

## Andhra Pradesh

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### Massive bio-diesel project launched

Special Correspondent

*Chief Minister announces ambitious Rs. 5000-crore plan for taking up jatropha plantations*

HYDERABAD: Chief Minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy has announced an ambitious project for taking up bio-diesel plantations of pongamia and jatropha over an extent of 51 lakh acres in the rain-shadow areas (RSA) of the State in the next three years at an outlay of Rs. 5,000 crores.

To serve the twin purpose of using the wastelands to boost up the economies in RSAs and offering bio-diesel as an alternative to diesel imported by the country at a huge cost of Rs. 1,17,000 crores annually, the project has been launched in over 36,000 acres this year using nurseries raised last year.

The project was finalised at a meeting chaired by the Chief Minister to discuss steps to safeguard the economy of the rain-shadow areas. It was decided to earmark a sum of Rs. 1,700 crores for the project in the 2006-07 budget.

A state level Bio-Diesel Board has been constituted to oversee the implementation with the Chief Secretary as Chairman. It would be a "tripartite" activity involving the Government, the farmer and non-governmental agencies with the Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development acting as "nodal agency".

Explaining the salient features to reporters later, Dr. Reddy said 60 per cent of the funds required for the project would come from the National Employment Guarantee Scheme, the watershed programme and the Indira Prabha programme and the rest from banks.

#### Support price

An extent of 17 lakh acres would be brought under cultivation under the two varieties of plants this year. The yield could be expected in the third year. One lakh acres each would be planted in the 13 districts where the National Employment Guarantee

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Scheme was under implementation and 50,00 acres each in the rest of the State.

Dr. Reddy announced a minimum support price of Rs. 5 a kg of pongamia/jatropha seeds. The APSRTC, which had a fleet of about 20,000 buses, would be a bulk purchaser of bio-diesel. A fund would be created with a corpus of Rs. 5 crores to ensure payment of MSP to the farmers.

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