

E-NEWSLETTER

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ENVIS CENTRE ON PANCHAYATI RAJ AND ENVIRONMENT

I n d i a n E n v i r o n m e n t a l S o c i e t y

NCW'S woman empowerment scheme goes the village way

THE HINDU

February 4, 2006

Ambitious "Chalo Goan ki Ore" campaign launched in New Delhi on Friday

NEW DELHI: The National Commission for Women (NCW) on Friday launched an ambitious "Chalo Gaon ki Ore" campaign aimed at empowering women in the villages.

The campaign, launched to coincide with the Commission's Foundation Day, was inaugurated by Union Human Resources Development Minister Arjun Singh. To begin with, it will cover the states of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi, where it will focus on the pressing problem of female foeticide and the missing girl child.

"All the schemes formed post-Independence had the village as their focal point. But somewhere in the middle we lost our way. We assumed what the situation was like in the villages, but did not know the reality," Mr. Singh said.

Mr. Singh also said that women had a lot to contribute to the country's development and called for empowering

and called for empowering them at the grassroots level. "It is not just the responsibility of the Commission but all of us to see that the campaign is a success," he added.

Speaking on the occasion, Union Minister of state for Women and child Welfare Renuka Chowdhury said the campaign would make women in the villages aware about HIV/AIDS, finance schemes and will also sensitise them on how take legal and police help.

Union Panchayat Raj Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar called for involving the 12lakh women Panchayat leaders in the campaign. These 12 lakh women can get organized and together with the Commission can ensure that the campaign is a success," he said.

In her opening remarks, NCW Chairperson Girija Vyas said the reason for starting the campaign in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi was the sharp dip noticed in the sex ratio in these States.

Kalam experiences simulated tremor

THE STATESMAN

February 6, 2006

President's Project finds ready takers in Manila

MANILA, Feb. 5. – The room in which Indian President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam was sitting shook, first vertically and then horizontally, as the Richter scale recorded a major earthquake to give him the experience of a simulated temblor today.

It was a different kind of experience for scientist Dr Kalam who visited the Philippines Institute of Volcanic and Seismological Studies.

Dr Kalam promised his dream project Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (Pura) for the Philippines to bridge the rural-urban divide.

The Pura concept, which envisages establishing integrated connectivities in rural areas in terms of providing basic infrastructure, caught the imagination of Philippine resident Ms Gloria Arroyo who responded to it enthusiastically during her talks with Dr Kalam.

It was agreed that two Pura centers

would be set up at Lanao, a hilly area of the Philippines, and Balcun, a coastal area, and some local companies are also expected to chip in with assistance.

“We will provide the technical know-how for the two Pura centers,” Dr Kalam’s press secretary Mr SM Khan said here.

Under Pura, besides physical connectivity, villages need to be connected to cities through strengthening of telecommunication and Internet facilities.

The Pura has been successfully implemented in 65 villages in TamilNadu, leading to large-scale employment and creation of entrepreneurs with the support of more than 8000 self-help groups.

President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam checks out genetically grown rice at International Rice Research Institute in Los Banos on Sunday.

SC: encroachers have no right to rehabilitation

The Times of India

February 9, 2006

New Delhi: At a time when vote-bank politics is under threat from impending removal of slums and encroachments mandated by the judiciary, the Supreme Court has come out with a tonic of a judgment for the administration saying encroachers have no right whatsoever to demand rehabilitation.

Adding a contemporary touch to help the ruling class save face, the court said the demand for rehabilitation would not gain any legal ground, even if a government had promised resettlement to encroachers of public land.

This ruling was handed down by a Bench comprising Justices S B Sinha and P K Balasubramanian rejecting the demand of the Milk Producers Association of Orissa challenging the decision of the Naveen Patnaik government to evict them from the public land they have encroached for years to carry on their business.

The rehabilitation of *guallas* (milkman) of Bhubaneswar in the adjoining villages had been engaging attention of Orissa government since 1987 and it had gone to the extent of initiating the process of identifying land

for the purpose.

Counsel for state, Janaranjan Das, argued that even if the chief minister was the author of the earlier decision to rehabilitate them in Pandara, Patrapada, Godakana and Jokalani villages, he has expressly resiled from that noticing that these villages fell within the city master plan.

Due to amendments to Orissa Municipal Corporation Act, it was now impossible to keep cattle within the city limits of Bhubaneswar, he added.

Justice Sinha, writing for the Bench, said even if the CM had promised rehabilitation of the *guallas*, it could not be taken to have conferred any legal right on them to demand rehabilitation. Taking note of the amendments to the Municipality Act the Bench said it expressly prohibited dairies or cowsheds within the periphery of the town and hence, the state cannot, even if it wanted to, rehabilitate the *guallas* within the city limits. Rejecting all contentions, the Bench ruled: "There does not exist any legal concept, which confers a legal right upon an encroacher to be rehabilitated."

Cutting trees prove costly

The Sunday Statesman

February 12, 2006

JAIPUR, Feb. 11. – Feeding his goat with branches from someone else’s tree proved costly for an artisan as the panchayats asked him to leave the village within 10 days. Mr Ahmed, a resident of Jawada Chittorgarh, could have escaped with a penalty but the panchayats acted tough, as he was a “trouble-maker”.

Mr. Ahmed had cut the branches from a tamarind tree that belonging to

one of his distant relative. On Mr. Ahmed’s refusal to admit mistake, the matter was taken to the panchayats. The elders decided to teach Ahmed a lesson. The panchayats also warned others against talking or co-operating with him. Sources said Mr. Ahmed was staying in a rented house for many years. But he hailed from a village in Madhya Pradesh. He has already left Jawada for his village.

Sibal for technologies that will benefit rural areas

THE HINDU

February 19, 2006

AMETHI: science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal on Saturday announced the institution of a Special award of Rs. 10 lakh for scientists who develop technologies that would benefit rural areas. The award, the first of its kind, would be presented by CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) annually.

Mr. Sibal said it was part of the Government's initiative to help change the mindset of scientists. "Scientists in India today focus more on finding solutions to problems faced by cities than the villages. We want to change that." It would also help to take development on the doorstep of *aam admi* (common man). "Even after 57 years of Independence, progress has not reached the villages as much as in the case of cities. The villagers are still not getting adequate prices for their produce, nor having proper access to quality power supply, irrigation and other facilities."

Earlier, Mr. Sibal inaugurated a five-day exhibition on rural-oriented technologies put up by his Ministry here. The exhibition is also the first of its

kind, as science and technology expositions have so far been held mainly at the district headquarter level or above. Also, they showcased technologies all sectors instead of being exclusively of being exclusively focused on rural areas. According to Ministry sources, similar exhibitions would be organized in other parts of the country. A highlight of the programme was the collaboration established with a Delhi-based non-governmental organisation to collect feedback from the villages to ensure that the exercise was not a one-time affair but an endeavour to enable the villagers to use the technologies.

Mr. Sibal said the Ministry would thoroughly go through the feedback and all assistance, including financial help, would be provided to ensure that the technologies got transferred to the field. "Amethi is the foundation of the Congress. Rahul Gandhi, Amethi MP, hoped that the people in rural areas would take full advantage of the initiative of the Science and Technology Ministry to take technology to their doorsteps.

An NGO at the service of rural poor

THE HINDU

February 19, 2006

Tirupati-based samiti is implementing government schemes

- Creches for farm workers' children at Tirupati
- SHGs formed in 200 villages
- Increased awareness lead to lower school dropout

CHENNAI: The Rashtriya Seva Samiti (RASS), a non-governmental organisation headquartered at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, has been in the forefront of implementing schemes of the Central and State Governments for women and children.

Started in 1981 as the Rayalaseema Seva Samiti to cater for the needs of the drought-prone region, its name was changed 10 years ago after the NGO's activities expanded to other States.

According to G. Muniratnam, general secretary, RASS is managing crèches for children of women farm workers in villages not covered by Anganwadi at and around Tirupati. Thirty children up to the age of six are taken care of by teacher and an assistant, given supplementary nutrition and educational tools, and kept in a clean environment free of cost. The scheme is funded by Union Human Resource Development Ministry.

Under the Child Sponsorship Programme, children are provided with clothing and education material up to a particular age. Funded by the Government and international agencies, the poorest of the poor children from villages are given aid for education up to matriculation. Special grants are given by international agencies on the

birthdays of the children and on festival days.

More than 6,000 children have benefited by the programme started in 1999.

At Tirupati, RASS has formed women's self-help groups in more than 200 villages. The members are given financial assistance to set up businesses of their choice. They are asked to save Re.1 every day and aid is given to them. Petty shops, leaf plate making unit, and other small units have come up in these villages. Mr. Muniratnam claims that nearly Rs. 12 crore has been given as loans to the members and repayment is prompt.

The products of the SHGs are marketed by the producers with RASS guidance.

Mr. Muniratnam says gambling, which was widely prevalent in villages around Tirupati, has been curbed to a large extent. A de-addiction center with 12 beds has been set up by RASS at Pappanaidupetta and significant result have been achieved.

The dropout rate has come down, thanks to increased awareness among women of sending their wards, especially girl children, to school. A separate school for disabled and another for differently-abled children have been set up with assistance from the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry.

Nearly 500 children have benefited from these two schools.

Youth interested in agriculture are trained in the use of modern implements and practices under the Acharya Ranga Krishi Vigyan Kendra.

Nearly 1,000 youth have benefited under the programme, for which a nominal fee of Rs. 50 is charged.

RASS has started implementing a programme, 'Sahaya Gram,' for the physically handicapped.

It has promoted a concept of model village on 20 acres to help all sections of the handicapped.

The scheme provides health services on wheels to the community and creates awareness of the importance of education. It lays stress on immunization and childcare and corrective surgery, and gives mobility aids. At a computer training center set up at Tripati, youth

are trained for six months in various programmes free of cost.

Work in naxal areas too

Mr. Muniratnam says the organization has set up women's SHGs even in naxal-prone areas in Orissa.

The organization's finances are audited and tested by the Comptroller and Auditor-General and also conducted.

Among the honours conferred on the organization are the FICCI award for outstanding work in rural development (1997), The Government of India National Award for good work in the field of disabled welfare (1994), the Jammalal Bajaj Endowment Award for service to disadvantaged groups and the rural poor (1989), the Rotary India Award for improving rural employment (2004.)

Panchayat polls in A.P. to be held in July-August

THE HINDU

February 23, 2006

HYDERABAD: Elections to Mandal and zilla parishads besides gram panchayats are likely to be held in four phases during July-August this year.

The Andhra Pradesh Election Commission has begun the exercise of finalizing the dates for the elections as the term of the Mandal / zilla parishads ends on July 21. The term of the gram panchayats will end on August 16.

After preliminary discussions with officials, the State Election Commission appears to have decided to issue the notification for the Mandal and ZP election in the second week of June so that polling is completed in four phases in July. The notification for gram panchayats election will be issued in July and election process finished in August. Election have to be conduct to 14,617 Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituencies, 1,096 Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituencies and 21,914 gram panchayats in July and August

respectively. Highly placed sources in the SEC said there was no question of any rescheduling of panchayats polls. The elections would be held as scheduled and the commission would try to complete the process a week ahead before the term of the bodies comes to an end, a senior official told *The Hindu*. The commission was also preparing the ward-wise electoral lists for the panchayats elections with the list published by the Election Commission as the basis. The list would be displayed in all panchayats two months ahead of the elections so as to enable voters to submit their objections or suggestions.

The commission has already sent proposals to amend the AP Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 making it compulsory for all parties to end the campaign 48 hours before the polling day, ban on sale of liquor two ahead of the elections and punishment for poll-related offenders under the PR Act instead of the IPC.

Sariska shift plan going nowhere

Hindustan Times

February 25, 2006

WITH NO response from the Centre on the Rajasthan government's proposal on relocating villages located within the core area of the Sariska Tiger Project (STP), the plan appears to have been dumped.

"Not a single paisa has come from the Centre; we just don't know how to go ahead with the plan," said Rajasthan's forests and environment minister Laxmi Narain DAVE.

The state government had asked for Rs 4.28 crore for the implementation of the first phase of the project involving the relocation of 129 families of two villages, Bagani and Kankwari. In all, 11 out of the total of 28 villages located within the park's core area were to have

been re-located in a phased manner over the next three year under a centrally funded scheme at a cost ranging between Rs.15 to 20 crore.

"After having agreed to fund the project in principal, the Centre's silence on the matter is intriguing", said officials.

Following reports of missing tigers at Sariska last year, the relocation plan had been formulated by the state government, based on the recommendations of the Sunita Narain-headed Central task force on tigers. The idea was to de-reserve 222 hectares of forestland in Barod Roond village near Behror in Alwar to settle Sariska villagers.