

# Minister, babu join issue with Plan panel adviser

Faizan Ahmad | TNN

**Patna:** Planning Commission adviser N C Saxena's remarks regarding poor utilization of central funds in Bihar has not gone down well with ministers and bureaucrats in the state, who countered the comments made by the retired bureaucrat at a function here in the assembly annexe last Thursday.

Rural development minister Nitish Mishra said Saxena's comments on lower utilization of central funds in MNREGA were not true. "Despite Centre's apathy and non-cooperative attitude besides other odds, Bihar has registered achievement in implementing MNREGA scheme," said Mishra.

At the seminar on 'Parliamentary budgetary practice and control of public money', Saxena had remarked, "The state has certainly shown growth, but much still remains to be done to further improve its education, health and other sectors. The state government should exert more pressure on the Centre, and also utilize the funds coming for flagship schemes like MNREGA, National Rural Health Mission and Sarva Shiksha Ab-

hiyan with effective monitoring."

Mishra gave figures of Bihar's share in rural poverty, share in MNREGA funds allotment and actual utilization for 2009-10 and 2010-11 and said there were many factors for lower utilization. They include lack of banking infrastructure and, above all, the late release of funds. "In 2008-09, Rs 440.06 crore out of the total allocation of Rs 1306.96 crore was released in the last three months of the fiscal. Again, Rs 383.79 crore out of

## POOR FUND UTILIZATION

total allocation of Rs 1032.78 crore during 2009-10 and Rs 608.03 crore against allocation of Rs 2103.65 crore for 2010-11 were released by the end of the financial year," Mishra said and added that under the circumstances, the released funds could not be fully utilized in the given fiscals.

Still, the minister said, the fund utilization under MNREGA scheme has increased consistently. In 2008-09, Rs 1305.85 crore was spent, Rs 1817.74 crore in 2009-10, and Rs 2632 crore in 2010-11, he added.

State education principal secretary

Anjani Kumar Singh also objected to Saxena's comment on utilization of central funds on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. In a rejoinder, he said that during 2005-06, the utilization was Rs 472 crore, which sharply increased to Rs 3438 crore during 2010-11. "The biggest hurdle in this programme is late release of central funds," he asserted.

Singh's reaction was not taken kindly by the opposition parties. State Congress president Mehboob Ali Qaiser in a statement criticized Singh for speaking like a politician. But Singh defended himself, saying, "I reacted to the comments made by Saxena, a retired bureaucrat. If he spoke like a politician, I replied him in the same language."

He said the Centre has approved allocation of Rs 11,123 crore in the current fiscal but, till date, released only Rs 1159 crore, or hardly 10% of the actual allocation. "The Centre on the one hand delays release of funds and on the other blames state governments for not utilizing them. As a matter of fact, the Centre does not provide as much fund for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan as budgeted by the state government," Singh said.