

# CEC favours law on water use

Tribune News Service

HISAR, April 21 — The Chief Election Commission, Dr M.S. Gill, has expressed concern over the alarming swell in the ground water table in Punjab and Haryana and pleaded for the setting up of a technically competent groundwater control board.

Delivering the convocation address at CCS Haryana Agricultural University (CCSHAU) here today, he called upon both states to consider legislation to regulate the sinking of tubewells, their distance from each other, the depth and their overall level of exploitation of a common source.

Dr Gill said in 52 per cent of Haryana particularly in Hisar, Sirsa, Rohtak, Jind and Bhiwani districts,

the water table had been rising 2 to 27 cm per year while in nearly 72,000 hectares, the water table had risen to less than 3 metre from the ground level. "This problem needs immediate corrective measures which have to be undertaken in agreement with our western neighbour" he said.

He said the liberalisation of Indian economy applied equally to the agriculture sector and with the implementation of GATT agreement, there was an opportunity for farmers belonging to Haryana and Punjab for better returns on their labour and investment. But to achieve this, it would be necessary to quickly invest in the infrastructure, which sadly was degrading.

Dr Gill said that massive invest-

ments were needed, particularly in irrigation, watershed development, agro-processing, enhanced electricity supplies, storage and marketing and for training, research and development.

He regretted that the real investment in agriculture had declined since 1980. This disturbing trend must be corrected immediately. India, he added, could not realise its full potential for development without progress and the uplift of the farmers.

The CEC was also apprehensive about the development of middle peasantry, particularly in Punjab which was hiring land from small and marginal farmers. He said the focus of our agriculture planning

should be the small farmer and the state should protect their interests with suitable provision of law against leasing arrangements.

Lamenting the low women literacy in the country, Dr Gill said the states should concentrate on much neglected literacy and primary school education. Instead of spending too much on multiplying universities and higher education, the priority should be on total literacy in the country.

Favouring curbs on liquor consumption in the country, he lamented that people in the country were spending too much on marriages and liquor. He was against the practice of states enhancing liquor sales for increasing their revenue.

Dr Gill urged the scientists of agricultural universities of Haryana and Punjab not to rest on their laurels and work for making their research more approachable to the farmers. He pleaded for enhanced financial allocation to these two universities as the prosperity of their respective states depended largely on the efficient and productive work of these universities.

Earlier, the Vice-Chancellor, Prof J.B. Chowdhury, said CCSHAU was committed to development of new technologies and making them available to the farmers. He said new courses like M.Sc. in Food Science and Technology, MBA in Agriculture Business Management had been introduced and steps were being taken for the placement of its graduates.

Prof Chowdhury asserted that efforts were afoot to explore tissue culture, genetic engineering and biotechnology for crop improvement, developing eco-friendly technology to reduce use of agro-chemicals and managing brackish water and problems of soils.

Earlier an honorary degree of D Sc. was conferred upon Dr Gill by the Chancellor of the university, Mr Mahabir Prasad. A total of 804 graduates including 31 gold medalists, who passed out between August 1985 to March 1997, were awarded degrees. Chief Minister Bansi Lal and state Agriculture Minister Karan Singh Dalal were among those present on the occasion.



Mr Mahabir Prasad, Chancellor of Chaudhry Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University, confers the degree of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) on Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill at the 20th convocation on Monday.