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Mechanised vermicompost unit inaugurated at Paiyur



To recycle waste: P. Murugesha Boopathy (right), Vice Chancellor, Tamilnadu Agriculture University, looking the earthworms to be mixed in the vermicompost tanks at the Regional Research Station, Paiyur, in Krishnagiri on Thursday after inaugurating the mechanical vermicompost unit. —

KRISHNAGIRI: A mechanised vermicompost unit was inaugurated at the Regional Research Station at Paiyur in Krishnagiri district on Thursday by P. Murugesha Boopathi, Vice Chancellor, Tamilnadu Agricultural University, in the presence of P. Subbian Registrar and M. Paramathma, Director Research.

He also inspected the unit and gave suggestions to improve the productivity.

He suggested removing plastics and other waste materials which were not easily compostable during filling up of the tanks. Earthworms were introduced into the soil by Mr. Murugesha Boopathy.

Professor S. Vijayabaskaran explained the salient features of the mechanised vermicompost unit being erected at a cost of Rs. 6.55 lakh with grant from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.

He said the mechanisation process was done purely from the locally available materials such as the carriers in the conveyor from the compost to the filling unit and from the filling unit to the sieves for sieving.

Mechanisation would save the labour cost. One tonne of vermicompost could be produced with only two labourers instead of 8 labourers through conventional methods of production.

A.K. Mani, Head and Professor, RRS, said the vermicompost produced here are sold to IIT Chennai and coffee planters in Karnataka.

The conventional unit which was started in 2003 has earned gross revenue of Rs. 25 lakh in 2,895 mandays. and the average production of vermicompost in the RRS was 46.71 tonne. N. Kumar, Dean (Horticulture), V. Thirumalai, Assistant General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development were present.

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2,90,854 tonnes of paddy procured in Tiruvarur

Fodder raised on 100 acres, being sold at Re. 1 a kg to farmers



Collector M.Chandrasekaran, right, speaking at the monthly farmers' grievances day meeting in Tiruvarur on Thursday.

TIRUVARUR: A total of 2,90,854 tonnes of samba paddy has been procured so far in Tiruvarur district by Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC), said M.Chandrasekaran, Collector, here on Thursday.

Speaking at the monthly grievances day meeting for farmers, the Collector said that samba harvest had been completed on 1,31,000 hectares out of 1,45,000 hectares of total coverage.

Farmers are involved in raising pulses in samba harvested areas. So far pulses-green gram and black gram have been raised on 74,000 hectares in the district. Insurance proposals have been sent to Government for oil palm crop which has been raised on 250 hectares.

Fodder has been raised on 100 acres in Korkai village in the farm belonging to Animal Husbandry department. It is sold at the rate of Re. 1 per kg to farmers. Farmers appealed to the Collector to write to Government to form an Organic Farming Board to help farmers. They also wanted to explore the possibility of selling gobar gas in cylinders.

C.Anbazhgan, Joint Director of Agriculture, Tiruvarur, and M.Palaniappan of Animal Husbandry department participated.

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Thornless bamboos gaining popularity

VILLUPURAM: The cultivation of thornless bamboo varieties is picking up in Villupuram district. In the past two years 250 hectares have come under bamboo cultivation in the district, according to P.Dhandapani, Deputy Director of Horticulture Department.

Mr Dhandapani told *The Hindu* that the Deputy Director-General Kameshwar Oza of the National Bamboo Mission inspected the areas under bamboo at Vikkiravandi and Rishvandhiyam blocks on Monday.

The objective of the mission was to encourage bamboo cultivation among the farmers so as to augment their income. The farmers were given an incentive of Rs 8,000 spread over two years for taking to bamboo cultivation.

Subsidy was also given to them for putting up the fertigation system — mixing fertilizers with drip irrigation. Two years into the mission the horticulture department had brought 150 hectares under bamboo while the Forest Department and the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Department had covered another 100 ha.

Mr Dhandapani noted that four thorn-less varieties such as the bambusa vulgaris, bambusa bulcoa, bambusa nutans and bambusa tulda had proved to be ideal for cultivation. These varieties could attain a height of 25—30 ft within two years and would attain maturity, with considerable girth, in four-five years. The farmers could obtain a yield of 50 tonnes of bamboo per hectare and because of their high-worth bio-mass they could get considerable income.

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Mettur level

The water level at the Mettur dam stood at 74.95 feet on Thursday against its full level of 120 feet.

The inflow was 833 cusecs and the discharge 1,800 cusecs.

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Water level

MADURAI: The level in the Periyar dam on Thursday stood at 110.20 feet (136 feet) with no inflow and a discharge of 250 cusecs. The level in the Vaigai dam was 37.80 feet (71 feet) with no inflow and a discharge of 60 cusecs. The combined Periyar credit stood at 630 mcft.



Farm sector in red

New Delhi, February 26, 2010

India's farm growth has, worryingly, gone negative by 0.2 per cent, the Budget-eve Economic Survey for 2009-10, said on Thursday.

A 0.2 per cent "contraction" means that even as prices rise, incomes of 52 per cent of all Indians (who depend on agriculture) have fallen to the that extent.

The drag comes after last year's 1.6 per cent farm gross domestic product, which is the sum of all incomes from agriculture and allied activities.

Agriculture has turned out to be India's Achilles' heel, even though the country is predicted to grow by more than 8 per cent overall.

The survey showed that the drought trimmed summer cultivation by 6.5 per cent, while food productivity shrunk by 16 per cent. Over all, agriculture ended up with a bloody nose.

"I think it's time for administrative reforms in agriculture, like a farmer's audit of agricultural institutions," P. Chengal Reddy of the Consortium of Indian Farmers' Association told Hindustan Times.

The negative growth, seemingly small, is actually a blunt blow at a time when rural spending is driving domestic demand.

According to a 2009 Citibank Research report, rural share of consumer demand for all motorcycles sold was 48.3 per cent. It was 10 per cent for passenger cars and 44 per cent for TV sets.

The effects of the drought quietly showed up in the form of a supply crunch and surging food prices, the single biggest driver of inflation.

"Rising food prices, spurred by expectations of shortfall in production, have brought the issues of food security, food management and productivity to the forefront of national strategy," the 2009-10 survey, led by chief economic adviser Kaushik Basu and his team, stated.

Food inflation remained above 17 per cent for five straight weeks, data released separately on Thursday showed. Since December, food inflation showed signs of spreading. In January, India's benchmark wholesale-price index rose 8.6 per cent — the fastest since October 2008.

India is more vulnerable than others to food price swings because of the relatively large weightage of food items in its price index. For example, a 20 per cent spike in rice prices would raise the consumer price index by 2.2 percentage points.

The survey said that more stocked grains should be released to cool prices.

Worst is over, prices coming down: Sharad Pawar

The government on Thursday said the worst is over and prices of various essential commodities like pulses, sugar and vegetables have started declining - a trend that will continue.

"As stated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (at the meeting of Chief Ministers on price rise), worst time is over. I am absolutely confident about that....the situation will change. We are on line for better days," Food and Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said winding up a day-long discussion in the Lok Sabha on price rise.

The entire opposition staged a walkout dissatisfied over the reply. While the Left Parties, Samajwadi Party and RJD left the House first, Leader of Opposition Sushma Swaraj led the NDA out of the House soon after.

Pawar in his reply, which lasted for more than an hour, doled out statistics to drive home the point that prices of various essential commodities like pulses, sugar, potato and onion have started coming down over the past three months.

On the other hand, farmers in West Bengal are suffering because the prices of potato have crashed, he said, adding the government would take necessary action to safeguard the interest of growers.

Earlier intervening in the debate, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee said the government would initiate action to bridge the gap between wholesale and retail prices to ensure that farmers got a fair deal.

The Rajya Sabha also discussed the issue day-long after Opposition relented for a debate in both Houses under rules which do not involve voting.

DECCAN Chronicle

TN hopes for best in budget-2010

February 26th, 2010

Feb. 25: For a nation and people recovering from a global slowdown and slump in domestic consumption, budget-2010 presents hope of triggering all-round growth. This is particularly so with the middle class reeling under the inflation and rise in prices of the essentials. There is widespread expectation, not only amid these sections but also with the trade and business community, not to forget the industry, that Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee will be able to pull a rabbit out of his hat on Friday.

The salaried people, who constitute a big chunk of taxpaying public and also the spending segment, have been consistently ignored in all the previous budgets. For instance, the tax exemption for medical expenses has been kept at a dismally low Rs 15,000 per annum for the entire family. "In these days of corporate medicare, what can you do with Rs 15,000? And in the case of education, the family now gets only Rs 100 per month per child, and hostel benefit of Rs 300. Inflation considerations are seldom applied to the middle class," says G. Sekar, a reputed tax consultant in Chennai, speaking about critical areas for redress in this budget.

In the absence of any social security cover for the senior citizens, the Finance Minister would do well to consider higher exemption limits and higher interest rates for their long-term savings, instead of the peanut offer of half-a-

percent extra by the banks.

Also, in the case of the housing sector, the common man wishing to own a modest sized house, the interest limit was fixed at Rs 1.50 lakh a decade ago. The government has not taken into account the five-fold increase in cost of housing over these years, Mr Sekar points out, adding that the insurance sector is another area requiring FM's special attention.

The corporate sector is eagerly awaiting abolition of the surcharge on IT, which is now a heavy ten per cent. The IT sector here in Chennai is also looking at extension of Section 10A/10B benefits and clarification that entire profits generated from SEZs would be tax-free.

Overall Indians are looking for a budget that would encourage economic growth and personal spending.

Dinesh Thakkar, CMD Angel Broking

I expect the Finance Minister to chalk out a comprehensive roadmap for controlling the fiscal deficit situation in India. Additionally, since the export market is yet to rebound in a substantial manner, the export sops that were announced last year could be continued. There could also be some emphasis on agriculture, due to the drought that India faced this monsoon season. However, I do not expect any significant announcements regarding the progress of the Direct Tax Code that was unveiled last year; similarly, I believe that the implementation of the GST will seemingly be postponed to 2011. From a stock market perspective, I do not expect any tinkering with the STT and the capital gains tax rate in the upcoming Budget. With the Indian economy back on a reasonable growth path, some of the stimulus provided earlier might be withdrawn, in terms of a partial rollback of the excise duty. Yet, if we were to consider the fact that in the past demand has been robust under much higher excise duty rates, I do not expect this rollback to dent demand. Additionally, the usual focus on infrastructure creation, agricultural development and social development is expected to continue".

Raja Marthandan, Manager, PR at SS Music

I expect that the current budget will be friendly to the common man on contrary to the last year's budget. I expect measures will be taken to tame inflation, which has gone way too beyond control. Also a restructuring income tax would be beneficial to common man especially salaried people who had been subjected to loads of pressure last year in terms of salary cuts etc. Reducing the income tax burden will enhance disposable income with the individual, which will help in maintaining demand supply balance and boost economy. The existing medical tax limit of Rs 15,000 can be increased. With increasing healthcare costs the current exemption looks pretty less. Similarly tax benefit for housing loans to be extended so that the realty sector picks up momentum. The FM should relook at the MAT (Minimum Alternative Tax) rates since the current rate of 15 per cent is quite steep. Fuel prices need to be regulated in a reasonable price range. On a lighter note Import duty on cars can be reduced.

Gopal Srinivasan, MD, TVS Capital

This budget is expected to focus on addressing core issues facing the economy, while balancing the need to sustain growth and contain inflation. Venture Capital and Private Equity has contributed to about \$48 billion of investments in India so far, in over 1300 Indian companies for funding their growth. There are over 250 VC/PE funds registered with SEBI, and they have been a key source for funding the growth of Indian Industries.

Specific to VC/PE, the following are some of critical areas that need amends, to greatly enhance the investments in this industry. A move was introduced by Finance Act, 2007 to restrict the tax incentives available to VC/PE sector only to investments made in specified sectors, as given in Sec 115U of Income Tax Act. Fiscal policy needs to be responsive to changing times and curbs introduced at the peak of economic boom needs a re-look. The restriction of exemption to few sectors need to be expanded to accommodate all industries (except those engaged in illegal activities or those not permissible by industrial laws) to tap into the huge entrepreneurial talent available within the country.

Yashaswini Kumar, Student, MOP Vaishnav

As a common citizen, I would expect the budget to bring down the prices of essentials and ensure that the tax slabs are increased so that there will be more disposable income to enhance purchasing power. I also would like to government to increase investments in foreign education as lots of aspirants can go abroad with low cost. More emphasis should be given for higher education and loans for pursuing higher education both in India and abroad. India should have educational institutes with high and international standards and more money should be allocated for this purpose.

Every time we approach a bank they ask us for so many documentations to process a loan. The FM should do something about this and ensure that we gets loans cleared quickly and easily.

A decent amount should be allocated for health of school and college students across the country especially in the rural areas. The FM should also suggest measures to control wastage of fruits and vegetables, as this is one main reason for inflation on food items.

Shravan Gupta, MD, Emaar MGF Land Ltd

From a macro-economic perspective, the budget needs to do a fine balancing act between growth and measures adopted to exit the fiscal stimuli. This would effectively decide the course of all policy and corporate decisions in the next fiscal. Significantly, according infrastructure status for the real estate industry is vital for the sector's growth as building new townships are similar activities as building large infrastructure facilities.

If it is accomplished, banks could extend loans to the industry on similar norms as they adopt for infrastructure companies. We wish that integrated townships projects should be given incentives at par with infrastructure and single window clearance mechanism should be introduced for such integrated townships to ensure efficient execution. Also, tax rebate to the developers for developing budget homes/EWS housing would help bridge the huge housing supply gap. Varied and high stamp duties across different states are still acting as a major impediment to the growth of real estate. Stamp duty needs to be brought down further to 4-5 per cent and made uniformly applicable across all states.