

Green court
orders STP
for Khalapur
toll plaza

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Pune: A sewage treatment plant (STP) is to be installed near Khalapur toll plaza on the Pune-Mumbai expressway by the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC), ordered the western region bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Thursday.

The STP is being set up to deal with the environment pollution caused by the disposal of waste material, food leftover and untreated water into the nearby streams and farms by the food malls, refueling stations and the toll plaza. The STP will be set up as per the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, under the supervision of the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB), ordered the tribunal.

The tribunal's bench of Justice V R Kingaonkar and Ajay A Deshpande was hearing an application by Loksevahavi Vikas Sanstha, an environmental trust from Sarsan in Raigad.

The application pointed out that there is no sewage collection, treatment and proper disposal system in that area and no waste processing facility for the solid waste generated from the activities carried out by these establishments. "The gram sabhas and gram panchayats of the villages in the vicinity had raised an objection to the environmental problems. The MPCB also issued notices to the establishments after an on site inspection by its field officers," said lawyer Asim Sarode who is representing the applicants.

Apart from the MSRDC, the MPCB regional officer in Navi Mumbai, additional chief secretary to the state environment department, Raigad district collector and Mumbai-based Mhaishkar Infrastructure Pvt Ltd and Ideal Road Builders Pvt Ltd, both hired by MSRDC for the expressway project, were named respondents in the case.

The MSRDC has undertaken the project through different hired contractors. Whether the MSRDC or the contractors and sub-contractors must pay for the STP was discussed on December 18. The tribunal directed, "expenditure required for construction and operation of STPs or a municipal solid waste plant may be appropriately recovered from each of the contractors as per terms of the contract and, in case of non payment, the MSRDC may take action against them including termination of the contract or recovery of the amount in any other legal manner or blacklisting the contractor."

BREAKING TRADITION OF SILENCE, WOMEN LEADERS CAST POSERS ON PATRIARCHAL POLITICS

Her voice in His bastion

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For devotees and villagers of temple town Shani Shingnapur in Ahmednagar district, questioning a tradition is blasphemy.

They recently conducted "purification" rites at the shrine of Shani after a female devotee managed to breach the security cover to protect God from women and climbed the 'chauthara' (platform) where the idol is installed to offer prayer. The temple committee and villagers are aghast the as 500-year-old tradition was 'ruined'. More so, because the woman vanished in the crowd and went unpunished.

A few kilometers away from the temple town, a woman sarpanch (elected village head) in Gatewadi village had dared to break another tradition of silence and opened her mouth. She was molested in the panchayat meeting.

It was not only her punishment for questioning the decisions taken by men. It was a "lesson" to all those women who dared to question and were aspiring to herald a change in a patriarchal political system using the constitutional right of contesting elections on seats reserved for them in panchayat elections.

Women, who had to keep their heads covered, remove their footwear/chappals and hold them in hands while walking in front of the chawdi or village panchayat office, occupying seats in the same administrative office has not gone down well with the "protectors" of tradition.

In the 'progressive' state of Maharashtra, all efforts are being made to resist women not only from entering into some temples but also from

crossing thresholds of panchayat offices even after being elected. There are instances of offices being littered, and dogs and stray animals being let in so that women leaders do not enter them. All types of humiliation and abuses are tried out to keep women away from performing their duties as village heads and panchayat members.

SILENCE OVER

Men still appear to be mentally unprepared to tolerate that women want equal rights, be it entry into temples or in politics.

"It is now decades that women reservation in panchayats is in place. But at grassroots, people are not yet ready to accept it. As long as you are gungi gudia (silent doll) and act as stamp in hands of husbands or mal politicians, there is no problem. The moment you want to work independently and start questioning, trouble starts. Molestation and character assassination are two lethal weapons used against village women leaders," says Sunita Lohar, a dynamic leader and former sarpanch of Borne village in Satara district.

Sunita's tenure as the sarpanch changed the face of the village. She now wants to contest the taluka and zilla panchayat polls. Her dream to have a career in politics has ruffled feathers of several male politicians. Some villagers threatened her husband and started a campaign to malign her.

"I am disappointed but not discouraged. They can't douse the fire within me. I will fight it out," she says with twinkling eyes.

The former sarpanch of Borne village is not the only Sunita to face this. Sunita Agham from Yavatmal district successfully contested elec-



Pic courtesy: Mahila Rajasatta Andolan

tion against the wish of male politicians. But when she was addressing a Gram Sabha, a former sarpanch threw chilli powder in her eyes and slapped her in public. Both the Sunitas locked horns with their detractors but Pratibha Tayde from Akola could not. Unable to handle a constant hate campaign against her, she committed suicide.

Kushavarta Bele from Latur says that women leaders have to take on opponents and give them a befitting reply. When she was contesting elections, her husband was beaten up. Kushavarta retaliated in a similar manner. She trashed those who had

beaten her husband in public. She successfully contested the Zilla Panchayat polls and now running an institute to empower women in politics.

FIGHT ON

Majority of the women leaders come from poor families and belong to backward castes. They have to face double discrimination.

First, for being a woman. Second, for hailing from poor and backward caste families. Vishakha Kamble, a Dalit woman sarpanch from Arag in Sangli district, was not allowed to hoist the Tricolour on Independence Day this year.

"The discrimination continues across the state. But many women leaders have shown grit and determination to lock horns with the system and proved their leadership

qualities at village-level," says Bhim Raskar of Mahila Rajasatta Andolan — a campaign for women in governance in Maharashtra.

He said women leaders like Mayatai Sorte, coming from a Dalit family in Vadval village of Latur, were ostracized. But they continued to swim against the tide and proved their mettle.

As the sarpanch of Pokhari in Yavatmal district, 600 km from Pune, Archanatai Jatkar cracked down on the manipulation of tenders for development works in the village. She decided that the process would be impartial and no government babu or elected members would get a 'percentage' of the funds meant for village works. She was warned of 'dire consequences', abused and vilified, but Archanatai decided to do away with the 'percentage raj' in the vil-

lage panchayat by introducing good governance practices.

Manorama Shinde, a sarpanch of Mhaishal village in Sangli district, says that women leaders are connected to grassroots and hence come up with innovative ideas to solve problems. "Introducing even a small change is a challenge. I asked villagers not to dump ash from crematorium in river and instead put it near plants. Villagers are responding," she says, insisting that women need to educate themselves if they want to work independently and must learn the art of politics.

A woman sarpanch in Kolhapur said requesting anonymity that her family members wanted her to resign from the post because they felt that she was getting 'involved' in politics. "They say if a woman has to excel in politics, she has to compromise on many things. But I am sure that hard work and determination will help me build a career in politics. But I want to give it a try... want to cross the threshold," she said.

As women leaders are fighting a battle for rights, 12 women had entered the Shanaishwar temple at Solashi in Koregaon taluka of Satara district on Wednesday after bringing down a board discouraging women from entering the shrine. Shanaishwar Devasthan Trust priests immediately "purified" the temple using 'gomutra' (cow urine).

Reacting to it, sarpanch Riya Sangale, a medical practitioner heading Wadi Ratnagiri, one of the holiest pilgrimage places in Maharashtra famous for Jyotiba temple, said, "Let them purify their minds. Women have reached moon and have imprinted their mark in all walks of life. Sky is the limit. She is no lesser than men in anyway and that's what we must inculcate in the mind of our girls."



THE GAME-CHANGERS

ROADS TO SCHOOL

CRUSADER | ARCHANA JATKAR

- Elected sarpanch of Pokhari in the Yavatmal district of Vidarbha twice, Archana put effort towards building roads to connect her village to surrounding schools
- She did so after many girls had left school prior to tenth standard due to poor road access
- She also built a well in the village as women had to walk 2-3 km daily to fetch water

FIGHT FOR GRASSLAND

CRUSADER | SHUBHANGI MORE

- This former sarpanch of Dehu village in Pune district took on the Union government to save her village grasslands
- The central government wanted to acquire some land in Dehu for a project to set up godowns
- She campaigned in the village, met the district collector and ministers
- As a result, the plan to acquire land was dropped

MISSION AGAINST MIDDLEMEN

CRUSADER | JANABAI DESAI

- This woman from Walunjwadi in Satara ensured that every government scheme meant for the poor was implemented in her village
- She had seen that government schemes did not trickle down to the masses because of the middlemen between the government and people

DESILT DRIVE

CRUSADER | SUNITA DAVI

- She launched a drive to desilt water bodies to overcome scarcity of the natural resource at Nandagane village in Satara district

OTHERS

- The all-women panchayat at Kavthepiran in Sangli used public places for the construction of toilets
- Many women leaders have taken up mission to construct toilets in villages

Edu board budget decision on Dec 29

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Pune: A special general body meeting of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) will be held to discuss the revised school education board budget on Tuesday (December 29).

The board members had demanded a budget of Rs 334 crore for the financial year 2016-17. However, the civic administration finalized a budget of Rs 317 crore, which was later revised to Rs 341 crore by the standing committee.

"The budget was revised

owing to new initiatives, like model schools, which were introduced during the standing committee meeting," said a civic official.

The education board had proposed a scheme to save girl child in the budget. Titled 'Indira Gandhi Lek Vachava Abhiyan', which aims to spread awareness against female foeticide while ensuring better education for girls. As per the civic officials, normally around 65%-70% of the budget money is spent on salaries and administrative and civic works.

Environment film fest to honour women forest guards

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Pune: The Lion Queens of India, the only female forest guards team that became instrumental in arresting gangs of women poachers at Gir National Park, will be felicitated at the 10th edition of Kirloskar Vasundhara International Film Festival (KVIFF) on January 6.

Ananda Kumar, who used SMS to alert people of Valparai

plateau, Tamil Nadu about the presence of elephants, thus preventing harmful encounters will also be honored with 'Green Oscar'.

The festival which follows the theme 'Smart and Sustainable: It's my city' this year will showcase as many as 175 films from over 25 countries.

Addressing a news conference here on Thursday, the festival director, Virendra Chitrav



said, "Pranod Patil and Sarang Yadwadkar will also be honored during the eight-day long festival that aims to make peo-

ple aware of how sustainable smart cities can be built."

Patil will be honored for his contribution in conserving the Great Indian Bustard. While Yadwadkar will be honored for his keen study of Pune's water carting capacity, pollution due to untreated sewage and analysis of Pune Municipal Corporation's (PMC) river navigation project.

The highlights of the festi-

val include 'Smart walk' and 'Eco Bazaar'. "Smart walk will involve visiting the eco-friendly houses that use renewable sources of energy while recycled, upcycled and organic farm products will be displayed at Eco Bazaar," Chitrav added.

African and SAARC countries will be seen participating for the first time in the film screening.

Presents an Exhibition of tribal paintings

आदि चित्र Aadi Chitra

From 23rd to 29th December 2015
Time of exhibition: 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
at
Darpan Kala Dalan (Art Gallery),
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TRIBES INDIA Showroom:
Ground Floor, BAF Building, Karandhenu,
Senapati Bapat Marg, Pune - 411 016 Ph: 020-25665289

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