

Jairam announces national award for sanitation

Staff Reporter

PUNE: Union Minister for Rural Development, Drinking Water and Sanitation Jairam Ramesh announced a national award for sanitation and water in the name of Maharashtra saint Sant Gadge Baba.

The Minister toured several villages in Satara district in Maharashtra to inspect the work of the Nirmal Gram Yojana for sanitation on Sunday.

The award, constituted in the name of the Saint who strove towards service to society through cleanliness, will be for villages, individuals or organisations working in the field of sanitation and drinking water, he has stated. Maharashtra's Sant Gadge Baba Swachta Abhiyan (cleanliness scheme) encourages villages to be open defecation-free, and such villages are awarded through the Nirmal Gram Yojana.

Pat for Maharashtra

Appreciating Maharashtra's efforts towards becoming open defecation-free, Mr. Ramesh said: "Out of the 25 lakh villages in India, 25,000 are open defecation-free, and out of these, 9000 villages are in Maharashtra alone." Maharashtra has 27,900 villages.

Mr. Ramesh is on a two-day visit to the State. On Saturday, on his visit to Hiwre Bazaar in Ahmednagar district, Mr. Ramesh said that in the coming budget there would



CLEANLINESS CAMPAIGN: Union Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh on a visit to a village in Maharashtra's Satara district on Sunday.

- PHOTO: PTI

• **Tours villages in Satara district as part of Nirmal Gram Yojana**

• **In Maharashtra, over 9,000 villages are open defecation-free**

be a 40 per cent increase in the outlay for sanitation and drinking water supply. "Sanitation projects have not got the importance they deserve. My aim is to bring that into the focus of rural develop-

ment," he said.

Dignity of women

Stating that toilets were integral to the dignity of women in our country, Mr. Ramesh announced that the women

from Hiwre Bazaar would be taken to different parts of the country, as "Nirmal Gram Dhoot" (sanitation ambassadors). "We will take them to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Assam and they can tell other women about the importance of using toilets."

Mr. Ramesh said the women should claim their right to use a toilet in every house. He urged the State to follow the practice in Haryana, where villages have declared, "no toilets, no bride."