

Farmers' plight a matter of concern: president

President Pratibha Patil Saturday called for constant monitoring and suitable changes in the implementation of the prime minister's relief package for the distressed farmers in Vidarbha in order to make it more effective.

Describing the suicides of farmers in the fertile region as a painful phenomenon and a matter of grave concern, the president said such desperate acts could hardly be the solution, however acute the problem might be.

In a heart-felt reply to the grand civic reception accorded to her - the first after she assumed India's highest office - by the municipal corporation of her post-marriage hometown, the president dwelt at length on various aspects of the agrarian crisis and made several suggestions.

'It is extremely unfortunate that the farmers in the land once called the 'golden axe' and known for its hospitality have come to such a pass,' Patil said, referring to the appeal made to her by Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh and Deputy Chief Minister R.R. Patil to help ease the crisis.

The president said a concerted effort will have to be made to reduce the cost of farming, create secondary sources of income for the farmers and provide them access to the market to sell their produce.

Increasing the area under irrigation, a fillip to water conservation and organic farming and provision of quality seeds to farmers were the other suggestions she made.

Citing the example of Rajasthan of which she was the governor before contesting the presidential election, Patil pointed out that the farmers there are not forced to commit suicide despite low rainfall in many parts of the state because they rear cattle and earn secondary income by selling milk.

Expressing satisfaction over the economic progress the country was making at a growth rate of about nine percent, the president however said the progress would be worthwhile only when its benefits reach the 'last man'.

'I have written to all the governors asking them to make a specific mention of the steps their states have taken to improve the lot of the poor in the monthly progress reports they send me,' the president told an impressive turnout of admirers.

She said it was not only a matter of personal gratification for her that she rose to the highest office of the country but a matter of pride for the world's largest democracy that a woman became its president 60 years after Independence.

Recalling that women fought for the country's freedom rubbing shoulders with men, Patil expressed deep concern over the pernicious practice of amniocentesis and the consequent falling ratio of women's population in the country.

'No country can achieve progress unless it empowers 50 percent of its population,' she said.

Referring to the grand felicitation, she said she had no words to express her sense of gratitude for

the love showered on her by the people of the city where her long political career blossomed.

Sarvoday leader Nirmala Deshpande presided over the function where Bihar Governor R.S. Gavai, who belongs to Maharashtra, was the chief guest.

(© IANS / India eNews)