Kerala – Paddy Shortage

Why in news?

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The Chief Minister was in the national capital in January seeking a greater allocation of rice to the State.

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What is the reason for poor paddy cultivation in Kerala?

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- It is a reflection of the failure of public policy.
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- **Labor cost -** Initially men from agriculture sector migrated to gulf region in search of better opportunities.
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- As the higher incomes transformed the households socially, the women too withdrew from agriculture.
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- This hit paddy cultivation most because mostly women were traditionally in the planting and harvesting of paddy in the state.
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- The sector began to face severe labour shortage.
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- As a result the wage rose.
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- This made the cultivation of paddy no longer viable, as cheaper rice came in from the rest of India.
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- **Land Ownership -** In abolishing tenancy the land reforms had extinguished the traditional landlords.
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- But it did not inevitably transfer land to those who actually laboured on the field.
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- Many agricultural labourers would have not migrated if they also owned

the land.
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- **Leasing -** Kerala is rare among the world's economies where agricultural production actually declined after land reforms.
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- In theory this can be rectified, if those with the ownership of land but not wishing to cultivate leased it out.
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- But leasing was made unlawful by the land reform Act.
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- At the time of its legislation, tenants were vulnerable of eviction at will.
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- Therefore this archaic law currently holds more of a symbolic value.
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- The law discourages tenancy as unlawful but is positive about the alienation of agricultural land to other purposes.
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- **Environment -** The present natural environment in Kerala is less hospitable to agriculture of any kind, let alone paddy cultivation.
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- This is due to the depletion of groundwater and sand mining of the riverbeds. There has also been the alienation of agricultural land.
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What should be done?

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- Kerala needs a land use policy that conserves every bit of its natural capital.
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- The State could consider acquiring all unused paddy land and making it available to the Adivasis on long-term lease.
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- It also should make amendment in its laws to enable leasing and consolidation of lands.
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- Public policy is likely to adapt only if political parties are pressurised by a citizenry.
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- Therefore citizen should also work towards improving the paddy cultivation by saving diversion of agricultural land to other purpose and

the regeneration of degraded lands.
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Source: The Hindu

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