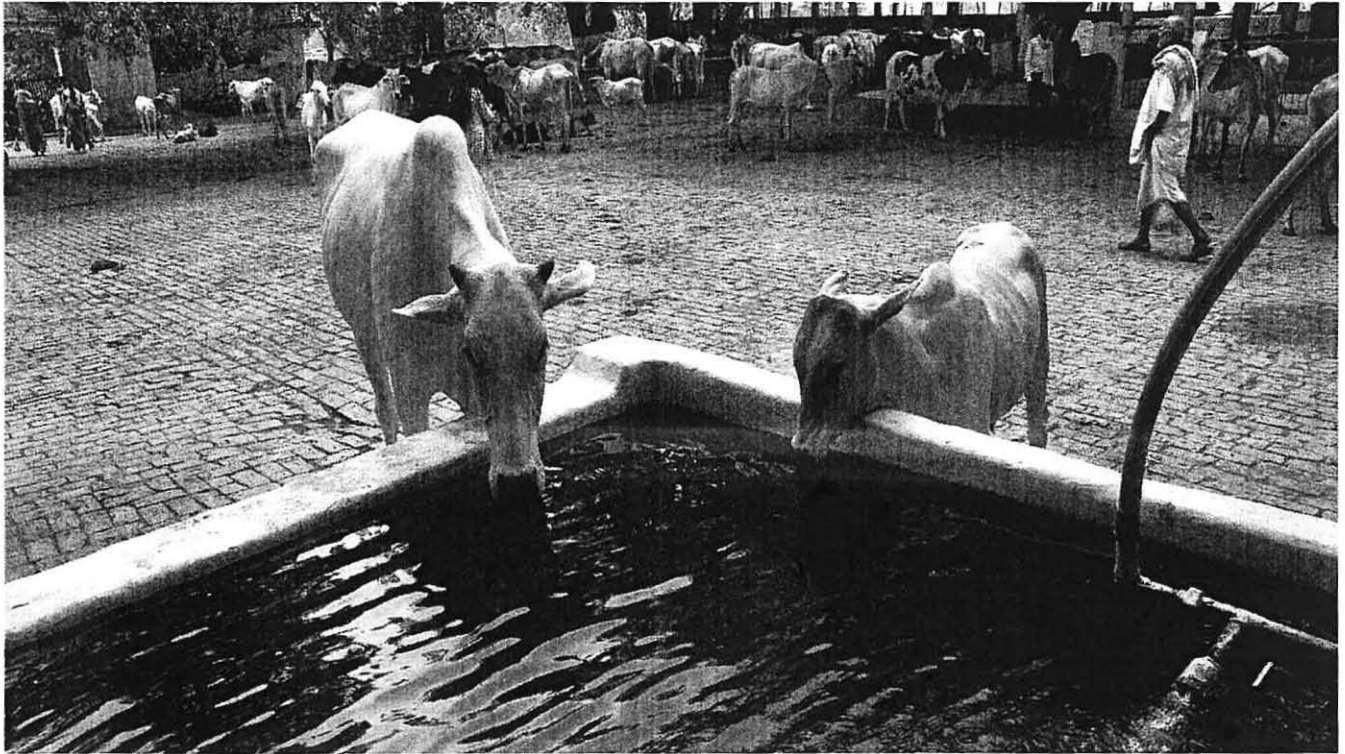


Why Modi govt's showpiece cow welfare agency is without chief for over a year, 'almost defunct'

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Representational image of cows in Varanasi | ANI

New Delhi: For more than a year, the post of chairman in the Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog — a government commission set up for the welfare of cows — has been lying vacant, and the commission itself is “almost defunct”.

In an indication that the panel is no longer a priority for the Modi government, which had set it up, a source familiar with the matter said the government is not keen to appoint a new chairman.

“For more than a year, no one has been heading the commission. Due to this, it has become inactive and all its schemes are now gathering dust,” the source added. “Cow welfare is something big on the agenda of the RSS, but the commission is no longer a priority of the government.”

In February 2019, the Union Cabinet approved the proposal to set up the Aayog for the “conservation, protection and development of cows and their progeny”.

Falling under the ambit of the Union animal husbandry ministry, it was tasked with providing direction for the implementation of schemes related to cattle.

Former MP Vallabhbai Kathiria was appointed the first chairman of the Aayog. Two non-official members were appointed for a tenure of two years. In February 2021, the term of the chairman came to an end.

“The tenure of the chairperson ended last year in February 2021. What is important is that the commission was supposed to have an advisory role and was not supposed to execute,” said a senior government official. “The Rashtriya Gokul Mission (scheme) and Animal Welfare Board of India (an autonomous body) are already there, so the commission was attached to them.”

ThePrint reached out to the animal husbandry ministry, under which the Kamdhenu Aayog was set up, over WhatsApp messages and email, but received no response until the time of publishing this report.

A senior official in the ministry, speaking on condition of anonymity said: “We are in the process of reconstituting the commission. It will take some time as we are making some changes to it.”

The controversies

According to the first source quoted above, the government “felt that the commission had often caused needless embarrassment”, and that chairman Kathiria had “on several occasions overstepped his brief”.

In January 2021, Kathiria announced a national ‘Kamdhenu Gau Vigyan Prachar Prasar Exam’, which drew much criticism and was cancelled after the animal husbandry department said the Aayog had “no mandate” to conduct it.

For the exam, the commission’s official website released 54 pages of “reference material” on topics such as Indian cows’ “superiority” over foreign breeds, including in showing “emotions”, the benefits of cow dung, etc. The commission’s website is now non-functional.

“First, the commission announced its ‘indigenous cow science’ examination and, after widespread criticism about its promotion of unsubstantiated claims, it was forced to cancel it by the animal husbandry department, which also said the Aayog had ‘no mandate’ to conduct the exam. These issues affect India’s image internationally,” said a senior official.

Kathiria, during his tenure, also made several controversial statements. In one, he said: “Cow is full of science... If we talk about the \$5 trillion economy, we have 19.42 crore *govansh* (cattle) in our country, which can play an important role in it. Even if a cow does not give milk, its urine and dung is still precious. If we use those, not only will cows be saved, the entire economy will be on track.”

In October 2020, the chairman made news for unveiling a “cow dung chip”, claiming that it “significantly reduced harmful radiation” emitted by mobile phones.

An official from the ministry under which the commission falls also noted that the Aayog's work was being done by the Rashtriya Gokul Mission.

“Under the animal husbandry ministry, we already have a Gokul mission, which is tasked with development and conservation of indigenous breeds of cattle and works to improve their genetic makeup. The Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog tried to do the same thing — which was not required. It was decided that its responsibilities would be merged with the Gokul mission and the Animal Welfare Board of India,” the senior government official said.

Reached by phone, Kathiria refused to offer a comment on the matter.

However, a source close to Kathiria said “bureaucrats did not allow the commission to operate and all schemes and suggestions were stalled”.

(Edited by Nida Fatima Siddiqui)