

# Toilet rule to head amendments list

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The toilet rule of the gram panchayat elections will top the list of amendments in the Panchayat Raj Act, said minister for rural development and panchayat raj M.Y. Ghorpade.

Addressing a meet on gender and local governance organised by the National Institute of Advanced Studies on Wednesday, Mr Ghorpade said the present government does not share the view of the previous Janata Dal government on the toilet rule. "We would have amended the rule earlier but at that time our government was still new and we passed two ordinances to protect the Panchayat Raj Act," he said, adding that minor issues like

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## Toilet rule to head amendments list: Ghorpade

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amendments to the toilet rule could not be put in those ordinances.

Recalling that the Dal government had amended the Panchayat Raj Act in 1993 making it mandatory for candidates to have toilets, Mr Ghorpade said, "this is no way to promote the use of toilets among villagers. Such rules can be politically misused," adding that the toilet rule would certainly be incor-

porated in his list of amendments.

Calling upon the newly-elected gram panchayat heads to adopt the "Pancha Sutras" for rural development, Mr Ghorpade said rural development has to become a movement and development could not be achieved by threats of disqualification of candidates under any guise.

The "Pancha sutras" contain the five basic essentials that villages in the state

require, he said, which are, paving of roads, proper drainage systems, toilets — both individual and community, smokeless chulas for rural women and moving of manure pits to a specified spot near the village.

"There is no dearth of money for this programme and all that people have to do is make up their minds and treat this as a relevant social rule," he said.

"I expect all newly-elected

members of the panchayats to go for it and adopt the "Pancha Sutra" formula on hygiene and good living in the villages," he added.

There is no scope for party politics in the panchayat level and nearly 80,000 people have been elected on non-party lines in the recent gram panchayat elections, Mr Ghorpade said, reiterating that basic necessities have no political colour.

The 70 per cent voter turn

in the recent elections is a clear indication that people at the grassroots level have voted for decentralised governance, he said adding that for the first time, every section of the society, including SC/ST, women and OBCs has been properly represented, he added.

On the research taking place at the village level, Mr Ghorpade felt the state government should interact closely with "thinking insti-

tutions" like the Nias so that progressive governments can structure policy framework on these studies.

Mr Ghorpade called upon the research units to have a continuous and close study with the villages over a long term so that they can chart out changes that take place at this level.

Dr N. Shanta Mohan, fellow, Nias said a study undertaken by Nias on the status of rural women in Karnataka

revealed that despite the Panchayat Raj Act, providing access to women to political areas and their effective participation is lacking.

Group discussions between representatives from non-governmental organisations, newly-elected gram panchayat heads and academics in the later part of the day noted that rotation of reservation of seats would go a long way in equal distribution of power and opportunity for all.