

Groundbreaking Initiative

A PRABHAKAR RAO

Bhu Bharati, a landmark reform, promises to benefit thousands of agricultural land owners by bringing them easier credit at low interest rates

■ By Amarnath K. Menon



For all the talk of land reforms in Andhra Pradesh, till about a couple of years back, there was no proper record of ownership of land in the state. There were often signboards on vacant plots warning encroachers but nobody had a clue about the ownership. Reason: multiple

agencies were involved in deciding the exact boundaries of a plot—its sale vested by a deed that was issued without proper authentication of ownership and a different agency collected the property and development tax. Of the 130 towns in the state, only about 30 have been surveyed so far for the purpose of land records. The last survey of land in a district was done in Chittoor way back in 1956.

Now, all that is changing with Bhu Bharati—a new comprehensive land administration system which involves the creation of a single dedicated agency in every district for maintaining an up-to-date record of land. It takes over all the functions of the survey department, property registration functions of the registration department, maintenance-of-land-record functions of the revenue department as well as the property tax and layout-approval functions of municipalities and gram panchayats. The initiative of introducing an Integrated Land Information System (ILIS) took roots in Nizamabad, one of the 23 districts in the state, more than two years back. There is now a paradigm shift in land administration with the focus shifting to maintenance of title records and offering of citizen-friendly services from mere generation of revenue for the government.

The need for registration of conclusive title of land arose because the existing law is no longer able to cope with conditions where land has become scarce, well-defined boundaries have become imperative and credit is made available only in cases of secure land tenure. Individual proprietary rights have become important because land has acquired a negotiable value.

The new system involves surveys using cost-effective, modern technologies like aerial photography and digital geographical positioning systems, which make the task faster and more accurate. It is capable of auto updation and there is no need for repeating the survey.

Bhu Bharati has benefitted people living in rural areas immensely by helping them increase their productivity, as better and clear titles of land ensure easy availability of credit at lower rates of interest. "The new system enables us to have a detailed and rigorous system



MAPPED: Agarwal with satellite photo of Nizamabad

of recording land titles, which apart from providing security of title to the owner, facilitates land-based banking and eliminates litigation thereby reducing the burden on the judiciary," says Vinod Kumar Agarwal, commissioner for Survey, Settlement and Land Records.

The survey in Nizamabad alone, covering 8,000 sq km, cost about Rs 34 crore and took more than two years to complete. National Remote Sensing Agency, Wipro and Speck Systems were roped for the project. Based on systems prevailing in Thailand, Canada, Australia and UK, it is set to open a landmine of opportunities.