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Civil Society

HOW BHUVANA KANNAN REVIVED FARMS STEEPED IN SALT

ROLLING BACK THE TSUNAMI

IS URBAN RENEWAL JUST HYPE?

Hazards Centre does two studies and finds that the govt's plans under JNNURM are more talk than reality

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Urban renewal

CITIES are meant to be levellers and drivers of opportunities and growth. But our cities are mainly known for their inequalities and inefficiencies. While a few Indians enjoy urban facilities, in some cases equal to the best in the world, tens of millions of others continue to live in appalling conditions. Such disparity makes it necessary to raise questions about our democracy and the real depth of our economy. If so many people do not have access to basic amenities, what good is the progress that we claim?

The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), launched about four years ago, was meant to deal with the backlog in our cities by providing funds and vision and establishing public-private partnerships. But if the Hazards Centre, a feisty little outfit located in Delhi, is to be believed, not all is well with the JNNURM.

You can read about the Hazards Centre's findings in this issue, and there will be replies from the government for sure, but the question before us is whether we can afford to continue to merely tinker with the problems of our cities.

Real solutions are required. And they are available For instance the task force on affordable housing for all headed by Deepak Parekh of HDFC has made several suggestions with regard to increasing the urban land stock and directly addressing the issue of housing and civic amenities for the poor.

The task force has emphasised the need to regard affordable housing as a core economic activity and place it at the centre of public policy because housing, housing quality and economic development are inextricably linked.

It is necessary to win the confidence of the urban poor so that they become participants and beneficiaries and not mere targets. With that focus, it is even possible to enter the tricky terrain of land acquisitions by making affordable housing one of the declared social objectives and structuring compensation as sustained long-term benefits.

The housing sector as a whole is a major contributor to employment and growth. It will therefore not do to allow it to go into a slump. But the housing sector needs to be more broad-based and inclusive. Both in its own interests and for the larger national good it can't restrict itself to the wealthy.

The task force has suggested that governments give the urban poor security of tenure because only then will they participate without fear in a process of renewal. Slum redevelopment, for instance, is a better and cheaper option than relocation, but it needs to be achieved through a community effort.

Similarly, finance has to reach the poor and for that they have to be brought within the banking system. Micro-finance institutions (MFIs) have a role to play here. Once again flexibility is called for so that MFIs can take deposits.

Finally, our cities will prosper when we allow a new breed of entrepreneurs to take over. Read in our business section how Matheran Realty helped by the Monitor Group is offering homes for just Rs 2.1 lakhs.

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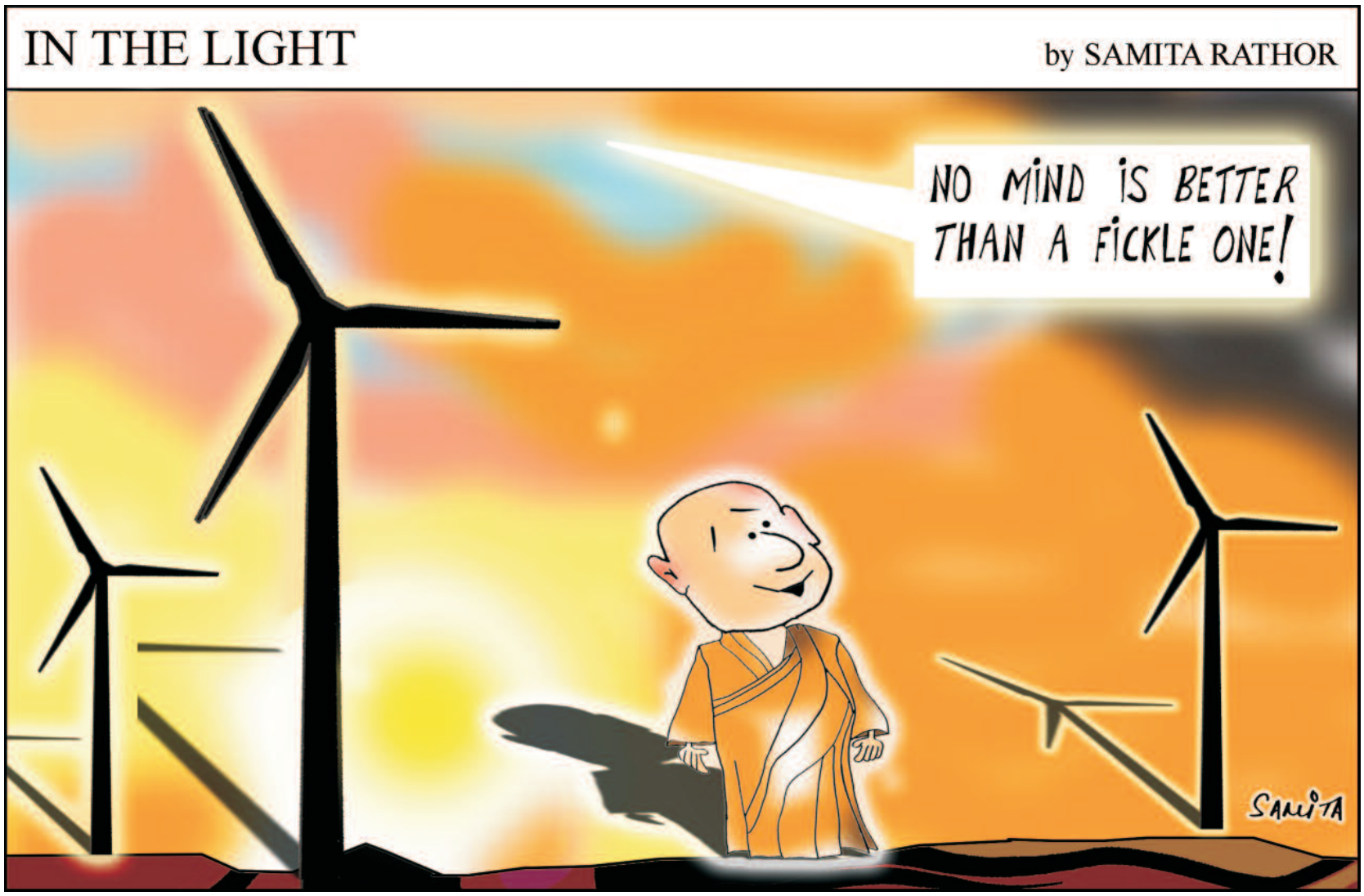


LETTERS

Small field

Your cover story, 'Small field, big crop' shows how companies can spread knowledge. Building a knowledge economy is not about spreading what we call high technology. It is about taking appropriate knowledge to the people, building their skills and inspiring confidence. The farming communities Tata Steel has been working with can now farm on their own. There will be no dependency syndrome, an ailment which afflicts many worthy NGO projects. I must say Tata Steel's rural development department has hit upon the right strategy.

Dr Dev Varma

With agriculture shrinking and food productivity going down, there are growing worries about food security. Tata Steel's project shows how small farms can be made productive for the farmer. It is critical to be able to feed nutritious food to one's own family first. The health of women and children improves, malnutrition goes down. The nation's health improves.

Anita Nandan

I wish more companies would emulate Tata Steel and help people attain sustainable livelihoods.

Asha Khosla

Your cover story is remarkable. The work of Tata Steel deserves to be seen as a national model.

Ajit

Homeless

Delhi's streets and lanes are the workplaces of runaway children. Does Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan provide any help in finding out about missing children? A lot of below poverty children from Bihar have run away to Delhi. Their parents are desperate to know the whereabouts of their missing children.

Amit Mahajan

The work of civil society organisations such as Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan has helped to bring about change at the grassroots. Civil Society should be congratulated for bringing the work of these people to the forefront .

Paramjeet

Homeless people are increasing in other cities of India. As you rightly mention, one reason is slum demolition. The other is the collapse of agriculture and increase in rural poverty.

Rajesh Mahajan

Micro-finance

Ujjivan is doing good work for the poor by lending them money. Regular banks don't help the poor. Ujjivan wants to remove poverty. I pray to God that Ujjivan becomes more successful.

Kapil Dev Singh

Access to micro finance – credit, savings, insurance and pension – is still highly unequal between men and women.

Vikas B

Subir Roy's article was very compact. It reflects the basic philosophy of Ujjivan and the micro-finance industry as a whole.

Goutam Das

Save Ganga

Congratulations to Dr GD Agrawal for forcing the government to put the Loharinag Pala dam on hold. It is ridiculous to build a dam so close to the Gangotri glacier. Ecologically and culturally it is a bad idea. Surely our engineers can come up with better ideas. Their problem is that they see water in isolation

Gautam

Colour therapy

I enjoyed reading Samita Rathor's piece on colour therapy. Sometimes you wear a particular colour and you feel really good. Grey days affect one's mood. Yellow makes us feel bright. Is it true that stones also have powers? Often we are advised to wear a particular stone. Do stones affect our personalities, and hence our destiny?

Jyoti

Annam

I would greatly appreciate it if Dr GG suggests Indian food which is less starchy for diabetics.

Steven Thomas

Is urban renewal

Citizens' probe finds shoddy data, little consultation

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A national mission to make investments in 63 Indian cities over seven years has run half its course, but there are concerns about how projects are being chosen and whether all the money and effort will finally deliver an improved and inclusive urban environment.

The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) was launched in 2005 shortly after the Congress-led United Progress Alliance (UPA) came to power. It was supposed to make investments in infrastructure and basic services for the urban poor.

The idea was to help cities solve their problems quickly by providing funds, reducing red tape and introducing new efficiencies through public-private partnerships. Local bodies were to have a key role and projects were to be judged on inclusiveness. Consultation, broad-based and in the public domain, was to be given importance so that investments flowed to where they were needed most.

However, preliminary findings of two studies undertaken by the Delhi-based Hazards Centre in various cities indicate quite the opposite: We are told there is inadequate consultation and lack of awareness about projects at the local level. There is also a mishmash of data and an absence of vision for cities.

The Hazards Centre has several years of experience in working with the poor in cities. It looks at issues of governance, community rights and the provision of basic urban services.

The early findings of Hazards Centre on how the JNNURM is being implemented were presented in the last week of February by Harini Narayanan and D Leena at the Indian Social Institute. Both Leena and Narayanan also spoke to *Civil Society*, as did Dunu Roy, the director of Hazards Centre.

JNNURM envisions a city development plan (CDP) followed by a detailed project report (DPR). The Hazards Centre says it was asked by the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) to examine 15 CDPs. This was the first study. In the second study, which is ongoing, local groups are part of a citizens' initiative anchored by the Hazards Centre to evaluate JNNURM claims on the ground.

These groups are now reporting that many of the claims made under JNNURM are simply not true. "For instance in Ajmer," says Leena, "we gave a group information about a project which we had downloaded from the urban development ministry's website. But when they went to the spot they found the project did not exist."

Harini Narayanan and D Leena of Hazards Centre

"Many of the claims are sweeping. When we went to the ministry we were given brochures and CDs and told to get further information from the website. For instance, we are told that a large number of houses have been built for the poor. But where are they, have people moved in?" says Leena, lamenting the lack of tangible claims.

"Now what we have done is got the list off the website of all the detailed projects and we are asking organisations to go with this list and visit each of these projects and take a photograph and come back," says Narayanan.

In Patna, for instance, there is a project that has been listed as having been completed. But when citizens visited the site all they found was a board. There are many more such examples the Hazards Centre review is throwing up.

The Hazards Centre sees basic flaws in the JNNURM approach. For instance, a distinction is made between urban infrastructure and governance (UIG) and basic services for the urban poor (BSUP). Leena and Narayanan point out that it is essential to see infrastructure as serving the needs of both the rich and the poor. A modern city primarily needs to be inclusive. Then again, in practical terms a division makes it difficult to fund an infrastructure project when it involves the poor.

The Hazards Centre gets the impression that the JNNURM is being used to push the poor out of cities instead of endorsing their productive role in the urban economy and meeting their needs of affordable housing, clean water, drainage and health care. To this extent, JNNURM in spirit merely replaces old-style city beautification

TRACKING JNNURM

- **City Development Plans are lacking in baseline data**
- **Just 12 per cent funds for basic services for the poor**
- **Poor consultation so people don't know about projects**
- **Projects on paper don't really exist**

more hype than reality?

LAKSHMAN ANAND

LAKSHMAN ANAND

The new and the old. The urban backlog is huge.

schemes which involve eviction and demolition.

While 75 per cent of the money to be spent is for infrastructure, just 12 per cent is for basic services for the poor, says Roy.

Most of the proposed schemes for the poor seem to be for housing, but there appears to be no coordinated effort to promote an entrepreneurial spirit that will deliver housing that the poor can afford. The goal should have been to give the poor better shelter within the city so that they remain close to sources of employment.

The CDPs, in fact, seem confused on the question of future employment. First of all they do not cite baseline data on employment though such data are widely available. Secondly, they talk of tertiary sector jobs without explaining what exactly this means.

The CDPs accept that a majority of people in cities are poor and belong to the unorganised sector. But they do not seem to have a strategy for keeping such people in employment. For example, even as jobs in manufacturing are seen as drying up in cities, it is not clear where alternative employment will come from.

The JNNURM favours market-driven measures. It has made certain legal measures such as abolition of rent control and land ceiling mandatory for city governments seeking financial support.

The JNNURM favours user charges and sees a growing role for the private sector in providing services. But private players do not seem to be interested in waste management, sewerage or even low-cost housing – which are the priorities for the majority of people in cities.

The absence of consultation with beneficiaries is a big concern. Public hearings have been held but apparently only in name. Hazards Centre says that its own experience in trying to be heard has been disappointing. "We would be called to a hearing with no notice and then without replying to our objections we would be listed as having been heard," says Leena. Roy says he has written 15 letters to the Union ministry for urban development but is yet to receive a reply.

It has been much more difficult for average citizens. They have either had no intimation of hearings or been required to decipher voluminous reports without expert assistance. When the Hazards Centre asked citizens' groups about projects that are supposed to be coming up, they invariably had no knowledge of them or had difficulty locating them.

The CDPs were meant to document the vision for cities. It was intended that they be crafted out of wide discussion and a search for new answers to longstanding problems. But the CDPs don't seem to have any evidence of this.

In the case of Hyderabad for instance, the CDP gives a vague list of stakeholders consulted and says that among them were "representatives of poor communities". It is no different in Mumbai. In Bangalore's CDP it is stated that 50 stakeholder consultations were held between March and June 2006 and the stakeholders included "government agencies, ULBs, NGOs, elected representatives, trade associations and the public."

One city that seems to stand out for its consultative process is Pune. It provides details of three stakeholder meetings with specific points raised and attributed to stakeholders. The discussions also seem to have gone into difficult issues such as relocation of slum dwellers and their need for finance and so on.

If the CDPs are lacking in vision it is perhaps because they have no clear ownership. The task of drafting them, says the Hazards Centre, seems to have been left to consultants. "When NGOs have been involved, they have been chosen because they are known to be market-friendly," alleges Roy.

The CDPs are fuzzy on figures for population, employment, migration and so on though these are readily available in most cases and should have been used to define a clear vision for the future of a city.

"How can plans be made for a city when a CDP does not spell out the baseline data with which the consultants are working?" asks Narayanan.

How thorough has the Hazards Centre been? Has it allowed its own position against privatisation in general to influence its assessment of JNNURM?

Asked about this, Roy says the Hazards Centre's interest is in what works. "All evidence points to private-public partnerships not working. If that is so why are we pushing them?" he asks.

In the case of JNNURM, the stakes are particularly high. If the government's single biggest initiative on urban renewal is adrift, as the Hazards Centre says, then an opportunity to showcase India's growth through its cities will be lost together with precious time and resources.

MPs back People's Charter

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A 'Charter of the People 2009' was released by Agatha K Sangma, MP, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) at her residence in New Delhi on 24 February. The charter is a 20-point development plan for India which the Parliamentarians' Group on Millenium Development Goals (PG-MDG) would like every political party to include in its electoral agenda.

These are, in fact, development issues of a non-political character. And the MPs who attended the release of the charter came from across the political divide.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Left to right: Thomas Sangma, Suresh Prabhu, Naveen Jindal, Agatha Sangma, Dr Viplove Thakur, Dr Vallabhabhai Katharia, Madhu Goud Yaskhi, Mani Charanamei

Sangma, 28, is joint convenor of the PG-MDG. The group consists of MPs committed to achieving the MDGs by ensuring these issues are factored into law and implementation.

The PG-MDG is an initiative of the Centre for Legislative Research and Advocacy (CLRA), a non-profit which works with all political parties in Parliament and in State Assemblies to achieve democratic governance.

"The charter sets the tone not only for what the electorate expects from its representatives but also the way forward," said CLRA in its press release.

The Parliamentarians' Group also serves as a platform where NGOs and people's movements can interact with legislators. Its chairperson is Supriya Sule of the NCP.

The MDGs consist of eight international targets for poverty alleviation to which India is committed. The eight goals include eradication of hunger and poverty, providing universal primary education, gender equality and women's empowerment, reduction in child mortality, improvement in maternal health, combating of HIV/AIDs, malaria, environment sustainability and developing global partnership for development.

These targets have to be met by 2015. Backlogs in India have led to concern that they may not be met here. The clock is ticking.

NGOs were also present and interacted with the MPs with suggestions. Among them were representatives of Save the Children, Care India, CENTAD, NCDHR and Third World Network.

The Charter of the People includes all eight MDGs and details what needs to be done by MPs. There are policy recommendations for each MDG.

The charter urges steps be taken to eradicate poverty and hunger, that the Right to Education Bill be passed and that diseases like malaria and illnesses like HIV/AIDs, be combated. It asks for police, prison and judicial reforms and for laws against sexual harassment and child sexual abuse.

Some of the most urgent issues which need to be tackled are in health and education. The charter recommends 3 per cent of GDP for health, 6 per cent for education.

To reduce infant mortality the charter asks for extension of the ICDS and its integration with the National Rural Health Mission. It recommends an increase in anganwadi workers who would focus on the 0-3 age group, breastfeeding, active immunisation and so on. For education it asks for strengthening government school infrastructure and for quality education. It also recommends community involvement.

In October 2008, CLRA extensively researched and published a Handbook for Parliamentarians on the MDGs. It serves as a crucial tool for legislators.

Villagers stop wood smuggling

Rakesh Agrawal
Sonbhadra (UP)

THE sun had not yet risen. A truck laden with wood was sneaking through a forest in Sonbhadra district in Uttar Pradesh. At Kodvania village, residents forced it to halt.

For years they had silently watched illegal timber being cut and smuggled from the forest. This time they were determined not to let the truck pass.

About 400 villagers surrounded the truck. The driver and his four helpers were forced to alight. They were taken under custody by the villagers. The local police station was hurriedly informed. But it refused to register an FIR saying smuggling of illegal timber was out of their jurisdiction.

The people did not give up. For three days, around 100 villagers, mostly Adivasis, guarded the truck and timber with bows and arrows.

Finally, the District Magistrate, Pandhari Yadav, was contacted. He sent the Sub-divisional Magistrate, Ghanshayam Kumar, with forest officials, to the spot.

"We discussed the issue and decided to release the truck and the wood to the Range Officer," said Mohammad Hanif, member, Forest Rights Committee, Kodvania. "There were problems about keeping the wood safe and secure. People were losing their daily wages, guarding the truck. But our three- day *dharna* showed the administration, the people and the local media, the endemic corruption in the forest department," said Hanif. According to the villagers, the wood was worth at least Rs 1.5 crores.

The forest rights committee of Kodvania was formed recently as per the new Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. Its members say they are performing their duty of preserving and guarding the forest, not just claiming their rights to small plots of land. "The smugglers were taking out this wood, both newly cut and old stock, from our ancestral forest. They are hand in glove with the forest department but we are determined to break this unholy alliance," said Hanif.

The Mayawati government has given clear instructions to the district administration and the forest department that the new law has to be implemented especially in forested areas like Sonbhadra district. The state has issued a government order for implementation and published guidelines. A State Monitoring Committee (SMC) has been formed. The three peoples' representatives in the committee are Adivasis who are members of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers, (NFFPF).

"The wood used to be dumped on the road sides in Renukot Forest Division by the Sub-divisional Forest Officer of Obra Range. From there it was smuggled out in alliance with traders. We thought as it is our wealth, we should stop this smuggling," said Shanta Bhattacharji, a member of the SMC.

A consciousness has emerged among people, especially Adivasis, to claim their rights over forest land and resources and protect forest wealth.

"People are very active now," said Natthu, who is an SMC member and the chairman of the district panchayat.

People settled in and around this 300- hectare forest since several generations. In 2008 they faced eviction by the forest department. But villages refused to budge. The capture of the truck laden with illegal timber has boosted their morale. They feel more confident of taking on smugglers and poachers.

Daredevils make a clean sweep

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

If you throw garbage
And amass water
All the devils
Mosquitoes and flies
Will hound you

ARUP Mondol, 10, and Rita Das, 8, recite this ditty as they march through Rishi Aurobindo, a slum in Lake Town, Kolkata. Both are members of two local children's troupes, Ahladi (Beloved Ones) and Dakabuko (Daredevils) who propagate social messages through song, dance, theatre and verse.

The children are outspoken, insouciant with loads of attitude. People are getting the message.

"My schoolmate's mother is up to no good," says 16-year-old Rimpa Malone. "She keeps condemning her daughters. She doesn't want them to study beyond primary school. I had to tell her how dangerous all this can be for the health of her girls."

"Uncle next door beat aunty every night. I told him he should never beat her, ever. He was shocked that I could confront him like this. But, believe me, he has never beaten her again," says Priyanka Saha with a sense of satisfaction.

Daredevils announcing health messages in Rishi Aurobindo slum

The two groups, Ahladi and Dakabuko, have been organized and trained by Prayasam, an NGO founded by Amlan Kusum Ganguly in 1998. While working for the Lutheran World Service, Ganguly noticed most slum children stayed away from programmes meant for them. He wondered why. His investigations revealed that the children suffered from preventable diseases like stomach ailments, malaria and skin infections. Their parents didn't have the time or money to consult a trained doctor so they would take their children to quacks.

Prayasam carried out a survey in Rishi Aurobindo to gauge people's knowledge of health and hygiene. Around 18,000 people lived here. Just 20 per cent washed their hands before they sat down to a meal. Around 15 per cent believed in covering cooked food. Mosquito nets were used by only 15 percent. Twenty per cent of residents wore slippers when they walked on the road. And 85 per cent indulged in spitting everywhere. As for baths, only 20 per cent had a regular shower and a change of clothes. Not surprisingly, 20 percent of the population regularly suffered from chronic gastroenteritis and malaria.

Ganguly realized that awareness had to be created on health and hygiene.

At Rishi Aurobindo he collected a group of young children or an Ekjot. He trained them to be 'area health minders'. Banking on his skills as a choreographer, Ganguly taught the children music, dance, lyrics and rhyme. The children's troupes also learnt how to draw cartoons with a message and puppetry. Things were done inexpensively and imaginatively. So puppets were crafted with rubber balloons and papier mache. The area health minders, renamed Dakabuko, started using their newly learnt skills to prevail on people to keep their environment clean.

Of course, getting people to mend their ways overnight was an ambitious venture.

A big open space inside the slum was used as a garbage dumping ground. "We wanted to convert it into a playground since we had nowhere to play. Municipal trucks were making many rounds, collecting garbage regularly. All it required was to motivate people to collect their garbage in personal vats for the municipal truck," explains Shibashis, one of the first area health minders Prayasam trained.

Shibashis and his friends put their heads together and composed some catchy lyrics. One of them was:

May it be green
May it be neat
May it be clean
Your home, my home
Breathe in the air that's clean

They recited these lyrics outside every door. Every time slum residents came to the open space to dump garbage, the children would request them not to do so. Their persistence paid off and soon the place was free to be turned into a playground.

Gastroenteritis was the next big thing the Daredevils took on. Since contaminated water was the cause, the children used handbills and posters to tell people how to purify their drinking water. These were placed strategically near tubewells and shops. The posters and handbills also told people how to use oral re-hydration therapy to arrest gastroenteritis.

The Daredevils ensured parents took little children for their polio drops. "Although the polio drops were given on Sundays, a convenient day for working parents, the tendency in our slum was to avoid taking the child," say Srabonti Pal and Rimpa Saha. Dakabuko staged street plays and put up posters in the open quadrangle where adults gathered every evening. On the day polio drops were being administered, the troupe kept strict vigil to ensure that every child below five years of age got immunized.

In a year's time, the slum colony became a more habitable place with cleaner drains, less garbage and healthier residents.

Once the area health minders transformed Rishi Aurobindo colony, they began spanning out to adjoining slum colonies. At the moment, Dakabuko's work covers nearly 60 government and municipal schools in Lake Town. The municipality and DFID fund the venture.

Ganguly understood the need to tackle social issues which impacted health, like child marriage. Girls were married off at a tender age and became mothers in their early teens. This led to anemia and malnutrition. "We had to get parents to value their girls. And we needed to instill self-worth in young girls," he says.

Ganguly then set up Ahladi as a media resource group to project the enlightened face of the slum community to the outside world. He identified five enthusiastic boys and girls and taught them Indian classical dance. They also learnt yoga, make-up and colour aesthetics. Ganguly took up compositions which addressed issues like domestic violence, child marriage and materialism. Each theme was explained to the children. In 2003, Ahladi gave its first performance. Since then, Ahladi has been performing at noted venues, including the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre.

Ganguly has used compositions by noted poets like Shankho Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore and Subodh Sarkar as well as music by Shubha Mudgal to get the message across.

School helps children go green

School's reception is made of wood and glass

The playground 's swings and slides use bamboo

Shreyasi Singh
Noida (UP)

LOCATED in an urban village less than a kilometre off the Noida-Greater Noida expressway, Gaia is a playschool for children between 18 months and four years. One step inside its wood and glass door transports you to a world that shuns the concrete city outside. Gaia, in Greek, means Mother Earth and the school lives up to its name.

Built on half an acre, picture-perfect Gaia has a spartan feel. A cobbled, winding path from the reception leads to two brick and slate-roofed huts that work as classrooms. On either side of the path is lush, green grass dotted with animal sculptures carved of wood. Geese and ducks chatter happily at a pond as children and their carers feed them bread. There is also an aviary with birds and rabbits, a wooden sandpit and a decent sized aquarium.

"We were sure we didn't want an exotic, modern look to Gaia. We were determined to design the school from a child's perspective. It was a daunting task till we saw a five-year-old child paint. We realized that whenever you ask a child to paint scenery, they all draw some huts, a winding path or river, greenery and animals. We had our solution because we believe in a direct touch with nature," says Aditi Jain, who co-owns Gaia.

Aditi explains the innate connect we enjoy with nature. She says if you carefully look at children, they are on a constant discovery of the five elements which they experience through their five senses. Gaia is designed to help these curious minds explore without the fear urban children and their parents often have of nature. Students are taught to take care of trees that give them shade, plants that give them flowers and water that quenches their thirst.

For those running Gaia it was imperative the school be designed as environmentally friendly. Coolers were used in place of energy inefficient air conditioners. The wooden floors are all weather, and give natural insulation in the harsh extremes of Delhi's summer and winter. The duck ponds aid rainwater harvesting. The ponds are located at a level lower than the rest of the school. Rainwater makes its way there and helps groundwater recharge. In the second phase of the school's construction, air will be pulled from under the earth through wind tunnels to cool the entire building. Nature is a big component of the school's curriculum. School begins at 9 am with a nature walk for around 90 little students through trees and plants. There are rare black guava plants, citrus fruit trees and bamboo saplings. The day ends at 12 noon after an unstructured bout of play in the sand pit or the garden.

Birdhouse

Classrooms

For Gaia, it has been tough but fulfilling to go green in this era of aggressively promoted modern schools with climate-controlled buses, centrally air conditioned classrooms and cutting-edge digital teaching aids.

"It has been tough to live with financial constraints. But at the beginning itself we decided we would not seek a school that would rake in profits. Gaia has not been built for that. We could have increased capacity by putting floors on top of another. Instead, we have huts that are stand alone. Many parents are appreciative of our go green efforts. But we do get parents worried that the heat could be bad for their children or that they could be allergic to sand. We ask them whether they had AC classrooms and haven't they turned out just fine," says Ashok Talwar, a professional photographer and filmmaker, who co-owns the school and is responsible for much of its design and visualisation.

It was also a challenge, Aditi says, to get the right teachers on board. "Teachers in mainstream playschools are used to a certain way of teaching. I have had to train them to understand learning cannot be taught. You have to let students experience what you say. It wasn't easy for them to reorient themselves. Together, I, my teachers, and our students learn every day."

Gaia's teachers now create their own songs and nursery rhymes with nature playing muse. In a poem titled 'Mother Earth', the sun is hailed as a glowing father, rain takes on the role of a big sister, and wind is a force-bearing brother. Of course, Aditi ensures her students also learn the well-defined basics of alphabets, numbers, colours and shapes that mainstream schools look for in new admissions.

Gaia has picked up through word of mouth in the last year. The tuition fee is Rs 3,000 per month. At the time of admission, the school takes another Rs 12,000 by way of registration and other charges.

Ashok and Aditi are determined to grow the school to Class 5 in the next few years. The odds are with them. With what they have managed in Gaia, nurturing is definitely something that comes easy to them.

Gaia is in Sector 93B, Noida. Phone 9971100091

Mothering the positive child

Na Karantha Peraje
Dakshina Kannada (Karnataka)

IN 2002 the district administration of Dakshina Kannada undertook a campaign to spread awareness of HIV/AIDS. It got in a local NGO, the Citizen Alliance for Rural Development and Training Society (CARDTS) to be its resource team. The NGO organized seminars, provided training to officials, youth clubs and neo literates. There were street plays on the subject.

A week after the awareness campaign, a couple turned up at CARDTS office. They said to Bhagavan Das, director of CARDTS: "We do not know when we are going to die. We do not want our child to become an orphan. From now on our child is your responsibility." The couple then disappeared.

Bhagavan Das recalls that defining moment. "It is easy to conduct awareness programmes on HIV/AIDs. But to take care of children orphaned by the virus? We thought, are we capable of handling such responsibility? Do we have the knowledge?"

Yet, moved by the plight of children affected by the virus, CARDTS took the bold decision of starting a home for them. Sathyendra Prakash and Shashikala, important members of the NGO, told Das, "We are with you."

Finding a suitable building to house the children was tough. People were reluctant to rent out their property once they knew children affected by the virus would be staying there. It was difficult to get staff. Ultimately, the building was found and the centre was started. The home was named Samvedana.

"When we decided to start the home we had no resources," says Bhagavan Das. "We approached a few donors. They bluntly told us, why do you want to waste your time and money for children who are going to die anyway? Then we decided to raise local funds. We asked local philanthropists and institutions. Often we just requested people to contribute Rs 750, which meets one day's expenses of the home. People were helpful. The YMCA in Mangalore and a local philanthropist were our key supporters."

A British couple, John Clarke and his wife who were consultants to an IT firm in Mangalore, had visited Samvedana with members of the Rotary Club. They decided they had to do something for the home. Due to their efforts the Press Association and United Business Media in UK began to extend financial support to Samvedana.

Indian Networks of Positive People refer children who have tested positive for admission to Samvedana. Those children whose parents have both tested positive are admitted. If one parent is deceased or if the child has no guardian, he or she can get admission. At times guardians or close relatives shun the positive child.

> **"Often we just requested people to contribute Rs 750, for one day's expenses of the home. People were helpful," says Bhagavan Das.**

There is little Kavyas whose parents used to work in the Gulf. Every year they celebrated her birthday with great enthusiasm. But her parents died of AIDS and Kavyas too tested positive. Her relatives brought her to Samvedana.

There is also Nitin, a child from Mumbai, who comes from an affluent family. His parents owned hotels in the city and extensive property in Dakshina Kannada. They died of the illness. Nitin's relatives began to squabble over his parents' property. Nobody was bothered about him. Now he lives in Samvedana and is trying to forget the past.

Samvedana's children

Altogether, 65 children from nine months to 15 years of age, stay at Samvedana. The home has a staff of 18 who teach, do nursing, management, cooking, cleaning and so on.

The children do yoga, play, picnic and study. They get a nutritious diet. Every activity has a strict time table. There are regular health check ups and hospitalized care, if necessary. Non vegetarian food is served at least thrice a week. The growth of each child is regularly monitored.

Children have come mostly from Karnataka and Kerala. The dedicated staff tries to make them feel at home. "It takes a day or two for a child to adjust here. When they are depressed we play the role of a guardian. Many have lost their parents when they were very young. Samvedana is everything for them," said Das.

The children are studying from Class 1 to Class 9 in government schools. Initially, school authorities were against these children. They were kept apart and provided with separate toilets. Later, advocacy with schools and local media helped the school authorities to understand that the children are harmless to others. Now the children are accepted and treated better. They are very talented and they take part in all activities organized by the school like cultural events, sports, dance and singing competitions. They have ambitions, but the future is uncertain.

So far nine children have succumbed to the illness. Each child is cremated according to his or her religious customs. Soon after the child's death Samvedana informs the child's relatives or guardians or the person who admitted the child at Samvedana. Sometimes they do come to receive the dead body of the child. At times they are indifferent. Samvedana takes care of the funeral. In such situations it is only the NGO who weeps for the child.

People are curious to see HIV positive children. Their attitude is to see them like animals in a zoo, and their dramatised sympathy does not help in any way, said one staff member. Bhagavan Das is very protective of the children and discourages visits by VIP sightseers.

CARDTS extends support to another 56 children who have tested positive and are living with their parents or guardians through a community outreach programme. Positive children living with their parents are eligible to enroll in Samvedana. The children are from villages and towns between Kundapura and Kasargod. Outreach workers visit their homes regularly and help with health, education, psycho social and nutrition support.

At Samvedana children run around happily and play. But all of a sudden if a child dies, it becomes very difficult to control the emotions of other children. It is tough to face such situations but Samvedana's team is mentally prepared. "It is our privilege to mother these children," said a staff member.

Animals party in Lucknow zoo

Anjali Singh
Lucknow

FOR many years, Jason the chimpanzee suffered loneliness and deprivation in his home at the Prince of Wales Zoological Gardens in Lucknow. The zoo, like the nawabs of yore, was a relic of faded royalty always short of cash. So Jason and his fellow animals quietly lived the life of the underprivileged.

That is till the zoo put up the animals for adoption. Things changed overnight. Banks, companies and individuals started tripping over each other to take the animals under their wing.

VIJAY SINGH

Renu Singh with the cheetah cub she adopted

Jason got adopted by the United Bank of India (UBI). The bank was so delighted with him, they decided to adopt one more chimp. "We were keen to adopt Nikita, the female chimpanzee, but someone else beat us to it," says Seema Singh, senior manager, marketing, UBI.

Actually Nikita got snapped up by a retired colonel. "In captivity these animals are dependent on us and we should not allow them to suffer due to lack of funds," said the kindly colonel.

The quality of life of the animals has improved dramatically. More people are turning up at the zoo, some to be in touch with their newly adopted wards others to have a *dekho.*

"Adoption of our animals has breathed new life into the zoo," says Renu Singh, director of the zoo who came up with the idea. "Since we no longer face a cash crunch, the extra funds have been put into improving the overall ambience. Footfalls have increased. The zoo has become a must see place."

When Renu Singh began inviting people to adopt the animals, she was uncertain of the response. But her fears were belied. Companies and individuals rushed in enthusiastically. The zoo now has a 'waiting list' of individuals wanting to adopt the animal of their choice.

"Since we began two years ago the scheme has been so successful that we have raised revenue to the tune of Rs 39 lakhs. Seeing such enthusiasm we have opened up our gardens and parks for sponsorship also," says Singh.

Most companies have a budget for social causes and adopting animals at the zoo has become a hit. Since costs range from Rs 1,000 to Rs 5 lakhs annually, everyone can afford to fund an animal as per their pocket. Says AC Hari, deputy general manager of Oriental Bank of India who has adopted two tigers: "The annual maintenance of tigers is Rs 1, 60,000. This is well within our budget. We want to improve their lives. Besides, tigers are disappearing from the wild so this gives us a chance to help increase their numbers."

"To be honest it's a two way approach," admits a senior manager of a petroleum products company on condition of anonymity. "When we put up our board with our company's name on it, we get publicity as well. All our branches plan to use their social budget for such causes."

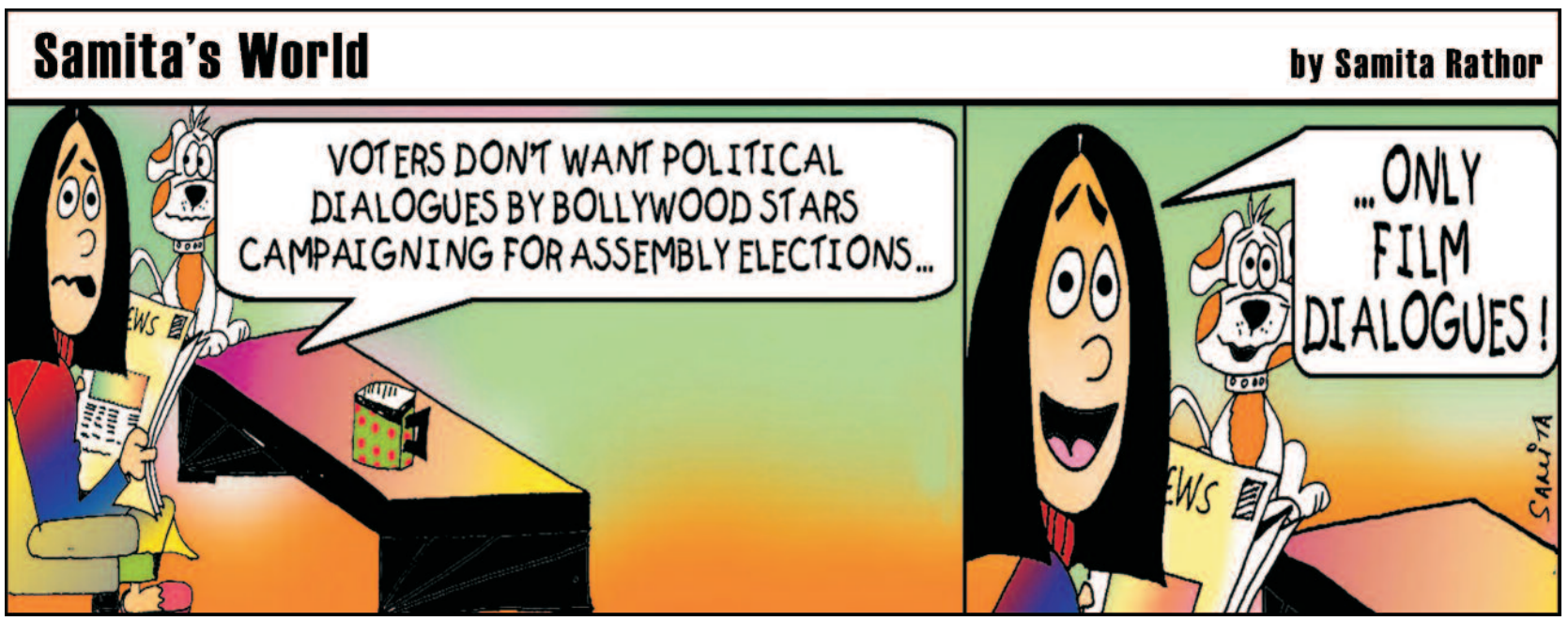
To retain public interest, zoo authorities have made the zoo a veritable party zone. There are birthday bashes for the cheetahs, chimpanzees, deer and giraffes. For the Pelican chicks, there are naming ceremonies. Tigers and zebras get to celebrate Valentines Day. These events attract crowds to the zoo.

Renu Singh has adopted two cheetah cubs whom she has brought up as her own daughters. "Suheli and Sharda were brought here from Dudhwa National Park. They were only eight days old when some rangers found them abandoned by their mother. They are a year old now and I just celebrated their birthday on 18 January," says Singh.

She has put in a lot of effort to acquire rare and endangered species. These animals are also getting public attention. "A white civet cat has just been placed at our nocturnal house. No zoo in the country has this animal but we got it when it was being smuggled out of the state by poachers who were nabbed by the Special Task Force (STF). I got in touch with STF and requested them to place the animal with us which they did."

Another animal Singh is trying hard to get is a man eating tiger who has been spreading terror in various districts of UP. Once he arrives at the zoo, he will be put up for adoption.

But who will want to adopt a maneater? "Everyone of course," chuckles Singh. "The controversy that surrounds the tiger has already turned this one into a celebrity. So, requests for his adoption are going to be pouring in. Everyone will want to save him."



Telling the truth online

Saurabh Yadav
Bangalore

A two bedroom apartment in Bangalore's Cooke Town with a vegetable vendor's push cart for a computer table doesn't look like a global NGO's office. But this is where the agenda for Tactical Technology Collective's (TTC) Info Activism camp was planned.

Founded by Marek Tusynski and Stephanie Hankey in 2003 in Amsterdam, TTC equips activists with the technical tools they need online for their causes. "Information is an asset," said Marek, "And by using it in new and interesting ways, activists are empowering people."

With offices in Brighton and Bangalore, TTC has held six global camps around open source technology. These interactions led to the creation of toolkits for online advocacy like 'mobiles in a box' and 'message in a box' which explain how to use mobiles and multimedia to campaign.

Their most recent camp was in Bangalore, last month. TTC was interested in linking developers of open source software with activists, especially social justice groups.

Participants from 38 countries painted, mapped, blogged and networked their way through. Campaigners shared success stories. They talked of how their campaigns could be replicated and have more impact by using mobiles, video and the Internet.

With invaluable help from Aspirations, USA, the camp got a bright and energetic bunch together to create a buzz. "Put together 140 really passionate, special people with a good support team, watch their brains churn at full speed, talking and sharing. It's like an addiction for me," said Gunner from Aspirations who was Camp Leader and Master of Ceremonies.

SAURABH YADAV

Chris Michael

Wael Abbas

On just one afternoon there were sessions on how to blog, do it yourself video, advocacy, mapping.

Marek Tusynski

On just one afternoon there were sessions on how to blog, do it yourself video, HIV/AIDs advocacy, mapping and so on.

There was Muzna Al- Masri from Lebanon who with her colleagues finds out where bombs are falling during war and then makes maps. These are posted online on Kharita, a non political website where activists from Lebanon and Palestine paste and share maps (kharita.wordpress).

Muzna and friends began doing this during the Israel-Lebanon war of 1996. Using government information, Lebanese newspapers, and a website which gave minute by minute updates, they plotted the bombs and the number of strikes. The idea was to show that bombs were being thrown randomly and not as precision strikes like Israel claimed.

The group also mapped bridges, roads and fuel stations which were destroyed so people would be able to navigate through the country.

Muzna is a PhD student and is studying the anthropology of conflict at Goldsmiths College's Department of Anthropology. Her PhD research is on the social construction of conflict boundaries within the city of Beirut.

She has co-founded Cinemayat or Cinema of Life. Muzna is interested in looking at life during war: how one lives, the resistance and suffering of people, how the village changes.

Cinemayat helped filmmakers during the recent conflict by providing cameras and editing and translation facilities. Finally, nine films were made. There have been problems with compressing the videos for the Internet but the camp helped them find solutions. Muzna will look at examples of video archiving like pad.ma (Public Acess Digital Media Archive) from India.

Wael Abbas Belal, Egypt's most influential blogger (misrdigital.blogspirit.com) was also at the camp. He has inspired many to go online. Wael is a journalist. His blog covers information missed by traditional media and provides SMS news on activism to 1600 Twitter followers.

Wael has gained worldwide recognition for using online videos to expose and publicise torture in Egypt's police stations. The videos, posted on YouTube, caused a lot of outrage and forced the authorities to take action against the policemen. Wael feels his biggest successes have been his exposure of human rights violations like torture, sexual harassment of women during a religious festival, rigging during elections and violent methods employed on peaceful demonstrators.

His images and videos made the media in Egypt 'push the envelope in investigative journalism'. He was working as a full time journalist but his activism cost him his job. There have been arrest warrants issued against him, he and his family have received threats, and he has been accused of being a Christian and a homosexual. He dreams of a democratic country where everyone is heard, freedom upheld, citizens have fundamental rights and minorities are respected.

Chris Michael from Witness (www.witness.org) has years of experience in designing and implementing high profile social and environmental justice campaigns for organisations like Global Exchange and Rainforest Action Network.

Witness has a 15- year history of empowering communities through video. "The first thing to determine is the reason for making the video, what the goal of the video is and who the audience is," says Chris. "The video has to be tailored to meet objectives." Witness distributes cameras to the communities they work with and trains them to make 'videos with a purpose'.

Activists are given Flip cameras which look like mobile phones and can film discreetly. The cameras have a one button delete so if the film maker is in danger of being discovered, the video can be deleted without looking at the camera.

Witness has had numerous successes. For example, 'Bound by Promises,' a video about slavery in Brazil in 2007 led to better conditions and greater investment in worker welfare.

There was also Malte from DeepaMehta (www.deepamehta.de), a website that encourages "research on the human-machine relationship and encouragement of education and apprenticeship." Started by Matthias Staps and Jörg Richter in 2000, DeepaMehta is a GPL licensed open source software. The founders were inspired by Deepa Mehta and her films and decided to name their platform after her.

DeepaMehta is a software platform for knowledge management. The DeepaMehta user interface has been built according to the principles of cognitive psychology. You store your information, not in files and folder, but into topic maps. We remember things by association and relationships, so the computer, by using this software, works the way our minds work. One advantage of such a software platform is that it allows many people to work together on the same project. It builds team spirit and collective intelligence.

Mirik gets Gorkha muscle

Young boys offer horse ride to tourists.

Vivek S Ghatani
Mirik (Darjeeling)

COOL wind, misty fog and a light drizzle greeted us at the Mirik Lake near Darjeeling. Tourists took a stroll along its shores. Some could be seen on boats. Young boys called out offering their horses for a ride. Then, we saw reality. A tourist drank tea and chucked the paper cup into the lake. A group of women began washing their clothes on the banks of the lake. We looked closely and saw heaps of garbage floating.

Mirik is a national lake, recognised by the Government of India. It is around 1.5 sq km in length. The total area of the lake and areas adjacent to it is 33 acres. We talked to the local NGO. "This lake attracts tourists and is the backbone of the local economy," said Ramesh Gazmer, secretary of Nature, Environment and Protection Activists (NEPA), the NGO which works here. "But it is dirty because people insist on throwing garbage in. A lot of encroachment has taken place. Local people have made houses. Who is going to check them?"

NEPA has been trying to create awareness of the lake. "We are a very small NGO," says Gazmer. "We recently did a cleaning campaign in which schools participated. In 2003 we started a signature campaign asking people to say no to plastics. We told the municipality's chairman. Our members tell people and tourists not to dirty the lake. But it has become a dustbin," he lamented.

Some years ago three water treatment plants were to be set up. This project, funded by the Central government, was executed by the Siliguri-Jalpaiguri Development Authority (SJDA). "A foreign scientist had visited the lake. After that, the government started the project which cost around Rs 68 lakhs. But it was never completed. As far as I know the state government has made no effort to prevent people from throwing waste into the lake or using it for bathing and washing," said Gazmer. His NGO believes sustainable development and a master plan to develop the lake can save it.

How important the lake is for the local economy could be judged by talking to young boys here who earn a living by offering tourists a horse ride.

"My father died four years ago. He used to offer horse rides to tourists. I started this business when I was eight years old. At that time I used to earn about Rs 800 a day. Today, it's very hard to make even Rs 400. The beauty of the lake is fading. Tourists are decreasing," bemoaned 14-year-old Wangdup Tamang.

The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), a political party that is spearheading the Gorkhaland agitation, has stepped in. It has formed a 21- member Jan Mukti Mirik Tourism Protection Committee to protect the tourism potential of Mirik. Members include locals, social workers, literary figures and senior citizens, said Binay Tamang, Press and Publicity Secretary, GJM.

"Neither the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council nor the West Bengal Tourism Department have taken any initiatives to check the contamination of Lake Mirik. They have not taken steps to repair and maintain the lake either. We came to know of this recently when our president, Bimal Gurung and myself came on a two- day visit to Mirik," said Tamang. He said the committee will educate locals, tourists and check encroachments. "We have also come to know that trucks throw *malba* into the lake. All this should be stopped at the earliest," said Tamang.

The committee will function directly under the GJM's central committee. "We have asked the committee for a detailed report. The party will support the growth of tourism in every way. After we get the report, the party will talk to concerned authorities to curb the menace," said Tamang.

He also said the committee has been empowered to create pressure on concerned authorities. "The committee will try to bring back the past glory of Mirik and the party will ensure every support," he said. Gazmer and his NGO were very happy. "Our NGO will extend support in every way," he said.

FXB' s India connection

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

FXB India Suraksha, an NGO that works for children orphaned by AIDS, recently launched a book titled, 'Hopes Alive: Surviving AIDS and Despair,' in New Delhi. The book, which narrates personal stories of women and children fighting the HIV virus to live a dignified life, was released by India's Vice President, Mohammad Hamid Ansari with Founder of FXB International, Countess Albina du Boisrouvray.

"Our strategy is designed to be the link between health and human rights. We believe no public health campaign can be effective without recognising the basic rights of those afflicted. The right to live with dignity is an important human right," said Countess Albina, who gave up her career as a renowned film producer to found FXB in 1989 after losing her 24-year-old pilot son while he was a rescue mission in Mali, West Africa.

FXB (Francois-Xavier Bagnoud) International offers comprehensive support to the families and communities that care for AIDS orphans, and

Albina du Boisrouvray with children at function

advocates for their fundamental rights. While there is no reliable consolidated data on the number of children orphaned by AIDS, UNAIDS estimates over 15 million children under the age of 18 had lost one or both parents to AIDS by the end of 2005. As the AIDS pandemic deepens, millions of children in impoverished communities are increasingly at risk.

Today, FXB has more than 100 programmes in 18 countries, including 33 FXB-Villages that follow a holistic, integrated methodology which promotes self-sustenance. Within these programmes, women and children are equipped with education and vocational skills like weaving and stitching to help them lead independent lives.

FXB India launched its first programme in Goa in 1991. It now works across the country in partnership with the government, the private sector and other voluntary groups. In 2008, FXB India Suraksha was successful in directly impacting around 57,317 people.

Local handicrafts like *dupattas*, slippers, notebooks and shawls made by communities covered by FXB programmes in Manipur, Mizoram, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Rajasthan were displayed. A group of children, supported by FXB, performed to the soulful music of the Hindi movie blockbuster, "Taare Zameen Par".

The Ishaara Puppet Theatre presented 'Chunaauti - The Challenge', a 15- minute performance aimed at spreading the message, 'Awareness Is Definitely Safe'. With the use of creative puppetry, the 'Chunaauti' cast effectively depicted preventive measures people need to take against AIDS. FXB works regularly with Ishaara. The puppet group has been consistently and effectively connecting the medium with the message.

FARM SAVIOUR

How Bhuvana helped repair the tsunami' s damage in Tamil Nadu

Rina Mukherji
Poompuhar (Tamil Nadu)

PATTABI RAMAN

Bhuvana explains the effects of the tsunami on farmland

WHEN the tsunami struck the coast of Tamil Nadu four years ago, the village of Poompuhar in Sirkali taluk of Nagapattinam district was one of the worst affected. As the first wave swamped this fishing village, built on the remains of the ancient Chola capital of Poompuhar, 128 bodies were washed ashore. Houses collapsed in the face of the ocean's mad wrath. Hapless villagers ran inland to save their lives. The lashing waves swept over miles of farmland, turning these fields saline.

When the waves withdrew, more than death stalked the coastline. With livelihoods and homes gone, Nagapattinam was a land of the living dead. But thanks to the efforts of two women, after four years, the farms are beginning to be productive once again. Canals of a traditional irrigation system have been de-silted and farmers who had been shattered by the tsunami now have hope for their landholdings.

Manimekhalai, 52, then the president of Poompuhar panchayat and Bhuvaneshwari Kannan, 39, an agricultural expert, stepped in promptly. Manimekhalai was a dynamic and much admired local leader. Bhuvana, as Bhuvaneshwari is popularly called, is a post-graduate in agriculture with specialisation in plant genetics. She had shifted to Maiyaladuthurai after her marriage. After a short stint as research associate, Bhuvana was keen to work with the community and pass on her expertise to farmers in the Kaveripoompatinam- Poompuhar area.

With Manimekhalai's help, Bhuvana began to familiarize herself with villages under Poompuhar panchayat's purview. Just a day after she had arrived, while she was moving around getting to know the topography of the area, the tsunami happened. "There was utter chaos as people ran helter-skelter from villages along the Cauvery towards the town," recalls Bhuvana.

Manimekhalai did not get fazed by the utter destruction of her panchayat area. She got down to work straight away, inviting NGOs and charities to come and rebuild the homes and lives of the tsunami-affected people in villages falling under her purview. The Covenant Centre for Development (CCD) in Madurai was one such NGO which stepped in. Bhuvana had joined CCD as a coordinator. In the devastating days after the tsunami, Bhuvana began to skillfully use her knowledge of agriculture to help farmers overcome the disaster and restore their lands and farms.

The sea water had so ravaged agricultural land that farmers had given up all hope. They were reluctant to even try and make an effort to redeem their fields. "We found that weeds and grasses which used to proliferate had withered away after the sea water doused our lands. Instead, we could see a blackish grey residue spread itself out on our fields, " says Soundarrajan, a local farmer who now grows paddy, green lentils and peanuts on his two acres in Poompuhar.

CCD first got the farmers organised into self-help groups (SHGs). The SHGs were then structured into two farmer federations, the Kazhi Kadaimadai Farmers' Federation and the Poompuhar Cauvery Delta Farmer Federation. A revolving fund was given to each federation. The Kazhi Kadaimadai Farmers' Federation received Rs 45 lakhs and the Poompuhar Cauvery Delta Farmer Federation got Rs 60 lakhs. The two federations could now extend credit to member-farmers, as and when the need arose.

Soil testing revealed that the damage was not that serious. "We found that the pH level was more or less intact, so the lands could easily overcome the salinity," explains Bhuvana. "On the basis of what the farmers told us, we decided to try and restore farmlands to make them suitable for farming."

Poompuhar lies in the Cauvery delta. Since the Chola era, this region has been served by an intricate network of canals created 2000 years ago by the

PATTABI RAMAN

Farmers plant paddy, lentils and peanuts which can tolerate saline conditions

PATTABI RAMAN

An irrigation channel dating to the Chola era

Bhuvana has a word with farmers

Chola kings.

The centrepiece of this irrigation infrastructure is the Grand Anicut or the Kallanai, a massive dam of unhewn stone. Built across the Cauvery river, it is one of the oldest water diversion structures in the world. It dates back to the 1st Century AD and it was built by the Chola king, Karikalan. The purpose of the Kallanai dam was to divert the waters of the Cauvery across the fertile delta for irrigation via canals. It used to irrigate 69,000 acres. By the early 20th century this ancient dam was irrigating an area of about one million acres.

The sea water had so ravaged farmlands that farmers had given up all hope. They were reluctant to even make an effort to redeem their lands.

The request that came from farmers immediately after the tsunami was to desilt the irrigation and drainage channels of this ancient irrigation network. Since rain had been scarce in the preceding years and there was very little water in the Cauvery, maintenance of canals had stopped. For over five years, there had been no investment in drainage. The irrigation infrastructure here is complex – in some places drainage and irrigation canals are separate while in others, the drainage of one village is the irrigation channel of the next. In some villages the maintenance of canals was taken care of by the community using traditional practices.

Workers were engaged on a 'cash for work' basis to desilt and make the canals workable. The fields, steeped in salt, were leached with fresh water many times over and then treated with gypsum and green manure. From January to February, immediately after the tsunami, fields in three villages were washed over and then this method was extended to fields in another 22 villages. Since indigenous saline-resistant varieties of seeds were lost due to the Green Revolution in the Cauvery delta, saline resistant varieties developed by agricultural universities were planted on the ravaged farmlands. The Trichy-I and Co-43 strains of rice, and the MCU-7 and SVPR-3 of cotton were tried out. However, the inadequate availability of water forced farmers to abandon cotton cultivation.

Regular leaching with fresh water was continued at intervals to restore the lands. Experiments continued with better and more appropriate strains. Ultimately, Trichy- I and Co- 43 varieties of rice proved to be the most suitable. Peanuts and lentils did well too. These methods have helped

PATTABI RAMAN

Local farmers discuss their problems with Bhuvana

restore 3000 acres in 15 villages of Nagapattinam district.

Although post-tsunami cultivation started within a few months, Bhuvana and her team from CCD realized that the Poompuhar area was susceptible to a cycle of disasters. Drought was the most common. Rains were erratic. Out of four monsoon months, the region received rain for just two months.

Farmers like Paramasivam, Muthukumaraswamy and Soundarrajan describe farming here as a 'lottery'. The crop yield depended on an erratic supply of irrigated water sourced from the nearby Mettur Dam. As enlightened farmers they felt the need to spread awareness of better methods of cultivating paddy. The single seedling system of rice intensification (SRI) method, which requires paddy to be watered only once a week, was opted for. Once the yield got consolidated, the federation contributed to setting up a seed bank. Under Manimekhalai's leadership, the panchayat handed over an acre on which the farmers' federations set up an office. The seed bank was located here. The Poompuhar Cauvery Delta Farmers' Federation today has some 90 tonnes of seeds stored in its bank which brings in a neat profit. The farmers were also linked to crop insurance schemes by the CCD, and now every farmer has the advantage of crop insurance in these villages.

The ancient Kallanai dam

Building up farmers' federations has benefited the work of the Irrigation Department. Maintaining the A class (main) canals arising out of the Cauvery and other rivers in this delta region was always a stupendous task for the department. In ancient times, villagers and local self-governing bodies would maintain these canals. After Independence, the canals were taken over by the Irrigation Department which was given the responsibility of looking after them through the Public Works Department. Each major river channel has more than 150 A Class or main canals arising out of it. Each canal irrigates some 300 to 3000 ha. The main canals branch out into numerous B Class canals. There were frequent fights over the erratic quantity of water. "The farmers would blame the Agricultural, Irrigation and the Public Works departments for not de-silting canals and failing to keep them in good condition," says R Sridhar, Assistant Engineer of the Agriculture Engineering Department.

In 1992-93, a management subsidy was introduced for the maintenance of these canals. Farmers, at that time, were not interested in cooperating with the Irrigation Department in any way. But once the farmer federations were set up, all farmers were willing to share the responsibility of maintenance. "Now each farmer, rich or poor, contributes Rs 60 per hectare as against the government's Rs 540 per ha. Without a controlling stake and personal involvement, most farmers did not want to contribute towards the task, leave aside help with the drainage and sewage," says Sridhar. With the recent rise in management subsidy from Rs 400 to Rs 300 per hectare, and the willingness of farmers to cooperate, the district is now witnessing a sea change in canal maintenance. Canals are being desilted under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). The farmer federations are monitoring the scheme.

The farmer federations have managed to restore the Poompuhar region from the destruction wrought by the tsunami. Now they are successfully looking into various tasks involved in cultivation. There are four committees, each handling infrastructure, marketing, credit and technology. Since 2006, the federations are managing the committees on their own with the CCD only handling the administration. According to CCD Executive Director Parthasarathi, plans are afoot to withdraw totally next year. After that "the CCD will only help with linkages needed to interact with outside organizations."

Fields still need to be leached several times with fresh water which, given the erratic rainfall, is a tough task. "Our farms are yet to get back to their original shape," admit Soundarrajan and Paramasivam. However, the worst is over, with farms having begun to yield crops again. The manner in which the disaster was overcome earned appreciation for Bhuvana Kannan who was awarded the Ramesh Bhat Fellowship by the Disaster Mitigation Institute, Ahmedabad.

The devoted leader

Rina Mukherji
Poompuhar (Tamil Nadu)

FOUR years after the tsunami, the people of Poompuhar lead a well-settled life. You can see resettled villages of fishing and farming communities with neat rows of houses. There are well laid out roads flanked by neon street lights. The transformation of 10 villages in this panchayat is the handiwork of former panchayat president, Manimekhalai, and the district administration. Homes have been built even for the most backward villages. A lot of NGOs and charitable organizations helped in post-tsunami reconstruction.

J MURUGAN

Manimekhalai

As panchayat president, Manimekhalai, 52, is simple, articulate and devoted to social work. Born into the Meenava fishing community, her family was always politically active. Her father is a longstanding DMK worker. Manimekhalai got involved in social work at the age of 15 when her father was wrongly implicated in a murder charge. He was honourably acquitted and his young daughter Manimekhalai, continued to devote herself to community work.

She became panchayat president in 1996 and served two consecutive terms. When the tsunami happened Manimekhalai swung into action quickly. "I knew there were a lot of NGOs willing to help on behalf of the government. I decided to get in touch with them and get whatever was forthcoming for villages under my panchayat." Nagapattinam was acknowledged as the district that was worst hit by the tsunami. The government acknowledged this fact and that helped to bring in relief quickly. Within a week's time, the Covenant Centre for Development (CCD), St Joseph's Eye Hospital, CHESVI and SOS Children's Villages, got busy in villages under her panchayat. Meanwhile, Manimekhalai had temporary shelters set up and personally supervised the distribution of food, clothing and relief materials, day and night. She realised that not sufficient attention was being paid to the plight of farmers so she got in touch with Bhuvaneshwari Kannan who was working with the CCD.

J MURUGAN

Villages have roads, electricity and street lights

J MURUGAN

Houses built for the most backward villages

When the farmers' federations needed land for an administrative office and a seed bank, Manimekhalai was prompt in making panchayat land available. Rolling credit extended to the farmers' federations is now administered from the same office building today.

A lot of construction in her panchayat has been funded by NGOs and charities. Joseph Eye Hospital of Madurai contributed 100 houses and a marriage hall, SOS Children's Villages built 64 houses, the G L Swamy Foundation, Vijaywada 300 houses, CHESVI made 68 houses and a community hall, Sawai made 500 houses, and ISED built 300 houses for the SC/ST community. But once things settle after a disaster, funds and aid are not forthcoming. Manimekhalai understood this. So she got organizations to contribute a few essentials before they made their exit. She got CHESVI to fund the upgradation of the elementary school and middle school. She roped in an NGO to impart training in disaster mitigation to the villagers. A 20-member committee has been selected from among the villagers and is fully prepared to handle disasters.

She is quick to acknowledge the cooperation she has received from bureaucrats at the district level. "I have worked under 10 district collectors, and they have always helped me and my panchayat colleagues. We function as a team," she says.

Apart from the way she handled the fallout of the tsunami, Manimekhalai has a long list of achievements to her credit. She set up a Rs 6 lakhs veterinary hospital in her village. When the fisher community contributed Rs 1.50 lakhs for a hospital she approached the government with this money and got Rs 22 lakhs sanctioned for a government hospital.

Manimekhalai cleared 23 acres occupied by squatters, widened roads and got new ones made. Ironically, this made her lose the last panchayat elections. Villages in her panchayat have sanitation. Open defecation is never seen in any of the villages. More than 500 public toilets have been constructed. Awareness and stringent rules have stopped open defecation. Her work has been acknowledged by the state and central governments with the 'Nirmal Gram Award'. Poompuhar has a police station, thanks to her. There is even a tourist bungalow here constructed on three acres which she donated from her share of the family property.

In 1998-99, she had 20 houses constructed under the Indira Memorial Housing Scheme for the SC/OBC communities.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has also been put in place here. "In May, June and July there is no work for people in Poompuhar," she explains. In 2006, she had a community solar dryer set up for the fishermen's community to facilitate the drying of fish. Fisher women have been trained in fish preservation. She is now keen to set up a home for the elderly.

In 1999, the National Commission for Women honoured her for her work as panchayat president.

Business

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Roadmap for affordable housing

And near Mumbai a developer gives homes for Rs 2.1 lakhs

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FAR from the debris of the downturn, a very different real estate market is taking shape. Developers have begun seeing business sense in building cheaper and affordable homes for people with small incomes.

With the bubble of rising real estate prices having burst, even some of the bigger companies are looking at the small home buyer, realising that this is where opportunity really lies.

The Ansals are putting Rs 400 crores into such housing in the north and others in their league elsewhere in the country are on the same track.

Inexpensive housing coming up at Karjat near Mumbai

But it is to the innovators in affordable housing that the day really belongs. They have the advantage of being first-movers, cutting costs and providing access to finance to a broad base of buyers desperate to own shelter. For instance, Matheran Realty Pvt Ltd is offering homes beginning from as little as Rs 2.1 lakhs in the hinterland of Mumbai.

Even as this happens, an important task force of the Union government headed by Deepak Parekh, chairman of HDFC, has stressed that affordable housing should be seen as a core economic activity and placed at the centre of public policy.

The task force has put forward suggestions for enhancing developed land and rental housing, upgrading of slums at places where they are located instead of shifting them and making finance available.

The task force observes that a democratic society needs to ensure housing for everyone. "Globally there is a strong correlation between economic development and housing and housing quality," it says.

In India, 42 million people or 15 per cent of the urban population live in slums. About 81 million people or 25.7 per cent of the urban population are below the poverty line. The Eleventh Five Year Plan estimates an urban housing shortage of 24.7 million units.

"Not to deal with this scale of the problem – even if it means doubling of the existing housing stock – or to delay action on this front can seriously affect the country's economic growth and poverty reduction strategies," the task force says.

AVAILABILITY OF LAND: Availability of land is essential if housing is to be made affordable. The task force's suggestions on land are significant. It has called for uniformity in laws and regulation. It has also suggested reforming outdated legislation such as the Land Acquisition Act of 1894.

It has however said that there is an urgent need to simultaneously add to the urban land stock through acquisition and to allocate the land for different purposes, including affordable housing.

At present, acquisition is seen as benefiting only the rich. Compensating farmers with cash has had many downsides, leading to an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust. The process of adding to the urban land stock is painful, slow and inefficient. Distortions in price and availability neither help industry nor the poor.

The task force wants affordable housing to be treated as a public purpose because this "alone will signal to the country that affordable housing is a development priority."

Issues relating to acquisition of farmlands can be dealt with through compensation packages that offer revenue streams that stretch over 10 or 15 years in addition to fixed one-time compensation.

SLUM UPGRADES: The task force has also suggested redevelopment and improvement of slums considering that millions of people live in them in urban India. It has said that an important precondition to this is that the government ensure security of tenure and provide the poor access to market funds. Security of tenure could take the form of regularisation of settlements, community ownership, leases or user rights.

Once the poor are protected against eviction and have access to finance, in situ redevelopment can take place. For this the task force suggests the involvement of NGOs and civil society organisations so that it becomes a community effort.

FSI /FAR REVISION: The task force is in favour of an increase in Floor Space Index/Floor Area Ratio. It feels this is necessary considering the intense competition over land use. The task force estimates that 15 -20 per cent of the affordable housing needs in cities could be met through adjustments in FSI/FAR. There would however be a need to match such changes with investments in infrastructure.

FINANCE: The task force has suggested that funds

for affordable housing under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) be increased 100 per cent and that part of them be used for creating new housing and part for in situ development with the help of NGOs.

It has also proposed that a cess of 0.5 per cent of all central government taxes be credited to a shelter fund managed by the National Housing Bank (NHB) and that budgetary support of an equal amount also be put in the fund so that there is a long-term impact on affordable housing.

The task force has strongly supported a bigger role for microfinance institutions (MFI) in housing particularly with regard to in situ development. It has supported the idea that these institutions be allowed to take deposits in addition to their current role of disbursing loans.

The poor need to save a lump sum amount for down payment. It is also important to assess a borrower's capacity to save. Since MFIs will have to give out for housing larger sums than they usually do, letting them take deposits will be a good idea.

THE OPPORTUNITY: Lone entrepreneurs have for long been sensing the business opportunity and creative challenge in providing affordable housing. Unfortunately, they have mostly had to operate within an unsympathetic policy environment. The real estate sector has been on a rollercoaster of unrealistic values and extravagant branding catering to just a small segment of the market.

Affordable housing requires reorientation of the real estate sector. The key challenges are in getting land at affordable rates, bringing down construction costs and making finance available to people with small incomes.

Matheran Realty has shown that it is possible. It will have 1,200 flats for people with small incomes ready for possession by June 2009 at Tanaji Malusare City (TMC), at Karjat, in the hinterland of Mumbai. These flats are priced at between Rs 2.1 lakhs and Rs 7.35 lakhs.

Such is the demand that there are 66,000 applications for 3,000 flats and that is just in Phase 1. When TMC is complete it will have 15,000 units. By December this year, 5,000 flats would have been handed over.

Instead of offering super luxury and focusing merely on those buyers with big incomes, Matheran Realty has opted for a pioneering effort in affordable housing for low-income groups.

The project is commercially viable and therefore has the potential to be a model for other developers. It shows that there is a huge demand for housing among people with low incomes and it makes great business sense to meet this demand.

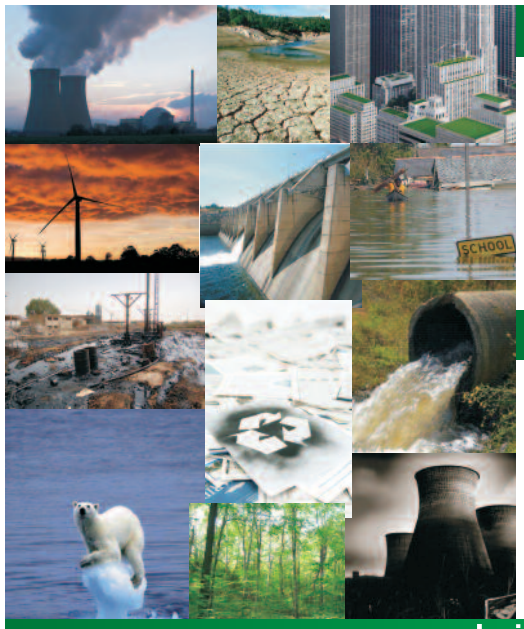
TMC is India's largest planned social housing project over 100 acres next to the Karjat Railway Station. It is well connected by road and rail to Mumbai's employment regions. SKM Consulting Australia has done the master plan, which meets the highest standards of sustainable development with playgrounds, schools, hospitals, shopping centres.

Matheran Realty has had the benefit of some handholding from the Monitor Group, a leading advisory and consulting firm which has a strong social spirit. The Monitor Group has been working with builders to make homes cheaper by bringing down construction costs and finding ways to give people with low incomes access to finance.

With TMC flats beginning at Rs 2.1 lakhs a new standard has been set. Till now, the smallest and cheapest apartments being financed and built in urban India were in the Rs 5 lakhs to Rs 6 lakhs range. TMC offers one room and kitchen in two sizes of 200 and 300 square feet. It has one bedroom and kitchen in 400 square feet and two bedrooms in 500 square feet. The prices are Rs 2.1 lakhs, Rs 3.15 lakhs, Rs 5.25 lakhs and Rs 7.35 lakhs respectively.

In affordable housing for people with low incomes, the tough thing to crack is finance. In this Matheran Realty was helped by the Monitor Group. There are now nine banks and financial institutions empanelled to provide loans to Matheran Realty's customers. There have been loan carnivals and educational interactions so that people who had never been exposed to housing finance earlier could get an idea of how it works.

The profile of the TMC buyer as provided by the Monitor Group is very interesting. Of 66,000 applicants 50,000 have been first-time home buyers. Among the applicants for the Rs 3 lakh house, 62.5 per cent earn less than Rs 15,000 a month, 18 per cent between Rs 15,000 and Rs 20,000. The rest earn above Rs 20,000. More than 80 per cent of all applicants, beginning from the one room format unit, asked for finance to make the purchase.



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24-25 April 2009

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Day 1 - 24th April, 2009

Session 1 Climate Change: What is it and why does it matter for business?
Session 2 International Scenario: What is carbon trading and where is it headed?
Session 3 Indian Scenario: Impact of climate change and the Governmental and Business response
Session 4 Indian Business and Climate Change Risk Management

Day 2 - 25th April, 2009

Session 5 Carbon Market Opportunities in India
Session 6 Clean Technologies: Renewable Energy in India (with case studies)
Session 7 Clean Technologies: Energy Efficiency in India (with case studies)
Session 8 The Way Forward for Indian Businesses in a Carbon Constrained Economy
Session 9 Conclusion and Final Address

**Tentative programme subject to modifications*

Invited Speakers

- Mark Runacres *Former British Deputy High Commissioner, Honorary Fellow at The Energy and Research Institute (TERI)*
- Nitin Desai *Former UN Deputy Secretary-General*
- Arun Maira *Senior Advisor, Boston Consulting Group*
- Raj Chengappa *Managing Editor, India Today Group*
- Vivek Kumar *Former TERI Fellow and now Adviser at Royal Norwegian Embassy*
- Jotdeep Singh *Rabo Bank Regional Head Asia, Rabobank India*
- Ravi Singh *S-G and CEO, WWF India*
- Dr V Raghuraman *Senior Energy Adviser, CII*
- Dr V Subramaniam *Former Secretary, MNRE*
- Dr Arun Kumar *President, Development Alternatives*
- Shirish Sinha *Head, Climate Change and Energy Programme, WWF, Carbon Disclosure Project*
- Fergus Auld *First Secretary, Climate Change, British High Commission*
- Bijendra *Climate Change Risk Expert, Emergent Ventures*
- Aseem Chaturvedi *Carbon Market Expert, Emergent Ventures*
- Bishal Thapa *Managing Director, ICF International*
- Ajit Gupta *Former Chief Scientific Adviser, MNRE*
- Shailaja Sharma *Advisor Future Fuels and CO2, Shell India*
- Jami Hossein *Managing Director, Wind force Management Services Ltd.*
- Anil Patni *DGM, Tata BP Solar India Ltd.*
- Samiran Das *CEO, D1 BP Fuel Crops Ltd.*
- Dr Ajay Mathur *D-G, Bureau of Energy Efficiency*
- Jens Burgtorf *Director Indo, German Energy Programme*
- Samir Maithel *Director, Greentech Knowledge Solutions (P) Ltd.*
- Rohan Parikh *Head of Green Initiatives, Infosys Technologies Ltd.*
- Niranjan Khatri *Environmental Initiatives Director, ITC*
- Ashutosh Pandey *Head-Carbon Advisory Business, Emergent Ventures*

Registration/Fee Payment

The fee per participant is Rs 15,000/-, payments should be made through a Demand Draft (DD) of Rs 15,000 in favour of the Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH). The fee includes course, venue arrangements, refreshments & certificate. The fee does not include accommodation, local/outstation travel. No refund will be allowed for cancellations made. For 3 or more Participants from the same company there will be a 10% discount given.

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Prof. Vineeta Dutta Roy (vineeta.roy@bimtech.ac.in)

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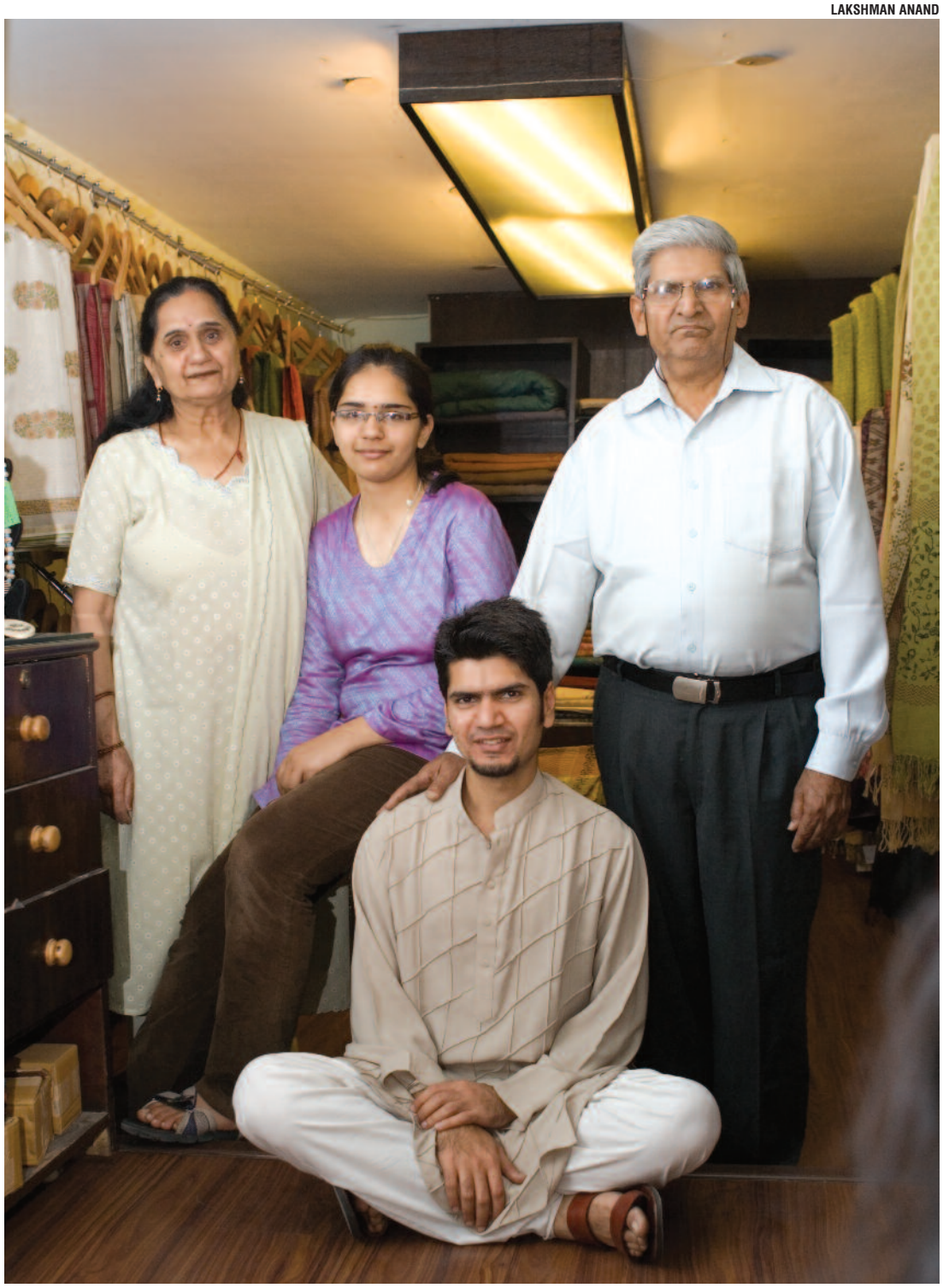
LAKSHMAN ANAND



Prashant Narang with his parents and sister Jyotsana at Tatsat

TATSAT is a small family-run enterprise at Hauz Khas Market in South Delhi, but it has a footprint that goes half across India and a socially conscious spirit that roams free on the Internet.

Tatsat, Sanskrit for 'all that is', partners self help groups, NGOs and other organizations big and small who would normally have no access to a retail outlet in South Delhi. Its shelves are an eclectic mix of jewellery, clothes, bags and so on – all the work of craftspeople and therefore very special in their identities. Products come from 12 organisations.

It all began some two years ago when a division of family assets resulted in a store going to Om Prakash Narang and his wife and their children. The store was well located in Hauz Khas, but the challenge of what to do with it went far beyond its real estate value.

At first they ran a clothes boutique with a tailoring unit, but that wasn't exciting enough. That's when Prashant, 28, convinced his father that it was important to do something innovative. It was his idea that the store be positioned as a hub for products from NGOs and community groups.

For his father Om Prakash Narang this path may have been an unfamiliar one but the ideas fitted in well with his own desire to do something novel. The Tatsat team comprises three more members, Om Prakash's wife Radha and the two daughters, Hema and Jyotsana.

Tatsat's first partnership was formed on Orkut, a social networking site. Prashant got lucky and came across a profile page for the Community Friendly Movement while randomly surfing the net. CFM works to build equitable and fair partnership between marketers in developed countries and producers in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other parts of the world.

Possibilities of collaboration struck Prashant instantly and he approached CFM with his proposal to showcase products from communities in his store. It was a first of sorts endeavor for both, as CFM until now did not retail their products in India.

Products supplied by CFM include fabrics, cloth bags, jewellery, and lifestyle accessories. The partnership grew and so did their business. Through CFM, Tatsat found more partners. Some of Tatsat's partner organizations are TARA, Swechcha, Usha, Jagriti, Foundation for Art, Manthan, Abhudaya and Lakshya.

This journey for them started with an inventive idea and continues to chart a remarkable path. Jyotsana explains: "We were new to the business and knew little about the workings. We visited all crafts exhibitions, trade fairs made regular trips to Dilli Haat (a government sponsored crafts bazaar) to connect with people we could possibly source from. But things took time to come along. Slowly, organizations started contacting us on their own. Now our suppliers come from different parts of the country, they specialize in varied crafts and support diverse causes. And somehow we manage to put together these wide-ranging aspects under one roof".

Tatsat's first partnership was formed on Orkut. Prashant got lucky and came across a profile page for the Community Friendly Movement.

Prashant goes on to explain the motivation behind their work, "We wanted to start a store that not only promoted shopping for a cause, as one's good deed of the day, but also create a business model that went beyond charity and actually upheld fair and ethical practice in trade. We want to be known for our quality and not just the causes we support".

A champion of fair trade, Prashant explains his point of view and challenges he faces, "Unfortunately, people in India often look at trade

with suspicion. Part of my mission is to change this perception. A mutually benefiting exchange is harmonious. It would be silly to not exploit this quality to make an impact at the grassroots level. When practiced with ethics, trade empowers people, something that charity may fail to do. And what can be better than empowering people by making them self-sufficient rather than victimizing them".

Tatsat's collection includes a large range of products from traditional handicrafts such as fabrics sourced directly from the weavers in Jharkhand to modern jewellery with contemporary designs made in an urban slum. The most recent addition to their collection comes from a local craftsman, Narayan Singh, from Delhi who makes blinds from bamboo. Singh made some blinds for their home and asked if he could showcase his work in their store. Today, Narayan's samples are displayed in the store and customers can get blinds made to order.

There are quite a few interesting and rare products at this store. Amongst other beautiful things on display are the Shibbori fabric and sarees. Shibbori is an ancient Japanese technique used to shape resist dyeing. Currently there are only a handful of set-ups in India using this technique. Tatsat also has an attractive selection of natural fabrics, linen, lead- cadmium-free ceramic pottery, salt rock lamps and recycled artworks.

A look at all the items on display in the store reveals the variety it encompasses. But for the Narang family there is a lot more to be done.

ABHI NANDITA MATHUR

Prashant recently travelled around Rajasthan to get a first hand understanding of crafts and their makers at the grassroots level. "We are constantly on the look-out for new ways to procure interesting products and improve our collection," he says.

As far as expanding the business is concerned he points out that this business model is not profitable enough to grow quickly. However they are keen to find new ways to go forward.

> **"Now our suppliers come from different parts of the country. They specialize in varied crafts and support diverse causes," explains Jyotsana.**

Hauz Khas isn't as plush as Greater Kailash or Khan Market where the really wealthy spend big bucks. But the store is well located nevertheless. Many of its customers are foreigners who have discovered the store and told others.

Local customers in Hauz Khas are also not exactly short of money. They are happy to spend on something that is truly unique. Since they mostly educated and sensitized to social concerns they would buy a product that helps a community.

Since the Hauz Khas market is where you will find general stores for household provisions and fruit vendors on the pavement, Tatsat comes as a pleasant surprise. So, for the last minute gift, or that random urge to splurge a little on the home, Tatsat offers options.

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Insights

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Short shrift for dam investors

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

THE Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) is in the news again for the wrong reasons, as usual. This time the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Limited (SSNNL) is trying to go back on its promises to the very investors who put their money in the project when it was facing its strongest opposition from all quarters.

The story starts in 1993 when the World Bank decided to withdraw itself from the project following loss of its credibility. Then, the Gujarat government's SSNNL floated the deep discount bonds (DDBs). It promised a return of Rs 1.11 lakh after 20 years on an investment of Rs 3600. The Nigam issued over 7.14 lakh bonds in January 1994, collecting about Rs 260 crores. Around 6.69 lakh bonds remained outstanding when the current process of redemption started in November 2008. As per the DDB prospectus, the Nigam had no option to call the bonds for payment before maturity, though the bond holders had that option at various stages.

Gujarat Finance Minister Vajubhai Vala, while presenting the interim budget in the State Assembly on February 18 this year, admitted that the deficit in 2008-09 was much higher due to the prepayment of DDBs of the SSNNL for which the government had earmarked Rs 2,720 crore. Out of this, Vala said, about Rs 1,800 crore had already been disbursed against premature redemption of the bonds. It is not clear why the government earmarked Rs 2720 crores for the DDBs when the requirement was for over Rs 3300 crores.

The SSP has been a huge drain on the resources of the Gujarat government. As the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has noted, the project was cleared without any financial plan. The state government borrowed indiscriminately to push ahead with the project at any cost, but most of the borrowings in the latter years went for servicing the earlier debts. Even as the project got by far the largest funding for any project from the Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme in complete violation of the norms of the scheme, the project's financial requirements have become an unbearable burden even for a so called prosperous state.

Now, considering that the SSNNL would have to pay over Rs 7400 crores to the DDB investors at maturity in January 2014, the Gujarat government passed legislation in 2008. The Act was to help the state escape the guarantee given earlier to the bond holders and to allow mandatory redemption of all bonds as of January10, 2009, by paying Rs 50,000 – the amount payable for each bond at the end of 15 years in case an investor so wishes, as per the original promise. If SSNNL succeeds in this attempt it will have to pay about Rs 3345 crores at this stage.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

NBA activist at a protest meet in Delhi

The SSNNL (Conferment of Power to Redeem Bonds) Act, 2008 passed by the Gujarat Assembly was clearly contrary to the terms and conditions of the bonds prospectus dated March 29, 1993. This Act has now been challenged by the investors in the Gujarat and Maharashtra High Courts. The lawyers also argue that the bonds were issued under securities laws and the Companies Act, 1956, passed by Parliament and the actions under the Union Act cannot be reversed through a State Act. The Gujarat High Court has mentioned that in case the Act is stuck down, the company would have to allow the investors to remain invested in the bonds. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) itself has challenged the Act in the Supreme Court. SEBI had also asked SSNNL to inform the bond holders individually and SEBI, the basis on which the Nigam arrived at the redemption value. It seems SSNNL has not done this.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) had warned in 1993, at the time of issue of the bonds, that the project is an unviable proposition, that the offer of such huge returns would put unjustifiable burden over the people of the state and that it would be an irresponsible way of allocating scarce public resources. That argument of the NBA, unfortunately, fell on deaf years.

Even CAG has repeatedly, including for the report for 2000-01, said that the state government has been borrowing in an irresponsible manner. The Gujarat government also realized this and in 2004 made an unsuccessful attempt at premature redemption of the bonds. SEBI had then asked SSNNL to first get prior, informed consent of the bond holders for premature redemption, through a meeting with them. Realizing that the bond holders are not likely to give their consent, the state government withdrew the proposal.

It is indeed ironic that the government was asked to take the prior informed consent of the bond holders who had voluntarily invested their surplus financial resources in the company. However, the government had to take no such prior informed consent of the landholders, whose only livelihood resource, the land, was being taken away by the government forcibly! It is clear for whom our system works.

SEBI has argued in its petition before the Supreme Court that if this Act of the Gujarat government is allowed, it "may lead to complete collapse of the market for securities issued by the government companies". The SEBI petition says that if, "a public limited company is permitted to avoid discharging their obligations to the public at

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NREGA seems to work

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI

NOW that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is in operation across the country for about a year, it is interesting to look into its performance from a pan-Indian perspective. What has been the extent of employment guaranteed to a resident of Bharat? What are the assets created across the country through the employment guarantee scheme?

Information on these counts is available on the website of the Ministry of Rural Development and is updated every month. A peep into the website helps one track the changes and performance at the level of every single gram panchayat.

I would like to share some basic findings that emerged from an analysis of data downloaded for 518 districts. The results presented consider all major states, excepting the north-eastern states (barring Assam), Uttaranchal, Goa, Pondichery and the Union Territories.

Even though data for the rest of the districts from these regions is available, districts from the north-eastern states (excluding Assam) and Uttaranchal have been purposively left out to underscore the difference in their ecological character vis-à-vis the rest of the country.

The performance audit of NREGS in these regions requires some distinct parameters, not very relevant for the rest of the country, and hence deserves separate attention. The other regions have been left out as they are too small to influence the pan-Indian characteristics of the impact of NREGA. I shall take up these regions separately in future.

The data used to report the findings were downloaded on 4th and 5th January, 2009. For most of the states they pertain to achievements till the end of November, 2008, while for a few they reflect the status till October, 2008. Data for some districts is also current, up to December 2008. It is found that:

- 91,06,1920 households registered their willingness to be considered for employment opportunities under NREGA. About 29.72 per cent belong to the category of Scheduled Castes (SC). Another 15.99 per cent of households are from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 54.30 per cent of registered households belong to the 'other' category.
- 12670.54 lakh person-days were generated under this programme nationally during the period under review. Of these 48.19 per cent person-days were provided to women.
- The share in employment is also more or less proportionately distributed across the three categories of SC, ST and others. About 31.48 per cent of employment went to households in the SC category. Households under the category of ST got a share of 22.56 per cent of the employment potential created. The remainder of 45.96 per cent went to households belonging to the category of 'others'. The bias in favour of the ST households (15.99 per cent of registered households and 22.56 per cent of share in employment) is a matter of encouragement.
- However, concern lies in the magnitude of employment created per registered household. Only 13.91 person-days of employment per registered households could be created during the period under review, far less than the target of 100 days to be achieved by March 2009. On a category-wise breakup it is 14.74 for SC households, 19.64 for ST households and 11.78 for those belonging to the 'other' category.
- There is, however, considerable variation across districts in terms of employment created per job card. Mandla in Madhya Pradesh and Dungarpur in Rajasthan have already created a little more than 75 person-days of employment per job card per job card – the highest among the districts covered in this analysis. Around 12.23 per cent of registered households in Mandla have already exhausted their quota of 100 days.
- On the other hand, there are 15 districts in the country that have so far created no employment opportunities for the job card holders. They are: Kamrup in Assam, Bandipora, Rajouri and Udhampur in Jammu and Kashmir, Bangalore, Dakshina Kannada, Ramnagara, Tumkur and Udupi in Karnataka, Ratnagiri, Sidhudurg and Solapur in Maharashtra and Faridkot and Sangrur in Punjab. Among them Rajouri has only two households who registered them as jobseekers under NREGA. The rest of the districts have issued significant number of job cards.

If we look at the nature of jobs done we find that roads have been constructed to facilitate intra village connectivity, drainage channels have been created or repaired to facilitate flood control and protection, a lot of soil (123.57 million cubic metres) has been removed in digging new tanks and ponds and creating small check dams. Land has been afforested to facilitate drought proofing.

If we look at the nature of jobs done we find that roads have been constructed, drainage channels have been created or repaired for flood control and protection, a lot of soil has been removed by digging new tanks, ponds and creating small check dams.

And 200.31 million hectares of land owned by people belonging to SC, ST, BPL categories have been provided with irrigation facilities. Another 985.58 million hectares of such land is expected to be covered by the end of the fiscal year.

Thus by the end of November 2008, a good amount of productive assets appear to have been created through schemes under NREGA, even though one is not quite sure about their quality.

This picture pertains to the average performance under NREGA schemes in the country as a whole and does not capture the considerable variations that exist not only across the states but also across districts within a state.

Still, the findings reveal that we are far away from achieving the primary objective of ensuring 100 days of employment to willing households in general. Understanding the nature of inter-state and intra-state variations in performance will reveal a lot more about the effectiveness or otherwise of NREGA. I shall focus on them in the coming issue.

Continued from Page 27

large as also the institutional investors who are investing funds for the welfare of their members, it affects the entire securities market in as much as the investors would not come forward for investing funds in securities issued by the government companies". It is clear that the consequences of the state government's act are far reaching and dire.

Here it is relevant to note that even after spending over Rs 28011.53 crores by March 2009, the Gujarat government has achieved command area development and hence proper irrigation facilities in just 3.31 lakh ha, which is 18.45 per cent of the project's final benefits. If we look at the progress rate for the last three years, we see that the project would take at least 17 more years to achieve full command area development. The project is as yet able to use hardly 10 per cent of the water available in a year at the dam site. It is clear that instead of clamoring for further work on the dam, the state government needs to focus on achieving the utilisation of the water available now at the dam site. That may make the project slightly less distressing.

Clearly, the DDBs have turned out to be Distressingly Disastrous Bonds for the Gujarat government. This is another incident that shows that SSP is also a financially non viable project.

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SEZs are land scams

KANCHI KOHLI

RITA ANAND

Protestors at a NAPM meeting

IN early December 2008, the Union Cabinet asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to grant infrastructure status to Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the country. Currently, SEZs are considered real estate projects and thereby need to pay higher interest on bank loans. As infrastructure projects, interest rates for developers of SEZs would reduce and thereby benefit these zones which are facing the impact of the global slowdown.

Why not view the RBI decision in the light of what is allowed to be developed within an SEZ? Any SEZ developer can acquire land with an upper limit of 5000 hectares. Fifty per cent of the land acquired now needs to be used for setting up processing facilities related to industry and the other 50 per cent can be used for building residential areas, entertainment infrastructure and so on. Previously, the ratio was 75 per cent for industry and 25 per cent for real estate. Therefore, half the SEZ areas to be developed are indeed self acknowledged real estate projects.

SEZs provide tax exemptions and special privileges to the developers as a means of encouraging Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India. Within three years of the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act in 2005, over 300 SEZs have been cleared by the Board of Approvals, the single window mechanism at central government level.

The declaration of SEZs has seen a major negative reaction from farming, forest dwelling and fisher folk communities. For anyone who has followed the environment and development discourse in India or can identify with the protesters of this paradigm, the negative reaction should come as no surprise.

The most fundamental issue is that of a massive change of land use that SEZs will usher in. Such changes have a huge impact on ecology and on people's livelihoods.

The most fundamental issue is that of a massive change of land use that SEZs will usher in. Such changes have a huge impact on ecology and on people's livelihoods. And this does not necessarily limit itself to agricultural land. While the stiffest of struggles against SEZs have been by farmers, the development of these economic hubs spreads way beyond that. SEZs intrude into forest lands, coastal stretches and grazing pastures. Take over of common areas along the coast means seasonal fisher folk lose their access to the sea and over spaces where allied activities like boat making, fish drying all take place.

It is also because of this reality that the entire argument of developing SEZs on wastelands rather than on fertile agricultural renders itself as futile. In nature, no land is 'waste'. All land has an important environmental service linked with it. Sometimes, land is able to intertwine itself with livelihoods and many times its existence as it is, is needed to maintain a balance in nature. Water recharge, natural barriers against disasters, soil binding and strengthening, sustaining wild flora and fauna, open pastures for grazing – such services don't and cannot figure in economic cost-benefit analysis, with SEZs being no different.

The second big question plaguing SEZs is the issue of compensation. Many struggles opposed to SEZs are fighting it out to secure a just price. However, in the market, payment is only made to those who are the owners of land. What about the artisans, farm labour, those who make the farming tools? Do they figure in the compensation packages offered by SEZ developers or even proponents of a single industrial operation? My clear answer would be, no!

The Government of India often showcases several statistics to highlight the increase in exports or the number of jobs that have been and will be created by SEZs. The justification is that the unemployed youth of the country will get absorbed and that their standard of living will improve. In contrast, have there been any official efforts to ascertain the number of occupations and jobs that are lost when people's farm lands are taken over or access to forests, grazing areas or the sea is curtailed? Entire families are dependant on these livelihoods, unaccounted and unrepresented.

It is often said that the concept of SEZs has always existed in India as Export Processing Zones (EPZs). But there are fundamental differences between the two, the primary one being the promoters are from the private sector rather than the public sector. The non-applicability and leniency of labour and environmental laws within such zones are another. There are other points that can follow highlighting that SEZs have unique and special privileges and that is why private developments are queuing up for them.

But all this makes one ask a very straightforward question to the decision makers at the Centre and the States. Governments talk about "inclusive growth" as a necessary element of governance. Do they not see the inherent contradiction between providing exclusive benefits to a few to accumulate profit, and the stated desire to include all in the process of development? Clearly, the two cannot co-exist and will always stand in conflict with each other. SEZs are only another step in that direction.

Kanchi Kohli is a member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi

Our very own local police

ML PANDIT

GOVERNING a billion plus people is, by itself, a formidable challenge. A high incidence of illiteracy and poverty make this challenge all the more difficult. When vote bank politics subject India's history and heterogeneity to varying interpretations along religious, caste and regional considerations, governance becomes even more complex. India's governance and current security concerns have to be understood and addressed in this milieu.

India is in the news as an emerging economy and as a nation threatened by terror, crime and dwindling standards of governance. While growing acts of terror are common knowledge and concern, the crime situation is no less alarming. According to a recent MSN Special Report, India already has the dubious distinction of recording the largest number of murders. The report refers to 50 lakh officially quoted incidents of crime for 2007-08, including murder, rape and drug offences but excluding cyber crime.

The situation cannot be tackled merely by another federal agency as is being contemplated. It demands effective and accountable grassroots surveillance and vigilance. This would entail a complete revamp of prevailing policing and security arrangements.

Presently the task is handled essentially by the state level police force. This force, in view of growing crime and terror, is already under tremendous pressure. Most of the force is deployed to secure the state apparatus, politicians and other VIPs.

While this force has been rendering satisfactory services to VIPs, it has failed to meet the basic security needs of common people. Leave alone monitoring and restraining suspicious elements, the force has a very bad record in even responding to victims who somehow manage to reach the police station. Moreover, rampant corruption has made the force treat every incident/accident as an opportunity to extract gratifications from both the accused and the victim.

But there are other reasons which render the police force incapable of handling the security challenge. Most prominent is the manning of the force by people drawn from the entire state and in some cases from outside the state. By the time a newly deployed member of this force gets familiar with the people of his jurisdiction, he is routinely transferred to another station.

How can such policing maintain close vigil on the activities of people and areas they are not even familiar with? This task can be handled better by a locally manned, accountable and mobile multipurpose police force. The tenure, strength and deployment of such a force would have to be determined by the needs of each locality.

When people manning security, traffic and other policing functions are drawn locally, they enjoy a decisive advantage in monitoring and restraining offenders. Moreover, such a police force itself becomes the beneficiary of the resultant peace and harmony. Besides, a locally raised police force is most likely to exercise greater restraint and impartiality. In fact, policing is an activity where the 'sons of the soil' slogan can be made to work wonders. A locally raised police force can also solicit the cooperation and guidance of community volunteers in containing crime and terror as is the practice in the Western world. It would also meet the growing demand of the minority groups to be given adequate representation in policing and monitoring of suspicious elements.

Secondly, the outdated tradition of confining the police force to police stations needs to be discarded. The force must always be on the move to instil confidence among the people and scare criminals looking for easy targets. When the police force patrols continuously, suspicious and criminal elements automatically get scared. This movement also encourages residents to become fearless and confront criminals.

A federal agency can be effective in countering crime and terror only when it is assisted by a local, mobile, accountable and efficient police force working at the grassroots. Nipping evil in the bud at ground level is a pre-requisite for national security.

The arrangement proposed here would, no doubt, entail additional expenses but the benefits outweigh the costs. Since people have lost faith in the competency and impartiality of the police force, attempts to make alternative arrangements have already begun. Most urban group housing societies as well as business and commercial establishments employ private security guards.

As per one estimate the country already employs a million plus privately raised security force.

According to Assocham, the private security industry has been growing at 25 per cent over the last five to seven years and this growth is expected to reach 125 per cent by 2012. The current turnover of Rs 22, 000 crore of the industry is estimated to reach Rs 50, 000 crore in the next four years. Since law and order is a basic state function, the government needs to reverse the above trend. This can be done by handing over security arrangements to the proposed locally manned mobile police force in all localities. Services of the private security personnel can be deployed under the proposed scheme.

The precedents for the proposed system are already available in most of the developed world, especially the USA. In the West, locally manned police forces manage all types of emergencies including fire fighting, accidents and traffic regulations with unbelievable speed, impartiality and efficiency. Let us give their time tested security arrangements a chance and say goodbye to the outdated station based police force concept.

The author is Professor, Birla Institute of Management Technology, Greater Noida, UP. Views expressed are personal.

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Living

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Go underground in natural cave

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

SUSHEELA NAIR

Guhantara, cave resort

WELCOME to Guhantara, India's first underground cave resort on the outskirts of Bangalore. At the entrance, a beautiful driftwood of 30 animals and birds crafted by village artisans catches your attention.

You enter the cave resort through a 300 feet long underground corridor. Strolling down the mud encased tunnels lined with sculptures, paintings and frescoes feels like going on a journey to prehistoric times. The architecture transports you to an antiquated age of dark stone and earthen roofs with rock walls painted with natural colours.

SN Ramesh, the architect of R-Square Designs, explains why he chose to design a cave, "Living in a cave sounds simple, but recreating it on a 45,000 square feet built area on one acre with contemporary construction materials and giving it real character was a hugely challenging task. One had to be innovative, imaginative and adventurous, juxtaposing construction materials with rustic authenticity and ethnic appeal."

The tunnels open to a central lounge-cum-auditorium called Rangamantapa which has a gigantic spider-like skylight. This area is for rain-dances in summer and for family reunions. The auditorium doubles as an amphitheatre. It can house 700 people. It also provides lovely natural light that spreads across to the restaurant, Sambhojana. A waterfall forms the backdrop to this atrium-like space. The waterfall has a Kausita or an extensive swimming pool.

Samvada is a 70-seater conference room. It is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, yet the room has the ambience of the old stone world. Madhusala, the bar is unobtrusive. It has a ceiling plastered with mud but in reality made of concrete. There is a massive outdoor games and recreational area called the Paurika.

The tunnels spiked with skylights lead to the rooms. The resort has 14 cave-like rooms. Each has hidden spaces for modern conveniences and a typical village door with wooden cross-bars and jute threading. The walls showcase a pastoral ambience with hand-painted sketches of animals. The furniture looks like it is made of stone and wood though in reality concrete has been used.

Equipped with all modern amenities, the rooms look ethereal and rustic. There are electrical fittings cleverly covered in wooden panels, attached bathrooms with medieval bathtubs and a rainwater shower. The balcony in each room overlooks a man-made lake created by rainwater harvesting, its waters held by a bund. The rainwater valley can store 100,000 litres of harvested water.

"Every creation is an inspiration from nature, be it columns, chairs or the cosy suites," say architects SN Ramesh and CH Ramesh of R-Square Designs. It took them seven years to conceptualise and another two years to turn their ideas into reality. To get the cave effect, the architects thought of ferro-cement concrete. It has been used on moulds of rocks, so that the natural rough texture is highlighted. The ceiling is plastered with cement and mud and the floors have concrete on moulds that mimic wooden flooring.

"We have made all efforts to incorporate eco-friendly features in the making of Guhantara," says Ramesh. The underground structure and the stream running around the cave have been designed as a natural air cooling system using geothermal principles. There is earth measuring one foot above the seven inch thick ceiling, ensuring maximum strength of the structure.

The resort, of around three acres, is housed 30 feet below the ground. There is no seepage. Ramesh compares the effect with the *kalyani* or water pots in the Belur Halebid temples to counter water pressure. Air ducts all around the periphery ensure natural air-conditioning. Even the material used is cost-effective and eco- friendly. Minimal wood has been utilised. In fact the amount of teakwood, plywood and veneer used would make a conventional 30 by 40 feet home.

Every design is hand made with due emphasis on artisans. The architects have used concrete moulds to highlight the natural stone-cave look, effectively. Waste wood and packaging have been used for the flooring. Solar energy is harnessed to serve the needs of power. There is bio-mass for heating water and CFL bulbs for lighting. Guhantara's ozone water-treatment plan ensures a hygienic environment.

The spacious lawns above the resort are watered with treated wastewater. The rugged furniture has a forest-like raw appeal.

The resort is truly green. It has a zero per cent footprint because it is 100 per cent underground. Guhantara Cave Resort bagged The Best Project Award, 2007 from Accommodation Times, Mumbai for its breakthroughs in architecture.

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Filming a 30- year war

Abhinandita Mathur
New Delhi

MEENA NANJI

Stills from View from a Grain of Sand

ON 7th and 8th March, the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT) in partnership with the India International Centre, New Delhi, hosted the 5th Asian Women's Film Festival as part of Women's Day celebrations. This year the theme of the festival was 'Dialogues in Diversity'.

A film that stood out in the festival was *View from a Grain of Sand*, an exceptional work by Meena Nanji. An Indian from Kenya, she moved to England when she was nine years old and subsequently to Los Angeles in the US.

Told through the eyes of three Afghan women, a doctor, a teacher and a rights activist, *View from a Grain of Sand* is the story of how war, international interference and the rise of political Islam, have stripped Afghan women of rights and freedom. Combined with rarely seen archival footage, the powerful stories of the three women provide illuminating context for Afghanistan's current situation and the ongoing battle women face to gain basic human rights.

Nanji has been working in film and video since 12 years. She is known for her experimental and documentary films. Her work has won numerous awards and has been screened at film festivals internationally. In 2008, *View from a Grain of Sand* won the Silver Conch International Documentary feature award at the Mumbai International Film Festival.

Meena Nanji

Extracts from an interview:

Why did you decide to make a film in Afghanistan?

I first heard about the Taliban in 1996. I was appalled by reports of what the Taliban were doing to women in the name of religion. Women were being denied health care because they weren't allowed to be treated by male doctors, and no female doctors were permitted to work.

When two members of RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, came to Los Angeles to speak about the conditions of women in Afghanistan in June, 2000, I saw how passionate and strong they were and how they were doing so much with so few resources. I really wanted to contribute somehow to that cause.

So I invited myself to see RAWA's work in the refugee camps in NWFP, Pakistan, in November 2000. They showed me around their camps, schools, orphanages. At that time I thought I would just be making a simple piece about the Taliban, women and RAWA's work.

RAWA also encouraged me to go and speak with other people not connected with the group, so I met some more women's groups, journalists, politicians, even a prostitute. It became very clear that the situation was far more complex than just the Taliban. Many people felt the Taliban were an anomaly, that they would implode soon enough as they had no popular support, that they had only people they paid who were 'loyal' to them. Most people were afraid of the return of the warlords

– Massoud, Rabbani, Sayyaf, Hekmatyar, Dostum – these were the people most feared. That was when I decided to do a film that would encompass Afghanistan's history of the last 30 years, and focus on the rights of women.

How did you make this film in such tough conditions?

I had a very small crew, just my camera woman, me and a translator. We didn't have a lot of equipment: a small digital camera, a wireless mike and a lighting package. Therefore it was very easy to get around – we were very mobile. I think, ironically, being women helped as generally people were very protective. Also, since we were not affiliated with any major, actually, any media company, people seemed a little more open to us. They felt we were doing this out of genuine concern and interest and over a long period. At that time a lot of journalists and filmmakers were just 'parachuting' in and out of the area, spending a week, or at most a month. We shot this film over three years, so people grew to trust us.

How did you procure all the fantastic footage used in your film?

It took a long time and a lot of research. I was also very lucky. The footage from the 60's and 70's I got from Afghan Films in Kabul – a film studio and archive house that had been built by the Soviets, I think in the 60's. The then director of the studio, Siddiq Barmack, had physically saved tremendous amounts of film from being destroyed by the Taliban. These were not just feature films made since the 1930's but technical films and news reels. At that time a lot of it was just lying in a huge warehouse, but now it is being properly archived. It's a real treasure!

The more recent film I got from news sources. Also, a lot of the footage from the 1980s was given to me by a friend who had made a film on the Afghan-Soviet struggle.

All the main characters in your film are strong women. Was that a conscious choice?

I have to say that most of the people we met were incredibly strong and had incredible stories. There was no shortage of strong people. You have to be strong to survive in the devastating condition of 30 years of war.

It came down to who was willing to be on camera and put up with us for so long! Some women we had started to follow. Later their families didn't allow the women to be filmed, or there were other issues, but everyone we interviewed – over 40 women – were all strong.

You have shown an interest in India.

I am of Indian origin. My grandparents were born in Gujarat, although my parents and I were born in Kenya. However, we always considered ourselves Indian, culturally and ethnically.

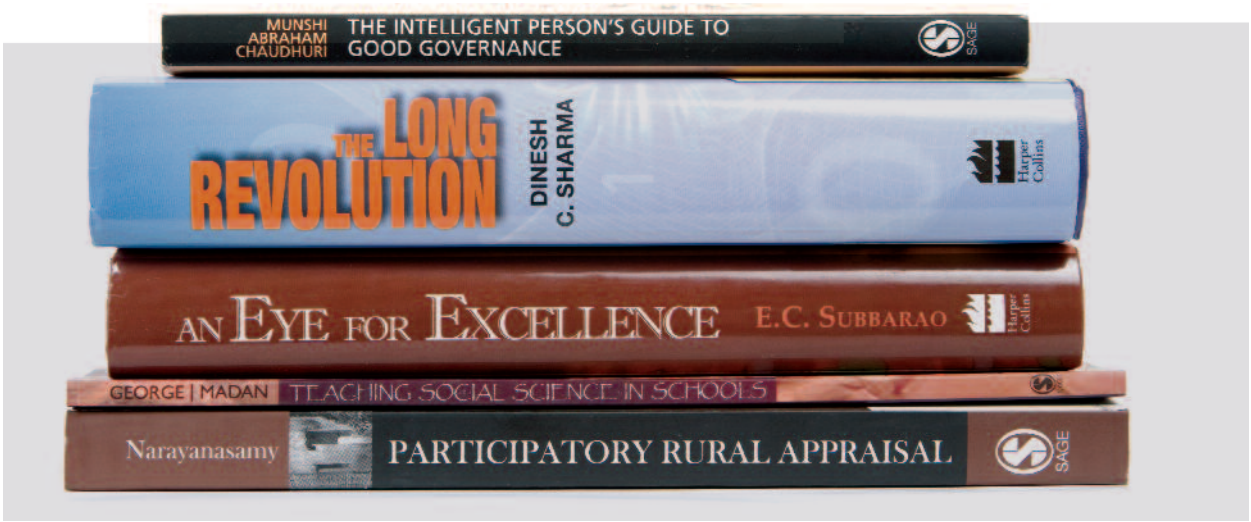
But I hadn't really visited India until 1999 and when I did, I just fell in love with the country. All the places I visited felt extremely vibrant. I have been visiting India almost every year since then. I can see the immense problems India has, and I would like to do some projects about these.

I would love to come and work here. It's a little harder nowadays, emotionally, as in my recent visits, I have noticed a marked anti-Muslim sentiment. I was born a Muslim, and since I have always thought of India as my motherland, it is hard to witness this.

What are your upcoming projects?

I have three films I hope to make in India over the next few years. One is a fiction film supported by the American actor Danny Glover and it is about an Adivasi artist.

Read more at www.civilsocietyonline.com



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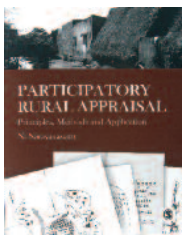
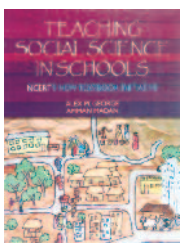


PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL PRINCIPLES, METHODS AND APPLICATION
N Narayanasamy
Sage
Rs 550

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a sophisticated methodology of involving the local community in planning and implementing a project. PRA helps the outsider to see the village through the eyes of the insider. The development practitioner gets to know not just the ecology and economy of the village but the daily life of a villager. This makes it easier to design projects and programmes keeping people's needs and aspirations in mind.

PRA is a step by step method. A number of strategies are used which the author explains in depth. For instance, information can be gleaned by involving villagers in mapping their village. Such maps can explain the health status of a village, its natural resources, indigenous skills, vulnerability index and so on.

In participatory modelling, villagers make a model of their village. Transects, or walking through a village with the community, gives an intimate insight into local ecology. The mobility map helps find out the where, how and why of migration – be it by a community or an individual. The chapatti diagram identifies organisations within villages and those that the community deems important. The book is an invaluable tool for people involved in rural development.



TEACHING SOCIAL SCIENCE IN SCHOOLS NCERT'S NEW TEXTBOOK INITIATIVE
Alex M George and Amman Madan
Sage
Rs 195

Since 2005 NCERT has been publishing new social science textbooks to replace the antiquated textbooks which students suffered earlier. The new books are more interactive, teaching children to learn by doing and provoking them to think.

This book clarifies questions raised by teachers, parents, students and educationists about NCERT's new textbooks. In a simple, friendly manner, the book puts to rest fears and worries. New textbooks require teachers to be trained in using them. In the absence of such programmes, the book is especially useful for teachers. It gives advice on marking, asking questions, use of boxes in textbooks, the importance of pictures and so on. Since the exam system is likely to be adapted to the new books, it is good for teachers to begin adjusting soon.

For the first time teachers too are being involved in a process of change. Previously textbooks were always turned around by experts who had no experience of the classroom and teachers just had to do as they were told. Thankfully, dictatorship in education is changing.

THE LONG REVOLUTION THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF INDIA'S IT INDUSTRY
Dinesh C Sharma
Harper Collins
Rs 595

This book is worth its weight. Dinesh C Sharma tells us the fascinating story of the growth of India's IT sector from start to finish. He writes like a good journalist digging out heaps of unknown stories. Never does he bore the reader.

We get to know how the foundation for the IT boom was laid. Sharma takes us from the Nehru-Bhabha era to the Indira Gandhi years. Rajiv Gandhi's great contribution is, of course, very big. He took technology to a new level by focussing on its wider application. The growth of a robust IT sector has a lot to do with state patronage and the importance government gave to building quality technical education.

Sharma narrates how and why IBM got thrown out of India by George Fernandes and how that led to the beginnings of a local IT industry, mostly in maintenance, by those who had worked for the multinational.

The government pitched in by building more technical manpower, introducing a Master's in Computer Applications course and setting up many more Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). This, to some extent, helped to stem the brain drain.

We are also taken through the years of liberalisation when IIT engineers who had migrated to the US began returning. The story of how companies like DCM, HCL, Infosys and Wipro became big names is told along with rich details of the outsourcing boom.

AN EYE FOR EXCELLENCE 50 INNOVATIVE YEARS OF IIT, KANPUR
EC Subbarao
Harper Collins
Rs 595

As the title suggests, the book is about the growth of IIT, Kanpur, which celebrated 50 years in 2008. The author writes about how the institute was founded. It had the firm support of Jawaharlal Nehru. Its founding father, Dr PK Kelkar, built the institution from scratch. The help rendered by the US government and nine famous US universities turned IIT, Kanpur into a world class institute. The Americans trained Indian faculty, gave advice on syllabus, helped with research and development. IIT, Kanpur introduced a broad-based syllabus which included the social sciences. The book also contains brief write-ups of IIT, Kanpur's students who went on to make a name for themselves in India and abroad. The US too profited for it was the students from the IITs who helped the IT sector to boom there.

The list is impressive and diverse. Some ex-students shone in enterprise and others tackled social and environment problems. So we have names like Narayana Murthy, Satish Kaura, Som Mittal, BN Singh, Muktesh Pant, Jeet Bindra along with India's greatest environmentalist, Anil Agrawal, and Satyendra Dubey, anti-corruption crusader and RTI hero.

Understanding good governance

Civil Society News
New Delhi

GOOD governance is a frequently used term these days. Nearly every problem from red tape to social evils is traced to the lack of good governance. But ask people who use the term what it means and the answer is invariably incoherent.

For a clearer understanding reach out to *The Intelligent Person's Guide to Good Governance*. Its authors are Surendra Munshi, retired Professor of Sociology from the Indian Institute of Management, (IIM), Kolkata, Biju Paul Abraham, Professor of Public Policy at IIM and Soma Chaudhuri, Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Michigan State University.

The book explains the concept of good governance, international perceptions, the role of the state and democracy. There is a whole chapter on civil society, its relationship with the state and with good governance. There is also due emphasis on the Indian experience.

Excerpts from an interview with **Surendra Munshi**:

Why is good governance the new buzzword in development circles?
Good governance became important as an issue for developing countries from the late 1980s when two important international funding organisations, the World Bank and the IMF, began to emphasise it. They started paying attention to policy processes in states for which funding was being considered. This emphasis on these processes has been traced back by some analysts to the 1980s when two important governments for the World Bank and the IMF, the Republican administration of President Ronald Reagan in the United States and the Conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, promoted neo-liberal market-friendly policies both for their own countries and for others around the world.

We should also note that the term good governance has found wide acceptance even outside the circle of experts and institutions which are professionally concerned with developmental issues.

Is good governance a misunderstood term?
Yes, it is. It means all sorts of things to different people. I mention in the *Preface* of the book that as the term good governance has been in discussion for quite some time now, we could have expected that the vast literature that exists on the subject would have proved helpful in clarifying key issues. This has, unhappily, not happened. Indeed, there seems to be an inverse relationship between the volume of literature on the subject and the clarity that has been achieved. One reason for the lack of clarity is that the discussion on good governance suffers from the self-inflicted narrow perspective of insulated experts. We need to go beyond their wisdom and open the discussion to those whose lives are affected.

Several commentators have pointed out how difficult it is to define the concept precisely. Keeping this difficulty in mind, I have defined good governance in the following words: Good governance signifies a participative manner of governing that functions in a responsible, accountable and transparent manner based on the principles of efficiency, legitimacy and consensus for the purpose of promoting the rights of individual citizens and the public interest, thus indicating the existence of political will for ensuring the material welfare of society and sustainable development with social justice.

Surendra Munshi

"Has there been a popular movement in any part of the world to replace a democratic government with an alternative system?"

Is democracy a roadblock to good governance?
While advantages of a democratic political system, as opposed to one-party states, authoritarian governments or military dictatorships, seem to be obvious, especially with respect to the authority that is derived from the consent of the governed, what is important is that those who are elected to power not only function in the interests of all but also appear to do so in a responsible and transparent manner. Democratic governments appear to be failing to live up to these expectations.

We need to ask whether there are acceptable alternatives. It has been pointed out that in country after country, even where democracy is supposedly in crisis, a large majority of the people seem to prefer democracy to any other form of government. Has there been a popular movement in any part of the world to replace a democratic government with an alternative system of government? The problems that democracy currently faces and the unsuitability of alternatives raise questions of where we go next. It is here that a reassessment of current models becomes vital. We need to recognise that the practice of democracy is as important as the system of democracy. In the spirit of KR Narayanan, the former President of India, we need to ask whether it is democracy that has failed us or whether it is we who have failed democracy.

The political class and the bureaucracy are often blamed. What is your assessment?
A basic problem is the manner in which politics has become a way not to achieve the common good but the good of the persons engaged in it. Politics of the negative kind pervades life in India at all levels. The outcome of this kind of politicisation is not only corruption but also what has been called in the book the 'vision deficit' in public life.

What is the role of NGOs in governance?
There is a need to evaluate civil society objectively. To think that if the state does not deliver civil society can do so lends itself to the possibility of committing a double error. The shortcomings of civil society may be overlooked and at the same time the mistake may be made of seeing the state and civil society as opposite principles. They have to be seen in a balanced manner, even though this may prove challenging, theoretically as well as practically. Civil society is relevant if the need for the balance is kept in mind. In the balance between different spheres of social life moreover depends whether good governance can be realised, for what is good governance if not a participative manner of governing where different modes of partnership are worked out for sustainable development with social justice.

THE INTELLIGENT PERSON'S GUIDE TO GOOD GOVERNANCE
Surendra Munshi, Biju Paul Abraham, Soma Chaudhuri
Sage
Rs 270

Often, in India, the government has schemes for the poor but it cannot deliver on the ground for reasons like corruption and inefficiency. What would you suggest?
We need political will, accountability, and transparency. We need to involve those whose lives are affected.

Eat as you live

Dr G G GANGADHARAN

AYURVEDA extensively talks about food and the consequences of food on our bodies. It considers food, along with sleep and copulation, as the most basic necessity of a human being. But Ayurveda strongly advises moderation and considers it the secret of a healthy, fulfilling and long life.

Ayurveda has a vast classification of favourable and unfavourable food advised on the basis of an individual's constitution (prakriti), when a person is healthy and when a person is diseased. Food in Ayurveda is classified on the basis of its form (prakara), taste (rasa) and fundamental properties (guna). Ayurveda also categorizes food based on its effect on the three vital humors (dosas) and its physical composition with regard to the five basic elements of the nature (panchabhauticatva). In the texts of Ayurveda like the *Caraka Samhita* we can find elaborate descriptions on healthy food habits on the basis of the seasons.

The nutritive value of hundreds of different palatable substances classified systematically and rationally into various categories, their effect on the body and their digestibility are described in great detail by Acharya Caraka. Wholesome food is described as that food which helps the harmonized body elements to sustain their state of equilibrium and the discordant body elements to regain their equilibrium. It is evident from these writings that the knowledge of wholesome food was a part and parcel of an individual's general awareness in the period of these texts.

Interestingly food according to its form is classified as ledya (food which is licked and taken), peya (drinkable food), ashana (which can be eaten without chewing), and khadya (that which can be bitten and eaten). Bhavaprakasha adds two more forms such as cushya (suckable food) and carvya (chewable food). On the basis of Rasa (taste) food is basically of six forms. These are:

- Madhura (sweet)
- Amla (sour)
- Lavana (salty)
- Katu (pungent)
- Tikta (bitter)
- Kashaya (astringent)

Food is said to act on the body according to its rasa (taste), guna (property/quality), virya (potency (hot/cold)), vipaka (post-digestive nature) and prabhava (on its own) properties.

Among these factors, rasa plays an important role in determining the nature of food. Rasa is reflective of certain qualities in the food and its ability to modify certain principles in the body (dosas). Rasa also reflects the tendency of the substance to affect the psycho-physiological complex of a human being.

The food which has madhura rasa (sweet taste) is wholesome to the body and has a nourishing effect. Madhura rasa promotes the growth of bodily tissues like blood, muscle, fat, bone marrow and ojus (finest metabolite of the body). It bestows strength and enhances the complexion, alleviates pitta and vata. Madhura rasa promotes health of the skin, hair and voice. It gives stability to the body and improves longevity. However, in spite of all these qualities, when used in excess it vitiates kapha resulting in anomalies like obesity, tenderness, laziness, hypersomnia etc.

Amla rasa (sour taste) bestows taste to the food, stimulates appetite, nourishes and energises the body, enlightens the mind, stimulates the sense organs, promotes strength, alleviates vata, nourishes the heart and helps in digestion of food. But, if used in excess, amla rasa causes thirst, morbid sensitiveness of the teeth, liquefaction and aggravation of kapha, edema in patients suffering from emaciation.

Food that are lavana (salty taste) help in carmination and digestion and alleviate vata, cure stiffness, obstruction and accumulation. If used in excess, lavana food vitiates pitta, aggravates rakta, thirst, causes fainting, burning sensation, depletion of muscle tissue, obstruction of the function of the senses and premature wrinkling and graying of hair. It may also lead to diseases like gout, alopecia and dyspepsia.

Katu Rasa (pungent taste) helps keep the mouth clean, promotes digestion, helps in the absorption of food, lacrimation and cures diseases like urticaria, chronic conjunctivitis and helps in the elimination of excretory products and alleviates kapha. In excess, such food destroys manhood by the virtue of their vipaka. It could also cause problems like asthma, emaciation, burning sensation in the throat, giddiness and thirst.

Tikta rasa or bitter taste although not very delicious to taste, but when added to other food substance such foods enhance taste. Tikta rasa foods are anti-tonic and germicidal. They are a good cure for burning sensation, itching, obstinate skin diseases, thirst and fever. They help in depletion of moisture content in the body that in turn can deplete tissues like fat, bone marrow, pus, sweat, urine, stool, pitta and kapha. When used in excess tikta rasa foods deplete blood, plasma, muscle, fat, etc. They can cause diseases of vata origin like body pain, cracked feet, joints pain, etc.

Foods which are kashaya (astringent) in nature are sedative and constipative. They alleviate kapha and rakta-pitta (hemorrhage). They absorb body fluid. However, excess usage will result in dryness of the mouth, afflictions of the heart and distension of the abdomen; such foods get digested slowly and obstruct the smooth passage of flatus, urine and semen. Kashaya foods can cause emaciation, exhaustion, thirst, stiffness and vitiates vata.

There are 10 antagonistic pairs of gunas (quality of substances) mentioned in Ayurveda, hence, a total of 20 gunas. Among these 20, foods that are either rooksha (dry) or snigdha (oily) are of special importance. Individuals having problems with dry and hard bowel may find that they have been consuming more dry food. For them food substances that have snigdha guna (oily food) such as animal fat, ripe bananas, coconut etc can help. Similarly, one who has a running nose and eyes can often get rid of it by limiting his diet to ruksha (dry) food. The same is applicable to food which is cold, hot, light, heavy, thick, fluidy etc.

Food which is balanced should possess these gunas in the right proportion. The strength acquired from food, according to Caraka, is important in keeping the immunological mechanisms of the body healthy. This is related to the Ojus which is considered in Ayurveda the ultimate representation of energy.

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Concentrate on peace within

SAMITA RATHOR

MOST of us want to enhance the quality of our work. We look around for all kinds of tools to assist us. Listen instead to Swami Sivananda's words of advice:

"In man's struggle to achieve any desired end, there is no necessity for him to turn to external forces. He contains within himself vast resources of inherent power lying untapped or only partially used. Because he has scattered his faculties on a hundred different things he fails to achieve anything substantial despite inherent potentialities. If he intelligently regulates and applies them, concrete results are ensured. To use his existing forces rationally and effectively he need not wait for invention of new methods of guidance. Nature itself abounds in instructive lessons,"

Concentration is pointed focus on a single object. People pride themselves if they are able to concentrate on two or more tasks at the same time. Scientifically and in reality, this is not how the mind works at its optimum level. The mind is capable of doing only one thing at a time. The best advice you can get is to keep the mind focused on one task and finish it before jumping into the next. Sometimes when we are engrossed in a task like reading a book we do not even hear if someone calls our name. Such is the power of pointed concentration. So imagine if you can apply this in any task you undertake or in your daily life. The results will be phenomenal. When one is immersed in a task without any distraction, time flies and we do not feel any stress or tension.

According to Swami Vishnudevananda, not only does concentration make the mind strong but it also minimizes senility. After 30 years of age, man's brain cells die off at 1000,000 per day and are not replaced. In yoga and other spiritual disciplines, concentration is the first stage of meditation, which ultimately leads to a higher state of being. The word meditation is so commonly used these days, yet it takes a lifetime to actually come close to its true nature. Meditation means a continuous dehypnotizing from identification with all material things around us. If we cannot be detached from our day to day activities it will be difficult to concentrate and meditate. This can be done only with regular sadhana (practice).

Just like a child who slowly takes his first steps after falling many times, meditation too comes after much effort, focus and practice. For those who are spiritually inclined with a seeking nature it may be instantaneous. A proper environment and attitude is essential before starting meditation.

Here are some meditation techniques for beginners. Even those already practicing may find these methods useful:

- Sandhya, that is, dawn or dusk are most conducive for meditation though the perfect time is brahmamuhuruta, the hours between 4 am and 6 am. This is the time when the mind is free of all activities and fresh.
- A separate room for meditation surely helps. Or keep an area which is not accessible to all. It could be a corner of your room.
- Face north or east while sitting. This has suitable magnetic vibrations.
- Sit in a comfortable steady posture with spine and neck erect but not tense.
- The mind needs to be quiet and still, discarding all thoughts.
- Start with regular abdominal breathing for five minutes making it rhythmic.
- If the mind wanders off, let it. Do not force or fight with the mind. Let it go but be aware it is going. Once you know that it is going off track just try and bring it back
- A focal point could be made between the eyebrows or the heart. Do not change it.
- Choose any object, symbol or mantra. Do not change the mantra.
- Slowly with regular practice the mind will get trained to become your slave. Have patience as this may take a long time.
- In the beginning 10-15 minutes may be good and it can gradually be increased.

A person who meditates can be more productive in terms of the quality and quantity of his output. He is peaceful from within.

Have an open mind and try and sit with yourself every day for a regular period of time, starting with 15 to 30 minutes daily. Not being able to sit with yourself is a clear indication of a restless mind. A restless mind can never be at peace. Peace is our true nature. Do we really want to move away from it?

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Inspired by their experiences on the trip, Benish, Saima and Tasleema with Jyoti, set up a small unit to make jams and preserves. Starting in April 2008 with strawberry, then cherry, apricot, plum, pear, peach and quince and ending in November with apple, the jams are made with fresh seasonal fruits. The addition of almonds, walnuts and raisins make the jams unique.

Afaaf hopes to branch out into dried organic foods and traditional pickle recipes.

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LAKSHMAN ANAND

RTI and the middle class

RITA ANAND

PERHAPS no other law has grabbed the urban middle class as much as the Right to Information Act. For the first time in 60 years, well off people sought to use a law to improve governance and make themselves accountable as citizens.

By and large, the middle class views most legislation with some distant amusement. Most laws are seen as populist measures thought up by governments for the rural areas which means for the poor somewhere out there. These are schemes the government rashly committed itself to, you will hear people say. Money will be gobbled by corruption. That's how it works, they shrug.

With RTI things have been different. The law more or less met with approval. It didn't pinch middle class pockets and then there was the delicious possibility of getting the recalcitrant bureaucracy to mend its ways.

In reality, RTI bridged the rural-urban divide. The right to information movement originated in villages. In Maharashtra, it was Anna Hazare who demanded transparency and accountability from the government. The bureaucracy are the servants of the people, he asserted, their salaries came from our money. In Rajasthan, Aruna Roy and her group the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) led an energetic movement asking that government files be opened for public scrutiny.

The RTI Bill too was drawn up by grassroots activists under the banner of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI). It was the Maharashtra RTI law which was minutely scrutinized and improved upon.

When activists were satisfied that they had put all they wanted into the draft Bill, it was placed before the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi. It helped that Aruna Roy and Jean Dreze were members. Activist groups stepped up meetings and rallies punctuated by song, music and the RTI slogan: *Hamara paisa, hamara hisaab.* The RTI Bill became law and is applicable in all states except Jammu and Kashmir.

There was also a transfer of skills from rural to urban. Methods used by MKSS in villages like the *jan sunwai* (public hearing) and social audit were passed on to Parivartan for use in Delhi's slums and colonies.

Apply, get reply

Since the RTI Act became law it has been used by the middle class to get information on personal issues like finding out about passports, exam mark sheets and voter identity cards stuck in various government departments. Residents of colonies in Delhi used RTI to find out about broken roads, overflowing sewage pipes, absent sweepers, streetlights on the blink, from the municipality. Just filing an RTI was often enough. Sweepers suddenly arrived to work, roads got repaired or a nervous engineer turned up much to the RTI applicant's delight.

Middle class activists also used the RTI law to uncover corruption in public works and siphoning of funds, thereby rendering service to society. Heroes, young and idealistic, emerged. The RTI movement will always remember Satyendra Dubey, the young engineer who worked for the National Highways Authority of India and was killed for exposing corruption in road building.

In Delhi, it was Parivartan with its leader, Arvind Kejriwal, who bridged the rich-poor divide and led by example. Parivartan began using the Delhi RTI Act before the Union law came into effect. The group chose Sundernagari, a slum in east Delhi, to change the sorry surroundings of residents. Parivartan exposed widespread corruption in public works and in the functioning of the public distribution system. The fight here was bloody but successful. Sundernagari became a model to be emulated.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Arvind and Parivartan reached out to Delhi's Residents' Welfare Associations (RWAs) offering help in using RTI. If you didn't draft your questions right, you would not get the information you were seeking, he says. A helpline was set up. People, on their own, approached Parivartan for guidance.

Arvind thinks it was really the spread of success stories which inspired people to go out and do something. "For 65 years nothing worked in governance. The middle class was cynical. That is over," he says.

Information about RTI spread quickly. If you Google the Internet today you will come across a flood of websites on RTI in India. There is no dearth of information. You can get help from community portals to fill up forms or to file a complaint if you did not get the information that you wanted.

The bureaucracy

If you are denied the information that you seek or you do not get what you were asking for, you can appeal to your State Information Commission or the Central Information Commission.

Appeal applications have been piling up, a sign of success, for it shows people are willing to doggedly pursue the information they seek.

But the information commissioners are not disposing of these cases. As a result, the RTI applicant is not getting justice and is feeling let down.

This grievance redressal system was set up by those who drafted the law. "But we are not responsible for the kind of people being appointed to head the information commissions. Unless the right people are chosen this will be a loss of opportunity for the government," says Arvind.

One state government appointed a retired IAS officer accused of corruption to head the commission, he points out. In November, another information commissioner disposed of 30 cases in the whole month. According to Arvind's calculations, "it takes 10 minutes to dispose of a case, so he did 30 minutes of work." Another information commissioner openly said he was a retired man so he had not come to the commission to work!

Under the RTI law a committee has to be set up to oversee appointments. But Rules have not been drafted. Arvind says these Rules must be drawn up to provide clarity. Eminence should be defined. He suggests a 'search committee' of 15 to 20 people which would invite names to head the commissions in an open, transparent manner.

Bureaucrats can also be considered. RTI is not about a people versus bureaucracy fight, according to him. There are good officials and bad ones just like in any office. After all, what is the bureaucracy? It is the middle class. It is you and me. Nearly every middle class home has a relative or a friend who works for the government.

Government officials have been enthusiastic users of RTI, especially when their own interests are involved like finding out about their transfers, appointments, medical benefits or housing. Yet, if an ordinary middle class guy asks for information, the same bureaucrat thinks RTI is a headache.

Till date RTI has not been used to embarrass any political party or politician. For that matter, nobody has been punished for not giving information either. But a law takes a while to change deep-seated attitudes. The fact that RTI has people in the middle class who use it to good effect has a significance that goes beyond what we may be able to assess right now.

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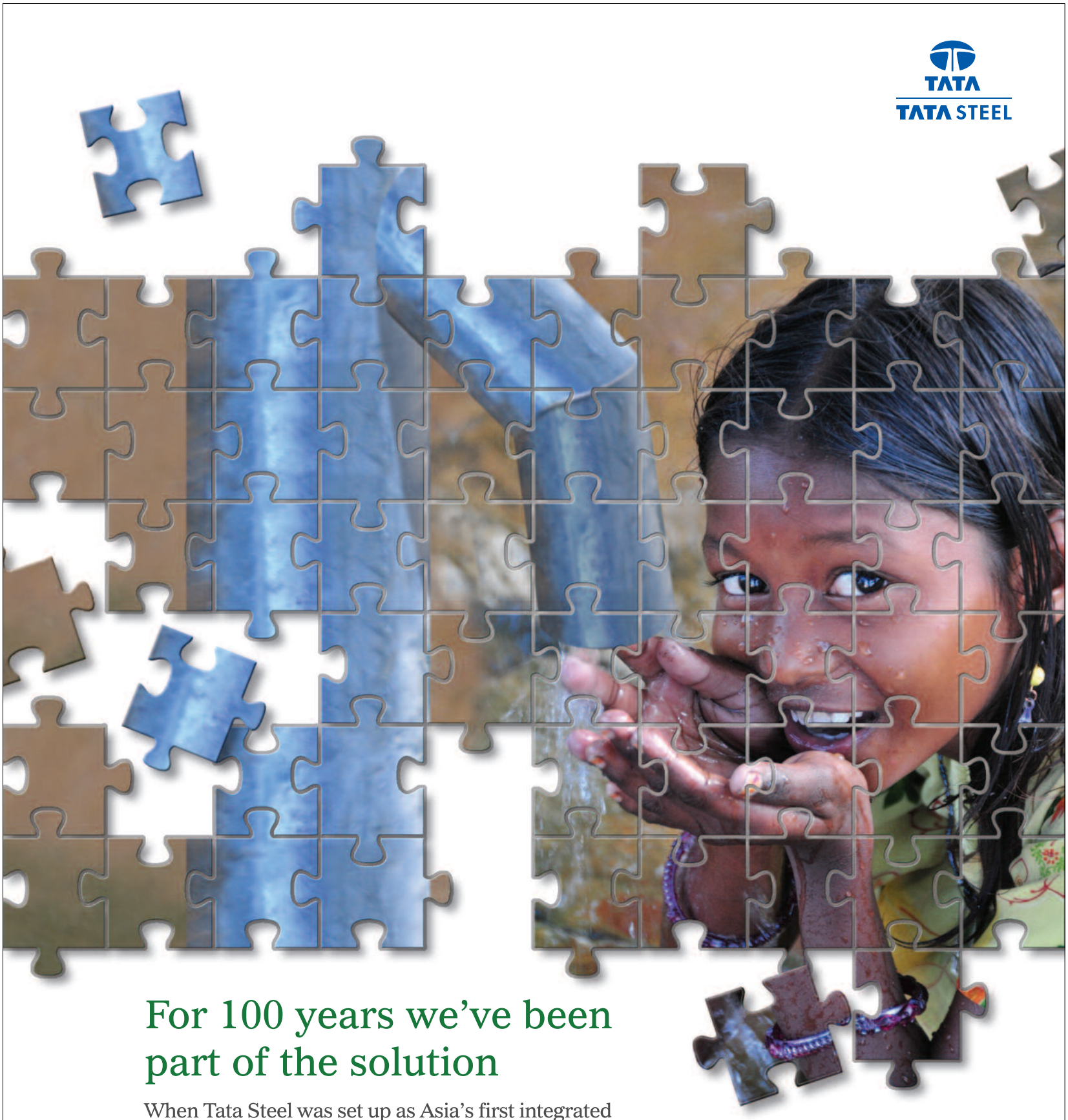

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