

# What govt must do to alleviate farmers' woes



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Tamil Nadu, for the past few years, has not been left at the mercy of Karnataka for water. For the merciful skies opened, pouring forth copious rains on the Cauvery riverbed. Yet whatever be in plenty, be it nectar or anything, will turn toxic. Won't it? There is a saying that the rains in the month of 'Thai' fall like ghee. But in this Tamil 'Thai' month, it rained cats and dogs in the Cauvery delta, rattling the farmers.

## **Procurement paralysed**

The Mettur dam was opened on May 24, 2022 over a fortnight ahead of the usual date of June 12. Cultivation works were undertaken on 10.5 lakh acres in the samba and thaladi seasons. When the farmers were waiting hopefully for a bumper harvest, the rains played havoc, putting the farmers in a fix. Crops on 2,17,500 acres were uprooted in Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai districts. As the rainwater stagnated in the fields, the paddy cereals began to sprout. Besides, the blackgram was cultivated as a catch crop, targeting 10 lakh acres. About six-lakh acre cultivation of blackgram was affected. The groundnut cultivation too declined. If there is a downpour during the period of harvest, the

crops cultivated bear the brunt, delaying the harvest. It takes time for the stagnating rainwater to percolate and dry up. Even after there is a let-up in rains, the harvest equipment cannot launch operations in the moist paddy fields. As a result, the paddy procurement gets paralysed. The sight of thousands of paddy sacks piling up in the drizzles at the direct procurement centres is quite rattling to the farmers.

### **The effects of climate change**

The sudden depression in the Bay of Bengal throws the farmers off balance. Moreover, it tells upon the livelihood of fishermen and the salt industry as well.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has already warned that as a result of the climate change, India's food production will decline by 16 per cent in 2030 and the number of the starved people will go up by 23 per cent. The Chief Minister said at an event that climate change has become a global threat.

The extreme weather conditions caused by the climate change have, of late, been affecting the Cauvery delta to a large extent. The region witnessed eight natural disasters in the decade

spanning 2010-2020. In 2020, the farmers were largely affected by back-to-back cyclones Nivar and Burevi, and the untimely north-eastern monsoon rains in December. Of course, our forefathers in the Cauvery delta too faced such natural disasters. The cyclones, storms and drought that happened during the British rule were documented. The epigraphs erected during the Chola Emperor Rajarajan era speak about the natural disasters that took place during those times. But what we witness in the modern times is just an altered form of natural disasters.

Fog, extreme cold weather, unseasonal rains and scorching heat have affected terribly the weather conditions in the Cauvery plains.

The demand from the farmers doing irrigation with the help of 500 lakes in Sengipatti and areas on the northern banks of the Cauvery is that the Mettur dam should not be closed on January 28, the usual day of the dam's closure. In these regions, the crops in the stage of shooting forth ears are dried. Water is also needed for rain-fed cultivation (maanaavari). After rain damage in the initial stage of samba cultivation, re-cultivation of samba happened on 20 per cent of area. Thaladi too has been delayed. Water is needed for about two lakh acre cultivation. So, the farmers resorted to an agitation, demanding that the Mettur dam be kept open till Feb. 15.

Meanwhile, heavy rains lashed the region from the start of February, worrying the farmers.

The ministers have inspected the flood-ravaged areas. The Chief Minister has written to the Prime Minister, demanding relaxation of norms on moisture of paddy in procurement. Some relief measures have been announced.

At the same time, we have long witnessed delay on the part of the union government in sanctioning relaxation of rigid norms on paddy moisture.

It is the need of the hour to effect serious changes in the agricultural practices in the Cauvery delta.

### **What the govt has to do**

Seasonal crop cultivation must be planned according to the changing climate conditions (It is a long-term initiative. Tamils have for ages adopted a 'water-oriented formula' to predict climate change and accordingly engage in agriculture).

Proper relief should be provided to the affected farmers. The number of equipment, drying yards and warehouses for drying up the wet paddy must be increased union-wise. The government had better start on its own harvest machinery rental stations. It can also launch factories producing tarpaulins, jute and other agriculture-oriented raw materials. Mobile paddy procurement stations can be set up. It is necessary for the government to conduct the exercise of paddy procurement in its own buildings and also weed out corruption. In view of the inadequacy of the union government's crop insurance scheme, the Tamil Nadu government can emulate the crop

insurance model of Maharashtra. More importantly, steps must be taken to study natural disasters and get them declared as national disasters in due course of time.

In the annals of agriculture, the Tamils' cultivation method is the most ancient.

Way back in 1948 the UN sent four paddy cultivation and irrigation experts to Thailand to recommend suggestions to augment the country's food production. Of the four experts, three were Tamils.

After the cultivation methods advised by the experts was adopted, the per acre yield, which was two tons once, increased to four tons per acre. That was why the Thailand farmers called it the 'Madras method of cultivation.'

This cultivation method was hailed in the following line in one of the old Tamil literary texts Perumpanatruppadai: "mudinaaru azuththiya neduneer chruvil" (pressing the paddy seedlings in the fields with abundant water). The ancient glory must be perpetuated.

Though nature protects the farmers, now and then it launches onslaughts on them. Hence, the farmers catch hold of the government's fingers for security in keeping with the popular saying, "Whither is the king without the farmer having a plough?"

So, the government must not let the farmers down at all.

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**