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THE HINDU

Farming at your fingertips



Team Prakruthi at the launch of Sreshta Krishi app Photo: Special Arrangement

Technopark's Prakruthi team lend home farmers a helping hand with their new mobile app Sreshta Krishi

If you are one of those people who dream of having a vegetable garden but don't know one end of a hoe from the other, then the folk at Prakruthi have a solution that's just a click away. As an extension of their activities to promote a healthy, environmental-friendly lifestyle, organic farming and sustainability, the techies of the Technopark-based 'green club' have come out with a new Android mobile application 'Sreshta Krishi' to help wannabe and/or home farmers in Kerala 'to meet the challenges of day to day farming.'

"One of our mottos is to promote organic farming in homes. In this regard, we have been conducting regular training sessions in conjunction with the folk at city-based CISSA (Centre for Innovation in Science and Social Action). Already, some 150 fellow techies attended the sessions. Although the sessions proved invaluable, we realised that there was a limit to spreading the knowledge by just holding one session after another or handing out information pamphlets, especially considering that there were plenty of takers for organic farming, both within and outside Technopark. An app is an easy option to spread awareness. The app was initially meant for techies but any one and every one can download it," says Biju Sundaran,

who spearheads the almost one-year-old Prakruthi. He also developed the content for the app based on expertise from agriculture expert C.K. Peethambaran, former director of research, Kerala Agricultural University, and entomologist Reghunath, plus research documents available online. Prakruthi member Anand Viswanathan was in charge of app development and Santoshkumar Sasidharan designed it.

The makers say that the app's still a work in progress but already it comes packed with info on the what's, when's, how's, do's and don'ts of farming.

They've included general information on all kinds of crops (mainly vegetables and fruits) that can be grown in our tropical climate; crops like tomato, red amaranthus, snake gourd, spinach, bitter gourd, ladies finger, cucumber, salad cucumbers, watermelon... They have even listed different varieties of each crop, apart from details about their growing season and sowing/planting methods and the like. An another interesting aspect about the app is that under each crop it gives detailed description about pests, friendly insects, diseases and deficiencies, accompanied by photos.

“Many people start off home farming quite enthusiastically but find themselves at a loss when their crops get affected by some pest or when it comes under bacterial/fungal/viral attack. What often happens is they let the particular plant just wither away, without realising there are solutions to each problem. Now, all they need to do look at relevant information and reference photos and they're all set. In case there is still any doubt, experts are just a call away,” explains Biju. The app also has a knowledge sharing space.

Sreshta Krishi app is available free for download on Google Play Store.

Impact of climate change by 2050

Study by researcher from the University of Oxford says it could have a significant impact on life, food production and health worldwide.

A new study has revealed that climate change could cause significant changes to global diets, leading to more than half a million extra deaths by 2050.

The research is the strongest evidence yet that climate change could have damaging consequences for food production and health worldwide and is the

first of its kind to assess the impact of climate change on diet composition and bodyweight, and to estimate the number of deaths they will cause in 155 countries in 2050.

Researcher Marco Springmann from the University of Oxford said that much research has looked at food security, but little has focussed on the wider health effects of agricultural production. Changes in food availability and intake also affect dietary and weight-related risk factors.

There will be an increase in heart diseases, stroke and cancer.

The countries that are likely to be worst affected are low-and middle-income countries, predominantly those in the Western Pacific region (2,64,000 deaths) and Southeast Asia (1,64,000), with almost three-quarters of all climate-related deaths expected to occur in China (2,48,000) and India (1,36,000).

On a per-capita basis, also Greece (124 deaths per million people) and Italy (89 deaths per million people) are likely to be significantly affected. The study is published in The Lancet.ANI

Sowing the seed of hope

Winner of the State Award in Agriculture, 32 years old P. Prasanna is a role model for women aspiring to become farmers

From an unknown entity, P. Prasanna has now become a household name in the tiny Tiruppalai Village after she rose to fame bagging Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Special Award this year for her achievement in agriculture. She recorded high yield of paddy through 'semmai nel sagupadi' (System of Rice Intensification).

She reaped 3,223 kilos of TRY 3 variety of paddy with just two kilos of the seed planted in 50 cents in 130 days. It was the highest yield adopting SRI method in the State for 2014-15. The award carried Rs.5 lakhs cash and a medal.

Women involved in farming activities is nothing new but there are only handful of them who are farmers. Though 75 percent of the agriculture work from sowing seeds to planting saplings, removing weeds and harvesting paddy are done by women, not many go on to become a farmer. "They find it difficult to balance between household duties and field work," says

Prasanna, “but what they miss here is just little knowledge about technical inputs in agriculture and expertise in man management. I focussed on these points and that stood me in good stead,” says Prasanna.

Hailing from Kancharampettai Village on the periphery of Madurai, Prasanna’s interest in agriculture is deep rooted as her father is also a farmer. “My father used to take me to the farms when I was young and involve me in every activity from performing rituals to sowing the seeds and harvesting the crop. It motivated me and I made it a habit to visit the fields. It continues even now,” says Prasanna, who is also working as science teacher in a private school.

Married to a peasant M. Padmanaban of Tiruppalai Village, she was able to protect her interests in agriculture. The Chief Minister’s Award for farmers inspired her and knowing her interest the agriculture department encouraged her to enrol for it.

“I visited the agriculture research centre in Thanjavur and got the TRY 3 variety. I sowed the seeds in around 50 cents of land in Chinnapatti near Chathirapatti Village. I used natural fertilisers in strict compliance with the Government guidelines. At every stage, adjudicators from the department visited my farm to record the growth. Even the colours of the leaves were noted down by the officers and they sounded positive. The success behind the high yield was the space I left between two saplings. The 22.5 cm space on all sides ensured sufficient sunlight. Water requirement is also less in this method. Finally, I harvested in February 2015. On that day itself the officials sealed all the grains and took them to the godown. Only a week before this Republic Day I got the information from the department that I have won the award. My four-year long dream came true,” she beams.

Prasanna has made it into a practice to visit the field every morning and evening and full day during weekends. She regularly updates herself and tries to implement innovative methods. She also evinces keen interest in terrace gardening. “Now, I am planning to use drip irrigation in sugarcane cultivation. Not many in my area have attempted this method. Hope I get the desired results,” she says.

Though 75 percent of the agriculture work from sowing seeds to planting saplings, removing weeds and harvesting paddy are done by women, not many go on to become a farmer

‘NDRF getting trained to rescue livestock also’

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh on Thursday said that animals were often the forgotten victims of natural disasters and it was commendable that National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was now getting trained to rescue livestock as well.

“No doubt, prevention of loss of human lives has to be the top priority. However, livestock protection is in no way less important,” Mr. Singh said, addressing a workshop on ‘Management of Animals in Emergencies’ organised by the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) here.

“I’m happy to know that they are now getting trained on management of animals in emergencies and working to get equipped to rescue animals also from disasters,” he added.

“India is vulnerable to a large number of disasters. On an average, direct natural disaster losses amount up to 2 per cent of India’s GDP. Around 94,830 cattle are lost per year on an average due to floods alone in India as per the National Disaster Management Authority’s [NDMA] Flood Guidelines,” he said, pointing out that the losses and impact of natural disasters on animals are equally significant, but are neither reported nor highlighted by media.

India is having not only the largest bovine population but also the second largest cattle population and the third largest sheep population in the world.

Collective efforts

Pointing out that disasters have the potential to affect our vast livestock resources adversely, Mr. Singh said there was a need to put in collective efforts to adopt a holistic approach in addressing the issues of animals for which sensitisation of all the related stakeholders is very essential.

The government has announced Rs. 1600 crore for Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries in the budget for the year 2016-17 as against allocation of Rs. 1491 crore in the year 2015-16.

Officials undergo training for better performance



G. Santhamurthy, Director of Planning and Research Department, giving away certificate to a participant at Karaikal on Thursday.

A three-day training programme on “Motivation for improved performance” for officials of Karaikal concluded on Thursday. The programme, organised jointly by the Planning and Research Department, Indian Institute of Public Administration and Administrative Training Centre, was divided into dozen sessions all centring around improving efficiency in administration with motivation as a tool.

Santha Williams, Deputy Director of Planning and Research Department, and K. Madhiyazhagan, Additional Director of Agriculture, spoke on the advantages of the training.

P. Poongavanam, Principal of Anna College of Arts and Science, presented her feedback on the training.

R.R. Dhanapal, coordinator of the training, said the training aimed at bringing about a transformation in the approach of the employees and the officials in ensuring quality public service.

G. Santhamurthy, Director of Planning and Research, gave away certificates to the participants.

Millet cultivation: Punjab to follow Pudukottai model

The success formula of a farmers’ producer company explained to a team

The Agriculture Department in Punjab has planned to emulate the success of minor millet cultivation being adopted by Pudukottai Organic Farmers’ Producer Company. A group of officials from the Agriculture Department

and Marketing wing of Punjab visited the producers' company here and interacted with farmers and company's executives on Wednesday.

Led by P.S. Siddhu, Commissioner for Agriculture, Government of Punjab, the team ascertained the quality of various minor millets being raised by the company.

Explaining the company's achievements, A. Adhappan, managing director of the company, told the team that the conventional varieties of minor millets included 'samai,' 'thinai,' 'kuthiraivali,' 'varagu' and 'cumbu' – all with a duration of 90 to 100 days. About 4,000 acres had been brought under cultivation in four blocks. He said that the company comprised 52 groups of farmers with a strength of 1,023 farmers, including women, in Kundrandarkovil, Pudukottai, Annavasal and Arimalam blocks. The company netted a profit of Rs. 2 lakh since its inception a year ago.

When Mr. Siddhu specifically wanted to know the formation of the company and its style of functioning, G. Akila, its chief executive officer, explained the norms for floating the company and support being extended by the State government.

She explained the profitability for these crops. The company had embarked on reviving conventional paddy varieties, she added.

G.S. Dhanapathy, a progressive farmer and director of the company, said that the millets raised could withstand drought conditions. With Pudukottai district realising poor rainfall, the millets were suitable for the district.

He also explained the bio-manure being applied for raising these millets.

The team also inspected the machinery and other infrastructure set up by the company for crushing the millets.

G.P.S. Randhawa, General Manager (Projects), Punjab State Agricultural Board, was among those who visited the company.

Flowers bloom early on Chennai outskirts

Cultivation of jasmines and marigolds has begun early due to availability of water after rains

There is no sign of the morning sun on the horizon, but a group of women are already at work on a three-hectare-farmland in Thirukkandalam village, near Red Hills.

They pluck jasmine and a few hours later, will be heading to the Koyambedu Wholesale Market to sell these flowers.

The jasmine has clearly arrived early. It's only in June–July every year that jasmine will be ready to be plucked.

The heavy rains in December last year have created a conducive environment for starting cultivation of these flowers early.

Since early January, a variety of flowers including jasmine, marigold (*samandi*), firecracker flowers (*kanagambaram*), country rose, tube rose, and cox comb, are being cultivated in small patches of land between large tracts of paddy fields in the northern and western areas of Chennai that border neighbouring Tiruvallur district.

These areas include Manjakuppam, Movur, Morur Kandigai, Monnvedu, Monnavedupettai, Othapai, Krishnapuram, Rangaravam, Venkatapuram, Velammakandigai, and Thiruvalankadu.

“Unlike paddy, flowers can be cultivated in a small area with just family members involved in the work. The November – December 2015 rains filled our wells, and there is enough water to irrigate our fields for an entire year now,” said 52-year-old Thangammal, a jasmine cultivator in Movur village near Avadi.

Farmers hold only small parcels of land that are anywhere between three and seven hectares. And, whole families are engaged in flower cultivation.

“As most flower cultivators are small farmers, the rains helped save on the costs of digging more borewells,” an official with the Department of Horticulture and Plantation Crops told *The Hindu*.

Horticulture officials said that 14 agriculture extension centres in the district covering major cropping areas like Gummudipoondi, Poonneri, Red Hills, Uthukottai, Tirutani, Pallipattu and Tiruvallur have been coordinating with flower cultivators to ensure modern irrigation methods reach them.

“All the jasmine sold at Koyambedu wholesale market is said to come from Tiruvallur district. In fact, except for ‘Bangalore’ roses, which come from Hosur in Krishnagiri district, all the flowers come from Tiruvallur district every day,” said P.K. Krishnan, a flower trader in Koyambedu.

New schemes to ensure effective transfer of technology from laboratory to land

Farm scientist Ayyappan delivers 34th annual convocation of Gulbarga University



Agriculture scientist S. Ayyappan delivering the convocation address of Gulbarga University in Kalaburagi on Thursday.— PHOTO: ARUN KULKARNI (RELATED REPORTS, PHOTOS ON PAGE 4)

Agriculture scientist S. Ayyappan has said that Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) has introduced new schemes to bridge the gap between agriculture scientists and farmers and to ensure effective transfer of technologies from laboratory to land. Delivering the 34th annual convocation address of Gulbarga University at ESIC Auditorium here on Thursday, Dr. Ayyappan, who was till recently the Director of ICAR, said that one of the new schemes is called “Student READY (Rural Entrepreneurship and Awareness Development Yojana)”. It is a one-year composite programme consisting of three components — experimental learning, rural awareness work experience and in-plant training — to be taken up during the last year of the undergraduate programme. ICAR has introduced another programme, ARYA (Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture), to help retain rural youth in agriculture through capacity building. Yet another programme introduced is called Farmer FIRST

(Farmer, Innovation, Resources, Science and Technology). This will help enhance farmer-scientist contact with multi-stake holders.

Dr. Ayyappan said that another programme launched to give impetus to the process of technology dissemination is “Mera Goan Mera Gaurav”. About 20,000 scientists, in groups of four, from agricultural universities and ICAR institutes will identify villages for providing technical information advisories and demonstration of agricultural technologies and practices in the fields. Each such group will adopt five villages for transfer of technologies directly from laboratory to land.

Stressing the importance of revising curricula of agriculture education at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, he said that efforts were under way to meet today’s challenges and requirements. The course curricula for undergraduate agriculture courses were being revised by including cutting-edge technologies such as biosensors, genomics, biotechnology, nanotechnology, vaccines, conservation agriculture, processing and value addition and IPR issues.

Referring to the state of higher education in the country, Dr. Ayyappan, who is now president of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences, expressed concern over the resource crunch faced by the universities and colleges due to lack of full financial support from State governments and the declining per-student expenditure in real terms.

Dr. Ayyappan noted that several States lack a system of providing effective support for innovation and development in higher education. “This is a matter of concern as a large number of students are in the State system and it is high time that this issue is addressed at the highest level for making appropriate interventions,” he said.

He said that more opportunities should be created for increasing intake in colleges and universities. Expansion would require immediate attention to consolidate and better utilise the existing infrastructure in colleges and universities and also to allow the private sector to play a significant role in this connection.

In the absence of Governor Vajubhai Vala, who is the Chancellor of the University, and Pro Chancellor T.B. Jayachandra, Gulbarga University Vice-Chancellor S.R. Niranjana presided over the convocation.

Govt. to allocate Rs. 1,000 cr. subsidy for drip irrigation

Agriculture Minister Pocharam Srinivas Reddy on Thursday said the State government would allocate Rs. 1,000 crore towards subsidy for drip irrigation system to farmers. He said the government has also enhanced the extent of land from 5 acres to 12.5 acres for which the drip system would be sanctioned.

Addressing a workshop for farmers on turmeric cultivation organised by the State Horticulture Department at Dhanora village in Tamsi mandal, the Minister said the State government has represented the Union Government to fix a minimum support price for turmeric. The move would help turmeric farmers in the State who are a beleaguered lot since a few years owing to plunging prices. The Agriculture Minister and Housing Minister A. Indrakaran Reddy also visited the turmeric field of farmer Kranti Yadav, who is expecting as high a yield as 50 quintals an acre. Mr. Srinivas Reddy said a subsidy of about 50 per cent would be implemented for cultivation of a particular brand of turmeric seed in the coming days.

The workshop was a huge success as over 6,500 farmers attended it.

Thrust on farm sector in Vypeen

: The Vypeen Block Panchayat Budget for 2016-17 has laid emphasis on improving the traditional agricultural practices in the area. The budget, with a total outlay of Rs. 38.32 crore, has set aside Rs 13.66 lakh for the secondary sector and Rs. 68.87 lakh for the services sector. Infrastructure development has been allocated Rs. 65 lakh.

The budget has also earmarked Rs. 65 lakh for the welfare of the Scheduled Caste community and Rs. 1.07 crore for Scheduled Tribe welfare. The employment generation project has been provided Rs. 6.37 crore.

The budget has also set its goal on social welfare and has provided for building houses for 186 people in the general category and 146 houses for the Scheduled Caste community members under the Indira Awas Yojana housing programme. A total of Rs. 8 crore has been set aside for the housing programme.

Modernisation and improvement of facilities at the Njarakkal and Munambam Ayyapally hospitals will also receive attention during the next

financial year. Improving dairying activities and healthcare for livestock are some of the other priorities areas in the budget. The budget has set aside Rs. 2.82 lakh to help improve organic cultivation of vegetables in the block panchayat area.

Flour mill opened for millet cultivators in Javadhu Hills

The Tamil Nadu Agricultural Marketing and Agriculture Business in association with VIT University's Centre for Sustainable Rural Development Research Studies had opened a flour mill for the benefit of millet growers in Javadhu Hills.

The university's vice president G.V. Selvam inaugurated the flour mill in Nammiyampattu village for the tribal people of Javadhu Hills to market their produce – 'samai' (little millet) – after converting it into flour. He said two more such mills were inaugurated in Palamaruthur and Puliur villages, and this would enable the growers to market their produce easily, a press release said.

Around 250 farmers received supporting instruments for azolla cultivation and 17 farmers received instruments to produce value-added millet products from the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Marketing and Agricultural Business on the occasion.

Each farmer received a sum of Rs. 15,000 as loan from Indian Bank, the release said.

A start-up to promote organic farming

A city-based start-up Trestor on Thursday said it will promote urban organic farming and community intranet as part its plans to promote community initiatives.

"Trestor has embarked on two community-driven initiatives aimed at promoting urban organic farming and community intranet, for which the company will provide all the necessary infrastructure and technical support. To get going, all one needs is a smart phone, on which one can download the mobile application developed by the company," Trestor founder Kunal Dixit said here.

Under community—driven organic farming, Trestor will provide communities 10 ft by 5 ft organic gardens, where they can grow fresh, healthy and cancer-free food.

With its unique crop sensor technology, community members in households need not devote more than 15 minutes a day to tending to their crop. Harvesting the produce at its peak is an added advantage, he said claiming that an area of one sq m is all you need to produce 20 kg of food a year. -- PTI

Rainwater harvesting campaign begins

The District Legal Services Authority launched a campaign to create awareness about rainwater harvesting in Ashtur village on Thursday.

Hanchate Sanjiv Kumar, Principal District and Sessions judge and chairman, DLSA, spoke to villagers about the need for water harvesting.

He visited check-dams, farm ponds, recharge pits for borewells and some old open wells in Ashtur and Imambad villages.

He asked villagers to pool resources to take up construction of such structures. “There is no need to rely on the government all the time. Farmers can form groups and take up construction of such structures,” he said.

He also asked farmers to work with the gram panchayat and other agencies. “Community participation could address issues like water scarcity more effectively,” he said. “Each village should have a committee to protect and develop water bodies. Lakes should be fenced and protective walls should be built around open wells, with large openings to inlet rain water.”

Recharge pits can be prepared around dead or functioning borewells. A circular recharge platform can be build around open wells too, he said.

He asked panchayat engineers to share with interested villagers, the designs for building such rain water harvesting structures. Farmers should plant more trees to retain the top soil and ensure increased seepage, he advised.

Officials should motivate farmers to take up more water harvesting structures in schemes like MNREGA, and water shed development.

“Villagers should also demand such structures from the government,” he said.

He congratulated the district administration for removing silt from lakes and open wells in the district.

Additional civil judge and DLSA secretary Somashekar Badami, government pleader Ramachandra Lamani, Bar president Mahadev Patil, general secretary Dhanraj Biradar, B.S. Patil, member, District Child Protection Committee, gram panchayat member Ganapatrao Patil, taluk panchayat executive officer Jagannath Murthy, Panchayat Development Officer Shridhar, Manik Rao Patil, assistant director, MNREGA, and others were present.

Villagers urged to pool in resources and construct wells and drill borewells

Tiny dragonfly may be world’s longest-distance flier



A beautiful dragonfly spotted in Tirunelveli. Photo: A. Shaikmohideen (for representative purpose only).

'Pantala flavescens' found in several countries, including India, have an estimated range of 7,081 kilometres or more.

A small dragonfly found in several countries including India may be the animal world’s most prolific long distance traveller — flying thousands of miles over oceans as it migrates across continents, scientists say.

Scientists at the Rutgers University-Newark (RU-N) found that populations of this dragonfly, called *Pantala flavescens*, in locations as far apart as Texas, eastern Canada, Japan, Korea, India, and South America, have genetic profiles so similar that there is only one likely explanation.

Prolific travellers

These insects travel distances that are extraordinarily long for their small size, breeding with each other, and creating a common worldwide gene pool that would be impossible if they did not intermingle, researchers said.

“This is the first time anyone has looked at genes to see how far these insects have travelled,” said Jessica Ware, assistant professor of biology at RU-N.

“If North American *Pantala* only bred with North American *Pantala*, and Japanese *Pantala* only bred with Japanese *Pantala*, we would expect to see that in genetic results that differed from each other,” said Ms. Ware. “Because we don’t see that, it suggests the mixing of genes across vast geographic expanses,” she said.

They have the adaptations

“These dragonflies have adaptations such as increased surface areas on their wings that enable them to use the wind to carry them,” Ms. Ware said.

Dragonflies, in fact, have already been observed crossing the Indian Ocean from Asia to Africa.

“They are following the weather. They’re going from India where it’s dry season to Africa where it’s moist season, and apparently they do it once a year,” said Daniel Troast, who analysed the DNA samples in Ms. Ware’s lab.

These need moisture to multiply

“Moisture is a must for *Pantala* to reproduce, and that is why these insects would be driven to even attempt such a perilous trip,” Ms. Ware said.

The species depends on it. While many will die en route, as long as enough make it, the species survives.

Flight patterns appear to vary. The hardiest of the dragonflies might make the trip nonstop, catching robust air currents or even hurricane winds and gliding all the way.

Others may be puddle jumpers.

Freshwater as breeding ground

Pantala need freshwater to mate and lay their eggs — and if they spot a freshwater pool, even on an island in the middle of an ocean — it is likely they use those pools to mate, researchers said.

After the eggs hatch and the babies are mature enough to fly — which takes just a few weeks — the new dragonflies join the swarm's intercontinental and now multi-generational trek right where their parents left off.

New record-holders

Monarch butterflies migrating across North America were thought to be the longest migrating insects, travelling about 4,023 kilometres each way, but *Pantala* breaks any migrating record they would have, with its estimated range of 7,081 kilometres or more, researchers said.

The study was published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.



Cabinet meeting in Latur today: Govt bigwigs in Marathwada to tackle drought condition

Ministers on tour to worst-hit districts, their inputs will be discussed.



Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has convened an emergency meeting of his cabinet ministers at Latur on Friday to review and initiate short- and long-term measures to tackle the severe drought situation in Maharashtra.

The onset of summer has got the government worried, as demand for fodder camps coupled with sinking water tables in state's biggest dams are playing havoc with the drinking water supply in some districts of Marathwada, Vidarbha and parts of North and Western Maharashtra.

Highly placed sources in the government said the biggest concern was of drinking water in drought-hit districts, but they had plans in place. "The state is already in talks with Union railway minister Suresh Prabu to ensure water supply through trains, if the situation requires it mid-March onwards. There is no reason to panic as ways to supply both fodder and drinking water for the next four months are being worked out," said a leader.

All the cabinet ministers from BJP and Shiv Sena have set out on drought inspection tours to their respective districts earmarked by the government. On Friday, they will present their inputs from the ground, which will then be discussed in detail at the special cabinet meeting in Latur. Fadnavis reckons that till the onset of monsoon in June-July, they will have to make elaborate plans to address the drinking water and fodder camp problems in the worst-hit districts. In the second week of February, Fadnavis had directed district collectors to restart the fodder camps, which were shut down by the agriculture and revenue department in some districts. The drought meeting assumes great significance as it comes ahead of the crucial Budget Session commencing from March 9. While the Congress-NCP has already scaled up attack on the government on the drought situation, what has it worried is the public outcry, which ministers believe cannot be left unattended. Leader of the Opposition Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil is already on a week-long tour to districts of Latur, Beed, Osmanabad, Aurangabad and Pune. Opposition leader in legislative council Dhananjay Munde has also set out on tour of Marathwada. As part of remedial measures, Fadnavis has decided to engage the administration and local organisations to address the problem. A few days ago, he held a meeting with newly elected district BJP presidents. Sources in the BJP said, "The idea is to mobilise the party unit to work at the grass roots and attend to problems in remote villages." At the party levels, they have shortlisted 15,747 villages reeling under dry spell from 21 districts in the state. Every district chief has been provided a detailed chart on villages to be covered, along with workers support system. While the district

and taluka administration will be the nodal agency in reaching out with water and fodder, the role of the BJP workers would be to work as a bridge to monitor the implementation of government schemes. They would also work as input providers where the system is found lacking. “The government should waive off loans to provide immediate relief to farmers. They need to provide fodder camps and deploy more water tankers in Marathwada,” Vikhe-Patil said.

hindustantimes

This Budget will be applauded by economic historians



Agricultural e-marketing will help improve market access for farmers (AFP Photo)

Has the Arun Jaitley Budget met expectations? The view that it lacks any Big Idea is a muted response. It is not in everybody’s luck to encounter each year a Victor Hugo moment of a Big Idea. But what is wrong with the big idea promoted by the Budget of “nurturing an aspirational rural society”? And this is what it seeks to do. Budgets are about opportunities and making credible choices.

First, the choice between adherence to fiscal rectitude versus tweaking the numbers. Eschewing the easier route of re-calibrating the path of fiscal consolidation reinforces credibility. Off balance sheets and extra-budgetary resources combine the virtues of fiscal consolidation with enhanced public investment. Deliberating on the preferred path of fiscal consolidation and debt to GDP ratio, and an acceptable methodology for cyclical adjustments deserve a review. The proposed committee would enlighten us on these.

Second, the arithmetic of the Budget is a credible one. Broadening the definition of disinvestment to include standalone asset sales and the projections from sale of spectrum are not unrealistic. Using disinvestment to finance infrastructure is a form of asset-swapping.

Third, doubling farm incomes by 2020 is a daunting challenge, implying faster growth for both farm and non-farm sectors. The allocation of Rs 2.78 lakh crore to Gram Panchayats and municipalities will enable this tier of governance to do what was expected in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. Similarly Rs 38,500 crores for MGNREGS, 100% village electrification, enhancing reach of agriculture and the long-term Irrigation Fund with improved water management and agricultural practices and market access to farmers through e-marketing, have many positives. Too many still live off agriculture even as its contribution to GDP has shrunk. Creating low to medium intensive agriculture hubs, non-agricultural livelihoods patterns, and synergising gains through orderly urbanisation, needs action beyond the budget.

Fourth, the Budget recognises that we need to improved outcomes from our education system. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan's allocation has been enhanced, 62 Narvodaya Vidyalas will cover uncovered districts and a Higher Education Financing Agency will benefit sector as a whole. The setting up of 10 public and private institutions for world-class teaching and research is aspirational. It will undo the ignominy of India having negligible institutions reckoned as centres of global excellence.

However, a regulatory culture and enabling ecosystem for education needs creative restructuring. Improving teacher training and quality of pre-parental education is necessary to improve outcomes at the primary and secondary levels. Similarly, centres of educational excellence will need autonomy and creating a milieu in which innovations flourish. These need painstaking reforms beyond the calculus of financial provisions.

Fifth, growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition to harness employable youths. Skilling India through 1500 Multi Skill Training Institutes, promoting entrepreneurship among SC/ ST and women in the Stand Up India initiative will encourage small and medium entrepreneurs.

Unfortunately, employment coefficients have remained muted. An era of jobless growth is a prelude to social unrest. Job creation to absorb both older

and new entrants — 12 million per annum— is fundamental. The hiatus of micro, small, medium, large, for job creation is a false one. We need them all. We need far greater compact between the Centre and the States, notwithstanding competitive federalism. Changes in the regulatory framework, particularly for land and labour, are inescapable.

Sixth, the health of our financial system remains worrisome. It is to the credit of the finance ministry and RBI to nudge greater transparency on impaired assets. Patronage driven portfolio decision by banks, encouraged by successive governments, will be sticky to undo.

The commitment for Rs 25,000 crore towards recapitalisation of banks, amendments of the SARFAESI Act 2002 to enable an asset reconstruction company to hold 100% stake and allow non-institutional investors in securitisation receipts are positive steps. The Indradhanush programme on autonomy of banks and the constitution of a credible Bank Board Bureau are important initiatives.

Seventh, improving governance through synchronisation of Jan Dhan Yojana, Aadhaar and mobile (JAM) platforms is a creative initiative. The proposed enactment of the National Identification Authority of India Bill 2010 as a Money Bill, and the separation of issues of privacy, citizenship/nationality while providing a neutral technology platform can be a game changer.

Given the success of the LPG, extending its reach to fertilisers and subsequently for agro-based programmes and the now rationalised Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs) will minimise leakages and multiply benefits to beneficiaries.

Finally, there are other initiatives like a statutory basis for the Monetary Policy Committee, Code on Resolution of Financial Firms and Financial Data Management Centre. Among others, inter alia, they will enhance trust between RBI and Finance Ministry, ensure symmetry between monetary and fiscal policy and provide impetus to financial sector reforms. Incidentally, eliminating the distinction between plan and non-plan expenditure will improve asset maintenance while optimising benefits from past investments. This budget galvanises a new aspirational rural India. It would be applauded by economic historians. The ‘Achhe din’ is a process not a product. It is a

departure, not an instant arrival. That process and departure has now begun in earnest.

NK Singh is a member of the BJP and a former Rajya Sabha MP. The views expressed are personal.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

The wilting tea industry of North Bengal



A closed tea processing factory of Lankapara tea garden in North Bengal
ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY

From Nangdala More on NH 31D, near Birpara in Alipurduar, there are five tea gardens on the way to the Bhutan border.

Four of them – Demdima, Jaybirpara, Bandhapani and Dekhlapara – are closed, wiping out 5,000 permanent and an identical number of temporary job opportunities.

Most of the able-bodied have left for other States in search of jobs. The women, children and the elderly subsist by collecting stones, used in construction, from the dry beds of scores of seasonal rivers flowing down from the Bhutan hills.

Welcome to the stressed tea industry of West Bengal, spread over roughly four districts in North Bengal.

Excluding some 10 million kg (mkg) from Darjeeling, the region produces over 300 mkg of tea annually (25 per cent of national production), with 60

per cent of the total contributed by large plantations employing 2.64 lakh permanent and a larger number of casual workers.

But industry insiders claim that barely 30-35 gardens out of 195 make profits. Some 30-32 gardens are closed or abandoned. Nearly half the closed gardens are concentrated near Birpara, especially in the Madarihat block.

Environmental decay

There is no specific reason behind the heavy concentration of sick assets here.

In a recent appeal to the State administration, the Indian Tea Association reported that rampant dolomite quarrying in parts of Bhutan had had a serious impact on the tea industry here.

In the rainy season, the dolomite extract is washed down to the plains, making the soil alkaline and rendering it unsuitable for plantation.

Responding to the appeal, the district administration of Alipurduar recently ordered setting up of an air and water quality monitoring centre bordering the Jayanti hills.

Management failure

Abhijit Majumder, son of the late Naxalite ideologue Charu Majumder and a prominent leader of the CPI (M-L), says management failure is the prime cause of the sickness.

“The boom in tea prices in the 1990s,” he says, “lured many to own gardens for quick returns. The subsequent crash between 2000 and 2006 found them cutting corners, damaging the asset quality and defaulting on workers’ dues.”

The entry of money-collection companies (or chit funds) from the middle of the last decade added to the woes.

Take the case of Bandapani.

Till 1995, when it changed hands, the garden was producing 9 lakh kg of tea without any major history of work stoppage.

According to Suryaman Tamang, a former head clerk, as the prices crashed, the new management (Alipurduar Enterprises) reduced consumption of agri-inputs and neglected measures to check dolomite seepage from the Dhumchi river, which flows through the estate.

This led to a steady decline in production, further impacting the cash flow. In 2010, the asset was sold to the money-collection outfit, Saradha Pleasure and Adventure, which went bust in 2013, with ₹4.7 crore dues against PF and gratuity.

Locals allege that 12 Duncan Goenka gardens similarly closed down last year.

Compare this with Gairkhata tea garden of Gillanders Arbuthnot. It too suffered losses during the tough market conditions. But, today, the garden records 50 per cent higher yield than the regional average. And its teas fetch a 40 per cent premium price.

Pressure on prices

Tea industry sources admit to management failures. But they claim that more fundamental reasons are pushing even well-managed gardens to slow death.

At the heart of the controversy is the proliferation of small growers and 'project gardens' during the Left Front rule.

There are at least 70 project gardens (including two of Duncan Goenka) in North Bengal operating outside the purview of the Plantation Labour Act.

Sources say that to complete the vicious cycle, project garden owners control a majority of the 164 bought-leaf-factories (BLF) in the region, dictating the price of green-leaf on small growers.

According to Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty, President of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Associations (CISTA), farmers received an average price of ₹10/kg in 2015. The tea was sold in the market at ₹50-55.

“Complying with regulations comes at a cost. Unless market fundamentals are set right, a majority of the gardens in the region will down shutters over the next decade,” says one of the top 30 garden owners in Dooars.

If he is right, North Bengal’s economy is headed for major trouble in the days ahead.

After crop insurance, now scheme for plantations



A view of a coffee estate in Belur taluk, Karnataka. The revenue insurance scheme is likely to be funded from the Price Stabilisation Fund.

The market-linked insurance scheme is designed to protect against price, yield fluctuations

After launching an ambitious crop insurance scheme – Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana – the Centre is now turning its focus on covering the risks of the plantation sector.

A market-linked insurance scheme for plantation crops such as tea, coffee, rubber and spices, is being worked out to protect growers of these crops against price and yield fluctuations. The scheme may also include tobacco.

Revenue insurance scheme

The scheme, to be called ‘Revenue Insurance Scheme for Plantation Crops’, is being formulated by the Commerce & Industry Ministry and will be first implemented on a pilot basis in seven districts, a government official told *BusinessLine*.

PSF funding

“The scheme will be funded from the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) for plantation crops which has not taken off due to a number of weaknesses,” the official said.

For instance, the PSF was not linked to landholdings and would kick in only when prices fell below a certain percentage of average prices prevailing over the past few years.

Growers had complained that it had stringent criteria for determination of distress.

“The new insurance-based scheme that is being formulated will insure the plantation growers against both price and yield fluctuations. The proportion in which the premium will be shared by producers and the government is being worked out,” the official said.

Growers of plantation crops such as rubber, coffee and tea are highly vulnerable to the volatility in global prices and have been reeling under the impact of the sharp price fluctuations since past few years.

Weather-based scheme

Though the government had introduced a weather-based crop insurance scheme for the coffee growers to cover the yield risks, the scheme has not been largely successful, despite being highly subsidised by the government for various reasons including lack of adequate awareness, complex methodology and poor payouts. “We have been asking the government to cover the risks faced by the plantation owners. Any scheme that covers both price and yield risks is a welcome move,” said Ullas Menon, Secretary-General of the United Planters Association of India (Upasi).

Menon also said that all category of growers – both small and large –should be included in such schemes.

Crop insurance

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has allocated ₹5,500 crore in the Budget for the roll-out of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana that seeks to not only

reduce the premium burden on farmers but also ensures early settlement of claims for the sum insured.

All food crops including cereals, millets and pulses, oilseeds, annual cash crops and horticultural crops would be covered under the PMFBY that will be rolled out from the forthcoming kharif season in June.

Ill-timed rains catch Gujarat farmers unaware

Speculation grips coriander futures; no report of severe damage

Farmers and traders were caught unaware on Wednesday, when parts of Gujarat received unseasonal rains post midnight.

As fears started mounting about the ill-timed rains damaging the ready-to-be-harvested crops wheat, cumin seed, coriander and mustard among others, speculation gripped coriander futures, which shot up by 4 per cent on Thursday.

Sowing areas like Bhavnagar, Amreli in Saurashtra, parts of South and Central Gujarat received rains with thundershowers on Wednesday midnight and during wee hours on Thursday. During the harvest season for rabi crops, traders and speculators suspected heavy crop damage due to the unseasonal rains.

Even as wheat, cumin seed and mustard did not show much movement on the comexes, coriander shot up by close to 4 per cent on the National Commodity & Derivatives Exchange Ltd.

During early trades on Thursday, the April coriander contract hit a high of ₹6,660 a quintal and traded around ₹6,575 before touching a low of ₹6,420.

In the spot market, the coriander prices hovered at around ₹70/kg in Unjha.

“The sudden spurt in prices on the exchanges seems to be out of speculation of possible crop damage. But there has been no major damage. On demand side also, we are seeing modest demand from international and domestic buyers. There is no reason for immediate surge in the prices,” said a coriander exporter from Unjha.

Farmer leaders expressed concerns over the suspected crop damage.

“We suspect significant crop damage to mainly wheat, cumin and coriander because the harvest is on and farmers usually leave their crops on the fields before packaging it into sacks. Such farmers were caught unaware last night and faced damage. However, so far we have no reports of widespread crop damage because of the rains,” said Vitthal Dudhatra, co-general secretary, Bhartiya Kisan Sangh-Gujarat.

But, according to the State Agriculture Department officials, there was no report of crop damage.

“So far there has been no report of damage. In fact, this is the flowering season for mango and heavy winds would have damaged flowering. But it was just rains and not storm so we do not see any major damage in horticulture crop,” said an agriculture department official.

Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department predicted more rains for the next 24 hours adding to the worries of the farmers.

In its forecast till morning of March 5, the Met department said, “Light to moderate rain/thundershower very likely at isolated places in the districts of Gujarat region, Saurashtra and in Diu, Daman, Dadra Nagar Haveli.”

Maharashtra farmers use new methods to save horticulture crops from hailstorms



A mango farm in Mhatre Mandir at Ratnagiri in Konkan. The impact of hailstorms is minimal as majority of the growers have either plucked the fruits or are in the process of plucking them.

The unseasonal rains and hailstorms in certain parts of Marathwada, Vidarbha and northern Maharashtra during the past week did not result in extensive damage to crops, as farmers had already moved into newer modes of cultivation.

Last year, heavy rains and inclement weather destroyed 76,000 hectares of crop mainly grapes and onion across these regions.

A break from tradition

“This year, many farmers moved away from older cultivation methods of using canopies for grapes, while many others switched to trellising style that does not let rain water accumulate on the vines,” said Jagdish Holkar, former Chairman of Indian Grape Processing Board, adding that damage to grapes and grapevines were much less this year.

However, in certain areas, there have been reports of cracks in grapes berries, which could lead to fungal infestation, he added.

Last year, wineries had to rescue table grape owners by buying 5,000 tonnes of the fruit, which was crushed to make an inexpensive table and port wines.

Agriculture Secretary of Maharashtra, D K Jain said that only harvested wheat in certain areas has been damaged.

Crops of onion, grapes and mangoes were only marginally affected.

Vivek Bhide, a mango farmer from Ratnagiri and member of the Mango and Cashew Board of Maharashtra government, said that although rains have not hit Konkan region, the weather in the last seven days has lead to an increase cloud cover coupled with a sharp rise in temperature.

The night temperature has risen from 18 degrees to 23 degrees within a span of two days. These two factors have lead increase in pest attacks such as Thrips.

However, the impact on mango farmers is minimal as the majority of them have either plucked the fruits or are in the process of plucking them.

“Unplucked mangoes, which are still as small as gooseberries, are prone to insect attacks.”

Green leaf price fixed at ₹16.50/kg



The Tea Board has announced the average price for green leaf in the Nilgiris as ₹16.50 per kg for March. This is fixed in line with Section 30A of Tea Marketing Control Order 2003, Tea Board’s Deputy Director of Tea Development CS Hariprakash said. “On representations of small growers, the Board announced the average price for their green leaf for the first time in December 2015. However, the price announced was only ₹12.50 a kg In December. It was increased to ₹13 in January 2016 and to ₹15 in February. We have been asking for more than ₹15 consistently every month to tide over our production cost as also the economic distress we had been suffering for long. To that extent, we welcome Tea Board’s fixing ₹16.50 for the current month,” H Thiagarajan, President, Nilgiris Small Tea Growers’ Association, told *BusinessLine*.

Jeera crackles on profit booking

Jeera prices moved down at futures market as participants booked the profit. Moreover, expectation of higher arrival at the producing States also pressurised the price. On the spot, jeera traded limited on restricted arrival of new crop. Traders said that export demand was marginal and supply was too low which restricted the price to go down much at the physical market.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) jeera March contract declined ₹150 or 1.06 per cent to ₹14,005 per quintal, with

an open interest of 4,950 lots. NCDEX April contract decreased ₹155 or 1.1 per cent to ₹13,990 per quintal, with an open interest of 7,101 lots.



About 6,000 bags arrived in Unjha mandi of Gujarat and price declined ₹20 to ₹2,200-2,600 per 20 kg. At Rajkot APMC, 1,200 bags arrived and price moved down by ₹25 to ₹2,350-2,600 per 20 kg.

Business Standard

Panel for over 70% reduction in Bt cotton licence fee for 2016

A 450-gramme packet of Bt cotton is sold for Rs 830 in Maharashtra; in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, it is sold at Rs 930



A high-powered panel of experts constituted by the government to recommend a national uniform price for Bt cotton for the 2016 season is believed to have suggested a price of Rs 800 per 450 grammes of Bt cotton

packet, which includes Rs 49 as trait fee or licence fee. The licence fee is 74 per cent less than the current one.

A 450-gramme packet of Bt cotton is sold for Rs 830 in Maharashtra, while in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, it is sold at Rs 930. In Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, it is Rs 1,000.

The trait fee is Rs 187 per 450 grammes.

The retail sale price recommended by the committee which held its last meeting a few days ago, is almost 25 per cent less than the highest prevailing price of Bt cotton in northern states, while it is 14 per cent less than the price in areas where the sales are most.

"We have taken a decision which is in the best interest of farmers and have tried to strike a balance between the interest of seed companies and also licence providers," a government official said. He said the committee's recommendations are not binding on the government and a final call on the same will be taken by the ministry of agriculture.

The government had constituted a high-powered panel of experts headed by a joint-secretary-level official in the ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare to operationalise its December 2015 cotton seed price control order.

The order empowered the Centre to fix a uniform retail price for cotton seeds including Bt cotton, following complaints that licence providers had not lowered their 'trait or licence fees' despite reduction in retail sale price of cotton which is also hurting the interest of farmers.

The licence providers led by MMBL have approached the high court against the circular on the grounds that the Centre does not have the power to determine the licence fee agreement mutually entered between two parties.

The Centre has approached the Competition Commission of India (CCI) against unfair trade practices being indulged in by some seed companies.

Odisha agri Budget to focus on reducing farmers' vulnerability: Naveen Patnaik

The focus of the agriculture Budget, 2016-17, would be on increasing the area under irrigation

Indicating that the upcoming agriculture Budget of Odisha will focus on reducing farmers' vulnerability to natural calamities, the agriculture cabinet committee on Thursday directed allied departments to enhance allocations for the betterment of farming sector in the state.

"The agriculture cabinet committee on its first meeting today directed the departments of planning and convergence, finance, agriculture and farmers empowerment and allied departments to enhance the outlay of the agriculture Budget," Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said after presiding over the agriculture cabinet committee meeting.

Stating that the departments have been asked to bring about convergence in their activities, programmes and schemes, Patnaik said the focus of the agriculture Budget, 2016-17, would be on increasing the area under irrigation and reduce the gap between irrigation potential available in the state and the actual area brought under irrigation.

"The Budget will also focus on reducing farmers vulnerability to natural calamities, provision of credits and agriculture inputs in time, improving agriculture production and productivity by laying emphasis on the modern farm technology and development of fisheries and animal husbandry sector," he said.

Emphasis would be laid on marketing of agriculture produce and creation of storage and warehousing facilities for better harvest management of agriculture produces, Patnaik said.

Stating that his government was committed to ensure that farm household incomes were substantially enhanced through different initiatives, the chief minister claimed the state government has taken a historic step in setting up an agriculture cabinet committee to fast track the policy and decision making process for agriculture and allied sectors.

Patnaik said the state government has changed the name of agriculture department to the department of agriculture and farmers empowerment.

Besides Patnaik, ministers of finance, agriculture, fisheries and animal resources, cooperation, water resources, energy, food supplies and consumer welfare, SC and ST development, panchayati raj and revenue attended the first meeting of the agriculture cabinet committee.

National online trading in agri commodities to begin from April

The proposed National Agriculture Market is to come about by electronically linking 585 major wholesale markets (mandis) in the country, termed Agricultural Produce Market Committees

Come September and the Karnataka government's initiative in getting farmers a state-wide e-market would be replicated elsewhere. The aim is to create a national e-market in this regard. This proposed National Agriculture Market (NAM) is to come about by electronically linking 585 major wholesale markets (mandis) in the country, termed Agricultural Produce Market Committees. Implementation of this idea is the responsibility of the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC). The project had been announced last July by the central government, with a Rs 200 crore allocation for three years.

The software contract has been awarded to a consortium led by Hyderabad-based Nagarjuna Fertilizers and Chemicals (NFC). "Online trading of 21 selected agri commodities will begin on the NAM in April, in 20 mandis. That will help bug fixing, if any, in the software. By September, about 200 mandis will be integrated with this platform and start trading of selected commodities online," said Vasudha Mishra, managing director, SFAC. She said the schedule is to link the 585 major mandis by September 2017.

NFC, with Techno Brain Global FZE, an information technology company with a global presence, will provide technical support. And, after developing the software, operate and maintain the NAM portal for five years. Training will be imparted to the participants, state-wise. Mishra said: "We have mandated them to use open source software."

The schedule is for linking 200 mandis by September, another 200 by March 2017 and the remaining 185 by September 2017.

NCDEX E-Markets, a subsidiary of the agri-centric National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, had linked the mandis of Karnataka. Farmers in that state are able to sell to the best bidder and commission agents also deal through that platform. The produce is graded and assayed, with the farmers paid on the spot. Prices are quoted accordingly, with farmers able to choose the best offer from a mandi.

NCDEX E-Markets has also started linking the mandis in Andhra Pradesh and has signed a similar agreement with the government of Gujarat. Adds Mishra: "Both Gujarat and AP have said they will link their mandis to the NAM platform, once this is operational." Once NAM is fully operational, a farmer should be able to sell to anyone in the country who offers the best price.

Nothing in budget for fisheries or aquaculture sector: Kamlesh Gupta

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the budget has completely ignored fisheries & aquaculture sector, proposing incentives and investments, only for agriculture

Fisheries & aquaculture is an important sector for food production in the country. The sector provides nutritional security to nation's food basket, contributes to agro exports and provides employment to 14 million people. Indian fisheries and aquaculture contributes to 6.3 percent of the global fish production, 1.1 percent of the GDP and 5.15 percent of the agriculture GDP. Seafood exports from India have increased by five times during the past 15 years to touch \$ 6.5 billion, making India the fourth largest global seafood exporter.

However, the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the budget has completely ignored fisheries & aquaculture sector, proposing incentives and investments, only for agriculture. This is highly disappointing for the Indian fisheries industry.

The centre should note that, aquaculture face challenges similar to agriculture - be it the climate, quantity and quality of harvest or price, often determined by market forces.

In the budget, for agriculture, the Finance Minister has proposed schemes and benefits, such as bringing more land under farm irrigation plan,

new crop insurance scheme, increased agriculture credit, increased spending on animal husbandry, cattle and livestock breeding and introduction of Krishi Kalyan Benefit tax, for the benefit of farmers. However, I do not think, farmers involved in aquaculture or fisheries, would be benefited in any way with the aforesaid schemes.

There has not been a mention of 'blue revolution' in this year's budget, a subject dear to Prime Minister Modi.

Today, fisheries or aquaculture do not enjoy benefits of agriculture, even though the sectors come under the purview of Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DADF), which is a department in the Ministry of Agriculture. This needs to be corrected.

FDI in food processing to hit farmers, employment: CAIT

Says, allowing FDI in food sector is nothing but a step in the direction of opening retail sector to FDI



Opposing the Budget proposal to permit 100 per cent FDI in food processing segment, traders body CAIT today said the move would adversely impact farmers and will result into mass unemployment.

"Allowing foreign investment in any form of retail will have adverse impact on traders, farmers, hawkers, transporters, small industries and will result into mass unemployment," Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said in a statement.

Allowing FDI in food sector is nothing but a step in the direction of opening retail sector to FDI much against the declared commitment of not allowing foreign players in the retail sector, it said.

"We strongly oppose this move of the government which will enable the global retailers to control, dominate and monopolise the food sector. The trade fears that today it is the food sector and tomorrow entire retail may be opened on one pretext or the other," it said.

It is a major shift in policy of the government and that too without taking traders into confidence, it added.

"The government seems to be much lethargic and having least bothered about trading community of the country which is generally considered as strong vote bank of BJP," CAIT said.

The body urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "give us an audience and listen our sufferings" as no priority is given to retail sector, it added.

Further it said the government has not taken cognizance of the report of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, which had stated that food wastage in India is merely 0.8 per cent to 10 per cent.

Any move to allow multinational companies into Indian retail trade will amount to "betrayal of confidence" of the small businesses in India, it said urging the government to issue a white paper on FDI in retail.