

Clean Village award presented to 15 panchayat president

Jayalalithaa also presents Clean Village Campaign award to 15 more panchayats

THE HINDU, Tuesday, August 16, 2005

Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Monday said the principal duty of the people was to take on negative trends in society such as extremism, terrorism and separatism.

In her address from the ramparts of Fort St. George to mark the 59th Independence Day, Ms. Jayalalithaa said though the country had to fight only against alien rule during the days of the freedom struggle, "we have to take on several inimical forces now."

Revolution for progress

The second duty before the administration was to immediately carry out a revolution for progress.

Development could be achieved only by extending the scope of existing opportunities to more people, even while creating new ones.

She handed over the Clean Village Awards for 2004-05 to the presidents of 15 panchayats.

Pylingulam in Kanyakumari district, Naganakulam in Madurai district, Muthugoundanpalayam in Erode district, Vaanapadi in Vellore district, Kalarampatti in Perambalur district, Lakshmiapuram and Ramakrishnapuram in Theni district, Kattambur in Sivaganga district, Kurandi in Virudhunagar district, Muthur in Coimbatore district, Pulvanchi in Thanjavur district, Methalodai in

Ramanathapuram district, S. Irayamangalam in Namakkal district, Melathirupalakudi in Tiruvarur district and Anaipatti in Dindigul district are the panchayats which bagged the award.

She also presented the Clean Village Campaign Award to 15 other panchayats including Mooduthurai in Salem district, Angamangalam in Tuticorin district, Belagondapalli in Krishnagiri district, Pagalmedu in Tiruvallur district and Nedungal in Kancheepuram district.

Ms. Jayalalithaa gave away several other awards at the function. Among the recipients were the SCOPE of Tiruchi district (best non-Governmental organization), M.K. Deivannaiammal of Erode district (best School Teacher/Headmistress), A. Rajeswari of Ramanathapuram district (best Anganwadi worker) and S. Parameswari of Kanyakumari district (best village health nurse).

Awards for the best District Rehabilitation Officer, best institution and social worker for the welfare of the disabled, best institution and best social worker for women's welfare, best Doctor and best Private Employer were also given away.

The Chief Minister distributed sweet packets to some physically challenged children at the function.

More funds for urban bodies, panchayats in Uttranchal

THE HINDU, Wednesday, August 17, 2005

The Uttranchal Chief Minister, Narayan Dutt Tiwari, has announced an additional grant of Rs.100 crores each to

village panchayats and urban local bodies to accelerate the pace of development.

“Funds have been provided and it is now up to the elected panchayats representatives, local population and the officials to frame need-based schemes and implement them so that the rural and urban areas develop in the right direction,” the Chief Minister said.

Describing panchayats as real time progress tools, Mr. Tiwari said that honest efforts in the right direction with public participation would help achieve the true “swaraj” dreams of Mahatma Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

The Government has also raised the grant from Rs.15 crores to Rs. 25 crores under the Vir Chandra Singh Garhwali Tourism Self Employment Scheme to enable more local youths to become partners in the development of Uttranchal as a tourism destination, he said.

Mr. Tiwari wanted boys and girls to equip themselves with the latest hospitality skills and provide a fine blend of the modern facilities and the rich hill culture to the tourists.

Efforts should be made to provide the facilities at a reasonable price so that the number of tourists increased. More business means more profits, he said.

Referring to herbal medicine as the tool for health care in the coming days, Mr. Tiwari wanted the people to take to farming and processing medicinal plants in a big way.

“You have the natural resource, climate and the human resource—all that is needed is a dedicated move to tap the potential”, he said.

Wolf gets first-hand feel of rural India

THE PIONEER, Friday, August 19, 2005

THE WORLD Bank President Paul Wolfowitz took a stroll through the muddy streets of Mushrifa and Kosgi villages, of Mahbubnagar district, in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday, to get a first-hand feel of rural India.

Prior to participating in the interaction programme at the Kosgi market yard, Mr. Wolfowitz went around the village, interacting with the members of women’s self-help group. He visited the houses of five women members—Manemma, Dasari Lakshmi, T Narsamma, M Kishtamma, and G Anjalamma to see for himself their living conditions.

Most of the questions from Mr. Wolfowitz were regarding the benefits that the self-help group scheme has brought to them.

Speaking through translators, the women told the World Bank President that the money was utilized for setting up small businesses and raising cattle to generate regular incomes for their families.

At the programme of interaction between the self-help groups and the World Bank President, women from 33 villages of Kosgi Mandal were present. He also participated in the “total literacy campaign” programme and talked to the students in the village.

Mahbubnagar district is one of the most under-developed regions of the Andhra Pradesh. Especially in the Kosgi area, people do not have access to even the basic amenities. There is no road linking the area to the other parts of the district and it was only after the World

Bank president decided to visit the area, that the authorities built a dirt road.

Later, Mr. Wolfowitz participated in the *Vana Samrakshana Samiti* (Joint Forestry Management Committee) in the village. He also saw a rural water supply scheme at the Bothalavani tribal hamlet.

Mr. Wolfowitz said that he was looking forward to discussions with the Governments about the ways in which the Bank could best support efforts to attain their development goals.

WB announces \$ 260m assistance to self-help group

IMPRESSED BY the work of the women's self help groups in Andhra Pradesh, World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz announced an assistance of \$ 260 million to the women's self-help project over the period through 2008. Wolfowitz, who after visiting villages in Mahbubnagar district interacted with women of self help groups from all over the State in Hyderabad, described the success of the movement as incredible. "The World Bank is honoured to be able to participate with your government in helping to make this project a success and we are very impressed with what you have done," he said committing \$ 260 million.

About 8 million women in Andhra Pradesh are involved with the self-help groups.

"I have heard about the improvements in education of the girl child and rural livelihood. I am eager to meet some these people doing the real business of development and making a real difference in the quality of their daily lives", he said.

He also lauded the emergence of India as a country of global importance and we are seeing its footprint across the world in new and exciting ways. I am here to learn from your model of development and reform in a democratic environment", he said in his statement at the Hyderabad airport.

Mr. Wolfowitz will interact with members of women's self help group in Hyderabad before leaving for New Delhi. In Delhi, he is scheduled to meet the President, Prime Minister, Finance Minister and others over the next two days.

Making villagers pay

The Times of India, Friday, August 19, 2005

The recent approval of a relocation package for Sariska tiger sanctuary has once again put the onus of biodiversity loss on local Gujjars. The entire process of preparing the relocation

plan has been conducted in an arbitrary and undemocratic manner flouting all principles of decentralized planning and people's participation.

In effect, the locals have been held responsible for biodiversity losses with no scrutiny of management failure and the corrupt and inefficient state machinery. At a more fundamental level it perpetuates the humans versus animal model. Continuing the dominant discourse of biodiversity conservation in India, it once again validates relocation as the only method of protecting forests. There's no doubt that the overwhelming presence of cattle inside the Core Zone-I of Sariska has put tremendous pressure on forest cover and that biomass extraction by villagers poses a serious threat to the sanctuary. However, there are other factors such as absence of initiatives to involve villagers in forest management that have contributed to the disappearance of tigers.

Relocation appears problematic because it not only treats a complex issue simplistically but it also ignores the emotional and economic realities confronted by displaced people. Relocation packages, due to their narrow perspective, fail to recognize the inconceivable magnitude of damage done by temples located near perennial springs in this deciduous forest while also glossing over other aspects of mismanagement. The earlier relocations of 1970s of Kirashka and Kanakawas to Sirawas and Bandipul highlight these aspects.

The forest department cites only one reason for degradation of forest cover-population pressure inside the sanctuary-whereas local villagers argue that they have always been unnecessarily harassed. In the 70s, villagers were compelled to move out without any consultation. They sold the land allotted to them and came back to the sanctuary because relocation was forced on them and they were thrown out without

creating conditions for survival at the new site. Consensus building on the issue has always been lacking as officials see villagers as inimical to biodiversity concerns. There has been hardly any interaction between officials and villagers.

In Sirawas, though the land is fertile and has a satisfactory water table, the villagers from Kirashka were not provided any infrastructure promised to them such as irrigation facilities, schools, grazing land, health centers, roads and electricity. Though electricity is supplied through the village to a large farmhouse, the village remains unelectrified because of corrupt officials.

There was so much corruption that the denotified land meant for relocation was allotted to an outsider alleged to be a close relative of a leading politician. Even at Bandipul, the forest was not cleared and the land not marked properly. In addition, the Gujjars who were relocated to this site have to encounter till today the wrath of surrounding Meena villages. So it was no surprise that the relocated villagers returned to Sariska.

It is difficult to imagine that things would be better this time. The experience of earlier relocation indicates a few things: The state machinery cannot be trusted with keeping its promise; local social dynamics at the new site, in terms of caste and class, play a significant role in deciding whether the relocated villagers will settle in; the facilities at the new site are very important because relocated villagers have to change their livelihood options; and the relocation packages does not address the needs of the local people.

The current relocation plan is no better with the total average estimated cost of relocation per family being Rs 1

lakh, which includes cost of house, crop and tree compensation, disturbance allowance and community works. Given the past history of relocation, it is best that relocation packages be prepared in consultation with the uprooted people and implanted only after all the promised facilities are put in place.

Sariska represents a classic case of how villagers are made to pay for the consequences of forest mismanagement by the state. It also highlights the autocratic functioning of the forest department in which principles of participatory forest management are totally ignored.

Campaign for forest rights to tribal

Immediate tabling of the Scheduled tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill demanded

THE HINDU, Wednesday, August 24, 2005

The Punarvasan Sangharsh Samiti (PSS), Nandurbar, and various other tribal rights organizations in Maharashtra have launched a month campaign for the immediate tabling of the Scheduled Tribes (Reorganization of Forest Rights) Bill, 2005 in Parliament even as conservationists and the Forest Department are opposing its provisions.

Encouraged by the introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill in Parliament there has been mobilization in the *adivasi* areas of Maharashtra for the bill to be passed. Since August 16, from Nandurbar in Maharashtra, the PSS has launched a series of mass meetings in various tribal pockets, which will end in Gandhinagar in Gujarat, on September 19. According to Pratibha Shinde of the Samiti, among the issues the campaign will highlight is the immediate passage of this bill, with all amendments suggested by social activists for strengthening tribal rights.

The Campaign for Survival and Dignity, a federation of adivasi and forest people's organizations from across the country, has been putting pressure for three years for security forest rights to tribal people. The Bill envisages, for the first time, recognition of the right of

forest-based communities. These communities, mostly the scheduled tribes are among the most marginalized section of Indian Society, according to Anurag Modi of Shramik Adivasi Sangathan. They are up against Indian Forest act, 1927 and subsequent laws, which have taken away their rights.

However, even as the Forest Department says this bill will sound the death knell of Indian Forests, villages in Melghat and other protected areas are quite keen on having their rights restored to them. The affected people do not seem to have much knowledge of the Bill and its provision. The Bill proposes "to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land in forest dwelling scheduled tribes who have been residing in such forests for generations but whose rights could not be recorded."

The recognition and vesting of forest rights under this Bill to the Scheduled tribes shall be subjected to the condition that such tribes or tribal communities had occupied forest land before October 25, 1980 (the date from which the Forest Conservation Act came into force) or such other date as the Central Government may notify in the

official gazette. This land will not exceed an area of 2.5 hectares per nuclear family. It also gives rights to the Gram Sabha, which will be the authority to initiate any action to initiate action for determining the extent of forest rights that may be given to the forest dwelling tribes.

A senior Forest Department official said these powers to Gram Sabha were too expensive and the forest department may as well be closed down.

Objection

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has already stated in a note that it does not agree with the introduction of the proposed Bill. In a meeting held in January this Year, MoEF said that there is no need to bring in a fresh law as sufficient provisions already exist under the Forest Conservation Act and the guidelines issued in 1990.

It also said that the draft bill puts a question mark on the very existence of National Parks and Sanctuaries where the current policy is to shift the habitations outside the protected area as has been done already in the Melghat Tiger Reserve.

Kishore Rithe of the Amaravati based Nature Conservation Society said the new bill would regularize encroachments and pave the way for contractors to officially denude forests. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has also opposed the bill. The BNHS believes that the Bill in its

present form will neither promote forest conservation nor social justice.

BNHS sources said that the provisions of the bill would be detrimental to the forest areas of the country.

A resolution passed by the society said that the draft bill is seriously defective and that there should be some clarity regarding implementation, with clear articulation of the role of the gram Sabha and forest department.

Supporters of the bill question how much control the tribal will have over forestland. Mr. Modi says that the Gram Sabha will not have much power. He doubts whether most tribal families will be eligible for land. He says in the last two decades the claims of lakh of tribal over forestland have been termed as 'encroachments'

Recently, a process of verification has been announced by the forests department, but very few tribals will be able to come up with the required 'proof' that they have been in possession of their lands for over a quarter of a century, he says.

However, activists feel that this bill was necessary and it was important to conclusively establish the rights of tribal people over forests. The issue is then to balance the concerns of conservationists and tribals and reflect their legitimate rights

New oil find may be *Jatropha* plant

It grows like a weed in wasteland and is used by rural folks to protect their crops

THE HINDU, Friday, August 26, 2005

The new oil find in the desert may be the bio-diesel plant *Jatropha*, commonly known as "Rattan jot" in this

part of the country. Rajasthan, occupying one-tenth of the country's total land mass but boasting of only one

per cent of its water resources, is considered ideal for growing Jatropha Curcus, also known by the names of Pongamia Pinnata, Honge and Karanja.

Jatropha, now spotted as an ideal source of TBO (tree borne oil seed), is already grown in the region. Farmers of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh have been putting the oil from its seeds to local use before the Planning Commission, concerned with the country's growing expenses over imports of crude—52 million metric tones of high speed diesel by 2006-07, decided to set up a Bio-diesel Mission in 2002.

It grows like a weed in the wasteland and is used as a hedge by the rural folks to protect their crops. The tribals in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh make use of the oil from Jatropha seeds for lighting lamps. On a commercial scale, it can be planted on under stocked forest lands, fallow lands and on farmers holdings as agro forestry along with agricultural crops.

Apart from the areas under the Japanese-assisted Aravali Afforestation Programme in Banswara and Udaipur, Rattan jot is grown across 600 hectares in Rajasthan. The pilot projects, covering 300 hectares each, are run by the Ministry of Agriculture and Maharana Pratap Agriculture University, Udaipur. The plants consume less water and can also adjust to harsh weather conditions.

Tribals in Rajasthan, M.P. make use of the oil from Jatropha seeds for lighting lamps

“In three years since the Planning Commission took the initiative on bio-diesel, a lot of things have happened. The latest has been the setting up of bio-diesel credit bank by the PCRA on August 17,” observed Leena Mehendale,

Executive Director of the Petroleum Conservation and Research Association (PCRA), addressing a media workshop on bio-diesel at the Press Information Bureau here on Tuesday.

“The target now is to bring 2.2-2.6 million hectare area under the plant all over the country so that we can start blending 5 per cent bio-diesel extracted from Jatropha seeds with petroleum diesel from next year and take it up to 20 per cent by the year 2011-12,” Ms. Mehendale said.

The use of bio-diesel results in substantial reduction of unburnt hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide and particulate matters. It has no sulphur, no aromatics and has about 10 per cent built-in oxygen, which helps it to burn fully, it is being pointed out. Though oil can be extracted from Jatropha seeds by trans-esterification (manually), there are now machineries, varying from 10 litres to 1000 litres a day in capacity, available in the market. “At present everything is on an ad hoc basis. The cultivation of Jatropha has not picked up momentum,” conceded Ms. Mehendale who said the Petroleum Ministry had already recommended fixing a minimum support price for bio-diesel from the plant. The MSP proposed by the Ministry is Rs. 23 per litre.

Once the announcement of MSP was made, at least 20 depots of the Indian Oil Corporation and other oil companies would be procuring the bio-diesel. “We expect this to happen soon,” Ms. Mehendale said.

“There is a need for subsidy and other incentives for the farmers. We have sent a note to the Finance Ministry suggesting Sales Tax exemption for the product for the product for the next three years,” she said.