

Civil Society

Short answers from across India

WHAT TO DO IN 5 MINISTRIES

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‘BHUTAN NEEDS TO FOLLOW ITS OWN PACE’

Prime Minister Tobgay on transition and growth

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WHAT TO DO IN 5 MINISTRIES

Rural development, education, health, environment and urban development are important ministries that can take India forward. We spoke to experts on what could be done.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

IB is out of step

THE report of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) on NGOs getting funds from abroad and being a threat to the nation is bizarre and really should not merit comment. It surely can't be the IB's brief to decide whether genetically modified (GM) seeds or big dams or nuclear power are in the economic interests of India.

Activists have a role to play in a democracy and those whose causes are spurious meet their own nemesis. But the right to broaden debates, experiment with ideas and even protest in the streets cannot be taken away.

In fact, there are many activists who don't take foreign contributions as a matter of principle. But they could just as well be against nuclear power or GM.

Governments and political parties are invariably wary of alternative points of view. The Congress-led UPA consulted activists, but only the ones it liked and to the extent it wanted. The BJP-led NDA comes to power with the reputation that it has no patience for NGOs. If this becomes actually so in practice, it will be very sad. A big opportunity exists for the country in serious partnerships to solve the problems of development.

It has been the belief of this magazine that people in the voluntary sector have an important contribution to make in providing solutions in areas like healthcare, education, environment, transparency and financial inclusion. Similarly, there are new-age business initiatives and technologies that should be adopted and scaled up.

In our small way, we have in this issue of *Civil Society* highlighted suggestions for what can be done in five Union ministries. Of course the exercise is not perfect. But we have spoken to some very interesting and experienced people who are also known for their integrity. A much deeper consultation is obviously needed. It is a process, which should begin sooner rather than later because governments lack expertise and should avail of all the help they can get.

This month's issue includes an interview with Tshering Tobgay, the young and dynamic Prime Minister of Bhutan. Tobgay's vision is to give Bhutan what is the best in the world, but to also ensure that the country grows and opens up at its own pace. India needs to understand Bhutan a lot better.

With heavy hearts we say goodbye to Shankar Ghose, who passed away on 14 June. Mr Ghose was a member of *Civil Society's* Advisory Board and was also a personal friend. He was a cheerful person who courageously kept Charkha going after his son, Sanjoy, was killed in Assam. We will always remember him warmly.

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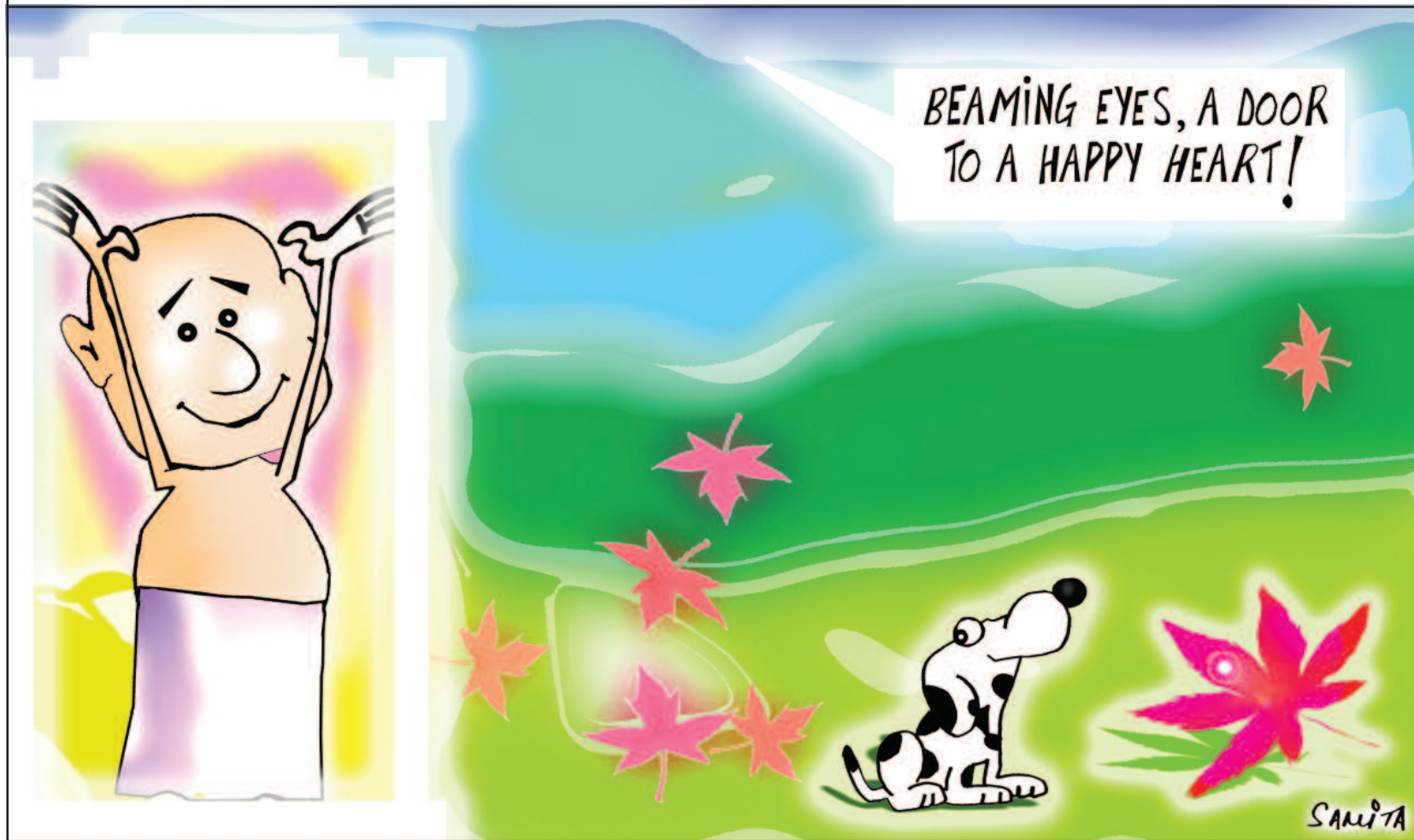
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Raahgiri

Your cover story, 'The city we want' was spot on. People living in big cities are getting fed up of traffic, noise and pollution. A respite, once a week, is a great idea. The Raahgiri concept should be taken to other cities. It will bring down pollution levels and help citizens bond among themselves and with the administration.

Maryam Seshadri

Nice to see the way Gurgaon

responded to Raahgiri. Even in the heat of June people participated. The new population of Gurgaon has converted it from a small, shabby town to a liberal, cosmopolitan city.

Shashank

I think the most amazing thing about Raahgiri is that it is actually happening. Let's hope this results in permanent changes in road design. We should also make some areas, like in the Walled City of Delhi, only for pedestrians.

Shaila Bajaj

Street vendors

I read your interview with Arbind Singh of the National Association for Street Vendors of India. The new law was long overdue. Implementation will depend on active municipalities. It might be a good idea to identify new places for vendors in new colonies in the National Capital Region of Delhi. Those areas are underserved.

Aman Sharma

There is a continuous flow of migrants who find vending the most convenient business to do in the city. So, it is important for the government to create

other avenues for work.

Geeta Majumder

Smartbin

Your article on the Smartbin was awesome. Many of my friends bought the Smartbin and so did I. Along with getting compost, at least we will be contributing to a green cause.

Smrutu Mishra

Commendable green initiative. I hope it is easily available nationwide.

Rina Mukherji

We would like to contact Arijit Mitra regarding the availability of the Smartbin in Mumbai.

Kishor D. Shroff

Their address is: GreenTech Life, Level II, Prestige Omega, 104 EPIP Zone, Whitefield, Bengaluru - 560 066
Phone: 098200 86532, 080 6771 0997

Plants & drugs

With reference to Jehangir Rashid's article, 'More plants, cheaper drugs' I would like to request the government to encourage farmers in the Jammu region to grow medicinal plants. Please propagate this idea. The climate is ideal but we need expert advice and saplings.

Vishal

Passion fruit

Congratulations to George and Elsy Kurian for producing Passion Delight. Your story is excellent motivation for young entrepreneurs. I wish you great success.

Roy Parathazham

Nicely written article. I have already tasted Passion Delight and I found it excellent.

Abey Palamattam

Jaypore

Arjun Sen's article, 'Jaypore is stylish' was quite inspiring for me as I have started my own boutique in Salt Lake City in Kolkata.

Julia Datta

I love everything about Jaypore and that in a way they are helping a family in a remote part of India keep tradition alive. Maybe Jaypore could do a story on one of these families and how the 'somewhat high-end prices' may have helped them.

Priyanka Walwaikar

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

‘Bhutan needs to be careful,

INTERVIEW

Tshering Tobgay

Umesh Anand
Thimphu

VISITORS to Bhutan are always struck by its natural beauty, traditions, doll-like constructions and the mellow, loving nature of its people. But beyond this arcadian stereotype there exists a country facing new challenges as it makes the journey from orderly monarchy to the flux of democracy and the reckless world of the social media.

Bhutan's people are trying to find jobs, rent homes, buy cars, get a modern education and much else. They are migrating to the country's urban centres. They remain steeped in inherited values, but are also caught up in the churn of an economy that is opening up.

As Bhutan's second elected Prime Minister, it is the task of Tshering Tobgay, 48, to find ways of addressing these aspirations. Gross National Happiness (GNH) is the national goal, but getting the chemistry of change right is important. How much, doing what and how fast are the issues.

Tobgay's Peoples Democratic Party has gone from being in opposition to capturing power. He is a dynamic and articulate leader who has studied science and has a Master's in Public Administration from Harvard. He has seen the world, but bringing the world to Bhutan is a huge responsibility. Tobgay spoke to *Civil Society* in Thimphu.

How difficult or smooth has the transition to democracy been?

It's been difficult for the simple reason that the Bhutanese people did not want democracy in the first place. It was His Majesty the King who forced the people to accept democracy. Our people had big concerns, they were worried about parliamentary, multi-party democracy. They were extremely anxious. His Majesty the fourth King, went to great extents to tell the people that as much as you may love the King, as good as the King may be, there is no way of guaranteeing the quality of kings deep into the future. Therefore, in today's day and age, we have to accept democracy, with all its unpredictability.

How did you know that people didn't want democracy? Was there a process of consultation?

Yes, there was a vast consultation, we had debates, public meetings, the media reported on this widely. It was the beginning of the social media in 2007. Most important, at the same time, we were drafting a Constitution. His Majesty the King took the drafted Constitution to the people. It is the draft Constitution that legalises the introduction and functioning of democracy in our country.

He took the Constitution to the people, district by district, where a minimum of at least one member



Tshering Tobgay: 'We need to protect our environment, we need to protect our culture'

per household participated in these large meetings and discussed the Constitution.

You asked me about the transition. The first election took place in March 2008 and the transition was very smooth. The past five years were very smooth. All democratic institutions played their part. I was in the opposition, a very small opposition, but we played our part, as indeed did all the other institutions of democracy.

Now, from the first elected government to the second elected government, that was also smooth. Despite the fact that it was just our second election, there was a change in government. That measures the success of democracy. So, we have a new party, a new government and the transition so far has been very smooth. One reason why it is smooth is because at the back of everybody's mind, be it a voter or an elected public official, is that we can take comfort in

have its own pace'

the fact that His Majesty the King is still the Head of State and has a role to play in our democracy.

Do you feel completely empowered?

Yes. I do.

Do you feel that people listen to an elected government?

Yes. Because we have the legal instruments. You can question the government. The media questions it. The opposition party questions it. The people at large question us but that is not encroaching on our space.

So, at the end of the day, the government rules. Serves.

There has been much talk of investment in your economy. A lot of investment has taken place in hydel power. In which other ways do you see the Bhutanese economy growing sustainably?

Agriculture has enormous potential, because we need to feed ourselves. Having fed ourselves, we have the opportunity to export to neighbouring countries. Whether it's fruit or vegetables, and because of the mountains they are available at different times of the year.

In addition to that, because of our pristine environment here, we have the opportunity to grow natural or organic produce, whether it's dairy, or vegetables or fruits.

Is organic farming a strategic goal for you?

Yes, it is. We do have huge opportunities in terms of agriculture. In terms of construction, there have been huge investments in the construction sector. Whether it's building a single home, building a highway or building a tunnel, there is a lot of work that's been done. You mentioned hydel power. There is a lot of work at the construction phase and it represents an opportunity to expand our economy in this particular direction.

Then there is tourism. We have all of 80,000 to 90,000 tourists in a year and we can do a lot better. We can improve the quality of tourism so that our guests can have a better time and the Bhutanese economy plays a more active role in tourism.

These are the three immediate sectors. There are others. Related to IT, for instance. Related to mining, because we are sitting on a lot of minerals. Many of which are not available in the region. Like dolomite, gypsum, quartzite...these are opportunities. But, we need to be very cautious.

All emerging economies are faced with the challenge of using new technology, cutting edge technology – leapfrogging.

Whether it's using the best of IT to enhance education through video conferencing. Whether it's talking to my district governors by video conference – I am not talking of Skype – I am talking of all-out, high-speed, real-time video-conferencing.

Or whether it's telemedicine and not just to consult via video conferencing and exchange X-rays. Perhaps maybe even to complement traditional

telemedicine with drones, with the quadri-copters, to transport medicines or to pick up blood samples – these present unprecedented opportunities.

We are implementing a pilot where schools are connected via real time video-conferencing so that teachers can talk to and teach at many schools in different parts of Bhutan. The cell-phone is an example...

How do you look for the best?

In terms of using technology... (we see if) it is a good investment for people all over the world that we are harvesting. We are paying for it, but we are eventually reaping.

One such example is electric vehicles. A lot of money has gone into it. A lot of research, a lot of development and we have a technology that works. For whatever reason, there are people who are sceptical about it in many parts of the world. We can leapfrog transport technologies.

Do you have a policy on electric vehicles?

We have a liberal policy. We are not forcing any-

'We can leapfrog and at the same time learn from others' experience. We can develop our urban centres so that they become sustainable cities, responsible cities.'

body, but we are nudging and encouraging through taxes, by popularising it, through popular discussion and I do believe that most of our city taxis will be run on electricity, buses will be running on electricity and most private vehicles will be electric.

With regard to mining, we need to be careful, we need to take things at our own pace. We need to be aware of our own constraints and our opportunities and not others' constraints and opportunities. We need to ensure that our constraints are followed, whether it's mining or it's urban development. We need to look outside and learn from experience. We need to see where others have done well and tailor that to our own needs.

I went to leapfrogging with electric vehicles because you mentioned urban development. There is a connection. We can leapfrog and at the same time learn from others' experience. We can develop our urban centres so that they become sustainable cities, responsible cities.

So how are you defining your cities?

We have a structural plan. It's not about growing mindlessly. We have our urban development policies. I think there are reams and reams of documents.

But, in real terms, what are the priorities that you set for cities?

Our priority is to, as much as possible, spread the centres of settlement all across Bhutan. We can't have everybody converge on one city. So that is priority number one. How we do it is a different matter.

It is a big challenge and we go back to the beginning of our discussion, which is the economy. We have to ensure that there is enough economic activity. In fact, more economic activity outside Thimphu, the capital, and other parts of the country. Wherever there is economic activity, we need to encourage urban space for development opportunities.

So, do you have strategies for Bhutan's beautiful cities to evolve in post-urban forms?

We do have overall goals. I agree with you that Thimphu needs attention. Most visitors think of Thimphu as a lovely, quaint cottage town.

We need to protect our environment, we need to protect our culture, and our environment and our culture and our history need to find expression in our cities. At the same time, we need to give the youth an opportunity to express their desires. All this needs to be done.

Are we doing everything? It's difficult. Do we have a master plan? We have a broad vision. We have a ministry of works and human settlement under which there is a department of urban development. And then we have the city government. It's a local government, the city corporation is headed by the mayor. There is a structure of governance in place.

There is a lot of excitement in the world about electric vehicles – they think Thimphu can be a model to showcase the success of the electric vehicle.

One of the learnings from the rest of the world is that cities run as well as their mayors or councilors are empowered.

It's up to us. We believe that local government units must be empowered to do their work. We are committed to empowering all local governments.

That said, we can't shirk our responsibilities also. Just last week, I was with the mayor of Thimphu. I drove him around, just to look at things, no other agenda. This is something that we have agreed to do every week.

What is the role that you see for civil society?

I think civil society is very important. I think it serves two very important purposes – one is to keep a check on the government, to keep the government honest. They represent the people, whether you are representing the disabled, or whether you are representing the media or it could be some minority. You keep the government on its toes.

The second purpose for civil society, at least in Bhutan's context, is where the government is not able to deliver some service, where there is a gap of public services, civil society has a very important role to play there.

That said, all of us, including civil society, need to be very mindful that we don't have too many civil societies. We can't have too many organisations and we cannot have organisations that exist for themselves, regardless of what they say. Because then it ultimately undermines the very purpose of or the credibility of genuine civil society organisations. ■



A variety of maths models make numbers fun to learn



This wall is covered with pictures of the earth's atmosphere



A student holds up her model

THE MODEL TEACHER

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

DRESSED in her school uniform – a blue kameez and a white salwar – Sonam Khan walked into class clasping a model of the Pythagoras theorem like it was her most precious possession.

Inspired by their teacher, Jagdamba Prasad Dobhal, the students of this co-ed secondary school, the Government Inter-College in Dudhali's Dehradun district, have designed models of geometrical shapes, maths formulae and graph charts that have made learning maths cool. "Sir made us realise that maths is real fun!" quips Aditya Rawat, Sonam's classmate.

But Dobhal's classroom is more than just a maths lab. One wall is plastered with big maps of Uttarakhand and other states showing the composition of soil, climate, geology and crops. The maps are peppered with icons. There are also pictures of festivals, folk dances, monuments and river valley projects on various maps.

"Walls shouldn't be lifeless, they must talk," says Dobhal. A modest and humble man, he has twice won the President's Award for Best Teacher as well as the National Information and Communication Technology Services Award for School Teachers bestowed by the Department of Social Education and Literacy, Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) in 2012.

What catches the eye in his classroom is a colourful model of the AIDS virus. "We made it using sticks, beads and coloured sheets. It helped us learn about this dreaded disease and understand why it cannot be treated," says Mohammad Sahil, a student of Class 9. Next to it hangs a model of the Earth's atmosphere depicting its stratosphere, exosphere and ozonosphere and the percentage of different gases present. "This is not my work but of these children," says Dobhal.

As a fellow teacher remarks, an ordinary teacher tells, a good teacher explains and an exceptional teacher inspires. Dobhal is a real inspiration. He goes beyond the call of duty, say his colleagues, who speak of his many selfless deeds and his commitment to his work.



Jagdamba Prasad Dobhal in his classroom

He suffered a stroke on 1 August 2009. Yet he came to school a few days later to make a presentation on ICT to a team from California. Two weeks later he made another presentation to an audience in which B.C. Khanduri, the ex-Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, was the chief guest. He overcame his paralysis through sheer willpower.

As in-charge of the National Service Scheme (NSS), he encouraged his students to work for the benefit of society. He identified locations vulnerable to forest fires around Dudhali in 2008 by using Google Earth. He then motivated his students to dig a trench during their summer vacation. "With the help of the Forest Department, we dug a 10x8 km fire line so that if a fire happened we could fight it at short notice," says Sandeep Negi, a student who was part of the trench-digging team.

Along with B.S.Negi, Deputy Director, Secondary Education, Uttarakhand, Dobhal and his students built toilets for poor households in Badkali village on the outskirts of the Rajaji National Park (RNP), very close to his school. They used locally available material like stones, polythene sheets and cement to build one toilet in just four hours at a cost of only ₹300.

"Negi has been an inspirational figure for me along with Atul Semwal, District Education Officer, Tehri, as they taught me to do with my hands what I want others to do," says Dobhal.

This approach is visible in his classroom. There is no fan whirring over his head. The only workable fan is for his students. Another fan, that is not functional, has been converted into a model of the solar system. When made to rotate with a stick, the model of the Earth revolves around the sun placed at the centre of the fan. Dobhal even sweeps the classroom. Seeing him, his students follow suit. There is total freedom in his class. Children are not fearful. Even during free periods, his classroom is full of students playing chess, carom and Scrabble.

Dobhal also motivates his students to use maths to understand the villages surrounding Dudhali. "We conducted household surveys to understand the social, physical and educational status of people in these villages. We were surprised by our findings," says Akash Kumar, a student.

"Our survey revealed that there are 162 children in these villages who should be in our school, but they go to costlier private schools," said Dobhal.

He decided to draw those children to his school. So he ensured his classroom is always friendly and inviting. "His walking-talking maths lab has wiped out fear of maths from children's minds as they can come and understand all the major formulas through models kept here," says Prem Prakash Dyani, principal of the school. Indeed, the squares, circles, cylinders, models, graphs, maps and models make his classroom look zany and playful.

Second, he keeps motivating children to reach out to people. "Instead of holding the School Development Monitoring Committee or parent-teacher meetings in the school, we decided to hold them in villages and listen to their problems as well," says Dobhal. The meetings reached out to parents and they began to speak to the teach-

PICTURES BY RAKESH AGRAWAL



Goonj to intensify work in the hills

Arjun Sen
New Delhi

LIFE is yet to return to normal in Uttarakhand a year after the devastating flash floods that left more than 5,700 people dead and caused massive damage to roads, schools, houses and other infrastructure.

But the process is underway, thanks to the massive relief and rehabilitation work taken up by the state government and NGOs.

One such NGO is Goonj – a 15-year-old outfit known for using unused resources collected from urban areas as a currency for carrying out development work in rural areas and thereby creating a parallel economy.

In a review meeting organised in Delhi on the first anniversary of the floods Anshu Gupta, founder of Goonj, gave a presentation to volunteers, patrons, well-wishers and CSR executives on the work done so far in the aftermath of the floods and what it intends to do over the next few years.

“We are committed to working for three years in the region primarily on health, menstrual hygiene, toilets in schools, *anganwadis*, libraries, training and employment generation,” said Gupta.

Referring to the work done during the past year, he said it “was a massive campaign, the biggest in our history”. An appeal sent out by Goonj through Facebook and e-mails three days after the floods went viral and was highlighted by TV channels, media outlets and various online portals, including that of *Civil Society*. It evoked a massive response as there was an “emotional connect”, said Gupta, with more than 100,000 visitors to the state, tourists or pilgrims, being stranded or being affected in some way.

The massive response, with phone calls, over 200 e-mails a day, more than 1,000 donation transactions every day and hundreds of volunteers willing to join Goonj’s relief and rehab work, forced the organisation to upgrade its backend facilities. “We were used to issuing three or four receipts for donations a day and suddenly we had to issue more than 200 a day. This tested us and left many donors irritated at not receiving receipts on the same day,” Gupta said.

Goonj received over ₹18 crore in cash and hundreds of tonnes of relief material. Utilising these resources, it has managed to reach over 400 villages – many of them so remote that even the state government had failed to access them.

“The Rahat-Floods campaign also gave us an opportunity to understand in depth the problems that the people of the state face. People know about tourism in Uttarakhand but few know about the

problems the people face. The state is unique in many ways,” says Gupta.

“The biggest problem is that the angry and broken mountains have not only destroyed life, property and infrastructure but also livelihoods due to the destruction of tourism-related infrastructure,” Gupta explained.

In the initial stages, Goonj concentrated on providing relief to meet the immediate needs of the affected and stranded people. Over 6,200 families received Goonj’s ration kits. It also set up over 50 medical camps and supported doctors with materials and medicines. It has also distributed 62 first-aid kits to schools so far.

Over the past year, through its NJPC (Not Just A Piece of Cloth) programme, Goonj has distributed over 40,000 MyPad sanitary napkins in more than 100 villages and has made satisfactory progress on creating awareness about the taboo subject of menstruation and women’s hygiene. It is also providing financial assistance for building 25 toilets,

especially for women, with community participation.

Among other work, including the Cloth for Work programme where people are given clothes in return for doing community work, Goonj has distributed winter kits to 13,000 families and clothing and other materials to 8,800 people for making bridges, doing cleanliness drives, and repairing roads and other community infrastructure.

It has also given 1,400 school kits for children, helped initiate fun and recreation centres in 64 *anganwadis*, set up libraries in 10 schools, established 10 study centres for providing tuition to school-going children, distributed 8,500 pairs of shoes and provided marriage kits (bridal wear, rations, utensils and so on) to support over 200 marriages, 82 water filters to various institutions, over 1,500 solar lights, systems and torches, and has supported repair of six schools.

Also, to generate livelihoods, Goonj has helped people take up making of *sujnis* (a kind of blanket made from waste cloth) and knitting of sweaters apart from providing 1,900 basic-need labour kits and helping to revive agriculture. In total, the organisation has sent 140 trucks of materials to the state.

Over the next three years, Goonj plans to focus on health infrastructure as it is non-existent at many places.

The organisation will be supporting voluntary efforts, pharmacists and ASHA workers in tackling basic issues apart from running regular medical camps. Goonj is also fully supporting the construction of a hospital in the Guptkashi region in partnership with other NGOs, especially the Emmanuel Hospital Association. ■

ers of the school. The Van Gujjars, a nomadic tribe, live here and most of their children do not attend any school.

“We decided to lure their children to our school,” says Dobhal. They addressed the basic needs of the children – nutritious food and hygiene. “Every month, from 2008 to 2010, we held camps there providing meals and teaching children basic hygiene like brushing their teeth,” recalls Yusuf Khan, a student. Instead of children coming to the school, the school went to them. Students carried blackboards, charts, books and even a computer into the forest. A few parents got their children enrolled.

Dobhal’s efforts are visible in the academic achievements of his students. The pass percentage of Class 10 students has increased from around 30 in 2006 to 74 in 2014. The number of children enrolled has also increased from 240 to 294.

The children also study the flora and fauna of the area. This region has many birds. The children have collected the wings of 29 bird species. They also address the polythene menace. In 2006, when Dobhal was in charge of the NSS, he inspired his students to collect polythene from fields, roads and homes and from a one-km bank of the Susawa, a mountain rivulet, in nearby Simlas village in Dehradun district. “Since 2006, every month, we collect about 3,000 kg of polythene and dump it in a pit,” says Anuj Panwar, a student.

The school, however, lacks basic infrastructure. Most students come from poor families. Dobhal donated his own TV with a satellite connection to the school. He has also given the school a sewing machine. “Sometimes I stitch school uniforms myself when the child cannot afford it,” says the modest Dobhal.

His efforts have yielded significant results both at curricular and co-curricular levels. Their projects have been winning accolades and awards at the NCERT Science Fair and the Teacher Science Congress since 2006.

But despite his dedication, Dobhal has not succeeded in improving the ‘system’. In 2009, he was removed from heading the NSS. “The rule is that a teacher can be its in-charge for only three years,” he shrugs. ■

Goonj went to over 400 villages, some so remote that even the govt. couldn’t reach them.

CONFLICT ZONE

ASHAs face neglect

PICTURES BY CHARKHA



ASHAs don't have access to training and earn meagre sums as incentives in Kargil district

Gizala Shabnam
Kargil

A giant hoarding frames the archetypal picture of India's polio campaign: an infant being administered polio drops. Another hoarding facing it has a cheerful sketch of a mother and her baby depicting the activities of community health workers.

The intent of these hoardings, installed at the entrance of Kargil's District Hospital, is to highlight the government's efforts at making universal healthcare a reality. But the stream of patients going in and out of the hospital in this small mountainous town are quite oblivious to the message being spread by the hoardings.

And, as one drives a few miles outside Kargil town, the attempt to spread awareness is virtually foiled by the daunting distances. Locked health centres and uninformed villagers tell a completely different story.

Kargil, the infamous ground for the 1999 war between India and Pakistan, 213 km from Srinagar, remained cocooned until the outbreak of the conflict that brought it national attention. Soon after the conflict, the focus shifted to the long-ignored people of this district in Ladakh. It did connect Kargil with the outer world, helping the people, at the very least, to put forth the difficulties they had faced all these years. The Kargilis welcomed education, health and employment reforms. These, in turn, ushered more complexities.

For instance, earlier, traditional therapies and recipes were sufficient for leading a healthy life. But the post-war era induced more complex and advanced medical amenities.

A number of health policies and schemes were

introduced with good intentions. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), launched on 12 April 2005 by the Government of India, sought to provide effective healthcare to the rural population. With its prime emphasis on women and children, one of the major projects of the NRHM was to provide every village with a trained female community health activist – the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA). The ASHA initiative sought to ensure inclusive growth by covering every village.

In Kargil, ASHAs were employed in each of its 129 villages (in nine blocks) and were expected to bring in significant improvement in the healthcare sector. In line with the programme's mandate, ASHA workers selected in Kargil were entrusted with the responsibility of promoting health and mobilising communities to utilise public health services.

Selected from the villages and accountable to them, the ASHAs were trained to serve as an interface between the community and the public health system. Apart from the primary role of registering and encouraging women to avail of institutional delivery, these health activists were also assigned to counsel their community on birth preparedness, safe delivery, feeding practices and immunisation and ensure their practice.

However, despite the Kargil government's effort to implement the initiative evenly, the advancement of ASHA in Kargil appears highly asymmetrical.



Nargis Bano, an ASHA

Though villages near the main town areas continue to be scrutinised well, remote areas benefit tangentially.

The blame for this is shared equally by the health-care department and the villagers.

Unlike an ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) or an AWW (Anganwadi Worker), an ASHA is not paid a fixed salary under the NRHM but receives performance-based remuneration. An ASHA is entitled to ₹600 for assisting delivery in any government-identified institution under the JSY (Janani Suraksha Yojana). There are fixed incentives for immunisation/vaccination and for motivating family planning. These promised incentives are a major motivating factor for the ASHAs which, when refused, tend to affect their performance. Over the years, their incentives are either deducted, delayed or done away with.

Nargis Bano, an ASHA in Karpokhar village, 50 km from Kargil town, was initially paid ₹600 for assisting deliveries. The incentive has now been reduced to almost half that amount. Zahra Batool from Kartse Khar village and Sadiqa Bano from Bartso village say they have not got any incentives for vaccination and immunisation for the past two years. The performance-based salary of the ASHA makes them dependent on the community members who they assist and direct. "Despite several efforts to make them aware of the benefits of having deliveries in hospitals, and the incentives and care offered under this scheme, many villagers do not respond positively," rues Fatima Bano, an ASHA.

Some pregnant women avoid informing the ASHAs as they feel the entire process is too voyeuristic. Apart from the scarce incentives and a reticent public, the performance of these ASHAs is also deterred by the nonchalant attitude of the healthcare authorities.

Once appointed, ASHAs in these remote areas are quite neglected. There is no regular replenishment of the ASHA kit, which leaves many of them with nothing to offer their patients in case of an emergency. Then, the training sessions are irregular. As opposed to the prescribed 23-day training, most ASHAs have not received training for more than a week. Most of the time, there are no trainers available.

Hakima Bano, an ASHA from Apatte (23 km from Kargil), has travelled all the way to the town many times, only to find no trainer available. Sakina Bano from Thasgam in Drass tehsil faces the same problem. However, areas close to the town have a pretty impressive ASHA record. ASHAs from major blocks – Trespone, Shargole and other nearby villages – say their job is very respectable and a great source of income.

It is clear that, as long as the farflung areas of Kargil remain underserved, the NRHM's prime objective of inclusive growth will not be met. This chequered status of women's healthcare in Kargil clearly reveals the casual outlook of the appointed authorities and calls for strict regulation to ensure its effective implementation that will guarantee even benefits for all. ■

(This article has been generated under Sanjoy Ghose Media Fellowship. Kindly send your feedback to charkha@bol.net.in)
Charkha Features

Doon old boys try for Kobad

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

KOBAD Ghandy continues to languish in his desolate cell in the high-risk ward of Tihar Jail. He is 67 years old and suffering from arthritis, a slipped disc and spondylosis. He was arrested in September 2009 in Delhi for being a member of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist). However, the police are still unable to establish any evidence that would show him to be directly involved in the violent activities of the Maoists.

Ghandy has been writing to the Director-General (DG) of Prisons for over three years, requesting basic amenities that would help him tolerate the harsh living conditions inside Tihar Jail, but to no avail.

Ghandy's classmates from Doon School have taken up his cause with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Gautam Vohra, a former journalist and director of Development Research and Action Group (DRAG), an NGO in Delhi, has been at the forefront of fighting for his schoolmate.

Vohra is seeking Ghandy's release on bail. "That would be the ideal situation," he says, "However, until such time, he should be shifted from the high-risk ward and placed where he would get the benefits a senior citizen is supposed to get."

"His age is taking a toll on his health. If he is not shifted to a different ward, he must be provided certain amenities that would help him endure the jail conditions," says Vohra. Ghandy must be provided a facility to heat water, like an electric kettle. He must be given permission to get regular health foods and vitamins from the canteen, points out Vohra.

He should have the right to call family members once a week, with the time limit increased from five to 10 minutes. "He must also be assigned a separate *sevadar* who would help in his daily chores, moving his things and lifting any heavy object," says Vohra. "Ghandy has also said that he would pay the person whatever the prison does."

But the prison authorities are turning a blind eye to Ghandy's requests. In a letter to the DG, Prisons, on 28 October 2013, Ghandy had stated that the jail authorities transferred him under duress to Jail 1 from Jail 3. He wrote: "At the time of transfer, I was suffering from severe kidney and skin problems since a month and though I had been requesting to meet the SMO (Tihar), he never called me... It was in this condition that I had to undertake the harrowing transfer, going through three searches and

having to lift my bags (some weighing up to 15 kg) myself no less than 18 times." He did not receive any response from the DG.

After his arrest, it took the trial court three long years to just frame the charges. Ghandy has been charged with some minor cases under Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code, with a pending charge against him under Section 20 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. This section deals with membership of a banned organisation. According to Supreme Court rulings, membership is no crime, unless it is linked to violence. So far, there is not a



Kobad Ghandy is a senior citizen and suffers from many ailments

'His age is taking a toll on his health. If he is not shifted to a different ward, he must be provided certain amenities that would help him endure the jail conditions,' says Gautam Vohra.

single charge of violence against him under the Explosives Act, waging war against the state, sedition, and so on.

Ghandy's interest in Maoism can be traced to his days in London. Back in 1968, Kobad Ghandy went off to the UK to study and become a chartered accountant. He already had a blue blood educational background from the Doon School, Dehradun, and St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. In London, he worked in an auditing firm during the day, attended correspondence classes at night and had a part-time job at Selfridge's on weekends. Within a few years, he passed the intermediate CA exam with flying colours. His audit firm was happy with his performance and Ghandy was well set on his way to becoming a successful CA.

While he was studying there, he began noticing the discrimination against Indians. To understand the reason behind this behaviour, Ghandy started reading Marxist classics like R.P. Datt's

India Today. Pursuing his study of society, he returned to India in 1971 and immersed himself in Naxalite literature.

"Ghandy can be defined as a Maoist sympathiser. He used to write for Maoist magazines. His ideologies are Maoist and he won't deny that," says Vohra. "He and his wife, Anuradha, worked with tribals in the interiors of Nagpur. According to the Supreme Court directive, you cannot be put behind bars for being part of a banned organisation. However, if you are seen as taking part in violent action, then you can be imprisoned. Ghandy has not been found

to be a part of any violent activity and he says that the cases are fabricated."

"The only genuine case against him is of false identity. He was found carrying an ID card which showed that he was not Kobad Ghandy. For that, he has already suffered imprisonment for over four years. He is a senior citizen now, suffering from a number of ailments. He should be granted bail, at least on humanitarian grounds."

Vohra remembers Ghandy as shy, intelligent and studious. "He was a good friend. It is shocking to see what he is going through now. I am of the same age as Ghandy. For us, it becomes unbearable to even stay at home in this scorching summer heat. You can only imagine what Ghandy is suffering in his cell."

According to Vohra, his friend spends his time in prison reading and researching. "Recently, he underwent cataract surgery (which was paid for by Ghandy's schoolmates). It's not easy for him to stare at a book for long, but still he reads voraciously whatever he can find in the prison library."

Vohra writes to Ghandy regularly. Ghandy too, writes back. And his letters reflect that his years in prison are taking their toll on his spirit. In Ghandy's latest letter to Vohra, written on 24 May, he talks about the DG of NHRC taking up his application for being moved to the senior citizens' ward. He writes, "My application for being moved to the Senior Citizens' ward was taken up by the DG, but apparently she says she will have to consult the Special Cell – which means, no."

Even though Ghandy is growing a little pessimistic, his friends refuse to give up. According to Vohra, the NHRC accepting the case is an important development. "Our present agenda is to keep at it with our application to the NHRC. We will make sure that Ghandy gets better living conditions within Tihar Jail as soon as possible," says Vohra. ■

PUC and one man's mission

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

LAKSHMAN ANAND

WHAT does it take to figure out whether automobile pollution measures are working in Delhi? It is simple: count the vehicles and the emission measuring centres! The numbers tell the story plainly.

After years of public health being put in danger, Mahesh Kumar Gupta, a retiree in his late sixties, did just that. He finally won an order from the Delhi High Court on a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by him.

In March, the Delhi High Court issued an order directing Delhi Police and the Transport Department to ensure that all vehicles carry PUC (Pollution Under Control) certificates.

"In 2011," says Gupta, "I came across various newspaper reports that said many people in Delhi are dying of pollution-related diseases such as asthma, bronchitis and high blood pressure. Children and the elderly are most affected."

Around the same time, the charges for PUC tests were increased from ₹40 to ₹80. The key reason behind the hike, stated the Pollution Control Board, was that airconditioners needed to be installed in PUC booths to maintain a cool temperature for the computers.

"Being a mechanical engineer, I was a little surprised," says Gupta. "The PUC booths are small structures, generally open from three sides. Air-conditioning such booths doesn't make sense. I started investigating the matter."

He visited various PUC centres only to find that most booths were not yet air-conditioned. "Interestingly, in the booths which were air-conditioned, the AC machines were covered with boards and were not working."

Gupta started gathering information from various websites on the total number of registered vehicles in Delhi. "I also wrote letters to the Secretary of the Transport Department, asking for a breakdown of the data in terms of cars, two-wheelers, commercial vehicles, ambulances, and so on." He also enquired about the total number of vehicles that had undergone pollution control tests.

"Neither the police nor the Transport Department was very supportive initially. They would ignore my letters, or respond by harping on their old themes, bringing in the Delhi Metro, CNG vehicles, and so on," Gupta says, "I also wrote to the School of Environmental Sciences, JNU and IIT, but there was no response."

After considerable effort, Gupta found out that, in 2011, there were 79 lakh registered vehicles in Delhi. Out of that, 14 lakh vehicles had been tested for pollution control. "So what happened to the other 65 lakh vehicles?" asks Gupta.

According to norms set by the Delhi Pollution Control Committee, every vehicle must undergo PUC tests every three months. Says Gupta, "There are 657 PUC centres in Delhi. According to the data I had received, each centre can check 50 vehicles in one day, even if they worked around the clock. So, if you omit public holidays and Sundays, simple



Mahesh Kumar Gupta discovered that there is a huge mismatch between the number of cars and PUC booths

mathematical calculation would show that the PUC centres cannot check more than 20 lakh vehicles every three months."

"I wanted to find out how many vehicles have actually been challaned by the Delhi Police and the Transport Department." In March 2013, Gupta filed a 104-page Public Interest Litigation (PIL) case in the Delhi High Court. "The Transport Department, Delhi Traffic Police, Central Pollution Control Board, Delhi Pollution Control Committee and the Ministry of Environment and Forests were the key respondents in the PIL."

The PIL case requested the respondents to furnish information on the number of vehicles challaned between 21 December 2012 and 21 March 2013, among other data.

The first court hearing was in May 2013. Gupta argued his own case. His advocate, Rohit Madan, introduced the case to the court and then Gupta took over. "Rohit is actually my son's classmate from school," says Gupta. "It was he who first gave me the idea of filing a PIL case on this matter. He has been very helpful."

Arguing one's own case is not easy. However, for Gupta, things went smoother than he had hoped. "I rely on my research data and technical knowhow as a mechanical engineer," says Gupta. "I found out that when the judge sees a normal citizen advocate his own case and provide solid research data at the same time, he actually sits up and listens intently."

Although Gupta is no stranger to the customs and proceedings of courts, he believes it is his homework that gives him the confidence to fight his own case. "In Delhi High Court, all the PIL cases are heard on Wednesdays. After every Wednesday, the cases are put up on their website. I study the cases and make notes from them. They have actually helped me learn the tricks of the trade."

This is not the first time Gupta has fought his own

case in the court. He has argued himself in all the PIL cases he has filed over the years as an RTI activist. His PILs have pushed Philips to better the longevity of their CFL bulbs and it was his PIL that made the manufacturer fix the cap of Dettol shaving cream tubes so that they don't break off due to continual usage.

After repeated court hearings for almost a year, the High Court finally directed the transport department to pull up its socks and also ordered a mass awareness campaign to ensure all vehicles carry PUC certificates.

Gupta proudly keeps a cutting of the newspaper reports announcing the court directive as well as public announcement advertisements issued by the Delhi Police in his file. The big black file also contains his various endeavours as a member of the GK I RWA and as a social activist. He humbly leafs through the pages and shows his reports published in *Samvada*, the community newspaper of GK I. "125 reports so far," Gupta says, "I have covered everything, from squirrels nibbling electrical wiring and causing short-circuits to empty houses being used as public toilets."

"The Delhi Police is expected to come up with an update soon, on the number of cars challaned after the High Court order was passed," says Gupta. "The anomaly (in the amount fined, depending on whether the vehicle is caught by the police or the transport department) is because the fines are provided for in the Motor Vehicles Act, which is Central legislation and cannot be amended by the state."

Gupta is a doting family man. His grandson pops into his room to announce his English test score. Gupta gives him an affectionate pat. He lives comfortably in his GK I residence. So, what makes this man not relax even after 42 years of service in private sector companies?

"My father died of an asthma attack. The city's pollution was a key reason behind his disease," says Gupta. "So maybe that is what goes on in the back of my mind when I fight for an environmental issue." ■

Money for Dalits used up

Bharat Dogra & Roopam Singh
New Delhi

IMAGINE how you would feel if money meant to provide drinking water, sanitation and other facilities for your village was blown away on a grand picnic.

That's what happened to Dalits during the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. Around ₹700 crore, set aside for the Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCSP), was spent on building flyovers and highways for the Games. When politicians from the BJP and CPI(M) objected, they were told that Dalits would be using those flyovers too.

Dalit welfare funds were also diverted for the torch-lighting ceremony of the Games.

For years, money allocated for the SCSP and the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) has been repeatedly misused, misallocated and diverted, reveal government documents. These funds are meant for some of the poorest sections of society – Dalit and tribal communities.

The SCSP and the TSP have been around for over 30 years with dedicated funds, admits the 12th Five Year Plan document, but the money has never been used for the benefit of SCs/STs.

"The expenditure in many of the states and Union Territories was not even 50 per cent of the allocated funds. No proper budget heads/sub-heads were created to prevent diversion of funds. There was no controlling and monitoring mechanism and the planning and supervision was not as effective as it should be," says the 12th Plan document.

A team of officials and senior political leaders crafted the SCSP and TSP over 1975-1980. The objective was to improve the socio-economic status of Dalits and tribals through targeted schemes. It was noted that despite development efforts the SCs/STs continued to lag behind and their condition warranted special attention.

"The prime objective of SCSP is to channelise funds and benefits through identified schemes, for which the states/UTs and Union Ministries

have to earmark funds in proportion to the SC population in the state/UT and the country, respectively...The prime object of the Tribal Sub Plan is development of tribal areas," according to the Planning Commission.

But there wasn't much support for the SCSP and TSP in bureaucratic and political circles. "Over time, the initial enthusiasm for the SCSP waned. It was converted into a mere arithmetical statistical exercise, showing notional and imaginary figures of allocations which had no relationship with measures required for the advancement of the SCs. This also happened to the TSP," noted P.S. Krishnan, who worked as Secretary, Welfare, with the Union government.

It was only in the past decade that civil society

For years, money allocated for the SCSP and the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) has been repeatedly misused, misallocated and diverted, reveal govt. documents.

groups woke up to the existence of funds meant for Dalit and tribal communities being misused. Although their activism did result in more funds being allocated, no innovative schemes or projects were drawn up for SCs/STs. In fact, a government review of how these funds were being spent revealed that the money was used for 'common schemes drawn up without any specific consideration for SCs/STs'.

These revelations galvanised Dalit groups. They sought legislation to improve implementation.

The Dalit Arthik Adhikar Andolan (DAAA), a unit of the National Campaign on Dalit Human

Rights (NCDHR), was at the forefront of this demand. It formed the National Coalition on SCSP-TSP Legislation, comprising about 201 SC/ST groups from across India. Their demand was buttressed by the 12th Report of the Sub Group I on 'Perspective Planning for Empowerment of SCs'. The report recommended central legislation for implementation of the SCSP.

The National Coalition on SCSP-TSP backed this report and said:

- Both the Centre and the states should set aside a dedicated fund from their total Plan outlay, in proportion to the population of SC/STs at national and state level, for their development.
- A well-designed, dedicated institution must be set up at Central and state level which will allocate SCSP/TSP funds to the ministries/departments, after ascertaining the development needs of SCs/STs. This should enable the ministries/departments to clearly show the schemes formulated for the development of SCs/STs under a separate budget head.
- Governments must encourage SCs/STs, civil society organisations and experts to plan and evaluate such schemes.
- The budget, outcome and details of SC/ST communities who have benefited from the SCSP-TSP money should be published and made public every year.

On 2 December 2012, Andhra Pradesh unanimously passed such legislation. Krishnan wrote that the new Act was a step in the right direction but it had certain lacunae. "Section 11(d) legalises the CWG-type of misdirections and is dangerous for the SCs/STs. An important task for the future is to get these lacunae and Section 11(d) removed and to secure an amendment inserting important provisions omitted such as those relating to the developmental autonomy of SCs. Meanwhile, Dalit activists and friends have to keep a watch on what programmes and schemes are undertaken under the SCSP even under the diluted Bill since much depends on this," he wrote. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON A SPIRITUAL MASTER USING HAIR DYE?

THE HAIR MAY DYE, BUT THE SOUL, NEVER!

SAMITA

A helping hand for the blind

Bharat Dogra
Kanpur

IN many parts of India solar energy brightens up huts and hearts. When the sun goes down, darkness doesn't descend. The lights come on. In Rasoolabad block in Kanpur Dehat district of Uttar Pradesh, solar energy is doing something more. It is providing a ray of light to visually disabled people.

Shramik Bharti, a grassroots voluntary organisation, well known for its pioneering work, started a 'sightsevak' campaign to prevent blindness and help those who are visually disabled get an education and find jobs. First, they did a baseline survey. Their findings revealed that the block had 230 blind people. A large number needed cataract removal and treatment of eye injuries.

Shramik Bharti began contemplating what job opportunities they could find locally for visually disabled people. They came up with a bright idea. Why not help the blind set up solar mobile charging centres? Villages don't have dedicated supply of electricity so there would be a demand for such a service.

Twenty-three solar mobile charging stations have now been set up. They are manned by the visually disabled. These centres provide them an income and employment.

But, equally important, the blind are now respected in their village communities. Villagers visit their centres to charge their mobile phones and invariably begin chatting with them. As a result, social interaction has increased. The visually disabled have found friends and well wishers in the process.

Shramik Bharti also looked around for other employment opportunities. They identified making leaf plates and cups, weaving cots and cot strings, starting small shops and so on as enterprises that would work in the local village economy and provide an income as well as dignity to the blind.

The voluntary organisation also found that many blind students dropped out of school at an early age. They linked them to the nearest schools and provided them educational materials so that their education could be resumed. One of these students, Pankaj, won silver and gold medals in studies.

Alongside, villagers suffering from cataract were identified and taken in small batches for eye operations to Khairabad Eye Hospital in Kanpur city. Later, they were provided spectacles.

A vision centre has been started for local treatment of eye injuries. This has video-conferencing arrangements to consult a senior doctor when necessary.

Shramik Bharti's integrated approach at block level is an inspiring example of work that helps the blind and prevents blindness. ■

OBITUARY

Shankar Ghose, the good man

WE must have a sense of history," was the last conversation a visibly frail Shankar Ghose had with his daughter, Ela, in the intensive care unit of a Gurgaon hospital. The man who intended to retire at 80 lost a long, determined battle against cancer on the night of 14 June, months short of his 79th birthday. And yet, his remarkable eight-decade journey reflects a sense of history as rich as the young India he saw evolve significantly during his lifetime.

Born in Patna to a senior government officer and a feisty young housewife who had been an active freedom-fighter, Ghose was the eldest of four children. He studied at missionary schools, developing an affiliation towards Christianity that instilled in him a deep sense of spirituality, lending him courage in difficult times. His well-thumbed copy of the Bible, by his bedside since the early 1950s, is testimony to this faith. Indeed, the countless evenings spent singing hymns and Christmas carols are memories that elicit warm smiles from family and friends alike.

Former schoolmates recall fond memories of Shanks, as he was known to friends, in St. Stephen's College – an institution that stayed close to his heart all his life. His respect for the institution reflected in the active role he played as head of the Old Boys Association of the College for an astounding 19 years. To him, nothing could mar the glory of the institution; it was simply "the College".

He imbibed a sense of responsibility early, taking charge as head of the family at the tender age of 18 while he was still in college, owing to his

father's sudden death. The family struggled during those difficult times together, cementing relationships that were to stay strong right to the end, with the three siblings by his side through his last ailing days.

Starting as a young management trainee at Caltex, right after graduation, Ghose moved up the ranks swiftly. His was a generation that was partaking of nation-building in a young India, brimming with promise and pride, eager to enjoy the fruits of the democracy their parents had fought for.

Ghose married Vijaya Rao, known to all as Viji, when he was barely 22 and she, 21. Together for 55 years, they were a much-loved couple to their culturally varied families, the meat-loving Ghose co-existing in perfect harmony with the strictly-vegetarian Rao. Their two children, Sanjoy and Ela, grew up in an environment of uncommon kindness, imbibing their father's spirited enthusiasm for life and their mother's pragmatic outlook and quiet courage. All beings were showered with equal affection in the Ghose household: pedigree and stray dogs, the occasional owl and parakeet, and the hundreds of people whose friendship they measured in decades, not years.

After a successful corporate career spanning four decades, Ghose retired from the Shriram Group in the mid-1990s. He had, by then, pioneered several philanthropic initiatives and was involved with a variety of social and development organisations. Hanging up his boots was simply not an option. He plunged headlong into the development sector fulltime, leading the

Villages must get water

Sabita Kaushal
New Delhi

A discussion on river rejuvenation was held over 13-14 June at the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi to understand the new BJP government's stand on water issues and to collaborate with it in rejuvenation of rivers. Among those who took part were politicians, academics, law experts, *jal sahelis*, water warriors and activists across the country.

Nitin Jairam Gadkari, Union Minister for Rural Development, Road Transport, Highways and Shipping inaugurated the seminar after paying homage to the late Gopinath Munde, who was

Rural Development Minister.

"Till villages and farmers do not receive water, India cannot progress," said Gadkari. He lamented the lack of electricity and proposed use of solar panels for power. He stressed that his government believes in ethics, environment and ecology. He explained that tree plantation along newly built roads would be a part of the work assigned under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Employment Scheme (MGNREGS) and that it would provide employment to millions of youth. The panchayats would be consulted.

Transparency and accountability would be his hallmark, he said, and promised that all new projects would be monitored via satellite to keep an eye

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Shankar Ghose at his home in Gurgaon

prestigious National Foundation for India for a successful five-year term.

Perhaps the most testing time came in 1997, when his son, Sanjoy, then 39, was abducted by the ULFA while he was working in Assam's Majuli island as a development worker. All efforts to find him failed, and the void never quite filled. For many years after, the hope that he would return someday stayed alive. But it was not to be.

A devastated father could have chosen to let the anguish fester, but Ghose channelised it otherwise. The retirement plans were shelved once again. He took on the mantle of leading Charkha, an organisation his son had launched three years earlier, that had been floundering with little direction since the abduction.

For well over a dozen years thereafter, and till his last breath, Ghose dedicated his efforts to Charkha. Under his leadership, Charkha became an established name in the field of development communication, with Ghose personally leading his team to work in some of India's most difficult areas, including places where conflict had sidelined development.

Well into his late seventies, he continued to travel extensively to remote locations, urging the youth to come forward and share in the challenging task of nation-building. Concerned about the growing fissures in a fractured society, he instilled in his team the urgent need for bringing congruence and harmony among faiths, making it an integral part of all programmes he designed.

Corporate executive, philanthropist, development worker, environmentalist – Ghose was all these and more, with a spirited involvement in everything he did and a humane tenderness that touched lives, creating friendships that remained fresh even six decades after they were formed. It earned him the love and admiration of people everywhere.

The twinkle in his eyes and the warmth of his ready smile will remain with those whose lives he touched in countless ways. ■

Anshu Meshack / Charkha Features

first, says Gadkari

on the true work accomplished and keep corruption at bay. He reiterated his government's promise to improve the present state of our rivers, especially the Ganga and the Yamuna. The minister spoke on how water conservation measures like rainwater harvesting must be improved, drip irrigation encouraged and check dams be given the highest priority. "Slow the water that runs, stop the water that slows and use the water that stops," he said.

For rivers to be clean, they need sufficient water to flow, unfettered by dams. Prof. Vikram Soni, an astrophysicist and environmentalist, spoke on how rivers must have at least 60 per cent volume of water in them to retain their natural flow. Otherwise, the river gets loaded with sand and silt, turns sluggish,

and lets its water settle underneath without flowing into the sea or inundating floodplains or recharging the wetlands. If there is sufficient water in the river, groundwater levels also rise.

Each tributary of a river needs to be pollution-free for the river to be healthy. As Manoj Mishra of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan put it, "A river is as healthy as its sickest tributary." So, amid talk of huge budgets and well-inked plans to clean any river, there is a need to understand that each tributary must be free of pollution too.

The speakers spoke on how water and land are closely inter-linked, and how local wisdom often provides low-cost indigenous solutions. Laws exist, it is the enforcement that needs to be strengthened.

Smaller water bodies such as ponds too need to be protected against encroachment carried out in the name of development.

The declining groundwater table is another cause for concern. Non-functional handpumps increase the distances to water sources. Sarita Yadav, from Lalitpur village in Bundelkhand, spoke of how women there travel nearly two km to fetch drinking water even today.

Whether it is the Yamuna or the Gomti, most rivers are dumping grounds for the sewage, filth and industrial waste generated by cities and towns along them. As Rajender Singh of Tarun Bharat Sangh, often called India's Water Man, said, "It is time we rethink our rivers, it's time we joined hands with water."

The consensus was that there is a compelling need to educate people, create more awareness, and involve panchayats and civil society groups in river revival – because what is needed is people's power. ■

Sabita Kaushal is with India Water Portal

WHAT TO DO IN

Short answers from around the country

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IN a complex world, governments need all the help they can find. It is not enough to be in power. Tuning in to new ideas and ways forward is as important. A special kind of connectivity is provided by civil society, which is that space where people in office can keep in touch with those who put them there.

Activists may not be good at winning elections (as we have recently seen), but they do reflect trends and concerns. There are also NGOs that deliver significant last-mile solutions and have a good understanding of what works and doesn't. Then again, many new-age businesses thrive on a vision for a better future and are known to transform lives.

Shared learning and partnerships are the way forward. In this magazine we have featured many such initiatives in healthcare, education, pollution control, urban governance and the spread of digital literacy.

But it is in the functioning of government that solutions of meaningful scale lie. So, as the Modi government settles in, we spoke to individuals and groups across the country on how five Union ministries that we believe have huge responsibilities in taking the country forward can be made more effective.

The ministries are Health, HRD/Education, Rural Development, Urban Development and Environment.

It is not a perfect exercise because you could add to or subtract from the list. But our point is that openness and diversity nourish governance and consultation is invaluable.

From the responses we received, a few broad points emerge. There is a need to improve capacity in government: qualified people with expertise are required. A database of human resources in the country is one suggestion. It is important to invest more in health and education.

All five ministries could do with better transparency, more accountability and simpler procedures. There is a need for dialogue between ministries and shared learning from programmes. Certain ministries should converge – for instance, Environment and Urban Development.

Generally, the role the respondents prefer for a Union ministry is that of a lighthouse for new ideas and better processes, a facilitator of action in the states.

1 HEALTHCARE

CONVERGENCE IS ESSENTIAL

Nerges Mistry, Director, Foundation for Research in Community Health

➔ The Ministry of Health should move towards a seamless convergence with all ministries and departments related to health. As far as I know there are 23 of them: Water and sanitation, urban planning, waste management, environment, agriculture and so on. It has been experienced elsewhere that the best health outcomes are achieved when functional interdepartmental committees are in place.

➔ The technical arm of the ministry, the Central Directorate, should be strengthened. Currently it is 'over-medicalised' with minimal experience in public health issues and their planning. The National Institutes of the directorate should be urgently upgraded to take leadership in guiding health policy and planning. This should be based on contemporary challenges with infusion of newer public health disciplines.



India's future: Education for all at a young age

➔ Improve human resource planning and management. The absence of HR planning skills has negatively impacted several health policies.

ENGAGE COMPETENT, TECHNICAL ADVISERS

Dr Abhay Bang, Co-Founder, SEARCH

➔ The Health Minister, if he/she is a person of integrity, should be more proactively involved in setting the priorities, based on what people need. Politicians have a better feel of this.

➔ Engage highly competent technical persons in public health and management as advisers. Today, the ministry depends on specialist doctors in Delhi (whose experience is Delhi-based) or on international agencies, which have their own agenda.

➔ Non-communicable diseases (diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart disease, cancer) and Universal Health Care Coverage should become high priorities.

➔ Monitor health programmes independently up to the district level and make the results available annually.

5 MINISTRIES

PICTURE COURTESY VINYAS



- ➔ National schemes with doubtful outcomes such as the Janani Suraksha Yojana and ICDS must be evaluated for cost effectiveness.
- ➔ An all-India public health cadre must be introduced for managing the delivery of health services.
- ➔ Strengthen the role of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), who number 900,000. They are as important to India's health as doctors.

IMPROVE COLLECTION OF DISTRICT DATA

Dr Santosh Mathew, Emmanuel Hospitals

➔ It is a well-known fact that the macro indicators of health in India have not improved fast enough despite multiple well-meaning programmes. There are many districts and sub-districts where indices are far below acceptable levels. There should be a task force to identify these priority districts from existing data and come up with a system of collecting qualitative data through a process of listening to various stakeholders. The stakeholders should include the state-run systems, civil society groups and private healthcare providers.

The information emerging should then be used to review current programmes and policies and plan ahead.

➔ Currently, the flexibility built into policy and programme implementation ends at the state level. It needs to take into account various geographical, social, economic and structural inequities at the district, sub-district and taluk levels in terms of the flow of funds and service delivery.

➔ We have done well in polio and HIV and there are lessons which can be learnt and principles can be drawn to address the larger public health issues like malnutrition among children and the infant mortality rate.

GO ALL OUT ON BREASTFEEDING

Dr Arun Gupta, Director, Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India

➔ Focus on infancy and breastfeeding: I feel there is a fundamental problem in the governance of child health and nutrition. An operational plan is needed instead of ad-hoc planning. If all the mothers are supported to breastfeed their babies, thousands of child deaths could be prevented. I do not understand why the government does not take any action to encourage breastfeeding in a much more coordinated fashion as Brazil did.

The government has issued very promising guidelines but they should be put into action. The ministry should ensure that a trained worker is available to the mother at the time of delivery and thereafter.

MEDICAL EDUCATION SHOULD BE RELEVANT

Dr R. Balasubramaniam, Founder & Chairman of Grassroots Research And Advocacy Movement (GRAAM) in Mysore

➔ The shortage of qualified and competent professionals, especially in rural India, should be addressed. This can be done by the introduction of fresh courses for training a new cadre of Physician Assistants and taking a constructive view of the rural physicians' course.

➔ Make medical education relevant to present-day challenges and introduce concepts of the practice of integrative medicine.

➔ Make AYUSH a logical part of the healthcare system, rather than calling it an 'alternative'. The benefits of yoga are now established beyond any scientific doubt and the government should look at popularising it without giving it any 'political' or religious colour.

2 EDUCATION

TRAIN TEACHERS, SPEND MORE

Dileep Ranjekar, CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

➔ Execute the national vision for education. Functionaries – including teachers – lack the in-depth perspective and understanding of the National Policy for Education and the National Curriculum Framework. Intense efforts need to be made to develop such understanding – linking education to social change – which is the most important objective. Illustratively, teachers and teacher educators must know why they teach subjects and how they need to be integrated in developing an individual who would become a responsible member of society.

➔ Increase the budget. Since 1965, most education commissions have seriously recommended education budgets in excess of 6 per cent of GDP. Our current budget is around 3.2 per cent or so. Investment in education is investment in building a society and a nation that is committed to our Constitution. It is about investing in developing generations of our nation. Quality is expensive and the nation must invest in imparting equitable high-quality education to all. Children of deprived and disadvantaged families should get the same facilities and learning environment as the children of the elite. While enhancing budgets, rigour is needed to prevent leakages in the system and to enhance effective utilisation of funds.

➔ Educate teachers because they are at the heart of quality education. Our cur-

rent process of preparing teachers through a 10-month B.Ed programme after poor quality graduation is unworkable.

Some critical issues for action are: (a) the recommendations of the Justice Verma Commission appointed by the Supreme Court of India must be rigorously implemented. This is the highest priority. (b) The current regulatory body – the NCTE – has failed to ensure quality teacher education. This body either needs to be radically reformed in terms of its constitution, functioning, scope of work and jurisdiction or abolished. It could hand over teacher education to universities. (c) An overwhelming number of about 16,000 B.Ed colleges are run by unscrupulous private parties who are not competent to deal with teacher education. Their functioning needs to be critically evaluated for integrity and quality. In addition, considering its integrative nature, we need to recognise that teacher education institutions cannot be standalone colleges but need to be part of a larger multi-disciplinary university. (d) Teacher preparation must be either for a period of two years after graduation or four years after Class 12 – with appropriate quality standards. ↻ Important institutions such as NCERT, SCERT, DIETs, BRC and CRC have been created to provide academic and administrative support to schools. The majority of these institutions don't have quality infrastructure, adequate budgets and, most important, enough competent people.

Detailed reports of the inadequacy in the functioning of DIETs have been made but are not being acted upon. Important recommendations incorporated in the 12th Plan need urgent execution.

↻ Early childhood education is crucial. Research across the world has established the fact that the most critical phase of development in the child's life is from the age of four to eight. Most developed nations prepare their children well during this phase since it has a far-reaching impact on the subsequent education quality. In our country, this is the most neglected area. There is also an equity issue. While the elite and rich somehow manage to place their children for pre-schooling experience, over 70 per cent of the poor population has no access to pre-schools.

Some specific actions for the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) are (a) early childhood education must become part of the Right to Education (RTE), (b) the functioning of *anganwadis* must be brought under the MHRD (currently it is under Women and Child Welfare), (c) *anganwadis* must be used to deliver early childhood education by dramatically improving their functioning, developing appropriate curricula, training teachers to be responsible for development of children in *anganwadis* and physically placing *anganwadis* in existing schools, (d) develop a large pool of teachers who understand early childhood education and deal with children of that age.

↻ Establish at least one school of education per state. Schools of education are needed to develop competent, well-meaning professionals in the domain and carry out research and investigation in educational issues to arrive at evidence-based solutions to our own native problems.

Just to explain the contrast. Canada, for a 35 million population, has over 5,500 education professionals being developed each year. In India, for a population of 1.25 billion, we don't have more than 300 education professionals being developed.

GIVE TEACHERS MOTIVATION

Arvind Sardana, Director, Eklavya

↻ The most important issue facing the public education system is improving teaching quality in schools. Current efforts to improve quality are aimed at monitoring teachers as culprits or instituting mechanical indicators. These efforts have only produced more distortions and a demotivating atmosphere for everyday classroom practice. This does not appear to make government schools better.

Teachers everywhere require autonomy, support and motivation to function as self-reflective people. Give voluntarism a chance and make them sensitive to the diversity of their current students. Allow teachers to choose short courses, provide access to resources and encourage the formation of peer groups. This is not a pipedream but a real possibility.

↻ Systemic reforms for school functioning are needed. Despite reports by many committees such as the Focus Group at NCERT, we have not probed why we have dysfunctional schools. The education bureaucracy does not ask what is being taught or what support may be required – what teachers imbibe is their fixation for paper work and keeping relations intact. The political patronage that is encouraged and sought by all sustains dysfunctional methods over a long time. This does not allow any action to be taken to ensure accountability and the purpose of the school. Teachers are the visible part of the system but unless we examine the role of other invisible

people involved, we are missing the whole picture.

↻ Ensure that the RTE norms and expectations from schools are adhered to without any interference.

↻ We require a complete relook at assessment formats and norms for teachers. We are doing the opposite of what is intended as change in assessment practice.

AN ECO-SYSTEM FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

Kabir Vajpeyi, Founder, Vinyas

↻ Discover, validate, share and implement diverse ways of effective learning that have worked – for example, activity-based learning in Tamil Nadu, Pragyan in Gujarat and so on. Document them. Contextualise them in different regions. Use the Education Innovation Bank of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. Motivate teachers and headmasters to use new or better ways.

↻ Bring in ownership through processes and systems. Recognise creativity and innovation at every level. Link the system with ideas and resources already created.

↻ Take Whole School Development Planning to ground level. Prepare a Whole School Development Plan for each school, as envisaged under the RTE. Let the implementation be in a phased manner if resources are short. Implement in a holistic manner the school development (master) plan.

↻ Go for quality not quantity. Simply multiplying a good solution to all situations often does not achieve quality. In scaling up, it is important to keep this in focus. A good seed idea + contextualisation x ownership of stakeholders may result in higher quality. A good idea x numbers (without contextualization) is not equal to quality. India is such a diverse country that for each problem there are likely to be numerous solutions – each relevant to its own context.

↻ Create a consolidated national database of people working in various national flagship programmes.

MAKE THE MoS FUNCTIONAL

John Mason, educationist

↻ Give the Minister of State (MoS) a functional role. Shashi Tharoor recently admitted that being an MoS was like standing in a graveyard: a lot of people are under you but nobody is listening! The MoS is in a position to play a pivotal role in governance through the Secretary (Education and Literacy) and guided by the senior minister. The role of the MoS should be structured accordingly.

↻ Promote Centre-state understanding. As education is a state subject the lack of cohesion between the Centre and the states is responsible for several anomalies in the functioning of schools and colleges. A first step should be a common programme to improve discipline in government educational institutions by reducing staff absenteeism, promptly filling vacant posts and improving class transaction.

↻ There is an urgent need to speed up decision-making and communication within the HRD Ministry and its related institutions. While guidelines on response time for various matters of governance should apply, an IT-enabled administration will facilitate quick decisions and communication.

3 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

IMPLEMENT LAW, GIVE RIGHTS

Aruna Roy, Founder, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)

↻ There are three main issues in the running of the Union Rural Development Ministry. The first is to understand that our social sector and rural development programmes are still inadequately funded.

Second, the arrangement by which money comes from the Centre and is spent by the states with very little accountability and very few powers with the Centre to do anything short of cutting funds makes for an unhealthy relationship and constant efforts at one-upmanship. This needs to be sorted out so that the ministry plays the role of a support rather than a watchdog, with the role of a watchdog being handed over to an independent agency, probably best served by social audits.

Last, a rights-based approach, including the genuine handing of controls to beneficiaries so that they can access their entitlements, has only happened on paper.

The experience with even a law like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) shows that the central and state gov-



Rights matter: Women hold up their job cards in Muzzaffarpur

ernments can ignore its provisions with impunity. Following the failure of delivery systems, it was thought that people would be a driving force that would ensure efficiency and end corruption. However, the failure to genuinely empower people is now being used to discredit rights-based paradigms. Rejecting the rights-based paradigm has unhealthy implications for participatory democracy and the capacities of the poor to define their own solutions.

The Union Rural Development Ministry must follow the law by which it is bound. For instance, under the MGNREGA, there have been constant violations of the law. The problems in the MGNREGA mainly stem from administrative stonewalling and the non-implementation of the transparency and accountability entitlements.

➔ 5 things that must not be changed in the MGNREGA:

1. The law should not be diluted and all 10 entitlements should be guaranteed.
2. Contractors and machines must remain banned from MGNREGA works.
3. Universal coverage cannot be reduced, as mandated by law.
4. Ensure labour is not diverted to work on big farmland holdings.
5. Category of works should be labour-oriented and assets should concentrate on rainwater harvesting and soil conservation.

➔ 5 things that should be implemented in MGNREGA:

1. Dated receipts must be issued so that workers can get work in 15 days.
2. Timely payment of wages.
3. Planning of works must be a reality and people must be involved.
4. Social audit units must be set up by the state governments and bi-annual social audits must be conducted with workers' participation.
5. Rules for appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms must be put in place for dealing with any complaint by any person in respect of implementation of the scheme under Section 19 of the Act.

INVEST IN GOOD PROFESSIONALS

Ved Arya, CEO of SRIJAN

➔ Spend on administration. Build state and district-level capacities, and enhance administrative cost to 10 per cent of the overall resource allocation: Inadequate manpower or competent human resources at the state and district levels have marred the prospects of success of flagship programmes like MGN-

REGA in the past.

The MGNREGA's annual allocation has ranged from ₹35,000 to ₹40,000 crore, but a mere six per cent of this is provided for administrative cost. State teams managing MGNREGA or watershed projects don't attract capable and experienced professionals. District Rural Development Agencies or Zilla Parishads, the bodies at the district level, have become emasculated without competent people.

➔ Planning and implementation capacities should be improved. Gram panchayats are supposed to be the project implementation agencies for a range of schemes but besides *sachivs* (secretaries), *sarpanches* hardly have anyone. Staff, if taken on for MGNREGS and other such schemes, on a contract basis, are hardly ever trained in the skills required. The Union government must raise the allocation for training, and bring in competent agencies to train the *sarpanches* and their staff bottom up in planning and implementation of MGNREGA and schemes for drinking water and sanitation, and watershed development.

➔ Panchayats need election reforms. The Union government must work with state governments to strengthen local democracy by removing the influence of money, criminal elements, and casteist forces in panchayat elections. This would lead to the rural poor having a greater say in the functioning of gram panchayats and in demanding accountability of public servants such as teachers, doctors and agriculture extension officers.

➔ Build rural infrastructure. In order for small farmers to get better prices for their agricultural produce including cereals, pulses, oilseeds, fruits, vegetables and milk, it is critical that the government build warehouses in every gram panchayat if not in every village. Similarly, it must invest in basic amenities such as potable water. Drinking water drawn from the ground in a very large number of villages now has fluoride and arsenic in quantities well above WHO prescribed limits.

To achieve this, set implementation structures as was done under the earlier NDA regime for the National Quadrilateral and Highways Scheme and the Prime Minister's Gram Sadak Yojana.

GIVE LOCAL GOVT ITS OWN SPACE

George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences

➔ To achieve the goals of the 73rd Amendment what we need is a Ministry of

Local Government where the panchayats and municipalities can function as envisaged in the Constitution.

Bringing the Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Ministries together will undermine the importance of Panchayati Raj. This was what happened between 1993 and 2004 resulting in marginalisation and neglect of panchayats.

Then, in 2004, a separate Ministry of Panchayati Raj was created which at least brought the concerns to centre-stage.

Since 2009 it has been clubbed with Tribal Affairs. Even during this period, several contradictions prevailed, for instance, the panchayat training institutions were under the Ministry of Rural Development.

4 URBAN DEVELOPMENT

DEMOCRATISE CITY GOVTS

Nasser Munjee is Chairman of the Development Credit Bank

➔ Urban Governance: Managing cities is a process that needs to be streamlined through very different institutional arrangements than those prevailing at the present time in both metropolitan cities as well as secondary towns.

Democratising cities is the fundamental change we need to make. Directly elected mayors of cities who are accountable to citizens is the fundamental change that needs to be made. The mayor then becomes the chief executive of the city with all investment, delivery and governance mechanisms under his/her control. The city would then negotiate with the government at the state and central levels for investments that are needed beyond the investment capacity of the city itself.

➔ Urban Finance: Financing cities is perhaps one of the major components of debt markets. The quality of leadership arising out of good urban governance would provide the means for developing the idea of the 'competitive' city.

Locally raised revenue streams would now become the key ingredient of local investment opportunities. Larger investments would rely on the possibility of raising greater debt depending on the nature of the opportunities in the city.

➔ Public-private-partnerships (PPPs) are extremely crucial for city investments and infrastructure management. But the role of public institutions will be critical to this endeavour. For enlightened PPPs, one needs to stress the independence and nature of public ownership and management as well as the concept of 'partnership'. Both have been sorely missing in all PPPs thus far.

➔ Reform of institutions and programmes: The role of HUDCO and programmes such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) needs to be recast. HUDCO needs to be split between its housing development role and its urban development role with enlightened leadership in both areas. HUDCO could become a very critical institution providing intellectual and financial leadership on the public sector side that could leverage vast energy from the private sector.

MEET THE NEEDS OF THE URBAN POOR

Ratish Nanda, Project Director, Aga Khan Trust for Culture

➔ Address the urban poor: There is an urgent need to address the requirements of the urban poor. This requires synergy across sectors – water, sanitation, housing improvement, education, community health, vocational training, urban street improvements and, often, conservation of the built heritage. With the assimilation of the Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation Ministry, it might now be possible to develop cities for people rather than for cars.

➔ Heritage cities: Our historic cities, such as Benaras, as well as historic conservation zones within all our major cities need attention. Here, conservation of the built heritage would need to be coupled with significant socio-economic development and environmental development initiatives for local populations. Cleanliness and waste management remain major priorities not only to showcase our built heritage to the world but also to keep disease at bay in urban areas.

➔ New construction: The CPWD remains one of the largest builders in the country and often undertakes some of the most prestigious building projects that are icons and models for others. Of late, India's new construction is aping the West, using materials such as glass which are inappropriate in our climate. The Ministry of Urban Development needs to incentivise building with traditional materials. Sandstone, a favoured material of the Mughals, is today sadly relegated to roadside pavements. Use of traditional building techniques would also help revive the building craft sector – keeping skills alive and creating employment for craftsmen.

➔ Better management: We need to simplify building regulations, approval processes, introduce management tools such as GIS, ensure coordination for

urban transportation, amongst other needs. These objectives and needs are so vast that they seemingly can only be achieved with significant civil society and corporate partnership – which must be encouraged and appreciated.

LET CITIZENS TAKE DECISIONS

Dunu Roy leads the Hazards Centre

➔ The Urban Development Ministry needs to be more democratic. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the ministry met once in 2011, five times in 2012, nine times in 2013 and once in 2014. At every meeting this committee only considered the Demand for Grants.



City chaos: Local urban bodies need more decision-making powers and funds

Not once did the flagship project of the Ministry, the JNNURM, nor the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) nor the Property Rights Bill for slum-dwellers, nor the Land Pooling Policy ever figure on the committee's agenda.

Under JNNURM and RAY the entire dialogue took place between consultants, bureaucrats and private corporations, without any space being given to elected municipal bodies or people's representatives.

The participation of ordinary citizens in the preparation of city plans was through closed-door consultations with selected stakeholders. Even when citizens' groups tried to provide their inputs, they were ignored and space given only to specific NGOs who claimed to represent the people.

One of the instruments through which democratic functioning can be achieved is the 74th Constitutional Amendment that mandates decentralisation through Ward Committees, devolves financial power through the State Finance Commissions and gives specific decision-making powers to Urban Local Bodies.

GIVE SHELTER TO THE HOMELESS

Amita Joseph, Director, Business and Community Foundation (BCF)

➔ One-third of Delhi residents live in slums for lack of an alternative. The housing shortage is around 24.5 million in the country. The Urban Development Ministry must concentrate on building low-income housing and dormitories for working women and men, and families so that there are choices. A large number of people in our cities are homeless. There should be shelters with basic amenities for them.

5 ENVIRONMENT

BE A LEADER, NOT A DESK

Anupam Mishra, Gandhi Peace Foundation

➔ The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) should be a leader

and not a desk. It should represent standards, values and vision. It should be empowered to be a knowledgeable, lean and efficient regulator. It should be set free from red tape and pressure groups. The best scientific, legal and oversight talent should be drawn to the ministry.

This is the reform that is urgently needed in its functioning so that it becomes a lighthouse for ideas. Our new government has promised development. But the development model we are following is the one that was used when imperial powers had colonies they could exploit. Today we treat parts of India as colonies to be exploited – like Bastar.

It is almost inevitable that fast development will mean fast clearances at any cost. The environment ministry should be able to apply the brakes.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Polluted groundwater: State Pollution Control Boards should monitor compliance with green standards

CLEAR, ENFORCEABLE NORMS NEEDED

Himanshu Thakkar, Coordinator, South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People

- ➔ Formulate clearly defined, legally enforceable norms for transparency, accountability, participation and inclusive democratic functioning of each arm of the MoEF.
- ➔ We need a credible mechanism to redress complaints regarding inadequate environment impact assessments (EIA)s, inadequate public hearings and so on.
- ➔ Formulate and implement a river regulation zone Act, which will include need for assessment of the services provided by a river whenever such services are affected and include these in EIAs and cost-benefit analyses. Also have norms for leaving certain rivers as no-go areas in each state. Define the process of ascertaining how much water can be taken out of a river on a cumulative basis, and include in this process groundwater use and groundwater-surface water interactions.
- ➔ The full EIA and not just an executive summary must be made available in local languages a month in advance of public hearings. The public hearings have to be conducted by an independent panel and not by government officials. There should be clearly defined norms of public hearings, what will be included in the minutes of public hearings, and who will take a call on their adequacy.
- ➔ A large number of projects that impact the environment and people adversely are excluded from the purview of the EIA notification. Some categories that need to be included: big dams, all hydro projects above 1 MW installed capacity, all embankments, all river-related projects, all projects that require more than 1 ha of forest land (with exceptions for projects like rural drinking water, rural educational institutions and so on).
- ➔ Monitor and ensure compliance. We need empowered monitoring and compliance mechanisms for each project that requires environmental clearance. At least 50 per cent of the members of these committees should be local community/ independent representatives.
- ➔ Environmental clearances should be time-bound and renewed after a certain period, say, 20 or 25 years.

BRING SYNERGY TO REGULATION

Chandra Bhushan, Deputy Director, Centre for Science and Environment

- ➔ Reform Green Clearances. None of the Green Clearances – environment, forests, wildlife, coastal and so on – are working for the environment or protecting the rights of the communities. They are also adding to the burden of industry in terms of project delays and high transaction costs. What is needed is to reduce multiplicity, remove archaic laws and streamline regulatory procedures.
- ➔ The MoEF should set up a national regulator to consolidate all green clearances – environment, forest, wildlife, coastal – so that project impact is fully

understood and decisions are taken. The fragmentation is not only adding to delays but also poor decision-making.

- ➔ Strengthen and synergise regulatory institutions. We need a national programme to upgrade the manpower, infrastructure and capacity of key regulatory institutions – central and state pollution control boards (SPCBs), MoEF and so on. These institutions must be given powers to impose financial penalties for non-compliance. But we also need to make these institutions more transparent and accountable, otherwise there is huge scope for rent-seeking.

We also need to synergise the work of different regulatory agencies. At present, SPCBs have nothing to do with the clearances given by the MoEF and the MoEF has no capacity to monitor clearance conditions it imposes on projects. There is a huge opportunity to use SPCBs for monitoring and compliance with green clearances.

GIVE POLLUTION BOARDS TEETH

Ravi Agarwal, Director, Toxics Links

- ➔ Regulators should be independent. We have a plethora of environmental laws. However, the SPCBs are unable to enforce them. There is political interference and a lack of transparency. The innumerable adverse court judgments demonstrate this. These boards, formed in 1974 under the Water Act, were fine for that size of the economy, but are totally out of sync with a \$ 1.3 trillion economy which is rapidly industrialising. Regulation must be made independent, free of interference and transparent.
- ➔ Invest in people and technology. We are not monitoring many key pollutants which have an immense impact on health, since we have not made required investments in manpower and technology.
- ➔ Graded penalties are required. Currently no regulator can take effective action against a polluter. Hence, while the defaulter can be closed down, he cannot be fined. It makes penalising pointless, since cases drag on for years in courts of law. We need to amend our laws to make graded penalties possible by the regulators. ■

BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

Cotton in, fabric out One-stop mill for farmers

Jency Samuel
Chennai

AT Buldana in Maharashtra a small, integrated spinning mill will soon become the first in the world where a farmer can enter the gates with a bale of cotton and come out with a finished product.

Based on technology provided by L. Kannan, founder and CEO of Microspin, the Buldana mill is part of his efforts to take India back to those halcyon days when the village was the nucleus of the global textile industry.

“Mine is not a far-fetched dream,” he says.

Technologies for mass production killed India’s village textile industry. Kannan believes in reversing this. His company, Microspin, has invented new technology that makes it possible for small textile enterprises to bloom in rural India.

In a conventional spinning mill, cotton from the farm is converted into yarn through a series of processes. Such factories require a lot of capital and consume much energy.

The Buldana unit was installed in May 2013 by the Buldana Urban Co-op Credit Society (BUCCS). Dr Suresh Zamwar, the managing director of BUCCS, got to know of Microspin through the Internet and a colleague. As BUCCS works in farming and innovation, they decided to have an integrated unit in Buldana. The infrastructure and working capital have been provided by BUCCS. Microspin is responsible for end-to-end management.

After preparatory work and personnel training, the machine went into operation in August and reached operational break-even within a month. With this unit, Microspin, a machinery manufacturer, has become a BOT (build-operate-transfer) company. The Buldana unit has given the Microspin team a better insight into making operations more profitable for the customer.

The unit, set up on 25,000 sq. ft., produces three tonnes of yarn every month. So far, BUCCS has been purchasing cotton mostly from ginners and a few farmers. “We hope to cut short intermediaries and deal directly with the farmers soon,” says Dr Zamwar.

Fifty local men and women are employed in the Buldana unit. Once the fabric line starts working, about 100 people will be employed.

“We would probably be the only place in the world where a farmer brings cotton to the in-gate that goes out as fabric through the out-gate,” says Kannan.



L. Kannan, founder and CEO of Microspin



Fabrics produced using BlowCard technology

‘We would probably be the only place in the world where a farmer brings cotton to the in-gate that goes out as fabric through the out-gate,’ says L. Kannan, founder of Microspin.

Kannan has patented a new technology called BlowCard that simplifies a part of the spinning process by integrating the three functions of blending, blow-room and carding activities carried out in a conventional spinning mill.

Microspin’s BlowCard is the trademark name of this technology. Kannan’s invention has brought down financial, energy and infrastructural outlay. So cooperatives of farmers and weavers can collectively invest in a small spinning mill. A lot of non-

technological but pertinent thought has gone into inventing BlowCard.

Kannan graduated from IIT Chennai and worked for many NGOs, industries and academic institutions. NGOs in the development sector wanted him to study the interplay of technology and society. “Working with them, I observed how technology drives social and economic factors. And how society in turn drives the evolution of technology,” he says.

PICTURES BY R. SAMUEL & MICROSPIN



The cotton to fabric integrated unit in Buldana

He founded a company to manufacture ATMs for rural areas. But Kannan was drawn to the textile sector, the largest employer after agriculture. He reasoned that a small impact in this sector would make a significant difference to the livelihoods of farmers and weavers and boost India's foreign exchange earnings. So Kannan began to study the sector closely.

Mass production of fabric is considered the most efficient way of producing textiles since the era of the Industrial Revolution. The value chain of cotton is very long as the transformation from cotton to fabric involves many processes. "Mass manufacturing can cut down costs, but it cannot deliver value. This is all the more true for textiles where the market is much more diverse," says Kannan. People like to feel that they are well dressed and everybody likes to have their own style.

Kannan observed that cotton farming still took place in small fields and weaving in small units.

The only exception was the way in which cotton was converted into yarn. Yarn is still made in spinning mills using the same technology introduced in the 19th century. He felt that the processes that converted cotton into fabric could take place in an integrated manner for efficient and profitable production.

Kannan observed that the solution towards small-scale integration lay in technology. He developed the first version of BlowCard despite being dissuaded by many and despite his non-textile background. "I was told that making cotton yarn needed sophisticated technology and precision. I couldn't understand why since our people had made beautiful textiles for thousands of years without that precision," he quips.

He learnt that quality – which was equated with uniformity and strength in the yarn – was defined by the manufacturer and not by the end user. So, with funds from the Ministry of Rural Development

he went ahead and began designing an integrated machine. Kannan produced four prototypes. They were distributed to NGOs in Andhra Pradesh.

One of them produced yarn with the prototype, and then wove the yarn into cloth. What emerged was a light, airy fabric made of pristine cotton. The NGO branded it Malkha, 'the freedom fabric'. The Malkha Marketing Trust has played its part in taking the textile to fashion designers and the world stage. The machines back the livelihood of traditional and neo-weavers, says Karthik of Microspin. Both farmers and weavers earn more and now produce a variety of designs.

Meanwhile, Kannan began working on fine-tuning BlowCard. Earlier, he had started Fractal Foundation as a non-profit technology incubator. If an idea nurtured under Fractal required substantial financing, it would be hived off as a separate company. So, while the BlowCard innovation was through Fractal, Microspin was started in 2011 to take it forward.

The yarn produced from the BlowCard machine is known by its proprietary brand name, Crafted Yarn. It has a distinct textural quality, fetching better value. The soft and airy quality of the fabric made from this yarn is often mistaken for linen.

Besides BlowCard, Microspin designs and manufactures the Draw Frame and Simplex Frame used in the pre-spinning process. The customised spinning machines are outsourced.

While a conventional spinning mill would have a capacity of 25,000 spindles or more, Microspin's mill has a sub-500 capacity. The entire set of machines costs ₹65 lakh. The outlay would be ₹1 crore, including training, working capital and so on. If dyeing and weaving are included, up to fabric production, costs would be about Rs 5 crore. A conventional mill, on the other hand, costs about ₹100 crore.

So, will Microspin's technology prevent farmer suicides and help Buldana's surrounding villages to prosper?

"Definitely," says Kannan even before the question is completed. The change is already visible in the lives and social status of those employed. The certainty of a monthly income has given them a certain dignity. It has also kindled aspirations.

Jitesh, the unit supervisor, is proud of his work. "People in my village respect me for working at the mill," he says. He dreams of heading the Buldana unit in a year or two. Nanda, an operator and part-time ITI student, is confident of managing the machines herself. "I am happy that I am paid the same salary as the male operators. I would like to start my own business in a few years," she adds.

Farmers, ginners and others involved in the cotton trade can profitably set up spinning or integrated units and get much better margins, says Kannan. He does a quick calculation and says if 100 cotton farmers get together and each gives 20 per cent of cotton grown on five acres as working capital, they could invest and start a unit.

A recent study by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) carried out in six districts of Maharashtra shows that 160,000 hectares is under cotton cultivation. If Microspin units are installed in these areas the earnings of farmers and weavers will change dramatically.

So, Kannan's idea of putting India's textiles back on the world map does not seem such a distant dream after all. ■

New coconut health drink

SHREE PADRE

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

ON the Karkala-Kudremukh highway near Bajagoli village of Karnataka, Augustine Joseph, a young man from Kerala, has constructed a makeshift shack to sell an innovative drink called Kalparasa. Made of coconut sap, Joseph's drink contains no alcohol and is non-fermented. Like most start-ups, his business is risk-prone. There is no town nearby and the population is sparse. Yet Kalparasa is gaining in popularity.

"I like this drink because it is much sweeter than tender coconut water," says Somashekhar, a local driver and a regular client.

To attract passers-by, Joseph has hung signboards along the road. People driving past stop to taste the new chilled drink. A tumbler of 200 ml costs ₹20. When Joseph first started his venture, he used to sell Kalparasa in earthen *matkas* covered with silver foil. But *matkas* are expensive and he found collecting them from customers irksome. So he switched to disposable glasses.

"Fifty per cent of our customers prefer to take it home. The problem is that the drink begins to ferment and change colour in around 40 minutes if we keep it unchilled," explains Joseph.

To tackle this problem, Joseph offers takeaway packets filled with ice cubes. Frozen Kalparasa has a shelf life of three months. Sealed frozen bottles can be bought in 200 ml, 500 ml and litre packs. A 200 ml bottle costs ₹30 and a litre one ₹125.

Kalparasa has been invented by the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) in Kasaragod. CPRI found a way to collect and extract coconut sap under controlled temperatures and create an unfermented, hygienic drink. Joseph was the first entrepreneur to buy the technology. Since then he has managed to make extraction more practical and generate a market for this health drink.

Unlike Neera, a popular drink in Maharashtra, extracted from palm spadix, Kalparasa doesn't need processing. One coconut tree yields an average of 2.5 litres of sap to make Kalparasa and it is ready to serve. Augustine started with trial extraction from two trees. By mid-May this year, he was able to market about 30 litres per day.

Joseph's is a family enterprise with younger siblings Mathew and Elizabeth helping him. Once the monsoon begins, it is not possible to climb coconut trees and demand for the drink also falls. So sap is not extracted from May to November.

Under the CPCRI method, the coconut spadix is connected to a box. The oozing sap, without coming into contact with the atmosphere or light, gets collected in a bottle, surrounded by ice cubes, inside the box. A low temperature of 4 to 6 degrees Celsius is maintained. This prevents fermentation and keeps insects and flies away (they often enter the



A family enterprise: Augustine, Elizabeth and Mathew Joseph

earthen pot in which Neera is traditionally collected). The tree climber has to climb the coconut tree twice a day. He collects the sap and refills the collection box with ice cubes.

Dr K.B. Hebbar, Head, Division of Physiology, Biochemistry & Post Harvest Technology, CPCRI, who developed the collection box, says Kalparasa is a health drink, rich in minerals, vitamins, polyphenols, anti-oxidants and so on. It is far superior to sugarcane or other fruit juices, he says. The fresh sap has 15 to 16 per cent of sugar. Jaggery or honey can be recovered from the sap. Kalparasa is fresh, hygienic and neutral with its pH ranging from 6.8 to 8.2. Unlike Neera, no preservative or chemicals need to be added.

Joseph began his enterprise because he knew a coconut farm owner, Joseph Scaria, whose plantation yield was languishing. Scaria wanted to revive his plantation and increase his income and Joseph's suggestion appealed to him. He put Joseph in charge of extracting sap for Kalparasa. Joseph trained three assistants for sap extraction. With one assistant, a climber can tap sap from 15 trees a day. Once sap extraction starts, it cannot be held hostage to the whims and fancies of the climber. The process has to go on without a day's gap. This, in addition to the challenging job of climbing trees, makes the task tough.

Joseph also has to keep an eye on the tourist traffic on the highway. His main clientele are pilgrims going to Sringeri and tourists heading for Kudremukh. "Once the rains start, they want to return home at the earliest. They aren't inclined to stop for a drink," he says.

To overcome low demand at this time, Joseph has started supplying Kalparasa to Karkala and Manipal towns. Some of his customers happened to own shops and were keen to vend it. Packed in 200 ml

and bigger pouches, the drink is now transported in thermocol boxes filled with ice to their shops. "Demand is encouraging, but you can't raise or lower production at short notice," says Joseph.

One of the biggest problems he faces is that slabs of ice have to be brought from distant Malpe almost daily. In consultation with CPCRI scientists, he has developed an improved collection box in which gel ice or ice cubes can be used. The advantage is that gel ice can be reused for four years. His new box is lighter, waterproof, weighs only two kg, requires less ice and the collected sap is easily visible. Joseph has registered his company, FJ Agro Technology, and started supplying this box, priced at ₹975, to new Kalparasa extractors.

Joseph says that the net income earned from Kalparasa is more than what one would earn from selling coconuts, coconut oil or desiccated coconut. It isn't advisable to tap the tree through the year as is being done in Tamil Nadu. "A coconut tree can yield 250 litres of sap per year. After deducting 60 per cent for labour and other expenses, the farmer will earn an average of ₹10,000 from a tree."

"But this job is not as attractive as it looks," he warns. "It needs skill and patience. Production is only one phase. The farmer has to be able to market the product, transport it and so on. Kerala-like societies are good models for collective transport and marketing. But again, even if there is good demand, you can't tap from all your trees because labour becomes the main bottleneck."

The Palakkad Coconut Producers Pvt. Ltd, a producer company floated by a farmers' association, has just started Kalparasa production and has big plans. It intends to bottle the sap and market it in a big way. ■

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INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Speed up low-cost homes

SUBIR ROY

ALMOST a quarter (23.8 per cent) of the households who are in urban India to eke out some kind of an existence have no proper houses to live in. India's 79 million urban households faced an 18.8 million shortage of houses in 2012, says an official report. This quarter, at the bottom of the pyramid for the most part, lives in 'informal housing,' essentially slums – an integral part of urban India. And if India does not change its ways this shortage will rise to 38 million by 2030, warns McKinsey, the consultancy.

Mumbai leads with just over half its population living in slums. The bigger the city, the greater the employment opportunity, the larger the slums – made up of either current or earlier migrants who come to seek a better life than what rural India can offer.

While 3 per cent of those without proper housing are homeless, the remainder (over 95 per cent) earn under ₹16,000 a month or ₹2 lakh a year and fall below the middle income group. They make do with scarce drinking water and severely underprovided toilets, often paying what is for many of them exorbitant rents for hovels to slum landlords. Those who own their shacks are nevertheless only de facto owners. They have no title or security of tenure as slums are not officially recognised.

This scenario underlines the crucial need for low-cost housing in urban India. And the greatest irony is that nearly all of those living in slums are able to regularly pay something, implying that low-cost housing is a viable business proposition.

There is a need to build close to 20 million low-cost houses. The bad news is that, according to a 2013 study by the consultancy, Deloitte, in the previous five years, only 80,000 homes in the ₹3-10 lakh range were built. The good news is that with the interest subsidy now available, a family earning as little as ₹8,000 a month can afford a ₹4 lakh home with a carpet area of 300 sq. ft. consisting of a room, a kitchen and a toilet. Given current land and construction costs, it is possible for housing companies to build 13-15 million homes in the ₹4-10 lakh price range.

In fact, there has been a pickup in low-cost housing since the mid-2000s and builders see good demand, says Deloitte. Over time, small developers have proliferated and the number of housing finance companies catering to low-income customers has crossed 10 with a current loan book of over ₹1,000 crore. New companies are growing their loan book annually at 100-300 per cent. Almost 60 per cent of low-cost property developers have met their profit expectations and so 90 per cent of them want to continue in the business. Not only do new housing finance companies have near zero NPAs, even delayed payments are at 2-5 per cent.

So what is standing in the way of scaling up this

viable model? The foremost hurdle, according to the government's own task force report (2012) for affordable housing, is that a project needs over 50 approvals from the national, state and local government and getting this takes between one and three years. It is the states who have to do the most to streamline this process so that all approvals can be secured in 60 days. The central government also needs to do its bit for the approval process involving entities like the environment ministry, the Archaeological Survey of

mous delays and uncertainties which raise risk and the risk premium sought.

For affordable housing to take off, developers need clear land titles, streamlined plan sanctioning processes and simplified procedures to get the subsidies sanctioned. Ideally, the whole process – from land acquisition to handing over the apartment – should not take more than 24 months.

The next big hurdle in the way of affordable housing is the rising cost of materials and construc-



A low-cost housing project

India, the Airports Authority of India and the defence ministry. On this aspect a beginning has been made with some cities taking the lead. Hyderabad and Pune have introduced single-window procedures and the latter a computerised approval procedure.

Another key hurdle is what the government itself makes from affordable housing which adds to costs. These range from the levy of service tax, plan sanction fees, stamp duty for registration and various provisions of the Income Tax Act like tax deduction at source and, of course, the opportunity cost of chasing approvals.

When Janaadhar Shubha, promoted by Ramesh Ramanathan, co-founder of Bengaluru-based Janaagraha, and others launched its low-cost housing project near Bengaluru, the cheapest apartment cost ₹7 lakh, far exceeding initial estimates. In this, the government took away ₹1.7 lakh!

Ramanathan lists nine agencies that have to sanction building plans, starting from the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to the pollution control board to the water and power utilities. To get a plan sanctioned after land acquisition, it takes between 12 and 24 months. Key challenges are: complex rules, ambiguous interpretation, enor-

tion worker wages. In the last few years the economy has experienced high inflation across the board and a rapid rise in wage rates for unskilled labour, mostly deployed in construction. The latter is, ironically, the result of the successful anti-poverty programmes of the two UPA governments.

Then comes the high cost and, at times, sheer unavailability of urban land. (It is important to note that this is not the foremost issue, as most think, but one of the foremost.) There are several ways of getting round it. One is for the central government to look at the large tracts that are under the control of defence, railways and ports. Some of this land can be spared. The second solution is not to look only at metros and tier one cities and take them as the norm. There is a lot of urban India beyond them where the peripheral areas are not that far away from the city proper. Affordable housing can be located in the periphery, where land prices are lower, provided there is adequate public transport for people to come to work. So the land price issue can be partly solved by addressing another prime urban issue – public transport.

The states have a huge role to play in the entire land issue. They have to make an inventory of land, create

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Schools without a roof

SIDDIQUE AHMAD

IN July last year, a report in a leading newspaper in Jammu highlighted the inability of the government of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) to carry out physical verification of school buildings in the state. The article reflected on reports of alleged misappropriation of funds worth hundreds of crores of rupees released for construction of school buildings under the centrally sponsored Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme in J&K. The state government was struggling to put together the real picture, with district officials not responding to the state education minister's queries and instructions.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), a flagship programme of the Union government in partnership with state governments, is mandated to open new schools in habitations that do not have schooling facilities, strengthen infrastructure and improve the quality of education.

The SSA was launched in J&K in 2002. Over 10,000 new primary schools and middle-level schools were opened across the state. But media reports say that a number of these SSA school buildings exist only on paper with funds being siphoned by government employees in connivance with contractors hired to construct school buildings. A considerable number of school buildings and classrooms remain incomplete, said the report, with funds being diverted for other purposes or misappropriated. The highest instances of such irregularities reportedly occur in the most remote areas of under-developed districts like Rajouri, Poonch, Doda, Kishtwar and Kupwara.

Twelve years later it is not difficult to find dilapidated school buildings in the border district of Poonch

along the Line of Control (LoC) that sadly reflect the sordid state of education in India's farthest villages.

In Marhote village of Surankote block in Poonch district, for instance, a primary school was established in 2004 under the SSA as an Education Guarantee Scheme Centre. Till 2008, it provided school education without a building. Teachers, appointed on a salary of ₹1,000 a month, did not receive any monetary compensation for nearly four



A primary school without a roof in the border district of Poonch

years. In 2008, the school was upgraded and received official recognition. It was christened Government Primary School, Chhapran, Marhote.

At this point, the teachers working in the school received a 'promotion' under the Rehber-e-Talim (ReT) scheme and became eligible for a salary of ₹1,500 a month. That year, a three-room building was also sanctioned. But the optimism of the children and teachers was short-lived – construction stopped soon after it started owing to a land dispute.

It is pertinent to mention here that the state government does not pay for the price of the land meant

for the school building. Villagers donate a piece of land and the cost of constructing the school is borne by the government. In 2010, the row regarding the land was resolved after continuous efforts by the villagers. But soon after, construction of the school building came to a grinding halt – yet again.

Today, the building stands roofless. "There are 40 students studying here. Since the building is still incomplete, we have been running the school in a *kuccha* house for the last 10 years," explained Ishtiaq Ahmed, the teacher in charge of the school.

He also pointed out wryly that the condition of the school building is no different from his own condition. Seven years ago the government promised to make his job permanent. Ten long years have passed but the government has yet to fulfil its promise.

To know the other side of the story, Mohammad Rashid, the contractor hired for the construction of the school, was contacted. He said that the estimated cost sanctioned was insufficient to construct the school building. The cost of construction is far higher in such remote areas, he pointed out. "The budget for construction is decided by people sitting in Delhi. The rate is uniform across states. But in hilly areas like Poonch, the cost is far higher."

If in a village as populated as Marhot, locally referred to as a vote bank, such disappointing conditions exist, imagine the condition of school buildings and basic facilities in smaller, even more remote villages. Children probably wait there endlessly for a roof over their heads and schoolbooks.

Well-meaning officials begin schemes often using a one-size-fits-all approach. Creativity of an unusual kind is required to make schemes work in a nation as geographically diverse as India. ■

Charkha Features

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a land bank and an asset management plan to go with it. They have to redesign the roles of their revenue and urban development departments and ensure that all urban land ceiling laws are killed in both letter and spirit. Land holdings have to be mapped and digitised, tenure clarified, building bylaws rationalised (e.g. defining sensible requirements for common areas and parking for low-cost housing) and the process of converting farmland to non-farm category simplified. Various states and cities like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Hyderabad and Magarpatta have taken the lead in developing land-sharing models for Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) housing projects.

The third solution is to look at the opportunity in existing slums. These can be redeveloped and built upward a little but not more than three-storied as the higher the construction the quicker the chance of structures becoming concrete slums with many attendant social problems. Such construction can properly house and change the lives of slum dwellers.

But there are two dangers to guard against. One is the state trying to build low-cost apartments that turn out to be hideous and substandard. Two, and

critically important, is passing on the land to property developers with higher floor space index and transferable development rights while allowing them to sell a part of the floor space created commercially after handing over some apartments to slum dwellers. This is a top-down approach that does not work. The slum allottees in such mixed income projects in which they suddenly have a property of enormous value invariably sell through whatever subterfuge and go live in another slum.

The way to make slum development work, ending up in affordable and livable housing, is to adopt a bottom-up approach. Slum dwellers need to take ownership of their slums and can be urged to form associations and with professional help chart their own course. A key enabler in this are the state governments. They should pass the necessary laws to give title and tenure of land to slum dwellers, as spelt out in the Rajiv Awas Yojana. The financing can come through housing finance companies. Mortgage finance can be greatly enabled through apartment owners being able to pledge their freehold land and the process has been facilitated by the central government creating the Credit Risk

Guarantee Fund Scheme for low-income housing loans. This can substantially lower the risk of default for housing finance companies.

It is easy to visualise the following scenario. Slum dwellers get together to form an association and secure the title to the land on which the slum exists. Then the housing finance company steps in, and in consultation with slum dwellers, prepares a blueprint for layout, infrastructure (walkways, water, sewerage, lighting) and apartment buildings. Slum dwellers with a family income of, say, ₹8,000 agree to take a loan of ₹3.5 lakh, attracting an EMI of ₹2,450 for an apartment priced at ₹4 lakh. The state pays by way of some interest subsidy and ₹50,000 capital cost. Willful defaulters face foreclosure and the dues of others facing say a health emergency or death of an earning member are taken care of by the risk guarantee fund. In all this a key enabler is NGOs handholding slum dwellers' associations.

This is not just doable but happening in bits and pieces. The model for low cost urban housing is mostly in place. What is needed is to scale up, push it forward. ■

What forest rules say

KANCHI KOHLI

OVER the past two years there have been several discussions to ascertain the administrative procedure followed by which forestland is diverted for non-forest use in India. In this article I will try to unravel this regulatory framework and its complications.

The coming into force of the new Forest Conservation Rules 2014 by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) is slow in its actual procedures but attempts to bring in efficiency by setting timelines. It, however, does nothing much to address the quality of analysis or scrutiny in the decision-making process around forest diversions. It also does little to ensure public interface in the forest clearance process.

The general understanding was that after the enactment of the 1980 Forest Conservation Act (FCA), the final approval for forest diversion would come from the central government, in particular, the MoEF. The FCA's corresponding Rules (1981 and amended in 2003) did spell out the role of an advisory committee and the points they need to consider while giving advice on whether a particular forest needs to be diverted for an industry, plantation, mining or port.

Forests are listed as a concurrent subject in our Constitution. Jurisdiction and decision-making powers have been given to both the central and state governments. So files related to forest diversion move from the user agency (which could be a state government, private individual or a private corporation) to offices of the state, to the MoEF and back to the state.

Most of these practices evolved through administrative processes and were not clearly laid out in parent legislation or corresponding rules. This issue was heavily debated before India's National Green Tribunal (NGT) when cases began to be filed before it, challenging the orders of the MoEF issued under Section 2 of the FCA under which orders for forestland diversion are given.

However, these cases got stuck in a legal quagmire when the NGT Act was read closely. It led to the realisation that the Section 2 order is actually passed by state governments and not by the centre. It can after that be challenged before the tribunal. Many projects pending before the tribunal then had to be kept aside until the tribunal took a final decision on its jurisdiction. The NGT decided that what comes before them is the 'final' order for diversion, which is by the state government. It also came to light that not all state governments were issuing these Section 2 orders, assuming that the approvals by the central government were the final permissions.

This meant that the in-principle (Stage 1) and final (Stage 2) approvals which were not laid out under the FCA or its rules but had become part of everyday administrative practice could not be scrutinised by the NGT. The tribunal's order in Appeal No.7 of 2012, challenging the Alaknanda Badrinath Hydroelectric Project in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand clarifies this.

The issue of who is the final authority in deciding



New rules put the onus of completing processes heavily on the district administration

forest diversions was further debated when the tree felling for POSCO's steel plant in Odisha was challenged before the NGT last year. The MoEF's position, in Application No.123 of 2013, was that their role is only a process of overseeing forest diversions and ensuring that such forests are not indiscriminately diverted. The FCA, argued the MoEF's counsel, has been enacted only with this intention. The state government said the MoEF had full authority to agree or modify the decision. The MoEF is, in the reading of the law, the final permission giver for forestland diversions.

Heady arguments went on for over eight months even as tree felling by the project authorities continued to be stayed by the NGT. In January 2014, the NGT lifted the stay and asked POSCO to start tree felling but only after the state government issued an order on its own merit, irrespective of the centre's go-ahead. During the course of this case, the MoEF submitted before the NGT that they were working on amending the FC Rules which will clarify all doubts regarding the decision-making process on forest diversions. The outcome is the 2014 Rules document.

The 2014 Rules now have three sets of forms that user agencies need to fill before they submit the proposal to the designated nodal officer of the state government. In most instances this is the state forest department. As per the Rules, "Form 'A' is for proposal seeking first time approval under the Act, Form 'B' is for proposal seeking renewal of leases, where approval of the Central Government under the Act had already been obtained, and Form 'C' is for prospecting of minerals."

Following this the Rules lay out clear timelines for files to move and decisions to be taken. Once the proposal for diversion is received it needs to move on within 10 days. If it is complete, the proposal goes to the concerned Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) where the forest to be diverted is sought, and if not, sent back to the user agency.

The DFO is given clear timelines too for process-

ing the papers and sending it to the Conservator of Forests (CF). For proposals up to 40 hectares of forestland, the timeline is 30 days; for forestland between 40-100 hectares 45 days, and over 100 the time given is 60 days. There is absolutely no justification in the Rules about why this differential timeline has been given. It also does not take into account the quality of forests being diverted or the extent of impact that needs to be understood before a decision is taken. A 35-hectare diversion might be cutting through a critical wildlife corridor or a 95-hectare stretch being parcelled off to a mining company might actually be destroying the livelihoods of many forest-dwelling communities.

What the Rules also establish is the process of recognition of rights of tribal and forest dwelling communities under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. In July-August 2009, the MoEF had issued a circular and letters to various state governments that this process needs to be completed and the consent of the gram sabha sought before the decision on diversion of forestland takes place.

The new Rules put the onus heavily on the District Collector to complete the process and report as per a format to the CF. Exactly the same timelines prescribed for the DFO have been presented before the Collector. The Rules completely ignore the fact that recognition of rights is a contentious process where historical records need to be examined and people's association with the forests are often contested. It is not a mere administrative tick-off. But the new Rules have no space for that.

These Rules, taken together with the MoEF opening up e-filing of forest diversion applications, are surely going to speed up decisions. This has been the one single complaint of industries, infrastructure and mining companies for over a decade. The new government has also signalled its intention to speed up approvals and processing of applications. The fresh FC Rules dovetail with such intentions. ■

Free the Ganga

HIMANSHU THAKKAR &
PARINEETA DANDEKAR

RIVERS are again in the news, but so far only for symptomatic reasons. We now have a new Minister of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. There is a fundamental contradiction within this nameplate.

There is also a lot of discussion about rejuvenation of the Ganga. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised the people who elected him from Varanasi that he would rejuvenate the Ganga. There is no clarity on how he plans to achieve this. His claim during the elections that what his Gujarat government achieved with the Sabarmati river provides a model for the Ganga is clearly a non-starter. The Sabarmati has water only for a 10.4 km stretch of the river that flows through Ahmedabad.

If you go upstream of this stretch, you will find a dry riverbed during most of the non-monsoon months. If you go downstream, you will find a river more polluted than the Yamuna in Delhi. And even the water you see in this 10.4 km stretch is not from the Sabarmati river basin. It has been taken from the Narmada river via the Sardar Sarovar Canal. Pertinently, Ahmedabad or the Sabarmati have no right over that water. The Sardar Sarovar Project was built and justified in the name of Gujarat's drought-prone areas like Kutch and Saurashtra.

The nameplate changing business has also been extended to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) which is now to be called the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. Here again the new nameplate is yet to be seen. Unfortunately, all the noises that we have heard so far seem to give primacy to growth rather than environment or forests! The new environment minister has yet to say anything about river protection but he is already talking about river-linking!

So is there hope for rivers in this new establishment, going beyond the symbolic nameplate? Here one is reminded of a meeting I was invited to, a few months before the elections, to discuss the state and fate of the Yamuna river in Delhi.

When I started speaking, I asked, what is a river? Is it just a source of water as engineers see it? Following a sudden change in programme, Uma Bharti became the chief speaker at the meeting. When it was her turn to speak, she actually tried to understand that question and find an answer. Her becoming the Union Water Resources Minister raises hope since she had been campaigning for *aviral dhara* of the Ganga and against the building of dams and hydropower projects in Uttarakhand. We hope she will realise that the impact of dams and

hydropower projects on rivers is practically the same everywhere.

Uma Bharti is also the Minister of River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. The question of what is a river becomes even more relevant in that context. A river is a complex ecological entity. We still do not understand fully how to define a river. But here we would like to highlight that rivers are the lifeblood of the ecology and carry much more than water.

One of the key elements that a river carries is silt or sediment that it accumulates along its journey from the hills to the delta where major rivers meet the sea. Along its route the type, quantity and movement of silt a river picks up varies with place and time. Silt is of different forms: it could be suspended



Silt is as important as water for the health of the river, its floodplains, delta and wetlands

ed matter, fine silt or coarser sand. It is the transfer of silt from the upper catchments to the plains that helps build fertile floodplains like the Indo-Gangetic plains.

The flow of sediment through rivers helps protect deltas, which are highly productive, biodiversity rich ecosystems, agriculturally fertile and thickly populated. Deltas are constantly facing the threat of erosion by the sea. In this fight between the delta and the sea, it is the sediment brought down by the river that helps the delta majorly. Since sea levels are rising due to climate change, the flow of sediment to the delta becomes even more crucial.

However, when we build dams, hydropower projects and diversion structures on rivers, we completely change the silt flow pattern in the river. The dams arrest the silt and hydropower projects release silt-free water downstream. The erosion capacity of silt-free water is greater. The additional erosion they cause to the immediate downstream may not compensate for the silt trapped in the dams.

Run-of-the-river hydropower projects may release silt annually or more frequently or on a daily basis from desilting chambers, but the transport pattern of the silt completely changes. Moreover, dams and diversions also completely change the character of flood-flow downstream, when it is

established that floods are the most important sediment transporting events. All these changes have huge impacts in riverbeds, in the floodplains and the deltas. And shockingly, we do not even understand these impacts.

It is only recently that scientists have started studies that now give us a glimpse of the impacts this changing flow of silt is causing. For example, our deltas are literally shrinking and sinking. Several independent scientific studies tell us that dams must take about three-fourths of the blame. About 80 per cent of the sediment that a river carries can be trapped by dams. This means that dams are annually trapping about 40 billion cubic metres (BCM) of sediment globally. That is more than five Sardar Sarovar dams! In India, our estimate earlier

showed that large dams are trapping at least 2 BCM of silt every year.

Not all the sediment trapped in dams would reach the deltas. A significant part would have been left on the floodplains. And sediment trapped by dams is one of the many reasons behind the sinking of deltas. However, scientists are estimating that deltas have already been deprived of at least 73 BCM of sediment by dams. In South Asia, during the past century, Indus delta sediment has reduced by 94 per cent, the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta sediment by 30 per cent and the Narmada delta sediment by 95 per cent.

For example, in 2007-08, the Ganga, the Mekong, the Irrawaddy and many other rivers flooded. More than 100,000 lives were lost and more than a million displaced. Most of the deltas that were flooded did not receive a significant input of sediment. These major flood events lead to sediment trapping behind mega dams.

The direct impacts of delta subsidence and sea rise include inundation of coastal areas, saltwater intrusion into coastal aquifers, increased rates of coastal erosion, increased exposure to storm surges in addition to threats to food security, livelihood security and water security for millions and a huge loss of biodiversity. These threats impact hundreds of millions of people who inhabit the delta regions as well as the ecologically sensitive and important coastal wetland and mangrove forests.

As Prof. James P. Syvitski, the Chair of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, told SANDRP, "We must learn to do better." However, decisions surrounding dams in most regions of the world are not even assessing the impacts on deltas. Ignoring sediments when building and operating dams comes at a huge price. For the full SANDRP report on this issue, write to us or see <http://sandrp.in/>. ■

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LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

Films that lingered

Cannes was about freedom from injustice



Run is the story of a young man who wants to become a rainmaker but gets sucked into a violent conflict instead

Saibal Chatterjee
Cannes

IT isn't often that a director addressing a packed press conference at the glitzy Cannes Film Festival is moved to tears.

Abderrahmane Sissako, one of Africa's most important contemporary filmmakers, was so overwhelmed by emotion as he spoke about his competition entry, *Timbuktu*, a deeply felt, finely-tempered portrayal of the conflict in northern Mali, that his eyes welled up.

The 53-year-old filmmaker clasped his head in his hands and said: "I cry in the place of those who have suffered... but the truly courageous ones are those who undergo real combat and rebel on a daily basis."

"It's difficult..." Sissako added. "We become more and more indifferent to the horrors if we are not careful." His appeal to the world to sit up and act with intent was, in a significant way, a broad summation of the dominant leitmotif of this year's Cannes Film Festival.

Several entries at the 67th edition of the annual event showcased the struggles of ordinary people – and in one significant case, of abandoned cross-breed dogs doubling as metaphors for hounded humans – against challenges posed by inimical social, economic and political forces in a crisis-ridden world.

In *Timbuktu*, Sissako, who was born in Mauritania but raised across the border in Mali, adopts a restrained approach to the theme of jihadist repression in a part of Africa where a liberal, tolerant strain

of Islam once reigned untrammelled.

All things deemed un-Islamic – smoking, soccer, music, women in immodest clothing – are prohibited by the religious fundamentalists. But people of the area, especially the women, resort to dignified defiance against the atrocities heaped upon them by armed marauders and kangaroo courts.

Timbuktu is primarily the story of a cattle-herding family that lives in peace in the dunes off *Timbuktu* until an accidental killing of a man sets off a chain of events that shatters their lives.

In the film's standout sequence, a group of youngsters plays soccer with an imaginary ball while a pair of hawk-eyed jihadists circles the field on a motorcycle. But the latter are unable to take any

Continued on page 30



Still from *Force Majeure*: a seemingly perfect family man is forced to look within

Continued from page 29

punitive action because there is no football in sight.

One young woman is brusquely told that she can no longer sell her fish at the market unless she wears gloves. Her response is curt and daring: “If you don’t like my hands, look away!”

A tall, big-built woman in a long, flowing robe walks across the screen ever so often, breaking all the restrictions that are in place: she smokes, sings, laughs... all this unfolds even as stonings, executions and lashings become more persistent.

Timbuktu is Sissako’s response to the horror of an incident that was largely ignored by the international media – the stoning to death on 29 July 2012 of a thirty-something couple in Aguelhok, northern Mali, by Islamists. Their crime: they were unmarried parents.

“I am no way trying to use shock value to promote a film,” says Sissako. “(But) I must testify in the hope that no child will ever again have to learn that their parents died because they loved each other.”

Shock and repulsion are also the principal elements in the only other African film that was in the Cannes official selection – debutant director Philippe Lacote’s *Run*, the first entry that the festival has ever had from the West African nation of Ivory Coast.

Run is a coming-of-age drama about a young man who aspires to be a rainmaker but, amid the country’s continuing civil war, is sucked into a violent and corrupt political movement. He eventually becomes an assassin.

Defiance takes on the form of a fierce canine rebellion in one of the most original films in Cannes this year – Hungarian director Kornel Mundruczo’s *White God*.

Dedicated to the memory of the recently deceased Miklos Jancso, the master Hungarian filmmaker whose pet theme was the abuse of power, *White God* probably draws its title from *White Dog*, the 1982 Samuel Fuller anti-racism film about a canine trained to viciously attack Black people.

Mundruczo takes his sixth feature film to a completely different plane, using genre conventions – a girl’s search for her lost pet, oppression of the weak and revenge of the underdog – with telling effect to craft a powerful cautionary tale made all the more

unsettling by dizzying hand-held camerawork and a persistently percussive background score.

White God is a dark, disturbing, dystopian story that pulls no punches in exposing what might happen when the powerful seek to impose their will on the disempowered. It was deservedly adjudged the best film in the Un Certain Regard sidebar.

A mixed-breed pet, Hagen, loses its home when 13-year-old Lili’s father dumps the dog on the streets to avoid paying a tax levied on non-pedigree canines.

As the girl searches high and low for her best friend while preparing for her orchestra’s annual concert, Hagen falls into the hands of a merciless dog-fight trainer and is turned from a benign domesticated creature into a ferocious attacker.

Defiance takes on the form of a fierce canine rebellion in one of the most original films in Cannes this year – Kornel Mundruczo’s *White God*.

Matters come to a head when Hagen, with a pack of hungry and mistreated mongrels, flees the dog pound and goes on a violent rampage across the streets of Budapest. Only Lili’s unconditional love has the power to halt this terrible war between man and dog.

In the director’s statement, Mundruczo points out that the “questionable advantages of globalisation” is that “superiority has truly become the privilege of white, Western civilization”.

He adds that *White God* “allows a glimpse of the passions raging on the other side, criticising our detestable self-confidence, full of lies and lopsided truths, set on domesticating the minorities while actually wishing only to destroy them”.

Given the predominance of stories of communities under siege, it was fitting that among a bunch of great documentaries unveiled in Cannes this year was *The Salt of the Earth*, an exploration of the work of leg-



White God is about the abuse of power. The dog is a metaphor

endary Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado.

The feature-length film, directed by Wim Wenders and the 70-year-old photojournalist’s son, Juliano Ribeiro Salgado, provides an overview of a lifetime devoted to recording wars, exodus and starvation in the world’s worst trouble spots.

The Salt of the Earth tracks Salgado as he works on an ambitious project (Genesis, begun in 2004) to celebrate the planet’s beauty. His commitment to ecological conservation forms an important strand of the narrative.

Says Wenders: “One could say that the reforestation programme they (Salgado and his wife, Lelia) have set up in Brazil, and the near-miraculous results they have achieved, concluded in a happy ending for Sebastiao, after all the misery he has witnessed and the depression into which he slipped when he came back from Rwanda for the last time... one can say that nature... allowed him not to lose his faith in mankind.”

Screened in the main Competition Section as well as in Un Certain Regard, several of the titles dealt



Beautiful Youth addresses the theme of economic deprivation



Jimmy's Hall is about a charismatic communist leader

with individuals or families struggling to keep their sanity in the face of social and economic threats. Among them was the masterfully minimalist *Two Days, One Night*, directed by two-time Palme d'Or winners, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne.

The marvelously consistent duo, known for investing tales of working class Belgians with universal appeal, is at their very best in their latest film, the story of a woman (played by French star Marion Cotillard) who is in danger of losing her factory job unless her co-workers sacrifice their bonuses.

Grappling with depression but egged on by her husband, she goes from door to door to appeal for help and provokes a range of reactions – from support and sympathy to outright hostility.

Two Days, One Night, a typical Dardenne brothers film rich in emotional nuance and character detail, is a disarmingly simple but profoundly moving portrait of humanity.

Two Un Certain Regard films, Jaime Rosales' *Hermosa Juventud* (*Beautiful Youth*) and Wang Chao's *Fantasia*, addressed the theme of economic

deprivation. They draw downbeat, desolate portraits of lost generations in two nations, Spain and China, respectively.

In *Fantasia*, set in the city of Chongqing in southwest China, a family struggles to make ends meet after the patriarch is diagnosed with terminal leukemia. The loss-making company he works for can bear only half his medical expenses. As the mother soldiers on regardless, the son drifts around aimlessly.

Beautiful Youth, on the other hand, is a stark and intelligently structured tale of unemployment and disillusionment seen from the standpoint of a young Spanish couple with a newborn child.

In Swedish director Ruben Ostlund's observational comedy, *Force Majeure*, the social is telescoped into the personal as a seemingly perfect family man is compelled to confront a not-so-salutary part of his character.

During a ski holiday, a workaholic Swedish father, instead of seeking to help his wife and two children, makes a dash for safety when an avalanche

approaches an outdoor terrace eatery.

Mercifully, no bodily damage is caused, but the man's cowardly flight drives a wedge between him and his wife and threatens to derail not only the vacation but their relationship.

In Rolf de Heer's *Charlie's Country*, a film set at literally the other end of the world, in a remote Aboriginal settlement in Australia, a personal struggle of a completely different kind confronts a community elder (award-winning indigenous Australian actor David Gulpilil) grappling with alcoholism and incarceration.

In the main Competition Section, Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan's exquisitely filmed drama, *Winter Sleep*, won the Palme d'Or.

The three-and-a-quarter-hour plot – if the series of remarkably riveting conversations between three main characters can be described as one – unfolds during the harshest season of the year in and around a hotel located in a small village in Cappadocia.

The owner of the hotel is an ageing former actor now engaged in writing think pieces for a magazine. His illusions about himself are called into question by his divorced sister and his much younger wife until the protagonist is forced to look inwards in search of life-affirming warmth.

Winter Sleep was a deserving and uncontroversial winner for it was way ahead of the other contenders in terms of scale of ambition and perfection of execution.

That is not to say that the film had no real competition. Mike Leigh's *Mr Turner*, Ken Loach's *Jimmy's Hall* and Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan* are all magnificent cinematic accomplishments that can only strengthen the already formidable reputations of their makers.

Mr Turner is Leigh's take on the life and work of the temperamental but monumentally gifted 19th century British landscape painter, J.M.W. Turner. Character actor Timothy Spall's brilliant interpretation of the artist's contradictions fetched him the best actor prize in Cannes.

Loach's *Jimmy's Hall* and Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan* are bound together thematically but definitely not stylistically.

The former is a lively dramatisation of the story of the charismatic Irish communist leader, Jimmy Gralton, who, on his return in the early 1930s after a decade-long stay in the US, sought to revive a cooperative dance hall as a space for his people to give vent to their talents and views, only to face fierce opposition from the church and the state.

In *Leviathan*, a hard look at contemporary Russia, a small man takes on the might of a slimy mayor who wants to grab the former's prime property. Zvyagintsev couches simmering anger and frustration in humour and a touch of lyricism.

Zvyagintsev explains the thrust of *Leviathan* thus: "I am deeply convinced that whatever society each and every one of us lives in, from the most developed to the most archaic, we will all be faced one day with the following alternative: either live as a slave or live as a free man. And if we naively think that there must be a kind of state power that can free us from that choice, we are seriously mistaken."

That, indeed, was the principal question that the best films at the 67th Cannes Film Festival – from *Timbuktu* to *Leviathan*, from *White God* to *Jimmy's Hall* – raised, each in its own distinctive way. None of them sought to provide answers, but they did not abandon hope either. Great films never do. ■

The village of birds

Amit Dasgupta
Guntur

SITUATED around 20 minutes from Guntur, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, and around two km from National Highway 6, the Uppalapadu Bird Sanctuary is a veritable paradise for nature lovers and photographers. Over the last 60 or 70 years, different species of birds, from as far away as Australia, have been migrating to the sanctuary for nesting. To date, around 30 different bird species have been identified and photographed, such as the painted stork, cormorant, ibis, egrets, herons, pelicans, ducks, teals and others.

Indeed, bird migration is now in such large numbers that forest conservation authorities are being forced to consider how they might increase the size of the sanctuary and provide more mounds to house the birds. When we visited Uppalapadu in February, on just one mound, there were literally



Villagers have created a safe environment for migratory birds

hundreds of birds and their young. It was such an amazing sight!

But there is another heartwarming story about this sanctuary. Uppalapadu has a water body of nine acres that surrounds the nesting area used by the birds – a gift from the villagers who live and work around the sanctuary.

Over the years, the villagers built a special kind of bonding with the birds which would not only flock to the water body but also ‘drop in’ at the village, thereby demonstrating that they did not feel threatened by the villagers. The villagers understood that

the birds would visit only to nest. After a few weeks, when their eggs hatched, they would undertake the long journey back with their offspring, to where they came from.

The villagers held a panchayat meeting and agreed to create a kind of protective enclave for the birds. They prescribed their own set of rules which ensured that the birds would not be disturbed or hunted. Noticing what a popular spot it had become, the forest department stepped in to build the mounds and improve the nesting habitat. There were serious challenges, of course, since the main

Indian Ocean plus

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

WALKING down the driveway you can hear the faint thump of a bass guitar and the clash of cymbals. Enter the house and the sound of Indian Ocean hits you with full force.

The iconic band spends most of its time at this house in Ghitorni, southeast Delhi, sipping tea, cracking jokes and composing music.

For the past few months their digs have welcomed seven exceptional artistes from all over India. Together they have created seven new tracks for Indian Ocean’s newest album, *Tandanu*.

Their most ambitious project so far, *Tandanu* is the seventh album by Indian Ocean. It is their first collaborative effort. The band worked with musicians like Shubha Mudgal, Karsh Kale, Shankar Mahadevan, Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, V. Selva Ganesh, Kumaresh Rajagopalan and Vishal Dhadlani to compose an amazing album.

“As a band, we used to live in a world of our own. We didn’t really keep track of others,” says Rahul Ram, the band’s maverick bassist. “Sure, we worked with other musicians for live concerts, films

and musical projects but that was all commissioned work.”

It was drummer and vocalist Amit Kilam who came up with the idea. Following the release of their last album, *16/330 Khajoor Lane*, the band had put up a wishlist on their website where fans could post names of artistes whom they would like Indian Ocean to collaborate with.

“We received suggestions ranging from A.R. Rahman to Carlos Santana,” says Ram. “Sounds

exciting but it was impossible to connect to international artistes.” Kilam adds, “We decided to work with Indian musicians, whom we knew personally or had met before and who we knew would look forward to working with us.”

The tracks are a perfect fusion of blues, jazz, rock and roll, grunge, folk and Carnatic ragas.

“We wanted the artistes to make their own contributions to the songs,” says Kilam. “We kept about 40 per cent of the track ready and then waited for the others to join us and complete it in their own style. It often happened songs initially selected didn’t work out, so we had to change them.”

Such was the case with Mudgal. The 54-year-old virtuoso classical singer first got in touch with

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Indian Ocean making music in Mehrauli

Indian Ocean in 1997 during a Sahmat concert in New Delhi and has been friends with the band ever since. “Initially, we were supposed to do a song by Kabir with Shubhaji, but after we gave it a go, it didn’t pan out well,” says Ram. “Then Amit suggested *Gar Ho Sake* a popular left song, which Shubha knew and thus that track happened.” As a track, *Gar Ho Sake* is on the same lines as the iconic *Bandeh*. It evokes feelings of nationalism, asking citizens to come forward and challenge injustice.

“For our title track, *Tandanu*, Shankar Mahadevan was our choice,” says Ram. Mahadevan performed the song with the band during the Storm Festival in Coorg last year. His immac-

Jobs and the poor

vegetation in the mounds had started decaying because of its continuous use by the birds. This meant that 'artificial' trees would need to be introduced. Over time, the birds accepted these trees and began to use them for nesting purposes. A watchtower was created along with a non-paved access road to allow visitors to enjoy the bird-watching experience.

At present, work is underway to increase the habitat area and provide new tanks and mounds for the birds, along with appropriate vegetation. With the involvement of the villagers, efforts are underway to create an education centre and to try and involve the children of the villagers in the project. This could turn out to be a fascinating and unique bird sanctuary.

The best season to visit the Uppalapadu Bird Sanctuary is from October to March. There are many wonderful places to visit in and around Guntur that are not too far away and offer a broad range of experiences from cultural tourism to religious and historical sites, not to forget the famed local *biryani* and other culinary delights.

For accommodation, both Guntur and Vijayawada offer a range. The climate is sub-humid. For photography, the ideal time is early morning before sunrise, as the opportunity to photograph the birds flying in flocks against the backdrop of the rising sun is truly spectacular. Cameras with zoom lens are recommended and, for the serious photographer, a tripod would be an excellent item to take along. Naturally, a pair of powerful binoculars would be an added bonus. ■

Amit Dasgupta is a recently retired Indian diplomat, who is currently living in Visakhapatnam. He may be reached at amit.dasgupta2013@yahoo.com.

ulate rhythm and amazing voice made him the perfect choice for this offbeat song.

Tandanu is an old folk song of the Belur-Halebid region. Ram picked up the song from his aunt who used to sing it to him when he was a child. "*Tandanu* literally doesn't mean anything. It's just music," says Ram. Although his aunt's version was a lot slower, Ram has turned it into a pulsating track for live concerts.

"*Tandanu* is something we have been playing with for the past 15 years or so," says Ram. "Just like *Tandanu*, *Cheetu* is another anthem that has been going around during our jam sessions for long, but we never got around to recording it for an album. We have a lot more songs like that."

Kilam explains that the band wanted to collaborate with a range of musicians. So Selva Ganesh, Kale, Rajagopalan and Pandit Bhatt were invited too.

Grammy winner Bhatt played his Mohan Veena to lend a soulful jhaala (a string solo) to *Charkha*. The tune of *Charkha* is inspired by a group of Santhal musicians with whom Indian Ocean had performed last year at the Everyone Is Someone Concert for the Civil Society Hall Of Fame 2013. "When we performed with those musicians, the tune of their song stayed with us," says Kilam. "So we took excerpts of the tune and worked around it with Pandit Bhatt and composed *Charkha*".

Starting from 27 April, the band released one song each week, accompanied with a small video showing behind-the-scenes stories for each song. The videos were released every Saturday on MTV Indies. ■

FOR India's large population of youth, mostly poorly schooled and unskilled, the future is not that bleak. In the last 10 years the UPA government plunged headlong into creating jobs for all to reap the benefits of the nation's 'demographic dividend.'

We now have the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the world's biggest job scheme, the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), the National Skills Development Council (NKDC), a spate of social legislation and so on.

The State of India's Livelihoods Report 2013 makes an overall assessment of these efforts. In six neat chapters, the reader gets a well-rounded view of India's job sector for the poor. The first chapter is an overview that discusses India's economic crisis and its impact on livelihoods. Tara Nair provides a statistical atlas of livelihoods and Ashok Kumar Sircar analyses policies and policy paralysis. There is a chapter on agriculture, another on social protection, and the last is on skilling India.

So, jobs are available. The question is of what kind? The problem the poor face is of chronic under employment – just 2 per cent of the poor tend to remain unemployed. Some of the challenges now confronting the state are: improving the quality of jobs, skills, wages, working and living conditions and placing more women in the workforce.

The percentage of women in the rural workforce appears to be declining. A Bill by Dr M.S. Swaminathan named the Women Farmer's Entitlement Bill, giving women recognition as farmers and the right to their deceased husbands' land could be an important step to empower rural women. In cities too, women tend to seek casual employment, moving in and out of low-paid casual work.

The Forests Rights Act 2006, it was believed, would improve the incomes of some of the poorest people in India like Scheduled Tribes and other forest-dwellers. Forest people would be able to form micro enterprises, processing and selling minor forest produce (MFP), it was hoped. In 2012, the Union government even changed rules to provide minimum support price (MSP) to 12 MFPs. But setting up such micro-enterprises requires very nimble professional help, not NGO activism.

In agriculture, with land becoming more fragmented, encouraging collectivisation of small farmers is one solution. Examples cited in the report are Kerala's vanilla growers association and its banana growers association. NGOs like BAIF and DHAN have created active tribal cooperatives and done exemplary work with small farmers in watershed management and in improving crop yields. The government could help by implementing tenancy reforms and boosting extension services by organisations like ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency). The Seeds Bill too, is still pending in Parliament.

The Union government also needs to create a

conducive climate for the private sector to invest in storage, handling and distribution of crops. Why companies have not done so is a bit puzzling. The report cites the government's larger than life role in fixing high MSPs or being the sole buyer of certain crops as dampening private sector initiatives. The APMCs (Agricultural Produce Marketing Centres) are seen as a roadblock. But removing the APMC without building a modern farm-to-fork system leaves small farmers in the lurch. So, redefining the role of the APMC and removing inter-state barriers could be a starting point.

Another problem besetting governments is capacity building. Governments don't have motivated staff or basic infrastructure to deliver a myriad schemes and projects. According to estimates the ambitious NRLM itself needs some 70,000 people. Then panchayats don't have support staff, *anganwadis* need two workers, primary health centres are in a shambles, schools don't have kitchens for midday meals and so on.

The report says MGNREGA is preventing labour from becoming skilled and moving into higher productivity jobs. But this is very contentious.

The MGNREGA is needed to build rural infrastructure. Let the gram sabha decide. Women have been accessing the scheme and receiving wages. Certainly, there is scope to improve the quality of work. For timely payment, a public announcement of wages credited into workers' bank accounts is a useful suggestion, made by the report.

The National Skills Development Council (NSDC) has mothered a burst of private initiatives to train youth, including dropouts. It now has 74 partners, including NGOs and entrepreneurs. Some 1,572 centres provide short training courses.

Most youth from low-income families, both urban and rural, are getting trained for jobs in the apparel industry, hospitality, retail, tourism, the auto sector and so on.

The problem is that industry continues to watch from the sidelines. It is employing youth in jobs that are casual, contractual and don't help them acquire higher skills or move up. Combine that with miserable living conditions and you have a potent mix.

A law for construction workers is not implemented and just 12 per cent are registered.

One option cited in the report for skill building is to convert government polytechnics, currently languishing, into community colleges like in the US. A good idea. But, finally, there is no substitute for a sound school education.

Last, a word about the role of the Planning Commission. Activists for long have complained that the commission needs to monitor how money is spent on centrally sponsored schemes by states. So if funds have been given to build roads, then the commission should know if those roads have been built. But it lacks such data, reveals the report. It goes from one Five Year Plan to the next without assessing outcomes. ■



STATE OF INDIA'S LIVELIHOOD REPORT

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Skilful Indha

INDHA Craft is a social enterprise and training programme started in 2005 by Literacy India, an NGO, in Daulatabad village of Haryana. Indha actually means a cloth that Haryanvi women wear on their heads when they carry water or firewood. It eases the burden.

Indha Craft is doing that too by empowering them. "Our first thought was to help women step out of a restrictive and conservative mindset and give them a skill to sustain themselves. Initially, Indha started with just 30 women," says Satya Prakash of Literacy India.

In nine years, Indha Craft has trained around 10,000 women from Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Telangana. The social enterprise has also received an award from the Indian Institute of Craft and Design.

Indha turns recyclable material like discarded paper, plastic, wood and jute into pretty products. Each woman is given the responsibility of making one finished product and not just part of a product. This gives the women the skill, experience and confidence to start their own enterprise if they wish to.

Indha Craft produces attractive bags, photo frames, stationery, masks and diaries.

Well known designer Tarun Tahiliani and students from design institutes have helped Indha.

Today, Indha has many corporate clients. They get orders ranging from 50 pieces to 5,000 pieces. Indha products are also available on flipkart.com and novica.com. ■

Lakshman Anand

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BILAL BAHADUR

Naturally fragrant

THE natural aroma of rose, lemon, lavender or rosemary is gently heady and therapeutic. But buying wondrous green products isn't easy on the pocket. Everybody enjoys using natural soaps and oils. To make such products available to people, Saklain Kawoos, a young social entrepreneur, has started a store in Srinagar's Polo View area.

Named Saklain's Coterie, the shop sells the entire range of pure essential oils and handmade natural soaps. You can take your pick. There is lavender oil, rosemary oil, almond oil, apricot oil, olive oil, walnut oil, tea-tree oil and juniper oil.

Various forms of hand-made natural soaps dot his shelves. These soaps are very different from the ones sold in the market. They contain just glycerine and saffron. There isn't even a trace of chemical, unlike soaps available in the general market.

Oils are extracted from the flowers of aromatic plants grown in Saklain's farm in Yaarsuthoo village of Budgam district. He gets the soaps made after supplying the requisite quantity of saffron and glycerine to the manufacturer. He also deals in dry fruits and pure saffron.

Saklain's Coterie is already acquiring fame. His store was mentioned in the BBC's *Good Food* magazine and has been covered by the local and national media. With sales picking up, Saklain is naturally thinking of exporting his products. ■

Jehangir Rashid



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