

Centre rewards 8 States

Bonus funds for executing rural water supply schemes

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Centre has rewarded eight States for performing well in executing rural drinking water schemes during 2011-12.

Union Minister of Rural Development Jairam Ramesh has decided to provide bonus funds to Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura, Assam, Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu for successfully expending 60 per cent of their

annual allocation under the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) by December 2011.

The decision was taken to avoid lapse of funds in view of poor utilisation by other States — that too when the focus was on solving the problem of inadequate drinking water supply or improving water quality.

A sum of Rs. 502.54 crore was released to the eight States as additional funds

over and above their annual allocation.

Mr. Ramesh personally wrote to the Chief Ministers informing them of his decision and appreciating their endeavour.

No bias: Ramesh

Mr. Ramesh denied any bias in the additional allocation saying the beneficiaries were not only Congress-ruled States. Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Tripura and Punjab have

non-Congress governments, whereas the Congress is in power in Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Haryana.

Assam and Gujarat have been given the highest bonus of Rs. 100 crore each, followed by Tamil Nadu with Rs. 98.20 crore, Arunachal Pradesh (61.01 crore), Punjab (46.82 crore), Haryana (Rs. 35 crore), Meghalaya (Rs. 31.50 crore) and Tripura (Rs. 30.01 crore).

Mamata intervenes to provide land to industry on easier conditions

Indronil Roychowdhury

Kolkata, Apr 2: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has finally intervened to provide land to industry on easier conditions. The government has removed the ceiling of a maximum 24 acre that an industrial unit could buy in the state directly.

The West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill 2012 introduced in the state legislature on Monday rectified the inconsistency, which the government itself created by adopting the policy of "no government acquisition."

Under the new law, while the government will still not acquire land for industry, it would also not bar companies from directly purchasing land upto whatever size needed. However this will apply prospectively.

The government position till now was that any holding beyond 24 acre would have to be first vested with the state, which, in turn, would lease out the additional holding to the industrial developer.

But the industry raised questions as to why should the government lease out land if it did not acquire. Fur-

ther, how far was it a prerogative of the government to vest or own a land, which was directly purchased by an investor. The amendment Bill moved and passed in the assembly by a majority vote on Monday cleared such contradictory provisions through removal of ceiling on industrial land holding.

The Bill says: "If the state government, after having regard to all circumstances of case and on the basis of project report filed by any person, is satisfied that such person is required land for the purpose of establishing a mill, factory or workshop, livestock breeding farm, poultry farm, dairy, industrial park or industrial hub or industrial estate, financial hub, warehousing, tea garden, agro- industry, power plant or power transmission or distribution substation, film city, tourism project, educational and medical institutions, bio-tech park, food park, port, airport, shipyard including ship building and ship breaking, oil and gas products, transportation, information and communication technology (ICT), ICT industries, mining and allied

industries and for the purpose of future expansion" of all the above mentioned projects "such person may, with the previous permission in writing, of the state government and on such terms and



Mamata Banerjee,
West Bengal chief minister

conditions and in such manner as the state government may, by rules prescribe, acquire and hold land in excess of the ceiling area applicable under section 14 M."

While the bill has not mentioned any upper limit of holding, it has allowed the owner of the land "to lease out the whole or any part of it with previous permission of the appropriate department of the state government."

This provision of the bill would allow a developer of any industrial park to lease out land to an entrepreneur willing to set up an industry within the park. The earlier provisions of the Act restricted such moves.

The bill has also allowed owner of the land, except tea garden owners, to sell land "by way of open auction."

However, the bill has mentioned that a holder of excess land would be given three years time to set up his project; otherwise the state would take away his land.

Although chief minister Mamata Banerjee, also the state land and land reforms minister, was supposed to move the bill in the assembly, she did not attend the assembly sessions on Monday. State commerce, industry and IT minister Partha Chatterjee instead moved the bill.

Chatterjee told the legislature, the present government would do legally what the former Left Front government was trying to do illegally. The earlier Left Front government by passing the provisions of the Act transferred land to investors and allowed them ex-

cess holding violating various sections of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955. But the present government has done away with such discrepancies.

The opposition bench said, the bill without any mention of upper limit of holding has made an attempt to bring back zamindari system in the state and has stood against the objective of land reforms carried out by the earlier Left Front government. The bill has also allowed indiscriminate land conversion.

Chatterjee said the committee of ministers headed by Mamata Banerjee would decide on the upper limit of land on case to case basis. Leasing out by private owners would be permitted only for specific purposes.

"We will by no means allow forcible acquisition," Chatterjee told the assembly.

Opposition leader Surya Kanta Misra moved a motion to refer the Bill to the select committee on the plea that a similar Bill initiated by the Left Front was referred to the select committee and, then, went to the back burner. But his motion was defeated.

हर विस क्षेत्र को 30 लाख का अनुदान

सूखा राहत

बेंगलूरु. राज्य के ग्रामीण विकास व पंचायत राज मंत्री जगदीश शेट्टर ने सूखे के स्थिति से निपटने के लिए हर एक विधानसभा क्षेत्र को 30 लाख रुपए का अनुदान देने की घोषणा की है। रविवार को टुमकूर के सिद्धगंगा मठ में मठाधीश डॉ. शिवकुमार स्वामी के 105 वें जन्म दिन के उपलक्ष्य में आयोजित कार्यक्रम में भाग लेने के बाद शेट्टर ने संवादादाताओं से बातचीत में कहा कि सूखे के हालात से निपटने के लिए सरकार ने हरसंभव कदम उठाए हैं। अधिकारियों को सूखा पीड़ित इलाकों में जाकर स्थिति का जायजा लेकर सरकार को रिपोर्ट पेश करने के निर्देश दिए गए हैं। उन्होंने कहा कि प्रत्येक विधानसभा क्षेत्र में पेयजल की समस्या का निवारण करने, पशुओं के लिए चारा उपलब्ध कराने सहित अन्य राहत कार्यों के लिए 30 लाख रुपए जारी करने का निर्णय किया गया है। उन्होंने कहा कि धन तुरंत जारी कर दिया जाएगा।

उन्होंने कहा कि कई सूखा पीड़ित इलाकों में भूजल स्तर नीचे चले जाने की वजह से वहां का पानी पीने योग्य नहीं रह गया है। इस पानी में फ्लोराइड की मात्रा अत्यधिक बढ़ गई है। इस समस्या को दूर करने के लिए राज्य के 12 जिलों में कुल 280 डी फ्लोराइड इकाइयों की स्थापना की जाएगी जिनमें से अकेले टुमकूर जिले में 26 इकाइयां लगाई जाएगी। उन्होंने कहा कि पेयजल की समस्या के स्थाई समाधान के लिए सरकार ने बहुउद्देश्यीय योजना तैयार की है। मुख्यमंत्री सदानंद गौड़ा ने बजट में सिंचाई व पेयजल के लिए 10 हजार करोड़ रुपए से अधिक धनराशि का प्रावधान किया है। उन्होंने कहा कि महानरोग के तहत दी जा रही दैनिक मजदूरी को 125 रुपए से बढ़ाकर 155 रुपए कर दिया गया है। कुछ लोगों ने मजदूरी और अधिक बढ़ाने की मांग को लेकर सुप्रीम कोर्ट में अपील की है पर न्यायालय से स्पष्ट आदेश नहीं मिलने के कारण फिलहाल 155 रुपए की दर से ही मजदूरी का भुगतान किया जाएगा। (का.सं.)

Sending wrong signals: Posco

The on-now, off-now Posco steel plant in Orissa is off once again, thanks to the latest firman from the National Green Tribunal. The proposed \$12 billion investment in one of the poorest States in the country has undergone severe scrutiny at various levels in the last six years. Yet, the Government has found it hard to take a final decision either way. If the South Korean company has not got fed up and abandoned the plan, it speaks more of its long-term business strategy rather than any belief in the ability of the Indian Government to set its own priorities right. Only last year the Environment Ministry under Jairam Ramesh had given the final clearance to Posco. Now, the Green bench has put a spoke in the prestigious project which, once set up, could go a long way in changing the economic landscape in Orissa. The tribunal has put the ball back in the court of the Environment Ministry. It is ironical that around the time the Green tribunal was nixing the project, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was reassuring his South Korean counterpart that India was keen to "move forward" with



the project. Posco proposes to set up the plant in eastern Orissa and requires more than 4,000 acres of land. Two-thirds of the land chosen for the plant is covered by forests. There was an agitation against the Posco plant reportedly by tribal people who could be replaced by the development, though some had suspected the hand of business rivals behind the protests. It is significant that the State Government led by the dynamic Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has welcomed what will be the single largest foreign direct investment in the country. Patnaik rightly reckons that the 12-million tonne per annum plant would go some way to alleviate the endemic poverty of the people in his State. For, not only the steel plant proper but the related industrialization in its wake would help change the landscape in that part of the State.

Significantly, on the day newspapers reported the rejection of the Posco proposal by the Green tribunal, it was also reported that the third quarter current account deficit of the balance of payments had risen to \$ 12.8 billion. Balance of payments reflects the actual trade in goods and services and invisibles both ways. India's was in the negative zone by a record 4.3 percent of its GDP in the quarter ending December last year. It was clear that capital flows were unable to match the growing outflow of forex on imports of various kinds. Given the worsening environment for business and trade, it is unlikely that things would improve substantially in the coming quarters, though FIIs had stepped up investment in the equity markets in the recent weeks. Contrary to the smug belief that we have abundant forex reserves, it is pertinent to note that the Government seems to have gone out of the way to send wrong signals to global investors. The retrospective amendments in the IT laws in the budget, the Posco rejection by the Green tribunal, the oft-repeated threat to stop the flow of funds in the share markets through the P-Notes, the lack of infrastructure, especially in power and communications, et al, all dissuade potential investors to skip India as a destination for their billions. Business environment in the country has suffered due to the policy paralysis in New Delhi and the venality of central and State politicians and bureaucrats. In other words, the travails of Posco should not be seen in isolation. A whole pattern has emerged which goes to show that the UPA Government has lost the plot. A government constantly engaged in fighting its own internal crises cannot be expected to create a conducive atmosphere for attracting foreign direct investment in industry and commerce. Or to help the economy to realize its full growth potential. The growing mess on the political front is reflected fully in the economic sector as well.