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Centre to set up rural business hubs in five districts

Special Correspondent

VILLUPURAM: The Union Ministry of Panchayat Raj has selected five districts in Tamil Nadu for setting up the “Rural Business Hubs (RBH)” with the objective of tapping the local resources for the economic uplift of the people, according to R.Palanisamy, District Collector.

Addressing a preliminary meeting of officials on the measures to be taken for the formation of the RBH here on Saturday, Mr. Palanisamy said that it was proposed to establish the hubs in Villupuram, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam and Krishnagiri districts.

The Union Ministry had designated Periyar Maniammai University, Thanjavur, as the “gateway agency” for the implementation of the project. In the identified villages the officials would gather information about the extent of area under cultivation, crop varieties, types of industries, raw material availability and the economic status of the people. Based on the inputs, the officials would prepare the reports delineating the ways and means of harnessing these resources for the betterment of the villagers.

The Collector said that under the project, measures would be adopted for augmenting milk supply and streamlining the milk procurement system.

Simultaneously strategies would be drawn up for marketing milk and milk products. Through the project silk worm rearing, cattle breeding, vermicompost and upgradation of village communication centres would be done. The Collector said that the banks would be tied with the selected villages for extending financial assistance and grant, wherever permitted.

Project directors from Periyar Maniammai University M.Gabriel, Swaminathan and Jayachandran, Assistant General Manager of NABARD Mahendran and others participated.

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Fertilizer stock

Staff Reporter

KRISHNAGIRI: All the Primary Agricultural Co-operative Banks in the district have been directed to maintain a minimum of five tonnes of DAP fertilizer stock.

The direction was given to the PACBs so facilitate the issuance of DAP without any hindrance to the farmers in the district.

Officials in the PACBs have been asked to register the stock and the price without fail.

The price list should be kept in a place where it was visible to the farmers.

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SIPCOT CMD holds talks with farmers

Special Correspondent

— Photo: G. Moorthy



Protest: Farmers expressing their opposition to acquisition of agricultural lands for setting up SEZ in Madurai district.

MADURAI: The State government would provide fair compensation to all farmers who gave away their lands for establishing the proposed special economic zone (SEZ) near Tirumangalam, said Small Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu (SIPCOT)'s Chairman-cum-Managing Director N. Govindan here on Monday.

Speaking with a large number of farmers from Sivarakottai, Karisalkalanpatti and Swami Mallampatti, among other villages in and around Tirumangalam, at a closed door meeting at the District Collectorate, Mr. Govindan said that the Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi had categorically stated on several occasions that lands should not be acquired without the consent of farmers.

Wherever there was no scope for agricultural operations, the officials had identified the lands for development. Keeping in mind the need to step up the economy, the State government had proposed setting up of industrial parks, he told the gathering, a press release said.

Further, he said that not only jobs would be assured to eligible local residents but compensation would also be awarded in a fair and transparent manner, the top officer assured. For this purpose, a district-level committee would decide the sale price and in the event of seeking enhanced price, the farmers could approach the

state-level committee, if needed.

However, a group of farmers from Sivarakottai is learnt to have expressed their reservation to the SEZ proposal and maintained that their lands were fertile, a farmer representing the group told reporters.

District Collector in-charge Dinesh Ponraj Oliver and other officers were present at the meeting, the press note added.

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Hearing on Bt brinjal today

CHENNAI: The Madras High Court on Tuesday adjourned to Wednesday hearing on a petition against a panel's approval for Bt brinjal.

In his petition, K. Thiruthanikachalam had prayed the court to declare the approval granted by the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee in October last year for environmental release of Bt Brinjal null and void.

After hearing brief arguments by petitioner's counsel, M. Radhakrishnan, the First Bench, comprising Chief Justice H.L. Gokhale and Justice K.K. Sasidharan, posted the matter for further hearing on Wednesday. _ *Special Correspondent*

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Global warming "more dangerous" than terrorism

Staff Reporter

— Photo: G. Moorthy



Green initiative: D.R. Karthikeyan (centre), former CBI Director, plants a sapling in Chellamuthu Gardens at Alagarkoil in Madurai District on Tuesday.

MADURAI: Global warming and climate change affects all countries, rich and poor alike, and are more dangerous than even terrorism, which targets only specific

countries, according to D.R. Karthikeyan, former Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation.

In the last century, forests had been indiscriminately targeted for narrow gains and this had also contributed greatly to this global problem.

Mr. Karthikeyan was addressing a sapling planting campaign, organised by the M.S. Chellamuthu Trust and Research Foundation, at Alagarkoil near here on Tuesday.

The campaign launched by Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers M.K. Alagiri recently aims at planting one lakh saplings in the district.

Avoiding the use of petroleum products, taking to bio-fuel and planting more saplings are the need of the hour, said Mr. Karthikeyan.

He said that trees helped in protecting the soil besides contributing to bringing in rain. He gave away saplings to families of mentally-challenged patients of the M.S. Chellamuthu Trust.

Speaking earlier, C. Ramasubramanian, State Nodal Officer, Mental Health Programme, and founder of the Trust, said that planting of saplings will be of great help. M. Easwaran, Commandant, Armed Reserve Police (Sixth Battalion), lauded the work being done by the Trust and assured Dr. Ramasubramanian of full support.

K.P.T. Ganesan, Chairman, Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Committee, said that saplings along with the tree guards would be provided upon receiving applications.

Trust officials said that while initially 100 saplings would be planted on the M.S. Chellamuthu Gardens campus at Alagarkoil, a total of 1,000 saplings would be planted through 300 families drawn from the 23 self-help groups affiliated to the Trust.

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“Food Safety and Standards Act will hurt small traders”

R. Sairam

Memorandum submitted to Chief Executive Officer

of Food Safety and Standards Authority

MADURAI: The stringent standards prescribed in the Food Safety and Standards Act will adversely affect small manufacturers and traders of food products, the Agro Food Chamber of Commerce and Industry has said.

Chamber president S. Rethinavelu said that many villages in the country were yet to have easy access to potable water and implementing the stringent standards immediately would result in small traders in rural areas losing out to multinationals.

A delegation, comprising Mr. Rethinavelu; president of the Tamil Nadu Chamber of Commerce and Industry N. Jegatheesan; and other office-bearers met the Chief Executive Officer of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India in New Delhi recently and submitted a memorandum pressing their demands.

Need for awareness

Mr. Rethinavelu said adequate levels of awareness should be created and food business operators educated to raise their business to the standards expected by the Food Standards and Safety Authority. For an initial period of three years, no prosecution should be initiated for contravening the norms of registration, licensing, and hygiene standards.

One accredited food analysis laboratory should be established in all districts before the Act is enforced as, at present, the number of such laboratories was insufficient.

The Agro Chamber also called for dropping the provision requiring the food business operator to obtain all documents prescribed.

This provision is “expensive and time-consuming,” and will greatly affect the small players.

He also called for reducing the licensing fee from its present levels of Rs.5,000 for petty traders and street vendors and Rs.10,000 for others.

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Water level

MADURAI: The level in the Periyar dam on Tuesday stood at 112.50 feet (full level 136 feet) with an inflow of 31 cusecs and a discharge of 400 cusecs. The level in the Vaigai dam was 39.01 feet (71 feet) with an inflow of 82 cusecs and a discharge of 260 cusecs. The combined Periyar credit stood at 1,053 mcft.

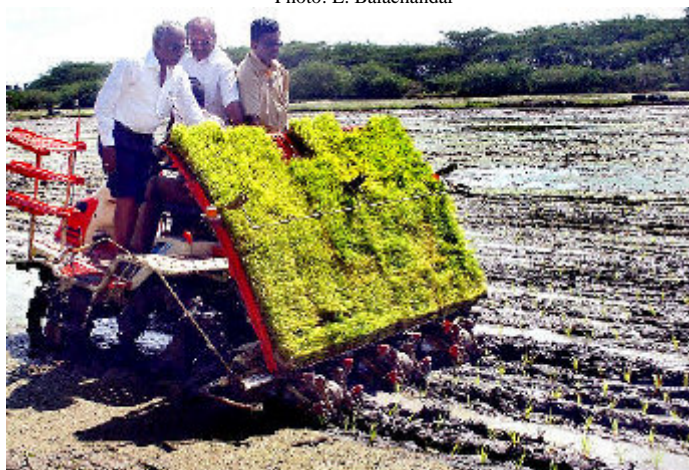
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Paddy transplanter introduced

Special Correspondent

— Photo: L. Balachandar



***Making things easy:* N. Sathiamoorthy, Joint Director of Agriculture inspecting paddy transplantation through a machine at Pappakudi near Ramanathapuram on Tuesday.**

RAMANATHAPURAM: Paddy transplanter, a machine which is touted as a viable alternative to offset the acute shortage of agricultural labourers, has been introduced in Ramanathapuram district for the first time.

As against several manual workers toiling for several days for raising the nursery, watering, transplanting the nurseries, the paddy transplanter, an imported one, completes the transplantation of nurseries in an acre within 90 minutes. A machine, which costs around Rs.9 lakh, transplants seedlings in 5 to 7 acres per day.

As per the system, the operator of transplanter grows nursery under the mat nursery method. He takes care of everything including paddy seeds, watering and other works.

He transports the seedlings, which are just 15 days old, to the required field. They are fed into the machine as cakes. As the machine moves, it plants the seedlings in the prepared fields at required places by giving appropriate space.

The transplantation work with the machine involves just two or three labourers only for placing the seedlings in plates. The iron wheels of the machine facilitate the vehicle to move in slushy fields. It avoids planting many seedlings at a spot. The fields look neat and clean.

“It has come as a boon to the agriculturists, who often encounter the problem of

acute labour shortage. It is not only a cost effective technology but also a practical one to change the face of the paddy cultivation,” N. Saththiamoorthy, Joint Director of Agriculture, told ‘The Hindu’ at Pappakudi after inspecting the paddy transplanter.

S. Rajendiran and K. Sakthi Mohan, Deputy Directors of Agriculture, said the machine followed features of the System of Rice Intensification technique spearheaded by the State government. Since proper spacing was given, the tillers could be high. Weeds could be easily cleared by operating cona weeder. It would reduce unnecessary overheads and agricultural inputs.

“Under traditional method, it would cost around Rs.6000 for raising nursery and planting in an acre. For transplanting to be done through transplanter, it costs just Rs.3500 an acre. There is absolutely no need to employ farm workers, who are in high demand,” said S. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, a farmer, who has brought his 7 acres of land under the new method.

G. Soundarrajan, Assistant Director, said progressive farmers of the district would be taken to the field for promoting the method.

Mr. Saththiamoorthy added that the chances of pest attack were less in this mode of cultivation than the traditional method. All out efforts would be taken to popularise this.

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Mettur level

TIRUCHI: The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 76.58 feet on Tuesday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 868 cusecs and the discharge, 1,800 cusecs.

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Bioresource conservation strategies to be identified

Staff Reporter

Global conference on climate change gets off to a start

PHOTO:R.M. RAJARATHINAM



INSIGHTFUL: Chairman of Neem Foundation Ramesh C. Saxena, left, hands over the first copy of the abstract volume of the ICCCB-2010 to Ram Rajasekharan, Director, CIMAP, at the Bharathidasan University in Tiruchi on Tuesday. —

TIRUCHI: The technological scope to make plants adapt to climatic change was presented as a hopeful defensive measure to address the issue of continuous escalation in global warming, in the backdrop of the inevitability of rising human population debilitating the capacity of depleting green cover to absorb carbon dioxide emission, at the inaugural of the four-day International Conference on Climate Change and Bioresource (ICCCB – 2010) at the Bharathidasan University.

Ram Rajasekaran, Director, Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, Lucknow, presented the optimistic perspective to a gathering of delegates comprising scientists, researchers and industry representatives from various parts of India and other countries including Singapore, China, Iran, Korea, Malaysia and Turkey.

There has been progress in genetic engineering of plants to adapt to heat/stress conditions, Dr. Ram said explaining the activities of serine-threonine protein kinases in plants, in his key-note address at the conference organised by the Department of Biotechnology.

Though climate change is a natural phenomena , global warming caused by human inducements like industrial pollution and green house gas emissions have led to melting of glaciers and rise in vector-borne diseases. Climate is determined by temperature and precipitation. The extent of temperature determines life on earth, he said, observing that a rise in temperature by two degree centigrade in the Indian context will cause enormous agricultural losses since 60 per cent of the land is rain-fed.

Dr. Ram received the first copy of the abstract volume on the occasion from Delhi-based Neem Foundation's Chairman, Ramesh C. Saxena in the presence of Vice-Chancellor M. Ponnaivaikko and conference convenor S. Sivaramakrishnan.

Dr. Ramesh said that the earth with a human population of 6.7 billion has a carrying capacity for 10 billion provided the bioresources are used in a sustainable way. He was hopeful of creating an effective impact through the conference that will deliberate on various issues including biodiversity, conventional agriculture to combat climate change, food security implications of climate change, and organic farming.

Citing a finding of the Inter-Government Panel on Climate Change, Dr. Sivaramakrishnan said that carbon dioxide was the major source of pollution and that the global temperature was expected to rise to an extent between 1.4 degree celsius and 5.8 degree celsius by 2100. The conference will deliberate on recent advances in bioresources and realistic applications for conserving and fostering sustainable bioresource management.

Presiding over, Vice-Chancellor M. Ponnaivaikko observed that the earth was slowly dying, referring to the 0.8 increase in temperature for one hundred years from 1906 to 2005. Against the overall average of 0.07 per cent per decade, the average of 0.13 in the last five decades was a distressing scenario. The presence of carbon dioxide in atmosphere has risen from 250 ppm (part per million) in 1750 to 541 ppm at present and was estimated to reach the level of 970 ppm in 2100, he said, emphasising on the need for accelerating the process of expanding green cover.

Department Head A. Ganapathy and A.S. Rao, Professor, also addressed the participants. Over 200 papers focussing on various issues in the management of climate change and management of bioresources are to be presented and discussed during the conference that has been envisaged to evolve strategic plans and policies to preserve and restore completely/partially degraded ecosystems due to climate change.

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Exports may post 8 % growth in Jan

Special Correspondent

Commerce Secretary alerts exporters to expect partial withdrawal of stimulus

Study on
India-ASEAN
FTA released
Progress of WTO talks not up to expectations

NEW DELHI: Continuing with the positive growth in the exports sector for the third consecutive month, India's exports are likely to post an 8 per cent growth at \$14 billion during January 2010 amid indications of a partial withdrawal of incentives provided in the stimulus packages.

"In January, we expect exports to be \$14 billion. But you must be ready for some cut back," Commerce Secretary Rahul Khullar told reporters here on Tuesday on the sidelines of a conference organised to release a study by Assocham on India-ASEAN FTA.

Exports, which came under severe pressure due to the global slowdown after October 2008, had aggregated a shade lower than \$13 billion in January 2009. In the backdrop of exports moving in tandem with a smart economic recovery, Mr. Khullar asked exporters and the industry to expect partial withdrawal of fiscal stimulus.

Mr. Khullar's remarks came a day after the Union Commerce and Industry Minister, Anand Sharma, talked about withdrawal of incentives to those sectors in exports which had posted robust growth. After a 13-month contraction with demand slowdown in the western markets, India's exports started recovering from November. However, because of a sharp decline till October, April-December shipments showed contraction of about 20 per cent. Releasing a study, Mr. Khullar said the Finance and Commerce Ministers were scheduled to meet later this week to decide on extension and withdrawal of stimulus packages for exporters for fiscal 2010-11. He also disclosed that India's overall trade proportion to its GDP, which shot up from 35 per cent in 2004-05 to 55 per cent in 2008-09, was likely to be lowered by the end of the current fiscal to close to 54.8 per cent in view of economic conditions prevailing both in global and domestic markets. He felt that incentives should be extended to sectors that were still under stress and the stimulus package be withdrawn in those areas in which recovery had happened. Referring to WTO negotiations, he said that progress on these had not been as per expectations and especially from countries like the U.S. which continue to stall these negotiations by insisting on market access to its agriculture products in developing world. He, however, clarified that countries like the U.S. had not unveiled what they would offer to those developing countries in return to market access that they were expecting from them.

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By Express News Service
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TNAU puts Bt brinjal project on the backburner

COIMBATORE: In the wake of the mounting protests against the proposed introduction of Bt brinjal, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) Vice-Chancellor P Murugesu Boopathi said the institute would not go ahead with its plan of introducing the new varieties for cultivation after the government refused to grant permission for the release.

Speaking to Express, Murugesu Boopathi said the research on Bt brinjal had been completed long ago. However, the university can release the four new varieties of Bt Brinjal for cultivation, only with the permission of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, besides consultations with the State government.

On the government denying permission for the introduction of the varieties, he said the institute did not wish to comment on the issue.

Contrary to the claims of the Vice-Chancellor, founder of Isha Yoga Centre Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev had condemned introducing Bt Brinjal into the country. "It seems there is some commercial motive behind introducing these genetically modified food items. When European nations have banned genetically engineered foods, why should it be introduced here, putting at risk the health of the people?" he asked.

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Different set of standards needed for GM food crops: Ramesh

Nitin Sethi, TNN, 10 February 2010, 03:01am IST

Topics:

- [Jairam Ramesh](#)
- [Bt brinjal](#)

Environment minister Jairam Ramesh tells Nitin Sethi that the conflict of interest issue in GEAC will be resolved before the next round of tests. Excerpts from an interview.

Q: Does your report set the standards required for clearance of all future GM food crops even though this is for a specific case?

A: Absolutely, for food crops. We have okra in the pipeline, we have two Bt brinjal varieties by the Indian Institute of Horticulture Research and one by the Indian Institute of Vegetable Research, we have GM rice also in the pipeline. We should have a different set of standards for food crops. I am persuaded by the argument that many doctors, including the DG of ICMR, feel standards should be stricter than for drugs because food is something you consume every day, not just when you are sick. In the case of drugs, you do independent clinical trials, why can't they be done for food crops, say for issues of chronic toxicity... M S Swaminathan has raised this concern repeatedly.

Q: But the approval body GEAC, it sets protocols and it checks results and it has members with conflict of interests.

A: You need a network of independent testing laboratories. One doesn't need to set up new labs, just a network of existing labs. We must have procedures that lead to public confidence through proper protocols and transparency.

Q: But that is something you and the ministry need to do.

A: Yes, that is my role. For example, the setting up of an independent regulator and Mr Prithviraj Chavan's role. But taking the bunch of scientific material that has come to me and assessing it, that is not my role, GEAC should be doing it.

Q: But don't you need to settle them now before other approvals come in?

A: We will certainly examine this. We need to have clear rules over conflict of interest.

Q: Will the conflict of interest issue plaguing the GEAC be settled before other approvals?

A: The next round of testing should not evoke such allegations of conflict of interest, that much I am clear. We should have clear set of guidelines and they should be implemented before we have an EC 3 (EC 2 committee cleared Bt brinjal).

Q: But conflict of interest should not arise for any GM approvals.

A: Yes, I agree. It's important to bring about a greater degree of transparency and communication. GEAC must establish a channel of communication with the larger scientific community and with civil society groups to inspire greater confidence.

Q: Is your word on the Bt brinjal moratorium final within the government now?

A: The GEAC comes under my ministry. I am the minister in charge. My word is final and the buck stops with me. Unless, of course, the prime minister asks it to be brought to the Cabinet, then I have to take it to the Cabinet.

Q: Why is the new biotech regulatory authority bill being lying for years now?

A: I don't know. I heard of it in 2004 long before I became a minister. We are now in 2010 and we don't have a regulator. Similarly, seeds bill also came about in 2004. In view of GM seeds, its an important issue. So is the issue of mandatory labelling (of GM products). First, the ministry of health put up a draft notification on it in 2006, then they said we are setting up a Food Safety Standards Authority of India and they will do it. Today, I spoke to the chairman of FSSA and he says he has been asked to go slow because we are getting a new biotech regulator. I find this buck-passing unnecessary. If we have an independent telecom regulator, we can have one here too.

Q: What about the seeds bill?

A: The seeds bill has just come, we are going to move some amendments in this session of Parliament but I am concerned how the seeds bill protects our system in the face of onslaught of private sector transgenic seeds. When it comes to seeds, my approach is somewhat different, I would say there should be a predominant role for public sector or else you get problems such as in Bt cotton where the farmer had to keep buying hybrid seeds. But this is the role of the government to do, not GEAC.

Sugar offtake from PDS in TN up 58% in 2 years

TNN, 10 February 2010, 03:48am IST

CHENNAI: The public distribution system (PDS) has turned out to be a great leveller, as food inflation drives people across various income groups to fair price shops. Now data made available by the state's civil supplies and consumer protection department clearly substantiate the shift in buying patterns in Tamil Nadu over the past two years.

With the gap in prices between government-controlled rates and retail shops widening, offtake from PDS network has gone up. While the offtake of toor dal has more than trebled from 3,410 tonnes in March 2008 to 10,319 tonnes in December 2009, PDS sugar sales rocketed by 58% between December 2007 and December 2009 from 21,767 tonnes to 34,444 tonnes.

Urad dal sales went up by more than four times, from 1,346 tonnes in March 2008 to 6,411 tonnes in December 2009. The sale of wheat flour through ration shops also rocketed from 524 tonnes in March 2008 to 4,369 tonnes in December 2009.

Meanwhile, number of ration card holders has also risen from 1.89 crore in March 2007 to

1.96 crore in January 2010.

Currently, a kilogram of toor dal costs around Rs 80 in the open market while ration shops are selling it for Rs 40. Sugar costs Rs 40 in the retail market, but it is available for Rs 13.50 at the PDS shop.