



Nation > 7

Commuter violence hits
Mumbai train services

World > 11

'Pak's N-arsenal contains
up to 90 warheads'

Avenues > 13

Urological solution

Sport > 15

Sania, Somdev
clear first hurdle



Bihar babu plants his way to *Guinness Book*

Amarnath Tewary ■ Patna

An IAS officer of Bihar cadre on Monday created history of sorts by planting nearly 1 crore saplings in a single day.

The Guinness Book of World Records has registered plantation of 5,41,176 saplings on July 15 this year in Pakistan. Bihar did it 20 times more and edged out Pakistan from the record book.

The man behind the mission is Tirhut Commissioner SM Raju, who hails from Karnataka and is an agriculture graduate.

"I've been nursing a dream to plant 1 crore saplings in a single day for two years. I achieved this goal through active cooperation of village panchayats and mukhias of my division," Raju told *The Pioneer*.

The IAS officer had to engage 3 lakh people from 8,463 panchayats and 7,500 villages of six districts of Tirhut division. "We planted the 96,19,870 saplings under the rural job scheme NREG," said an ebullient Raju.

He said though he had been planning for this day for two years, when he got the news of



SM Raju: Tirhut Commissioner

Pakistan's Environment Ministry getting the *Guinness* certification, he decided to beat their record as soon as possible.

"I discussed my idea with the Bihar Chief Secretary and with the blessings of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, I plunged into this mission and ultimately succeeded," said the IAS officer.

"With groups of four families each planting 200 trees; now they must protect the saplings for three

years, till the plants grow sturdy. During this period, they will be paid 100 days a year," Raju said.

He has charted out a blueprint to protect the planted trees and to provide job to villagers simultaneously through his mission.

"Since Tirhut region in north Bihar is a flood-prone area, mukhias here find themselves unable to provide jobs to poor villagers throughout the year. So I've engaged them into this programme," Raju said.

The workers will get the full pay of about Rs 102 under the rural job scheme if they can ensure the survival of 90 per cent of the plants under their care. For a 75-80 per cent survival rate, they will be paid only half the wage. If the survival rate is less than 75 per cent, the families in the group will be replaced.

This Greenathon mission of the IAS officer has given fresh lease of life to the villagers of north Bihar. "We had never thought we would get employment at this age under this scheme. We're very happy and thanking Raju Saheb", said the villagers of Tirhut.

If the locals are to be believed

the villagers of Tirhut have vowed to protect the trees at any cost and they're taking constant vigil to the planted saplings.

"They seem to feel as if the trees they are protecting belong to them," Raju said.

The non-fruit trees like *neem*, *jamun*, *gulmohar* and *peepal* have been planted along the state and national highways while the fruit-bearing saplings such as the guava, mango, litchi, lemon and *amla* were planted in the villages.

Raju explained that this tree plantation mission was going to serve the society in many ways. It will promote social forestry in flood-affected areas of north Bihar.

A total sum of Rs 700 crore would be spent on this scheme in three years, said Raju, who was also actively associated with the Chief Minister's much-praised Vikas Yatra.

Now, a beaming and confident Raju hopes to get his mission and the name of the State reflected in *The Guinness Book*.

"Yes, I do hope that they would consider my effort and even the whole society would appreciate my move," said Raju.