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THE HINDU

Minister urges States to stock up on onions, food grains

The extent of the damage to crops due to the recent rains is not yet known as the Union Agriculture Ministry is still preparing its assessment.

During the march to Rashtrapati Bhawan against the Centre's Land Acquisition Bill on Tuesday, the Opposition had raised a slogan 'Narendra Modi, Kisan Virodhi'.

"The long-pending discussion on the agrarian situation in the country finally started in Parliament this [Wednesday] evening under Section 193... it will resume tomorrow [Thursday] when I will give my response in which I will list the steps for farmers," Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh told *The Hindu*.

He, however, said he had no knowledge of the high-level meeting or if a relief package comprising new measures for farmers was in the offing.

Mr. Singh said States such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh had already started the process of drawing assistance for farmers from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).

The Ministry has in addition advised States to draw from the Rs 500-crore Price Stabilisation that Fund Mr. Jaitley had announced in his July 2014 Budget to stock up on food items, especially onions and potatoes hit by disruptions in supplies, he said.

Inflation in retail prices of vegetables hit 13 per cent in February, according to official data released last week.

Better breakfast fetch higher grades: study

Reinforcing the connection between good nutrition and good grades, researchers have found that free school breakfasts help students from low-income families perform better academically.

The study suggests that subsidised breakfast programmes are an effective tool to help elementary school students from low-income families achieve more in school and be better prepared for later life.

“These results suggest that the persistent exposure to the relatively more nutritious breakfast offered through the subsidized breakfast programme throughout elementary school can yield important gains in achievement,” said researcher David Frisvold, assistant professor of economics in the Tippie College of Business, University of Iowa.

The researchers found that students who attended schools that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s School Breakfast Program (SBP) had higher scores in math, science, and reading than students in schools that did not participate.

Frisvold conducted his study by examining the academic performance of students in schools that are just below the **threshold** and thus not required to offer free breakfasts and those that are just over it and thus do offer them.

He found the schools that offered free breakfasts showed significantly better academic performance than schools that did not, and that the impact was **cumulative**.

Math scores were about 25 percent higher at participating schools during a student’s elementary school tenure than would be expected otherwise.

Reaping a good harvest



Government offices, educational institutions, households, and private enterprises have taken to vegetable cultivation in a big way over the last

couple of years. Survey Bhavan at Vazhuthacaud is among the lot that has a success tale to narrate with nearly half an acre of land on its premises being turned into a full-fledged vegetable garden.

It has been only three months since the initiative was launched at the office with the support and guidance of the Department of Agriculture. “When this new building came up, construction waste, plastic waste and all kinds of stuff were dumped in the compound itself. It was a sore sight for those who came to the office and for us employees. So we decided to put the land to better use and vegetable farming was the first option before us,” says D. Jayachandra Babu, first grade surveyor with the office.

A 10-member team, Krishikkoottam, comprising the employees was constituted to coordinate the farming activities. The employees took it upon themselves to tend to the plants after office hours and on holidays.

With two wells in the compound, water was never a problem. They have already had a good harvest of red amaranthus, tomato, brinjal, long beans, lady’s finger, chilli, snake gourd, bitter gourd, yellow cucumber and ivy gourd. Banana cultivation has also been started on the premises.

“This comes under the Department’s Vegetable Development Programme which propagates organic, pesticide-free farming. Minimum area required for the project is 50 cents and 27 such projects were given approval during the current financial year. Survey Bhavan was given Rs. 46,600 from the department and thanks to the interest and enthusiasm of the staff, including the Survey and Land Records Director Mithra T., the initiative has been very successful,” says P. Prabha, deputy director of Agriculture. In fact Survey Bhavan garden has been chosen as the best institution-level farm in the district.

“We have done business to the tune of Rs. 15,000 till now. The products are bought by employees themselves. The best thing is after we started the initiative, we are getting enquiries from various other institutions nearby,” Jayachandra Babu adds.

Haryana may return land to farmers

Haryana Agriculture Minister O.P. Dhankar on Wednesday said that the government would consider returning the panchayat land at Uhlawas village back to the panchayat if officer bearers sent a proposal demanding it.

The land was given to the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust.

He was replying to a question in the ongoing session of the Assembly, regarding the panchayat land at Uhlawas village, Gurgaon, which was given to the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust on a lease for 33 years.

The land was given for setting up a charitable eye hospital at the rate of Rs. 3 lakh per acre with five per cent annual increase with a stipulation that the hospital would be constructed within a period of two years of lease.

Chittoor gears up for tough summer

District Collector Siddarth Jain on Wednesday said the administration was geared up to tackle drinking water crisis in the district during summer, with an action plan being readied to create amenities at an estimated Rs. 100 crore.

The Collector was launching the one-day 'Public awareness campaign on government welfare schemes' at the TTD Kalyana Mandapam at Kuppam.

Mr. Jain said Chittoor district had been reeling under drought conditions for more than a decade, with groundwater levels dropping to below 1,300 feet.

"Apart from providing drinking water, our top priorities are water conservation works to sustain agriculture and providing water and fodder to cattle across the district. All officials and people's representatives should make concerted efforts tackle drinking water crisis during summer," he said and emphasising the need for greater public participation, "without which tangible results will not be possible".

The Collector also sought field-level officials of MPTC and ZPTCs, Panchayat Secretaries and members of Janmabhumi committees to actively participating in preparation of modules for smart village and smart ward concepts, besides launching massive awareness campaigns in all villages about the 20-point rural development agenda as envisaged by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. Madanapalle Sub-Collector R.V. Karnan, Kuppam Area Development Authority Special Officer Priyanka and Zilla Parishad Chief Executive Officer Venugopal Reddy were also present.

Tapioca price likely to remain stable

The Agro Market Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre (AMI&BPC) of the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Agri Business has indicated that the price of tapioca would remain stable in November and December.

To facilitate farmers take appropriate decision on sowing tapioca in March and April, the AMI&BPC at the Centre for Agricultural Rural Development Studies (CARDS), Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, analysed the price of tapioca in Salem market over the past 15 years to provide market intelligence for tapioca growers. The AMI&BPC analysis revealed that the price of raw tapioca would be in the range of Rs. 7 to Rs. 8 a kg in November and December 2015. The Exim policy 2016 may impact the prices of raw tapioca and their value-added products, according to the price advisory. At present, tapioca is ruling between Rs. 700 and Rs. 800 a quintal against Rs. 1,350 per quintal in March and April 2014. Sago which was sold at Rs. 6,700 a 90 kg bag had come down to Rs. 3,582 a bag. The price of tapioca starch, which was sold at Rs. 4,000 per 90 kg bag has come down to Rs. 2,260.

The farmers, who got a good price last year, could get only half the price this year. This was mainly because of the crash in sago and starch price because of higher production and less demand. Tapioca is cultivated on about 0.21 million hectares of land with a production of 7.74 million tonnes.

Tamil Nadu stands first in respect of tapioca production and processing it into starch and sago. Tapioca is cultivated in 14 major districts, including Namakkal, Dharmapuri, Salem, Villupuram, Tiruchi, Erode, and Tiruvannamalai covering an area of about 1.21 lakh hectares of land, the release added.

Seed farm inspected

The Director of Seed Certification, M. Radhakrishnan, recently inspected the State Government Seed Farm in Danishpet in Kadaiyampatti block and held discussion with the officials on the need to process adequate quality seeds.

Mr. Radhakrishnan inspected the model seed farm of paddy Co (R) 48 variety, nearing harvest, which stood on five acres and ascertained crop yield estimate.

He inspected the Ragi GPU 67 variety seed farm (on six acres); kambu Co (Cu) 9 seed farm (on two acres).

He directed the officials to ensure that the seeds are free from notified diseases. At the seed processing unit functioning on the same premises, Mr. Radhakrishnan inspected various registers.

He inspected the stock of both the field level seeds and processed seeds. He advised the officials to ensure total processing of the seeds up to 98 per cent purity.

R. P. Rajendran, Joint Director of Agriculture, D. Barani, Deputy Director of Agriculture, V. Rajadurai, Assistant Director of Seed Certification, Salem and other officials were present.

Emphasis on farm, health sectors



The Kasaragod district panchayat's budget for the 2015-16 fiscal lays emphasis on programmes in the farm, social welfare, and health sectors.

Presenting the final budget of the existing governing body, district panchayat vice-president K.S. Kuriakose projected an estimated revenue of Rs.137.53 crore while the expenditure figure was put at Rs.130.59 crore. A total of Rs.4 crore has been earmarked for agriculture and allied sectors while animal husbandry will get Rs.1.20 crore and dairy sector Rs.1 crore.

Mr. Kuriakose presented the budget in the presence of district panchayat president P.P. Shyamala Devi at the district panchayat hall here on Wednesday.

Organic farming

The budget has earmarked Rs.82.5 lakh for promoting organic vegetable farming, and Rs.35 lakh for taking up paddy cultivation in barren land.

Also, Rs.77 lakh has been set aside for agriculture-related infrastructure, including a bio-fertilizer plant.

Check dams will be built at a total cost of Rs.27.94 crore by utilising assistance from the NABARD.

The panchayat has set aside Rs.8 crore to address the woes of the differently abled victims of endosulfan. Also, Rs.7 crore has been earmarked for building new blocks at the district hospital. Rs.25 lakh has been earmarked for drinking water projects.

Rs.2 crore has earmarked for building new blocks at the Ayurveda hospital.

Housing scheme

The budget has earmarked an additional outlay of Rs.3.65 crore for general category under Indira Avas Yojana (IAY). Also, Rs.4.01 crore has been set aside for the Scheduled Tribes under the IAY and Rs.1.57 crore for the Scheduled Castes.

Rs.30 lakh will be utilised for building houses for financially backward Scheduled Castes families.

A total of Rs.1.84 crore will be spent to set up 16 anganwadis under the Shishupriya scheme in select pockets.

With the aim of promoting dairy sector projects, Rs.50 lakh will be utilised for providing cattle feed at subsidised rates, while the budget has envisaged schemes for promoting the rearing of the Kasaragod Dwarf breed of cows and in turn to promote organic farming.

Rs.50 lakh will be spent for educational schemes and Rs.1.08 crore for renovation of school buildings.

For maintenance of roads under district panchayat, Rs.25 crore will be spent and Rs.5 crore for repairing other roads. A total of Rs.1.32 crore will be spent for beautifying the district panchayat office premises.

‘Lacks vision’

The Opposition members said the proposals lacked a vision for development. The budget did not lay any special focus on mitigating the woes of the sizeable number of endosulfan victims or for the development of the backward district, Congress leader and district panchayat member Padoor Kunhamu Haji said. The proposals were a sheer repetition of the previous budget, he said.

He said it was startling to note that only Rs.25 lakh was set aside for drinking water projects in a district facing acute shortage of water. He said that at least Rs.5 crore should have been set aside to address the issue.

Farmers urged to set up cocoa-based cottage units

Farmers have been urged to form cottage industry units based on cocoa using technologies developed by the Kerala Agriculture University.

KAU Director of Research T.R. Gopalakrishnan said that the KAU had already released 10 improved varieties of cocoa, which occupy more than 70 percent of plantations in India.

“In fact, these varieties endowed with disease resistant qualities have helped rejuvenation of cocoa farming after die-back disease destroyed almost all plantations in the eighties. We are ready with five more advanced varieties and once the state variety release committee accords sanction, they would be available for farmers,” he said while addressing a two-day seminar conducted by KAU’s Cocoa Research Station in collaboration with the Directorate of Cashew Nut-Cocoa Development (DCCD), Kochi, at Vellanikkara, on Wednesday.

Addressing the seminar, Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) Vice-Chancellor P.Rajendran mooted a farmer-producer company of cocoa cultivators for enhancing the prospects of cocoa farming in the State.

Dr.Rajendran said that such a single-door marketing mechanism would enhance the bargaining power of farmers and ensure benefits of farmers' cooperative movement.

The Vice-Chancellor also stressed the need to train rural farmers in cocoa processing so that rural hubs in cocoa product diversification would come up in every district helping indigenous use of quality product. This will ensure maximum returns for the farmer.

“Cocoa, a cash crop, is an effective inter crop in coconut and arecanut orchards. It also contributes to soil nourishment through organic recycling. Thus proper approach in cocoa farming and processing can do wonders in enhancing farmers' income”, he said.

The seminar will conclude on Thursday after technical sessions on cocoa farming, processing, pest and disease management.

Dr. Koshy Abraham, Associate Dean, College of Horticulture; Dr. T.N.Jagdeeshkumar and Dr. A. Prema, members of KAU General Council; Dr. Venkatesh N Hubbaalli, Director , DCCD; M.R.Rajesh , Manager Mondeez India Food limited; Dr.B.Suma, head, Cocoa Research Station and Dr. Minimol spoke.

Food adulteration will be checked, says Sivakumar

The government will strengthen all measures to prevent adulteration of food items in the market, including rice, coconut oil, fruits and vegetables, Health Minister V.S. Sivakumar has said.

There was no need for panic regarding rumours about plastic content in the rice available in the market as scientific tests of several samples of rice across the State had failed to detect the presence of such contamination, he added, following a high-level meeting convened at the Secretariat here on Wednesday. He was referring to recent media reports on plastic contamination in rice sold in the State.

Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan and Civil Supplies Minister Anoop Jacob were present at the meeting.

The Secretaries of the departments concerned had been asked to formulate specific action plans to check adulteration of food items. Following complaints about plastic content in rice, the Food Safety Department had examined over 25 samples of rice from various parts of the State, but had found the allegations to be untrue.

The public could test samples of rice to check for adulteration or plastic content at the analytical labs of the government in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Kozhikode directly or through the Food Safety officials.

2,000 samples tested

Coconut oil adulterated with mineral oils had not been detected anywhere in the State in the past two years, though the Food Safety Department had tested over 2,000 samples. Some 300 samples of coconut oil were found to have been contaminated with edible palm oil and palm kernel oil and action had been initiated against the manufacturers and distributors.

NOFA to offer training in organic farming from March 21

The Natural Organic Farmers' Association (NOFA), a division of the Andhra Chamber of Commerce and Industry Federation, is organising field demonstrations and training in organic farming at the agricultural fields belonging to Kusalava International Limited at Adavinekkalam in Agiripalli mandal from March 21.

NOFA treasurer Ch. R.K. Prasad stated in a press release that the programmes would be conducted on third Saturdays of every month to spread awareness on the utility of organic farming to the people. Farmers would be shown the procedures that have to be adopted for growing crops the organic way.

The organic farming methods which involve relatively low investments were being popularised for the benefit of society at a time when indiscriminate use of fertilizers and other chemicals in growing crops endangered the public health, Mr. Prasad observed.

Vitamin D may help treat age-related diseases



The sunshine vitamin can be of great help for people during their sunset years as it may play a vital role in the prevention and treatment of diseases associated with ageing, says a study.

The researchers reviewed evidence that suggests an association between Vitamin D deficiency and chronic diseases associated with aging such as cognitive decline, depression, osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and cancer.

These findings were published in the *Journal of Aging and Gerontology*.

“Vitamin D deficiency is a common, serious medical condition that significantly affects the health and well-being of older adults,” said one of the authors Sue Penckofer, professor at Loyola University Chicago Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing (MNSON).

When the sun shines on our skin, the skin produces Vitamin D. A diet rich in Vitamin D or the intake of Vitamin D supplements can also cover our need to some extent.

Older adults are at risk for Vitamin D deficiency due to diet, reduced time outdoors and poor skin absorption of the nutrient.

“Better understanding the relationship between Vitamin D and chronic diseases in older adults and whether treatment of Vitamin D deficiency can prevent or treat these disorders is important given the increasing number of people at risk for these health issues,” researcher Meghan Meehan from MNSON said.

The Institute of Medicine generally recommends that adults up to 70 years of age take 600 IU of Vitamin D daily and adults over the age of 70 consume 800 IU of the nutrient daily.

As the older population continues to grow, universal guidelines for testing and treating Vitamin D deficiency are needed, the study authors concluded.

“Research to examine the proper dosing of Vitamin D supplements necessary to prevent the chronic diseases of aging also would have significant benefit for future generations,” they added.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Himachal targets 6.5% growth

The agriculture sector continues to occupy a significant place in the state economy and any fluctuation in the production of food grains and fruits affect the economy. According to Economic Survey report for 2014-15 released on Tuesday, the share of primary sectors, which include agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and quarrying, has declined from 25.1% in 2000-01 to 19.28% during 2013-14.

The report, which was tabled in the state assembly, has estimated growth rate of state for current financial year at 6.5% and per capital income at Rs 1,04,943. According to the report, agriculture sector in the state generates about 14% to the total GSDP, while secondary sector's contribution has increased from 26.5% in 1990-91 to 37.87% in 2013-14 -- reflecting signs of industrialization and modernization.

Benefits of Surya Namaskar



The simple Surya Namaskar that has been practiced in India for years has recently found a whole lot of takers. And if you want a good start to your day, what better than the Surya Namaskar, which is known to have a host of health benefits.

There are 12 different poses to do in a Surya Namaskar and you're known to have finished a complete round when you've performed two consecutive sets.

You don't need to be doing yoga regularly in order to practice the Surya Namaskar. If performed correctly, this exercise does not strain or cause injury. If performed in the morning, it relieves stiffness, revitalises your body and refreshes the mind. Do it during the day and it will instantly boost you up, practice it after sundown and it helps you unwind.

Not only does the Surya Namaskar give you a great stretch and keep you fit physically (it is extremely beneficial for your joints, ligaments and improves flexibility and posture), but it also does wonders for your mental and emotional health.

Surya Namaskar stimulates almost every system in your body — the cardiovascular system because it keeps the heart strong and, the digestive system as well as the nervous system.

It also makes endocrinal glands like the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands, function normally.

Practising the Surya Namaskar regularly is also known to ease stress and give you peace of mind besides increasing your levels of concentration. If you have trouble sleeping at night, the Surya Namaskar will help you fall asleep without using any external stimulants.

How to keep your plants healthy this summer



While some people are naturals at gardening, others are not. And plants can be really confusing at times, given so many different kinds of soil or fertilizers. But don't lose heart. Like you learn different languages, music or dance, gardening too is an acquired skill. Poet PB Shelley had once said, "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" Reinstating the poet's line, albeit in a different perspective, it could very well be a signal to all those green thumbs who have been planning a makeover for their balcony garden. For this is the time to replace your Petunia, Cineraria, Calendula, Chrysanthemum, Marigold and Dahlia with Periwinkle, Zinnia, Portulaca, Gomphrena, Calliopsis, Lily etc and enjoy a prolonged display.

Container gardens could also be a solution for those staying in rented apartments. Vegetables like cucumber, bitter gourd, pumpkin, chillies or even watermelon can be easily planted in pots and grown slowly through summer.

Trust us, it's not just fun, but really satisfying! You can't turn the sun off, can you? It's not just humans who suffer in the heat of summer, plants too need

proper hydration and care. And with some precautions, the season can be really good for your plants. So, before the plants and shrubs you tended to all winter wither in the scorching heat, here are a few tips to keep your greens healthy and blooming this summer.

POT POLICY

Now that the temperature is gradually soaring, it's time for a soil check.

Potted plants can be kept in a cluster. That way, they will face sun from one side only.

The plant soil should get more nutrients in summer to sustain high growth and extra energy that is required after the dormant winter.

Apply manures like cow dung, bone dust, vermicompost, hoofs and horns and oil cakes once in two to four weeks.

The morning sun is best for potted flowers and vegetables.

PLANT CARE

Sometimes, plants attract pests. Apply pesticides, preferably natural ones. Indoor plants do not require direct sunlight. But make sure they get at least bright natural light.

Sprinkle water twice a day for terrace plants. In case of potted plants, allow excess water to run out from the bottom of the pot into a saucer placed below.

Plants should be pruned occasionally to remove damaged parts and to help fresh growth.

Plants should never be permitted to wither. You can also cover the top layer of the soil with mulch (decaying leaves, bark or compost, spread around or over a plant to enrich or insulate the soil), containing wooden pieces, twigs, dead plant leaves etc. It will not only provide extra fertilizer for the soil, but will also help retain moisture. Small pebbles may also be used to cover the

soil from losing moisture. Sometimes, to make the leaves shine, wipe it with a soft, damp cloth.

FERTILIZERS

While planting a sapling or shifting it to a bigger pot, you can either use manure or water-soluble feed each week to 10 days all throughout summer. If you don't add nutrients to the soil at regular intervals, plants in containers, pots and hanging baskets will suffer.

Fertilizers are now available in various forms like powder, pellets sticks and liquids. Pellets sticks are the easiest to use. Liquids dissolved in water are best for house plants as they are evenly distributed throughout the potting medium to all roots.

Vegetables like chillies, pumpkins and brinjals often require extra manure for healthy growth.

RIGHT CROPS FOR SUMMER

Certain vegetables thrive well even in pots. You can either grow them in deep pots (12-18 inches in depth) or use planter boxes instead. However, it is very important to choose the right vegetables -the ones whose roots don't grow very deep. Get started if you want to grow vegetables at home. Cucumber, bitter gourd, pumpkin, watermelon, lady's finger, a variety of chillies and brinjal are best to plant this season. "For the proper growth of vegetables in your balcony, the pot size should be of 8-10 inches," advises Dr Rahman.

SUMMER BLOSSOMS

Summer adds colour and beauty to a garden because it is time for blossoms. It also means more heat and high humidity. Therefore, germination of the seeds becomes faster in the humid and warm soil. Bright indirect light usually is sufficient to encourage good flowering. It is good time to plant

some flowering saplings like Periwinkle, Zinnia, Portulaca, Gomphrena, Calliopsis, Amaryllis lily et al.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Untimely rain plays havoc with vegetable, pulse prices

Prices of vegetables and pulses are set to shoot up after unseasonal rain damaged over 50 lakh hectares of standing crops across the country, putting enormous strain on household budgets.

Consumers will have to pay more for potatoes, carrots, cabbages, mustard and almost all the pulses over the next few weeks. Rain in northern, central and western parts has caused widespread damage to crops in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

Inclement weather not only affects production but also the quality of agricultural produce, besides hampering movement of supplies throughout the supply chain, exacerbating the situation and pushing up wholesale inflation.

Wholesale Price Index-based inflation in February reflected higher food prices at 7.74 per cent. Further upward pressure in prices could force the Reserve Bank of India to think twice on policy rate cuts at its policy meeting early next month. Vegetable prices rose 15.5 per cent, while fruits surged 16.84 per cent. Prices for the politically significant onion rose 26 per cent.

Widespread damage

The Centre has estimated that standing crops over 50 lakh hectares (lh) were damaged — 27 lh in Uttar Pradesh, 14.5 lh in Rajasthan, 7.5 lh in Maharashtra, 50,000 hectares in West Bengal and at least 6,000 hectares in Punjab. “Wheat on some 6-7 acres of my 20 acres has been destroyed. Seasonal vegetables, potatoes in particular, besides cabbage and carrots have been affected,” said Karamjit Sidhu, a farmer from Kotla Suraj Lohar village in Amritsar district.

Farmers from UP said potato and mustard crops have been badly affected as also wheat, while pulses such as chickpea (*chana*), black gram (*urad*) and green gram (*moong*) have been hit to a lesser extent.

“Almost the entire mustard crop has been flattened,” said Rajiv Kumar, who owns 13 acres in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh. “The impact on wheat is less but more for mustard with hailstorms in Rajasthan and UP. There won’t be much addition to inflation on the basis of a slight fall in wheat output.

“It’s not clear how much damage there has been to potato and perishables,” said Suresh Pal, who heads the Division of Agricultural Economics at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute.

Wholesale and retail prices of vegetables, such as bitter gourd, cauliflower and brinjal, have already shot up this month in the Capital. Agriculture Produce Market Committee data showed that the average price of brinjal increased some 19 per cent to Rs. 17.6/kg in March from February.

During the same period, cauliflower prices rose to Rs. 20/kg from around Rs. 14/kg. Retail prices for bitter gourd and lady's finger have surged by 20 per cent, selling at Rs. 120/kg from Rs. 100 a month ago. Retailers expect prices, which have gone up by about Rs. 5/kg for most vegetables, to remain high with fresh arrivals not expected soon.

Delhi Govt acts

Agriculture Ministry officials refrained from giving estimates of the damage, but Delhi Government officials Gopal Rai and Asim Ahmed Khan convened a meeting this week to check the steadily rising prices and announce emergency measures.

These included the display prices of major vegetables at wholesale market yards and keeping an eye on commission agents

Growers prefer to sit on coffee, hoping to get better price



Tough brew The decline in farmgate prices here is mirroring the global trend in coffee prices, influenced by the developments in Brazil.

Bengaluru, March 18:

The recent drop in coffee prices, tracking the global trend, has rattled domestic growers and forced them to hold back their produce in anticipation of better realisation in the days ahead.

This is even as the harvest of the robusta variety has almost come to an end in key growing regions of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Since November last year, coffee prices have been volatile and declined sharply in recent weeks.

Prices of Arabica Parchment are now ruling between Rs. 8,800 and Rs. 9,000 per 50-kg bag against Rs. 10,500 in mid-December.

Similarly, Arabica Cherry prices are now hovering between Rs. 4,250 and Rs. 4,350.

Robusta parchment prices have now come down to Rs. 5,600- Rs. 5,900 against Rs. 7,130-7,350 a year ago, while Robusta Cherry prices are ruling lower between Rs. 2,800 and Rs. 3,000.

The decline in farmgate prices here is mirroring the global trend in coffee prices, influenced by the developments in Brazil.

Reports suggest that the next Brazilian crop will not be as low as originally expected, making prices volatile.

“Growers are holding back their coffee expecting that they would get a better price,” said K Kurian, Chairman of the Karnataka Planters Association.

Lower crop size

As the harvest comes to an end, the assessment is that the crop size of Arabica in Karnataka is lower than the Coffee Board’s projections at around 60,000 tonnes while that of Robusta is pegged around 2.1 lakh tonnes, Kurian said. But the decline in prices at the farmgate levels has not made any difference on the consumer so far.

Coffee Board Chairman Jawaid Akhtar confirmed the trend that the growers are not keen on selling their produce at current prices, hoping that they would pick up in future.

Shipments down

“Growers are not intending to sell at these prices, a trend reflected in the quantum of shipments as well,” said Ramesh Rajah, President of the Coffee Exporters Association.

According to Coffee Board’s provisional data for exports from January 1 to March 16, shipments are down by some 16 per cent at 66,059 tonnes against 78,658 tonnes in corresponding period a year ago.

Though there are buyers for coffee at these prices, growers are not willing to sell and are anticipating a rebound.

“There is a lot of mismatch between sellers’ expectations and current prices. As a result, there’s still a lot of coffee left in the hands of growers,” Rajah said.

However, exporters peg the Arabica crop size at around 90,000 tonnes, while that of Robustas should touch around 2.3 lakh tonnes.

For the current 2014-15 season, the Board – in its post monsoon estimate – has pegged the crop size at 3.31 lakh tonnes, some 8.7 per cent higher than

last year's final estimate of 3.04 lakh tonnes. Arabica output is pegged at 99,600 tonnes, while Robusta has been projected at 2.31 lakh tonnes.

Brazil connection

While a weakening Brazilian currency has given exporters of the Latin American nation an edge over others, Indian exporters are looking forward to some support from the Government in the forthcoming Export-Import Policy.

“We want the Government to increase the DEPB rates to around 2-3 per cent from the current 1 per cent,” Rajah said

Business Standard

ONGC helps paddy farmers by supplying water from Godavari



Following a request made by West [Godavari](#) district administration, the Rajahmundry Asset of [ONGC](#) lifted [water](#) from the Godavari River and released it into the canal to save the standing paddy crop suffering due to acute water shortage, a senior official said.

"District Collector K Bhaskar called upon the ONGC for saving the standing paddy crops in the mandals under the ayacut of bank canal of Godavari west delta through by lifting water from river Godavari. We responded swiftly to the request," Debasis Sanyal, Executive Director, [ONGC Rajahmundry Assets](#) said in a release here today.

ONGC deployed high discharge pumps to lift water directly from the river

Godavari and pump into the bank canal, at Dongaravipalem, hamlet of Siddantam mandal in West Godavari District, the release said.

"The company started pumping water at the rate of 2500 gallons per minute with two of its pumps. The pumps are operating 24x7," it added.

The mandals that would benefit from the move include Penugonda, Achanta, Poduru, Palakollu, Yelamanchali, Narsapuram.