

## Kerala Fest to pave way for UN tag for pokkali farming

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KOCHI: In a bid to create a road map that would help pokkali farming in the state gain the status of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS), a national intangible heritage festival is being organized here from February 14 to 16.

The festival is being hosted by the Centre for Intangible Heritage Studies (CIHS), Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady and National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi, in association with Palliyakkal Service Cooperative Bank, Ezhikkara and department of culture, Kerala.

GIAHS are outstanding landscapes of aesthetic beauty that combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and a valuable cultural heritage. India currently has three such systems recognized by Food and Agricultural Organization under the United Nations. One of them Kuttanad Below Sea Level Farming system is in Kerala. The other two are Saffron Heritage of Kashmir, India and Koraput Traditional Agriculture.

B Venugopal, honorary director, CIHS, said the festival has the theme of 'intangible heritage and disaster'. "Our idea is to explore the possibilities of providing recognition to pokkali cultivation in the state which has proved itself as a futuristic agricultural practice," said B Venugopal.

The festival is expected to recommend a strategy for the state to safeguard its intangible heritage. "We need to create a road map for receiving the IH status," said Venugopal. This would be helpful at the next consultative meeting of the Unesco to be held in New Delhi shortly, he said.

For the first time, an university-level certificate course on intangible heritage would be launched during the programme, Venugopal said. Venu Vasudevan, CEO, Kerala Rebuild Initiative would inaugurate the event. Keynote address will be delivered by Amareswar Galla of Anant National University, Ahmedabad. Field sessions would be held at Ezhikkara on Saturday, followed by presentations by Palliyakkal bank and Chendamangalam grama panchayat. The festival would end on Sunday.

Palliyakkal Service Cooperative Bank at Ezhikkara had been at the forefront of promoting climate resilient farming, a model now acknowledged by the state government.

The pokkali land lie in 33 panchayats, two municipalities and one corporation area in Alappuzha, Ernakulam and Thrissur. According to a report by the agriculture department, original area under pokkali was estimated to be 25,000ha but is carried out only in 8,500ha. Out of this 8,500ha is under regular pokkali cultivation and the remaining is cultivated only when the climatic conditions are favourable.