

Bank scheme announced

As per the State Government's directive, the Madurai District Central Cooperative Bank has announced a special one-time settlement scheme for non-farm loans obtained from the cooperative banks.

According to a press release, borrowers may utilise the offer as the loans would be charged a meagre six per cent simple interest in the event of arriving at a settlement as per the terms and conditions.

The penal interest among others would be waived. The offer is valid till January 31. Aspirants who have already remitted 25 per cent as down payment may also utilise the opportunity by settling the dues before the last date.

For further clarifications, borrowers could approach the officers, said Regional Joint Registrar K.V.S. Kumar.

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"Steps will be taken to bring down prices of pulses"

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi on Sunday said the food department would take immediate steps to bring down the prices of pulses in retail market.

In a statement here, the Chief Minister said the reduction in the prices of pulses in wholesale had not percolated down to the retail market. He said the price of thoor dhal per 100 kg had come down to Rs. 7,000 from Rs. 9000, while the price of the secondary quality dhal had come down to Rs. 6,500 from Rs. 7,000. Similarly the prices of thoor dhal imported from Tansania and Myanmar and black-gram had also come down.

Pointing out that borrowing was inevitable to run government efficiently, he said no government could implement massive welfare schemes such as the Ramanathapuram combined drinking water scheme and the Hogenakkal combined drinking water scheme without borrowing. He also denied AIADMK general secretary Jayalalithaa's claim that the State government's total debt had touched Rs. 90,000 crore, saying that the amount was only Rs. 74,858 crore.

As regards the no-confidence motion moved against the chairman of the Ayodhyapattinam panchayat union representing the PMK, the Chief Minister explained that the DMK and Congress members submitted a memorandum to the district Collector after the chairman committed a lot of irregularities.

He said three AIADMK members defied the diktats of the party high command and voted with the DMK-Congress combine in support of the no-confidence motion.

‘Do not use land under food crops for cultivation of other crops’

Staff Reporter

Officials told to ensure that farmers get a good price for their produce

ERODE: In promoting various crops, Horticulture Department officials should ensure that they do not take away land under food crops, C.V. Sairam, senior scientist, Zonal Project Directorate, Indian Council for Agriculture Research, Bangalore, has said.

“In the interest of the society, the Department officials should not use land under food crops for promoting any other crops, as food crop production is on the decline,” he told the Department officers at the one-day master training programme on Technological Options in Production, Post Harvest Management and Marketing of Aromatic Crops, the MYRADA Krishi Vigyan Kendra conducted here on Friday.

“I understand that other crops should also be promoted and that Horticulture Department officials have targets to meet, which can be easily achieved by working in coordination with other departments.”

Mr. Sairam also asked the officers to ensure that farmers get a good price for their produce, as they “win on farms but lose out in markets.”

V. P. Alagesan, assistant director, Horticulture Department, Erode, said under the National Mission on Medicinal Plants, the Department had promoted gloriosa cultivation on 150 hectares and provided subsidy for the same to farmers.

The Department provided 50 per cent of the estimated cost of cultivation of Rs. 1.35 lakh a hectare and had given the subsidy to 135 farmers, he said and added that gloriosa seeds were used for preparing medicines to cure knee pain.

Mr. Alagesan said in the current year, the Government had given a target of 200 ha and the Department had achieved the target by promoting the same plant.

He conceded that gloriosa cultivation was concentrated in and around Moolanur and Dharapuram, areas that were part of Tirupur district, but under the jurisdictional control of the Erode office of the Department. Once the control of the areas was transferred to the Tirupur office, the Erode office would have a tough time meeting the targets as in rest of the areas of the district, there was hardly any cultivation of medicinal plants and herbs.

The programme would provide the right opportunity for the Department officers to take up cultivation of medicinal plants, herbs and aromatic plants in other parts of the district, he added. G. Santhanam, assistant general manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Erode, said under the Banks tribal development programme to be taken up in Thalavady, Bargur and Kadambur hills, the Department officers could consider promoting herbs and aromatic plants.

M. Balusamy, professor and head, Agriculture Research Station, Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, Bhavani Sagar, said the University was committed to providing support to initiatives of the Department by giving quality seeds and saplings.

MYRADA-KVK Programme Coordinator P. Alagesan spoke on the activities of the organisation and explained how it had promoted rosemary cultivation in the hills and also offered marketing assistance for the farmers.

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Water level

MADURAI: The level in the Periyar dam on Sunday stood at 115.60 feet (full level 136 feet) with no inflow or discharge. The level in the Vaigai dam was 51.18 feet (71 feet) with no inflow and a discharge of 1,860 cusecs. The combined Periyar credit stood at 2,876 mcft.

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Training for agri-entrepreneurs to be held

Staff Reporter

Open for unemployed graduates of farm, veterinary, fisheries, home science and allied subjects

MADURAI: The next batch of a 60-day free residential training programme, to be conducted by Voluntary Association of People Service (VAPS) in association with NABARD for setting up agri-clinics and agri-business centres, will commence on January 30.

The course is open for unemployed graduates of farm, veterinary, fisheries, home science and allied subjects. VAPS is one of the organisations approved by the Union Ministry of Agriculture to conduct the training for graduates from Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to encourage graduates to take up self-employment.

Trained candidates can avail credit of up to Rs.5 lakh without any collateral security and Rs.10 lakh with security up to an overall ceiling of Rs. 50 lakh for group projects for their ventures from nationalised and cooperative banks.

A credit-linked subsidy of 25 per cent of the capital cost loan would also be offered for candidates from the general category.

For candidates belonging to SC/ST categories and women, 33.33 per cent subsidy would be offered.

VAPS has so far trained about 798 Agricultural and Veterinary and Animal Science graduates from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry in 20 batches from Madurai and three from Salem, according to a press release.

Further information could be obtained from Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Training Centre, 39, Besant Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai 625 002. telephone: (0452) 253 8642 / 4361 903/ 98942 46874/ 9976913781.

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Technology Week to showcase modern farming methods

Special Correspondent

SALEM: The Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Sandhiyur near here will host to 'Technology Week' celebrations to showcase the important aspects and advantages of modern farming methods on its premises from January 27 to January 31.

According to its Programme Co-ordinator S. Manickam, an exhibition will be organised explaining

the location-specific new technologies on System Rice Intensification (SRI) method, precision farming, pulses production technologies, soil health and management, mealy bug management, market information through Internet, scientific goat rearing, poultry rearing and farm implement.

Agriculture Minister Veerapandi S. Arumugam will inaugurate the week in which Tamil Nadu Agriculture University Vice Chancellor P. Murugesu Boopathy and other farm scientists will also take part.

Hence, the farmers are requested to participate in the week-long programme and get benefited, says Mr. Manickam in his press release here.

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Discussion on coconut complex

THANJAVUR: Collector M.S.Shanmugham on Saturday held discussions with farmers of Pattukottai and Peravurani in Pattukottai regarding establishment of a coconut complex.

The Government had issued orders for establishing the complex at a cost of Rs.4 crore on 20 acres of land in Ponnavaarayankottai near Pattukottai.

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Mettur level

TIRUCHI: The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 79.32 feet on Sunday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 1,300 cusecs and the discharge 8,001 cusecs.

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Farm suicides: a 12-year saga

P. Sainath

In 2006-08, Maharashtra saw 12, 493 farm suicides. That is 85 per cent higher than the 6,745 suicides it recorded during 1997-1999. And the worst three-year period for any State, any time.



Big 5 states 1997-2008								
Year	Maharashtra	A.P	Karnataka	M.P. & Chhattisgarh*	FS* Big 5 states yearly total	FS All-India yearly total	Big 5 as % of all FS	Big 5 as % of ALL suicides
1997	1917	1097	1832	2390	7236	13622	53.1	7.6
1998	2409	1813	1883	2278	8383	16015	52.3	8
1999	2423	1974	2379	2654	9430	16082	58.6	8.5
2000	3022	1525	2630	2660	9837	16603	59.2	9.1
2001	3536	1509	2505	2824	10374	16415	63.2	9.6
2002	3695	1896	2340	2578	10509	17971	58.5	9.5
TOTALS								
1997-2002	17002	9814	13569	15384	55769	96708	57.5	8.7
2003	3836	1800	2678	2511	10825	17164	63.1	9.8
2004	4147	2666	1963	3033	11809	18241	64.7	10.4
2005	3926	2490	1883	2660	10959	17131	64	9.6
2006	4453	2607	1720	2858	11638	17060	68.2	9.9
2007	4238	1797	2135	2856	11026	16632	66.3	9
2008	3802	2105	1737	3152	10797	16196	66.7	8.6
TOTALS								
2003-2008	24402	13465	12116	17070	67054	102424	65.5	9.6
TOTALS								
1997-2008	41404	23279	25685	32454	122823	199132	61.5	9.1

* M.P. & Chhattisgarh now have separately recorded data for recent years (available on the NCRB website). Since the data for earlier years cannot be disaggregated we treat them as a single entity in this table, for convenience.
 Sources: Data for 1997-2005 derived by Prof. K. Nagaraj from NCRB reports (Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India) for those years (The Hindu, Nov. 13-15, 2007) and extended thereafter with NCRB AISI data from years 2006, 2007 and 2008.
 *FS- Farm suicides

The loan waiver year of 2008 saw 16,196 farm suicides in the country, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. Compared to 2007, that's a fall of just 436. As economist Professor K. Nagaraj who has worked in-depth on farm suicide data says, "the numbers leave little room for comfort and none at all for self-congratulation." There were no major changes in the trend that set in from the late 1990s and worsened after 2002. The dismal truth is that *very high numbers of farm suicides still occur within a fast decreasing farm population.*

Between just the Census of 1991 and that of 2001, nearly 8 million cultivators quit farming. A year from now, the 2011 Census will tell us how many more quit in this decade. It is not likely to be less. It could even dwarf that 8 million figure as the exodus from farming probably intensified after 2001. The State-wise farm suicide ratios — number of farmers committing suicide per 100,000 farmers — are still pegged on the outdated 2001 figures. So the 2011 Census, with more authentic counts of how many farmers there really are, might provide an unhappy update on what is going on.

Focussing on farm suicides as a share of total suicides in India misleads. That way,

it's "aha! the percentage is coming down." That's silly. For one thing, the total number of suicides (all groups, not just farmers) is increasing — in a growing population. Farm suicides are rising within a declining farm population. Two, an all-India picture disguises the intensity. The devastation lies in the Big 5 States (Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh). These account for two-thirds of all farm suicides during 2003-08. Take just the Big 5 — their percentage of all farm suicides has gone up. Worse, even their percentage of total all-India suicides (all categories) has risen. Poor States like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are doing very badly for some years now.

In the period 1997-2002, farm suicides in the Big 5 States accounted for roughly one out of every 12 of all suicides in the country. In 2003-08, they accounted for nearly one out of every 10.

The NCRB now has farm suicide data for 12 years. Actually, farm data appear in its records from 1995 onwards, but some States failed to report for the first two years. Hence 1997, from when all States are reporting their farm suicide data, is a more reliable base year. The NCRB has also made access much easier by placing all past years of "Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India" reports on its website.

The 12-year period allows us to compare farm suicide numbers for 1997-2002, with how they turned out in the next 6-year period of 2003-2008. All 12 years were pretty bad, but the latter six were decidedly worse.

Reading a 'trend' into a single year's dip or rise is misleading. Better to look at 3-year or 6-year periods within 1997-2008. For instance, Maharashtra saw a decline in farm suicide numbers in 2005, but the very next year proved to be its worst ever. Since 2006, the State has been the focus of many initiatives. Manmohan Singh's visit to Vidharbha that year brought the "Prime Minister's Relief Package" of Rs.3,750 crore for six crisis-ridden districts of the region. This came atop Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh's Rs.1,075 crore "CM's relief package." Then followed the nearly Rs.9,000 crore that was Maharashtra's share of the Rs.70,000-crore Central loan waiver for farmers. To which the State government added Rs.6,200 crore for those farmers not covered by the waiver. The State added Rs.500 crore for a one-time settlement (OTS) for poor farmers who had been excluded from the waiver altogether because they owned over five acres of land.

In all, the amounts committed to fighting the agrarian crisis in Maharashtra exceeded Rs. 20,000 crore across 2006, 2007 and 2008. (And that's not counting huge handouts to the sugar barons.) Yet, that proved to be the worst three-year period ever for any State at any time since the recording of farm data began. In 2006-08, Maharashtra saw 12,493 farm suicides. That is nearly 600 more than the previous worst of 2002-2005 and 85 per cent higher than the 6,745 suicides recorded in the three-year period of 1997-1999. The same government was in power, incidentally, in the worst six years. Besides, these higher numbers are emerging within a shrinking farm population. By 2001, 42 per cent of Maharashtra's population was already urban. Its farmer base has certainly not grown.

So was the loan waiver useless? The idea of a waiver was not a bad thing. And it

was right to intervene. More that the specific actions were misguided and bungled. Yet it could also be argued that but for the relief the waiver brought to some farmers at least, the suicide numbers of 2008 could have been a lot worse. The waiver was a welcome step for farmers, but its architecture was flawed. A point strongly made in this journal (*Oh! What a lovely waiver*, March 10, 2008). It dealt only with bank credit and ignored moneylender debt. So only those farmers with access to institutional credit would benefit. Tenant farmers in Andhra Pradesh and poor farmers in Vidharbha and elsewhere get their loans mainly from moneylenders. So, in fact, farmers in Kerala, where everyone has a bank account, were more likely to gain. (Kerala was also the one State to address the issue of moneylender debt.)

The 2008 waiver also excluded those holding over five acres, making no distinction between irrigated and unirrigated land. This devastated many struggling farmers with eight or 10 acres of poor, dry land. On the other hand, West Bengal's farmers, giant numbers of small holders below the 5-acre limit, stood to gain far more.

Every suicide has a multiplicity of causes. But when you have nearly 200,000 of them, it makes sense to seek broad common factors within that group. Within those reasons. As Dr. Nagaraj has repeatedly pointed out, the suicides appear concentrated in regions of high commercialisation of agriculture and very high peasant debt. Cash crop farmers seemed far more vulnerable to suicide than those growing food crops. Yet the basic underlying causes of the crisis remained untouched. The predatory commercialisation of the countryside; a massive decline in investment in agriculture; the withdrawal of bank credit at a time of soaring input prices; the crash in farm incomes combined with an explosion of cultivation costs; the shifting of millions from food crop to cash crop cultivation with all its risks; the corporate hijack of every major sector of agriculture including, and especially, seed; growing water stress and moves towards privatisation of that resource. The government was trying to beat the crisis — leaving in place all its causes — with a one-off waiver.

In late 2007, *The Hindu* carried (Nov. 12-15) the sorry result emerging from Dr. Nagaraj's study of NCRB data: that nearly 1.5 lakh peasants had ended their lives in despair between 1997 and 2005. Just days later, Union Minister for Agriculture Sharad Pawar confirmed those figures in Parliament (Rajya Sabha Starred Question No. 238, Nov. 30, 2007) citing the same NCRB data. It's tragic that 27 months later, the paper had to run a headline saying that the number had climbed to nearly 2 lakh. The crisis is very much with us. Mocking its victims, heckling its critics. And cosmetic changes won't make it go away.

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Towards sustainable water management

T.N. Narasimhan

An international private-social group foresees India's water demand exceeding

availability by a factor of two by 2030. Time is now for India to take on the daunting task of formulating a unifying national water policy.

The 2030 Water Resources Group is a consortium of private-social sector organisations formed in 2008 to provide insights into emerging world-wide water issues. In a report, “Charting our water future” issued in 2009, the group provides a candid, fact-based integrated assessment of the global water situation over the next two decades.

Globally, current withdrawals of about 4,500 cubic km exceed the availability of about 4,200 cubic km. By 2030, the demand is expected to increase to about 6,900 cubic km, with a slight drop in availability to 4,100 cubic km. Thus, by 2030, a global deficit of 40 per cent is forecast. For India, the annual demand is expected to increase to almost 1,500 cubic km, against a projected availability of 744 cubic km; a deficit of 50 per cent. The report admits unavoidable uncertainties in these estimates. As an independent check, an alternative perspective merits consideration.

India’s average annual precipitation is about 1,170 mm, and the land area is 3.28 million sq. km. Thus, the volume of annual precipitation input is 3,840 cubic km. The projected availability of 744 cubic km constitutes about 19 per cent of this amount. In comparison, California, known for its spectacular hydraulic-engineering structures, diverts about 18 per cent of its annual rainfall. For a variety of reasons, California is already contemplating a 20 per cent reduction in water use over the coming decade. Conservatively, if we assume that India may harness 15 per cent of rainfall with careful management, an annual availability of about 600 cubic km is perhaps a reasonable figure to comprehend the scope of India’s water crisis.

Looking to the future, the report stresses that closing the gap between supply and demand will be very difficult. Rather than claiming to provide solutions to all water problems, the authors cautiously consider the report a starting point for meaningful dialogue among all stakeholders for action towards credible solutions. In this spirit, we may examine the implications of their findings to India’s water situation.

In the broadest sense, two questions arise: What do the findings portend for India’s economic growth? How should India respond to the impending crisis?

Concerning economic growth, even a modest 6 per cent annual growth implies a real tripling of the economy by 2030. Is this achievable, if the annual availability is limited to about 600 cubic km? What rate of economic growth should India reasonably plan for?

The question how India should respond is of fundamental importance. India’s greatest challenge is to set in place an equitable, efficient system of governance for sharing a finite resource among all segments of society, simultaneously preserving the integrity of the resource for future generations.

At the time of independence, the annual availability of water in abundant quantities was taken for granted, and India’s Constitution declared water to be a State subject, with the Union government playing a role in inter-State issues. The Constitution

does not explicitly recognise water's unique attributes as a finite resource, widely variable in space and time, and vital for the sustenance of all living things.

At the beginning of the 21st century, when confronted with the imperative of sharing this vital resource among all segments of society according to the values of justice and equality assured in the preamble, one finds a conspicuous lack of philosophical authority necessary to make decisions on the allocation, prioritisation, protection, regulation, and management of water resources. This want of a philosophical basis is manifest in a lack of a national water policy. If so, what might be an appropriate philosophical approach?

India is about as large as Europe without Russia. Both have long histories of human habitation. India comprises 28 States and 7 Union Territories. Europe is a union of 27 independent nations. In 2000, the European Union issued the far-reaching Water Framework Directive with the goal of achieving sustainable management of water. The Directive requires all member-states to establish water laws conforming to common hydrological principles applied over river basins, with the active participation of citizens. The Directive's philosophical foundation is set forth in the preamble: "Water is not a commercial product like any other but, rather, a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such."

In 1976, a committee on Earth Resources, Time, and Man of the International Union of Geological Sciences observed: "Mankind is on the threshold of a transition from a brief interlude of exponential growth to a much longer period characterised by rates of change so slow as to be regarded essentially as a period of non-growth. Although the impending period of transition to very low growth rates poses no insuperable physical or biological difficulties, those aspects of our current economic and social thinking which are based on the premise that current rates of growth can be sustained indefinitely must be revised. Failing to respond promptly and rationally to these impending changes could lead to a global ecological crisis in which human beings will be the main victims." This observation clearly anticipates the findings of the 2030 Water Resources Group.

Even with the best available technologies, the finiteness and unpredictable variability of water resource systems place severe limits on human aspirations for prosperity. At present, India is in a difficult position of not only accepting this reality but also having to take concrete steps to adapting to the reality.

A related development. A November 2009 report, "A framework for India's water policy" of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, discusses India's water endowments and the human challenges confronting sustainable water management.

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Now, UN climate panel under fire on global warming

PTI, 24 January 2010, 09:52pm IST

LONDON: Amid a possible new row for 'wrongly' linking global warming to a rise in natural disasters, the UN climate panel has underlined that it was reassessing the evidence for surge in hurricanes and floods around the globe.

The latest criticism of the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change headed by India's R K Pachauri comes after the panel admitted its mistake in asserting that Himalayan glaciers could disappear by 2035.

The report also included another claim that rapidly rising costs from events such as floods and hurricanes were linked to climate change.

"We are reassessing the evidence and will publish a report on natural disasters and extreme weather with the latest findings. Despite recent events the IPCC process is still very rigorous and scientific," The Sunday Times quoted Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, vice-chair of the IPCC as saying.

According to the newspaper, the panel based the claims on an unpublished report that had not been subjected to routine scientific scrutiny - and ignored warnings from scientific advisers. The report's author later withdrew the claim because the evidence was too weak.

The link was central to demands at last month's Copenhagen climate summit by African nations for compensation of USD 100 billion from the rich nations blamed for creating the most emissions.

According to the newspaper, the panel knew in 2008 that the link could not be proved but did not alert world leaders. Ed Miliband, the energy and climate change minister, has suggested British and overseas floods - such as those in Bangladesh in 2007 - could be linked to global warming.

US President Barack Obama said last autumn: "More powerful storms and floods threaten every continent."

In another report, The Sunday Telegraph said the scientist whose report originally claimed that Himalayan glaciers could disappear by 2035, has for the past two years been working as a senior employee of The Energy and Resources Institute, (TERI) the Delhi-based company of which Pachauri is director-general.

The new controversy also goes back to the IPCC's 2007 report in which a separate section warned that the world had "suffered rapidly rising costs due to extreme weather-related events since the 1970s".

It said a part of this increase was due to global warming. The academic paper at the centre of the latest questions was written in 2006 by Robert Muir-Wood, head of research at Risk Management Solutions, a London consultancy, who later became a contributing author to the section of the IPCC's 2007 report dealing with climate change impacts.

Muir-Wood wanted to find out if the 8 per cent year-on-year increase in global losses caused by weather-related disasters. He found from 1950 to 2005 there was no increase in the impact of disasters once growth was accounted for. For 1970-2005, however, he found a 2 per cent annual increase which "corresponded with a period of rising global temperatures."

BASIC countries accede to Copenhagen Accord

IANNS, 24 January 2010, 06:55pm IST

NEW DELHI: Officials from Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC countries) met here on Sunday and indicated their support to the Copenhagen Accord on climate change.

The officials from the four countries met in New Delhi to devise a common strategy ahead of the Jan 31

deadline for the accord, a non-binding agreement that emerged from the climate change summit in the Danish capital in December.

The meeting of the bloc of emerging powers is likely to announce a fund they will set up to help other developing countries cope with the effects of climate change.

Only four countries -- Australia, Canada, Papua New Guinea and the Maldives -- have signed the Copenhagen Accord so far, though South Korea have also indicated their willingness to do so.

Though Australia and Canada have signed, they have not indicated the greenhouse gas emission reductions they are committing under the accord -- something developed countries are supposed to do.