

THE HINDU

TODAY FARM NEWS

06.10.2012 A.M

Better deal sought for coconut farmers

The Kerala Karshaka Congress has launched an agitation demanding a better deal for coconut farmers in the State and the coconut sector as a whole, with a relay satyagraha being staged at Kuttiyadi in Kozhikode, known as the State's coconut capital, from Thursday and another protest being held before the Secretariat on Friday.

According to Karshaka Congress president Lal Varghese Kalpakavadi, successive governments, including that of the UDF, had not given the deserving attention to this sector, which was why the prices of fresh coconuts had not changed much in the last 25-30 years.

The State had six Central Ministers, who along with the MPs from the State, should join hands with other coconut-producing States like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to pressurise the Centre to initiate steps like banning import of palm oil at South Indian ports, hiking the import duty on the same in North Indian ports and also to lift export restrictions on coconut oil, he said.

Curbs on export

Pointing out that there was a 10,000-tonne limit clamped on export of coconut oil, Mr. Varghese said only branded packs, each of a maximum of five kg, were allowed. This was when there was a huge scope of penetration into the Gulf market, which had a large number of NRIs and which were presently being catered to by Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

Promoting coconut oil

The Karshaka Congress was also demanding extension of the Coconut Board's activities into production, value addition, research and marketing as well, on the lines of the Spices Board and the Rubber Board. It also wanted the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, which had met

exclusively to discuss the endosulfan issue, to convene a meeting for the coconut sector as well.

Mr. Varghese said the possibilities of distribution of coconut oil through PDS, as well as use in the mid-day meal scheme should be discussed.

Cardamom growers back Spices Board move

A meeting of cardamom growers convened by P.T. Thomas, MP, at Spices Park, Puttady, in Idukki on Wednesday to resolve the boycott agitation by cardamom traders expressed its full support to the Spices Board decision on increasing the bidding price to Rs.5 and reducing the payment date from 21 days to 12.

A Spices Board official at Puttady said 250 farmers attended the meeting. They submitted a memorandum to Mr. Thomas to start an auction centre in Kochi and issue new licences to the auctioneers to re-start the auction process. The farmers demanded parity in Sales Tax in Tamil Nadu and Kerala as there was disparity of five per cent hike in Kerala.

Mr. Thomas said a meeting of traders and auctioneers had been convened in Kumily on October 5 to find ways to solve the issue.

Design EXIM policies to help farmers: UAS Dean

Lauds market intervention by NCDEX in Gulbarga district



Focus on farming: B.T. Pujari, Dean (Agriculture), University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, speaking at a seminar jointly organised by The Hindu Business Line, the NCDEX, the SBM, the FKCCI and the HKCCI in Gulbarga on Friday. —Photo: Arun Kulkarni

While stabilisation of the market is a crucial factor for sustainable agriculture, and import and export policies should be designed to help farmers, according to B.T. Pujari, Dean (Agriculture), University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur.

He was speaking at a Hedgers and Prospective Hedgers Awareness and Education Seminar on Agriculture Business and Commodities Price Risk Management jointly organised by *The Hindu Business Line*, the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), the Federation of Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Hyderabad Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the State Bank of Mysore here on Friday,.

Dr. Pujari said that to ensure food security to the ever-growing population, which is emerging as one of the major challenges, and to feed hungry mouths, it has become imperative for the government to tread cautiously on its EXIM policy as far as agriculture commodities were concerned.

On crop holidays declared by farmers in certain parts of the country, particularly Andhra Pradesh, due to lack of remunerative prices for their produce, Dr. Pujari said that this was a dangerous trend and the government should ensure proper pricing policy for agriculture produce. He said that export and import policies covering agriculture commodities should be under the Agriculture Ministry and the import and export of agriculture commodities should be based on supply and demand.

Dr. Pujari, however, was optimistic that despite the crisis, agriculture was here to stay and that it would survive, though it was facing severe constraints, including shortage of labour.

Lauding market intervention by NCDEX in Gulbarga in the past two years, Dr. Pujari said that the entry of NCDEX in the market has helped stabilise prices of red gram.

G. Chandrasekhar of *The Hindu Business Line* stationed in Mumbai and an expert in the field of agriculture commodity market, in his presentation, stressed the importance of achieving at least 4 per cent growth in the agriculture sector to achieve 9 per cent GDP during the 12th Plan period.

“We will not be able to remove poverty unless we achieve a 4 per cent growth in the agriculture sector... outgrowth in agriculture had remained constant at 2.5 per cent, which was not sufficient to push the country forward in the path of development,” he said.

Blaming lopsided policies for the slow growth rate in the agriculture sector, Mr. Chandrasekhar said that the policies were not growth-oriented and that they did not lay stress on agriculture development, irrigation development and improving rural infrastructure and building capacities among farmers.

He said that agriculture should become a source of strength and not a burden and the planners should use information technology, bio-technology, and nano technology to help agriculture achieve the much-desired growth rate.

Deputy Manager of NCDEX Deepak Sayana gave an insight into the functioning of the spot, future and forward markets and how it helped farmers get better prices for their produce. Business in agriculture futures market has witnessed a record growth from Rs. 5.71 lakh crore in 2004 to Rs. 119.48 lakh crore in 2010-11, he said.

Training programme for farmers

The Pathanamthitta district panchayat has launched a training programme for farmers and farm workers in the use of mechanised farming implements.

According to district panchayat president Babu George, the training programme is part of the panchayat initiative to farm in fallow lands in different parts of the district. He said the programme was organised in the paddy fields of Thatta near Pandalam in association with the Agriculture Department on Friday.

Training was given in the use of tractor-cum-rotavator, special cultivator, garden tiller, coconut climber, and transplanter, he said. Mr George inaugurated the training programme. G. Maya, grama panchayat president; Rosamma Babuji, block panchayat member; B.Shobhanakumari, principal agriculture officer; Ambili V. Kumar, assistant engineer, and A.J. Sunil, agriculture officer, also addressed the function.

NABARD awards for farmers' clubs presented

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) awards for the best farmers' clubs were distributed here on Friday.

R. Amalorpavanathan, Chief General Manager, NABARD, presented the awards at the State Level Review and Development Meet of farmers' clubs.

Members of the farmers' clubs, sponsoring bank officials, representatives of NGOs, government officials, representatives of federations of farmers' clubs participated in the meeting.

'Expand activities'

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Amalorpavanathan asked the farmers' clubs to expand and diversify their activities so that they could realise better prices for their products.

K.R. Rao, General Manager, NABARD, welcomed the gathering and K.N. Jnanendra, General Manager, NABARD, proposed a vote of thanks.

Haritham Farmers' Club, Kozhikode, sponsored by South Malabar Gramin Bank, Medical College branch, Kozhikode, was adjudged the best farmers' club in Kerala.

The second and third best club awards were won by Mannarmala Farmers' Club, Malappuram, sponsored by South Malabar Gramin Bank, Perinthalmanna branch, Malappuram; and Kelakam Farmers' Club, Kannur, sponsored by North Malabar Gramin Bank, Kelakam branch, Kannur, respectively.

The awards for the branch managers of the respective winning clubs were presented by G. Sreeram, General Manager, Canara Bank.

Thanjavur farmers describe how soil is wet with tears

Central team surveys paddy fields to take stock of situation



water, please! A farmer showing a piece of soil to the Central team led by R. K. Gupta, Chief Engineer, Central Water Committee, in Thanjavur on Friday. —Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

water, please! A farmer showing a piece of soil to the Central team led by R. K. Gupta, Chief Engineer, Central Water Committee, in Thanjavur on Friday. —Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

Representing to the Central team that visited the district on Friday, farmers of Thanjavur district highlighted the acute water shortage they were facing and the difficulty in raising the samba crop. They appealed to the team to do the needful to get water from Karnataka.

They met the team members at various places in Budalur and Thanjavur blocks and showed them the ploughed paddy fields where they could not do any sowing for want of water.

The team comprising R.K.Gupta, Chief Engineer; T.K.Sivarajan, Director, Monitoring, Virendra Sharma, Superintending Engineer, and Pradeep Thakur, Deputy Director, Planning, all from the Central Water Commission, toured the district to ascertain the extent of area sown and requirement of water till October 15, 2012 with respect to samba cultivation.

As soon as the team arrived at Grand Anicut by 1.30 p.m. farmers of Tiruchi district met them and told them they need water for 110 days for the samba season. “You alone can help us in this regard to get water from Karnataka,” they emphasised.

The team saw uncultivated paddy fields at Padarakudi village in the Budalur block. At Kachamangalam, a farmer couple Rani and Rayappan, said, “We are not even able to sow in

the ploughed paddy fields for want of water.” The team also visited Megalathur, Kadambakudi, Orathur, Budalur, Koilpattu and Kallaperambur. At Kallaperambur farmers said they were not able to go for direct sowing and had to stop with ploughing the field.

Agriculture department officials informed the team that samba could not be raised on 180 hectares in Padarakudi village, 166 hectares in Kachamangalam village, 210 hectares in Megalathur, 170 hectares in Kadambakudi, 210 hectares in Orathur, and 450 hectares in Budalur.

The team members said it was only a technical group and will submit its report to Centre. K.Baskaran, District Collector, Ganesa Marachan, Chief Engineer, PWD, Tiruchi, Z. Mohammed Yahiya, Joint Director of Agriculture, Manoharan, Superintending Engineer, PWD, Thanjavur circle, S.Suresh Kumar, District Revenue Officer, accompanied the team during the visit.

Ban export of cotton

The Confederation of Indian Powerloom Industries has urged the Union Government to ban the export of raw cotton and waste cotton in order to stabilise the yarn prices and ensure adequate supply to the domestic industries.

The unrestricted export of cotton resulted in drastic fluctuations in the yarn prices, which in turn affected the powerloom sector. The domestic industries were rendered non-competitive in the world market because of the spiralling prices of yarn, confederation president M.S. Mathivanan told reporters here on Friday.

Tamil Nadu has more than five lakh powerloom units, which provide employment to thousands of people. It consumes more than 55 per cent of the yarn produced in the country. A majority of the fabric produced in the State are being exported. But the Union Government continues to ignore the concerns raised by the powerloom sector, Mr. Mathivanan said.

The State even has a large number of units that consume the yarn spun of the waste cotton extensively to produce home furnishing products. “These home textile units are severely affected as the export of waste cotton led to the increase in the prices of yarn produced from it,” he said. The Union Government should ban the export of cotton and waste cotton and bring the cotton under the Essential Commodities Act, he demanded.

“The spiralling yarn prices and the power shortage brought down the productivity of powerloom sector by 50 per cent. A majority of the units have stopped their operations due to the fluctuations in yarn price and frequent power cuts,” he said.

Mr. Mathivanan wanted the Union Government to withdraw the 11 Varieties Reservation Act, which prevented the production of reserved fabrics including saris, lungis, dhotis and towels in the power looms. “The country had more handlooms when the act was implemented in 1970s. The situation has changed now. The number of handlooms have come down drastically. Only in government records, a number of handloom units exist. In reality, they don't. For instance, the Komarapalayam has 6,000 handlooms according to records. But less than 100 handlooms are functioning there,” he claimed.

The Government should look into the changes taking place in the textile industry and withdraw the act, he said.

Mr. Mathivanan said a delegation from the confederation would soon meet the Union Minister of Textiles and explain to him the problems faced by the sector. “If our problems are not solved, we will have no other option but to resort to a series of agitations,” he said.

Plan samba according to weather, water, varieties

Tamil Nadu Senior Agro Technologists Forum has advised farmers of Thanjavur and Tiruvarur districts to plan their samba cultivation according to weather forecasts, water availability , and age of the varieties.

In a press release issued here on Wednesday, the forum said that it receives a special 10-day weather forecast for Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Nagapattinam districts from Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System, Thailand.

As per the report dated October 2, 2012, there will be no rain up to October 6. From October 7-11, heavy rain is expected. Accordingly, farmers of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Nagapattinam districts are advised to complete the Kuruvai harvest, wherever the crop is in harvesting stage, before October 6. Further, direct sowing can be done in dry soil with dry seed. Where the river water is available, they can puddle the field, level it perfectly, and sow the sprouted seeds before October 6 .

Farmers have been advised to avoid sowing between October 7 and October 11 as the heavy rain may damage the sown seeds.

Short duration paddy varieties can be sown in the fourth week of October.

Need more water for samba

The Tamil Nadu unit of Kisan Khet Mazdoor Congress (agriculturists' wing of the Congress) has urged the Central government to release at least 15,000 cusecs up to January-end for samba cultivation in the delta region. In a memorandum to the Central team that visited the Grand Anicut on Friday, vice president of the State unit of the wing Puliur R.Nagarajan said the current release of 9,000 cusecs implemented by Karnataka as per the court orders is not sufficient for the cultivation of 26 lakh acres, which has begun. Besides, he pleaded that the Cauvery River Authority (CRA) should be convened at least once in three months.

Falling prices of black gram worry farmers

The falling prices of black gram have left farmers in Bidar district worried. While the Union government announced a minimum support price of Rs. 4,300 a quintal for black gram, the grain is selling between Rs. 2,750 and Rs. 3,180 at the wholesale agricultural produce market here this week.

Bidar was among the few districts to have a near-normal monsoon this year, and the harvest of black gram has been pretty good. But farmers are distressed as the prices of the grain have fallen after the good harvest.

According to Agriculture Department officials, black gram was sown on 33,755 hectares, and the total yield was 2.53 lakh quintals.

Sowing was staggered and only the first batch of the yield, of around 14,000 quintals, reached the APMC yard so far.

The sudden arrivals have brought down prices. Traders say it is the supply and demand equation at work: "This is normal during heavy arrivals. I think prices will pick up slowly," said Veerashetty Gangashetty, a member of the Agro-Produce Traders' Association.

Farmers, however, disagree. “Traders want to buy at lower prices and sell at higher rates. They are only bothered about profits. They don’t care about us,” says Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha district president Vishwanath Patil Koutha.

He complained that the State had been indifferent to their demand for starting procurement centres for black gram.

“We have urged the government to buy the grain at Rs. 4,800 per quintal. But farmers are being forced to sell for under Rs. 3,000. This almost equals the cost of cultivation. How can farmers make profits in such a system” he asked.

“All that talk about demand and supply is a lie,” said Siddappa Metre, sangha district secretary. “How does the trader explain the fact that green gram is selling at Rs. 80 a kg in kirana shops, while farmers are being forced to sell it at Rs. 27.5 per kg? Does the logic of demand and supply not work here” he asked.

Agriculture Department officials said a proposal to initiate a market intervention scheme to arrest the falling prices had been sent to the State government. “Once the Agriculture Commissioner clears it, we will start the process,” said a senior officer.

Farmers booked

Krishnaraja Sagar police have booked a criminal case under certain provisions of Indian Penal Code against 100 unnamed farmers, who gathered at the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) reservoir near Srirangapatna on October 3 to show their disapproval of the Cauvery River Authority’s recommendation of sharing water with Tamil Nadu, for allegedly violating prohibitory orders.

The farmers have been accused of damaging public property, obstructing public servants from discharging their duties, assaulting police personnel besides disobeying orders and violating the prohibitory orders under certain provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code.

However, so far no arrests have been made.

Farmers flock to machinery expo

Farmers responded enthusiastically to an exhibition-cum-demonstration of farm machinery in paddy cultivation at Kumbala here on Friday.

The event was organised by the Agriculture Department and Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at a paddy field at Arikkady, which had been left fallow for nearly a decade. It took barely an hour to prepare the nearly half-an-acre land for transplant of rice seedlings from a nearby nursery, a statement said. Mini tractors, tractor-operated implements, power sprayers which can be used up to a height of 45 ft, and garden tillers were demonstrated.

Reapers which can harvest paddy from an acre in an hour, pre-germinated paddy seeder, and coconut climbing machine were the other attractions. "The response can be viewed as a positive sign for the return of paddy cultivation to this region," said an official. Kumbala panchayat president P.H. Ramla opened the event.

Coconut farmers take out protest

Coconut farmers under the banner of the All India Kisan Sabha took out a march to the Principal Agricultural Office at the Civil Station here on Friday, pressing various demands including procurement of copra at Rs.7,000 a quintal.

The protestors demanded that coconut farmers be given right to produce toddy (neera) and that the government help the farmers find international market for products made of coconut.

Kisan Sabha State treasurer P. Thulasidas Menon inaugurated the protest. District vice-president T. Abdu presided. Welcoming the gathering, Kisan Sabha district secretary P.M. Vasudevan said that the State government was procuring copra at a minimal level. He said the traders' lobby and a section of officials were cheating the farmers.

Even when the government fixed a rate of Rs.5,100 a quintal, the rate of copra in the market had plummeted to Rs.3,700.

Mr. Thulasidas Menon said that farmers must be given right to produce vinegar and jaggery.

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Punjab seeks Rs 5,000 cr for crop diversification

The Punjab government today demanded Rs 5,000 crore in 12th Five year Plan for crop diversification in the state and asked the Centre to prepare a roadmap to bring the state out of wheat-paddy cultivation.

“There is a need to immediately launch a technology mission for diversification of agriculture in green revolution areas with an allocation of Rs 5,000 crore for 12th Five Year Plan period, on the pattern of the mission for bringing green revolution to eastern India”, the Chief Minister, Parkash Singh Badal said while holding a meeting with a Central team led by Union Agriculture Secretary Ashish Bahuguna here to hold talks on crop diversification.

He also urged the Union Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar to depute a high-level central team for chalking out an action programme on crop diversification in Punjab.

The Chief Minister also asked him to immediately constitute a joint committee comprising senior officers of the central and state governments for preparing a roadmap for diversification of agriculture in the state.

Spices Board receives Niryat Bhandu award

Niryath Bandhu Award for Spices Board



Dr. Jayathilak IAS, Chairman, Spices Board receiving the Niryat Bandhu Award for its glittering performance in spice exports, from Shri. Pranab Mukherjee, President of India at Vigya Bhavan, New Delhi on 5th October 2012. The Union Commerce and Industry Minister, Mr. Anand Sharma is also seen. The spice export from India is on the rise for the financial year 2011-12, it has registered an all time high and crossed the US \$ 2 billion mark.

Spices Board Chairman A Jayathilak has been given the 'Niryat Bhandu' award for the board's excellent performance in spices exports.

The award was presented by the President, Pranab Mukherjee at a function in New Delhi yesterday, a board press release said.

Spices export from India is on the rise and registered an all time high in the 2011-12 fiscal, crossing the \$2 billion mark, the release added.

Technical snag: No sale of orthodox tea at Kolkata auction this week

Thanks to technical glitches ("link failure"), no online sale of Orthodox tea could take place this week (Sale Number 40) at Kolkata auction, while there was partial sale of CTC, according to tea brokers' sources.

However, normal sales took place at Guwahati and Siliguri, it is learnt. Inquiries reveal that the pending sales would be carried forward to next week.

This week at Sale 40, the total offerings (packages) at the three North Indian auction centres were 4,50,873. It might be recalled that there were no sales in the corresponding period of last year.

This week at Kolkata, the offerings comprised CTC/Dust 1,56,423 (nil), Orthodox 32,888 (nil) and Darjeeling 9,258 (nil). The corresponding figures for the two other centres were: Guwahati 1,39,281 (nil) and Siliguri 1,13,023 (nil).

Liquoring Assam CTCs sold irregularly around last levels while the remainder was lower. Dooars was irregularly easier.

Tata Global was the mainstay and there was fair support from Hindustan Unilever on the leaf teas and active enquiry for the Dusts. Western India dealers operated on the liquoring sorts. North India and local sections were selective. Exporters operated on the larger brokens and fannings.

Due to a link failure at Kolkata, the CTC leaf and dust sales could not be completed. The remainder of the sale has been deferred to next week.

Darjeeling wholeleaf varieties witnessed improved enquiry and the prices were firm with selected lines selling at attractive levels. Broken and fannings also maintained levels. Tata Global, Hindustan Unilever and traditional exporters were the mainstay. Local dealers were active for cheaper broken and fannings.

Pulses, edible oils production may fall this year: Thomas



Though rice, wheat and sugar production is expected to be at comfortable levels, production of pulses and edible oils may fall short of requirement this year, said K.V. Thomas, Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

Talking to a group of journalists after inaugurating the Centenary Building of National Test House (Southern Region) here today, he said according to the assessment of the Meteorology Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, this year production of rice and wheat will be as good as last year.

Paddy, wheat

Last year, production of paddy was to the tune of about 103 million tonnes and wheat was to the tune of 94 mt. More or less, the same quantity of rice and wheat is expected this year as well.

He said his department has discussed with various State Government officials for the procurement of rice and wheat. All arrangements have been made, including jute bags.

His Ministry has called for a meeting of the Food and Public Distribution Ministry officials of all states on October 29 and 30 in Delhi. All other procurement details will be worked out that time.

Storage capacity

On storage capacities, he said five years ago there was a capacity to store 55 mt of foodgrains. Now, it has been expanded to 75 mt. By the end of this year, another 45 lakh tonne capacity will be added.

About 151 lakh tonnes of new capacity will be added by the end of 2013. Besides, two million tonnes of silos will also be constructed. "Hence, I don't see any problem as far as the storage issue is concerned."

Regarding sugar, he said last year the production was projected at 240 lakh tonnes. However, finally it ended up with 262 lakh tonnes, while the domestic need was only 220 lakh tonnes.

This year, the projection is at 230 lakh tonnes, which is quite sufficient. "We think, even this year, sugar production will surpass the projection and go up to 240-245 lakh tonnes," he said.

Pulses, edible oils

But, he said his Ministry is "slightly worried" about the pulses and edible oils situation. Chances are that the production of pulses and edible oil come down this year. Even internationally, availability is slightly low.

With this in mind, he said, the Government has decided to continue with the supply of pulses and edible oils at subsidised price. This year, the subsidy on pulses will be Rs 20 a kg and on edible oils Rs 15 a litre. States are also allowed to import pulses and edible oil for distribution and it will be subsidised by the Central Government, he said.

PDS computerisation

Besides, the Central Government has decided to computerise the Public Distribution System end-to-end — from the Food Corporation of India godowns to state-run ration shops, every movement will be computerised. It is a 50:50 project, funded by the Central and respective State Governments.

Earlier there were 20 crore ration cards in the country. After the computerisation process began in some states, two crore cards were found to be bogus and eliminated from the system, he said. "PDS system has to be modernised. All the loopholes are to be plugged to strengthen the system, and make it more efficient," he said.

Food Security Bill

Talking about the Food Security Bill, he said the Bill is being considered by the Parliament Standing Committee, and is likely to be passed. And, the Standing Committee is expected to submit its opinion in a month. "The Bill may be passed in the coming Winter Session," he said.

Answering a question on wheat exports to Iran, he said the exports are going on under Open General Licence scheme. The central pool has 80.5 mt of wheat, while what is required for public distribution is only 55 mt. So, exports will continue till the need to stop it arises.

On food subsidy bill and whether the government plans any cut, he said the government is bound to give food items on subsidised rates. At present, he said, food subsidy alone accounts for Rs 88,000 crore, and it will continue. "There is nothing to be worried," he said.

Hindustan Paper Corpn workers end strike

The striking casual workers of Hindustan Paper Corporation paper mill here resumed their work today following an agreement with the public sector mill's authority.

The casual workers entered into an agreement with the paper mill's management who agreed to pay interim relief to the over 1,700 workers in deference with the revised remuneration as announced by the Central Labour Department, HPC Casual Workers Union sources said.

The workers returned to work today after their indefinite dharna and a sit-in demonstration since Thursday affecting normal production works of the paper mill located in central Assam's Morigaon district.

The workers were demanding revised remuneration as announced by the Central Labour Department and implementation of the Gauhati High Court order issued to HPC three months ago to pay the revised remuneration to the causal workers, Kalita told reporters.

Pulses, edible oil output may lag this year, says Minister



Production of pulses and edible oil may fall short of requirement this year, said K.V. Thomas, Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, in Chennai on Saturday. Rice, wheat and sugar output, though, are expected to retain or top last year's levels, Thomas told a group of journalists after inaugurating the Centenary Building of the National Test House (Southern Region) here.

Thomas said his ministry was "slightly worried" about the pulses and edible oil situation. Chances are, production of pulses and edible oil may come down this year. Even globally, availability of pulses and edible is slightly low. With this in mind, he said, the Government has decided to continue supplying pulses and edible oil at subsidised rates. This year, the subsidy on pulses will be Rs 20 a kg and on edible oil, Rs 15 a litre. States are also allowed to import pulses and edible oil for distribution and it will be subsidised by the Union Government, he said.

Rice, wheat

According to assessments by the Meteorology Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, production of rice and wheat this year will be as good as last year's, Thomas said. Last year, production of paddy was around 103 million tonnes. For wheat, it was to the tune of 94 million tonnes. More or less, the same quantity is expected this year as well, he said.

He said his department has discussed with various State Government officials for procurement of rice and wheat. All arrangements have been made, including providing jute bags. A meeting of food and public distribution ministry officials of all States has also been called for on October 29 and 30, in Delhi. All other procurement details will be worked then, he said.

On storage capacities, he said, five years ago it was store 55 million tonnes for food grains. Now, it has been expanded to 75 million tonnes. By the end of this year, a further 45 lakh tonnes will be added. About 151 lakh tonnes of fresh capacity will be added by the end of 2013. Besides, two million tonnes of silos will also be constructed. "Hence, I don't see any problem as far as the storage issue is concerned," Thomas said.

Regarding sugar, he said, it was projected at 240 tonnes last year. However, 262 lakh tonnes were produced, while the need was only 220 lakh tonnes. This year, the projection is at 230 lakh tonnes, which is quite sufficient. "We think, even this year, sugar production will surpass the projection and go up to 240-245 tonnes," he said.

PDS computerisation

The Union Government has decided to computerise the public distribution system end-to-end — from the godowns of Food Corporation of India to State-run ration shops, each link in the chain will be computerised. It is an equal joint venture funded by the Union and respective State Governments, he said.

Earlier, there were 20 crore ration cards in the country. After the computerisation process began in some States, two crore cards were found to be bogus and were eliminated from the system, he said. "The PDS system has to be modernised. All the loopholes are to be plugged to strengthen the system, and make it more efficient," he said.

Food security Bill

Talking about the Food Security Bill, he said the Bill is being considered by the Parliament Standing committee, and is likely to be passed. And, the panel is expected to submit its opinion in a month's time. "The Bill may be passed in the coming Winter Session," he said.

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