

A rare opportunity for Orissa villagers

By Prafulla Das

BHUBANESWAR, SEPT. 19. For the people of the poverty-stricken Kashipur block of Orissa's Rayagada district, it was a rare opportunity to air their grievances to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. Nine persons, including three women, who interacted with Mr. Vajpayee during an hour long video conference this morning, utilised the opportunity to list out their demands. The Prime Minister, who gave a patient hearing, assured all help.

Those who spoke to Mr. Vajpayee demanded, among other things, supply of sufficient rice to continue the food-for-work programme in all the villages of the block; BPL ration cards for the families living below poverty line and increase in the number of beneficiaries under the old age pension scheme from the present 5,000 to 20,000 in Kashipur.

The video conference was organised by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) at the instance of the Prime Minister's Office. While Mr. Vajpayee conferred with the people of Kashipur from New Delhi, the State Chief Minister, Mr. Naveen Patnaik, participated in it from his office at Bhubaneswar.

Ms. Sumani Jhudia, a tribal and an active social worker, told Mr. Vajpayee that the hapless people of Kashipur do not require the Government to stand behind them all the time, but help them to be on their own, according to Mr. Bishnupada Sethi, District Collector of Rayagada.

Mr. Biswanath Majhi, a resident of Panasguda village who lost three members of his family, gave an account of the first of the seven deaths in his village in July.