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### **NREGA to help India usher in second Green revolution: Min**

New Delhi: The 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan will address the UPA's flagship job guarantee programme Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The plan approach paper says that while the growth in agriculture in the 11<sup>th</sup> plan is likely to average 3.3 per cent per year, inflation is causing concern among farmers who are not only facing higher costs but also adverse effects of certain policies like export bans to cope with inflation. Some other concerns of the farmers like effect on wages of MGNREGA will also be considered by the 12<sup>th</sup> plan.

Planning commission and Rural Development Ministry say that going forward in going forward in the 12<sup>th</sup> plan, MGNREGA will help the country usher in Second Green Revolution. Rural Development Ministry specially feels that post reform the scheme will contribute handsomely to the farm productivity by resolving the issues raised by the farmers and farm Ministry.

“Agriculture is out concern as well. In the 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan period, MGNREGA will contribute significantly and we are working in this direction with the Farm Ministry. The country has roughly 150 million hectares of crop area. Out of which 50 million ha is irrigated and rest 100 million ha is rain fed.

This is where MGNREGA will make capital investment in the form of developing water resources, land leveling, compost making and other farm related activities,” rural development Ministry secretary BK Sinha told The Pioneer.

This follows secretary level talks between the respective Ministry Jairam Ramesh and Sharad Pawar as consequence of a debate the Farm Ministry had sparked by writing a letter of the Rural Development Ministry few months back saying MGNREGA is adversely affecting agriculture. The farm secretary is drafting a report on the issue, the scheme's effects on farm sector and the measures to be taken to correct the fallouts. Then Pawar will take up the report with Ramesh, according to the sources in Farm Ministry.

Sinha has a meeting with the Farm secretary PK Basu last month and conveyed the above “efforts” to his. Sinha said while the effect of MGNREGA on agriculture is not “significant”, Farm Ministry's concerns have to be viewed “differently”.

According to the Rural Development Ministry in 2010-11 average ‘person days’ under MGNREGA were 47 days and out of which 11 days were in agriculture peak season. In fact, 68 per cent of the MGNREGA work was related to water resources in the last year,

which covertly helps the farm sector, Sinha informs.

However, the Ministry is working out more ways to address the Farm Ministry's concerns. "In the 12<sup>th</sup> plan, we will work out MGNREGA in a way to increase farm productivity of the country by clubbing it to farm activities of small and marginal farmers, SC/ST landholders, Indira Awaas Yojna Beneficiaries and Forest Right Act beneficiaries," Sinha explained.

This of implemented "in spirit" can usher in to Second Green Revolution as small and marginal farmers account for 80 per cent of the operational landholding in the country.

The Pioneer had carried a story earlier that the Rural Development Ministry is reviewing the scheme to make it farmer friendly by bringing agricultural activities like sowing, harvesting, soil preparation, irrigation, compost preparation and allied activities relating to livestock in its ambit. This will be implemented with a special focus in 2,000 most backward blokes of the country. Planning Commission is in the process of making list of these 2,000 backward blocks, which shall be available soon.

Sinha further added that there is a pilot project going on in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh which of successful would be encouraged across the country. Under the pilot

project, the district administration encourages labour groups to enter onto a mutual agreement with farmer representatives to create a "labour bank" for farm activities. This will sort out the labour shortage issue during peak farming season. Farm secretary Basu is set to visit Nalgonda to study the mechanism and the Ministries will meet again thereafter. It is notable that eight districts including East Godavari in coastal Andhra Pradesh have gone on a crop holiday as a token protest to the UPA Government's "anti-farmer" policies. Lastweek, BJP leader Rajnath Singh who had visited AP took up the matter in Zero hour of the ongoing Parliament Session and demanded a special session of Parliament to discuss the problems of farmers in the country. He too demanded that MGNREGA should be linked with agriculture as there was crisis of labour for working in the fields after the scheme was brought into force.

The 12<sup>th</sup> plan will have concrete roadmap on Second Greed Revolution in the country and will talk of collective effort by various Ministries like farm, Rural Development and Water Resources in this direction. On the 64<sup>th</sup> Independence Day Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said acknowledging the sustained high inflation in the last two year that the country needs a Second Green Revaluation in agriculture to check price rise and provide food security to the nation and there would be major focus on this in the 12<sup>th</sup> plan.

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## **Powerless Panchayats**

**Nine months after Jharkhand held its first panchayat polls, elected representatives complain of poor infrastructure, lack of support**

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Turiamba: A makeshift room, its roof covered with plastic sheet and walls made of bamboo tied together with hand spun rope, is the panchayat office at Turiamba, in Jharkhand's Gumla district. Mukhiya Mani Devi is the sole occupant of the office. Adjacent to her room is an open toilet and next to it is another building- the panchayat office that the state government built in 1995. The two rooms in this office are stacked with cow dung cakes and its roofs and walls are crumbling. Since this building is not "safe to work in". Devi says she prefers the makeshift room.

In the same district, panchayat heads Gandura Oraon of Marasili and Sukri Devi of Amalia panchayat operate from their homes. "The government has not given us stationery to record the demands and complaints of people," says Oraon.

Turiamba, Marasili and Amalia panchayats in Maoist-affected Gumla district are among 4,423 panchayats that went to the polls in November-December last year- the first panchayat elections in Jharkhand. According to the provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996, each panchayat has the "powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government". These included the powers to enforce prohibition, have ownership of minor forest produce, and

prevent alienation of land, manage the village market, control resources and make plans for the development of the community.

More than nine months after the elections, panchayat heads say they have their hands tied. Most of these panchayats lack the infrastructure and staff required to carry out their work.

Mani Devi of Turiamba panchayat had drawn money from her personal bank account to purchase two copy books, one register and a pen, besides four plastic chairs and a table. "After I got elected, the state government has not given me any power. But the people who voted for me have expectations and I have to fulfill their demands for roads, drains, water, and medicine and so on. If nothing else, I need stationery to record their complaints and demands. So I bought some of it," she says.

When asked why panchayats were empowered, Tanuja Lakra, Block Development Officer at Bharno block in Gumla, under that jurisdiction these panchayats feel, shot back: "Why don't you ask the government?"

On September 4, hundreds of these elected representatives of rural bodies held a demonstration outside the state assembly under the banner of the Gram Swaraj Manch. On September 13, a group of them enforced a road blockade in Dumka.

“Crores of funds meant for development are at stake. We want the state government to provide local state government to provide local bodies all those powers that are given to them by law,” says Ashok Bhagat, president of the Manch.

Though Bhagat says the infrastructure should have been ready before the elections were held, government officials say it takes time to put a system in place. They point out that the government has begun work on constructing panchayat office buildings across the state and equipping every panchayat office with fax, telephone and computer.

“It takes time to institutionalize panchayats. We hope to complete the work by the end of this fiscal,” says Nagina Singh, Deputy Secretary (Panchayati Raj).

As of now, the state government has opened two bank accounts – one under the

head ‘MNREGA’ with a deposit of Rs.30 lakh and another under the head ‘Development’ with a deposit of Rs.50 lakh for Turiamba panchayat. These accounts were to be jointly operated by the mukhiya as its chairperson and panchayat sevak as secretary.

While the MNREGA account showed a withdrawal of nearly Rs.25 lakh, the development fund remained unutilized since the state government had not notified the rules and regulations to its withdrawal.

Though Jharkhand was created in 2000, panchayat elections were held up because of various litigations. After a decade, the Supreme Court cleared these litigations and ordered the State Election Commission in 2010 to hold these polls at the earliest.