

CLEAN INDIA CAMPAIGN GAINS MOMENTUM

By FAKIR HASSEN

As the world celebrates Mahatma Gandhi's birthday today (2 October 2017) India has set itself a target for his 150th birthday in 2019 – a clean India, free of the open defecation that is rife, especially in rural areas.

On September 15, 2017, the President of India launched a nationwide sanitation campaign 'Swachhta Hi Seva' at Iswarganj village in Kanpur, sparking renewed frenetic activity across the country to bolster the campaign in the fortnight leading to Gandhi Jayanti.

The President administered the Swachhta Hi Seva Pledge, whereby the Nation resolved to create clean healthy and new India.



Addressing the gathering the President said "India is fighting a decisive battle for cleanliness and hygiene. Cleanliness is not the responsibility of only sanitation personnel and government departments; it multi-stakeholder national movement."

That ideal has gained huge momentum in the wake of the Akshay Kumar-Bhumi Pednekar film 'Toilet', in which the character played by the actress revolts against the rural practice of women having to rise early to go in a group to an area for open defecation.

Mahatma Gandhi had once famously said "sanitation is more important than political freedom."

The latest initiatives extend the Swachh Bharat campaign launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 15, 2014, when he called on the nation to fight filth and open defecation, change old habits and achieve a Swachh Bharat by 2019, to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Modi also said that "women's pride is an important issue in our villages today. The practice of open defecation must be stopped. Toilets must be built and used."

These objectives are generating demand for toilets, leading to their construction and sustained use by all household members, promoting better hygiene behaviour amongst the population and improving cleanliness by initiating solid and liquid waste management projects.

With exponentially increasing funding from government annually in the last three years, under the Swachh Bharat Mission, 48 264 304 toilets were constructed. The number of Open Defecation Free Villages reached 238 966. Individual toilet coverage increased from 42 percent in 2014 to 64 percent in 2017. Five states have declared themselves free of open defecation.

A massive survey covering 92000 households in 4626 villages across the country is being conducted. An additional 200 villages located on the banks of Ganga are being surveyed.



Eminent personalities like Amitabh Bachchan were nominated as Brand Ambassadors for Swachh Bharat Mission and celebrities like Sachin Tendulkar and Akshay Kumar attended champion collector conclaves for motivational purposes.

A host of special initiatives and projects have been developed rapidly. Swachhta Action Plans were developed by 76 union ministries and departments and a

web-based portal was developed to monitor progress and highlight implementation status. Women Swachhagrahis were appointed and Swachh Shakti Awards were instituted to further enhance women involvement with the program.

The Swachh Bharat success stories said that accessible and secure toilets had made a big difference to the lives of village communities, as they did not have to travel distances in the dark to relieve themselves. In addition, the health risks of open defecation were greatly reduced by having a toilet in the house.

In the past week alone, celebrities in the two biggest public support areas in India after religion – cricket and cinema – have supported the plans.

Actress-turned Member of Parliament Rekha participated in Tamil Nadu Governor Vidyasagar Rao's launch of



Swachhata Hi Seva by planting jasmine saplings on a vacant plot as Rao called on the public to ensure that vacant lots do not lead to piling up of rubbish and rubble.



The Indian cricket team, led by captain Virat Kohli showed their support of the campaign ahead of the fifth and final ODI against Australia in Nagpur. Team India posted on their social media channels, showing the team disposing of garbage in the dustbin, with Kohli adding, "There is no other place the garbage deserves to be

other than the dustbin. We at the Indian cricket team support the Prime Minister's Swachhata Hi Seva campaign."

Source <http://www.news18.com>

Support for the campaign has even extended to the Indian High Commission in South Africa, which undertook a vigorous cleaning-up effort of its offices and periphery as well as beautifying its gardens at the historic building designed by the architect of the nearby Union Buildings, Sir Herbert Baker.

