

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
PANCHAYATI RAJ  
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:375  
ANSWERED ON:26.07.2006  
STRENGTHENING OF PRIS  
Jindal Shri Naveen

**Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:**

- (a) whether periodic assessment is made by the Government to ascertain the effectiveness of Panchayati Raj Institutions(PRIs);
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether the Government proposes to further strengthen the PRIs;
- (d) if so, the steps being taken in this regard;
- (e) whether the Government proposes to involve women and youth to generate greater awareness about the role of PRIs; and
- (f) if so, the details thereof?

**Answer**

MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ ( SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR )

(a) & (b) The Constitution provides that it is the legislatures of States that will endow the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) with powers and authority. In accordance with the same, States have devolved powers and responsibilities to the Panchayats in varying measure. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj is continually interacting with the State Governments to ascertain the effectiveness of PRIs.

2. To provide an impetus to the implementation of Part IX of the Constitution in letter and spirit by States, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj convened seven Round Tables of State Ministers in charge of Panchayati Raj between July and December, 2004 and evolved, by consensus, a set of around 150 points for action, which have been put together in a compendium that was adopted unanimously at the conclusion of the last Round Table in Jaipur. The joint programme of action seeks to ensure that on the basis of Activity Mapping, funds, functions and functionaries are devolved to all 3 levels of PRIs to enable them to emerge as institutions of self-government.

3. A Council of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj under the Chairmanship of the Union Minister for Panchayati Raj has been constituted to review the implementation of the recommendations. The first meeting of the Council was held on 5th - 6th August, 2005 at Kochi, Kerala and the second meeting was held at Bhubaneswar on 15th -16th June, 2006. A Committee of Chief Secretaries of States and State Panchayati Raj Secretaries has also been constituted under the Chairmanship of the Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj to monitor the progress on the implementation of the 150 recommendations of the Seven Round Tables and the decisions of the Council of States Ministers of Panchayati Raj. Six review meetings of the Committee have so far been held in April, 2005, June, 2005, September, 2005, November 2005, April, 2006 and June, 2006.

4. With a view to interacting with Panchayats and carrying out a review with the authorities concerned of the progress in implementing the points for action mutually agreed upon in the Round Tables, a process of visiting the States and UTs at the level of Union Minister of Panchayati Raj has also been initiated. The Minister has so far visited fourteen States and two UTs, namely, Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttaranchal, Haryana, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala Chandigarh and Lakshadweep. Each visit is concluded with a Statement of Conclusions jointly signed with the Chief Minister of the State concerned, highlighting the key points of action on which the State would move to operationalise the recommendations of the Round Tables. In the case of Kerala, the Statement has been initialled by the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj and the Minister for Local Self Government, Kerala. It is expected that the Chief Minister will sign the approved version of the Joint Statement on his next visit to Delhi, as was the case with Chief Minister of Sikkim.

5. An exercise is also underway to review different statutes with a view to harmonise them with the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution. Similarly, the guidelines of Centrally Sponsored Schemes are being reviewed to ensure the centrality of Panchayats in planning and implementation. As regards new Centrally Sponsored Schemes, wherever relevant, it is proposed to provide for a central role for Panchayats. Thus, for example, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides for the Panchayats to be the 'principal authorities' for the planning and implementation of schemes under the Act. Steps are also being taken to fill in critical gaps in infrastructure and capacity so that Panchayats can effectively fulfill their constitutional role.

(c) &(d) Yes. The Government proposes to further strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions through a series of measures some of which are as follows: Constitution of a Group of Ministers

The Government has constituted a Group of Ministers headed by the Minister of Human Resource Development Shri Arjun Singh to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The terms of reference of the GOM included, inter-alia, rationalization of CSS Policy in accordance with the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. The GoM had met on 24th August, 2005 and as per its directions, 22 key Central Ministries are carrying out an Activity Mapping exercise delineating what is to be done at the Central, State and Panchayat levels in respect of functional areas of the Ministries and the Centrally Sponsored Schemes being handled by them.

#### Empowered Sub-Committee on Financial and Administrative Empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions

An Empowered Sub-Committee on Financial and Administrative Empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions under the Chairmanship of Minister for Rural Development was set up in March 2003 by the Planning Commission, in pursuance of a decision taken in the National Development Council. The members of the Committee are Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Minister of Finance and Company Affairs, Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment, Minister of Tribal Affairs and Chief Ministers of Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan. The Terms of Reference of the Sub-Committee include, inter alia, working out the modalities for strengthening the financial domain of the PRIs through transfer of resources from the Centre and State Governments; assessing the capacity of the PRIs to raise revenues and other resources and to develop an action plan in this regard; analyzing the capability of PRIs at different levels to absorb the financial allocation made to the PRIs under different schemes; and to develop a framework to ensure fiscal discipline and financial accountability at different levels of PRIs. The Empowered Sub-Committee held two meetings before it was reconstituted on 14th September 2005, with the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj as the Chairperson and the Union Minister of Rural Development added as a member of the Sub-Committee. The reconstituted Committee held its first meeting on 12.6.2006.

#### Planning at the Grassroots level

The Government had appointed an Expert Group under the chairmanship of Shri V. Ramachandran to recommend concrete steps for making planning at grass roots level a reality, since planning for economic development and social justice is a mandated function of Panchayats and other local governments in the Constitution. The Group has submitted its report. It has suggested a practicable action programme for local level planning in the Eleventh Plan which is to start in April 2007. It has also suggested in detail the manner in which national programmes of importance in education, health, employment, poverty alleviation, housing and rural infrastructure could achieve their objectives better if centrality is given to Panchayats in working out details and in implementation. Based on the recommendations of the Expert Group, the Planning Commission has sent out guidelines to all State Governments/UT Administrations, for preparation of District Plans and their incorporation into the Annual Plans of States for 2006-07. The ultimate objective is to make integrated local level planning for area development a reality by the end of the 11th Five Year Plan.

#### Electronic tagging and transfer of funds to Panchayats

One of the goals set by the Government in the NCMP was to ensure that the funds going to the Panchayats are neither delayed nor diverted. In pursuance of this goal, a Committee in the Ministry of Panchayati Raj went into this issue in detail and submitted its report in May, 2005. Recommendations of this Committee are being put in to operation for transfer of 12th Finance Commission grants to PRIs from Consolidated Fund of the States to the Panchayats at the three levels.

#### Empowerment of Gram Sabhas

Schedule XI of the Constitution provides for the devolution of powers to Gram Panchayats and Panchayati Raj Institutions with regard to subjects that have a bearing on economic development and social justice in rural areas. A joint programme of action was chalked at the seven Round Tables held during July to December, 2004 between the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj and State Ministers of Panchayati Raj to ensure that on the basis of Activity Mapping, Panchayats at various levels are devolved with funds, functions and functionaries to enable them to emerge as institutions of self-government. Efforts are also being made to institutionalize social audit measures through Gram Sabhas so that Gram Panchayats are made responsible to the Village Community as a whole.

#### Implementation of the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA)

On the basis of the recommendations of a Committee of Experts known as the Bhuria Committee, the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) was passed and came into effect on 24th December, 1996. This law extends Panchayati Raj to Fifth Schedule areas only. The law applies to the following nine States which have Fifth Schedule Areas viz., Andhra Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan.

The matter was discussed in the Third Round Table of Panchayati Raj Ministers in September, 2004 where State Ministers agreed to enforce the provisions of PESA and also to undertake wider consultations with other Govt. departments so as to harmonize the provisions of laws concerned with the aims and objectives of PESA. Progress in this regard is being continually reviewed. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has also entrusted to Indian Law Institute, the formulation of appropriate amendments in the State laws concerned with a view to assist the State Govts. to carry out a similar exercise. The first report has been received from the Indian Law Institute and has been circulated to the State Govt. concerned for comments. Action is also being taken to harmonise the relevant Central legislations, policies and schemes with the provisions of PESA. All the major central legislations are being examined with the help of Ministry of Law and Justice to identify their conflicting provisions with PESA and to introduce desired changes therein. Some of the important legislations being examined are the following;

- i) The Land Acquisition Act, 1894
- ii) Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957
- iii) The Indian Forest Act, 1927
- iv) The Forest Conservation Act, 1980

v) The Indian Registration Act.

Central Policies and CSSs/Central Schemes pertaining to wastelands, water resources and extraction of minerals from lands in Schedule V Areas are also the focus of the harmonization exercise at the Central level. The National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation of Project Affected Persons, 2003, National Water Policy, 2002, National Minerals Policy, 2003, National Forest Policy, 1988, Wild Life Conservation Strategy 2002 and National Draft Environment Policy, 2004 are also being examined. A National level meet of Secretaries of Panchayati Raj and Tribal Affairs of all PESA States was convened by the Ministry on 14th July, 2006 at New Delhi to give a further push to the process of implementation of the provisions of PESA in letter and spirit.

(e) & (f) Yes, the Ministry is taking steps to actively involve Women and Youth to generate awareness about the role of PRIs. Towards this end, a Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan and Panchayat Yuva Shakti Abhiyan have been launched by the Ministry early this year.

Though in many States women representatives have succeeded in getting elected to more than one third of the seats/offices in PRIs, they are not organized or united to raise their voice and articulate the concerns of their constituency. They need to take stock of their challenges, experiences and achievements so that their problems get redressed. For carrying forward this initiative, State-wise Sammelans, named Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan are proposed to be conducted in different parts of the country. Two such Abhiyaans have been conducted at Udaipur in Rajasthan on 23rd-24th April, 2006 and Patiala in Punjab on 17th-18th July. These Sammelans were preceded by the constitution of a core group and preparation of a demand charter. This demand charter was then debated, discussed, amended and finally adopted in the sammelans.

On a similar pattern, Panchayat Yuva Shakti Abhiyan is also being implemented. The Abhiyan was launched on 19-20 June in Faridabad, Haryana. It is proposed to extend the Abhiyan to 8 other States by December 2006. A full 47% of the country's population comprise the youth, in the age group of 13-35 yrs. There are 2.5 lakhs Youth Clubs under the Nehru Yuvak Kendra with 8 million members. More than 50% of the elected representatives of the PRIs are in the age group of 18-35. Through a step by step process and after the core committee meetings, a draft charter of concerns has been formulated for ratification amongst a wider constituency. The possibility of joint working has been identified by the core committee of interested stakeholders, youth activists and community leaders.