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# THE HINDU

## **Blast disease reduces 'Andhra Ponni'**

*Advathur farmers are worst hit; workers agree to reduce wages*

Farmers who have raised "Andhra Ponni" (BPT 5204 variety) are at a loss as the crop has been damaged because of the blast disease.

A number of farmers of Adhavathur near Tiruchi who have raised this crop are the worst-hit, as the disease has caused extensive damage.

Farmers who have raised the crop said that while they were expecting at least 50 bags an acre, the yield was just 10 bags.

The blast had eaten away the crop and they wanted the State government to sanction adequate relief.

## **Gesture**

The gravity of the loss is so serious that even farmer workers who had come to harvest the field, have volunteered to reduce their wages, particularly after ascertaining the poor yield.

## **Monitoring committees for DPCs set up**

To aid fair functioning of Direct Procurement Centres (DPCs) in the district during harvest season, the district administration has announced formation of inspection committees which will monitor procurement from farmers.

The committees have been formed in Madurai East, Madurai West, Tirupparankundram, Melur, Kottampatti, Vadipatti, Alanganallur, Tirumangalam, Kallikudi, Usilampatti, Chellampatti and Sedapatti blocks.

In an official statement, Collector L. Subramanian said availability of water had resulted in good yield in the district after nearly two [years](#) and a high paddy yield was expected from over 44,000 hectares of land.

“The farmers will be unable to get good rates in the markets and will depend on the DPCs, and the district administration will ensure smooth functioning of the centres,” he said.

Fine variety of rice had to be procured at Rs. 14.70 per kg and general variety at Rs. 14.10 per kg. “The farmers should get [the money](#) directly at the centres after their produce has been procured and no middlemen or traders should interfere in the [process](#),” he added.

### **Less yield**

Last year, most farmers in the district avoided the DPCs and sold their produce at high rates in local markets since the yield had been very less.

At present, 69 DPCs had been ordered to function in the district, of which 27 centres of Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC) had procured more than 490 tonnes of paddy from the farmers.

“The monitoring committees will comprise up to five members including officials from the Revenue and Agriculture departments and farmers from the block. Based on complaints, periodical monitoring and inspections of the DPCs will be undertaken by the committees,” said Joint Director of Agriculture Jaisingh Gnanadurai.

### **For complaints**

If there were complaints, the farmers could also contact the Regional Manager, TNCSC, at 0452-2534278 or the Assistant Registrar, Cooperative Societies, at 0452-2530911, Dr. Subramanian said.

### **Mobile soil testing unit**

The mobile soil testing unit would visit Madathattuvilai Primary Agriculture Cooperative Bank on February 9, Paraseri VAO office on February 10, Alur VAO office on February 11 and Manavilai Primary Agriculture Cooperative Bank on February 12 in Kurunthancode block. Farmers are asked to utilise the [services](#) of the mobile soil testing unit. [Results](#) of the soil test and necessary suggestions would be given to farmers’ instantly, says a release from collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan.

## Samba harvest in full swing

<b>A RICH HARVEST</b>	
● Farmers expect to reap 30 bags of paddy per acre this year	● Harvesters are being hired at Rs. 1,500 per hour
● One acre of paddy can be harvested in one hour in ideal conditions	● Shortage of experienced workers forcing farmers to hire harvesters
● 80,000 acres of land in Tiruchi district (delta) covered under paddy cultivation	

*Private parties buying paddy at Rs. 1,000 for a bag of 61 kg*

Samba harvest is in full swing in delta areas of Tiruchi district. Farmers are busy harvesting the Andhra Ponni variety of paddy which they cultivated using harvesters in the delta areas of Lalgudi, Musiri, Manachanallur, Tiruverumbur, Pullampadi, parts of Manikandam, and Thottiyam.

Subramanian, a farmer of Vellanur in Lalgudi taluk, was harvesting paddy on one acre of his land on Wednesday. He said he expected to get 30 bags of (60 kg each) from his one acre of land. Private parties are purchasing the paddy at Rs. 1,000 for a bag of 61 kg, he said.

Many farmers sold the paddy after keeping some quantity for their own use.

Harvesters were hired by farmers at Rs. 1,500 per hour. “If the crop is good and the field is dry, one acre of paddy can be harvested in an hour,” said the driver of the harvester who was busy harvesting paddy at Vellanur. The harvesters leave the straw in the field and carry the paddy grains with them, only to be dumped in the yard near the field after harvest was completed. “With non-availability of labour for harvest, almost in all delta areas of Tiruchi district, harvesters are used for harvesting paddy. There are nearly [100](#) harvesters in Tiruchi area,” said an operator of harvester.

Agriculture Department officials said that samba paddy had been cultivated on 80,000 acres of land in delta areas of the district.

Harvest, which started 10 days ago, would go on till February 20 in delta areas.

In non-delta areas, paddy had been cultivated on 35,000 acres of land. As the crop was late sown, paddy would come for harvest in March in non-delta areas, officials said.

Yield had been affected because of blast disease in some areas, Agriculture Department officials said. However, farmers had taken a maximum of six tonnes an hectare (2,200 kg per acre), they added. Horticulture crops were cultivated on most of the non-delta areas. While Vaiyampatti is a major vegetable area, mangoes were cultivated in Marungapuri, Manapparai, and other places.

### **Rural technology park promotes indigenous technologies**



The Hindu

**RELEVANT TECHNOLOGIES:** Dr. M.V. Rao, Director General, NIRD showcasing a new cooking energy concept. Photo: Nagara Gopal

*Government of India is setting up such parks in five African countries*

Not many would be aware that the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Hyderabad has a well established Rural Technology Park (RTP). Here, several relevant and user-friendly technologies are showcased which are useful for improving rural livelihoods.

Training is given to interested budding entrepreneurs for their skill up-gradation. After training, they are also assisted, so that they can start their enterprises.

The Institute has adopted more than [100](#) villages across the country where innovative ideas are implemented.

### **Current focus**

“We are also focusing on “Make in India” theme. The idea is to identify critical gaps and address them by enhancing the quality and marketability of the products having an [eye](#) on market demand.

“As the [Indian](#) market itself is so huge, rural producers can tap it and in the [process](#), create enormous value for their enterprises. This is a very important step, especially in creating opportunities for the rural youth across the country and also addressing the current unemployment scenario,” says Dr. M.V.Rao, Director General, NIRD.

For example, the Institute is promoting the concept of harnessing solar energy at a big level. Solar street lights have become very popular in all the villages adopted by the Institute.

Lights have been installed in all these villages with community involvement.

“Earlier a solar street light used to cost more than Rs.20,000, but thanks to innovative designs, the cost is now reduced to less than Rs.4,000 and several such lights have been installed in remote villages in Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Maharashtra,” says Dr. Rao.

### **Preserving food stuff**

Tee Wave, a technology partner with the Institute is working on this concept for preserving vegetables, fruits and fish.

Unlike traditional motors and appliances which run on high electricity, these appliances run on very low power DC motors. Hence, these are very useful in remote areas where electricity is a problem. For crops like soya, Saraswathi Mahila Gruha Udyog, a sort of self help group, has been created which is manufacturing a lot of products like soya milk, papad and soya powder.

## **Honey bee**

Those interested in honey bee rearing can visit the honey house to learn how to set up bee boxes, honey extraction and value addition. NIRD has been training hundreds of entrepreneurs in bee-keeping as well as honey collection and preservation.

Another component is the training programmes in bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides. This is fast finding a lot of popularity among the farmers from several states.

Emphasis is placed on how to manufacture bio inputs because sourcing inputs is a big problem for growers on time.

The institute conducts training on neem based enterprises and vermi-composting as these are eco-friendly and are preferred in organic farming.

Cooking gas is not available easily in villages. Rural women need to go to nearby forest areas to collect firewood for cooking.

The institute has developed various models and efficient technologies for cooking. These include models developed by Centre for Science & Villages (CSV), Wardha and Appropriate Rural Technologies Institute, Maharashtra.

## **Cooking stove**

NIRD has tied up with both these organisations to popularise these cooking stoves and various innovative models so that cooking happens faster with fuel efficiency. In some of these models, as a by-product, cooking coal is also produced. This is used again as fuel.

“We invite farmers, rural youth, women self help groups and NGOs across the country to come and visit our technology park so that they can get a better idea as to how it can help them,” says Dr. Rao.

## **Success**

The success of the technology park has encouraged the Government of India to commit setting up such parks in five African countries including Malawi and Zimbabwe to start with, as part of India-Africa partnership.

For more information interested readers can contact Dr. M.V. Rao, Director General, National institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, email : mvraoforindia@gmail.com, Mobile : 09703440004.

### **Milk: good, but not magical**

Embattled milk producers in the U.S. launched a [social media](#) campaign last week to rebuild public confidence in the health benefits of their product.

But how healthy is it? While the U.S. government urges milk consumption, some studies have begun to suggest potential ill effects from drinking too much of the white stuff.

### **The old hurrah**

A diet rich in milk has long been promoted as a way for children to build strong bones and muscles, and stave off the harms of osteoporosis in seniors. Proponents have especially noted its calcium, potassium, and Vitamin D content. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends daily consumption of fat-free or low-fat milk or dairy products, at 2 to 2 1/2 cups for younger children and 3 cups a day for older children and adults.

### **Raw milk concerns**

Some consumers say the healthiest type of milk is raw milk, straight from the cow. But health officials say milk must be pasteurized to kill off disease-causing germs like campylobacter and salmonella. Studies indicate pasteurization can affect a few of the vitamins found in milk, like thiamine, vitamin B12, and vitamin C, but milk is only a minor source of these vitamins. Overall, pasteurization does not significantly change the nutritional value of milk and it may save lives, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### **Recent questions**

Some scientists have begun to question previous statements about milk's benefits. For example, some researchers have noted low fracture rates in Asian countries where little milk is consumed, and questioned whether there is enough evidence to support the federal milk consumption recommendations. What's more, some studies have linked milk to risk of ovarian and prostate cancers

though many scientists believe more research is [needed](#) before drawing conclusions about milk as a cause.

### **The milk industry says**

A Swedish study prompted media headlines such as ‘Milk may not be very good for bones or the body.’ Calling it a breaking point, milk producers decided to do something more to address declining milk consumption and anti-milk [messages](#) from vegan groups, non-dairy competitors and others.

The new social media campaign highlights, for example, how much more protein a consumer can get from cow milk compared to almond milk. Milk producers also are arguing the importance of milk in a culture where soda consumption is high and many kids don't eat [recommended](#) amounts of fruits and vegetables.

### **Less than perfect**

The idea that milk is 'a perfect food' has been discredited, said David Levitsky, a nutrition and psychology expert at Cornell University. “But it remains a rich source of calcium and is still viewed as a valuable part of a well-balanced diet, especially for kids,” Levitsky said, adding that the bone-building benefits of milks fall off for people during their 20s.

“It's a good food,” Levitsky said. “But you shouldn't look at it as a magic food.”AP

### **Santhals turn away from agriculture**

Research undertaken by the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) has pointed to a shift in the socio-economic and cultural life of tribal communities like the Santhals over the decades.

A recent study conducted by the AnSI at Kuotala village in West Bengal's Birbhum district, has revealed that in six decades the economy of the village has shifted from agriculture to one of menial [work](#). Most men now work as daily labourers, rickshaw pullers and gardeners at private homes. The women work as maids



## **Simhadri unit down, agriculture hit**

Agricultural power supply was hit to some extent in Telangana, after a unit of the NTPC Simhadri power project in Visakhapatnam tripped on Tuesday. The plant tripped on Tuesday evening due to a boiler tube leak, affecting supply to the extent of 500 MW for Telangana and Andhra Pradesh [States](#). Telangana discoms have lost more than 255 MW of supply due to the glitch, which affected the balance between demand and supply. The unit will be restored by Thursday evening, officials said.

## **APCC delegation visits neera producing facility**

A delegation of the Asian and Pacific Coconut Community (APCC) conducted a visit at the Karappuram Coconut Producer Company at Kanjikkuzhy, near here, on Wednesday. The visit by 53 delegates led by Fiji Minister for Agriculture Inia Seruiratu was organised to understand the functioning of the neera producing company.

They interacted with company chairman and Kanjikkuzhy block panchayat president D. Priyeshkumar and chief executive officer P.K. Mani.

During the course of the visit, the delegation also participated in a demonstration session with members of the Friends of Coconut Tree (FoCT), an initiative of the Coconut Development Board. Enquiries were made regarding the coconut climbing machine. Sources claimed that nearly 10 orders had been received for the machine. A few delegates also tried a hand at using the machine. They were of the view that the equipment had great scope for utilisation in their countries.

The delegation later visited Kannankara and attended a demonstration by neera technicians, following which they [left](#) for the Central Coir Research Institute and the Coir Museum at Kalavoor.

According to the delegates, the visit was aimed at understanding innovative techniques and also exchanging technologies that were being utilised in coconut production.

## **Agricultural summit in Belagavi from February 21**

‘Agrovision’, a three-day agricultural summit, will be held at the Exhibition Complex at Autonagar here from February 21.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will inaugurate the event and Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium enterprises Kalraj Mishra and Gerardine Mukeshimana, Agriculture and Animal Resources Minister of Republic of Rwanda will be present.

The summit is being organised by the Karnataka Small Scale Industries Association (KASSIA) and MM Activ Sci-Tech Communications on the theme ‘Building sustainable livelihoods and increasing farmers’ income’.

KASSIA president and organising secretary Chidananda M. Rajamane told presspersons here on Wednesday that over 150 delegates would participate. Around 21 workshops would be held. The focus would be to lay a foundation for a more progressive and sustainable rural economy with thrust on agro-food processing, besides educating, encouraging and empowering farmers in the north Karnataka region.

## **Turning up the heat to grow crops of future**



Shiv Kumar Pushpakar

Warm temperatures have unexpected roles in controlling how plants grow and flower, two studies [show](#). The findings could aid the development of crops that adapt to changing climates.

### **Organic Mela in Hubballi from today**

Michael Commons, a permaculture expert from Thailand, will be here on Thursday to share his experiences in organic farming during an organic mela being held here for three days.

The organisers are Sahaja Samruddha, an organic farmers collective, Deshpande Foundation and Thailand based Earth Net Foundation. It is being held at Laxmi Sadan in J.C. Nagar.

Sahaja Samruddha convener Krishnaprasad told presspersons here on Tuesday that 67 pesticides that were banned across the world were being used indiscriminately in India. It was entering the human body through food. The mela would showcase healthy food crops being grown through organic farming, Mr. Krishnaprasad said.

Organic farmers from across the State and farmers' groups which were into organic farming would exhibit and sell products. Mr. Krishnaprasad said that a cooking competition of desi food would be held on Thursday at 10 a.m. For details call 9880274452 or 9538691868.

To a query, president of Savayava Krishikara Balaga, Virannagouda Patil said that they were aware of a few farmers branding their crops as “organic” without taking up organic farming and they were trying to bring into force an effective certification mechanism.

### ***Cooking competition to be held***

### **Experts in coconut sector felicitated**

The Asian and Pacific Coconut Community (APCC) felicitated three prominent personalities who had contributed significantly to the development of the sector. O.V.R. Somasundaram from Tamil Nadu, K.K. Haridas from Kerala and C.R. Vijayakumar from Karnataka were felicitated at the APCC meet here.

Mr. Somasundaram cultivates plantation crops under mixed cropping at his farm near Pollachi. K.K. Haridas, a doctor by profession, was felicitated

posthumously for his research in coconut.C.R. Vijayakumar pioneered the cultivation of IR-8 variety of paddy.

### **Training programme on cotton cultivation techniques**

A [free](#) training programme on summer cotton cultivation techniques would be conducted at Krishi Vigyan Kendra on the premises of Veterinary College and Research Institute here on February 17.

A [press](#) release from Dr. B. Mohan, Programme Coordinator, said that the training would be provided on cotton cultivation methods and techniques for higher productivity.

Farmers, members of women self-help groups can participate in the programme.

Interested persons can come in person on working days or [register](#) through phone numbers 04286266345, 266244 and 266650.

Participants will have to provide their Aadhaar number during [registratio](#)

### **Workshop on documentation of traditional knowledge**

The Karnataka Biodiversity Board (KBB) has organised a two-day workshop on documentation of traditional knowledge related to biodiversity among local communities.

The event will be held in Sagar city, beginning February 13, said board member M.D. Subhashchandran.

Farmers from Malnad region and persons from tribal communities with traditional knowledge of herbal medicines, preparation of bio-fertilizer and bio-pesticides, fermentation and food [processing](#) techniques, and those who have worked to protect rare varieties of plants and breeds of animals can attend the workshop.

Participants can document their traditional knowledge with the KBB, he said here on Wednesday. Documentation can be done by filling the form provided by the KBB.

A similar workshop was held at Sirsi in Uttara Kannada district last month, he said.

Persons interested in taking part in the workshop should [register](#) with the KBB by February 11.

For details, call (08386) 223426 or 9481048964.

### **[A compound in litchi behind mystery brain disease?](#)**



The Hindu

**SUSCEPTIBLE:** It was under-nourished children who were affected by the disease. Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

### **TOPICS**

#### [health](#)

A compound found in litchi seeds might be responsible for a mysterious brain disease that strikes many young children in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar each summer, according to two independent groups of researchers.

“Eating litchis is absolutely not dangerous for adults or well-nourished children,” said T. Jacob John, who is a paediatrician but is better known as a leading virologist. He was with the Christian Medical College at Vellore in Tamil Nadu.

Along with colleagues, Dr. Jacob John had [published](#) two papers last year in [Current Science](#) suggesting that ‘methylenecyclopropylglycine’ (MCPG), a

substance that exists in litchi seeds, could be behind the yearly outbreaks in Muzaffarpur, a major cultivation centre for this fruit.

### **The symptoms**

In these annual outbreaks, which peak in June, young children would be healthy in the evening but early next morning have convulsions and even become unconscious.

A large proportion of those affected died and many of those who survived continued to suffer from mental retardation, muscle paralysis or movement disorders.

It was under-nourished children who were affected by the disease, Dr. Jacob John told this correspondent. Children in poor rural families, typically of labourers working in litchi orchards, were the ones at risk.

In [work](#) just published in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, a large team of [Indian](#) and U.S. researchers, including from the National Centre for Disease Control in New Delhi and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the U.S., ruled out bacterial and viral infections as causative factors.

“One specific hypothesis” to explain the disease was that exposure to MCPG might cause very low blood sugar levels and brain problems in some children, noted Aakash Shrivastava and others in the *MMWR* paper.

In tests carried out in animals, MCPG has been shown to lower blood sugar levels and produce brain problems. It was found to interfere with a biochemical pathway in cells that turns fatty acids into glucose, which also resulted in the accumulation of toxic molecules.

In under-nourished children, who had little glucose reserves in their body, MCPG could be blocking their cells' ability to utilise fatty acids when blood sugar levels dropped early in the morning, remarked Dr. Jacob John.

As a result, the brain could then be deprived of the glucose it [needed](#). The toxic substances that MCPG produced could also be taking their toll on brain cells.

MCPG's mechanism of action is thought to be similar to the one produced by a toxin found in unripe ackee, a fruit found in West Indies and West Africa.

The clinical symptoms of ackee poisoning are similar to those displayed by affected Muzaffarpur children.

However, it has still to be conclusively established that MCPG in litchi is indeed the cause of the disease seen in children.

During the forthcoming litchi season, the MCPG levels in unripe and ripe litchi fruit as well as seeds would be examined, said Mukul Das of the CSIR-Indian Institute of Toxicology Research at Lucknow, a co-author of one of the *Current Science* papers published last year.

The published literature indicated that the compound was present in litchi seeds. The unripe fruit might be having more of it than the ripe fruit. “These things need to be tested,” he remarked.

In the *MMWR* paper, Dr. Shrivastava and colleagues said that laboratory investigations to assess the possibility of MCPG in litchis being the cause and to understand why only some children were affected are ongoing.



### A switch in time

A new study by Jean Dreze and Reetika Khera reveals dramatic improvement in Bihar’s public distribution system (PDS), with grain leakages coming down from 90.9 per cent in 2004-05 to 24.2 per cent in 2011-12. True, there is need for more micro and ground-level research to ascertain these findings, which are based on mere comparison of household PDS consumption data from National Sample Survey rounds with official grain offtake figures from the FCI. But if they are reasonably accurate, the figures on leakages are heartening. Seen alongside the vastly improved functioning of the PDS in Chhattisgarh and Odisha, they suggest it is possible to ensure proper delivery of entitlements even in poor [states](#). Indeed, once people start accessing their due rights, the pressure on the system to deliver also increases.

Having said that, however, the [current](#) system of grain procurement and distribution isn’t the best way to deliver entitlements. It is too deeply reliant on political will and the benevolence of individual chief ministers to [work](#). Leakages are the default setting, hardwired into the system’s DNA. That comes

from the very fact that rice sells in the open market for Rs 25-30/ kg, whereas it is sold through the PDS at Rs 3. To make this grain available, the FCI incurs an economic cost of Rs 30/ kg on procurement, stocking, transport and distribution. Indeed, it is less expensive as well as more efficient for the Centre to simply transfer the subsidy directly into the bank accounts of the targeted beneficiaries, for the latter to purchase their grain requirements from the open market. The government can always procure and [stock](#) just enough grain for it to undertake market intervention to contain any price volatility. With nearly 12 crore bank accounts having been opened under the Jan Dhan Yojana so far, this switch is possible.

The other reason why such a shift is necessary is that the average poor household consumes more grains, around 50 kg per month, as against the entitlement of 25 kg under the National Food Security Act. These families have to, then, acquire the balance from the open market. But with the government mopping up a third of India's rice and wheat production — and probably half the marketable surplus — the markets are shallow and denuded of supply. Direct benefit transfers will not make the poor any worse off than if they obtain their full PDS entitlements, while making access to markets for the remainder of their dietary requirements easier.



### **Recipe: Aloo samosa**

**Preparation time:** 30 minutes

**Cooking time:** 30 minutes

**Makes:** 16

### **Recipe Ingredients:**

**For the Cover:** 2 cup refined Flour 3tbsp Clarified Butter ½tsp Salt ¼tsp Carom seeds  
**For the Stuffing:** 6 large Potatoes ½ cup green Peas 2 green Chilies ½tsp Ginger, finely chopped 1tbsp Coriander leaves, finely chopped 1tbsp chopped Raisins 1tbsp chopped Cashew nuts ½tsp red Chili powder ½tsp Garam masala 1tsp Dry Mango powder Salt to taste



**Recipe Method:** Mix salt, carom seeds in the flour. Add melted clarified butter and mix well.

Add a little water at a time and knead into a soft pliable dough. Cover it with moist Muslin cloth and keep aside for 15 minutes.

Boil the potatoes and peas separately till done. Cool the potatoes and mash them well. In a bowl add mashed potatoes and add all dry masalas and green chilies, ginger and mix well.

Add green peas, cashews and raisins and mix well. Add coriander and keep aside.

Divide the dough into 8 equal parts. Roll each part into a 5" diameter circle. Cut it into two parts like semi-circle.

Take one semi circle and fold it like a cone. Use water while doing so. Place a spoon of filling in the cone and seal the third side using a drop of water.

Heat oil in a kadhai and deep fry the samosas in medium hot oil till golden brown.

### **Onion soup for the winters**



*Onion is probably the most underrated vegetable. While it is used in most every food item we make, little is said about it and it's mostly used as garnishing.*

However, if you wish to include more of this tasty vegetable, try making an onion soup. It's easy, nutritious and of course, a rather tasty and low-fat delicacy to indulge in.

**Ingredients** - 4 [medium](#) sized shredded onions - 2 or 3 garlic cloves - 2 tablespoon butter - 3 medium sized or 2 big sized potatoes, peeled and cut - 1 carrot, peeled and cut - 1 cup fresh vegetable [stock](#), or 2 Vegetable stock cubes - 1 liter water - Few leaves of soa, celery, parsley and coriander. Salt and pepper to taste.

**Method** Place frying pan on gas and put the butter in it. Peel and shred onion and add to frying pan. Fry them until golden brown. Add crushed garlic and mix well.

Add sugar, salt and pepper, soa, celery, parsley and coriander to the vegetable stock in a large pan. Or put the vegetable stock cubes in a pan of water and boil and

add all the herbs and salt and pepper. To the stock, add the fried onion and garlic mix.

Add the cut potatoes and carrots to the pan with the stock and simmer on low heat for 30 minutes.

After that, take the soup off the heat and put it all in a blender.

Remove and simmer for 10 more minutes until it's nice and warm.

You can add melted cheese to it and serve with bread sticks.

### **Lip-smacking Bengali dishes**



*We spent 24 hours with pure-bred Bengali chefs to learn everything there is to about river water fish.*

Bengalis have many loves. Among them, food and intellect sit neck and neck. In chef Puranjoy Das' kitchen at Worli's Cafe Nemo, they collide when we bring up the subject of galda (pronounced golda) chingri. The large fresh water prawns are usually cooked with the shell and head on to protect the delicate and delicious, brain that Bengali aunties vouch is responsible for its exceptional taste. It's also what differentiates 'their' prawns, from 'ours'. Purnendu Bose, of Vashi's popular Bengali restaurant, Iti, smirks, "Salt water prawns are stupid. The galda chingris yellow brain is edible, unlike sea water prawns."

Disdain aside, fresh water fish, which the Bengalis are masters in cooking, is a universe unto itself. The pomfret-surmai eaters find it intimidating to negotiate.

Das simplifies it by starting with three staple varieties - Katla, Bhetki and Pabda - and a dramatic pause later, includes Ilish (Hilsa).

What's so special about Ilish? It's the tastiest fish ever. Bengali bhodrolak are always [game](#) for a healthy debate, but not when it concerns the Ilish. It's so special, often feasts are cancelled due to its unavailability. Every year, newspapers in West Bengal and Bangladesh make it a point to carry a piece on Ilish's peak season price. It's also part of every significant Bengali feast — Durga puja, Kali puja, weddings (a raw Hilsa is dressed in a sari and [gold](#) nose ring to signify the [bride](#)). Available throughout the year in Kolkata, it floods markets between September and early November, and costs Rs 700 onwards per kilo. In Mumbai, it's not surprising to see it hawking at Rs 1,500 a kilo.

A member of the herring family, Ilish schools in coastal waters and ascends up the rivers and against the tide to lay eggs. "A good Ilish is recognised by its shine which comes from swimming against the tide. The more it swims upwards into the river, the better it tastes," says Bose, who gets a [supplier](#) from Kolkata to transport 40 kilos of it in ice boxes twice a week.

In the case of Ilish, the rules are well defined: the larger the fish, the lesser the bones and better the taste. Any Ilish that weighs less than 800 grams is not considered worthy of a reputed Bengali feast. "Be careful when buying Ilish from fish markets in Mumbai," warns Bose. Lighter and dull skinned Ilish are unlikely to hail from the Ganga. "Those could be coming in from the coast of Gujarat. They taste nothing like the real thing," he adds, predictably.

Ilish roe is to the Bengali what caviar is to Russians, but an Ilish with little or no eggs is your best bet. "It's a delicate fish. Its taste comes from the water in which it swims, and changes quickly. When it lays eggs, its flavour is transferred to the roe," explains Bose.

Which is why seasoned Bengali cooks won't wash Ilish after it has been cut. Also, unlike other varieties, the Ilish isn't fried before being slipped into gravy. "Rinsing the fish after cutting it rids it of flavour. Frying it means you are transferring flavour to the oil," says Bose.

How then do Bengalis savour the famous fried Ilish? "Each time we fry Ilish, the oil in the pan gets spiked with juices from the meat. The fried fish is served with a bowl of the oil on the side, which is drizzled over plain rice," he explains.

## **The handling**

### **Ilish or Hilsa**

**How to cut:** Once washed and scaled, Ilish is kept flat on a cutting board and chopped into three — the head, chunky tail and torso. The tail has the largest number of bones. Most restaurants pick these out before serving you boneless Ilish. The torso can make three or four robust pieces, spine intact. Holding the torso vertically and cutting it into two fillets disturbs the spine. This can result in slices that are unable to hold their form post cooking, making it difficult for eaters to negotiate the bones and reach the flesh.

### **Bhetki**

Bhetki (Barramundi or Asian sea bass) is the best fresh water produce for beginners, and lies at the heart of Bengali appetisers, says Das. A large fish found in abundance in Bengal, Bhetki has a long spine and no pin bones, which makes it easy to fillet and use for chops, fish fingers and kobiraji cutlets (the 'poet's cutlet' is made of mince, but sometimes, fish and is a fat patty laced in frothy beaten eggs. "It's flaky, white flesh is ideal for paturi (mustard marinated fish steamed in banana leaf) and European or Asian preparations like the steamed Bhetki with tamarind, ginger, shitake and cellophane noodles." How to cut: Take a knife, and starting at the tail, gently cut the fish along its belly, stopping just below the head. Cut outward, perpendicular to the belly. The cut will be towards the head. Continue the cut so the head can be removed. Pull out the entrails and rinse the exposed meat. Insert the knife behind the ribs along the

base of the backbone and move towards the tail. Repeat on the other side. Remove the spine along with the head to get two fillets.

### **Katla**

Katla or the major [Indian](#) carp and Rui (Rohu) are to Bengali homes what eggs and potatoes are to others — less celebrated, cheap and eaten every day. Available at fish markets in Mumbai for Rs 180 a kilo, they are what you will find in standard macher jhol and macher kaliya (snigger). How to cut: The fish is placed flat and hacked into three pieces —head, tail and torso. The torso is held perpendicular to the board and cut into two pieces, separating the back (gada) and peti (belly). Peti pieces are prized since they are tastier.

### **Prawn with a brain**

Sweeter in taste, with firm texture and size similar to that of a baby lobster, galda chingri are cooked in almost all Bengali homes and restaurants as the velvety chingri malai curry. However, Das, uses it in ingenious recipes such as Casino (see box), where he layers it with herbed garlic, shallot and bacon butter, topped with panko bread crumbs, oven baked on a bed of rock salt. "The only prep the galda chingri requires is a good wash. It is cooked with the shell intact to protect its delicious brain," Das says.

### **Bhetki Macher Paturi**

**Ingredients:** 6 pieces of Bhetki fish fillet For the marinade 1 tbsp turmeric, 1 tbsp red chilli powder, Salt to taste, 3 tbsp mustard oil

For Paturi 4 tbsp poppy seeds (khus khus/posto). Soak the poppy seeds in hot water for an hour, 5 tbsp mustard paste (use Bengali kasundi), 10-12 whole green chilli, 6-7 tbsp mustard oil, 1 tbsp kalonji (nigella seeds), ½ tbsp turmeric powder, Salt to taste, ½ tbsp sugar Banana leaves - cut into squares of 10 inches each (6 pieces), String to tie the banana leaves

### **Method:**

Wash the fish and marinate it in turmeric, red chilli powder, salt and mustard oil. Keep it aside for at least 30 minutes.

Make a thick fine paste of poppy seeds, mustard powder, six whole green chillies, turmeric and salt. To it, add kalonji, sugar, 3 tbsp mustard oil and mix well.

Take a banana leaf and pour 1 tbsp mixture onto the middle. Place a fillet on it. Add 3 tbsp more of the mixture on top. Place a slit green chilli on the fish and drizzle with ½ tbsp mustard oil.

Fold the banana leaf from four sides, make a parcel and tie it with a string. Repeat with other pieces. Place the leaf parcels in a steamer for 15 minutes.

*(Courtesy: Chef Puranjoy Das, Cafe Nemo)*

**Galda Chingri (tiger prawn) Casino**  
**Ingredients:** 1 tbsp chopped chives, 1.5 tbsp chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, 1 tbsp chopped scallion, 5 drops Tabasco sauce, 1 tbsp lemon juice, half garlic clove, roughly chopped, pinch of kosher salt, Cayenne pepper to taste, 4 tbsp unsalted butter, softened, 50 gm bacon (2 slices), 1 tbsp shallots, 50 ml white wine, ½ cup panko crumbs, rock salt for the baking sheet (optional), 8 galda chingri (fresh water tiger prawns); butterfly them with shell on, 2.5 cup rock salt

**Method:**

In a mortar and pestle, pound the herbs, garlic, Tabasco, salt, lemon juice and Cayenne pepper. Add the paste to butter and whip.

Cook the bacon, shallots and white wine until just cooked through. Ensure the bacon is still soft. Remove from heat and keep aside. Once cool, combine the bacon mixture with butter mix.

Preheat the oven to 200oC. Cover a baking tray with a 1/2-inch-thick layer of rock salt. Heat the tray in the oven for 5 minutes. Place the prawns, shell side down on top of the salt. Layer equal portions of the bacon and butter mixture on butterfly prawns. Sprinkle panko bread crumbs on top of the butter. Place the tray back in the oven and bake for 6-8 minutes. Serve with a lemon wedge.

## Where to buy

- Partho's Fresh Fish in Thakur Village, Kandivali stocks every fresh water variety you can think up, including the tough to find Ilish and Koi. Call: 9619561717

- Pushpa, a fish seller from Khar market has been popular among fresh water fish lovers in the western suburbs. Here, customers come from as far as Borivali to buy fresh Ilish and Katla. Call: 9819611625

- The fish market in Sector 9, Vashi also has a few fresh water fish stalls.

## Heard of beetroot laddoo and sweet potato puri?



*As they say, the best is always kept for last, we all [love](#) digging our teeth in sumptuous desserts all the. How about a twist in taste! Why not try some innovation in your kitchen by preparing these sweets that are sure you kick your taste buds.*

## Beetroot Laddoo

### Ingredients:

Beetroot- 1

Coconut- 1

Semolina- 2 cups

Sugar- 1.5 cup

Ghee- for frying the mixture

Cardamom- 2-3 nos.

**Method:**

Boil the beetroot first and grate it finely.

Grate the coconut and keep it aside.

Then mix grated coconut and semolina, and saute the mixture in ghee till it turns golden brown.

Take a pan, add 1.5 cup sugar, 1 cup water, then add the grated beetroot, and boil it for some time.

Then add the coconut-semolina mixture that has been sauted along with cardamom.

Then make them in round shapes, and garnish with raisins and cashewnuts.

**Sweet Kachori****Ingredients:**

Stuffing:

Grated coconut- 1 cup

Sugar- 4 tbsp

Khaskhas (poppy seeds)- 2 tbsp

Oil for frying

Ghee

Cashewnuts- 4-5

Raisins- 10

**For the cover:**

Wheat flour- 2 cups

Potatoes- 2

Sweet potato- 1

Salt

Sago (Sabudana) flour- for binding

**Method:**

Take a pan and then add finely cashewnuts, khaskhas, raisins in oil for tadka. Then mix this tadka in coconut.

Wrap this mixture in the coating made of potatoes, wheat flour, sago flour and sweet potato and shape them like kachoris and deep fry it in oil.

Serve with yogurt.



## Drinks Recipe: Pineapple ginger lemonade



*It is another refreshing drink for the summers*

**Ingredients:** One pineapple (chopped into big pieces), ginger, two tbsp lemon juice, three tbsp honey, three cups water, ice cubes.

**Method:** Mix all these ingredients in a cup of water and put in the blender, blending until it becomes smooth. Use the strainer to strain them and dilute with water. Serve chilled.

## 4 must eat white vegetables



*If white coloured clothes have a soothing effect on people, eating white vegetables is beneficial too and you should include more of cauliflower and garlic in your diet.*

Here's a list of healthy white vegetables that you should consume more, [reportshuffingtonpost.com](http://reportshuffingtonpost.com):

**Cauliflower:** It contains sulfur compounds that are associated with fighting cancer, strengthening bone tissue and maintaining healthy blood vessels.

**Mushroom:** Mushrooms are low in calories, fat-free, cholesterol-free, gluten-free, with barely any sodium, and yet they carry a wealth of selenium, potassium, riboflavin, niacin and vitamin D. Mushrooms are also filling, so they can help you control your weight.

**Garlic:** It is believed to help in growing hair, cause acne to disappear and keep colds and flu at bay. Its antioxidant properties can help boost your immune system.

**Potatoes:** The white potato provides as much fiber as and more potassium than other commonly consumed vegetables or fruit. A [medium](#) skin-on baked potato weighs in at just 163 calories, a whopping 941 milligrams of potassium and 3.6 grams of fiber. Potatoes also provide vitamin C, vitamin B6 and magnesium in addition to small amounts of high quality protein.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### To help growers, rubber import duty hike likely

Commerce Ministry moots 30% Customs duty to curb shipments into the country

#### New Delhi, February 4:

The Centre is looking at raising import duty on natural rubber to protect domestic growers against cheap imports and check a further fall in prices. The duty hike could be announced in the Union Budget.

“The Commerce Ministry has proposed to the Finance Ministry to increase the duty on natural rubber from the [current](#) 20 per cent to 30 per cent,” a Government official told *BusinessLine* .

Rubber growers have been asking for a higher increase in import duties, with some demanding that it be raised to 75 per cent. “Such a sharp rise would hit rubber users such as tyre manufacturers. We can’t allow that as all interests have to be kept in mind,” the official said.

With international rubber prices dropping to a seven-year low, imports have increased several-folds forcing domestic prices down to a five-year low. On Wednesday, RSS-4, which is used mainly by various industries, was quoted at Rs. 122 a kg at Kottayam and Kochi.

### **Rising imports**

In the first three quarters of the fiscal, rubber imports increased by 24.89 per cent to 3.26 lakh tonnes compared with the same period a year ago.

Rubber growers argue that their conditions are worse off because of the tyre industry's preference for cheaper rubber from South-East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand.

Low prices and demand have also dealt a blow to domestic production with several farmers either stopping tapping or reducing acreage. According to industry estimates, production in the first three quarters this year was lower by 17.33 per cent at 5.17 lakh tonnes compared with the previous year.

“We don't want domestic rubber production to stop because of cheaper imports. That is why we think there is indeed a case for raising duties,” the official said.

Rubber growers associations such as UPASI, APK and IRGA have sought imposition of safeguard duties (levies imposed to check a sudden surge in imports) on rubber and have submitted a petition to the Directorate-General of Safeguards. In order to take a balanced position on rubber keeping in mind all interest groups, the Government is formulating a National Policy for the rubber sector. An expert committee has been constituted to evolve a suitable regime for production, consumption, manufacture, and imports of rubber in the short term and long term.

### **Drip irrigation to be a must in Maharashtra's sugarcane farms; details being worked out**

The State has 9.37 lakh ha under sugarcane cultivation

### **Mumbai, February 4:**

Taking a cue from Karnataka, the Maharashtra government has decided to make it mandatory for sugarcane farmers to use drip irrigation systems in their farms. The fund raising and modalities of such a massive plan is being worked out by various departments of the State government.

Karnataka has schemes worth Rs. 4,500 crore for shifting the entire 4.20 lakh hectares of sugarcane farms to drip irrigation in the next three [years](#). In Maharashtra, sugarcane is cultivated on 9.37 lakh ha and therefore, expenses are expected to be double that of the neighbouring State.

Last week, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had announced that henceforth sugarcane cultivation would only be allowed on farms having functioning drip irrigation systems.

### **Water guzzler**

A senior State government official said that sugarcane requires huge amount of water and its growth has been at the cost of other crops. Planning has started for raising the funds to implement the project. On an average, the per acre cost of drip irrigation system is Rs. 40,000. The net outgo from the State exchequer as subsidy is being worked out, the official said.

A report on the sugar price policy for 2015-16 by Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices under the Union Ministry of Agriculture, has pointed that in Maharashtra, sugarcane cultivation, which is on less than 4 per cent of the total cropped area of the State, consumes 70 per cent of irrigation water. Future growth of cane in Maharashtra is likely to be severely hampered by scarce water supplies unless much of sugarcane is put on drip irrigation or varieties are evolved that use less water, the report said.

The report has starkly mentioned that sugarcane in Bihar consumes just 822 litres of water to produce a kg of sugar compared with over 2,100 litres in Maharashtra. Jagadeesh Sunkad, consultant, Asian Development Bank, said that Maharashtra government has taken the right decisions but the implementation needs to be fine tuned. [Today](#), a farmer provides water to his sugarcane crop once in seven days but with drip irrigation he will require daily watering, which is again dependent on power supply, he said.

Farmers require the right amount of subsidy, coupled with regular power supply and maintenance know-how at village level to service the drips otherwise it will be dead [investment](#) and only the plastic and agri-tech companies will benefit from it, Sunkad said.

***Producing one kg of sugar in Maharashtra requires 2,100 litres of water as compared to 822 litres required for the same in Bihar***

## bl05 com turmeric

### **Erode, February 4:**

#### POOR DEMAND DRAGS TURMERIC

Turmeric prices decreased in Erode markets on Wednesday following poor upcountry demand. Of the 3,800 bags that arrived 45 per cent was sold. Traders quoted Rs. 500 a quintal higher for the finger variety and Rs. 900 for the root variety and purchased more than 300 bags. The price of the finger turmeric in the Regulated Market Committee decreased by Rs. 350 a quintal, but due to arrival of quality root variety turmeric the price was up Rs. 750. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association Sales yard, the finger turmeric was sold at Rs. 5,840-7,814 a quintal, the root variety at Rs. 5,400-7,566. Salem Hybrid: The finger turmeric sold at Rs. 6,763-9,039, the root variety Rs. 6,584-8,539. New Mysore variety: The finger variety sold at Rs. 6,318-7,812, the root variety at Rs. 6,200-7,569. Of the 977 bags that arrived, 412 were sold. Our Correspondent

## Spot rubber prices improve

### **Kottayam, February 4:**

Spot rubber prices were mixed on Wednesday. The most active RSS 4 improved marginally tracking the sustained gains in global markets. There may not be a sharp recovery in prices unless the tyre companies come forward with regular and quantity buying orders, a dealer said. The daily reference price for RSS 4 was given at Rs. 130.70 (Rs. 129.15) a kg, by the Rubber Board. The grade improved to Rs. 122 (Rs. 121), according to traders. February futures recovered partially to Rs. 118.55 (Rs. 117.46), March to Rs. 119.60 (Rs. 118.47) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) increased to Rs. 108.91 (Rs. 107.61) at Bangkok. February futures closed at ¥205.3 (Rs. 107.94) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg): RSS-4: 122 (121); RSS-5: 107 (108); Ungraded: 98 (98); ISNR 20: 104 (104) and Latex 60%: 80 (78).

## **Sugar output up 15% during Oct-Jan**

UP, Maharashtra, Karnataka mills produce more

### **New Delhi, February 4:**

Sugar production this season (October 2014-September 2015) increased to 134.83 lakh tonnes (lt) as of January 31, about 15 per cent higher than the same period a year ago, according to data released by the [Indian](#) Sugar Mills Association (ISMA).

Sugarcane arrears have crossed Rs. 11,000 crore and the industry has demanded that the export incentive provided last season be extended.

Mills in Karnataka and Maharashtra are “in a dilemma” to produce raw sugar.

The association estimated that so far 39,000 lt of raw sugar has been produced by mills, far lower than the 5.94 lt produced by December 31, 2013.

Further, raw sugar futures had fallen below 14.50 cents/lb after crossing 16 cents/lb in the last week of [January](#), which made exports unviable, said ISMA.

### **Proposed incentives**

“Consequent to reports on Food Ministry’s proposal of incentive of Rs. 4,000/tonne for 14 lt of raw sugar exports in 2014-15, ex-mill prices had improved by Rs. 50-60/quintal but the momentum could not continue due to delay in CCEA’s decision and gazette notification from the Government,” said an ISMA statement.

Until September last year, the Centre had provided a subsidy between Rs. 2,277 and Rs. 3,371 a tonne for exports of 40 lt of raw sugar.

### **State-wise output**

In Maharashtra, the country’s largest sugar producing State, 175 mills produced 54 lt, up from 41.5 lt by 151 mills last season. “As per second advance estimate of ISMA... the State is likely to produce around 95 lt,” it said.

Mills in Uttar Pradesh produced 33.5 lt, up from 27.84 lt last season. The State is expected to produce 64 lt in 2014-15.

Karnataka had 63 mills engaged in crushing which produced 22.79 lt as against 22.2 lt produced by 59 mills at the same time last year.

Tamil Nadu, where crushing had been delayed due to the State government directing mills to pay a higher cane price, had produced 1.5 lt against 3.68 lt last season.

### **Marginal decline**

Gujarat also registered a marginal decline from 6.34 lt to 6.25 lt in 2014-15. Mills in Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana produced 1.50 lt , 2.40 lt and 2.20 lt till 31 January 2015, respectively.

In all, 508 mills were operating as on January 31 as against 491 at the same time last season. ISMA estimates total production for the [current](#) season to be 260 lt and pegs domestic requirement of 247 lt. Surplus [stocks](#) are likely to be around 20-25 lt.

According to industry sources, Cane Commissioners of major sugar producing States had a meeting with Food Ministry officials and revised their estimates of sugar production for this season upward by 5-6 lt.

*So far 39,000 lt of raw sugar has been produced by mills, far lower than the 5.94 lt produced last year. Further, raw sugar futures fell below 14.50 cents/lb after crossing 16 cents/lb in the last week of January, this made exports unviable*

## **Business Standard**

### **Fertiliser industry wants de-canalisation of urea imports**

**Presently, subsidy provided on urea is 90% on product cost while it is only 30% on other fertilisers**

The Fertiliser Association of India (FAI) has listed de-canalising [urea](#) imports, bringing urea prices to reasonable levels and ensuring timely payment of subsidies as its top demands in the run up to the Union Budget 2015-16.

“Presently, urea is imported completely by the government. We have made a plea that urea imports be de-canalised and prices of urea be brought to reasonable [level](#) to ensure balance in ferttiiser use. We have also urged the Government of India to ensure timely payment of subsidy to fertiliser makers. For [PPL](#) alone, the pending subsidy is about Rs 400 crore. The [FAI](#) has already submitted its pre-Budget memorandum to the Centre,” said D S Ravindra Raju,

whole-time director of Paradeep Phosphates Ltd (PPL).

Presently, subsidy provided on urea is 90 per cent on product cost while it is only 30 per cent on other fertilisers. This has created a huge imbalance in fertiliser consumption, prompting the farmers to buy more urea that has adversely impacting soil health, Raju said.

“One of our demands is to de-regulate the fertiliser sector to enable direct payment of subsidy to the farmers. Both de-regulation of the fertiliser sector and [de-canalisation](#) in urea imports is the need of the hour. Let competition and market forces determine fertiliser prices”, Raju said. At present, fertiliser subsidy is paid directly to the manufacturers of fertilisers. In case of urea, the retail price has been fixed at Rs 5,360 per tonne by the government and the difference between cost of production and retail price is paid as subsidy to manufacturers. Urea prices have remained largely unchanged over the last decade. “No greenfield fertiliser unit has come up in the country in the last two decades. This has raised the country’s import dependence. Timely payment of fertiliser subsidies will help stimulate new [investments](#) in the sector,” he added.

At a seminar held in December last year, FAI chairman and PPL’s managing director S S Nandurdikar had called for allocation of sufficient quantity of domestic gas in order to encourage domestic production of urea as well as phosphatic and potash fertilisers.

Vegetable prices up at Delhi wholesale market

**Vegetables as a [category](#) showed deflation of 4.78% in December y-o-y, which meant prices started rising substantially in January**

[Vegetable prices](#) in [Azadpur wholesale market](#) have risen in the range of 20-40 per cent in [January](#) 2015 as compared to the corresponding period last year. A few items saw a rise beyond this range. While carrots turned expensive by 129 per cent, peas, spinach and cabbage prices increased 87 per cent, 182 per cent, almost 96 per cent, respectively.

Data sourced from Agmarket.nic.in, which falls under the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, Ministry of Agriculture, showed that potato prices have fallen by 26 per cent during the same period. So did those of apple, among fruit.



Agmarket sources its data from all the registered mandis across the country, which falls under the ambit of Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee Act (APMC). However, data sourced from individual mandis might [show](#) a different trend as arrivals vary. The government for policy purposes usually relies on Agmarket data.

Data also showed that prices of carrots were up 129 per cent in January year-on-year, of peas 87 per cent. Cauliflower prices rose 23 per cent during the same period, tomato 44 per cent, brinjal 40.4 per cent and tur dal 28 per cent. (see chart).

Vegetables have a miniscule 1.74 per cent weight in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), [inflation](#) in which would move only slightly even if prices rise substantially. Besides, potatoes have a weight of 0.2 per cent in WPI.

Vegetables as a category showed deflation (decline in prices) of 4.78 per cent in December year-on-year, which meant prices started rising substantially in January.

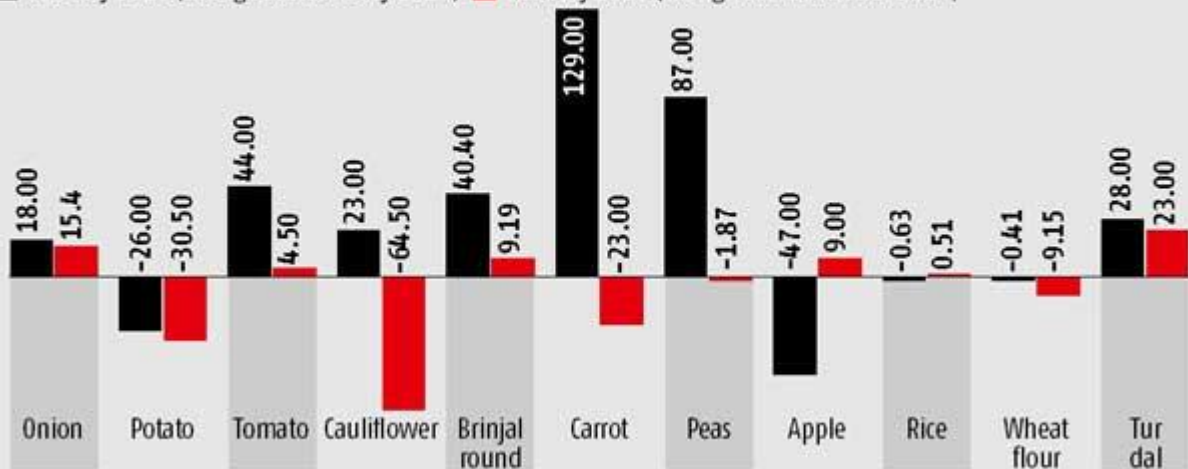
However, as compared to December, prices of some vegetables were down in January, perhaps due to seasonal impact and to some increase in output. Peas' prices dropped 1.87 per cent between December and January, while carrot was 23 per cent down. Cauliflower was 65 per cent cheaper in January 2015 as compared to December [2014](#).

## SCALING UP

Change in prices of select vegetables and fruit In Azadpur mandi

(in %)

■ January 2015 (change over January 2014) ■ January 2015 (change over December 2014)



Source: Agmarket.nic.in

Seasonal fruits were cheaper even on a yearly basis. For instance, apple prices were almost 47 per cent less than last year. Month on month, prices were nine per cent higher in January as compared to December. Fruits have a 2.11 per cent weight in the WPI.

The [WPI](#) inflation was only 0.11 per cent in December, a moderate rise from the flat prices in November.

“Potatoes are the cheapest this year and prices are expected to fall further in the coming months, barring a minor increase around late February and early March, when it is stored. Production is much better this year as compared to 2014,” said Trilok Chand, one of the biggest wholesale traders of potato at Azadpur.

“There has been an increase in prices as compared to last year’s mainly due to rain in some parts of the country and uncontrolled export of tomatoes, chilli and onion to Pakistan,” said Rajendra Sharma, president of the Azadpur market committee.

He said the impact of low fuel prices was usually felt on commodities which have a fixed selling price. In fruit and vegetables, it is primarily a function of demand and supply.

“In the peak arrival months of October to December, we used to get 2,500 trucks of fruits consisting of 10 tonnes each in Azadpur, which continued this

year as well. So, there is no supply shortage,” said Rajkumar Bhatia, one of the biggest fruits traders in Azadpur.

**a**

## **Attacks by the stem borer pest and dry weather have hit arabica output**

**Reuters | Mumbai**

India's annual exports of [coffee](#) are set to drop by a tenth in the marketing year ending September 30, hit by lower output of the [arabica](#) variety as farmers' demand for higher prices erodes foreign competitiveness.

Lower shipments by India, the world's sixth-biggest coffee producer, could further stiffen global prices of arabica, which jumped 50 per cent in [2014](#). Italy, Germany and Belgium are India's main coffee buyers.

"Exports will drop at least 10 per cent," Ramesh Rajah, president of the Coffee Exporters' Association of India, told Reuters. "Indian coffee is too expensive compared to other destinations."

Attacks by the stem borer pest and dry weather have hit arabica output, prompting [Indian](#) planters to demand a hefty premium for both arabica and robusta grades over New York and London futures.

India, which exports three-quarters of coffee production, shipped 303,290 tonnes in the 2013/14 marketing year. But since the start of the latest season on October 1, exports have fallen 13 per cent to 75,179 tonnes.

Production of arabica, which makes up a third of India's total coffee output, could fall 12 per cent to 90,000 tonnes this season, Rajah said. Arabica harvesting has nearly been completed but farmers are not willing to sell, holding out for prices to rise.

"The price has been fluctuating a lot abroad, expecting a drought in Brazil," said Anil Kumar Bhandari, a planter and a member of the state-run Coffee Board. "Indian farmers are waiting for prices to climb up again so they can commit sales." Adverse weather in top producer Brazil could widen a global coffee

supply deficit in 2014/15 and prop up prices, a Reuters poll of 13 traders and analysts showed.

Arabica coffee is typically roasted and ground for brewing and can vary widely in quality, with some reaching top levels.

Robusta, however, is more bitter, and either processed into instant coffee or added to a roasted blend to reduce the cost.

"A significant amount of arabica is still unsold," Bhandari said. "If prices stabilise, arabica exports can pick up from March-April onwards. Robusta supply will also start around that time."