

Keeladi: 9 quadrants, 183 antiquities unearthed in ninth phase of excavation

The artefacts include a gold ornament, finely shaped terracotta animal figurines and spindle whorls, besides iron nails; charcoal and bone samples have been collected for scientific analysis

The Hindu Bureau
MADURAI

A total of nine quadrants have been excavated and 183 antiquities have been discovered so far in the ninth phase of the archaeological excavations at Keeladi in Sivaganga district. The ninth phase of the excavations commenced on April 6.

According to the status report, the antiquities that have been discovered so far in the ninth phase includes a gold ornament, finely-shaped terracotta animal figurines, spindle whorls, gamesman, hopscotch, glass beads, antimony rod, copper needle, bone points and iron nails. From different stratified deposits, charcoal and bone samples were collected for scientific analysis.

The report said that initially four quadrants were excavated.

At a depth of 35 cm, a compact, rammed floor built with clay and lime mixture was discovered.

The thickness of the floor was 3 cm to 6 cm. Below the floor, thousands of potsherds made of black-and-red ware, red slipped ware and red ware were



Antiquities found in the ninth phase of excavation at Keeladi in Sivaganga. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

unearthed. Perforated, white-painted, russet-coated and rouletted ware potsherds were also unearthed beneath the floor.

When these potsherds were analysed, hundreds of graffiti marks like fish, ladder, geometric and non-geometric symbols were identified, the report said.

In the fourth phase at Konthagai, which is part of the Keeladi cluster, a

trench measuring 10 x 10 m was excavated and a total number of 17 burial urns were unearthed at three different strata, the status report said.

On April 6, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin had inaugurated the ninth phase of the archaeological excavations at Keeladi, through video conference. The ninth phase will go on till September 2023.

The ninth phase commenced on the eastern side of the spot where the eighth phase of the archaeological excavations was carried out.

According to the officials of the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, over 1,200 artefacts had been unearthed in the eighth phase of the archaeological excavations undertaken at Keeladi.

India still reliant on smear microscopy for diagnosis of TB, says Soumya Swaminathan

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

India is still reliant on smear microscopy for the diagnosis of tuberculosis (TB), while the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended that every person with suspected TB symptoms must have access to molecular testing, Soumya Swaminathan, chairperson of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, said on Saturday.

Delivering a lecture on 'TB in India: past, present and future' at 'CIDSCON 2023', the 13th annual conference of Clinical Infectious Diseases Society, she said that less than 25% of the notified TB cases have had the WHO-recommended molecular testing.

For every TB case notified to the government, 2.5 cases were out in the community, she said, adding:



MP Kanimozhi; Soumya Swaminathan, chairperson of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation; Preetha Reddy, vice-chairperson, Apollo Hospitals, and other dignitaries at 'CIDSCON 2023'. R. RAVINDRAN

"Diagnosis is the weakest link. According to the WHO, 4.2 million people with TB are either not diagnosed or not reported globally. Multiple studies have shown that case detection is the weakest link in the cascade of cases."

Dr. Soumya further said that mortality post-treatment was also high but not captured in the TB programme data, and emphasised the need for more active case finding.

Under-reporting and uncertain care of TB patients in the private sector, undernutrition, lack of investment in research and development and innovations and co-morbidities were among the challenges, Dr. Soumya added.

She also stressed the need to improve TB notification rates, and optimum utilisation of Cartridge-Based Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (CBNAAT) machines.

Lok Sabha member Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, during the inaugural session of 'CIDSCON 2023', emphasised the need to invest in research and look at a holistic approach for managing infectious diseases.

She said the COVID-19 infection showed how ill-prepared all countries were against infectious diseases and new diseases. "We have to invest in research. There are drug-resistant diseases, zoonotic

diseases and emerging infections," she said.

She hoped that the conference would create more awareness and put pressure on policymakers to look at infectious diseases in a more scientific and educative manner.

'Protocols laid down'

Preetha Reddy, vice-chairperson, Apollo Hospitals, said infectious diseases were now an important and integral part of the healthcare system of all hospitals.

"Infectious Diseases Department played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic. It had laid down protocols and monitored outcomes," she said. V. Ramasubramanian, president, CIDS and organising chairman; Priscilla Rupali, secretary, CIDS, and P. Senthur Nambi, organising secretary, spoke on the occasion.

Coming, women-only courts for alternative dispute resolution

Sreeparna Chakrabarty

NEW DELHI

The Union government is set to launch an initiative under which women-only courts will be set up at the village-level as an alternative dispute resolution forum for issues such as domestic violence and property rights, and to counter the patriarchal system.

The scheme will be launched on a pilot basis in 50 villages each in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir in August and extended to the rest of the country over the next six months. Detailed standard operating procedures have been prepared for all the States, which will be released next week.

The *Nari Adalat* (women's court) of each village will have seven to nine members - half of which

would be the elected members of the gram panchayat while the other half will include teachers, doctors and social workers - who would be nominated by the villagers.

"This platform will leverage their potential as advisers and leaders within their communities, functioning as a pressure group," a senior official in the Ministry of Women and Child Development told *The Hindu*.

The court will not only address individual cases of women and girls within the local community who require assistance or have grievances, but also raise awareness of government schemes and the legal rights and entitlements of women. The *Nari Adalat* will, however, not hold any legal status.



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+ Women-only courts for alternative resolution

“The services provided will include alternative dispute resolution and grievance redressal, counselling, evidence-based decision making, pressure group tactics, negotiation, mediation and reconciliation with mutual consent for accessible and affordable justice,” the official said.

Additionally, the platform will engage with citizens, promoting awareness about women’s rights, legal opinions, various schemes and collecting public feedback.

Members known as *Nyaya Sakhis* (legal friends) will be nominated or selected by the gram panchayat, while the head of *Nari Adalat* called the *Mukhya Nyaya Sakhi* (chief legal friend) will be chosen among the *Nyaya Sakhis*. The tenure of the head will be generally six months after which a new one will be selected.

The scheme would be run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development under the *Sambal* sub-scheme of Mission Shakti, which is dedicated to strengthening women’s safety, security and empowerment.

The implementation process will be done in collaboration with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the Ministry of Rural Development and Common Service Centres operated by the Ministry of Electronics and Information technology.

Eligibility criteria relaxed for Urimai Thogai scheme

T. Ramakrishnan

CHENNAI

The State government seems to have gone the extra mile in accommodating prospective beneficiaries of the 'Kalaigal Magalir Urimai Thogai', a basic income scheme for women, and coming up with a fresh landholding size.

Normally, farmers with landholding up to 2.5 acres of wetland or up to 5 acres of dry land are considered small and marginal farmers. In many schemes, both in the past and the present, they get more support than others. But, this time, for the purpose of the Magalir Urimai Thogai scheme, a senior official explains that they have taken a liberal view by doubling the size of landholding. The ceiling on landholding has been fixed as 5 acres of wetland and 10 acres of dry land, according to the rules framed for the scheme. Another official clarifies that the new

yardstick is specific to this scheme alone.

Another important feature of the scheme is that ration cards constitute the major criteria for determination of the beneficiaries. Approximately, there are 2.2 crore rice-drawing cards in the State, of which 30% are expected to be left out of the proposed scheme. Perhaps, this was why Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, in his speech at a meeting of senior officials and District Collectors on Friday, mentioned that about 1.5 crore applications were expected.

Apart from the landholding size, annual income limit and electricity consumption are some of the key stipulations of the scheme. As for electricity consumption, the reference point is annual and not monthly or even bimonthly for the present billing cycle. By keeping the annual consumption as the reference point, the authorities hope that the

vagaries of consumption in one or two billing cycles will get eliminated over the year and every eligible person will be brought under the fold of the scheme. Even if one is to go by the bimonthly billing cycle, only 10% of the ration cardholders - around 22 lakh - consume more than 600 units bimonthly, according to a study.

The inclusion of village panchayat ward members in the ambit of the scheme has been allowed, considering the economic status of many ward members. There are close to 99,500 ward members in the State. On families that are receiving aid from social security programmes, such as old-age and widow pension, the government has excluded them as it is contemplating increasing the present quantum of financial assistance.

Besides, a general norm that is being followed is that no family should get a second benefit.

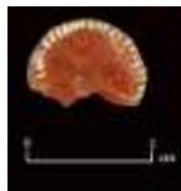
Archaeologists come up with rare findings in Tamil Nadu

S. Ganesan
TIRUCHI

A gold stud, a bone point and a carnelian bead have been unearthed by archaeologists at Porpanaikottai in Pudukottai district of Tamil Nadu, where the State Archaeology Department has taken up excavation this year.

A Sangam-age fort is believed to have existed at the site.

The stud in floral design with six petals was found at a depth of 133 cm in one of the eight trenches dug at the site. "The ornament, weighing 0.26 grams, was probably used as a nose



New find: (from left) The carnelian bead, the obverse and reverse sides of a gold stud and the bone point found by archaeologists at Porpanaikottai. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

stud and is an indication of the culture of the Sangam Age," T. Thangadurai, Excavation Director, Porpanaikottai, told *The Hindu*.

The bone point and the broken piece of carnelian bead were found at a depth of 140-160 cm in another trench.

The bone point, with pointed ends on both sides and carvings, was probably used for weaving, Mr. Thangadurai observed.

The discovery of the red round-shaped carnelian bead is a pointer to domestic trade. "Carnelian beads have been found at Kodu-

manal and a few other places in Tamil Nadu. The stones were usually sourced from Gujarat," he added.

The excavation at Porpanaikottai was inaugurated by Thangam Thennarasu, Minister for Finance, who is also in-charge of the

Archaeology Department, on May 20.

A three-course brick structure was unearthed within a few days of digging. Over 150 antiques, including potsherds, hopscotches, spouts, pieces of glass bangles and beads, a terracotta lamp, a coin, a spindle whorl and rubbing stone, besides a couple of graffiti, have been found at the site so far.

Porpanaikottai, situated about 6.5 km to the east of Pudukottai town, is one of the new sites where the department had taken up excavation this year.

Studies carried out at the site using Light Detec-

tion and Ranging (LIDAR), a remote sensing method, had indicated that a fort had existed at Porpanaikottai.

A habitation mound spread over 1.26 hectares is believed to have existed within the fort. The excavation is currently focussed on this area.

Eight trenches, six of them in the properties owned by three persons, are being dug currently. The excavation is being carried out by 35 workers under the supervision of Mr. Thangadurai and research scholars, A. Sudhakar, S. Munusamy and S. Bharath.

Centre adding more services to Ayushman Bharat health centres

Screening, prevention, control and management of non-communicable diseases, treatment for common ophthalmic and ENT problems, basic oral health care, elderly and palliative health care services will be added by August-end

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) programme, which has grown to more than 1.6 lakh centres and registered over 178.87 crore beneficiaries (as of June-end) in the five years since its inception, is undergoing its biggest expansion of services, Health Ministry sources say.

The Union government is adding services such as screening, prevention, control and management of non-communicable diseases, care for common ophthalmic and ENT problems, basic oral health care, elderly and palliative health care services, emergency medical services and screening and management of mental health ailments.

"The expansion programme is under way, and the aim is to cover all the centres by August-end," a senior official said, adding that the expansion plan



The Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres programme is aimed at bringing in promotive, preventive, curative, and rehabilitative aspects of Universal Health Coverage. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

has been worked upon since 2020.

To complement the expanded services, the essential list of medicines and diagnostics has been expanded to make available 171 medicines at primary health care-health and wellness centres and 105 at the secondary centres. A total of 63 and 14 diagnostics will be added

respectively.

A new cadre of community health officers, with 1.29 lakh in position, has been introduced at the secondary centres to act as clinicians and public health managers and to lead the team of Accredited Social Health Activists, anganwadi workers and auxiliary nurse midwives.

The senior officials said

the centres were being encouraged to undergo the National Quality Assurance Standards assessment and certification with a target of 50% by 2026.

The programme, started in 2018, is aimed at bringing in promotive, preventive, curative, palliative and rehabilitative aspects of universal health coverage.

"The goal is to provide comprehensive primary health care (CPHC), including both maternal and child health services and non-communicable diseases as well as free essential drugs and diagnostic services through AB-HWCs closer to the homes of people," the official explained.

"CPHC and wellness package activities at AB-HWC include yoga, Zumba, meditation, counselling for healthy diet and lifestyle, marathons, cyclothon and celebration of annual health days. More than 2.16-crore wellness sessions have been conducted with participation of 23.83-crore individuals," the official said.

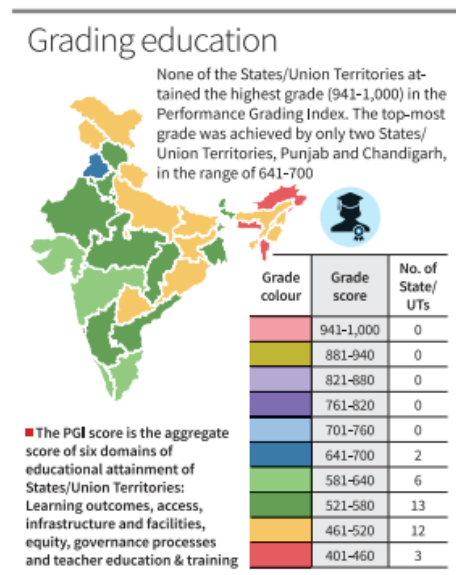
Central government records show that more than 122.02 crore cumulative screenings for non-communicable diseases have been conducted. These include 41.81 crore for hypertension, 36.16 crore for diabetes, 24.75 crore for oral cancer, 11.44 crore for breast cancer and 7.83 crore for cervical cancer.

States fail to get top grade in school education

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

While Chandigarh and Punjab were the top performers in school education for 2021-22, none of the States or Union Territories was able to achieve the highest grade, Daksh, in the annual survey released by the Union government.

The Education Ministry's Performance Grading Index (PGI) released on Friday had 10 grades with Daksh being the top (scoring above 940 out of 1,000 points) and Akankshi-3 at the bottom (up to 460 points). None of the States managed to achieve the top five grades in the rankings. Chandigarh and Punjab, despite being top-ranked, could only secure the sixth-highest grade of Prachesta-2, closely followed by Gujarat, Kerala, Maharashtra, Delhi, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu at Prachesta-3. Thirteen States including Andhra



Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh have been categorised as Akank-

shi-1 States, where room for improvement is substantial.

Further down are 12

States, including the north-eastern States of Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Assam and Bihar, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram under Akankshi-3.

Since 2017-18, the Ministry has released five annual reports that provide insights on status of school education in States and Union Territories. The key domains are learning outcomes and quality, access, infrastructure and facilities, equity and governance processes of schools based on five parameters.

The first parameter relates to 'learning outcomes'— how children do in language, maths, science, social science and so on. The second is 'access to education' which includes net enrolment ratio, retention, transition from primary to upper primary level and secondary, and mainstreaming of out-of-school children.

The third parameter, infrastructure, encompasses availability of science labs, computer labs, book banks, vocational education subject, supply of mid-day meal, functional drinking water facility, availability of uniforms and free textbooks.

The fourth parameter, 'equity', considers student performances between minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and those of general category. It relates to whether schools have ramps, disabled-friendly toilets and so on. The last parameter, 'educational governance and management', includes digital capture of daily attendance, percentage of single-teacher primary schools, vacancies in educational posts, inspections and teacher evaluation.

The States can take domain-wise action to improve their score, the report said.