

## Lending a caring hand to the old

A new initiative launched by the Raipur Smart City Limited hopes to bring a ray of hope in the lives of the elderly living in the city, writes Krishna Das



RELIVING OLD DAYS Available for free, senior citizens can enjoy the facilities from 7 am to 9 am and in the evening from 5 pm to 7 pm.

A survey conducted by the New Delhi based non-profit organisation, Agewell Foundation, found that one in two senior citizens suffer from loneliness and almost every fifth senior in the country is in need of some psychological counselling. Taking a cue, Chattisgarh's capital city of Raipur, has taken a leap forward to create a caring and loving environment to the elderly people living in the city.

A new initiative called 'Bapu ki Kutiya' has been launched by Raipur Smart City Limited. For any elderly battling loneliness, this initiative offers them a chance to relive their childhood memories. From an area dedicated for playing and interacting with each other and read literature, the kutiyas have been equipped with DTH enabled LCD TVs. There are radio sets, yoga mats, carom board, chess along with proper seating arrangements, newspapers, magazines and mythological books. Through vintage songs and films, a general atmosphere of conviviality is sought to be created. The message of the facility is: the elderly are wanted.

The facility at present can accommodate over 30-35 people at a time and has been set up at a budget of ~1.5 million by the Raipur Smart City Limited. "The district administration will set up 100 'Bapu ki kutiyas' in the state capital's parks and public places," Chief Minister Raman

Singh announced after inaugurating the first facility and the model project at the Raipur Collectorate. He added that the centre will be a healthy and entertaining platform for the elderly.

Available for free, the senior citizens can enjoy the facilities from 7 am to 9 am and in the evening from 5 pm to 7 pm. The construction of the Kutiya will not cost any additional burden to the state exchequer as the authorities have decided to utilise the idle fund from the Jila Nirashrit Nidhi (District Destitute Fund) for the project.

While the funds aren't a constraint, the maintenance is surely an issue. The district authorities, who will build only the basic infrastructure and facility, have decided to get social groups and organisations on board for maintenance. The response has been overwhelming as about two dozen organisations have come forward to partner in the cause.

The huts will be constructed as per the suggestion and demand of the organisation qualifying in the bid. The centre will be set up across the length and breadth of the capital city. The venue is preferred to be a garden that will provide a green atmosphere to the innovative plan.

The Raipur Municipal Corporation will be bearing the electricity bill costs while the social organisations coming on board will have to bear the other expenses. The authorities are also looking forward to engage the local residential association so that projects can be run in their respective areas.

Raipur District Collector Om Prakash Chaudhary, the brain behind the innovative project, says there are choupals in the villages where the elders gather and share good times. But they miss such social engagements in the cities and urban localities. 'Bapu ki Kutiya' will provide a room where they can unwind and rejuvenate themselves, he adds.