

New collector settles fear of panchayat chiefs

Jaya Menon

The Indian Express, Thursday
February 22, 2007

The storm has blown over in Madurai, with new Collector D Karthikeyan, who took charge today, promising to “carry on the good work” of his predecessor T.Udayachandran whose transfer to Erode prompted the Dalit presidents of three reserved panchayats to threaten to tender their resignations.

Udayachandran’s transfer to Erode came in the wake of reports of strained relations between him and MK Azhagiri, son of Chief Minister M Karunanidhi. Yesterday, the three presidents of panchayats, where civic polls were held for the first time in October last year, issued a joint statement, threatening to resign, if Udayachandran was not brought back to Madurai. All the three panchayat presidents who had been provided security said they feared threat to their lives.

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Udayachandran had played a crucial role in holding elections in the panchayats dominated by ‘upper caste’ Thevars, who had in the past ensured that the ‘dummy’ presidents resigned soon after

they were declared winners. With promises of several development projects and even personal loans, the former

Madurai Collector ensured that the Thevars did not pressure the presidents to resign this time, helping the DMK government to boast of a major achievement.

In Pappapatti, the Thevars had threatened to get their president, P Periyakaruppan to resign if Udayachandran was transferred. Periyakaruppan had declared yesterday that he was ready to even commit self-immolation if Karunanodhi did not heed to their demand to retain Udayachandran in Madurai.

Today, however, Karthikeyan along with Udayachandran had a 30-minute meeting with the panchayat presidents, vice-presidents and ward members and assured them that all promised projects for the village within the panchayats would be no going back on the government’s promise. “We have to go by what the new Collector says. We will wait and see,” said Moona Baluchamy, president of the Keeripatti panchayat.

UN body seeks to empower more rural women in India

Kumkum Chandha

Hindustan Times,
February 24, 2007

The visit of the president of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD),

Lennart Bage, to India next month will coincide with the launch of the second phase of the tribal development project in Orissa. The IFAD has completed its initial three-year phase in the state.

The project initiated by IFAD, a UN arm, focuses on building the capacity of the state's poor. Known as Orissa Tribal Empowerment and Livelihood Programme, it is an enabling process for the vulnerable groups, particularly women, to plan and manage their own development.

The project has a ten-year span and it is expected to benefit 338,000 poor people in 75,000 households in rural areas.

Bage is also expected to visit Maharashtra to launch a women's empowerment programme. A rural credit project by IFAD in eight districts of Maharashtra empowered women through improved services of formal financial institutions.

If IFAD's country manager for India, Mattia Prayer Galletti is to be believed, IFAD aims to create unemployment: "our success" he told *Hindustan Times* on the sidelines of the recently held Governing Council session here, "is to create unemployment for money lenders and middlemen. If we can make these people jobless then we can say we are successful".

With the success of the Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project, IFAD will now plunge headlong into empowering women, Galletti said. In 35 districts of Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, It has, through self-help

groups, improved women's access to and control over resources. Following the development of income generating activities and access to financial services, the project will spearhead access to health care, education and other services.

"Development", explained Galletti, "is not only income generation but a platform for social and private issues. Our job is to create opportunities and ensure that there are enabling conditions for them. We create the space to ensure that issues like health, sanitation and literacy get adequate response".

According to Galletti, IFAD will no longer design programmes in isolation but work in partnership with the actors involved." In the past we made the mistake of positioning ourselves as a one-stop shop for solving problems. But we soon realized that in countries like India, programmes supported by the government already exist. The issue is one of access and information. The communities do not even know what these programmes are all about. We now want to work as a link between the government and the community – an information source in telling the people about the existing programmes and, of course, impart training".

Conceding that corruption is an inhabiting factor, particularly in the Indian context, Galletti said IFAD is in the process of influencing state governments to set up working groups to remove bottlenecks: "Technical, functional and all else" he said, adding, "Instead of confronting governments, we want them to influence them, to identify, share and compare ideas and, in the end,

if we are able to help them then it is a win-win situation”.

Confronted with the problem of naxalities and Maoists insurgents in India and Nepal respectively, Galletti said that in Orissa and Chattisgarh there was “an interesting overlap” between IFAD programmes and naxalite areas. Calling it a matter of institutional pride to be present where others are not, Galletti said that in Nepal, Maoists screened IFAD programme before giving the green signal. In India, the IFAD project staff is often summoned by naxalities to find out how the project is doing. This kind of scrutiny, in Galletti’s view, is a “good service”.

Kalam for focus on rural areas

Staesman News Service

The Statesman
16 February 2007

With 17 per cent of India's population living in rural areas, the President today called for a synchronized development of urban and rural regions of the country. Speaking at the opening of the Vibrant Gujrat, Urban Summit today, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam said: "Redevelop urban areas and also develop the cluster of villages in surrounding areas." The President laid great emphasis on employment generation in these village clusters. He also said that rural culture should be nurtured. Dr. Kalam spoke of "green building" which ensure saving of 30-40 per cent of energy and use of solar power in villages and new architecture. "Use municipal waste to generate power" was his advice. He suggested water harvesting in every home and desalinization in view of Gujarat's long coastline.

The Gujrat chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, demanded that the cities of Gandhinagar, Karamsad and Porbender be also brought under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission. At present, only Ahmedebad, Surat, Rajkot and Vadodara are covered under this scheme. Mr. Modi added that Gujrat will be taking up development of 168 cities during the Nirmal Gujarat Year.

Dr. Manmohan Singh had with Dr. Kalam last evening, and the formal approval was given at the Cabinet meeting chaired by him this morning adds SNS from New Delhi.

Cabinet approves President Address

The Union Cabinet today cleared the text of the president, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's address to a joint sitting of parliament on the opening day of the Budget session on 23 February. The address was given final touches at a meeting the Minister