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# THE HINDU

## **Towards care of indoor plants**



The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information and Training Centre is conducting a one-day training programme on Indoor Plants Care and Maintenance. The programme will be helpful to house wives, farmers, entrepreneurs, youngsters, SHG, NGOs and students, a release said. Training certificates will be issued to participants.

Date: September 1

Time: 9.30 am to 4.30 pm

Contact: 2626 3484.

Location: Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information and Training Centre, U-30, 10th Street, Anna Nagar.

## **Nashik farmer gets just 5 paise per kg for onions**

A farmer from Karanjgaon village in Nashik district has claimed to have got the rate of 5 paise per kg for onions, prompting him to dump his produce of 13 quintals in his field in protest, even as a trader blamed “poor quality” of bulb for the low price.

Sudhakar Darade, who hails from Niphad taluka, said his onions got valued at Rs. 5 per quintal (100 kg) at Saikheda sub-agriculture produce market committee (APMC) on Tuesday. — PTI

## **Farm ponds to be set up to breed fish fingerlings**

The government has proposed to set up farm ponds for breeding fish fingerlings with a subsidy of Rs. 2.10 lakh.

The government under the National Agricultural Development Programme (NADP) is encouraging farmers to set up farm ponds at an outlay of Rs. 5 lakh on their own lands for breeding fish fingerlings during 2016-17.

Interested farmers can contact the Assistant Director, Department of Fisheries, Mettur Dam over phone 04298 244045 and collect the application forms. They should submit the applications with all the needed information and documents.

## **Agri expo in Hyderabad on September 8**

A three-day conference-cum-trade fair focused on agriculture and dairy sector, Agritex 2016, is to be organised in the city from September 8.

## **New trends**

The fourth edition of the event, organised by Kenes Exhibition, Telangana Department of Agriculture and Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agriculture University, would have 'Telangana – Seed Capital of India' as the main conference theme. It would showcase new trends and developments in the field of agriculture, with a special focus on innovation and start-up pavilion, a release said.

## Seed production highly profitable for farmers



*Government provides subsidy, apart from a premium price, for seeds procured.*

R. Palpandi, a farmer from Alligundam panchayat, was not earning adequately by selling the pulses cultivated in his 11-acre farm in the market. That is when he was given the idea of cultivation for seeds, which could be sold to Tamil Nadu State Seed Development Agency (TANSEDA).

Today, Mr. Palpandi claims that with the cultivation of green gram for seeds, he earns nearly thrice the amount of what he used to.

Collector K. Veera Raghava Rao, who inspected Mr. Palpandi's farm along with senior officials on Wednesday, said that with additional effort and adherence to rigorous quality standards, farmers could earn manifold through seed production.

S. Kanagaraj, Joint Director of Agriculture, who is also the General Manager of TANSEDA for the district, said that any farmer could apply for seed production and the government provided subsidy for the production apart from a premium price for every kilogram of certified seeds procured from the farmer.

“In case of green gram, we provide Rs. 81.3 per kilogram for procured seed and a production subsidy of Rs. 25 per kilogram. The farmer may not get even half this price if the produce is sold in the market,” he said.

Explaining the procedure, R. Ravichandran, Deputy Director (Agriculture) for State Schemes, said that farmers could register for the scheme by paying a minimum amount with the department. “Quality seeds will be provided to the farmer for sowing. At every stage of cultivation, rigorous inspection will be performed by the Assistant Director of the respective area, seed certification team and seed testing officer,” he said.

Mr. Ravichandran said that both physical purity and genetic purity of the seeds being grown would be ensured.

“After cultivation and processing, seeds will again be tested and certified before procurement,” he said. He added that since TANSEDA produced only one-third of the required seeds on its own, farmers had a huge scope in meeting the remaining demand.

### **9 new breeds of indigenous livestock registered**

Nine new breeds of indigenous farm animals have been registered by the Karnal-based Indian Council of Agricultural Research-National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (ICAR-NBAGR), taking the total number of indigenous breeds of livestock in the country to 160.

The breed registration committee of the ICAR in its recent meeting here approved the registration of the new breeds of livestock and poultry.

The cataloguing of India’s animal genetic resources by the ICAR and registration of breeds is aimed at creating a sense of ownership among local communities responsible for development of breeds.

The new germplasm of indigenous farm animals registered as breeds by the NBAGR includes one breed of cattle, two breeds each of goat and sheep, three breeds of pig, and one breed of chicken.

### **‘Helps in inventorisation’**

“The registration of various unique populations as breeds shall help in inventorisation, improvement, conservation and sustainable utilisation of animal genetic resources of the country,” said Dr. Trilochan Mohapatra, Director General, ICAR, after giving away certificates to the applicants who registered nine new breeds.

Notably, “registration” is documentation of the knowledge, skills and techniques (KST), and biological resources of local communities. Recognising the need for an authentic national documentation system of valuable sovereign genetic resource with known

characteristics, the ICAR had initiated the mechanism for registration of animal germplasm through the NBAGR.

In 2008, the ICAR constituted a breed registration committee under the chairmanship its Deputy Director General (Animal Science) for the purpose. The mechanism is the sole recognised process for registration of animal genetic resources material at national level.

### **Excise Minister to open farmers' meet**

Excise Minister T.P. Ramakrishnan will inaugurate the Global Farmers' Meet organised by the city-based Pravasi Krishi Vikasana Kendra here on August 27.

The agriculture excellence awards instituted by the organisation will also be given away on the occasion.

### **Tirunelveli gets Rs. 21 crore for horticulture schemes**

The district has received Rs. 21.34 crore as grant for implementing schemes to increase horticultural crop production and install drip irrigation systems.

In a statement, Collector M. Kaurnakaran said farmers going in for high density planting of mango would get Rs. 9,840 per hectare as subsidy (target for Tirunelveli district this fiscal - 70 hectare) and the assistance would be Rs. 17,592 for guava (10 hectare). For lemon, the quantum of subsidy would be Rs. 12,000 per hectare (65 hectare).

For the cultivation of high-yielding vegetables, the cultivators would be given a subsidy of Rs. 20,000 per hectare (target - 180 hectare), Rs. 16,000 per hectare for mulching of fields (70 hectare) and Rs. 20,000 per hectare for invigorating mango orchard lacking yield (30 hectare).

### **Boon**

For establishing vermin-compost units, each measuring about 1,000 square feet, Rs. 50,000 would be given to 8 beneficiaries and Rs. 2 lakh for packaging rooms, Rs. 87,500 for storing onion, Rs. 75,000 for buying tractors with the capacity of less than 50 HP (maximum 5 beneficiaries), Rs. 2,500 for battery-operated sprayer (140 persons) and Rs. 4.68 lakh for erecting polythene greenhouse with 1,000 square meter area (10,000 square meter) would be given.

Under the National Agriculture Development Programme, the district has received Rs. 56.62 lakh for increasing onion production, Rs. 41.15 lakh for pest management in fruits and vegetables, Rs. 15.56 lakh for kitchen garden and Rs. 43.67 lakh for increasing productivity of agriculture produces.

For the Peri-metro vegetable clusters development programme, Rs. 1.68 crore had been allotted and Rs. 21 lakh had been earmarked for traditional agro development programme.

He informed that the district had received Rs. 7.46 crore for installing sprinklers and drip irrigation on 1,083.80 hectare.

### **Launch of vegetable farming**

Public Works Minister G. Sudhakaran and Education Minister C. Raveendranath formally launched vegetable cultivation on the premises of their official residences on Wednesday.

Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar was present on the both occasions when the saplings of various varieties of vegetables were planted in grow bags, according to an official release. — Staff Reporter

### **Team reviews Centre's agriculture schemes**

A national-level monitoring team reviewed the implementation of two agricultural programmes of the Central government — National Food Security Mission (Pulses) and National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm — in Vellore district on Tuesday.

According to officials, the six-member team visited fields in Vellore, Anaicut, Gudiyatham and Natrampalli blocks to take stock of the implementation of the schemes. This included officials from the Directorate of Oilseeds Development, Hyderabad, scientists from the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and agriculture officials.

They interacted with farmers on the benefits of the schemes and visited groundnut seed farms and pulses seed farms in Vellore, Gudiyatham and Natrampalli blocks that exclusively produced seeds. A 100-hectare demonstration of red gram inter-crop with groundnut at Gudiyatham took place.

In Anaicut block, the team visited a five-year-old oil palm field and field that had transplanted red gram at Natrampalli block. They advised farmers on various techniques to get high yield of oilseeds and pulses. They spoke about increasing area of cultivation, using technology and improving productivity. Officials of the Agriculture Department, Vellore, were present.

***Six members visited fields in Vellore, Anaicut, Gudiyatham and Natrampalli blocks***

## **KVK committee meeting held**

Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Virinjipuram, conducted its seventh scientific advisory committee meeting on Tuesday.

The meeting was conducted to discuss the various problems faced in Vellore, agricultural environment and technical problems faced by farmers, and evolve suitable plans comprising field visits and demonstrations.

A total of 21 members including scientists, extension officers and farmers participated in the meeting, a press release said.

## **The art of tree shaping**



E.Kalaimathy is losing sleep these days. She wants to push her skill to the limit and grow Bonsai in the small plastic caps that cover many medicine bottles. She knows she will soon do it herself just the way she started off 15 years ago growing a Ficus in a small plastic cup. Today, it occupies a place of pride in her verandah as a massive houseplant growing in a Bonsai round pot and looking as pretty, healthy and green as ever. “These small trees teach you big lessons,” she says.

If you happen to cross the building of Sacs Plaza in Tallakulam, you may find the entrance to the building owned by her husband, G.Elango, lined with a variety of small plants now that are ready to be picked up by random customers who step in for other purchases. It is not without a reason the plants, that are often sold in several other city nurseries at a high cost, are being given away.

Quite unlike an engineer-turned-businessman, Elango too is crazy about breathing lives into drawing rooms and balconies, verandahs and neighbouring streets by greening every space. In fact, when he shifted to Jawahar Nagar in 1990, he planted 150 saplings in his and the adjacent streets. Today each of them stands tall as a tree turning the locality into a cute little avenue.

With husband and wife complementing each other's love for greenery, their house is home to over 300 plants growing in pots of all shapes and sizes, majority of them miniatures. While they insist Bonsai is a pure hobby born out of love and respect for greenery, the EB staff finds it difficult to believe! How can you grow so many plants just as hobby and not sell, the couple is often questioned and threatened their electricity connection would be converted under the commercial tariff.

So Elango has now decided to go full blast in promoting greenery. "I want people to understand the drama of potted plants. It is so easy and fun to take care of them just the way you care for your child and see them grow," he says, believing every house, big or small, can lend a corner for at least two potted plants.

His wife is the silent supporter tending to the green babies with equal passion. How did she get started in a town like Madurai? It was the typical case of a housewife left with ample free time once her husband and children left for work and school. Her uncle's family that owns the Hotel Fortune Pandiyan would often show her the bonsai creations that adorned the hotel lobby. "I got interested and started reading books and articles on Bonsai," she says.

Whenever Elango travelled outside he returned with books, gardening tools, seeds and Bonsai kits for his wife. And from one rubber and one weeping fig tree planted in 2001, Kalaimathy moved on to a greater variety and today her collection includes bonsai-trained dwarf pomegranate, Western cherry, Kodaikanal oranges, bougainvillea, the banyan tree, tamarind and circus trees and adenium. The challenge of growing miniature trees kept her hooked to the art of turning living young trees into loving works of art. But her favourite are the Ficus whose hanging roots lend support to the main tree.

She also loves to twist the plants into different forms or braid the pliable trunks using copper wires or hanging stones and pebbles around the stems. For the convenience of growing Bonsai, when she required different shaped pots with holes, the couple ran into problem finding a suitable potter in Madurai. Finally one person in Poovandhi agreed to



make it for them after being shown the drawings and Elango ended up buying a truckload in one go.

Regardless of their shape and size, says Kalaimathay, Bonsai are do-it-yourself trees that combine art and horticulture. “All you need is any tree of your choice and few tools and the timely attention and care the tree requires,” she adds. “It is the pruning technique that makes any tree a bonsai, whether you choose the formal upright style, the slanted or the cascading style,” chips in Elango, who has also installed a Mist chamber to provide the right temperature and light to his saplings.

“Caring for your plant is nothing less than caring for a pet or your child,” says Elango and both husband and wife vouch what a satisfying therapy it is. “It is a meditative hobby that gives you peace of mind,” he says. And how creative you can get, giving it a shape and most importantly keeping it small is what makes you happy, she adds.

### **‘Krishi Bhagya has become a model for the country’**



The Krishi Bhagya scheme, introduced by the government to help farmers by making dry land farming not only sustainable but also lucrative, has become a model for the country, Krishna Byre Gowda, Minister for Agriculture, has said.

Mr. Byre Gowda, accompanied by Basavaraj Rayaraddi, Minister for Higher Education and district in-charge, was speaking to presspersons here on Thursday after reviewing the arrangements being made to hold a convention of Krishi Bhagya beneficiaries from 12 districts of north Karnataka, scheduled on August 29.

“Keeping in view the chronic problems faced by farmers in cultivating dry land, mainly due to vagaries of monsoon, the government introduced the scheme which was aimed at harvesting rainwater to protect crop during a crucial time through Krishi Hondas. In addition, under the scheme, farmers were provided with improved farm techniques by

way of using advanced farm machineries and equipment to get more yield and also achieve economic growth.

The novel scheme of the government has not only won the appreciation of the Union government, which had sought all details of the scheme, but has also caught the attention of some of the neighbouring States which are now keen on adopting it,” he said.

Stating that the scheme has become very popular among farmers cultivating dry land, he said that the convention was being held to motivate other farmers to adopt the scheme and improve their economic status.

“Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will be inaugurating the convention and around 30,000 farmers from all over north Karnataka would attend it,” he said.

### **Beehives to save elephants and farms**



Crop-raiding elephant herds often run into trouble with electric fencing around farms, while farmers without any protection measures around their lands suffer huge crop damage. An innovative idea to use bees to prevent both the loss of elephant lives and the loss of crops seeks to change the way the problem of man-animal conflict is addressed. Dr. Lucy King’s ‘Elephants and Bees Project’ has helped reduce such conflicts.

Dr. King heads the Nairobi-based ‘Save the Elephants’ (STE) charity’s ‘Human-Elephant Co-existence Program’ and its ‘Elephants and Bees Project’, which is active in 11 countries mainly in Africa, Thailand and Sri Lanka. The project has also been adopted in Karnataka’s North Kanara district by the non-profit Wildlife Research Conservation Society (WRCS).

“A beehive fence is made up of interlinked live beehives, and ‘dummy’ beehives hung 10 metres apart and interlinked with a plain piece of fencing wire that, if disturbed, causes the whole fence to swing and release the bees as ‘natural electricity’ to deter crop-raiding elephants,” Dr. King told *The Hindu* in an email interview.

According to Dr. King, elephants are wary of bees. “My studies have shown that elephants will run from the sound of disturbed African bees as they fear being stung around the sensitive parts of their body, like the eyes, inside the mouth, and up the trunk,” she said.

She said that STE’s studies had found that the fences were effective in 80 per cent of cases, but bulls were more likely to risk such bee attacks, especially in a herd, and cause damage. While Dr. King’s work focuses mainly on Africa, she said that each project was different and beehives were being used for different purposes. For example, “South Africa and Gabon are using beehives to protect important tree species from being damaged by elephants,” said Dr. King, who completed her D.Phil on the project from Oxford University.

Inspired by Dr. King’s experiment, the STE website quoted WRCS officials as saying, “pre-recorded bee sounds were broadcast during crop raiding events and they showed an instant withdrawal of elephants from the crop fields.” Following this, they have set up low cost beehives in clay pots, bamboo structures and wooden logs to deter elephants.

Apart from acting as a defence mechanism for farms, beehive fences also act as an additional source of income, especially for the poorest farms. “The beehives can generate as much as 50 per cent more income for them in a year from the sale of honey,” she said. Dr. King noted that bees also have an important function as pollinators, adding, “Our studies have proven that farms with beehive fences experience fewer crop raids and consequently have higher productivity than those farm areas that are unprotected.”

### **Farmers of old, new ayacuts push for Pandiaru-Punnampuzha project**

Notwithstanding the friction amongst farmers belonging to the old and new ayacuts in the district over sharing of water from the Bhavani Sagar Reservoir, a consensus prevails among all that the ultimate solution lies in implementation of Pandiar-Punnampuzha project proposed as early as in 1968 in right earnest.

Representatives of the old ayacut encompassing 40,000 acres wetted by Thadapalli-Arakankottai (24,000 acres) and Kalingarayan (16,000 acres) canals, and the new ayacut in 2.07 lakh acres irrigated by Lower Bhavani Project canal, agree that water harnessed from the project will provide long-term solution for ensuring two wet crops each for the old and new ayacuts.

At present, the old ayacut is provided water for two wet crops, and the new ayacut divided into two equal parts receives water in turns for one wet crop and one dry crop every alternative year. The project will make good the water shortage during the years when monsoons fail, according to a functionary of Tamilzhaga Vivasayigal Sangam.

The Bhavani Sagar Reservoir with a capacity to hold 32 tmc water is the source for fulfilling the requirement of 28 tmc water for the new ayacut and 8 tmc for the old ayacut in a water year, as per the Cauvery Tribunal directive.

In the last two years, both the old and the new ayacuts received water in excess owing to bountiful rainfall. But, this time, the South-West monsoons have failed, and a crisis is looming large.

Farmers from the old as well as the new ayacuts have urged the district administration to prevail upon the State Government to pursue the project in all seriousness with the Central Government.

Through the Pandiyar-Punnampuzha Hydroelectric Project that envisages construction of four dams, two diversion weirs, and powerhouses, the States of Kerala and Tamil Nadu propose to harness water from Devala-Punnampuzha river systems that empties into the Arabian sea.

The two States have agreed to have equal shares of the total yield of 14 tmc out of the project accruing from the annual rainfall of 2500 mm in Devala and Devagiri villages in Gudalur taluk.

Of the four dams, three: Pandiar, Yelamalai and Marapalam in The Nilgiris will be in Tamil Nadu, and Punnampuzha in Kerala. The idea is to harness 7 tmc of water from Yelamalai to Tamil Nadu through a tunnel, and Kerala's share of 7 tmc will be sent from Marapalam dam through a 7 km tunnel from Nadugani to Keelnadugani.

The project received the approval of planning commission in 1968, and work was taken up a year later, but subsequently stopped. The project for diversion of 7 tmc water towards Tamil Nadu requires construction of a 27-km-long diversion canal between Pandiar basin and Sigur river to release water into Moyar for utilisation at the Lower Bhavani Dam.

## Former super cop on a farming mission



Farming used to be an integral part of life for the Parayil family of Olavaipu, a village having vast stretches of Pokkali farmlands in Cherthala.

Over the years, the Pokkali fields in the possession of the family remained fallow owing to cost overruns and scarcity of labour. But a member of the family, P.K. Hormis Tharakan, former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), is all set to revive farming in his ancestral land.

Mr. Tharakan launched farming in five hectares of land at his native place in Thaikkattussery grama panchayat. A distinguished IPS officer of the 1968 batch, Mr. Tharakan feels truly at home while devoting his attention to farming, after long years of strenuous job as a top man in the echelons of security, having served in the capacity of Director General of Police of Kerala, chief of RAW and adviser to the Governor of Karnataka.

“It was almost 20 years ago that farming had been taken up in the family’s paddy fields there,” Mr. Tharakan told The Hindu. He sowed paddy seeds in the fields with the assistance of farm labour a week ago and is eager to see the crop coming up.

He is happy that the government is extending support to revive farming. His farm field will get help from the Agency for Development of Aquaculture Kerala (ADAK), which is promoting the novel scheme ‘oru nellum, oru meenum’ (one paddy, one fish).

The scheme envisages farming paddy and fish in successive crop seasons. Up to 80 per cent cost on infrastructure such as strengthening of bunds and cultivation of mangroves is aided by the government agency under the National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change.

Mr.Tharakan is concerned at the scarcity of farm labour.

“The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme needs to be reoriented to ensure that farming initiatives are not deprived of labour. A social audit needs to be conducted on the issue,” he says. While the prevailing scheme permits deployment of labour for works such as removal of weeds and building up of bunds, availability of labour for other works such as transplantation is necessary to ensure success.

### **Farmers asked to buy only quality seeds**

Ahead of the rabi season, which commences in September, farmers have been asked to buy only quality seeds to ensure a good crop. Not only farmers, the dealers also also be aware that seeds should be sold only under government licence, Deputy Director of Seed Inspection C. Krishna Kumari said on Wednesday..

Dealers should not sell seeds of sub-standard quality and farmers should verify whether labels affixed to the seed container had serial number, lot number, date of test, date of expiry, physical purity, genetic purity, adaptability of season and also address of producer. Moreover, farmers should refrain from purchasing seeds from unknown sellers.

Dealers should display the daily stock of seeds and their price outside their outlets. Seed Inspectors would conduct checks in seed outlets to ensure that no violation in sale took place.

The Deputy Director said any violation would attract a maximum of seven years of imprisonment under The Seeds (Control) Order, 1983, and other penal provisions of The Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

The seed inspectors would also lift samples from dealers to check the quality of germination and genetic purity.

Seeds were being sold through 161 private dealers, 40 government dealers and 80 cooperative societies across Thoothukudi district. In 2015, 23 cases were booked against those who violated the rules related to seed quality and certification, she said.



### **Maharashtra urges farmers to grow indigenous variety of cotton**

The state government plans to urge farmers in the state to grow indigenous variety cotton and not genetically modified Bt cotton. Pandurang Fundkar, Minister for Agriculture, said the state aims to ensure that, within the next four years, at least 25 per cent of the cotton grown in the state is of indigenous variety.

Fundkar said, over the last few years, attack of other insects especially pink bollworms have increased and it has resulted in over-usage of pesticides and insecticides.

“In Gujarat, cotton farmers have suffered huge losses last year due to attack of pink bollworm and unless we are careful the same will befall on our farmers also,” he said.

The state will take up awareness campaign which would ask farmers to mix and plant Bt and non-Bt seeds to help them protect their crops.

### **Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan farmers to exchange ideas to boost agriculture**



In a move to promote innovation in agriculture sector, farmers of Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh will exchange experiences based on new experiments being done in the field of farming in both the states.

“The two states have different climatic conditions as well as variety in types of soil. Exchanging new ideas and best practices will help farmers of both the states to combat challenges faced in agriculture sector, besides enhancing productivity,” an agriculture department official said on Friday.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh had during a meeting with Rajasthan’s Agriculture Minister Prabhulal Saini recently at Kota in the western state expressed mutual consent on this step, he said. It has been decided that atleast 50 farmers from Chhattisgarh will be sent on a study tour to Jaipur where they will also attend the agri-tech fair to be held from November 9 to 11, he said.

The farmers of Rajasthan were also invited in Raipur for studying advanced methods of farming, specially in horticulture crops sector. The Rajasthan government was informed in the meeting about various new practices underway in the field of horticulture in Chhattisgarh, like preparation of clusters of guava, lemon, custard apples and berries and the ongoing plantation of cashew saplings alongside the roads at wide-level, the official said.

Besides, initiatives like use of solar energy to ensure drinking water supply in villages of Chhattisgarh and distribution of solar irrigation pumps to farmers were also appreciated by officials there, he said.

Similarly, according to Rajasthan government, the state is the leading producer of cumin, mustard, and barley and even they had developed west Rajasthan as hub of date palm production, the official said. The exchange of innovative ideas among the farmers of different states will help them to take up production of new crops according to the standard procedure, he added.



## Geographical indication: Battle over Basmati



When Krishnakumar Tomar, one of the first to grow basmati in this fertile belt, harvested his crop 14 years back, he had no idea where to sell it. With no local takers for the aromatic paddy, the 40-year-old from Badi, which falls in Raisen district, was told he could get a good price for it at Delhi's Narela mandi or Kota in Rajasthan, both many hundred kilometers away.

"I wondered whether it was worth the trouble going all the way there", recalls Tomar. The long road journey to Narela may only have further sowed seeds of doubt over his decision to switch from growing regular high-yielding paddy.

But today, "basmati is my main crop", declares this science graduate, who grows Pusa Basmati-1 (PB-1), a variety bred by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in New Delhi, on his entire 35-acres farmland. He devotes more resources and attention to it than even wheat, which is cultivated during the rabi winter season and sold to government agencies at the official minimum support price (MSP).

Tomar used to previously cultivate paddy varieties such as 'Mahamaya' and 'Kranti', which gave yields of up to 30 quintals per acre. PB-1 yields are lower at 18-22 per acre. The difference, however, is in prices.

"Ten years ago, ordinary paddy sold at Rs 600 per quintal. Even today, the government's MSP is only Rs 1,470. In basmati, prices rose as high as Rs 3,900 per quintal in 2013. They have fallen since to Rs 2,000, but are still more than that of non-basmati", he points out.

Tomar is among the many farmers in this area – having assured irrigation, thanks to the Barna Dam completed in the late 1970s – who have stopped planting regular paddy or

soyabean in the kharif season. They have prospered by switching to a crop that is now a bone of contention between Madhya Pradesh (MP) and the northern states led by Punjab and Haryana.

All the three are, incidentally, ruled by the BJP either by itself or in alliance.

At the heart of the dispute is MP staking claim for inclusion of 13 of its districts – from Morena, Bhind, Sheopur, Gwalior, Datia, Shivpuri and Guna in the north to Vidisha, Raisen, Sehore, Hoshangabad, Narsinghpur and Jabalpur in the central-south – in the Geographical Indication (GI) area officially demarcated for basmati cultivation.

### **Maharashtra Cooperation minister hints at major reforms in sugar sector**

Maharashtra Minister for Cooperation Subhash Desh-mukh has signalled the government's readiness to usher in major reforms in the sugar industry, which could pave the way for gradual decontrol of the sector. These reforms come at a time when around 50 per cent of the sugar mills in the state are in various degrees of financial distress.

Deshmukh said the state was in favour of doing away with the renewal of crushing licenses for the mills. Crushing licenses are issued by the sugar commissionerate before the start of the crushing season, and mills that start operating without it can invite penal action.

“The need for yearly renewal of crushing licences is cumbersome and the state government is in favour of scrapping it. Mills need to send us a proposal on this and we will take it up with the Centre, to make the necessary changes in the Sugarcane Control Act,” he said.

The move, Deshmukh said, was in line with the government's attempt to deregulate industries and reduce the number of licences required. He said that the government had already brought down the licences necessary for setting up of industries from 60 to 27.

“Like other sectors, the sugar sector should be allowed to regulate. We are also in favour of reducing other restrictions, such as aerial distance between two mills,” he said.

The proposals, he said, should come from the sector and the state would then take it up with the Centre. Last season, 177 mills had gone for crushing.

While ruling out immediate financial boosters for the mills, Deshmukh said the state would help in restructuring their loans or selling of excess land to help mills get on their feet.