

## Rigid taste makes south Kerala pay more for rice

Preference for a particular variety of rice is making the southern districts of Kerala pay a hefty premium for their staple diet.

Kerala, a food deficit state, is totally dependent on rice supplied from neighbouring states, especially Andhra Pradesh. While seven districts in the north largely prefer Kuruva rice from Andhra Pradesh, the seven districts in the south prefer the Jaya variety from the same state.

'Kuruva rice is produced in the Nellore region in Andhra while Jaya is cultivated in East Godavari district in that state,' said Shyam Sundar, a prominent rice trader in Kozhikode.

Though both the varieties are from the same state, the price differs by around Rs.5 per kg.

On Monday, the price for a kilogram of Jaya rice was around Rs.22 in the Kollam wholesale market, which caters to the needs of most of the southern districts. The price of Kuruva, on the other hand, was only Rs.16.50-18.50 in Kozhikode, the major rice market that supplies to the northern region.

While Kozhikode is getting enough supply of Kuruva, the case is different in Kollam.

'We are waiting for our consignment. We were informed that the consignment is ready in Andhra Pradesh. It will reach here soon,' said a trader in Kollam, who did not want to be named.

'In East Godavari there are only a few millers and they seem to act in cohort to dictate the prices. This is one of the reasons for the price rise. But in Nellore the situation is different,' said Shyam.

'The price of Kuruva from Andhra is not going up because of a competing Tamil Nadu,' said Shaji Jose, the marketing manager of the Kerala Civil Supplies Corporation.

Traders say it is the people's preference that is causing the price of rice to go up in the southern districts.

'There are other good quality rice varieties that are cheap, but people's taste preferences play a major role. People seem to have enough money to satisfy their preferences,' said the trader from Kollam.

Traders and the government tried to introduce new varieties of rice in the southern market but failed in their attempts.

'I tried to sell Jaya rice from Gujarat but it did not succeed,' said Shyam, who wanted to probe the south market as well.

However, consumers in the south say that it is lack of awareness that is making them stick to a particular variety of rice.

'People here think that rice varieties that are cheap are inferior. If Kuruva is the most preferred variety in north Kerala and is cheap, people in the south should not hesitate to buy it. But people seem to be ignorant about this. They are sticking to the Jaya variety simply because they are used

to the taste,' said Harikumar, a government employee residing in Thiruvananthapuram.

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