

THE HINDU



In a speech loaded with her clear aspirations towards national leadership, AIADMK general secretary Jayalalithaa on Thursday called for a change of rule at the Centre, saying that her party would be a constituent of the new government.

In the background of an 'amicable' parting of ways by the AIADMK with the Left parties, she made not even a fleeting reference to the failed alliance.

Focussing primarily on the farm sector, the AIADMK leader came down particularly on the Centre's nod for methane gas exploration in the Cauvery delta. The methane exploration would turn the delta into a "desert."

"I will not let industry flourish by decimating agriculture," she said.

She also criticised genetic engineering in food crops, stating that it would take away the farmers' control over seeds.

Ms. Jayalalithaa said only a government of which AIADMK was a prime constituent would set up the Cauvery River Water Management Board.

Envisioning a new government, she said an AIADMK-constituted government would strengthen the armed forces by increased budgetary allocation and modernisation, roll back the right of oil companies to hike petroleum price and put back the country's economy on track.

On fishermen issue

On the festering issue of arrests of Indian fishermen, the Chief Minister hit out at Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for meeting with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa "without raising the issue of their release."

“The last decade was a wasted decade under the UPA rule and it was time the people hammered it out,” Ms. Jayalalithaa said. To ensure this, the victory for the party should be a resounding one, larger than the one they handed out to her in 2011 Assembly elections, she said.

“Vote to the Lok Sabha all 40 candidates of the AIADMK, ” Ms. Jayalalithaa said campaigning for Nagapattinam candidate K. Gopal.

Launch awareness campaign about effects of pesticide: HC

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the Delhi Government and the Union Agriculture Ministry to launch an awareness campaign about the harmful effects of pesticide residue in fruits and vegetable in the Capital and across the country respectively.

Focus on wholesale markets

Passing the direction, a Division Bench of Justice B.D. Ahmed and Justice Siddharth Mridul said the focus of the campaign should be wholesale *mandis* , malls, cinema halls, retails fruit and vegetable bazaars in colonies and other public places.

The Bench said the governments should use printed material as well as audio and video modes to spread awareness among consumers about the hazards of pesticides.

Report of a six-member committee

It was hearing a *suo motu* petition in the matter following a media report alleging presence of poisonous residue of pesticides in fruits and vegetables being sold in the Capital. The judges passed the direction after going through the report of a six-member committee, set up by the Union Government under agriculture scientist Sarita Bhalla.

The committee report, quoting a study on use of banned pesticides by farmers, said that the amount of pesticides used in India was up to 750 times the European standards.

Adverse effects

Of five internationally banned pesticides, traces of four were found in fruits and vegetables here, the report said. These pesticides cause headache, affect fertility and damage kidneys and liver, the report added.

Farmers seek minimum income guarantee in manifestos

Although the time for freebies is over as Lok Sabha elections have been announced and the model code of conduct is in place, more than 20 lakh farmers across the country have sought assurance from political parties for a minimum income security for agriculture households.

The income guarantee must reflect “inter-sectoral parity” which should match the salary of a farm research scientist, said farmers groups at a press conference on Thursday.

Raising the slogan, *Jo kisan ki baat karega, woh desh par raj karega* (whoever speaks about farmers will rule the country), representatives of more than 100 farmers’ organisations released a charter of demands to be included in the manifestos of political parties.

The groups have already spoken to major political parties, including the Janata Dal (United), the CPI and the Biju Janata Dal, and are in touch with the BJP.

The major demand is for setting up a commission for farmers’ income that should come up with a formula guaranteeing minimum livelihood income for farmers, taking into account investment, basic health, education, food, shelter, clothing and lifestyle. Other demands include ecologically sustainable farming systems, community control over agricultural resources and ensuring non-toxic, diverse, nutritious and adequate food for all.

“Several countries are giving direct income support. Even developed countries are giving incentives. Studies have shown that if the farm sector is address there are better chances of reaching the development goals than through any other route,” said Kavitha Kuruganti, convener for Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture.

“What is the point of increasing the food grain production if the farmers do not benefit from it,” she asked referring to the all-time record output expected this year. “This is about lives and livelihood of farmers.”

Farm leaders Rohtas Rathee, Saroj Mohanty and Pankaj Bhushan said that to start with, the farmers in rain-fed agriculture zones and growers should be considered.

Mr. Bhushan said 106 farm organisations had endorsed the charter of demands and each had decided not to allow campaigning of parties who ignored farmers in their manifestos.

Representatives

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Training on direct sowing

A day-long training on direct sowing technique in paddy cultivation was imparted to farmers at Vadakadu near here on Thursday. M. Asokan, professor and head of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Vamban, which organised the training under the National Agriculture Development Programme, said that direct sowing would address labour shortage. Kathiravan, assistant professor of KVK, said that direct sowing would minimise the quantum of seeds to 16 kilograms an acre from the usual 25 kilograms. — Special Correspondent

Workshop on pepper cultivation

A workshop on pepper cultivation, organised jointly by the Arecanut and Spices Directorate, Kozhikode, and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, for farmers in the district will be held at the Thalakkoli community hall at Periya at 10 a.m. on Monday.

Budget against interests of farmers: JD(S)

The proposals in the Union and State Budgets are against the interests of farmers, Janata Dal(Secular) [JD-S] leader K. Krishnankutty has said.

He said in a statement here on Wednesday that agriculture subsidy in the country would come down from 24 to 10 per cent with India's signing of the WTO-2013 agreement in Bali in Indonesia on December 7, 2013.

This would adversely affect the agriculture sector in developing countries and cause more farmer suicides. The developed countries led by the U.S. wanted to cut down farm subsidies in developing countries. But, the Obama government had passed a Farm Bill on February 7 to increase farm subsidy there by six times, Mr. Krishnankutty said.

The Budget proposals put forth by Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram were aimed at cheating farmers. Mr. Chidambaram had stated that the subsidy on fertilizer would be Rs.67,971.5 crore. But, the Union government had taken away the price control on fertilizer and in the past four years its prices had gone up by three fold, he said.

The State Budget had not ensured remunerative prices for cash crops. The Rs.200 crore earmarked for high-tech farming was only a sweet promise to hoodwink farmers.

The profitability of high-tech farming was yet to be proven. There was no monitoring of this project implemented by grama panchayats in the State, Mr. Krishnankutty said.

The State should ensure that rubber growers got at least Rs.200 per kg of rubber. The State government should enact the Farmers Income Bill to ensure remunerative prices for farm products, he added.

China: No commercial production of GM staple food

China has not approved commercial production of any genetically modified (GM) staple food, Chinese Minister of Agriculture Han Changfu has said.

“We have been cautious over GM food because we want to make sure that it is safe,” he said at a press conference on Thursday on the sidelines of the annual session of the National People’s Congress.

“The government has never allowed any other GM agricultural products to be planted except cotton and papaya,” Mr. Han said.

China granted bio safety certificates in 2009 to two pest-resistant GM rice varieties and one type of corn, the first country to allow field trials of GM staple foods.

Stating that the country’s GM safety regime remains strict, Mr. Han threatened severe punishment for any unauthorised GM crop sales, planting and field trials.

In China, 90 per cent of soybean oil is made from GM soybeans. Mr. Han said he himself consumes food containing GM ingredients.

“Whether GM food is safe or not should not be decided by departments or individuals, it should be decided by scientists following strict standards and procedures,” he said.

China has set up committees of experts to supervise GM crop safety management.

Farmers seek minimum income guarantee in manifestos

Although the time for freebies is over as Lok Sabha elections have been announced and the model code of conduct is in place, more than 20 lakh farmers across the country have sought assurance from political parties for a minimum income security for agriculture households.

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NABARD launches tribal project in Pachamalai hills



A tribal development project of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) aimed at providing sustainable livelihood for residents of habitations of Pachamalai hills in Tiruchi and Salem districts has got under way.

The NABARD has taken up the project with an outlay of Rs. 6.99 crore, which would include a grant of Rs. 5.85 crore and the rest to be disbursed as loan.

The project to be implemented in association with Hand in Hand, a non-governmental organisation, is aimed at preventing migration of the residents of the habitations to urban areas in search of employment by ensuring sustainable livelihood in their place of living.

Although the Pachamalai hill receives about 1,200 mm of annual rainfall, farmers in the hills were unable to harvest the rainfall and often sustain losses because of landslides and erosion. The project seeks to adopt integrated natural resources management and extend support for farm activities such as raise cashew and mango plantations.

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Dietary protein quality matters most, says FAO expert group

The best approach for optimal health and well being is to prioritise protein quality and hence we should eat no more or less than what we really need and spend wisely on a protein diet.

This recommendation was made by an expert working group of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, which met at St. John's Research Institute here from March 2 to 5.

Giving details about the meet, Anura V. Kurpad, Head of the Division of Nutrition at St. John's Research Institute and president of Nutrition Society of India, told *The Hindu* that the expert group felt that dietary protein quality had important implications on human health and disease.

“It is not just the quantity of proteins that we consume, but also the quality that has an impact on the way we grow, age and our overall nutrition,” he said. “Consumption of quality protein in adequate quantity will benefit humans and limit the impact of our pattern of consumption on the environment and the sustainability of our food supply for the future. Measuring protein quality in different animal and plant foods with reference to their impact on human health is challenging,” he explained.

Dr. Kurpad said that the expert group felt the need to identify and update the tools used to define protein quality. “This requires additional research in humans to define what the right amount is and the quality of proteins that we should produce and consume,” he said.

The group also called on the governments, the UN system, food producers and consumers to promote the importance of dietary protein quality.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Farm kit to detect virus in shrimps

Mangalore-based College of Fisheries has developed a diagnostic kit for the detection of ‘white spot virus’ in shrimps.

Addressing presspersons here on Friday, K M Shankar, Dean of the college, said ‘white spot virus’ is widespread in the world. In India, it causes an estimated annual loss of Rs. 500 crore in shrimp culture industry.

The farmer-level kit is ideal for diagnosis and will cost farmers Rs. 40-50, whereas the laboratory-level diagnosis costs Rs. 500 a test.

Stating that ‘white spot’ viral attack is contagious and kills shrimps quickly, he said this kit would help in the early warning of the virus attack.

Developed by the Department of Aquaculture of the college, the technology was evaluated in shrimp farms in India and outside since 2006. The technology was developed with funding assistance from the Department of Biotechnology of the Government of India, Shankar said.

The kit can be preserved for four months in a refrigerator, he said.

Named RapiDot kit, the technology will be transferred to a French multinational company — Virbac Animal Health Care — in Mangalore on March 8.

S Ayyappan, Secretary of Department of Agricultural Research and Education and Director-General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, will hand over the technology to Virbac Animal Health Care, he said.

‘Ensure income guarantee for all farm households’

Ahead of the forthcoming general elections, farmers organisations have demanded that the new Government ensure income guarantee and promote ecological sustainability in farming.

In their charter of demands being placed before all political parties for inclusion in manifestos, over 100 farmer organisations, including the Bharatiya Kisan Union, said there should be a guaranteed minimum living income for all farm households.

“The new Government should set up a Farm Income Commission to oversee and ensure minimum living incomes accrue to all farm households,” said Saroj Mohanty of Paschim Odisha Krushak Sanghatan Samanvay Samithi. There should be a revamp of the current price support system with correct valuation of costs incurred by farmers, reasonable margins over such costs and to include living costs, with procurement made effective and expansive.

“The average monthly income of majority of the farmers is far less than their average expenditure, making it difficult for most farm households to make their ends meet,” Mohanty said, adding that around 2,300 farmers are quitting agriculture on a daily basis, triggering migration to cities. As a result, the country’s food security and livelihood security for the farmers are at risk. Stressing the need to make farming more profitable, Kavita Kuruganti of the Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture, said the Government should intervene when prices go below the minimum support price (MSP) levels. “What is the point in increasing food production if the farmers are not benefited by it. The MSP should have a statutory basis. Any trading below the MSP levels should be considered illegal,” she added.

Turmeric firm as traders build inventories



Turmeric prices continued to rule firm on the back of a firm demand and rising sales.

“Traders in Erode have received some upcountry demand. So, they are quoting a higher price for quality turmeric. Some traders are building inventories, anticipating demand from North India. Usually, during the March and April turmeric sale will be high as traders, expecting demand from North, buy them to build inventory,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

The Nizamabad market is closed till Monday and turmeric is selling at a lower price at Warangal in Andhra Pradesh, as traders are expecting arrival of the new crop from next week or the week thereafter. Till then, prices are seen ruling at current levels.

Ravishankar said that this year turmeric prices may increase along with sales.

The price of the hybrid finger turmeric increased by Rs 200 a quintal, due to arrival of quality turmeric. The root variety in Regulated Market Committee and Erode Cooperative marketing society increased by Rs 200 and Rs 100 a quintal respectively, on demand for the root variety from North India.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,749-6,769 a quintal, the root variety at Rs 4,619-6,589.

Salem Hybrid crop: The finger variety fetched Rs 6,169-7,801 a quintal, the root variety Rs 5,869-6,710. Of the 1,472 bags that arrived, 1,089 bags were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,690-6,699, the root variety at Rs 5,590-6,590. Of the 901 bags on offer, 740 bags were traded.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,469-6,868, the root variety Rs 5,574-6,639. Of the 936 bags put up for sale, 864 bags were picked up.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,472-6,889, the root variety at Rs 5,279-6,489. All the 134 were picked up.

TNAU to hold training on fast food products

The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University is conducting a two-day training on 'fast food products' on March 11 and 12. The programme fee has been fixed at Rs 1,000.

The training would cover topics such as pizza, vegetable noodles, burger bun, cutlet, pani poori, peas masala poori, samosa, bhel poori, gobi manjurian, channa masala and fried rice.

Interested persons can register their names on or before March 11.

China says no commercial production of GM staple food allowed

China has not approved commercial production of any Genetically Modified (GM) staple food, as per Chinese Minister of Agriculture Han Changfu.

“We have been cautious over GM food because we want to make sure that it is safe”, he said at a press conference yesterday on the sidelines of the annual session of the National People’s Congress, the country’s top legislature.

“The government has never allowed any other GM agricultural products to be planted except cotton and papaya”, Han said.

China granted bio—safety certificates in 2009 to two pest—resistant GM rice varieties and one type of corn, the first country to allow field trials of GM staple foods.

Stating that the country’s GM safety regime remains strict, Han threatened severe punishment for any unauthorised GM crop sales, planting and field trials.

GM food remains controversial nearly two decades after being introduced in the commercial market and there is still no consensus on whether they are harmful to humans. A total of 28 countries have planted GM crops.

As much as 81 per cent of soya beans, 35 per cent of corn and 30 per cent of oilseed rape in the world are GM products, state—run Xinhua reported, citing the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri—biotech Applications, a non—profit organisation devoted to promoting crop biotechnologies.

The debate on the safety of GM food was revived in China last year when celebrities joined netizens and experts to appeal for the consumers’ right to know when they’re buying GM products.

In China, 90 per cent of soya bean oil, which accounts for more than half of cooking oil consumption, is made from GM soybeans. Han said he himself consumes food containing GM ingredients.

“Whether GM food is safe or not should not be decided by departments or individuals, it should be decided by scientists following strict standards and procedures”, he said.

China has set up committees of experts to supervise GM crop safety management.

He also added that mandatory food labelling for 17 varieties of GM products is required by law or regulation.

Business Standard

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Govt engages farm cos to boost output to meet food security targets

In order to push production of [pulses](#) and [oilseeds](#) in the country to ensure adequacy under the [Food Security Bill](#), the government has started focusing on the farmer producer organisations for exclusive production of critical crops like pulses and [millets](#).

This will be under technology mission for oilseeds and pulses owing to its inadequacy to cater to domestic demand. A grant of Rs 50 crore has been

allocated to small farmers' agri business consortium, ([SFAC](#)). SFAC is a society exclusively promoted for mobilizing FPOs.

Over and above the general outlay under the mission to boost the production, this project for promotion of FPOs is intended to develop value chain of pulses and millets. According to officials, the project not only intends to boost production but also engage FPOs in marketing from farm gate to the market to cut down the transaction cost, thus help FPOs to develop the entire value chain .

To support the FPOs engaged in pulses and millet production, the nodal body SFAC has been mandated for price intervention activities to buy the produce from the farmers if the prices fall below the minimum support price. This mandate of SFAC is in addition to the conventional procurement agencies like [NAFED](#), [CWC](#) and NCCF etc.

The project implementation is for a period of three years from 2013-14 to 2015-16 for mobilising 106 FPOs exclusively for developing pulses and millet production.

FPO is company set up by farmer producers of agricultural commodities. These FPOs will be promoted by the farmers, run by the farmers and for the benefits of the farmers. The objective of the FPO is to improve returns to farmers through collective inputs purchase, collective marketing, and processing, increasing productivity through better inputs, increasing knowledge of farmers and thus ensuring quality. According to officials, the basic objective of FPO concept is to link small farmers to technology as well as to the markets in association with private, corporate or cooperative sector and if necessary, by providing backward and forward linkages. That is where the need comes to bring in corporate structure to induce governance and monitoring.

Under the government procurement scheme, NAFED, CWC, SFAC, NCCF are the Central Nodal Agencies for procurement of oilseeds & pulses under Price Support Scheme (PSS). In the current year, meanwhile the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) has started procurement of many oil seed and pulses crops after the market prices of many of them have crashed below the minimum support price. This is under the price support scheme of NAFED.

Already 2.33 lakh metric tonne of groundnut has already been procured from Gujarat and Rajasthan as the market prices are ruling below MSP of RS 4,000 per quintal. The market prices are ruling in the range of RS 2,955-3,000 per quintal. The prices of gram and tur are ruling around Rs 2,500-3,000 per quintal and Rs 3,900-4,000 per quintal as against MSP of Rs 3,000 per quintal and Rs 4,300 per quintal respectively. However market data shows that prices of tur and gram have gone up to around Rs 6,000 per quintal and Rs 3,500 per quintal in far flung areas.

Price of sunflower is ruling around Rs 2,800-3,500 per quintal as against the MSP of RS 3,700 per quintal. The procurement is mainly going on in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, said sources. Many crops of oilseeds and pulses are ruling below MSP due to bumper crop and flat demand. Moreover in oilseeds, much of the domestic edible oil demand is met by cheap imports of soybean refined oil.