

# Govt mulls 50% women quota in panchayats

Mahendra Kumar Singh | TNN

**New Delhi:** UPA failed to deliver its promise of 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies within 100 days but it is working to keep its word on empowerment at the grassroots — by increasing reservation for women to 50% at the panchayat level.

On Thursday, the Union Cabinet is likely to consider a proposal for 50% reservation for women in panchayats.

The proposal is to amend Article 243D of the Constitution that currently provides for one-third reservation to women in panchayats. Now,

it is proposed to be increased to 50%. It is through rotation that seats are allotted for reservation in panchayats.

The one-third reservation for women in panchayats came through the 73rd constitutional amendment during Narasimha Rao's tenure as PM. However, it was Rajiv Gandhi who had first mooted the idea of empowering women at the grassroots.

Four states — Bihar, Uttarakhnad, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh — already have 50% reservation for women as states have the power to bring in amendments in their state laws to increase women's representation up to 50%. Rajasthan has also announced 50% reservation to be implemented in the next panchayat election in early 2010. On Wednesday, Kerala announced 50% reservation for women in panchayats and other local bodies.

## PACKING A PANCH

Current  
Reservation

33%

Proposed  
Reservation

50%



## GREATER REPRESENTATION IN PANCHAYATS

50% quota  
for women

|| Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, 27 AUG: In a move to ensure greater representation to women in the decision-making process at the village level, the Union Cabinet today gave its nod to enhance reservation for women up to 50 per cent in all the three tiers of panchayats across the country.

The provision will apply to the total number of seats filled by direct election, offices of chairpersons and seats and offices of chairpersons reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. "The Cabinet approved the proposal for moving a Bill to amend article 243 d of the Constitution for enhancing reservation for women in panchayats at all tiers from one third to at least 50 per cent," the I& B minister, Ms Ambika Soni, told reporters after the Cabinet meeting.

Thirty three per cent reservation for women in panchayats was ensured through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment during the regime of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, though it was Rajiv Gandhi who first mooted the idea.

States like Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have already enacted legislation reserving 50 per cent seats for women in panchayats.

Later addressing reporters, the Union rural development minister, Mr C P Joshi, described the decision as a landmark one in keeping with the commitment made by the government in the President's address to Parliament.

Mr Joshi highlighted the importance of decentralisation and ensuring transparency, accountability and responsiveness on the part of the delivery system so that benefits reach the needy and the poor. At present, out of the total elected representatives of panchayats numbering approximately over 10 lakh are women. With the proposed constitutional amendment, the number of elected women representatives is expected to rise to more than 14 lakhs.

## Seven new IIMs

NEW DELHI, 27 AUG: The Union Cabinet today approved setting up of seven new Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) in Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan. Four of these IIMs will be set up during 2009-10 at Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Raipur (Chhattisgarh) and Rohtak (Haryana), and will be functional during the 2010-11 academic session, the information and broadcasting minister, Mrs Ambika Soni, told reporters. She said locations of the three other IIMs in J&K, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan will be decided later. || SNS

The amendment is likely to be moved during the winter session of Parliament. The National Commission of Women chairperson Ms Girija Vyas also welcomed the Cabinet decision.

There would not be any financial implication in operationalisation of the proposal. Rural development ministry sources said the government is considering some proposals like spot payment by banks at the work-site and deploying gram panchayat representatives in banks to process the dues to address the issue of late payments in NREGA.

Mr Joshi has already held one round of discussions with representatives of political parties including those from RJD, BJP, Congress, CPI-M and NCP and would have further consultations. "Lack of awareness, delayed payment of wages and non-maintenance of proper records are affecting implementation," Mr Joshi said. The minister of state for rural development, Mr Sisir Adhikari, alleged that many states were not spending the administrative funds.

# Govt nod to 50% seats for women in panchayats



Bihar first reserved 50 per cent seats for women.

By **Mail Today Bureau**  
in New Delhi

**THE GOVERNMENT** on Thursday scurried to show its commitment to one of its 100-day promises and approved 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats across the country.

The cabinet's nod to amend Article 243D of the Constitution, however, would not be enough to meet the government's deadline of inking the provision into law which, anyway, expires on September 12.

The promise to set aside half the panchayat seats for women was made by President Pratibha Patil in her joint address to Parliament on June 4.

The government, therefore, must get the amendment passed by Parliament to enforce it and it is set to default because that cannot be done within a fortnight from now.

In her address, the President had made a specific mention of getting this quota Bill passed and the Congress is already committed to holding the next Lok Sabha elections only after reserving 33 per cent seats for women.

Law minister Veerappa Moily had

## Almost 39% panchayat members are women

said the proposed law would be passed during the previous session of Parliament but the government could not do that.

Bihar was the first to reserve 50 per cent of these seats for women and the cabinet's nod has come as a vindication of the model adopted by the Nitish Kumar government.

At present, "at least 33 per cent" of

the seats in panchayat bodies have to be reserved for women. The proposed amendment would take their participation in local self-government to the highest scale globally.

At present, almost 39 per cent of elected panchayat representatives are women.

"With the proposed amendment, the number of elected women representatives is expected to rise to more than 14 lakh. Having more elected women representatives would benefit the states and Union Territories where Panchayati Raj is in existence," information and broadcasting minister Ambika Soni told newsmen after the cabinet meeting.

The provision would apply to all seats filled by direct election, offices of chairpersons and seats and offices of chairpersons reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

# 50% seats for women in Kerala civic bodies

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Kerala on Wednesday joined states like Chattisgarh, Bihar and Maharashtra by setting aside 50% of elected seats in panchayats and all other local bodies for women. Announcing this after a cabinet meeting, chief minister V S Achutanandan, who is heading a CPM-led LDF government, said a special session of the assembly would be convened from September 8 to 17 to bring in the required legislation. "The session will focus only on the legislation," he said.

A liaison committee of LDF partners had last week asked the state government to reserve 50% seats of seats for women in panchayats and local bodies. At present 33% of seats in civic bodies are constitutionally guaranteed for women. The law allows states to make amendments to raise it up to 50%.

Once okayed by the assembly, the law would increase women's representation on administrative panels of civic bodies like standing committees, giving them a decisive say on important matters like budget allocations for welfare schemes.

Greater presence of women on civic bodies would make formulation of schemes, budget allocations far more gender-sensitive. Kerala has 999

## Bihar first to give 50% quota to women in panchayats

**U**PA is mulling increasing reservation for women to 50% at the panchayat level. Bihar was the first state to give 50% reservation to women in panchayats in 2005. In Uttarakhand, women have an overwhelming 55% representation in panchayats as many of them contested even from non-reserved seats and won. But the state works through the UP Panchayat Act and is yet to have its own law. The central move will pay political dividends to UPA in the coming assembly election in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. CPM leader Brinda Karat welcomed the move but demanded that government show the same seriousness about the women's reservation bill. **TNN**

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village panchayats, 152 block panchayats, 14 district panchayats, 53 municipalities and five corporations. The cabinet also decided to give 12kg rice free to STs. All school children who are eligible under the mid-day meal scheme will also be given 5kg rice free of cost before Onam. **TNN**

# Half of panchayat seats for women

## Failing On 33% Quota For Fairer Sex In House, UPA-2 Keeps Its Rural Promise

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The country seems set to have an army of women politicians. UPA-2 may have failed to deliver on its promise of 33% reservation for women in legislatures within 100 days but it has kept its word on empowerment at the grassroots with the Union Cabinet on Thursday clearing a proposal to increase reservation for women to 50% in panchayats.

The proposal, reported by TOI earlier, aims to amend Article 243D of the Constitution that currently provides for 33% reservation for women in panchayats. This is proposed to be increased to 50%. The "women only" seats in panchayats are rotated.

States where 50% women's quota is already in force has boosted their status. In Bihar, it has seen the spouses of women heads of panchayats styling themselves as 'mukhiyatis' in a symbolic yet significant role reversal. Panchayats are expected

women politicians at the grassroots as the experience of Bihar — the first state to reserve half of the panchayat seats for women — shows — making the administration more gender-sensitive.

Taking the lead in women empowerment, five states — Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — already have 50% reservation for women as states have the power to bring in amendments in their state laws to increase women's representation up to 50%. Rajasthan has also announced 50% reservation that will be implemented in the next panchayat election in early 2010. Kerala, too, has announced 50% reservation for women in panchayats and other local bodies.

In Uttarakhand, women have an overwhelming 55% representation in panchayats as many of them contested even from non-reserved seats and won. But the state works through the UP Panchayat Act and is yet to



**RURAL EMPOWERMENT:** The move will, at one stroke, boost the number of women politicians at grassroots

to serve as nurseries for women leaders, preparing them for tasks they may have to shoulder in case the addition for politics endures. It was during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as PM that the idea of decentralising power and empowering women at

the grassroots was mooted. The one-third reservation for women in panchayats came through the 73rd constitutional amendment during PV Narasimha Rao's tenure as Prime Minister. The move will at one stroke boost the number of

have its own law. With the proposed constitutional amendment, the number of elected women's representatives at the grassroots level is expected to rise to more than 14 lakh. At present, women account for 36.87% of the total 28.1 lakh elected panchayat representatives.

I&B minister Ambika Soni said after the Union Cabinet meeting that a proposal to have 50% quota for women in urban local bodies is likely to be taken up later.

Panchayati raj minister CP Joshi called Thursday's decision as historic saying it would take empowerment of women to another level.

All India Democratic Women Association general secretary Sudha Sundaraman said, "This will facilitate increased participation of women in decision making and strengthen the democratic process. But this measure must be followed up with the passage of the women's reservation Bill in Parliament"