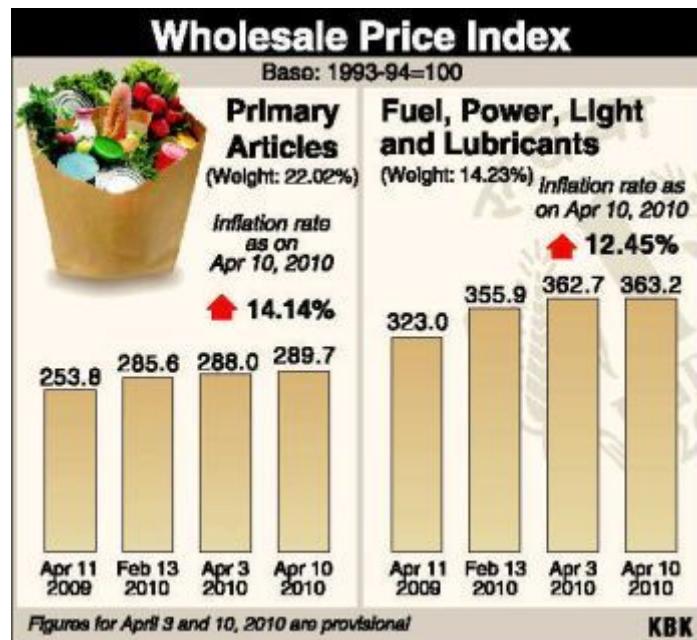


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Food inflation creeps up to 17.65 per cent

Special Correspondent



NEW DELHI: With the prices of certain essential items such as rice, milk, fruits and vegetables continuing to rule high, food inflation crept up further to 17.65 per cent for the week ended April 10 from 17.22 per cent in the previous week.

Fearing that the WPI (Wholesale Price Index)-based overall inflation — ruling at 9.9 per cent in March and well above its fiscal-end projection of 8.5 per cent — may shoot up further on account of the spill-over from food inflation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday this week hiked the key policy rates to squeeze money supply and get a hold on the price spiral. Analysts expect food inflation to soften on arrival of the rabi crop harvest in markets by the middle of next month and in case the Meteorological Department happens to forecast a normal monsoon in its initial projections to be unveiled on Friday. Clearly, while a good rabi harvest would moderate food inflation to a large extent, the deciding factor would be the monsoon as prospects of good rainfall would tend to douse overall inflationary expectations. On the contrary, if the pressure on food prices continues to persist, the overall inflation is certain to move up further, especially when manufactured products and fuel items are already witnessing price pressures.

Seed godowns' work to end in May

M. Balaganessin

For benefit of paddy growers, millet cultivators of Perambalur, Ariyalur districts

PERAMBALUR: Work on construction of seed storage godowns in Perambalur and Ariyalur districts has been in full swing for the benefit of farmers, especially paddy growers and millet cultivators.

It is expected to be completed by May-end.

Each godown, being constructed at an expenditure of Rs.25 lakh under the centrally-sponsored 'Seed Village' programme, has a storage capacity of 200 tonnes.

Its plinth area is 2,400 square feet and has a height of 12 feet for ensuring adequate ventilation and aeration for safe storage of the seeds.

"Presently, farmers of both districts stock their seeds at the depots of Agricultural Extension Centres. But, they face several odds especially space constraint, due to simultaneous stocking of fertilizers or the stagnation of rainwater during monsoon. The construction of the godowns will facilitate safe storage of the seeds," said V. Radhakrishnan, Joint Director of Agriculture, Perambalur.

R. Rajagopal, Executive Engineer, Commissionerate of Agriculture, who inspected the work on Wednesday, said the work would be completed by May-end.

The godowns are being constructed at Veppanthattai and Veppur (in Perambalur district); and Sendurai, Andimadam, T. Pazhur, Tirumanur and Ariyalur (in Ariyalur district).

S. Sivakumar, Assistant Director of Agriculture, said that apart from millets and paddy, the godowns would also benefit groundnut cultivators especially in and around Sendurai.

Seed processing unit sanctioned

Mr. Radhakrishnan said that a seed processing unit has been sanctioned for Veppanthattai in Perambalur district at an outlay of Rs.3.5 lakh.

So far, the composite Perambalur district accounted for a single seed processing unit, located at Tirumanur near Ariyalur.

"The farmers of Perambalur district were the worst hit, as they had to carry the seeds to Tirumanur. But, the construction of the seed processing unit at Veppanthattai will ensure expeditious processing of seeds. Further, it will also curtail the expenditure for the farmers to a great extent," Mr. Radhakrishnan said.

U.K. Malayali forum to help farmers

Staff Reporter

ALAPPUZHA: The Union of United Kingdom Malayali Associations (UUKMA), an umbrella organisation of Keralite associations in the U.K., has announced financial and technical support to scientific techniques adopted by farmers here.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, UUKMA president Varghese John Kalavaniyil said the union would join hands with the State government and extend help to small-scale agriculture entrepreneurs selected by the government.

The organisation was also planning financial assistance to the State's primary education sector and for development of basic infrastructure in the health sector.

Local self-governing bodies that required such assistance could contact the organisation through the government, Mr. John said.

UUKMA, through its website www.uukma.org, was also setting up links to help Indian students who desired to pursue higher education in the U.K., but were apprehensive about getting fleeced by fly-by-night education agents and consultants.

Details on the education facilities in the U.K. were being posted on the website, apart from tips on how to avoid being fleeced, he said.

Stating that the UUKMA, one of the largest non-resident Keralite organisations, was active in social welfare in the U.K., through various ways including crisis funds, Mr. John said the union had 48 associations under it, with around 20,000 families.

The organisation was planning to extend its activity to Kerala, and the proposed activities were part of this plan. Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan and Union Minister for Indian Affairs Overseas Vayalar Ravi had declared support for the organisation's activities, he said.

Horticultural crops bear the brunt of storm

Staff Reporter

Crops on 3,000 acres either partially or fully affected, say officials

Photo: T. Vijaya Kumar



Shattering impact: A farmer looks at the banana plantations at Vemuru in Tenali that were uprooted due to strong gales that lashed parts of Guntur district on Wednesday. —

GUNTUR: The thundershowers accompanied by strong gales left a trail of destruction in most parts of the district on Wednesday evening. Horticultural crops like banana, beetlevine and papaya bore the brunt with strong gales uprooting trees and banana shafts.

Assistant Director, Horticulture, division 1 A. Madhusudan Reddy and A.D-2 Padmavathi who toured parts of the district on Thursday assessed that crops on 3,000 acres were either partially or fully damaged.

Banana plantations in Thullur, Tadepalli, Mangalagiri and Duggirala mandals were damaged as the strong wind cut off the shafts. The plantations fell in the slushy waters incurring heavy losses to the farmers. Mangalagiri M.L.A Kandru Kamala too visited the damaged fields.

“We have estimated that horticultural crops extending to 1,200 acres in these four mandals were affected due to thunderstorms,” Mr. Madhusudan Reddy said. Papaya plantations in Mangalagiri, Tadepalli also were damaged. The damage was severe in parts of Tenali division, where over 2,000 acres was affected.

Assistant Director Padmavathi said that about 50 acres of banana plantations and 75 acres of beetlevine were damaged in Ponnur, 800 acres of banana crop got damaged in Kollipara mandal, 700 acres in Bhattiprolu mandal. In some of the fields the entire crop was uprooted presenting a pathetic sight.

The Department of Horticulture has prepared a report to be sent to the State Government. Farmers who had suffered partial damages would be eligible for input subsidies, the A.D said.

Farmers told to take up paddy cultivation under SRI method

Staff Reporter

ERODE: Collector R. Sudalaikannan has called upon farmers in the district to take up paddy cultivation under the System of Rice Intensification method to enhance productivity.

Participating in a special mass contact programme held at Jambai village in Bhavani block on Wednesday, the Collector said one farmer from each village should volunteer to adopt the system of rice intensification method for paddy cultivation and demonstrate its benefits to others. This would encourage other farmers to adopt the method and enhance the productivity of paddy crop in the district. The Agriculture Department would extend all necessary assistance to the farmers for the effective implementation of the method, he said.

Listing out various programmes implemented in the district, the Collector said the government continued to come up with new schemes for the benefit of people from all sections of the society. People should come forward to learn about these schemes and take full advantage of them to enhance their quality of life.

The district administration, he said, conducts mass contact programmes in selected villages every month and efforts were being made to spread awareness among people on important government programmes. Officials from all the government departments participate in these programmes.

Oil palm farmers disprove sceptics

G. Srinivasan

The tree gives yield for nearly 15 years, says farmer

Photo: M_Srinath



RICH SOURCE OF INCOME: A view of the palm seed bunches in an oil palm farm in Agricultural Research Centre in Pattukottai in Thanjavur on Tuesday. —

THANJAVUR: Oil palms have come to stay in Thanjavur district. When the crop was introduced in the Cauvery delta districts in 1994-95, there was scepticism regarding its survival in the delta. Many farmers who went for its cultivation uprooted the crop after three years though Government gave subsidy and encouraged them to sustain the crop. But many progressive farmers who took up the cultivation have sustained it and are now reaping a good crop.

R.Kaliyaperumal of Kakkarai village in Orathanadu taluk was one of the farmers who took up oil palm cultivation in 1994-95. Now the crops planted then have grown into big trees and are yielding bunches of fruits. He has raised oil palm on seven acres of land. Cauvery sugars which has put up an oil extraction plant at Varanavasi in Ariyalur district is marketing the fruits. "Previously, we have to take the fruit bunches to Thanjavur. Now they are procuring it at Orathanadu itself," said Kaliyaperumal.

Harvest is done every fifteen days. The price offered is Rs. 4 per kilo. "In Andhra Pradesh, oil palm is procured at Rs. 5 per kilo. Price can be raised here also," said Kaliyaperumal. Ten tonnes of fruits can be harvested per acre in an year. "I have taken even 14 tonnes of fruits. I get a net profit of Rs. 40,000 per year."

One interesting aspect of oil palm is that it gives yield for nearly 10 to 15 years when once cultivated. It comes for bearing on the third year. Maintenance is cheaper after initial stages. "I irrigate the plant through micro irrigation," Kaliyaperumal said. A bunch of fruit weighs 40 to 60 kilos. "Government is giving a subsidy of Rs. 7,000 worth seedlings (143 seedlings) per hectare in the first year. Subsidy in the form of fertilisers is worth Rs. 2,450 in the second year. In the third year Rs. 800 worth of fertilisers is given. In the fourth year Rs. 3,250 worth of inputs is given as subsidy for oil palm" said P. Loganathan, Joint Director of Agriculture, Thanjavur district.

The crop has been raised on a total area of 1,300 hectares so far in the district. The target area for 2009-10 is 110 hectares which has been covered. Target for 2010-11 is awaited from the Government.

"Farmers seek compensation"

Staff Reporter

Photo: N. Rajesh



Relief: A farmer speaking at the grievance day meeting in Tuticorin on Thursday.

Tuticorin: Farmers have demanded compensation for the banana trees that were destroyed by a gale on April 7.

During the grievance day meeting, presided over by D. Ravichandran District Revenue Officer and Collector-in-charge here on Thursday, they demanded a compensation of Rs. 100 for each damaged tree.

Referring to information gathered by the Deputy Director of Horticulture, Karunanidhi, he said a team had conducted a survey to assess the damage and an estimate of Rs. 1.34 crore was sent to the government seeking relief.

According to the survey, 3,35,581 banana trees were fully damaged and 11,863 trees were partly damaged on 158 hectares.

Meanwhile K.P. Perumal, district secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, sought power supply for agriculture purpose in three phase for a minimum of 14 hours a day as against supply for nine hours only. An official from the TNEB attributed it to power shortage.

Farmers from Ettayapuram, Vilathikulam, Kovilpatti and Ottapidaram blocks wanted compensation for pulses damaged on their fields in 2008.

There was also a demand for water supply to promote paddy cultivation and raise standing crops in kar season. Though the water level in Manimuthar and Papanasam stood at 80 feet which was sufficient, the officials concerned were reluctant to give, the farmers said. Mr. Ravichandran said that priority was given based on government's advice regarding supply of water for kar season, .

Totally, 86 petitions including 39 non agriculture petitions were taken up during the meeting. D. Ranjith Singh, Deputy Director of Agriculture, Balasingh, Agriculture Officer, and A. Dhanasingh David, Personal Assistant to Collector (Agriculture), were present.

Planters express concern over drought conditions

Special Correspondent

Udhagamandalam: The Nilgiri Planters Association (NPA) has expressed concern over the drought conditions prevailing since January in all the agro-climatic zones of the Nilgiris district.

Pointing out that it will lead to a steep fall in tea production during the months ahead, the Chairman, NPA, Jiten Pareek, said in a press release on Thursday that on the price front too the scenario was disappointing.

The data provided by the United Planters Association of Southern India Tea Research Foundation revealed that the district received the last useful rains on January 14. Some of the estates received meagre rainfall during the second half of April. The percentage of rainfall received during this period by Coonoor, Kotagiri, Kullacombai Kundah and Ooty was also far below the decennial average. The drought conditions were severe for the last 90 days.

The maximum temperature touched 33 degrees Celsius in the district and the relative humidity levels were below 40 degrees on many days during the months of February and March 2010. Plantation activities would be delayed resulting in drop in the yield.

Claiming that the situation had been further aggravated with infestation of mites almost throughout the district, Mr. Pareek said that the drought had led to high percentage of mortality in new areas and places where infilling had been done. The financial crunch would hit the industry badly. Adverting to the wage bills which had gone up considerably, he said that the cost of production had also gone up. While the industry was able to absorb the increase over the last two years, it was now on the brink of a financial crisis.

The need of the hour was financial assistance from the government, he added.

Mango farmers suffer heavy loss

Special Correspondent

VIJAYAWADA: Mango growers in Krishna district have suffered heavy losses with fruit, which was ready to be harvested, dropping in nearly 26,000 hectares because of the heavy gales on Wednesday evening. Mango fruit that drops from the tree is considered unfit for transport and, therefore, loses its value in the market.

Assistant Director of Horticulture K. Balaji Naik on Thursday said that horticulture crops on 26,681 hectares, out of a total of 71,279 hectares, were affected by the heavy gales. The gales caused mango spread over 25,951 hectares to drop and there was extensive damage to banana, papaya, drumstick and other vegetables in the remaining 730 hectares, according to "preliminary reports".

The gales affected fruit and vegetable gardens in 33 mandals of the districts. Farmers in 200 villages suffered losses, Mr. Naik said.

While the mango farmers suffered loss due to fruit dropping, farmers cultivating banana, papaya and drumstick suffered extensive losses with the gales breaking branches and uprooting trees. Though the mango farmers are not eligible for compensation, the farmers that raised other fruits and vegetables would be given compensation in the form of subsidy for inputs, he said.

Enumeration teams have been formed with a horticulture officer, an agriculture officer, an extension officer, a tahsildar and a village revenue officer and a detailed enumeration would begin on Friday so as to complete in "three or four days". The preliminary report will meanwhile be sent to the State government through the district collector, Mr. Naik said.

The damage to mango due to the gales, was put at 20 per cent.

Dairy farmers to get training

Staff Reporter

Training centre to be set up at Ammakandakara

Two-day dairy farmers' meet

from today

PATHANAMTHITTA: The Dairy Development Department and the Agricultural Technology Management Society will jointly set up a modern training centre for dairy farmers at Ammakandakara near Adoor. Minister for Food and Civil Supplies C.Divakaran will lay the foundation stone of the centre at a public function to be held at Ammakandakara on Saturday.

A dairy farmers' meet will also be held on Friday and Saturday as part of the function. A seminar on dairy development will be held on Friday. R. Heli, former director of the agriculture department and G. Sreenathan, former director of the dairy development department will address the seminar.

The stone-laying ceremony will be held at 10 a.m. on Saturday. The Revenue Department has already transferred 4.61 cents of land to the Dairy Development Department for setting up the centre. The Dairy Development Department has sanctioned Rs.59 lakh from its Rural Infrastructure Development Fund for setting up the centre in a time bound manner.

It is noteworthy that the State's largest watershed development programme will be launched in the locality.

Experts say that the proposed training institute in the vicinity of the Peringanad watershed development project area - spread over 6,150 hectares in Pathanamthitta, Kollam and Alappuzha - would help in boosting milk production. The financial aid for dairy farmers for 2009-'10 under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana would also be disbursed at the function.

Milma seeks hike in milk price

R. Ramabhadran Pillai

KOCHI: Kerala Milk Marketing Federation Limited (Milma) is hopeful of the State government considering the cooperative body's proposal to increase the price of milk.

The programme committee of Milma has recommended a hike of Rs.5 per litre and the decision will be conveyed to the government in a few days, Milma chairman P.T. Gopala Kurup told The Hindu on Thursday. The director board of Milma will meet in Kozhikode on April 29 to take stock of the situation.

Mr. Kurup says the government had approved Milma's proposals to hike the price on four earlier occasions. The government is expected to approve the proposal as there is dire need to provide better support to dairy farmers, he said.

Milma has been finding it hard to meet the market requirements as the domestic production is less than half of the total supply of over Rs.10.5 lakh litres of milk a day. The dwindling production is a sad reflection of the situation in the State's dairy sector — farmers are deserting it in search of more profitable occupations.

The production has been decreasing owing to a variety of reasons, says O. Reddy, a scientist of the National Dairy Research Institute, Bangalore, who has studied the problem. The cost of production in

Kerala is high in comparison to other States. The labour cost and cost of cattle feed are higher in Kerala, he told The Hindu. The farmer Karnataka gets Rs.17 to Rs.17.50 a litre where the cost of production is much less. The dairy farmer in Kerala is incurring a higher cost for the inputs while the returns are less. There are various departments dealing with the dairy sector in Kerala and this too has turned out to be counter-productive, he says.

Out of the proposed increase of Rs.5, the farmer will get Rs.4.60. Without the farmer's support Milma cannot exist, Mr. Kurup says.

Karur farmers to step up protest

Staff Correspondent

Plan to build the proposed textile park was dropped

Farmers to start building huts on the acquired land

DAVANGERE: Farmers of Karur village will lay siege to the Deputy Commissioner's office here on Friday demanding that the district administration return their lands acquired for a textile park.

The farmers have been staging an indefinite dharna in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office for a few days now.

Talking to reporters here on Thursday, Honnuru Muniyappa, president of Karnataka Rajya Raittha Sangha and K. Manjula, leader of the sangha, said that huge tracks of fertile land in Karur and surrounding villages had been acquired by the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) to set up a textile park. Farmers were told at the time of acquisition that thousands of youth from Davangere district would get jobs once the textile park was built, he said. The proposal to set up the textile park had now been dropped, he said.

The farmers also plan to stage a dharna in front of the KIADB office here on Friday. The farmers plan to erect huts on the acquired land on March 24 and from March 25 onwards, they would start cultivating the land.

The farmers said they were prepared to face any eventuality but would not allow KIADB or the district administration to hand over their lands to leaders of political parties.
