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NATION

Soz disagrees with UNDP Human Dev Report

Pioneer News Service | New Delhi

Water Resources Minister Saifuddin Soz on Thursday created a flutter by disagreeing with UN Development Programme (UNDP) on its ranking system that put India at 126 position in its annual Human Development Report.

"India is a country with over a billion people, the diversity is more than anywhere else in the world, it is a young democracy. It is unfair to compare it with countries like Norway or Sweden (who consistently hold higher ranking)," Soz said while releasing the latest HDR report prepared by UNDP.

While awarding India a low rank, the report noted that the quality of life is improving in India as compared with previous years, although not dramatically. The focus continues to be on efficient water management and access to drinking water and sanitation for millions of urban and rural poor. India has moved a few notches up in the development ranking of 172 countries at position 126 and does marginally better than its neighbours - Pakistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Easier access to water had huge impact on quality of life for women in rural areas. The report highlight a study by Ahmedabad-based Self Employed women's Association (SEWA) which showed how income for women went up by spending less time on collecting water.

The report is against massive river diversion programmes. The policy paper speaks out against projects like inter-linking of major rivers, which formed a major part of the previous Government's election manifesto.

The report expressed concern that in parts of India, groundwater tables are falling by more than one metre a year, jeopardising future agricultural production, the report noted.

In a stark comparison between the two neighbours, the report noted that "India may outperform Bangladesh as a high growth globalisation success story, but the tables are turned when the benchmark for success shifts to sanitation. Despite an average income about 60 per cent higher, India has a lower rate of sanitation coverage.

UNDP's Arunabha Ghosh, one of the authors of the report, said that it is true that there are limitations to comparable data. What was more important was the interest the report generated towards development goals. "India has started ranking its states on development index," Ghosh said.

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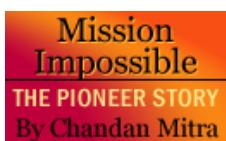
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