

Two Nobel peace prize nominees from Bihar

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PATNA: Two Nobel peace prize nominees for 2005 from Bihar - Tiliya Devi and America Devi through their peaceful peoples' movement prevented CPI (Maoists) from spreading their tentacles to more than 550 flood-prone villages spread over in four districts: Saharsa, Madhubani, Darbhanga and Supaul.

The two Dalit illiterate women, Tiliya and America, who are associated with the two Jhanjharpur-based organisation "Lok Shakti Sangathan" (LSS) and "Samajik Shaikshaniik Vikas Samiti" (SSVK) respectively, are among those on the preliminary list of nominees for this year's Nobel Peace Prize which is to be given to 1,000 women from all over the world jointly.

Both of them fought opposition from all quarters including at their homes for bringing about a change in the life of poor and downtrodden. They encouraged poor villagers to fight for their dignity and livelihood.

"We have selected two local grassroots leaders in each of the 550 villages in 20 blocks of Saharsa, Supaul, Madhubani and Darbhanga districts. Only last year, we came to know through police that some of the hardcore activists of CPI (Maoist) had sneaked into our villages with a view to expanding their base", Tiliya and America told TOI in Patna.

"Soon after getting the information, we immediately mobilised our village level workers against the infiltration of Maoists. They immediately organised a series of village level meetings to thwart Maoist design. So far no incidents of naxal violence has been reported from these 550 villages", they said. "In the nearby villages of Darbhanga and Madhubani, the Maoists have made a strong base due to the absence of any sustained movement", they said.

"Similarly, we have succeeded in mobilising savings of Rs 53 lakh from the small contribution of poor villagers (Rs 15 per month). Over 2.7 lakh people belonging to 550 villages have been making contribution to the small savings called "Gram Kosh" (village fund) for the last one and half decade, they said.

"We have created a strong financial support base for emergency situation like marriage in the family, health problems and land related problems", Tiliya said.

Grassroot activists like America, Tiliya, Surya Narayan Saday and Anandi Devi led the movement against the government decision to utilise the services of "Rajsthani tractors" in the interiors of Madhubani district couple of years back.

These tractors were brought mainly for the repair and mud-cutting work on the existing Kamala Balan embankment and in West Kosi Canal project works. These tractors were designed to do cutting, shifting, loading and unloading of muds without any support of manpower.

As many as 180 such tractors were engaged for embankment related works round-the-clock, which rendered more than a thousand local farmers of Madhepur, Lakhnaur, Jhanjharpur and Andhrathari blocks of Madhubani district jobless.

A large number of labourers including about 75 per cent male migrate from this region (read Madhubani and Darbhanga) annually to far-flung areas like Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan in search of job. So women here rule in flood prone districts in the total absence of male population.