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Court backs farmers' right to irrigation facilities

Mohamed Imranullah S.

Directs NHAI to form panel for considering realignment of highway

MADURAI: The right of agriculturalists to enjoy irrigation facilities is, in a way, a part of the fundamental Right to Life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, the Madras High Court Bench here has observed.

A Division Bench, comprising Justice D. Murugesan and Justice S. Nagamuthu, also said that attempts to bring in development in other sectors at the cost of agriculture would prove detrimental to national interest.

They made the observations while setting aside a notification issued by a District Revenue Officer for acquiring lands, passing through two waterbodies, to widen National Highway 67 between Tiruchi and Karur.

They directed the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to form a committee of experts for visiting the site and exploring the possibility of realigning the road, thereby minimising the disturbance to the waterbodies.

The Tiruchi Collector and the Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department were directed to extend assistance to the committee to facilitate completion of road-widening works before July based on the agreement entered with contractors.

The agriculturalists, who are the beneficiaries of the Punganoor and Kallikudi water tanks, were permitted to submit written objections, if any, before the committee, which should take them into consideration before arriving at a decision.

The orders were passed while disposing of two writ petitions, one filed by the Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Association of the Manikandam Panchayat Union in Tiruchi district and another by a farmer hailing from the same place.

Writing the judgment, Mr. Justice Nagamuthu said: "It is true that formation of a road under a national project is as important as any other project.

But, while doing so, every endeavour should be taken to minimise disturbance to irrigation resources.

Threat

"In recent times, growing scarcity and competition for water stand as major threat to future advancement in poverty alleviation. It is needless to say that food

production is likely to be affected if our irrigation sources are not preserved.”

The judge also said that it was the primary responsibility of the government to protect natural water resources besides ensuring the livelihood of agriculturalists and marginal farmers as 65 per cent of the population was involved in the agricultural sector.

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“Cardamom growers can switch over to organic farming”

Staff Reporter

CUMBUM: Cardamom growers can switch over to organic farming in a phased manner to get better price for their produces and tap highly potential international market meant for organic cardamom, according to R. Chandrasekaran, Deputy Director (Development), Spices Board, Bodinayakanur.

He was delivering special address at a regional seminar on cardamom cultivation for cardamom growers in Theni and Idukki districts held here on Friday.

There was a great demand for organically grown cardamom in international market.

Reduction in use of chemical fertilisers and increase in use of organic materials will scale down production costs. Even if there were any slump in yield, better prices to organic produces would certainly compensate the loss owing to slump in yield, he added.

Global demand for cardamom in the coming years will be increased manifold. Now, people in several countries were ready to pay good prices for green produces that has no chemical residues. Organic cardamom would be in great demand in future, he added.

“First, change of mindset of growers is essential to take up organic farming methods.”

The Spices Board will offer subsidy of Rs.28 – Rs.16 in the first phase and Rs.12 in the second phase - per pepper plant. Experts and Farmers’ representatives said that cardamom had been cultivated in large scale in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Yield per hectare was 500 to 1,200 kg a year per acre.

Top hybrid variety of cardamom was sold at Rs.915 per kg in the last week auction.

Scientific techniques on planting and replanting management, raising nurseries and irrigation management were explained to participants from Theni and Idukki districts. Cardamom Growers’ Association representatives in Kerala and Tamil Nadu took part.

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Relief sought for damaged paddy

Staff Reporter

PUDUKOTTAI: A cross-section of farmers of coastal areas in the district complained of serious damage to standing samba paddy crop after a pest attack this season and demanded adequate compensation.

A. Ramasamy, president of the Kallanai Kaalvai Vivasayigal Pasanadarar Sangam, said about 20,000 acres of 'Deluxe Ponni' variety raised in a number of villages had borne the brunt of the pest attack.

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Mettur level

The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 80.55 feet on Friday against its full level of 120 feet.

The inflow was 1,194 cusecs and the discharge, 8,000 cusecs.

— Staff Reporter

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'Madurai Malli' farmers likely to get land for collection centre

Staff Reporter

500 farmers grow jasmine on 1,250 acres in two blocks

MADURAI: The district administration has agreed to consider allotting land for establishing a common collection centre to the farmers of Uthappanaickanur near Usilampatti in the district who cultivate the famous 'Madurai Malli' (jasmine).

District Revenue Officer Dinesh Ponraj Oliver, who chaired a meeting recently to discuss the problems of jasmine growers, also suggested that the State Horticulture

Farm at Periyakulam, Theni district, may be approached to ascertain the feasibility of establishing the collection centre and also make available their expertise to the Uthappanaickanur flower growers.

R. Shankar Narayan, Assistant General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), M. Kathiresan, Deputy General Manager of Indian Bank, V. Chidambaram, Deputy Director, Agriculture Business, M. Krishnaswamy, Deputy Director, Horticulture Department, Federation of Flower Growers of Uthappanaickanur and ARD, an NGO, were among those who took part in the meeting.

Mr. Shankar Narayan told *The Hindu* that around 500 small and marginal farmers were growing jasmine and other commonly-used flowers at 1,250 acres of land in the two blocks of the districts. One was Usilampatti block, in which seven panchayats were involved in this sector while the other was Chellampatti block in which two panchayats were into flower cultivation.

“As the farmers are mainly dependent on commission agents, who pocket at least 20 per cent of their income, this meeting was held to help farmers get the full benefits of their produce,” he said.

The meeting was also intended to address another major issue of farmers which was the fluctuating prices. He said that while jasmine prices sometimes went as high as Rs. 600 per kg during peak seasons or when productivity was low, it also plummeted to levels as low as Rs. 20 a kg when there was a glut in the market.

Further, proposals to grant licence in trading of fertilizers and pesticides to the farmers’ federation were also mooted, to which the Department of Horticulture assured full support.

They also agreed to ensure technical guidance to farmers in improving productivity. Mr. Shankar Narayan also suggested that the jasmine farmers be considered for providing drip irrigation facility.

The meeting decided to seek the Collector’s approval to form a high-power committee, headed by him and comprising AGM, NABARD, Indian Bank and the Deputy Directors of Departments of Horticulture and Agriculture Business to oversee progress and achievements in this regard.

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Tiruchi farmers seek release of adequate water

Special Correspondent

Removal of encroachments ordered

— PHOTO: R.M. RAJARATHINAM



Airing grievances: Farmers raising their demands at a meeting with government officials in Tiruchi on Friday.

TIRUCHI: Farmers' representatives of Tiruchi district have appealed to the State government to ensure the release of adequate water for the standing crops fed by the 17 irrigation channels in Tiruchi and other mid-delta districts during the Mettur closure period.

Pointing out that the Mettur reservoir was due for closure by January 28 the farmers said, at least 3,000 cusecs of water should be released during the non-Mettur season to meet the requirements of the crops that are dependent on the 17 irrigation channels.

The district administration should take up the matter with the State government well in advance to secure the release of adequate quantum of water, so as, to ensure that the flow could be maintained at the tail ends of the irrigation channels, said R. Subramanian, Deputy Secretary, District Cauvery Delta Farmers Welfare Association, speaking at the Farmers Grievances Day meeting here on Friday.

The State general secretary of the Bharathiya Kisan Sangam P. Ayyakannu, while emphasising the point, also urged the district administration to ensure the release of water in the Uyyakondan river for at least 50 more days as there was a delay in release of water in the river this season owing to the execution of the flood control works.

Responding to the issue, C. Kannappan, Executive Engineer, River Conservation Division, Public Works Department, informed the meeting, that the Department has already written to the government seeking the release of about 2,500 cusecs of water.

N. Veerasekaran, Coordinator, South and North Ayyan Vaical Ayacutdars Association, urged the State government not to allow the cultivation of Bt brinjal or any other genetically modified crop varieties in Tamil Nadu. He condemned the Centre's decision to hold consultative meetings on Bt brinjal in only seven States and claiming that there was no opposition to it in Tamil Nadu.

He also expressed regret over the meagre increase of Rs.50 in the procurement price for paddy announced by the State government recently and demanded that the government raise the minimum support price for paddy to Rs.1,500 a quintal and

for sugarcane to Rs.2,000 a tonne.

Responding to a complaint from K. Sivaraj, district secretary of the farmers' wing of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, about encroachments on an inlet channel in the Nagainallur tank, Collector T. Soundiah instructed the officials to remove the encroachment and clear the channel under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. V. Govindarajan of the Cauvery River Keezh Panguni Madhagu Ayacutdars Sabha alleged illegal pumping of ground water for industrial purposes from the Coleroon bed in the Sengaraiyur area and urged to prevent it.

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Core sector clocks 6% growth in Dec

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NEW DELHI: The six core sectors grew 6% in December, which is likely to drive up industrial growth and make up for any loss of farm production to sustain the Indian economic growth story. In December 2008, the core sectors had grown by 0.7% only.

The high growth in the six core sectors — crude oil, petroleum refinery products, coal, electricity, cement and finished steel, having a weight of over 26% in the industrial production index, may take the Industrial growth to 9% this fiscal against just 7.6% so far.

“It is an indication of further improvement in the industrial performance that will contribute to the industrial growth rising to about 9% by the end of the current fiscal year, Icrier director and chief executive Rajiv Kumar said.

Finished steel and crude oil turned the table, expanding by 9.6% and 1.1% respectively, against 8% and 0.3% contraction in the same period last year. Cement remained at top of the chart growing by 11%, though it was less than 11.6% in December, 2008. However, oil production — both crude and refinery — and coal output remained sluggish.

For the first nine months of this fiscal, these sectors grew by 4.8% compared to 3.2% a year ago. When these six industries grew by 5.3% in November 2009, industrial production expanded by more than 11%. "This growth is because of base effect. But I think some momentum is picking up in the economy and also in the core sector," Crisil principal economist DK Joshi said.

Coal output, however, declined by 2.5% to 48.79 million tonne, while crude production expanded by a paltry 1.1% at 2.9 million tone, and refinery output grew by a meagre 0.9% at 12.6 million tone during the month under consideration. Meanwhile, the World Bank on Friday extended a loan of Rs 3,724 crore to the Andhra Pradesh government for three major infrastructure projects in the state.