

Civil Society

NUTRITION MUDDLE IN DELHI

PIL asks for
State Food
Commission



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Harvesting Rain for Profit

Name: Shri Muniraj,
Village: Muthur, Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu

Muniraj, a marginal farmer with seven acres of land from Muthur village of Krishnagiri district, had a greenhouse where he practiced floriculture. However, a falling water table meant that irrigation became a problem – especially during summer months even for drip irrigation.

To overcome the problem of insufficient water, Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) encouraged Muniraj to save every drop of rainwater falling on his green house. SST provided technical information and engineering support for creating a pond, next to the greenhouse, large enough to collect six lakh litres of rainwater. To prevent loss by seepage, the pond was lined with a polythene sheet and a shade net was used as cover to help arrest loss by evaporation. The pond gets filled up with 3 days of rain. The water saved in this pond is sufficient for the crop needs for one season.

IMPACT: Muniraj is now financially secure and earns more than ₹30,000 per month. He has built a pucca house and also bought a car. He has become an expert on rainwater harvesting and offers advice to several villages in the area.

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Farmers in distress

A decade ago, the National Commission on Farmers submitted an important report which listed several measures to take to make farming more remunerative and sustainable. Importantly, the commission proposed a single unified market in India and a return of 50 percent above input costs on wheat and rice. The current agitation in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra is about prices not charity. Farmers have worked hard to increase production from their fields, but can't get a fair price for their produce. On the one hand input costs are high and on the other the market is constricted. For this issue, we spoke to Dr M.S. Swaminathan, who was the chairman of the commission, and he made the important point that the problem was not over-production but under-consumption. Farmers needed to be liberated from a variety of constrictive policies.

The problems of the farm sector have been staring us in the face. It should worry us that they have only grown more acute over the past two decades of economic reforms. Agitations across the country tell us that farmers expectations have changed. They want governments to go beyond old-fashioned responses like writing off loans. The solutions they are looking for are more robust and in step with the larger promise of a spirit of competitiveness in the economy.

Governments can't wish away their responsibility towards the farm sector with the excuse that people are coming off the land. Even if they were to get employment in construction, manufacturing, retail and so on, there would still be the core issues of the farm sector which would have to be addressed. The solutions are complex and involve the market, environment, input costs and investment in infrastructure. There is much scope to promote businesses related to agriculture which in turn would bring jobs and growth to rural areas. Farmers generally need much greater freedom to find solutions to their problems.

An important voice in this issue of the magazine is of Ashwani Mahajan of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the concerns he raises over the introduction of genetically modified crops. The shaping of GM policy in India has been dominated by the lobbyists of corporations whose interests have essentially been commercial. It needs to be a scientific and environmental debate which includes the rights of communities that have nurtured India's amazing biodiversity over generations. The concerns Mahajan raises over the Niti Aayog are also interesting. Does the thinking emanating from the Niti Aayog merely recycle outmoded ideas from other economies? How relevant is the think tank to contemporary India?

Finally, the bad news from the National Capital Territory of Delhi is of widespread malnutrition among its children. It is three years since the National Food Security Act was passed but it hasn't been implemented. A PIL lays this sorry situation bare.



COVER STORY

Muddled nutrition in Delhi

Malnutrition is a serious problem among Delhi's children, but the Right To Food Act is yet to be implemented. A PIL in Delhi High Court now seeks the setting up of a State Food Commission.

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The magazine does not undertake to respond to unsolicited contributions sent to the editor for publication.

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Ph: 011-46033825, 9811787772
Printed and published by
Umesh Anand on behalf of
Rita Anand, owner of the
title, from A-53 D, First Floor,
Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya
Nagar, New Delhi - 110017.

Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt.
Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II,
New Delhi - 110020.

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2015-17.
Registered to post without
pre-payment U(SE)-10/2015-17
at Lodi Road HPO New Delhi -
110003 Registered with
the Registrar of Newspapers
of India under
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 36

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10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO GO GREEN

Carry a Bag Wherever You Go

Tucking in eco-friendly bags into your purse enables you to achieve a plastic-less future

Say No to Bottled Water

Drinking tap water prevents using plastic for packaging purposes and saves 1.5 million tons of plastic waste per year

Up Your Reuse Game

Reusing plastic containers to store stuff is one of the easiest ways to encourage conscious consumerism

Go Paperless

Reading e-zines or e-books can help reduce the ecological footprint to a great extent

Harvest Rainwater

Reduce the demands on groundwater by collecting and utilising rainwater

Sun Ho!

The use of solar energy can prevent the total and complete dependence on fossil fuels and other non-renewable sources of energy

Focus on Compost

Segregating waste and using the organic waste as compost helps improve soil quality

Ditch the Shower

An average shower uses almost 60 litres of water while using a bucket to bath can do the job in 10 litres at the most

Go Local

Eating locally available food actually helps save on transportation trips thus leading to lesser environmental pollution

Plant a Tree

Almost 48 pounds of carbon dioxide is absorbed by a matured tree per year. Combat climate change by planting more trees for a cleaner and greener Earth

IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Paani Foundation deserves a people's award for its work. It should also be honoured with a national award.
Ameeta Dasgupta

Is it possible for Paani Foundation to help the farmers of Tamil Nadu? They are suffering the worst drought in decades and it's all manmade. A campaign, like the one the foundation is doing in Maharashtra, is badly needed here. The farmers of Tamil Nadu aren't aware of the right strategies. They are asking for river linking and rubbish like that. Actor Rajinikanth is taking it up. Please, could Paani Foundation educate him?
Radhakrishnan J.S.

I would like to point out a calculation error in your story. Your correspondent writes: "He (Jagadale) has 10 acres. Three years ago he grew onion all over his land and harvested 20 tonnes. That year, onion prices hit the roof. Jagadale earned Rs 1 crore from his onions."

First of all, earning Rs 1 crore from 10 acres means earning Rs 10 lakh per acre. Secondly, Rs 1 crore for 20 tonnes of onions means Rs 500 per kg! I would request you to please crosscheck your figures before publishing.

Thirdly, your article says: "Last year, water harvesting and watershed management carried out across

villages made it possible to save more than a billion litres of water, which would otherwise have arrived in 1.3 million tanker loads. And ₹272 crore worth of water is now being annually conserved."

Some calculation correction is needed:

First, one billion litres of water saved is 100 crore litres. That will be 0.1 million tankers (of 10,000 litres) and not 1.3 million.

Secondly, saving of ₹272 crore means the cost of water would be ₹2.72 per litre, that is, ₹27,000 per tanker

Vijay Kedia

Oops, we got our maths wrong. Thanks for your intricate calculations.

Editor

Sewage solution

This is with reference to your story, 'Small sewage solution is finally here'. I congratulate the people who have drafted the Faecal Sludge and Septage Management Policy (FSSM) for involving people to sensitise other people on proper disposal of waste generated from their homes, offices etc. I would love to be part of this movement. I am pursuing my PhD on disability issues at Sri Krishnadevaraya University in Ananthapuramu, Andhra Pradesh. I have been working with various NGOs/government agencies for the past 23 years. I hope all states in India implement this policy.

Mala Nagaraju

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

Water Cup

Thanks for the story, 'Winning the Water Cup.' The Paani Foundation's dedicated objective to make drought past history in Maharashtra is indeed laudable. The state has the highest number of dams and the worst irrigation coverage. So the foundation's strategy is absolutely right. Water harvesting will not only raise the groundwater table, it will create knowledge among people. And knowledge is power.
Shanta K. Dasarath

This is an amazing story, beautifully expressed and articulated and motivational too. Thanks to Shree Padre and, of course, to the Paani Foundation. Truly inspirational.
Harish B.S.

Really, real social work has been done for Maharashtra.

Sudarshan Jain

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Mail to: The Publisher, Civil Society, A-16, (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension - 2, New Delhi - 110049.

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'GEAC and Niti Aayog are wrong on GM mustard'

Ashwani Mahajan on the failure of globalisation and why India needs its own path

Civil Society News
New Delhi

DIFFERENCES are out in the open once again over genetically modified (GM) crops with the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) weighing in heavily against the introduction of GM mustard.

The SJM's position is consistent with its earlier opposition to Bt brinjal and Bt cotton.

In the past, it opposed the introduction of GM under the Congress-led government at the centre. This time it is questioning the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, which is technically its own government because the SJM is an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

The SJM is particularly disenchanted with the Niti Aayog's vice-chairman, Dr Arvind Panagariya, who has issued a report favouring the introduction of GM mustard. It feels the Niti Aayog has gone out of its way to support GM crops.

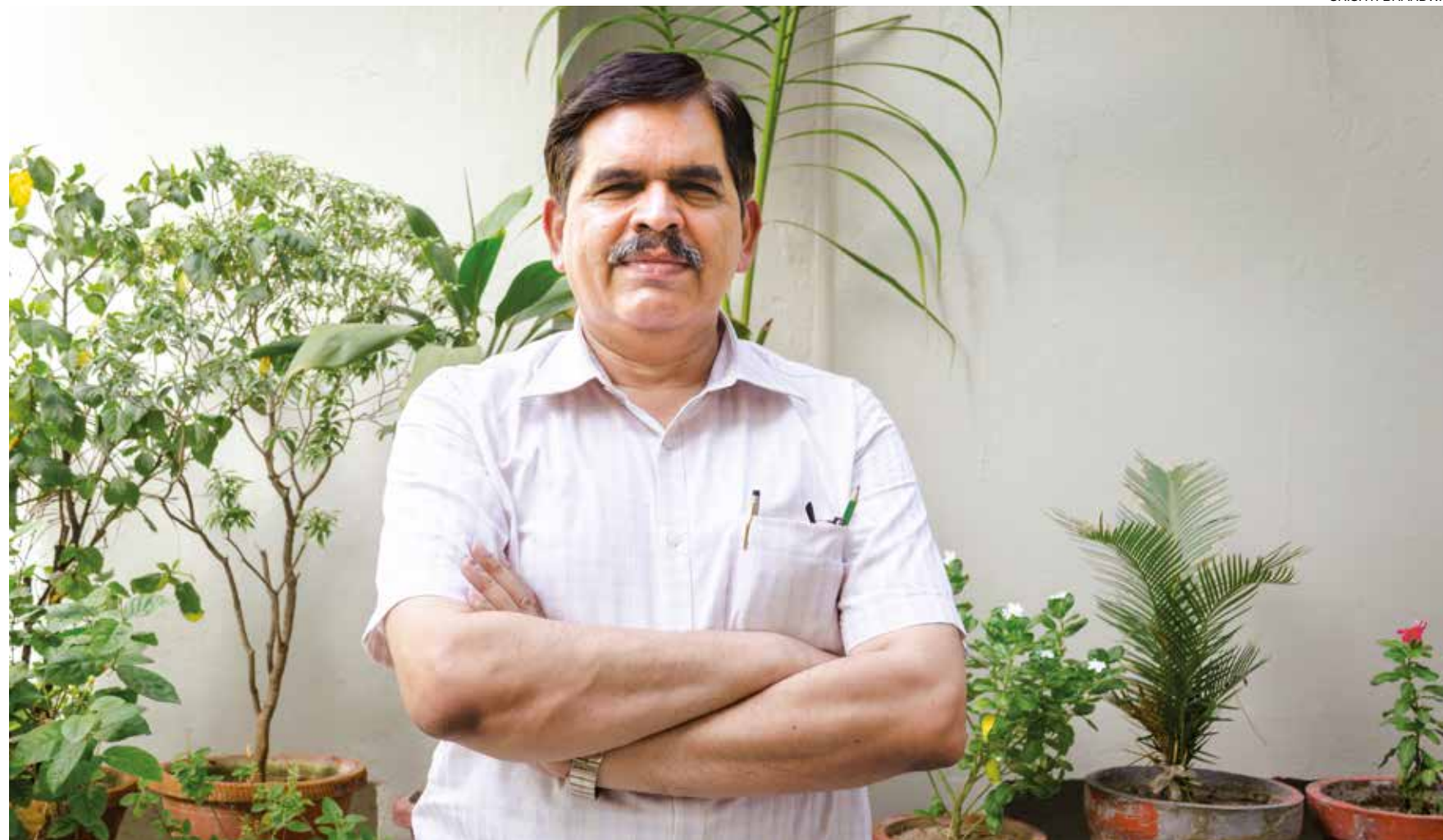
The SJM's position is that India's biodiversity is its wealth. The wide number of varieties of fruits, vegetables and grains that exist need to be preserved and nurtured through the involvement of communities. GM will lead to uniformity and give corporations control over seeds.

The SJM also points out that feedback on Bt cotton from several farmer organisations has been negative. Input costs have risen and problems with pests have become more complex.

The mustard issue is at a crucial stage because the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) of the government has cleared it. But the SJM says the GEAC is compromised and controlled by business interests.

The SJM backs natural farming, indigenous technology and has consistently opposed globalisation, perceiving it as an exploitative trend. "SJM was started as a platform for all those who believe, like we do, that globalisation is not going to work or even last long. It's a passing phase. Ultimately it is *swadeshi* that is going to survive," says Dr Ashwani Mahajan, professor of economics at Delhi University, who has been working for SJM since 1994.

When we caught up with Dr Mahajan for this interview, it was at the sparse office of the SJM in Delhi. It was a blistering summer afternoon and a power outage lasted throughout the interview. Dr



Dr Ashwani Mahajan: 'Monopoly of seeds means surrender of our food security and my organisation can't allow that'

Mahajan, well in command of his facts, was soft spoken and firm and quite clear that the SJM's views won't be overlooked.

Why won't globalisation work?

We are of the opinion that capitalism and so-called communism and socialism are all based on the exploitation of nature. If you look at the bigger canvas, anything that doesn't work on the principle of sustainability doesn't have a future.

The whole world has been looking for an alternative to capitalism and socialism. What is your alternative?

From the beginning, we were of the opinion that globalisation was adopted as a last-ditch method of saving capitalism. Those countries practising capitalism were facing recession, low demand and so on. They wanted to capture world markets through the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the name given to this strategy was the Washington Consensus. We all know how socialism drowned. China tried the capitalistic route. Its current status isn't encouraging.

We believe that a country's development methodology should not be based on exploitation of nature and the hunt for markets. On the contrary, every country should adopt a model of development based on its own resources, its own intellect, its own manpower and environment. Ultimately, what you

need is a vision of self-reliance.

We were told when we began that self-reliance is an anachronism in a world which has become a global village. Now, in the same global village, the high priests of globalisation are talking of *swadeshi*. They are saying, be American, buy American, hire American. Even in the European Union the talk is to go local.

The whole world, out of compulsion, is speaking the language of *swadeshi*. Our message to our people, to the world, is that globalisation has failed and only development based on your own resources, intellect, manpower and natural resources will take you ahead.

Well, technologies that have done a lot of good to the world have spread because of globalisation.

You can't juxtapose technological invention with globalisation. Technological innovation, in science, in medicine, in agriculture, is an ongoing process. It has nothing to do with globalisation per se. To give away your markets in exchange for technology is wrong.

So you say technology is neutral space. Yet you have staunchly opposed genetically modified (GM) mustard. Why?

Because GM is against nature. GM seeds are seeds of destruction. The arguments being given for Bt cotton are fallacious. They don't exist. They said

productivity will increase. But the graph shows declining returns. The productivity of Bt cotton and cotton grown traditionally is the same. They said use of chemical pesticides will decline. Actually, it has increased. We have data.

These seeds are against nature. So far, pollination is a natural process. Now if you insert genes from a fish into a tomato, this is against the natural order. Besides, we know about the many cases that have been filed against Monsanto's Round-Up variety for causing cancer.

We studied GM mustard too. It is not more productive than our traditional varieties. They said it's *swadeshi*, we found out it's not. They said it contaminates only up to 20 feet. That is also wrong. Contamination stretches for several kilometres and is a big issue in our biodiversity-rich environment. Beekeepers are upset at the impact GM will have on bees. Their livelihood will vanish. I told GEAC and Niti Aayog your report is unscientific, please read it again.

So why is GM being pushed repeatedly?

There is a conflict of interest among members of the GEAC. Some of them have links with multinational companies and derive benefits for pushing GM.

GEAC is not an independent body. They say we have scientists. I told them you should have independent scientists. I asked Arvind Panagariya why he was pushing GM when his mandate is to

push cooperative federalism. States are not interested in GM. Without asking their opinion, how can he write a report on GM. He said, We have to educate them. We asked him, Where were you educated on GM, so that you could teach them further? It was discussed with farmers, we were told. But we know so many farmer organisations — the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, the Bharatiya Kisan Union — they are all against it.

But the whole world is taking to GM.

Not at all. Only six nations. These include the US, Canada, Brazil and the UK, and they included India because 95 percent of the cotton grown here is now Bt. But who gave them permission? It was given

'We believe that every country should adopt a model of development based on its own resources, its own intellect, its own manpower and environment.'

after they had already started growing it. They misled farmers into growing Bt cotton and then the acreage increased to 95 percent.

When this issue came into the public domain, Bt brinjal did not get permission. Scientific data was made public. For GM mustard, too, we are asking for all data to be made public. If the data consists of eight to 10 thick dossiers you can place it on the internet.

GM is one of the biggest issues facing the country today. The environment ministry has not given it the nod as yet. Basically this is an attempt to monopolise the seeds market in India. Monopoly of seeds means surrender of our food security and my organisation can't allow that to happen.

But India does need more productive seeds.

We have better seeds than what has been given by Professor Pental. Our seeds are more productive. As for our mustard we can eat its leaves, extract aromatic oil, use it in Ayurveda. Our biodiversity sustains our people. We should not destroy it.

What do you think of the Niti Aayog?

When the Niti Aayog was formed we welcomed it. The former Planning Commission had a top-down approach to development, a one-size-fits-all model. Sharing of financial resources with states was steeped in politics. If the state was allied to the ruling party at the centre it was bestowed with money, special packages and so on.

Modiji understood the skewed situation. He had studied it as chief minister. He said what was needed was cooperative federalism. We need a bottom-up approach and programmes in line with that approach. Accordingly, the 14th Finance Commission report cut down centrally sponsored schemes and the focus is on cooperative federalism.

We have welcomed all this. But they appointed Arvind Panagariya, who does not understand India. He has spent his formative years abroad and comes

with old-fashioned ideas of globalisation, WTO compliance, development via the FDI route. Well, the WTO has failed and FDI won't give you any results.

The PM is not pushing for GM either. He says technology is required to increase agricultural productivity. But his words are misread as advocating GM. The PM wants the Northeast to be organic. He cannot be a proponent of GM.

This government has been there for more than three years now. Since then GEAC has had 20 meetings. They have made various proposals, done field trials and so on, but not even one has been passed by the environment ministry. Besides, almost 99 percent of public opinion is against GM.

But agriculture does need growth?

Yes, of course. But, over the years, funding for research has diminished. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) does not have

funds. We used to spend 27 percent of our budget on agriculture. Today we spend just one-and-a-half percent. The victim of that reduction is the researcher. So companies took over and scientists began working on their projects. We have, per hectare, the highest number of scientists in the world. They are not working because there is no incentive, no encouragement, no motivation. We have to promote our indigenous scientists, not foreign science and scientists.

Very few Krishi Vigyan Kendras actually work on the ground.

See, if I say proudly that our non-GM mustard variety is better it is because our agricultural scientists have developed it. We objected to Bt brinjal. When we told the chief ministers of states to speak against Bt brinjal, they said, We have thousands of varieties of brinjal and all of them will vanish. Vandana Shiva said at a meeting that in Raipur we have 150,000 varieties of rice. Which country has this kind of diversity? I can't allow it to be ruined.

Will the Niti Aayog listen to you?

If the Niti Aayog does not speak for the benefit of the nation, no one will listen to them. If they want to get heard they will have to prove that they are working for the small man, the poor person and the most marginalised individual.

I am not criticising them. But we don't see any effort on their part to improve the agricultural sector. To them, increasing the farmers' income simply means introducing GM.

I would request them to go to their archives. There they will find the dust-laden S.P. Gupta report. They will find the answers to everything — how to increase the income of farmers, how to improve livelihoods, how to develop an indigenous agro-food processing industry. They should take out this report and lobby to get its recommendations implemented. ■

‘A SINGLE INDIAN MARKET IS WHAT FARMERS NEED’

Dr M.S. Swaminathan says the current glut is not due to over-supply but inadequate consumption

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE upsurge of violent protests by farmers in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh comes in the wake of seething discontent in the agricultural sector across India. Farmers have been contending with a range of problems, from lack of water to declining soil quality and rising input costs. Where they have overcome these issues and improved productivity, they have found themselves being denied fair prices.

While the knee-jerk political response has been to write off bank loans, the solutions that farmers need are in fact much more complex. There is no silver bullet. Reducing indebtedness provides relief, but the real challenge is in making farming sustainable and profitable.

State governments who want farm incomes to rise need to think long-term. At the national level a clear vision is necessary for the agricultural sector. Not only do the solutions lie across state boundaries, but the reasons for distress are mostly the same and farmers' organisations in different parts of the country are coming together.

The recent agitation began in a village called Puntamba in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra on 1 June. The gram panchayat here had passed a resolution in April warning of a strike by farmers if the state government did not pay prices 50 percent above production costs for all crops, waive farm loans, increase the milk purchase price by ₹50 and provide subsidy for drip irrigation.

Farmers in Nashik and Ahmednagar have moved away from dryland agriculture (jowar, bajra) to growing grapes, pomegranates and vegetables. Many farmers have taken to dairy farming, especially in Puntamba.

The little-known Shetkari Sanghatana supported the resolution. The agitation spread on its own and crossed the border to Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh. Interestingly, support also came from Rajasthan, where farmers called a strike. And, earlier, farmers from Tamil Nadu had protested for days together on the streets of the nation's capital.

This rising tide of discontent could perhaps have been avoided if the country had chosen to meaningfully engage with reports of the National

Commission on Farmers (NCF) submitted more than a decade ago.

Headed by eminent scientist Dr M.S. Swaminathan, the commission recommended:

- A substantial increase in agriculture-related infrastructure (irrigation, drainage, land development, water conservation, agricultural research and roads).
- MSP for all crops, at least 50 percent more than the weighted average cost of production.
- Timely data about spot and future prices of commodities through Multi Commodity Exchanges (for export crops) and APMCs.
- A single Indian market.

The most important recommendation was that of a single market. The commission said that the hugely restrictive and trader-dominated Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) mechanism "needs to shift to one that promotes grading, branding, packaging and development of domestic and international markets



Dr M.S. Swaminathan



Farmers throw vegetables on the road in Mandsaur to protest

against low prices after a bountiful harvest

for local produce, and move towards a single Indian market".

Civil Society, which has interviewed Dr Swaminathan in the past, caught up with him in London for this interview on the current agitation.

More than a decade has passed since the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) report specifically recommended that the minimum support price (MSP) be fixed at production cost plus 50 percent. Why do you think governments have not implemented this recommendation?

Generally, in our country recommendations relating to the farm sector are not attended to in the same way as other sectors. I do not know why the government has not implemented the NCF recommendations. Only a few technical suggestions have been promoted.

The farmers currently agitating in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are asking for an MSP of cost plus 50 percent for all crops. Is it a reasonable demand?

The MSP of cost plus 50 percent was suggested after careful consideration of the requirements for the economic regeneration of farmers in our country. Although they constitute a majority of the population, their economic well-being has not received the attention it deserves. This is one of the reasons poverty levels are high in our country.

It seems the current problem comes from over-supply. What do you think should be done to advise farmers on what to grow?

The current problem is not due to over-supply, but inadequate consumption. Hunger and malnutrition are widely prevalent and the Global Hunger Index 2016 prepared by IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute) ranks India 97th out of 118 countries. At the same time, we should help farmers

with timely advice on land use planning based on both ecological and economic factors.

Efforts to link farmers directly to consumers and APMC reforms don't seem to have helped Maharashtra. What are your observations?

APMC reforms are yet to take root. It is not only in Maharashtra, but in other states also that market reform has not been attended to. Also, NCF

‘Although farmers constitute a majority of the population, their economic well-being has not received the attention it deserves. This is one reason poverty levels are high in India.’

recommended a single market in the country without restrictions on inter-state movement of farm commodities. This will cut down corruption and help farmers.

We have also been talking for a long time about building infrastructure for the farm sector like cold storage facilities and so on. But this hasn't happened on any scale. Industry is not investing. How can such infrastructure be built?

It is correct that post-harvest infrastructure is very weak, with poor investment from both the public and private sectors. This is why we have heavy post-harvest losses, particularly for perishable commodities like fruits, vegetables and animal products. Only of late some attention is being paid to this important factor.

Farmers are also subjected to global swings in prices. This year the price of soya bean crashed in world markets and that impacted farmers in MP who grow soya bean, we are told. The government also imports at will. What can be done to insulate our farmers?

Farmers are subjected to considerable price and market volatility. Soya bean is a good example. We need to have both a price stabilisation fund and effective global and national market intelligence. The import-export policies generally tend to favour both foreign producers and local consumers. Our farmers' interests are not generally kept in view while developing these policies. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR

DID YOU KNOW THERE IS MOTHER'S/FATHER'S DAY AND NOW A YOGA DAY!

IN THAT CASE IT IS TIME TO HAVE A DOG'S DAY TOO!!!



The Good Samaritan of Tikiapara

Mamoon's English medium, co-ed slum school

PICTURES BY SATVIK PAUL



Mamoon Akhtar with students at the Samaritan Mission School in Tikiapara

Subir Roy
Kolkata

INNUMERABLE NGOs are helping the needy across the country in different ways. What makes the Samaritan Help Mission in Howrah, which adjoins Kolkata across the Ganga, exceptional is the way in which people of different faiths, nationalities, private initiative, official assistance and corporate help have combined to nurture a vibrant island of hope.

The Samaritan Mission does its work in Tikiapara, a huge slum that runs alongside the railway tracks connecting Howrah Station. It is 80 percent Muslim, poor and intimidated by crime. The mission was founded and is led by Mamoon Akhtar, 46, its secretary, and most of its work is housed on land belonging to the Belilious Trust.

Mamoon's (everybody calls him so) father was a skilled worker and keen that his son get a good education. So he put Mamoon in one of the area's leading schools, St Thomas. But he had to leave after reaching Class 7 under humiliating circumstances because his father was out of a job and could not pay the school fees. Mamoon finished

high school through open learning and, with his father departed, supported his family by doing odd jobs and offering private tuition. Not being able to complete his formal schooling, enabling others to do so and in the English medium became the driving passion of his life.

Two incidents shaped him. One day, he found a man beating up a woman because she refused to be a drug pusher. Mamoon tried to stop him and got beaten up himself. He was finally rescued by other locals who knew him and called him "Sir" because he taught children. The little boy whose mother

Unable to complete his formal schooling, enabling others to do so and in the English medium became the driving passion of Mamoon's life.

Mamoon had tried to save caught up with him and simply said, "I want to study." He asked the child to come to his house and soon he was running evening classes for 20 children in a spare room. To keep doing so, Mamoon went around the community seeking help and enlisted the services of local girls who had completed school as teachers at ₹100 per month.

Then, one day, he spotted a newspaper clipping which pictured a lady singing with a group of children. She was Lee Alison Sibley, Jewish wife of someone with the US consulate in Kolkata. Mamoon wrote to her, seeking help; she replied that he should ask the local community. Mamoon wrote again. Eventually, she came, saw what he was delivering from a single windowless room, was overwhelmed, wrote out a cheque for ₹10,000 and asked a local journalist friend to write about his work. It highlighted the fact that Mamoon taught children from all communities. The article roped in Ramesh Kacholia of Caring Friends Mumbai. Ramesh Uncle thereafter became a permanent mentor.

With what Mrs Sibley gave, Mamoon set up Samaritan Help Mission in 2001, the name inspired by the biblical story he had learnt in school. When

Mamoon canvassed for additional help from the community around him he also reaped a bonus — a strong community connect. In 2007 the informal school became the Samaritan Mission School, accredited and recognised by the West Bengal government. Today it is a co-educational English-medium school, affiliated to the state board for secondary education, with an enrolment of 1,300. The big thing is 'English medium'; Mamoon knows the difference that makes.

Now switch to I.R. Belilious Institution on Belilious Road, covering two acres of land bequeathed by a Jewish couple, Rebecca and Isaac Raphael Belilious (they both departed by 1910, childless), with a football field, basketball court, a water body, a two-storied school building and a bigger one coming up which will take classes up to Class 8. The whole complex comes under the Belilious Trust Estate. As a child Mamoon swam there, to later see the water body turned into a municipal garbage dump, the government school virtually defunct, the whole space gone derelict and a den of drug pushers.

In 2014 Mamoon and a small group of friends started canvassing the residents of Tikiapara and eventually, on 14 November, Children's Day, a meeting of a thousand people was held at I.R. Belilious Institution. Also present were the trustees of the institution, the local MLA and the Howrah police commissioner, Ajay Mukund Ranade. The meeting decided to revive the institution, after some debate of course as to why a *madrassa* should not be started instead of an English-medium school. But Mamoon prevailed and from the next day began the physical clean-up job by the locals through *shramdaan* with help from the municipality. The police did their own kind of clean-up. In December the trustees and the police commissioner decided to start an English-medium school, also open an evening school, name the effort the Rebecca Belilious English Institution, and hand over its management to the Samaritan Mission.

As you enter, to the left is a prominent sign indicating it is a banking kiosk of the State Bank of India. The place is filled with women, 7,500 of whom from the adjoining slum have accounts there. A biometric point of sale device enables cash dispensation for those who have Aadhaar registration. Along with education, financial inclusion is also taking place right there. The Samaritan Mission also works as a banking correspondent of Indian Overseas Bank.

Right after the bank outreach is the Rebecca Belilious Charitable Dispensary which treats over 200,000 outpatients a year with help from Howrah government hospital doctors. In it there are well-equipped rooms for ophthalmology, dentistry, cardiac care, gynaecology and general medicine. Why is the place not teeming with people and why is it a bit dark? The reality of non-metropolitan India catches up. There is a power cut on.

All the facilities and construction are fairly new and don't seem heavily used. The grants are coming but how accessible is the entire facility? The question is answered when I spot in another corner



Classrooms are informal and friendly



Girls learn sewing at the vocational training centre



The dispensary is well-equipped with all facilities

a door marked Jan Aushadhi, an initiative by the Indian government to make available cheap essential generic drugs to all. Inside, the shelves are stacked with medicines and two staffers busily fill prescriptions. All the elements that make up a complete out patient facility are present. Too few people overall? It is a hot midday during Ramzan fasting.

In another corner of the complex is a narrow hall with two rows of sewing and embroidery machines with girls working on them. An instructor is explaining to one of the girls how to work on what

looks like a pocket which has to be fixed onto the garment. This is the vocational training centre.

Another doorway bears a key message, a skill development centre facilitated by two police commissioners, Ranade and D.P. Singh. It captures the active and supportive role that the local police played in the work of the Mission.

Next to it is being built a drinking water plant which will use the reverse osmosis process and ration daily entitlements through smart cards. No service is rendered free, explains Mamoon. A token fee is levied to make people realise the value of what they are getting.

After these facilities there is a clean water body (it has been snatched back from extinction) and beyond it is an astro turf football pitch, enabled by the CSR programme of Chevrolet GM. At a second campus 10 km away in Bankra, Ambuja Cement helps run a vocational training centre and the Tata Trust a centre to facilitate the integrated use of technology in education to revive government schools.

You realise CSR funding helps but it is an additionality. The Mission's lifeblood comes from its community ownership, aided by faceless philanthropy, all explained to you by a balding, energetic Mamoon, despite undergoing Ramzan fasting, who is fluent in English and Bengali but prefers Hindi if you have it too.

As my tour ends Mamoon makes a critical point. At one stage an Islamic organisation was ready to help but wanted the project to have an Islamic character. Mamoon declined. He says his Mission knows no creed and he is trying to bring about active give-and-take between the two main communities in Tikiapara which live peacefully but separately, a bit aloof from each other. Twenty percent of the slum-dwellers are Hindus but they make up 30 percent of the students of the Mission. That additional 10 percent is a badge that Mamoon can wear with pride. ■

Survivors tell the real TB story

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

DEEPTI Chavan, 34, was diagnosed with tuberculosis when she was 16 and studying for her board exams. An X-ray confirmed it. But, months later, doctors found hers was a case of multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB. Her treatment, she recalls, was excruciating. While one drug made her suicidal, irritable and “lose her mind”, another ruined her complexion. In 2000 when she had the first surgery on her left lung, her parents had to fend off questions about who would marry her. Six years of treatment and two surgeries later, she has not only married but emerged as an activist fighting for the rights of people diagnosed with TB.

Chavan is part of Survivors Against Tuberculosis (SATB), a network of people who overcame the disease and now work to make TB care more accessible and patient-centric in India.

It is a much-needed campaign. The battle against TB, for those who contract it, is long and lonely. Misdiagnosis by doctors, incorrect treatment, stigma, and the side-effects of medicines destroy their lives.

TB is a burning health issue in India which has the most TB patients in the world. According to estimates, around 1,400 Indians are killed every day by TB or one Indian a minute.

Launched in August 2016, SATB also works as a support group. Its focus is on life after TB. Most patients wonder whether they will be able to pick up the threads of their lives again. “We wanted to highlight cases of people having been able to do something after TB and thus encourage people currently on treatment. We also wanted to explore areas like depression about which nobody talks. Why doesn't the public health system give counselling? Doctors have no time for this,” says Chapal Mehra, convener of SATB.

Chavan says women TB patients suffer even more because not only is their access to treatment restricted, they have to confront the stigma associated with the disease. “In some cases in rural India, many women are thrown out of their homes and often their husbands end up abandoning them,” she says, pointing out that family support was her greatest strength in those dark days.

It is important to bring TB out of the closet. “I started talking about my story and wanted to do something for people affected by TB so that no one suffered the way I did. People began mailing and calling me. I started counselling them. Many organisations then approached me, asking me to

share my story,” she says.

Another passionate SATB advocate is 25-year-old public health professional Saurabh Rane who divides his time between Mumbai and Delhi. He was diagnosed with TB at the age of 21. A year later, he was told he had borderline extensively drug resistant TB. At the time he was doing his internship at medical school. He remembers telling his first doctor to run a drug sensitivity test. Rane recounted the vague side-effects of the medicines he was taking. “I was told to stop being a doctor and start being a patient,” he remembers.



Chapal Mehra, convener of Survivors Against Tuberculosis

Rane's secondary diagnosis was also done accidentally and he eventually decided to change his doctor. During treatment he faced severe side-effects like temporary partial blindness, deafness, jaundice and thyroid problems. He lost two lower lobes of his lungs in the course of the treatment. Apart from physical weakness, he had to contend with depression and fatigue.

But Rane was not one to give up. While still on treatment he ran a half-marathon. Later, he went on to scale Stok Kangri peak in Ladakh. What patients need most of all, he says, is stigma reduction, support groups, awareness of the disease, medication, nutritional support and care.

There are others like Chavan and Rane connected to SATB but most prefer to keep a low profile. “It was important to create a group which would ideate, facilitate and where we could help think about how their treatment period could have been better. Most organisations who work with TB survivors just ask them to tell their sob stories. It was sort of pathetic. The people who had undergone TB treatment were bright and young. But these organisations were merely using them to come to their events and talk about how they had almost died,” says Mehra.

The campaigners strongly support survivors of drug resistant TB which can take up to three years to get cured. This variant of TB has a survival rate of

40 percent. The campaigners picked the most challenging cases of people who went through numerous surgeries, misdiagnosis and then rebuilt their lives. “It was very important to show that even in the most challenging circumstances there is the possibility that patients could survive the disease,” adds Mehra. The side-effects of drugs are horrible and the treatment expensive. It costs ₹2 lakh to ₹4 lakh to treat drug resistant TB. SATB is lobbying for financial support from the government.

It has written to the Prime Minister's Office, asking for access to Bedaquiline, a new life-saving

AJIT KRISHNA

drug that has proved very effective even for patients with extreme forms of drug-resistant TB. “Why does India with the largest TB burden globally and with over 1,00,000 cases of drug resistant TB continue to deny patients drugs they urgently need?” questions the letter. It also calls for access to appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

Mehra is also concerned about the virtual absence of research into TB. “The Indian government should be proactive in funding a TB vaccine. There are vaccine candidates but none of them has shown the kind of effectiveness we need in India,” he says.

SATB has run many successful multi-media campaigns that include patient narratives. Last year the group launched a book, *Nine Lives — Women and Tuberculosis in India*. The volume profiles nine women TB survivors who, despite stigma and discrimination, successfully combatted TB. Authored by Mehra and Zarah Udawadia, the book includes a set of recommendations to make TB services and the health system more gender-sensitive.

SATB has also made recommendations to policy-makers on how to comprehensively address India's TB crisis in the National Strategic Plan. The focus areas are public awareness of TB among communities to ensure prevention and reduce stigma and accurate diagnosis, stemming the crisis of drug resistant TB, providing nutrition and economic support to TB patients, creating a strong health information system, engaging the private sector and prioritising changes in the treatment of TB.

SATB takes pride in having organised the first and only TED talk on TB from India by the reputed TB specialist, Dr Zarir Udawadia.

The consequences of not addressing TB control adequately can be frightening. Sixty percent of TB patients go to private doctors for treatment. When they don't get appropriate diagnosis and treatment, there is every possibility that a large number of them will infect other people. ■



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For more information about the Tata group, visit www.tata.com

Roads reduce hills to rubble

Bharat Dogra
Shimla

IN the hill states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand an unprecedented expansion of highways is causing havoc. Trees are being uprooted and shops and homes demolished. Unsightly mounds of rubble now adorn roads that were once lined with trees. People who know the landscape well and could have suggested ways and means of avoiding ecological devastation are never consulted.

Travellers on the Kalka-Shimla highway generally look forward to reaching the cluster of shops in Dharampur and Sukhi Jori. This market had several well-known eateries such as Gyani-ka-Dhaba and Shaane Himachal where tourists and local travellers liked to eat. They would also pick up other provisions from nearby shops. On a routine day this market was a colourful blend of tourists, small shopkeepers and villagers.

All this changed in the week following 29 May when demolition squads and big machines rolled in to flatten hundreds of small and medium sized shops, eateries and housing units.

Visitors accustomed to seeing a lively market were shocked to see mounds of rubble everywhere. The authorities say that this demolition was unavoidable as a four-lane expansion of the highway is being undertaken and that compensation payments have been given or are in the pipeline. But locals tell a different story.

They say that more shops and houses have been demolished than strictly necessary. Many persons who had believed they were safely out of the demolition brigade's line of fire, were asked to clear out at very short notice which was traumatic. In the process, they suffered more damage. Compensation is available for those with complete ownership papers but some do not have them. Those with small businesses say that it will be very difficult for them to start afresh at a new spot.

As part of the highway expansion project, demolitions have taken place or are likely to soon take place at several other places on the stretch from Timber Trail to Chamba Ghat. Many of those

who are not affected by demolitions in small market clusters or stand-alone eateries will, all the same, face a loss of business. At a time when there is increasing realisation of the importance of linking locals with tourism, this trend of isolating them on a major tourist route is highly unfortunate.



In Himachal Pradesh, people say they are never consulted on road design

Activists are particularly agitated about plans for massive widening of a highway on the sensitive route from Uttarkashi to Gangotri. Thousands of old trees are likely to be felled.



In Uttarakhand, villagers point out that felling trees will cause landslides

In addition, thousands of trees have been felled for the highway expansion project and huge piles of rubble dot a road that was once green. Tree-cutting will cause more landslides and accidents, increasing risks for villages, farms and wildlife.

The story is likely to be repeated at several other places due to a rapid increase in the widening of

highways and construction of new highways in the Himalayan region in ways which ignore the ecological vulnerability of this region.

Suresh Bhai, a senior Gandhian activist associated with the Raksha Sutra movement for saving trees in Uttarakhand, says that arbitrary standards of very wide roads which may be suitable for the plains but which can be ruinous for the ecologically fragile hills are being built in the Himalayan region.

He and other activists are particularly agitated about plans for massive widening of a highway on the sensitive route from Uttarkashi to Gangotri. Thousands of old trees are likely to be felled. Enormous rubble will be generated. Most of it will be thrown into the Ganga.

This area is already prone to disasters including landslides, floods and earthquakes. A combination of large-scale tree felling and very heavy construction work will greatly increase the vulnerability of this region to disasters.

In addition, a large number of people employed in several wayside shops and eateries on this famous pilgrim route are likely to face a loss or disruption of livelihood. Farms, orchards and houses in roadside villages will be adversely affected too.

A lot of this damage can be prevented if the entire planning of such projects is done with proper consultation and participation of local people, who offer several suggestions for avoiding traffic jams and improving road safety on the basis of better knowledge of local conditions.

The solutions they offer can help avoid the possibility of rampant felling of trees and other ecological damage as well as the threat of large-scale demolitions and related loss or disruption of livelihoods.

But the main problem is that local people are not really consulted on such issues and the entire project planning is

done in a very centralised way without proper consideration of social and ecological impact.

This is not only bad for the local people but also for democracy. Planning for such projects can certainly be improved by closely involving local communities. They know their local environment and there would be less opposition to projects. ■

The loitering lions of Gir

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Ahmedabad

THE 35-km drive from Khambha to Dhari in Amreli district of Gujarat is most astonishing. Scampering across the road, lined with *babul* trees, is a plethora of wildlife: hare foxes, antelopes, wildcats, deer. But what really takes your breath away are lions, lots of them, strolling around with a devil-may-care attitude.

In fact, lions are spilling out of the Gir forest, their traditional home, and populating the surrounding districts of Somnath, Amreli and Bhavnagar. Around 40 percent of the lion population has actually been spotted loitering nonchalantly outside their territory in recent years.

"We saw a pride of lions walking leisurely along the path to Dhari. Unnerved by people staring at them, they ambled along. The lions had moved out of Gir forest a short distance away," says Bhikhubhai Batawala, President of the Lion Nature Foundation of Gujarat.

The population of lions in the Gir forest has increased from just 168 in 1963 to 530 today. "Asiatic lions are the proud inhabitants of the Gir forest in Junagadh district surrounded by the Girnar hills. It is their only abode here," says A.P. Singh, Chief Conservator, with considerable pride.

"During the last five decades, India's approach to Asiatic lion conservation has been one of the best efforts in the world," writes H.S. Singh, in an analysis published in *Current Science*.

The Gir Wildlife Sanctuary was established in 1965 to protect the Asiatic lion when it was an endangered species. Over the years, wastelands, community lands, peripheral forests were all brought into the sanctuary area and the lions got a much more expansive forest. Today, five protected areas: the Gir National Park, Gir Sanctuary, Pania Sanctuary and Girnar Sanctuary, covering 1,621 km, are managed as the Asiatic lion's habitat.

All these protected areas, their corridors and adjacent regions are likely to be declared an Ecologically Sensitive Zone (ESZ). But even this isn't enough for the lions. "The visiting area of the lions may be three times more. They are spreading out to over 1,475 villages of the four districts," writes H.S. Singh.

The Maldharis, a nomadic tribe, were resettled out of Gir forest. That, says H.S. Singh, led to the rise of the main ungulates that lions feed on like spotted deer, sambar, blue bull and wild boar. Buffaloes and cows are also hunted by lions. "Unlike other super predators, the number of lions has increased four-fold and wild ungulates by over 13 times in Gir forest," writes H.S. Singh.

The dry deciduous forest here has over 600 species of trees, 36 varieties of mammals, 300 species of birds and 2,000 insects. Seven rivers pass through it. The Shetrunji river forms a wonderful corridor for lions, stretching to the erstwhile Bhavnagar king's Jesar sanctuary in Palitana as well as the Mitiyala sanctuary. A.P. Singh says lions have moved along the riverine corridor to Palitana.

Wildlife enthusiasts like Batawala say lions can be



A lion crossing the road on the outskirts of the Gir forest area

Five protected areas, their corridors and adjacent areas are likely to be declared an ESZ but this isn't enough for the lions.

spotted in over 1,000 villages of Amreli, Junagadh and Bhavnagar districts as well as in Saurashtra region in western Gujarat. "In fact, there are more lions in villages than in forests, though they would be more secure in Gir," says Manish Vaiya, a wildlife enthusiast.

Lions have moved all the way to Dhandhuka, around 100 km west of Ahmedabad. They could reach Ahmedabad as well. Lions have also been spotted in the coastal areas of Pipavav and Porbandar.

The problem with lions spilling all over is their safety. There is the increased risk of human-animal conflict. Rampant tourism and the ecological devastation caused by industrial growth could also be dangerous for them.

The lions are a big tourist attraction. Hotels and resorts have sprouted in and around Gir. They aren't built in an eco-friendly way and use a lot of concrete, throttling natural drainage and knocking down trees. There are safaris with vehicle-loads of tourists noisily zooming through forested areas.

Male lions form their own prides after attaining the age of three and begin moving out of the forest. They thrive on *nilgai* or blue bull that are a curse to farmers since they feed off their crops. But lions also attack cattle and this angers farmers. They have been placing traps in their fields to ward off lions.

Two farmers were caught trapping lions in Lasa village in Amreli district. Four lions were killed three years ago and the farmers were fined ₹15,000.

Lions also get killed on railway tracks. A pregnant lioness and her three cubs were run over by a train recently. Batawala and his friends were very upset and built a memorial in honour of the lioness and her cubs. "The memorial has become very popular," he says. "Villagers have adorned its walls with pictures of goddesses." Lions get run over by trucks too in the busy Pipavav port area, says Batawala.

The Gir forest and Girnar hills are also important pilgrimage centres for Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Muslims. The area is crowded with temples. At least 100,000 people visit the Bhavnath temple during Shivratri. Five days before Diwali, Hindus perform a *parikrama* (circumambulation) of the Girnar hills over five days. A.P. Singh says the forest department does try to move the lions out of harm's way during these times.

The forest department in Palitana has organised several *dairos* or traditional music programmes by Fatima Meer who sings about protecting lions. *Dairos* have become very popular in those villages. Impressed by Meer, Vaidya and local villagers are propagating the message that "lions are our own animals. We should not harm them even if they sometimes attack our animals".

Relocation of some lions to the Palpar Kuno sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh has been locked in litigation. The Supreme Court ruled in its favour but the Gujarat government refused to allow it. Relocating wild animals from their natural habitat is a sensitive process. Some experts believe Palpar Kuno is not a good home for Gir's lions because of its high temperatures and landscape.

But with the population of lions expected to double, if the forest department continues with its conservation strategy, Gujarat will need to find a sustainable jungle plan. ■

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



Farmers say wastage is less and they can pool resources and buy a mill

Mini rice mills a gain for farmers

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

AFTER paddy is harvested farmers spend time, money and energy converting it to rice that can be sold in markets. They need to transport the paddy to a rice mill for hulling. The yellow layer of husk is removed mechanically and white rice, ready for the kitchen, emerges.

In recent years, two engineering companies, in Karnataka and Maharashtra, have developed rice mills the size of a washing machine that are portable and inexpensive. So groups of small farmers can now pool resources and buy one, lowering costs and saving time.

"Wastage is much less in the mini rice mill. We get 60 to 70 percent rice," says M. Manjunath, a farmer from Basavapatna, Channagiri, "When we get paddy milled in huge machines, a considerable portion of paddy is left inside the pipes. This mill has no such wastage. Previously, a few of us would get together and take the paddy for hulling in a hired vehicle. We had to wait there for hours until

the hulling was over. All these headaches have vanished with the mini rice mill."

Manjunath bought his rice mill from Maruthi Engineering of Harihara in Shimoga district of Karnataka, a 40-year-old company. Maruthi developed its mini rice mill more than a year ago. Running on a 3 HP motor, the mill produces 150 kg of rice in an hour. When they launched it a year ago,



Paddy being hulled in the mini rice mill

The biggest convenience is the mill's portability. Farmers can make their own rice with it.

the rice mill was priced at ₹50,000. Now, with constant R&D, the price has declined by half — to ₹25,000.

According to K.S. Halaswamy, owner of Maruthi Engineering, they have sold over 200 mills so far. Out of this, 165 machines were sold in 2016-17. "The maintenance expenditure of this mill is minimal. It can be transported in an auto-rickshaw. Most mini rice mills have been bought and taken to West Bengal. Very few have been bought in our home state. Some have gone to Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh."

Halaswamy says feedback from farmers is quite encouraging. One limitation of this rice mill is that only cleaned paddy can be put in for milling. The mini rice mill doesn't have destoning facilities either. A few customers have asked for these services.

Some have requested that the machine be adjusted to run on petrol too. Maruthi Engineering is considering these suggestions. Boiled rice (red rice) can also be hulled in this machine. But rice which isn't polished, for which demand is on the rise, cannot be made in this mill.

S. Shashikumar, a farmer from Akkalikatte, Channagiri, bought the rice mill eight months ago. "So far it has functioned very well. The company provides good service too. I'm happy," he says.

According to Halaswamy, the smallest rice mill available until recently was of eight quintal capacity per hour. It required a 10 HP motor and cost around ₹2-3 lakh.

The idea of inventing a mini rice mill struck him when he saw a mini rice mill in China two years ago. It was actually a Japanese one and cost ₹3 lakh. "Why can't we make it here at less cost, I started thinking. I have been doing research and development on this since the last couple of years. After discarding eight models, the ninth one proved to be successful," he says.

The biggest convenience of this mill is its portability. Farmers can make their own rice, using the paddy they grow. Halaswamy says that in Tamil Nadu, a couple of people are using this machine for job work.

In Maharashtra, a company named Thejam is manufacturing another model of a mini rice mill. In fact, the company has been producing such small rice mills for the past two decades. Three years ago, the company changed its name to Swar Neem Machine Sales. The earlier model has now been refined. The latest one weighs 50 kg and has caught on with farmers and job workers. Prashanth Gole, owner of the company, says, "We have sold 100 machines in the last two years."

Their rice mill, named Thrupti, is priced at ₹30,000. It too runs on a 3 HP single-phase motor. The production of rice per hour ranges between 120 to 150 kg. Gole says they have sold several of their rice mills to customers in Kolkata and Odisha apart from Kolhapur, Ratnagiri and other towns and cities. He has now started receiving orders from Kerala.

The machine is three-and-a-half feet high and one-and-a-half feet wide. It can be easily transported in an auto-rickshaw or any small vehicle. In paddy-growing belts, the mini rice mill can be leased out, too. ■

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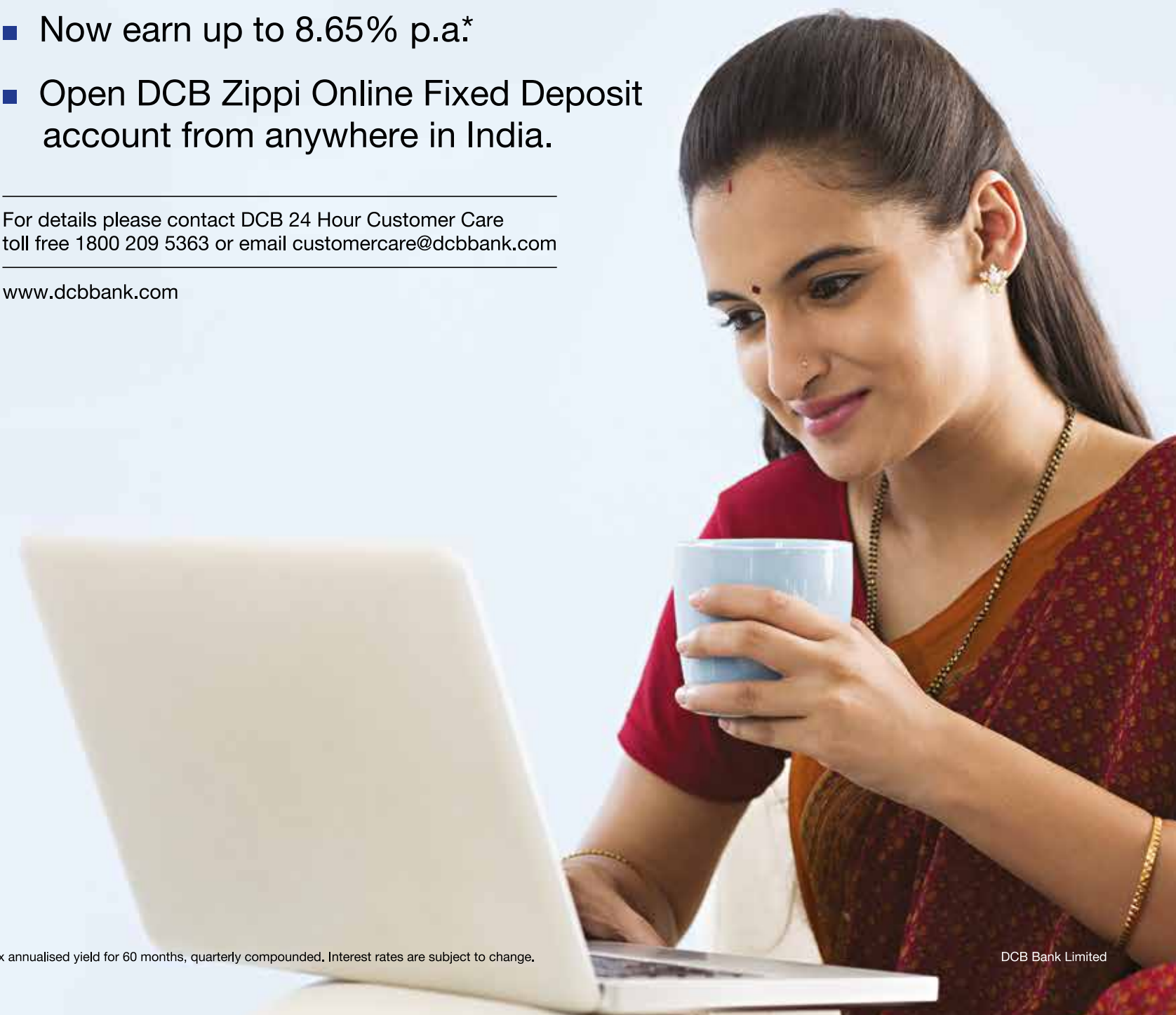
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MUDDLED NUTRITION IN DELHI

Matri Sudha PIL asks for State Food Commission

Civil Society News
New Delhi

An estimated 50 percent of children in the National Capital Territory of Delhi are undernourished, but a State Food Commission that can address the problem has not been set up.

The Food Security Act of 2013 stipulates the setting up of food commissions in the states to monitor mid-day meals served in government schools and supplementary nutrition provided in *anganwadis*, which are mother and child care centres.

It has been more than three years since the enactment of the law, but the state government is yet to appoint a commission even though malnourishment in Delhi is well documented and it is also established that mid-day meals served in schools and *anganwadis* are of poor quality.

The law seeks to ensure, among many other things, that children from poor homes get at least one good hot meal in a day so that their growth and development is not impeded.

A public interest litigation (PIL) has now been filed in Delhi High Court by Matri Sudha, an NGO involved in child welfare and maternal health.

Matri Sudha wants the High Court to direct the government to set up the State Food Commission without which it won't be possible to deploy expertise and coordinate the work of various arms of the government to bring about a significant improvement in nutritional levels.

The commission is the pivot of the food security law and in its absence, there is no means of evaluating nutritional security nor is it possible to address complaints regarding violation of entitlements.

The law bestows on the commission several crucial functions to deal with the prevention and management of child malnutrition. It is supposed to identify households eligible for foodgrains at subsidised prices. It is expected to make sure that nutritional support reaches pregnant women, lactating mothers and children between the ages of six and 14.

The PIL, which has been filed through advocate Vikram Srivastava, says that in the absence of a State Food Commission, there is a vacuum in monitoring and evaluating the malnutrition situation in Delhi.

Since the Food Security Act is meant to specifically benefit the poor and disempowered, there is no alternative to enforcement of the law by the government.

At ₹25,000 a month, Delhi has the highest per capita income in the country. Its GDP growth rate is 8.8 percent. But these levels of prosperity do not counterbalance malnutrition and anaemia among children and mothers.

No political party has seriously addressed the problem. It hasn't figured in election manifestos. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has inherited it as a legacy of previous Congress regimes. But despite being three years in power, AAP hasn't acted either.

A free-for-all kind of situation exists with no regulation over quality of meals and credentials of suppliers. There appears to be no coordination between departments. The result is malnutrition has gone up by one percent from 26.1 in 2005-6 to 27 percent in 2016-17.

The need for an accountable system is underlined by the scale of the demand. Roughly 30 percent of Delhi's population exists in slums. On record, there are 1.2 million children who avail of mid-day meal schemes in Delhi government schools. There are 840,000 beneficiaries of supplementary nutrition at *anganwadis*. This number is lower than the 1.7 million who were getting supplementary nutrition in 2012, which is strange because the number of *anganwadis* actually went up from 10,607 to 10,897 over the same period.

It is not clear why the State Food Commission has not been set up. Applications made by Matri Sudha under the Right to Information (RTI) Act



A sparse meal at an *anganwadi* in Lal Kuan in southeast Delhi



Arvind Singh of Matri Sudha

Delhi has the highest per capita income in the country. Its GDP growth is 8.8 percent. But surveys show that 50 percent of Delhi's children are malnourished.

have elicited confused responses from the state government.

For instance, the government at one stage said that the State Grievances Commission would serve as the State Food Commission. Under the law the government can designate an existing commission to do the job, but using the State Grievances Commission was not a workable idea because it had only two members and no chairman. Moreover, it has no expertise or machinery for dealing with the issues pertaining to child malnutrition.

The government's answer to the latest RTI application by Matri Sudha is that the setting up of a commission is under consideration.

Among the many issues that Matri Sudha has raised is that of accountability in the delivery of services. In October 2015, for instance, four service providers in the mid-day meal scheme were blacklisted by the Department of Education because of poor quality of food. Children were falling ill.

However, the same service providers were given contracts for *anganwadis* by another department of the government. This came to light in the answer to an RTI application filed in August 2016 with the Department of Women and Child Development.

The department provided a list of 23 service providers for supplementary nutrition and Matri Sudha found that three of them were those who had earlier been blacklisted under the mid-day meal scheme.

The PIL cites performance audit reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). In its report on the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) for the period 2006-07 to 2010-11, the CAG placed Delhi among nine states where malnourished children numbered above 50 percent.

A recent survey undertaken by CRY, an NGO dealing with child rights, in Delhi's slums also found 50 percent of the children surveyed to be malnourished. (See Civil Society January 2016.)

PICTURES BY AKSHAY NAGPAL



Matri Sudha workers counselling women

The CAG found 89 percent of cooked mid-day meals in Delhi failed to meet standards and that supervision by government departments was lacking.

Matri Sudha says in its PIL: "The concerned departments, primarily Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) and Department of Education (DOE) and their contractors responsible for providing adequate and nutritious food to children have been indicted of violations, unregulated operations and sub-standard food containing at times even extraneous elements such as lizards by the CAG."

"The petitioners submit that the non-appointment of the Food Commission in Delhi as mandated under the National Food Security Act, 2013 is one of the major causes for this poor state of affairs and leading to gross violations of children's right to health."

Matri Sudha's team consists of young people who work in the slums of Delhi. They promote awareness of nutrition and help pregnant women and mothers access government schemes.

Arvind Singh, 32, plays a lead role in Matri Sudha. His interest in malnutrition began with a project on iodine deficiency in eastern Uttar Pradesh. When he returned to Delhi, the CAG reports highlighting malnutrition in the capital were just out.

"It hit me that in Delhi, GDP is high, per capita income is high but that is completely contrary to what is happening at the grassroots. So, we started analysing government reports of the women and child development ministry and we found that there were clear-cut governance issues involved. We also started picking up issues that are linked directly or indirectly to malnutrition," says Singh.

"These were issues like tuberculosis, which is ignored by the government. For severely malnourished children with medical complications the government



The overcrowded maternity ward in Safdarjung Hospital

has a protocol. The ministry of health and family welfare has guidelines for such children. There are institutions in Delhi in all government facilities where such services are supposed to be provided. District hospitals are supposed to have nutritional support centres," Singh explains.

"We started filing RTIs. We went to government hospitals: Sanjay Gandhi Hospital, Guru Gobind Singh Hospital and the situation was exactly what we found in the reports. We did face-to-face interviews with the families whose children were admitted in those hospitals. In 2011, the National Commission for Child Rights came out with a fact-finding report on the ICDS which flagged issues of nutrition and the ICDS."

Matri Sudha's concern was that when facilities existed there was no reason why children should be allowed to fall into the third and fourth stages of malnutrition. It wanted to get the system working.

Under the ICDS *anganwadi* workers are the primary people who identify malnourished children. They are linked with the Asha workers, who under National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), are linked to the primary health centres (PHCs).

But the Ashas and *anganwadi* workers have to be monitored. Similarly, the primary health centres have land and budgets but aren't functioning. Additionally, the AAP government has bypassed them by announcing Mohalla Clinics, thereby further distorting the system.

The ICDS has 95 projects covering a million beneficiaries — 200,000 pregnant and lactating mothers and 800,000 children from 0-6 years of age.

But Matri Sudha found to its surprise that only 65 children had been officially listed as severely underweight by the government.

So, the NGO conducted its own small survey in a part of southeast Delhi where it was working. It found that even in its tiny sample of 345 children below six years, about 31 were in the second and third stages of malnutrition. There was clearly something amiss with the state government's figures.

"There is a dedicated budget for malnourished children under the National Food Security Act and the government has revised the supplementary nutrition norms and costing in every state," says Singh. "After we brought this discrepancy



A newly born child on the floor in Safdarjung Hospital

Matri Sudha's concern was that when facilities existed there was no reason why children should be allowed to fall into the third and fourth stages of malnutrition. It wants the system to work.



Anganwadi workers are the primary people who identify malnourished children



A woman whose malnourished children were helped by Matri Sudha

to light we saw a change in the Delhi government report. In its last report, the figure for severely malnourished children went up to 1,000."

Matri Sudha reached out to the government. Singh says he went to the Delhi Secretariat and explained the situation to Sandeep Kumar, Minister for Women and Child Development. The additional director was also there. After an hour-long presentation, he said we will form a group to look into the matter.

"We waited six months and then again approached him. He said he had put inspectors and volunteers at the centres. We told him that wouldn't work because it was really a convergence problem between the two different ministries for women and child development and family welfare," says Singh.



Water is key to health but this is what children get in Delhi's slums

"I also met Satyender Jain, the Delhi health minister in 2015. We went with a report on the PHCs. There are 240 plus in Delhi. The first point of reference for a malnourished child is the PHC. The municipal corporations operate a parallel system of maternity centres and dispensaries," says Singh.

"I told him, under the National Health Mission, the PHCs are to be strengthened by improving infrastructure. Their number is also to be increased. But meanwhile, the AAP government came up with its own parameters and left behind the 240 PHCs which have funding. They set up Mohalla Clinics though it would be so much wiser to strengthen existing PHCs, which already have human resources." ■

Fresh, crisp and in demand 2 salad enterprises catch the clean-eating trend

Civil Society News
Gurugram

DELIVERING hundreds of eatable salads across New Delhi and Gurugram in a day is not the kind of enterprise the faint-hearted should get into. There are power failures, traffic jams and water shortages to contend with. Sourcing high-quality vegetables and fruits is another kind of challenge. It is also important for the packaging to look right and the messaging to be perfect — salad-eating types tend to be finicky. Finally, delivery must be so smooth that none of the stress that went into getting a salad to a demanding customer's table ever gets noticed. It is important that the box be as flawlessly crisp and fresh as the salad it contains.

But two brave small enterprises, Salad Days and Raw Leaf, have shown that the perfect low-calorie meal can reach homes and offices fresh and hygienic in the face of daunting logistics. Riding the trend of eating healthy, they have been first-movers in acquiring a growing number of loyal customers who want to get off oil and heavily cooked stuff. Salads, wraps, grills, *shawarmas*, smoothies and cold-pressed juices are being ordered for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Both Salad Days and Raw Leaf are fuelled by the passion of their founders who have started small and are in no serious hurry to grow. They are happy to sell what they personally like to eat, which is, of course, key to the quality they promise. They are also completely hands-on and work with small, self-trained and committed teams. Right now, profits matter less to them than the admiration of customers.

Kunal Gangwani, 29, and Varun Madan, 33, turned their backs on employment and rolled out



Kunal Gangwani and Varun Madan of Salad Days



PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA

Salad Days from a hole in the wall at Mahipalpur near the airport where connectivity was so poor that they had to rush out of their office to take the first orders on their mobile phones.

The crummy pavements and crowded lanes of

Mahipalpur are an unlikely location for a business in fresh salads. But that is where they got started with Salad Days and had their first taste of failure and success.

A modestly funded company, Salad Days is not



Seema and Simarjit Singh of Raw Leaf

the usual kind of business. But if you once played in a rock band together, as Gangwani and Madan did, and you aren't finicky about working out of a basement, chances are that you wouldn't mind plunging in and testing the frontiers of new eating habits. Salad selling can also define your professional life in personal ways. It can turn work into fun.

Gangwani and Madan studied at XLRI in Jamshedpur at the same time. It was here that they were part of the XLRI band, the Bodhi Tree — Gangwani playing rhythm guitar and Madan the drums. With a decent management degree under their belt, they got into jobs and then opted to drift out of them. It was then that they met up again by chance.

Salad Days has acquired a steady viability over three years with one customer bringing in the next. Gangwani and Madan aren't ready to talk numbers yet, but the lights are on and they even make a little money. From Mahipalpur, they have moved their

kitchen and office to Udyog Vihar in Gurugram, but the founders still sit in a basement, though a bigish one and nicely done up, and there is a well-equipped and airy kitchen on the floor above.

A second kitchen is coming up in south Delhi because the numbers of those wanting to eat healthy has been growing. Anything oily is increasingly being banished from diets. Fresh greens are the perfect substitute. Working people also don't have the time in the morning to put together lunch or in the evening to cook dinner. Salad Days is a great option.

The business has grown just as Gangwani and Madan imagined it would. They saw in themselves their potential customers. They say they had travelled widely and lived in the West and discovered the evolved joys of eating simple salads. So, when they were looking out for a business they could enjoy running, they decided that delivering salads to people like themselves would be

a great thing to do.

"We love this kind of food. We wanted to create something that we could buy ourselves," says Gangwani. "We looked around us and found that there were pizzas, burgers, *dosas*, sandwiches, but no salads. It was a gap we decided to fill."

Salad Days delivers around 500 salads a day. That is a good number, but the founders say they aren't chasing numbers.

"We want to be the best. We don't want to be the biggest. Whatever we do should be the best from our side. If we cannot do it better, it is because we don't know how to do it better," says Madan.

It is also a business not built on big money or lots of cash burn — an euphemism for charging less for products and services than they actually cost so as to lure customers and show numbers.

"What is the point of the hard work we put in if we don't make a profit and literally pay people to buy our salads. A sustainable business is what we want to build. That is why we didn't go after big money," says Gangwani.

But that is not just emotional blabber. It is a good strategy for a business which is not in a hurry. Customers can be few, but if they are hooked and happy, individual spends can be significant. It is a comforting thought to know that you can get a fresh and hearty salad at a reasonable price when you need it.

"There are people who spend more than a lakh of rupees a year eating salads," says Gangwani. "It gives us confidence that we have played our cards well."

At Raw Leaf, Simarjit Singh, 50, has also happily done his own thing and is soaking in the early success of his enterprise. He has teamed up with a school friend. Singh's wife, Seema, handles marketing.

Raw Leaf was started in 2014 and has just about begun to break even as the number of customers has grown. Located in Gurugram, close to where the Singhs live in Palam Vihar, Raw Leaf's customers are mostly among the diplomatic crowd in New Delhi. But with the business having grown by word of mouth, the customer base has expanded to include others. For instance, a TV host has his lunch sent from Raw Leaf to Noida every day.

"I am in no hurry to add customers or put more items on our menu," says Singh. "If the delivery cost is high we charge the customer more. We don't do the 30-minute delivery kind of thing because

Continued on page 24



The kitchen at Salad Days

everything is fresh and an order is made from scratch. So, we say we need an hour and a half. Initially, we would say that we could only deliver the next day.”

Raw Leaf is on Zomato and Swiggy, but Singh says he is not interested in paying for visibility on the sites. In fact, an order coming through Swiggy is a problem because the delivery boy turns up and wants the order instantly. Raw Leaf prefers having its own direct customers who are accustomed to its systems.

Singh is a former tea-planter, who got out of Assam when violence overtook the gardens. He relocated to New Delhi and drifted into the food business. The juicy corn and hot dog vends at cinema halls in the National Capital Region are his. He also supplies frozen momos.

It was while trying to think of what else to do that he looked closely at the possibilities in organic

farming. “We discovered that organic farming is mostly a big fraud,” says Singh, who has an expansive and unpremeditated planter-like manner about him.

In 2012, they took two acres on lease in Palam Vihar and began farming themselves. They began growing vegetables with high-quality imported seeds and investing in their produce. They also put a drip irrigation system in place.

It is five years now and they haven’t used chemical fertilisers and pesticides and so what they grow is almost certainly organic. Vegetables they grow on their two acres go into the salads that Raw Leaf sells thereby going from the farm to the table in a specially supervised way.

In an extension of the salad experience, Raw Leaf also offers *shawarmas* and chicken and *pita* pockets, which qualify as low-calorie healthy meal options. There are also cold-pressed juices and smoothies.



A chef prepares an order in the Raw Leaf kitchen

‘There are people who spend more than a lakh of rupees a year eating salads,’ says Kunal Gangwani of Salad Days. ‘It gives us confidence that we have played our cards well.’

The combinations are many. You could opt for Detox, which consists of beet, coriander, carrots, tomatoes, mint ginger, amla and lemon. Or you could go for Zest, which has pomegranate, watermelon and mint. Perhaps you would prefer Power Punch which is wheatgrass, beetroots, carrots, celery, mint, lemon and amla.

Salad Days also offers cold-pressed juices and smoothies. It has begun delivering sushi for another enterprise run by a Japanese entrepreneur, who began by being a customer of Salad Days and quickly turned into an admirer.

Both Salad Days and Raw Leaf see their strength in being independent. They exist on their own terms. Quality matters a lot to both and so does transparency in dealing with customers.

Their immediate appeal is in the healthy food that they offer, but is there more to changing customer preferences than diet? Are customers looking for customers they can primarily trust, especially when it comes to food? Are these the truly valuable companies of the future because they have built soul connections with their markets and are shorn of the hype and clever messaging on which bigger and more aggressive brands are built?

Gangwani says of Salad Days: “I don’t know of any other brand that has come up in the past three, four or five years where customer loyalty is so strong.”

Singh is less eloquent, but when he asks customers who are located at a distance to pay more or wait an hour and a half for their orders, he too tests their loyalty and says much the same thing about Raw Leaf. ■

‘I am in no hurry to add customers or put more items on our menu,’ says Simarjit Singh of Raw Leaf. ‘We don’t do the 30-minute delivery kind of thing because everything is made fresh.’

The making of a President



DELHI DARBAR
SANJAYA BARU

NOTHING unsettles the old Delhi Darbar more than to find a hitherto unknown name hog the headlines. The question “Kovind who?” brings back memories of the day Pratibha Patil was declared the United Progressive Alliance’s (UPA) candidate for the job. Minutes before her candidature was announced, in 2007, a prominent television journalist called me. He had heard from his ‘sources’ that the candidate would be a woman from Maharashtra. Was I aware who? I was at the time in the Prime Minister’s Office. I had not yet heard who the UPA had picked so I was unable to offer a name. The journalist took a guess and his channel ran the story — “Nirmala Deshpande likely to be named UPA candidate for President!” Nirmalaji was a Gandhian familiar to the Delhi Darbar because of her involvement in peace-building between India and Pakistan. Minutes later the name of Pratibha Patil was announced. The Delhi commentariat asked, “Pratibha who?”

Even as we once again read and hear debates about the essential and adequate qualifications of the head of state, and many remain nonplussed by the name of Bihar Governor and former member of the Rajya Sabha Ram Nath Kovind, there is a story that comes to my mind that I can now narrate.

In May 2007 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked me to prepare a list of about 10 names of prominent women from different walks of life — politics, academia, science, literature, culture and social service. It had been decided that the president should be a woman and so the search was on. I spent an entire weekend thinking of names, with the help of my wife, a university professor. We prepared an impressive list of the who’s who of distinguished women leaders from all walks of life. After all, this person would be India’s first woman head of state.

To be honest the name of Pratibha Patil was not

on our list. A few days before Ms Patil was to be sworn in as president I was summoned by Prime Minister Singh and asked to draft her post-election acceptance speech, in which the newly elected president thanks members of the electoral college. This is one of the speeches that the president is free to draft on her own. All the official speeches of the president, at home and abroad, have to have the prime minister’s imprimatur but there are some speeches that a president can draft on her own and speak her mind. An acceptance speech is one such. So I was surprised to be asked to draft that speech.

Should I consult Ms Patil? What would she want to say, I wondered. Write what you think she should say, I was told by the PM. So I sat down and drafted a speech. The PM read it and thought it was okay. The draft was then sent to Congress President Sonia Gandhi for her approval. Ms Gandhi made several changes. An entire paragraph drawing attention to

liked it. I made it!” I narrate this episode to draw attention to the fact that a personable woman politician completely unknown to the Delhi Darbar became India’s first woman president. Her most important qualification? She was a Congress party loyalist. One should also remember that 10 out of 12 times Congress prime ministers have chosen Congress politicians for the post of president. So how can the Congress, or anyone else who did not make an issue of this in the past, now object to a BJP prime minister naming a ‘not-so-prominent’ party loyalist as president?

Indeed, how many can name all presidents without the help of Google? Sure, there would be much higher recall of a name like A.P.J. Abdul Kalam or even Rajendra Prasad, but even now most who care to remember the name of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan think he was a Tamil from Madras!



Ram Nath Kovind with Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Public memory about the occupants of Rashtrapati Bhavan is patchy. The occupants of the ‘palace on Raisina Hill’ have come in all shapes and sizes. The only thing common to a good majority — 10 of the 13 presidents — is that they were all members of the Indian National Congress. So why have so many of our so-called public intellectuals asserted that Prime Minister Modi ought to have picked a non-party person acceptable to all? Economist-turned-public intellectual Amartya Sen insisted that the next president should be ‘an inspirational figure of elevated national standing’ and not merely a party political personality? I do not recall his saying that in 2007, or 2012!

It is true that the occupant of Rashtrapati Bhavan can elevate or make a mockery of the country’s highest constitutional office. President Zail Singh was criticised for declaring that he would pick a broom and sweep if asked to do so by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Some presidents have been criticised for their own corruption in office but most others for turning a blind eye to the enormous corruption within the President’s Secretariat. One president who was highly regarded by high-minded persons was accused of taking away carpets and paintings from Rashtrapati Bhavan while vacating! It is an office that has had its ups and downs. President Pranab Mukherjee has elevated the profile of his office by undertaking a series of worthwhile projects that have lent grace and charm to the presidential palace. Hopefully, the next President will continue this tradition. ■

the fact that Ms Patil was the first woman president was surprisingly scratched out. References to Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi were introduced. After reading the final draft Ms Patil made only one addition to the text — a quote from Sant Tulsidas!

Ms Patil was a nice lady, as I soon discovered. Perhaps to convey her gratitude, President Patil invited me to the first official banquet hosted by her. I was surprised to find my favourite dessert — *shreekhand* — served. Rashtrapati Bhavan chefs were never known for being innovative. It was always the usual *gulab jamun* or *rasmalai*. I went up to the *rashtrapati* to compliment her on her decision to serve *shreekhand* — a speciality of Maharashtra and Gujarat. She smiled and said, “I am glad you

Why 5 June is a pretence



**FINE
PRINT**

KANCHI KOHLI

IT'S just gone by, 5 June or World Environment Day. Once again there were email alerts, text messages and announcements about pristine nature and assurances of its protection. Planting of trees, a symbolic act, was repeated. The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change celebrated the day with the theme of connecting people with nature.

Now that all the events are done and dusted, let's look at how much environment is really a priority in India.

Take, for instance, one of the longest standing issues facing environment governance in India — the manner in which impact assessment procedures are adhered to. One would think that 23 years after a legal framework was put in place some basic requirements of authenticity of information and public participation would be resolved.

But travel to the coast of Maharashtra and cold reality strikes. In March 2017, a public hearing for the construction of a captive jetty by I LOG Ports Private Limited was proposed, the site of which is Nate village, Rajapur taluka of Ratnagiri district. This was the second time the public hearing was to be held. The first time it had to be postponed since the basic documents required for an informed hearing were not made available in the local language as required by law.

This time around, it was the assessment itself. Their Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) was prepared by Bhagavathi Ana Labs Private Ltd, an approved and accredited consultant to carry out such studies. Scrutiny revealed otherwise.

Not only was the assessment highly inadequate since the project was going to critically impact the biodiversity and livelihood of the ecologically fragile Ambolgad Nate area, there were parts of it that had been picked up from a report by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS).

A letter dated 7 March 2017 to the Maharashtra State Pollution Control Board by the Director of BNHS says: "The report has copied word to word our work carried out under a project on coastal and marine biodiversity of Konkan without any citation of our work."

It concludes emphatically: "The biodiversity section of the current EIA is fully plagiarized and copied from the BNHS report and warrants to be rejected outright, making public hearing untenable."

The public hearing was cancelled, but this fact was not acknowledged. The Konkani Vinashkari Prakash Virodhi Samiti, who brought this to light, is seeking action against the EIA consultants as well as cancellation of the EIA itself.

After all, the law has a provision that the

environment ministry can reject a project on the grounds of false or misleading data being submitted, more so if such action can materially affect the appraisal of impacts. Ironically, there is nothing on plagiarism per se, an issue which keeps popping up time and again. The Samiti's letters to the relevant authorities are yet to be acknowledged or answered.

None of this is surprising anymore at a time when environment laws are under constant review and amendment. Colleagues at the Centre for Policy Research — the Namati Environmental Justice Programme have consistently collected information and analysed the changes to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification. Part 4 of their series on coastal regulation reveals that the ministries of

documents were being signed. Available documentation and conversations revealed that a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) was underway to assess the number of people likely to be impacted by the acquisition of land for the Parsa Coal Mine.

The discussion was a reminder of an earlier fact. In January 2015, 20 gram sabhas (village assemblies) of Sarguja, Korba and Raigarh districts in Chhattisgarh had met the environment minister and the minister for tribal affairs, and demanded that these areas should not be allocated for coal mining. These meetings were both a request and a word of caution, asking the government not to go ahead with coal mining as the village assemblies, invoking their constitutional rights, would definitely



The Hasdeo river and the Hasdeo Arand forest area

Environment governance in India, especially the manner in which EIAs are carried out, is still flawed and unjust.

tourism, shipping and urban development have "demanded further reduction in the NDZ (No Development Zone) and more infrastructure on the coast (either for tourism, sewage and effluent treatment or ports)."

The building and construction sector has already benefitted from legal amendments. As I wrote earlier in the year, these projects don't require detailed environmental scrutiny, provided "objectives and environmental conditions that can be monitored" are included in the permissions granted to building bylaws and related permissions. The issue is under challenge before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and arguments are underway. Meanwhile, the sector can enjoy ease of doing business.

Recently, in central India, a group of villagers in Sarguja district of Chhattisgarh were worried. The district collector had called a meeting and some

oppose it. Their homes are in the ecologically fragile and biodiversity-rich Hasdeo Arand and Dharamjaigarh forests area, which are also important elephant corridors in central India.

One of the projects of concern for the gram sabha representatives was the Parsa coal block. It was not just reallocated but its environment clearance process has been revived and is underway. The villagers have once again opposed the SIA process, and are likely to state their opinion at the public hearing on the Parsa mine as and when it is organised.

With sensitive coastal areas being opened up for port-led development, river interlinking submerging tiger habitats, and rail corridors to carry extracted ore zig-zagging across prime forest areas, hard reality strikes. It's easy to celebrate the environment on one day and then slide into amnesia. ■

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No place for fear in the classroom



**BACK TO
SCHOOL**

DILEEP RANJEKAR

THE winter's afternoon in a Rajasthan school was special for us since we were to spend time with the Bal Sabha (Children's Parliament). Its members were excited to present to us the structure, design and scope of the Bal Sabha. The children appeared to be bright and engaged with the school's processes.

After they left, an invigorating discussion followed with the teachers on several issues regarding society, education and teachers' experiences in the school. Almost all the teachers appeared to be engaged and enjoying what they were doing. Among other issues, we also discussed their views on corporal punishment. At a principle level, all teachers agreed that usage of threat or intimidation of any kind is detrimental to the learning process. We were happy about this conviction. When we were about to leave, a lady teacher asked me, "How do we discipline the children if we don't punish them?" In her mind, the only way to discipline children was by punishing them. It is very reflective of what a large section of teachers struggle with while thinking about disciplining children.

The belief that punishment is necessary for children is very widespread and deeply entrenched in society, including parents. About seven years ago, many parents were apprehensive about sending their children to Azim Premji Foundation schools because our teachers did not punish children. Parents asked, what kind of a school is this that does not beat children? Today, one of the key reasons why parents want to send their children to our schools is the absence of punishment.

While many beliefs about children and the process of education have changed, both teachers and parents almost regularly resort to punishing or threatening children in order to "make them obey the norms" set by them. The threats and intimidation manifest in several forms ranging from shouting, abusing, humiliating, beating, caning, pinching, pulling ears, making the child stand outside the class or on the bench or making children hold their toes or throwing chalk pieces/dusters at them. Some teachers use extremely cruel and painful methods such as deeply pinching the arms (where it hurts the most).

Punishment of a severe nature can leave permanent scars on the mind of the child. In 2007, a large group of ex-students of my own school assembled on the school premises exactly 40 years after passing out. While a small section of them decided to felicitate four of our teachers, many

amongst us opposed it and boycotted the function, recalling the severe punishment meted out by these teachers. Forty long years had not been able to erase those memories.

The Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 prohibits corporal punishment in schools. However, the Act applies only to children from six to 14 years old. Further, the National Policy for Children of 2013 specifically provides that the State shall "ensure no child is subjected to any physical punishment or mental harassment" and requires the State to "promote positive engagement to provide children with a good learning experience". Several subsequent court decisions have prohibited any physical or mental punishment.

One of the stated roles of education in the National Policy of Education is to further the goals of secularism, socialism and democracy. This needs the process of education to be interactive, participative and democratic. Thus, anything that creates a feeling of oppression, force and compulsion has no place in education.

Why do teachers and parents still resort to



The belief that punishment is necessary for children is widespread.

punishment as a means to discipline a child? There are several explanations. Teachers often perceive that punishment yields immediate results, it solves an immediate problem, it brings immediate order out of chaos, and it establishes control. The second reason — more insidious and often part of our psychological DNA — is the way we see power as something to be used to subdue someone weaker, to ensure obedience. The third is our cultural bias of fear being necessary for learning — our own personal experiences reinforce this.

The fourth and a crucial one is that teachers don't know the alternatives! The teacher education in our country does not prepare them to deal with children who may not follow the norms. If you are not professionally competent you either use the traditional methods or allow your emotions to take over and do what your anger guides you to do.

We forget how helpless a child feels against the power of teachers and parents and how wrong it is to oppress the child with such power. Through punishment, we often legitimise violence and reinforce the arbitrary use of power. This very act is

against establishing democracy in the process of education. It prevents the realisation of the free potential of the child. The child gets a clear message: "You can do it because you are bigger and more powerful than the child."

What are some of the possible solutions?

- Universally develop an understanding among teachers and parents that every child is capable of learning and children learn best when they are respected, valued and involved in the process.

- View discipline as something that enables/encourages performance through commitment, rather than merely maintaining order or conformity with set norms. The focus should be on self-regulation and self-discipline.

- Build a stimulating school and classroom culture, and evolve norms that are applicable to all — teachers and students. Develop the same among parents.

- Develop the belief during teacher education that the process of teaching and learning is all about developing a comfortable and enabling relationship between the teacher and student. There is no place for fear and apprehension in this relationship.

- Treat making mistakes in the classroom as part of learning; students should not be ridiculed or reprimanded for them. Help students see that with additional effort they can overcome learning difficulties. Believe that students can change learning habits and behaviour with guidance.

- Do not belittle students when academic goals are not achieved. Do not compare individuals or groups of students with each other in terms of how quickly or well they learn new material. This can be most stressful and is worse than direct corporal punishment. Do not discriminate on the basis of academic or socio-economic status of a student.

- Use the daily school assembly effectively to bring critical issues to a platform where they can be openly and without fear, discussed by all. This will create a culture of openness leading to lack of stress. Do not judge students on the basis of their behaviour but analyse the reasons behind their behaviour and discuss it with them with sensitivity and care.

- Avoid outbursts of anger, harsh disciplinary methods, raised voices and insensitive comments as these only alienate students. Instead, rely on firm, consistent instructions to convey messages to the class. Explain non-negotiables to students clearly — talk about why they are non-negotiables.

- Facilitate and teach conflict resolution within the classroom. Encourage students to discuss and generate ideas about how to effectively solve the problem, thus enabling them to take responsibility for the situation and develop the skill of negotiation.

We owe it to our future generations to help them become constituents of a society that believes in an environment that is open, rational, caring and, above all, free of fear. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

Indian films losing out to foreign Indian films



MACRO VIEW

SANTOSH MEHROTRA

WHILE Indian filmmakers fight the Censor Board — in the age of the internet when all sorts of content is available to all kinds of audiences — Hollywood imports have begun to make a serious impact on the box-office in this country.

Perhaps it is time to urgently look outward as well as inward if Indian cinema is not to lose ground to a double whammy of foreign imports hurting a local industry forced to become too tame for the international palate.

Most telling is the Australian film *Lion* produced with foreign investment and selling to the Weinstein Company for \$12 million before generating \$130 million at the box-office worldwide. The significant factor here is that the predominant language of *Lion* is Hindi. Clearly, a global audience for world cinema is more than happy to hear the authentic rhythms of the character and read the sub-titles. Starring the then six-year-old Sunny Pawar as well as Nicole Kidman and Dev Patel who plays Sunny's grown-up self, the film found universal appeal.

A past example of this trend, *Slumdog Millionaire*, tells of even greater foreign success with an Indian narrative and there are plans to take more authentic Indian stories to the world — bypassing Bollywood which is being left to cater to the cultural diversity of the masses in Bharat and, hopefully, those in new markets such as China.

The trouble is that, with the intellectual property owners of *Slumdog* and *Lion* residing outside the Indian tax system, the benefits accruing to the Indian economy were production funds brought into the country as foreign exchange and a temporary recognition of the skillsets of Indian technicians. However, no share of the \$1 billion in *Slumdog's* case, nor *Lion's* \$130 million will find its way back to India which provided locations, labour and services but not investment or other incentives that might have entitled us to negotiate a share of the international pie.

Meanwhile, despite being the largest film industry in the world, Bollywood has actually been stagnating. Factoring in inflation, annual growth is in low single digits whereas films like Hollywood's *Jungle Book* topped ₹135 crore in Indian box-office takings.

Is it not high time to analyse why India is failing on two fronts: one, why Indian producers prefer to shoot abroad and, two, why foreign filmmakers

have to overcome innumerable obstacles to shoot here? With Bollywood fragmenting and contracting, why are we not doing more to reverse these trends and attract the makers of film and television series such as *Homeland* and *Indian Summer* to our country instead of letting South Africa and Malaysia steal away projects for which we have stronger cultural claims and geographical advantages?

Part of why India remains a country "to avoid shooting in" is that other countries offer producers rebates of 30-40 percent whereas India offers disincentives such as:

- Foreign filmmakers will be surcharged by 200 to 300 percent as separate pay scales and rentals apply;
- Permissions will involve the I&B ministry's approval of foreign scripts when the same does not apply to local film producers (until of course it can hurt the most, i.e. during the certification or, rather, the censorship process);



Sunny Pawar, the young actor feted for his role in *Lion*

- Permissions will be required from numerous departments in each state like the Bombay Municipal Corporation, Port Trusts, Architectural Society of India, the Railways, traffic police, and local bodies such as temples, political wards and the like, all of which involve conversations that are brokered by location managers often involving under-the-table inducements.

Who needs all that when filmmaking is seen elsewhere as something to be won and then facilitated with red carpets rolled out for brave financiers, producers and directors with a universally appealing story to tell?

Because so much black money still finds its way into India's domestic film industries, the government is rightly unwilling to rebate local filmmakers. However, when the country's industry is clearly losing out to cost inflation and high entertainment tax, why is there not a mechanism to become a part of such foreign-owned intellectual property through whole-hearted and full-blooded cooperation? A clear-cut strategy needs to find political will and be implemented.

Other countries incentivise all filmmakers and

help them complete their arduous work. Rebate systems such as in the UK and Canada and in many states in the US are thoughtfully structured to provide the host country/state with some skin in the game, via an equity share in a film or television series. If India does not quickly institute a similar system to attract filmmakers, it will continue to see an outflow of its best homegrown ideas and lose out to competing economies in Southeast Asia.

Take the UK, for example, which represents only around 7 percent of the world market for international film sales. India accounts for around half of that but, unlike the UK, the rate at which international films are being consumed here may soon overtake the UK and make the country a more important target for Hollywood as well as international independent studios.

Hollywood spends over \$1.2 billion in the UK whereas in India, foreign producers might spend one percent of that figure or less. The same hunger to compete, as the UK, might wean India off its unhealthy dependence on Bollywood and make some of its talented directors aim their stories at a global audience as well as those many millions of cinemagoers in India with comparable tastes. This is a more likely way to retain a share of the commercial spoils.

The following steps could have a direct positive economic impact that could transform this situation and repatriate a share of the net global income from such films to India.

- Institute a production rebate system for Foreign Exchange Funded Films (FEFFs) in return for an equity share for the Indian co-producer in such FEFFs to the extent that these FEFFs are shot in India, thereby bringing a proportionate share of world net revenue back into the Indian tax net. An example of this is Sir Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* in whose case even today six-monthly remittances are made to the Indian government by the film's revenue collection agency. In today's world, the central government would be encouraging such FEFFs by refunding a proportion of the costs spent in India which can be traced back to the inward remittance of foreign currency. The local executive producer, facilitating such a refund, would be in a position to command a share of the film's net revenues just as his counterpart does in the UK, Canada and elsewhere.

- Institute a level playing field by removing the inflated costs that are charged to international producers, costs that currently deter them from filming here. This would need to be imposed on all Indian film associations and unions. The culture of surcharging the foreigner has no place in a competitive environment in 21st century India.

- Empower the Film Facilitation Office, currently being set up in Delhi, to deal with script approvals by qualified script readers and to obtain permissions in a painless manner. I understand this has government backing but await the announcement of foreign films being shot here on the back of it.

Enough work has been done in India on film treaties that have been ignored because they do not address the practical problems producers face. Other countries in the region are winning business at India's cost in lost revenue, accolades, profits and taxes. If we are to have 'make in India' then let us have it or we shall continue to see filmmakers 'faking' India elsewhere. ■

(With inputs from Michael E. Ward, Producer, Krea Films, UAE)
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LIVING

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The other films at Cannes

Migration, ethnic strife, values, democracy adrift

Saibal Chatterjee
Cannes

A young Syrian refugee attempting to sneak into Hungary is shot down by the border police. As he lies wounded and disoriented, he discovers that he can levitate at will. The illegal migrant is sent to a refugee camp but is soon smuggled out by a cynical doctor who sees in the man's secret power an opportunity to make a killing. This, in a nutshell, is the plot of Kornel Mundruczo's *Jupiter's Moon*, one of the 19 films that competed for the Palme d'Or at the 70th Cannes Film Festival in May.

Jupiter's Moon wasn't the only film in the festival's official selection to explore the global refugee crisis or the European Union's current troubles as populist politicians seek to benefit from a growing disquiet sparked by the universal fear of the other. Delving into what it means to be uprooted from one's own land, the film raises questions about the dynamics of faith, the possibility of miracles in a hopeless world and the challenge of being different.

Cannes, beyond its glitz and glamour, is a film festival acutely aware of the world around it. It, therefore, loves multi-layered, politically loaded cinematic essays like *Jupiter's Moon* — a natural affinity that also extends to its choice of non-fiction films usually showcased in the Special Screenings section. The world's premier film festival acknowledges the need for and responsibility of cinema to dig deep into contemporary realities and pose uncomfortable questions. It is driven by a firm belief that, amid all the strife that mankind faces, miracles do happen — and a benighted world is lit up — when gifted chroniclers set their minds to the task.

Both directly political and magnificently artful, Mundruczo's intriguing and engaging film tells us a great deal about the world we live in without seeking to offer pat solutions to mankind's problems. That is also true of the other 'political' films that

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The Square, a darkly comic Swedish satire, won the Palme d'Or



BPM (*Beats Per Minute*) won the Cannes Grand Prix



Happy End is about a wealthy bourgeois family in Calais

Continued from page 29

were in the 2017 Cannes Competition line-up: Michael Haneke's *Happy End* and Fatih Akin's *In the Fade*.

Putting the central idea of *Jupiter's Moon* in context, Mundruczo says: "I have somehow always thought that there is a greater, comprehensive universal faith that reaches beyond the relative faith dictated by a given culture and historical age, one that can have an impact on all people, especially in a day and age where we seem to be settling scores with traditional religion... Instead, we are defined by money and success, by the ever-present god of populism and instant gratification."

STORIES THAT PROVOKE

Beach parties, photo calls, high fashion and stardust are an integral part of the Cannes Film Festival. But far more central to its celebration of cinema are the deep conversations the films spark. Even when it is below par, as it was in several respects this year by its own high standards, the festival throws up provocative narratives like the one at the heart of *Jupiter's Moon* and reminds us of the enormity of the obstacles that the world faces as it negotiates a maze of serious problems pertaining to floundering economies, ethnic wars, terrorism, undermining of democracy and rampant hate-mongering. "We did not want to make a refugee film, but to use the present crisis as a context for rethinking miracles," says Mundruczo.

Challenging fiction films by the established masters of world cinema, disturbing and insightful documentaries from leading lights of non-fiction moviemaking and a handful of genre offerings that touched upon fractious themes — Cannes had it all this year. The cinematic spectrum that the festival showcases has always been fascinating. So one had expected its 70th edition to pull out the stops. Not that it did not try — the Competition lineup as well as the Un Certain Regard and Special Screenings sections had many world cinema heavyweights, not the least of whom was Austrian auteur Haneke, a two-time Palme d'Or winner and Cannes regular who never fails to excite fans of his austere and incisive brand of cinema.

The films in the festival's principal segments were expected to whet the appetite of cinema lovers. That did not quite happen to the anticipated extent, notwithstanding the fact that a few of the Palme d'Or contenders — Russian director Andrei Zvyagintsev's *Loveless* and Lynne Ramsay's *You Were Never Really Here* in particular — did make a strong impression and were tipped to be frontrunners for the festival's top prize.

On the final day, the jury presided over by Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar, sprang a surprise by voting for Ruben Ostlund's *The Square*, a vibrant darkly comic Swedish satire that probes the themes of trust, responsibility and social hypocrisy in the modern world through the story of an esteemed curator of an art gallery facing an existential crisis.

The film's win was seen by many as a stunning upset. But its expansive theme does have an undeniable appeal for anybody who is perturbed by the direction that first world societies are headed in. "In the film, we face the weakness in human nature," says Ostlund in his director's note. "In attempting to do the right thing, the hardest part is not to simply agree on common values, but to actually act

according to them..."

In *Loveless*, the story of an estranged married couple forced to work together when their only son goes missing, there is no scope for redemption. The film paints a bleak portrait of urban Russia where personal aspirations snuff out genuine emotional connections. *You Were Never Really Here*, a sinewy thriller set in New York, is about an ex-soldier-turned-hitman who battles a sex trafficking ring to save a teenage girl. Both films are stark reminders that the world is an unsettlingly unhappy place today.



Jupiter's Moon is about a young Syrian refugee who discovers he can levitate

GLOBAL ISSUES

But while the overall show may have left some critics a tad cold, the political thrust of the films that the Cannes programmers assembled this year ensured that there would be no dearth of talking points during the festival that turns this French Riviera town — once a nondescript fishing port — into the world's movie capital for 12 days every May.

Reflecting the reality of a world grappling with severe political and ethnic strife, many of the titles in the 70th Cannes Film Festival addressed the breakdown of communication between individuals, societies, communities and nations. It's a collective, global existential crisis that humanity is facing and it was reflected in no uncertain terms in the selected films. The broad pattern that emerged pointed to an ever-increasing urge among storytellers to reflect upon and seek to make sense of a world under siege.

One wouldn't have got that sense had our primary source of information been the glamour-struck Indian entertainment press. Large swathes of it couldn't see beyond Aishwarya Rai, Sonam Kapoor and Deepika Padukone, the three Bollywood actresses who walked the red carpet in their capacity as L'Oreal brand ambassadors. The Indian media's

fixation with the Mumbai divas is understandable: in the absence of nothing to cheer on by way of films from the subcontinent, they treat the Cannes Film Festival as no more than a high-voltage jamboree that yields eye-catching photographs of American and European divas in their best designer outfits. The Indians invited to the parade bask in the reflected glory of being in a place where the shutterbugs never stop working and the media spotlight never dims.

But those in the know are aware that there is a great deal more to this extravagant summer event

than the red carpets, tuxedos, bow-ties, flowing gowns and the heady hoopla fuelled by non-stop global media coverage. Cannes remains, first and foremost, committed to cinema.

It was no different this year. Europe is in the midst of multiple crises. It is up against a swelling population of migrants and the constant threat of terror attacks. While repercussions of the former found its way into the themes of a wide array of films, the latter reflected in the unprecedented security measures adopted on the ground by the festival authorities.

Less than a year ago, in July 2016, Nice, about 45 minutes away by road, had witnessed a horrific terror attack on Bastille Day when a truck driven by a radicalised youth ploughed through a crowd of revellers. Understandably, there was fear in the air in Cannes and a tight security ring was thrown around the venue of the festival, inconveniencing filmgoers streaming in and out of the screening hub in the Palais des Festivals.

Who better to capture the forbidding mood of Europe than Michael Haneke? His ironically titled *Happy End* is about a wealthy bourgeois family in Calais whose transport and construction business is

passed from the ageing patriarch Georges Laurent to his daughter Anne, played, respectively, by Jean-Louis Trintignant and Isabelle Huppert (who were also in Haneke's Palme d'Or-winning *Amour*). The old man, now contemplating ways to end his life, is served by the family's Moroccan retainers, Rachid and Jamila, who are often objects of racist disdain.

The Laurent family faces a host of grave issues, personal and social, and the new head of the brood does not help matters by deciding to marry a British lawyer (Toby Jones) in the midst of a civil suit relating to a mishap caused by negligence at one of

this year, French director Robin Campillo's *BPM (Beats Per Minute)*, travels a quarter of a century back in time to portray Parisian AIDS activists in the early 1990s who waged a war to get the government of the day and pharmaceutical giants to invest in medical research in the fight against the epidemic.

RETRACING JOURNEYS

A war of a completely different but equally dangerous kind is the subject matter of *Demons in Paradise*, first-time director Jude Ratnam's documentary on the aftermath of the Sri Lankan civil war that ended in 2009 but still continues to divide the nation. In 1983, aged only five, Jude, a Sri Lankan Tamil, fled the massacre in Colombo and elsewhere instigated by the majority Sinhalese government.

More than three decades later, Ratnam undertakes the same journey on a red train from the south to the north of the country and investigates aspects of the war that have never been recorded on the screen by a local filmmaker. Tell-tale signs of the 26-year-long violent conflict are everywhere, especially in Jaffna and its surroundings. The film becomes a means for Ratnam to remind himself and his compatriots of the horrors that his community not only faced, but also perpetrated.

Demons in Paradise, a film of urgent importance, exposes the Sinhala role in precipitating the bloody conflict. It also takes a critical look at the violence that was unleashed by the Tamil Tigers on 'traitors' to the cause. Ratnam says: "Currently in my country,



Still from *In the Fade*

their construction sites. Their placidly insular world is always at risk of being shaken up by the refugees who reside in the jungle camp on the edge of Calais and are occasionally seen restlessly trudging the streets. *Happy End* is a sly, crafty film that bears the stamp of a master — it addresses the ways of affluent Europeans and the realities that they would rather not confront.

In German-Turkish filmmaker Fatih Akin's Competition entry, *In the Fade*, starring German-born Hollywood actress Diane Kruger, a woman fights for justice when her Turkish husband and their six-year-old son are killed in a blast masterminded by a neo-Nazi group in Hamburg. Cast in the mould of a vengeance thriller, the film journeys into the core of the rising socio-political agitation triggered by a growing hatred for outsiders and depicts the legal loopholes that allow perpetrators of violence to be let off the hook.

The film that took home the Cannes Grand Prix

more than seven years after the end of the civil war, the victors are celebrated, general amnesia is encouraged and silence is imposed. I want to break that silence and help the scars of recent events heal rather than grow deeper."

The filmmaker is aware of the controversy *Demons in Paradise* is likely to lead to. "I know I will have to face harsh, perhaps even hateful, criticism from both communities. The Sinhalese will claim that I am betraying my country by stirring up a past that is best forgotten. On the other hand, the Tamils will insist that I betrayed our cause by revealing the atrocities committed by the Tamil Tigers," says Ratnam.

English actress Vanessa Redgrave, 80, was in Cannes with her first film as director, *Sea Sorrow*, a 74-minute heartfelt documentary that traces the

history of forced migrations that have occurred from across the world over the past century. The powerful film makes a strong case for the UK in particular and Europe in general to play a proactive part in providing safe havens to the wave of refugees that have been coming in of late from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, especially children unaccompanied by parents.

Redgrave, a timeless theatre and cinema icon, makes illuminating references to William Shakespeare — especially to *Richard III* and *The Tempest* — in driving home the horrors of deracination and the lack of political will among today's world leaders to do something about it. Pointing out that Europe generated the largest number of refugees in the post-Second World War era, *Sea Sorrow* — the title is drawn from Prospero's lines spoken to daughter Miranda in *The Tempest* — asserts that the continent is morally bound to act with a sense of urgency. As 65 million refugees struggle to find a new life, Europe cannot slam its doors on migrants, the film suggests.

TRUTH ON FILM

A powerful new documentary film about former US Vice-President Al Gore's sustained campaign to encourage renewable energy use across the world, took sharp swipes at President Donald Trump, a climate change denier. Gore was at the forefront of the decades-long campaign that culminated in the Paris Climate Conference in November 2015.

An Inconvenient Sequel tracks the progress made by him in the 10 years since *An Inconvenient Truth* put the global spotlight on the question of climate change and what needs to be done to reverse it.

Talking to the press, co-director Jon Shenk said: "This film is about a truly epic battle between all those who have got us into the mess we are in today and those who want to do things in a new, sustainable way."

For Gore, film has proven to be a powerful medium. "When *An Inconvenient Truth* premiered in Cannes, I learned something I did not know before. Film is the most effective medium to deliver a message. The news environment is so messy and chaotic today that it is difficult to get focussed attention," he said. While in the film he laments the distortions that have crept into democracy, he asserted that the climate change fight is now "a hopeful cause because we have the solutions".

Among the more unusual films that played in Cannes was one in the parallel Directors' Fortnight — French documentarian Sonia Kronlund's *Nothingwood*, which celebrates the life and work of Kabul-based actor-director-producer Salim Shaheen. The gutsy 51-year-old has braved 35 years of war to continue making films in Afghanistan, inspired in the main by Bollywood. He has 112 films behind him and, as he told this writer after the screening of *Nothingwood*, will begin working on his 113th and 114th films as soon as he returns to Afghanistan.

In one scene in *Nothingwood*, Kronlund expresses the fear that a particular location might have landmines. "There are no landmines," Shaheen assures her. "But even if there are, we will both die of cinema," he adds airily. Nobody defines passion for cinema quite like Salim Shaheen: an irrepressible man who sums up the spirit that the Cannes Film Festival celebrates. ■

Bengali cooking decoded

By Anita Anand

IF you have not been to the two Bengals (east and west), one in India and the other in Bangladesh, Chitrita Banerji's *Bengali Cooking* is a delight. If you have, the book is still a delight.

Having lived the first 20 years of my life in West Bengal, mostly in rural areas, the book takes me back to places that seem to have fallen into the deep recesses of my mind. It is, unusually, divided in chapters woven around seasons, festivals that fall during the seasons, and the food prepared during those times.

Ours was not a Bengali household. My parents came from Punjab and our cook, Shankar, was from Odisha. My father worked for a British coal mining company. So, the home kitchen was a *kichiri* of sorts — Punjabi, Bengali and English recipes dominated the table from *paranthas*, *rajma-chawal*, *rotis*, chicken and meat curries to fish curry Bengali-style and meat roast with potatoes, bread pudding and caramel custard. Our fare was rich.

Banerji has a good understanding of Bengali cuisine, being a Bengali herself, living in Bangladesh

for several years, and then moving to the US. She is a gifted writer. Her descriptions of the food, the seasons, the rituals and history, all come together in mouthwatering ways.

The Bengali calendar is a solar one, Banerji writes, and is based on six seasons: *Grishma* or summer; *Barsha* or monsoon; *Sharat* and *Hemanta* or early and late autumn; *Sheet* or winter and *Basanta* or spring. As to be expected, *Barsha* is the most important season as the rains “infuse the parched earth with new life and wash away the dust and grime of previous months”.

No discussion of Bengali cuisine is complete without the mention of rice and fish. “The dual entity of rice-fish which is at the heart of Bengali cuisine is reflected in a thousand and one ways in the rituals and ceremonies of Bengali Hindus,” writes Banerji. Added to this are the numerous preparations of potatoes, brinjal and many varieties of spinach and other greens.

Banerji describes a typical Bengali meal, eaten in courses. The traditional way was to eat on the floor which was covered with a mat or carpet, off banana leaves, washed and glistening. In the centre of the leaf was placed a mound of rice, “flanked by vegetable fritters, wedges of lime, whole green chillies and a bit of pickle. And, in the centre of the mound of rice,

a little hole to pour in a spoonful of ghee or clarified butter to flavour the initial mouthfuls of rice”.

The order in which Bengali food is eaten is essential. Each dish is eaten separately, with a bit of rice. The bitter is eaten first, with a handful of rice and the vegetable mixture known as *sukhto*. This is followed by *dal*, with fritters of vegetables or fish, after which come other fish dishes with gravy and then, meat preparations. Chutneys and *ambals* are last, before the sweets. No self-respecting Bengali would not offer or partake of a sweet — *sandesh*,

chamam, *pantua*, *roshogolla*, and so on, which then signifies the meal has ended.

For this menu to be enjoyed to the maximum, eating with the fingers is key. The tactile experience of picking up the food with the fingers and then the experience of the fingers touching the tongue and mouth, all add to the enjoyment of the flavours. No spoon or fork could parallel this experience.

Banerji also touches on the many aspects of Bengali life, urban and rural, in all its richness. The importance of *adda*, or hanging out in tea shops; the great love Bengalis have for *hilsa* fish; the numerous preparations of sweets with the base of *chhana*, or split milk; the extensive use of *posto* or poppy seeds and mustard oil; the different varieties of rice to be used for various occasions and so on.

She acknowledges the Muslim influence as seen in the *parothas*, *kebabs*, *pulaos* and *biryanis* which are part of Bengali cuisine as well as the impact of the British Raj. Many dishes and words such as chop and cutlet are now part of Bengali vocabulary.

What the Bengali eats today, Banerji says, depends on their means and preference. For the very poor, it has always been a struggle to get basic rice. Many poor peasants in Bangladesh survive on a handful of rice, some onion and green chillies and, if possible, some potato or green vegetable.

The notes in the book describe the meaning of Bengali terms used. The section on common ways of cooking Bengali food describes the various dishes, in a non-recipe way. Two pages of possible menus are extremely helpful. When I lived in the US in the 1970s and '80s my American friends would often complain about Indian cookbooks, which wouldn't say what goes with what or how you could prepare a complete Indian meal. Clearly, Banerji's experience of living in the US has helped her understand this need. ■

Anita Anand is the author of, most recently, *Kabul Blogs: My Days in the Life of Afghanistan and Cholo Kolkata*, an illustrated book for young people.



Bengali Cooking: Seasons and Festivals; Chitrita Banerji; Aleph Book Company ₹299

Activism in fiction

By Anjana Basu

SHE was known for her candy coloured prose, like Dylan Thomas on steroids. A vie-able die-able thing to flip through. Now *bees saal baad* comes the new eagerly awaited book from an author teased into writing another novel after her many political treatises. Of course the literary world was scattered by spoilers so that even before the book arrived one had a sense of what it was going to be like.

In the beginning there are none of those experiments with turns of phrase though the poisoned vultures set a grim conceptual mood with enough lightness of touch. Arundhati Roy tells it like it is, straight from the shoulder.

Which is why much of it sounds like nightmares heard before, the great Indian situation skillfully unravelled, part by part, many tales told with determination covering the chaotic subcontinent of darkness that the country seems to have become. All of it invading our homes in the breaking news on our TV screens every day. *Hijras* and women in men's bodies definitely trending — one of them

actually wrote a book about adopting a baby and in this one there are two babies. 9/11, Bhopal, Anna Hazare, *gau rakshaks*, Dalits, Ayodhya, Kashmir — everything Roy has fought for or commented on is here spiced with heavy doses of irony — and within a matter of pages. The narrative is slipped in between slices of fact and history.

She doesn't attempt to spin out her poetry to make horror beautiful, though neon can well be the colour of death and destruction, scarlet blood shrieking rape. Roy's sources of inspiration are as varied as her subjects — Leonard Cohen, Shakespeare, Urdu *shayars*, used to counterpoint or accentuate the irony. Her changes of voices and language are quicksilver.

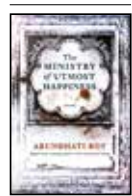
One figure shimmies through from *The God of Small Things*, the jolie laide S. Tilottama, a dusky *beedi*-smoking Malayali. There she was a jazz song, here she's a Billie Holliday number and for a while she seems to ground the story with love and loss in Kashmir. Any resemblance to actual people of course should be tactfully ignored — but then the Hijra Anjum is a real person inspired by a Dayanita

Singh photograph, the famous Mona Singh. Roy turns various political figures into a cast of Voldemorts with nicknames like The Poet Prime Minister, Gujarat Lalla — the only one who does have a name is Mr Aggarwal and one wonders where the muffler went.

Roy, of course, has never cared what people thought of her after the first hysterical hype that followed her Booker win. Having decided finally to embark on her second work of fiction, she has gone ahead with it exactly as she thinks fit with touches of almost magical realism evoking not Marquez but Rushdie.

You could put it down as one of those portmanteau things that Dickens was famous for where links between things are rather tenuous at times. Perhaps a portmanteau of today's India was actually Roy's gameplan — and she herself admits that she is trying to stuff everything into a shattered story with her language as the glue.

Indian writing has always had a vast sweep but somewhere in that vastness is the closure that makes it all worthwhile. What links people here is the graveyard of dead hopes with battered angels hovering like dying vultures. Despite the quiet moment with Anjum and the baby — yes, despite the puddle of urine too — there is no closure. However, to be fair, India's turmoil, too, has no closure. ■



The Ministry of Utmost Happiness; Arundhati Roy; Penguin ₹599

Big lizards and a spectacular sea

PICTURES BY SUSHEELA NAIR

Susheela Nair
Jakarta

As our chartered boat skimmed past the port town of Labuan Bajo, the drop-off point for Komodo Island in Eastern Indonesia, we passed by fishing hamlets, the occasional fishing or day-tripping long boats, and deserted islands with long white sandy beaches and soaring hills in the background. The beautiful aquamarine sea here is dotted with islands and brims with marine life. On board, we savoured a spectacular feast of grilled fish, salads and tropical fruit. Strolling along the pier, we could see fascinating corals.

The Komodo National Park (KNP), a divers' haven, has sharks and manta rays below the surface and, above it, houses one of the world's most impressive creatures — the Komodo dragon. Divers claim that the waters off Komodo are one of the best diving sites in Asia. The island's fascinating underwater landscape includes 385 species of beautiful corals, mangrove forests, and seaweeds. Its waters are home to thousands of fish species, 70 types of sponges, 10 types of dolphins and six types of whales, besides green turtles and various species of sharks and stingrays.

Located between the islands of Sumbawa and Flores, the park stretches across three main islands, Rinca, Komodo and Padar, and numerous smaller ones. The KNP was initially established to conserve the population of Komodo dragons, estimated to be 5,700, with native colonies on Komodo, Gila Motang, Rinca and Flores. In 1977, the park was declared a biosphere reserve by UNESCO.

When we reached the island, we embarked on a short, guided trek instead of a day hike in search of the world's largest lizard. We passed by the entrance gate and farther off saw some Komodos sprawled on the floor of the dining area and others enjoying their siesta around the ranger's office. On the way, we spotted other wildlife like wild boar, monkeys, deer and a myriad of birds. The terrestrial fauna in the park is of rather poor diversity in comparison to the marine fauna.

We then encountered some Komodo dragons lazing in the shade. These stocky predators are the largest lizards on Earth and are a protected species. There are only about 4,000 of them living in the wild, all found on this cluster of islands. Gigantic, the lizard-like creatures are about two or three metres in length with claws, beady eyes, a toxic bite and scaly skin, which looks like chain mail. They can easily weigh about 165 kg.

Our guide informed us that a Komodo has 60 teeth and a mouth full of deadly bacteria. These lizards have an acute sense of smell. Hence we did not attempt even a distant selfie with them as we were warned not to go close. A foot-long pink forked tongue darted in and out of the mouth of one while saliva drooled from the mouths of another two. We spotted one with its head close to the ground, camouflaged by the trees. Another heaved



The waters off Komodo are one of the best diving sites in Asia, say divers



The entrance to the Komodo National Park



The famous Komodo dragon

itself up and lurched towards me, reaching so close I could hear its guttural hiss.

Despite their enormous size and appearance, they are not active hunters. “What makes them daunting is the fact that they are patient predators. In the wild, they stalk a victim, usually a weak or injured one. Although they eat mainly carrion, they prey on deer and water buffalo. After following the victim for a while, sometimes for several days, the Komodo will devour the dying prey,” explained our guide.

We also saw one clambering a tree. I learnt from our guide that the lizards eat their own dead and are cannibalistic, forcing their young to live on trees for up to five years to avoid being attacked. We learnt that female Komodo dragons lay their eggs in birds' nests as a sort of decoy so that other adult dragons don't eat them and the young ones then live on trees to avoid being devoured by their parents.

Rinca and neighbouring Komodo have a more arid landscape than Flores. Rinca, 17 nautical miles from Labuan Bajo, gets the most visitors, as the dragons tend to congregate around the park ranger's

office and spotting them is easy. There are supposedly no designated dragon-feeding places on Rinca, but there are often half-a-dozen massive beasts near the camp kitchen at Loh Buaya.

On our way back, some members of our group stopped to snorkel over pristine, red coral reefs around the Pink Beach inside Komodo National Park, where one can see green turtles, lion fish, and lots of anemones. A boat ferried them to the island where they could sunbathe, swim or snorkel at one of only seven pink beaches in the world. Some tourists set off on an exploration spree of the island. They hiked up the main hill to enjoy a stunning view of the overall beach from high above. The beach gets its name from the red coral that washes ashore.

For snorkellers, the beautiful marine life is amazing. It is rich with soft corals and an abundance of colourful coral fish. Before ending our trip, we stopped by Kanawa Island to watch schools of tiny silver fish wafting around us in the water in iridescent clouds of psychedelic colours with parrotfish nibbling at coral blooms — a fitting finale to our trip. ■

FACT FILE

How to reach: Labuan Bajo is the transit port town to several islands. Chartered boats can be hired from Labuan Bajo port which take four hours to Komodo Island. It is 22 nautical miles from the mainland.



**AYURVEDA
ADVISORY**
Dr SRIKANTH

For a sturdy liver

I have been suffering from indigestion, nausea and poor appetite for several weeks. I am 42 and work in a public relations company. I suffered from jaundice about six months ago. My doctor says I need to eat a healthy, low-fat diet to keep my liver in good shape. What else can I do?

Shipra Seth

The liver is the largest internal and metabolically most complex organ in humans. It is a wonderfully resilient and complex organ that nurtures and protects our body day in and day out. The liver performs over 500 different functions including fighting off infections, neutralising and disposing of toxins, manufacturing proteins, regulating sex hormones and cholesterol levels as well as supplying our body with vitamins and minerals.

Because of its wide-ranging responsibilities, the liver often comes under attack by viruses, toxic substances (including alcohol), contaminants and disease. Often, people with liver problems will be completely unaware because they may not have any symptoms at all!

There are many forms of liver disease. The good news is that many of them can often be prevented by understanding risk factors, taking precautions and by making healthy lifestyle choices.

- PREVENTION:**
- Avoid alcohol or keep it to a bare minimum. For the liver the safest amount of alcohol is no alcohol at all.
 - Eat a healthy and balanced diet which contains fibre-rich and plant foods, which are low in refined sugar and fat.
 - Eat foods that are free from pesticides and pollutants.
 - Minimise your intake of salty and sugary snacks.
 - Exercise regularly — regular exercise keeps weight under control and helps to prevent non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.
 - In fact, not getting enough exercise and eating too much unhealthy food can damage the liver in the same way alcohol can!
 - Drink plenty of water, at least two litres per day.
 - Some cholesterol-lowering drugs/painkillers may have side-effects and cause liver problems in the long term.
 - Recreational drugs are hepatotoxic, so strictly avoid them.
 - Prevent hepatitis. Viral hepatitis is a serious disease that harms the liver.

- Please get vaccinated against hepatitis.

NUTRITION: Certain vegetables can contribute to the overall well-being of the liver. These include garlic, green leafy vegetables, turmeric, lemon, beets and carrots.

- Garlic is known to activate liver enzymes that flush away toxins.
- High in plant chlorophylls, green leafy vegetables are great detoxifiers.
- Turmeric boosts liver detox by flushing out known dietary carcinogens.
- Drinking freshly-squeezed lemon or lime juice in the morning helps stimulate the liver.

Beets and carrots help the liver by eliminating toxins like heavy metals from the body.

HERBS: Consumption of the following herbs as supplements regularly will keep your liver healthy and disorders at bay.

- Triphala: about 20 ml of decoction with a teaspoon of honey, twice daily before food.
- Trikatu (a combination of black pepper, Indian long pepper and ginger) — about 1 gm powder to be consumed with honey/water — after food.
- Haridra (turmeric) — 2 gm of turmeric paste mixed with three teaspoons of juice of amalaki (Indian gooseberry) could be administered once or twice a day.

Triphala, trikatu and haridra are available in tablet form from Himalaya Wellness.

- Pippali (Indian long pepper) — regular consumption of 2 gm of long pepper powder with a teaspoon of honey, once or twice a day for about a month.
- Bhumyamalaki, katuki, kalamegha, kiratiktika — all these bitter herbs are established hepato-protectives — 5-10 ml of fresh juice / 2-3 gm powder of any of these herbs can be taken along with honey.

MEDICATIONS: Liv.52, from Himalaya, is still the undisputed 'par excellence' medicine useful in all types of liver disorders; it is available in multiple formulations to suit various age groups — drops/syrup (for children), tablet and DS tablet (for adults) — take 5-10 ml of syrup/1-2 tablets, before food.

Arogyavardhini vati (Sri Dhootpapeshwar Ltd or Baidyanath) — 2 tablets, twice/ thrice daily, after food.

Guduchyadi Kashaya/Drakshadi Kashaya (Vaidyaratnam Oushadhasala, Thrissur/ Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal) — 10 ml, diluted with 30 ml of boiled and cooled water twice daily before meals.

Pipplyasava/Rohitakarishtha/Punarnavasava (Vaidyaratnam Oushadhasala, Thrissur/Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal) — 20 ml diluted with equal water, twice daily after meals. ■

Dr Srikanth is a postgraduate in Ayurveda and has been a consulting physician for the past 17 years. He is currently National Manager, Scientific Services, at The Himalaya Drug Company.

PRODUCTS

Water on wheels

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY INDIA



Jaya Raghav Padhir of Karjat with her Water Wheel

RURAL women walk miles in India with pots on their heads to fetch water. There probably isn't a single state in the country that has a tap in every home. In the midst of summer, when temperatures touch over 45°Celsius, women still make this arduous journey in search of water. Carrying multiple pots of water is physically exhausting and tells on the health of women.

Habitat for Humanity India is easing the burden on rural women in Maharashtra by providing them an inventive Water Wheel. It is a cylindrical drum made of safe food-grade high-density polyethylene. The Water Wheel can hold 45 litres of water, three to five time more than what women, on an average, carry on their heads. The wheel is equipped with a plastic or metal handle to make it easy to roll on the ground.

All the women who received the Water Wheel say it has made their lives much easier. Lakshmibai Neel of Porgaon village in Aurangabad says she can carry more water per trip and, what's more, even her husband and children share the burden.

In Nagewadi village in Karjat, women used to make several trips to wells and the Pathraj river to fetch water. The Water Wheel, says Nana Ragho Bhangare, a student of Konkan College, enables her to go to college without feeling exhausted.

"Carrying heavy vessels filled with water was cumbersome and tiring. Habitat for Humanity India's Water Wheels are saving us energy and time. We are also able to carry more water," says Jaya Raghav Padhir of Karjat.

Habitat for Humanity India has provided over 3,400 Water Wheels in Aurangabad, Latur, Nanded, Osmanabad and Karjat regions of Maharashtra. The intervention has impacted the lives of nearly 3,442 families. ■

Contact: Habitat for Humanity India, 102/103, 1st Floor, Dhantak Plaza, Makwana Road, Marol, Andheri (East), Mumbai – 400 059 Tel: 91-22-2920 9851/52; Fax : 91-22- 2920 9854 Website: www.habitatindia.in

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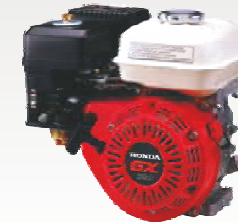


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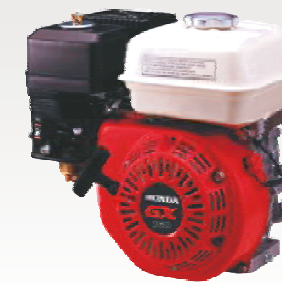


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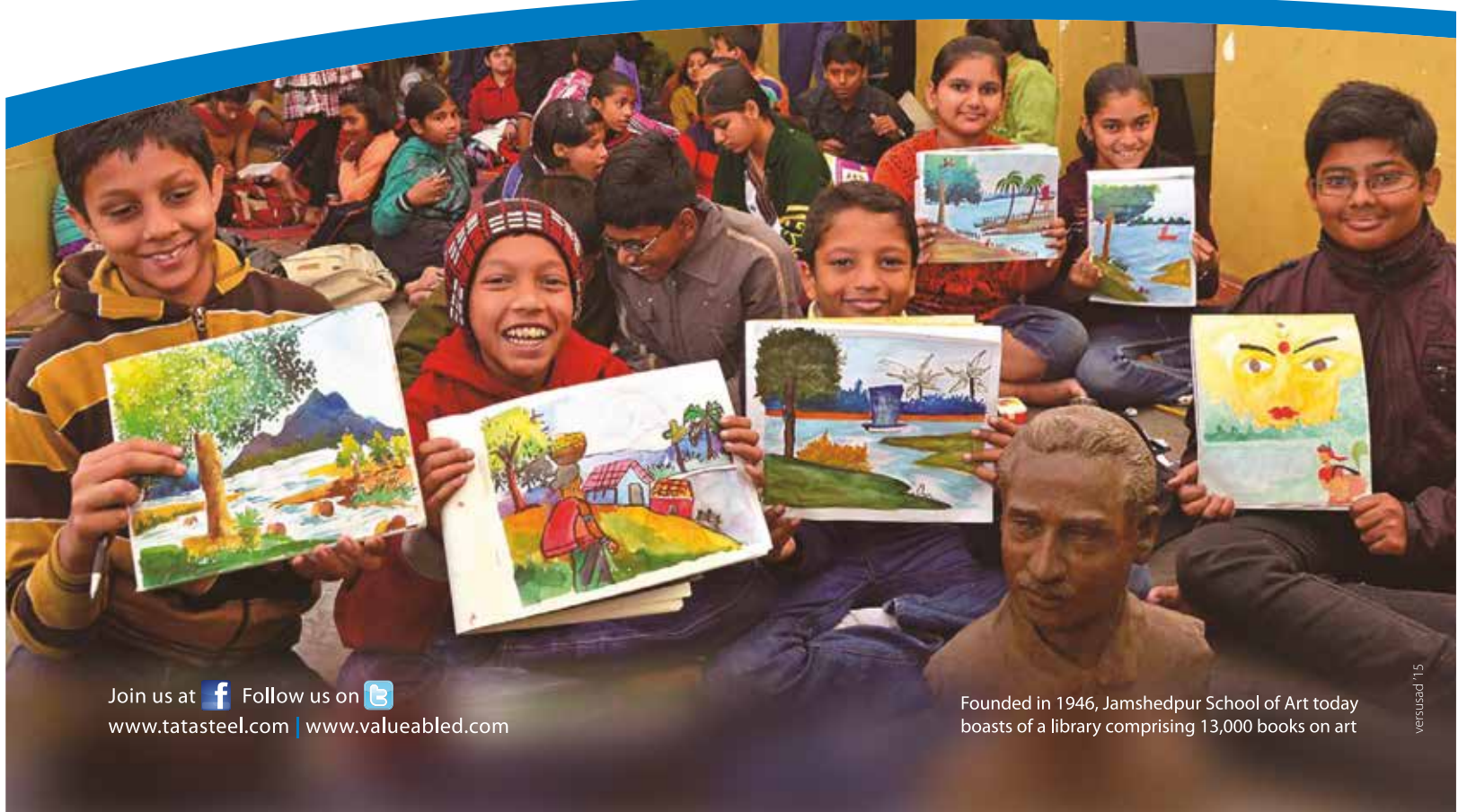


SHAPING THE FUTURE

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Founded in 1946, Jamshedpur School of Art today boasts of a library comprising 13,000 books on art