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Construction of integrated agri extension centres to begin soon

Construction of buildings for the integrated agricultural extension centres at six places in the district would begin soon, Collector K.S.Palanisamy has said. Ten integrated agricultural extension centres, which would serve as a one-stop shop for technical support and input requirements of farmers, would be established in Tiruchi district and work was underway on four of them.

Work on the construction of the extension centres at Manikandam, Tiruverumbur, Thottiyam and Vaiyampatti was under progress and they would be completed soon. Construction of buildings for the centres at Lalgudi, Manapparai, Uppilliyapuram, Marungapuri, Thathaiyengarpet and Anadhanallur would begin soon, he said after inspecting the construction of the building for an extension centre at Thottiyam on Wednesday.

Each of the centres would be set up at a cost of Rs. 1.50 crore. While a majority of the centres were being established with the assistance from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), a few are being set up under the National Agricultural Development Programme.

The centres would have facilities for conducting demonstrations, meetings, trainings, field campaigns for implementation of State and central government schemes and offices for officials of agriculture, horticulture, seed certification, agricultural engineering and block-level technical managers. They would have provisions for scientific storage and mini exhibition halls.

Mr.Palanisamy on Thursday inspected the creation of farm ponds and rejuvenation of open wells in disuse at Emurpatti under the Watershed Development Agency. Farmers, he said, could harvest rainwater by creating farm ponds or by collecting the water in open wells that are in disuse in their farms. Joint Director of Agriculture R.Chandrasekaran, P.Murugesan, Executive Engineer, Agricultural Engineering, were present.

SRM University organises hackathon

IT Association, SRM University, Chennai, will present SRM Hackathon, a two-day nationwide event on its premises from October 3. SRM Hackathon challenges young developers to use their coding prowess to solve some intriguing real life problems ranging from the military to journalism to healthcare, said a university release. The university has invited entries from colleges and companies located in Bengaluru. Those interested to participate in the event can submit their ideas by September 20. For details, call 9087860881

Awareness of organic produce and millets

An awareness programme for consumers on organic produce and millets is being organised on September 10-11. The event has been organised by Jaivik Krishik Society in association with the Department of Agriculture and Horticulture. It will be held at Cubbon Park, near Band Stand at 11 a.m. Agriculture Minister Krishna Byre Gowda will inaugurate the mela and the newly constructed eco friendly outlets of Jaivik Krishik Society, the NCS and HOPCOMS Lalbagh.

Horticulture set to achieve new high in Madurai

Combining technology and innovation, a 36-year-old software engineer-turned-farmer, V. Govindaraj, has successfully produced a record output of cucumber from a land measuring just 2,000 square metres in a sleepy hamlet, Chetti Pillayar Natham, near Tirumangalam here.

A dry belt, where getting potable water is seen as a Herculean task by villagers, this young man has turned not only the area fertile, but also introduced a new meaning to agriculture.

Speaking to a group of visiting journalists on Wednesday, Mr. Govindaraj said that he was guided by the officials in the department of horticulture. “With just 2,000 square metres of land spread, I have produced 21 tonnes of cucumber in 130 days. In one year, I hope to harvest close to 100 tonnes. This was possible due to the poly house concept, where we can control the temperature, increase humidity, prevent pest attack, disease and use water through drip irrigation...” he added.

The Collector, K. Veera Raghava Rao, said that farmers should come forward to adapt to changes. Presently, there were about a handful of farmers who had taken up cultivation of vegetables like cucumber on an area of 25,000 square metres in the district by adopting poly house concept in locations like near Alagar Koil hills, Sivaganga Road. “When more number of farmers would understand the nuances and adopt the technology, the cultivable area shall expand and we may get more green cover,” he noted.

The National Horticulture Mission has a number of programmes for the farmers and it offered attractive subsidies, which should be utilized to the maximum. In the case of Mr. Govindaraj, the government gave subsidy to the tune of Rs. 8.90 lakh against his investment of Rs. 24.50 lakh. Depending on the capability of the farmer subsidy can be availed, said Go. Poopathi, Deputy Director (Horticulture). “The location does not matter much as the crop is grown with the aid of technology. Be it semi-dry or bone-dry, the interest of the farmer was important. He can turn the land into a fertile zone,” he stressed.

At Rayapalayam village, a retired banker N. Devaraj, who owned land in the area had established solar panel at a cost of Rs. 4.39 lakh through which he generated electricity and operated the motor to draw water from the well for his farm. Armed with a subsidy of Rs. 3.35 lakh from the Department of Horticulture, he is successfully growing sapotta, curry leaves, Amla, and “Navalpazham.”

Interaction

A group of 13 students from Horticulture College for Women, Tiruchi, interacted with the farmers who had adopted poly house technology for growing cucumber. The students said that they were here as part of their curriculum. During their three-month internship, they would be interacting with farmers, visiting the farms and also learning from the officials in the Department of Horticulture. “It is a very good experience for us to see for ourselves and understand the difficulties and problems of farmers and offer suggestions from what we have studied,” the girls said.

State government to bail out green gram growers

The State Cabinet on Thursday gave permission for market intervention to bail out growers of green gram by offering a minimum support price of Rs. 5,225 a quintal in Bidar, which has witnessed crash in prices.

The National Agricultural Federation (NAFED) had been identified as the nodal agency for procurement of green gram in Bidar for about 45 days. The permission from the Centre had been obtained for procuring the green gram by offering the MSP, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister T.B. Jayachandra said, briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting.

The Cabinet also cleared the decks for recruiting 66 assistant directors of agriculture, 169 assistant agricultural officers, and 371 agricultural officers through direct recruitment by approving a proposal for framing special rules for such recruitment. The candidates would be chosen directly without interview on the basis of rankings to be given based on 50 per cent of their marks in degree and 50 per cent of the marks scored in the competitive exam to be conducted by the Karnataka Examinations Authority, the Minister said. The Cabinet also increased the age limit for those entering into police services to 28 years from the present 26 years for the general category and other

backward classes (OBCs). The age limit has been relaxed till 30 years for the SC/ST communities, the Minister said.

Meanwhile, Bengaluru city will get a science gallery which would engage young adults on the interface between science and arts.

Special session

Meanwhile Mr. Jayachandra announced that the State legislature would hold a special session on September 14 to ratify the GST Bill.

Centenary fete of farm research stations begins

The State-level inauguration of year-long centenary celebrations of the Regional Agricultural Research Stations at Pilicode, Neeleswaram, and Padannakkad, set up in 1916 during the British rule, got off to a colourful start on Thursday with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan planting a hybrid coconut sapling at the Secretariat in the State capital.

The function was held in the presence of Revenue Minister E. Chandrasekharan and Agricultural Minister V.S. Sunilkumar, while similar functions were organised in all district headquarters and village offices across the State, an official release here said.

In Kasaragod, Additional District Magistrate K. Ambujakshan inaugurated the programme by planting a hybrid coconut sapling.

The programme was attended by Pilicode Regional Agricultural Research Station faculty member A.V. Meera Manjusha and Deputy Collector P.K. Jayasree.

MLA pushes growth plans of Vorkady KVK

Adequate funds will be allotted for developing the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) of the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) at Vorkady, near Manjeswaram, P.B Abdul Razak, MLA, has said.

Mr. Razak was inaugurating a workshop-cum-training programme on 'pests and diseases of major crops' here on Thursday.

The KVK was established in 1984 targeting farmers belonging to linguistic minorities of the region. Reluctance of KAU scientists and officials to work in the northern most part of the State had rendered it inactive.

Absence of permanent staff and prolonged negligence have ruined the infrastructure such as office buildings, quarters, and the partially completed hostel on 16 acres of leased land.

The KAU, in an attempt to revive the centre, recently shifted the office of the Associate Director of Extension of Northern Zone to the KVK from the Regional Agricultural Station, Pilicode.

K. Abdul Kareem, former head of Pilicode station, was posted as the Associate Director of Extension at the centre.

Mr. Razak offered support from his local area development fund to address water shortage and purchase computers, equipment, and establish technology demonstration units.

He said sufficient resources would be mobilised either from his asset creation fund or from other sources for completion of the hostel.

NABARD to promote 3 producer firms of tribesmen

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is planning to promote three producer companies of tribal farmers from the district in the current fiscal, V.R. Raveendranath, Chief General Manager, NABARD (Kerala and Lakshadweep), has said.

Speaking after inaugurating a rural market of WAYFARM (a farmers' producer company promoted by FARMFED, a federation of various farmers' clubs in the district) here on Thursday, Mr. Raveendranath said the producer companies for tribal people were aimed at empowering the marginalised section of society.

“The NABARD has promoted as many as 2,000 producer companies in the country this year, including 107 in the State,” Mr. Raveendranath said.

Ten producer companies, including three in tribal sector, had been registered in Wayanad district .

“The NABARD is targeting to refinance a sum of Rs.4,950 crore to the banking sectors of the State during the current fiscal, including short-term refinance of Rs.1,625 crore for Cooperative Banks and Kerala Grameen Bank as well as long-term refinance of Rs.3,325 crore to commercial banks, cooperative banks, and Kerala Grameen Bank,” Mr. Raveendranath added.

Meeting on September 13

Prakash Kammaradi, chairman, Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission will hold a meeting here on September 13 in connection with providing stable price for arecanut growers. He will participate at a conference in Central Plantation Crops Research Institute at Kasaragod on September 10. — Special Correspondent

Farmers' forum meet held

The Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) conducted a 'kisan gosthi' farmers' meet at Thalaivasal recently to create awareness on the Prime Minister Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and explain the latest farm technologies.

The programme was organised under Prime Minister Krishi Synchronisation Yojana that ensured the above insurance scheme to minimise the farmers' burden during natural calamities, pest and disease, and also animal damage.

Mini exhibition

P. Soundarrajan, Joint Director of Agriculture, who inaugurated the training programme and mini exhibition, appealed to the farming community to utilise the new insurance scheme and optimum usage fertilizers as per soil health card.

K. Ramasamy, ATMA farmers' committee chairman, Thalaivasal, advised the farmers for proper utilisation of subsidy scheme.

R. Janaki, agricultural officer, explained the guidelines of new insurance scheme and parthenium weeds control to minimize the farmers' problems.

R. Mahalingam, assistant engineer-agricultural engineering, spoke on the use of various machineries and implements from sowing to harvesting the crop.

K. Selvam, assistant director of horticulture, in-charge, explained water management in horticultural crops and technology involved in mulching.

S. Saravanan, professor and head, Avian Disease Laboratory, explained advises related to control and prevention of livestock and poultry.

Paddy growers in Kabini area stare at a bleak future



Farmers in the Kabini command area in Mysuru district have lost hope of harvesting paddy crop in about 1 lakh acres, with no prospect of getting water from the Kabini dam throughout this season.

“We are certain of losing this year’s crop in the Kabini belt. The standing crop needs water till December, but water in the dam may last only till October,” said Kabini Raitha Hitarakshana Samiti president Kurubur Shanthakumar.

Mr. Shanthakumar, who is also president of the Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers’ Association, told *The Hindu* that the discharge from the dam into irrigation canals (which was stopped on August 30 and resumed since Tuesday) may be stopped in the next few days. The crops are only a few days old and need water at least for the next three months. Farmers are of the opinion that the water being discharged into irrigation canals was a temporary step to appease them.

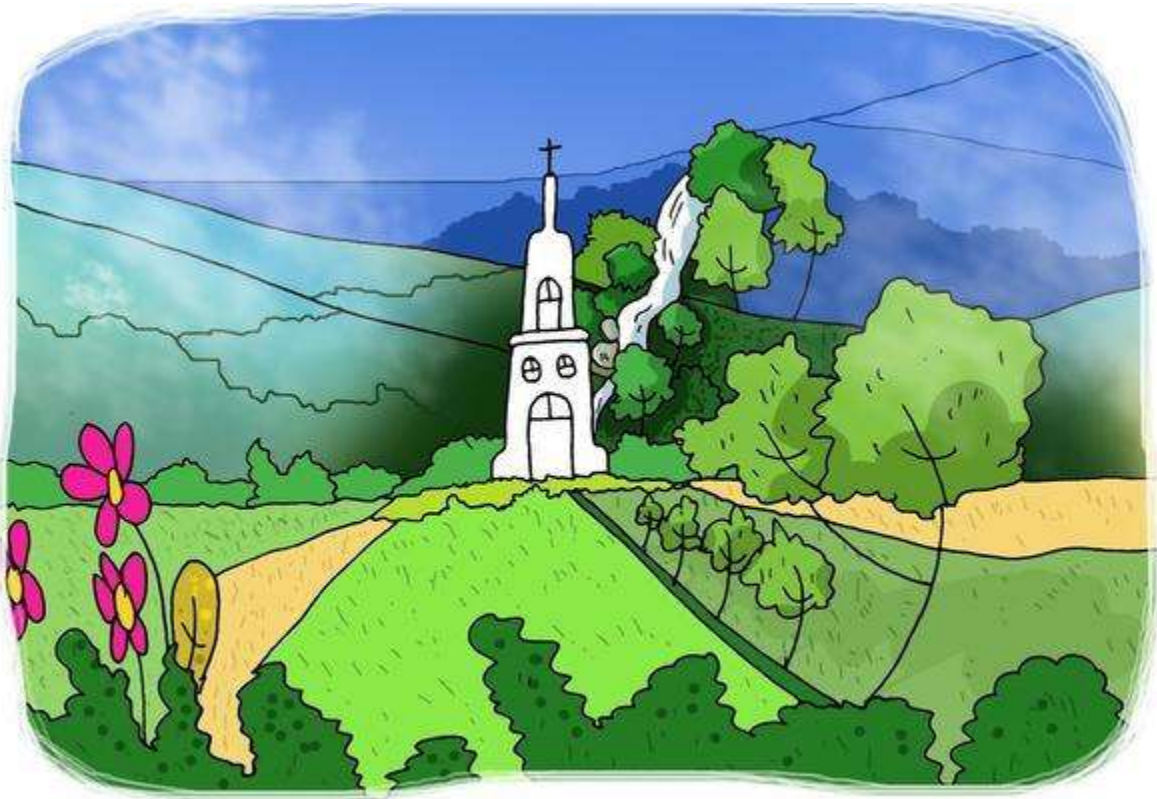
“If water is released at 5,000 cusecs from the Kabini dam for the next 10 days, storage level will drop by about 4 tmcft, leaving about 3.5 tmcft of water in the dam, which is sparse to irrigate the standing crop,” Mr. Shanthakumar said.

About 25,000 acres of land, situated in the tail end of the irrigation canals in the command area, had remained unsown owing to lack of water, he claimed. Mr.

Shanthakumar said the command area had mostly small landholders — those cultivating land measuring about 2 to 3 acres.

Attahalli Devaraj, a paddy and sugarcane grower in the Kabini command area, said water had not been flowed from the dam to all the lakes in the command area owing to failure of monsoon. “If water had been released to these lakes, there could have been some respite to farmers.”

HAVEN under water



Long, long ago, there was a beautiful valley in Austria in the region known as Tyrol. It nestled in the shadow of two lofty mountain ranges, the Karwendel in the west and the Brandenberg Alps in the east. The place was lovely and full of green meadows where crops of all kind, fruits and flowers grew. And the birds sang all day long.

The people who lived there were happy because they had everything they wanted. A charming place to live in. Plenty of tasty and healthy food, and far more money than they could possibly spend. Everything was prosperous. And there were no problems. They worked all day and slept peacefully at night. There stood a big church in the middle of the valley which was the most visited building of all because everyone went there to pray,

both morning and evening. They thanked God for giving them such a peaceful and carefree life.

But gradually, one important change crept in. There came a time when the people took their prosperity for granted and did not remember that it was a blessing from God. They got busy making more and more money and collecting more and more things.

They had no time to go to church or pray. In fact, they forgot God altogether! The priests were busy enjoying a luxurious life and did not come to church. People did not find the time and so, the church was totally neglected and full of dust and cobwebs. The only people who came there were the village children and the street urchins. They played loud, noisy games inside, breaking the pews, the candle stands and the holy pictures and there was nobody to forbid them. But although the people forgot their maker, nature did not.

Retribution

“How can they be so ungrateful?” asked the breeze that blew.

“How can they forget the Almighty who blessed them with so many things?” asked the sky, frowning down at the valley.

“They do not deserve it,” said the green grass and the trees that surrounded the valley. And then, a strange thing happened. One morning water began to rise from the floor of the church, rising higher and higher, inch by inch, covering the entire valley. When the sun rose the next morning there was only a beautiful lake covering the entire valley where the city had been. The lake came to be called Lake Achensee.

People say that on clear mornings if you dive deep into the lake, you can still see the traces of a ruined city below.

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Training programme on feed management of fish

A free one-day training programme on 'Feeding management of fish' will be held at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra on Veterinary College and Research Institute premises on September 16. A press release from N. Akila, Senior Scientist and Head, KVK, said that the training will focus on rearing of fish and prawns and feeding them. Farmers, members of self-help groups, youth and interested persons can participate in the training programmes. Interested should register themselves for participating in the training before September 15. For registration visit the KVK in person or register through phone: 04286-266345.

Rs. 405 crore farm loan waived

The State government has waived farm loans to the tune of Rs. 405 crore fetched by 81,775 farmers of Salem district from the cooperative institutions, the District Collector V. Sampath has said in a press release issued here on Thursday.

Deposits

The Salem District Central Cooperative Bank has topped the list among all the central cooperative banks in the state by accumulating deposits to the tune of Rs. 3,335 crore.

The Collector said that the cooperative institutions in the district distributed Rs. 674.25 crore as loans to farmers during last year, against the target of Rs. 591.80 crore. A sum of

Rs. 35.15 crore was disbursed as medium term loans during last year compared to the target of Rs. 35 crore.

The Chief Minister has directed the cooperative banks to disburse farm loans afresh to the farmers whose loans were already waived. The release called upon the farmers to take advantage of the government scheme for the benefit of the farmers.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Kisan at the blackboard



For over a decade, Prem Singh was more scientist than farmer. It wasn't easy battling nature in what is one of India's most challenging regions for farming. But he persisted, and is today one of the more successful farmers in Bundelkhand. Now he has set up the Kisan Vidyapeeth, or farmers' school, so that others too can reap success and joy from their work on the land and more youngsters are drawn to farming.

Barely a few months old, the school is located at Singh's farmhouse in Badokhar Khurd, about six km from Banda town in Uttar Pradesh. A philosophy graduate, Singh joined his family's farming profession in 1987 only to realise that the output fell way short of the input in that region.

"I dabbled in different things and suffered losses for three years. My grandfather thought I was going to ruin the family tradition," he says with a smile, as he settles down comfortably on a *charpoy* (string cot), with a cup of *chai* in hand. "I realised that natural resources were running dry due to bad farming practices. Around 40 years ago, we used to have three crops a year in the Bundelkhand region, while today we just about manage one. We were giving up our traditional practices, and the water problem we face today is a direct consequence of that," he says.

The past decade has seen Bundelkhand grapple with droughts in the summer, delayed monsoons followed by inadequate rainfall and, to make things worse, unseasonal rain and hailstorm in the winter, which affected the rabi crop.

Singh advocates the *aavartansheel kheti*, or periodic proportionate farming, based on the principles of the periodic ratio-based economics conceptualised by the late A Nagraj, a resident of Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh. It essentially involves using a cyclic agricultural process, one that maintains nature's equilibrium.

The main features of this method are: Allocating one-third of the landholding for a forest or a garden, which will not only provide produce at a fraction of cost and labour, but will also generate dry wood for fuel and act as a catalyst for rainfall; cow breeding — the dung and urine will supplant artificial fertilisers in the farm; a part of the land must be set aside as grazing ground for the cows; over the years, the land used to grow crops must be rotated with that used for grazing, to help maintain soil fertility; and, lastly, the use of local seeds must be encouraged. The idea is to customise farm practices to suit local conditions.

"Machinery and artificial fertilisers and seeds eat up almost 60 per cent of the profits. Additionally, they harm the soil. We must stick to the basics. The cow, which was once integral to farming, has lost its importance due to a scarcity of grazing grounds. A lot of people are quitting farming for these reasons," Singh says. He hopes to use his school to share whatever he's learnt over the years and enthuse other people to return to farming.

So far, around 300 people have visited the Humane Agrarian Centre — a classroom-cum-farmers' museum at the school, which explains the philosophy and practical aspects of farming. Singh insists that the focus is on learning, rather than teaching.

Most of the school's visitors are farmers from the surrounding regions, but there is also a large number of youngsters — either students of agriculture or those hoping to take up

farming in the future. Finding the classroom teaching outdated elsewhere, they head to Singh's farm to gain practical insights about various techniques.

“We want to see if natural farming can be viable in the long run, especially if we blend traditional techniques with modern tools. Visiting the school helps us understand some of the things we read in books,” says Vivek Singh, a student of the Banda Agriculture University. The two-year course at Kisan Vidyapeeth will include theoretical and practical sessions. For a whole year, students will practise their classroom learning on a farm under the guidance of a farmer.

During the second year, they will work on individual projects in addition to taking part in a group project to analyse the costs involved in setting up a virtual farm using aavartansheel kheti. The next step for Singh is an online curriculum to make the course freely available to farmers anywhere in the world. Meanwhile, the first batch at his school started classes in the first week of May.

Singh and Johan D'Hulster, a Belgian farmer from Schriek and the founder-director of the biodynamic farm Akelei, will be available to chat online at designated times to take questions from students.

Singh is aware that apart from lessons, what farmers need during the crucial fledgling years is a financial support system.

“We need to start off with making farming sustainable, instead of chasing big profits and competition... we need a shift in thinking. I hope this school can make a difference in the future,” he says.