

# Civil Society

**A PEOPLE'S REPORT ON GOVT**

## **BHOPAL CLOUD OVER UPA-2**



A street play in Delhi after the recent court verdict on the Bhopal gas leak



### **'BOOST INCOMES OF SMALL FARMERS'**

Food security means availability, access and absorption, says Dr MS Swaminathan

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## BHOPAL CLOUD OVER UPA -2

The UPA-2 government has acted belatedly on Bhopal. But on the whole it has much to do to prove that its *aam aadmi* agenda is on course.

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# Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

## A People's Report

THE UPA-2 submitted a "Report to the People" on its first year in office. Our cover story this month is a "People's Report on UPA-2". It is based on a cross-section of opinions from all over the country. These are people who you won't see on TV as talking heads. But they make a significant contribution in what they do and are real enough. We believe their opinions are important and should matter to any government in power.

While the government's ceremonial report made no mention of Bhopal, it is the accountability of companies, pollution and depletion of resources that worry people the most when they look at the performance of their government.

People want growth with equity and justice and the expectations from the UPA are huge with it being emphasised that the UPA was brought back to office because of the empowering and inclusive policies that it had initiated.

People are in many ways far ahead of their government. They have a modern and globalised view of the rights of the citizen and the consumer. They don't look kindly upon leaders who barter away these rights in the name of getting investment or who spend too much time on the same page with the corporate sector.

Bhopal is of course a case in point. This magazine has reported on Bhopal from time to time. More than a year ago we did a story headlined: 'Will someone please clean up the mess in Bhopal?' We also had occasion to cover the Bhopal victims when they came to Delhi to ask for something as basic as clean drinking water. It amazed us then that they couldn't get a hearing in Delhi when they were really the victims of the world's worst chemical disaster. How was it that the UPA government couldn't see the *aam aadmi* in the people of Bhopal crying out for justice?

An attempt at damage control has now been made through a Group of Ministers. Providing compensation, cleaning the toxic waste lying in the Union Carbide factory and ensuring clean drinking water should rightly be priorities. It is necessary to know how this is going to be done quickly.

We believe the toxic waste should be cleaned if necessary by the government because it is doing too much damage by lying around. It has long-term consequences for public health and the people of Bhopal have suffered because of the toxic waste for far too long. But simultaneously, Dow must be held responsible and it should pay as it would in the US for such an accident. It can't be allowed to get away because of some corporate fiddle.

A larger message of corporate accountability must go out. It is not difficult to see the kind of problems that are being caused by industrial pollution. An official report lists 80 plus really bad locations. The damage that is being caused is not very dissimilar from what happened in Bhopal. The scale could be smaller, the process of poisoning slower. If the UPA is serious about development, this has to stop. The rights of people to health and livelihood have to be respected. The draining away of common resources like groundwater has to end.

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## IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



## LETTERS



### Mediation

Your cover story, 'Stuck in court? Try mediation,' was very useful. The story illustrates what a group of dedicated lawyers can do. Most people who approach courts are worried and tense. They have to show amazing patience in their search for justice. Mediation, with a healing touch, is a humane and rational approach. As your story shows, it

also delivers timely justice.

*Shikha Mishra*

Congratulations to this group of lawyers for doing great service to humankind. Mediation should spread across the country. We need lawyers like you!

*Ashish*

The basic idea behind mediation is to open the path of communication which gets blocked after differences creep in. We open up communication and get the parties to sit across the table and talk.

*Rekha Thaliyani*

### Baby Aadhar

The architects of the UID/Aadhar project should realize that the most critical phase in a person's life is childhood. India's record in nurturing children is not a good one.

Despite several conventions on child rights and a universal birth registration system, many children are not registered because of cultural and delivery norms. Especially in rural India, mothers fail to 'name' their newborns and register them. There is no penalty for not registering. All these babies become 'undoc-

umented' babies. In schools, the village Masterji can enrol them without a birth registration certificate or a document. Newborns in the age group, 0-3 are most vulnerable.

In Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat more births are taking place in public health centres and hospitals so birth registration does take place. Despite Maoist threats in Chhattisgarh, the state is doing well in reducing infant mortality through their grassroots programme, 'Mitanin' by which a health worker helps the pregnant mother to deliver in a public health facility.

The UID should be able to track a child's birth and growth till adulthood. A three-year-old child is supposed to join an anganwadi centre for nutrition support and schooling. A five-year-old child is expected to enrol in primary school and, after 15, join high school.

Today, large numbers of children drop out of school for reasons like migration of parents to urban areas for jobs, for seasonal work and so on.

Instead of giving Aadhar cards to adults, the UID should provide the Aadhar card to the newborn or at any stage of childhood. The card

should have details of birth, place, name of parents etc. This would help document all children and provide them an identity. Why should a child wait to become an adult to get his or her Aadhar card?

The architects of UID claim that their process is all about inclusion. Then why not include children from the time they are born?

*Dr Manu N Kulkarni,*

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### CORRECTIONS

In the interview with JP Singh in the June cover story, it was wrongly stated because of a transcription error that Justice Katju is a believer in 'arbitration'. He is in fact a leading champion of mediation.

In the story, 'Radical doctors' published in the May issue, Dr Swarup Jana's correct name is Dr Swapan Jana and Dr Ashish Kundu's correct name is Dr Ashok Kundu.

*Editor*

# 'Future belongs to nations

*The first step in food security is to boost small farmers and increase their purchasing power, explains MS Swaminathan*

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

HE is best known as the Father of India's Green Revolution but Dr MS Swaminathan has travelled a long way since then. He has worked devotedly on agriculture down the years. As a result, he has seen the rise and fall of Indian farming in all its aspects.

Twenty years ago Dr Swaminathan started an NGO, the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Chennai. It promotes sustainable agriculture and works with farmers who have little land, even those with just a homestead. Dr Swaminathan is a champion of the small farmer.

At a critical juncture when the National Advisory Council (NAC) will be discussing the Food Security Bill, the big question is whether Indian agriculture can provide affordable food for all?

The health of India's agriculture will have a bearing on food production and food security. India's landscape is fast changing. Urban spaces, SEZs, industry are swallowing agricultural land like never before. There is also the looming threat of climate change. On the other hand there is the farmer, stuck with high input costs, low prices for crops and unpredictable weather.

As a Rajya Sabha MP and a member of the NAC, Dr Swaminathan brings to the table his rich experience in farming and boosting food productivity. In his sparse apartment in Delhi, Dr Swaminathan talked to *Civil Society* about food security and the centrality of the small farmer. Extracts from the interview:



**Dr M S Swaminathan**

**Are you in broad agreement with the Food Security Bill? What are the key issues you think it should contain?**

The Food Security Bill is the culmination of Mahatma Gandhi's desire that independent India should give the highest priority to mitigating hunger. Since the last 60 years we have been doing many things starting with the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The Tamil Nadu government went further and began a universal mid-day meal programme in schools.

The food for work programme was started in 1974-75. It has culminated in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MNREGA) which is to ensure purchasing power in the hands of the people. Even the Bengal Famine was not due to a famine of food but to a famine of purchasing power. Where there is work, there is money, where there is money, there is food. And therefore purchasing power is important. MNREGA was designed to provide at least Rs 10,000 a year in the hands of the poor.

In the last five years we have seen a paradigm shift from a purely patronage approach to a rights

approach – the right to education, the right to information, the right to employment, the right to land for tribals and forest dwellers. The charity approach has been replaced by a rights approach. This shift is very important.

The Food Security Bill is a continuation of this rights-based approach.

**How should this right be defined in the Food Security Bill?**

Food security implies social, economic and physical access – a balanced diet, sanitation, clean drinking water and primary health care. Both food and non-food requirements are involved. For example, if you don't have good drinking water, you will have stomach ailments and poor health.

On the other hand if we don't produce more, we can't have food security for two reasons. One is that unlike Europe or America where hardly two or three per cent of people are involved in farming, in our country over 60 per cent are engaged in farming. Intelligent people in cities think the consumer is in the city and the producer is in the village. But the producer is the consumer. Actually, producer-

# who have grains, not guns'

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Security Act should look at the totality of what needs to be done.

## Are you supporting universal entitlements?

Any Act of this kind can have two components – common but differentiated entitlements. Even the Climate Convention talks of common but differentiated responsibilities. Similarly, in a Food Security Act common entitlement means common to all the people in this country, or a universal public distribution system, availability of food in the market at reasonable prices, availability of drinking water, sanitation... for everybody, for 110 crores of people.

But differentiated entitlement will be for those who are really poor, who have no purchasing power. Various numbers have been cited. I would say one-fourth of our population is poor. For them you need to provide food at an economically accessible price, say Rs 3 per kg, but Tamil Nadu prices rice at Rs 1 per kg of rice.

## So you are for universal entitlements?

Overarching it should be a universal entitlement. (But there should also be) legal entitlements. And it is important to ensure effective enforcement and implementation, what you call governance. That cannot be legislated.

The future belongs to nations who have grains not guns. Guns you can purchase, grains you cannot. Because of climate change, food will be very highly priced. Therefore, we need to improve availability of food from home-grown food. This has two advantages. One, we can be sure of our food, and secondly, by increasing the productivity of small farms you will increase the purchasing power of producer-consumers and mitigate hunger now prevailing among them.

## How can you legislate on this?

Some are legal entitlements. Some are enforcements. The Supreme Court takes the right to life with the right to food and water. You can't have the right to life without food and water. The court has been giving instructions. It is not necessary for an Act to be all about legal entitlements. But some enforcement and coordination has to be prescribed.

For example I have been pleading for a long time for national grain storages. Today, in Punjab and Haryana grains are put in gunny bags which are left lying around. Then the rains come. Now you can't discharge a Food Security Act without food. They say we can have a food security fund. If we don't have grains we can give money. If you do that,

prices will go up. In the Sixth Pay Commission, when government servants got more money, the cost of living index went up almost immediately.

Giving money therefore means prices will rise. India is home to the largest number of malnourished children, women and men. In September, this year, there will be a big summit in New York to review the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The first goal is reducing hunger and malnourishment by half by 2015. And we will present a poor picture there.

I hope the Food Security Act will not take a narrow view of just providing some wheat and rice at an affordable price. That is important, I agree. But it does not constitute food security. Economic access to food, at affordable cost, is one important element of food security. That's important. But if you don't have enough food in the market, prices will go up. If you don't have safe drinking water, sanitation and so on, calorie intake alone won't help you. So this is a great occasion for our country to overcome the stigma of malnutrition, maternal deaths and low-weight children.

In my view the food security law should start with children, 0-3 years old in particular, for that is when 80 per cent of brain development takes place. In a knowledge era unless you can give children the opportunity for expression of innate genetic potential, intellectual and physical development, we will not be a great nation. Take a lifecycle approach to food security. Start with pregnant women, babies and then go up to old and infirm people.

The government has so many schemes. Some are legal entitlements. The other aspect is to have enforcement of schemes, some kind of monitoring mechanism, so that whenever the Supreme Court calls, you can say this is being done. Both prescriptive and mandatory measures are possible.

Is it actually possible to deliver 35 kg at Rs 3? It is possible. You have to provide money and planning for this. Even now 50 to 60 million tonnes are available to the government. Some grains are rotting. Because they are rotting, the grains are being exported.

If we increase consumption in this country, there will be no food surplus. You need to improve your storage. You go to an average American/Canadian/Australian farm. They have beautiful silos where they store food without any loss. Here our farmers produce food with so much difficulty and then you put it in some gunny bags and allow it to rot. Now

*Continued on next page*

**'The first step in food security is to improve the productivity and prosperity of small farmers. Only then will they have money to buy a balanced diet.'**

consumers form the largest segment in India. Over 60 per cent of producers are consumers. However, the producer is malnourished. Or in other words, the producer does not have money to buy.

Sixty per cent of our area is rain-fed, just 40 per cent has irrigation. Only 16 per cent of our crops are pulses, oilseeds, sometimes horticulture. Now if the producer wants to buy other commodities he needs money. So the first step in food security is to improve the productivity and prosperity of small farm agriculture. Only then will small farmers have money to buy a balanced diet.

We have three components of food security. First, availability of food in the market which is a function of production and that means enhancing the productivity of small farms, dryland farms. Secondly, absorption of food in the body, which is a function of safe, clean drinking water, sanitation, primary health care. And thirdly, access to food, which is a function of purchasing power or jobs. With food inflation being high, money is important for food security.

Food security therefore means availability, access and absorption. These three are critical. A Food

*Continued from previous page*

this is not on. We can't have food security without attention to production, food safety and safe storage of grains.

**You have often talked of decentralization of storage. Could you tell us more about this?**

I suggested a minimum of 50 locations, ideally 128, in different agro-climatic regions where climate risk management research and training centres can be set up all over the country and in particular in rain-fed areas and tribal areas.

You will find that next month, the media will report starvation deaths. Even in a district like Thane, close to Mumbai, there will be starvation. Media will show pictures. Tribals are there.

You should give visibility to grain storage so that prices can be tamed. In a country of 110 crores of people which will become 150 crores by 2040 or so, the government should remain at the commanding heights of the food security system. That can only be possible if you have national grain storages. People will then know that around one million tonnes of grain are there. And if there is drought or a flood or a disaster, the food can be rushed to them.

**You have emphasized water a lot for food security.**

There are five major sources of water. We have high-density rainfall which comes in 100 hours a year. We need to harvest and store every raindrop. In MNREGA, emphasis has been rightly given to water harvesting, watershed management and soil conservation. I would say we need to utilize the enormous labour available.

The month of June is the time. June must be monsoon management month. Professors in agricultural universities, students, those who have knowledge of water-harvesting should go from village to village and see what preparations have been done. Have farmers got seeds in place? Do they have fertilizers? Is the water-harvesting structure alright? They will learn much more than sitting in classrooms.

In MNREGA we should give dignity to the work being done. I would say institute a water savior award for the best MNREGA group which saves the most water. MNREGA workers must feel they are doing something nationally important. The beneficiary approach should change to a participatory approach.

As Gandhi said, don't make people beggars. Enable everyone to earn their daily bread.

Apart from harvesting rain, use water more efficiently. Some years ago the Ministry of Water Resources started at my suggestion a programme called, 'more crop and income per drop of water.' We have farmers participating in this programme across the country.

We can augment supply of water, manage our demand better and use new technologies. There is rain water, river water, groundwater, recycled sewage water and effluents from industry. Nearly 80 per cent of water which industry takes can be given back in a pure form.

Finally, there is sea water. Ninety-seven per cent of water is sea water. As Mahatma Gandhi said when he started the Salt Satyagraha, sea water is a social resource, not a private resource. We should use sea water farming, or agri-aqua farms in the Andaman

and Nicobar Islands and the Lakshwadeep islands.

**We have just had a heated debate on seeds.**

Nearly 80 per cent of seeds are farmer saved seeds. Hardly 18 to 20 per cent of seeds come from companies or the National Seeds Corporation. There is difference in assessment on whether farmers can get more yield and income by changing their seeds.

If you go to tribal areas, you will find not only do they save their own seeds but they grow traditional foodgrains, millets. In fact the Food Security Act should promote grain banks everywhere with local grains, apart from wheat and rice. We should promote diversification of the food basket and not confine ourselves to wheat and rice.

So traditional seeds must be conserved and saved. Fortunately there is a National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources in Delhi which has got more than a million varieties. There is also DRDO which has established a very interesting storage in permafrost at Chang La not far from Leh. It is naturally cooled.

Farming is the largest private sector enterprise in India in which 115 million families are involved. It's not just a bunch of industrialists like CII. Farmers keep their own seeds and make their own judgment on what to grow and what not to grow.

**Is there any role for the scientific establishment in all this?**

The scientific establishment should have a great stake. When we started our agricultural universities, the idea was that rural people would consider them as their own. They would see the university as their friend, philosopher and guide. Now we have over 40 agricultural universities. They should go in June to help farmers in villages. But they don't go. I have been going to visit fields for the last 60 years. My knowledge is not from books alone. Unless you intermingle with farmers, you'll be living in a world of your own. The field is the laboratory, not the scientist's personal research.

In 1964 when I realized we have a new opportunity to make a breakthrough in the yield of wheat — we were importing at that time 10 million tonnes under PL 480 — I proposed to the government that we establish 1,000 national demonstration plots in the poorest farmers fields. I said if you demonstrate anything in the rich farmer's field, its success will not be attributed to technology. They will say this fellow is a wealthy man, I can't do it.

So we changed the methodology of extension from the prosperous farmer, to the toiling farmer. Unfortunately, now those demonstration plots are all malls. I went to see one of my best farmers and his land has been given to a heritage hotel, you see.

In those days, farmers put up the demonstration plots. I only helped. They produced four to five tonnes of wheat, whereas earlier they were producing only one tonne, one and a half tonnes. The rich farmers came and saw their success and a small government programme, called a high-yielding varieties programme, became a mass movement.

A government programme cannot trigger a revolution. It is only the farmer's enthusiasm that can do it. I told the Prime Minister don't talk of a green revolution. Forty per cent of farmers want to quit farming. So how do you create a mass movement? You need enthusiasm.

# Coke and

**Civil Society News**

*New Delhi*

**S**HARAFAT Ali is an old man who can barely walk. But he came all the way from Ghaziabad to be there at Hazards Centre's book launch. Ali wanted to tell everyone what his neighbour, the Coca-Cola factory was up to.

"We have rashes, tumours and tension ever since this cola factory came up in our area Agriculture is ruined, so is our health. There's no grass. Cows don't yield milk. Twenty-five cows passed out after drinking water released by that factory," he said.

Sukhbir Shastri, an elderly activist from Ghaziabad, nodded in agreement. The two are members of Azadi Bachao Andolan, an ongoing agitation against the Coca-Cola factory.

Hazards Centre's report, 'How harsh is your soft drink' has been brought out in collaboration with the People's Science Institute, Dehradun. It is a chilling study of soil and water contamination around five PepsiCo and Coca-Cola factories. They are located in Mehdiganj and Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh), Kaladera and Chopanki (Rajasthan) and one in Panipat, (Haryana).

You could say places like Ghaziabad are crammed with ugly factories anyway, so pollution is hardly a surprise. But the needle of suspicion points to the cola factories because whether they are in industrial zones or in the countryside, the results are uncannily similar.

Dunu Roy of Hazards Centre says the activists wanted to do the study in partnership with Coca-Cola and PepsiCo but their offer was rejected. They tried to sneak into cola factories as visitors, says Banjyotsna Baruah, one of the researchers, but they did not succeed.

The researchers did not lose heart, though. They went ahead and examined water in villages in a two to five km radius from the factories. They inspected drains carrying effluents from the factories and collected samples. Cola waste dumped on roadsides was taken away for study. Fields were surveyed for toxic contamination. Eyewitness accounts were carefully documented.

The most important finding that emerged is that all water sources — groundwater and surface water — were contaminated with chromium. Out of 85 water samples collected, 59 had chromium concentration above the permissible limit. Drain water samples also had high COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand) levels — the maximum was 12,417 ppm — suggesting that the effluents must have contained chemicals apart from the three metals analysed (chromium, lead and cadmium). Sludge too had significant amounts of chromium.

"Chromium is widespread," says Roy. "Village

# Pepsi have deadly record

LAKSHMAN ANAND



From left: Banjyotsna Baruah, Dunu Roy and Sharafat Ali

**“Chromium is widespread,” says Roy. “Village wells we examined had it too. But it declines the further you go from the cola factories. Why is this happening? What is its origin? We cannot say.” Such heavy metals are not part of beverage-making.**

wells we examined had it too. But it declines the further you go from the cola factories. Why is this happening? What is its origin? We cannot say.”

The mystery deepens. Such heavy metals are not supposed to be part of any beverage-making process. In fact that's why no standards have been fixed for them in the Environment Protection Act, 1986. “The illnesses mentioned by Sharafat Ali appear to be due to exposure to excessive chromium,” says Roy.

A long list of serious charges are being leveled against the cola companies. If you read the report you will find the cola factories are draining aquifers, dirtying fields, ruining crops and causing ill health. The cola companies are promising jobs and development and spreading poverty and pollution instead.

State governments too are to blame. To permit water-guzzling factories to set up shop in a dry desert state like Rajasthan defies logic. Aquifers are

drained of precious groundwater to make a useless drink. That water could grow food, save lives during Rajasthan's frequent droughts.

Banashakti Baruah says a Pepsi plant was set up in the Matsya Industrial Area of Alwar, 160 km from Jaipur in 1998. According to calculations, the factory extracted groundwater at the rate of 7,500 litres per hour. Water levels nosedived from 15 to 18 meters to 60 to 90 meters. In 2006, Pepsi had to close its plant. It ran out of water. Now Matsya has been declared a Dark Zone. Fifteen villages live in misery. But Pepsi traipsed off to Chopanki in Bhiwadi in Haryana. It has in fact increased its production capacity by four times, according to the report.

Kaladera in Rajasthan is an impoverished arid village, which depends on groundwater. Yet a Coca-Cola factory flourishes here, extracting water. Villagers say the quality and quantity of water has gone down and soon their region will be declared a

Dark Zone. Coca Cola claims to be harvesting water. It dug 50 wells in the bed of the Bagawali river which, by the way, has been dry for 15 years. The wells were supposed to be 200 metres deep. In fact, they are only four to five metres deep. You can see the picture in the report.

Adequate compensation for land has not been given to villagers. In Chopanki people said they were given only Rs 10 lakh per hectare whereas the market price was Rs 50 lakhs. In Ghaziabad, people have not received even one-third of the compensation due to them as per government rules, says Sharafat Ali.

In Mehndiganj village, the anti-cola agitation is especially strong. The gram sabha alleges in 1999 the Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd took the village's common land. The panchayat, to cool down local tempers, said the company would give jobs and develop the region. Neither happened.

The Gaon Bachao Sangharsh Samiti now leads the agitation. It points out that the village has lost its land and water. About 25 per cent of wells have dried up. The water table in Mehndiganj, Nagepur and Bhikaripur has dropped 2.8 meters between 2005 and 2006. The company would periodically release its polluted water into farmers' fields. The unsuspecting farmers used it for irrigation. Now they say their fields have turned infertile. The cola factory has built a drain which empties its leftover water into the Ganga.

Cola sludge thrown on roadsides is causing health problems. According to a CPCB study in 2003, this sludge has dangerous levels of cadmium, chromium and lead – confirming Hazards Centre's findings.

The Hazards Centre study was carried out at the request of communities living around Coca-Cola and Pepsi factories. Its genesis can be traced to the year 2004. At that time, Plachimada in Palghat district of Kerala rose in revolt against the Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Ltd factory situated in its vicinity. The Plachimada panchayat pointed out that the cola factory was depleting groundwater, wells were turning dry and the quality of water was suspect. The factory was duping farmers by passing off its sludge as 'fertilizer'. When farmers used it on their fields, their crops withered away.

A Chennai lab tested water samples here and pronounced the water unfit for use. The Plachimada Solidarity Committee then requested Hazards Centre and the People's Science Institute to do a detailed study. They found groundwater samples contained high amounts of lead, chromium and cadmium.

When the Plachimada study was presented to the Anti Coke Pepsi Movement in New Delhi in July 2006, participants requested a similar study be done in 11 cola factory areas. Since Hazards Centre did not have money to do such an extensive study, it covered only five of the locations suggested.



# Mamata wins, but a bigger battle

*The Left Front will leave behind a state in utter shambles*



Mamata Banerjee with members of her party after winning civic elections in Kolkata

Saibal Chatterjee  
New Delhi

A 33-year-old left bastion is crumbling. If the 2011 electoral script plays out the way All-India Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee expects it to, the politically volatile state is just a year away from the end of a not-so-happy era.

Riding on the back of consecutive wins in the 2008 panchayat elections, the 2009 Lok Sabha polls and the recent battle for the control of Bengal's 81 civic bodies, the railway minister's political juggernaut has inched tantalisingly close to Writer's Buildings.

West Bengal is one Assembly election away from pulling off the sweeping political, social and economic change that large swathes of its people have been clamouring for since Nandigram and Singur exposed huge chinks in the armour of the

world's longest-serving democratically elected communist government.

If Mamata does indeed become the Chief Minister of West Bengal next year, the inevitable question would be: are the Trinamool Congress and its temperamental leader equipped to address the challenges that lie ahead? Says adman

**“The biggest task before her would be to move an entire bureaucracy that is aligned with the left to some level of neutrality,” says Suhel Seth, one of her advisors.**

and marketing pundit Suhel Seth, “Petulance is good when you are anti-establishment, but it certainly isn't when you become the establishment.”

Mamata Banerjee is up against a heap of challenges, many of which are direct fallouts of the uninterrupted leftist hegemony in West Bengal since 1977. She would, therefore, have to consciously curb her tendency to fly off the handle at times. Her task is cut out.

“The biggest task before her,” says Seth, who advises the Bengal Opposition leader on matters relating to the Indian Railways, “would be to move an entire bureaucracy that is aligned with the left to some level of neutrality.” That is easier said than done. West Bengal is in the dumps. The new dispensation, as and when it assumes office, would need a herculean effort to clean up the mess that the state administration is in.

Filmmaker Sekhar Das, once a card-holding member of the CPI (M), feels the politicisation of

# looms in Bengal

the administration is Bengal's biggest bane. "The work culture here is linked to politics," he says. "In most other states, no matter who is in power, the process of development never stops. Bengal has to learn to put the interests of the people above political compulsions."

On the eve of the last general elections, a study on West Bengal (aptly titled *A Story of Falling Behind*) commissioned by Trinamool Congress MP Dinesh Trivedi and authored by economists Bibek Debroy and Laveesh Bhandari enumerated five broad areas of governance in which the state had steadily lost ground under leftist rule: industry, law and order, infrastructure building, education and fiscal management.

The critique cited a World Bank report to point out that Kolkata, Bengal's economic and political nerve-centre, ranked behind Patna, Ranchi, Bhubaneswar, Jaipur and Lucknow in terms of business environment. Among other things, Debroy and Bhandari found that Bengal has 94 policemen per 100,000 people against the national average of 126, that only about 28 per cent of the state's households had access to safe drinking water and that its revenue deficit was 4 per cent whereas the average Indian state registers a surplus of 0.4 per cent.

The leftist coalition has been in power in Bengal for seven terms. During this period, the state has seen steady decline on crucial indices. This reality was vindicated by a development report card (*Thirty Years of Left Front Rule in West Bengal*) that the Congress released in April 2009 just before party general secretary Rahul Gandhi went to the extent of calling the state "a basket case."

The Congress booklet fell back on a survey by social scientist Jean Dreze to assert that the problem of hunger in rural households was the worst in Bengal, where 11.7 per cent of families in the villages go hungry every night. According to the survey, the national figure is 2.5 per cent whereas in Bihar it is 3.2 per cent and in Orissa 5.9 per cent.

Apart from the problems listed by Debroy and Bhandari, one could add five other pain points that the Mamata dispensation will confront if and when it does wrest power in West Bengal: the rot in the state's political system, the politicisation of the police force, the deeply entrenched culture of bandhs and hartals, the shrinking space for dissent and the worsening plight of the minorities and the rural poor.

So a concerted ten-pronged strategy to arrest the decline of Bengal is what Mamata would need to adopt as the Chief Minister of a state that has for long languished in the doldrums. Probably with that in mind, the railway minister has put together a band of experts to advise her on economic matters. Besides Seth and Debroy, this panel includes FICCI secretary-general Amit Mitra and former Union revenue and rural develop-

ment secretary D. Bandyopadhyay.

Also among Ms Banerjee's advisers is close political confidant Partha Chatterjee, leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, who brings to the table years of experience as a public relations executive in Andrew Yule.

Suhel Seth emphasises that restoring order in the bureaucracy should be top priority for Mamata. "Once she manages to depoliticise the bureaucracy, a lot of other things will fall in place. The police force, for one, will also turn over a new leaf," he explains. "The police are never politically aligned. They take orders from the top."

Lawyer Arunava Ghosh, a former Trinamool MLA who is now with the Indian National Congress, alludes to the need for reversing the rapid deterioration in the quality of political dis-

**The problem of hunger in rural households is the worst in West Bengal, where 11.7 per cent of families in the villages go hungry every night.**

course in Bengal. He says: "Too many undesirable elements have infiltrated politics in this state. How many of the new councillors are graduates? It's time for a clean-up."

Custodial deaths, widespread political violence, the lurking Maoist threat and suppression of intellectual scrutiny of the ways of the ruling establishment, among other things, have led to an erosion of democratic institutions in Bengal. While sections of the electorate hope that Mamata Banerjee will set things right, her political opponents and naysayers are not so sure of her intentions. As CPI (M) MP Mohd Salim says, "Her demand for early Assembly polls smacks of unseemly haste."

But it would appear that the state is now beyond fretting over whether Mamata Banerjee is the right alternative to the leftists. As Arunava Ghosh points out, "The people of West Bengal are at the end of their tether. They just want the Left to go. People aren't thinking of what the alternative dispensation will deliver. At this point they want change come what may."

It would, therefore, be important for Mamata to dissociate herself from certain habits and strategies that she borrowed from the Left, including her endorsement of bandhs and hartals as a political tool. Moreover, her fierce opposition to the Bengal government's decision to set up a chemical hub in Nandigram and a Nano plant in Singur – both proj-

ects had to be aborted in the face of popular resistance – has earned her an anti-industry image.

Says journalist Rohit Basu, senior vice president of Tara News: "Mamata will have to dispel the negative vibes that Bengal currently exudes as a result of the Nandigram and Singur fiascos. Getting industry to treat the state as a reliable investment destination will take some doing."

Suhel Seth agrees but refrains from using the word 'industry'. "Mamata Banerjee will have to create a pro-investment climate in Bengal," he says. "People are saying that she is opposed to development. That notion has to be changed."

As minister of railways, Mamata has already initiated an exercise to woo industry. For instance, she has proposed the setting up of a rail coach factory at the abandoned Tata Motors site in Singur. In an open invitation to captains of industry to participate in the building of railway infrastructure, she has proposed an elaborate public-private partnership plan.

Above all else, Mamata would have to help Bengal rediscover the power of democracy and probity in public life, says filmmaker Sekhar Das, whose last film, *Kaaler Rakkhal*, was an expose on the how the rural population is exploited by ruling party functionaries. "The state has forgotten the virtues of democracy," he laments. "Despite being in power without a break for three decades, the leftists could not build a new political culture in the state. That is the reason why people are desperate for change."

For Das, "change would always be welcome" especially in the light of the manner in which the leftist coalition has belied the people's hopes. "When the Left came to power, Bengal had expected the dawn of a new brand of politics. But the ruling politicians sacrificed the larger cause in pursuit of petty personal and political agendas," he says.

Will Trinamool Congress be any different? After its victory in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation election, the leader writer of the party's weekly mouthpiece, *Jaago Bangla*, declared: "The people are our strength. We have to respect the power they have given us. We have to be loyal to the people and ensure all-round development for them." Are these empty words or an expression of genuine intent?

Much will hinge on how Mamata conducts herself going forward. "Trinamool Congress is a one-horse party," says Seth. "Mamata Banerjee must build a second tier of visible and empowered leadership." He asserts that it is unfair to describe the firebrand Trinamool Congress leader as somebody who does not pay heed to advice. "She not only listens and acts on suggestions that she receives, she also gives us feedback of implementation," adds Seth. "Those who say she doesn't listen do not know her."

Rita Mukherjee, a former banker and Trinamool supporter, in a write-up posted on the party's official website, says: "A deep-rooted sense of humanism guides Mamata Banerjee. This is what has made her the voice of the people." That probably should, for the moment at least, be the last word on why and how Mamata Banerjee has emerged as the rallying point for change-seekers in Bengal.

# Pahalgam's glacier is vanishing

Syed Basharat  
Srinagar

THE Kolahoi glacier, which is close to the famous tourist resort of Pahalgam, has been steadily receding over several decades because of diminishing snowfall and rising temperatures. The glacier could vanish in 20 years, warn scientists.

In October last year a study titled, "Climate Change, Glacial Retreat and Livelihoods," revealed that in the past 30 years the Kolahoi glacier which used to be a little more than 11 sq km has shrunk to 2.63 sq km. The study was conducted over a period of three years by glaciologist Shakil Ramsoo, an assistant professor in the department of geology, University of Kashmir.

Pertinently, Kolahoi's run-off feeds Jammu and Kashmir's main river, the Jhelum, which rises from a spring at Verinag situated in the south-eastern part of Kashmir. The river flows through Srinagar before entering Pakistan through a deep narrow gorge. The Jhelum is a tributary of the Indus river with a total length of about 480 miles.

Geologists here say glaciers shrink because of various factors including weath-

er conditions. "If temperature had been the only reason for retreat of glaciers, then many glaciers which are showing advance at several sites in the Himalayan region, particularly Ladakh, should have also shown retreat," says RK Ganjoo, a professor in the geology department of Jammu University.

Gurcharan Singh, an expert in remote sensing and a renowned environmentalist here, believes that two important glaciers, the Thajwas in Sonamarag and the Kolahoi are receding fast. "Some 30 years ago, we would see the foot of the Thajwas glacier in Sonamarag but now we have to traverse three to four kilometres from Sonamarag to reach the foot of this glacier," he says.

Singh attributes retreat of glaciers both to rising temperature and erratic snowfall. "We used to receive snowfall in Kashmir in the month of December but the snow season has changed drastically. Now we receive snow in February. By that time the soil temperature increases and this does not let the snow accumulate," he says. "The retreat of glaciers has also resulted in heavy floods in most areas of Srinagar city."

Glacial retreat in the Indian Himalayas ranges from 19 metres per year for 17 glaciers in the Kashmir region to 20 metres per year for 21 glaciers in Sikkim, said Singh. And 51 glaciers in the main Himalayan range of India, Nepal and Sikkim are retreating at an average of 23 metres per year.

"In the Karokoram range of the Himalayas there is a mix of advancing and retreating glaciers with 18 advancing and 22 retreating during the 1980 to 2003 period," says Singh.

According to VK Raina, a retired officer of the Geological Survey of India (GSI), evidence in the form of glacier landforms indicates that the glacier bearing Lidder river once had a much larger Kolahoi glacier cover than what exists today. The total number of glaciers that are still present in the Lidder basin is around 50 covering an area of 39 sq km. The largest glacier in the west Lidder valley is the Kolahoi glacier.

The East Lidder river is described in geography books as originating from a glacial tarn, the Shisharam Nag, famous for its scenic beauty and religious significance as it lies on the way to Amarnath.

Raina, who has authored a number of books on glaciers in India, says the Kolahoi glacier, till the beginning of the 20th century had a well preserved glacier front with a major ice cave. A prominent lateral moraine ridge flanks the glacier along its left flank and is indicative of the thickness and volume the glacier must have had in the recent past – a feature observed in almost all the glaciers in the Himalayas, he added.

"Going by the first-ever survey map of this glacier made around the middle of the 19th century, the Kolkahoi has recorded constant retreat. In the earlier phase, that is between 1854 and 1902, the annual retreat was much faster around 30 metres a year, which came down to around 10 to 15 metres a year till the mid-eighties of the last century. Recent studies have indicated that the rate of retreat is more or less the same," Raina says.

According to a United Nations Environment Programme and World Glacier Monitoring Service study, the average melting rate of mountain glaciers has doubled since the turn of the century with record losses seen in 2006 at several sites. Experts here say rising temperatures are rapidly shrinking Himalayan glaciers, emphasizing the effects of climate change that have caused temperatures in the mountainous region to rise by about 1.1 degrees Celsius in the past 100 years.

Mushtaq Ahmad Parsa is the Wildlife Warden, South Kashmir and the Kolahoi glacier falls under his jurisdiction. "The soil crust is warming very fast," he said. "Perforation of the ozone layer, besides earth heat and erratic snowfall are responsible for the Kolahoi retreat." He said this year Pahalgam received only six inches of snow. "Two decades ago, Kolahoi used to receive 16 to 17 feet of snow," he said.

Whatever the reasons and opinions put forward by experts for the retreat of glaciers, a dramatic shift in priorities is taking place among the people of Kashmir. "Politics will continue to go on like this even if the Kashmir issue is settled once for all. But issues like glaciers retreating is something that we should ponder over. We can live without political dramas we but can't live without water," said Ghulam Rasool Marazi, a shopkeeper in Lal Chowk.



**16th**  
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ABHINANDITA MATHUR



The Super Six group

## Super Six get ready to fly

**Abhinandita Mathur**  
New Delhi

**S**ONU Singh, 18, recalls that 9 June was just another day. "I returned from work and was watching TV when I answered Sudha ma'am's call. It was crazy. I kept asking her: are you serious, really serious, in complete disbelief."

Sonu is an ex-student of Deepalaya, a school which teaches underprivileged children. His former teacher, Sudha, had called to tell him that he, and five students who had finished school from Deepalaya, had been selected to study in the US for a year.

"Not only did Sudha ma'am give me this great news, but she also gave me the task of informing the other selected students. I never thought how difficult this task would be."

Chandni, Indira, Ambika, Neha and Chander refused to believe him. They thought he was pulling a fast one. Sonu called his teacher and told her to tell them herself.

These six students are amongst 51 chosen from India to spend a year studying in the USA under the Community College Initiative Program, an initiative of the United States Department of States Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs Community College.

The program enables students from Asia, Africa, South and Central America to spend one year studying in community colleges in the US. They earn a vocational certificate. This is the first year Indian students are part of the project. The program provides academic instruction in agriculture, applied engineering, business management and administration, health professions, information technology, media, tourism and hospitality management. Students also get a chance to experience

America's cultural and social life.

It was in November that Deepalaya was invited to participate by sending their students for screening tests. Seven students appeared for the written test out of which six were successful. They cleared the next round of interviews too. The final results came after a four month wait.

During this time, the young achievers continued to chase their dreams here, not realising that a change in plan was in the horizon.

Sonu will now study Business Management and Administration at Pierce College in Washington State. He hopes to return and make a mark in the corporate world. He can't stop smiling as he talks about that life changing phone call.

When Sonu called 21-year-old Chandan Giri who was hanging out with a friend after work, he too reacted with sheer disbelief. Chandan has opted to study Business Management and Administration too. "Yes, just like Sonu, but I will be in California" – a word he has googled every time he logs on to the Internet since that day. He has recently resigned from his job at Reliance Insurance where he worked as a Channel Service Officer. Chandan hopes to take full advantage of the education system in America and return to fulfill his dream of becoming the company's Branch Manager.

When Sonu called, all of them suspected he was playing a prank. "It was that unreal for us," he says.

Since the news sunk in, the group has been busy planning and preparing. Some had to resign from their jobs others had to skip exams to make it to the new class in America. But whatever effort it took, opting otherwise was out of question.

Indira who works as a nurse at Apollo hospital recently got a raise for exceptional performance and dedication. She had barely celebrated this achievement when she got the news and had to resign. "Who would have thought this would happen? When I got this job, I thought I'd got my big break, but obviously I did not know what was coming," she says.

After doing a course in Nursing and Health Care, Indira plans to return and work in the health sector. Though she already has an offer from her current employer, she wants to work for the less privileged. "I got this break because of an organisation like Deepalaya and now it is my turn to give back to society," she explains.

Ambika Nair, 21, who will study Business Management and Administration thanks her school for this opportunity. She is elated like her friends but very nervous about something. "I am vegetarian," she explains. Neha Sharma shares the same sentiment. "I too am vegetarian, so I think I should pack as much food as I can so that eating habits don't come in my way."

She googled the city she will spend the next year in and found the temperature would get to minus 18 degrees. "I can't imagine how cold that would feel," she says. While the course she has opted for is Nursing and Healthcare, Neha hopes to specialise in Physical Education. She is looking forward to sharpening her skills in basketball.

Chandni, 21, was an all-rounder at Deepalaya School. She has done a course in Ancillary Nursing and Midwifery (ANM) and she now works as a staff nurse at the Deepalaya School in Kalkaji Extension. "An exposure like this will make us world standard professionals" she says.

After finishing the course in Nursing and Healthcare she plans to return and work in the rural sector where she feels qualified workers like her can make a big difference.

After a lot of exhaustive paper work and running around to get logistics sorted, the students are happy to finally receive their passports with visas. They have been hooked on to the Internet, busy shopping and wondering about

the experience of being on an aeroplane, a first for all of them.

Despite sleepless nights full of excitement and anxiety, the Super Six are all set to fly high. As Sonu says: "My mother is amused to find me day dreaming and smiling at the wall or waking up at 2 am to look at my college brochure and passport for the fortieth time. But she doesn't scold me for disturbing her in the middle of the night. Its the first passport in the family after all."

**The programme enables students from Asia, Africa, South and Central America to spend one year studying in community colleges in the US.**

# Govt and VHAI join hands

**Kavita Charanji**  
Shimla (HP)

**D**r Anita Joshi's journey to work is gruelling everyday. She leaves on a local bus which takes her on a two hour bone rattling ride to Sunni hamlet. She alights and then steps gingerly on a precarious wooden bridge to cross over the gushing waters of the Sutlej river. Finally, she rounds off her journey with a 10-minute walk to Thalli village in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh.

Dr Joshi heads for the health centre where she works as a medical officer. The centre is run by the Himachal Pradesh Voluntary Health Association (HPVHA). She sees about 30 to 35 patients, everyday. "Most patients are women with nutritional deficiencies, anaemia and gynaecological disorders," says Dr Joshi as she settles into another busy day.

Her first patient is Bajiru from Koda village. Bajiru trudged for one hour to reach the health centre. She complains of cold, fever and weakness caused by anaemia. After examining her carefully, Dr Joshi prescribes some allopathic and Ayurvedic medicines. The doctor's next patient is also from Thalli village. He is a member of an 'eco-battalion' which plants trees and he complains about his knee. Dr Joshi prescribes Ayurvedic treatment. Throughout the day there is a steady stream of patients.

But what makes this health centre unique is that it is the first one to be set up by an NGO in partner-



**A small patient being examined at the health centre run by VHAI and the government**

ship with the state government.

"Our centre is a government sponsored outfit. Most government facilities will be made available here. It is a sort of recognition by the state. The centre is to have a tuberculosis Directly Observed Therapy (DOT) service, an HIV/AIDS counselling service, immunisation services and a school health programme. Our centre will also be an adolescent counselling hub for Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) and family planning services," says Narender Sharma, executive director of the Himachal chapter of the Delhi based Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI).

The Thalli health centre, which is supported by the Mumbai-based Nidhee Trust, covers eight panchayats of Sunni block in Shimla district. Before it was established on 12 June, 2009, people from Thalli had to traverse a distance of 60 to 70 km to reach the nearest health centre at Karsog.

The VHAI centre now provides free treatment, mostly using Ayurveda. It is equipped with an OPD and laboratory facilities for routine tests.

The centre's strong point is its outreach programme. A team of five medical personnel treks

to villages to raise awareness about health, environment and hygiene. Four school camps have been held in the past one year.

The outreach programme is now keen to expand and go to anganwadi centres. Top of the mind is tackling anaemia and preparing health cards for children. "The prevention mode is very important. If we educate children on health issues, they will go back to their families and carry the message of disease prevention," says Sharma. Now the plan is to hold two health camps in a month.

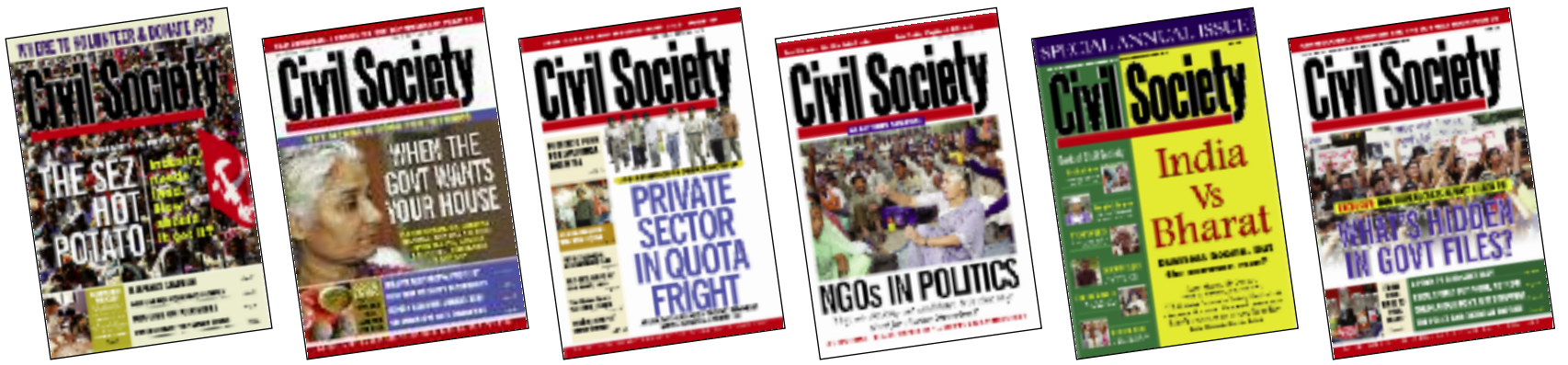
The Thalli health centre has a good record on immunisation. But ante natal and post natal services will need to improve to deal with infant and maternal mortality and encourage institutional deliveries. Also on the cards is a trauma centre, ultrasound and X-ray facilities.

On the whole there is much for the Thalli health centre team to be upbeat about. "The ultimate objective was to create a health model in Himachal and then convince the government to go in for a public-private partnership in the health sector. We have achieved that," says Sharma.

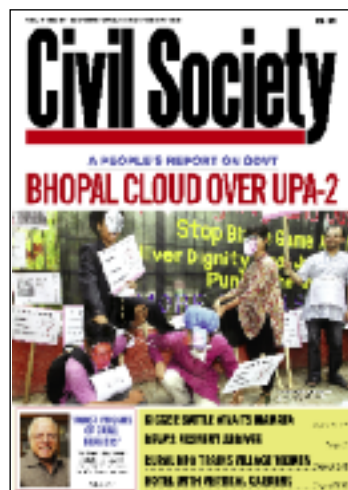
## SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR





# POLITICS IS NOT JUST ABOUT POLITICIANS



UNDERSTAND DEVELOPMENT  
UNDERSTAND POLITICS

## **Civil Society**

RIGHT PLACE FOR POLITICS

# VOICES FROM ACROSS INDIA AS PEOPLE REPORT ON GOVT

# BHOPAL CLOUD OVER UPA-2

*Aam aadmi agenda has many miles to go*

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

THE second United Progressive Alliance (UPA-2) government completed a year in office in May with a ceremonial 'Report to the People' only to find itself under the cloud of the Bhopal disaster. How could a government so committed to working for the *aam aadmi* or common man have forgotten the victims of the world's worst chemical accident?

Now a Group of Ministers (GoM) has made certain face-saving proposals, but it remains to be seen how they are implemented. Bhopal carries a huge burden of pollution. After a full five years in office and now a year into its second term the UPA has acted belatedly to find a solution. Toxic wastes continue to lie at the Union Carbide plant site and have widely contaminated the groundwater. Compensation, paltry as it is, has not been disbursed and tens of thousands of people live in a twilight zone of apathy and neglect.

Bhopal's survivors, their bodies brittle with chemical poisoning, have often trekked to Delhi to ask for simple things like clean drinking water. Promises made to them were never implemented.

Instead, leading lights of the UPA courted Dow Chemicals, the new owners of Union Carbide, and tried to find ways of bringing the company into India without the liability for the accident. A very visible spokesman of the Congress, Abhishek Singhvi, is retained as a lawyer by Dow. And Jairam Ramesh, Environment Minister, thought nothing of visiting the plant site, picking up a clump of soil and saying that he was not experiencing any contamination.

Bhopal as an issue may in fact have remained forgotten if it weren't for a lower court order which gave industrialist Keshub Mahindra and a couple of others a mere two years in prison for the accident. It suddenly shocked the public conscience that the management of a company could get away so lightly.

The Bhopal case also raises a larger question. Is the UPA so soft on companies that it will do nothing to rein in polluters and make them accountable for fear of slowing down investments? People we spoke to across the country seemed to think that in the past five years industrial pollution has been growing and making a mess of the lives of ordinary citizens.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), a toothless and inefficient body, has bestirred itself and listed 82 locations where industrial pollution



**BHOPAL:** The lower court's verdict shocked the nation



The UPA-2 government's Report to the People on the first year of its second term being released



MNREGA: Awareness of employment guarantee has been spreading

should be of serious concern.

However, managements responsible for causing pollution at those locations have not been charged let alone punished.

There is concern that as the UPA seeks to deliver eight and nine per cent growth through private investment, it will throw India open to companies that cause pollution and degrade natural resources. It could be manufacture of chemicals, or ship-breaking or companies like Coke and Pepsi sucking out groundwater.

A yet bigger worry is that the UPA leadership appears to be out of date. It does not seem to have the vision to promote technologies and choose paths of growth that preserve ecological balance. Voices emanating from government articulate an old-fashioned notion of development in which growth simply has to bring pollution.

Perhaps this is the mindset which makes the UPA weak in the knees when talking business with bigger economies. Witness the poorly constructed dia-

logues with the American corporate sector. India could ask for and get much more. But the UPA leadership does not seem to know how to position itself globally in contemporary terms.

Perhaps we have moved up a bit from letting a Warren Anderson go scot free despite charges against him. But there remains the inability to strike better equations based on concerns for ecology and environment and the rights of the average Indian.

When it comes to industry, the UPA's priority seems to be growth at any cost. Often the cost is greater than the gain to the nation. Pollution hurts ordinary people the most, bringing with it displacement, disease and loss of livelihoods. There is the danger that growth figures will not reflect this decline in quality of life.

**SPLIT PERSONALITY:** But the UPA seems to have two personalities. The same government which can't seem to see the *aam aadmi* in Bhopal, has no difficulty locating the *aam aadmi* elsewhere.

The National Advisory Council (NAC) under Sonia Gandhi has as its members activists who are known to be close to the ground. In its first term NAC was successful in pushing policies and laws which have the potential to improve governance and deliver justice. The NAC has now been reconstituted with as many knowledgeable and sensitive people as the first time around.

It was through the first NAC that the UPA introduced laws like the right to information (RTI), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (MNREGA), Scheduled Tribes and Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act. From the new NAC we can expect a fresh draft of a bill on food security and another to curb communal violence.

Without the new NAC in place, the UPA did not lose sight of its social promises. It succeeded in passing the Right to Education Act and pushed through the Women's Reservation Bill in the Rajya Sabha.

How exactly have the UPA government's flagship schemes been doing? The results appear to be mixed. In most cases a beginning has been made but implementation lags behind. There are miles to go to keep these promises. India's human development indicators continue to be embarrassing.



**RURAL HEALTH:** According to assessments, the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has created a cadre of 700,000 village level health workers called Ashas (Accredited Social Health Activist) who spread awareness of ante-natal care, institutional deliveries, post-natal care, immunisation and nutrition in villages. As a result the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), a government scheme which gives women an incentive if they opt for hospital deliveries, has takers. After a long time, there is demand for public health services.

panchayat elections round the corner, the government lost its nerve. To prevent corruption in MNREGA, the social audit has to be strengthened.

What emerges from reports is that MNREGA is gradually being streamlined. Women are coming to work sites, there is an increase in wages and the introduction of business correspondents is proving that payments can be made easier.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



**EDUCATION:** The Human Resources Development ministry has been moribund for decades. Under Kapil Sibal, we finally see a Right to Education law. The abolition of Class 10 exams and the introduction of grades have been welcomed. Opening opportunities for higher education has also been welcomed.

But spreading education to Muslims, tribals and forest-dwellers remains an unfinished task. And improving the quality of education across the board is one of the most critical challenges facing his ministry.

**FOREST RIGHTS:** There is a consensus emerging that development and dialogue are the only answer to Maoism and that tribals need to be weaned away. Yet at state level, there is no political will to implement the forest rights law. Even if small plots of land are handed over, community forest rights are not.

This is because forest produce is a revenue-earner for cash-strapped states and forests are seen as sites for industrial development and mining. Maoism is endemic in states like Orissa, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand because of mining polices and under development.

The Centre clearly has a lot to do for building consensus and using incentives to get states to fall in line.

**There is a consensus emerging that development and dialogue are the only answer to Maoism and that tribals need to be weaned away. Yet at state level, there is no political will to implement the forest rights law.**

But the government is unable to deliver those services. Rural health infrastructure is in a shambles and there aren't enough doctors, nurses or medicines. Not just district hospitals, but an integrated chain of rural health facilities needs to be built from scratch. Money is available but there is no clarity on spending it, no model health facility which can be replicated. If these issues are not addressed, the gains made will be frittered away. There is also a long standing demand for an urban health mission.

**EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE:** Awareness of MNREGA has spread across the country. The social audit, invented by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, (MKSS) in Rajasthan, has emerged as the key tool in fighting corruption in the scheme, creating awareness, improving work efficiency and ensuring village infrastructure is built.

The late YSR Reddy, chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, took the social audit further, getting the MKSS to train a cadre of people, including the bureaucracy, to do large-scale social auditing. The social audit was institutionalized with the setting up of a Directorate of Social Audits.

But even Rajasthan, which was a frontrunner in implementation of MNREGA because of the MKSS, could not imitate this model. In November 2009, CP Joshi, Union Minister for Rural Development made an attempt to recreate the Andhra model in his own constituency, Bhilwara, with the MKSS. Corruption was uncovered and best practices, like making all information available on a board, began to spread. But sarpanches and petty officials ganged up and with

**ENVIRONMENT:** Union environment minister Jairam Ramesh covered himself in ignominy by going to Bhopal, picking up a clump of mud and declaring he's alive. But the ban on Bt Brinjal has been hailed. The moratorium on mining in Goa, increased interest in protection of the Western Ghats and Green Tribunals are welcome steps.

On the other hand, what is worrying environmentalists are fraudulent public hearings, industrial pollution and over extraction of natural resources. Public hearings are being conducted hurriedly, surreptitiously, far away from the project site, so that people affected cannot attend. The environment assessment report is not made public or done shoddily. The Union environment ministry needs to step in.

**RTI:** The right to information (RTI) is indeed a sterling law. Since it came into being activists and the middle class have used it effectively to expose corruption in government. It now needs to be taken to panchayats so that farmers, tribals, agricultural workers can get access to information. This can be done by putting all information online and through community radio. Activists have been saying that RTI needs to provide speedy redressal of cases. They have been demanding information commissioners who are honest and hard working.

We asked a range of people to provide a snapshot of how they felt about the UPA's performance in the first year of its second. Beginning on the next page are some interesting responses.

# Civil Society spoke to a cross-section of people on UPA-2

## Minorities are disappointed

**Zakia Soman**, Founder member, Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan



We heaved a sigh of relief when the UPA came to power at the Centre in 2003. We had seen the horrendous face of Hindutva in Gujarat in 2002. But the UPA has disappointed us on many counts. The plight of the survivors in Gujarat remains unchanged; they live without basic civic amenities in make-shift colonies built by religious

organizations. There is no compensation for the losses suffered and what happened to legal justice is a mockery. There has been no rehabilitation efforts by the Centre even as the state government refuses to acknowledge their existence.

The Sachar report established that Muslims face tremendous socio-economic and political exclusion and poverty even as they live with a sense of fear and insecurity in ghettos across the country. Unfortunately, not much has been done to implement the recommendations of the report. It almost appears to be a design to announce a Committee and then just sit over its report. It appears convenient for the Congress and so-called leaders to keep the community backward.

Reports from various states suggest that in spite of Constitutional safeguards and the proclaimed secularism of the UPA there exists a lot of discrimination on the ground.

Based on the promises made in the Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme, the women activists of Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan framed a set of 20 questions which were posed to various district and state officials in different states including Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, UP, Bihar, MP etc. The questions ask for information on access to various Government of India schemes. The experience suggests that the PM's New 15-Point Programme has remained on paper.

There is very little or no awareness of the 15 Point Programme in the community, the NGO sector and the officials who are supposed to implement them. There is no teeth given to the measures proposed therein and it is not binding on the states.

Our women activists were repeatedly told '*humey koi information nahin hai*' (we do not have any orders) when they inquired about how many people were helped under various schemes. Some good officers amongst the bureaucracy even said that they would be ready to help if there was any instruction in writing to them. Failing this they cannot help any particular section such as minorities. Some were even annoyed and said, why should there be special schemes for you Muslims?

The UPA calls itself secular but there is a lack of political will to make a difference to the lives of minorities.



Women at a MNREGA site.

## Market forces dominate policy

**Nikhil Dey**, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)



Large numbers of the poor and disadvantaged rejected the India Shining campaign of the BJP and provided a mandate for equity, development and democracy in 2004. This mandate was the spirit behind the National Common Minimum Programme (CMP) and path-breaking legislation on right to information and employment guarantee.

The 2009 verdict should have made that mandate stronger and more decisive. Unfortunately, in the first year of UPA-II its focus has been on rising growth rates and Sensex figures as the main indicators of progress. As a result, we have seen a year of market forces dominating policy, and a weakening of equity and social sector issues.

The CMP was a clear benchmark of priority and evaluation in UPA I. It is missing now. As a result, it is not clear how one can hold the government accountable, and to what. New legislative initiatives have not got off the ground. A weak draft Food Security Bill is being discussed by the Group of Ministers, and if passed in its present form will institutionalize food insecurity.

The flagship programmes of UPA-I have amply demonstrated their value. Instead of pushing their implementation, the government seems to be anxious about the reactions of vested interest. It is diffident in implementation. This is true of the Right to Information, (RTI) law the Forest Rights law and the renamed, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA). Renaming the Act does not add up to better implementation.

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has suffered from a lack of resources and the unwillingness to hold government accountable for basic provisions. The Right to Education is now an Act, but suffers from similar weaknesses. Commitment has to be displayed through enthusiastic political initiative.

The Prime Minister wants new laws, but wants policy-makers to watch growth rates and financial prudence. What you watch is what you get.

Claims of "inclusive growth" are being violently challenged and exposed in some of the most mineral-rich parts of India, where our poorest people live. The government seems to prefer guns and bullets to development and democracy, to decide our collective future. The last year has shown an absence of perspective and humanity in its response to a crisis of violence in the heart of India. This political myopia needs to change.

The next four years require a clear acceptance of the priorities of 60 per cent of our population, a change of heart and a genuine commitment to the politics of the *aam aadmi* and *aurat* – not just for dealing with the problems of the tribal belt, but for India as a whole.

## Improve govt schools

**Dileep Ranjekar**, CEO, Azim Premjee Foundation, Bangalore



At the outset, it is unfair to evaluate the UPA government's performance in just 12 months in a sector like education.

UPA-2 scored high in the very act of appointing Kapil Sibal as education minister – who is action-oriented and wants to do something. A flurry of decisions were made and several pending actions were cleared. In a way it was not too difficult to 'stand out' against the background of almost 10 years of inaction and regression. There is new life in the education sector because of a moving scoreboard. A few

notable decisions such as – scrapping of the AICTE, introducing RTE and RMSA, initiating examination reforms in the CBSE – have far reaching implications.

I think the government must continue its tempo and establish its long-term credibility by reforming, first, the examination system, secondly, teacher education and thirdly, by introducing Indian Education Services. The goals of the National Policy for Education ought to be achieved. Corruption at all levels must be eradicated and leakages of huge funds in education must be plugged.

The two areas in which the Government must do better are – participative decision-making and attention to learning accountability across education levels. Both are currently very low on the agenda.

Similarly, while promoting PPP the Government must retain the final accountability for quality of education with itself and choose only such partners that are competent and genuinely interested in quality universal education.

Finally, I must stress that achieving 'Equitable Education' is the Government's constitutional responsibility and the quality of education in government schools should be such that Ministers, MPs and the upper middle-class do not hesitate in sending their children to government schools. The situation of 80 per cent of children studying in schools that have low-quality infrastructure, teaching-learning processes and inadequate number of teachers – cannot make India a developed nation ever!

## What happened to the 100-day agenda?

**Ravi Chopra**, Director, People's Science Institute



The UPA-2 started its term with a flurry of announcements of 100-day agendas by several ministers. Four hundred days later, hardly anyone remembers those agendas and fewer care. This is symptomatic of its first year.

There are a few positives – sending back the Bt Brinjal issue to the research desk, pushing the Women's

Reservation Bill through the Rajya Sabha and the resurrection of the National Advisory Council – though strictly this cannot be credited to the government. Several important initiatives like the passage of the Food Security Bill, strengthening the implementation of rural employment guarantee and the Forest Rights Act, assuring natural flows in the upper reaches of the river Ganga and the rejuvenation of CAPART are languishing, stymied by an obdurate bureaucracy, vested interests and lack of adequate political will.

The *aam aadmi* sheen has worn off. The tremendous rise in food prices has hurt the poor the most. The self-employed poor in New Delhi are being sacrificed at the altar of the Commonwealth Games. Money is being thrown into anti-poverty yojanas but there is no oversight to see that schemes are properly implemented or in whose pockets the crores end up in.

The Prime Minister often stresses the need to focus on good governance. But his government is bent on diluting the RTI Act. Scams abound. More and more mineral rich districts are witnessing an undeclared state of emergency as the government tries to protect corporate interests. The disgraceful Bhopal Gas Tragedy verdict is a grim reminder of which side the establishment is on.

In such trying times, civil society needs to be far more vigilant, active and persistent in protecting the rights, entitlements and freedoms of the poor and marginalized.



NARAYAN

Right to food campaigners demand a law on food security

## GDP is not everything

**Goutam Ghose**, Filmmaker, Kolkata



The UPA government is trying its best on many fronts, but the basic problems confronting the nation still persist. GDP growth alone cannot be used as a barometer to measure the progress of a country. It might create new billionaires and millionaires, but it definitely does not solve the real issues.

You have to take everybody along if you want the country to really grow. I don't think the UPA government is doing enough in that respect. What has made matters worse is the political bankruptcy of the Left. They are with the people in one place and against the people in another. That is unacceptable and is true of most political outfits in this country.

Maoism is an issue and the government has to accept the reality and intensity of the disgruntlement. We have to understand the conditions in which tribals live. It is terrible. This situation has been created by the scramble for mineral resources. We now live in a free economy, but that does not mean the government should abdicate all control over the resources of the land. If a red corridor has sprung up it is because of the continuing legacy of underdevelopment in these areas.

## Cities are guzzling far too much

Chandrasekhar Hariharan, CEO, BCIL



Just the last three quarters have seen investments into India nearing \$ 20 billion, against China's \$ 7 billion for the same period. Clearly the world is saying that India is an oasis of stability in political and economic terms. And it is even more startling to realise that this wealth is created by 94 per cent of a population that is illiterate. The rest five to seven per cent of us only 'manage the wealth'.

Such growth has brought with it savage abuse of natural resources. Our mineral wealth is quietly being mortgaged, putting at risk those living in the vulnerable hills of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Our rivers in the sub-Himalayas are being strangled out of existence.

Our lands continue to be poisoned with synthetic fertilizers in our bid to

coax more out of saline topsoil. Our cities at no more than five per cent of the nation's landmass are consuming everything that the rest of our ecosystems produce.

How can we increase opportunity in the hinterland? How can we have our villagers see that their life is superior to the frenzied lifestyles of urban Indians? This has to start at school. We need our 400 million children to be growing up with a deep sense of respect for their culture. If the UPA Government can promote MNREGA and IRDP in a way that people's dignity is respected, and programmes offer sustainable livelihoods, that will be a lasting contribution that the government will make. That will serve their political aims and India's silent cry for equitable growth.

The government must take seriously the environment writing on the wall. Our cities should use 50 per cent less energy, 70 per cent less water. Cities should treat waste in a way that city infrastructure demands are reduced by 70 per cent. The UPA must combine to bring a slew of encouraging incentives for all stakeholders in this business of infrastructure for energy, water and waste.

By such a gesture of a noticeable set of guidelines and measures for the green building industry, the government will have sent out a clear signal that India is earnest on climate change concerns and that as a growing superpower India will set the right example for the world.



Bhopal survivors protesting

## Where is the corporate accountability?

Ravi Agarwal, Director, Toxics Link



What we have been witnessing under the UPA is a steady decline in corporate accountability. The corporate sector and the government work closely together to the exclusion of others. There is therefore a clear conflict of interest which is unacceptable.

The UPA has allowed an atmosphere to build up in which there is a reaction against environmentalists. But every economy needs a wider dialogue in which a range of concerns get articulated. In India today the space for such interaction has narrowed. The result is that industry virtually does as it pleases and is often not in tune with the larger social goals of the country.

The Central Pollution Control Board has listed more than 80 sites which have dangerous levels of pollution. At none of these places have the companies causing the pollution been asked to pay for the damage they have caused.

So, it is not about toxicity, but accountability. It is about the vision for the country. How contemporary are we really? Lead-free paints have just begun to be used here when they have been in use in developed countries for a long time. Or take the case of endosulfan which is banned elsewhere but is still used here.

## Higher priority to farming

Dr U Jaikumar, Scientist, Kerala Agriculture University



The decision of the UPA to earmark 30 per cent of budgetary outlay for social sector development has been appreciated. The employment guarantee scheme is noteworthy. Agricultural production, especially of wheat, has increased despite drought. Farmers got substantial relief through debt write-off and settling agricultural

credit lesser by two per cent interest.

Implementation of programmes in the agricultural sector has to be accelerated by doing away with bureaucratic hurdles. Decision-making and execution should be decentralized to the beneficiary level.

To achieve a growth rate of 10 per cent, agriculture should be given the highest priority. My suggestions are:

- Good support price to cover production cost plus decent wages to agricultural workers. An 'Agricultural Commodity Price Security Fund' can be mooted by levying statutory contribution from industries and allied sectors.
- A comprehensive 'Agricultural Human Resource Development Programme' (AHRDP) is needed. Younger generations have to be trained to take up agriculture as a profession. They have to be groomed as 'Agricultural Operation Service Providers'. To train them, colleges should be opened in line with IIT, medical colleges etc. The self-respect of farming should be elevated. The 'Food Security Army' experiment by KAU is a landmark in this regard. Absence of a strategic 'AHRDP' towards food security is a major handicap in agricultural growth.
- Market intelligence and an internal in situ market linked production and processing scheme are needed to provide safe food to the public. It is a big shame that we are losing agricultural commodities worth Rs 70,000 crores per annum due to poor storage, handling and processing.

## Farmers in a bad way

**Anand Narayan**, engineer turned farmer in Dakshina Kannada



In picking competent people for some ministries, the UPA government seems to have done well. It is mostly untainted in terms of massive scandals.

But agriculture continues to be bleak and farmers are unable to make ends meet. Cost of inputs, both infrastructure costs and consumables are going up. There is no noticeable increase in the prices of farm produce. Farming mostly remains the occupation of people who don't have any other choice.

The gap between agricultural scientists and farmers is very large. Both communities reside in different worlds. The Union government appears keen to address food security. But leaks and gaps in the system nullify its efforts.

More importance should be given to local food security by making small geographical regions as food independent as possible. Even an agricultural and water-rich region like Dakshina Kannada district is importing most of its food grains and vegetables. With oil prices rising regularly, such situations can cause instabilities in future.

Impediments in the path of sustainable farming need to be removed. For example, in my own agricultural taluk of Belthangady, it is very hard to locate quality seeds and organic fertilizers.

We need imaginative blending of modern scientific interventions with robust traditional methods. Both knowledge and farm inputs have to be made available to farmers at their doorstep.

A small wish list:

- We would like to have a taluk level Agricultural Resource Centre (ARC) funded by the Union government. It should run in a cooperative manner – not by the government – and it should provide quality information and other inputs
- An action plan to make talukas or at least districts, food self-sufficient units.
- We would like the PDS to be restructured or the system of cheap food grains done away with. The PDS has in reality proved to be a disincentive to grow food.



The Bhilwara social audit: Voluntary labour at a MNREGA site

## Let's have stringent CSR guidelines

**Amita Joseph**, Director, Business & Community Foundation



North India alone recorded more than 600 deaths in winter. Should these be treated at par with starvation deaths? About one per cent of the urban, homeless population are disenfranchised.

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs issued 'voluntary guidelines' to the corporate sector in December 2009, on human rights, labour standards, environmental norms. Companies draw heavily upon natural resources – water, for instance. Companies must be water positive where they operate. CSR guidelines must become regulation with stringent monitoring especially of multinational and transnational corporations whose Corporate Social

Responsibility must extend to the way they do business. They should be discouraged from using a weak regulatory environment as an excuse to do nothing.

## Don't ignore farmer-friendly crops

**Dr L Narayana Reddy**, organic farmer



Employment guarantee has become a 'school of laziness' for the coming generation. There is no productivity in this programme. Ironically, it has become detrimental to agriculture. Rejuvenating tanks and water bodies is good work. But who ensures that real work is done?

Let the government make it mandatory for people to work in farmers' fields. The farmer is willing to pay wages. For those who have worked for 200 days, let the government give Rs 10,000 as bonus.

According to me, there is no shortage of food in this country. With just two light showers, it is possible to cultivate millets. Why have we sidelined it by providing rice for Rs 2 or Rs 3 through PDS? Why it isn't possible for us to develop a suitable milling machine for millets?

For us, potato seems to be the only tuber. Sweet potato doesn't require much care. We are ignoring farmer-friendly, easier crops. The government seems to be taking an interest in crops that only benefit corporations and multinationals.

Several crores are written off as debt relief. How much benefit has really gone to the deserving? In my 74 years experience, I have never borrowed money or have paid interest. The government should teach people to live with self-respect.

A step like debt relief only encourages laziness.

Crop insurance brings shamefully low relief like Rs 10 to Rs 25 an acre. The loop-holes of this scheme have to be plugged and villages have to be made units for crop insurance.

# Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

## Reva's big moment arrives

*Chetan Maini ties up with Mahindra to fulfil an EV dream*

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

WHEN is the right time for a start-up to scale up? When should an entrepreneur move out of the garage? The story of Chetan Maini and the iconic Reva, the world's most successful electric car, has answers to questions like these. He recently gave Mahindra & Mahindra a controlling stake in his company to discover a new bandwidth for his

passion for clean and green mobility.

Reva as an idea took germ some 15 years ago. Over time it got built as India's only wholly original car with technologies that made pollution-free personal transportation in cities a reality.

It came to be known as a car full of attitude and oomph. If you took a Reva out on the street, people would stop to ask about it. You could own a Mercedes, but if you wanted to show that your heart was in the right place you needed a Reva too.

It was a small car which didn't dent, had zero emissions and required little or no servicing. It was also cheap to drive at 50 paise a kilometre.

For all this, the numbers sold were small. National policies didn't favour electric vehicles. There were no tax incentives. Infrastructure which would provide charging ports and so on was lacking.

People often dismissed the Reva saying that it

*Continued on page 25*



Chetan Maini shakes hands with Pawan Goenka of Mahindra & Mahindra

# Rural BPO trains village women

*HarVa aspires to create profits and social impact*

LAKSHMAN ANAND

**Shreyasi Singh**  
Gurgaon

**R**IGHT off the busy Gurgaon-Sohna road, with its corporate offices, apartment blocks and unending malls, is the agrarian village of Teekli. You pass small shops and clogged, narrow roads and suddenly the landscape changes. Verdant farms and open skies replace urban dust and chaos.

Surprises don't end there. Right in the middle of one such farm is a small house. Inside, there are over 20 village women, most with heads firmly covered, furiously working away at their computers, oblivious to the summer heat and a noisy generator. They are employees of a rural BPO run by HarVa, a start-up founded in July 2009 to harness the value of rural India. The women are busy fixing classified advertisements in English and mining data for the government of Haryana's Animal Husbandry Department, an important client for this BPO, wholly staffed with women.

"This isn't about women's empowerment. I don't believe women need to be empowered. In any case, how am I qualified to do that? This is about creating true value for everybody," stresses Ajay Chaturvedi, who quit his well-paid, high-flying strategy job with Citi Bank to set up HarVa, a "for profit rural enterprise" that delivers what he calls "double bottom lines" – financial returns and social impact.

HarVa has a simple model – to focus on the intellectual and infrastructure capital available in India's rural areas to develop profitable businesses and help rural communities gain employment and skills. "The purely capitalist model has failed. It negates the human factor completely. And, NGOs can't create real value. Development can't be charity. HarVa is essentially a socio-capitalist model," says Chaturvedi who, with his BITS Pilani engineering degree and an MBA from Wharton Business School, USA, looks like an unlikely rural warrior.

In his beige trousers, green tee shirt and sun glasses, 36-year-old Chaturvedi does seem a little out of place among his all-women team dressed in colourful sarees and salwar kameezes. But his ambitions are clearly in sync. "During my four years with Citi from 2004 onwards, I travelled extensively across India. I was coming back to India after around 10 years. And, it became clearly apparent to me that the potential in rural India was underdeveloped."

HarVa has identified four main areas ripe for socio-capitalism: community farming, waste management, microfinance and rural BPOs. He intends to focus on Haryana, Bihar and



**Ajay Chaturvedi at the HarVa BPO**

Uttarakhand. But, for now, it's the rural BPO in Teekli that is HarVa's primary concern. "If we perfect the model here, we can easily replicate it elsewhere. We don't see scalability as a big problem," says Chaturvedi confidently.

HarVa currently employs 25 women, each of whom earns between Rs 2,500 to Rs 4,000 per month. They are involved in data entry, data extraction and copy paste services for HarVa's four clients which include a management consult-

ing firm, a recruiting company and a brokerage outfit.

HarVa trained 200 women in Teekli for free, putting them through an exhaustive three-month English and computer skills learning programme. Its cadre of 25 employees has been selected from this pool.

None of this was easy, of course. It was tough convincing villagers to allow their women to step out of their homes and come to work. HarVa

began by making announcements in September 2009, asking women who had studied till at least Class 8 to come forward. Chaturvedi also went door to door to speak to women.

HarVa's women feel they have been blessed with an unexpected opportunity. There is a steely resolve to hold on to their newly acquired status. "Education is such a gift. I never thought I would get an opportunity to study again. I had never even seen a computer. My husband is so happy I am doing this. There is so much excitement about being a part of this. I make sure I am here at sharp 9 am every morning," says 28-year-old Anita Yadav, a mother of two. Chaturvedi calls her 'gifted' telling us how she mastered the keyboard in three hours flat!

"I am so proud that I supplement my household income now. I can buy what the children want. I can buy some clothes for myself," says Suman Devi, who takes home about Rs 2,500 every month, reinforcing the wages of her husband who works as a driver. "I want to teach my husband computers too. We don't have one at home, but I know I can teach him what I have learned here," she claims proudly.

"It would never have been possible for me to work outside the village. My family wouldn't have allowed it. But they are supportive now because the BPO is close to home. I want to continue working here. I have no dreams to work in the big offices of Gurgaon. Those are not for us," says Archana, who has studied till Class 12 and had even trained to be a Hindi teacher before she got married. With two children born one after another, till HarVa, she had little opportunity to look for a job. It isn't just the money, she adds, but the joy of contributing and learning new things that keeps her motivated.

This goodwill hasn't yet converted into profits but Chaturvedi is unfazed. Since HarVa started, Chaturvedi has seeded the company with nearly Rs 70 lakhs, raising funds from interested companies, ex-colleagues and pitching in personal savings built while working for corporate giants like IBM and Compaq in the USA.

"Rural BPOs are bound to work. The biggest problem facing our BPO industry today is rising cost and attrition. New destinations like the Philippines and China are threatening to take over. We need to wrest back the advantage that helped India corner the lion's share. Migrating operations to lower cost destinations and tapping the vast pool of cheap rural workforce can address this," he explains.

To generate revenue from the BPO model, HarVa has defined a critical mass of 200 employees at the Teekli centre. They hope to have 50 women on board in the next two months and hit the 100 mark by the end of the year. The company is also determined to take the model to Bihar and Uttarakhand.

Persuasive and determined, Chaturvedi thinks positively. "We have cracked the code. You don't need a graduate to do a BPO job, like you don't need a mechanical engineer to fix a car, you need a mechanic." It's a discovery he knows will yield a bumper harvest for both HarVa and the villages it works in.

**Continued from page 23**

didn't have scale. Chetan himself struggled to win policy concessions and sell the Reva in larger numbers. But the real work that was being done was in developing technologies and honing them in different markets.

The Reva was well received in Europe. And so across geographies and climatic conditions, the Reva Electric Car Company was getting feedback that was invaluable for defining consumer preferences and developing technologies.

Could all this have happened faster if the Reva had a bigger partner right in the beginning? Chetan doesn't think so. According to him it is important to be small to stay focussed and work closely with consumers on product development.

"Three years earlier would have been too early and three years later would have been too late," Chetan says about the tie-up with the Mahindras. Extracts from an interview:

**Why didn't you do such a tie-up as the one you have now done with Mahindra and Mahindra earlier?**

In the past one year or so, I saw the entire opportunity for electric vehicles changing. I started seeing an interest level that I hadn't seen for 20 years.

There was a significant shift in policy with a huge amount of funds coming to be allocated for electric vehicles. President Barack Obama said he would like to see one million electric vehicles by 2015. At the Frankfurt Motor Show, 42 electric cars were on display. There has also been a lot of interest on websites, consumers wanting to buy and so on.

There was also a change in the way business viewed the opportunity in electric vehicles. Investments were being made in infrastructure whereas before no one was talking of infrastructure.

Unique partnerships were being forged with suppliers like Samsung and Bosch coming together. Peugeot and Mitsubishi were talking about electric cars.

The whole concept of co-creation and collaboration had begun to take on a meaning that we hadn't seen before.

It was clear to us that opportunities would be coming to us much faster in the next five years. And that we would need much more than just capital if we were to make use of the strengths and the global advantage we had acquired in the past 15 years.

We needed to see how we could establish a global presence very strongly with distribution and after sales networks.

On the other hand, internally we had to see how we could lower our costs and accelerate our product development processes.

My own vision has been to create clean and green mobility – to change society. With this partnership we hope to have a much larger impact on society

than we would probably have had just by ourselves.

**At which point does the innovator need to give up the garage?**

In the initial years if we had partners we probably would not have been able to move so quickly. It was very important for us to be dynamic and have a low-cost structure. We need to react quickly to the market.

It was too early to take a larger partner because the technology was premature. We needed to see how the product worked in the marketplace. The interest level from a larger partner might not have been as focussed.

I think there has to be the right timing. Internally what you have done and the eco system around you have to come together in some kind of harmony.

There is a time. Three years from today it would be too late. Three years ago I think the company may not have been as valuable and would still have

been going through growing pains.

**So scale is not always good for a valuable idea? It requires the right mothering, incubation...**

Very true. Several companies have had EV (electric vehicle) programmes. But if an EV programme is going to be 0001 per cent of your revenues it doesn't get the kind of importance it deserves.

So, at the early stage it is very important to have a different sort of organisation. Or if it is a large organisation, it requires an entrepreneurial area which can make it happen.

**You have some 3,000 cars on the road, but you are seen as such a valuable company?**

Well, it is 3,500 vehicles, but it is the largest fleet of electric vehicles in the world. It is 100 km of field experience which nobody in the world has. It is consumer insights which have enabled us to develop the second generation platform of technologies.

These consumer insights are very important because no matter how much your company does internally, it is only when you get consumer feedback that you begin to develop second generation technologies. We have been working very hard on creating a second generation of technologies based on consumer insights.

We value this a lot because it is going to take companies several years to get. And time is of essence.

**And that kind of intense interaction with the consumer can only happen when you are small?**

We had a strategy. We chose our markets. Each car has over three years of data stored in it. We have been very close to our customers not only to understand from them what they think about the car but also to know how the car performed.

Putting all this together would have been very difficult as a larger group. It has been a very focussed area for us. We drove this learning which I think was critical.

**'There has to be the right timing. Internally what you have done and the eco system around you have to come together in some kind of harmony'.**



# Insights

- **Opinion**
- **Analysis**
- **Research**
- **Ideas**
- **Angst**

## States can attract investment

V RAVICHANDAR

IN May 2010, Bangalore and subsequently the country was witness to a rare photo-op. The Chief Minister (CM) got himself photographed in a snappy suit outside the Vidhan Soudha. This was a photo shoot in the run up to the upcoming Global Investors Meet (GIM) in June. While the CM's handlers felt that a western suit would trump a safari suit in attracting global investors, ordinary citizens were understandably bemused by the hype around the event. The city has over three hours of power cuts per day but you had advertisements asking investors to come and enjoy the energy advantage! Clearly someone in the corridors of power had a sense of gallows humour.

Post GIM, there has been talk of over 350 agreements and over Rs 4 lakh crores of investment flowing in. One has a sense of déjà vu. Our past record with these events has been dismal. There are announcements running into thousands of crores that never see the light of day. One can recall two Memorandum of Understanding from the last decade – one was a project inappropriately called NICE and another was an Indo-French deal to do the Bangalore Master plan with GIS, et al. While the former is still a work in progress (it is supposed to be a road to Mysore) the latter is in cold storage given the land use patterns that were recommended.

There is a saying that Quality is not a coat that you can put on in the morning and expect to be branded a Quality conscious person. Similarly if Karnataka (or any other State) has to be an attractive investment destination, it needs to have a round the year appeal based on sound fundamentals – this implies that we get our act together on the governance mechanisms and the hard and soft infrastructure. Without that, one fears that the only appeal might be access to land banks and concessions offered by the State.

So how does one attempt building a credible value proposition for investors that helps create jobs and is credible? The government should focus on basic infrastructure across the State with a focus on high speed road and rail connectivity. They should offer an enabling policy environment to let regional development prosper and



inclusive growth to happen. Private enterprise will use the infrastructure and policies to find suitable places for business. This requires thinking holistically about regional development encompassing live and work clusters and not just industrial belts in isolation. Unless quality of life indicators get the same attention as industrial parks the overall development across the State will remain a pipe dream.

There could be some lessons in suitably adapting the World Development Report (WDR) of 2009 that talks about reshaping economic geography. The WDR mentions the transformations along the three dimensions of density (higher in cities), distance (shorter with migration), and division (global trade) are essential for development and should be encouraged. It advocates promoting dense urban clusters and like any World Bank presentations packs fancy charts of a few centres in any State as mountains while the rest are flat areas.

We have a contrarian view. Mountains don't work in isolation and it is not desirable to just promote a few 'mountains' of development. They affect families and the virtuous social security system, breed crime, destroy social fabric, strain

infrastructure and harm the environment. There could be exceptions in some well run mega cities but they cannot be the norm across the State. The way out in the context of any State is to enable a set of 'hills' and a few 'mountains', a way suggested by a friend, Santosh, who manages software professionals when he is not cooking up out-of-box ideas that have merit.

First, let us look at a State like Tamil Nadu. It has some fairly intense economic activity in Chennai, Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Erode, Salem, Namakkal, Tiruchengode, Hosur, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Sivakasi, Mettur. It is apparent that private enterprise decides where the 'hills' come up and not the government (or the World Bank). Contrast Tiruppur against Trichy and Namakkal against Madurai to see the power of private enterprise in determining economic affluence.

Take a place like Namakkal. The government barely knew the place existed in 1960. Today it is a hub. Private enterprise started building a 'hill'. The government waits and then brings institutions to support these 'hills'. For example, the proposed Automotive Research Institute at Namakkal or the ongoing Textile Research Centre in Tiruppur. The government intervenes to regulate growth, plan the 'hill', and make it liveable.

Let us adapt this line of thought to Karnataka. Currently, we have one 'mountain' in Bangalore, an ugly 'mountain' in Bellary, a reasonable 'hill' in Mangalore, a sleepy 'mound' in Mysore, and ragged 'patches' in Gulbarga, Dharwad, Bidar etc. The challenge is to spread the prosperity around the State. This GIM seems to encourage two 'mountains' in Bellary and Bangalore. It needed and could have been more innovative to enable a series of 'hills' across the State.

Let's see how this can happen with an example. The Bidar, Dharwad region is a transit point in the cotton journey from Gujarat and Maharashtra to Coimbatore (where it gets ginned, spun and woven) and back. Margins are thin due to high transportation costs. So government can play a role by having policies and appropriate investments in making this area a textile SEZ. Bridge

*Continued on next page*

# Ganga in a fix

SURESH BABU

INDIA's iconic river, the Ganga, is back in the news. When the Ganga was declared a national river, much hype was created. But no concrete action has been taken since for its restoration.

According to media reports, the Union Government is now looking for aid worth Rs 15,000 crore from the World Bank for cleaning up the Ganga. The Department Related Standing Committee has directed the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to "go beyond the standard pipes and sewage treatment plants approach to ensure that the flow of the river Ganga is at pre-historic levels." Both developments indicate that things are at a standstill.

A study by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in 2007 showed that the Ganga contributed to 40 per cent of polluted river stretches in India. A ray of hope emerged in 2008 when the Union Government accepted that all was not well with the Ganga Action Plan (GAP).

On 4 November, 2008, while declaring the Ganga a national river, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said there was a need to replace current piecemeal efforts in select cities with an integrated approach that sees the river as an ecological entity and addresses quantity, in terms of water flows, along with quality.

Subsequently, the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) was set up in February 2009 as an empowered planning, financing, monitoring and coordinating authority to adopt a holistic approach. Mostly comprising Union Ministers, Chief Ministers of basin states, NGRBA also has five eminent experts and civil society representatives. The first meeting of the NGRBA, held in October 2009, resolved that by 2020 no untreated municipal sewage or industrial effluent would flow into the Ganga.

On 5 May, Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister for Environment and Forests, stated in the Rajya Sabha that an estimated Rs 15,000 crore would be required to clean the holy river in the next 10 years. He said the Union government is in talks with the World Bank for aid. A sewage treatment capacity of 3000 million litres per day (mld) is required, he said. Plans and schemes are being prepared. But nothing is available yet in the public domain.

But is investment alone the solution? Since the launch of GAP in 1985, about Rs 1,400 crore has been spent on interception and diversion of raw sewage from flowing into rivers, setting up of sewage treatment plants (STP), construction of low cost toilets, electric crematoriums etc. It was hoped that with these activities, the river would be cleansed.

Ironically GAP has been a bureaucratic programme dominated by hardware installations like pipes, pumps and STPs. While GAP is still chasing targets, the infrastructure created has failed to clean the Ganga. Despite creating an STP capacity of 1025 mld, over 45 per cent of sewage generated in the river basin still undergoes no treatment.

Let's take the case of STPs installed. Most of them are underutilized. The location of STPs depends on land availability and not on sewage availability and the connections are never completed. The operation and maintenance of STPs is lousy. They work only when electricity is available. Whatever sewage is treated or partially treated is mixed with untreated waste negating pollution control efforts. On the other hand, toilets constructed mostly remain unused for want of water and users.

The bitter truth is that there was an absolute disconnect between plans for water, sewage and pollution management. Pollution in the Ganga is predominantly due to sewage which is an end product of water used at household level. Even after 25 years of GAP, in cities and towns there is no sound data on water usage or sewage generated. Municipalities have some vague idea about 'official' water supply figures. But data on the large volumes of groundwater used remains a mystery to our planners. As a result all planning is based on bad data and the investments bring in no results.

What complicates matters further is that the river has been milked dry for electricity generation and water supply. Water use in cities and towns has increased exponentially over the years. A large chunk of water drawn from rivers is lost in leakage and pilferage. There is no restriction, no policy, on how much water can be extracted without affecting the riverine eco-system. As freshwater flows reduces, the assimilative capacity of the river decreases, and pollution loads increase.

model gets replicated elsewhere in the State based on competitive advantage that can be created and sustained.

Sounds utopian? Not really. But it has a few pre requisites to make it happen. For starters, the State has to be serious about spreading prosperity across the State and focus on making it happen in the more challenged regions. Secondly, an enabling government policy and infrastructure (hard and soft) environment with appropriate reg-

Maintaining ecological flows is very important.

Fundamentally, as a growing nation with severe resource constraints, demand management needs to be the norm. Reduce water demand to reduce sewage generation and therefore pollution. This is not simple. Such a strategy needs campaigns to change behaviour along with social and institutional processes and strategies to facilitate conservation. It requires an integrated approach to pollution management – linking water supply, sewage management and pollution. It also requires strong community involvement and a strict regulatory framework based on the polluter pays principle.

The government will, therefore, have to take a stand on the numerous hydel projects it has planned in the Northern Himalayas. It needs to draw up a progressive policy on environmental flows. There is nothing in the public domain indicating that the government is working towards this.

The failure of GAP shows that centralized, end of the pipe solutions are not good enough. Wherever feasible, we need to consider treatment of sewage as close to the source as possible. This needs research on available and affordable technologies and fiscal instruments like tax-rebates to encourage citizens to treat and reuse their sewage.

Another important aspect is that sewage discharge norms are ancient as they do not account for the changed hydrology of Indian rivers. For instance, treated sewage is supposed to have a biochemical oxygen demand of 30 mg/l. But this is based on the assumption that the river will have 10 times more flow as compared to sewage discharged so that it can dilute it by 10 times. But many stretches of the Ganga are starved of water.

What has been missed by NRBGA is the emphasis by the Prime Minister on the importance of involving citizens. The Prime Minister directed his officials to recognise the spirit of the Ganga Action Plan as conceived by Rajiv Gandhi of making cleaning of the Ganga River a people's movement.

Here is an opportunity for the NRBGA to bring back communities, get them involved in implementation and report back to the Prime Minister.

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## Continued from previous page

loans to big players, microfinance for smaller players can develop an eco system of logistics, transportation and ginning by the smaller players and spinning, weaving, looming and finishing by the bigger players. The 'hills' start getting formed in the interior region of the State. Employment is generated. The region gets activated with hotels, ancillaries and support infrastructure. Centres of excellence get promoted. Magic happens. The

ulation is imperative. Thirdly, horizontal integration across government departments like urban development, industry, agriculture, PWD is required. Lastly implementation excellence will determine whether the initiatives planned will succeed. If this is done, the much hyped PPP projects and investments can actually happen across the State.

*V. Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting hopes to go trekking across the 'hills' in the State*

# Myth of a public hearing

KANCHI KOHLI

SOME districts in Chhattisgarh have seen dramatic industrial transformation in just 15 years. Forests have turned into mines, agricultural fields into steel plants and national highways into private company roads. There is never a dull moment in Raigarh or Janjgir-Champa, if you are in tune with the times. Between road accidents, occupational deaths, protests, silent resistance...there is so much to keep pace with. Ironically, for the national news media, these districts don't exist.

In 2005, industrial expansion in the districts was making smooth headway. People were unaware that a procedure existed for seeking environmental clearance, prescribed by central legislation. Such procedures certainly applied to industries coming up in Raigarh. At a public hearing for the expansion of the Jindal Steel and Power Limited, some determined individuals and informal networks decided to begin working together.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the law and its machinery remain in favour of industry seeking approvals at the cost of proper assessments and due procedures. When irregularities are caught, ways are ingenuously found overnight to set things right. There are many examples I can cite but for the moment I will limit myself to one.

In July 2009, Ramesh Agrawal, a dedicated activist from a small group called Jan Chetana wrote to Jairam Ramesh, then newly appointed as Union Environment Minister, drawing his attention to a public hearing for a project which was wound up in just 20 minutes, leaving over 1000 protesters utterly surprised and shocked. (See *Civil Society* August 2009)

The hearing was part of procedural requirement for an environment clearance for a 1200 MW thermal power plant at village Badadarha, Tundri district in Janjgir-Champa, proposed by DB Power Ltd. The public hearing started on 30th June, 2009, at 12.00 pm in the Block Office at Dadhara. There was strong protest right from the very beginning as the site of the public hearing had been fixed more than 35 km from Badadarha village where the plant was to be set up.

The Jan Chetana letter to the Minister quoted paragraph 1.0 of Appendix IV of the EIA notification which clearly states that: "The Public Hearing shall be arranged in a systematic, time bound and transparent manner ensuring widest possible public participation at the project site(s) or in its close proximity district-wise..."

Experience from across the country shows this is one of the most disregarded clauses of the public hearing procedure. Conducting a public hearing 35 km from where the impact of the project will be felt was a deliberate attempt to exclude the voices

of locally affected people. It went against the very spirit of participatory decision making.

But just as protests for the postponement of the public hearing started, the Additional District Magistrate (ADM) and the presiding officer, SK Chand, announced conclusion of the public hearing proceedings. The grounds they gave were that no person was coming forward to speak specifically about the project.

The public hearing was declared completed. No attempt was made by the officers to ascertain why local people were protesting leave alone to address



Women at the so called public hearing

those concerns.

A day after the email was sent to the Minister, there was a response stating "many thanks. let me see what I can do and revert." And then there was silence, till the minutes of the 64th meeting of the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) on Thermal Power projects became available on the website of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) sometime in February this year. The EAC had considered the project for environment clearance on 30th January, for the first time.

Jan Chetana and all those people whose voices had been disregarded at the public hearing, were hopeful. Members of the EAC viewed the video recording of that meeting and concluded that they were not satisfied with the manner in which the proceedings had been concluded. The minutes recorded voiced apprehensions that there was lack of clarity on whether the views of the public were heard, whether the project authorities had responded to queries and whether all other necessary procedures had been followed. The EAC sought the views of the state government, a representative of the Chhattisgarh Environment Conservation Board (CECB) and the District Collector. They deferred the clearance till such discussions took place.

These individuals were called in for a meeting with the EAC in New Delhi. The EAC chose to put

its faith in what these three government officials said. In keeping with EAC tradition, none of the protesters or those who had petitioned the ministry was deemed worthy of stating their opinion in person to the EAC.

Thereby the 67th meeting of the EAC was held from March 19 to 20. Those who attended when the DB power project was being discussed were the ADM, presiding officer SK Chand, and a representative of CECB. In their written and oral submissions these officials declared the 20-minute public hearing as completed! Their take was that members of an organization called the Kishan Mazdoor Sangh disrupted the public hearing and the people present were not allowed to raise issues for discussion. Ramesh Agrawal and Rajesh Tripathy of Jan Chetana, who were present at the public hearing, say that this allegation is completely baseless.

The officials agreed that protestors were demanding a change of venue for the public hearing. Most of them were not residents of Badadarha, the place which is to be most impacted by the project. Ironically, what officials failed to see was that the people from Badadarha were not there in huge numbers primarily because the public hearing was held 35 km away.

The officials claimed that they repeatedly asked people to come to the dais and raise their concerns, but none did. According to the statement of the state government to the EAC, the officials stated that seven persons who did come up to the dais, did not raise any environmental issues. Instead they raised concerns about the venue for the public hearing, their unwillingness to sell land and a complete no to the company entering the area.

What the officials and the EAC failed to see was that the 1000 people present at the so called public hearing were objecting to the venue and were demanding that it be reorganised. They were vehemently against the project and the company. Their point of view was that until these issues remained unresolved, they would not take part in any other EIA related substantive or technical issues. This socio-political position was clearly not of significance to the presiding officials.

The EAC deferred its decision. The matter was listed again from 30th April to 1st May. At that meeting the EAC regarded the public hearing as complete. But the EAC has still not recommended the environment clearance and instead referred it to the MoEF officials suggesting that they take a legal opinion in this matter. Only then will the final appraisal will be done.

Which twist will this story take?

*The author is a member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi.*

# Living

- Books
- Eco-tourism
- Film
- Theatre
- Ayurveda

## Hotel goes vertical with gardens

**Susheela Nair**  
Bangalore

LOCATED in the heart of Bangalore, near Cubbon Park, the city's lung space, ITC Royal Gardenia is a juxtaposition of luxury and eco-friendliness. Designed by architect Rajinder Kumar, the hotel's architecture incorporates the unique charm and flavour of Bangalore, India's Garden City.

The interiors have been aesthetically crafted by Francesca Basu, a designer based in Britain. Nature is the underlying theme. Drawing inspiration from layers of life forms, Basu has dexterously woven the theme of nature through colours, motifs and textures into the interiors in each floor. She has chosen elements of nature ranging from stones to earth, trees, wood, water, fire, foliage, animal life, flowers, winged species, including birds and butterflies, sky and clouds.

As one enters the windswept lobby through the glass facade, the first thing that strikes one is the perceptible drop in temperature. The architecture tries to bring inside a bit of the outdoors, in keeping with the Garden City theme. The nature theme is discernible everywhere, from the high atrium lobby to the rooms and suites in each floor and the restaurants. The white sofas, couches and jharokha-style seating arrangements, done up in shades of green, lend charm to the Grand Arrival Court or the spacious lobby. The lush greenery is indeed a welcome relief to the frenzied activity outside the hotel.

The most amazing feature of the lobby, however, are four state-of-the-art vertical gardens, 10,600m tall steel structures each embedded with up to 1,500 plants. The vertical gardens are drip irrigated. These soaring columns of green stretch right up to the 12th floor. Around 1500 species of philodendrons grow in the vertical gardens and they are a visual delight. A soil-free gravity-defying method has been used to grow plants. The vertical gardens are supported by a vertical wall and divided into two layers. The water drips evenly and provides moisture to every plant along the entire length. It collects at the base and is recycled for use. Plants are graded according to the lighting

*Continued on next page*



Vertical garden in the Cubbon Pavilion coffee-shop

SUSHEELA NAIR



The lobby area

SUSHEELA NAIR

# Green fashion diva

**Sejal Mahendru**  
New Delhi

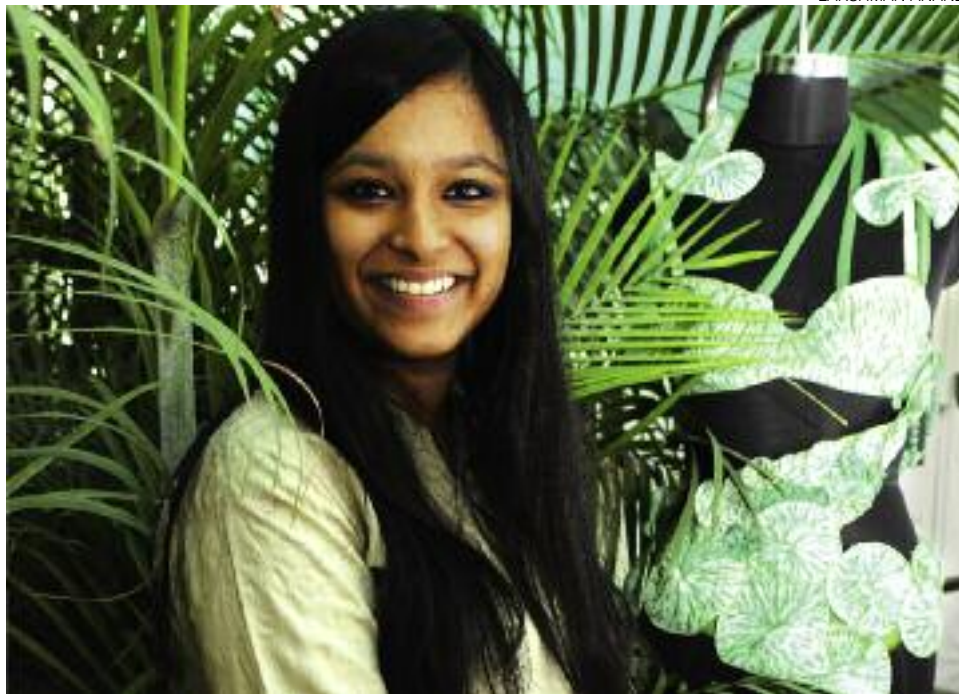
**F**ASHION designer Yadvi Aggarwal is just 20 and already a rising star in the fashion world. She catapulted to fame after winning international lingerie brand Triumph International's Inspiration Award beating off competition from students of the best design schools across the country. Yadvi will now represent India at the international finale to be held in London in September.

Yadvi, a third year student at the Pearl Academy of Fashion in New Delhi, says her designs are inspired by nature.

"Our lives revolve around this magnificent planet," she says. "My designs are inspired by Mother Earth and its magnificent forms. They are a parable, a story, about the need for sustainability."

Yadvi says she wants to draw attention to global warming and the depletion of natural resources.

Unlike other designers who use synthetic fabrics and chemical colours, Yadvi's clothes are



Yadvi Aggarwal with her green creation

made with hand-woven cotton fibres and vegetable dyes from herbs like turmeric.

"I am fascinated by how alive and beautiful nature is," says this designer with a green heart.

Yadvi's lingerie collection which won the Triumph award is called 'Back to Basics'. Made with organic, hand-woven fabrics in vibrant green shades, reflective of nature, the piece is innovative yet wearable. The garment has an earthy

LAKSHMAN ANAND

touch. It is a green, flowery two-piece which received a lot of appreciation.

An avid nature photographer, Yadvi says she gets her design ideas from the images and shapes she captures with her camera. It is these images which are translated into garments.

A talented and focused designer, Yadvi has always dreamed of making it big in the fashion world and winning the Triumph competition is indeed a feather in her cap. Her talent and dedication are reflected in her creation.

Yadvi earlier exhibited her collection of evening wear at the Dastkar Bazaar, a handicraft fair which is held annually in New Delhi. Her garments were made of Cambic, a natural, biodegradable cotton, dyed in natural colours derived from flowers.

Yadvi is keen to promote the use of eco-friendly materials in the fashion industry. She has been awarded a scholarship from Pearl Academy of Fashion for the past three years for academic excellence. We hope this fashionista with a cause goes a long way.

## Continued from previous page

they require to flourish. Patrick Blanc, the creator of the vertical gardens, and the hotel management have ensured that the lighting system is energy efficient.

The lobby leads straight into the central courtyard, to the pillared Lotus Pavilion, housing the beer and beverage bar. The multi-columned Lotus Pavilion is reminiscent of Tipu Sultan's palace at Srirangapatnam. It lends a touch of heritage. The roof of the pavilion is a lush green, providing a stunning view of uninterrupted green cover to guests looking down from the 12 floors.

In the Cubbon Pavilion coffee-shop named after Sir Cubbon – the man who designed the city's green lung less than a couple of km away – the garden climbs up to the 12th floor. A steel structure supports the plants and a state-of-the-art irrigation system ensures that each one of the 25,000 plants is provided the correct amount of moisture.

Nature themes continue into the rooms, whether Towers, ITC One, Junior Suites or the Eva Rooms. The interiors of the rooms manifest different layers of life forms offered through nature. Each floor reflects the same theme through colours, motifs and textures. In the Junior Suite, a beautiful and eye catching deep-red hibiscus has

been woven into the headboard of the bed. The Peacock Suite or the split level Presidential Suite extends over an expansive 5040 sq ft and features an exclusive and private infinite pool set amongst large terraces. The colour scheme represents the magnificence of the peacock.

The Pelican Suite or the Queen's Suite, with its white marble and water features, is complemented by colours of gold with splashes of bright pink portraying the grace of a pelican. The décor in the hotel's Kaya Kalp Spa sports eco-friendly touches – room dividers created with the trunks of bamboo trees, and walls lined with fabric made of natural fibres such as jute, hemp and linen.

Fueled by green technology and with its customer services innovatively transformed, the hotel lives up to its motto of 'forward to green, back to nature.' The hotel has utilized innovation, cutting edge technology and design integration to earn new benchmarks in energy efficiency, water efficiency and low carbon techniques, and is a model of environmental stewardship.

Green practices at the ITC Royal Gardenia include solar energy for outdoor lighting and steam generation. Use of 100 per cent recycled paper and stationery during conferences, as well as energy-efficient light fittings have added to its green credentials. Even the food is served in

"Dudson crockery" which is eco-friendly as it is produced using low-energy technology. The hotel also claims that guests spending a night emit 40 per cent less carbon than they would by staying at any other hotel in Bangalore. "You create a positive footprint... when you stay with us. Other eco-friendly initiatives include renewable energy, rainwater harvesting systems, recycling and solid waste reduction programmes," says S Arunaachalam, Chief Engineer of the hotel.

Incidentally ITC Royal Gardenia was conferred the highest rating for green buildings in the world – the LEED India Platinum Rating making it the world's largest platinum rated hotel. Jubilant over the prestigious Award, the elated Anand Rao, Area & General Manager, says, "We are absolutely delighted and proud to receive this award. This is yet another manifestation of ITC's leadership in sustainability practices. ITC is the only company in the world to be carbon, water and solid waste recycling positive." Another feather in its eco-friendly cap is the Best Eco-friendly Spa Award conferred to the hotel's Kaya Kalp Spa which offers a number of indigenous therapies of eastern origin like the internationally acclaimed Indian Ayurvedic massages and other eastern healing trends through gem stones and precious metals.

ITC Gardenia, Bangalore- Tel: 080-2211 9898

## PHOTO-FEATURE / PRASANTA BISWAS



Dirty water is used for washing



A child carts coal to the market

# The curse of coal

**H**OME is hell if you live in Jharia. A slow fire burns beneath your feet. Noxious fumes and dust hang overhead. Yet impoverished tribal communities like the Santhals, Agarias and Birhors, living in Lodhna, Jairampur and Bokapahari slums of Jharia, call this home.

Once a green forest with rivers and wildlife, Jharia is now ugly and polluted.

People eke out a living picking bits of coal, sometimes from dangerous abandoned mines.

"We don't have any alternative means of earning an income," explains Budhia, 53, of Lodhna, Jharia.

One basket of coal sells in the local market for Rs 50. It pays for a meal or two, just enough to keep them alive. Through the haze you can see women, the elderly and small children collecting and carting coal. Nearly seven per cent of India's children work in mines.

"I ran away from my school two years ago," says Sitarani, 11, of Bokapahari. "My younger brother is in school. I usually collect coal with my mother and neighbours for survival. My father is suffering from tuberculosis."



Jharia is a permanent inferno

The fight is for survival. Air and water cause lung and skin diseases. Tuberculosis, bronchial asthma and pneumoconiosis are widespread. So is malnutrition.

"Coal firing in the evenings is finishing off Jharia," says Dr Alamgir, a physician. "The residual smoke after firing is creating acute respiratory problems for 80 per cent of the people. I haven't seen this much pollution anywhere in India."

Yet Jharia is one of the largest clusters of mines in India located in Dhanbad contributing to the economic development of the country with its coal. Subterranean coal fires have existed here for almost 100 years. More than 400,000 people live on this smoldering land in danger of subsidence.

The Bharat Coking Coal Company Limited

(BCCL) which inherited the underground fires has not been able to scotch them.

The government has launched the Jharia Action Plan with Rs 60 billion. Said to be the biggest rehabilitation plan in the world, it would require resettling nearly 500,000 people. Jharia town's residents don't want to move. They worry about space and distance.

But for poorer tribals shifting is a matter of survival. "We are slum dwellers here," says Jadab Rao of Jairampur. "Our only income is to gather coal from mines. Every two to three years the BCCL gives us a notice ordering us to shift. Now again BCCL has told us to vacate this place at the earliest. The company is going to dig this area very shortly in search of another coal mine. It is our destiny that we have been rootless since 25 years."



## RANDOM SHELF HELP

A quick selection from the many books that turn up for review

# That addictive TV tale

Saibal Chatterjee  
New Delhi

A book that formalises the rules and techniques of writing for Indian television was long overdue. But that certainly isn't the only reason why Venita Coelho's *Soap!* is to be treasured.

"When I started out in the medium," the author writes in the Preface, "there were no books, guides or structured courses that taught the actual reality of writing for television. We made it all up as we went along, driven by crazy deadlines and impossible schedules. We wrote and we learnt."

Thanks to her "handbook for aspiring writers", which identifies and chalks out the 'rules' that need to be followed in an industry where rules are notoriously conspicuous by their absence, the scenario can only get better. Armed with the knowledge of what to expect from the medium and, just as importantly, from the people who control it, writers can avoid the pitfalls that the early buccaneers faced.



**SOAP!  
WRITING AND  
SURVIVING  
TELEVISION IN  
INDIA**

Venita Coelho

Collins

Rs 299

This is a business where wannabe writers are nearly always up against numerous roadblocks. Coelho's book, lucidly and succinctly, lays down the broad guidelines for negotiating the minefield that is television writing in India. It covers much ground – not just the process of ideation and pitching, setting the tone for a story and creating characters and situations, but also signing contracts and chasing payments.

None of the above steps is easy but Coelho's book, embellished with nuggets of wisdom that she picked up in the course of an eventful career in television, provides enough insights into the medium and its many challenges to soften the task somewhat.

Significantly, Coelho's focus is squarely on an alternative brand of television storytelling, not on the customary saas-bahu narratives. She writes: "... the power of television to drive positive change is immense. If only we had the people with the vision and courage to act on this." Could her book be the turning point?

# Why is the world so rude?



**TALK TO THE  
HAND**

Lynne Truss

Rs 199

Fourth Estate

This breezy book, written by best selling author Lynne Truss of *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* fame, explores the phenomena of bad manners in a light hearted yet anguished way.

Being rude isn't just a Delhi trait. Rudeness is becoming a global disease. Truss particularly focuses on the British. The French are more polite, is her opinion. The Americans say rudeness is their national disease. The truth is it all depends on your personal experience. In Delhi, the most boorish behavior takes place on the road as drivers jostle to outwit each other, overtaking, speeding and jumping traffic lights. Why are people so crass? The death of courtesy coincides with the birth of the Internet era and the rise of the mobile phone. Each person tries to live in a bubble, a personal space that no one is supposed to impinge. Even in Asian societies the old way of life, of bonding is over in urban regions.

And yet we are more prone to intrusion from cheery electronic voices and call centres. Their happy, impersonal greetings merely irritate. Truss lists 'six good reasons to stay home and bolt the door.' Good advice. Politeness and good manners begin at home, they say.

# Defining moments

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

Everyone wants to know the secret of someone else's success. What are the values and concerns that people who have done something remarkable cherish and how do they make them different and more effective than others. Most success stories have turning points. There is that mentor or trusted advisor who helps unlock a new sense of purpose and redefine the future. Sometimes such realisation dawns at a chance meeting. Or it could come in the course of an intense consultation. There are those who have been influenced over time by several people who passed on insights and helped set goals.

*The Best Advice I Ever Got* is a remarkable book of brief pieces in the first person. It is conversational in its tone and therefore very easy to read. The people featured vary from businessmen like Azim Premji, Deepak Parekh, Anand Mahindra and to people from the film world such as Javed Akhtar, Aamir Khan and Shahrukh Khan. You will also find Devi Shetty the heart surgeon and the former President, APJ Abdul Kalam.

So, it is a rich collection that doesn't let go of you easily. You could read it in one sitting or a flight or you could gift it to someone who may just happen to be at one of those crossroads in life where one doesn't know what advice will work.

The book is a collection of pieces that used to appear in *Business Today*. It takes journalists to put together such offerings which may seem ordinary but actually run deep.



**THE BEST  
ADVICE I EVER  
GOT**

Collins Business

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## ON THE STANDS

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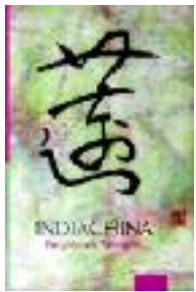
Rs 1100

The latest issue of MedHerb is now available. All the information you need on trade and commerce in herbal plants is available in this big green book. This time the focus is on Nepal, apart from India. The book contains all aspects of medicinal and aromatic plants including trade, processing, policy, regulation, stakeholders and the status of products in both countries.

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# Across the Great Wall



**INDIA CHINA  
NEIGHBOURS  
STRANGERS**

Edited: Ira Pande

Harper Collins

Rs 699

*Divide* had pictures by Kulwant Roy. In *India China* you can see pictures by Luo Dan on a China off the beaten track. There is also Pablo Bartholomew on Kolkata's Tangra.

"We have this scare psychosis of China dating to the 1962 war," says Pande, "But the relationship is not just 60 years old. It goes back a long way, to the ancient Silk Route, Buddhism, trade in South India."

A very different picture of the India-China relationship emerges from the pages of history: a

ties between India and China, Tansen Sen on Buddhism and trade, Xiang Bao on growing up together, Zhang Xing on Bowbazar's Chinatown. Read also Prasenjit Duara, Edward Friedman, Prem Shankar Jha, Meghnad Desai, Harsh V Pant. Usha Chandran writes on women in China, Pallavi Iyer mulls over who is better, there is Shiv Shankar Menon on Beijing's metamorphosis and we have Vikram Seth with a gentle travel piece.

"Tibet was a little troublesome," says Pande. "You know a function remembering 50 years of the Dalai Lama in India was held here and it irritated the Chinese. But we are a secular space. So, we had Andrew Fischer from Mcleodganj write an antiseptic piece on Tibet, taking a historical view, showing how Tibet was also part of the Great Game being played by Britain and Russia."

Pande says getting so many well-known writers to contribute wasn't an issue. IIC is very respected as a space for writers, academics and intellectuals. Its membership is rather vast and distinguished.

Both books originated from conferences held at IIC. *The Great Divide* emerged from a Track 2 conference held on Af-Pak. Pande said people from Pakistan and India had a very intense dialogue. Pande met them and discussed her idea of the book. They agreed to contribute and suggested themes. "After that the Mumbai terror attack took place," recalls Pande. There was hardly any response. Phone lines went dead. But she persisted and got in writers.

A conference on India and China relations helped Pande network China writers. Dr Ashwani Seth and Professor Tan Chung whose father studied in Shantiniketan with Pande's mother, helped out with names. So did Shiv Shankar Menon.

The two books are actually part of IIC's quarterlies. Pande joined IIC four years ago. She's worked as an editor with Seminar, Biblio, Dorling Kindersley and Roli Books and is a writer herself. At IIC she first published *India 60 years* in 2006. At that time IIC co-published with Penguin Viking. This was followed by *Beyond Degrees* on the occasion of 150 years of the first presidency universities in India.

Soft copies are still produced by IIC. The hard copies are now published by Harper Collins. The idea is not really commercial since IIC is a non-profit, but to distribute the books as widely as possible.

Both books are nicely laid out. You get your share of eye candy. But read the books to widen your horizons, to understand the relationship you share with your neighbours.

## Civil Society News New Delhi

In recent years the venerable India International Centre (IIC) has had to contend with a younger neighbour down the road, the India Habitat Centre (IHC). But there is no competition really, especially when IIC draws on its old strengths and fulfils its original mandate of fostering international goodwill and being a global friendship hub. One example is two insightful books produced by IIC's publication division headed by Chief Editor Ira Pande.

First to attract attention was *The Great Divide*, a volume of essays by writers from India and Pakistan published some months ago. The book unflinchingly examined the uncomfortable relationship the two countries share. It had pieces by celebrated writers from both sides of the fence. So there was Ashutosh Varshney, BG Verghese, Meghnad Desai, Pervez Hoodbhoy, Sonia Jabbar, Urvashi Butalia, Shiv Vishwanath and others.

They wrote on a smorgasbord of emotional issues ranging from the very idea of Pakistan and the bitter legacy of Partition to Talibanisation, to music, art, Urdu, literature and food.

The second book recently launched is *India China, Neighbours, Strangers*. Along the same lines as *The Great Divide*, this book has Indian and Chinese writers expressing themselves on the rocky relationship the two nations share. It's a good read, educative and thoughtful.

"The idea was to look at Pakistan and China, not merely through the narrow prism of defence and international politics, but from a much wider angle," explains Pande. "Both books examine the convergences and differences which exist between India and her neighbours. It is meant for the lay reader."

Apart from analytical articles on diplomacy and politics there are pieces which examine historical relationships. There are personal histories, photo essays, travel, sociology and culture.

Pande has used visuals evocatively. *The Great*



Ira Pande

LAKSHMAN ANAND

**'We have this scare psychosis of China dating to the 1962 war. But the relationship goes back to the ancient Silk Route, Buddhism, trade.'**

more subaltern perspective, the outcome of interaction between people from both countries through trade and travel. Culture too wasn't a one-way flow of ideas. Practices and beliefs from China began to seep into India too.

The book has a whole lot of Chinese writers. Surprisingly, none felt constrained. "They were very forthcoming," says Pande. "There was nobody who did not respond to my request to write."

Read Tan Chung on the religious and literary



# Guide to happiness

SAMITA RATHOR

**T**HE 14th Dalai Lama is 75 years young this July. He works non-stop, travelling endlessly around the world to spread peace and compassion. He has the ability to stay seated cross legged for hours without showing a glimpse of discomfort during his teachings. It is an inspiration for those who cannot sit still for a minute. His child like laughter is contagious enough to make the most serious smile.

During the few occasions we have had of spending time around the Dalai Lama, we readily agreed that he never seemed to look or show any signs of fatigue and tiredness. Talking for hours non stop takes a lot of energy but in the case of the Dalai Lama a totally opposite phenomena seems to take place. During his teachings calmness and good energy multiply effortlessly.

The Dalai Lama has three main commitments in life that he speaks of often.

His first commitment is the promotion of human values such as compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment and self-discipline. All human beings are the same. We all want happiness and do not want suffering. Even people who do not believe in religion recognise the importance of these human values in making their life happier. He refers to these human values as secular ethics. He remains committed to talking about the importance of these human values and sharing them with everyone he meets.

His second commitment is the promotion of religious harmony and understanding among the world's major religious traditions. Despite philosophical differences, all major world religions have the same potential to create good human

## SOUL VALUE

beings. It is therefore important for all religious traditions to respect one another and recognise the value of each other's traditions. As far as one truth, one religion, is concerned, this is relevant on an individual level. However, for the community at large, several truths, several religions, are necessary.

His third commitment is to the Tibetan issue. As a Tibetan he carries the name of the 'Dalai Lama'. Tibetans place their trust in him. He has a responsibility to act as the free spokesperson of the Tibetans in their quest for justice.

The Dalai Lama has officially declared that he will carry on with the first two commitments till his last breath.

## ON COMPASSION

"I believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. From the moment of birth, every human being wants happiness and does not want suffering. Neither social conditioning nor education nor ideology affect this. From the very core of our being, we simply desire contentment," says the Dalai Lama.

He tells us that from his own limited experience he has found that the greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion.

The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes. Cultivating a close, warm-hearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. This helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we

may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the ultimate source of success in life.

## ON LOVE

Ultimately, the reason why love and compassion bring the greatest happiness is simply that our nature cherishes them above all else. The need for love lies at the very foundation of human existence. It results from the profound interdependence we all share with one another. However capable and skillful an individual may be, left alone, he or she will not survive. However vigorous and independent one may feel during the most prosperous periods of life, when one is sick or very young or very old, one must depend on the support of others.

Compassion can be developed by removing the greatest obstacles, anger and hatred. As we all know, these are extremely powerful emotions and they can overwhelm our entire mind. Nevertheless, they can be controlled. If, however, they are not, these negative emotions will hound us and stick like glue, retarding our quest for the happiness of a loving mind.

So as a start, it is useful to investigate whether or not anger is of value. Sometimes, when we are discouraged by a difficult situation, anger does seem helpful, appearing to bring with it more energy, confidence and determination.

Jetsun Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso, usually shortened to Tenzin Gyatso, is known as the Dalai Lama. He was born on 6 July 1935. This year, 2010, he enters his 75th year.

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## PRODUCTS

# DAILY DUMP

Compost your garbage in the comfort of your home with Daily Dump's attractive earthenware vessels. A stacked set of three vessels or a 'khamba' along with a 'leave it' pot is what you need to buy. Prices are reasonable. Daily Dump will explain the procedure. It is simple and at the end of the process you will get a pile of compost. Sprinkle that in your garden and watch your plants glow green. Daily Dump sells a wide range of very pretty khambas made by artisans. You can buy accessories too like rakes, gloves, aprons and sieves. Daily Dump also offers five disgustingly cool books for children and waste less products for your home. From one outlet in Bangalore, Daily Dump now has many clones scattered around India.

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