

# Business Standard

## Child leaders elected to eradicate social evils against children

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The elections to the National Maha Bal Panchayat to select its 11 members who will "stand responsible as the legitimate and direct voice" of children from their states and be committed to eradicate social evils of exploitation against children in any form was held here on Tuesday under the leadership of Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi.

The election was held at the Bal Ashram - a rehabilitation and educational support centre being run for children who are rescued from various states.

A total of 66 Bal Panchayat members from the six states - Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh - came forward, nominated themselves and through elections, formed the Maha Bal Panchayat of 2018.

Lalita Kumari from Rajasthan was elected as Bal Sarpanch, Champa the Vice-President and Surjeet the Secretary.

The key focus areas of intervention through Maha Bal Panchayat are provisioning of basic infrastructure in schools, schoolteachers' appointment and monitoring for regular attendance, preventing cases of early child marriage and facilitating links to several social welfare schemes.

Newly-elected Bal Sarpanch Lalita said: "I have a huge responsibility on my shoulders... I will try my best to solve the problems of children. First of all, I will try and rescue children from child labour and then send them to school."

The election was held under the Bal Mitra Gram (BMG) programme, which has been setting benchmarks in promoting child-centric community development since 2001, since it was launched as a social transformation initiative cum model by Bachpan Bachao Andolan, of Satyarthi.

In order to amplify the voices of children, hone their leadership skills and the impact of BMGs, the concept of a national level Bal Panchayat was introduced in 2008 and since then over three of them have been elected and constituted.

Satyarthi termed the BMG "the first step towards my aim of making a child-friendly world" where parents, teachers, communities and leaders listen to and respect the voice of children and involve them in decision making.

The elected Assembly of Children will also put forth their achievements, concerns and a charter of rights at the National Consultation to be held in New Delhi on May 11, organised by Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation and Global March against Child labour.

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