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The True Mirror of A & N Islands

Media Delegation Visits ICAR-CIARI's Agro-Eco Tourism and World Coconut Germplasm Centre at Sippighat



Sri Vijaya Puram, Feb 10: A group of journalists from prominent national and regional print and electronic media visited the Horticulture Research Farm in Sippighat on 9th February 2026. This delegation consisted of 41 members, with 12 journalists hailing from Chhattisgarh and 29 from Tamil Nadu. The team was headed by Mr. Arun Kumar, Director of the Prime Minister's Communication Cell & PIB Chennai, alongside Mr. Ramesh Jaibhaye, Deputy Director of PIB Raipur. The event commenced with a cordial welcome address delivered by Dr. Jai Sunder, Director of ICAR-CIARI, Sri Vijaya Puram. Following this, the delegates were escorted around the farm by Dr. Ajit Arun Waman, Senior Scientist and In-charge of Sippighat Farm, who provided insights into the institute's agro-eco-tourism initiatives along a 1-km eco-tourism trail. Covering an area of 32 hectares, the Sippighat Research Farm exhibits a rich variety of plantation crops, tropical fruits, spices, and ornamental plants. It offers visitors the chance to learn about scientific plant husbandry practices and acquire quality planting materials. The agro eco-tourism theme focuses on nature conservation, sustainability, and the appreciation of scenic beauty. A significant highlight of the visit was the World Coconut Germplasm Centre (WCGC), which conserves nearly 1,000 coconut palms that represent unique germplasm sourced from Asia-Pacific Island nations and the Nicobar group of islands. The centre maintains 30 conserved coconut accessions, which include 24 original collections from Pacific Ocean islands namely, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, French Polynesia, American Samoa, Tonga, and Samoa—as well as six accessions from the Nicobar Islands, all preserved within the field gene bank at Sippighat. The World Coconut Germplasm Centre (WCGC) is a leading institution focused on the conservation, assessment, and sustainable use of coconut genetic resources. It functions as a living repository of various coconut accessions that represent island and coastal ecosystems from both India and other countries. Coconut is a crop of significant economic, nutritional, and cultural value, especially in tropical island areas.

Acknowledging the necessity to preserve its rich genetic diversity, the World Coconut Germplasm Centre was founded to protect valuable indigenous and exotic coconut collections from genetic erosion due to climate change, pests, diseases, and evolving land-use patterns. The Centre houses a diverse array of tall, dwarf, and hybrid coconut varieties, including locally adapted island genotypes as well as introductions from the Indian Ocean and Pacific regions.

The Germplasm Centre is essential for genetic conservation, maintaining field gene banks under island agro-climatic conditions. These conserved accessions serve as the basis for long-term crop improvement initiatives. Researchers utilize the germplasm to characterize and evaluate key traits such as yield potential, nut quality, pest and disease resistance, tolerance to abiotic stresses, and adaptability to coastal and island environments.

In addition to conservation efforts, the Centre serves as a crucial research and breeding resource. The genetic materials preserved here support national and regional programs aimed at developing enhanced coconut varieties that meet farmers' requirements, particularly in vulnerable island ecosystems. Furthermore, the Centre plays a role in bolstering climate-resilient agriculture by identifying and promoting coconut varieties that can endure salinity, moisture stress, and extreme weather conditions.

The World Coconut Germplasm Centre at ICAR-CIARI functions as a significant educational and outreach platform. It is often highlighted during scientific visits, farmer interactions, training programmes, and awareness events, aiding stakeholders in comprehending the diversity and potential of coconut genetic resources. The Centre underscores India's dedication to the conservation of global plant genetic resources and the advancement of sustainable horticultural development. In summary, the World Coconut Germplasm Centre at ICAR-CIARI serves as an essential hub for the preservation of coconut biodiversity, the promotion of scientific research, and the support of sustainable livelihoods in island and coastal areas. It plays a crucial role in ensuring that this "tree of life" continues to contribute to food security, income generation, and ecological balance for future generations.

The delegates also received a briefing on current research initiatives, which include inter se mating, pollen collection, selfing, germplasm multiplication, and hybridization programs. Comprehensive characterization of palm morphology has been conducted on six tall coconut accessions Rennel Tall, Katchal Tall, Auck Chung Tall, Tahiti Tall, Tamaloo Tall, and Pao Pao Tall which have demonstrated potential for crop enhancement due to increased nut yield, improved virgin coconut oil extraction, and favorable nut characteristics.

Furthermore, studies on palm morphology concerning the Niu Leka dwarf, noted for its distinctive orange-colored fruits, have recognized it as a unique genetic resource originating from the Niu Leka Green dwarf population. Ongoing observations are being conducted to enhance the selection of superior mother palms aimed at developing compact dwarf coconut varieties that are appropriate for future breeding initiatives. Other significant attractions at the agro-eco-tourism site included the Spice Processing Unit, a specialized facility where a diverse array of spices is processed through a combination of traditional methods and contemporary techniques. The Mangrove Viewpoint provided delegates with a tranquil view of lush mangrove forests, showcasing their rich biodiversity and peaceful natural environment. Visitors also enjoyed the Nature Trail, a serene one-kilometer walking path that enables guests to breathe fresh air, closely observe nature, burn calories, and refresh both body and mind. Additionally, the delegates explored the Plantation-Based Organic Spice Garden, where they acquired knowledge about traditional and organic spice cultivation methods.

This visit was coordinated by Mr. D. Karunakaran, Scientist and all under the leadership and guidance of Dr. Jai Sunder, Director of ICAR-CIARI, Port Blair.