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Source : www.pib.gov.in Date : 2021-03-03

MOHUA LAUNCHES FIELD ASSESSMENT OF SWACHH SURVEKSHAN 2021

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Important Schemes & Programmes of the Government

Shri Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Housing Affairs (MoHUA) launched the field assessment of Swachh Survekshan (SS) 2021, the sixth edition of the annual cleanliness survey conducted by the Government of India, at a web event in New Delhi today. SS was introduced by MoHUA in 2016 as a competitive framework to encourage cities to improve the status of urban sanitation while encouraging large scale citizen participation.

Speaking at the webinar, Shri Mishra said, “SS has led to a spirit of healthy competition among cities and towns of India. The journey that started in 2016 with only 73 cities with million plus population has grown manifold, with 434 cities in 2017, 4,203 cities in 2018, 4,237 cities in 2019 and 4,242 cities in SS 2020, including 62 Cantonment Boards. Cities have been regularly filling in their data, updating their progress in the MIS along with running several citizen centric campaigns in preparation of SS 2021. Today, we are happy to formally kick off the survey as more than 2,000 assessors get ready to go on the field to assess the performance of cities”.

Every year, the on-field assessments for SS takes place between January 4-31. However, the same had been delayed by two months due to the COVID pandemic and will now be conducted between 1-28 March 2021. The Swachh Survekshan framework is redesigned innovatively every year, to ensure that the process becomes more robust. Keeping in mind the Ministry’s efforts towards ensuring sustainability of the sanitation value chain, the SS 2021 indicators focus on parameters pertaining to wastewater treatment and reuse along with faecal sludge. Similarly, the crucial issues of legacy waste management and remediation of landfills have also been brought to the fore in this edition of Survekshan.

Shri Mishra also touched upon how SS has become a tool for citizen engagement in the spirit of a true ‘Jan Andolan’. Elaborating on the same, Shri Mishra said, “I am happy to share that the SS 2021 has already garnered over 3 crore citizen feedback through a variety of platforms such as the Vote for Your City App, Swachhata App and Swachh Survekshan portal, amongst others”. The Ministry further announced that apart from ranking cities and States, this year, SS would also be ranking districts (basis the performance of their cities).

Since its launch in 2014, Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) has made significant progress in the area of both sanitation and solid waste management. 4360 Urban ULBs have been declared ODF, 2158 cities certified ODF+ and 551 cities certified ODF++. Moreover, 66 lakhs individual household toilets and over 6 lakhs community/ public toilets have been constructed/ or are under construction. Additionally, nearly 60,000 toilets across 2900+ cities have been made live on Google Maps. In the area of solid waste management, 97% of wards have 100% door-to door collection while 68% of the total waste generated is being processed. A total of six cities have been certified as 5 Star, 86 as 3 star and 65 as 1 star under the Star Rating Protocol for Garbage Free Cities.

The second phase of SBM-U for a period of 5 years (2021-26) has recently been announced in the union budget of 2021. The next phase of the Mission will focus extensively on aspects of sustainable sanitation including faecal sludge and wastewater management, along with holistic solid waste management with a focus on curbing and ultimately eliminating the use of single-use plastic (SUP), reducing air pollution through effective management of construction & demolition waste, and reducing soil pollution through remediation of legacy dumpsites.

For regular updates, please follow:

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Source : www.thehindu.com Date : 2021-03-21

THE EMERGING CRISIS OF OBTAINING HELIUM IN INDIA

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Distribution of Key Natural Resources - Minerals & Oil Resources of the World

Rich source: Of the natural gas emanating from the boiling water in a tank in Bakreswar, 1.8% was helium. | Photo Credit: scanrail

Helium is colourless, odourless, tasteless, inert and a noble gas. Yet, it finds many applications, mainly in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, in rockets and in nuclear reactors. India imports helium for its needs, and with the U.S. appearing set to cut off exports of helium since 2021, Indian industry stands to lose out heavily. What is the solution? Can India become self-reliant towards its needs of helium gas?

In 1906 a young Englishman by the name of Moris Travers arrived in Bangalore, to take up the position of the Director of Indian Institute of Science. Travers extracted helium in small quantity by heating up monazite sand abundantly available in Kerala beach, in a pioneering effort.

Dutch physicist Kamerlingh Onnes liquefied Helium by cooling the gas to -270 degrees Celsius. It is known that Kamerlingh Onnes collected helium gas from the springs of Bath in Baden Baden, Germany for his liquefaction experiment.

Some scientists and geologists started looking for helium underground – they guessed it may be present there by analysing debris from volcanic eruptions. From the oil drilling operation in Dexter, Kansas, in the U.S., chemists Hamilton Cady and David McFarland discovered the presence of helium in natural gas. They further went on to discover that despite its overall rarity, helium was concentrated in large quantities under the American Great Plains.

The U.S. became the most important exporter of helium across the world. It was soon realised that U.S. was also the biggest store house of helium.

The U.S., now, is planning to switch off export of helium from 2021. Qatar is a possible exporter but acute political and diplomatic wrangles have made Qatar unreliable.

Every year, India imports helium worth Rs 55,000 crores from the U.S. to meet its needs.

Around 1956, as vice chancellor of Viswabharati University, Professor Satyendranath Bose once visited a village called Bakreswar (near Santiniketan) where he found water boiling naturally in a small tank. Satyen Bose’s antenna for unexplored and exciting science perked up! He was keen to analyse the natural gas that came out of the tank.

Satyen Bose asked his student Shyamadas Chatterjee to look into this. What Shyamadas Chatterjee found out was stunning: 1.8% of the natural gas emanating from the boiling water was helium. After further experiments, this result was established.

Shyamadas Chatterjee’s hunch was that the area called Rajmahal volcanic basin around Bakreswar and nearby Tantloi, now in Jharkhand, were floating on an ocean of helium.

He and his student Debasis Ghose started exploring Tantloi, which is populated by tribal people. The village is situated next to a stream, with naturally hot water with natural gas emanating from it. Preliminary investigations of the stream indicated there was around 1.6% of helium in the

emanating gas, a little less than that in Bakreswar. This was around (1965-66). Professor Bose was in raptures.

Homi Sethna, then the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission arranged for the project to be part of the newly started Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC) project of Kolkata.

When I came over to Kolkata around 1984 to VECC from BARC, Bombay the helium project did not show much activity. The adventure of it all attracted me. I persuaded Dr. Divatia then the director of VECC to take a trip to Bakreswar along with Professor Chatterjee and Dr. Ghose.

In the evening Debasis Ghose produced a letter written by Prof. S. N. Bose to Nurul Hasan, Minister for Education on January 22, 1974, where Prof. Bose had, with his legendary foresight, argued with the minister for the production of helium on a semi-commercial scale. Prof. Bose unfortunately died on February 4, the same year. It should be mentioned that Bhabha Atomic Research Centre under the leadership of R. K. Garg, head of the Chemical and Engineering Division, in the 1970s made an effort to extract helium from monazite sand just as Travers did some years ago. Unfortunately, this project was doomed, and BARC did not push it any further.

When we took over the project in late 1980s we got very busy with other research and development projects. We all thought collection of helium on a large scale is a semi-commercial operation and nothing very much to do with research or development. Besides which, we just did not have the adequate man power.

So, this vast reservoir of helium in the Rajmahal volcanic belt remained untapped.

Extracting helium on a large scale did not seem to be of great importance to our scientific fraternity. After I stepped down from my official job in 2009, the possibility of helium extraction looked even more bleak. Then, I found a very understanding and enthusiastic person in the present chairman of Atomic Energy Commission, Dr. K. N. Vyas, who readily agreed to give the project a push with all the might of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE).

Work has started in right earnest in collaboration with Atomic Mineral Division of DAE. Preliminary measurements and survey have already started.

Our target is to at least meet India’s requirement of helium. India consumes about 70 million cubic metres per year. But the reserve of helium by far exceeds this.

So, this effort although somewhat late is not too late yet!

India’s Rajmahal volcanic basin is the store house of helium trapped for billions years, since the very birth of our Earth from the Sun. At present, we are mapping the Rajmahal basin extensively for future exploration and harnessing of helium.

In conclusion, helium is not just for ballons but it is the key ingredient for India’s high technology and the most sophisticated medical diagnosis.

(Dr Bikash Sinha is an INSA senior scientist and former director of Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics and Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre, Kolkata)

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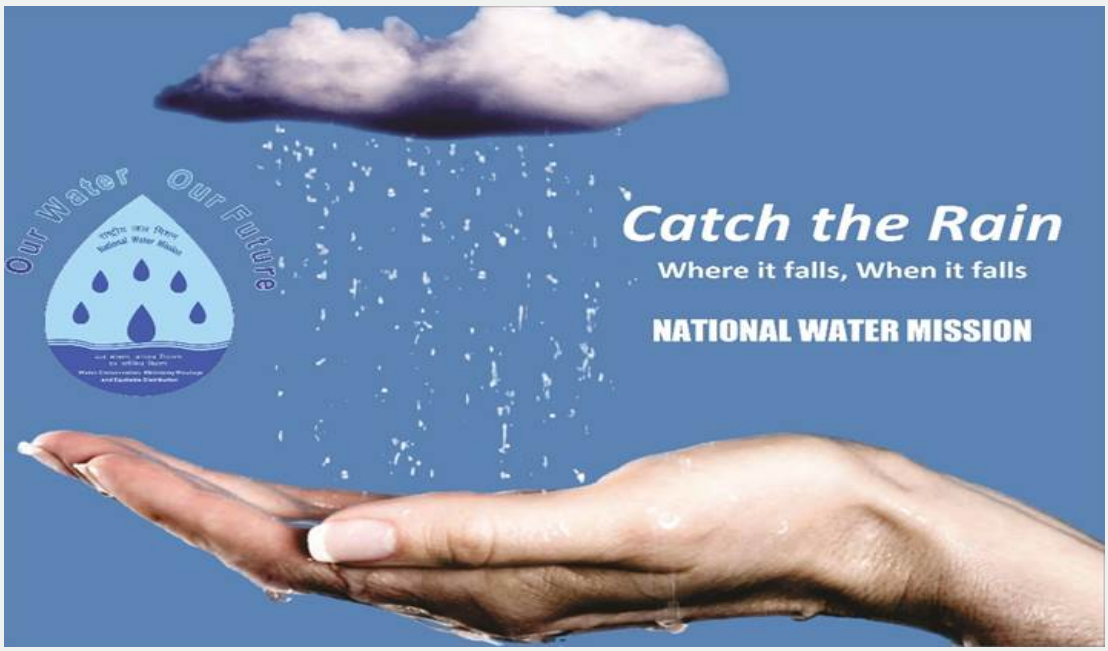
Source : www.pib.gov.in Date : 2021-03-22

PRIME MINISTER SHRI NARENDRA MODI TO LAUNCH “JAL SHAKTI ABHIYAN: CATCH THE RAIN” CAMPAIGN ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD WATER DAY ON 22ND MARCH 2021

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Distribution of key natural resources - Water Resources incl. Rivers & related issues in world & India

[Curtain Raiser]

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will launch the “Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA): Catch the Rain (CTR)” campaign on 22nd March 2021 on occasion of World Water Day. The Prime Minister will also address Central & State Government officers of Departments/ Ministries concerned, District Magistrates/ District Collectors/ Deputy Commissioners of districts and Sarpanchs of all Gram Panchayats through video conferencing/Virtual Platform.



“Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain” will be taken up in all districts, rural as well as urban areas, of the country with the main theme “Catch the Rain, where it falls, when it falls”. The campaign will be implemented during the period 22nd March, 2021 to 30th November, 2021 - the pre-monsoon and monsoon period in the country. The campaign is being launched as a Jan Andolan to take water conservation at grass-root level through people’s participation to accelerate water conservation across the country. The campaign is intended to *nudge* the State and all stakeholders to create Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RWHS) suitable to the climatic conditions and sub-soil strata to ensure storage of rainwater, as rains falling in the four/five months of monsoon are the only source of water for most parts of the country.

Gram Sabhas will be held in all Gram Panchayats of each district (except in the poll bound States) to discuss issues related to water conservation after the address by the Hon'ble PM. These Gram Sabhas will also take "Jal Shapath" or Oath for water conservation.

Signing of MoA to implement the Ken Betwa Link Project

In the presence of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the Union Minister of Jal Shakti and the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh will sign a historic agreement on 22nd March 2021 to implement the **Ken Betwa Link Project (KBLP)**, the first project of the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers, through video conferencing/ virtual platform. This agreement will herald the beginning of inter-state cooperation to implement the vision of Sh. Atal Bihari Vajpayee to carry water from areas that have surplus water to drought prone and water deficit areas through the interlinking of rivers.

The rainfall pattern in India is highly skewed with most of the rainfall happening in about 100 days in a year. Also, due to geographical variations, India has some of the driest and wettest places in the world. Keeping this in view, the National Perspective Plan was prepared by the then Ministry of Irrigation to transfer water from water surplus basins to water-deficit basins.

KBLP involves transfer of water from the Ken to the Betwa River through the construction of Daudhan Dam and a canal linking the two rivers, the Lower Orr Project, Kotha Barrage and Bina Complex Multipurpose Project. The project will provide an annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh ha, drinking water supply to about 62 lakhs people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.

The Project will be of immense benefit to the water starved region of Bundelkhand, spread across MP and UP, specifically to the districts of Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of Madhya Pradesh and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi & Lalitpur of Uttar Pradesh.

This agreement will come after long, consistent efforts on consensus building between the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, facilitated by Government of India, and will pave the way for more interlinking of river projects to ensure that scarcity of water does not become an inhibitor for development in the country.

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BY/AS

[Curtain Raiser]

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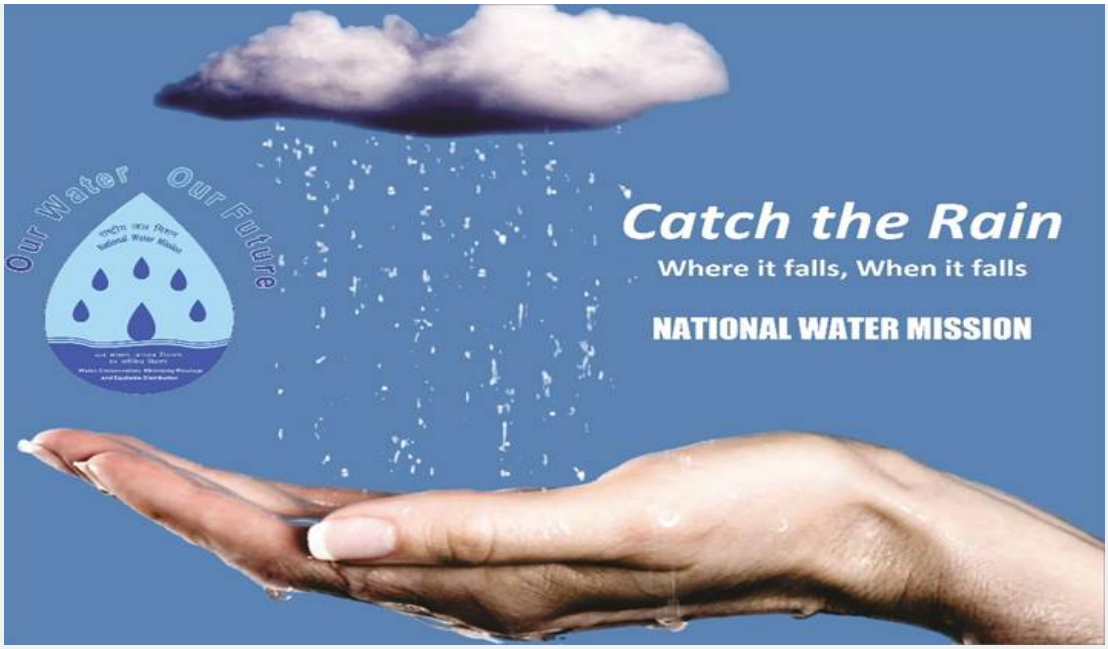

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BY/AS

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Source : www.thehindu.com Date : 2021-03-23

GANDHI PEACE PRIZE FOR MUJIB AND SULTAN QABOOS

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Important Schemes & Programmes of the Government

The Culture Ministry on Monday announced that the father of the nation of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the former Sultan of Oman, the late Qaboos bin Said Al Said, will be awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2020 and 2019, respectively.

The Ministry said the jury, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and comprising the Chief Justice of India, the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and founder of Sulabh International Bindeshwar Pathak, met on March 19 and decided on the awardees for the annual prize.

The Ministry said Rahman was chosen in “recognition of his outstanding contributions towards social, economic and political transformation through non-violent and other Gandhian methods”.

“PM Modi has said Bangabandhu [Rahman] was a champion of human rights and freedom, and is a hero to Indians as well. He also said the legacy and inspiration of Bangabandhu has made the heritage of both countries more comprehensive and deep-rooted, and that the path shown by Bangabandhu has laid a strong foundation for the partnership, progress and prosperity of both countries over the last decade.”

It said the award recognised his unparalleled contribution towards inspiring the liberation of Bangladesh.

Regarding the 2019 prize, the Ministry said, “His Majesty Sultan Qaboos was a visionary leader whose twin policy of moderation and mediation in addressing international issues won him praise and respect across the globe... H.M. Sultan Qaboos was the architect of the special ties between India and Oman. He had studied in India and always maintained a special relationship with India.”

It said the award recognised his leadership in strengthening the ties between India and Oman and his efforts to promote peace in the Gulf region.

The Ministry said the award carries Rs. 1 crore, a citation, a plaque and an item of traditional handicraft or handloom.

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