collector to cancel the licence granted to these companies for tapping the groundwater and protect the people of the village.

Procurement of coconut soon

The Department of Agriculture is gearing up to commence procurement of coconuts from farmers by the last week of December.

Efforts are on to establish a network of dryers to convert the procured coconuts into copra, Minister for Agriculture K.P. Mohanan told a press conference here on Tuesday.

He said a solar dryer was being installed at the Vengeri market in Kozhikode as a pilot plant. “Based on its feasibility, similar units would be set up at district farms, Kerala State Coconut Development Corporation and agricultural wholesale markets. Experts will be consulted on the selection of the appropriate model,” he said.

Mr. Mohanan said the decision to procure coconuts instead of copra was dictated by the lack of facilities for drying at the local level. The solar dryers, he said, would supplement the conventional dryers being installed as part of the procurement programme.

20 dryers by Kerafed

“As many as 20 dryers will be set up by Kerafed at the district farms, the KSCDC units at Mamom, Edapally and Thiruvannoor and the three wholesale markets. Simultaneously, efforts are on to hire copra dryers from cooperatives. We hope to have 35 dryers in operation by January end,” he said.

The Minister said the processing of procured coconuts was expected to commence by January with support from NAFED, Warehousing Corporation, cooperatives and the Agriculture department. He said two to three Krishi Bhavans would be identified in each block for procuring coconuts from registered farmers.

Mr. Mohanan said the revolving fund for procurement would be disbursed to agricultural officers by the first week of December. The copra would be given to NAFED while the remaining would be used to manufacture coconut oil.

The Minister said district Principal Agricultural Officers would be authorised to disburse pension for small and marginal farmers.

Fallow land

He said the government had initiated moves to make fallow land suitable for farming. The department would institute awards for the local bodies that convert maximum area of fallow land into agricultural land during the period from December 1, 2012 to July 31, 2013.

As many as 14 lakh farmers across the State had registered themselves with Krishi Bhavans. These farmers would be given financial assistance for various schemes through their bank accounts. Thirty-five agro service centres would be opened in the year 2012- 13 to promote mechanised farming. As mnay as 1,00,000 cow and buffalo calves would be imported under a livestock enhancement programme.

IIHR to host symposium

At a time when nearly one-third of the population is starving and 40 per cent of children are malnourished in the country, food crops worth Rs. 90,000 crore are being lost every year to diseases and pests.

As this problem is assuming serious proportions, about 250 scientists from across the country in the field of plant pathology are set to brainstorm at the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR) in Bangalore on Tuesday to find ways and means of reducing food crop loss due to diseases so that it is possible to not only increase food production, but also make agriculture a viable economic option for farmers.

For sustainable agriculture

Director of the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research Amrik Singh Sidhu told presspersons in Bangalore on Monday that the institute would host a three-day national symposium on ‘Blending conventional and modern plant pathology for sustainable agriculture’ starting on Tuesday.

The symposium is being jointly organised by the IIHR, University of Agricultural Sciences - Bangalore and the Indian Phytopathological Society. “The symposium will come out with an action plan as well as a roadmap for management of various diseases causing crop losses,” he said.

Ripple effect

Expressing concern over the seriousness of the situation, he pointed out that there were many classic examples in the history of plant pathology wherein fungal diseases in potato, rice and other crops had caused famines and led to loss of human lives.

IIHR's Plant Pathology Division Principal Scientist P. Chowdappa said import of fruits and vegetables too had contributed to increase in the incidence of new diseases.

Call for benchmarking pesticide impact on environment

Taking note of the complaints of contamination of natural resources and health hazards due to the use of chemical pesticides, Indian Council of Agricultural Research's Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board chairman Gurubachan Singh on Tuesday called for benchmarking application of each variety of pesticide by periodical monitoring of its impact on human beings, animals and environment through sample tests.

"Any new pesticide is allowed to be released only after a statutory testing. But despite this mechanism, there is a hue and cry over how these pesticides affect health and environment after they are tried for a few years. Hence, there is a dire need to benchmark their applications by taking up sample testing every year or two to know their impact on environment, humans and animals," Dr. Singh said while inaugurating a three-day national symposium on "Blending conventional and modern plant pathology for sustainable agriculture", organised jointly by the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Indian Phytopathological Society and University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore.

He said that such a benchmarking initiative would help monitor the impact of pesticides on health and environment so that any remedial measures could be taken up at the earliest if there were problems.

He said that such a measure was a must to build and record data related to the impact of pesticides on environment. Dr. Singh, who was a co-chairman of the Supreme Court-appointed committee to know the impact of endosulfan, recalled that there was no data available for this committee when it tried to know the impact of endosulfan.

He asked plant pathologists to involve multi-disciplinary experts, including geologists, environmentalists and agro meteorologists, besides stakeholders such as farmers and NGOs while deciding on pesticides.

He stressed the need for trans-boundary disease management across the countries to prevent the spreading of diseases from one country to another.

UAS, Bangalore, Vice-Chancellor K. Narayana Gowda observed that plant pathologists had played a key role in increasing the country's food production to 251 million tonnes.

He underscored the importance of weather-based monitoring and forecasting of diseases.

IIHR Director Amrik Singh Sidhu and Indian Phytopathological Society president R.K. Khetrapal spoke.

Several veteran plant pathologists were honoured.

The symposium in which about 250 plant pathologists from different parts of the country are participating would come out with a recommendation on eco-friendly methods of controlling plant diseases in a bid to increase food production.

Crop loss

At a time when nearly one-third of the population is starving and 40 per cent of children suffer from malnourishment in the country, food crops worth Rs. 90,000 crore are being lost every year due to diseases and pests. IIHR's Plant Pathology Division Principal Scientist P. Chowdappa said that the crop losses due to diseases ranged from 12 per cent to 30 per cent. He called for putting in place a strong bio-security measure to prevent the spreading of plant diseases from other countries through imports of fruits and vegetables.

PIL on Nilayur channel extension scheme adjourned

The Madras High Court Bench here has adjourned by two weeks the hearing on a public interest litigation petition filed by a non-governmental organisation alleging irregularities in executing the Nilayur Channel Extension Scheme aimed at feeding 94 water bodies that irrigate 9,947.62 acres in Madurai, Virudhunagar and Sivaganga districts.

A Division Bench comprising Justice K.N. Basha and Justice P. Devadass deferred the hearing of the case in order to enable a government counsel to obtain instructions with regard to the exact status of the project and the outcome of a writ petition that had been reportedly filed by a land owner, who refused to part with his property for the project, in the Principal Seat of the High Court in Chennai in 2003.

V. Muniasamy, secretary of Mass Education and Action for Rural Development Society, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), of Kariapatti in Virudhunagar district had filed the PIL petition by claiming that he was one among the first to impress upon the State government to execute the channel extension scheme from Nilayur to Kambikudi in the interest of farmers in the three southern districts.

After its approval by the government on June 29, 2009, and allotment of Rs. 8.94 crore for the project, the petitioner expected the works to be handed over to his NGO. But it did not happen. Hence, he had filed the present case claiming that only one third of the works up to Anaikulam had been completed and the rest was left incomplete much to the disadvantage of hundreds of farmers.

Filing a counter affidavit to the petition, M. Sampath Kumar, Chief Engineer (Water Resource Organisation), Public Works Department, Madurai region, said that the extension work was approved by the government following representations made by the farmers and elected representatives over a number of years and not solely because of the petitioner- NGO.

It was meant to fill 94 water tanks — 50 in Madurai, 21 in Virudhunagar and 23 in Sivaganga — by diverting the flood flow of Vaigai river after paying due consideration to the riparian rights of original ayacutdars of Vaigai water. It was proposed to extend the channel by excavating 8.675 km of main channel and 12.51 km of six branch channels.

Claiming that the contract for executing the work was given through a tender notification, the Chief Engineer said that the entire work of excavation, except for a distance of 45 metres in Chonaguruni where a land owner refused to part with his property, was completed on March 31, 2005, after the government approved a revised estimate to the tune of Rs.19.49 crore on January 3, 2003. “The rehabilitation of Nilaiyur channel for improving carrying capacity to feed the Nilaiyur Extension Channel works is in progress with an estimated cost of Rs. 23.50 crore. This work is proposed to be completed on or before February 6, 2013. Speedy action is also being taken to conclude the land acquisition court cases. After that, full benefit of the scheme will reach the downtrodden ryots of this region,” he added.

On the other hand, filing a written reply to the counter affidavit, the PIL petitioner Mr. Muniasamy alleged that the Chief Engineer had provided wrong information to the court as the distance between Nilayur Tank and Kambikudi was 25 km and not 8.675 km as claimed by the latter. This statement itself was sufficient to conclude that the extension work was still incomplete, he said.

Opposition seeks rollback of FDI

UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi listens to Leader of the Opposition Sushma Swaraj during the debate on FDI in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. Speaker Meira Kumar is at centre.— Photo: PTI/TV-GRAB

The Opposition parties went hammer and tongs at the government for its decision to allow FDI in multibrand retail as the much demanded debate under rule 184 (that entails voting) began on the issue in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. They wanted the government to withdraw the decision.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a constituent of the United Progressive Alliance, and the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party (which extend outside support to the UPA) claimed that the move would lead to many small traders losing their jobs, farmers being badly hit and all profits being siphoned off by retail giants like Walmart at the cost of the Indian people and consumers.

While the DMK’s T.K.S. Elangovan made it clear that the party, though opposed to FDI, would not vote against the government, the SP and the BSP remained noncommittal on the issue of voting. BSP floor leader Darasingh Chauhan kept the government and the Opposition guessing by announcing that the party’s strategy would be known at the time of voting on Wednesday.

Earlier, initiating the debate on the motion, Leader of the Opposition Sushma Swaraj recalled that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, as Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha, had in 2002 opposed FDI in retail. She wanted to know what had changed for the government to allow it now.

When large supermarkets were a failed concept in the western countries, how could the UPA regime claim that it would create job opportunities here, Ms. Swaraj wondered. She said the BJP was not opposed to FDI *per se* and that she was even ready to travel with Dr. Singh worldwide to invite investments in other sectors like infrastructure.

The decision to allow FDI in retail was not a step towards development but a leap into a ditch of destruction, Ms. Swaraj said, adding foreign retail chains would not buy products from small and medium farmers at all.

Saugata Roy (Trinamool Congress) wondered why the government took important decisions, such as the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal and FDI in retail, ahead of the U.S. presidential elections.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was on the board of WalMart before she joined the American government, Mr. Roy claimed, adding her May 2012 visit to India was to make UPA-II agree to FDI in retail, a move that would benefit the U.S.

“Does the government of India have to respond to American urging?” asked Mr. Roy.

SP chief Mulayam Singh Yadav said the decision on FDI in retail was not in the interest of the country as it would affect 20-25 crore people and their families connected with retail trade, besides increasing unemployment: “I am not speaking for [the government] or against you. Please reverse the decision on FDI and call an all-party meeting.”

Mr. Singh asked why the government, which claimed that the FDI decision would increase employment opportunities, could not allow retail chains all over the country. “Why do you allow it only in cities having a population of more than 10 lakh people?” Small traders might commit suicide because of its decision on FDI, he warned.

Mr. Elangovan said the decision would affect a large chunk of farmers and small-time traders. “We will watch you [government] and correct you. We don’t want to go with the BJP [by opposing the government].” The DMK member also made it clear that his party would not allow FDI in Tamil Nadu.

Darasingh Chauhan (BSP) said WalMart would act only as a commission agent between farmers and consumers, and asked the government not to allow FDI in multibrand retail in haste. He reminded the government that the Britishers entered India to do spice trade and later brought the entire country under their control.

Basudeb Acharia of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) criticised the government for not empathising with the plight of poor farmers. If FDI in retail trade decision was in the interest of the country, why were so many people opposed to it, he asked.

Karnataka exceeding irrigation area, says Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu on Tuesday charged Karnataka with irrigating 11.685 lakh acres of land as against 8.47 lakh acres permitted by the Cauvery Tribunal and depleting the water in the four reservoirs of the State.

Making a submission before a Supreme Court Bench, comprising Justices D.K. Jain and Madan B. Lokur, senior counsel C.S. Vaidyanathan, appearing for Tamil Nadu, said “in 2012-13, the State had received only 23.9 per cent inflow at Billigundlu, which worked out to 73.49 tmcft out of total availability of 307.81 tmcft. The remaining 234.32 tmcft (76.1 per cent) was fully utilised by Karnataka.

He said even during 2002-2003 which was another comparable deficit year, the State received 39.2 per cent share, but this year the attitude of Karnataka seemed to be that whatever water available there belonged to that State and “we will not share it.”

He said notwithstanding the deficit rainfall, Karnataka had not suffered any distress and had sown crops on 11.685 lakh acres. “It has already drawn more than 102 tmc ft. (up to November 30) as against about 102 tmc ft., which is the average drawal in the four major reservoirs up to end of November. Thus it has not suffered any reduction either in the irrigated area or in the quantity of water. Karnataka cannot claim and seek to retain any water for the rabi crop, when Tamil Nadu could not have even one crop."

Mr. Vaidyanathan said while the Tribunal had permitted irrigation only on 8.47 lakh acres, the Central government had allowed irrigation on over nine lakh acres and it seemed whatever the State had submitted to them had been accepted.

He said "this is shocking. My [Tamil Nadu's] crops are withering away, they [Karnataka] are allowing more and more crops and storing water for the third crop. Obviously they cannot have any water for us if they overreach themselves. Their contention that distress is to be borne only by Tamil Nadu and not by them is really shocking and the State was denying the legitimate rights of the people of Tamil Nadu enjoyed for over centuries."

He argued that while Tamil Nadu was suffering to salvage even a single samba crop, the claim made by Karnataka either for the second rabi crop or for the crops in new areas was wholly unjustified. Further the claim of 23 tmc ft made by Karnataka for drinking water supply, including the requirement of Bangalore City from December to May, was highly exaggerated and unrealistic as the actual requirement was only 4.4 tmcft. He wanted the court to direct Karnataka to release 30 tmcft of water to save the standing samba crop.

Senior counsel Anil Divan, appearing for Karnataka, said the Tamil Nadu's application was not maintainable. Raising technical objections, Mr. Divan said once the Cauvery River Authority headed by the Prime Minister had passed an order after considering all aspects, including deficit, the present application was not maintainable. He said the court should not be carried away by emotional appeal or sympathy since farmers of both the States were involved, and pass ad hoc orders.

hindustantimes

TODAY FARM NEWS

05.12.2012 A.M

Weather

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather

Partly Cloudy

Wednesday, Dec 5

Max **Min**

29.5° | 25.5°

Rain: 0
Humidity: 75
Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:17
Sunset: 05:41
Barometer: 1012

Tomorrow's Forecast

Cloudy

Thursday, Dec 6

Max **Min**

30° | 23°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
Dec 7	Dec 8	Dec 9	Dec 10	Dec 11
30° | 22°	26° | 23°	25° | 23°	25° | 22°	25° | 22°
Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast	Cloudy

Airport Weather

Delhi **Delhi**

Rain: 0
Humidity: 51
Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:59
Sunset: 05:24
Barometer: 1017

04thdec 2012 P.M

Inventories sales by stockists drag chana

Chana has been witnessing a down-slide in Indore mandis on weak buying support and sluggish demand in pulses. Amid report of favourable crop prospect and with harvesting of new chana crop approaching near, a panic button has set in among the stockists. With depleting demand and panic selling by stockists, chana prices in the past one week have declined by Rs 300-Rs 350 a quintal with its price on Tuesday being quoted at Rs 4100-Rs 4150 a quintal. Similarly chana (desi) declined to Rs 4000 a quintal.

According to traders, besides slack demand, arrival of imported chana from Australia has made stockists release existing stock of domestic chana with them in panic, leading to steep decline in its prices in the past few days. Added to this, bumper crop prospect of domestic chana has also lent strength to sluggish trend in chana. Bearish sentiment in chana futures with chana December contract on the NCEX witnessing a lower circuit on Saturday last has loosened grip of speculators from dictating chana prices in the physical market and this is one of the reasons for current downtrend in chana, said a local chana trader Mr Prakash Vora.

With decline in spot chana, its dal has also declined in local mandis by over R 300 a quintal in the past one week. On Tuesday, chana dal (average) was quoted at s 5000-Rs 5025 a quintal, chana dal (medium) at Rs 5100-Rs 5125, while chana dal (bold) ruled at Rs 5400-Rs5425 a quintal (down Rs 300 a quintal from last week).

Sluggish trend also continued in dollar chana on weak demand both in the domestic and export market. On Tuesday, dollar chana prices in local mandis declined to Rs 4000-Rs 6000 a quintal (against Rs 5000-Rs 6500 a quintal last week) amid arrival of 4500 bags. In container also, dollar chana has declined by over Rs 800 a quintal on poor export demand. On Tuesday dollar chana (42/44 count) declined to Rs 7250 a quintal 44/46 count at Rs 6900, 46/48 count at Rs 6500, while dollar chana 58/60 count declined to Rs 4325 a quintal.

Raw coconut demand heats up oil

Coconut oil market in Kerala and Tamil Nadu recovered from lower levels this week due to huge demand for raw coconuts all over South India.

Prakash B.Rao, Vice President, Cochin Oil Merchants Association (COMA pointed out that there is a huge demand for raw coconuts due to ongoing Sabarimala season. Copra prices had also gone up because of lesser conversion.

Farmers are willing to sell raw coconuts rather than converting it into copra due to better prices available from the market, he said adding, that the market is showing some positive signs due to high demand of raw coconuts.

The coconut oil prices in Kerala increased to Rs 61.50 per kg against last week prices of Rs 60, while in Tamil Nadu, it stood at Rs 59.50 against Rs 58 per kg. Copra prices also surged ahead touching Rs 4,300 per quintal in Kerala (Rs 4,200) and Rs 4,000 in Tamil Nadu (Rs 3,900).

According to Rao, palm oil prices are slightly weaker compared to other edible oils due to huge built up stocks with large scale importers. However, palm kernel prices slightly improved this week at Rs 53 per kg compared to last week prices.

Palm oil prices dropped to Rs 54 per kg from the last week level of Rs 58, while palm kernel oil prices are ruling at Rs 53 per kg against Rs 52 quoted last week.

Thalath Mahamood, former President, COMA pointed out that up-county and local demand coupled with Sabarimala pilgrim season started reflecting in the market and showing signs of price improvement. Traders are expecting a slight improvement in prices at Rs 1 to 2 per kg in the near term, he said.

Bharat N.Khona, former Board Member, COMA said that the market is showing some strength for an upward trend. The prices are likely to rise further due to demand for milling grade copra which is flowing in good quantity from Tamil Nadu to upcountry millers.

However, he expressed some concern over the low prices of palm oil in international markets, saying that “the situation has to be watched”.

Profit booking pounds wheat

Indian wheat futures and spot market witnessed a downtrend on profit booking on Tuesday.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, wheat for December delivery decreased by Rs 18 and traded at Rs 1,594 a quintal, it had touched a high at Rs 1,615 a quintal earlier on Tuesday. January contracts went down by Rs 11 to Rs 1,585 a quintal. Similarly, wheat spot prices on the exchange eased by Rs 25 and traded at Rs 1,525 a quintal.

In the physical market, after ruling flat for almost four weeks, dara wheat prices eased marginally by Rs 10 and quoted at Rs 1,530-1,540 a quintal. Around 650 quintals of dara variety arrived from Uttar Pradesh the stocks were directly offloaded at the mills. Mill delivery was at Rs 1,530-1,535 a quintal while delivery at the chakki was Rs 1,540 a quintal.

There are no local stocks available in the market and till the government is giving stocks to the bulk buyers, dara wheat prices may continue to rule around current levels, said Satish Kumar, a market expert. The flow of the stocks is not regular in the market, he added.

On the other hand, Desi wheat varieties continued to rule flat and quoted between Rs 2,500-2,550 a quintal.

Flour Prices

Despite a downtrend in wheat, flour prices ruled unchanged on steady buying and quoted at Rs 1,750 a quintal. Similarly, Chokar ruled flat and went for Rs 1,550 for a quintal.

Turmeric stocks pile up on tepid sales

Lack of orders and tepid sales have led to piling up of turmeric stocks in and around Erode.

"All the exporters and traders are disappointed as no fresh orders for the turmeric have been received from North India.

A week ago, they have received orders from Delhi and some other States. Now the exporters are busy in dispatching the stocks.

Some local traders and stockists are quoting decreased price and are buying limited stocks for their local orders, " said R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

He said that the traders are now in idle position, just visiting the market watching the arrivals and prices of both the varieties of turmeric. They are buying few quantities of the hybrid variety. Farmers are also bringing limited stock for want of proper price and sales. He said that the exporters and traders are saying that fresh orders will be received by them only in January when the prices may touch Rs 7,000 a quintal. Some lots of quality turmeric will get Rs 7,500-8,000 . The new crop will arrive by the third week or end of this month.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association Sales yard, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,089-5,319; the root variety Rs 3,886-4,619.

Salem Hybrid crop: The finger variety fetched Rs 4,599-5,649; the root variety Rs 4,439-4,965. Of the arrival of 1,296 bags, only 241 were sold.At the Regulated Marketing Committee, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,372-5,409; the root variety Rs 4,279-5,099. Of the 654 bags arrived, 628 found takers.

At Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,129-5,637 and the root variety Rs 4,029-5,131. Of the 635 bags arrived, 570 were sold. At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,587-5,539; the root variety Rs 3,889-5,196. All the 399 bags were sold.

Cotton wilts onslack buying by mills

Cotton prices declined by Rs 200-300 a candy of 356 kg on lower demand frommills and exporters. Kapas price declined by Rs 10 for a *maund* of 20 kg.

Gujarat Sankar-6 price declined toRs 33,300-33,400 a candy, while kapas was down by Rs 10 to Rs 800-870 a maund in Rajkot. About 40,000-42,000 bales (of 170 kg each) arrived in Gujarat and 150,000 bales arrived in India.

Cotton touched Rs 34,000 last week but after that demand has come down and arrivals too started increasing. In Gujarat, arrivals of cotton were up by almost 5,000 bales a day.

A cotton broker said: “After prices gained last week, mills and exporters demand declined and it may continue this week also. But price may not go below Rs 33,000 a candy in near future.”

The Government has procured 20.74 lakh quintals of cotton at the minimum support price (MSP) so far in the 2012-13 marketing year that began from October. Currently, the MSP of medium staple cotton has been fixed at Rs 3,600 , while long staple cotton is Rs 3,900.

Mixed trend in pepper

The pepper market witnessed a mixed trend on Tuesday with December moving up while other active contracts showing a decline. Consequently, two active contracts ended below the previous day’s closing.

December contract moved up as long position holders were holding on to their position while short position holders liquidated. Activities were very much limited, market sources told *Business Line*.

They said three tonnes of farm grade pepper arrived at the terminal market and that was traded at Rs 365 a kg. Small quantities of new pepper were reported to have started trickling in the primary markets.

December contract on the NCDEX increased by Rs 350 a quintal to close at Rs 38,770 a quintal. February and March dropped by Rs 145 and Rs 200 respectively to close at Rs 34,230 and Rs 33,675 a quintal.

Turnover

Total turnover decreased by 1,860 tonnes to close at 1,865 tonnes. Total open interest fell by 164 tonnes to close at 7,308 tonnes.

December open interest dropped by 256 tonnes to 4,762 tonnes while February moved up by 93 tonnes to 2,130 tonnes. March declined by just one tonne to close at 359 tonnes.

Spot prices remained steady at previous levels of Rs 37,200 (ungarbled) and Rs 38,700 (MG 1) a quintal on limited activities.

Indian parity in the international market remained unchanged at $7,300 a tonne (c&f) for Europe and $7,600 a tonne (c&f) for the US, they said.

Rice exporters rake in moolah on higher prices in Sept quarter

Rice exporters, such as KRBL Ltd and LT Foods Ltd, saw their profits shoot up in the September quarter on higher prices and shipments.

Strong demand from traditional markets in West Asia led to the rise in exports of Indian basmati rice during the September quarter. Even shipments of non-basmati were higher compared with the last quarter, on higher demand from newer geographies such as Africa among others.

“Improved branding, higher exports of basmati and non-basmati varieties boosted our performance,” said Anil Mittal, Chairman and Managing Director, KRBL Ltd. The company is targeting a turnover of around Rs 2,000 crore for the current fiscal and has crossed the half-way mark at Rs 1,006 crore in the first half. A 40 per cent rise in domestic sales of basmati also contributed to improved performance, he said.

Basmati prices in the current financial year are almost twice that of last year on reduced supplies.

“Prices are on a different scale this year. Besides, higher realisation in non-basmati rice has helped the growth,” said Vijay Arora, Managing Director, of LT Foods.

Total basmati exports by Indian companies in the first seven months were up about 17 per cent in the first seven months. Shipments in April-October period stood at 1.92 million tonnes against 1.64 million tonnes. In value terms, the exports for the period were up 26 per cent at Rs 10,452 crore.

“Strong demand and better prices helped us double our topline and bottom line for the September quarter,” said Vijay Setia, Executive Director, Chamanlal Setia Exports Ltd.

The Government had lifted a four-year ban on non-basmati rice shipments in September 2011. Since then, India has emerged as the largest exporter of rice.

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Volatile rupee, weak demand may hit cotton exports

DOWNTREND*

Month	cents/lb
August	84.40
September	4.15
October	82.17

* - Cotlook A Index

The fall in international cotton prices and fluctuation in value of rupee against dollar seem to have cast gloom on the prospects of cotton exports.

Demand for cotton in China, which accounts for about 65 per cent of the shipments from India, is expected to remain subdued due to the economic slowdown in the country.

M.B. Lal, Forward Markets Commission-nominated member of Cotton Association of India and former Chairman of Cotton Corporation of India, said that at present there is a disparity between domestic and international cotton prices and it will be more profitable for Indian companies to sell their produce here rather than exporting it.

“Cotton prices in the international market are down because China is keeping away from market,” he said.

Price scenario

Rupee had appreciated 5.2 per cent against dollar in September and but fell in the following two months.

On Tuesday, it gained nine paise to 54.68. Appreciation of rupee reduces the value of dollar receivables. However, profit margins can be protected by hedging.

Though cotton is quoted at 70-75 cents a pound in the international markets, India is currently exporting to Bangladesh at 82 cents a pound due to strong demand.

Domestic textile companies are not aggressive in placing orders for cotton as they are waiting for prices to fall.

Prices of the home grown Shankar-6 variety are currently trading at about Rs 33,000-35,000 a candy of 356 kg. There are no purchases being made by the Government agencies in Gujarat and Maharashtra as the domestic prices are ruling above the minimum support price announced by the Government, said Lal.

Textile companies will start placing orders for cotton in coming days as there is a strong export demand for yarn, he said.

Exports may dip

The Cotton Advisory Board had estimated India's exports to dip 46 per cent to 70 lakh bales (of 170 kg each) from 129 lakh bales. Registration for cotton export with Director General of Foreign Trade was at 4.5 lakh bales as of November 5.

The Government has made registration mandatory for cotton export though it is done under open general licence. Besides, an exporter can register for only 10,000 bales at a time and has to complete his obligation before seeking further registration. New exporters can apply for 1,500 bales.

Australia explores tie-ups in Indian dairy sector

Stirring Indian milk with Australian technology for production of value-added items. This was the key theme discussed between Indian dairy players and an Australian dairy team at a joint meeting here today.

The Australian team, led by Michael-Carter, Trade Commissioner, expressed interest in exploring India-Australian tie ups in the areas of animal husbandry, dairy development and livestock research.

It was observed at the meeting that while the Indian dairy sector is witnessing phenomenal growth in terms of milk production, it is facing challenges in the form of export growth and development of value- added products.

On the other hand, Australia has lesser production of milk, but significant expertise in the areas of processing and livestock development.

"Australia is currently the third largest exporter of dairy products in the world and our strength in accessing export markets can be leveraged by India companies through tie-ups with Australian dairy firms and co-operatives," Carter said.

M.V. Reddy, Andhra Pradesh Director of Animal Husbandry, pointed out that the Indian dairy sector could explore imbibing Australian technology to increase average milk production and fodder management.

In a follow-up to the meeting, another Australian dairy delegation will visit Hyderabad in March during the second edition of the Dairy Show and meet with dairy entrepreneurs and farmers from Andhra Pradesh and other parts of the country.

Andhra Pradesh produces 11.6 million litres of milk, but only about 13 per cent was being procured by the organised sector, leaving farmers with surplus production. Also, the procurement price here is the lowest compared with other milk producing centres at Rs 17 a litre, compared with Rs 19.50 in Maharashtra and Rs 22 in Gujarat.

Vietnam brews competition for other tea producing nations

Tea producers and exporters in Asia and Africa are seeing a new challenge to them from Vietnam.

For some years now, this new entrant had been giving them stiff competition in some traditional markets.

“The international delegates from Asia and Africa who attended our deliberations have seen the threat from Vietnam a real challenge as by now, Vietnam has emerged as the fifth largest producer and exporter of black tea”, Dr A.V.K. Iyengar, Director, Kothari Agricultural Management Centre (KAMC) who led the deliberations, told *Business Line.*

Last year, Vietnam produced 178 million kg (mkg) and out of this, exported as much as 143 mkg.

“Vietnam holds 4.2 per cent share in global annual tea production while the big four ahead of it have significantly higher share – China 36.8 per cent, India 23.4 per cent, Kenya nine per cent and Sri Lanka 7.8 per cent. Still, Vietnam cannot be underestimated because with new fields and clones that will last for several years, it has potential volumes”, Dr Iyengar said.

“In the export basket, Vietnam holds 8.3 per cent share while the big four ahead of it have significantly higher share – Kenya 24.5 per cent China 18.8 per cent, Sri Lanka 17.5 per cent and India 11.2 per cent. It serves little purpose to contend that Vietnamese tea is ‘cheap’ because importers are seeing it as ‘affordable’. ‘Watch Vietnam’ is the new caution, our deliberations noted,” he said.

“This programme was sponsored by Union Ministry of External Affairs. Tea plantation and factory managers, officers of Tea Boards, tea research institutes and extension wings, forest officers, professors of tea technology and science from different countries attended. The deliberations covered a wide gamut – management, domain-strengths including cultivation culture and tea tasting. Besides lectures, field visits, tea tasting sessions and interaction with scientists and experts were organised,” Iyengar said.

Spot rubber declines on peak arrival season

Physical rubber prices surrendered further on Tuesday. The market seemed to be expecting a sharp increase in arrivals during the ongoing peak production season. There were no genuine buyers in the commodity even at the prevailing levels.

Sheet rubber slid to Rs 160 (164) a kg, according to traders. The grade weakened to Rs 161 (164) a kg at Kottayam and Kochi as reported by the Rubber Board.

In futures, the December series weakened to Rs 163.75 (165.85), January to Rs 165.80 (167.87), February to Rs 167.70 (169.99) and March to Rs 169.75 (172.00) a kg for RSS 4 on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) recovered marginally to Rs 165.17 (164.96) a kg at Bangkok. The December futures for the grade remained totally inactive during the day session, but then dropped to ¥248.90 (Rs 165.82) from ¥250 in the night session on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rates were (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 160 (164); RSS-5: 156 (159); ungraded: 151 (154); ISNR 20: 157 (158.50) and latex 60 per cent: 107 (108).

Low price in open market distress cotton farmers

The cotton growers in Vidarbha region are once again in distress as prices of the cash crop were dropping below expectations in the open market.

Though the Government has fixed the minimum support prices (MSP) at Rs 3900 per quintal but prices in local market are far below expectations.

As compared to last year, the demand in the international market particularly China and Pakistan is virtually nil due to good crop there. This has resulted in less prices compared to last year when it rose to the higher side.

The Maharashtra State Cotton Marketing Federation which is bound to protect interest of farmers have so far not intervened in the price issue.

Moreover, this year the produce or the yield of cotton per acre shrunk to about two quintal which is worrying farmers. This is the third year when they are facing the problem.

Though the Cotton Federation had announced they will open the procurement centres well before Diwali but they are still not in sight, sources close to cotton growers group said.

Huge losses are in store for cotton growers of the state this year too, said officials in Cotton Growers Co-operative Marketing Federation.

Farm activists too said crop losses would be anywhere between 25-50 per cent.

What is more perturbing is that despite poor crop, not only in the state but also in Gujarat this year, rates in open markets have remained stable around Rs 4,000 a quintal, they said.

“Cotton is always an unpredictable commodity. There are so many factors, from weather conditions, crop situation in other countries, international markets to the fickle nature of demand from industry. All these go into deciding the open market rates,” explained a close aide of NP Hirani, Chairman of Cotton Federation.

He said the Federation has till date opened 92 procurement centres but managed to procure merely 788 quintal at the Government price of around Rs 3,900.

“With market rates ruling around Rs 4,050, farmers prefer to sell to private traders to earn more,” said Hirani.

For the first time this season he admitted that crop loss this year could be to the tune of 25 percent.

“Crop in our state is better that in some parts of Gujarat, where damage has been more widespread,” he added.

While traders have bought 1.71 lakh quintals, the Cotton Corporation of India has procured only 1,500 quintals till date, Hirani claimed.

“The arrivals are low, indicating poor yields. At the start of the season, we were not expecting such a heavy loss.

Last year, we had a crop of 88 lakh bales in the state. This time it may be around 66 lakh bales,” he said.

However, Kishore Tiwari of Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti (VJAS) told PTI that the State Government has officially admitted that cotton yield is likely to dip by nearly 40 per cent because of Bt cotton failure in more than 4 million hectares.

“A report sent by the State Agricultural Department to the centre has estimated that the net direct economic loss to cotton farmers in the state will be nearly Rs 6,000 crore, whereas accumulated losses are likely to cross more than Rs 20,000 crore due to a steep rise in cultivation costs,” said Tiwari.

“The Government will have to intervene to bail out farmers. Last year, the State had given a relief package of Rs 2,000 crore to Vidarbha. But this year the losses are more.

We demand a compensation of Rs 20,000 per hectare and fresh crop loans for every farmer for the ensuing kharif season”.

“We also want food security and free health education, along with the implementation of land development, soil enrichment and watershed development under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act,” he said.

The VJAS has threatened to take out a protest march of farmers to the Vidhan Sabha here on the opening day of the Winter Session of the Maharashtra Legislature on December 10.

Business Standard

TODAY FARM NEWS

05.12.2012 A.M

FinMin mulls phasing out urea subsidy in 3 yrs

The Finance Ministry is considering phasing out urea subsidy in the next three years starting from the current financial year. Urea now consumes almost half of the fertliser subsidy in the country.

A proposal has been sent to Finance Minister P Chidambaram for his approval. If approved, a Cabinet note will be floated on the same.

Government officials, however, said since the political environment was not conducive for the move the finance minister would tread very cautiously.

As per the proposal, the Budget Estimate for subsidy for this year should also be cut in the Revised Estimates.

Officials said the Finance Ministry plans to go ahead with the proposal at the earliest but the Prime Minster's Office is not very comfortable going ahead with it at the moment. The Fertiliser Ministry too is opposed to the proposal.

When contacted, Fertiliser Minister Srikant Jena raised questions over the complete exercise of developing a system for direct transfer of subsidy, if the subsidy needs to be phased-out.

Urea prices are regulated by the government and are currently sold at Rs 5,360 per tonne for agricultural purposes.

The fertiliser department proposed to increase the Urea prices by 10% earlier this year. However, the cabinet referred the proposal back to the ministry. The last time the price of this key nutrient was revised in 2010. That time, the price was raised by 10% from Rs 4,830 to Rs 5,310.

Also, the Urea prices for consumers went up by Rs 50 recently as the cabinet approved an incentive of Rs 50 for the retailers to make them comply with the mobile based tracking system for the movement of subsidised fertilisers.

In 2011-12, urea consumption in India stood at 29 million tonnes compared to 28.2 million tonnes a year earlier. India imported 7.83 million tonnes of urea in 2011-12 compared to 6.6 million the previous year.

Subsidy on domestic as well as imported urea combined amounted to almost Rs 33,000 crore in 2011-12 against Rs 21,543 crore in 2010-11.

For the current fiscal, Urea subsidy has been pegged at Rs 32,400 crore.

OMSS wheat prices high due to high state taxes: govt

Punjab and Haryana levy taxes at the rate of 14.5% and 11.5% for every quintal of wheat purchased

Sanjeeb Mukherjee / New Delhi December 04, 2012, 12:37 IST

The government today said that price of wheat sold in the open market for bulk consumers through the open market sale scheme (OMSS) could come down if state governments reduce their respective domestic taxes.

Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, minister of state for food (independent charge) K V Thomas said that the government is releasing around 7.5 million tonnes of wheat and rice for both bulk consumers and retail traders in the open market to cool down prices. “Wheat traders did not purchase wheat when supplies were abundant but instead want the government to purchase from farmers and sell them at cheap rates,” Thomas said.

He also said that foodgrain damages have considerably come down in the last few years due to relentless effort of the central government and Food Corporation of India (FCI).

Punjab and Haryana levy taxes at the rate of 14.5% and 11.5% for every quintal of wheat purchased from these two states, which contribute almost 80% of the total wheat produced in the country.

Traders said that the wheat under OMSS is being sold to bulk consumers in non-producing states at a price which is inclusive of the minimum support price plus freight and local taxes.

In producing states, the price is MSP plus taxes but without any freight.

Cotton farmers in Vidarbha distressed due to low prices in open market

The cotton growers in Vidarbha region are once again in distress as prices of the cash crop were dropping below expectations in the open market.

Though the Government has fixed the minimum support prices (MSP) at Rs 3900 per quintal but prices in local market are far below expectations.

As compared to last year, the demand in the international market particularly China and Pakistan is virtually nil due to good crop there. This has resulted in less prices compared to last year when it rose to the higher side. The Maharashtra State Cotton Marketing Federation which is bound to protect interest of farmers have so far not intervened in the price issue.

Moreover, this year the produce or the yield of cotton per acre has shrinked to about two quintal which is worrying farmers. This is the third year when they are facing the problem. Though the Cotton Federation had announced they will open the procurement centres well before Diwali but they are still not in sight, sources close to cotton growers group said. Huge losses are in store for cotton growers of the state this year too, said officials in Cotton Growers Co-operative Marketing Federation.

Farm activists too said crop losses would be anywhere between 25-50 per cent.   What is more perturbing is that despite poor crop, not only in the state but also in Gujarat this year, rates in open markets have remained stable around Rs 4,000 a quintal, they said.

"Cotton is always an unpredictable commodity. There are so many factors, from weather conditions, crop situation in other countries, international markets to the fickle nature of demand from industry. All these go into deciding the open market rates," explained a close aide of NP Hirani, Chairman of Cotton Federation. He said the Federation has till date opened 92 procurement centres but managed to procure merely 788 quintal at the government price of around Rs 3,900. "With market rates ruling around Rs 4,050, farmers prefer to sell to private traders to earn more," said Hirani. For the first time this season he admitted that crop loss this year could be to the tune of 25 percent.

Cotton arrivals dip, crop estimates might be lowered global pricing trend uncertain

India might have to revise its cotton crop estimates downwards for 2012-13, with low arrivals of the new crop. Two months ago, the Cotton Advisory Board had estimated the cotton crop for 2012-13 at 33.4 million bales (a bale is 170 kg). This could be lowered when it meets later this month. According to market sources, the revision would be 33.2-33.3 million bales.

A veteran trader and exporter cotton said that lower arrivals of cotton at this time indicates that the crop size will be lower than earlier estimates. Arrivals around this time are normally about 200,000 bales a day, while the present level is between 150,000 and 180,000 bales.

Cotton prices are ruling around Rs 33,000 per candy (356 kg) and with the rupee trading at 54-55 against the dollar, exports may be viable with thin margins. Arun Dalal, an Ahmedabad-based trader and exporter, said, “Exports could touch 150,000 bales by mid-December. However, exports are competitive and only help create only monetary liquidity as the margins are wafer thin.” He added that cotton imports are at a halt as the local crop has started arriving in the markets.

DIM OUTLOOK

Area, production of cotton in india

Year	Area (lakh ha)	Production (mn bales)
2008-09	94.06	29.00
2009-10	103.10	30.50
2010-11	111.42	33.90
2011-12	121.78	35.30
2012-13*	116.14	33.40

* Estimated on October; 1 bale = 170 kg

Source: Cotton Advisory Board

Not just in India, even globally cotton crop has been estimated to come down as competing crops such as soya have given better returns to farmers. According to Washington-based International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), global cotton production will decrease by 11 per cent to 23.2 million tonnes in 2013-14 on lower cotton prices and increased attractiveness of competing crops.

This would be the second consecutive season of decline in cotton production and the smallest output in four years. Production is expected to fall sharply in the US and Turkey, where competition vis-a-vis grains and soya beans is strong. Smaller cotton crops are also projected in China, Pakistan, Central Asia and Francophone Africa. ICAC said, “Production is forecast only slightly down in India,” it said.

Global cotton mill use is expected to continue growing slowly in 2013-14, on the basis of a continued gradual recovery in global economic growth. The ICAC forecasts global cotton mill use to rise by three per cent to 24.2 million tonnes, driven by south Asia. World cotton trade could remain almost stable at 7.8 million tonnes, as a further drop in Chinese imports could be offset by increased demand from the rest of the world.

After three consecutive years of increase, global stocks could contract by 6 per cent from the record level of 16.6 million tonnes forecast in July 2013 to 15.6 million tonnes in July 2014. Most of this reduction in stocks is expected to take place outside of China.

China has been a major player in the cotton market. Apart from its own production, the country is a big importer of cotton and a big market for India. The market is anxiously looking at China’s next move, as the country is sitting on a huge stock of cotton.

ICAC said, “One major source of uncertainty regarding short-term global cotton supply and use projections stems from Chinese policies. The Chinese government has accumulated a national reserve of over seven million tonnes in the last 14 months by buying domestic and foreign cotton.” According to the ICAC, while this national reserve will likely continue growing until end-March 2013, it is not clear how it will be managed after that point. “International cotton prices are currently supported and stabilised by Chinese policies, but changes to these policies could have opposite results,” the ICAC noted.

Conference on spices stresses on quality

India is giving strong emphasis on developing the spices sector by giving importance to quality production, said A Jayathilak, chairman, Spices Board.

Inaugurating the 27th sub-committee meeting of the International Standard Organisation (ISO) on spices, culinary herbs and condiments here today, he urged development of standards to ensure quality and food safety.

Today's multifaceted spice trade industry and fast changing world calls for a close partnership between countries. Globalisation presents many challenges and it is necessary that the countries work in co-operation for mutual benefits, he added.

The ISO sub-committee meeting is being held in India after a gap of 30 years. The meeting is being attended by delegates from Spain, Sri Lanka and Iran besides India. Experts in the field of quality, food safety, scientists from Indian Institute of Spices Research, Agmark , Spices Board, and representatives of the spice industry are participating in the three-day conference.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

TODAY FARM NEWS

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CM's pre-poll bounty for farmers

BANKURA: Chief minister Mamata Banerjee played the Santa for Bankura villagers on Tuesday, pulling out resources from central assistance projects and the state budget to shower them with pre-poll sops.

Mamata expects that the villagers will reciprocate to her largesse by setting up "people's panchayats" (read Trinamool-run panchayats) in the next rural elections and evict the CPM from the three-tier equation.

Mamata's promises clearly have a long-term aim far beyond the expected gains in the panchayat polls. She hopes the bounty will stand her in good stead in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, in which she hopes for a clean sweep to increase her clout in national politics.

Under the schemes announced on Tuesday, a landless labourer is likely to get a minimum asset of Rs 85,000 - three cottahs of vested land and a house under Indira Abas Yojna, apart from the monthly dole of rice and wheat at Rs 2 a kg, plus seed money for starting business, if the delivery mechanism works.

The CM showered bounties on middle-level farmers as well. Those who can afford to spend a little can avail of a Rs 8,000 benefit in electricity charges to run power-driven pump sets, Rs 70,000 subsidy to buy farm implements worth Rs 1 lakh and also crop insurance EMI if they have a Kisan Credit Card.

They are also entitled to soft loans on a diminishing interest rate, beginning with 7% interest. A farmer under the scheme can pay off the first installment and can earn from the rest of the amount in a fixed deposit, thus getting interest on government money before paying off the loan.

The CM also allotted funds to give away free cycle vans to each of 30,000 farmers to carry their produce to nearby markets. She increased the subsidy component for women forming self-help groups from 20% to 30%.

While inaugurating the country's largest piped water project at Onda on Tuesday, the CM announced a revamp of the district's infrastructure - rural roads, super-specialty hospitals, eight model schools, and a rural hub among others.

Mamata promised that her government would fulfill all the promises "despite its financial constraints".

"The Left Front government left behind a huge debt that had been piling up for 34 years. Yet we have been managing finances without going to Delhi with a begging bowl. Schoolteachers are getting their salary on the first day of the month. We have also decided to absorb 10% para teachers and PTTI students in schools," the CM said. She announced that the government has set up 78 new primary schools in the district and sanctioned 14,562 scholarship for school students.

However, a closer look at schemes for individuals reveals that the money for farmers won't come easy. Any scheme has to be approved in a meeting of gram samsad as is the procedure, and a business plan has to be drawn up first by the farmer and duly approved by the zilla parishad before the government sanctions the seed money for starting a business.

The main challenge before the government is to beef up the delivery mechanism without which the promises would sound hollow. The CM thus appealed to the bureaucrats to speed up execution so that her promises bear fruit in time.

Mamata, however, has got her arguments ready in the event of a logjam. "You are all aware that the CPM-run zilla parishads have come in the way of development works. Set up people's panchayats and we will take stock of the projects after the panchayat polls and give them a boost when I will be coming next time," the CM said.

Farmers to get financial help to get incentives in their bank accounts

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The state agriculture department has put in place all systems for disbursing financial incentives to farmers through bank accounts, agriculture minister K P Mohanan said here on Tuesday.

According to the minister, the data bank of farmers in all districts is ready and registration of farmers has been completed through Krishi Bhavans.

To promote conversion of barren land into agriculture fields, the state would give cash awards to panchayats that convert maximum barren land to agriculture fields between December 1 and July 31, 2013, said Mohanan.

As per statistics, Kerala has 98,014 hectares of land that can be converted into farm land. The panchayat that does maximum conversion during the given period would be given Rs 10 lakh as prize money. The second and third place winners would get Rs 5 lakh and Rs 3 lakh respectively, the minister said.

The panchayat level committee comprising farmers, people's representatives and officials would Identify the additional land for agricultural activities.

The government proposes to open 35 agro service centres for promoting mechanized agricultural activities. The service centres would train farmers on mechanized farming and rent out machines to them.

The minister said that a host of subsidy schemes are being devised for the development of dairy and poultry sectors. The government would provide financial assistance of up to 75% to farmers interested in cattle rearing. Training programmes have also been planned to give farmers exposure and insight into production of value added dairy, meat and poultry products, the minister said.

Opposition attacks govt over distress sale of paddy

BHUBANESWAR: The opposition Congress and the BJP on Tuesday came down heavily on the BJD government for allegedly forcing farmers to resort to distress sale of paddy in the state. They demanded that the government take immediate steps to resolve the crisis, open more marketing yards and pay bonus to farmers at Rs 300 per quintal of paddy on minimum support price (MSP).

The parties made these demands during a special discussion in the assembly over the issue after Speaker PK Amat agreed for a discussion breaking the deadlock continuing over the last five days. The Congress members later staged a walkout expressing displeasure over the reply of food supplies and consumer welfare minister PK Deb over the issue.

Participating in the debate, Congress chief whip Prasad Harichandan said the present paddy procurement process has triggered resentment among farmers from beginning of procurement season. The farmers are forced to sell their produce at low price due to nexus between government officials and millers, he alleged.

In a fresh instance, district collector of Nuapada on Monday seized over 5,000 quintal of paddy from a miller, Harichandan said to drive his point home. He said paddy procurement is yet to start in 17 of 30 districts.

Leader of opposition Bhupinder Singh said it seems the government is running at the mercy of millers. He said farmers had to wait for days to sell their produce and finally sold them at low price. The procurement committees at district and state levels do not function properly, he alleged.

Deb in his reply blamed the Centre for turning down repeated requests of the state government to hike the minimum support price on purchase of paddy to Rs 1,400 per quintal.

The minister asserted that the government is taking all possible steps to ensure that farmers get the minimum support price.

Besides, the government is taking steps to check irregularities during procurement process and has already booked 46 cases against millers. Action has been initiated in 27 cases so far, he said

Nagri paddy gift to woo leaders

RANCHI: Nagri villagers on Tuesday gifted bunches of recently harvested paddy from the disputed land to the MLAs before the start of the assembly session. Almost 227 acres in the area have been acquired by the government to set up an educational hub there - a fact that the local people opposed.

"Raure sarkar chala tha hamre ker jameen ke ghuraye deva, chauua puta ke asirvaad mili, (You run the government, please return our land, our children will bless you)" said an elderly woman of the village while handing over the paddy to an MLA.

Many ministers accepted the paddy and promised to support the villagers in their fight. Raghuvar Das said, "An enquiry should be made on land occupied by ministers and government officials and educational institutions should be constructed on those land."

MLA Kamal Kishore Bhagat said, "We will have a talk with the government. The land should be given back to villagers."

Ratan Tirkey, who was leading the villagers, said, "Nagri movement will be strengthened. The government is trying to destroy the tribals by taking away their land and we will continue protesting against this motive."

Other MLAs like Annapurna Devi, Geeta Koda and Bandhu Tirkey supported the cause too, but on the other hand, education minister Baidyanath Ram and excise minister Raja Peter refused to accept the paddy.

The villagers had earlier planted paddy on the land earmarked for constructing the education hub, opposing the government move to acquire the plot.

Milk supply in city restored

GUWAHATI: Milk supply in city markets was restored on Monday at revised rates as diary farmers agreed to provide milk to the sellers at Rs 36 per litre, instead of Rs 39. Milk-sellers are now selling milk in the city at Rs 40 per litre.

The Brihattar Guwahati Go-Palak Sanstha, association of dairy farmers of Guwahati and milk-sellers were at loggerheads after the dairy farmers hiked milk price from Rs 33 to Rs 39 per litre recently. The disagreement between dairy farmers and milk-sellers over the hiked price of milk at the source brought milk supply in the city to halt on Saturday and Sunday. But after constant opposition from milk sellers, dairy farmers finally reduced the milk price to Rs 36 per litre.

After reduction of price at the source, milk is being sold for around Rs 40 in the city. Consumers are unhappy over the hiked price of milk.

"In the meeting between dairy farmers and milk-sellers, it was decided that public will get milk at a price of Rs 39 per litre. But there can be slight fluctuations depending on the distance covered by the sellers . The milk-sellers have promised that they will ensure good quality of milk," said Babu Ram Poudel, general secretary of the Go-Palak Sanstha.

Meanwhile, consumers have demanded strict vigilance by the health department to control the unscrupulous traders who were caught red-handed in many pockets of the city in the last few months for selling adulterated milk.

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Forget FDI, try Amul model to empower farmers, says V K Singh

Former Army chief V K Singh today left open the question of his taking a plunge in politics or contesting elections in the future.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a farmers' agitation here, he opposed FDI in multi-brand retail, contending that it will in no way help farmers.

"I don't know," was all Singh said when asked whether he was open to the idea of joining politics.

On media reports that he would contest the 2014 elections from Haryana, he said, "This is all what you (media) people have written. I have nothing to say."

On FDI, he maintained even when Pepsico came into India, it was said that it would help farmers but that was never the case.

"In India, we have an excellent model in terms of Amul to empower farmers. We can bring about the same change what people are trying to bring through FDI by making suitable modifications to the Amul model," he said.

Singh said farmers would not be benefited because the multi-brand retailers will import cheap items from other countries and not procure them from within India.

On whether he would be part of Anna Hazare's core group, he said it was not necessary to be in a core group when one fights for a cause.

"My aim is to reclaim India and I will be working with people who have same thinking," he said.

V K Singh asks PM to dump report on freeing sugar

Joining a 'Parliament Gherao' agitation by sugarcane farmers, former army chief Gen V K Singh today asked Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to reject the Rangarajan Committee report on freeing sugar.

No politician has worked for farmers. They get votes from you people by promising many things, but they forget that there is a community called farmers after the elections. Next time when you go to the polling booth, think who will fight for you and then vote only for that person," Gen Singh, who fought a bitter battle with Government on his age issue, said.

However, the former army chief said he was not supporting any particular party but was only asking farmers to keep their "betterment in mind" before pressing the EVM button.

The protesters gathered near the Parliament Street police station, less than a kilometre from Parliament House, and raised slogans demanding that the report be rejected.

Singh favoured the proposal floated by Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan's V M Singh that there was a need to raise a 'Kisan Sena' in the country that would fight for farmers' rights.

He also asked farmers to come on one platform, transcending religion, caste and community in order to reclaim their legitimate rights.

Dubbing as "anti-farmer" the Rangarajan Committee report that has recommended phased decontrol of the highly regulated Rs 80,000-crore sugar industry, he said the Prime Minister and Parliament should not accept the report.

"Everyone knows our Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is a world renowned economist. He is a capable and competent person. We hope he will not accept the report and we appeal to him not to accept the report," he said while warning that a "big revolution" would take place if the Government accepts the report.

The report also suggests removal of levy obligation, a foolproof release mechanism and a uniform, revenue-linked sugarcane price.

Sharing the dais with INLD chief Om Prakash Chautala, the retired General accused the Government of giving away subsidies meant for farmers to mill owners who sell those materials to farmers in black market.