

Concern over closure of District Agro-Meteorological Units

DR. FAUZIA KHAN (Maharashtra): Sir, District Agro-Meteorological Units (DAMUs), established in 2018, offer farmers free localized weather forecasts and agricultural advisories, helping them to make informed decisions on agricultural activities like sowing, fertilizer use, harvesting, and crop storage, thereby reducing crop losses and improving yields and income. It is understood that there are proposals to close down 199 DAMUs, including those shut in March 2024, and to privatise these services due to rising costs as automated electronic communication is favoured over employing personnel at agro-met units.

DAMUs, in collaboration with Krishi Vigyan Kendras, have provided invaluable training to farmers on agricultural practices and climate-resilient seed varieties. Block-level weather advisory services and forecasts through SMS, *WhatsApp*, electronic and print media have helped farmers manage daily weather changes and extreme events. These advisories have also provided crop and location-specific guidance, extreme weather warnings, and best practices for various farming sectors, including beekeeping, livestock, poultry, pig and fish farming.

A 2020 National Council of Applied Economic Research study showed that 98 per cent of surveyed farmers adapted their practices based on weather advisories, leading to economic benefits. The closure of DAMUs will affect food security, agricultural productivity and farmers' livelihoods. While the Government may feel that automated systems can replace human involvement, the unique value added by agro-met staff through localized and personalized advisories cannot be overlooked. Therefore, I urge the Government to retain the localized agro-met services to strengthen the agricultural economy.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The following hon. Members associated themselves with the Special Mention made by Dr. Fauzia Khan: Dr. Kanimozhi NVN Somu (Tamil Nadu), Dr. V. Sivadasan (Kerala), Shrimati Mahua Maji (Jharkhand), Shrimati Jebi Mather Hisham (Kerala), Dr. John Brittas (Kerala) and Shri P.P. Suneer (Kerala).

Demand for changes in Ayushman Bharat Scheme