

## Highest ever allocation for agriculture

*Slew of measures to enhance productivity and farmers' income*



*A paddy field at Kolathur village in Tiruvannamalai district.*

Agriculture sector received an all-time-high allocation of Rs. 5,189.15 crore in the State budget presented in the Assembly by Finance Minister O. Panneerselvam on Thursday. This is against Rs. 4, 829.93 crore provided in 2012-13. The Minister also announced a slew of measures aimed at enhancing productivity and farmers' income.

To give a major thrust to water conservation and management through drip irrigation, the Minister removed the ceiling of one acre for small and marginal farmers for availing themselves of the benefits under micro irrigation schemes.

Vouchers would be provided to farmers and they would be free to choose quality suppliers. Subsidy would go to the farmer's bank account and later released to the supplier only after satisfactory installation of drip irrigation equipment and third party inspection report.

Pointing out that lack of adequate storage facilities, market information and access to markets forced the farmers to resort to distress sale,

Mr. Panneerselvam announced that infrastructure would be upgraded in select agricultural markets, which would be functionally integrated at a cost of Rs. 15 crore with National Agriculture Development Programme funds.

The markets would also be integrated with commodity exchanges like Multi Commodity Exchange of India and National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange. He hoped that these initiatives would reduce wastage and improve sharing of market intelligence. Strengthening of post-harvest and processing facilities would also stabilise prices of agricultural commodities.

A sum of Rs. 20 crore was allocated for promoting agro processing units in the budget under the National Mission for Food Processing.

### **Special focus**

It had been planned to bring additional five lakh acres of paddy cultivation under the System of Rice Intensification. Special focus would be given for increasing the area under vegetable cultivation to 8.2 lakh acres from 7.25 lakh acres during 2013-14.

A special project to integrate markets handling perishable commodities with village production clusters would be implemented, besides encouraging innovative technologies like precision farming and protected cultivation practices like shade net cultivation. A revolving fund of Rs. 150 crore would be provided to the Tamil Nadu Cooperative Marketing Federation to ensure timely availability of fertilizers. A sum of Rs. 50 crore would be allocated as revolving fund for ensuring availability of liquid fertilizers.

An annual seed plan had been prepared to popularise high-yielding varieties and improve seed replacement ratio. A provision of Rs 161.62 crore had been made for production and distribution of

quality seeds for various crops. The crop loan target under the coop. sector would be stepped up to Rs. 4500 crore from Rs. 4000 crore in the ensuing financial year.

Mr. Panneerselvam said Chief Minister Jayalalithaa would soon announce a relief package for non-delta districts affected by drought. A drought memorandum was also being submitted to the Central government.

The government would initiate necessary action for early commencement of the third intra-State river linkage scheme – the Pennar-Palar link project – the Minister assured while announcing an allocation of Rs. 156.44 crore for the ongoing Thamirabarani-Karumeniar-Nambiar link and Cauvery-Gundar link schemes. Stating that a substantial allocation of Rs. 3,314.5 crore had been made for irrigation, Mr. Panneerselvam said an agreement for implementing the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project had already been signed with the World Bank and a provision of Rs. 390 crore, out of the total project cost of Rs 745.49 crore, had been made in the budget to take up dam rehabilitation work. Rehabilitation of traditional water bodies would be taken up at a cost of Rs. 50 crore. The government had submitted a Rs 1,560-crore proposal to the Asian Development Bank for the Cauvery Delta Area Improvement Scheme to mitigate the impact of climate change. The project included reconstruction of tail-end regulators and improvement of drainage channels in the delta region.

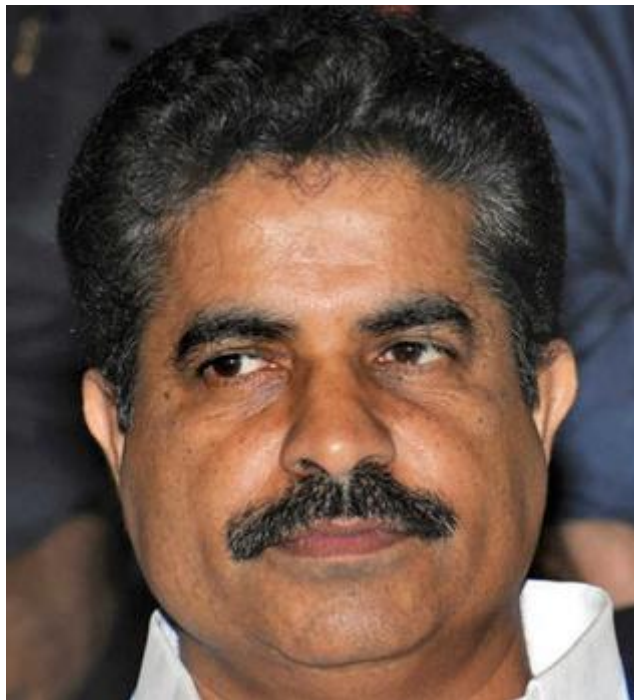
## **Rs.7,888 crore sought as drought relief**

The Kerala government has sought Rs.7,888 crore from the Centre for drought relief.

In a memorandum submitted to a Central team visiting Kerala to assess the drought situation in the State, the government said that

loss from damage to agriculture crops alone would come to Rs.5,980 crore.

Revenue Minister Adoor Prakash, who held discussions with the team led by Joint Secretary Narendra Bhushan at the end of its visit on Thursday, told the media that the team had agreed to consider some long-term projects for drought relief.



It was convinced of the drinking water shortage in many parts of the State and loss of paddy crop in Palakkad district.

The Minister said the team had visited Palakkad, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kollam, and Pathanamthitta districts and was expected to submit its report in a week.

However, the team would be recommending assistance only in accordance with the Central norms in this respect.

Mr. Prakash said the assistance sought by the State included compensation for loss of electricity generation amounting to Rs.1,610 crore.

# Rs. 30 crore sought for drought relief works in Namakkal

“The district administration has recently sent a proposal to the Commissioner of Revenue Administration seeking allocation of funds to the tune of Rs. 30 crore for drought relief works in the district that received the lowest annual rainfall in three decades in 2012,” Collector D. Jagannathan told *The Hindu* here on Thursday.

He said that they had sought the funds to carry out a total of 1,191 works in five municipalities, 19 town panchayats and 15 panchayat unions in the district in 2012-13 to distribute drinking water to people.

The 322 panchayats in the 15 panchayat unions had sought Rs. 21.89 crore (73 per cent of the total funds) for 884 works. A sum of Rs. 4.05 crore (13.57 per cent) was sought for 158 works in town panchayats, while Rs. 3.91 crore (13.1 per cent) had been sought for 149 works in the municipalities.

In panchayat unions, maximum fund was sought for drilling 592 bore wells at an estimate of Rs. 16.54 crore, extension of 158 pipelines at Rs. 1.91 crore, construction of 45 overhead water tanks at Rs. 1.42 crore, construction of 10 open wells at Rs. 69 lakh, repairing 11 bore wells and pump rooms at Rs. 19 lakh, provision of nine hand pumps at Rs. 9 lakh and augmentation of four water resources at Rs. 3 lakh.

A sum of Rs. 1.01 crore had been sought for other minor works, but no fund was sought to hire water tankers to distribute water to rural dwellers. Among the municipalities, Tiruchengode has sought Rs. 1.69 crore for 45 works, followed by Komarapalayam with Rs. 1.57 crore for 53 works, Rs. 44.1 lakh for 20 works in Pallipalayam, Rs. 11 lakh for 11 works in Rasipuram and Rs. 10 lakh for 20 works in Namakkal municipality.

“The district administration, local bodies and officials from various departments are working out other possibilities of making drinking water available to people at ease in the summer with the available resource. Availability of water in various sources and the status of ongoing works is discussed in detail in weekly review meetings that are conducted on Mondays,” the Collector said.

Mr. Jagannathan said all local bodies were using the general funds only to meet the drinking water requirements of people over the last two months.

“Officials have also been asked to speed up completion of the various pending water supply works,” he added.

## **Agri ‘mistake’: Speaker orders probe**

Making no secret of his displeasure over the “agri mistake” committed by the government, Speaker N. Manohar ordered an inquiry into the issue and submission of the report at the earliest.

This action, he hoped, would ensure that such mistakes would not occur again. The step by him indicated that the officials found responsible for the government committing the “mistake” might be punished.

Responding to nearly half-a-dozen privilege motions served by Opposition parties over the issue, he gave a strongly-worded ruling. He said “executive accountability to the Legislature is the basic premises on which Parliamentary democracy rests. Adequate care must be taken while presenting documents in the Legislature”.

Indirectly referring to the charges made by Opposition that the government “misled and deceived” the people and the House on the matter, he said “Legislature represents the will of people. We shall



uphold its dignity”. At the same time, he requested the Opposition to close the matter “magnanimously” as the government had “regretted the mistake”, terming it as a procedural lapse and typographical error.

Mr. Manohar said presentation of the annual budget with details about receipts and expenditure was a Constitutional obligation on the part of the government as per Article 202. No money should be drawn from the State’s Consolidated Fund otherwise.

He recalled that Agriculture Minister Kanna Lakshminarayana mentioned about errors in the document presented by him in the House on March 18 titled Agriculture Budget Plan with a request to members to treat it as Agriculture Action Plan. While presenting the general budget earlier, Finance Minister Anam Ramanarayan Reddy too termed it as Agriculture Action plan/ agriculture policy statement.

He said the two Ministers had issued the necessary clarification orally that time itself with a request to the members to consider the document as Agriculture Action plan/ policy Statement, due to non-availability of time to carry the corrections.

## **Farmers let down, says Vaiko**

Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam general secretary Vaiko said the budget has not accommodated the interests of farmers though there were some welcome announcements like food subsidy and health insurance for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. In a statement, he said the budget had not taken into account the demands of farmers for a compensation of Rs. 25,000 per acre of land where crop had failed due to drought and Rs. 15,000 per acre to those who could not take up cultivation due to scarcity of water. The demand for enhancing the procurement price of sugar to Rs. 3,500 per tonne and paddy to Rs. 1,500 per quintal was also not considered.

# **No relief package for farmers: Karunanidhi**

The State budget has lost its importance under the AIADMK government because of the frequent announcements made by the Chief Minister, DMK president M. Karunanidhi said on Thursday.

In a statement here, Mr. Karunanidhi, in his reaction to the budget proposals, said announcements were being made on a daily basis in the Chief Minister's name. This robbed the budget and its financial projections for the year ahead of their efficacy.

He also said farmers across the State would be disappointed that no relief packages were announced for them.

The DMK chief was also scathing on the government for ignoring relief measures for small and medium industries that had suffered the most because of the power outages – ranging from 15 to 18 hours in some districts. Despite having governed for two years, the AIADMK government had not shown any improvement in the power scenario. He said the announcement that Udangudi power project would commence work only in 2013-14 was disappointing.

He also noted that the AIADMK government had announced that it would procure 3,000 buses for the State Transport Corporations in 2011 and another 3,000 buses in 2012, but they declared in the budget that less than 3,000 buses had been procured for both years put together.

Experts have already announced that the current year will be a drought year for the entire State. But the budget had not referred to it conspicuously, he added.



# Focus is on farm lending

Coimbatore district is likely to see banking activity focusing more on farmers, weavers, and those in rural areas during the next 12 months.

The district's annual credit plan, which was released by the District Collector M. Karunagaran on Thursday, envisages disbursement of Rs. 3,560 crore loan to agriculture and allied sectors next financial year. This will be 42 per cent of the total credit estimated to be disbursed in the district in the next one year and 30 per cent higher than the credit planned for the sector in 2012-2013.

The total annual credit outlay of Rs. 8,433 crore is the highest among the district in the State and is Rs. 1,725 crore more than the credit plan for this year.

For the last 10 years, the district has disbursed loans more than the amount envisaged in the credit plan and the total credit outlay has increased nearly 300 per cent. Major share of the credit plan will be by Canara Bank, State Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank and Indian Bank.

In 2013-2014, the credit outlay for the small and medium-scale sector is 26 per cent more than the current year and 40 per cent of the total credit. The District Collector said financial inclusion has been completed in 136 villages and has been taken up in 92 more. Though the credit outlay has increased over the years, the actual increase in the benefits received may be relatively less because of inflation. Credit disbursement to the needy should be increased.

U. Ramesh Kumar, General Manager of the Canara Bank, received the first copy of the plan and said that Coimbatore District had a high credit ratio. Banks need to focus more on weavers' credit card. For every card given, the beneficiary will get Rs. 4,300 as subsidy and three per cent interest subsidy.

Similarly, banks are adopting villages to enable overall development. Yet, there are many who are still relying on private money lenders. Apart from financial inclusion, banks should help these people get assistance at low interest rates.

J. Vanangamudi, the District Lead Bank manager, said the district has received nearly 1300 applications this year for the weavers' credit card. The plan for 2013-2014 has earmarked Rs. 100 crore for self help groups. Banks should have a pro-active approach in lending to the needy.

## **Farmers' conference on March 30**

Lower Bhavani Farmers Association will organise a conference at Velalar College in Thindal, near Erode, on March 30.

It will focus on river water rights and problems of farmers, said S. Nallasamy of the association. Nearly 3,000 tmcft of water was getting drained into Arabian Sea. This water should be diverted to Cauvery river, he said.

If 200 tmcft of water from the Netravathy basin was diverted to Hemavathy, it would help ease the Cauvery water sharing crisis. He said the Cauvery Management Authority and Regulatory Committee should be formed immediately.

## **Awareness programme on rights of farmers held**

A one-day programme to create awareness among farmers on the Legislation of Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001, and capacity building was held in Namakkal.

It was organised by Chennai-based M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), with support from Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV and FRA), New Delhi.

The programme was divided into three interactive sessions in which farmers participated and got their queries clarified. Farmers also brought many traditional varieties grown by them in their region and displayed them in an exhibition to benefit farmers from other regions of the district. In addition to farmers, other participants in the programme included representatives from various government departments and non government organisations.

Nodal Officer V.A. Amalraj and Senior Scientist C. Jayabose of the Sugarcane Breeding Institute in Coimbatore dwelt in detail the legislation, functions of authority, its benefits to farmer, how farmers' varieties could be registered and the process involved in filling farmers' varieties in detail.

## Annevare certificates given to 1.58 lakh farmers

*90 per cent areas suffered more than 50 per cent crop loss*

ANNEVARI CERTIFICATE PARTICULARS			
CROPS	FARMERS	CULTIVATED AREA	AFFECTED AREA
Paddy	9,519	4,708 ha	2,892 ha
Groundnut	2,354	1,413	798
Pulses	4,324	960	885
Cotton	44,090	23,650	23,237
Millets	85,322	47,566	45,715
Castor	23	47	14
Onion	13,343	5,964	4,734
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,58,975</b>	<b>84,377</b>	<b>78,285</b>



Finding almost 90 per cent of the area cultivated in the district last year to have suffered more than 50 per cent loss, district administration has issued *annevari* certificates to about 1.58 lakh farmers so that their crop loans could be restructured, District Collector Darez Ahmed announced here on Thursday.

Speaking at the farmers' grievances day meeting here, he pointed out that the banks had already received a circular that they need not

even wait for the *annevari* certificate from the district collectors for restructuring the loan. According to the circular, as the State government vide its notification dated February 13 had declared all districts (except Chennai) as “drought-affected”, the entire restructuring exercise should be completed by May 13.

Dr.Ahmed said that of the total cultivated area of 84,317 hectares, as much as 78,285 hectares had been indentified to have suffered loss of more than 50 per cent. This includes 9,519 farmers who had raised paddy, and their 2,892 hectares had suffered crop loss of the total cultivated area of 4,708 hectares.

The collector said while the co-operative sector had extended crop loans to the tune of Rs.60 crore last year, nationalised banks had extended Rs.700 crore. “It could be even Rs.900 crore by the ends of this quarter.”

At the same time, he explained that he had reported to the government that perennial crops such as mango and coconut had not been affected. Apart from restructuring the loans, all the banks would start extending new loans too, he added.

He also said that he was prepared to furnish village-wise, crop-wise, and area-wise statistics regarding the issuance of *annevari* certificates to the affected. Rajachidambaram, State general secretary, Tamilaga Vivasayigal Sangham, demanded to know about the quantum of compensation announced for these farmers. “We want to know the crop-wise figures as what the State has announced so far is only for delta ryots,” he added.

Besides, he wanted to know whether restructuring meant that the interest would be added on to the principal and new payment schedule would be given or does it mean that the interest would be totally waived.

“Please do not add the interest with principal for rescheduling as the farmers are already groaning under the loan burden thanks to the serious drought and huge losses,” he added.

The collector said that he was awaiting orders with regard to the compensation.

Mr.Rajachidambaram, who once again raked up the interest subvention scheme issue, said that the banks had been treating a number of repayments as “overdue” in order to deny the subvention of three per cent to those who had repaid loans within the prescribed schedule. Besides, they were unwilling to extend subvention for sugarcane, he alleged. He was unhappy that there was delay in extending subvention. Lead Bank Manager S.Chandrasekharan explained that the funds were received by the bank branches only by April for this exercise and hence the delay.

Responding to the plea of Mr.Rajachidambaram and A.K.Rajendran to ensure subvention of interest for genuine farmers, the collector said that he had categorically told the bankers that he would accept only the crop loans extended through Kisan Credit Card Scheme as crop loan and not those accepting jewel as collateral. Hence, he has instructed the bankers that at least 35 per cent of the crop loans should be done through the KCC as against 10 per cent as in the previous years.

Dr.Ahmed also told the farmers that they need not extend any collateral for crop loans up to Rs.1lakh.

## **Drought of funds disappoints farmers**

The Federation of Farmers' Associations of Delta Districts has expressed “serious disappointment” over the Tamil Nadu budget.

Aarupathi P.Kalyanam, State general secretary of the federation, told *The Hindu* that six lakh farmers who have been left out by Chief

Minister Jayalalithaa in her announcement of compensation for delta farmers had been hoping to get some relief in the budget. Though the State government did mention these six lakh farmers in its submission to the Supreme Court as suffering serious loss due to drought, it did not bother to provide them anything. Adding insult to injury, while it initially said that the compensation announced was for 1.75 lakh farmers, the budget says the same amount is being distributed for 3.21 lakh agriculturists. “Thus there is nothing in the budget to mitigate the misery of the drought-affected farmers,” he said. If the State government were to fail to come out with any relief announcements, it might trigger suicides once again in the delta region, he said.

Mr. Kalyanam said it had been the demand of farmers that agriculture should be allocated 20 per cent of the total budget. Of this, 10 per cent could be used for farmers' welfare and the rest for production. But hardly five percent has been earmarked in the current budget.

Above all, even the National Commission for Agriculture recommended as early as 2006 that 50 per cent over and above the cost of cultivation should be the minimum support price for various agricultural commodities. Then Ms. Jayalalithaa , who was in the opposition, endorsed this view. But this issue had totally been lost sight of in the current budget.

The State government's continued dependence on the revenue from liquor has ruined the rural economy and womenfolk are in tears, he lamented.

## **Farmers unhappy over high-level panel visit to Tuticorin district**

It was disappointing that the high-level team formed to inspect drought-affected area, did not take stock of irrigation fields in



Tuticorin district during its visit on March 17, farmers said at the grievance redressal meeting here on Thursday.

Collector Ashish Kumar, who presided over the meeting, said that the high-level team comprising ministers of various portfolios had a busy schedule on that day and there was no sufficient time to inspect all areas.

However, the team had a feel of the ground realities and the farmers could expect right compensation soon. Many farmers said the distribution of compensation must be expedited.

A farmer from Ammanpuram said that water was not being released to save standing crops and farmers who relied entirely on the south main channel had been facing difficulty in irrigating the fields for the past 25 days.

But farmers relying on the north main channel were enjoying regular water supply, they said and complained of bias.

Farmers relying on the north main channel objected to this and when the two groups of farmers raised their voices, the Collector appealed to the farmers to maintain discipline and sought deployment of police force at the venue.

Based on storage level, water would be released to suit the requirements of farmers, he said.

V. Krishnamurthy of Ettayapuram sought the intervention of authorities to disburse crop insurance for 2008-09 at the earliest.

S. Nallaiah, district secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, affiliated to the Ettayapuram Communist Party of India unit, also demanded similar benefits. The Collector appealed to the officials to expedite disbursement of the insurance benefits and he urged them to disburse it within this month-end.

Mr. Nallaiah also charged that a secretary deputed in the agriculture cooperative credit society at Kadambur had swindled the insurance money due for farmers in 2010-11 and it should be given to the farmers soon.

K.P. Perumal, district secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasaiyigal Sangam, sought release of adequate water from Manimuthar and Papanasam dams for farmers in Tuticorin district for the 'kar' season.

Revolving fund of Rs. 10,000 each was provided to 10 Farmers' Interest Groups. The funds were released under Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA). Farmers from Tiruchendur, Alwarthirunagari, Pudur, Ottapidaram, Kovilpatti, Srivaikuntam and Vilathikulam blocks received the assistance.

Joint Director of Agriculture D. Ranjith Singh Dhanraj and Personal Assistant to Collector (Agriculture, M. Kanagaraj were present. Earlier, Assistant Executive Engineer (Agriculture Engineering) explained techniques adopted in farm mechanisation to enhance agriculture productivity.

## **Farmer-scientist interaction**

The Centre for Advanced Studies in Poultry Science of Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) will hold a farmer-scientist interaction on March 26 at the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences here. About 150 selected poultry farmers and veterinarians will take part. KVASU Vice-Chancellor B. Ashok will inaugurate the programme.

# Follow scientific water management techniques, farmers told



*District Collector Siddhartha Jain addressing “Buyer’s Farmer’s meet” in Khammam on Thursday. -PHOTO: G.N.RAO*

Speakers at a buyer-farmer meet organised by the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) here on Thursday underlined the need for prudent water management, adoption of modern technologies and collective marketing linkages to enhance agricultural production. The meet was organised by the ATMA under Irrigated Agriculture Intensification and Diversification component of the Andhra Pradesh Water Sector Improvement Project (Nagarjunasagar Modernisation Scheme).

Addressing a gathering of farmers and buyers from across the district at the inaugural session of the meet, Collector Siddharth Jain has called upon the farmers to follow scientific water management techniques in adherence to modern technological methods for reaping rich harvest. The farmers should tap the expertise of the agricultural scientists and capitalise on collective marketing linkages for increasing their agricultural output. The agencies concerned should enable the farmers take informed decisions on matters ranging from soil conditions to scientific methods of cultivation, harvesting and marketing, he suggested. APWSIP (Market Led Extension) State consultant P.V.G.K. Murthy said the buyer-farmer meets were being organised for the benefit of

the farmers of the Nagarjunasagar command area spread in five districts including Khammam.

A similar meet will be conducted at Miryalaguda in Nalgonda district on March 23, he said adding that the initiative forms an important component of the APWSIP which aims to enhance productivity of irrigated agriculture under NSP command area apart from modernisation of the NSP and other designated purposes. ATMA Project Director J. Premdas, NABARD AGM Prasad, Joint Director of Agriculture Rafi Ahmed, APWSIP senior agriculture consultant M.N. Reddy, Senior Extension Coordinator P. Narayana Chowdary, agriculture specialist P. Koteswara Rao and others were present.

The meet featured lectures and interactive sessions on a wide range of topics including production aspects and scope for collective marketing in agriculture commodities, marketing and value addition of pulses and oil seeds.

Short films on success stories in collective marketing were also screened on the occasion.

## **Rajasthan to extend MSP benefit to farmers**

The Rajasthan Government will extend the full benefit of minimum support price to farmers for procurement of wheat along with payment of bonus during 2013-14. The target has been set for procurement of 30 lakh tonnes of wheat on MSP during the new financial year beginning April 1.

State Cooperative Minister Parsadilal Meena made the announcement while intervening in a debate during Zero Hour in the State Assembly here on Thursday. He said the advance procurement carried out on the Madhya Pradesh pattern in Alwar

district on a pilot basis, which had proved to be successful, would be considered for extension all over the State.

“With a view to providing relief to farmers, the State Government has enhanced the bonus from Rs.100 per quintal to Rs.150 per quintal and made a provision of Rs.450 crore under [this] head in the 2013-14 State budget,” said Mr. Meena.

He said that 20 lakh tonnes of wheat was procured during 2012-13 against the target set for 15 lakh tonnes. The bonus of Rs.100 per quintal was paid along with the MSP for the first time in the State, he said.

Mr. Meena assured the House that adequate arrangements would be made for supply of sacks and establishment of godowns and procurement centres in the new financial year. State Food & Civil Supplies Commissioner and Additional Commissioner have been sent to Bundi and Kota districts to look after the arrangements for wheat procurement.

Earlier, Minister of State for Science & Technology Rajkumar Sharma informed the House during Question Hour that 50 reverse osmosis plants would be installed shortly in the fluoride-affected areas of the State to solve the problem of contamination of ground water. Villages and towns have been identified for installation of these plants.

# WHRF warns against conversion of paddy fields



*Global attention: World Human Rights Forum director Richard Berkley accompanied by National Forum for People's Rights leaders visiting the Aranmula 'puncha' on Tuesday.*

The proposal to construct an airport converting the biodiversity-rich wetland and paddy field and the natural streams in Aranmula is a challenge against the nature, Richard Berkley, World Human Rights Forum (WHRF) director, has said.

Mr. Berkley, accompanied by the National Forum for People's Rights (NFPR) leaders, said this during his visit on Tuesday to the Aranmula puncha (paddy land) that was identified as the site for the proposed airport project.

He said the proposal to convert the water-rich paddy land after demolishing hills in the region was a reflection of man's haughtiness and ignorance.

Mr. Berkley said the paddy land and a natural stream that were already converted in the name of the airport project should be reconverted to its original state with out any further delay.

## **Government duty**

He said protection and conservation of the water sources, especially wetland, low-lying paddy lands, and natural streams, were the duty of the government as well as the local people.



Mr. Berkley said sustainable development was the motto of the WHRF, and any move to convert the Aranmula puncha would only deprive the village of water. He said conversion of wetland and paddy land, especially in the drought-affected district of Pathanamthitta, was a criminal offence.

## **Border mafia behind illegal diversion of PDS rice**

*Subsidised rice being sold for Rs.40 a kg*

The district police have reported large scale illegal diversion of subsidised foodgrains meant for sale to ration card holders at nominal rates.

Deputy Superintendent of Police, Neyyattinkara, Y.R. Rustom has reported to State government that a well entrenched Kerala-Tamil Nadu border-based mafia profited from the racket.

They included owners of factories that sold branded rice, units that made rice-based 'instant food' products, and a set of ration wholesale and retail dealers.

The police said the group made a "twenty fold" profit on every kilogram of boiled and raw rice they diverted from the public distribution system.

Subsidised rice meant for sale to ration card holders at insignificant rates ranging from Rs.1 to Rs.8 for a kg were retailed in supermarkets and malls as packaged rice priced at Rs.40 and above for a kilogram.

### **FCI godowns**

The illegal diversion took place at FCI warehouses and premises of rational wholesalers and retailers.

All transactions relating to subsidised foodgrains were just on paper. There was little physical movement of foodgrains from the FCI warehouses to wholesale dealers and from them to ration retailers and finally the public.

## **Factories**

The illegally diverted rice grains ended up in factories in Palakkad, Kalady and Karnataka.

Investigators said fraudulent public distribution system (PDS) retailers even used ration cards of recently deceased persons and fudged entries in daily sales ledgers to illegally divert foodgrains and kerosene for sale in the open market.

Subsidised kerosene, retailed to ration cardholders at Rs.14.50 a litre, fetched four times its price in the black market.

It ended up as fuel in fishing boats, standby power generators in marriage halls, cinema theatres, shopping malls, and earthmovers.

## **The day of inspection**

The police said the sales records at several PDS retail outlets they inspected 'curiously' showed that 90 per cent of ration card holders had availed themselves of their quota of fuel and grain on the same day, which invariably fell at the end of every month when rationing inspectors routinely arrived to 'verify' stock.

## **Separate report**

In a separate report, the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau has told the State government that District Supply Officers needed to stringently inspect FCI warehouses and premises of PDS dealers.

Most of them maintained surplus stocks of subsidised foodgrains and fuel.

Illegal diversion of foodgrains was reported most from PDS outlets in the coastal belt of the district.

Investigators also found that a bulk of the illegally diverted wheat ended up in factories in Tamil Nadu where it was processed and exported as labelled cattle feed priced at Rs.50 and upwards a kg.

## **Pokkali rice cultivation in Alappuzha to begin soon, says District Collector**

District Collector P.Venugopal said that cultivation will be started in about 5000 hectares of Pokkali paddy fields at the Pattanakkad block of the district this season.

### **One fish-one rice**

The Collector was chairing a meeting of farmers and officials convened to discuss the issue of Pokkali rice cultivation here on Thursday. The scheme of one rice and one fish will be implemented in pokkali paddy fields. The Collector instructed the agricultural officials to give assistance of Rs. 25000 per hectare under the scheme for cultivating fallow land. The water from the paddy fields will be flushed out from April 1 itself.

### **Welcomes decision**

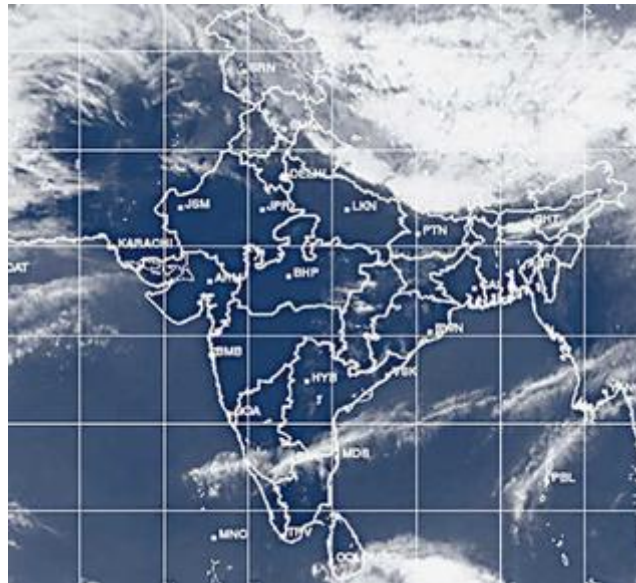
Meanwhile. Pokkali Paddy Field Protection Agitation Council general convener Franscis Kalathunkal has welcomed the decision to restart cultivation in the pokkali paddy fields.

There will be support from all farmers and fishermen to the venture of conserving the Pokkali rice, which has got Geographical Indication (GI) status, he said.

## Aquaculture

The cultivation in the paddy fields has been discontinued for a long time as a result of the round-the-year aquaculture in these fields. in the district . The move comes as a relief for farmers.

## Weather



*INSAT PICTURE AT 11-30 hrs. Observations recorded at 8-30 a.m. on Mar. 21.*

### ANDHRA PRADESH

Anantapur	39	22	0	0
Arogyavaram	35	20	0	1
Bapatla	34	22	0	0
Calingapatnam	35	23	0	1
Gannavaram	35	22	0	0
Hanamkonda	37	21	0	0
Hyderabad AP	36	25	0	0
Kakinada	33	24	0	0
Kavali	34	23	0	0
Kurnool	37	26	0	0
Mahabubnagar	37	24	0	0
Machilipatnam	34	23	0	0
Nandyal	36	21	0	0
Narasapur	34	24	0	0
Nellore	35	24	0	2
Nizamabad	39	23	0	1
Ongole	36	24	0	0
Ramagundam	35	21	0	0
Tirupathi AP	35	22	0	90
Tuni	37	23	0	0

Vizag AP	37	24	0	0
Vizag	33	25	0	3
<b>KARNATAKA</b>				
Agumbe	33	16	0	13
Bangalore AP	34	19	0	tr
Bangalore	35	21	0	1
Belgaum AP	35	16	0	4
Bellary	39	22	0	0
Bijapur	36	17	0	1
Chitradurga	35	21	0	7
Chickmagalur	36	21	0	21
Chintamani	37	20	0	0
Gadag	35	21	0	7
Gulbarga	38	23	0	0
Hassan	33	20	0	39
Honavar	33	21	0	0
Karwar	35	21	0	0
Madikeri	29	16	0	110
Mangalore AP	34	24	0	0
Mysore	35	20	0	4
Mandya	37	21	0	4
Panambur	34	25	0	26
Raichur	38	23	0	0
Shirali	34	23	0	0
<b>KERALA</b>				
Alappuzha	33	26	0	53
Kannur	35	27	0	11
Kochi AP	34	25	0	21
Kottayam	35	25	0	65
Kozhikode	35	27	0	16
Punalur	37	23	0	5
Thiruvanantha				
-puram AP	33	24	0	25
Thiruvanantha				
-puram City	33	25	0	75
Vellanikkara	37	25	0	15
<b>TAMIL NADU</b>				
Adiramapattinam	33	23	0	100
Coimbatore AP	36	23	0	2
Coonoor	24	13	0	126
Cuddalore	32	23	0	73
Chennai AP	33	23	0	32
Chennai	33	24	0	12
Dharmapuri	37	18	0	0
Kanyakumari	33	25	0	27
Karaikal	32	23	0	10
Kodaikanal	21	11	0	51
Madurai AP	36	23	0	18
Nagapattinam	32	23	0	27
Palayamkottai	35	25	0	71

Pamban	34	26	0	83
Parangipettai	33	23	0	40
Puducherry	33	24	0	8
Salem	38	23	0	0
Thanjavur	35	26	0	33
Tiruchi AP	37	23	0	15
Tirupattur	38	16	0	1
Tondi	32	24	0	56
Tuticorin	33	25	0	40
Ooty	24	10	0	11
Valparai	29	13	0	68
Vellore	35	23	0	45
<b>LAKSHADWEEP</b>				
Amini Divi	35	24	0	1
Minicoy	33	27	0	69
Kavarathi	35	28	0	64
<b>OTHER STATIONS</b>				
Kolkata (Alipore)	37	23	0	0
Mumbai	33	23	0	0
New Delhi	35	18	1	1

The columns show maximum and minimum temperature in Celsius, rainfall during last 24 hours (trace) and total rainfall in mm since March 1, 2013.

## DRY WEATHER

### OVER A.P.

**CHENNAI:** Isolated rainfall occurred over Kerala. Dry weather prevailed over Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Lakshadweep.

On Wednesday, the maximum temperature rose at a few places over coastal Andhra Pradesh and changed little elsewhere over the region. They were appreciably above normal at one or two places over north coastal Andhra Pradesh, Coastal Karnataka, above normal at one or two places over rest coastal Andhra Pradesh, North Kerala, appreciably below normal at one or two places over Telangana, below normal at one or two places over Rayalaseema, north interior Tamil Nadu and remained normal over the rest of the region. Anantapur, Rentachintala, Nizamabad and Bellary recorded



the highest maximum temperature of 39 degree Celsius in the region.

The minimum temperature fell appreciably at a few places over coastal Karnataka, at one or two places over Telangana, coastal Tamil Nadu, fell at one or two places over rest coastal Karnataka, rest Telangana and changed a little elsewhere over the region. Tirupattur and Belgaum Airport recorded the lowest minimum temperature of 16 degree Celsius in the plains of the region.

**Forecast (valid till Saturday morning):** Isolated rain may occur over Kerala, Lakshadweep. Mainly dry weather will prevail over Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, A.P. and Karnataka.

## Water level

Water level in Periyar dam stood at 112.90 feet with an inflow of 100 cusecs and discharge of 100 cusecs on Thursday.

In Vaigai dam, the water level stood at 46.75 feet with inflow of 28 cusecs and discharge of 60 cusecs. There was no rainfall in the region, according to PWD authorities.

Water level in the Papanasam dam on Friday stood at 80.55 feet (permissible level is 143 feet). The dam had an inflow of 181.13 cusecs and there was no discharge from the dam. The level at Manimuthar dam was 91.90 feet (118 feet). The dam had an inflow of 43 cusecs and 400 cusecs was discharged.

### **Kanyakumari**

The level in Pechipparai dam stood at 7 feet. It was 30.35 feet in Perunchani, 4.43 feet in Chittar I, 4.52 feet in Chittar II and 4.10 feet in Poigai dam.

## Weather

### Chennai - INDIA

#### Today's Weather



Sunny

**Friday, Mar 22**

**Max Min**

31° | 24°

**Rain:** 0

**Humidity:** 84

**Wind:** normal

**Sunrise:** 06:12

**Sunset:** 06:19

**Barometer:** 1010

#### Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

**Saturday, Mar 23**

**Max Min**

32° | 22°

#### Extended Forecast for a week

<b>Sunday Mar 24</b>	<b>Monday Mar 25</b>	<b>Tuesday Mar 26</b>	<b>Wednesday Mar 27</b>	<b>Thursday Mar 28</b>
33°   23°	31°   23°	32°   23°	32°   23°	32°   23°
Partly Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast

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## Panneerselvam presents tax-free growth Budget



*Finance Minister O Panneerselvam on Thursday presented a tax-free, revenue-surplus and growth-oriented budget for the year 2013-14. Chief Minister Jayalalitha is also seen. Express*

Finance Minister O Panneerselvam on Thursday presented a tax-free, revenue-surplus and growth-oriented budget for the year 2013-14 with a 10-point strategy for steering the State's economy back to the path of accelerated inclusive growth, besides announcing a slew of measures for the agriculture sector and price control of essential commodities.

This is the third consecutive revenue-surplus budget presented by Panneerselvam since 2011.

**The highest ever allocation of Rs 5,189.15 crore for agriculture sector and measures for bringing 13.2 lakh acres of land for increasing paddy and vegetable production,** setting up of a land bank of 25,000 acres to attract more industries to the State, creation of the Tamil Nadu State Highways Authority on the lines of the NHAI and allocation of ` 2,000 crore for the

Infrastructure Development Fund are some of the highlights of the budget.

Delivering his budget speech, the Finance Minister promised to adopt prudent fiscal management to implement the 10-point strategy without adding to the tax burden of the common man.

Despite pressures for vital expenditure and serious resource constraints, no new tax would be imposed, nor would any existing rate be hiked, he announced.

He also projected a revenue surplus of Rs 664.06 crore during 2013-14 and fiscal deficit of Rs 22,938.57 crore, which is 2.84 per cent of the GSDP, well within the stipulated norm of three per cent.

Pointing out that within the last two years, the government headed by Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa had brought the State's finances back on track, the Minister said from a revenue deficit of Rs 2,728.69 crore in 2010-2011, the government had already presented two successful budgets with a revenue surplus.

Though the budget estimates for 2012-2013 had projected a revenue surplus of Rs 2,376 crore owing to increased expenditure commitments, especially because of the efforts to revive the financial health of TANGEDCO and the substantial reduction in receipts from the Government of India, the revised estimate of revenue surplus was reduced to Rs 451.52 crore. However, the fiscal deficit has been restricted to Rs 19,889.31 crore, which is only 2.88 per cent of GSDP. "Both these indicators are well within the targets specified in the TN Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2003, and requirements of the 13th Finance Commission," he said. Stating that the budget was prepared against the backdrop of the gloomy national economic scenario, Panneerselvam charged that the recent Union budget did not have any commitment to control inflation.

Throwing light on the public debt position of Tamil Nadu government, the Minister said the net public borrowing for 2012-13 was restricted to Rs 15,675 crore against the eligibility of Rs 20,716 crore. Besides, the 'debt to GSDP' ratio has been

contained at 18.98 per cent against the mandatory 24.5 per cent. The proposed net borrowing for 2013-14 would be Rs 21,142 crore against the approved limit of Rs 24,263 crore.

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## **Business Standard**<sup>beta</sup>

# Potato rises 3% on limited supply



Potato futures for May surged by Rs 22.90, or 2.50%, to Rs 937 per quintal in 123 lots.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), the April contract jumped up by Rs 15.20, or 1.66%, to Rs 928.50 per quintal in 74 lots.

Prices rose as speculators enlarged their positions.

Firming spot market trend amid restricted arrivals from the major producing regions supported the trade.

# Turmeric gleams despite higher arrivals



**Erode, March 31:** A bullish trend prevailed in turmeric markets here on Thursday with 'very fine' hybrid variety fetching as high as Rs 9,000 a quintal. Also, prices increased despite higher arrivals. "Exporters who had to fulfil orders for 'very fine' hybrid variety quoted Rs 9,006 a quintal and purchased all the 148 bags that were up for sale. Prices of other varieties also increased by Rs 200 a quintal," said R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

The rise in prices had led to farmers bringing more turmeric to the markets. On Thursday, over 6,000 bags were brought for sale, up some 1,000 over Wednesday. Nearly 70 per cent of the arrivals was sold.

Traders and stockists are buying the turmeric quoting competitive price. At the Regulated Market Committee, due to arrival of quality turmeric, the price increased by Rs 350 a quintal.

Turmeric growers said that they expect prices to touch Rs 10,000 soon.

There is good demand for the hybrid variety in Delhi, encouraging traders to quote a higher price.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety sold at Rs 4,699 -8,206 a quintal and the root variety at Rs 4,269-6,807.



**Salem hybrid crop:** The finger variety quoted at Rs 6,919-9,006, root variety Rs 5769 to Rs 7096 a quintal. Of the 1,739 bags that arrived, 60 per cent was sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger variety ruled at Rs 7,109-8,419 and the root variety at Rs 6,065-7,417. Of the 856 bags on offer, 733 found takers.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety went for Rs 6,196-8,366 and the root variety at Rs 5,840-7,134. Of the 401 bags put up for sale, 358 got sold..

## **Ragi prices gain on lower output**

**Bangalore, March 21:** Prices of ragi (finger millet) have shot up 60 per cent to Rs 2,200-2,300 a quintal compared with last year due to poor crop in Karnataka.

“This year, there has been a good demand for ragi, but due to poor rains in November and December, crop realisation has been 35-40 per cent,” B.V. Gopal Reddy, Vice-President, Karnataka Maize/Ragi Merchants’ Association, told *Business Line*.

“Last year crop was good in terms of quantity and prices were low. This year, due to shortage, prices have firmed up sharply. If the same trend continues, prices of ragi are likely to touch Rs 3,000-3,200 in short term,” he added.

According to the Karnataka Agriculture Department, the rabi target for ragi was 0.36 lakh hectares. But the actual area sown was 0.39 lakh hectares. Due to poor rains and inadequate moisture, the crop withered in major growing areas of the State.

Ragi is extensively grown in major growing regions such as Chamarajnagar, Hassan, Doddaballapur and Chikaballapur, Bangalore rural, Magadi, Kanakapura, Hosadurga, Bellary, Davangere, Haveri and Harappanahalli.

Arrivals of ragi in key markets in Karnataka have begun to slow down.

Since ragi is staple food in rural Karnataka especially southern districts, many farmers have kept nearly quarter of what they have grown for both self consumption and sowing. Another reason for prices to firm up is due to good demand from cities such as Mumbai and Delhi due to its medicinal and nutritional properties.

“This crop year, traders and agro processing industries from Mumbai procured 70-80 tonnes a month compared with 20-30 tonnes last year,” said Reddy. Whereas buyers from Delhi procured from both Ranchi and Karnataka.

## Tea prices soar on supply shortfall, good demand

**Kolkata, March 21:** An end season supply shortfall in 2012 coupled with stagnant production outlook for the early season crop in 2013, set tea prices soaring.

According to J. Kalyansundaram, Secretary, Calcutta Tea Traders Association, there has been little or no carry-over stock from 2012. “The demand has been very good and there has been no carry-over stock from last year. This has pushed up the average prices of tea by over Rs 50 a kg, this year,” Kalyansundaram told *Business Line*. According to planters, lower rainfall is set to keep the production of the early season (first flush) crop in Assam stagnant at last year’s level. The north-eastern state contributes half of the country’s tea crop. “The next 2-3 days will be very crucial to determine production. If it does not rain during these days, then production could be affected,” said Arun N. Singh, Chairman of Indian Tea Association.

Poor rain might cast its spell on the second flush crop as well, Singh, Managing Director of Goodricke Group, said. First flush, which usually comes in end-March, accounts for nearly eight per cent of the country’s total production.

“In 2012, the crop was hampered due to the severe drought. This year, though the first flush is likely to be slightly better, it will still be lower compared to earlier years as some districts such as Jorhat

have hardly received any rains,” said C.S. Bedi, Managing Director, Rossell Tea.

The first flush tea requires around two inches of rain each month during the January-March period for a good crop, sources said. However, the region hardly received any rains in January and February. Even in March, rainfall has been scanty and sporadic in some districts. Typically, nearly 50 per cent of the first flush comes up during the last week of March. “This year, we have the Holi coming up during the last week; this will delay plucking, thereby, bringing down the March production,” Bedi said.

### **Prices**

Average prices of CTC leaf were up by nearly 55 per cent, at Rs 137 a kg in Sale 12 held on March 19 compared with Rs 88.48 in Sale 13 in 2012 (there was no Sale 12 last year). There would be no Sale 13 this year due to non-availability of tea this being the closure of the season.

## **Biotech regulator to take call on GM crop field trials today**



**New Delhi, March 21:** After almost a year, the country’s biotech regulator is set to meet on Friday to consider approval for the commercial release as well as field trials of genetically-modified (GM) crops.

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), which was reconstituted on March 11 after its term ended on June 8 last year, will meet on Friday for the first time since its last meeting, to screen applications held on April 11.

The GEAC is expected to discuss extending the tenure of the Standing Committee to review applications for the commercial release of Bt cotton hybrids that were approved earlier.

Besides, it is also expected to discuss the status on availing no-objection certificates from the State Governments for conducting field trials of GM crops.

The 22 proposals to be taken up at the meeting include Monsanto India's request for undertaking the first stage large-scale field trials or the BRL1 (biosafety research level 1 trials) for transgenic maize in the additional location of Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. The Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company Ltd (Mahyco) has requested additional location for conduct of event selection trials on 12 nitrogen use efficient cotton.

The Hyderabad-based Directorate of Oilseeds Research is seeking permission to repeat event selection trial on castor during the Kharif 2013.

The Central Institute of Cotton Research, Nagpur, is seeking extension of validity to event selection trials on transgenic cotton for bollworm resistance.

Mahyco is seeking the extension of validity for conducting trials on Glyphosate tolerant Roundup Ready wheat and salt tolerant transgenic rice.

BASF India is seeking extension of validity period for elite event selection trials for transgenic rice lines. Bayer BioScience Pvt Ltd is seeking extension of permission for BRL-1 trials of its TwinLink and GlyTol Cotton.

The reconstituted 16-member GEAC team is chaired by Hem Pande, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests.

The three independent outside experts include C.R. Babu of Delhi University's Centre for Environmental Management of Degraded Ecosystems; B. Sesikeran, former director of National Institute of Nutrition and S.S. Banga, Professor at Department of Plant Breeding & Genetics, Punjab Agriculture University.

# Coonoor tea Golden Jubilee auction tomorrow

**Coonoor, March 21:** A pan-India e-auction will be held facilitating buyers registered with any auction centre in the country to bid for the teas listed in the Coonoor Tea Trade Association (CTTA) catalogue.

This will be at 2 p.m. on March 23 when a specific auction tagged as 'Sale No: 53' with the title 'CTTA Golden Jubilee Auction' will be held.

The sale will be conducted at the Tea Board e-auction portal.

While bidders can be in any State, the trade will be subject to CTTA rules and applicable taxes.

“This is an extra auction we conduct just to commemorate the 50 years of the commencement of the Coonoor auctions on March 23, 1963.

All the brokers have catalogued some specific teas to mark the Golden Jubilee auction”, CTTA Chairman Sunil Goyal told *Business Line*.

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