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THE HINDU

Higher yield may bring down price of rice

TAKING STOCK


A LOOK AT GRAIN PRODUCTION AND PRICES IN TAMIL NADU

PERFORMANCE IN PRODUCTION


[in lakh hectares]

	Target	Achieved*
Paddy	21	15.3
Millets	12	8.7
Pulses	11	5.7

* As on December 15
Source: Agriculture Department



PRICES OF RICE: A COMPARISON

	Current week price* (Rs/kg)	Last year price** (Rs/kg)	Variation (%)
BOILED RICE	30.93 to 31.50	29.93 to 29.25	3.32% - 7.69%
RAW RICE	30.47 to 30.85	29.88 to 29.36	1.98% - 5.07%

Note: Average prices of two varieties of rice — Fine IR 20 and Common CR 1009 — are taken into account.
* Week ending December 10, 2014. ** As on December 11, 2013

Source: Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department
(http://www.consumer.tn.gov.in/daily_weekly_prices.html)

With Tamil Nadu farmers aiming for an all-time record production of grains this year, the focus turns to the impact of a bumper harvest on the price of rice.

The opinion is divided among a cross-section of experts, officials, farmers and traders on whether a record yield will lead to a sharp fall in the price.

While one group contends that there is every reason to be optimistic of a considerable reduction in the price of rice because of a likely improvement in supply, the other group feels that the price may rule steady or go up a bit, as there is no correlation between the production and the price. However, both agree that the price is governed by a variety of factors, of which production is one.

Officials of the Agriculture Department are confident of achieving 140 lakh-145 lakh tonnes of grain this year, with paddy accounting for 90 lakh tonnes. The State produced 75 lakh tonnes during 2011-2012 and 70 lakh tonnes last year.

According to D. Thulasingham, president of the Federation of Tamil Nadu Rice Mill Owners and Wholesale Dealers Associations, a conservative estimate reveals that the State's annual rice requirement is around one crore tonnes, of which two-thirds comes from the State and the rest from other States, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. This does not include the paddy procured by the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation for the Public Distribution System, which requires 52 lakh tonnes of paddy or 36 lakh tonnes of rice.

A senior government official says that besides the production in Tamil Nadu, one more factor has to be taken into account this year. With the Central government's stand against the State governments giving incentive over and above the minimum support price, the chances are high for greater availability of rice in the open market as many States may fall in line with the Centre's stipulation, bringing down the prices.

However, K.R. Shanmugam, Director of the Madras School of Economics, says there will not be much change in the prices of rice as the State has reached a fairly high level of production, and any increase will only be marginal. Besides, the monetary policies of the Reserve Bank of India play a crucial role in pushing up or down the rate of inflation. Mr Thulasingham says labour cost is an important component of the price, and it is only on the rise.

Maize growers reap rich harvest with new variety

The variety gives higher yield, is resilient against pest attacks



Mahendran, a maize grower of Malayadipatti village, explaining the quality of the harvested crop to the Krishi Vigyan Kendra scientists in Pudukottai on Tuesday.

A new variety of maize – ‘TNAU Maize hybrid Co6’ – raised on experimental basis in select farms at 10 villages in three blocks in the district has recorded good yield.

The variety released by the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University in 2012 aims at increasing maize yield and preventing pest attacks. Till last season, farmers registered an average yield of 6,500-7,000 kg a hectare and the quality of the crop was also average. However, the hybrid variety has fetched an average per hectare yield of 7,400 kg.

Advantages

The 110-day variety raised during July-end this year had several advantages, particularly in controlling pest-attack. “The downy mildew popularly known as *adisambal noyi* causes extensive damage to the crop after a month from the date of sowing the seed,” said R.P.Gnanamalar, Professor and Head of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, who selected the fields in Kundrandarkovil, Gandarvakottai and Tiruvarangulam blocks in the district under the frontline demonstration programme.

The scientists from the Kendra visited the fields of Mahendran, a maize grower of Malayadipatti village in Kundrandarkovil, who harvested 7,500 kg a hectare on Tuesday.

The farmer said that during the previous seasons, he used the private hybrid variety and his harvest stood somewhere between 6,500 and 7,000 kg a hectare. Further, the quality of the produce was also below normal. The stem thickness was far less at the time of maturity of the crop and maize cobs were not fully spread from the bottom to the top.

K.Geetha and S.Mathiyazhagan, Assistant Professors, KVK, said that adequate crop protection techniques were guaranteed all through the cultivation period.

Micro-minerals were supplied to the farmers for use during the 45-th day and 60-day of the crop. “Micro minerals strengthened the growth of the crop,” they said.

The new hybrid variety was also resistant to other diseases: ‘Sorghum downy mildew’, ‘leaf blight’, ‘stock rot’, and ‘sheath blight’.

Women’s SHG members encouraged to take up poultry



Jeeva, a member of women's self-help group, feeding the chicks at Mutharasanallur village in Tiruchi.— PHOTO: M. SRINATH

Backyard country chicken farming, promoted by Animal Husbandry Department has supplementary income and a livelihood option to rural women in Tiruchi district.

Women's self-help groups members, and individual women have been the beneficiaries with country chicken (native breed or nattu kozhi) which have a niche market and prime rate compared to broiler chicken, fetching them income.

Taste of the country chicken was considered an attractive feature to rear the birds. Jeeva and Dhanalakshmi of Sangam Self-Help Group, at Mutharasanallur, are two beneficiaries of the scheme. They said that they rear 250 chicken each at the backyard of their houses.

Ms. Jeeva said that the chicks were given on September 29 and the birds had now grown to 1 kg and 300 grams.

"I am selling the birds now at a cost of Rs. 300 a kg. This has come handy for us and whenever we want money, we sell the birds in the market or to individuals and get money," said Ms. Jeeva.

"We have built a shed with space of one sq. ft per chicken. Space can be more than one sq. ft as chicken fall on each other if the space was one sq. ft," Ms. Jeeva said.

For women in rural areas, who are without work, country chicken farming was a livelihood option, she said.

Jayashree Muralidharan, District Collector, and R. Mohana Rangan, Joint Director, Animal Husbandry Department inspected the farm on Thursday.

The Collector said Rs. 1,29,000 was provided for each unit of 250 chicken to the beneficiary. Out of this amount, 50 per cent was bank loan. The State government provided 25 per cent of the project cost as front end subsidy while the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) provided another 25 per cent as back end subsidy.

In 2012-13, Rs. 1,17,000 per unit was provided to 35 women and in 2013-14 to 240 women. During this year, the amount had been increased to Rs. 1,29,000. The target for this year was 160 beneficiaries.

With reduced fat content, country chicken was the best food for the elderly people. Country chicken and its eggs meet the protein requirement of people in rural areas. In urban areas, restaurants provide country chicken delicacies to customers.

Sago manufacturers want natural products to be marketed

The Tamil Nadu Tapioca Natural Sago Manufacturers Association has asked all the sago manufactures not to adulterate and bring their products to The Salem Starch and Sago Manufactures Service Industrial Co-operative Society Limited (Sagoserve), so that a competitive environment prevails in market.

Recently, members of the association met the Chief Minister O. Paneerselvam and submitted a petition to him. They said that the skin of tapioca was peeled off and natural sago was manufactured in the past 10 years and was sent to North India.

But, later, sago was manufactured without removing the skin and also banned chemicals were added to whiten the final product.

Last year, maize flour was added to the sago that resulted in fall in price of tapioca. The situation led to farmers and tapioca manufacturers protesting against adulteration as officials of Food Safety and Drug Administration Department tightening their grip. Hence, in the past six months, natural sago was marketed that received well accolades from the consumers. “The price was also good,” they added.

But due to prevailing market conditions, whitening of sago started.

Fearing action, manufacturers instead of selling through Sagoserve, started to sell in open market and earn good price. The association wanted stringent norms to be followed.

Acreage under pokkali cultivation dips



SHRINKING FIELDS

- Vast tracts of fields come under shrimp farming throughout the year
- Floods in Alappuzha and Ernakulam a big blow to pokkali cultivation
- Vast areas have been taken over for developmental activities in Ernakulam
- Vast areas have been taken over for developmental activities in Ernakulam
- Acreage under the rice variety has shrunk to about **1,800 hectares**
- In **2013**, only about **1,700 hectares** came under sowing
- 'One rice and one fish' scheme remains on paper in many places



'Shrimp lobby behind flooding of sown fields'

Vagaries of the weather, rapid infrastructure and property developments and expanding shrimp farming have reduced acreage under pokkali cultivation in the State. According to available data, acreage under the rice variety, unique to the coastal areas of the State lying roughly between Kuthiathode in Alappuzha district and Kodungalloor in Thrissur district, has shrunk to about 1,800 hectares.

Of these, data for 2013 season showed that only about 1,700 hectares came under sowing. Scientists engaged in research on pokkali rice estimate that the State may have had about 26,400 hectares at the turn of the century.

A host of problems have plagued pokkali farming in the State. Though shortage of hands was the key issue more than a decade ago, it has now turned out that vast tracts of the fields have come under shrimp farming throughout the year despite the State's declared policy of "one rice and one fish" cycle in a calendar year.

Information from some of the agricultural offices in the district showed that pokkali cultivation has had a reasonably good season this year. About 120 hectares came under sowing in Varappuzha panchayat. Kumbalanghi had about 38 hectares; Chellanam 40 hectares; Pallippuram 52 hectares and Edavanakkad 25 hectares.

A scientist at the Vyttila Rice Research Station said the most recent blow to pokkali cultivation was the flooding of the fields in 2013 when unprecedented rain inundated large areas in Alappuzha and Ernakulam districts.

The flooding resulted in substantial loss in terms of seed production. About 1,700 hectares came under sowing during the 2013 season. However, most of the fields were inundated.

A spokesman for Pokkali Samrakshana Samithi, a voluntary group engaged in propagating pokkali cultivation, said pokkali fields came under constant pressure from shrimp farming. He alleged shrimp lobby was behind the flooding of sown fields with salt water ahead of the harvest this season.

Scientists also pointed out that large areas under pokkali had been taken over for developmental activities in Ernakulam district.

Making short work of crop woes

e-Short, a field device developed by the Fruit Research Station in Medak, can provide real-time solutions to problems of four horticultural crops

REAL-TIME ROCKSTAR		
WHAT IT IS: A TABLET LOADED WITH THE E-SHORT APPLICATION. IT ALSO CARRIES A VOICE AND SCRIPT FACILITY IN TELUGU		
 <p>Search for problems afflicting four crops</p>	<p>WHAT IT CAN DO</p> <p>These problems are in the nature of pest, disease and nutritional deficiency</p>	<p>Provide real-time information exchange with the Fruit Research Station</p>
	<p>Photographs loaded on the device also help the farmer detect the disease afflicting the crop</p>	<p>Developed on a Rs.50 lakh funding from the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana in 2012</p>

They have done it again.

The Fruit Research Station (FRS) here has developed a ground-breaking Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platform and a dedicated field device capable of two-way information exchange in real-time.

The device, named e-solutions for horticulture (e-Short), can be handled by technically-trained extension officers. It can instantly search for problems afflicting mango, banana, tomato and chilli in three categories – pest, disease and nutritional deficiency problem.

Supported by the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, the proposal received a funding of about Rs.50 lakh to develop the application in 2011. Under A. Kiran Kumar of FRS, the device was developed in a year, and the device – a tab loaded with ‘e-Short’ application – was handed over to 50 extension officers.

These were used for about a year after field tests commenced in November 2013. The device carries a voice facility and script in Telugu which can be easily understood by farmers. It also carries photographs that help farmers understand the common problems being faced in the cultivation of the aforesaid crops. The farmer can easily compare the pictures with the crop’s condition, and directly seek help at the FRS on how to save the crop.

The device was tested at Medak, Warangal, Adilabad, Mahabubnagar and Khammam (Telangana), Krishna, Chittoor, West Godavari, Kadapa, Vizianagaram, Guntur and Kurnool districts.

Once the field officer visits the farmer, his data would be saved in the system and it could be retrieved any time. Such data would serve the purpose of future research.

“We are able to address the problems of the farmer in these sectors in real-time, and now we are confident that it can be scaled up to the required level by training personnel,” Dr. Kiran told *The Hindu* .

Muthalamada orchards still a toxic hub

Agriculture Department findsexcess use of pesticides

(Palakkad): Mango orchards at Muthalamada remain a ‘toxic hub’ owing to indiscriminate spraying of hazardous pesticides..

The orchards, which were earlier known for widespread use of the banned pesticide endosulfan, now use other pesticides, including Cymbush, Monocrofosate, Talstar, Malathion, Azoxistobin, Omethoate, Chlorpyrifos and Thiabaeazove. Agricultural Department officials conducted a surprise raid on a few mango orchards and godowns on Friday upon receiving evidence of excess use of pesticides, especially in farms leased out to people from outside.

Two godowns that had stocked the pesticides were sealed pending investigation.

“The trend is not confined to Muthalamada. Health-related complications have been reported in Moochamkund. Adavumaram, Narippara Challa, Chulliyarmedu and Mechira. Most pesticides used here are highly poisonous. They are, in fact, substitutes of endosulfan,” said S. Guruvayurappan, a local resident and South India coordinator of Wildlife Protection Society of India.

Muthalamada is one of the largest mango production centres in the country. Its fruits are first to hit the market, by January-end. Last season, containers with Muthalamada mangoes were sent back from the Gulf countries after the samples tested positive for high pesticide content,” said Arumugan Pathichira, a social worker and anti-endosulfan activist.

“Here the pesticide is sprayed on trees with the nozzle of the pump directed upwards. The person engaged in spraying gets affected almost instantly,” he added.

“Mangoes estimated to cost Rs.200 crore are exported from Muthalamada every season. In spite of our campaign for organic farming, a number of farmers buy chemical pesticides in large quantities from Pollachi,” said K.D. Kannadas, a farmer at Govindapuram.

Muthalamada has mango orchards spread over 20,000 acres.

H. Hanifa, a farmer, said Muthalamada produced almost all the best and most sought-after varieties of mangoes in India — Alphonso, Neelam, Mallika, Malgova, and Chenthooram.

She is plucky about her coconuts



Suchitra on her way up a coconut tree at Mattu village in Udupi district.

Her mobile never stops ringing. Meet Suchitra R.(30), a resident of Mattu village in Udupi district, who has not only stormed the male bastion of climbing and plucking coconuts from off the trees, but is also a master at it. You have to see her to believe it.

There is a shortage of skilled persons who can climb coconut trees in the region, and Suchitra ably fills this space. Though Suchitra has completed her Pre-University Course and done a course in secretarial practice at the ITI in Udyavara, she was lured to the trade when a team of agricultural scientists from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Brahmavar, visited her village. Suchitra happened to meet the KVK programme coordinator, Jayalaxmi Hegde, and he told her of the weeklong training being given at the KVK to climb coconut trees with the help of a climbing device.

“I liked the idea and enrolled for the course. The KVK provided the device free of cost after I completed the course. After the training, I took up the profession early this year,” she said.

Despite being educated, she did not shy away from the profession. In fact, her family members, including her husband Umesh, supported her. “The fact that there is a shortage of coconut pluckers, and the desire to do something new and try something which only men did, prompted me to take it up,” she said.

Though most people are surprised to see her scrambling up a coconut tree, almost all appreciate her for it. “People have responded positively to my taking up this profession. I am glad when people recognize me,” she said.

Suchitra gets about 10 calls a day for her service. The number of coconuts on a tree varies from five to 30. She charges Rs. 30 for climbing one tree. “I enjoy my job and am happy about it. I am self-employed. What more can I ask?” she said.

The people of Mattu are all praise for her. Vasu Poojary, a farmer, who grows paddy, brinjals and coconuts on an acre of land, said it was difficult to find coconut climbers. “In the beginning, I was surprised to find Suchitra climbing up a coconut tree, but we are all proud of her achievement. Besides, coconut tree-climbers are a dire necessity now,” he said.

Sarojini, a homemaker, said: “I am happy that a woman has achieved this. I want other women to learn it. Suchitra is a role model for other women.”

Farm varsities’ association meet begins today

The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) will host the fifth regional committee meeting of the Indian Agricultural Universities’ Association (IAUA) here on December 19 and 20.

Swapan K. Datta, deputy director general (Crop Science), Indian Council of Agricultural Research, will inaugurate the meeting.

A.K. Srivastava, president, IAUA, will preside. Arvind Kumar, deputy director general (Education), ICAR, will be the guest of honour.

R.P. Singh, IAUA executive secretary, KAU vice chancellor P. Rajendran and KAU director (Academic) T.E. George will speak.

The IAUA is a registered society established in November 1967 with nine State agricultural universities as its founder members. The strength of the IAUA

membership is 61, and this comprises 54 agricultural universities in the country, five deemed universities under ICAR and two Central universities.

The main objective of the association is to foster rural development in the country by integrating research, education and extension in agricultural universities.

The association acts as a liaison between member universities and various departments under the Union and State governments.

The theme of the fifth regional committee meeting is 'Family farming for sustainability'.

Eat pokkali rice to conserve water birds, say birders



Special arrangement

The Cochin Natural History Society, an NGO, has launched a campaign asking bird enthusiasts to buy pokkali rice from farmers to support the farming and thereby conserving wetlands, the habitat of wetland birds.

Eat pokkali rice to save wetland bird habitats, exhort birders of Kochi.

The Cochin Natural History Society (CNHS), an NGO dedicated for conservation of birds, has launched a campaign asking bird enthusiasts to buy pokkali rice from farmers of Varapuzha area to support them and thereby conserving wetlands, the habitat of wetland birds.

Pokkali farming is facing crisis in the district with drastic reduction in the extent of farmland. The farming activity itself had become uneconomic forcing the farmers to abandon it, said Vishnupriyan Kartha, secretary of the society.

The CNHS is focusing its attention on Devaswom Padam in Varapuzha, which is one of the favourite wetland birding sites in the district. The presence of around 50 bird species draws birders and nature enthusiasts to this site. The destruction of wetlands will naturally lead to loss of habitat of avian fauna. Sustainable farming is the only way to protect the birds. Hence the campaign, Mr. Kartha said.

The bird species present in the wetland include Little Cormorant, Oriental Darter, Indian Pond Heron, Purple Heron, Grey Heron and Little Egret. Asian Openbill, Lesser Whistling Duck, White-breasted water hen, Purple Swamp hen, Bronze winged Jacana and Pacific Golden Plover are also found here.

Calling the attention of birders who have been carrying out “birding and photography at Kadamakudi and Devaswom Padam regularly,” a communication from the CNHS urged them to buy pokkali rice to revive the farming. A group of social activists are supporting the farmers by returning the profit from selling pokkali rice procured from them, he said.

Pokkali paddy farmed by the local farmers is converted into rice at a threshing unit and the rice is sold at Rs. 60 a kg. The profit is returned to the farmers as an incentive for engaging in pokkali farming, said Jesudas Varapuzha, one of the activists.

Last year, One quintal rice was thus sold and profit shared among the farmers. There was good demand for pokkali rice and the transportation of rice to the buyers was one hassle faced in its marketing, he said.

The society had been covering the wetlands since 2011 during the Asian water bird census. When the birders assemble here for the next census in January, the members will be encouraged to buy the rice from the farmers.

Poultry farmers asked to tap global market

State ranks fourth in broiler chicken production

Only 3 to 5 per cent of the total poultry products in the country are exported and poultry farmers should concentrate more on tapping the global market, a message strongly disseminated by scientists and officials during the 31st annual conference on 'Poultry Production for Global Trade' (IPSACON' 2014) here on Thursday.

Organised by Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Namakkal, and the Indian Poultry Science Association, the conference was inaugurated by Minister for Animal Husbandry T.K.M. Chinnayya, who said that precautionary measures taken by the State government prevented the outbreak of avian flu from Kerala. He said that the State ranks fourth in broiler chicken production and second in egg production in the country. Eggs to the tune of Rs. 11.93 billion were produced in 2012-13 that rose to Rs. 12.55 billion in 2013-14. Also 333.40-tonne broiler chicken was produced in 2012-13 that rose to 496 tonne in 2013-14. "Various schemes were implemented for the industry that will soon make the State a leading producer of poultry products," he added.

R. Prabakaran, president of Indian Poultry Science Association, said that poultry industry contribute 11 per cent to the country's total gross domestic product, but pointed out that the market is purely domestic. "Import relaxation of poultry products by other countries should be utilised and exports should be encouraged," he added.

Collector V. Dakshinamoorthy said that 988 farmers are involved in rearing four crore chicken in Namakkal and there are five lakh broilers and 2.5 lakh country chickens.

"The industry witnesses frequent threats and are effectively managed," he added.

Vice-Chancellor of the university S. Thilagar wanted a slaughterhouse to be established in Namakkal, so that chickens can be freeze-dried and exports can be done.

“Favourable environment is prevailing here and it could be optimally utilised,” he added. K.P.P. Baskar, MP, and V.K. Sazena, general secretary of the association, also spoke.

The conference souvenir and compact disc was also released on the occasion.

About 200 scientists from across the country are participating in the three-day conference that ends on December 20.

Earlier, K.A. Doraisamy, Dean, Veterinary College and Research Institute, welcomed the gathering, while K. Mani, organising secretary, proposed a vote of thanks at the event.

Carbon-dioxide emissions at all-time high in 2013



AP

Smoke and water vapour stream from a coal-fired power station in Germany. Coal power plants are under pressure due to Germany's targets for reducing carbon-dioxide emissions.

4.2 % rise in India's discharge of the greenhouse gas: study

Global carbon-dioxide emissions from burning of fossil fuels and production of cement reached a high of 35.3 billion tonnes in 2013, mainly due to the continuing steady increase in energy use in emerging economies such as India, a new report says.

Brazil (6.2 per cent), India (4.4 per cent), China (4.2 per cent) and Indonesia (2.3 per cent) reported a sharp rise in emissions of the greenhouse gas that year.

The global emissions, however, increased at a notably slower rate of 2 per cent than the average yearly 3.8 per cent since 2003. The slowdown, which began in 2012, signals a further decoupling of global emissions and economic growth, mainly reflecting the lower emissions growth rate of China, says the annual "Trends in global CO emissions" released by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre.

The top three

China, the United States and the European Union remain the top three emitters of carbon dioxide, accounting for 29 per cent, 15 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively, of the world's total. After years of a steady decline, the emissions of the gas by the U.S. grew by 2.5 per cent in 2013, mainly due to a shift in power production from gas back to coal and an increase in gas consumption for space heating, the report says.

In the European Union, emissions continued to fall — by 1.4 per cent in 2013.

The much lower increase in emissions in China — 4.2 per cent in 2013 and 3.4 per cent in 2012 — was primarily due to a decline in electricity and fuel demand from the basic materials industry, and aided by an increase in renewable energy and improvements in energy efficiency.

"With the present annual growth rate, China has returned to the lower annual growth rates that it experienced before its economic growth started to accelerate in 2003, when its annual carbon dioxide emissions increased on average by 12 per cent a year," the report says.

Scanty rainfall leaves farmers worried in non-delta areas

THE LOOMING CRISIS

- Storage in a majority of the **98 rain-fed tanks** under the Ariyar division is inadequate
- About **90 tanks** had less than **25 per cent** of the storage capacity
- Cultivation taken up only **24,000 acres** as against the target of **64,000 acres** in the region
- Uppiliyapuram, Marungapuri, Manapparai, Vaiyampatti, and Thuraiyur staring at drought
- Despite sporadic rain, there has not been much inflow in the tanks
- Farmers say they were this problem for the third year in succession

Tiruchi district has so far recorded 37 p.c. deficient rainfall

Farmers in most parts of the non-delta areas of the district are keeping their fingers crossed over the prospect of the samba paddy crop because of the scanty rainfall so far this year.

Tiruchi district has recorded below normal rainfall under the northeast monsoon (October-December) so far this year, registering 37 per cent deficiency. Between October 1 and December 10, the district has received only 224.2 mm of rainfall against the normal 354.5 mm for the period, according to figures available at the website of the Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai.

Samba paddy cultivation was taken up in full swing in the canal-irrigated delta areas of the district after the release of water from Mettur reservoir, but farmers in the non-delta (rain-fed) areas could not do so for want of rain.

There has not been adequate storage to sustain cultivation in a majority of the 98 rain-fed tanks under the Ariyar division of the Public Works Department in the district. According to sources in the department, 90 tanks had storage of less than 25 per cent of their capacities. Four tanks have 25 to 50 per cent storage and another four have 50 to 75 per cent storage, the sources added.

Official sources said the rain, though widespread, has not been intensive enough and there has not been much inflow into the tanks.

The Agriculture Department had targeted to cover about 62,000 acres of land under samba paddy in the non-delta areas of the district this year. However, only 24,000 acres of land have been covered. Farmers who had raised the crop depending on well irrigation are looking for some rain at least towards the end of the northeast monsoon to see them through the season.

Farmers say the rain received so far had been too scattered and inadequate. “Farmers in Uppilliyapuram, Marungapuri, Manapparai, Vaiyampatti, and Thuraiyur areas could not take up paddy cultivation in the absence of rain. Most tanks are dry and the government should take steps to declare these areas as drought hit,” said Ayilai Sivasuriyan, district secretary of the CPI-affiliated Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam.

Farmers point out that they were facing poor monsoon for the third consecutive year. “We could be in for a severe problem in the coming months as wells will go dry in the non-delta areas,” said P.Ayyakannu, State vice-president, Bharathiya Kisan Sangam.

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather

Clear

Rain: 0

Humidity: 89

Wind: normal

Tomorrow's Forecast

Friday, Dec 19

Max 29° | Min 24°  Partly Cloudy

Sunrise: 06:22

Sunset: 05:44

Barometer: 1014

Saturday, Dec 20

Max 29° | Min 25°

Extended Forecast for a week

**Sunday
Dec 21**



29° | 25°

Partly Cloudy

**Monday
Dec 22**



30° | 25°

Partly Cloudy

**Tuesday
Dec 23**



30° | 25°

Partly Cloudy

**Wednesday
Dec 24**



26° | 24°

Partly Cloudy

**Thursday
Dec 25**



26° | 26°

Partly Cloudy

Why eating lotus stem is good for you



Here are some benefits of lotus stem that you were probably unaware of.

Lotus stem recipes are still a delicacy for many households here. This aquatic plant, which grows in few places, is available everywhere in a dry version. But here are some health benefits that you probably did not know until now -

1. Lotus root contains many essential vitamins.
2. Lotus stem is a great source of Vitamin C, which helps boost the immunity of a person and fight viral infections.
3. The root also contains essential minerals like zinc, magnesium, copper and iron, which help the body in the production of red blood cells.
4. Lotus root is known for strengthening the respiratory system of a human body, which ultimately helps a person fight a number of diseases.
5. They are rich in dietary fiber and low on saturated fats, hence keeping a person's calorie count in check.

With so many reasons this root vegetable gives to a human being, one should make sure to include in the diet regularly.

Green tea and it's magic



Green tea and its benefits are known worldwide. This hot brew is extremely healthy and has many benefits.

Here's why you should switch to green tea.

Anti-aging

Chemicals called catechin that are present in green tea significantly improve the activity of SOD, and so provide a large boost to the body's ability to fight the affect of free radicals. Many of the affects of aging, particularly on the skin, are caused by a buildup of free radicals in the body, which can damage and aging of your body's cells.

Oral care

Green tea is a big natural source of fluoride, so this in combination with its anti-bacterial effects provides a great natural way to help strengthen your teeth, prevent cavities and help reduce bad breath.

Benefits skin

Green tea and its extracts are commonly used to prevent and treat a number of skin diseases, including skin cancer. Topical applications of green tea extracts also help protect against UV exposure from the sun, and are used to reduce the impact the sun has on the health of your skin. Many of the benefits found for green tea, only occur after drinking it for an extended time, months or years. It also detoxifies the body causing the skin to glow and clears the complexion.

Aides in weight loss

Several studies have hinted that green tea provides a boost to exercise-induced weight loss so if you're aiming at reducing weight or that abdominal paunch then consider adding green tea to your diet.

Broccoli can reduce premature ageing in kids



A substance found in broccoli can reduce disease-related defects in children who suffer from Hutchinson-Gilford Progeria Syndrome (HGPS).

The HGPS is said to be responsible for premature ageing in children, mainly due to a defective protein in their cells.

Scientists at Technische Universitat Munchen (TUM) University in Germany have identified the system responsible for removing cellular debris and for breaking down defective proteins.

They also succeeded in reactivating protein breakdown in HGPS cells and reducing disease-related defects with the help of a substance found in broccoli.

The defective protein is referred to as progerin, which causes the cell to "age".

Consequently, HGPS patients develop classic diseases of old age such as atherosclerosis, osteoporosis, heart attacks and strokes.

The disease is, therefore, regarded as a possible model system for the natural aging process in cells.

In order to find out which specific metabolic pathways are affected by the mutation and the defective protein, professor Karima Djabali and her team conducted a comparative study of diseased and healthy tissue cells in which they investigated the composition of proteins in the cell nuclei and looked for differences.

During the research, they found a substance in broccoli called sulforaphane that activates protein degradation in cells.

The scientists treated the HGPS cells with the substance and found that significantly less progerin accumulated within the cells.

Moreover, DNA damage and nuclear deformations, other effects of the disease, were also reduced in treated cells as compared with untreated cells.

"Of course our experiments are very basic, but every active substance and every new approach brings us a step closer to a treatment for HGPS patients. It could also help us develop anti-aging strategies in the future," Djabali said.

Must-have winter items for your kid



Strawberries: Packed with vitamin C and antioxidants, strawberries are not only tasty but also filled with nutrition. Give your kid strawberry milkshake or serve the fruit dipped in yogurt as an evening snack.

Carrots: The beta-carotene rich veggies can help boost the body's white blood cell count and also improve your kid's immune system to fight against cold and viruses. Dish out gajar halwa or let them munch them raw.

Sweet potatoes: A root veggie is a good option to serve your kid during winters as it provides warmth to the body. Go ahead and cook up interesting dishes using sweet potatoes, which are a rich source of Vitamins A and C, and minerals.

Nuts: Generating heat in the body, munching on nuts is recommended during this season. You can either pack walnuts, pistachios, almonds, etc in your kid's lunchbox or combine them to make nut barfi.

Spices: Spices like ginger and garlic are said to increase a body's metabolism. Use these spices in your food to add flavour. Add ginger to the lemonade you serve your kid, made at room temperature, of course.

Recipe: Chicken Dumplings



Here is a recipe to make the most delicious chicken dumplings at home.

Ingredients:

6 boned chicken breast with skin, 10 cups water, 1 tsp sage, 1 tsp poultry, 1/8 tsp grounded basil leaves, 1 tbsp salt and pepper.

Method:

Put these ingredients in a large sauce pan to simmer over low heat, until the chicken is done. Then remove the chicken and remove the skin. While the chicken is cooking, make the dumplings.

Ingredients (for dumplings):

5 cups of all purpose flour, 1/2 cup shortening (or desi ghee), 1/4 tsp salt, 1 beaten egg and some water.

Method (for dumplings):

Put flour into a mixing bowl and stir in salt. Work in shortening as you would when making pie crust, using two knives or a pastry cutter. Add egg, working it into the dough. Then stir in cold water 1/2 cup at a time, until the dough comes together and is at a stage where you will be able to roll it out. Lightly flour a surface and roll out the dough to a pie shell thickness (about 1/8 inch). Using a pizza cutter, cut the dough into 1/2 to 1 inch squares. Finally, put the squares into the chicken broth and cook until done (about 30 minutes). Return the

chicken to the soup with the dumplings to cook another 15 minutes or until you have a gravy texture. After you get a gravy texture, it's ready to serve.

Recipe: Hyderabadi mutton biryani

A legend from the kitchens of the Nizam of Hyderabad, the kachche gosht ki biryani, also known as the Hyderabadi mutton biryani or is a spicy, fragrant and colourful variant of biryani in India. The traditional style of making the biryani by cooking the raw meat with spices for couple of minutes and then covered with rice and kept on dum until done.

Preparation time: 30 mins

Cooking time: 45 mins

Marinade mutton in spices overnight

Ingredients

Mutton: 1kg

Basmati rice: 500gm

Cumin (jeera): 1 tsp

Whole garam masala: 2 tbsp

Garam masala powder: 2 tsp

Boiled egg for decoration (optional): 2

Rose water (optional): 1 tbsp

Garlic-ginger paste: 2 tbsp

Golden-fried sliced onions: 2 cups

Mint leaves: 1 bunch

Curd: 2 cups

Cashew nuts (optional): 50gm

Turmeric powder: 1 pinch

Saffron: 1 pinch

Coriander leaves: 1 bunch

Salt: As per taste

Kashmiri red chilli powder: 1 tbsp

Oil: 5 tbsp

Procedure:

The Marinade -- Wash mutton (I prefer the raan or hind leg of a goat, for biryani). Pat dry and add garam masala, salt, ginger-garlic paste, red chilli paste, and two cups of curd. Put it in a clean film pastic bag and keep it in the refrigerator to marinade overnight.

Directions:

- First boil the water, add oil, salt and half-cook the rice.
- Next fry thinly sliced onions until golden brown. Add 1/3 of the golden-brown onion to the mutton marination and rest keep aside.
- Now in a handi (deep pan) add the marinated mutton in the bottom and top it of with half cooked rice, add mint leaves, coriander leaves and top it up fried onions. In a separate bowl, add some warm milk to soak saffron. Once the milk soaks the colour of the saffron, add it to the handi.
- Cover the handi or pan with a airtight lid or add sticky dough to the edges and cover it with a lid. Cook for 45 min.
- Add rose water and garnish with sliced boiled eggs.
- Serve hot with raita and mirchi ka salan.

DECCAN Chronicle

Chilli yard proposal will make staff red like chillies



Spread over 56 acres with nearly 25 lakh square feet of area, it is the largest chilli yard in Asia and a hub for chilli exports. (Photo courtesy: www.visualphotos.com)

Hyderabad: A high level committee officials of engineering-in-chiefs from AP recommended that 2 lakh sq. feet of space in Guntur's famous chilli yard was available to set up government offices.

Spread over 56 acres with nearly 25 lakh square feet of area, it is the largest chilli yard in Asia and a hub for chilli exports. If the recommendation of the committee is accepted, the staff working for the Andhra Pradesh government would have to bear the heat, literally.

The Guntur chilli is known for its pungency and it is difficult for anyone to even stand for a couple of minutes in the chilli yard.

On their part, the government employees said none of them would agree to work in offices set up in the chilli yard. "As it is, employees are not willing to shift from Hyderabad to Vijayawada or Guntur. Now the chilli yard proposal will make them go red like hot chillies," an employee said.

AP Secretariat Seemandhra Employees' Forum leader Murali Krishna said setting up of offices in or near the chilli yard was not correct. The Mirchi Yard should be utilised only for the purpose it was established for, he said.

When contacted, roads and buildings engineer-in-chief Dr G.V.S. Suryanarayana Raju, who is heading the committee, confirmed that they had identified three locations to set up the government offices.

“One of the three locations is the Guntur district Mirchi Yard. About 2 lakh sq. feet of space in it can be taken on lease to set up offices. The remaining can be left for farmers to sell their produce,” he said.

“The other two locations identified are marketing yards and godowns in Vijayawada and the Acharya Nagarjuna University campus. The university administration has expressed its willingness to give two blocks and some space that comes to 2 lakh sq. feet,” Dr Raju said. He added that the state would take a final decision.

Avian Flu scare unlikely to hamper chicken sales.

TVM: Going by market signs, Keralites have already set aside the avian flu scare and resumed their heavy chicken consumption.

Thanks to the free chicken food festival and other publicity programmes organised by the state government and poultry farmers, the retail prices of chicken, which had dipped to around Rs 65 per kg during the avian flu scare, rose to Rs 79 by Thursday.

By December 25, the price is expected to be around Rs 85- Rs 90 which is Rs 5 less than that during the last Christmas.

At the peak of the flu scare, the sales in Thiruvananthapuram district had dropped to a quarter of its original consumption of two lakh chickens per day.

“The hoteliers and caterers have started taking huge volumes of chicken and hence the prices are back to normal. However, the individual buyers are still slightly pessimistic.

By Christmas, the sale is sure to go up,” said Abdul Jabbar, secretary of Poultry Farmers and Traders Association of Kerala.

Interestingly, the avian flu never impacted the price of chicklings which was always around Rs 35.

Make the perfect drink for X'mas festivities



Eggnog by Makers Mark

If you've got a big group coming over for a Christmas lunch/dinner, you can save some time by whipping up one large batch of eggnog or mulled wine, rather than mix individual drinks for the guests. For this holiday classic, you'll need:

For the mulled wine (serves 6) You'll need:

- 750 ml red wine,
- 1 orange (zest and slices separated),
- ¼ cup of brandy,
- 8-10 cloves,
- 1/3 cup honey,
- 3 cinnamon sticks,
- 2 tsp ground ginger

Combine all ingredients in a large vessel and place on low/medium heat for about 20 minutes. Stir occasionally until all the honey is dissolved. Strain or carefully pour the wine into mugs and enjoy.

For the eggnog (serves 12) You'll need:

- 500 ml bourbon,
- 450 ml milk,
- 450 ml heavy cream,
- 12 eggs,
- ¾ cup sugar,

- nutmeg powder to taste

Once the ingredients are ready, start by separating the egg whites from the yolks. Next, beat the yolks until creamy, and whip in the sugar as well. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites until they stand in peaks (adding $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of additional sugar, if required). Pour the bourbon into the egg yolks and beat. Add the egg whites. Beat the cream and then add that as well as the milk to the egg and bourbon mix. Finish off with the nutmeg powder.

Cheers to Christmas



COCONUT VODKA

Europe's favorite drink during the festive season has to be mulled wine. It dates back to Roman antiquity but it wasn't until the 14th century that the mix of wine, fruit and spices gained its name, from an Old English word meaning "muddled".

Charles Dickens gets the credit for elevating mulled wine into a traditional holiday drink. It was its appearance in his popular short story, *A Christmas Carol*, that sealed its place in Christmas culinary history.

Another favorite that found its way around the world is the eggnog. This is a drink made with whipped eggs, cream, nutmeg and a mixture of rum, brandy or bourbon. It is said to have originated in the late 18th century among the aristocracy — they were the only ones who could afford the luxury of milk and eggs. History on this one varies, but it is accepted that the drink gained popularity in the English colonies during the Imperial years.

This Christmas, you could pay homage to the mulled wine by preparing it in the traditional way but serving it chilled, in accordance with the beautiful weather we are experiencing at the moment. And to compliment it further, you could serve it alongside a delicious plum cake, thus enhancing the flavor of the wine and the cake.

You could also play with some coconut vodka and rum infusions. Here's an easy DIY vodka infused with coconut recipe for Christmas. It can be enjoyed neat, or in cocktails. The writer, who's also known as "Tug", is the bartender at Wink, Vivanta by Taj President.

COCONUT VODKA

Ingredients

1 ltr vodka (preferably a good-quality vodka)

½ a coconut, shredded

Directions

Combine the vodka and coconut in a bowl. Cover. After 24 hours, taste the vodka for the desired flavour (I found it got just about right after two days of steeping).

Strain the vodka and transfer to a bottle. Enjoy straight or in any cocktail that calls for coconut-flavoured liquor.

HOLIDAY SPICE

Ingredients

60 ml coconut infused vodka

20 ml cream of coconut

60 ml pineapple juice

30 ml half & half (cream & milk)

2 dashes of cinnamon

2 dashes of nutmeg

Directions

Shake and strain into a stemmed glass. Garnish with a cinnamon stick.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Poor export demand pounds Basmati

New Delhi, December 18:

Prices of basmati rice fell for the second consecutive session on poor export demand. Basmati Pusa 1121 (steam) traded at around Rs. 9,500 per 100 kg in wholesale markets of Punjab, down Rs. 100-200 rupees, traders said. Poor overseas demand for basmati dragged prices down. Exports for the premium variety slowed down as the largest buyer, Iran, had raised the import duty on the same from 22.5 per cent to 44 per cent, effective July 1.

India had exported 1.94 million tonnes of basmati during April-October, compared with 2.11 million tonnes in the year-ago period, according to government data. Non-basmati prices, however, were nearly unchanged, with Sharbati (steam) prices in Delhi spot markets remaining flat at around Rs. 4,400 per 100 kg.

The variety was also quoted flat at around Rs. 3,600 in Taraori, Haryana. Basmati rice variety Pusa 1121 (sela) was offered at Rs. 5,200 in Karnal markets.

Sugar rules flat on slack demand

Mumbai, December 18:

Spot sugar prices ruled flat on Thursday on ample supply amid slack physical demand. Prices on the futures market pared some of the earlier losses. *Naka* and mill tender rates remained unchanged. Arrivals at Vashi wholesale market continued at 61- 62 truckloads, while local dispatches were 60-61 loads. On Wednesday about 23-24 mills offered tenders and sold 45,000-48,000 bags at Rs. 2,540-2,650 (Rs. 2,540-2,650) for S-grade and Rs. 2,650-2,780 (Rs. 2,650-2,780) for M-grade. Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates were: S-grade Rs. 2,686- 2,882 (Rs. 2,686-2,902) and M-grade was Rs. 2,802-3,021 (Rs. 2,812-3,021). *Naka* delivery rates were: S-grade Rs. 2,650-2,700 (Rs. 2,650-2,700) and M-grade Rs. 2,750-2,900 (Rs. 2,750-2,900). Our Correspondent

50% turmeric unsold in Erode markets



Erode, December 18:

Half of the turmeric on sale in Erode markets went unsold on Thursday as buying by traders was limited.

“Though traders have some upcountry demand, they procured only limited stocks. Only medium quality turmeric arrived on Thursday for sale”, said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association. He said there was no improvement in the turmeric futures; so the traders did not quote increased price.

Sales

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association Sales yard, the finger turmeric was sold at Rs. 3,610-7,055 a quintal, the root variety at Rs. 3,540-6,616. Salem Hybrid: The finger variety was sold at Rs. 5,969-7,869 a quintal, the root variety at Rs. 5,889-7,000. Of the 1,355 bags that arrived, 618 bags were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric was sold at Rs. 6,199-7,327, the root variety at Rs.6,099-6,733. Of the 1,507 bags on offer, 1,327 bags were traded.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric was sold at Rs. 6,199-7,229, the root variety at Rs. 5,969-6,799.

Of the 490 bags that arrived 447 were picked up.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric fetched Rs.6,099-7,451. The root turmeric was sold at Rs. 5,619-6,913.

All the 157 bags put up for sale were sold.

Workers' body seeks separate ministry for fisheries

Visakhapatnam, December 18:

The National Fishworkers' Forum, a federation of state-level trade unions, has urged the Union Government to give serious thought to their long-pending demand for the formation of a separate ministry for fisheries.

Retaining fisheries within the purview of the Union Agriculture Ministry is leading to a gross neglect of the fisheries sector, the forum said.

At a press meet here on Thursday, forum chairperson M Ilango said a resolution was passed on the issue at the recent general body meeting of the NFF in Maharashtra.

He said the Narendra Modi Government should take cognisance of their demand.

Further, he said, the NFF also urged the Union Government to ignore the recommendations of the committee headed by Meena Kumari on the deep sea fishing policy.

The committee, he alleged, had not consulted the leaders of the fishermen community and, therefore, its recommendations harmed their interests.

He said that fishermen and women should be provided loans at four per cent by commercial banks and loan waiver should be effected periodically, as in the case of farmers' loans.

Coastal region protection

He said the violators of the Coastal Regulatory Zone Act should be punished and the Government should take steps to protect the fragile coastal environs and the fisheries resources.

Ilango said corporates should not be allowed in fisheries-related activities as it would adversely affect the interests of fishermen. Further, he said the Union Government should not give permission to any vessel, Indian or foreign, for deep sea fishing, as it would have a bearing on the interests of fishermen

Incentive for raw sugar exports soon

Government may have moved in a little late to tackle the situation, says industry

Bitter-sweet A Vellayan, President of Indian Sugar Mills Association and Executive Chairman of the Murugappa Group, with Sudhir Kumar, Secretary, Union Ministry of Food and Public Distribution, at the 80th Annual General Meeting of the association in New Delhi on Thursday Kamal Narang

New Delhi, December 18:

Union Food Secretary Sudhir Kumar has said the Centre will take a call on extending export incentive for raw sugar soon.

The matter has been under examination for weeks with the industry reiterating the need for extension in view of sliding prices amidst rising production costs and excess supply.

The incentive was approved by the Centre for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 seasons (October-September) and had been in place till September. The scheme, reviewed every two months, provided a subsidy between Rs. 2,277 and Rs. 3,371 for a tonne of raw sugar. Around 7,00,000 tonnes of raw sugar have been shipped under the scheme last season.

“Our assessment of the present stock and the production estimate for the year took some time. Now that there is clarity and we’re heading in the right direction, there will be a decision,” said Kumar on Thursday at the 80th Annual General Meeting of the Indian Sugar Mills Association.

He said that the Government estimated the 2014-15 season opening stock at 72 lakh tonnes (lt) and had pegged ending stock at 74 lt.

Brazilian sugar

Industry officials, however, are worried that the Government might have made its move a little late. With global crude oil prices falling, some feel, Brazil – world’s largest sugar producer– could produce more sugar instead of ethanol.

“On the international front, due to the steep fall in crude oil prices, there is possibility that there could be a shift from ethanol to sugar production. With the Brazilian real falling, the price of Brazilian sugar will be cheap that it will threaten to come into India and despite the import duty, it will be cheaper than Indian sugar,” said A Vellayan, Executive Chairman of the Murugappa Group that runs EID-Parry.

Vellayan, who took over as President of ISMA on Thursday, said that domestic mills are being forced to sell to international traders in forward markets at cheaper prices to generate cash flow.

“They are selling February-March’s product today to be able to pay farmers. Exports have not yet started and banks are hardly lending to mills. It is an unviable situation,” he said.

“We don’t see oil prices rising for another 6-8 months during which time Brazil will have a new crop.

“So with a decline in oil prices, it’s a possibility that more cane will go into sugar and less into ethanol,” said Tarun Sawhney, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director, Triveni Engineering & Industries Ltd.

Business Standard

Onion price rises 65% this month as rain interrupts harvest

Steep decline in arrivals across major mandis leads to higher prices

[Onion prices](#) have jumped since December 1, due to supply disruption. The latest spells of unseasonal rain have left farm areas with deep mud in the fields, resulting in farmers halting the harvesting of mature standing crop.

Data compiled by the [National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation](#) (NHRDF) showed the price in Mumbai at Rs 2,100 a quintal (qtl) on Thursday, against Rs 1,270 a qtl on December 1, a 65 per cent rise. Total arrival in the city was 770 tonnes on Thursday, against 1,505 tonnes on December 1.

“Rising prices can be attributed to steep decline in arrivals across major mandis, as the unseasonal rain damaged standing crops and delayed harvesting of matured ones. There has been no export demand as well,” said Ajit Shah, director, Agricultural Produce Market Committee, Pimpalgaon, one of the Asia’s largest onion mandis, close to Nashik.

Supply of new-season crop started early December, as farmers commenced harvesting of the early variety of kharif crops.

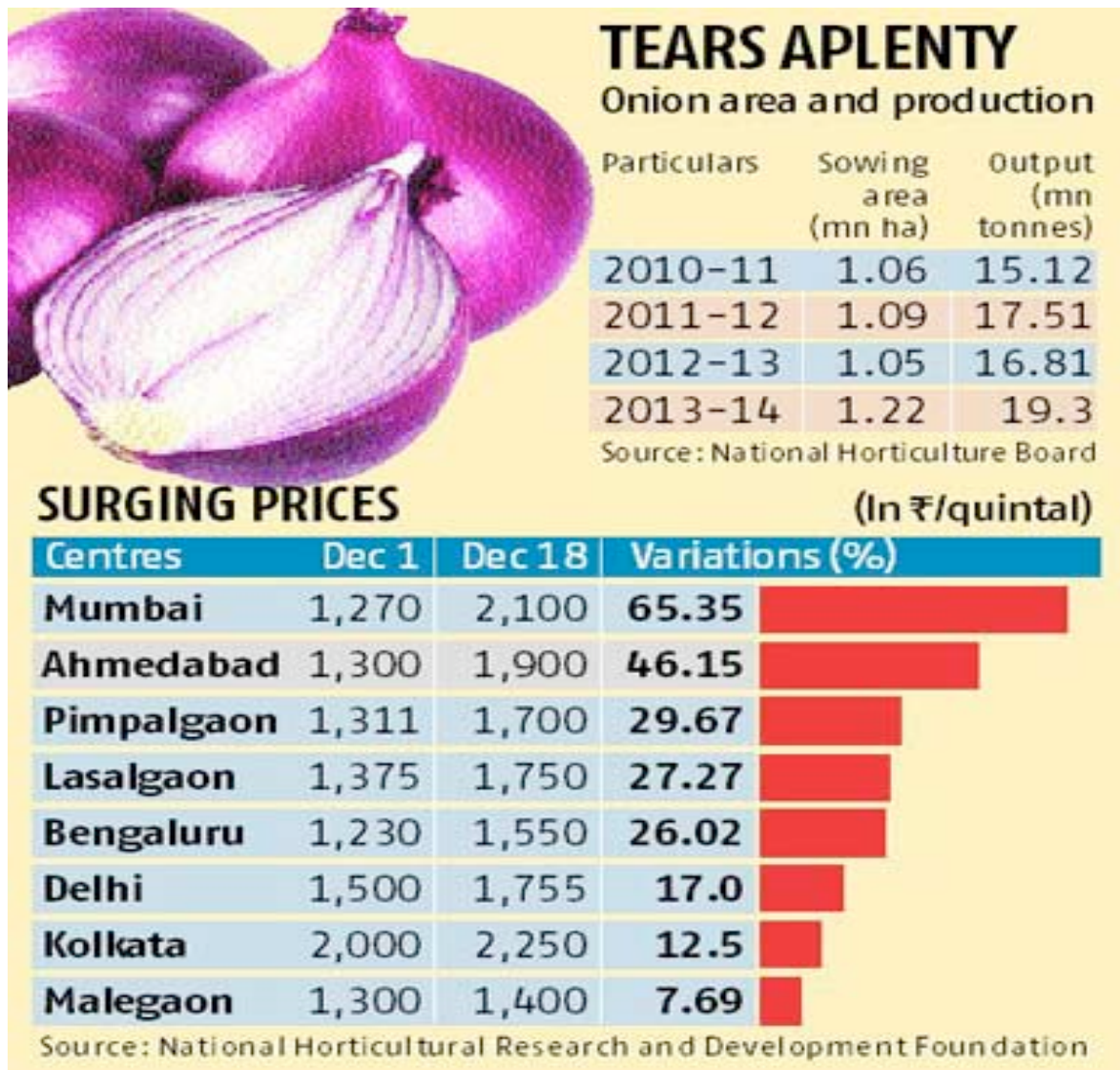
These had been sown with a delay of over a month, due to the late commencement of monsoon rain. The harvesting, as mentioned earlier, stopped with the deep mud in the fields. The best quality onion does not carry any mud, due to fear of spoilage.

With a 16 per cent fall in arrivals to 1,025 tonnes on December 18 as against 1,234 tonnes on December 1, the price was quoted at Rs 1,700 a qtl at the

Pimpalgaon mandi on Thursday, a rise of around 30 per cent.

At the benchmark Lasalgaon market, in the same district, the price was quoted at Rs 1,750 a qtl on Thursday as against Rs 1,375 a quintal on December 1.

“This is a temporary phenomenon. The price will soften in a week, with gradual reduction in field moisture and commencement of harvesting. There is no shortage of onion this season,” said R P Gupta, director of NHRDF.



Some, however, worry that the soil moisture and deep mud in the field might spoil unmatured standing crop.

The National Horticulture Board, in its second advance estimate, projected output at 19.3 million tonnes during crop year 2013-14, a 15 per cent rise from 16.8 mt in crop year 2012-13.

Basmati exports set to decline

This year, **earnings** from the export of **basmati rice** are expected to fall 15-20 per cent, owing to Iran banning the import of the commodity from India.

Iran purchases about 40 per cent of the basmati rice sold in the international market by Indian exporters. Through the past few years, Iran has been charging an import duty on rice (basmati and non-basmati) to safeguard the interests of farmers in that country. This was lifted once the local crop was consumed. Last year, the import duty was raised from 22.5 per cent to 40 per cent in July; the move was rolled back in December. This year, however, Iran banned such imports.

Mohinder Pal Jindal, president of the All India Rice Exporters' Association, told Business Standard though exporters had purchased about 80 per cent of the estimated export demand, there was no clarity on the demand from buyers in Iran.

Besides Iran, Europe and Saudi Arabia are the major buyers of Indian basmati rice. Though demand from these regions is stable, given the bumper crop in India, exporters are bracing up for low prices.

Last year, the average realisation was \$1,400 a tonne; as of now, the price stands at about \$900 a tonne. It is expected if the import restrictions in Iran aren't lifted, the price will fall further.

Enthused by the high demand and remuneration last year, farmers in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have diversified from non-basmati to basmati this year. However, due to a fall in import demand and oversupply in the domestic market, prices have crashed from Rs 3,500-4,000 a quintal last year to Rs 2,200-2,800 a quintal this year.

EXPORT NUMBERS				
year	Basmati exports (in mn tonne)	Average realisation in \$/tonne	Export income in \$mn	acreage in mn hectare
2010-11	2.2	997	2,496	1.6
2011-12	3.2	925	3,226	1.8
2012-13	3.5	1,050	3,564	1.8
2013-14	3.7	1,295	4,866	1.9
2014-15 (P)	3.2	1,150	4,025	2.1

P: Projected
Sources: Agri and Processed Food Products Exports Development Authority

A senior official in the Agriculture and Processed Food Products Exports Development Authority said the slowdown in demand had resulted from the ban by Iran. He added in the past few years, basmati exporters had booked huge profits, as Iranian importers had bought aggressively. Last year, Iran had imported 1,450,000 tonnes of rice from India; this year, that country's rice imports from India will stand at 900,000 tonnes.

Annual consumption of rice in Iran is about three million tonnes and production this year is reported at about two million tonnes.

The official added a price correction for basmati was expected, as prices had become unrealistic. High production of food grain across the globe had led to a fall in the prices of various commodities and rice exporters couldn't remain insulated from this trend, he said.