

THE HINDU

Karnataka may seek review on water release

The Karnataka government is likely to file a petition in the Supreme Court on Friday seeking a review of its Thursday's order asking Karnataka to release 2.44 tmcft (thousand million cubic feet) of Cauvery river water to Tamil Nadu for irrigating its standing crop in the delta basin.

This is said to have been decided during the flash visit to Delhi made by Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar and his Water Resources Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Thursday evening to hold discussions on the latest development with the State's senior counsel Fali Nariman here.

While Mr. Shettar merely told journalists that he had a discussion with Mr. Nariman and the decisions taken in the meeting would be announced in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Friday, State counsel Mohan Katarke told *The Hindu* that the legal experts were examining the matter. "The State has been advised by the legal luminaries to obey the SC's order on water release [to Tamil Nadu]" he said.

The CM and Mr. Bommai left for Bangalore night itself on a special flight. Informed sources said the State government had given fresh technical data on the water availability, drinking water requirements and other details which would be examined and utilised if there was a move to file a fresh petition in the Apex Court.

It may be noted that Mr. Bommai had, earlier in the day, informed the Legislative Assembly that "it [the government] is not in a hurry to release Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu". Water-levels had depleted across all the Karnataka Cauvery basin reservoirs and there was not enough storage to meet the drinking water requirements of Bangalore, Mysore and other towns in the basin, he had claimed.

Two new tobacco varieties

The Tobacco Research Station here has introduced two hybrid tobacco varieties — HV2000-6 Abirami CR and VDH-3 Kamatchi.

They were released on Thursday at the 4th Tobacco Variety Release Committee meeting chaired by its Chairman A. Chandrasekaran. Abirami-CR, the first hybrid variety to be developed by the research station, was a caterpillar-resistant, high-yielding and sun-cured chewing tobacco cultivar, said station Director T.G.K. Murthy. It registered the highest yield of 3,952 kg per hectare.

Abirami CR registered an increase of 9.1 per cent over the parent Abirami variety in cured leaf yield. Chewing quality was also superior and nicotine level low, compared to the traditional Abirami crop, he said.

Kamatchi (VDH-3), another high-yielding sun-cured chewing tobacco variety, had a production potential of 4,165 kg per hectare, which was 12.9 percent higher than the Abirami variety. It also had good chewing quality with high economic returns and tolerant to major field diseases such as black shank and leaf curl. It was also tolerant to leaf-eating caterpillar, and aphid attack. It had less nicotine and chlorides, he said.

The hybrids would replace the parent varieties immediately in the tobacco zone to scale down cultivation costs, improve productivity under pest stress and ensure higher income, he added.

Agro bazaar in Kalpetta

Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan will open an agro bazaar here at 9 a.m. on Saturday. The bazaar will provide agriculture implements and services for farmers under an umbrella in the district. M.V. Shreyamskumar, MLA, will preside over the function. — A Correspondent

Kiran says 'no' to waiver of farm loans

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

- **Naidu's promise of waiving farm loans is impractical: Chief Minister**
- **'UPA loan waiver amount was pegged at Rs. 60,000 cr. whereas as loans in the State alone will reach that amount next year'**
- **'PACS results reflect farmers' confidence on the measures being by the Congress'**
- **New irrigation projects have created new ayacuts or stabilised the existing ones in 23 lakh acres**

Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy has ruled out the scope for waiver of loans availed by farmers.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, Mr. Reddy termed as 'impractical' the promise of loan waiver. In an indirect reference to Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president N. Chandrababu Naidu's promise to waive crop loans, he said parties that were giving the assurance were 'hoodwinking' the farmers.

He pointed out that a whopping amount of Rs. 52,000 crore was proposed to be disbursed as loans to farmers this year and this amount would reach Rs. 60,000 crore next year. "When the UPA government announced loan waiver across the country, the total amount was pegged at Rs. 60,000 crore. The quantum of loan disbursed in the State alone is expected to exceed this figure next year," he said.

'Farmer-friendly'

Mr. Kiran Kumar Reddy said farmers reposed their confidence in the Congress government as 'farmer-friendly' government and gave their mandate in favour of the ruling party in more than half of the primary agricultural cooperative societies (PACS).

He, however, evaded a direct reply when asked whether the government was treating the results as an endorsement of his government's functioning even though the Congress could

win just two seats in Assembly bye-elections since 2009. "I have never made such claims. The results mandated that the government should work with more vigour to serve the farmers' cause," he said.

They also reflected the confidence on the slew of measures implemented since 2004 by the Congress including free power and increase in the minimum support price of food grains.

Referring to the Jalayagnam programme, he said the new irrigation projects had resulted in creation of new ayacut or stabilisation of the existing ayacut in 23 lakh acres.

Farmers advised to opt for alternative crops

Groundwater levels fall in Nalgonda district

With the levels of groundwater falling steeply in the district, between 10 and 30 feet in the last five years, and scarcity of irrigation water due to drought-like conditions, the Agriculture Department is advocating the need for farmers to select such crops which consume less water and also take less time to yield returns.

The water level is falling because of 'indiscriminate' drilling of borewells by farmers and others, a study conducted by the Agriculture Department has revealed. The depletion in level is 10 feet in Chandur mandal.

The study report shows that in other mandals like Vemulapalli, Nadigudem, Munagala, Mellacheruvu, Kodad and Chilkur the figure ranges from eight to six feet, while in Bhongir, Alair, Arvepalli and Tirumalgiri it is between four and five feet.

As a consequence, wells in several areas are drying up and the farmers are not able to find water in fresh borewells .

In such circumstances, the Agriculture Department is advising ryots not to go for paddy, which requires more water.

Instead, the department is impressing upon them to raise alternative crops like pulses, castor, jowar, groundnut, maize, til (nuvvulu), which utilise less water.

Farmers seek compensation for crop failure

They want Sankarankovil taluk to be declared 'drought-hit'



Seeing red:CPI(M) cadre staging dharna in front of Sankarankovil taluk office on Wednesday.—

Photo: A. Shaikmohideen

Urging the district administration to declare the entire Sankarankovil taluk 'drought-hit' after two farmers committed suicide reportedly due to crop failure, the farmers backed by Communist Party of India (Marxist) staged a dharna in front of the Sankarankovil taluk office on Wednesday. As weak monsoons have resulted in crop failure across Sankarankovil taluk, farmers Chendurpandian of Vellappaneri and Jeganathan of Varaganur, who had taken substantial loans from cooperative banks and local moneylenders for farming operations, allegedly committed suicide recently.

Solatium

Demanding a solatium of Rs. 10 lakh for the families of the two farmers, the CPI (M) has urged the State Government to pay compensation of Rs. 25,000 per acre towards crop loss. They also demanded waiver of the farmers' debt with the banks. Protestors led by State secretary of Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association, Shanmugam, took out a march from Swamin Sannidhi to the taluk office, where they were stopped by the police. Farmers were prevented from entering the taluk office premises, the protestors sat on the road and continued their dharna before dispersing. Tirunelveli district CPI (M) secretary K.G. Bhaskaran, heads of 19 village panchayats and a large number of farmers participated in the agitation.

Retail outlet for marketing Ooty tea inaugurated



Brewing well:Collector Jayashree Muralidharan inaugurating the sale of Ooty tea through Chinthamani Cooperative Supermarket at the collectorate in the city on Thursday.—

Photo:M.Moorthy

A retail outlet for marketing Ooty tea powder, set up by the Chinthamani Cooperative Supermarket, has been opened at the Collector's Office in the city.

The outlet was declared open by Collector Jayashree Muralidharan on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, Ms.Muralidharan said Chief Minister Jayalalithaa has ordered the sale of Ooty tea powder through cooperative ration shops at just Rs.15 for 100 grams so as to increase its sale.

In Tiruchi district, about 12,000 kg of tea powder of Incoserve (Tamil Nadu Small Tea Growers' Industrial Cooperative Factories Federation Ltd) was being sold through the ration shops every month.

The government has also given instructions to open retail outlets for the Ooty tea powder, she said.

The retail outlet would function from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. G.Radha, project director, District Rural Development Agency, G.Rajendra Prasad, Joint Registrar of Cooperatives and other officials were present.

Advocate commissioners to inspect flower market

Merchants allege lack of garbage disposal system

: The Madras High Court Bench here on Thursday appointed two advocate commissioners to inspect a government complex occupied by wholesale traders of paddy, agricultural inputs and flowers near Mattuthavani bus stand here. They would examine facilities available there for disposal of garbage and suggest suitable measures if the existing waste disposal system was found to be inadequate.

Justice K.K. Sasidharan made the appointments following a writ petition filed jointly by A. Vaithilingam, president of Madurai Flower Merchants and Commission Agents Association and 11 other members of the association. He ordered the two advocates, Mahaboob Athif and R. Meenakumari, to submit their inspection report by March 11.

The judge made clear that the Madurai Municipal Corporation Commissioner as well as the secretary of Madurai Market Committee should provide necessary assistance required for the advocate commissioners to measure the complex and prepare a detailed report indicating the location of the shops, garbage disposal yard and other relevant particulars.

While the writ petitioners were directed to pay a remuneration of Rs. 25,000 to one of the advocate commissioners, the Market Committee secretary was ordered to pay an equal amount to the other commissioner.

During arguments, petitioners' counsel N. Dilip Kumar said that as per the original layout of the complex, 154 shops were earmarked for paddy merchants, 60 for those selling agricultural inputs and 100 for flower merchants.

The layout contained provisions for vehicle parking, public amenities such as toilets, pathways and a garbage disposal yard.

Though tonnes of garbage was accumulated in the complex every day, there was no proper system in place to dispose the waste. The garbage bins were insufficient and some miscreants

used a canal located between the market complex and the Madurai-Melur Highway for dumping their waste.

The garbage was also burnt at times causing serious environmental and health hazards.

Even as the occupants of the complex were struggling to cope up with the existing facilities, the Market Committee had suddenly decided to construct additional shops in the space earmarked for dumping garbage and hence the present writ petition.

However, responding to it, the Market Committee claimed that it would not be possible to dump garbage at the earmarked area as it was situated very close to a high tension electricity cable. After recording their submissions, the judge asked the advocate commissioners to find out if the garbage generated in the complex could be dumped in an alternative place.

Minister to open dairy farmers' meet on Sunday

Minister for Dairy Development K.C. Joseph will inaugurate the Kozhikode District Dairy Farmers' Convention 2012-13, to be held at Koodathayi Bazaar, near Koduvally, on Sunday.

P.M. Vasudevan, Deputy Director of Department of Dairy Development, told reporters here on Thursday that the department, in association with Malabar Regional Milk Producers' Union, dairy cooperative societies, farm information bureau, Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA), and the Department of Animal Husbandry was organising a variety of programmes in connection with the convention from February 8 to 10.

Programmes

The programmes would begin with Koduvally Block panchayat president P.P. Kunhayin hoisting a flag at 8 a.m. on Friday at a venue named after Verghese Kurien, Father of White Revolution.

A cattle exhibition and veterinary camp would also be inaugurated by Mr. Kunhayin on the same day. The medical camp would be inaugurated by Omassery grama panchayat president Komala Valli while district panchayat president Kanathil Jameela would inaugurate an exhibition of equipment associated with dairy farming.

The Milma Fest would be inaugurated by Minister for Electricity and Transport Aryadan Mohammed on Saturday at 9.30 a.m. while Minister for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry K.P. Mohanan would inaugurate a symposium for dairy cooperative society office-bearers. M.K. Raghavan, MP, would give away the educational scholarship under the Dairy Farmers' Welfare Fund and honour senior dairy farmers on the occasion. Purushan Kadalundy, MLA, would deliver the keynote address.

A dairy quiz would be held at 2 p.m. on Saturday. M.I. Shanavas, MP, would release the District Dairy Handbook at 4 p.m. V.M. Ummer, MLA, would lay the foundation stone for the new building of Koodathayi Bazaar Dairy Cooperative Society.

The inaugural session to be held at 9.30 a.m. on Sunday would be presided over by Mr. Ummer. Minister of State for Home Affairs Mullappally Ramachandran would inaugurate the district-level celebrations of the golden jubilee of the Department of Dairy Development. P.T.A. Rahim, MLA, would inaugurate a seminar on dairy farming. A.K. Saseendran, MLA, would inaugurate the valedictory session of the convention at 3 p.m. Various awards for dairy farmers would be distributed on the occasion.

Mr. Kunhayin; Milma Managing Director K.T. Thomas; and Dairy Development Officer of Koduvally Block panchayat Varky Thomas were present at the press meet.

Pest surveillance project to be launched

Farmers in Kasaragod will soon be equipped with a technology- assisted system for targeted management of pests and crop diseases primarily using biocontrol methods.

The State Planning Board is taking up a pilot project on ICT (Information and Communication Technology)-enabled pest surveillance in the district with the involvement of the Department of Agriculture, Kerala Agricultural University and the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council, Kerala (VFPCCK).

P. Rajasekharan, Chief (Agriculture), Planning Board, told *The Hindu* that the groundwork for the pilot phase had been initiated. To be launched this month, the project involves a network of

field- level scouts trained to keep a constant tab on pests and plant diseases. Named Field Officers, the scouts will transmit the field level data to a central server using specially equipped mobile phones. The field data will be correlated with information on microclimatic conditions to generate an advisory for farmers for the week ahead.

Biocontrol

“Over the next two months, we hope to come up with a system that can automatically generate an advisory for farmers. The focus will be on biocontrol methods,” says K.M. Sreekumar, Associate Professor, College of Agriculture, Padannakad, who is coordinating the pilot project.

The Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management, Kerala (IIITMK) will host the central server for the field data. The institute is developing an Android- based application that will help the scouts to upload the data instantaneously from the field using a mobile phone. The GPS- enabled phones will also help the scouts to upload photographs from the field.

The National Institute of Plant Health Management (NIPHM) has been roped in to provide technical advice and train the field- level staff.

The pilot project will be implemented in 15 grama panchayats spread over five agro ecological zones in Kasaragod. It will cover eight crops, namely rice, coconut, arecanut, pepper, rubber, banana, cowpea and cucurbitaceous vegetables. “We have identified three pests and three diseases for surveillance. The project will also help to monitor nutrient problems like calcium, potassium and magnesium deficiency and iron toxicity,” Dr. Sreekumar said.

The seven scouts to be recruited shortly will visit the fields every week to collect information on the pest and disease situation. Additional information will be collected from padasekhara committees, Haritha Sanghams and banana farmer groups to confirm the accuracy of the data. A field supervisor will also be deployed to verify the data at periodic intervals. Efforts are on to equip one high school in each of the 15 panchayats to record weather data using a rain gauge, thermometers and hygrometer table. A teacher and two students in each school will be trained to record the microclimatic information on a daily basis.

“A pest or disease aggravates under three conditions, namely the innoculum (parasite), a susceptible plant and favourable climatic situation. By monitoring these three factors, it should be possible to develop a protocol for effective biocontrol,” Dr. Sreekumar explains.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

University of Agricultural Sciences will organize international workshop

The University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad is organizing International workshop on 'Promoting Small Millets for Improved Rural Economy and Food Security' in collaboration with M S Swamynathan Research Foundation of Chennai and McGill University of Canada on February 8 & 9.

The International workshop will be inaugurated on February 8 in the new auditorium of UAS, Dharwad by Dr. Alagusundaram, Director, IICPT, Tanjavur and Dr R R Hanchinal, Vice Chancellor, UAS, Dharwad will preside over the function.

Dr Sara Ahmed, Senior Programme Specialist, IDRC, New Delhi and Prof. G.S. Vijay Raghavan, Professor, McGill University, Canada are also participating as guest of honors. About 150 scientists, subject matter specialists, representatives of NGO's, students, millet growers and rural women entrepreneurs from different states of the country will be participating in this workshop. During these two days of workshop oral and poster presentation of scientific papers, Exhibition cum sale of value added products of millet will be organized. The workshop involves group discussion with experts, millet growers and women entrepreneurs to formulate new guidelines for millet production and promotion.

HindustanTimes

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Friday, Feb 8

Max Min

Sunny

29° | 22°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 06:34

Humidity: 89

Sunset: 06:12

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1013

Tomorrow's Forecast



Saturday, Feb 9

Max Min

Partly Cloudy

31° | 23°

Extended Forecast for a week

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Feb 10	Feb 11	Feb 12	Feb 13	Feb 14
31° 23°	26° 22°	26° 23°	26° 24°	26° 24°
Partly Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast

Bansal assures more rakes for onion transportation



The Railway Minister, Pawan Kumar Bansal today promised to provide adequate number of rakes required for the transportation of onions in the country.

The assurance came after Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar wrote a letter to the Cabinet Secretary, Ajit Kumar Seth about the shortage of rakes for transportation of onions.

“I have also received the letter from Pawar about the demand of rakes for onion transportation,” Bansal said, adding that “we will provide whatever number of rakes is required.”

The Central Railway had provided 50 rakes for transportation of onions in January and nine rakes have been given this month, he said.

Nine more rakes are required and we will provide that, he added.

Onion prices have increased sharply in the recent past.

The government has banned its export as part of its measure to control the prices.

Govt may allow export of 5 million tonnes more wheat



Private trade may soon get access to the wheat stored in Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns for exports, as the Government plans to allow an additional shipment of 5 million tonnes (mt) soon.

The Government, the biggest wheat stockholder with an estimated 30.8 mt as on February 1, is under pressure to create storage space for fresh produce as the country looks forward to a bumper harvest for the third year in a row. As on January 1, the current central pool stocks were close to thrice the prescribed buffer and strategic reserves of 11.2 mt.

EXPORTS

Sources said the Food Ministry had circulated a note for inter-ministerial discussions on allowing exports of an additional 5 mt for which the Union Cabinet is expected to set the price.

The Government has, so far, allowed exports of 4.5 mt from the Central pool stocks mainly by State-run trading corporations.

The State entities, such as PEC, STC and MMTC, have tendered about 2.5 mt so far and have actually shipped out 1.6 mt.

Private trade, which largely sources from the open market, has exported about 2 million tonnes.

Total wheat exports from India since October 2011 till date stand at around 3.6 mt.

BUMPER CROP LIKELY

India has emerged as one of the largest exporters of wheat this year and the bulk of it has been shipped to Korea and Taiwan, as also to neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Yemen.

The country, which produced close to 94 mt last year, aided by a conducive climate, expects to harvest a similar crop in the current year as acreage is almost similar to that of last year.

However, the temperature during February and March would decide the crop size.

The Government, which hiked the minimum support price for wheat by Rs 65 a quintal to Rs 1,350, expects to buy about 42 mt in the rabi marketing season 2013-14.

Seed industry wants export push

As it gathers in New Delhi for a three-day meet tomorrow in Gurgaon, the Rs 12,000-crore Indian seed industry wants the Government to facilitate exports to tap the Rs 2.5 lakh crore (\$50 billion) global seed business. It also wants the Government to give Income-Tax exemption and create conducive environment to encourage investments into the seed sector.

“We can be a major supplier of commercial seeds to global markets having good ecosystem of seed production. At present, our share in the global seed business is less than one per cent. We need Government support in removing bottlenecks for exports and provide infrastructure,” Raju Kapoor, Executive Director of National Seed Association of India (NSAI), told *Business Line* over phone, on the eve of the inaugural of the fourth edition of Indian Seed Congress. The three-day meet will be inaugurated by the Union Minister of Agriculture, Sharad Pawar.

Raju Kapoor said the US tops the list of seed business with a share of \$12 billion, followed by China with \$9 billion, France with \$3.5 billion and Brazil with \$2.5 billion. The Indian industry is expected to cross the \$3-billion mark by 2015.

Asking for measures to facilitate investments into the industry, he said the seed producers used to have IT exemptions till 2004. “But it was withdrawn later. The total outgo from this count is less than Rs 200 crore. But it means a lot for the producers,” he said.

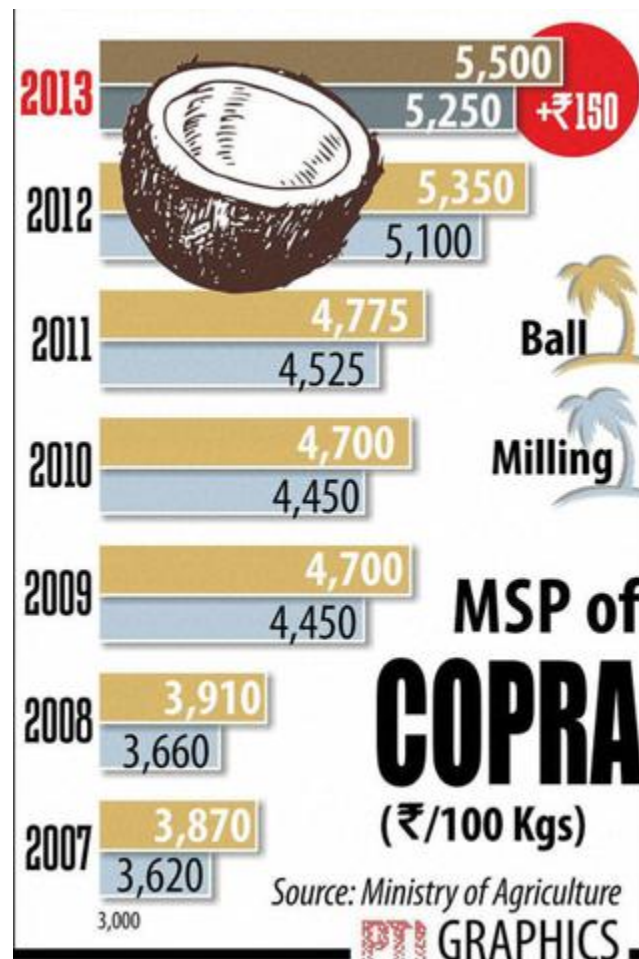
OPPORTUNITIES

He said there was a need to strengthen public-private partnership in order to improve agriculture productivity. The seed component was very small in the overall cost of cultivation but its contribution in the final outcome was very significant.

The theme for this year's Seed Congress is 'Seeds of change – enabling evergreen revolution'.

"It will discuss the Centre-State stewardship of seed sector, regulations versus controls, contribution of the seed sector," N.K. Dadlani, Director, NSAI, said.

Govt hikes copra support price by Rs 150 a quintal



The Government has hiked the minimum support price (MSP) for copra by Rs 150 a quintal for the 2013 season over last year.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Thursday approved the (MSP) hike for fair average quality (FAQ) “Milling Copra” at Rs 5,350 a quintal and “Ball Copra” at Rs 5,500, an official statement said.

PRICE SUPPORT

The increase in copra MSP is expected to encourage farmers to step up investment in coconut cultivation and thereby production and productivity of coconut in the country, the Government said.

The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (Nafed) would continue to act as the nodal agency to undertake price support operation at the minimum support prices in the coconut growing States.

Thursday’s hike in MSP is lower than the increase of Rs 250/quintal recommended by the Agriculture Ministry.

OUTPUT DATA

Bulk of the copra is produced mainly in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Production of copra in Tamil Nadu ranges between 7 lakh tonnes and 12 lakh tonnes a year while in Kerala it ranges between 5 and 10 lakh tonnes.

The peak season for copra starts by mid-March in Kerala and ends in June. However, in Tamil Nadu the peak season starts in April and goes on till August.

PRICES

In Tamil Nadu, the price of milling copra is ruling at Rs 4,450 a quintal, while the ball copra is traded at Rs 5,200, said Prakash B.Rao, Vice-President, Cochin Oil Merchants Association. In Kerala, the milling copra is currently traded at Rs 5,200 while ball copra is ruling at Rs 4,700.

Besides Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, coconut is grown on a total area of over 19 lakh hectares. Coconut is also grown in Assam, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal, Goa, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

Clear imperfections in onion market, cartels exist: CCI study



According to the report, market structure of onion is unilaterally dictated by the traders, not farmers.

Country's onion market, dictated by traders, has clear imperfections including cartelisation and hoarding that impacts price of the agricultural commodity, a Competition Commission study has said.

There are “clear imperfections in the onion markets and presence of interested cartels”, it said.

Bangalore-based Institute for Social and Economic Change conducted the study for fair trade regulator – Competition Commission of India (CCI). The report, which looked at competitiveness in major onion markets of Maharashtra and Karnataka, was submitted to the regulator in December.

“Results of seasonal indices, correlations, daily, monthly arrivals their prices etc, indicated existence of anti-competitive elements in the onion markets.

“A few big traders having well connected networks with market intermediaries in other markets seem to play a major role in hoarding for expected high prices,” said the findings, released recently.

According to the report, market structure of onion is unilaterally dictated by the traders, not farmers. Minimal role of farmers in price discovery due to low size of average farm holdings – 1.15 to 1.3 acre, unfavourable weather conditions and price risk are cited as major reasons for the situation.

“Most of trading is in the hands of commission agents and traders. Lack of trading expertise, market knowledge and risk bearing capacity has prevented most of the farmers to make any dent in onion trading,” it noted.

The report stressed that changes in onion prices have a huge impact on the food security, farmer and consumer welfare.

“Factors like significant marketing costs, lack of market infrastructure, control of trade in the hands of few traders, restricting entry for new traders, often strikes by market functionaries, etc. can also be responsible for high prices of onion,” it said.

During the agricultural year 2011-12, onion was grown in an area of 1.04 million hectares with a production of 15.75 million tonnes.

The study has also suggested various measures to improve the overall functioning of onion markets.

“To avoid collusion between traders, involvement of Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) officials in the auctioning process should be mandatory. Besides, co-operative marketing societies must be encouraged so as to prevent collusion amongst traders,” it said.

“Onion is one of the most market sensitive commodities that creates ripples in the trade as also political circles.

Its significant position in the diets across all income groups and an important ingredient in many Indian recipe causes wide ranging effects of any significant price change,” the report said.

Indian tea delegation to visit Iran

India is sending a tea delegation to Iran in the first week of March. The earlier plan to club the Iran visit with a visit to Pakistan has been abandoned in the wake of recent developments souring Indo-Pak relations.

The delegation to Iran is likely to be led by M. G. V. K. Bhanu, Chairman of the Tea Board of India, and would include representatives from major tea producers, the Commerce Ministry, the Indian Tea Association, the United Planters' Association of South India and a few merchant exporters.

India exports about 15 million kg of teas, mostly Orthodox varieties, to Iran through the official trade channel.

The three-day programme will include visits to Teheran and Isfahan and meetings with the Iran Tea Association and officials of several government departments such as the Iranian Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Health and the Department of Customs. There will be meetings with the officials of four commercial banks designated for handling rupee trade with India, besides a buyers-sellers meet. India has a list of about 50 Iranian importers of Indian tea.

The meetings are crucial for various reasons. The meeting with the Director-General of Imports & Exports of Iran is expected to help the delegation members assess the priority accorded to tea imports from India vis-a-vis imports of other commodities. The meeting with officials of the Health Ministry is important in view of the health-related standards Iran has set for the import of foodstuff and edibles, including tea. This will help Indian trade find out if Indian tea continues to meet those standards.

The Indian delegation, it is learnt, might insist on differential rates for minimum valuation of tea by the Customs authorities. Iran applies differential rates to teas imported from Sri Lanka. The argument being put forward for differential rates for minimum valuation is the low price of South Indian varieties of tea. Currently, all varieties of Indian teas attract minimum valuation at the flat rate of \$4.5 per kg. This rate, it is felt, should be lower for South India teas, which, being of low

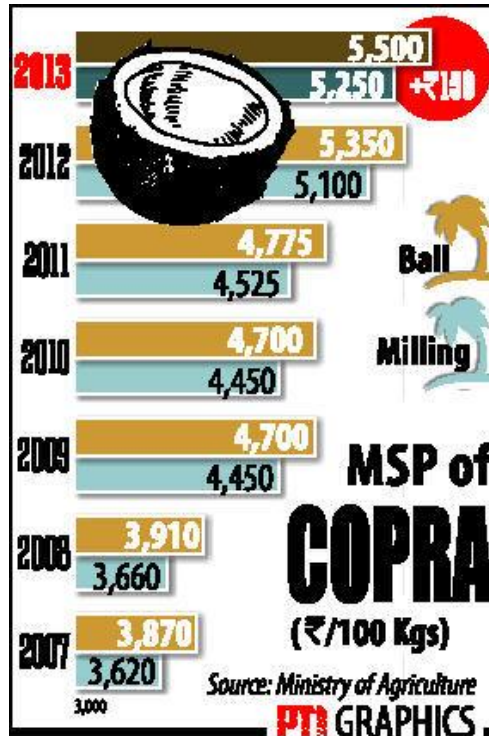
quality, are cheaper and, therefore, sell at lower rates. However, the contractual value of high quality North Indian varieties being high, the present rate should be alright for them. Right now, Indian tea imported by Iran attracts duty of 30 per cent — 19 per cent Customs duty on C&F value of the import plus another 11 per cent of commercial profit tax.

The meeting with the bankers will discuss, among other things, revolving Letters of Credit, it is learnt. Another factor which is causing concern to the Indian trade is the steady decline of the Iranian currency in terms of the dollar. The exchange rate now is believed to \$1=45,000 Iranian currency, nearly double the rate prevailing some time ago.

Govt hikes copra MSP by Rs 150 per quintal



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The increase in copra MSP is expected to encourage farmers to step-up investment in coconut cultivation and thereby production and productivity, the Government said.

National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (Nafed) would continue to act as the nodal agency to undertake price support operations in the coconut-growing states.

Coconut is grown in a total area of over 19 lakh hectares in States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It is also grown in Assam, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal, Goa, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

Jeera crackles on weak overseas demand



On the back of weak overseas demand and below normal domestic buying, jeera was traded flat in spot on Thursday, while a mixed trend prevailed in the futures market.

New jeera medium quoted at Rs 2,220-2,320 for 20 kg; NCDEX quality raw quoted at Rs 2,525-2,625 at Unjha market of Gujarat.

At Unjha market, jeera arrival stood at 3,000 bags and traded around 4,000-5,000. New jeera arrival stood at 300 bags and offered at Rs 2,800.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), jeera for March contract marginally increased by Rs 7.50 to Rs 13,495 a quintal, with an open interest of 10,563 lots.

NCDEX April jeera contract decreased Rs 45 to Rs 13,550 with an open interest of 6,726 lots.

EXPORTS

According to jeera traders, enquires from exporters are few but local demand is sluggish due to prospects of higher output.

Jeera price may decline with the arrival of the new crop in the local market and expectations of higher output.

This year, India's jeera production is estimated around 36-38 lakh bags.

Jeera acreage in Gujarat is reported to be around 3.35 lakh hectares, according to the data released by the Gujarat Agriculture Department.

Rabi crop arrivals cast shadow on edible oils



Edible oils extended their loss on Thursday on the back of bearish domestic futures markets. Imported palmolein and soyabean refined oil declined by Re 1 each for 10 kg. Groundnut, cotton and sunflower oils dropped by Rs 5 each. Rapeseed oil eased by Rs 2. The sentiment was weak on hopes of rabi crop arrivals beginning soon, said sources.

A spokesman of Riddhi Broker told *Business Line*: "Positive outlook for rabi oilseed crop and expectation of start of new arrivals of seeds especially mustard- rapeseed in producing centres have weakened the undertone of the markets.

"The market will be looking for direction from the US Department of Agriculture monthly supply and demand reports scheduled to be released on Friday. It could turn out to be bullish for palm oil due to tighter soyabean stocks".

In Mumbai, Ruchi sold about 750-800 tonnes of palmolein at Rs 510 for delivery up to February and 50-60 tonnes sunflower refined oil at Rs 785. Liberty sold 250-300 tonnes palmolein at Rs 512-514. About 80-100 tonnes palmolein were traded in resale.

Liberty was quoting palmolein at Rs 512-514; super palmolein Rs 561 and sunflower refined oil Rs 800.

Ruchi quoted palmolein at Rs 512; soyabean refined oil at Rs 710 and sunflower refined oil Rs 785.

Allana's rate for palmolein was Rs 512 and super palmolein Rs 560.

In Saurashtra – Rajkot, groundnut oil dropped to Rs 1,920 (Rs 1,920) for *telia tin* and Rs 1,250 (Rs 1,250) for loose (10 kg).

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, soyabean refined oil's March futures dropped to Rs 705.15 (Rs 708.35) and April was down to Rs 701.65 (Rs 703.95).

Malaysia's crude palm oil's March contracts closed at MYR 2,529 (MYR 2,524), April at MYR 2,552 (MYR 2,547) and May at MYR 2,568 (MYR 2,565) a tonne.

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg): Groundnut oil 1,250 (1,255), soya refined oil 710 (711), sunflower exp. ref. 720 (720), sunflower ref. 785 (790), rapeseed ref. oil 798 (800), rapeseed expeller ref. 768 (770); cottonseed ref. oil 610 (615) and palmolein 509 (510).

Vikram Global Commodities, Chennai, quoted Rs 568 for 10kg Malaysian super palmolein.

Pepper falls on selling pressure

The pepper market continued to head south on selling pressure and bearish sentiments spread by operators and consequently all the active contracts were closed much below the previous day closing.

Activities were limited and the turn over was concentrated on March delivery with 82 per cent while that in February was at 9 per cent. Activities in April were also less.

On the spot 65 tonnes of fresh pepper arrived and that were traded at Rs 386, Rs 396 and Rs 406 a kg. Growers said that many of them would not be selling if the prices dropped to below Rs 400 a kg.

February contract on the NCDEX decreased by Rs 365 a quintal to close at Rs 38,600. March and April fell by Rs 565 and Rs 380 respectively a quintal to close at Rs 36,015 and Rs 34,700.

TURNOVER

Total turnover increased by 186 tonnes to 1,572 tonnes. Total open interest decreased by 51 tonnes to 3,600 tonnes.

February open interest dropped by 47 tonnes to 686 tonnes while that of March dipped by 34 tonnes to 2,081 tonnes. April was up by 8 tonnes to close at 554 tonnes.

Spot prices in tandem with the futures market trend and increased arrival dropped by Rs 200 a quintal to close at Rs 39,600 (ungarbled) and Rs 41,100 (MG 1) a quintal.