

TELANGANA/INCENTIVISING PLASTIC WASTE COLLECTION

In Mulugu — collect 1 kg plastic waste, get 1 kg rice in return

SREENIVAS JANYALA
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C NARAYANA Reddy, the District Collector of Mulugu in Telangana who has initiated a campaign to make the district free of single-use plastic, says it all started as a challenge to some village school kids who wanted a cricket kit.

"I told the kids at the Jakaram village school to collect as many empty plastic bottles lying in and around the village. In one hour they collected 996 bottles. I realised what a huge problem it was and we started this drive," he says.

Since that school challenge in early October, the district has collected nearly 50,000 kg of plastic and seized over 600 kg of single-use plastic (SUP) through a network of collection points in 174 Gram Panchayats. The plastic is then sent for recycling.

Reddy believes that if citizens are incentivised, they would participate enthusiastically. "Since rice is a staple food, we came up with the idea of giving 1 kg of rice to anyone who collects and deposits 1 kg of plastic at the Gram



Mulugu D C Narayana Reddy inspecting plastic waste brought by people. *Express*

Panchayat collection centres. The idea has clicked. The rice is of premium quality which we purchased at Rs 30 per kg," he says. The rice

that is being given in place of plastic has been procured using money donated by local traders and NRIs; 57 people have donated over

200 quintals of rice in 10 days. "Some people donated bags of fine rice while others donated cash. Some people donated cloth bundles to stitch bags," said another district official.

There were penalties as well. The district collected almost Rs 1 Lakh in just one month by penalising people using SUP.

R Sudarshan, a teacher at the Zilla Panchayat school in Kothur, says his students have got in the habit of picking up discarded plastic bottles on their way to the school and depositing it there.

Reddy says that instead of banning SUP suddenly and then trying to enforce it, it is better to do it gradually. "Involving people is very important and I am thankful for the immense support I am receiving from the people. In some villages, people who were doing odd jobs have started dedicating their entire day to collecting plastic. In return they get good quality rice, which encourages them," he said.

Reddy wants to make Mulugu the first district in the country to eliminate the use of SUPs.

On November 16, the district administration conducted an exhibition on innovative ideas to stop the use of plastic. Hundreds en-

rolled for the exhibition with themes such as exploring alternatives to plastic bags etc. Winners were given cash prizes.

Last weekend the district also introduced its first ATM that dispenses coupons in place of plastic water bottles. The administration has tied up with some hotels and restaurants and these coupons can buy a cup of tea or a snack.

The idea of curbing plastic use has caught on so much that a couple has sent out their marriage invitations printed on cloth bags, which people can use in place of plastic bags when buying groceries. Reddy has also appointed a tailor in every village who gets a monthly honorarium for stitching cloth bags if people bring clothes.

Mulugu is also preparing to make the biggest tribal festival in the country, which takes place in Medaram village in February, free of plastics. More than 5 lakh people attend it. "Even if people bring plastic, we are making arrangements so that the plastic is collected and taken away. We are training 1,000 volunteers who will take away any plastic bags that the pilgrims and devotees are carrying and give them cloth bags," Reddy said.