

IN BRIEF



Last batch leaves for Amarnath from Jammu

JAMMU
The last batch of 89 pilgrims on Saturday left for the cave shrine of Amarnath from here to join the annual yatra, which entered its last phase, officials said. "All the 89 pilgrims present at the Bhagwati camp left in four vehicles, amid tight security arrangements, around 2.45 a.m.," the officials said. PTI

Ramdev urges boycott of Chinese products

HARIWAR
Yoga guru Baba Ramdev on Saturday urged the people of the country to boycott Chinese products. His statement comes in the wake of the ongoing standoff between India and China in the Doklam area of Sikkim. He also appealed to political parties to come together on the issue, keeping aside their differences. ANI

'India will gain 100% literacy in next 5 years'

JAIPUR
Union HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar said here on Saturday that India would achieve 100% literacy rate within the next five years. "There was a literacy rate of 18% in the post Independence era. Today, it has gone up to 80% and I guarantee that within the next five years, it will be 100%. There will be no illiteracy in the country," he said. IANS

FIR against 2 policemen for instigating suicide

RANCHI
An FIR was lodged against two police officers for instigating a youth to commit suicide, police said on Saturday. The FIR was lodged based on the statement of Suresh Kumar, the father of Shiv Kumar who committed suicide. Shiv Kumar had alleged police torture in his suicide note. IANS

Amid clamour over cows, who will save the Deoni?

Lack of funds and indifference has seen closure of centres for preservation of this resilient breed native to Karnataka, Maharashtra & Telangana

RISHIKESH BHADUR DESAI
BELAGAVI

The debate over the protection of cows across the country has not rescued the Deoni, an important native breed of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Telangana, from complete neglect.

Favoured by farmers for its resilience, disease resistance and docility, centres set up for the research and development of the Deoni are now closed or on the verge of closure.

A farm run by the Telangana State Animal Husbandry Department (TSAHD) for the propagation of the Deoni at Zaheerabad was shut down early in 2017, with the 46 pure-bred Deoni cattle at this facility being given away to nearby goshalas. And yet, TSAHD has not applied for grants under the incumbent National Democratic Alliance government's Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM), or any other scheme, for protecting indigenous breeds such as the Deoni. In fact, local officers do not appear keen on preserving the breed.

Only 50 animals

A similar farm managed by the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (CVAS) in Udgir, Maharashtra, has been downgraded to a cattle shelter for want of qualified staff. "The farm has only about 50 Deoni animals. No scientific breeding or propagation activity is undertaken by it. We are only conducting studies on subjects such as the effect of different types of grass on Deoni calves," said a senior faculty member of the CVAS, who did not want to be quoted. "A shortage of funding is one of the reasons behind this," he added.

Emails sent to officials in the governments of Telangana and Maharashtra received no response. The email to the Chief Secretary of Telangana was forwarded

Classy cattle

The Deoni is a dual purpose breed, with the cow yielding nutritious milk and the bull considered fit for hard field work



A Deoni calf. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

- The native tract of the species spans around 12,000 sq. km. along the Manjra river in Bidar and the surrounding districts of Zaheerabad in Telangana and Latur in Maharashtra

- The Deoni have drooping ears, a bulged forehead, and mostly white hide with a few black spots

Deoni cattle are maintained under a semi-intensive system of management

The fat percentage in the milk is 4.3% on average

- They are known to survive harsh drought conditions and are resistant to common diseases that affect exotic breeds

- Deoni milk is categorised as A2, which is produced by indigenous cows, and contains beta casein and proline. This milk is easier to digest than the A1 category produced by exotic breeds

They are usually reared by grazing in fallow lands, dry lands or bunds of farms

to the TSAHD, but there has been no clarification or further information.

Inhospitable location

Meanwhile, in Karnataka, the State government is now the beneficiary of an RGM grant, with which it is setting up a Deoni R&D centre in Ballari's Kurikuppe, where a farm for other breeds of cows and buffaloes already exists, far from the Deoni's native tract of the Manjra river basin in the Deccan.

This is happening even as the R&D centre dedicated to the Deoni near Bhalki in Bidar district, which was started 30 years ago by the State-aided Karnataka Veterinary, Animal and Fisheries Sciences University

(KVAFSU), is starved of funds.

Only about ₹16 lakh is provided for the annual maintenance of the 120 heads of Deoni cattle, both adults and calves, raised in the Bidar farm. The farm in Ballari will benefit from the Central government's generous RGM funding of ₹10 crore over five years for the preservation of each native breed. Minister for Animal Husbandry A. Manju defended the government's decision to set up the centre in Ballari, saying the farm needed funds badly.

"We are not damaging the activities at the Deoni farm in Bidar," he said, while admitting that the government may not be able to give the



Sturdy breed: The Deoni have drooping ears, a bulged forehead and a mostly white hide. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

KVAFSU any funds for recurring expenses.

However, officers in the Ministry admitted that a breed should remain within its indigenous geographical tract for better conservation.

Others in distress

"Gokul Gram is a scheme to conserve, develop and propagate native cattle breeds. The activities should include production and processing of milk, and the distillation and processing of cow dung to make compost and other products. It should be done with the involvement of villagers. All of this should preferably be done within the native tract. If these guidelines are violated, the Centre can stop its funds

[for the protection of native breeds] to Karnataka," a senior officer with the Union government said. He said a team would be sent to Karnataka to check on the progress of the scheme, and to see if the guidelines were being violated.

R.N. Srinivas Gowda, the retired founding Vice-Chancellor of KVAFSU, said the Deoni farm should have been set up based on scientific advice and not on the administrative convenience of the State government.

"It is wrong to set up the Deoni farm at Ballari. Will the government set-up a coffee estate in Kalaburgi or a red gram centre in Udupi? Animals and crops have their native tracts and this has to

be respected," he said, adding that the Deoni was being lost to cross-breeding and inter-breeding, which was weakening its gene pool.

Similar project

The Government of India's Animal Husbandry Commissioner, Dr. Suresh Honnappagol, also a former V-C of KVAFSU, told *The Hindu* that he would look into reports of the closure of the Zaheerabad farm and the lack of R&D activities in Udgir.

He said the Union government was committed to the preservation, propagation and development of the Deoni breed via the RGM or other programmes.

A similar project had been approved for the Malenadu

Gidda cattle breed, he said.

Harsh Gupta, who holds additional charge as Secretary, Hyderabad Karnataka Region Development Board, said the government would initiate all possible efforts to preserve the Deoni breed.

"We will not only support the KVAFSU's Deoni farm but also involve farmers in the process of propagation of the breed. We could also explore the possibility of the Karnataka Milk Federation marketing Deoni milk separately," he told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Gupta said he would study and review the progress of the RGM programme, and see why it was being taken up at Ballari.

(Inputs from R. Avadhani in Zaheerabad)