

## **A brave attempt to restart farm advance: M.S.Swaminathan**

**THE HINDU**

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*This is the statement of M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman, National Commission on Farmers, on the Union budget 2006-07:*

As desired, I give below my views on the Union budget for 2006-07 in the context of the urgent need for agricultural renewal and renaissance.

Using the Finance Minister's terminology 'best of times' and 'worst of times' improvement in agricultural growth to about 2.3 percent as well as food production to over 209 million tonnes is a good sign. At least the agricultural growth rate is now slightly above the population growth rate.

In relation to the 'worst of times,' our farmers who number 25 percent of the world's farming population have been subjected to serious problems of climate aberrations, land degradation and market failure. Market fluctuations continue to be very adverse to small growers of vegetables like tomato, onion and potato and other perishable commodities. I am afraid the seriousness of the agricultural crisis has not been fully captured in the budgetary initiatives.

The allocation for rural infrastructure development through Bharat Nirman, particularly for bringing 6 lakh hectares of additional area under irrigation, would certainly help to improve farm productivity. The allocation for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, if properly utilized should help to upgrade degraded land and improve soil health and water management. If the gender budgeting is done properly in relation to rural investments there should be some

relief to female workers whose share in the total work force is increasing.

### **Short-term credit**

Enhancement of agricultural credit and the plan for giving credit to 5 million more farmers is a welcome one. The most significant and timely assistance given to resource poor farmers is the provision of short-term credit at 7 per cent up to a limit of Rs. 3 lakhs. The proposal to give relief to those who are currently severely indebted is also a welcome one. The move to provide separate credit windows to Self Help Groups of tenant farmers is another welcome step. I am glad provision has also been made to revive agricultural cooperative credit institutions.

The steps to strengthen the National Horticulture Mission in the Northeast by establishing a Central Institute of Horticulture in Nagaland is a welcome one. At present most Technology Missions are subsidy rich and technology poor. There is also provision for establishing a National Fisheries Development Board and a National Jute Board. These boards will serve a useful purpose only if they are structured as professional bodies attending to all links in the production-consumption chain in an integrated manner.

### **Non-farm employment**

I also welcome the steps indicated in the budget for increasing opportunities for rural non-farm employment. Thus, the support to cotton textiles and particularly to the handloom

sector, handicrafts and food processing will help to diversify income avenues in villages.

Strengthening the technological backup to food processing through the establishment of a National Food Processing Technology Institute and the upgrading of the Paddy Processing Centre at Thanjavur will be helpful.

I am also happy that the contribution of our agricultural universities has been recognized through the allocation of Rs. 100 crores to the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. I only wish that similar recognition had been given to the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, which completed 100 years of glorious service to the nation last year.

The only additional support indicated for agricultural research is the initiation of a World Bank Project.

In short, the budget has made a brave attempt to restart our agricultural advance. I only wish that the suggestions given by the National Commission on farmers for our agricultural renewal and renaissance had been given greater attention. In particular, market reforms and market infrastructure are crying for attention.

Agriculture being a State subject, I hope the State budgets will fill the serious gaps. The Union budget has, however, failed to convey the message that if agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will have a chance to go right.

# Ground control: Organic manure is NE'S new buzz

*The Indian Express*

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## In 'organic by default' region, farming trend ready acceptance

**W**ITH an MA degree in international business from the University of Greenwich, London, Kumar Sanjeet Narayan Dev should not have returned to his home state. But that was exactly what he did. He came back to Gwahati and now runs a unit that manufactures organic manure, which he describes as a lucrative area with a tremendous future.

Sanjeet has with him his sister Panchali, an MSc in biotechnology. And their back room comprises IIT Guwahati, which has offered them technology as well as standing buy-back orders for most of their output.

Though Assam and the Northeast are mostly organic by default-according to government figures, of the net cultivated area of 4.3 million hectares, around 30.92 lakh hectares have never seen the use of chemical or inorganic fertilizers-conscious organic farming has suddenly picked up across Assam, especially among those cultivating ginger, turmeric, oranges, black pepper and pineapples.

On an experimental basis, the Assam agriculture department has taken up organic cultivation of joha or scented rice across 92 hectares in three districts involving 162 farmers. "The young and educated generation of farmers are the most enthusiastic about organic. These is because they have access to information and want to make farming a profitable venture instead of just a family

tradition," says NNBarpujari, director of agriculture, government of Assam.

That the Northeast is "naturally organic by default" can be gauged from the extremely low consumption of fertilizer in the region. While the national average is currently around 94 kg/hectare, the average in the Northeastern region as a whole is only 31 kg/ha.

In the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim it is even lower: while Arunachal's average is 2.7 kg/ha, Sikkim uses 3.1 kg/ha.

So, though scientist at the Regional Centre of Organic Farming at Imphal, may attribute the low fertilizer consumption to lack of awareness and non-availability of fertilizers, the situation dovetails nicely with the purposes of the Central Technology Mission for Integrated Development of Agriculture (TM-IDH).

Apart from the ever-increasing number of farmers keen to go organic, one section of entrepreneurs is moving the comparatively new area of manufacturing organic manure and vermicompost. While Kumar Sanjeet Narayan Dey's bio-manure 'Green-Markers' has found a ready buyer in IIT Guwahati, Hiren Sharma, small-time farmer of Bamunpara village in Darrang district earns Rs 1.6 lakh annually through the 120 MT of vermicompost manufactured in his eight units.

Organic and bio-manure has caught the imagination of the educated unemployed across district. Nabajyoti

Rajkhowa, a science graduate armed with a diploma in computer applications, for instance, did not bother to look for a government job after leaving college. Today, he is a major vermicompost manufacture in Golaghat in Upper Assam, with an assured market among tea-growers and other cultivators and earns around Rs 3 lakh per annum.

The one problem the authorities foresee, however, relates to certification, essential if the cultivators are to get the right remuneration. For instance, farmers in the hill district of Karbi Anglong get barely Rs 25 crore for their annual

ginger crop; in the national market, the produce is valued at Rs 200 crore.

“We have already taken up the certification process with some accreditation agencies like SGS India of Gurgaon and SKAL India of Bangalore,” says Barpujari. “The farmers’ efforts should not go in vain.”

With the Centre allocating Rs 3 crore for the Northeast under the National Project on Organic farming during 2005-06, and certification agencies conducting tests on different farm products of the region, it won’t be long before agriculture comes down to earth.

# “Make Uttaranchal medicinal plant hub”

THE HINDU

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## Union Minister holds meeting with agro exporters and State officials

- He said his ministry would clear all feasible proposals
- The Minister also promised dry ports in Dehra Dun and Pant Nagar

**DEHRA DUN:** The Union Minister of State for Commerce, Jairam Ramesh, urged the Uttaranchal Government here over the weekend to expeditiously send him proposals aimed at developing the export potential of agriculture, medicinal plants and handicrafts as an important revenue generator for the masses.

Addressing newsmen after a meeting with agro exporters and senior officials, Mr. Ramesh said that exports did not merely mean earning dollars but creation of a lot of earning opportunities through direct and indirect employment for the poorest.

To a query, the Minister said that given the right direction the people of Uttaranchal -- known for massive social actions like the Chipko movement -- could successfully convert the State into one big enterprise where everyone gained through mutual efforts. He assured all financial and technical

assistance for upgradation of cultivation, processing and marketing skills.

Urging officials to make real time efforts to develop Uttaranchal as the capital of medicinal plants by promoting cultivation of important herbs that had a ready market, he said his ministry would clear all feasible proposals for Medicinal Plant Processing Zone, Agricultural Export Zone and also try to cut down the bottlenecks faced by the State while interacting with his Ministry.

He also promised a dry port in Dehra Dun and Pant Nagar. “We are there to give you all assistance provided you show the will and come up with feasible proposals,” he said.

State Horticulture Secretary Utpal Kumar Singh said that Kutki, Chiraita, Kutki, Sarpangandha, Tagar, Kalihari, Atis, Jata Masi, Lavendor and Van Kakri had been identified as herbs that could be promoted for mass cultivation in the hills.

# China to focus on narrowing urban-rural divide

THE HINDU

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## More equitable distribution of the fruits of its economic successes

**BELJING:** China will focus on narrowing its urban-rural divide and attempt a more equitable distribution of the fruits of its economic successes, Premier Wen Jiabao told the country's legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC), on the opening day of its annual meeting on Sunday.

He identified the building of a "new socialist countryside: as the "major historic task" facing the country.

To achieve this he promised an increase in direct subsidies to grain producers, the acceleration of the development of rural infrastructure and sharp hikes in funding for education and health services in the countryside.

China's 800 million odd peasants comprise 70 percent of the population, but with an average annual income of \$400 (a third of average urban incomes) they make up only around 40 percent of domestic consumption.

The gap widens when health care and other social benefits provided to many urban residents but lacking in the countryside are factored in.

Mr. Wen said 339.7 billion Yuan (\$42.4 billion) would be allocated from the Central Government budget for investment in agriculture and rural areas, an increase of 14.2 percent over 2005. Rural healthcare will see a seven-fold increase in spending to reach 4.73 billion Yuan this year.

### Universal education

Subsidies for free text books and boarding allowances for students from poor families, the repair of school buildings and other measures aimed at ensuring universal, nine-years of collection will be met with a 218.2 billion Yuan (\$27.2 billion) budget allocation to be made available between 2006-2010.

Mr. Wen praised China's economic performance in 2005, when the economy grew by 9.9 percent. He also struck a note of caution, warning that the rapidly growing economy was threatened by excessive investment, production gluts and mismanagement.

"Production gluts are increasingly severe, prices of related goods are falling and inventories are rising. Business profits are shrinking, losses are growing and latent financial risks are increasing," Mr. Wen said.

He announced a relatively modest growth target of 8 percent for 2006.

The World Bank and other analysts have projected the growth at above nine percent this year, but the Government typically sets cautious targets.

It had also set a target of 8 percent growth for 2005 but the actual growth was almost 10 percent.

Beijing has in fact been trying to restrain its red-hot economy in recent years, warning that a prolonged annual growth rate above 9 percent could cause inflation and financial problems.

Mr. Wen called for a sharp hike in spending on science and technology in

line with official plans to make china a world power in areas ranging from genetics and nuclear energy to medicine and computers. He said China must “increase its capacity for innovation” and “leapfrog advances in key areas of science and technology.”

In 2006, the Central Government will spend 71.6 billion Yuan (\$8.9 billion) to support these efforts, an increase of over 19 percent from the previous year.

### **Foreign policy**

Mr. Wen’s speech avoided breakthrough statements on foreign policy and defence. But he reiterated once more China’s stand on the Taiwan issue.

“It is the people’s will for cross-Strait relation to develop in a direction of peace, stability and mutual benefit,” he said. “Anyone who vainly seeks to destroy this great trend will certainly fail.”

Taiwan President Chen Shuibian has recently antagonized Beijing by scrapping an official council on reunification.

With cross-straits tensions simmering, China is set to spend 280.7 billion Yuan (\$35.3 billion), 14.7 percent more on defence in 2006 than it did last year, a spokesman for the national Parliament said.

# When nature calls, Watch grass grow

THE PIONEER

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## Standing crops in MP fall to storms

**BHOPAL:** EVEN AS the administration assess the loss of crops and property due to unprecedented rain and hailstorm in different parts of Madhya Pradesh, farmers are making efforts to safeguard what remains of their crops.

A hailstorm occurred all over the State in the past three days and has damaged crops worth lakhs of rupees. Senior officials, however, claim that there has been minor damage to the crops.

The unexpected rain and hail, according to the farmers, caused extensive damage to the ripe standing crops. Certain crops that had been harvested, were awaiting transportation to the *mandis*. Out in the open, they were totally damaged. The areas affected were

the districts of Khargone, Bhopal, Burhanpur, Khandwa, Vidisha, Chhindwara and Jabalpur. Betul and Khargone reported the maximum damage.

Besides the damage to crops, heavy loss of property was reported from different districts. Mudhouses were washed away and galvanized iron sheets were blown away in the severe storms. The State Government has directed the district collectors to send a detailed report after surveying the loss of crops and property. The Agriculture Produce Commissioner Ikbal Ahmed said that preliminary reports revealed that in most of the areas, the rains and hailstorms had not adversely affected the crops.

## Where has all the paddy gone in Alappuzha

**ALAPPUZHA:** PADDY CULTIVATION in the Alappuzha district is facing a vertical collapse. According to a study conducted by the Economics and Statistics Department, 36.8 percent paddy fields had vanished in the last 10 years taking the total area under cultivation in the district down to a mere 32,083 hectares in 2003-2004 from 50,781 hectares in 1993-1994.

The very survival of rice production in the district, which supplies most of the crop internally, has been threatened by the conversion of 18,698

hectares of land for other purposes. The report also says that reclamation process of paddy field is continuing unabated.

Despite the shrinkage of land under paddy cultivation, production rate has shown an increase, though nominally, raising hopes of cultivators says the report. The rate of production of rice per hector had gone up in 1997-98 to 3,350 kilos from 3,323 kilos in 1993-1994 and this reached 4,703 kilos in 2002-2003. Though the production had shown a dip 2003-2004 to 2,989 kilos per hectare,

farmers as well as statisticians are optimistic.

The report has highlighted the enthusiasm shown by the farmers in using highbred seeds. They say that the main reason for the improvement in rice production owed to the usage of good better-bred varieties of seeds.

## **Much ado about organic farming in south Orissa**

**RAYAGADA:** THOUGH MASANOBU Fukuoka of Japan spearheads the organic farming movement; tribals of the entire southern Orissa are considered natural organic farmers.

Conventional crops are in high demand by the locals for their sumptuous taste. For traditional crop, no chemical fertilizer or pesticide is used. The seeds are stored in a traditional manner so that the cycle of regeneration goes on.

This kind of agriculture is also known as “permaculture” (permanent agriculture) or natural farming because the process sustains itself. Fortunately, the demand for these are rapidly increasing in India and the international sphere, but certification of these organic products is a cumbersome process and a costly affair.

In the absence of such a certification unit in this region, the naturally grown organic foods hardly fetch a remunerative price. While the Government advocates innovative schemes in the KBK region, establishment of a certification unit will pave the way for the value addition of the naturally grown foods by tribal people.

This will further moderate the cultivation process in promoting the traditional skill of tribals that is fast losing in the wake of modernization. For this the investment is the least on awareness, skill up gradation, delivery of physical inputs as tribals are already aware and skilled.