

23<sup>rd</sup> June 2021

### **Assam gets world's 1st GM rubber sapling**

In a major experiment in rubber farming, Rubber Board has started field trial of world's first genetically modified (GM) rubber in Assam. Developed in the biotechnology laboratory at Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII) in Puthuppally, Kottayam, the new variety was planted at board's Sarutari research farm in Guwahati.

"It's a major achievement as we are the first to plant a GM crop on the soil, while others are still keeping them in labs. The new crop will greatly benefit farmers once the trials are over. It will resist reduced moisture or drought, low and high temperatures as well as high light intensity," said Dr James Jacob, director, RRII.

### **Lakshadweep: Kerala HC stays 2 orders, asks govt why upset food habits**

The Kerala High Court temporarily stayed two controversial orders of the Lakshadweep administration — one pertaining to closure of dairy farms and the other on change in the menu of midday meals for school children in the islands.

Lakshadweep Administrator Praful K Patel had recently ordered the closure of government-owned dairy farms, and for meat and chicken to be taken out of the menu of the midday meal scheme, prompting Ajmal Ahamed, a native of Lakshadweep, to file a public interest litigation in the High Court.

The petition said the order on midday meals was issued with mala fide intention to change the food habits of the people of the islands, and alleged that the decision to shut down government-run dairy farms was meant to promote marketing of dairy products from Gujarat, Patel's home state.

Staying the orders and giving the Union Territory two weeks to file its counter affidavit, a division bench of Chief Justice S Manikumar and Justice Shaji P Chaly asked the Union government why it was upsetting the food habits of the region.

### **Prohibition Law under challenge: Gujarat govt raises objections on maintainability of pleas**

After the Gujarat government argued in the High Court that legal challenges to the state's prohibition Act were not maintainable because the Supreme Court had upheld those sections in 1951, the petitioners contended that several such provisions have seen "material changes" over the years.

Advocate General Kamal Trivedi on June 21 had argued that except for two sections, the remaining sections of the Act being challenged by the petitioners have already been upheld by the Supreme Court in 1951, and thus a fresh challenge on two new grounds — 'manifest

arbitrariness' and right to privacy — cannot be entertained before the Gujarat HC and can only be looked at by the SC.

Six petitions are before the Gujarat HC, including a PIL, challenging the Act, primarily on the grounds of right to privacy and of 'manifest arbitrariness', as has been laid down in cases such as Shayara Bano versus Union of India (which criminalised triple talaq) and Navtej Johar versus Union of India (which decriminalised homosexuality).

### **Qatar envoy says India officials met Taliban; Jaishankar points to no dip in Afghan violence**

Even as a senior diplomat from Qatar has said that there has been a "quiet visit" by Indian officials "to speak with the Taliban", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar underlined the intra-Afghan talks have not resulted in a reduction of violence in Afghanistan. The minister also said that "any political settlement" in Afghanistan must "preserve the constitutional democratic framework".

Addressing the UN Security Council on Tuesday through virtual mode, Jaishankar said, "India has been supportive of all the efforts being made to accelerate the dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban, including the intra-Afghan negotiations. If the peace process is to be successful, then it is necessary to ensure that the negotiating parties continue to engage in good faith, eschew the path to find a military solution, and fully commit towards reaching a political solution. A tangible demonstration of this commitment is required."

This came a day after Qatar's special envoy for counter-terrorism and conflict resolution, Mutlaq bin Majed al-Qahtani, said that he believed the Indian side was engaging with the Taliban as the group is seen as a "key component" in any future government in Afghanistan.