

All rural job card holders to get bank accounts, says minister

By the end of this month, all beneficiaries of India's rural job scheme will get wages directly credited into their savings accounts, Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said here Friday.

So far, 29 million zero-balance savings accounts have been opened in state-owned banks or post offices across the country for as many rural job card holders under the National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREG) scheme.

"By the end of September this year, all job card holders will have accounts where their wages will be directly credited," Singh told reporters after announcing Rs.16 billion (\$3.6 billion) aid to east Indian state Bihar, currently ravaged by floods.

Singh said that a total of about 40 million job card holders will have such accounts, a move that will ensure they get their wages without any help from middlemen.

India launched the NREG scheme in 2005 to provide a minimum of 100 days' employment in a year to the poorest of the poor, who account for about 26 percent of the country's over one billion population.

The scheme, currently implemented in all 603 districts across the country, is intended to create assets in rural areas with special emphasis on water harvesting, irrigation, and other such activities.

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