

Farmers criticise water management policy

ERODE, March 20, 2014 - The Lower Bhavani Farmers' Welfare Association on Wednesday started distributing pamphlets to sensitise farmers to "water mismanagement" by the Public Works Department for the last 56 years.

Stating that the Lower Bhavani Project ayacut has so far lost 272 tmc water so far due to the PWD's water management policy, association president C. Nallasamy invited officials and politicians for a debate on the issue.

Political decency demands that the people's representatives in The Nilgiris, Erode, Tirupur and Karur gave an explanation for the PWD's action before seeking votes.

Prize

He announced a prize of Rs. 1 crore to anyone among the people's representatives: both sitting and past as well as the candidates for the four Lok Sabha seats; past and present district collectors; and past and present PWD officials, who would prove the PWD's action to be right.

Without explaining the PWD's action and the rationale behind banning toddy, politicians seeking votes from farmers in the region would face uncomfortable situation, Mr. Nallasamy said.

The farmers were unhappy with the manifestoes of both the DMK and the AIADMK since there was no mention about ethanol.

By scaling up use of ethanol, India will be in a position to bring down import of petroleum. The failure of political parties to come out with convincing replies to these issues would force the farming community to field its own candidates, he cautioned.

Demand

Mr. Nallasamy reminded the State Government that the farmers in the Lower Bhavani Project ayacut area were awaiting its action on their demand for release of water for cultivation of gingeley under the turn system in fields that had not been irrigated for the last two years.

The Government was in a position to release water since there was 10 tmc combined storage of the dams in The Nilgiris district, and 4.6 tmc in the Bhavani Sagar Dam, he said.

🔗 ***Unhappy with manifestoes of DMK, AIADMK***

🔗 ***PWD wasting water***

Centre seeks EC nod for relief to farmers

NEW DELHI, March 20, 2014 - The Centre has approached the Election Commission seeking permission to provide relief and rehabilitation to farmers affected by unseasonal rain and hailstorms in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. As the Model Code of Conduct is in force, the government has to seek the ECI's approval before implementing any policy decision. Maharashtra has sought Rs. 1,427 crore in relief for damage to the rabi crop on 17.69 lakh hectares in 28 districts. Madhya Pradesh has reported damage on 11.55 lakh hectares in 51 districts. The State has sought approximately Rs. 4,000 crore. Central teams have visited both States and submitted their assessment of the damage.

Karnataka has also given a memorandum to the Union Agriculture Ministry, reporting damage to 1.68 lakh hectares of agriculture crop and 15,298 hectares of horticulture crop in 13 districts.

A meeting of the high-level Committee (HLC) on Natural Calamity and the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM), chaired by Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, decided to extend relief to the affected farmers. But the panel was barred by the ECI from announcing its decision.

“The Election Commission only gave us permission to hold a meeting of the HLC and the EGoM, not to announce the decisions without taking its permission,” Mr. Pawar told journalists after the meeting.

No official report about suicides: Pawar

Asked about reports that several farmers have committed suicide in Maharashtra in the past three weeks, Mr. Pawar said “nothing has been officially communicated to us.”

Declining to divulge details of the HLC and EGoM meeting, he said he had, in 2009, disclosed some decision relating to sugar export and had to apologise to the Commission. He did not want to repeat that mistake, he said.

Seeking to dispel concerns over onion production, he said the output last year was more than double the previous year’s.

The Centre will seek the ECI’s permission also to implement the compensation directives the HLC issued for Arunachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, which were hit by floods last year.

Hailstorms caused huge damage to crops in Maharashtra, Karnataka, M.P.

Farmers yet to get crop sale payouts

Davangere district administration says it lacks funds



Farmers’ dues will be settled after the Lok Sabha elections, officials say.

DAVANGERE, March 20, 2014 - The district administration is yet to pay an amount of more than Rs. 150 crore to farmers for selling paddy and maize at procurement centres from January 24 to February 28.

The officials have expressed their inability to pay as the government had not released funds, alleged B.M. Sathish, BJP leader and former Chairman of the Davangere Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC).

Talking to reporters on Wednesday, Mr. Sathish and APMC member A.H. Chennabasappa said the Deputy Commissioner had promised to pay the farmers within three days of selling under RTGS but they had not yet done so.

When the farmers had met officials, they cited lack of funds and said their bills would be settled after the Lok Sabha elections.

‘Harassment’

This was in contrast to selling to private traders who would pay the farmers on the same day itself. Mr. Sathish accused the government of harassing the farmers and also demanded interest on the delayed payments from the government.

Mr. Sathish said he had filed a Right to Information application to find out the amount given to the contractor for transporting the crop from the procurement centre to the warehouse, who did not perform his job and left the farmers to handle their crops themselves. After getting the details he would take the district administration to court, he said.

Govt. will provide maximum relief to hailstorm-hit farmers: Chavan



Maharashtra CM Prithviraj Chavan during a visit to a grapes field damaged after heavy hailstorm at Hotgi village in Solapur. PHOTO:PTI

MUMBAI, March 20, 2014 - Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan on Wednesday assured that his government is committed to provide relief to hailstorm-hit farmers in the state and appealed to them not to take any “untoward decision” that could harm them.

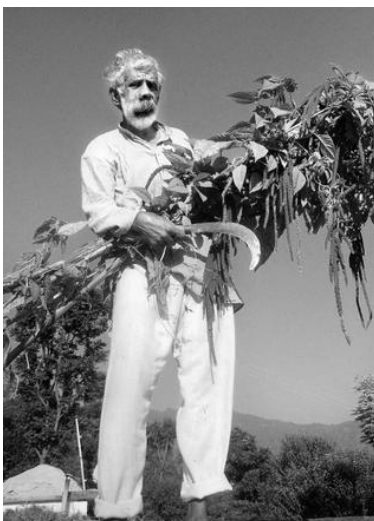
Chavan’s statement comes in the wake

of reports that several farmers have committed suicide in the hailstorm affected districts. “As you all know Lok Sabha elections have been declared and the Model Code of Conduct has been enforced.

Considering the magnitude of devastation, the government is trying its best to provide maximum relief to the affected farmers,” Chavan said.

“Myself and my cabinet colleagues have toured the affected districts and discussed the compensation to be given at informal cabinet meetings. The state government has demanded a financial package of Rs 5,000 crore from the Centre and also apprised the Election Commission of India about the damage caused,” Chavan said in an appeal to the farmers. He said a high-level group comprising Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, Finance Minister P Chidambaram, Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde, Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh and Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia, has been formed. A central team has recently completed its tour of the affected areas. PTI

Farmer’s notebook



saviour: The farmer is also credited with discovering an old tradition called Barahnaja . -Photo: Special Arrangement

The native seeds are high yielding and resistant to pests, floods and drought

Management of red hairy caterpillar in groundnut

Collect and destroy the egg masses

During active growth stage, groundnut crop is infested with sucking pests and defoliators. Among the defoliators, groundnut red hairy caterpillars, cause devastating effect on the crop by devouring the leaves.

Adult moths emerge from the soil with the onset of the monsoon.

A female moth lays about 600-700 cream coloured eggs in groups mostly on the under surface of the leaves and occasionally on other vegetation. Incubation period ranges from 2-3 days.

Larval period

Grown up caterpillar is reddish brown with a black band on either end having long reddish brown hair all over the body. It is the destructive stage of the pest. Larval period lasts for 40-50 days.

Pupation takes place along field bunds or in moist soil at a depth of 10-20 cm where they undergo pupal diapause for about 10-12 months. Adults are medium sized moths having white wings with brownish streaks.

Early instar larvae feed voraciously by scraping the under surface of the tender leaves.

Grown up larvae feed voraciously on entire foliage, flowers and growing points. They often migrate from field to field in search of food after devastating the foliage in the field where they have hatched. Severely damaged crop gives the appearance of having been grazed by cattle.

Control measures

- Collect and destroy the egg masses and voracious early instar larvae.
- The pupae may be collected at the time of summer ploughing and destroyed.
- Set up bonfires or light trap up to 11.00 P.M. after receipt of summer showers to attract and kill the moths.
- Dig the trench around the field at 30 cm depth and 25 cm width to check the movement of migrating larvae.
- To check early instar larvae spray phosalone 35 EC at 300 ml/ac.
- For grown up caterpillar spray fenitrothion or chlorpyrifos at 600 ml/ac in 300 lt of water.

(Dr. J. Ramkumar is Assistant Professor and Dr. R. Durai Singh is Programme Coordinator, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Ramanathapuram – 623 503, email: arsrarnad@tnau.ac.in, Phone: 04567-232639.)

How grazing affects climate warming



Local reindeer grazing history is an important determinant in the response of an ecosystem's carbon sink to climate warming. Tundra with a long history of intensive grazing showed a weak response to climate warming.

Turning shrubbery into environmental sensors



By using carbon nanotube sensors, researchers hope to develop plants that could be used to monitor environmental pollution, pesticides, fungal infections, or exposure to bacterial toxins.

Stop trials of genetically modified crops: writer

DAVANGERE, March 20, 2014 - M.G. Eshwarappa, noted folklore writer, and Andanuru Anjaneya, secretary of the Sharana Muddanna Savayuva Krishikara Balaga, have strongly opposed the permission given for field trials of genetically modified (GM) crops though it was established that these crops were hazardous.

Mr. Eshwarappa said that Veerappa Moily, Union Minister for Environment and Forests in February had stated that field trials of GM crops including GM varieties of rice, wheat, maize would be permitted.

But the Union Minister, when the farmers had surrounded him in Bangalore on Tuesday, had stated that he had not approved such trials.

Eshwarappa urged Moily to impress upon the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), which is meeting on March 21 to give further approvals for GM crop trials, to stop giving clearances.

Eshwarappa and Anjaneya have appealed to the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to learn from Kerala and Tamil Nadu which have rejected field trials of GM crops. They said that farmers in most places engaged in developing different seeds indigenously and they have been successful by sowing such seeds.

Crop loss put at Rs. 344 crore

A Central team from Delhi took stock of the crop loss in East Godavari district during its tour of areas where the loss has been extensive. The crop loss has been put at Rs. 344 crore by the Central team.

Foot-and-mouth vaccination campaign begins



Tamil Nadu - The animal husbandry department has launched a preventive foot and mouth vaccination drive in the State, which will be completed by Friday

Water level

The water level in the Papanasam dam on Wednesday stood at 50 feet with an inflow of 136 cusecs. The level at Manimuthar dam stood at 73.14 feet with an inflow of 30 cusecs.

Kanyakumari - The level in Pechipparai dam stood at 7.15 feet, 37.5 feet in Perunchani, 3.05 feet in Chittar I, 3.58 feet in Chittar II, 3 feet in Poigai and 42.14 feet in Mambazhathuraiyaru.

The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 48.94 feet on Wednesday against its full reservoir level of 120 feet. The inflow was 172 cusecs and the discharge, 500 cusecs.

Rice to take sea route to Kerala from now on

KOCHI, March 20, 2014: The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has decided from now on to regularly transport rice to Kerala via the sea route from Andhra Pradesh considering the advantages like almost zero transit loss and cleaner consignments.

An FCI official said here on Wednesday that 6,300 tonnes of rice, both raw and boiled, arrived here in containers for the first time and that the experience was encouraging.

The permitted level of transit loss is between 0.1 and 0.2 per cent of a consignment sent by rail and FCI official said that even this level of loss could be overcome by using containers for transport. The consignments will also be cleaner because of little or no contamination unlike in the case of rail rakes.

FCI officials are optimistic that if there are no labour troubles it would be possible for FCI to stick to the new schedule.

The Food Corporation would also be saving money because transport by rail involves consignments arriving here on Sundays when no unloading operations take place, forcing the Food Corporation to cough up extra payments in demurrage.

The Food Corporation of India transports approximately 1.40 lakh tonnes of rice and wheat, almost half the consignments being rice from Andhra Pradesh. Only a small quantity of raw rice was sourced from North India, making it possible to transport nearly the entire quantity of rice to Kerala by sea, the FCI official said.

6,300 tonnes of rice, both raw and boiled, arrived here in containers for the first time , and it achieved zero transit loss.

hindustantimes


Weather

Chennai - INDIA






Today's Weather

Thursday, Mar 20
Clear
Max 31° | Min 22°
Rain: 0
Humidity: 89
Wind: normal
Sunrise: 06:14
Sunset: 06:19
Barometer: 1013

Tomorrow's Forecast

 **Friday, Mar 21**
Sunny
Max 32° | Min 26°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday Mar 22	Sunday Mar 23	Monday Mar 24	Tuesday Mar 25	Wednesday Mar 26
				
34° 24° Sunny	34° 24° Partly Cloudy	29° 22° Overcast	30° 23° Overcast	29° 24° Overcast

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Maharashtra finalizes Rs 4,000cr relief package for hailstorm-hit farmers

: The state government on Wednesday evening finalized a Rs 4,000 crore relief and rehabilitation package to farmers in 28 districts in the state hit by unseasonal showers and hailstorms.

The decision was timed to take the wind out of the sails of the BJP, whose prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi will kick off the saffron alliance's Lok Sabha poll campaign from Vidarbha - one of the badly hit regions -- on Thursday.

The unseasonal rains and hailstorms had caused heavy damage to about 20 lakh hectares crops, killed cattle and destroyed other farmland properties, leading to a spate of farmer

suicides across Vidarbha, Marathwada and Northern and Western Maharashtra.

The state's relief package will benefit millions of agricultural families, and was decided at a cabinet meeting held in the evening with permission from the election commission. The package provides for compensation of Rs 10,000 -25,000 per hectare to farmers besides waiver of electricity bills for the next six months, sources said. The state will also waive off the interest on farmers' loans and will halt recovery of loans for a few months. Of the Rs 4,000 crore, the Centre will bear about Rs 1,600-Rs 2000 crore.

The formal announcement will be made by state chief secretary J S Saharia on Thursday as the election code of conduct prevents ministers from making such announcements.

The grim situation following the hailstorms had begun to badly hurt the poll prospects the Congress-NCP ruling combine. The latest deaths were of two farmers, one from Rajawadi village in Renapur taluka of Latur district, and another from Khandapur, who hanged themselves from trees.

Some social activists peg the farmer suicides at 80-100, far more than the average 80 such deaths that occur in the state every two months.

Crops such as horse gram, wheat, jowar, and fruit crops including Pomegranate, sweet lime, grapes, mangoes, bananas, watermelons, and papayas have sustained heavy damage while vegetable crops have been fully destroyed.

Modi plans to tap into the deep unhappiness and desperation of farmers by flagging off his poll campaign from Vidarbha. He will spell out the NDA's agriculture policy, state BJP chief Devendra Fadnavis said on Tuesday.

Modi will address a conclave of farmers at a village in Yeotmal and meet relatives of farmers who ended their lives.

THE HINDU Business Line

Raw sugar export subsidy under WTO scrutiny

New Delhi, March 19:

India's recent decision to give subsidies to exporters of raw sugar is facing international flak with many countries questioning its validity under global trade rules.

Major nations such as Australia, Colombia and Brazil, which export agricultural products, have said that the subsidies would affect their interests and distort the world market.

In February, the Cabinet approved a subsidy of Rs. 3,333 a tonne for export of raw sugar in response to rising stocks of white sugar in the country. The incentive is valid till this month-end. The incentive will then be reviewed by the Government before it decides if the subsidies should continue.

Under pressure

"The pressure being piled on India at the WTO is largely to ensure that the subsidies do not get extended for a longer period of time," a Government official told *Business Line*.

The opposing countries, in separate representations to the WTO, have asked India to explain the legal validity of the move under multi-lateral trade rules that do not allow new subsidies for exports.

The issue will be taken up at the meeting of the Committee on Agriculture on Friday where India, the world's second largest producer of sugar, will have to explain its move.

"India's defence is that WTO rules prohibit export subsidies only on finished products and raw sugar is a semi-processed item. It is, therefore, exempt from such restrictions," a Government official told *Business Line*.

But other exporting countries, including the world's top sugar producer Brazil, are not willing to buy the argument.

Brazil, in its submission, has pointed out that developing countries are allowed flexibilities for giving export subsidy (under Article 9.4 of the Agreement on Agriculture) only to meet marketing or transportation costs and there was no legally-binding decision by the WTO to extend its scope.

It also said that in case India says that the subsidies are for reducing marketing or transportation costs, it should give evidence of how it is happening.

Australia, Colombia and the European Union have asked India to specify the quantities of export that has already happened at the subsidised price and the period for which the subsidies will continue.

Output, exports

White sugar stocks in the country at the beginning of the current sugar year (October 2013-September 2014) was a whopping 8.8 million tonnes (mt). Sugar output in the on-going year is expected to be 25 mt against domestic demand of 22 mt.

Due to low global prices, Indian mills have exported less than 0.8 mt of raw sugar this season.

If the Government continues its subsidy programme for the remaining months of the season, exports could touch an estimated 4 mt.

Rs. 13.86/kg floor price for Nilgiris green leaf tea

Coonoor, March 19: Tea Board has announced the benchmark price to be paid to the tea green leaf supplied by small growers during March.

According to Tea Board Executive Director R Ambalavanan, as the schedule for Parliamentary elections has been announced, the meeting of the district-level Price Monitoring Committee for fixing the green leaf price will not be convened.

Price sharing formula

So, the Tea Board has fixed the benchmark price to be paid to the green leaf suppliers as Rs. 13.86 a kg in the Nilgiris, Rs. 10.93 in Idukki (Kerala) and Rs. 11.39 in Wynad (Kerala) districts.

"All factories are advised to pay the green leaf suppliers the highest of the two – this benchmark price or the rate arrived at in line with the price sharing formula for the factory concerned," he said.

Orthodox offerings drop at Coonoor tea sale

Coonoor, March 19: Amidst lower offerings of orthodox tea, 12.68 lakh kg is being offered for Sale No: 12 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association to be held on Thursday and Friday.

Of this, 2.83 lakh kg belongs to teas remaining unsold in previous weeks.

A volume of 8.78 lakh kg belongs to the leaf grades and 3.90 lakh kg belongs to the dust grades.

As much as 11.85 lakh kg belongs to CTC variety and only 0.83 lakh kg, orthodox variety. In the orthodox, both leaf and dust offerings are low.

In the leaf counter, only 0.42 lakh kg belongs to orthodox while 8.36 lakh kg, CTC. Among the dusts, only 0.41 lakh kg belongs to orthodox while 3.49 lakh kg, CTC.

Last week, due to inadequate demand, about 40 per cent of the tea offered worth Rs. 4.07 crore remained unsold. The volume of 7.76 lakh kg sold was the least among all auctions so far this year.

For that matter, volume less than this had not been sold since April 12, 2013.

The average price of Rs. 80.39 a kg was the least since January 10 this year. Collectively, last week's turnover of Rs. 6.25 crore was the lowest of past two years.

Among corporate buyers, while Hindustan Unilever Ltd bought good medium varieties, Tata Global Beverages Ltd, Duncans Tea Ltd and Godfrey Phillips India Ltd did not operate.

Stockist buying heats up edible oils

Mumbai, March 19: Sentiments in the edible oils market turned better in second half of day, tracking firm reports from the markets abroad and sharp gains in domestic futures. On the Bombay Commodity Exchange, palmolein rose by Rs. 5, while soyabean refined oil futures jumped over one per cent on the NCDEX. Sunflower and cotton refined oil dropped by Rs. 5 in spot. Trading activities witnessed sharp jump as stockists came forward with fresh orders.

Liberty was quoting palmolein at Rs. 645, super palmolein Rs. 665, super deluxe palmolein Rs. 685. Ruchi quoted palmolein at Rs. 645, soyabean refined oil Rs. 677 and sunflower refined oil Rs. 700. Allana was quoting palmolein at Rs. 645, soyabean refined oil Rs. 677 and sunflower refined oil Rs. 710. At Rajkot, groundnut oil was up Rs. 5. Rates for *telia* tin was Rs. 1,170 and Rs. 745 for loose (10 kg).

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs. /10 kg): groundnut oil 770 (770), soya refined oil 670 (675), sunflower exp. ref. 650 (655), sunflower ref. 705 (710), rapeseed expeller ref. 680 (680) cottonseed ref. oil 670 (675) and palmolein 632(627).

Centre to seek poll panel nod for relief to farmers

New Delhi, March 19: The Centre will approach the Election Commission to announce relief for the rabi crop losses suffered by farmers in parts of the country following the recent unseasonal rain and hailstorms.

"We have taken a certain view (on compensating the losses) and it will be communicated to the Election Commission on Thursday," said Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, after chairing an empowered group of ministers meeting on damage to standing crop.

"There will be some losses to foodgrain production, but it is not a worrisome situation. My worry is more about a section of the farming community that has been affected by the hailstorm and rain," Pawar said.

Asked about farmers committing suicide in Maharashtra, Pawar said there has been no official report so far on the suicides.

Rabi crops such as wheat, gram, jowar and mustard besides horticultural crops such as grapes, banana, mango, tomatoes and onions have been affected by hailstorm and rain in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab.

So far Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka have sought Central compensation for the crop losses. In Madhya Pradesh, standing crops have been impacted in about 11.55 lakh hectares across 52 districts in the State.

In Maharashtra, crops have been damaged in 17 lh spread over 28 districts, while in Karnataka affected area is estimated at 1.85 lh. "We will be sending a Central team to Karnataka soon to assess the losses," Pawar said.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivaraj Singh Chouhan has pegged crop loss in the State at Rs. 13,000 crore, estimating wheat crop loss at 20 lakh tonnes and gram at 10 lakh tonnes. Maharashtra has reportedly sought Rs. 5,000-crore financial package to compensate farmers' losses, agency reports said.

Spot rubber rules steady

Kottayam, March 19: Spot rubber ended almost steady on Wednesday. There were no specific factors to set a definite trend in the market and it lost direction amidst extremely dull volumes. "Major consuming industries are unlikely to re-enter the market now since we pass through the final few days of the current financial year," analysts said.

Sheet rubber continued to close unchanged Rs. 149.50 a kg, according to traders. The grade finished flat at Rs. 149 and Rs. 146 respectively, according to the Rubber Board and dealers. April futures weakened to Rs. 150.05 (Rs. 150.76) May to Rs. 153.05 (Rs. 153.59), June to Rs. 155.30 (Rs. 155.73), August to Rs. 155 (Rs. 156.06) and September to Rs. 155.63 (Rs. 158) while the July futures improved to Rs. 157.50 (Rs. 154.22) for RSS 4 on National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS-3 (spot) dropped to Rs. 140.80 (Rs. 141.72) at Bangkok. March futures closed at ₹243.5 (Rs. 146.15) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg): RSS-4: 149.50 (149.50); RSS-5: 146 (146); Ungraded: 142.50 (143.50); ISNR 20: 143 (143) and Latex 60%: 111(111).

Business Standard

Dry spell could mar Darjeeling tea

If rain gods don't intervene in the next couple of weeks, many tea lovers won't get to sip the Darjeeling first flush, the region's first tea crop after a period of dormancy.

Traditionally reserved for royalty in India, the Darjeeling first flush is now reeling under an unusually dry spell that has lowered production 65 per cent in March. Production in March is important, as it accounts for 10-15 per cent of the total quantity of first flush. About 80 per cent of the first flush is exported.

The first flush (March-April) comes in floral, mild and muscatel flavours and many favour it over the second flush (May-June), which has a more pronounced muscatel flavour.

"This is the flavour that mostly goes to continental Europe, including the UK," said Sanjay Bansal, chairman, Ambootia Group. Ambootia's Brumes D'Himalaya SFTGFOP1, the Himalayan Mists, is a first flush made for French gourmet tea company Mariage Freres, while the Spring Dance tea is retailed at London's famous store, Harrods.

"The situation is grim. If it doesn't rain in the next two-three days, revenues from the first flush will come down dramatically," said A N Singh, managing director and chief executive of Goodricke and chairman of the [Indian Tea Association](#). Goodricke owns Castleton, a favourite of tea connoisseurs across the world. In September 2013, 1.2 kg of Castleton had fetched a record Rs 88,000 at an auction in Russia.

TEA PRODUCTION

Figures in mn kg

Place	2012	2013
Assam	590.12	618.14
West Bengal [#]	279.30	315.26
South India	239.38	242.60
Others	17.53	24.04
All-India	1,126.33	1,200.04

[#] West Bengal includes Darjeeling production figures; Darjeeling production in 2012: 8.9 mn kg; 2013: 10.15 mn kg
Source: Indian Tea Association

The average price of [Darjeeling tea](#) is Rs 500/kg. Usually, the Darjeeling first flush is forward-contracted. Considering the private sales so far, this variety has seen the price levels recorded last year. Now, many are wondering whether tea producers in Darjeeling will be able to honour their contracts. "If the situation deteriorates and it doesn't rain for the next two weeks, that is a possibility," Bansal admitted.

Though Assam, another tea-producing region, is also recording dry weather, producers aren't particularly perturbed.

Unlike Darjeeling, which produces only 10 million kg a year, Assam produces 618 million (51 per cent of India's overall tea crop. Therefore, any drop in production assumes significant proportions in Darjeeling.

This season, [Assam tea](#) prices have risen 5-10 per cent. As of February, the tea crop in Assam saw a fall of 2.5-3 million kg.

For now, everyone is pinning hopes on the weather. "There are 30-40 per cent chances of rains in the next few days. Dark clouds have gathered," said the owner of a tea estate in Darjeeling.

Cardamom down 0.4% on profit booking

[Cardamom](#) futures fell marginally to Rs 859 per kg today as traders reduced holdings amid sluggish spot demand.

At the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), cardamom for May contract declined by Rs 4.30, or 0.49%, to Rs 859 per kg with a business turnover of 62 lots.

The spice for delivery in April month fell by Rs 4.10, or 0.48%, to Rs 829.70 per kg with a trading volume of 268 lots.

Marketmen said profit booking by speculators at existing levels and fall in demand at spot markets put pressure on cardamom prices in futures market.

Potato up 0.6% on pick-up in spot demand

[Potato](#) prices moved up by Rs 7.20 to Rs 1,182 per quintal in futures trade today, on increased spot demand against restricted arrivals.

At the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), potato for delivery in March rose by Rs 7.20, or 0.61%, to Rs 1,182 per quintal, with trading volume of just five lots.

The potato for delivery in April also moved up by Rs 5.60, or 0.46% to Rs 1,204 per quintal with a trade volume of 36 lots.

Analysts said increased demand in the spot market against tight supplies from producing regions mainly pushed up potato prices at futures trade.
