

Civil Society

ON THE TUBER TRAIL

The Kunbis cultivate amazing varieties



‘MIGRATION TO CITIES HAS SLOWED DOWN’

Amitabh Kundu on the cost of urban exclusion

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BHILS IN LAND BIND

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The Godrej logo is written in a stylized, cursive font. The letters are filled with a gradient of colors, transitioning from green at the top to purple at the bottom.

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ON THE TUBER TRAIL

Joida, a remote district in Karnataka, has emerged as India's tuber capital. The Kunbis, who live here, cultivate an amazing number of varieties, one of which is unique.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Getting land right

IT is unwise to seek instant solutions to the challenges of land acquisition and environment protection. Yet that is precisely what the NDA government seems to be trying to do with the ordinance on land and the directives emanating from the environment ministry. The NDA's intention is no doubt to send out the message that it believes in action and that it won't let its economic agenda get trapped in a quagmire of social concerns. Its focus is jobs and investment and that with growth all will be forgiven. But how good is it for anyone, business and investors included, to swing from the one extreme of the Congress-led UPA government which took no decisions to this one where we want to solve all our problems with one stroke of the pen?

In fact, there shouldn't be a need for diktats. Such is the mandate Modi has received that his government is uniquely placed to carry people along through consultation and build real support for the idea of reforms. Investment, jobs and better living standards are what he promised in his campaign. But getting people off the land is complex and requires building trust and instilling confidence. People are not equipped for another kind of life and are suspicious of governments and industry. At the same time the rural economy is changing and people do also want to move on. An opportunity therefore presents itself to put in place honest processes that reassure rural communities of a better future.

Reforms either by stealth or fiat are not such a hot idea. The Congress' pathetic SEZ law is an example. Since then many milestones have been crossed in terms of compensation and informed consent. There have been several agitations. Gram sabhas have asserted themselves. People don't want to feel they are being swamped by economic changes. They need to know they are long-term beneficiaries of a transformation, not the victims.

We explore these developments through two interviews in this issue. Vinayak Chatterjee of Feedback Infra speaks for industry when he says the previous law had made it virtually impossible to acquire land and that it is the job of government to lead on the question of public purpose. A government must be trusted and if it belies that trust it will meet its comeuppance.

In a separate interview, Prof. Amitabh Kundu tells us that urban migration is actually slowing down because cities are becoming exclusionary. But there remains the need for people to get off the land and find jobs because the rural economy is changing and its growth is slow. The aspirations of rural people have to be met through education, better infrastructure and appropriate urbanisation so that they can move on from traditional but unsustainable livelihoods.

As these complexities play out, the need to stimulate the economy and deal with poverty is bigger than ever. The government has little option but to be decisive and visionary. The challenge is how to do that while being fair and inclusive.

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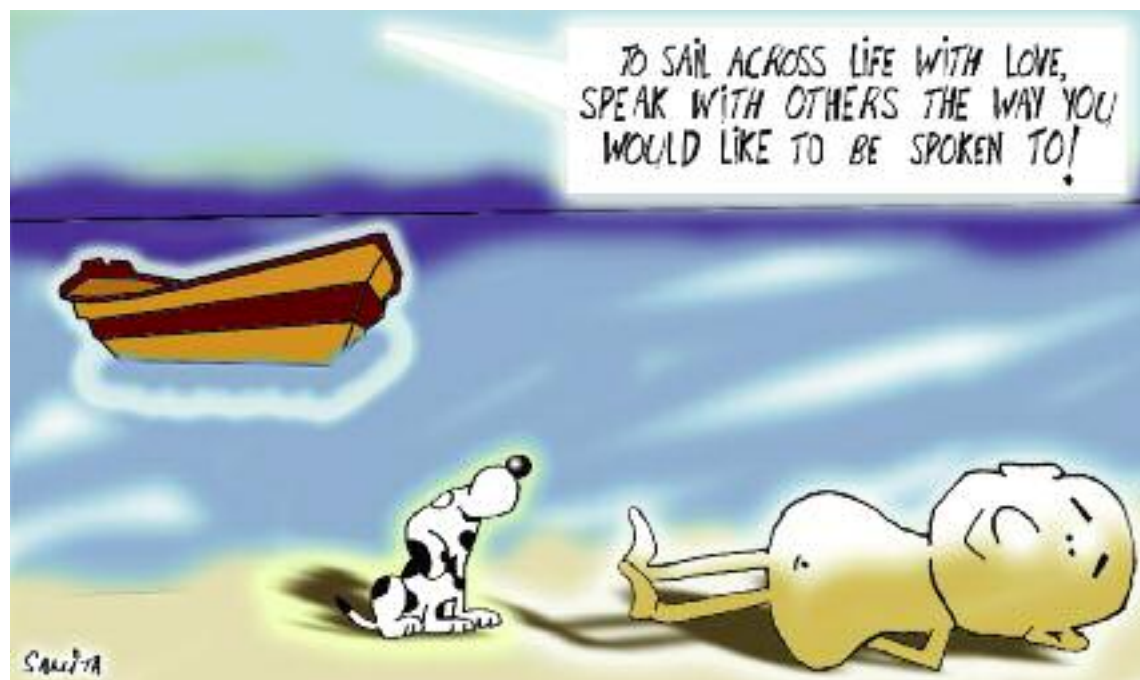
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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Disaster management

Important points have been highlighted in your interview, 'India is a country of disasters', with Goonj founder Anshu Gupta. Goonj has shown how important it is to bridge the immediate needs of the people affected in a calamity.

Abhishek Taneja

I agree with all the points made by Anshu Gupta. There is poor communication, lack of planning and gaps between systems. In Uttarakhand there was no specific warning of impending disaster from the India Meteorological Department or any other body. In fact, we do not have a system in place to forecast cloud burst events, though the technology for this is available.

Mayank Srivastava

I work with the Government of India

on disaster management. We still rely heavily on post-disaster search and rescue and provision of adequate relief as the sole factors for effective disaster management. But disaster management needs to be more holistic. There is need for better preparedness in terms of having effective early warning systems in place and timely dissemination of information together with efficient evacuation. Local communities should be consulted on what they need after a disaster. What is the whole point in distributing wheat to people stuck on embankments for months, living in tents? Or distributing candles in areas severely hit by storms?

Dr Sushma Guleria

It would be wonderful if rehab and

disaster management were taught to children in schools so that they could grow up knowing what to do and pass this learning on to their parents and other people at home as well.

Gemini Dhar

I agree with every word that's been spoken by Anshu Gupta on the need for better and more effective disaster management. I say this as somebody who worked in Hudhud relief. Congratulations to Goonj.

Chakri (samalochana@gmail.com)

Dream school

Highly inspiring. Teachers like Edward D'Souza should be recognised, honoured and encouraged further.

Sanjeev Kulkarni

Cheaper housing

This is a wonderful initiative as there are scores of people who live in squatter settlements across the country due to unavailability or unobtainability of affordable housing. I remember my final year of architecture when we were exposed to this situation and asked to design apartments under the affordable housing belt. If there are more schools pushing their students to think differently, we can definitely overcome this problem.

Anjali Mariam Paul

Eye-opener

Dileep Ranjekar's column, 'Back to School', resonates so much because it raises issues which are the need of the hour. The column is an eye-opener.

Naveen Khajanchi

Ranjekar's column has inspired me to try and understand education in India better and also explore the models of education employed in Sweden and Finland.

Nasim Ahmad

The ignorance about national policies on education and curriculum is a fact. We need to know the importance of these documents. Similarly, we must rescue education from the present system of memory-based learning. Obviously this requires changes in syllabus and methods of evaluation.

Arun Patil

An outstanding column, indeed. What if this were to be brought to the notice of the Prime Minister?

Vinod Parekh

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‘MIGRATION TO CITIES HAS

INTERVIEW

Amitabh Kundu

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE rural economy has been in decline, but people coming off the land in search of jobs haven't been turning up in established Indian cities like they used to. Statistics show that the rate of growth of rural to urban migration has been falling as cities tend to shut out the poor and the jobs that came from manufacturing are no longer available.

Are older Indian cities therefore ceasing to play their traditional role as centres of opportunity and prosperity? And will the newer and smaller cities, with their focus on being smart and attracting global investment, be able to absorb unskilled people?

To have a better understanding of these changing urban equations and the implications of leaving rising aspirations unfulfilled, *Civil Society* spoke to Amitabh Kundu, who retired as professor of economics from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and is currently at the Institute of Human Development in New Delhi.

Is it true that the rate of rural to urban migration is increasing and resulting in an adverse impact on our cities?

There is a systematic effort to create some sort of anxiety about the rate of urbanisation and migration into Indian cities. It isn't just the media, administrators and policymakers who talk about this. It is also part of the global perspective of urbanisation in developing countries. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) talks about the epicentre of urbanisation shifting from Latin America to Asia to India.

Is this statistically correct? The rate of growth of our urban population has declined significantly in the last two decades from 3.8 per cent in the 1970s to 3.1 per cent in the 1980s to 2.7 per cent in the 1990s. It continues to be 2.7 per cent for the period 2001-11.

So there has been no increase in the growth rate of the urban population.

One of the reasons for this decline is decline in the fertility rate, which has taken place in the entire country. Therefore, if the urban population's natural fertility rate is declining the urban growth rate will also come down.

But if you make adjustments for that, the decline in the growth rate of the urban population is much sharper than the decline in fertility. So there is a decline in migration also.

If you calculate from the National Sample Survey (NSS) data – Census 2011 has not yet reported migration – you do find that the percentage of adult male migration to urban areas has declined. This is something that should worry us because the urban-rural differential in productivity is very high. The rural economy has been going up but at a very slow pace. In the last decade if our overall growth rate has



Amitabh Kundu: 'Middle class civil society is trying to capture the urban space'

been 7-8 per cent, the rural economy has not grown over 2-3 per cent. The gaps have widened. So how come rural to urban migration has not picked up?

Yes, why has rural to urban migration declined?

I think the answer lies in the nature of urbanisation taking place, in the character of our cities. Cities have become more exclusionary. We would like our cities to be engines of growth, which means they should attract foreign and domestic investment. So we are 'sanitising' our cities.

We are making our urban spaces cleaner. The percentage of the slum population to the total urban population has gone down from 23 per cent in 1999-2000 to 17 per cent in the latest NSS data. We had around 61 million slum dwellers in 2001. The Pranab Sen Committee predicted that the slum population would increase to 93 million by 2011. The 2011 Census shows that it has gone up only to 65 million.

Secondly, this increase from 61 million to 65 million is also because in the 2001 Census they did not cover towns below 50,000. This time they did. But they were restricted to statutory towns.

Slums are not being encouraged. Slum eviction from the city's inner areas, where land values have gone up, has taken place. Middle class civil society is trying to capture the urban space. Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) in Delhi, Advance Locality Management in Mumbai or Janaagraha in Bengaluru who are, in a way, doing a good job trying to improve service delivery to the middle class who don't want to live in congested, crime-prone unhygienic areas, have been able to exert pressure and slow down migration of poorer sections of the population.

In metropolitan cities, manufacturing has gone down since it causes pollution. The percentage of services – hotels, restaurants, shopping malls – has gone up. Basically we are providing comfortable living conditions to the middle class and the upper middle class so that they do not look for locations outside, and we are trying to attract global capital. Global capital's interest is law and order, and health and hygiene. Both are being guaranteed by the exclusionary nature of urbanisation taking place.

Does a slower rate of migration affect the economy of the city?

BEEN SLOWING DOWN'

AJIT KRISHNA



structural advantages: our large youthful population of 430 million with a higher level of productivity and less medical expenditure. So the Indian economy has a very low dependency rate.

Our population that is 65-70 years plus is not increasing, unlike in Europe. But our workforce is. It is only now that our fertility rate has gone down, so the percentage of children is less but our youth population is more. This is a structural advantage that India has. China's percentage of young people who are 18-35 will be less than India's in another 10 years. India also has a high savings rate and a high investment rate. So India's growth rate is going to be much higher.

But a critical assumption in the ADB model is that the urban growth rate will be very high. We will have a shift of population from low productive agriculture to high productive industry and services. Rural, dispossessed, unskilled people will come to urban areas and be absorbed.

But if that does not happen, if migration slows down, if people are not able to come to the city and be absorbed, the whole projection made by ADB will go absolutely haywire.

The UN had predicted that the urban growth rate would be 3.2 per cent per annum between 2020-2025. But our urban growth rate has already gone

'Earlier, uneducated and poor people would migrate to the city and start selling things on the pavement. Now it is no longer possible. There is better policing.'

down to 2.7 per cent. The UN recognises that urban growth is not taking place. They have now revised their projections downwards. The slower growth rate is due to the exclusionary character of our urbanisation. This will have an adverse impact on our economic growth rate and that's why I am worried.

So you are saying that urbanisation is critical to achieving high economic growth in India?

The model that predicts that India is going to achieve all this critically depends on the assumption that the rate of urbanisation is picking up. But I am confident that the low urban growth rate that has been registered cannot continue for very long. It has to go up otherwise there will be chaos. The rural population is increasing and if the rural economy grows by only 2 per cent....

How can a fraternal role for the city be defined so that you bring a large rural population into the city?

You are asking me a question on which I can only speculate. I believe the capture of urban space by the urban elite is so strong that you will never be able to make cities expand this way. So I have been

very sceptical of this idea of allowing large cities to grow.

Won't new cities attract migration?

Isher Ahluwalia in her India Infrastructure Report has predicted that 53 million plus cities will become 87 million plus cities. This is more than what McKinsey Global Institute predicts – that by 2030 there will be 65 million plus cities. That means top-heavy urbanisation. Exclusionary cities that are a million plus and attract global capital will not encourage an informal sector to come up.

I personally feel that if you really want to promote urbanisation you have to create a network of small and medium towns. These should have some agro-processing character, they should not require people to have a high level of management skills and should be able to absorb people. You need appropriate training that can allow small-scale industries to produce things efficiently and get linked with the larger formal sector. Lower-level informal sector activities can be upgraded.

The 2011 Census – unlike the other censuses that identified only 400-500 new towns – identified 2,800 new towns. Something is happening: rural areas are getting urbanised and they are creating these towns. These towns need to be captured and strengthened.

We need to provide them with the right technology and plan urban spaces so that informal activities can get absorbed. People from rural areas can shift to small and medium towns and maintain their links with the village, going back to cultivate and in the process take urbanism to rural areas. I have a feeling that this kind of dispersed urbanisation that does not take India into the cottage industry age but creates modernised new towns is a process that has to be strengthened.

You are suggesting strengthening the organic urbanisation that is already taking place?

Absolutely. We need to disperse into second-order centres which are connected with efficient transport systems. There is effective demand in rural areas and small towns which is not being tapped properly. If you are focusing on demand from the big cities you are restricting your market.

The size of the middle class is not that large now. But in another 20 years it will be significant. Only 35 per cent of the total middle class demand comes from metropolitan cities. The remaining 65 per cent comes from rural areas and small towns. So there is demand potential that needs to be tapped. Once you provide some infrastructure it should be possible to encourage this process of industrialisation.

I looked at the NSS data and defined middle class as those who are getting per capita consumption expenditure of \$10 per day. That's the global definition which right now is high by Indian standards. In purchasing power parity it works out to ₹300 per person per day. Multiplied by five (household size), it comes to an expenditure of ₹1,500 per day. That is going to rise to 35 per cent of the total global consumption. This is huge. The government needs to facilitate dispersed urbanisation. ■

What do we expect the cities to be achieving? By 2050 the population of this country will go up from 1,280 million to 1,600 million. The workforce is 500 million and will go up to 930 million. So an additional workforce of 430 million will be asking for jobs. Is the country prepared for this? Is exclusionary urbanisation going to address this issue?

The composition of migration has changed. There are jobs for business executives, management executives, software professionals. The better-off, more skilled people are migrating. Earlier, uneducated and poor people would migrate to the city and start selling things on the pavement. Now it is no longer possible. There is better policing. There is better management of urban spaces. It is no longer possible for a dispossessed agricultural labourer to migrate to urban areas.

You ask whether that meets the objectives of this country. Yes, perhaps. If you want the economy to grow at 6-7 per cent you need the skilled worker.

But ADB has predicted that India's per capita income which is currently less than half of the global per capita income is going to be 20 per cent more than the global per capita income by 2050. We have

Bhils paid for land but don't

Ravleen Kaur
Jaipur

NAGA Katara, a Bhil in Rajasthan's Dungarpur district, was only 20 when he bought 14 *bighas* for farming. Along with his family, he worked hard on his undulating hilly patch in the district's Chak Mahudi village to make it fertile. He now harvests about four crops in one season. But even after 50 years, legally he is still a landless farmer. And so are another 3,000 Bhil families spread over 7,000 hectares in the district. They live in perpetual fear of being evicted anytime by the state government.

"We sold goats, family heirlooms, cattle and jewellery to buy this land. For 30 years the government has been charging us a penalty for 'encroaching' on its land. In spite of paying huge penalties this land can still be taken away from us anytime without even informing us," said Katara.

Katara's story goes back to the 1960s when the royal family of Dungarpur – a district with a vast population of Scheduled Caste tribes – announced sale of princely land. The Bhils, aspiring to become landed farmers, borrowed money from relatives and approached those known to the then Maharaja of Dungarpur, Maharawal Lakshman Singh Dungarpur. The land was sold for ₹50 per *bigha*. Some people received a *patta* inked on a piece of cloth as a sale deed, many did not get anything. They were too scared of the Maharaja to ask for it. This land came to be known as Chak Rajdhani – the royal land and all the 21 villages settled on it are prefixed by 'Chak'.

"The Raja selling off the land was big news. The land, originally a forest, was cleared by hired contractors and even the stumps and roots of trees were sold off to extract maximum price for the forest wood," said Katara.

"Those were tough times. We had very little to eat and no money as we had invested everything in buying the land. Gradually, we built a house, dug a well and acquired animals. The water and dung improved the soil and we could sow corn, pulses and a rainfed variety of rice besides millets. Now we get enough from the farm to last us six to seven months. The rest of the time, our kids go to town for daily wage work as there is hardly any MGNREGA work in this area," said Nahar Singh, a fellow villager from Chak Mahudi.

In 1977 the state government began to survey land and the Bhils were told that the land was never theirs. As per the Rajasthan Land Reforms and Acquisition of Land Owners' Estates Act, 1963, all the princely land now belonged to the government. The Maharaja, allege the Bhils, hid this fact as most of the land was sold after 1963. Even as they continued to farm, in 1982 the Bhils began to receive notices for trespassing on government land. "The notice said that we were illegal encroachers and needed to pay a penalty of ₹5,000, for this," said Nani Bai Ahari of Chak Sarkan Khopcha village.

"The penalty ranged from ₹500 to ₹5,000. People had to sell off jewellery and borrow all over again to pay this first penalty. But nobody raised a voice

against it, hoping that the land would be granted to them if they paid up. In subsequent years, the penalty was lower but it has been ongoing for more than 30 years now. In fact, the sum paid over all these years could very well be above the cost of the land," said Madhulika of the Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, a group campaigning for forest and land rights for Adivasis in Dungarpur.

In April 2012, Dungarpur municipality was converted into a municipal corporation, giving the town administration rights to expand in its periphery. "This means that our land can be acquired anytime even without fair compensation. This is one of

until that is resolved. Still, we have sent a letter to the state Revenue Department asking for advice so that we can really help people," said Inderjeet Singh, the Collector of Dungarpur.

When the princely land was acquired in 1963, the Maharaja was entitled to compensation. But the amount of compensation has been a bone of contention between his family and the government. Dissatisfied with the compensation decided by the Udaipur Revenue Court, the family went to the higher court in Ajmer that redirected the case to Udaipur in 2006. Since then, it is being heard there without any substantial outcome.



Naga Katara with fellow Bhils in Chak Mahudi village



The Bhils worked day and night

'In spite of paying huge penalties to the government this land can still be taken away from us anytime without even informing us.'

the reasons that has brought us together to campaign for our rights," said Karma Roat of Chak Mahudi, who began uniting people on the issue in 2005.

"Agriculture in this area is hard work. If we had *pattas*, we could seek government subsidy for embankments, levelling and digging wells. We are scared of investing much money in the land ourselves because it can be taken away from us anytime," said Shankarlal Khatadi of Chak Mahudi-II.

After a string of applications and correspondence under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, the Sangathan brought together people from the affected villages to stage a protest in front of the Dungarpur collectorate. Villagers even petitioned Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje when she visited the district.

"We initiated an inquiry into the case and got to know that a compensation claim of the erstwhile king is still sub-judice and nothing can be done

Meanwhile, in 1987-89, the sub-divisional magistrate of Dungarpur granted *Gair Khatedaari* (right to till for livelihood but not ownership) to 450 farmers in 15 villages under the Rajasthan Land Revenue (Allotment of Land for Agricultural Purpose) Rules, 1970. There was a condition: whatever compensation was decided for the royal family would be reimbursed to the farmers who had been given this right. According to the State Land Revenue Act, land allotment under *Gair Khatedaari* can be regularised after three years and the farmer given ownership rights. The time limit was then 10 years. However, none of these farmers got ownership rights as no compensation has been decided till date. "Most of these Bhils are second-generation farmers whose fathers bought the land from the Maharaja. They have been tilling it for more than 50 years so, as per the law, the land should be theirs by now anyway. But, strangely, the government is reluctant to give land to Adivasis," said Madhulika.

"Even though the compensation case is sub-judice, it does not change the fact that the land still belongs to the government. Also, the court has not put any stay on activities on the land and called it 'disputed'. They have built anganwadis, primary health centres, schools and even given mining leases on the Chak land. So when it comes to farmers, why is a compensation case such a hurdle?" said Man Singh Sisodia, convener of the Sangathan.

Lakshman Singh Ahari handles the contract for

own it

transportation of soapstone from a mine near his house and farm in Chak Sarkan Khopcha. The mine, on lease since the 1980s, has breached the water table in the area. "Many marble mines and crusher units are spread across Chak Lolakpur village too," said Man Singh. "Such is the government's laggardness on the case that when the previous collector ordered an inquiry, the investigating officer could not find any documents and approached the Sangathan for information that we received under the RTI Act to prepare his report."

The Additional District Collector of Dungarpur, Ashok Kumar, said, "The tilling rights given long

PICTURES BY RAVLEEN KAUR



to make sloping land fertile

ago in 1987-89 have still not been regularised because of the compensation case so how can we proceed further with more allotments? What if the court decides on a big compensation amount? The Maharaja's descendants have claimed compensation for everything on that land, including ponds, johads, etc. Plus, they can claim interest up to 12 per cent for each year since the acquisition. Water supply for half of our population comes from the Dimiya dam which is on the Chak land. All these factors make it a very complicated case."

People have diligently kept every receipt of the penalty payments made over the years in the hope that some day it will act as proof of land ownership. "In recent years, even the penalties have become very high but nobody dares question the *patwari* as he will straightaway ask you to leave the land if you don't pay," said Ramesh Doda of Chak Bhandariya village.

Gram sabhas are taking place in villages to make people aware of their land and forest rights. "People filed 1,200 applications in eight panchayats on the issue under the state's Sarkar Aapke Dwar programme under which bureaucrats visit villages to hear civic complaints. But there has been a hearing in only one village till now. So, in December last year, we submitted a petition to the government demanding action in a month's time failing which we would go to court. We are readying our papers for the court petition now," said Madhulika. ■

After protests ESZ tag may go

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

UTTARAKHAND's long agitation against dams in the upper reaches of the Ganga river culminated in victory two years ago. The former UPA government declared a 100 km stretch from Gaumukh to Uttarkashi as an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ). On 18 December 2012, a notification was issued. A series of dams were cancelled. NGOs and anti-dam activists were relieved. The agitation began to taper off.

Ironically, on the second anniversary of the ESZ notification, those who opposed dams are staring at defeat. Following protests by 88 villages in the ESZ area, the state government has requested the Centre to cancel the ESZ notification. It is optimistic that the Centre will oblige and that dam building will resume once again.

The villagers living in the ESZ catchment area of some 4,179 sq. km. have been protesting repeatedly since the past month. They held a *bandh* in Uttarkashi town on 18 December. They fear that if the ESZ notification is implemented, their villages will lag behind in development. "The villages need development to face disasters," said Chandan Singh Panwar, the *pramukh* of Bhatwari block. Local leaders from the Congress, the BJP and the BSP, had joined the *bandh*.

The ESZ notification, along with the orders of the Supreme Court, has jettisoned around 1,743 MW worth of power projects in Uttarakhand.

Under pressure from environmentalists, the former UPA government had stopped construction of a series of dams and hydro-electricity projects (HEPs).

In June 2013, the upper reaches of the state were ravaged by floods. Existing and under-construction dams and HEPs aggravated the impact of this disaster, a fact noted by the Supreme Court, which in August 2013 put a stay on further construction of these structures.

The Congress-led government in the state now wants stalled hydel projects to be restarted and new ones to begin. A team headed by Uttarakhand Chief Secretary N. Ravi Shanker met Nripendra Mishra, principal secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and requested the Centre to withdraw the ESZ notification. "We raised the issue of stalled hydro-electricity projects in the state. As almost all under-construction hydel projects are stalled, its ill impacts would be borne not just by our state but by the entire country," said Ravi Shanker.

But on 10 December, the Centre had admitted to the Supreme Court that dams in Uttarakhand had caused 'irreversible' damage to the environment.

NGOs and anti-dam activists say vested interests like contractors, who would benefit from dam construction, are spreading misinformation and instigating people's protests.

"Contractors are staging the protests and political parties are taking advantage of it," remarked Kamala Pant, convener, Uttarakhand Mahila Manch, a network of women activists in the state.

On another spectrum is Avadesh Kaushal, founder of Rural Litigation and Entitlement Centre (RLEK), an NGO in Dehradun. He has been consistently backing protests against the ESZ notification and demanding its immediate withdrawal. "It is anti-development, hence anti-people and against the betterment of our hill state," declared Kaushal.

One major reason for this situation is that the state government was supposed to submit a zonal master plan that would be approved by the MoEF within two years of the ESZ notification. The master plan was envisioned as a people-friendly one. But the government has not as yet drafted the master plan.

"The state government has suspended the process of making a zonal master plan for the ESZ," said Ranbir Singh, principal secretary, Department of Forest and Environment, government of Uttarakhand.

NGOs say the ESZ notification ushers in eco-friendly development. It stops the indiscriminate building of dams and hydro-electric projects, mining, commercial felling of trees and setting up of polluting industries. It helps Uttarakhand become a model of sustainable development.

"The ESZ encourages construction with locally available materials and slate mining. So it depends on how one defines development," said Anil Gautam of the People's Science Institute, an NGO in Dehradun heading the anti-dam lobby.

The ESZ notification is no doubt a forward-looking one. It proposes measures to prevent land degradation and erosion. It prohibits dumping of debris into rivers and encourages two-storied homes, recycling of plastic, bio-farming, green industries, micro-hydel projects, solar energy projects and so on with the participation of panchayats and women.

"The government should empower local communities and panchayats to own and operate mini and micro-hydel plants since Uttarakhand is an eco-sensitive hill state," said Trepan Singh Chauhan, convener of Chetana Andolan, a people's movement against dams in Tehri Garhwal.

The victory of the contractor lobby reflects a complete gap in communication between NGOs and the people. ■

Crowdfunding a rally

Tushar Dhara
New Delhi

A coalition of civil society groups, including Pension Parishad, National Alliance of People's Movements, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan and Right to Food Campaign, held a rally and *dharana* in New Delhi in December to coincide with Parliament's winter session. The rally sought to bring diverse groups together, provide a platform for social issues and highlight social sector concerns to Members of Parliament (MPs), bureaucrats, the media and so on.

These groups came together under the slogan 'Abki Baar Hamara Adhikar' – a twist on the winning election slogan, 'Abki Baar Modi Sarkar'. The organisers' aims were ambitious: to get at least 20,000 people to Delhi to participate in the 2 December 'Convergence Meeting'. Each participating organisation was given the task of mobilising people in its 'catchment area'. This included getting people to go to Delhi, arranging finances for their travel, booking the transport, organising food and so on.

To do this, one of the organisations, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), started an inventive crowdfunding effort. The MKSS began working with rural communities in south-central Rajasthan 25 years ago on minimum wages and land issues. This work led to the birth of India's powerful right to information (RTI) movement, and the conceptualisation of the radical RTI Act. MKSS also played a fundamental role in the implementation of MGNREGA, (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), which provides a statutory guarantee of 100 days of work to every rural family at an inflation-indexed minimum wage rate.

The MKSS decided to mobilise people primarily around the issue of MGNREGA. Recent actions by the government have sought to dilute the employment scheme by changing its statutory nature, starving it of funds and tinkering with its rules so that money would go to contractors and machinery rather than daily wage labourers. MKSS decided to hold a 'MGNREGA bachao' yatra in the second half of November. The aim was to travel through villages and work sites to talk about the threat to MGNREGA and convince people to come to Delhi for a day as a gesture of solidarity.

Planning for the yatra began in the second week of November. The target set for Delhi was 600 people and it was estimated that 10 buses were needed for the journey. The cost per person to and fro was estimated to be ₹600. This meant that ₹3.5 lakh would have to be collected for 600 people.

The MKSS works in blocks in Rajsamand, Bhilwara, Ajmer and Pali districts. Twenty panchayats were identified for raising money and a jeep was hired. The strategy for raising finances was simple: each worker would be requested to contribute ₹100. The minimum wage in Rajasthan is ₹167 for eight hours of manual work, but most labourers make less than that. For every ₹600 collected from six people, one person would make the trip to Delhi. Everyone would not be able to go, but

they would know and feel they had a stake in the exercise. Sending 600 people to Delhi involved tapping 3,600 people for money.

A decision was taken to involve everyone interested in preserving MGNREGA in the effort, including lower-level government employees and contract staff. An example of the former is the rozgar sahayak who coordinates MGNREGA activity at the panchayat level. The latter includes mates (overseers) at work sites. Since their work and salaries are intimately tied to the Act, they have a

longstanding and ongoing process mired in a legal battle in Rajasthan. Forming a union from amongst a pool of nearly a crore of MGNREGA labourers in the state has been a compelling reason to strengthen collective bargaining. For just this reason, the ruling political establishment has seen this as a potential threat to their hegemony, and done all they can to prevent the registration of a statewide union.

Simultaneously, buses were booked and lists made of potential people for the Delhi trip. Routes were charted out for the buses, based on the num-

AJIT KRISHNA



People hold up papers with details of payments made for the rally

Twenty panchayats were identified. The strategy for raising finances was simple: each worker would be requested to contribute ₹100.

stake in its continuation. Sarpanches and officials aligned with the BJP also helped raise money as their own fate was tied to MGNREGA.

The response was tremendous. People came forward enthusiastically to contribute. Roop Singh, who looks after the accounts of MKSS and was involved with the entire effort, said, "People are afraid for their livelihoods and that is why they want to save MGNREGA."

Another strategy employed was to ask the mates if they would take responsibility for collecting money from their work sites. Each mate who agreed was requested to collect ₹100 from each person volunteering to contribute and then hand over the money to the MKSS. The crowdfunding campaign was made transparent by issuing receipts to everyone for the amount they contributed. People who gave money also received a 'MGNREGA union' button.

The formation of a MGNREGA union has been a

ber of people coming from each panchayat. Each panchayat contributed handsomely. Thekarwas panchayat, for instance, yielded ₹28,000 while Taal panchayat contributed ₹42,000.

Apart from the finances, the logistics of travel were numerous. Pick-up routes for the buses had to be prepared and banners printed so that the journey would be smooth and without harassment from road transport officials; lists of people willing to come to Delhi had to be compiled for each panchayat and updated; the money had to be collected, counted and documented; a route map of Delhi had to be prepared and given to each bus driver, and so on. Unexpected developments had to be resolved quickly. For instance, 15 people from Ajitgarh panchayat dropped out suddenly. They had to be persuaded, if possible.

The philosophy that underpinned the 'MGNREGA bachao' yatra, and the larger convergence meeting, was that rights-based legislation like MGNREGA that empowers people is also best saved by the people. It was not just a few activists in the villages and some intellectuals in the cities who could reverse the government's retrograde social sector steps, but the collective voice of people at the grassroots that would add weight to the effort. People were made stakeholders at every step of the process. Thus, 13,000-15,000 people from over 18 states came to Delhi on a cold December day to add their chorus to 'Abki Baar Hamara Adhikar'. ■

Tushar Dhara works with the MKSS

CONFLICT ZONE

Caught in the crossfire

Mussarat Yasmeen

Jammu

FOR residents of villages near the border in Jammu and Kashmir, (J&K) the New Year began with cross-border firing and shelling, forcing over 10,000 villagers in Samba and Kathua districts to move into makeshift shelters in safer places. Continuous ceasefire violations along the border and security outposts killed two Army jawans, a woman and injured 11 locals in the first week of January. Ongoing examinations for Class 11 were postponed. Over 50 villages were affected.

“Before that, it was elections that had kept our state in the news and earlier it was the floods – the worst in the last six decades. But no one really talks about the struggles faced day-to-day by villagers living in these sensitive locations. How different or difficult is life here? This one question never makes any headlines,” said Mohammad Iqbal, a local from Kulliyian village in Poonch district.

Located 250 km from Jammu, Poonch is at the border bounded by the Line of Control (LoC) on three sides (north, west and south). The 1947-48 war between India and Pakistan divided it into two parts. One went to Pakistan. For the past several decades, this district has been severely affected by cross-border conflict. Not only that, its tough geography and isolated location have kept it out of development and it ranks as one of the most backward districts of the state.

Its villages, located near the border, face numerous development issues. From roads to education, safe drinking water to livelihoods – they fight very basic challenges. “I live only a few km from Poonch town but I am forced to live in the dark ages – we do not have roads, no mobile network works here, there is no effective healthcare,” said Shabbir Ahmad, 45, a resident of Kusalliyan village.

There is no way of informing or reaching their near and dear ones during an emergency as there are no roads. In the absence of healthcare infrastructure, people are forced to use rudimentary, and at times ineffective treatment, which can only suppress symptoms but not cure the illness. Statistics issued by the Health Department show there are only 1,907 sub-centres against the required 3,044. “We do not have even a first-aid facility and we are just five km from the district headquarters,” rued Ahmad.

There is technically one sub-centre in Kulliyian, provided under the Army’s Sadbhavna Operation and not by the government. “The employees of the sub-centre open it at will. Most of the time, patients have to return without medicines as the sub-centre remains without stock for almost 10 months of the year,” said Azad Shah, another villager.

According to Altaf, another local, the sub-centre receives medicine stock once a year and it finishes in two months. After that, the villagers are left to fend for themselves.

Another issue plaguing the healthcare services in Poonch is staff shortage at these centres. The number of female community health workers in sub-centres across Poonch district is 3,941 while the males number 541. There are only 845 doctors in the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) with 705 pharmacists available for the people of Poonch.

The biggest threat is to the lives of pregnant women. “No lady doctors have been appointed. Putting aside their shyness, even if women of this conservative society come to get a health check-up done, traversing the risky paths in this hilly terrain, they go back disappointed because the centre is closed,” said Azad.

The villagers live under continuous stress of conflict. “If any villager gets injured during cross-border firing, there is no way to get immediate treatment. We have to wait for help from the security forces,” said Ahmad.

In 2013, the then Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah, had stressed the need for health sector reforms to ensure better delivery of services to patients and to equip hospitals with modern technologies. He had stressed the need to enhance and upgrade health facilities in rural health centres so that the load of patients in city hospitals could be reduced. He had also said efforts to rope in private

CHARKHA



There are no health facilities for people living in border areas

investment in the health sector and launch of joint ventures needed to be encouraged. Even after two years, nothing has been done on the ground.

Even during the Assembly election campaign in December, every party promised to provide better healthcare services to villagers. “Every year we are promised better services but at the end of the day, we find ourselves cheated by these parties and their leaders. It is due to our immense faith in our democratic system that we vote despite every wrong. We are hopeful that once the parties decide to come together to form a new government, our issues will be highlighted and solved on a regular basis,” said Ahmad. ■

*(This article has been generated under the Sanjoy Ghose Rural Fellowship)
Charkha Features*

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Rickshaw finds finance

Rakesh Agrawal
Varanasi

FOR 20 years, Zamil Ansari has been pulling a rickshaw in Varanasi and earning barely enough to feed his family of six. “My income was ₹200-250 per day. Out of that I used to pay Rs 50 to the rickshaw-owner from whom I was hiring the vehicle,” says Ansari, who lives in Bazardiha, a downtown area of the city.

One day a passenger told him that he too could own a rickshaw by paying just ₹800 a month. The passenger was a worker with Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) Wheels, a social venture company that helps rickshaw-pullers own their vehicles.

Excited by the idea, Ansari decided to go for it.

Ansari soon became the proud owner of a brand new rickshaw by paying for it in instalments. He bought one for his son, too. Both are now pulling rickshaws and earning more money.

Around 1,200 rickshaw-pullers in Varanasi are now owners of their vehicles. “I never thought I would own a rickshaw,” grins Kamal Khan, who has been pulling a rickshaw for 20 years too. He is 40 but looks years older. “My children will now lead a better life. I can also afford to cultivate my small patch of land.”

Naveen Krishna, a postgraduate in social work from the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), founded SMV Wheels in April 2010. “Our venture is a small effort to improve the lives of rickshaw-pullers,” says Krishna. “Research studies estimate that India has 10 million rickshaw-pullers and that 97 per cent of them rent their vehicle from a mafia of merchants. In Varanasi, rickshaw-pullers slog 14 hours a day, rain or shine. They earn between ₹50 and ₹200 per day, ferrying Indians and foreigners through the narrow lanes of the city. They own nothing and save nothing.”

Krishna had worked for the Union Ministry of Rural Development’s Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART). He had helped the expansion of the Rickshaw Bank in Tripura, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. He had also helped transfer ownership of around 1,200 rickshaws in Assam to rickshaw-pullers.

But when Krishna gave up his job to start his venture, his father was shocked. “He felt I was being stupid,” he recalls. The banks refused to loan him money. “I had just ₹7,000 when I approached my mentor, Sumit Swaroop, founder of the Magic Tree House Play Schools in Delhi. He gave me ₹40,000.”

Krishna first modified Varanasi’s traditional rickshaws with the help of IIT and BHU, turning them into lightweight and easy-to-ride vehicles. The old ones are made with hollow iron pipes. Each weighs 95-105 kg. The SMV rickshaw weighs 75-80 kg. It has double-ball bearings and a canopy. Rickshaw-pullers affirm that the vehicles are a hassle-free and easier ride.

“I want to name this rickshaw the Shatabdi Express, after the fastest train in India, as it runs fast, really fast,” giggles Rajesh Singh, 26, a recent owner of an SMV rickshaw.

SMV Wheels’ new rickshaw costs ₹16,900. A trol-



Naveen Krishna with an SMV Wheels rickshaw



A rickshaw plies in Varanasi

ley is for ₹12,700 and a *thela* (push cart) for ₹9,600. This includes the licence fee from the municipality, insurance, an ID card and a municipal pass.

“They need to fill in a form, register with us for ₹500 and pay the first instalment of ₹300 per week. After that they get a new rickshaw,” says Sumit Singh of SMV.

“The rickshaw-puller gets a licence and number plates, which legitimises his professional standing. The accident insurance covers them for ₹1 lakh. Rickshaw-owners get 60 per cent of the profits from advertisements displayed on the back of the rickshaw and those who are paying instalments get 20 per cent,” explains Pravin Singh of SMV.

SMV Wheels has publicity vans parked in markets, *ghats* and *chaurahas*, informing people about their venture. They distribute pamphlets in settlements where rickshaw-pullers live and put up posters. They have also developed an index that measures the poverty level of the city’s rickshaw-pullers.

Very few rickshaw-pullers default on their payments. SMV reduces the risk by extending credit only to city residents. They don’t lend to recent

migrants. “We can make exceptions for ‘genuine’ outsiders who have local guarantors. Women in the rickshaw-puller’s family are encouraged to inform the company if there is any default risk. They tell us if their husbands are splurging money on liquor and can’t pay us,” reveals Sumit. “We give a two-week warning and then seize the rickshaw and resell it to another customer at a discount. There have been 20 such cases so far,” adds Krishna.

Krishna takes great pride in having changed the lives of hundreds of impoverished rickshaw-pullers. “Initially, these pullers had no confidence. After associating with us, they are full of positivity. They want more facilities and are even ready to pay for them. Earlier, they would spend a day’s earnings on booze and dope. Now they save and have a sense of ownership. This is a great change and I’m happy to have been able to bring it about,” he says.

Five foreign funds have invested in SMV Wheels: First Light Ventures, KL Felicitas Foundation, Silicon Valley Community Fund, A-Spark Goodwill Venture and UnLtd India. Around ₹1.25 crore is being invested in three instalments.

“In 2012-13 we sold 443 units and spent ₹50 lakh. Our revenue was ₹30 lakh. We aim to sell 1,000 units this year,” says Krishna. He is confident that SMV will break even in three years.

Convincing rickshaw-pullers to opt for the SMV scheme was a challenge, admits Krishna. “Our strength comes from involving the municipality,” he says. The municipality decides the number of rickshaw permits that are to be issued. Legally, one rickshaw-owner can get one permit. But this is only on paper. In reality, a few unscrupulous *seths* put up fake names, bribe officials and corner most of the licences. Then they rent out rickshaws to pullers. In Varanasi, only 10,000 permits have been issued but 40,000 rickshaws ply in the city.

SMV Wheels buys rickshaws in bulk to get them cheaper. Each rickshaw costs ₹14,000, including ₹600 for insurance and the municipal fee. It is sold for ₹16,900. SMV makes ₹900 per unit sold since ₹2,000 goes on administrative cost. They also earn from the advertisements displayed on rickshaws. Recently, the UP AIDS Control Society has shown an interest in advertising.

Krishna wants to expand to neighbouring Jaunpur and Ranchi in Jharkhand. “Even if we manage to reach out to one or two per cent of the rickshaw-pullers, it’s a huge market for us,” says Krishna. He plans to expand to other cities through the franchise route.

In 2013, the World Bank awarded \$2 million (₹10.74 crore) to 20 organisations, including SMV, who were working in the sectors of financial inclusion, trafficking, health, education and livelihood. “This grant of \$100,000 (₹53.7 lakh) will help us move beyond Varanasi to Ranchi,” says Krishna.

SMV Wheels also won the Sankalp Award and the First Light Village Capital award in 2011.

The social venture recently tied up with the Uttar Pradesh government to introduce solar rickshaws. “We plan to reach out to at least 20 per cent of the estimated 10 million rickshaw-pullers in the next 10 years,” says an upbeat Krishna. ■

Doctors on mission Kashmir

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

IN the usual course of things, you wouldn't come across an Assamese doctor treating Kashmiri patients on the outskirts of Srinagar. The credit for this extraordinary – and heartwarming – scenario goes to Doctors For You.

The ravaging floods that hit various districts of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in the first week of September virtually turned life upside down. Lives were lost, structures collapsed and property was destroyed. Providing medical help to the people was a huge challenge, especially as major health institutions were inundated.

On 13 September, Doctors For You (DFY) dispatched an assessment team followed by three mobile medical teams. The latter comprised doctors from Assam who were working in New Delhi at the time.

“DFY was one of the first to intervene and extend medical support to the flood victims. In the acute phase, DFY ensured continuation of essential health services for six districts of Kashmir region,” said G. Shandeepan, Emergency Response Manager (ERM), Doctors For You. Shandeepan was part of the first team that landed in Srinagar.

DFY is a registered medical humanitarian organisation that delivers healthcare services to vulnerable communities, and emergency medical aid to people affected by natural disasters, conflicts and epidemics.

“We served people in 75 locations in Srinagar, Budgam, Pulwama, Bandipora, Baramulla and Kulgam districts. At the same time, DFY provided medical help to over 26,000 people who were either displaced or affected by the floods. We organised health camps in the form of static camps and mobile medical units (MMUs),” said Shandeepan.

He said DFY conducted 110 medical camps in both urban and rural areas that served 10,800 people. In addition, DFY partnered with five other NGOs and supported them with medicines and doctors.

Shandeepan said that Srinagar city areas like Barzulla, Lal Chowk, Batmaloo, Aloochoi Bagh and



Doctors For You is training health workers under the NRHM

Chattabal got immediate attention from DFY since they were badly affected by the floods. Health camps were organised so that basic health facilities were restored for the public.

“In some cases, we provided first-aid to the flood-affected people while others came forward with complaints of hypertension and diabetes. We delivered special kits to the people. The kits were prepared by UNDP and they came in handy for patients in the initial phase,” said Shandeepan.

“DFY reached 39 schools and 17 anganwadi centres for health talks and served over 4,904 individuals through its de-worming campaign to prevent worm infestation among children. We also started Vitamin A distribution with this programme. Health talks were given to 214 adolescent females and school teachers also,” said Shandeepan.

Shandeepan said that delivery kits and nutritional supplements were distributed in seven remote villages of Kashmir Valley where hospitals and primary health centres were partially or completely damaged. He said DFY also organised antenatal check-ups in Gundi-Nowgam, Sumbal, and Bandipora areas of Bandipora district.

“We conducted a state-wide capacity building programme for health workers on ‘Public Health in Emergency’ in partnership with the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). The programme was designed in three phases. In the first phase 70 state-level trainers were trained in Srinagar and Jammu,” said Shandeepan.

In the second phase, DFY conducted district-level Training of Trainers (TOT) in Leh and Kargil districts in Ladakh, and in Kulgam, Shopian, Baramulla, Srinagar, Kupwara, Ganderbal, Pulwama, Anantnag and Budgam districts in the Kashmir region. In the third phase, DFY trained 12,000 ASHAs through the 800 trainers trained in the district-level TOT and 70 trainers trained in the state-level TOT.

“We supported five health facilities with three in Pulwama, one each in Baramulla and Bandipora districts. DFY is also involved in health facility assessment for 75 flood-affected health facilities. We are supporting our partner organisation, Islamic Relief & Research Trust, in operating mobile medical units in 47 flood-affected villages of Bandipora and Baramulla districts,” added Shandeepan. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR

I DON'T APPRECIATE WHAT I HAVE,
THE SAME REASON YOU DON'T
APPRECIATE WHAT I SHOULD HAVE!



SAMITA

PHOTO FEATURE

Ajit Krishna

Coffee for the spirit

OPPOSITE the majestic Taj Mahal is a humble symbol of love, a small café called Sheroes Hangout. The innocuous café, tucked into one of Agra's byzantine lanes, is, like the Taj, unique. Started on 9 December 2014 by Stop Acid Attack Network, it employs five survivors of acid attacks – Ritu, Rupa, Chanchal, Geeta and Neetu.

“The idea was to help the girls become financially independent, to support the cause and make people aware of what an acid attack victim goes through. In the long run, we'd like to make it an *adda* for women's empowerment,” says Ashish, a volunteer with Stop Acid Attack Network that has invested ₹10 lakh in the café.

The café's ambience is warm and friendly. The walls are peppered with graffiti. There is a boutique with colourful clothes, a library with books on women's empowerment and a kitchen where the aroma of food wafts through. The menu lists coffee, of course, other beverages, snacks, sandwiches, desserts, Indian and Chinese dishes and so on.

Ritu, now 21, was 17 when she was attacked. She was a state-level volleyball player then and wearing red that day, she recalls. Ritu had stopped wearing red all these years. But she has overcome her fear and now wears the colour. She manages the café's accounts and dreams of being a painter.

The boutique is Rupa's baby. She was 15 when she was attacked. Afraid of her own face, she stopped looking in the mirror. Rupa smiles and proudly shows you all the clothes she has designed.

Geeta was attacked 22-23 years ago. Her daughter, Neetu, was just three years old and sleeping right next to her. “I can't tell you what I have gone through,” she says. Neetu wants to become a singer and you might hear her crooning behind the counter while you sip your coffee.

It's a place you spend time searching for because you want to be there. “We walked a long way just to visit this place,” say Alex and Amanda, both tourists from the US. Sumesh, a student of pharmacology, says he walked in out of sheer curiosity. “I wondered, what is this place? When the girls explained, I knew this is going to be my regular hangout joint.”

The café attracts people from all age groups. Eighty-year-old Maya Devi says this is the first café she has visited in her entire life. “I am here to meet the girls. My granddaughter told me about this place,” she says.



Rupa, Ritu, Geeta and Neetu with volunteers

“It's a ‘pay as you wish’ cafeteria,” explains Ashish. “You can pay ₹200 for a cup of coffee. The extra money goes to the survivors. We encourage everyone to come. If somebody wants to pay ₹10, that is also fine. At least he will talk about the café to may be 10 other people, spread the word, and perhaps create awareness so that such attacks are prevented.”

Those who come here say Sheroes Hangout is an experience. You emerge stronger. The girls inspire.

They face all their difficulties with a smile. Sheroes is all about strength, courage, love, support and a family. The girls form a family into which all are welcome.

Megha, a volunteer and a first-year college student says: “The more time I spend time with them, the more fearless I get. Sometimes I feel they are taking care of me.”

It's the only café in the world where the customer gets a tip – a lesson for life. ■



Rupa with her line of clothes



Ritu serving coffee



Geeta in the kitchen

OBITUARY

Liberal who stuck to the facts

Sanjaya Baru pays a personal tribute to BG Verghese

HE stood up to Indira Gandhi as indeed he did to Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy. Boobli George Verghese was a man of firm convictions based on hard facts. He never countenanced prejudice shorn of evidence, be it on the part of those in power or those fighting the powerful.

I entered the field of journalism after Verghese left it. So I never knew him as an editor, though I knew of him. As a student at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) fighting Indira Gandhi's Emergency I, along with hundreds of others like me, shared the anger of thousands of readers of the *Hindustan Times*, when Verghese was summarily dismissed by its owner, KK Birla, because he was critical of Indira Gandhi's policies.

However, my respect for him is based on my knowledge of his research and writing over the past two decades and more, when he was a senior fellow at Delhi's Centre for Policy Research (CPR). I had the opportunity of associating myself with many of his activities as a member of the CPR board and of publishing his columns in the newspapers I edited. At CPR, Verghese produced several books and reports, interacting with senior aca-



demics and young researchers.

Verghese was a true liberal. He lived by the liberal dictum that even when one disagrees with a point of view one will defend the right of an interlocutor to hold that point of view. He lived by the liberal editor's motto that while opinion is free, facts are sacred.

Hence, he challenged other dissenters like him when their arguments were not based on facts. That is why he was willing to stand up and criticise what were among many of his friends and well-wish-

ers fashionable views about the downside of development. Views that have come to gain undue currency within the so-called 'civil society' groups.

He deployed his felicitous pen to begin a column questioning Arundhati Roy's views on big dams and development thus: "The poetry was charming; the facts wrong; more rhyme than reason. Arundhati Roy, the poet laureate of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, allowed poetic licence to run away with her in writing about the Sardar Sarovar Project."

When Verghese wrote thus, he could not be dismissed as an apologist for the powers that be. He had earned his anti-establishment credentials fighting none other than Indira Gandhi, whom he served in her salad days as Prime Minister. He was

Indira's press secretary from 1966 to 1969, in the years of her meteoric rise and before she hired the services of the legendary HY Sharada Prasad, who then served her for her entire tenure as PM, including when she returned to power in 1980.

While journalists still remember him for his journalistic courage, conviction, editorial leadership and the felicity of his expression, academics, scholars and policy-makers will long remember him for his painstaking research on river water issues, on the development of the Northeast and on India's relations with her eastern neighbours, especially Bangladesh and Burma, the land of his birth.

Born at Maymyo in Burma in June 1926, Verghese was educated at the prestigious Doon School, St Stephen's College and Trinity College, Cambridge. His writing and editing skills were honed as editor of *The Doon School Weekly*. Like many great editors of his generation he worked at all the major newspapers of the time, namely the *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express*. I had the pleasure of publishing him in the columns of *The Financial Express* and the *Business Standard*. Till recently he wrote occasionally for *The Tribune*, *Outlook* and many other publications.

My personal association with Verghese is related to a little known part of his long and varied career. After the Kargil War in 1999, defence min-

A true teacher

Rohinton Kapadia is remembered by his former students

IT is difficult to write the obituary of a person who did not have much time or patience for post-mortem rituals prescribed by organised religions. In fact, he did not have much time for organised religions per se, and most of his friends and acquaintances, more often than not, were outside Kolkata's shrinking Zoroastrian community to which he belonged.

Professor Rohinton Kapadia, who died in hospital after a prolonged battle with cancer early on the morning of 11 January, was one of those rare individuals and teachers who could not be described as a public figure at all in spite of having nurtured generations of students in the English department of St Xavier's College, Kolkata, where he started taking classes in 1968.

He preferred to remain in the background while encouraging students to go back to the text. Without his urgings - and sometimes stern words - many of them would otherwise never have touched the novels of his favourite author, Joseph Conrad, for example. Not surprisingly, in spite of keeping so low a profile, one can be sure that he would be fondly remembered as someone they could go back to when times were hard, and one was in need of solace.

Kapadia, popularly known as Kappie among his students although they usually never addressed him as such, besides being an extremely thoroughgoing teacher, was more remarkable as a human being who could make even an average student feel that s/he could have something to contribute, notwithstanding a lacklustre performance in class and in examinations. In other words, he was no elitist and in his presence nobody would feel left out. These are values that have been cherished for years in the institution that he served almost all his life - St Xavier's College. And few others represented these principles better than Kapadia. Yet he



was remarkably free of pedantry, pretentiousness and starchiness, and being his student and ultimately his friend was an outstandingly liberating experience.

Kapadia was born in Mumbai in a Parsi family in 1943 at a time when many had fled Calcutta in fear of Japanese bombing during World War II. His father, Jal, was, like him, a teacher, and so was his second brother, Hoshang, who pre-deceased him. He was a diehard Kolkatan like the rest of his family, and he was raised in this

city. Like his two brothers, both his schooling and college education were at St Xavier's. He began his teaching career at St Xavier's School, Bokaro, at a time when its founder, Father John Moore, from Australia, was serving there. This is where he befriended Ronjooy Karlekar, who later joined Jadavpur University.

Students from his first years in college remember him as a bright young man, a little older than them, who could make light of even his favourite Conrad. He introduced his students to the English parodist and caricaturist, Max Beerbohm, who did those wicked imitations of the prose styles of liter-

isters George Fernandes and Jaswant Singh had created a small policy advisory group of outside analysts. Verghese and I were members of that group. It was in that period that I came to understand Verghese's intense nationalism. He was as committed to the security and development of India as he was to the welfare of its people. He did not see a contradiction in the two, as many civil society activists tend to.

He saw good relations with India's neighbours and India's own development as being inter-linked and he saw the two as necessary elements of any agenda for pro-people development. Hearing Verghese on issues like irrigation projects, I was often reminded of Mao Zedong's famous line that one cannot make an omelette without breaking an egg.

It was in recognition of his courage, conviction, humanism and commitment to development that, I believe, he was awarded the Magsaysay Award. If Verghese should be remembered by any award then it is not the ones he received but the ones he gave away. He took interest in encouraging good journalism and long after he had ceased to be a journalist continued to associate himself with the Chameli Devi Jain Award for Women Media Professionals – an award that has recognised the talent of several of India's best media professionals.

The best tribute to Verghese would be that journalists, researchers and civil society activists – representing the three groups that he was himself associated with – learn to respect facts and dedicate themselves to the pursuit of the truth in whatever they say and do. Verghese abhorred empty sloganeering, howsoever appealing it may sound, and always respected facts, even when they were not convenient. ■

ary greats like Conrad. He did in-depth studies of the prescribed authors, and went even beyond. While teaching Browning's "My Last Duchess", he would display Botticelli's famous painting, which is referred to in this dramatic monologue.

In those early days, when some students would walk in noticeably high, he always chose to ignore their drug-induced state. He did not do it because he thought doing drugs was cool, but perhaps because he never damned those who were different, long before it was politically correct and trendy to do so. He would take students with problems of their own, some of their own making, under his wing, and give them courage to face their own shortcomings. He would also help young colleagues get over their initial hesitation. He was head of the English department from the late 1980s up to the early 1990s. He retired in 2003.

A great teacher he was no doubt, but he also loved the good things of life such as food, and well-tailored trousers and shirts. He was always well-turned out without being ostentatious. He was a generous host and would never forget to treat his students who dropped by at his place. At the end, he bore the agonies of his illness uncomplainingly and with fortitude. ■

Rural food fest inspires locals



Bharat Dogra
Bilaspur

THE Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS), an acclaimed health programme based in Chhattisgarh, has started an agricultural project to promote organic farming and conservation of seeds in Bilaspur district. It has also organised two rural food festivals to educate youth about nutrition by endorsing traditional foods.

Experimental cultivation is taking place right inside the JSS campus. Objectives include improving crop yields, reducing costs of cultivation, enhancing soil and minimising water usage.

Hom Prakash, coordinator of JSS' agricultural efforts, says, "We are using SRI (System of Rice Intensification) technology which emphasises growing less plants per acre so that each gets better nutrition from the soil. We do not use any chemical fertilisers, pesticides or weedicides. Thus food grains and seeds are free from any contamination."

Two types of manure are prepared. One, called Jeevan Amrit, is made from cow urine, cow dung, small quantities of gram flour and jaggery. The second is green manure. All inputs are local and low-cost. This increases self-reliance.

Nearly 405 varieties of rice are conserved at the farm here. Around 50 varieties are grown to provide seeds to local farmers. These include selected varieties such as Vishnubhog, Kasherbhog, Zeeraphool, Dubraj, and so on. Several varieties that use less water and mature in 60 to 100 days are also available such as Naina Kajal, Bhara Bhulau, Gorakhpuri and Khurburi.

Studies have highlighted the strength of traditional food systems of tribal communities based on self-reliant agriculture and forest sources. This enabled people to meet their food and nutrition requirements from diverse foods, some of which

could grow in adverse weather conditions such as drought.

However, some of these traditional strengths are fading. There is a need to create awareness among the younger generation in rural areas about their traditional diets so that they don't die out.

Hence, the JSS organised two rural food festivals.

"The Self-Help Groups (SHGs) who took part were invited to bring along their food materials and cook dishes of their choice in the feast," said Anil Bamne, coordinator of the

food festivals. "It was clearly explained that the aim is to make people, particularly the younger generation, more conscious about the diversity and richness of traditional farming and food systems. Shifting cultivation and mixed farming systems were discussed, especially their potential to provide diverse and nutritious foods at low risk and cost.

"There was a lot of enthusiasm among people for the *Jevnaar*, as the feast was called. They started coming from their villages at night, bringing various food materials including those collected from forests. By 10 am, they had prepared most of their dishes. Nearly 40 different types of dishes were prepared."

There was enough time for interactions and to learn about the dishes prepared and raw materials used by others. Various groups tasted each other's dishes and collected a lot of information that they could use to add to the nutrition and diversity of their food.

For instance, participants came up with a list of different ways in which *mahua* could be used: as *puri* when mixed with wheat flour, as *laddus* when mixed with roasted wheat, as a vegetable when cooked with gram, as *laata* when cooked with seeds, as *pakoras*, snacks and sweets when fried. While *mahua* is commonly known to be used only to make liquor, what people saw in the *Jevnaar* was *mahua's* many uses as food, including the possibilities of mixing other grains with it, particularly when there is a shortage of grain.

Similarly, there was an interesting display of lesser-known green leafy vegetables, roots and tubers, vegetables which are dried for later use and a vegetable obtained from the bamboo plant.

As they set off to return to their villages, the villagers and especially the women expressed a lot of appreciation for this opportunity to learn from one another. They said it would be very useful if such an event could be organised at least once a year. ■

ON THE TUBER TRAIL

The Kunbis cultivate an amazing number of varieties



Joida's star attraction -- taro or colocasia esculenta

Shree Padre
Joida (Karnataka)

JOIDA taluk in Uttara Kannada is so remote and badly connected that the local Kunbi tribals trudge 20 km and sometimes even 50 km just to catch a bus. Joida mostly has no transport, no electricity, no hospital and no mobile network. Seriously ill people have to be wrapped in a sheet and carried to the nearest town. If, by a stroke of luck, a bus turns up, it may be possible to arrive at a hospital in time.

But if you think Joida should be written off, think again. Remote and backward it may be, but in recent times it has found a place on the country's agricultural map. Cut off from the rest of India, the Kunbis have been growing an amazing variety of tubers organically. Their main tuber, is the big taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), which grows to the average height of a man. Agricultural scientists are now trying to gauge if the Kunbi taro is distinct. If yes, the Kunbis can apply for geographical indication.

The Kunbi tubers caught the attention of Balachandra Hegde Sayimane, a farmer and forestry researcher who works as a coordinator with SWIFT (Sahyadri Wildlife and Forest Conservation Trust) in Nilkund. He was researching non-timber forest produce and had to stay overnight at a remote Kunbi village.

"I couldn't escape the sight of tubers in all the houses I went to. I realised that tubers play a very important role in the lives of the Kunbis. The only money they earn is by migrating to Goa to work as farm labour. It struck me: can we help them earn a good income from tubers? They won't need to migrate then."

Sayimane organised a one-day Tuber Fair at Joida on 19 November and invited a five-member team of agricultural scientists from the Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI) in Thiruvananthapuram.

Dr S. Ramanathan, who headed the team, spent a day studying the Kunbi tubers. He and other scientists are

excited by what they have found.

"We have already drawn up an action plan," says Dr Ramanathan, who is Principal Scientist at the CTCRI. "We will make arrangements to grow some of our varieties in Joida on a trial basis. We will also arrange for some taro samples to be taken to our centre where we will explore the possibility of producing flour."

He says the productivity of existing tubers could be boosted and varieties like the orange-fleshed sweet potato, elephant foot yam, white yam and arrowroot could be introduced.

For many of India's poorest farmers and tribal communities, tubers and roots are an important source of nutrition. They are easy to grow, thrive in a variety of soils and are relatively free of pests. But their status is rather low.

"They are orphaned," says Dr Ramanathan. "There are no special programmes for tubers. Importance is given to cereals, pulses, oilseeds, cotton and sugarcane. Kerala is the only state to have recently started a tuber crop development programme."

Dr Ramanathan warns that with climate change, productivity of food crops will decline. "But tubers can withstand fluctuating weather conditions to some extent. That is why they are projected as food security crops."

THE TUBER FAIR

Eighty farmers brought samples of their tubers to the tuber fair. The big taro was the star attraction. A husband-wife team rustled up taro cutlets with honey, chutney and a variety of other tubers. It was relished. Prizes were given for the best taro, the farm with the highest diversity and so on. At the end of the day, the tubers had sold out. The total income generated was as much as around ₹1.80 lakh in just one day.

"We weren't aware at all that these tubers we grow have a good market. Now that we know, we would like to increase their yield," remarked Devidas M. Velip, Taluk President of the Kunbi Samaj.

Tubers are easy to grow, thrive in a variety of soils and are relatively free of pests. But they suffer from low status and are orphaned.



The team of scientists was excited by

the tubers grown by the Kunbis

The CTCRI scientists made presentations on tuber cultivation, its potential, value-added products, new tuber varieties and so on. Samples of value-added products were exhibited. There was also a discussion on how to help the Kunbis increase their income from tuber cultivation.

The tuber fair was part of a programme to improve livelihood security in the Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF), New Delhi, funded it.

It is Kunbi women who mostly cultivate the tubers and sell them. They rely on the men for arduous tasks like digging. The women keep the money they earn for their children's education.

Seven types of curries are made from the big taro: *pana*, *ate*, *komb*, *sambar*, *kulya kadi* (with crabs), *sumda kadi* (with prawns), *kapa* (steamed with rice batter). *Kona payas*, made from dioscorea tubers, is a popular *kheer*-like dessert.

Other main tubers that are grown include greater yams (*Dioscorea alata*) and lesser yams (*Dioscorea esculenta*). A few families grow tannia (*Xanthosoma fagitifolia*) and Chinese potato (*Plectranthus rotundifolius*). Around 15 to 20 varieties of tubers are grown. Unlike other tribals, who collect wild tubers from the forest, the Kunbis cultivate theirs.

The Kunbis practise a ritual called Naye when they offer their new tuber crop to God Janmi the day after Ganesh Chaturthi. No family uses the tuber before conducting this ritual. Mirashi, their community leader, has to visit each house to conduct this offering. In fact, since Mirashi couldn't find time to conduct this ritual, about 50 households that were interested in bringing their tubers to the tuber fair couldn't do so!

SLOW PROGRESS

But in Joida the biggest roadblock the Kunbis face in marketing their tubers is chronic underdevelopment.

Neelakantha Nayak, 59, a runner or delivery agent for Karnataka's postal department, started his career 36 years ago. Till date, he is the only link between Joida's remote villages and the rest of the world.

For two decades, there were no roads to his office – the Karamjoida branch post office. He had to walk for 20 km. "Many times, I encountered bears, wild



Shobha Shelpekar, a Kunbi, proudly holds up her taro tuber

Kunbi lore

HISTORY has it that, as a result of the Portuguese invasion, Kunbis migrated from neighbouring Goa between the 12th and 15th centuries. Most of them settled in Joida *taluk* that has a high percentage of forested area. Kunbis are categorised as Scheduled Tribes in Goa and as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Karnataka.

They continue to live in joint families. "There are about 30 families with more than 20 members each," says Devidas M. Velip, Taluk President of the Kunbi Samaj. In the 1990s a big joint family in Deria had more than 100 members. The family has since split into 21 smaller families.

Although they start living separately in newly constructed houses acquired under government housing schemes, they continue to dine together. They go home only to sleep.

Living in forested areas, cut off from all communication, the Kunbis are compelled to survive on subsistence farming. During the fallow



Vithoba Velip and her husband in their big taro garden

season, for three months in a year, one or two members from each family migrate to Goa to work as farm labour. Each person brings back ₹20,000-25,000.

Shy by nature, Kunbis hesitate to socialise with others. They are immensely attached to their native villages, festivals and rituals.

There are primary schools in Joida taluk but for high school and college, Kunbi children have to travel to far-off places. Says Jayanand Derekar, a post-graduate from the community, "About 20-30 students, mostly girls, drop out after Class 5. An equal number of students don't study beyond Class 12." Now there is a new college at Kumbarawada. About 20-25 Kunbi youths have graduated, another five are in college and five are post-graduates.

For their health needs the Canara Welfare Trust of Karwar has arranged a mobile hospital under its Sanjeevini Seva Trust. The van, equipped with a doctor, staff and medicines, goes to fixed centres in Kunbi village areas once a week and provides medical assistance.

But their diet seems to have a positive effect on their health. Devidas Velip says: "There are quite a few healthy old men over 100 years in almost all Kunbi hamlets."

"Though there is malnutrition, anaemia and other such disorders, chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer are relatively less among the Kunbis," observes Dr Sangappa Neelappa Dabe, Medical Officer of the government *taluk* hospital at Joida, where he has worked for 13 years. "We conducted a survey recently to identify TB patients. We had a tough time locating such cases." ■



Rukmini Vithoba Gowda displays a range of tubers that she grows

wild boar and bison. After 5 pm tigers roamed in the area. It was frightening but what could I do?"

Once roads were built, Nayak bought a bicycle. Now he rides a motorcycle. But Joida's progress has been very slow and halting. Fourteen villages don't even have a path a motorcycle can navigate. Education and health facilities lag for 18,000 out of the 20,000-strong Kunbi community. The total population of the *taluk* is 50,000.

How much Kunbis earn by selling tubers depends on how far they are located from the bus service.

Rukmini Vithoba Gowda of Pattedgali grows 14 varieties of tubers. Since she lives on the periphery of the Kunbi settlement, she has one great advantage – bus connectivity. During the harvest season from November to December, she takes her tubers to Joida's weekly market. She earns ₹9,000 a year. From November to June she cooks a tuber dish almost every day.

Sumitra Krishna Velip lives in Malkarni. The bus service is only seven km away. She grows seven varieties of tubers on half an acre. If she gets a low price for her produce at the Joida market, she travels to distant Ramanagar. Her annual income from tubers is about ₹50,000. "We produce more for the market than for ourselves," she says.

But most Kunbi households aren't so lucky. Only 10 per cent can hope to find a bus after walking for an hour. For the rest, selling their tubers is tough. So they grow only as much as the family can consume.

Families that are close to Goa grow more tubers since they have a ready market in the state. Goa prices for tubers are higher. The big taro, called *maddi* in Konkani, is much sought-after by the Gowda Saraswath Brahmin community.

Vani Pai, a Gowda Saraswath Brahmin, says: "We believe that the taro has to be eaten at least once a year. Families that visit Goa always return with *maddi* tubers. Depending on the season and supply, one tuber costs between ₹50 and ₹100."

Villages like Vagili, Bomdeli, Viral, Mayire and Pathagudi have no motorable roads. Though Goa is just 25 km away, these villages, once in a while, have to go to Joida town, which is 50 km away. "They start at 6 am with packed *roti* and curry. They reach Joida around 3 pm before the offices close. They are compelled to stay at some friend or relative's home that night," says Devidas Velip.

The Kunbi Samaj is now considering starting a tuber growers' organisation. They will then be able to pool their produce and take it on a truck to Joida where they plan to open a sales centre.



CTCRI scientists have invented many products from tubers including noodles and pasta

RECIPE

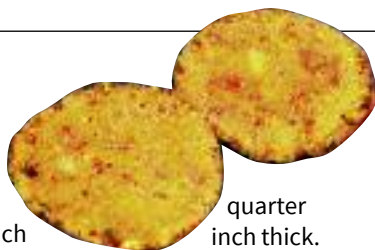
Maddi Podi

INGREDIENTS:

- Colocasia or arbhi:** Small piece
- Chilli powder:** A pinch
- Tamarind:** Small piece
- Wheat rava:** For coating
- Salt:** To taste

METHOD

Peel the outer skin of the tuber. Slice it horizontally, about



quarter inch thick. Make a thick paste of tamarind, rava, chilli powder and salt. The tamarind paste is used to smoothen the colocasia. You can use a little extra. Coat the colocasia slices with this paste and

marinate for 15 minutes.

Heat the tawa and pour in a little oil. When the tawa is hot enough, lower the flame and put in the slices covered with paste. Roast the slices for about 10 minutes. Apply a little oil and turn it onto the other side. Roast similarly. This dish can be eaten as a snack or as a side dish with rice.

Recipe by: Vani Pai Poltoli, Joida

BRINGING IN TOURISTS

The Kunbis can also earn from tourism. The Kali Pravasodyama Sangha (KPS), which represents seven homestays and a nature resort, is keen to include tubers on its menu for tourists. Another four homestays will be starting in Joida *taluk* shortly. Some representatives of the KPS came to the tuber fair. “We are for sustainable and responsible tourism with social commitment,” said NR Hegde, President of KPS. “We are keen to promote tubers and create a market.”

After the tuber fair, the KPS organised a one-day workshop on how to cook tubers. Representatives from 15 homestays and resorts took part. Housewives and cooks from home-stays and resorts experimented with tubers and made *paratha*, *holige*, *payasa*, *sasive* and *bomda*. The recipes were shared. “It was good exposure,” remarked Hegde, “because none of the cooks had cooked so many tubers before.”

A poster with pictures of important tubers and their nutritional values will be exhibited in all homestays and resorts. Narasimha Chchapakhanda, a member of SWIFT and the owner of a resort, is planning to print a brochure and distribute it to homestays and shops that sell tubers. “Demand will grow once we start cooking tubers for guests. We will make tubers available in nearby shops to guests who want to try cooking tubers at home. This is how we successfully introduced jackfruit *pappadams* here.”

FOOD AND MORE

Cassava, potato and sweet potato rank among the top 10 food crops produced in developing countries. India’s most important tuber crop is cassava or tapioca. Originally from Brazil, it was introduced in Kerala in the 16th century by the Portuguese. In the 18th century, the Maharaja of Travancore, Vishakam Thirunal, popularised it and it became a substitute for rice for a while before being upended by rubber plantations.

Today, Tamil Nadu has the highest productivity of cassava in the world. The tuber is pampered with irrigation and fertiliser in the state. It is used as an industrial raw material both in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Different modified starches, liquid glucose, fructose and sago are extracted from cassava starch. Salem is the hub of the sago industry which is in high demand in Maharashtra -

How much Kunbis earn by selling tubers depends on how far they are located from the bus service. Joida has hardly any roads.

where it is cooked as a *khichdi* – Gujarat and West Bengal.

Andhra Pradesh and Odisha lead in cultivation of elephant foot yam. Baruahsagar, near Jhansi and Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh, are also tuber hotspots. More than 75 per cent of the area under sweet potato is in the east and Northeast. Productivity of sweet potato in India is lower than the rest of the world. Taro is grown along Andhra Pradesh’s coastal belt.

CTCRI is trying to promote cultivation of tubers. In partnership with the International Potato Centre, it is promoting the orange-fleshed sweet potato in Odisha.

Although it has as much beta carotene as a carrot, the orange sweet potato hasn’t been popular because of its taste. “But now we have developed varieties with good palatability,” says Dr Sheela MN, principal scientist and head, Division of Crop Improvement, CTCRI. “One tuber meets the Vitamin A requirement of a person. The FAO is recommending the orange sweet potato as a nutritional food security crop. It is a short-duration crop that can be grown in 120 days. We also

have an 85-day duration crop called Sree Kanaka that has 8.8 mg of Vitamin A in 100 gm plus iron and zinc.” It is also low-glycemic and good for diabetics.

The orange sweet potato can be promoted for midday meals in schools, especially in tribal areas where there is Vitamin A deficiency. The MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is promoting the orange sweet potato in Odisha’s tribal belt.

“We are going to release two sweet potato varieties, SP 13 and 14. One is orange and the other is purple. Japan produces sweet potato juice and noodles made from tubers. We have made pasta from *Dioscorea alata*, the purple-coloured yam. In Rajahmundry the purple yam is being grown in a vast area. It

is used for making chutneys and is exported to the Gulf. This yam has anti-cancer properties and is excellent for osteoporosis and rheumatism,” says Dr Sheela.

CTCRI has also developed two new varieties of cassava, Sree Atulya and Sree Apurva, for industrial use. “These have 30 per cent more extractable starch. We also have a mosaic resistant variety,” says Dr Sheela. In Brazil, cassava is consumed as a flour called *farinha*. CTCRI is likewise planning to convert cassava into flour.

CTCRI and other centres working on tubers have so far released more than 100 varieties of tubers. Gajendra, a non-acrid elephant foot yam developed by the Kovvur Station of All India Coordinated Project on Tuber Crops,

is now popular throughout India.

Eventually, it is India’s small farmers who will find ways and means to mainstream tubers. Take Shanker Kishore Chaudhary, a farmer in Bihar who cultivates elephant foot yam or *ool*. He grows the crop on his own fields and on surrounding fields that he has rented.

“I normally harvest 50 to 60 tonnes from a hectare and earn a gross income of ₹2 lakh in about 10 months,” he says. “Alongside I grow *rajma*, peas, *bhindi* and banana. Intercropping brings me a profit of some ₹15,000 to ₹20,000 per hectare.”

Chaudhary has developed more than 50 value-added products from elephant yam. Some years ago at the Sonepur Fair, he sold thousands of *gulab jamuns* and *litti* made from this yam. Chaudhary describes growing elephant foot yam as ‘tension-free farming’ – the tuber doesn’t require cold storage, there are no marketing problems and the income is always good. ■

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BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

‘Govt has to be trusted to get public purpose right’

AJIT KRISHNA



Vinayak Chatterjee: ‘PPPs have got a fresh lease of life’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A recent ordinance on land acquisition issued by the BJP government dramatically does away with consultation and consent at local levels for projects that are being undertaken in the public interest. It leaves generous compensation for acquired land intact, but seeks to cut out debate and dissent in the belief that better infrastructure delivered quickly will speed up economic growth in India. The goal is to generate more jobs for the large numbers of young people giving up agriculture in search of other livelihoods.

So, will the ordinance become a law finally passed by Parliament? Will it transform the pace at which roads and power plants are built?

Predictably, the Congress and the Leftist parties and activist groups have criticised the ordinance. But will the ordinance really work for investors? Or will it create an atmosphere of mistrust and ferment

and make the task of setting up projects even more complex?

Civil Society spoke to Vinayak Chatterjee, Chairman and founder of Feedback Infra, who has in the past 30 years built a reputation for being a forward-looking and impartial observer of the development strategies of successive governments.

With one stroke of the pen, the land acquisition law has been amended through an ordinance. How effective will this be? How good is it for business?

It will be effective a lot for infrastructure and the public-private partnerships (PPPs). But for manufacturing industries, honestly, it has not undone much because the compensation remains the same, the social impact remains the same and the consent conditions remain the same. So my friends in the manufacturing sector haven't seen any great benefit.

For those in the infrastructure sector the government has brought in an interesting caveat, and I think it's a fair caveat, that land is not alienated from

the government. In most PPP projects, like a road, the land is not transferred to the owner. When the concession period finishes, like for the Delhi airport the concession period is for 60 years, the land reverts to the government. So PPP projects where the land is not sold have been brought into that definition where you don't require consent and social impact assessment as much as you don't it require for some of the other infrastructure projects that are defined as public purpose. So PPPs have got a breath of life and the government has included in public purpose social infrastructure like hospitals, universities and schools, all of which I think are important.

The manufacturing sector is not overjoyed. But people who are in the business of utilising land for infrastructure, social infrastructure and PPPs have seen easing of restrictive conditions.

But land has a history. We have had several struggles for land rights, we have a history of displace-

ment and there were struggles for a new land acquisition and resettlement law. You now have a situation where the consent of the gram sabha is not required. Will this not create social unrest? How will projects be sustainable?

At the end of the day there is a need for balance. If the pendulum swings to two extremes, it's not good for day-to-day decision-making. Earlier, the government could acquire anything under the guise of public purpose. It just had to issue a notification and it acquired land with very poor compensation to farmers and with no responsibilities for resettlement and rehabilitation.

Jairam Ramesh has gone on record to say the biggest defaulter has not been the private sector but the government. So that was one extreme end of the pendulum where the State acquired large tracts of land not only for its own use but also for parastatals and PSUs and did nothing with it or acquired land even when it was not required or encouraged crony capitalism under the guise of State acquisition.

The other end of the pendulum is a situation in which you can't move an inch unless 80 per cent of the people put up their hands, the procedures take five years and you have a plethora of ways and means which just stops development in its tracks.

The current Bill does not allow this to happen. It seeks a balance.

The fire driving this (the land ordinance) is jobs. Today jobs aren't just in the manufacturing sector but in retail, hospitals etc. Left to itself, the first few drafts of the land acquisition Bill had actually given signs of stalling development, which means sitting on a powder keg – because it means no jobs.

The BJP/NDA government is practically oriented. You have to have one guiding star at the end of the day and that is to pull this country out of poverty and create jobs. Be it income tax or GST, things that are irrational, they are trying to sort it out.

The SEZ law was similarly pushed through by the previous regime without consultation and SEZs were seen as a means of grabbing land by the private sector.

No, not the private sector. Crony private sector tried to get into bed with crony politicians and use the machinery of the State to grab land at very low compensation to farmers. It could have been anything. They saw it as another window. But that has now been stopped.

But land is acquired for educational institutions under dubious reasons. Hospitals are given land with conditions that are not fulfilled. You could bring anything under public purpose. Shouldn't public purpose have been more clearly defined? Isn't a situation like this prone to conflict?

But then you can't trust the government to do anything. You can't trust the government to own banks, or Coal India. If you start with the position that the government cannot be trusted to define public purpose, then across the length and breadth of the economy you have to ask for removal of the State.

Across the world there is a process of decentralising decision-making by involving communities. In India we have moved to consulting smaller and smaller units of people, like the gram sabha. Suddenly, this ceases. How good is this for business?

Let's see what has ceased. There are different provi-

sions. First is the definition of compensation. Not a pin has been touched in that legislation. It is generous compensation, two times, four times, 100 per cent ... to see that the farmer gets a fair price. Then resettlement and rehabilitation has not been touched. The real issue that has been touched is social impact assessment and 80 per cent consent and the definition of public purpose. If there is a very pressing reason that a power plant has to be located in a certain area because it has linkages with coal mines with transmission lines, surely the larger good of the country cannot be subsumed. If you tell the State to suspend judgement of the greater common good, then you can also tell it to cease making laws in Parliament.

At some level you cannot remove the State from decision-making and leave it totally to consensual behaviour of the affected parties.

'At some level you cannot remove the State from decision-making and leave it totally to consensual behaviour of the affected parties.'

Remember the people are politically represented. They have panchayats, MLAs, MPs. In our pluralistic society even in projects defined as public purpose, if there is a huge outcry our polity is such that that may be taken into account. But it had given a fillip to a situation where development had come to a standstill. So things are being balanced out now. It's difficult to satisfy every constituency.

So you are saying the ball is in the government's court to deliver on public purpose?

If, say, a university wants to buy land from farmers, this law is not applicable. It is applicable only for acquisition. Anybody can do a private deal with farmers and buy, say, 100 acres for, say, a university.

But if, say, a university has to be set up it could be public, private or public-private, it could be like Nalanda, and they appeal to the government, saying we are credible people with a credible agenda, we need your assistance as a state to set it up in your state. The state may refuse. So the State can choose whether it wants to align itself with what it sees as public purpose and acquire land under those conditions. People are confusing the law with free purchase of land and land acquisition by the State.

But the record of governments has been very bad. It has. But public purpose will be put to the test of the courts also. If it is misused, somebody will go to court with a PIL and say this is not public purpose. At least this is a far tighter interpretation of public purpose that allows it to be discussed, debated and even taken to the judiciary.

It isn't manufacturing but urbanisation that will require land, especially mass housing, that has been put under the definition of public purpose. Or, if I have to set up schools, hospitals, commercial areas across the length and breadth of the country, or smart cities. So this is about creating an enabling environment. The discussion has to go beyond a bunch of manufacturing industrialists to the use of

land for economic development and therefore, by definition, the creation of jobs.

What is your take on the alleged early demise of public-private partnerships?

I wouldn't call it demise. It has achieved a certain maturity after going through a rite of passage. The first phase of PPP started in 1997 and lived a useful life. Whether it is mobile phones, better highways or power distribution, we are experiencing the successes of PPP. The five PPP airports – Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Bengaluru – have the highest customer rating in terms of quality of services, including cleanliness, maintenance, etc. There are power plants with private capital churning away.

This has come after long years of public expenditure on public utilities. In 10 to 15 years what we have done is to turn a super tanker around in the direction of private capital, which was not there at all.

At the same time, fault lines have emerged and lessons have been learnt. Private sector fault lines have been overaggressive bidding, overleveraging balance sheets, gold-plating costs and crony capitalism.

On the part of the government, there has been an abysmal lack of sensitivity to sovereign deliverables. It has gone to great lengths to absolve itself of all risks to the private sector and absolved itself of any deliverables. So, while the intellectual framework of PPP has gone up, the government still sees itself as being in a landlord-serf relationship.

Then there is the banking sector which has been overambitious in the amount of funds it has lent to dubious projects and dubious promoters. Here I am not talking about only public sector banks. It is not the job of the commercial bank sector to fund very complicated, risk-prone infrastructure projects. They have been, shall I say, overenthusiastic in lending to risky projects.

You have been talking to government. What is the way forward?

I've simplified it into five Rs. The first is a risk allocation framework. Let the sovereign decide what risks it can take. Should traffic be a private risk or a sovereign risk? It should be a sovereign risk. Should fluctuating coal prices be a sovereign risk or a private risk? It should be a sovereign risk. And when the sovereign doesn't perform, what happens?

The second R is a regulatory framework. A level playing field is needed so that public and private talk to each other as partners and not one talking down to the other.

The third is resource allocation over the long term. It has to be outside the commercial banks – infrastructure debt funds and so on.

The fourth is resetting the implementation framework. Land, environment, Centre-Centre coordination and Centre-state coordination. So that once a project is conceived, regulatory obstacles are got out of the way.

Finally, there is renegotiation. Academic research shows that 64 per cent of PPP projects in Latin America in the mid-'90s and early 2000 were renegotiated in the first three years. PPP contracts are by definition incomplete contracts. It is impossible to know in advance all the problems that will occur. The other way of saying it is that you must be prepared for Black Swan events. The document and partnership must have an inbuilt mechanism for renegotiation. Problems in a project must be seen as a part of a learning curve. ■

Nagarro goes with cycles

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

THE experience with Raahgiri on Sunday mornings has been quite something. People have found it really cool to be able to take over stretches of road in Gurgaon (and now in Delhi too) to do yoga, the Zumba or just to run and cycle. Whole families have been turning up, sometimes with pets in tow.

Raahgiri's message is that cities primarily belong to people. Streets have to first be safe for walking and cycling. Driving comes only after that. After a year plus, some policy changes are in the offing and there are cycle tracks being planned. But, truth be told, Sunday morning outings have remained just that. For the rest of the week it is mayhem as usual on the streets. The challenge remains to get the Raahgiri spirit into everyday living.

Nagarro, an IT company based in Gurgaon, decided to try by encouraging its employees to cycle between the company's buildings which are dotted around Udyog Vihar. Like most big IT companies, Nagarro employs a humongous number of people. Unfortunately it does not have a single campus. Getting from one building to another on foot can be tedious and doing the distance quickly by car has been the usual solution till the cycles were offered.

"We want to sensitise our employees to the advantages of bicycling and non-motorised transport in general," says Megha Jha, who heads public relations at Nagarro. She is coordinating the cycle-sharing programme.

"We have six office buildings. We have set up cycle stands in three of them and have asked our employees to take the cycles out to commute between the offices, or simply go for a light ride during lunch hours."

Nagarro has tied up with The Atlanta Foundation (TAF), a Hyderabad-based organisation which promotes sustainable non-motorised transport (NMT) solutions and bicycling.

"TAF has provided us 25 hybrid Montra bikes which we are using," says Jha. "These are geared bikes, so we had to train our employees how to properly use them. All our employees love the new bikes and are regularly riding them."

"It gives us relief from the office environment. We don't have much physical activity in our work, so when we take the bike out for riding it not only feels refreshing but also provides a little workout for us," says Bhavna Kataria, an engineer.

Some employees have also begun cycling to work. Roopesh Mittal, a senior technology associate, uses a bike most days of the week. "My home is about 12 km away from my office. It takes me around 22 minutes to reach office from home. Interestingly, when I come in my car, it can take me about an hour because of traffic," says Mittal.

"I am not a regular biker. I only bought my bike a few months back," says Mittal. "I don't find it very tiring to ride to work. Once I reach office, I take a shower, change into my office clothes and start working. In fact, I feel much more refreshed and focused on the days I bike to office."



Nagarro has set up cycle stands at its offices in Gurgaon



Employees are encouraged to cycle between office buildings

"We will be getting more cycles soon. This is a new experience for us as well and we are learning a lot every day from the feedback we are getting from our employees," says Jha. "We will also allow them to take the bikes home with them on weekends, if they feel like riding around during the holiday."

The streets around the Nagarro offices aren't exactly the most suitable for cycling. They could do with repairs and designated cycle tracks would be welcome. "We have requested the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG) to make the roads a little more cycle-friendly. We have asked them to develop a proper pedestrian crossing near our main office and design cycle tracks around it so as to avoid accidents. We are still awaiting a response on that," says Jha.

Nagarro's interest in promoting cycling comes directly from Manas Fuloria, one of the founders of the company and managing director for Europe. He has been cycling to work all along from his home in Gurgaon.

Fuloria is quietly passionate about bringing changes in the way cities are managed. A PhD in engineering from IIT Delhi with a degree from Stanford as well, he was one of the enthusiastic sponsors of Raahgiri in the belief that it would create awareness and serve as an emblem of evolved living.

"Transformations happen slowly, but beginnings have to be made," says Fuloria. "People who have been a part of Raahgiri have been sensitised to the plight of pedestrians. There are slight changes in the way some people behave on the road now." ■

Missing the bus on coal



RAJIV KUMAR

INDIA FIRST

MY avant-garde friends tell me that nationalism and patriotism are not only old-fashioned but politically incorrect values in these days of economic globalisation and fusion culture. Apparently, these values distract from real concerns like inequality and protection of human rights and the environment. I disagree wholeheartedly. This column will consistently advocate that a policy regime based on “Putting India First” can serve the national interest and simultaneously achieve other legitimate goals. This requires being rooted in India’s ground realities, a clarity about policy goals, and the courage to think innovatively. It cannot be achieved by using borrowed models or ideology.

The present coal power muddle affords a good example. Coal is and will remain the principal energy source for the foreseeable future. Coal output increased from 352 million tonnes (mt) in 2001 to about 613 mt in 2013. During this period, however, domestic demand increased from 411 mt to 744 mt, necessitating imports of nearly 100 mt. Coal India Limited (CIL), the public sector monolith, saw its output stagnate from 431 to 462 mt between 2011 to 2013 while imports were rising.

In comparison, China’s coal output increased from 1,001 mt in 2001 to nearly 4,000 mt in 2013. In keeping with overall economic performance, the gap in Chinese and Indian coal production has significantly widened.

CIL has visibly adopted the easier technological option of opencast mining. Consequently, 90 per cent of its output comes from mines that are an environmental scourge, if not strictly regulated. Such mining disrupts communities and livelihoods of tribal people, predominant in coal-producing regions.

In contrast, China’s coal output, more than six times the Indian production, is made up of 80 per cent coal from underground mines, which result in relatively far lower ecological and demographic impact.

CIL also gave up on advanced technologies like automated long-wall mining; fluidised bed combustion for pithead power generation from high ash content coal; and installation of pithead thermal power plants with merry-go-round transport that would have helped it bypass the railway bottleneck



PRASANTA BISWAS

Mining remains a dirty and dangerous vocation

An opportunity to come up with an innovative policy framework has been lost and we may end up with another round of costly litigation.

and at the same time achieve a far better energy balance. Consequently, productivity in the Indian coal mining sector remains far below global averages and mining remains a dirty and dangerous vocation.

Coal shortages are painfully reflected in more than 20,000 MW of electricity generation capacity remaining unutilised. It is expected that India will import almost 200 mt annually of non-coking coal in the next 10 years. This will be supremely ironical because, despite the woefully underexplored geology, the country possesses proven coal reserves of more than 100 billion tonnes.

Moreover, our coal reserves may remain unutilised because of the ever tightening globally imposed carbon constraint and the exponentially rising civil society pressure against negative impacts on the environment and population. Coal reserves are in effect a wasting resource. Ground realities require us to jettison the present policy regime and replace it with a wholly new paradigm. Incrementalism and tinkering at the margins or reacting to court decisions will not serve our

national interest.

In the light of these ground realities, clearly enunciated policy goals for the coal sector would be: (i) maximising non-coking coal output in the shortest time and eliminating shortages and imports; (ii) adopting latest mining technologies to minimise environmental degradation and population displacement; (iii) introducing latest coal combustion and carbon sequestration technologies to maximise pithead power generation. This avoids transporting poor quality coal over long distances and bypassing railway connectivity problems; (iv) raising productivity to make coal mining globally competitive; and (v) attracting investment for geological exploration as India remains a woefully underexplored region with reserves having been identified only for an average depth of 30 metres below the surface.

These objectives would be best achieved by attracting large-scale private investment by specialised mining companies that can undertake geological exploration, mining operations and transportation using latest technologies and at globally competitive costs. At the same time, it is important to ensure that profit-maximising private sector mining companies are effectively restrained from practices that will damage the environment and trample the rights of indigenous people. A robust regulatory mechanism, effectively implemented, can ensure that these two ostensibly conflicting objectives of attracting large-scale private investment and minimising environmental degradation and human costs can both be achieved.

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Given the present poor state of public governance, effective and transparent regulation will be achieved only with the active involvement of civil society. This alone will prevent regulatory norms from being compromised by a nexus of crony capitalists and corrupt officials. We already have a successful example of the involvement of civil society organisations in the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sarak Yojana, in which it helped achieve the desired quality of road construction.

The Supreme Court's decision of August 2014 provided the new government with a golden opportunity to put a comprehensive policy in place. Admittedly, there was urgency in addressing the vexed situation in which the industry was landed after the Supreme Court rulings. However, seven months is surely sufficient time for designing a robust and comprehensive policy response. But to do so required a change in the policy mindset, from merely reacting to Supreme Court judgments to taking the long-term and more holistic view of the goals and ground realities.

I am afraid that with the twice promulgated Coal Mines Special Provision (Second) Ordinance (the

first was passed in October and the second on 29 December) not only has an opportunity to come up with an innovative policy framework been lost but we may end up with another round of costly litigation.

More important, the ordinance does nothing to attract private investment and technology by specialised mining companies that produce coal for commercial sale as opposed to producing it for self-consumption. After repeated readings of the Ordinance, I do not find any provision for large-scale commercial production of coal in the country. This rules out coal mining except by public sector companies, as envisaged in the Nationalisation Act of 1973. The Ordinance only legalises coal mining by private sector actual users, which was hitherto done by an executive order that the Court found illegal.

The Ordinance does not address the five goals enunciated above. Its objective, as spelled out in the first paragraph, is merely to ensure continuity of coal mining. It reinforces CIL's dominant position by requiring that 'actual users' who mine coal surrender their excess production to CIL, not to other users!

The high reserve price, in a period of sharply declining world coal prices, subsequently announced may further discourage serious mining

companies. The Ordinance does not even mention the need for environment and human rights protection and enhancing productivity with the use of frontline technology. There is no mention of putting in place a regulatory framework, let alone involving civil society organisations for making it transparent and effective. In short, it is a reactive policy document that misses the woods for the trees or ignores the national interest to address contingent circumstances.

The Ordinance will likely result in continuation of domestic coal scarcity, rising imports, use of backward technologies, poorly paid mining workers, environmental degradation and continued uncertainty about private sector investment. The sad spectre of coal being carried on bicycles for daily sale in Ranchi by hundreds of 'illegal miners' will continue. This is likely to be repeated in other key sectors like iron ore, steel, natural gas and so on. It is time we recognised the need to overthrow the present policy mindset and replace it with one in sync with the 21st century. Hopefully the NITI Ayog will be tasked to do so. ■

Rajiv Kumar is Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research and Founder-Director, Pehle India Foundation

The doomed forest



KANCHI KOHLI

WOULD you like to trek up, asked one of my colleagues. There was no way I was going to say no. It had taken me all of nine years to make it to the footsteps of the mighty Khandadhar waterfalls, one of the highest in Odisha. The sun was up and far into the distance one could see the waterfalls shimmering. The forests of the Khandadhar hills formed the perfect backdrop to the waterfalls. Both elements of nature were in perfect harmony.

As we approached the entrance to the tourist complex inviting us to visit the waterfalls, a dilapidated signboard read 'Paudi Bhuiyan Tribal Welcome You'. It signalled to me that the Khandadhar hills, home to this Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), had perhaps already started their journey to oblivion along with the history of this community.

This part of the Khandadhar hills in Sundargarh district of Odisha has been in the news for the last several years not for its socio-ecological importance or its aesthetic presence but because the South Korean Pohang Steel Company (POSCO) and its Indian counterpart have been eyeing what lies beneath this forest. The red earth, over which the Khandadhar waterfalls drifted, littered with the leaves of the forest, is rich in iron ore.

I had imagined the area to be majestic with thriving forest-based livelihoods and a formidable geographic presence. Having written about the impacts of mining on the hills based on primary work by fel-

low researchers and long-distance conversations with people working in the area, Khandadhar was surely going to mystify me. It did, with pleasurable ease.

But from the time I first gazed at the hill range and its spritely waterfalls, I kept drifting to the words, 'prospecting licence', 'iron ore', 'forest rights', 'mining leases', 'court case' and so on. I kept trying to concentrate on the forest and its history for some time. Yet, I was acutely distracted.

Was the presence of iron ore under the hill range its biggest disadvantage? Were the communities living in and around the area going to lose out to an unfair process and massive land use changes? Will it

The Odisha Mining Corporation has started issuing notices to villages to acquire land for mining purposes.

make any difference that the area now falls within the electoral constituency of the present Minister of Tribal Affairs, Jual Oram?

The prospect of this area opening up for mining continues to loom large. In early November, there were news reports that the Odisha government had requested the Union government to grant a prospecting licence for over 2,000 hectares in favour of POSCO India Pvt. Ltd. POSCO wants to mine iron ore in Khandadhar and use it partly for its proposed steel plant in Jagatsinghpur district as well as for export through a proposed captive port not far from the steel plant. For almost a decade now, the company has not been able to start operations in Jagatsinghpur due to an ongoing people's resistance

and legal battles that are pushing the company and the state government to follow due procedure.

The news in and around Khandadhar is that the Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) has already begun issuing various notices to villages for acquiring land for mining processes. Many affected people are not clear for what purposes the notices are being issued to them. Conversations in the area and inputs from social activists in the state reveal that the notices are being issued by district authorities to call for *palli sabhas* (village assemblies) and set processes in motion at village level. Clarity still needs to emerge on whether these are being called to initiate land acquisition proceedings or for 'completing' the recognition of forest rights prior to the official diversion of forestland for non-forest use.

Meanwhile, end-December 2014 saw several affected tribal communities congregating under the banner of the Khandadhar Surakhya Sangram Samiti (a committee to fight and save Khandadhar) and taking to the streets in massive numbers. They came together to submit a memorandum to the Sub Collector, addressed to the Prime Minister. Their plea to the PM and the Chief Minister of the state is not to go ahead with iron ore mining.

The disjointed priorities of governments and the project-affected people are resulting in an important social conflict. In the last few decades such conflicts have emerged in different parts of the country in all shapes and sizes. These are not just real stories of who wins and who loses and neither are they only battles between domination and assertion. In more ways than one, these struggles present an acute challenge for a democracy like India. Here governments and corporations are seeking to bypass principles of good governance to achieve an elusive goal called economic supremacy. ■

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God is in execution



DILEEP RANJEKAR

BACK TO SCHOOL

THE National Policy for Education 1986 (modified marginally in 1992) was prepared after much debate and thinking that had originally begun even before 1968. The policy was adopted by Parliament.

Several architectures including the formation of institutions at various levels (national, state, district, block and cluster) were created by the policy framework. It also dealt with issues such as efficiency and effectiveness at every level, making things work, periodic review of such institutions and so on. If we had pursued meticulous implementation of the National Policy for Education and various other allied programmes, the quality of education would have been dramatically different. The most recent piece of legislation governing school education is the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 which has mandated several requirements ranging from infrastructure to teacher-pupil ratio and continuous evaluation of students. The implementation of this legislation – both in private and government schools – is, however, very poor.

I am dealing with a few issues below in an illustrative manner.

Critical Institutions – SCERT and DIET: A District Institute of Education and Training (popularly referred to as a DIET) is supposed to exist in each district. It is expected to play a vital role in academically contributing to pre- and in-service teacher preparation. Knowing the importance of this institution, the then Prime Minister in 2010 asked for and got a detailed status report on issues such as status of infrastructure, quantity and quality of faculty available, training facilities, the actual work carried out and so on.

Some of the critical aspects of this report were (a) out of the 685 districts only about 530 had a DIET (b) more than 60 per cent did not have the prescribed training facilities (c) compared to the sanctioned strength of 25 faculty members, the actual available average number of faculty members was eight. And we were not even referring to the quality and qualifications of these faculty members. It is well known to many in the government that the process of appointment of faculty members in a DIET is unsatisfactory. It is commonly said that many faculty members are sent to a DIET as a “pun-

ishment posting”. In some districts, for several years, DIETs have had just three or four faculty members.

There are similar issues with the State Council for Education Research and Training (SCERT). Broadly, there are fewer people than sanctioned, no investment is made in building the capacity of people and a shared vision of the institution is lacking. There are also fundamental issues related to budgets, resources, infrastructure, motivation, morale and integrity of work.

Academic support to schools: Roles have been created at the block and cluster levels to support schools academically. A typical district with around 2,000 schools is supposed to have approximately 150 such people. For a large state, there would need to be about 2,500 to 3,000 people who can form such an academic pool. But states say that schools

immediately achieve the teacher-pupil ratio (TPR) per school in the prescribed manner.” In his opinion, if we continue to have multigrade teaching (without even training teachers for such teaching) in about 75 per cent of the schools and have over 20 per cent single-teacher schools (where, if that teacher is absent, no learning happens inside the school) irrespective of what other steps we take, the quality of education would continue to be poor. Unfortunately, when the government and the relevant authorities review the TPR, it is for the whole state or district. The result is that we have deceptive statistics. It is like saying the average depth of the river is three feet because at some places the depth is one foot and in some places it is eight to nine feet – and claiming it is safe to cross.

Most educationists agree that if an adequate number of high quality teachers (one teacher per 35 students) is available in every school, overall quality would surely improve. We need to ensure at least one teacher per class and the class should not exceed more than 35 students. The RTE has mandated this.

There are several reasons why we have failed to achieve this. The most basic reason is failure by the state governments to appoint teachers because of inadequate budgets or lack of political will. The second most important contributor is irrational distribution of teachers across the schools. The political interference in teacher appointments and transfers has often led to irrational and skewed teacher-pupil ratios. Schools situated in urban areas and closer to the main roads (that are easy to reach by bus or public transport) have a highly favourable TPR – in some cases it is as ridiculous as one teacher per five students. In remote and difficult areas, on the other hand, it could be even one teacher for 70 students. There are also deeper issues such as absence of educational, health and other amenities in remote areas because of which teachers are not willing to live there.

Implementation is all: The Joint Review Mission that was carried out by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 2013-14 has clearly brought out that most institutions created to contribute to the quality of education in the states are either not functioning or are functioning at sub-optimal level.

We have total clarity on the purpose of these institutions, the kind of people that must be appointed in them, how they should function and what they should contribute to. The crux is in the implementation of this understanding. We don't need any supplementary programmes to achieve the goals of education. God is in execution of what we have so thoughtfully decided. It is about creating enabling conditions. It is about single-mindedly going after implementation. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation



India has a shortage of high-quality teacher educators

do not get the academic support they are supposed to. Some of the more prevalent reasons are (a) large number of vacancies (b) abolition of posts and reassignment of such people as teachers in the schools since there is shortage of teachers (c) poor preparation and development of people (d) people in academic roles are loaded with non-academic work (e) lack of enabling conditions such as a conveyance allowance and so on.

One of the most fundamental issues related to the professional development of teachers today is the shortage of high-quality teacher educators. In terms of structure, we are supposed to have around 3,000 teacher educators per state – therefore, at a national level we are supposed to have an academic talent pool of over 75,000 people. However, in reality, we may not have more than 1,000 high-quality people across the country.

Teacher-pupil ratio: In 2009 in a serious conversation with the principal secretary of education of a large state, I asked him about the most important issue to be resolved in the government schools. He did not have to think much. He said, “We must

Spend on pension, care



MATHEW CHERIAN

GREY LINES

INDIA's older population has trebled since Independence and is now significantly at 100 million. But the number of people over 65 years is about to double

in 25 years. It is likely to affect India's economy much more than the demographic dividend we reap today if we do not reform the health sector.

The proportion of the population aged 60 years and above was 7 per cent in 2009 and was projected to increase to 20 per cent by 2050. In absolute numbers, the elderly population in 2013 was approximately 100 million and is expected to sharply increase to more than 315 million by 2050.

The more developed states in the south and a few others like Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra have experienced demographic transition ahead of the others and are therefore growing older faster than other states. Certain regions, primarily in the central and eastern parts of the country, still have high fertility and mortality levels, and therefore younger population age structures. While improvements in health, decline in fertility and increase in longevity are desirable, the projected increase of the elderly population over the next few decades warrants priority attention for economic and social policies to become senior citizen-friendly. In particular, we need to look at healthy ageing.

Unless we spend on pension, care and healthcare for the elderly, the impact of ageing will become a demographic burden. The "grey tsunami" is very much at our doors. One-third or 66 per cent of older persons are living below the poverty line (BPL) and 90 per cent are from the unorganised sector with no regular source of income, dependent on family members economically, socially, emotionally and for caregiving.

But with a demographic transition taking place there is reduction in the pool of persons potentially able to provide family care. As people age, often their independence declines, dependency on family increases and they become more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence which damages their dignity and mental health and compromises their rights. Older women, in particular, are vulner-

able to 'property-grabbing' by family members or others and older single men are more vulnerable to undesirable companions robbing them of their assets.

Physically, ageing takes a greater toll on women than on men. Women experience proportionately higher rates of chronic illness and disability in later life than men. It is observed by researchers that older women have greater problems related to non-communicable diseases and have lower social and mental health status, especially single women and widows. Older women live with numerous gender-specific chronic conditions like osteoporosis, arthritis, post-menopausal problems and depres-



Ageing takes a greater toll on women than on men

Public health centres for seniors are available in only 30 out of 622 districts and there is no geriatric training for doctors or medical personnel.

sion, which are often disregarded as 'women's problems' and not treated as geriatric problems requiring treatment and management. Further, for women especially, old age connotes reduced sexual appeal and, in denial of their sexuality, they are classified as asexual.

India needs to commit at least 6 per cent of its GDP to public health, leave alone geriatric health. Currently, public health centres for seniors (geriatric centres) are available in only 30 out of 622 districts; there is no geriatric training for doctors or medical personnel; and there are 12 million cataract patients without treatment.

The ageing of the population in India brings with it an increase in the burden of chronic disease. The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study estimated that in 2001 almost half of the adult disease burden in low and middle-income countries was attributable to non-communicable diseases. Ischemic heart disease and stroke were the two leading causes of mortality and disease burden in people aged 60 and older.

In India, healthcare is unavailable for the bulk of the elderly. There are just three geriatric wards in the country – the first was opened at the Madras Medical College, the second at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi and the third in the Thiruvanthapuram Medical College. We have less than 5,000 geriatric beds in a country of our size. China has 500,000 beds for older persons. The progress in the National Programme for Healthcare of Elderly, launched by the UPA, is abysmal after three years of work. Nobody is listening even in the current government.

In this context, reversing ageing and staying healthy and active have become of paramount

importance. There are two ways to reverse ageing: lifestyle factors and specific techniques. At HelpAge India we promote 'active ageing' which rests on the three pillars of social connection, a fairly good dose of exercise and moderation in food habits. The aspect of food in moderation is called optimum nutrition or, as yogic masters have always emphasised, the overworked stomach should be filled only a third with food.

Many talk of stress reduction and relaxation but a simple way to reduce stress is social connectivity. The older you get, the more you need others' company. We have found that senior citizen associations in many parts of India are the best antidote to loneliness. Many such associations are involved in teaching the young, constructive work in slums, and keeping themselves occupied in civil society. These associations are the future – be they morning clubs, laughter clubs or Reiki societies and yoga groups. Many of them continue to identify healthy and active ageing as

a significant objective and a large number run community activities to help older members stay healthy through exercise. This area of intervention is about creating environments and policies that foster active and dignified ageing, allowing an older person to actively participate in family, community and political life, irrespective of level of functional ability.

Another important aspect of healthy ageing is intergenerational love. The relationship that grandchildren have with grandparents is relished by both – a case of pure unconditional love. This improves elders' health. One may call it family connectedness, which is essential to combat loneliness and depression. It is difficult to compensate for this love. Indeed, the longer older persons stay active, the longer they may enjoy good health and well-being and remain independent. The reverse is also true: the longer they enjoy good health and well-being, the longer they can contribute to and participate in society. ■

Mathew Cherian is CEO of HelpAge India

Crowdfunds help debut films

First-timers get awards too in the south



Kuraiondrumillai is about a boy who works for a chain of supermarkets but wants to help farmers

Saibal Chatterjee
Thiruvananthapuram

CROWDFUNDING appears to have grown roots in the cinema of south India. In the course of a little over one year, three independent directors – two from Kerala, one from Tamil Nadu – successfully dug into multiple sources of finance to bring their debut films to fruition.

And that is not all. Another young Malayali filmmaker fell back on the financial support of a chartered accountant to produce his first film.

All these maiden ventures have earned awards and accolades, with the three Malayalam films in the quartet, all made by self-taught directors, leading a much-needed resurgence of non-mainstream cinema in Kerala.

Among the Malayalam-language titles that hit the headlines in the last two editions of the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) are *CR No. 89* (*Crime No. 89*) and *Oraalppokkam* (*Six Feet High*). Both are crowdfunded films helmed by debutants.

CR No. 89, directed by Sudevan, won the NETPAC (Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema) Prize for the Best Malayalam Film at IFFK 2013, besides being adjudged the best film of the year by the jury of the Kerala State Film Awards.

Oraalppokkam, made by Sanalkumar Sasidharan, bagged the NETPAC Award and the Fipresci (Federation of International Film Critics) Prize at the IFFK 2014.

Another first-time Malayali director, Sajin Baabu, was

feted at last month's IFFK with the Audience Choice Award for *Asthamayam Vare* (*Unto the Dusk*).

Asthamayam Vare, a film with nameless characters, no background score and sparse dialogue, is not a crowdfunded effort, but was made possible by MP Sheeja, a chartered accountant, writer and artist who loved Sajin's story so much that she offered to fund the film along with a friend, L Geetha.

On the evidence of the finished product, which premiered at the 19th IFFK, it is easy to understand why Sheeja opted to invest in Sajin's vision.

Asthamayam Vare is a strikingly fluid film that follows a restless young man as he travels across daunting but beautiful landscapes, grappling with the conflict between his orthodox religious upbringing and his inner urge for freedom.

It was filmed on 120 locations over a period of 60-odd days, during which Sajin and his cast and crew trekked miles deep into dense forests, across valleys, and up steep hills to capture the visuals that form the spine of *Asthamayam Vare*.

Sajin describes his film as an unusual "spiritual journey" that is neither "art nor commerce". He says: "It is just a film that I wanted to make. There was no compromise in *Asthamayam Vare* with cinematic language."

It is indeed this spirit of independence and self-belief that is driving this small but now increasingly visible band of filmmakers that are poised to forge a new future for Malayalam cinema.

Sasidharan, a law graduate, cut his teeth by making crowd-

Continued on page 30



Sudevan, director of *CR No. 89*



Sasidharan, director of *Oraalppokkam*



Meena Kandasamy in *Oraalppokkam*

It is indeed this spirit of independence and self-belief that is driving this small but now increasingly visible band of filmmakers that are poised to forge a new future for Malayalam cinema.

funded short films while he bided his time for an opportunity to mount his debut feature.

It was a 12-year wait. He wrote many screenplays but found no takers. Producer after producer rejected his ideas. “It was difficult for me,” he says, “to convince regular film producers that I had the ability to make a feature.”

So he decided the only way forward was to adopt a “cooperative film production model” to get his career off the ground. For his very first film, a short subject made in 2001, Sasidharan had raised ₹30,000 from the people of his own village.

He went on to make three more short films through the same method of funding. In 2012, he gathered the courage to extend the experiment to a full-length film.

Oraalppokkam, featuring Dalit poet-activist Meena Kandasamy and actor Prakash Bare, was produced through an online crowdfunding campaign run under the aegis of Kazhcha Chalachitra Vedi, a film society that Sasidharan himself had launched to promote the kind of cinema he believes in.

“I was sure I would stick to my vision no matter what, so I turned to crowdfunding,” says Sasidharan. “It gave me complete freedom to make *Oraalppokkam* exactly the way I wanted to.”

The production wasn’t easy by any means. The film, 70 per cent of which was shot in Uttarakhand, came together bit by bit, in pace with the flow of money. “It took me a whole year to complete



A still from *Asthamayam Vare*

Oraalppokkam,” says Sasidharan.

The struggle, he is quick to add, has been worth it, especially in light of the response that his labour of love has received. “I had thought *Oraalppokkam* would appeal only to those that like experimental films,” he says. “I am pleasantly surprised that it is striking a chord with everyone.”

The particular and the universal come together in an impressive way in the visually arresting and emotionally multi-layered *Oraalppokkam*. It tells the story of a man in search of the woman he has broken up with after living together for five years.

The quest – it ends in Kedarnath – becomes a voyage as much into the recesses of the man’s own troubled mind and heart as across an Uttarakhand ravaged by a natural calamity.

Oraalppokkam, which presents a complex tapestry of the felt and the imagined, of dream and reality, and of past, present and future, is a non-judgmental study of the damage that man does to himself and the environment as a result of indiscriminate exploitation.

“I always knew I wouldn’t use conventional methods to tell the story,” says Sasidharan. The risks he took have paid off and he now plans to get the ₹24 lakh film into the theatres.

Sudevan, maker of *CR No. 89*, has no such ambition. His film, which cost only ₹7 lakh, was funded entirely by contributions from well-wishers and the collective, Pace Trust. “I do not expect it to be

released in the theatres,” he says.

He hopes to recover the investment by means of film society and festival screenings and through the sales of DVDs. “For every film society screening, I receive ₹10,000 and I have already managed to raise nearly ₹2 lakh,” reveals Sudevan.

“For *CR No. 89*, I did not go to any producer. So for its exhibition, too, I do not want to depend on mainstream distribution,” says the director, who has made several short films since 2004.

“When I started out, I wasn’t confident that I could make a feature-length film, so I experimented with short subjects for a decade,” says Sudevan. “A group of four or five friends supported me during this phase of learning.”

With each film, Sudevan’s circle of admirers and supporters grew, enabling him to continue his chosen crowdfunding route.

His independent approach entails filming within a 10-km radius of his village in Palakkad district, hiring actors who live nearby so that they can go back home after a day’s shoot, and keeping a tight leash on all other production expenses.

In Chennai, Karthik Ravi, a mechanical engineer who

chucked up his Tech Mahindra job to pursue his passion for filmmaking, managed a decent commercial release for his crowdfunded Tamil feature, *Kuraiondrumillai (On a Clear Day)*.

The honest, heartwarming film, which tells the story of a boy who works for a chain of supermarkets but wants to help the farmers in his native village better their lot, garnered positive reviews. But getting the ₹75 lakh *Kuraiondrumillai* to the screen was no mean achievement for the movie industry outsider.

“I completed the film in 2013 with the help of 60 individual contributors,” says Karthik. “It took me a year and a half to release it.” Although he did expect better play in the multiplexes for *Kuraiondrumillai*, he is happy with how it all turned out.

“The film opened two weeks before Diwali in 2014 and managed to survive long enough to be noticed. I will break even,” he says, acknowledging how essential it is for filmmakers like him to ensure returns on the investment made by individual contributors.

Karthik, who was in Thiruvananthapuram to take part in a panel discussion held during the 19th IFFK, believes that “a film never fails, it is the budget that does”.

He says: “Crowdfunding will rise to a different level in the future.” For independent directors, securing a place in the sun will become infinitely easier in that scenario. ■

Where's Shashi? And more...

Anjana Basu
Kolkata

LITERARY festivals thrive on controversy, no matter how distressing that might seem for the organisers. But the Apeejay Kolkata Literary Fest, now in its sixth edition, was the last one would expect to be dogged by controversies. Nonetheless, it was. Sunanda Pushkar's alleged murder hit the headlines and the result was threatened chaos in the programming. Shashi Tharoor was numbered among the top six reasons to look forward to AKLF 2015, but his presence rapidly seemed to be a matter of guesswork.

At the inauguration, there was an air of expectancy. "Where's Shashi?" an attractive woman demanded but got no answers until there was a sudden rush of camerapersons and the man of the moment entered, surrounded by the media. Given the fact that Kolkata's dominant paper ignored the Apeejay Litfest as competitive and supported by India's dominant paper, one could only speculate on what the other Kolkata newspapers would have reported if any fracas had broken out on the Tharoor issue: "At an unnamed event at the Indian Museum, Dr Shashi Tharoor..."

There was, of course, no fracas barring the fact that Tharoor effortlessly stole the limelight whenever he was present, taking questions on politics like the motivation of the Aam Aadmi Party after the launch of his recent book, *India Shastras* in a session that went 45 minutes over the schedule and overshadowed the following event which had Jeet Thayil in conversation with Upamanyu Chatterjee – who, incidentally, will never live down *English August*.

Women raved over Tharoor's people skills and gift of the gab. The media dogged his footsteps and other delegates felt ignored. The Tharoor hangover lasted well into the Crime Writers' forum the following morning when Kishwar Desai quipped that a whodunnit question had been hovering over the Litfest ever since a "certain politician who was a literary figure" had become part of it.

Tharoor apart, the focus of AKLF 2015 was a celebration of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's 125th birth anniversary and the preservation of national values, an exploration of India's tryst with heritage. This accounted for the delightfully varied locations of the festival, beginning with the inauguration at the Indian Museum where a brains trust of speakers turned over the issues of tangible and intangible heritage. The distinguished panelists included Shashi Tharoor, Jawhar Sircar, Leila Seth and British historian Charles Allen, known for his seminal work on Indian history, most recently *Ashoka*.



A formal moment at the Kolkata Literary Festival



Shashi Tharoor with son Kanishk



Jeet Thayil with Upamanyu Chatterjee

Apeejay 2015 played the notes of heritage and culture, from the monumental in the shape of the Museum and the Lascar Monument, to Bollywood with Tisca Chopra holding forth on Bollywood romance to Ruchir Joshi and the Harlequin publishing director, Amrita Chowdhury, in front of a rapt audience comprising the city's feted Ladies' Study Group. Add to that a walk from the Indian Museum to the Park Street Cemetery, a literary mile on a nippy Sunday morning, ending up at Henry Derozio's grave, which surely had the poetic ghost stirring in delight.

Things are looking up for AKLF. The trickle of foreign writers to the festival has gradually increased into a flow and it has been ranked among January's 10 best literary festivals.

This year saw writers of the calibre of Bangladesh's Kanis Ahmed, Pakistan's Mohammed Hanif, crime writers Caryl Ferey (France), Hakan Nesser and Zac O'Yeah, both from Sweden, Australia's Ali Cobby Eckerman, Lionel Fogarty and Alexis Wright, travel writer Michael Buckley, Paris-based photographer Reza Deghati and French author Florence Noiville. There was a session on 'Border Crossings' moderated by the director of the Lahore Literary Festival, held at the Victoria Memorial.

There were travel tales – the launch of *Matabele Dawn* crammed with royal families spanning the Pataudis and Wajed Ali Shah, with an underlying theme of destruction highlighting the importance of conservation. *National Geographic* photographer Deghati presenting award-winning

photographs from the publication that was first launched in 1888. Not to mention environmentalist and adventure-traveller writer Buckley who wrote the first guidebook on Tibet and has gone on to present his latest, *Meltdown in Tibet*. Environment was certainly another of the underlying themes, being part of man's intangible heritage.

Youngsters weren't forgotten. 'Read Rite' brought the voices of Debdan Chaudhury, Kanishk Tharoor, Pia Padukone, Indrapramit Das and Sandip Roy to the smart young adults of Modern High School, raising issues of inspiration and whether writers are inspired by social media. Sourabh Pant had the audience of Bhowanipore Educational Society College in splits – and most of the young people present swore that he was 300 per cent funnier in real life than in his books. Naseeruddin Shah and Motley presented Vikram Seth's *Beastly Tales* on the overflowing lawns of the Tollygunge Club in an evening of *sigris* and starlight.

Additionally, a two-day Oxford Juniors Fest was held on the Apeejay lawns where I had the whimsical task of presenting tigers and Jim Corbett's ghost from my book *In the Shadow of the Leaves* on a pleasant Saturday afternoon and where Nabaneeta Dev Sen distilled enchantment for young folks on Sunday.

AKLF 2015 was for me a constantly ringing phone and emails filling my inbox – not from publishers but from literary fans wanting to know whether they could just walk into the events, whether passes were required or not and how many people were allowed since they were planning group sessions. A few wondered why they had not heard more about it – so perhaps AKLF's media partner has some work left to do. History is young. With gracious surroundings, a warm heart, good programmes and a few murmurs of controversy, AKLF is bound to go from strength to strength. ■

'NAXALISM HAS BECOME A

Civil Society News

New Delhi

INDIA has been grappling for years with leftwing extremism in around 200 districts in nine states. The State has sent in the police and security forces to slug it out with the Naxalites, mostly Adivasis and forest-dwelling communities who know the terrain well and are more sure-footed.

The defining feature of Naxalism-affected districts is underdevelopment and poverty. Adivasi and other marginalised communities lead a tenuous life. Though the forest has always been their home, they have no tenancy rights. Millions have been displaced by the State to build dams or make way for mining companies. By law Adivasis are entitled to self-governance, land rights and forest rights but these remain on paper. Naxalism has found fertile ground in the simmering anger of tribal and forest-dwelling communities.

Activist groups have been saying all along that leftwing extremism has its roots in deprivation, displacement and underdevelopment. If these are tackled, Naxalism will lose support. This view finds credence in a set of research papers published as a book, *Countering Naxalism with Development*.

An Expert Group, set up by the Planning Commission, of academics, activists, bureaucrats, intelligence and police officers, analysed causes of the insurgency and solutions. But the question is, how do you build schools, roads and health facilities in a conflict zone where the administration is absent?

Santosh Mehrotra, editor of the book, is professor of economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. He has been chief economist of global human development reports of the UNDP. The erudite Mehrotra spoke to *Civil Society* about why leftwing extremism continues and what can be done.

Your book has an impressive and diverse group of writers. How did the book come about?

The book came about as background papers to an Expert Group created by BN Yugandhar, member of the Planning Commission, in 2007. The work of the Expert Group, of which I was member-secretary as head of rural development in the Planning Commission, led to a report, "Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas". Chapter 2 of the book summarises its recommendations.

Yugandhar was our intellectual instigator. A remarkable person, he brought SR Sankaran, D Bandopadhyaya, KB Saxena, all former rural secre-



Santosh Mehrotra: 'Why are we not talking to the Naxals?'

'As economic activity increases in these areas, the Naxals have begun to extort money from contractors, miners, development projects...'

taries, into the Expert Group. This was a knowledgeable group, sympathetic to the poor with deep understanding of their lives especially Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST). Then there was BD Sharma, an IAS officer who had served as ST Commissioner and understood PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act) very well, K Balagopal, human rights activist who has stood for Naxalites who were wrongly implicated, Bela Bhatia, the anthropologist, and Sukhdeo Thorat, an academic and Dalit rights activist. We also had in the Expert Group nationalist police officers like Prakash Singh, architect of police reforms, and Ajit Doval, former head of the Intelligence Bureau and now our National Security Adviser.

But they are all basically in agreement.

Yes, this is the interesting thing. They have profound understanding of the issues involved. They were not

entirely in agreement but the disagreements were relatively minor. The report was very influential and remains so. It led, I believe, to the Integrated Action Plan for districts affected by leftwing extremists by the Planning Commission. Once the report was out, I was asked to bring the papers together as a book.

How has the conservative security establishment reacted?

We didn't have them in the Expert Group. After all, Ajit Doval and Prakash Singh were there. We got a strong opinion from them that was contrary to what the rest of the security establishment was saying. The security establishment can still pick holes, but the tragedy for the country is that the book remains topical. I would much rather it had become historical.

Why does Naxalism persist?

The report's conclusions were not internalised by the government, profound as they were. The issue is complex and nuanced. The papers look at the plight of the tribals and the marginalised communities in those areas. They are not just to be pitied. It is tragic that the people who rose up in arms on their behalf, exploited and betrayed them. Naxalism has become a business. As economic activity increases in these areas, the Naxals have begun to extort money from contractors, miners, from development projects... you name it, they are milking it.

On the other hand, if the security establishment retains this posture – which is a combination of the incompetence of the CRPF, and the underfunding and undertraining of the police – you have a situation where the tribal is caught between a rock and a hard place.

Tribals and other marginalised communities are not looking for revolution. Some elements of the Naxals are looking for revolution. But my sense is, over the years, the intellectually sophisticated elements of the Naxals have disappeared. They are dying and all you have now are the lumpen – people who become Naxals because they see no alternative. They have grown up in an area where there are no schools, no health centres and no electricity. They are unskilled and have mainly their labour to sell.

Tribal communities want an ordinary life, which includes a few basic requirements. If they get displaced, they should get rehabilitated. They should get health services, wherever they are, education services, wherever they are. These facilities should be provided in any case.

Instead, they get a war happening around them. They suffer it and are cowering in fear from the

BUSINESS'

State security forces and the young Naxals. That's the situation.

How are we going to break out of this?

It is true that teachers will not teach in a place where a war is going on. Doctors and nurses will not go there either. It's also tough to supply electricity to remote villages in hilly terrain. It is not the easiest of situations. Things have been further complicated since, in the last seven to eight years, there has been an increase in mining activity in these areas. But, unfortunately for our country and for local communities, we did not have a resettlement and rehabilitation law to go hand-in-hand with land acquisition. Finally, after five years of negotiation, we got the new land acquisition law in September 2013. It's not a bad law except that they went too far. So you had this reaction from this government, resulting in amendments to the Act through an ordinance.

So we are back to the drawing board?

No, because there has been a huge improvement upon the previous situation. We have a law on resettlement and rehabilitation as part of the land acquisition law. But it has come so late. Now there are entrenched interests in leftwing extremist areas.

The government wants to boost mining. There is the coal ordinance. How will the government do that in a conflict zone?

There are three to four characteristics of leftwing extremist areas. First, they are dominated by SC/STs, second, these are hilly, rocky, remote areas, and third, these forests are located in mineral-rich areas. You do need to mine those areas. But to do that you have to establish peace because industrial activity can take place only if you win the confidence of local people.

The question that the book in a sense tries to address is: why are we not talking to these people? We talk to everyone. We talk to the JKLF and they have not given up arms. We talk to Naga groups, Mizo groups and the ULFA. They have not given up arms either.

We should offer them talks. If the Naxals repeatedly reject talks, you can come down hard on them. The people would also understand because then you have a case. You can say we offered them talks but they are only interested in State power. Then you can take a harsh line and it would be accepted. You can say, we'll disarm them, demobilise them and rehabilitate them. We can ask them to surrender. If that were to happen, you can speed up development in those areas.

Nepal had a Maoist insurgency for a long time. They managed to mainstream them. The Maoists

are now Members of Parliament. They have run governments. The irony is that it was the Government of India that facilitated clandestine talks in Delhi between the Government of Nepal and the Maoists. Those talks went on for months and years. The Naxals are our own people. We can surely make them come to the table.

Instead, the tribals and the local people suffer. The CRPF suffers. The nation suffers. We are importing coal and bleeding the country of foreign exchange when we are sitting on coal.

The tribal communities rely on non-timber forest produce (NTFP), which is consumed by the middle class, like tamarind, *makhana* and *chironji*. Why has the government not put in place a minimum support price (MSP) for NTFP? It won't cost much.

Is there need for a new kind of administration in forested areas?

Equilibrium gets established in resource-rich areas, based on low-level conflict. Wherever one is in a position of some strength, one does not disturb the other too much and whatever illegal activity is taking place, goes on.

Why should leftwing extremist areas matter? They matter because of their minerals – bauxite, coal, iron ore. Not (a forest produce like) *makhana*. Mining is not going on at the pace it would have had there been peace along with rehabilitation for the displaced. But a fair bit is going on. The Naxals

are okay with it since they have a better life than they would have had. Each gets entrenched in their position because of personal gain. So mining companies, whether private or public, continue with their activities. The Naxals take advantage of this economic activity to make more money than usual.

The trust of the tribals has been broken time and again. If they had been properly rehabilitated and well-compensated for land acquisition, their attitude might have been different. They do want schools, health centres and livelihoods. They do want their lives transformed. It is failure on the part of the State that after so many decades this problem continues to fester.

Why are we not implementing PESA, the forest rights law and so on in these areas?

Just framing and implementing PESA will need a lot of work by the states. If in 18 years we have not implemented these, are we going to wait another 18 years? If we were to negotiate with the Naxals, rehabilitate them, provide them land and jobs, then there is hope. The sub-head of the book reflects the tension between State security and social justice. We can make the Naxals an offer so good that it is irresistible. ■



COUNTERING NAXALISM WITH DEVELOPMENT

Challenges of Social Justice and State Security

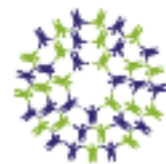
Edited: Santosh Mehrotra

₹ 599

PEACE REFLECTIONS

HUZAIFA KHORAKIWALA

Joy within



CONTENTMENT is the state of being happiest with the least. Contentment lies in giving. As you give and give and give, it may be possible that you will be

left with nothing.

While giving, you may have brought a smile to a child's face. Maybe you helped someone through her illness. Maybe you brought joy to the aged. You gave and you gave. And then, all those to whom you gave, prayed for you. You received their love and blessings. So as you gave and gave, you became the richest person in the world. Through giving you played a barter game and bought in return, peace and happiness. You gave and contentment came. You gave and you gave and you received the unparalleled wealth of contentment and happiness. You were surrounded by the greatest bounty of life - internal tranquility.

My dear friends, you can buy your happiness. I put a guarantee on this. Can there be a kinder God? He has shown the way happiness can be earned. Yes, it is by giving.

When you go to the grave or your body is burnt to ashes, what will remain with you? It will be your soul. On your soul will remain the permanent imprints of all your acts of giving and kindness. Nobody can rob you of your charity, giving, and generosity. Every person you helped will reflect that light on your soul. Your soul will shine. It will be at peace.

The accumulation of wealth and the ambition to be rich and powerful destroys virtue and goodness. Whom do you want to show your external glory to when God knows the bankruptcy of your internal karma? Your thoughts cannot be hidden from God, and neither your deeds. God loves those who give. Feel the pain of every suffering person in the world. Share the sorrow of the world. Be a part of the solution. And bring happiness to the world.

The greatest power in the universe lies with the giver. God is the greatest giver. If you wish to be powerful, be independent of begging and pleading and showing your hand of need to others. Your power lies in giving. Your soul will ascend to nobility.

Give your love, wealth, time, effort, service and knowledge. Make giving a habit. Reach the highest forms of giving by the purity of your intentions. The name of your breath will be called happiness. ■

Saura art

DELICATELY painted on tussar silk, Saura art with its fine lines and colours can perk up a bland wall. Devi Prasad, a painter of Saura art, says this genre originated with the Saura tribe of Odisha, one of the oldest tribal groups in India. The art depicts the Sambalpur dance. The predominant colours used are black white, ochre and red. Devi Prasad is a Saura too. He says he studied at the BK College of Art and Craft in Bhubaneswar and began painting Saura art, modernising it deftly with his brush. His Tree of Life painting, he says, attracts the most buyers.

The Saura artists have been formed into a cooperative of 2,000 members. They have access to training. Devi Prasad sells a range of paintings from Odisha, including the familiar pattachitra that now depict modern themes that appeal to the middle class. Prices are very reasonable. ■

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PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA

Camel bags

VINOD Kumar and Mohammad Tanveer manufacture and sell a range of bags made with camel leather. There are travel bags, backpacks, laptop bags, handbags, clutches and purses in different shades of brown. "All our bags are made from 100 per cent natural leather. We are careful to buy leather only from dead camels. We also don't use chemicals while processing. A generous rub of mustard oil gives the leather a darker tan," explains Vinod Kumar. The designs are attractive and fashionable. "We download them from the Internet," he explains.

Their small business is based in Udaipur, Rajasthan. Both Kumar and Tanveer say this is their traditional occupation. Mostly tourists buy their bags. They travel to exhibitions across the country and online retailers now approach them.

The problem, they say, is credit. It is difficult for them to get money to expand their business from government sources. "You need a guarantor. Where do I get one from? Government officials won't sign for us," says Kumar. Recently he managed to get a small loan and he hired eight workers.

"But if I can get a bigger loan, I can hire more people and even try exporting my bags. I could set up my own online retail site. We don't know, as yet,

how to take advantage of the e-commerce boom.

The government should help us," says Kumar. ■



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Introducing Tablets for better education

SST has started using tablets in schools to help children improve their learning levels. This has attracted many children coming to the schools.

S. Latha, a girl student studying in class 4 of Panchayat union primary school, Thirukkurungudi village, Tirunelveli district was irregular in attending school. Therefore she was not able to keep up with the rest of the students in class. After introduction of tablets, she enjoys coming to the school and uses tablet every day. She finds the school interesting. She is no longer a slow learner. She is one among the best students in the class.

**SRINIVASAN SERVICES TRUST
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equal opportunity. it is always at work at Tata Steel.



Tata Steel recognises and values the differences in employee backgrounds and skills. Our training takes care of this and brings them to the same level. Giving all equal opportunity to grow and contribute to the nation's well-being.

Our **Safety Excellence** practices improve occupational health and safety management all the time. This is possible because we adhere to stringent internationally recognised safety standards.

We also train and supervise employees on **safety procedures and healthcare.** Where we provide them information on safe handling of potential hazards and safety equipment. This turns them into better employees and ensures even better productivity.

Indeed, the values of equal opportunity is what works at Tata Steel.

TATA STEEL
Values stronger than steel