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State budget proposals hailed

KOCHI: Vivek Krishna Govind, chairman of the Ernakulam branch of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), has welcomed the State Budget.

Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac has played a populist card while presenting the budget, Mr. Govind said in a statement.

He said the suggestions given by the ICAI for revamping the insurance sector had been considered by Mr. Isaac. Several pro-poor initiatives had been introduced, which was to be appreciated. The reduction in overall stamp duty structure would help the real estate sector that had been badly hit by the recession, he said.

The allocations for the Kochi Metro rail, the SmartCity and the Vizhinjam projects were welcome. But only time would tell whether these projects would be implemented and the allocated funds utilised for them, he added.

Algiers Khalid, president of the Kerala chapter of the Indian Cellular Association, said the green energy vision unveiled in the Budget should be welcomed. The initiative to set up a separate fund for it was a landmark in energy management, he said. He said the funds allocated for the Seaport-Airport road were inadequate.

Tax cut welcomed

The Cochin Oil Merchants' Association welcomed the Budget proposal to continue the reduction in tax on coconut, copra and coconut oil. The move would help the coconut farming sector and the coconut oil mills, a statement issued by the association said. The statement also welcomed the government's move to refrain from additional taxation on trade and industry.

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Early rain brings cheers to farmers in Theni

Unexpected rain lashes Cumbum Valley and dam catchments

Early rainfall useful for crops such as coconut and mango, but not for standing paddy crops

Forest officials are relieved since they need not make arrangements for water supply to animals

THENI: Unexpected rain accompanied by thunder and lightning in the Cumbum Valley and Periyar and Vaigai dam catchment areas on Saturday has not only cheered farmers but also brought down temperature sharply. The sudden shower was due to an earlier onset of southwest monsoon, said farmers in the valley. Veerapandi recorded 9 mm of rainfall, the highest in the district.

While Periyar dam received inflow after a long time, people in towns and villages in Theni district enjoyed a salubrious climate on the night of Saturday.

The farmers opined that summer rain used to start only in April after the onset of southwest monsoon. Fortunately, cool breeze and sudden rain in March forecast early onset of rainy season, they said.

"If we get good breeze in the Tamil month of Masi, rain is sure in Panguni. But how come we get rain in Masi this year," they wondered.

"Farmers in rain-fed areas can start preliminary work such as preparing the ground for sowing without any hesitation," they said.

It will also be useful for perennial crops such as coconut and mango. Only paddy growers whose crops were at harvesting stage, do not welcome this early summer rain because it will destroy standing crops. Wet grains will attract only poor procurement price.

Forest officials heave a sigh of relief as it lessened their work.

Normally, forest officials make special arrangements to maintain drinking water supply within reserve forests to prevent migration of animals to farms at villages near the reserve forest border for want of food and water. This rain has given fresh life to dry streams and to keep grasslands wet.

Water level stood at 109.2 mm in Periyar dam. The storage was 786 mcf. Water level at Vaigai dam was 36.75 feet.

Dindigul

The sky was overcast in Dindigul on the evening of Sunday. However, the temperature did not come down much.

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Call to promote 'conservation agriculture'

It means cultivation without overexploiting natural resources

This method is being practiced in nearly 80 countries

COIMBATORE: "Conservation agriculture is practiced on more than 80 million hectares worldwide in nearly 80 countries and the area is expanding rapidly. It refers to feeding the world without consuming natural resources. Since it is considered a route to sustainable agriculture, Indian scientists should take advantage of this technique for taking Indian agriculture to the next phase," P. Subbian, Registrar, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, said here on Wednesday.

Training programme

Inaugurating a two-day training on "Conservation Agriculture" at the university, he said since conservation agriculture was a major departure from conventional farming, a whole range of practices for planting, harvesting, irrigation, nutrient supply and plant protection need to be evolved.

Threats

"Intensification of agriculture has accelerated soil degradation causing a great deal of carbon loss. Climate change and monsoon failures have become serious threats in agricultural production. In the face of these challenges, conservation agriculture seems to be the panacea for soil and water conservation, and environmental protection," Mr. Subbian said.

Characteristics

Elaborating on the characteristics of the concept, he said it involved minimum soil disturbance by adopting no-tillage and minimum traffic for agricultural operations, adoption of spatial and temporal crop sequencing, crop rotations, and crop diversification, so as to derive maximum benefit from inputs by minimising adverse environmental impacts.

It also reduced the cost of production, incidence of weeds, saved water and nutrients, eliminated the burning of crop residues that caused green house gas emissions, reduced evaporation and improved biological activity and root growth.

The Registrar called for developing technologically sound packages of practices for individual crops and cropping sequences so as to popularise it among farmers.

Machinery

He also stressed the need for standardising and promoting quality machinery to suit the requirements of wide range of crops.

“Since conservation agriculture is knowledge-driven, strengthening the knowledge base and information sharing mechanism will be vital for its growth and success,” Mr. Subbian said.

S. Jeyaraman, Director, Centre for Soil and Crop Management Studies, P. Muthukrishnan, Head, Department of Agronomy, and M. Mohamed Amanulla, Professor, Agronomy, TNAU, spoke.

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'Fertilizer stock adequate'

Coimbatore: There are more than adequate stock of fertilizers and farm inputs in Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies in all blocks.

A release from Joint Director of Agriculture, Coimbatore said that as on March 1, 2010 there was 3,450 metric tonnes of urea, 450 metric tonnes of DAP and 3,450 metric tonnes of potash, 250 metric tonnes of super phosphate fertilizer and 3,525 metric tonnes of complex. Hence, farmers have been requested to avail the fertilizers and farm inputs from the PACB societies. Farmers should obtain receipts on purchase. In the event of refusal to give receipt or selling the farm inputs at higher price over and above the stipulated rate, information could be passed on to the Joint Director's office at 0422-2432789.

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NABARD sanctions Rs. 1.38 lakh to a farmer

For improving a sugarcane harvester he has invented



ENCOURAGING:P. Kantharaj of Arapalayam in the city demonstrating the sugarcane harvester invented by him.

MADURAI: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has sanctioned Rs. 1.38 lakh to a farmer here for improving a sugarcane harvester he invented.

While present models of sugarcane harvesters in the market mainly cater only to big farmers having more than five acres, this invention meets the requirements of small farmers having one or two acres, R. Shankar Narayan, Assistant General Manager, NABARD, told The Hindu.

The funds have been provided under NABARD's 'Rural Innovation Fund' set up to encourage grass root innovation that will improve productivity and income of farmers. The farmer, P. Kantharaj (42) of Arapalayam, has been given the grant to fabricate five more units of his harvester and also improve the efficiency and reduce its weight.

“Madurai district has a lot of small farmers who are also facing a labour shortage. They can make use of Mr. Kantharaj's invention,” Mr. Shankar Narayan said.

Even the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University's (TNAU) Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute at Tiruchi and National Innovation Foundation at Ahmedabad have expressed interest in this project and have imparted technical inputs, he said.

The farmer also took part in a South Indian Sugarcane and Sugar Technologists Association's exhibition, he said.

A project implementation monitoring and review committee, chaired by Mr. Shankar Narayan has been formed with KN. Subramanian, Lead District Manager and agriculture experts included as members.

The farmer has also been training to prepare an activity chart and action plan to indicate the timeline to fulfil the project. This assistance will help the farmer take his innovation to a commercial scale, he said.

Mr. Kantharaj said that his sugarcane harvester can cut two tonnes in one hour or 16 tonnes in an eight-hour shift. A team of 25 labourers need eight hours to cut 15 tonnes. This petrol-powered equipment is powered by a 1.5 horsepower motor and weighs a total of 45 kg. It is also very easy to operate.

“My main problem is not inventing this equipment. It is the inability to manufacture it on a large scale to meet the large demand. I hope that some manufacturers will take notice and take up large-scale manufacturing so that many farmers could benefit,” he said.

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Two-day agri summit concludes



INFORMATIVE:Farmers looking at an exhibit at the expo in Madurai.

MADURAI: A two-day exhibition-cum-conference on agriculture, 'Agri Summit 2010,' concluded here on Saturday. The conference, organised by the Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry in association with Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, was spread over eight sessions that had experts discussing topics like agronomical practices, nutrient management, micro irrigation and economic sustainability.

The conference was inaugurated by the Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, P. Murugesha Boopathi. K. P. T. Ganesan, chairman, Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board, also addressed the participants. A. Vellaiyan, president, Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who introduced the theme of the summit in his presidential address, said that sustainable development involved management and conservation of natural resource base. With food being the basic necessity of any nation, sustainable agriculture became an inevitable mission to improve food security in the current economic scenario.

According to a press release from the chamber, the summit discussed sustainable agriculture in the light of topsoil depletion, groundwater contamination, decline of family farms, neglect of working and living conditions of farm workers, increasing cost of production and disintegration of economic and social conditions in rural communities.