

Project for recharging of ground water approved

The Hindu

May 1,2006

Comprehensive master plan prepared for flood-affected areas of Haryana

- Project reports for low height cascade dams on Ghaggar prepared
- 48 flood schemes completed
- 124 new and 45 ongoing schemes approved

CHANDIGARH: The Haryana Government has approved a Rs.2.85 crore project for recharging of ground water through injection bore wells in the sweet water zone of districts Ambala, Kurukshetra, Karnal, Kaithal and Panipat, the Irrigation and Revenue Minister, Ajay Singh Yadav, said here on Sunday.

He disclosed that the construction of the ground water recharging project for Massani Barrage in district Rewari had already commenced. Similarly, some more schemes were also being prepared for Rewari and Mohindergarh districts to recharge ground water.

The Irrigation Department had prepared three project reports for low height cascade dams on the river Ghaggar and its tributaries at Kaushlya, Dangrana and Dewanwala to prevent wasteful flow of water and loss of property in floods during monsoon season. These projects had already been submitted to the Central Water

Commission for their appraisal and clearance. These would not only solve the drinking water problem of district Panchkula but also help in moderating floods in Ghaggar belt of Punjab and Haryana. The Department was also preparing a detailed master plan for the improvement and rehabilitation of agriculture-related reservoirs including Bibipur Lake, Kotla Lake, Ottu Lake and Bhindawas Lake.

The Government had also prepared a comprehensive master plan for flood control in the chronically flood-affected areas of Rohtak, Jhajjar, Bhiwani, Jind and Hisar districts. About 48 flood schemes had already been completed while 45 were in progress.

It had also approved 124 new and 45 ongoing schemes. Mr. Yadav said that the State Government had prepared another master plan for increasing irrigation potential of 3.43 lakh hectares area within the next four years.

Encroachments from gram sabha land to be removed

THE PIONEER

May4, 2006

Delhi Rural Development Board headed by Development Minister Raj Kumar Chauhan on Wednesday ordered removal of encroachments from gram sabha lands in the Capital.

It is learnt that about 800-1000 acre of such land has been encroached upon. Interestingly, a large number of unauthorized colonies have come up on these lands.

The Rural Development Board Meeting was convened on Wednesday to discuss problems and clear developmental projects of rural areas. Development Minister Raj Kumar Chauhan said 159 developmental schemes, to the tune of Rs 365 crore.

Chauhan said that the entire stretch of gram sabha land that has been identified would be made encroachment free and it would be demarcated and a *pucca* boundary wall would be erected for its protection.

The Board also decided to fix a rent of Rs 1,100 for the general category and Rs 500 for Multipurpose

Community Centre, Rs 500 for Scheduled Castes in Villages. Members of the Board have expressed concern that these centers are not being put to use owing to the huge rent.

Outer Delhi MLAs, who are members of the Board, have raised an issue that there is unequal developmental growth in the Capital.

“Most of the developmental projects are being executed in East Delhi due to the 2010 Commonwealth Games. On the other hand, rural areas have been neglected as no discipline of games is slotted to be performed in Outer Delhi,” said Congress MLA Vijay Lochav.

NCP leader Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that Board should look into the problems of rural villages seriously.

The Board also pondered on the demands of most of the MLAs that developmental schemes should include electrification of rural areas, which can be done through high mast lights or through street lighting through Halogen/Mercury lights etc.

Punjab all set for a 'blue revolution' in farm sector

THE HINDU

May 6, 2006

State's per unit area of fish production is at 6094 kg per hectare as against the national average of 2600 kg

- Area under fish culture steadily increases
- Rs. 7.5 crores allocated for fish farming
- Plan to develop village ponds as fish farms
- 500 villages of Hoshiarpur district taken up under this scheme

CHANDIGARH: After the success of the 'green' and the 'white', Punjab is all set to usher in the 'blue' edition of revolution in the farm sector, State's Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Fisheries Minister Jagmohan Singh Kang has said.

An official release quoting Mr. Kang said that Punjab had kept its record intact for per unit area of fish production at 6094 kg per hectare, as against national average of 2600 kg.

Mr. Kang said that the area under fish culture had steadily increased to 9890 hectares from about 8960 hectares last year. Besides this, production of fish from natural resources had gone up to 85,642 tones during the year 2005-06 in comparison to 77698 tones in the previous year.

The Minister also said that the department, through its 14 fish seed farms, had laid special emphasis on increasing the production of quality fish

seed of Indian major carp and exotic carp. While the department's seed production went up to 4.37 crores during 2005-06 in comparison to 3.70 crores during the last year, an additional 9.50 crores fish seed was being produced in private sector as well.

The Minister added that the State was committed to furthering the blue revolution, for which an amount of Rs.7.5 crores had been allocated for fish farming during the current fiscal as compared to Rs.2.15 crores in 2004-05.

He said that during the last year fish farmers of the State had received a subsidy of Rs.66.67 lakh.

Meanwhile, the State Government has chalked out an ambitious plan to develop all the village ponds as fish farmers, Mr. Kang disclosed. As many as 500 villages of Hoshiarpur district have already been taken up under this scheme where an amount of Rs. 3.5 crores was being spent.

Towards effective rural health care

Will the National Rural Health Mission succeed?

THE HINDU

MAY 7, 2006

THE recently announced National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has raised concern for many reasons. Of the various projects that come under the NRHM, the most ambitious is that of training 4,75,000 health workers—glorified as Accredited Social Health Activities (ASHA). Thousands of crores have been sanctioned for the project which will soon begin in 18 states where rural health-care is dismal. The creaky machinery that is the Government health sector makes it happen?

Different needs

No, it cannot, if it resorts to unimaginative methods. Ours is a country with diverse social, economic, class and caste issues that vary from one village to the next. Proper training of health workers cannot be done with directives coming from the Centre. It cannot be done with easy-to-learn booklets being passed around to semi-literate women, or through classroom lectures by bored officials. The Government spends a measly 0.9 percent of the GDP on health, which is one of the lowest in the world. Only five countries (Cambodia, Myanmar, Burundi, Pakistan and Sudan) spend less. Yet, a substantial amount of last year's funds is lying unused in some States. The Government, instead of attempting to monitor the spending, has promised to increase expenditure to three percent of GDP. Corruption is

unchecked in many public sector hospitals.

The private sector is in no way better and in some ways, worse. Of the 4,70,000 doctors (of allopathy) in the country, 85 percent are in private practice. Barring a few exceptions, they are busy making money and have no time for what they consider the drearily routine of prevention of disease, and health at village level. Even professional bodies like the IMA and the various medical fraternities have ignored this larger problem. Meanwhile, false euphoria is generated by the media about Medical Tourism, liver transplants and heroic 14-hour microsurgeries.

Systematic planning needed

The government now proposes to extend healthcare to 400 million rural folk through the NRHM. If done without systematic planning, this massive project is sure to shoot itself in both feet. With a view to evolving a workable system, a three-day workshop was held in Pune from April 10-12. It brought together NGOs working in the rural sector, government officials from the Centre and from three of the States involved with the NRHM, and a representative from the World Bank. The workshop was organized by the Foundation for Research in Community Health (FRCH) along with the Social Initiatives Group (SIG) of ICICI Bank. Formed mostly of young, enterprising women, the SIG supports and monitors big and small rural health projects.

Health is not the monopoly of the medical profession, or of government health departments. The workshop demonstrated some wonderfully imaginative work being done by individual groups across the country. These have shown that proper training of health workers in villages has helped in reducing material and infant mortality and teaching preventive aspects of health. This is more important than costly cures given in big hospitals. The rural health project in Jamkhed, Maharashtra, was one of the earliest of such ventures and it won Dr. Arole and his wife the Magsaysay Award in the 1970s. Other pioneers like Dr. Anita (the founder of FRCH) and Anna Hazare have been working among rural communities in Maharashtra for decades. At the Jan Swasthya Sahyog in Bilaspur, Chattisgarh, Dr. Yoges Jain and his team develop cheap, health-related technologies which will benefit poor patients. Dr. Sundararaman, a Professor of Medicine from JIPMER, has long been a Supporter of the People's Movement and was key to the success of health-worker training in Chattisgarh. At the Tribal Health Initiative in Sittilingi, Tamil Nadu, Dr. Regi and Lalita George train hundreds of young tribal women health workers. At the Community Health Cell in Bangalore, Dr. Ravi and Thelma Narayan help NGOs with much-needed advice and facilitate the link between civil society groups and the government.

There are many such individuals and groups in India but their will remain limited unless the government fulfils its role and supports those doing it. For the NGOs, any collaboration with the government needs persistence and a willingness to let go of prejudice. Newly formed northern States of Jharkand and

Chattisgarh have shown that this is possible. The Mitatin Health Worker Training Project in Chattisgarh, in which 60,000 women were trained, was a result of such effort. In the thick of political and administrative upheavals, this was made possible through the efforts of Alok Shukla, the

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IT IS NOW UP TO THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE USE OF THE CREATIVE FACULTIES AVAILABLE IN PEOPLE AND IN GROUPS.

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Secretary of health in the State who actively supported the initiative to work with the concerned NGOs. The Chattisgarh experiment merits attention because of the clear-headed objectives and the sheer energy that has gone into the task.

Where the doctors have failed to reach, well-trained health workers have been of great help. Being part of the rural community, they are more sensitive to problems like unsafe drinking water and scarcity of food, or social taboos. In teaching skills to health workers, didactic methods are of temporary benefit and vertical transmission of knowledge of little value. It is better taught horizontally, through interactions, practice and close involvement with the community. Women make better health workers than men, for they have the natural ability to pass on their learning to the family.

The Government has already sanctioned its thousands and sent off letters to State Governments to initiate the programme. 1,50,000 are to be trained by 2006. Who are the trainers and how will they be trained? How will

the medical profession, which has long neglected basic health-care, react?

Not the least important is the need to understand the political activism underlying health. By using the term ASHA, the government has rightly linked health with government has rightly linked health with activism. There are local and outside determinants, which influence the health of disadvantaged people everywhere. Thanks to globalization and advertisements, villagers can get Coca Cola but not clean drinking water. The International Monetary fund and the World Bank, which support many national rural programmes in developing countries, have become moneylenders. At the village level, the health worker will come up against oppressive practices like dowry, female foeticide, gender and caste bias. She needs support from the *Panchayat* and the medical profession. And most importantly, the

proper training to do her job. As shown in Chattisgarh and Maharashtra, health workers can be motivated to take on other concerns-like intervening on behalf of the community and mobilizing them for issues as diverse as food right and against forest felling.

Signs of hope

In the past, the link between the Government sector and NGOs was lukewarm. At the workshop in pune, there were hopeful signs. The Aroles, Antias, Sundararamans and Narayans are few but they have prized wisdom, and pragmatism, to share. They have held their vision for decades and have evolved by learning from their mistakes. It the creative faculties available in people and in groups, and make the Rural Health Mission a reality. Only then can ASHA translate into hope and not mere hype

Woman power on display in Bihar panchayats polls

The Times of India

May 8, 2006

Raghopur: Women hold up half the sky, Mao is said to have observed. In Bihar, it is not Moaists but Nitish Kumar, who seems to have caught on to truth here. What he unleashed through 50% reservation for women in seats of panchayati raj institutions is a veritable revolution.

For the first time in states history, discussion on the elections is not only among men. Women are also taking an active part in it, both as candidates and voters. Indeed, the men in many cases are feeling rather left out.

Sania Khatun, who is contesting to become the *mukhiya* of the Amba panchayats in Bangusarai, approaches the house of Bajju Mahto, accompanied by six women. Barely giving a passing glance at Mahto, who is standing at the door, the women enter the house to canvass support among the women folk of the family directly. Mahto is perturbed and makes it a point to tell the group that he too should be also asked for his opinion. After all, he is the head of the family. Pat comes the answer from one of the group members, that are correct, but every individual has his or her vote and should be approached.

What follows must have hurt Mahto even more. As the group leaves his house, it now has one extra member-Mahto's wife. This is a common scene in Bihar. Particularly in villages, one can see groups of women going house to house seeking support. That's quite a change from the earlier situation, when women were not even consulted to find out their preference. It was taken for granted that women would vote for whichever candidate the head of the

family voted. The fact that they are now being approached has given them a great sense of self-respect. The sense of empowerment stemming from the realization that their opinion matters also means that fewer candidates are now willing to settle for being a dummy for their men folk.

Talk of *mahila raj* is life. A woman from a backward caste family, firmly believes that new revolution would bring in *mahila raj* in country. Whats more, she is convinced that *mahila raj* will be better than *mardon ka raj* as women mukhiyas and panchayats members will be more accessible than men.

Ram Pratap Choudhary of Raghopur, after finishing his graduation in the early 1940s stayed back in the village to do social work, says the 50% reservation for women in local bodies has revolutionized electioneering in the state.

Ram Binod Choudhary, a post-graduate who runs a small business in Raghopur, was less sure about how much empowerment of women will happen because of this. But he too admitted that women have finally joined the mainstream in local politics.

The change has also meant that the arena of local politics has shifted. So far, in Bihar, politics used to be dealt with at the small village market where all the men used to congregate in the evening. But, the large participation of women has brought politics to the household. Not that men have been relegated to playing bit roles. Some women candidates are dummies in these polls too. But there is a growing realization

that process itself would make many of them candidates think independently.

But, can women deliver? When a women candidate was asked whether she

understands intricacies of bureaucracy at block and district level, she countered with a pertinent question: how many men understand it?

Villagers up in arms against sand-mine operators

THE HIND

May 8, 2006

Mining units in Kotputli tehsil behind depletion of groundwater

PAWTA (JAIPUR): Farming is making way for sand mining in the fertile tracts along the National Highway No.8 in Kotputli tehsil of Jaipur district in Rajasthan. After the coming up of factories consuming gallons of water daily in manufacturing of beer in the industrial township in Alwar district falling in the National Capital Region, it is now the turn of the sand-mining units to guzzle the precious groundwater of this desert State.

The construction industry in Gurgaon and elsewhere in Haryana, Delhi and Punjab now makes use of Rajasthan's "bajri" (construction sand) for ready mix concrete in the wake of a ban on sand-mining in these States. Hundreds of trucks filled with wet sand line up daily on the single track roads in Chandoli, Torda and Dudawas villages in Kotputli on their way to Delhi, 160 kms away.

"We allowed them to take away our mitti (soil) and now our water is also gone" lamented Ram Kumar in Chandoli village as water buffaloes look in askance. His 80-year old father, Bhagirath, perched on a creaking charpoy, said their well used to have water up to the brim till recently.

The "minefields" (!) are hardly 10 km from the national highway at Pawta where once the Sota rivulet, a contributory of the Sahibi river (also dried up), used to flow. The 110-year-old Buchra dam in the catchment area of the rivulet has no water. The sand is taken out from the dry-river bed and from the farmlands adjoining it.

The situation is volatile in 52 panchayats in Kotputli tehsil, situated some 80 kms north of Rajasthan capital where 16 sand-mining units have come up over the past one year, have seemingly brought down water levels in the wells and tanks. Villagers are up in arms against the sand-mine operators, who hail mostly from Haryana. "We too used to take out 'bajri' in the past. But our needs were limited," noted Nityendra Manav, a local youth who is coordinating the agitation.

Last month the washeries were closed for about 20 days following protests. And the results were positive. "As long as the units remained closed the water level in the wells rose," noted Ram Kumar, a sarpanch.

The local population, at their wits end over the trouble they brought upon themselves, on Thursday held a meeting

with Magsaysay award winner and waterman Rajendra Singh at Pawta. At the end of the two-hour long session, which witnessed acrimonious scenes involving the local MLA, Subhash Sharma, representatives of the panchayats bodies and the sub divisional authorities, the verdict was in favor of an immediate closure of the units. "Sand-mining will surely create ecological imbalances and lead to depletion of ground water," was the verdict from Waterman.

Rajendra Singh's visit Chandoli and Dudawas later brought him face to face with the operators of the sand-mining units whom the villagers refer to as "Bajri mafia". A large posse of policemen, accompanied by Sub Divisional Magistrate Devendra Kumar Sharma ensured peace, though the dialogue remained inconclusive.

The unit owners claimed ushering in prosperity to the area. "The purchasing power of the people here has gone up you can see them owning

tractors, motorcycles and mobile phones," Lokesh, an engineer with one of the units pointed out. The units claims to provide jobs to 500 person though the local dispute this. "We made a mistake at the outset itself when we allowed the plants to come up. They have brought jobs for 10-20 persons and distress for lakhs of people," Subhash Sharma, MLA said.

The area has sand deposits up to 100 feet deep. The sand-mining units together have 15 tube wells dug in the fields, which draw 13,000 litres per hour. The unit owners explain that 'bajri' is replenishable and its excavation helps to improve the carrying capacity of the drains and rivulet. The unit owners also flaunt a certificate from the Jaipur-based Ground Water & Mineral Investigation Consultancy Centre to claim that about 30 percent of the water used for washing sand is recycled. On a single day the units take out 560-m³ water from the ground.

Revive Sardar Patel Lake

HINDUSTAN TIMES

May 9, 2006

This lake in Put Kalan Village was developed by DDA in 2003, now it languishes for want of care

THERE IS no dearth of projects in the pipeline. The authorities gleefully announce a plan and the inauguration takes place with much fanfare, but things fail to move beyond that. Sardar Patel Lake, Put Kalan, is a case in point.

The lake that overlooks the Kanjhavala main road is an erstwhile johad (village water body) of put Kalan village. It was rechristened as Sardar Patel Lake after DDA developed the lake and a park around it and inaugurated it with much fanfare in the presence of a Union Minister, the area MP and other DDA officials and area bigwigs. They all took the credit the new look of the lake and promised further development.

That was in October 2003. Since then no senior DDA official has visited the lake. Though an important link, the road to the lake is narrow, dusty and full of potholes. From far, the sight of the lake is no doubt quite pleasing, but a closer look reveals that all is not well.

The good things about the lake first. The setting is almost perfect. The lake is surrounded with a small garden and a cool shade of trees. There is an old Shiva temple, an akhara and a well. Two ghats provide an easy access to the lake.

Now for the damaging affects. Sewage flowing in the open drains of the neighboring colonies finds its way into the lake. "I have reported the state of affairs to my superiors but nothing has happened so far," says a DDA official

posted at the site. The lake has two floating fountains, but only one works.

WATER BODIES

No guards have been deployed here to take care of the complex. "Children from the neighbourhood have damaged the wiring of the now defunct fountain. Benches erected by DDA too have gone missing and two have gone missing and two iron gates have been damaged," says an area DDA official. He feels that this place can be developed into a picnic spot.

The greenery around the lake is confined to the temple and the akhara nearby. "That portion of the complex is enticing. There is need for proper development all around the lake," says Azad Chand, a resident of Put Kalan.

Two water pumps that draw ground water feed the lake. However, the natural slopes that would carry the rainwater are missing. Whatever little water does find its way into the lake bring along garbage.

The only visitors to the lake are the kids from the neighboring colonies, who enjoy a dip here. Since sewage flows into the lake, the water too is not clean. However, in the absence of a guard, the children cause a lot of damage to the complex.

"There are no toilets for the visitors. Things can improve if the authority

introduces boating facilities and sets up some snack shops,” says Ram Pal, a resident of Put Kalan village, who regularly visits the temple next to the lake.

DDA officials are not ready to buy these stories. “We are taking good care

of the Put Kalan Lake. We will rectify the problems if any. The people living around the complex need to behave more responsibly,” says a senior DDA official.

He refused to divulge any further development plans for the lake.

Model village resource center for backward areas in three months

THE HINDU

May 10,2006

NEW DELHI: A model village resource center for backward areas will be set up within three months, Union Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said here on Tuesday.

Inaugurating a national consultation on Rural Technology and Development and the future of the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), Mr. Singh said the center would be part of the space technology-enabled village resource centers (VRC) programme being developed by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).

He called upon scientist to developed technology for the benefit of farmers for skill development and income generation. New technologies for improved production should be made available to farmers, which would be suitable to the different agro-climate conditions, he said. CAPART should also publicise its new model of development through which the

economy of rural areas would not only be strengthened but also be made sustainable through the medium of voluntary institutions, he said.

VRC programme

The VRC programme, being implemented by the satellite communication programme of ISRO, involves setting up 85 centres for collecting data on land use, wasteland mapping and forest development.

The programme is to focus on making available developmental benefits such as tele-health, tele-education and emergency communication to rural areas. Started about a year-and-half ago, this programme is aims to set up 300 centres.

In her presentation, Veena S. Rao, director-general of CAPART said the efforts of the organization would be to draw up model schemes for addressing the problems of critical areas, which are responsible for the poor socio-economic status of rural communities.