

THE HINDU, MADRAS, 03 AUG 2002

# A.P. launches 'back to school' campaign

By Our Special Correspondent

**HYDERABAD, AUG. 2.** 'Chaduvula Panduga', a nine-day programme to induce children in the age group of 5-15 years to join school, was launched amid fanfare all over Andhra Pradesh on Saturday.

Flagging off the campaign at Vijayawada, the Andhra Pradesh Governor, C. Rangarajan, suggested revival of mid-day meal scheme to prevent school dropout.

He exhorted non-Governmental associations to take up the responsibility of providing mid-day meal to children in view of the financial constraints faced by the Government.

The Chief Minister, N.Chandrababu Naidu, flew in to Basar, the abode of Goddess Saraswathi, for the launch of the scheme.

In the presence of priests and the Chief Minister, some 18 children performed "Aksharabhyasam" (learning to write the first letter).

He announced the setting up of the Basar Development Authority to develop the region into a centre of learning.

At Bodhan town in Nizamabad district, the Chief Minister was a witness to the emotional scene of a 12-year-old boy, Saikular, rendering a song penned by him

on the travails of an animal grazer when his parents refused to send him to school.

Moved by the poem, Mr. Naidu announced a reward of Rs.25,000, which will be deposited in a bank to meet the boy's educational needs.

Ministers and collectors were present at the launch of the programme in other districts.

'The Government has set an ambitious target to enrol 20 lakh school children during the course of the year.

Official estimates show there are 150 lakh children in the age group of 5-15 years in the State.

Of them, 130 lakh children have been enrolled in schools.

The remaining children have no access to formal education as most of them are engaged in child labour to supplement the income of the poor families.

The Government has released Rs.1 crore each to districts and Rs.5 crores for Hyderabad to provide input support for the massive enrolment of children into formal education system.

Along with motivating children to join school, the Government has resolved to come down heavily on those engaging children in labour.

The child labour eradication cell was activated.

As part of Chaduvula Panduga, a

special effort would be made to identify child labourers in towns and villages.

It has been decided to invoke a host of enactments currently in force to punish those employing children, the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation act of 1986 being the prime one.

Chaduvula Panduga is being regarded as an important component of the Government's endeavour to achieve 100 per literacy by 2005

Apart from the 20 lakh children out of schools, there are about 80 adult illiterates to be taken care of by the on-going literary movement.

The literacy rate jumped from 44.09 per cent in 1991 to 61.11 per cent.

This is attributed to special drives conducted by the Government such as "Chaduvukundam" and "Akshra Sankranthi"

The current festival is an effort to create conducive atmosphere in schools for children to stay back.

The school dropout rate is substantially high in Andhra Pradesh.

According to one study, nearly 20 per cent of the students drop out between primary and upper primary stages.