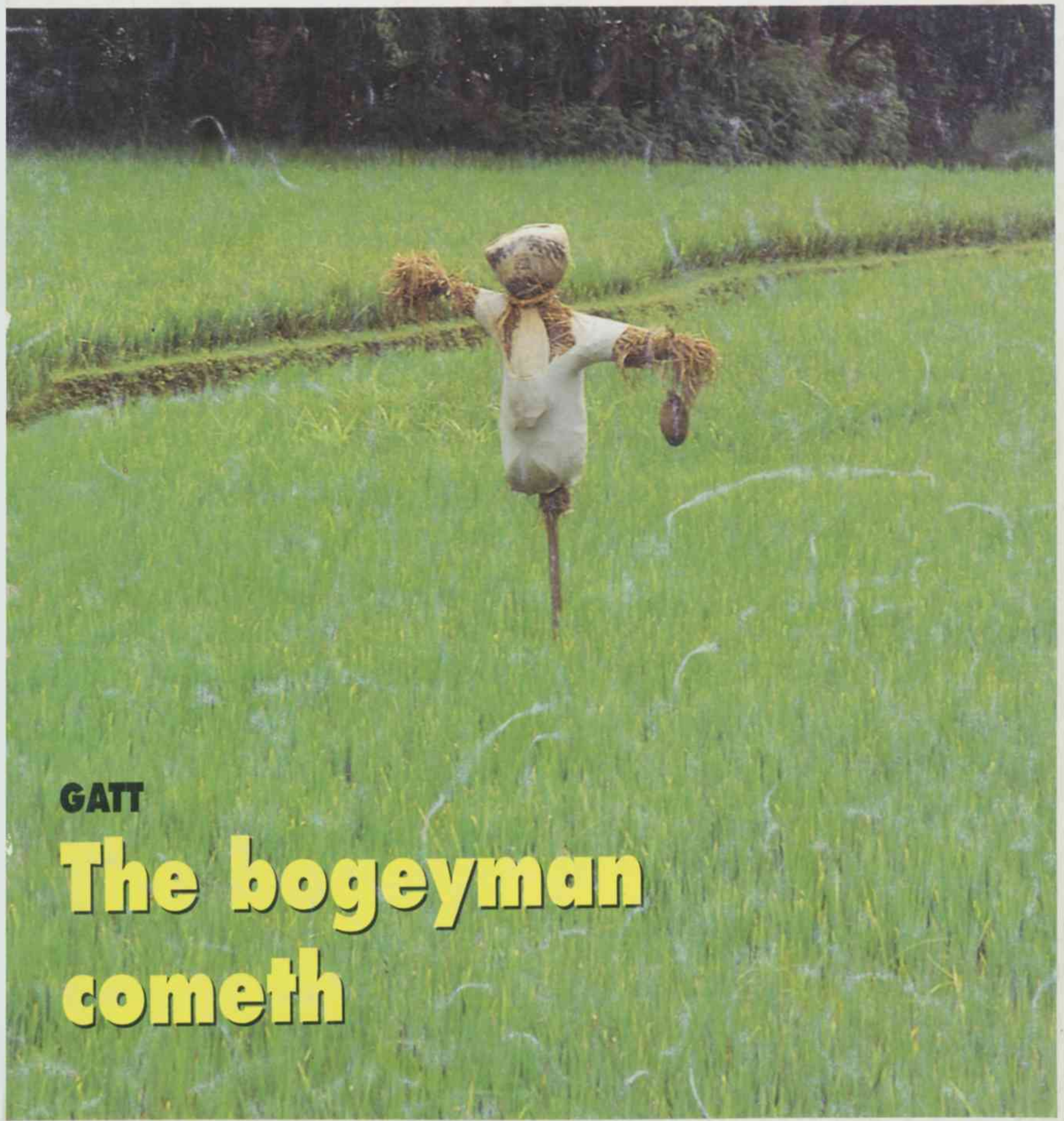


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Down To Earth

JUNE 15, 1994



GATT

The bogeyman cometh

A scourge of cotton: an American pest in India
India & the Netherlands: the greening of the bikes
How Santhal tribals punish sex offenders

GATT

Running on empty

Indian farmers are entering the GATT era riding on the bogey of ignorance. Some see GATT as the golden opportunity that will unshackle them from restrictive trade practices, while others see only doom. In this background of misconceptions and rumours, political parties are wooing the farmers with their versions of GATT. *Down To Earth* reporters visited 6 states and filed this report:



MORE than a month after the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), ignorance and uncertainty about its implications continue to prevail among Indian agriculturists. The principal issues for farmers is whether they can retain and sell seeds and whether they will be able to compete in the new trade order. However, not many efforts are being made to appraise the farmers about GATT and few of them are aware of the forces that will operate under GATT.

Although the government claims that it is informing the farmers about GATT, both the district administration and the farmers themselves deny this. Union commerce minister Pranab Mukherjee says, "We are

achcha hai ya kharab hai (Nobody has told us anything. We want to know whether it's good or bad)."

As things stand, little GATT-related information has percolated to the rural communities. If any information has reached the villages at all, it is because of political motivations or because of activists. Pro-GATT lobbies like the Union government and the Congress are highlighting the merits of the accord, while opposition groups and activists are harping on its shortcomings.

Information shortfall

Right now, the farmers are being deluged mainly by motivated arguments. In the battle of words between



Heads & tails: a burning effigy of Nehru welcomes the era of liberalisation and Dunkel (above); Tikait and Nanjundaswamy signal their resistance at a 1993 anti-Dunkel rally (left)

organising seminars, workshops, public contact programmes and distributing literature to tell people that Indian farmers will benefit from GATT." However, Mukherjee's statement does not jell with the version put forward by Ram Babu, a farmer in Gujja village of Rajasthan's Dhaulpur district: "*Hame kuch nahin batate. Hum to janna chahte hain ke*

the opposition parties and the Congress, the real issues that affect farmers are getting clouded. All the while, anti-GATT activists are trying to put across their message more forcefully by hunting for a political platform.

There is a difference in the various media being used by the rival groupings in their campaigns. GATT proponents are pitching their stands through the electronic media and government agencies. Anti-GATT activists are concentrating on newspapers, personal contacts and traditional rural gatherings, translating arguments into local idiom. For instance, Tejpal Singh of Ulhasgaon in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district sang at the Sisauli gathering of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) on May 17: "*Beware farmers, a Dunkel disease has come/We had thrown out slavery, but here comes another calamity/The rulers have sacrificed kindness and justice/They have robbed the country of its riches.*"

That the rumour network, too, has been functioning at a hyper pace is indicated by the general, but ill-informed, conclusions arrived at by the local populace. Although the Union government has directed district administrations to spread the GATT message, several district administrations claim that either they have no such instructions or that they are unaware of the issues.

GATT politics

Political parties, with the exception of the ruling Congress, are preparing action plans to fight GATT

ANTI-GATT

ALL the major opposition parties, with the help of mass-based organisations, are planning either demonstrations, rallies, civil disobedience movements or study camps for farmers throughout the country to protest GATT. In the Rajya Sabha, where the Congress is in a minority, opposition parties are getting together to prevent GATT-related bills from being passed. Although they are united against GATT, there are wide differences in what each party is highlighting:

Left parties: The Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI, Forward Bloc and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) plan a joint civil disobedience movement in New Delhi and the state capitals. The CPM says GATT is merely a continuation of the policy of economic liberalisation that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have dictated.

Janata Dal: The party says GATT

will undermine the sovereignty of the country and the prices of commodities will go up, farmers will be fleeced by MNCs and consumer goods will flood the markets.

Bharatiya Janata Party: It has launched a *swadeshi* movement and its countrywide action plan will be formulated at the party's national executive meet in Vadodara, June 10-12. Their contention is that GATT will wipe out cottage and small industries in rural areas and

lead to large-scale unemployment.

Samajwadi Party: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav is touring the state, addressing public meetings and seminars against GATT. The party objects to intellectual property rights in agriculture because it will restrict farmers' rights to seeds.

Opposition states: The chief ministers of the opposition-ruled states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Delhi are seeking legal recourse against GATT.



Says Dhaulpur district collector Prem Singh Mehra, "To be frank, I don't know anything about GATT." District magistrates in Muzaffarpur and Bareilly districts also echoed Mehra.

Says a senior Ludhiana district official, "I don't think it is essential for us to act because the Punjab Agricultural University is a far more effective medium." A senior Congress leader of the district said that a major propaganda blitz would be undertaken once office-bearers are briefed by the party high command.

The Maharashtra state government apparatus has also not been too pressed in trying to explain the Dunkel Draft or its implications to the district panchayats and farmers. Says the suave Sumeet Malik, district magistrate of Sangli, "I do not have any instructions from the state government to talk or explain anything about GATT. My only source of information and understanding is from what you people write."

In Bareilly, information flow has been mostly from the Gene Campaign committee. In Bihar, local Hindi newspapers like *Aaj* and *Dainik*

information. Harender Singh, a farmer, says, "The articles on Dunkel are read and discussed." These established dailies are supplemented by the village-level news-flyers.

Clear as mud

Despite the paucity of information, the villagers do have an idea of what GATT is, even if it is distorted. Some see it as an opportunity to increase production and exports whereas others imagine that it is a foreign

company that is out to usurp India's farms.

Sharp distinctions — in terms of attitudes towards GATT — exist between small and progressive farmers and these are apparent at the ground level: in the villages.

In Karnataka's Dharwad district, where traditional methods of farming are still dominant, opposition to GATT is of a mixed character. Ironically, Dharwad is also home to the seed companies that are the target of the anti-GATT campaign. In some parts, support for the anti-GATT agitation is total; in others, it is grudgingly partial.

Rural communities in Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh), Dhaulpur (Rajasthan) and Bihar dismiss GATT as a manifestation of covert imperialism. In these areas, the cultivators are either subsistence survivors or those shifting from coarse grains to cash crops that use modern technology. For them, the spectre of an international accord is a measure beyond



Though small farmers are aware of GATT, the question is: in what manner?

RAHUL SHRIVASTAVA / CSE

PRO-GATT

Congress: The Congress has directed its district and state organisations to launch mass contact programmes and educate farmers about the advantages of GATT Pamphlets and literature will be distributed to the state units. The Sewa Dal, a frontal group of the party, will counter the opposition propaganda at the grassroots and 50,000 volunteers have been asked to fan out to the districts and educate the farmers.

Union government: Seminars and discussions are being organised throughout the country. The Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity has begun press campaigns and prepared short films and the Directorate of Field Publicity is taking the message to *tehsil* and *taluka* levels. District collectors have been directed to disseminate information. The electronic media are being used extensively: Doordarshan repeatedly telecasts crisp pro-Dunkel clips on prime time and longer features like *Dunkel ya Dungal?* (Dunkel or Chaos?).

CPM activists rallying against implementation of the Dunkel draft

their control. GATT is the veritable four-letter word in Dhaulpur villages. The mere mention of it draws looks of disgust or apprehension.

The situation in Punjab's Ludhiana district and Maharashtra's Sangli district is quite the opposite: the general impression is that GATT will present opportunities that will render benefits to progressive farmers.

THE TRANSITIONAL AREAS

'Ours by right'

DHARWAD (KARNATAKA)

Opposition to GATT in Karnataka is spearheaded by the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRSS), which has gained strength over the past 2 years and forced the ruling Congress government to accord comparatively greater seriousness in projecting its viewpoint of GATT. The thrust of the official programme — to be carried out by the district administrations — is to counter KRSS' main plank: that the Dunkel provisions are a threat to the traditional "rights" of cultivators to retain and sell seeds. The state government is busy preparing instructional booklets and is organising a collective course in the state capital.

The task of the officials will not be easy. Local political leaders of all parties feel that fears over the seed issue have spread to most villages. Says V Basavappaiah, a farmer in Bellary's Hospet *taluka*, "There are bands of 20-30 farmers with middle-sized holdings in nearly every village proclaiming that a great struggle to protect farmers' rights is around the corner."

While KRSS leaders like M D Nanjundaswamy refer to specific provisions of GATT when explaining their stand to the media or leading marches in Bangalore and Delhi, their appeals in villages resound with patriotism. Suresh Yavagal, a cotton farmer in Gadag *taluka* and a KRSS activist, explains that farmers

produce "for the nation and not the market, so profits are not the major motivation for us"

KRSS members say that contemporary farming practices imply every kind of financial and technical support. "The talk of reduction of subsidies, which I have been told is the rule of GATT, is treacherous," says Gundappa, a small farmer in Gadag. He dismisses any suggestion that his information may be erroneous.

In most of Dharwad, passions are aroused easily over farmer-to-farmer seed transfers, which are the mainstay of agriculture in the district's paddy, jowar and cotton cultivation. Only one hybrid — DCH-4 for cotton, created by the Dharwad-based University of Agricultural Sciences — is used and even this is distributed almost free. However, this variety is restricted to irrigated areas in the northern Nargund *taluka*. In the rest of the district, more dependent on tank irrigation, traditional varieties are cultivated.

The degree of endorsement of KRSS' stand varies. In the middle part of the district, such as in Gadag and Shirhatti *talukas*, sentiment against GATT is aggressive. H Mujahid of Mummigatti village insists seed prices must be determined by farmers and not by manufacturers.

In Nargund *taluka* in north Dharwad, the view is slightly modulated. Here, the beneficiaries of DCH-4 feel that the cost of research for new and better seeds must be borne by cultivators. "But such research must be carried out by the government so that prices are kept low," says Naresh Nayakar, a member of a local panchayat. "We oppose GATT because it will prevent the government from carrying out this research."

Blind ballot

WHATEVER the outcome of the byelection in Rajasthan's Rajakheda assembly constituency on May 26, it will be remembered for one thing: GATT as a campaign issue. Previously, elections in Rajakheda were always contested along caste lines: Brahmins versus the rest. But now, Samajwadi Party candidate Mohan Prakash, a former legislator and prominent member of Gene Campaign, claims GATT will overshadow caste issues.

Prakash, a Brahmin, says, "I am

contesting this election as a test case. This is the first time this issue will be focussed on in an election. The government has signed the agreement, but the laws required for implementation still have to be passed. If I win, no political party can afford a weak stance on this issue."

BJP nominee Manorama Singh, the widow of Mahendra Singh — whose death precipitated the byelection — is expected to coast to

Mohan Prakash



victory on a sympathy wave. But even she does not shy from stressing on the "evils" of GATT.

Only Congress nominee Pradyuman Singh keeps harping on "fighting the Brahminical order" But his son Bikram Bohra, who handles election strategy, admits that GATT cannot be ignored. Says Bohra, "We have made adequate preparations and can give Mohan Prakash a suitable reply."

"Agriculture in India will never suffer"

Union Commerce Minister Pranab Mukherjee spoke to Down To Earth on GATT and related issues. Excerpts:



T.C. MAHOTRA / CSE

farmer's rights. First, whether he can use his own seeds. Second, whether he can use it for subsequent cultivation, and, third, whether he can sell seeds. My answer to all these is: yes.

What farmers cannot do is sell branded seeds. But even now, most farmers get their seeds from neighbours and not from commercial firms. There is no question of accepting UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties).

On the government's information campaign:

We have to deal with a great deal of disinformation about GATT. We have launched a counter-campaign to present the right picture. We are organising seminars, workshops and taking up public contact programmes and distribution of literature on how Indian farmers will benefit from GATT.

On farmers' rights:

There are 3 issues concerning

On intellectual property rights on microorganisms:

Is there any model in the world available for protection of microorganisms? If you ask me, none. Even in the US, the laws are subject to 2 Supreme Court rulings. When we develop our model, we will look into this very carefully.

Our scientists are second to none and we have nothing to worry even if big companies open up shop here. We have tremendous prospects for seed exports. According to

M S Swaminathan, India can capture 25 per cent of the world seed market.

On the export scenario:

I must point out that the reduction in subsidies and export tariffs was directed at developed countries. They were to ensure a market for developing countries. So, it is to our advantage. Besides, comparatively, Indian agricultural products will be cheaper because of low labour cost and other reasons. This will give us a clear competitive edge in the world market.

Agricultural production will never suffer in India because we have a large domestic market with considerable shock absorption capacity. Developed countries are worried because their domestic market is very small.

On health and sanitary conditions as non-tariff barriers:

I must clear this great misconception regarding who was responsible for introducing agriculture in GATT negotiations. The developing countries brought this issue in. V P Singh in 1986 had urged for agriculture to be included in the GATT negotiations because "agricultural trade was no longer a competition between efficiency but between subsidies." The US-EC wrangle on subsidies was a later phenomenon.

The most ironic example of the opposition to GATT is in the southern parts of the district — Rannebennur, Hirekerur and Byadgi talukas — where farmers are contract seed growers with companies like Cargill, Indo-American Hybrids,

Sultan Seeds and Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds. Most hybrids for sunflower, tomato and, more recently, cotton, are produced on the fields of the local farmers. Although the farmers' incomes have increased, compared to that of others in the dis-

trict, cash advances and stipulatory buy-back arrangements with seed companies have also increased indebtedness among them. Says a Rannebennur farmer, Veerappan Maragal, "While more cash is evident in our hands, many of us owe much more to the private companies."

Support for KRSS in this region has been only to the extent of getting it to rein in the seed companies. Says Narsingh Hossanah of Byadgi, "I support KRSS because it keeps Cargill in check." But he admits that he would not like the firm to be chased out of the country.

More interestingly, a thriving farmer-to-farmer seed trade in the hybrids produced for the firms has come into operation, although the volume and prices are yet low. Says Hossanah, "All of us do it. The companies do not stop it because of the KRSS." Seed buyer A Punnaiah of Shigaon says, "It is my right to buy seeds at the lower price. This should never be curbed."

Keeping MNCs in check: KRSS activists attacking the Cargill plant at Bellary



We want non-tariff barriers to be removed completely. When WTO (World Trade Organisation) comes into force, if a member country feels that its commercial interest is being jeopardised by an action under this provision, it can be taken up with GATT. Likewise, if the US takes action against us under Special 301, we can get redress from GATT.

But otherwise, standard of health is important for all of us and cannot be compromised.

On the exemption on account of balance of payment:

Two issues have been raised in this context: first, that it is the IMF which will decide about the Balance of Payment problem; second, what happens when we lose BOP cover?

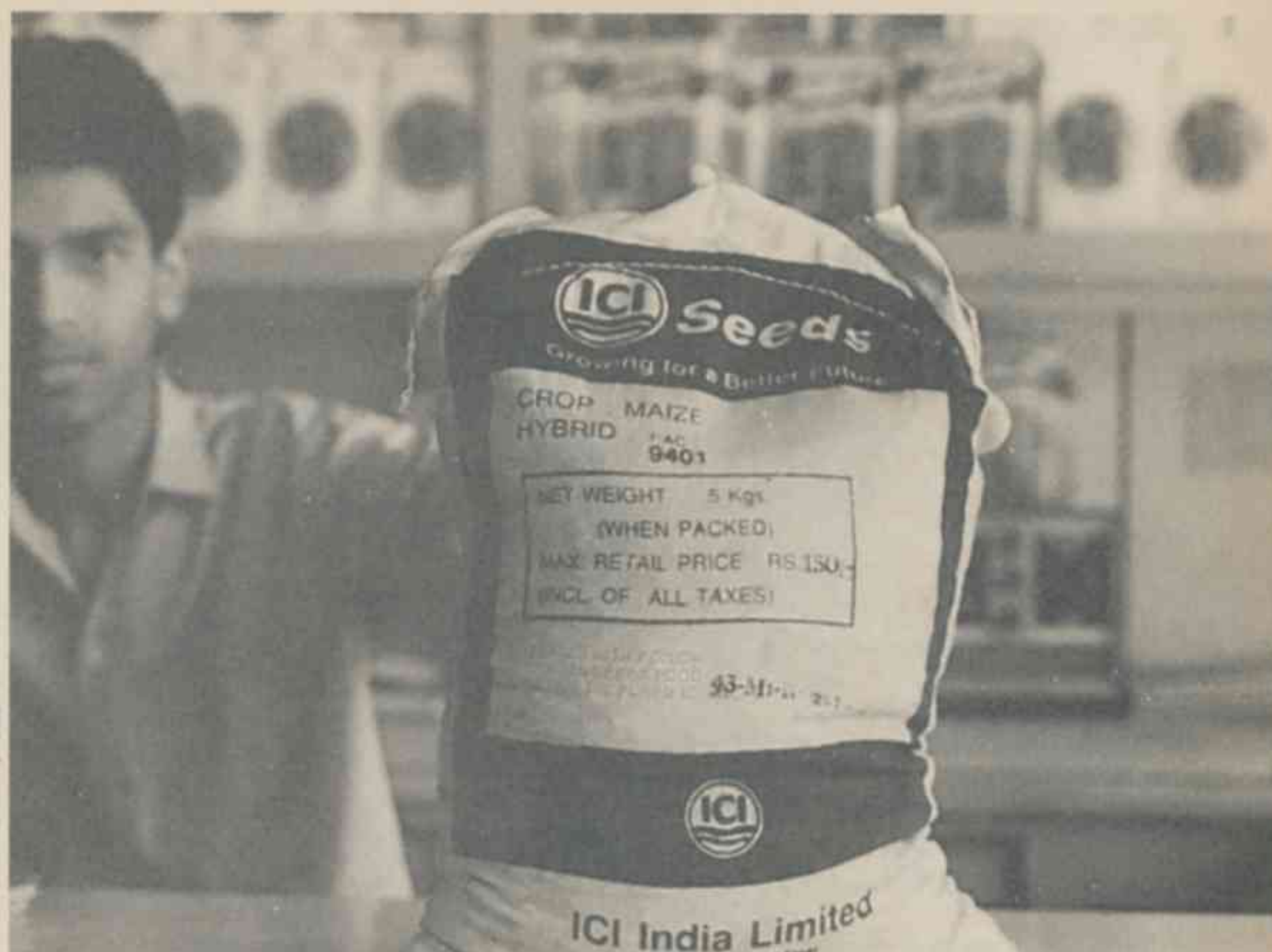
Is it not the job of IMF to determine the BOP problem? IMF has done it since it was created. Nothing is new about it. Second, if we lose BOP cover, then we have a tariff schedule to regulate the import of agricultural products. So, even if you open up, you will still have to import by paying a duty. GATT has already accepted our tariff schedule, which includes 100 per cent import duty on cereals, 150 per cent on food products and 300 per cent on edible oils. If we have a surplus, who would like to import forcefully?

Cash crunch

BAREILLY (UTTAR PRADESH)

Up to 90 per cent of the farmers in Bareilly district, one of the areas in which farmers are taking up cash crops, are small and medium farmers. These farmers simply oppose GATT. As Chhote Lal, a small farmer of Inayakpur, admits, "We all oppose it, but we don't know why." Chhote Lal's fear is that the "government will take over all our fields and set up cooperatives by combining all the small fields."

The remaining 10 per cent are big farmers who buy seeds from the market, which offers improved varieties of paddy from Andhra Pradesh, seeds for wheat from Punjab and Haryana and seeds for vegetable and other crops from Govind Vallabh Pant University for Agriculture and Technology at Pantnagar in Nainital



Hybrid maize seeds are popular in Bihar, but also expensive

district of the state.

Jeswant Singh, *pradhan* of Jeed, says, "Seeds will become costly — that much is sure. Some of the big farmers in our village won't mind spending more on seeds if the yield is higher. But they say we will not be able to retain the seeds and plant them a second time."

Fright vs might

DHAULPUR (RAJASTHAN)

Dhaulpur consists mainly of farmers with small holdings. The principal subsidy provided to farmers is on seeds, which, during demonstration exercises, are sold at 50 per cent concession. The main crops are wheat and mustard.

In Roond village, Ajmer Singh says the peasants are already hard-pressed and now GATT is an additional worry. "We are scared," he says. "We have been told frightening things. We will suffer once Dunkel comes."

Warns Bhagwan Singh of Kheda village, "*Janata pareshan hai. Sochte hain jaise angrezon ke zamaane mein tha, vaisa hi hoga. Hum to har-taal kar denge* (The public is upset. They think it will be like the British rule. We will go on strike)."

For Mahavir Singh Rana of Chavvni village, Dunkel means *gula-mi* (slavery) and he says the govern-

ment is "selling the farmers but should be aware of the staunch, united opposition it will face from the *kasthkars* (farmers)."

Beeda of Sarani village says that the widely prevalent practice of exchanging seeds will stop once GATT is implemented. Niranjan Singh of neighbouring Puren village laments, "We depend on farmer-to-farmer sale of seeds. If the foreigners stop that, we will be ruined."

Uninformed

SARAN, BHOJPUR, MUZZAFARPUR & PATNA (BIHAR)

Barring those living near urban centres, these districts of Bihar are populated largely by small and marginal subsistence farmers. Wheat, paddy, maize, pulses, chillies, oilseeds and fruits like bananas are the major crops. High-yield varieties of seeds supplied by government undertakings are popular.

Emotions on GATT are based on what little information is available, virtually always anti-GATT textured.

Mahawat Singh of Ratanpura in Muzzafarpur district narrates an interesting tale: "I was returning from the Sonpur *mela* when an argument broke out between 2 men over a seat in the bus. The person who first occupied the seat told the other not to behave like Dunkel. I asked my fellow traveller what Dunkel was and was told that it is a foreign company

that would come to India soon and take over our agriculture."

Some farmers in the state have also entered the seed business; they perceive a threat. Rajeshwar Prasad of Hathi Tola in Patna district fears, "I will have to buy their (MNCs') expensive seeds and will not be allowed to retain some of the seeds."

Harender Singh of Baijalpur Keswa village in Saran district says, "I am totally against Dunkel because once it comes to Bihar, I will not be able to use my seeds. I use my own seeds for 3 years and change it after that. If I am not allowed to keep my seeds, I will have to sell off my land as I cannot afford to purchase fresh seeds every year."

Periodic farm fairs like the Sonpur *mela* become hives of information-exchange on GATT. But even here, the shades of opinion are dictated by the level of prosperity. Nandan Singh, one of the big farmers in the village, says, "I understand we will all be able to produce a double crop of wheat with the new improved seeds. Then, what is wrong with Dunkel draft?"

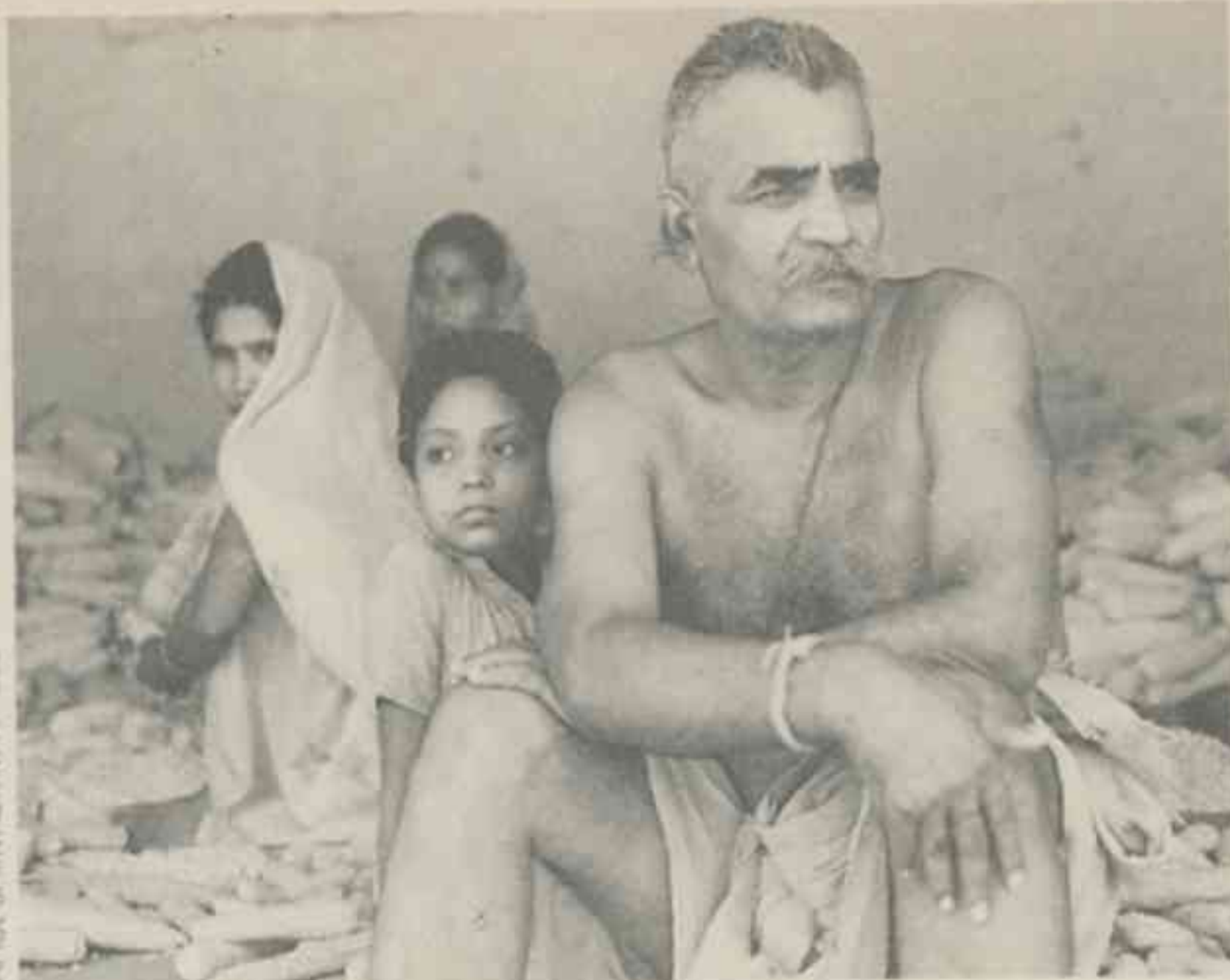
But Ram Kumar Singh of Chanda village in Bhojpur district is unconvinced. "How can I compete with the big American companies?" he asks. "If they sell cheap grains, most of the farmers in my *panchayat* would be wiped out. They say after signing Dunkel, farmers would be able to export. Here in the villages, most of the grain is consumed internally and most farmers do not even have surplus to sell. As in the past, foreign companies will come and buy our grains at cheap rates and sell them at high prices."

THE PROGRESSIVE AREAS

Impatient and opportunistic

LUDHIANA (PUNJAB)

In Ludhiana, there is a perceptible shift from food grains to cash crops like sunflower and vegetables. Big farmers are impatient with restrictive trade practices and look upon GATT as the opportunity they were waiting for. Supporting their aspirations are 10 impressive predictions about export



I will have to buy expensive seeds and will not be allowed to retain some of the seeds

Rajeshwar
Prasad, Hathi
Tola, Patna

gains in the GATT era (See box **The export graph**).

But even in these areas, there are apprehensions about seed availability. Anti-GATT groups like the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Lakhwal) have sprung up, and there is a distinct, albeit lowscale, fear of the accord's provisions, especially those concerning seeds.

Jagjit Singh Hara of Kanganwal colony, a Padma Shri awardee whose family cultivates about 35 ha, says, "Call it (GATT) the messiah of Indian agriculture, because it will provide opportunities to grow, to compete internationally. But it will also expose the inefficient, the babies of the protected economy."

Hara, who has adopted a quadruple cropping system on his farm, says the farmers of Punjab are adventurous and can take up the gauntlet successfully because they have the talent. "And our seed industry will also gain advantage. It is sick now, it needs to be revived through collaborations, if necessary. After all, it is the foundation of agriculture. Once better seeds are available, we will have a big boom."

Spreading the GATT gospel in Punjab is the Punjab Agricultural University PAU vice-chancellor A S Khehra says, "The general impression is that it (GATT) can create competitiveness. If we work earnestly, we will be the gainers, as far as agriculture is concerned." Khehra feels the PAU scientists can compete in the new environment.

But there are voices of protest. Gurmail Singh of

Majara village says, "If GATT is so beneficial, why aren't we being informed about it? And, some newspapers say it will hurt the farmer. Is that correct? What is the truth?"

There is definitely an undercurrent of expectation and optimism among the "progressive" farmers. Mohinder Singh Grewal, who has a 5-ha, triple-cropped farm, is cautious because he says information about GATT is scarce and what the newspapers say is usually biased. But, he says, "If we work hard, GATT will prove better for us. Our scientists will also have to work hard and will have to teach the farmers and make available the latest technology. Then we can get good results, no doubt." Grewal is a multiple award winner for excellence in the sphere of agriculture, and his quiet confidence is the hallmark of the average Ludhiana farmer contemplating GATT.



GATT will expose the inefficient, the babies of the protected economy

Jagjit Singh Hara,
Kanganwal,
Ludhiana



Our scientists will have to teach the farmers and make available the latest technology

Mohinder Singh
Grewal,
Ludhiana

The export graph

ALTHOUGH commerce minister Pranab Mukherjee maintains that India has good chances of cornering a sizeable chunk of the projected increase in world agricultural trade (up to 7 per cent, according to International Monetary Fund estimates) in the post-GATT era, there are overwhelming doubts about such claims.

The increase in trade volume is anticipated mainly from the reduction of subsidies in developed countries, which will lower their food production. According to Ashok Gulati of the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER), India's exports of rice and wheat, marine products, processed food and vegetables are expected to rise, especially to southeast Asia and the Gulf region. According to NCAER, international prices of food commodities are expected to increase by 40-45 per cent.

But the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) predicts relatively small changes in the net export earnings of developing countries. Critics like former commerce secretary S P Shukla believe that the US and the

European Union will maintain export subsidies and retain the domestic support. As a result, the international market will never be competitive enough for Indian farmers.

Even if subsidies are reduced and the prices of temperate crops such as wheat get pushed up, the FAO predicts that the volume of world trade in temperate zone products may not change much. Similarly, given the inelastic demand for tropical products, the volume of world trade in these commodities also may not change much.

There is the chance India can gain if it becomes a net exporter of wheat, rice and sugar. However, Jawaharlal Nehru University economists Deepak Nayyar and Abhijit Sen are doubtful. "With demographic pressure on land, neglect of agricultural investment and structural imbalances in Indian agriculture, it is unlikely that India will emerge as a large exporter of

cereals, whether wheat or rice," they say.

Past trends are not encouraging. An UNCTAD report says that although India produced around 10 per cent of the world's agricultural output, her share in world trade in agricultural commodities was only



How rosy is the future for agricultural trade?

around 0.6 per cent in 1989 and has been declining.

This was because India's exports have been restricted to build up domestic food stocks. So, will India's predicted increase in food exports in the post-GATT era be at the expense of domestic food security?

Buoyant and rising

SANGLI (MAHARASHTRA)

Over the past decade, Sangli has witnessed farmers making a marked switch to hybrids among cash crops, especially oilseeds. Growing fruit and vegetables for exports is an even more recent trend.

Farmers in the more developed talukas of Sangli are almost buoyant in their anticipation of GATT, though they are thirsty for more information. One such area is Mahisal village in Miraj taluka.

Says Mahisal sarpanch Kaddarrao Shinde, "We are aware that there will be problems in pushing the exports of our produce and the entry of multinationals. But there are mature thinkers in my village who are already planning to meet the challenge."

The sale of hybrid seeds, developed by both Indian and foreign

companies, has reached boom proportions in Sangli. Even the seed sale trends of state corporations and private agencies has changed. In 1990, for instance, 2,100 quintals of jowar seeds were bought from state corporations and 1,100 quintals from private companies. In 1993, the figures were 1,600 quintals and 2,300 quintals respectively.

Some farmers contend they buy seeds to ensure better quality. But 32-year-old Nigam Shah, manager of V M Shah & Co, the busiest seed outlet in Sangli, thinks he knows better. "Some of my customers are really knowledgeable," he says, "but there are many who are simply struck by the glitzy packaging. Mark my words, the age of marketing has arrived in the seed industry."

The political leaders of the dis-

trict, including Sangli zilla parishad president Shivaji Rao Naik, explain that the confidence of the farmers of the region is a trait typical of areas that have had a longer experience of development. Talukas such as Miraj benefited from a well-developed lift irrigation system that utilised the Krishna waters from the late '60s onwards. Says Naik, "In most parts so served, agricultural prosperity was experienced by many farming families at least 15-20 years ago."



Many are struck by glitzy packaging.

Mark my words, the age of marketing has arrived in the seed industry

Nigam Shah, Sangli, Maharashtra

Naik also says that now "a younger generation has come up, determined to further increase their earnings in new ways" In several villages, this younger lot — in their late 20s and early 30s — are distinctly conscious that they are farmers with a difference: most of them are graduates and some have professional training in agriculture.

"Moreover, in our mindset, we are as forward looking as any professional group in the country," says A D Patil of Mahisal, who, while being one of the youngest of panchayat members, already wields considerable influence in the body. Patil points out that the younger farmers of his village keenly keep themselves "informed of the latest ideas in agriculture" and make frequent trips to attend agricultural workshops, even if they are 500 km away.

Lurking doubts

Nonetheless, some doubts lurk among Sangli's farmers. In Mahankal taluka, those living away from the Krishna river complain that the others are better off and have had more opportunities for modern farming. Panchayat samiti chairperson Ajitrao Ghorpade says international trade is a complex affair and many honest attempts by farmers could go awry. Members of sugar cane and oil cooperatives are also apprehensive that private companies will step in and wipe them out.

Although there are no clearcut ayes and nays about GATT in any district, villagers recognise that GATT is an issue that requires politi-

TRIPS and farmers' rights

Gatt on TRIPS

Provides for protection of plant varieties.

Microorganisms and microbiological processes are patentable.

Countries can either provide for patenting of plant varieties or develop an effective *sui generis* system of protection or a combination of both.

Pro-GATT position

This will not affect farmers' rights to use and sell seeds.

Naturally occurring genes will not be patented.

Anti-GATT position

There is no such thing as an artificial gene. So transgenic constructs will become patentable, which will work like patents on plants and animals. This will restrict farmers' access to genetic resources.

Farmers' rights to use and sell seeds will be subject to the consent of plant breeders.

cal attention. Larger, progressive farmers look to GATT as an opportunity to expand horizons, whereas smaller farmers, even in the forward-looking Sangli and Ludhiana districts, are wary. The latter group has political representation in the progressive areas voicing their concerns.

For instance, Ajmer Singh Lakhwal, president of the Punjab unit of BKU, says, "The small farmer with less than about 4 ha of land will be finished because new technology will be expensive. In Punjab, more than 80 per cent of the farmers have holdings of less than 2 ha. How can we expect them to export? Only big farmers will benefit as they will gobble up the small holdings. Mahatma Gandhi boycotted foreign goods, but now we are welcoming the foreigners."

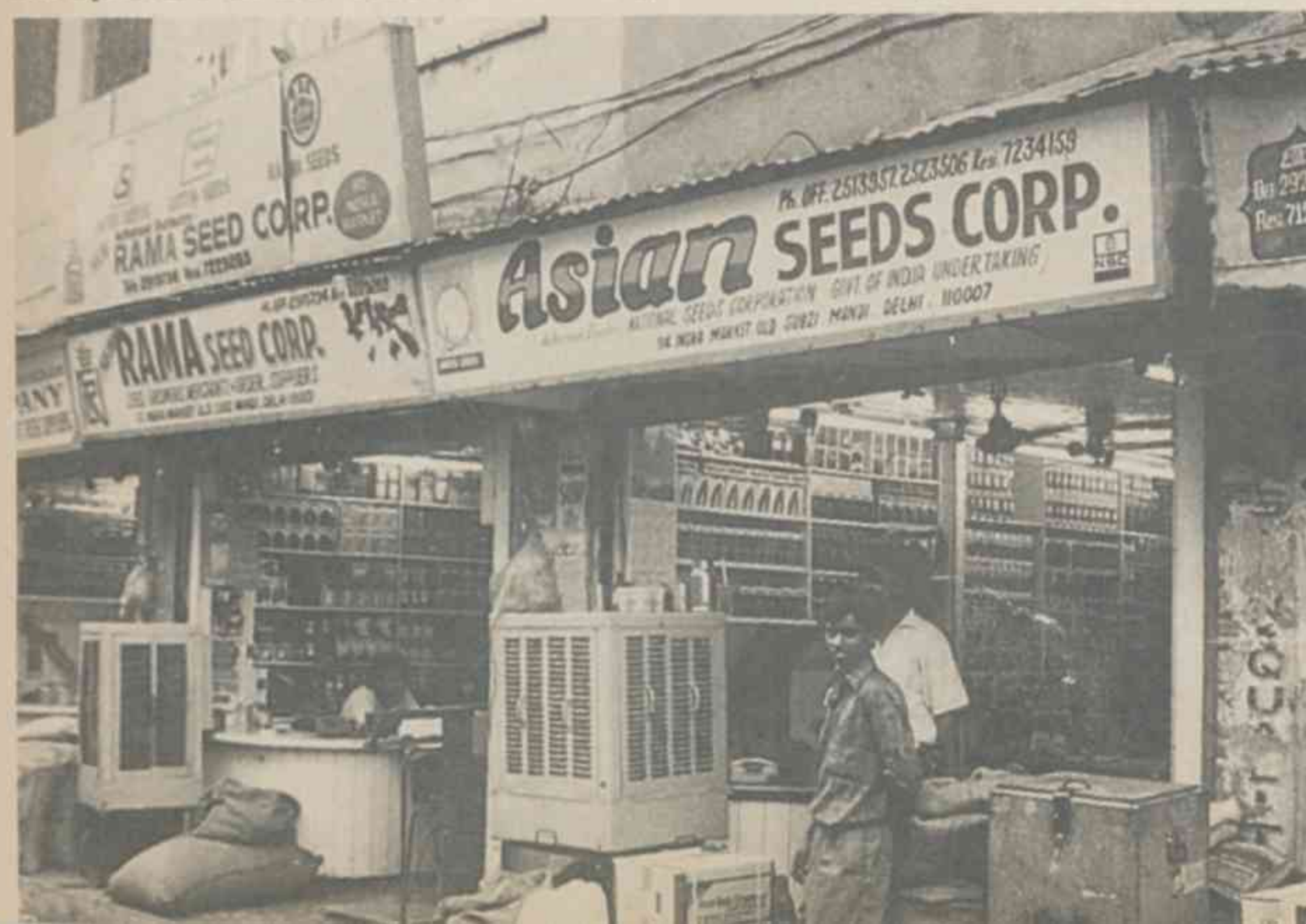
Meanwhile, the political band-

wagon keeps on rolling. The opposition parties are striving to synchronise their anti-GATT campaigns in the hope that a combined protest will hit the government (see box **GATT politics**). Senior Janata Dal leader George Fernandes exhorts the opposition to "march separately but strike together"

In the opposition-ruled Bihar, chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav's rustic oratory has hit hard: "*Saath hazar rupaya kilo tamatar ke beej mili Khet mein kaddu barabar tamatar hoi per usme hoi khali pani. Ye kheti tumhar na rahi aur bahar ke hawai jahaz ake keedamar dawai dali. Neem ka patta kya datune na mili. Tulsi ke jhar per jal bhi na de paybe.* (Rs 60,000 for 1 kg of tomato seeds. Tomatoes will be of the size of pumpkins but only full of water. The fields will not be yours and foreign airplanes will spray pesticides. You won't be able to use neem for cleaning teeth. You won't be able to worship tulsi)."

Regardless of the lobbies, farmers will not necessarily get converted to either cause. As Dileep Mans, a 27-year-old farmer of Mahankal taluka in Sangli, points out, "In every aspect of my profession, I take deliberated decisions. Nobody is going to lead me by the nose on my impression of what the Dunkel Draft implies for my fields." ■

All eyes are on the future of Indian agriculture: will it go to seed?



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