

# Civil Society

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**THE SEZ  
HOT  
POTATO**

**Industry  
needs  
land.  
How  
should  
it get it?**



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THE GANDHIGIRI OF ANUPAM MISHRA

# SOMEONE

# Civil Society

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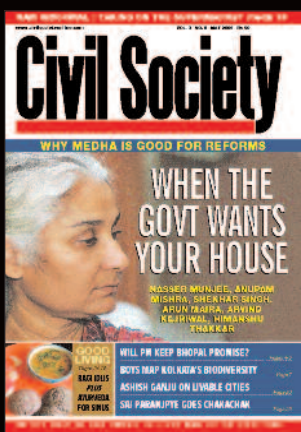
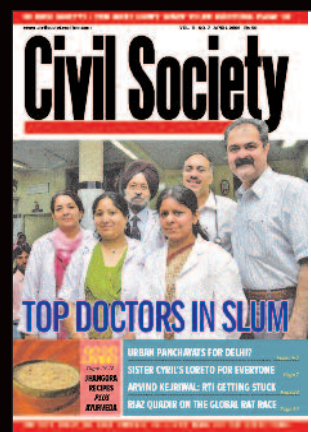
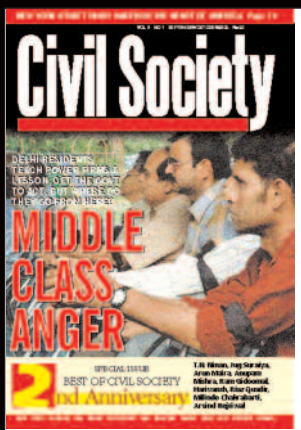
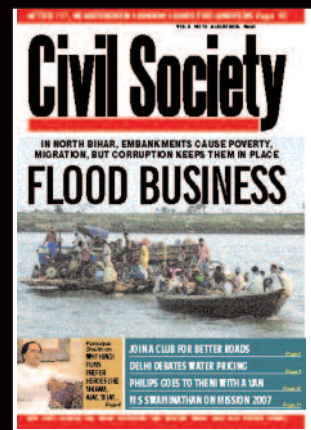
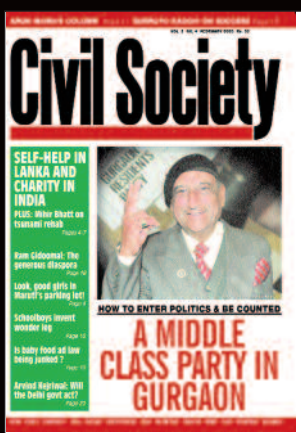
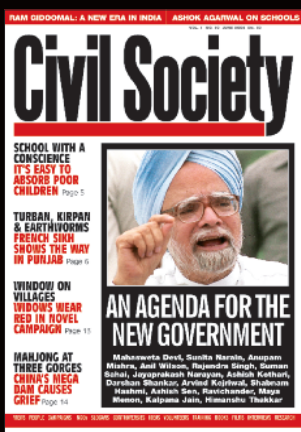
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## IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

**Dhanak clarifies**

'Marriage should be a Rainbow' was an interesting story on our group initiative. However there are a few misrepresented facts which we wish to correct.

- Our group Dhanak was formed in 2004, not in 2006.
- Ranu and Asif have been married for seven years not five.
- Vasuda and Suresh got married under the Special Marriage Act, first. Then they had a Hindu ceremony and a blessing ceremony in the church. All these three ceremonies were attended by the entire family on both sides.

We also wanted to add that to our disappointment the story highlights the problems and fallouts more than the positive aspects of peaceful co-existence and eventual acceptance from most families through dialogue. The main purpose of our group is to tell people that such marriages exist and are as good or as bad as other kinds of marriages. Religion is never an issue and religious stereotypes must be broken both at individual and societal level.

We thank you for letting people know about us. For any queries readers could write to us at [dhanak04@rediffmail.com](mailto:dhanak04@rediffmail.com) or visit our website: [www.dhanak.org.in](http://www.dhanak.org.in)

*We at Dhanak, New Delhi*

**No money in jatropha**

I wish to bring to your notice some facts about *Jatropha curcas*. This particular species is very low yielding. Under the best conditions it yields one tonne of seeds per hectare. Considering the fact that the seeds would be purchased by biofuel manufacturers at a cost of Rs 5 per kg, the farmer makes only Rs 5,000 per hectare per year. There is no doubt that the plant survives under adverse conditions but under those circumstances the yield gets reduced to just half or one-third. If the

**LETTERS**

government is so enamored of *jatropha* it should plant it on its own lands. Asking farmers to grow *jatropha* is wrong. There are many other plant species that would give farmers higher monetary returns than *Jatropha curcas*.

*Dr AD Karve, president, ARTI, Pune*

**Green Cures**

I would like to congratulate Dr GG Gangadharan for his excellent column Green Cures. It is most useful. Plants like tulsi are easily available and the method of using them is not too complicated. It has been found that most so called herbal creams, shampoos, oils and potions are nothing but chemicals. Their herbal component is extremely miniscule. You could start a gardening column on growing useful plants.

*Sharda Kumari, Gurgaon*

**Grassroots newspaper**

I really liked Jauymini Barkataky's story on *Khabar Lehariya* (Village newspaper grows in stature). What was especially heartening was the

way journalism can empower women. There are very few regional newspapers that give people useful information. There is also a lack of trust. People see TV and newspapers as channels of entertainment, most often. This is why small local media like community radio is catching on. Also, with all this talk by industry about 'bottom of the pyramid' *Khabar Lehariya* too could attract advertisements.

*Poonam Mahtani, Gurgaon*

**Rural surgeons**

I am personally grateful to you for two reasons: first, for highlighting our work at Mehrauli in your February issue; and second for being bold enough to run a monthly journal of this quality. May God give you success in your venture.

But most humbly I beg to state that I am not the 'founder' of the rural surgeon's movement. All my life I have lived in the 'posh slum' of south Delhi. I have been an admirer of those of our colleagues who have and are toiling in the periphery, with limited resources, innovating appropriate measures to bring a smile on the faces of the impoverished people of our country. In today's world, they are like: Full many a gem of purest ray serene The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear Full many a flower is born to blush unseen And waste its sweetness in the desert air.

*Dr JK Banerjee, Dehradun*

**Spiritual quest**

I always read Samita Rathor's, 'In the Light' first. It is very enlightening. I also like her column on spirituality. Formal religion has crumbled. What we need is an amalgamation of ethics and spirituality.

*Rupa Mehta, Kolkata*

“ Okay, if you have an MBA from Harvard you get to own a beach house, a good car... But what else do you do with that money? How do you integrate it into society? Actually, its harder to spend money than to make it. ”

*Yohei Sasakawa*

*Chairman, Nippon Foundation*

“ If you want to travel you need a path and my path is that of logic and simplicity. Logic and simplicity provide clarity. Clarity makes us positive. A positive cause produces positive results. If we are positive then we are happy. ”

*Tenzin Chogyal*

*Clear Path Travels*

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COVER STORY

## SEZ HOT POTATO

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Cover photograph by LAKSHMAN ANAND

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# Civil Society

## Think, do we need new zamindars?

HERE is something decadent about the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) policy. It makes Indian industry leaders, for all their swashbuckling ways in international markets, seem like feudal lords of yore, grabbing land and fleeing the poor in their own country. This may not actually be so, but it is the impression that has gained ground as companies seek out plum real estate for themselves in the name of development. Offers like one job for life for every family displaced are quaint and have a dramatic quality one associates with the Hindi movies of the sixties when factories actually provided jobs in an old fashioned way. For sure SEZs will bring jobs, but it remains to be seen whether they will go to the people who are pushed off their land. One job per family is a promise that is unlikely to be kept. Similarly, the suspension of environmental norms and labour laws at SEZs in the belief that this will make industry more competitive is laughable. The world learnt to stop thinking like that a long time ago. To complete this embarrassing picture, we have the government acquiring land under a law that dates back a hundred years and giving it to companies which can then profit exponentially from it. And when protests break out, because people don't want to part with their precious land, the government tells industry to go and get the land on its own without so much as a passing thought for the farmer's inability to cope with such transactions or say no to powerful corporate entities.

Sadly, these developments come at a time when there is 9 per cent growth. Indian companies have been doing well for themselves and have shown that they can compete internationally. As a nation we have an opportunity to build on this. But unfortunately this magazine has to report a growing unhappiness with the UPA government among ordinary people. We also see increasing mistrust of industry. It is possible we are wrong. But as journalists we must tell you what we see.

Surely, this is no way to build a modern Indian economy. But that is what we are told SEZs and the policy initiatives around them will deliver. Each day, to the command of some unseen baton, figures fly fast and furious about the employment, growth and prosperity that SEZs will bring. It is in everyone's interests that these claims be impartially understood for what they are really worth. It is also inadvisable to talk of benefits without understanding the costs. So, the government must tell us what the social and other costs of setting up SEZs are.

Perhaps the SEZ policy is the result of the tunnel vision of the commerce ministry. But if that indeed is so then the rest of UPA government is guilty of not tempering the commerce minister's exuberance. Are we wrong in expecting something more modern and farsighted from the UPA? Social concerns apart, SEZs will serve as duty free enclaves where investments will do little for building on the real competitiveness of Indian industry. We also need to be explained the rationale for giving ownership of cities and urban infrastructure to companies whose limited liability undermines their public accountability.

An economy's health depends as much on balanced governance as on investment. The SEZ policy indicates an abdication of governance.

**Publisher**  
Umesh Anand

**Editor**  
Rita Anand

**Editorial Team**  
Amit Sengupta  
Riaz Quadir  
Vidya Viswanathan  
Rakesh Agarwal  
Rina Mukherji  
Shuktara Lal  
Bidisha Srivastava

**Contributors**  
Ram Gidoomal  
Arun Maira  
Milindo Chakrabarti

**Consulting Education Editor**  
Abha Adams

**Photographer**  
Lakshman Anand

**Cartoonist**  
Samita Rathor

**Layout Assistant**  
Virender Chauhan  
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**Write to Civil Society at:**  
E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana 122017, Ph: 9811787772  
civil\_society@rediffmail.com

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# Delhi RWAs sink in poll quicksand

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

MUNICIPAL elections in Delhi have decimated a squabbling Congress, but more significantly they have despatched into oblivion a handful of independent candidates who set out to cleanse politics and voice the concerns of resident welfare associations (RWAs).

RWAs have been seen as a force to reckon with in Delhi. Through Bhagidari, or participatory governance, Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit sought to build them into a vote-bank. Over time, however, they acquired a voice of their own and became vocal in their criticism of the government's inability to improve the quality of life in the capital.

Coming into their own RWAs have many a time needed and embarrassed the Dikshit government. For instance, RWAs have been instrumental in stopping a hike in power tariffs through a long and emotional street campaign. They have had the government scrap a water privatisation initiative undertaken at the behest of the World Bank.

But in the municipal elections held in April, the RWAs saw their first foray into active politics end in a whimper. The turnout of voters was very poor and the RWA members who stood as independents had little to show for their efforts.

RWA involvement in the elections had two goals: to improve the standard of candidates who enter the council of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and to raise issues that the middle class wants addressed.

But the defeat of RWA candidates raises questions about the real support that RWAs enjoy in neighbourhoods. After all, they could not even get people to vote, it is pointed out. It also pits them against politicians.

Their defeat comes close on the heels of a stirring victory by an independent candidate in the Mumbai municipal elections.

The Mumbai victory was the result of NGOs and other citizens' groups coming together to

put up a single clean candidate and make him successful. The intention was to set an example.

On the contrary, in Delhi, the RWAs were a divided house on the question of contesting elections. One set, supported by the NGO People's Action, was eager to plunge into politics and there was talk of contesting all the seats in the municipality. On the other hand, the Delhi RWA Joint Front, consisting of some 200 RWAs, felt it would be foolhardy to try and compete with politicians.

The Joint Front felt it would be better to put up one candidate, as in Mumbai, and support

Safdarjung Enclave we had a meeting and put all the candidates on a dais. It was very nice and perhaps done for the first time. We made it very clear that we were constituents. Of course, as voters RWA members will choose one candidate over another. But that is a silent choice that is made in private.

**Why was the turnout of voters so poor?**

Electoral rolls are not up to date. More than 50 per cent of the names do not exist. People have shifted or whatever.

**What happens when someone from an RWA stands for election?**

No one votes for a losing candidate. A candidate from an RWA does not belong anywhere. In principle I am not against a good person standing. But there are certain realities. In a ward you need at least 300 supporters to sit in booths and so on on election day. But an RWA cannot muster 20 people.

**This means that the support that RWAs enjoy is in itself in question.**

You see people want their work done. They don't want to come into conflict with political parties.

**So middle class people are distancing themselves from an active political role.**

Yes.

**Then how do you get better candidates to contest elections?**

Political parties must put up better candidates. We should convince them to do so for their own sake. It cannot happen overnight. There are so many interests involved. But a beginning should and can be made.

**Recently an independent was elected in the Mumbai municipal elections thanks to citizens' initiatives.**

That would have been a better idea, to have one good candidate and for everyone to work for victory. I said that here. We have limited resources so it is better to concentrate on one or two or three candidates and make their candidature a success story.



Pankaj Agarwal

*We don't want to compete with political parties. We want to be constituents.*

him or her with all the resources available. In the absence of a consensus, candidates sprang up. They had neither resources nor strategy and were easy meat for their political rivals.

Civil Society spoke to Pankaj Agarwal, general secretary of the Delhi RWA Joint Front, on the election results and why he is opposed to a political role for RWAs.

**RWA members have contested elections. How have they done?**

They have failed miserably, as we expected. From day one we were against contesting elections. We are constituents. We don't want to be in competition with political parties.

**But surely even if RWA candidates don't win, they have some effect on politicians.**

RWA members are citizens. But RWAs cannot be in politics. If you lose with what face will you ask these same politicians to do your work. If rivalries set in political parties will always see us as competitors and not constituents.

**So the role of the RWA is to remain politically neutral?**

Yes. I tell you in my ward in

# A Japanese

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

YOHEI Sasakawa has never really had a problem making money. He inherited a lot and built on it with dedication till he was in his forties. But what worries him a great deal is how money should be spent. How it should be put to its best possible use. It won't do to just give it away and there is no point leaving money behind when one dies. So, spending money for him is a key managerial challenge. There is a need to define the dynamics of trusteeship. Students of the Harvard Business School go to him to learn just this so that when they graduate to the world of big business they can reinvent bottom lines.

Sasakawa has cut his own path. As a relentless champion of the rights of people with leprosy, he has straddled the world working particularly in India to put an end to the needless stigma associated with a wholly curable disease. It is a cause pursued doggedly because it is important to be "consistent and patient", he told us in New Delhi. From identifying camps where leprosy people live ghettoized in fear, to holding a National Forum for them to articulate their concerns and aspirations, Sasakawa has shown that it is possible to turn deep-seated rejection into acceptance.

Sasakawa, who is chairman of the Nippon Foundation and the WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, recently received the International Gandhi Award for 2006 at Wardha in Gujarat. Here are excerpts from a long and inspiring conversation with him:

**What is the Indian arm of your foundation doing right now?**

We are showing the true self of our foundation. We are providing full disclosure, including financial. Many NGOs fail in transparency. They believe they are doing good for society so they are not precise about numbers. But the money received is public money so we have to disclose how it's spent. Transparency is important because I plan to visit Indian companies and ask them to support our foundation's work.

Secondly we are highlighting the human aspect of leprosy and establishing its links with civil society. We want a free exchange of information with NGOs and organisations so that we can break down barriers between our foundation (which is working only on leprosy) and other NGOs working on other issues. It is necessary to create tools for integration.

Initially people with leprosy were very afraid to raise their voices, believing they would be targeted. They thought they had no choice but to live in silence. The situation is changing. The National Forum meeting, for instance, has made a difference. Our National Forum wanted to have its meeting at the YWCA. Although we paid in advance we were rejected and stopped from staying there. But the fact that we could come together and hold such a meeting against such odds showed that it is possible to speak out and have an identity.

The Global Appeal is similarly significant. When world endorse the appeal people with leprosy realise that they are not alone. Cured people are raising their voices. In the National Forum we are stressing that self-help is very important. It is necessary to be independent.

**What does Mahatma Gandhi mean to you?**

I have read Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography and tried to use it in my life. One lesson is to be patient

# Gandhian

and consistent. Once I start a job I should not change my angle or direction. I may not be able to make changes but if I am relentless society will respond to make changes. I agree today globalisation is more like collateral damage. The strong are getting stronger notion is taking over. This is unfortunate. Business has become a game. Money is business. But money should not be the final goal. How to use it as a tool for your life is what is important. I see lots of people making money. It seems to be their only goal.

A group of 30 students from Harvard Business School visited me. They are taught how to make money, but not how to use that money. Okay, if you have an MBA from Harvard you get to own a beach house, a good car and so on. But what else do you do with that money? How do you integrate it into society?

Actually, it is a great deal harder to spend money than to make it.

*Many Indian companies have CSR programmes. But they are mostly window-dressing. What is it like in Japan?*

We are investigating the work Japanese companies are doing and ranking them on the stock exchange. You can see all their rankings. Soon consumers will begin checking them out and the companies will have reason to worry. The situation in Japan is the same as in India. There is a lot of window-dressing and it is all very flashy. But I think it will finally point us in the right direction. Well, at least something gets done.

**“ I have read Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography and tried to use it in my life. One lesson is to be patient and consistent. ”**



**“ Money should not be the final goal. How to use it as a tool for your life is what is important. ”**



Yohei Sasakawa receiving the International Gandhi Award for 2006 in Wardha

*Tell us how it is possible to integrate people with leprosy with the rest of society and include them in the common spaces that are available.*

People afflicted with TB and other diseases get integrated. But not those with leprosy. Currently we have identified around 7,000 colonies and established a database to understand each colony. It is true they are segregated and they have their own autonomy I would respect their autonomous status by giving them micro credit and radically improve their colonies. Raising their living standards and upgrading the colonies would help the process of integration.

Colonies survive by begging. It is really sad. Many of them have the passion and intelligence to work but they don't have the opportunities. They can drive auto-rickshaws, work in several sectors but the opportunities have to be there.

It is also true that the people with leprosy feel safer in colonies and have peace of mind living there. The colonies have a long history. The autonomy system in colonies is important. When people get too old to beg others go and earn and provide food for them. We want to improve their living standards so they can successfully work out of their colonies.

# In search of the Indian wheelchair

**Satya Sivaraman**  
New Delhi

**W**HAT should a wheelchair have to operate in Indian conditions? 'A good horn'. An outrageous joke, isn't it, but one which helps sum up dismal Indian traffic conditions.

Jokes apart, for Dr Jon Pearlman, a researcher from the University of Pittsburgh, USA, what is more important is designing a wheelchair for India's large and growing population of people with disabilities. Clearly it would have to be a wheelchair which would be easy to manoeuvre on India's

wheelchairs used for locomotive tasks were highly energy demanding and contributed to physiological strain.

"The problem essentially lies in the fact that patients themselves are rarely consulted while designing wheelchairs and there is a 'one size fits all' approach that simply does not work in practice," Pearlman says. For example, standard wheelchairs used in many Indian hospitals are not adjustable and cannot be adapted to suit the needs of individual patients.

The prototype of an electric wheelchair that Pearlman is developing hopes to overcome many of

special features are that its armrests can be moved up and down so that users can slide into the seat from the sides of the chair and its seat is adjustable to various angles.

The device has five wheels – two in the front, two at the back and one in the middle – to give it maximum manoeuvrability and traction in offroad conditions. Further, the wheelchair has a braking system designed to be always on when there is no power supply in order to prevent accidental motion.

"Our goal is to get these wheelchairs produced and sold at a retail price of around Rs 40,000 or even less," says Pearlman, who is in touch with several

LAKSHMAN ANAND



**Dr Jon Pearlman**

rugged terrain.

"Unfortunate is how I would describe the situation in India," says Pearlman, who is currently working at the Delhi-based Indian Spinal Injuries Center (ISIC) on designing an electric wheelchair. He points out that the country has everything that is needed to design appropriate wheelchairs - sufficient engineering talent, the required manufacturing capabilities and a large customer base. Yet there is a severe dearth of good quality wheelchairs.

To buttress his argument Pearlman refers to the shocking conclusions of a paper published last year titled, 'Wheelchair charity: a useless benevolence in community-based rehabilitation' which looked at the fate of manually-operated wheelchairs donated to users in West Bengal. Of the 167 wheelchairs studied, the results demonstrate that the majority went unused (57.4 per cent) and many were sold (14.2 per cent). Only 7.4 per cent were used regularly; the remaining were used occasionally (10.5 per cent) or were attendant-propelled (10.5 per cent).

Rejection of the wheelchairs was attributed to lack of habitat adaptability (34 per cent), pain, fatigue and discomfort (28.6 per cent), frequent damage (15 per cent), upper limb issues (11.6 per cent), and inability to drive (10.7 per cent). It was also found that the cardio-respiratory response was higher in occasional users than regular users, while

**India has everything needed to design appropriate wheelchairs-talent, capabilities and customers. Yet there is a severe dearth of good quality wheelchairs-**

the typical problems that such assistive devices face. Started two years ago as part of a collaboration between the US Department of Education and the Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO), Kanpur, a major government-run company, the project involves designing a manual chair, a paediatric chair and a power wheelchair appropriate for Indian users. Students from the Indian Institute of Technology (Kanpur) were also involved in the designing of these prototypes.

The prototype of the power wheelchair developed so far weighs a good 80 kg runs on a battery that is commonly used in most automobiles and has a steering wheel similar to that of a two-wheeler. Its

Indian manufacturers interested in taking up production and to whom the design will be given free of cost. The cheapest electric wheelchair currently available in the Indian market is priced at around Rs 60,000.

Though both the electronic controller and motor for the power wheelchair are imported from the United Kingdom and China respectively, Pearlman hopes to find indigenous substitutes soon. An important consideration in the designing of the wheelchair is that it should be easy to repair and have parts that are locally replaceable.

Pearlman is also carrying out research on understanding the various needs and behaviour patterns of wheelchair users in order to develop the design further. Currently, the prototype design is being fine tuned through consultations with patients at the ISIC, which has recently set up a Department of Assistive Technology (DAT) in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh on its campus in New Delhi.

Though Pearlman is diplomatic about the situation of people living with disabilities in India, the fact is that there is simply not enough social or government concern for this section.

To begin with, till the 2001 Census, there was no accurate figure for the number of disabled people in the country. Coverage of disabled people was included in the Census only after repeated appeals and a massive campaign, which included huge *dharnas* and a deluge of letters and faxed messages to the Prime Minister's Office.

Till the latest census the Government of India, based on a 1991 survey, put the figure of the number of disabled at 1.9 per cent of the Indian population. The recent Census report points to a disability percentage of 2.13 per cent, which means the number of people with disabilities is 2.19 crore.

According to the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), however, the percentage of people with disabilities in developing countries stands at 10 per cent, and the Asia-Pacific average is 5-6 per cent. If this is true then the real figure for people with disabilities in India should be around 70 million.

Government figures put the number of those with disabilities in employment at a meagre one per cent while according to an independent study Indians spend Rs 72,000 crore per annum in caring for disabled family members. The government bears only a fraction of this cost.

"More than anything else it is the degree of concern for each individual user that lies at the heart of good designing," says Pearlman.



PRASANTA BISWAS



# Hotline for Kolkata's vulnerable elderly

**Rina Mukherji**  
Kolkata

**T**HOUGH modern medicine and improved health facilities have contributed to better life expectancy and a huge increase in India's elderly population in the past 50 years, geriatric medicine and social security measures have failed to keep pace.

Consequently, increased longevity, breaking up of the joint family and lack of geriatric care have left the elderly helpless in most cities and towns, this despite the declaration of the National Policy for Older Persons by the Government of India in 1999. Currently, 35 per cent of India's urban population and 32 per cent of its rural population is made up of the elderly. Yet, financial and other constraints prevent geriatric wards from being set up in rural and urban centre by the government.

To address these problems, a Kolkata-based NGO Banchbo, has recently introduced eastern India's first 24-hour helpline to cater to the medical problems of senior citizens as part of its Project Banchbo Healing Touch.

An offshoot of Banchbo that has been working over a decade with underprivileged children in education and health in south Kolkata and Patharpratima in South 24-Parganas, Banchbo Healing Touch is an initiative by several doctors and laypersons in and around Garia to provide emergency and preventive services to the elderly.

"As an attending doctor, I found the elderly in need of not just medical help but love and care. Nuclear families and the hectic pace of life in urban India have isolated the old. We thought of an organisation that would provide medical attention at the patients' homes, while monitoring their progress on a regular basis," explains Dr Dhires Chowdhury who founded Banchbo when he was a medical student about 10 years ago with friends in Garia, and with the patronage of Dr Sudipto Sen, the then director of Woodlands Hospital and Nursing Home. On call are doctors Arijit Das, Nilanjana Majumdar and gynaecol-

ogist Roma Guha.

Several eminent medical professionals serve on Banchbo's Board including the head of the WHO International Reference Centre and well-known specialist in medicine, Dr J Sil, gynaecologist Dr Pranab Dastidar and chest specialist Dr A K Roy Chowdhury. Also on the board are the CEO of CMRI, and former vice president of Peerless Hospital, Rupak Barua and ex-vice chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University, Dr Pabitra Sarkar.

Often, senior citizens tend to neglect problems that have been dormant for years. Says Nilima Roy, "I had been prone to colds as a child, but once I reached adolescence, I grew physically fit and had always remained so until last year. It was the changing season that started causing frequent colds and coughs ever since I crossed 60. But last year, I started experiencing severe breathing problems while climbing up the stairs during the Pujas in October." Her condition worsened, and Mrs Roy was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) requiring hospitalisation. Hers was a case of mild COPD which grew severe due to neglect.

Renuka Chowdhury fell and had a femoral fracture. Since her sister's husband was a Banchbo member, her family rushed the 71-year to hospital as an emergency case and availed of prompt medical attention.

Bharati Das is a 60-year-old housewife who is suffering from chronic hypertension since the past 20 years. She also suffers from acute amoebiasis. A couple of months ago, her hypertension worsened so she had to be hospitalised. "Domestic matters prevented me from visiting my physician for a regular check-up. Probably this caused a flare-up and an attack. My blood pressure rose so much, that I

nearly passed out with discomfort." Her husband, retired academician Dr Ranjit Ranjan Das, is a life-long vertigo patient with severe hypertension. Similarly, Prof Sourin Bhattacharje has hernia and haemorrhoids while his wife Reba is a COPD patient.

Sebabrata Majumdar too needs constant monitoring. He suffered two massive heart attacks and had a urethra blockage that caused urine retention. He had to be hospitalised. With his son abroad, and a brother who is constantly ill with geriatric problems, Banchbo is the ideal organisation for him.

Says JM Kar, who has aching limbs and hypertension at 73 years of age: "Getting to be part of a group of positive friends and a community of people in the same age group is working wonders physically."

Banchbo Healing Initiative provides a package of medical services for the elderly in and around Garia for an annual membership fee of Rs 1,800. When there are two members of the same family the fee is Rs 1,500 for one and Rs 1,200 for the other. The annual fee drops from Rs 1,800 and Rs 1,500 to Rs 1,500 and Rs 1,200 after the first year.

Members are provided a detailed medical history and identity card indicating the salient features of their medical condition, three mandatory medical visits at home per year, along with one specialist check-up at a chamber and a comprehensive laboratory test per year.

All emergency calls are attended by a nurse, and an on-call doctor with an ambulance equipped with basic medicine and medical facilities against a payment of Rs 350 during the day, and Rs 500 between 10 pm and 7am.

In case of hospitalisation, a member gets a 5-10 per cent discount on bed charges, 20 per cent discount on pathological tests, and 15 per cent on machine tests at diagnostic centers that Banchbo has tie-ups with.

Banchbo has five doctors on call to attend to its members at their residence. Several specialist senior doctors are also empanelled for their services, and a patient can avail of a 25-50 per cent discount on every consultation with these doctors in their chambers.

Although the services are not free, many senior citizens have opted for them mainly because geriatric problems are rarely catered to so holistically in India.

As Dr A K Roychowdhury, senior chest physician and an empanelled doctor with Banchbo who has been actively

involved in the organisation's health camps in the Sundarbans concedes, "In the West, where I have lived and worked all my life, every senior citizen enjoys the advantages of social security. In the absence of such measures here, we are trying to provide a much-needed service at affordable rates."

Besides, even when patients have medical insurance, the right medical advice and follow-up is not available. As Dr Ranjit Ranjan Das explains, "My wife and I have medical insurance cover. But in an emergency, reliable medical advice to see the right specialist is hard to come by. This is what got us to opt for Banchbo's project."

With six major diagnostic centres in south Kolkata Banchbo members can get discounts. Besides, several hospitals and nursing homes are on their list.

Currently, Banchbo caters to members in Garia, Santoshpur, Jadavpur, Bansdroni, Naktala, Baishnabghata Patuli. These are all places that can be reached in 30 minutes if there is an emergency.

However, of late, there is a demand from residents in Behala and New Alipore too.

**Banchbo has five doctors on call to attend to patients at home. Many senior specialist doctors provide services too.**



**The best Tata vehicle has no wheels at all.**

We call it the vehicle of change. It's something we've been driving successfully in far-flung villages for over 50 years. Artificially created lakes and large-scale plantation of trees have changed the face of many districts. Construction of roads has given remote villages better access. Irrigation facilities like check dams have improved yield in several districts. Rural developmental projects have brought potable water to the villages. Leprosy patients have been rehabilitated. Soil and water management. Use of alternative fuels. Cattle manure... It's a journey that's only just begun.

# Jupiter Academy's amazing story

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

IN 1998 Sandip Bhatnagar was just a small businessman with a shop that did machine fabrication in Indira Nagar's maze of lanes in Lucknow. His father had recently passed away and Bhatnagar fondly recalled something he had said. Every evening, when Bhatnagar would down his shutters, he would while away his time with friends. His father had mildly disapproved and had often advised him to do something worthwhile.

As Bhatnagar finished tinkering with his machines one evening he noticed two small boys idly playing marbles in the *galli* outside his shop. He called them in, sat them down, gave them paper and pencil and then he began to teach. "The boys were a little nervous at first," he recalls. Lesson over, the children scampered home. Next evening, to Bhatnagar's surprise, they returned. Teach us some more uncle, they said.

Soon another eight to ten children sauntered into Bhatnagar's impromptu *pathshala*. Word spread and his class swelled to 150. Bhatnagar found himself eagerly playing a teacher's role every evening. He lost interest in his former friends. A local newspaper wrote about him and this new phenomenon of out-of-school poor children coming on their own to enroll in Bhatnagar's class.

Smile Foundation, a non-profit in Delhi which works with social entrepreneurs, started to mentor him. Nine years later, Bhatnagar's NGO, Jupiter Academy, runs six centres in Lucknow at Takrohi, Samaudipur, Prakash Lok and Sidhauri. It teaches 1,204 underprivileged children, 70 per cent of whom are girls who work as domestic help.

Basic education is still the focus. The idea is to get children through school. Some are even becoming graduates. It is no longer just Bhatnagar, but 22 teachers. Smile helps with salaries. Out of 14 students

who appeared for the UP Board's Class 12 exam last year, 12 got a first division. Children are coached and also admitted to government and private schools he has befriended. "The private schools willingly waive the admission fees and the monthly fee is cut by half," he says.

Over the years, Jupiter Academy has fine tuned its

finances impoverished young rural migrants who want to set up their own business with loans ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 15,000. And no he doesn't charge any interest. He has always got his money back. Bhatnagar has just one condition: someone who takes a loan must pledge to send his or her children to school.



Sandip Bhatnagar and students from Jupiter Academy took a ride on the Metro

If a poor man wants to start a business, Bhatnagar finds out his background. Then he is given 15 days of training. "If somebody wants to become a barber he has to identify a spot to work from. I give him Rs 5,000 for equipment. For vegetable vending I get him a cart and vegetables and watch his progress for 15 days. If it is satisfactory I fund him," he explains.

That's not all. His NGO has a Jupiter Health Club of women and teenage girls that won an award in March for being the best health club in Lucknow. It was conferred this honour by Doordarshan's Kalyani programme. The club's multifarious activities include water, sanitation, AIDS awareness, polio and health camps. The club got 12 toilets designed for women in Samaudipur village, lowering costs and making

inexpensive construction techniques and labour available.

"Smile Foundation listened to my ideas and helped me implement them," says Bhatnagar. "Apart from funding they gave me guidelines, arranged for doctors for health camps and teacher training. If it wasn't for them, especially Santanu Mishra who heads Smile, I would not have got this far," he says. Bhatnagar's wife, Sunita, who is a Hindi school teacher at Career Convent College, helps him too.

Last year children from Jupiter Academy joined the Wada Na Todo Abhiyan. They journeyed to Delhi with Bhatnagar. "They took a ride on the Metro and asked me in wonder why this train did not huff and puff." What do his own children do? Bhatnagar looks puzzled. "Oh, I have no biological children," he says. "You see all these 1,204 children are my own."

methods. Now a survey is done to identify out-of-school children. Then the parents are contacted and encouraged to enroll their children. "If you call them with love the children will come," he says. "They confide their troubles to me."

Jupiter Academy also provides vocational training so that students can start small businesses. Courses include computers and software, chikankari work, jewellery design and soft toys. Bhatnagar has taught machine fabrication to some students too. Any academy of this size would have become a money making machine. Bhatnagar however regards Jupiter Academy as a cause. He doesn't charge any money.

Bhatnagar used to work for Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL). He started his machine fabrication business with money from the Prime Minister's *rozgar yojana*. Now he has his own *rozgar* scheme. He

**COORDINATOR**  
Habitat Learning Centre  
(HLC) of the India Habitat  
Centre (IHC)

## VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

**Last Date**  
**June 10**  
**2007**

**POSITION** : Coordinator, Habitat Learning Centre  
**PROJECT** : Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D).  
**REPORT TO** : Director, India Habitat Centre  
**LOCATION** : India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road New Delhi

**QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE:** Masters in Social Work/ Social Sciences/Computers & IT • Minimum of 5 years experience in implementation of Information and Communication Technology for Development Projects, involving coordination with NGOs, corporate sector and international organizations.

**CORE COMPETENCIES:** Effective Coordination Skills • Strong conceptual skills • Strong teamwork abilities • Strong interpersonal communication and facilitation skills • Familiarity and working experience with NGO partners • Understanding of development issues, ICT4D in particular

**JOB SUMMARY:** HLC is the social and research wing of the IHC. HLC is primarily a multi-purpose learning centre aiming to provide underprivileged children access to information technology so that they are able to explore more and better options for an improved quality of life. It also aims to train facilitators working in Bastis & Slums so that they are able to enhance the quality of their interaction with children and are equipped with efficient tools to impart I.T. education to children.

The candidate should have a good understanding of Development Issues, ICT4D in particular. The coordinator shall be responsible for coordination, initiation, implementation & monitoring of programmes, HLC Newsletter, publicity & advocacy and fund raising.

**Application to this vacancy should be sent to: [liberhan@indiahabitat.org](mailto:liberhan@indiahabitat.org)**

# Rape gets serious attention

Rakesh Agrawal  
Ajmer

ON a sultry day in April, about 500 women protestors from rural areas in Rajasthan gathered outside the district collectorate in Ajmer. They were from the Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS) and they had only one thing on their mind – to highlight issues related to rape through the Balatkar Virodhi Manch (Forum Against Rape).

The Manch was formed 10 years ago, when the court gave a verdict in the Dhapu Bai case which was widely denounced as unjust. The court had then dismissed the rape case of Dhapu Bai on the basis of her medical report which did not establish rape. It insensitively declared that the victim was 'sexually habitual.' Since then, the Manch has worked to expose every aspect of rape and generate public opposition to this heinous crime.

The public hearing followed a partly legal approach. Although all 21 victims were present in the hearing, they remained incognito. The Manch activists read out the cases along with the action taken by the police, court and administration. Society's reaction and the steps taken by the Manch were also put forward. "The overall aim of this hearing is not to sensationalise the matter, but sensitise the judiciary, administration and general public against such heinous crimes," explained Manch coordinator Indira Pancholi.

These representative cases in which the Manch has been actively involved from the very beginning – from lodging a First Information Report (FIR) to providing financial and emotional assistance to victims – highlighted all sides of inspections, anti-women legal proceedings, the court's ambience, the role of the public prosecutor and using force on the victims to 'compromise.'

The Samiti organised the public hearing with the Jan Morcha, Rajasthan Child Relief and You, Bal Vikas Chetana Manch, Bhilwara and Dalit Adhikar Manch, Jaipur. Also present were a couple of teachers from Delhi University, the local MLA, the PUCL

president and the legendary Bhanwari Devi.

Nine out of the 21 victims were minors. While one victim was raped by her father, another was raped by her stepfather. In another case it was the uncle who raped a victim. In most cases, the crime was committed by someone known to the victim.

What was common in all the cases was the insen-



The Forum Against Rape at its public hearing

sitive and anti-women approach of the police, administration and medical fraternity. In many cases, the police initially refused to write an FIR and demanded money for it. After public pressure by the Manch, the police wrote the FIR, but delayed the investigation. In one case, where a four-year-old was raped by her stepfather, the medical report denied any rape and the criminal was set free. "It proves that there is a strong nexus between the police and medical fraternity," said Tripta Vahi, a Delhi University (DU) professor who was present.

Most of the victims belonged to low income groups and had little money and no social support. In the case of a nine-year-old Muslim girl who was raped by a Gujjar youth, the culprit was supported by his community. In fact, the victim's family members were threatened by the culprit's family. Result: they didn't dare appear in court and the criminal was duly acquitted.

But in another case, society supported the victim

even after the culprit was acquitted. The panchayat ostracised him and asked him to pay compensation to the victim.

"Make violence against women a live issue in your panchayats and crimes against women must be discussed in all the gram sabhas. To get justice, you women have to struggle. Be brave and fight to the end," said the heroic Bhanwari Devi who was herself a victim of rape. She fought bravely against the criminals and an insensitive legal system.

Others supported her. "You women have broken the tradition of remaining silent. This must continue," asserted Neeraj Malik, a DU professor. Another academic gave a historical perspective to the patriarchal tendency that is the root cause of gender discrimination. "This is the reason why women are considered 'second sex' and violence against them is its ultimate notion," said Vahi.

A women's *chaupal* was held inside the collectorate office. "We discussed issues like what women feel about this, why these kinds of incidents occur and what should we do to prevent them," said Pancholi.

Consequently, it was decided to launch a campaign of six months to one year duration to sensitise the men through pamphlets, posters and exhibitions. "The issue of gender discrimination will be openly discussed in homes, at open forums and at village meetings," said Bhanwari Devi.

Meetings with police officers have been scheduled. "I'll be personally present in the meeting with the DIG," assured Anita Bhadel, the local MLA. It was also decided that the now defunct District Women Support Committee established four years ago would be revived. Similarly, meetings with the state secretary to prevent violence against women will resume.

A series of consultations and meetings on the issue with important sections of civil society have been planned. The PUCL is also supporting the Manch in its efforts. "We will continue our association with the Manch and we have accepted their consultations," said Than Singh Jatav, PUCL president and ex-MP from Bharatpur.

## National Rural Employment Guarantee

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

MANY NGOs have been monitoring the government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). Among them is the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action's (CASA). It has been carrying out an awareness campaign on the scheme in as many as 113 districts in 14 states. Recently, it held a national consultation on the NREGS in New Delhi.

The NREGS is being extended to an additional 130 districts this year. So far it was operative in 200 districts in 27 states.

"We wanted to inform the gram sabha about the NREGS, mobilise it and create awareness," said Jayant Kumar of CASA. The NGO's grassroots partners said prior to their campaign there was

little knowledge about the scheme. Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan were more aware than Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Some states were merging other development programmes with the NREGS, defeating its purpose. Arun Kumar of the Rajasthan Vikas Manch said Dalits and Adivasis did not know and thought it was a drought relief programme.

There appears to be interest in the scheme. But it lingers along. For one, job cards are in a mess. While 58 per cent of households applied to be registered only 61.7 per cent were issued job cards. In Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, applicants were paying between Rs 20 and Rs 25 for their photos to be pasted on job cards. In Rajasthan, the cost of a job card could rise to as much as Rs 100. Fake job cards were also doing the rounds.

Then, gram sabha members did not know how

to fill application forms. Receipts were not always issued. The sarpanch too often played dirty, issuing job cards to unworthy candidates and bullying hapless applicants by retaining their job cards.

Panchayat representatives were not very clear about the provisions of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. According to CASA they require training in accounts, book keeping, developing village development plans, social audits, tax collection and maintenance of created assets. Even if a panchayat was ready with money and job cards it could not provide timely employment because it had to take technical clearance from a 'competent authority'. Labour would not get paid on time because the finished job had to be technically evaluated by the 'competent authority' once the work was over.

In fact measurement of work was riddled with

# Rural women climb power ladder

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THERE has been a paradigm shift in power in the young hill state of Uttarakhand. Women have been hired to take over from men the job of reading electricity meters and delivering bills. They also maintain high tension wires and perform emergency repairs.

The Uttarakhand Power Corporation (UPC) has improved its revenue collection by 20 per cent in the past year thanks to the diligence of these rural women who came straight off the fields.

Earlier the same tasks were given to men. But the UPC's losses kept mounting. Reading meters and making sure bills reach customers is very hard work in the hills.

Under pressure to improve its financial performance, the UPC looked around for novel solutions and decided to try out women.

The women were more accustomed to trudging long distance and working on their fields. The opportunity to be employed by the UPC came as release from the tedium of their domestic chores and meant more money. They plunged in with an enthusiasm and sturdiness that the men could never muster.

Some 400 women have been given temporary jobs. The men are still around and with the women performing so well they are feeling increasingly insecure. Finally, the UPC will have to take a call on how many people it can keep on its rolls for the same tasks.

Initially, the men tried to dissuade the women from taking up the work. They told them that would not be able to get the meter readings right and that the maintenance of the high tension wires was too dangerous. Climbing poles and trekking to distant places was work for men, the women were told.

However, the first successes were all that mat-

tered. The women never looked back after that.

Uttarakhand may, in fact, lead the way for other states who have serious revenue problems in their power corporations because of inefficiency and corruption.

In Uttarakhand women in ever-growing numbers are seeking work as meter readers, bill distributors and maintenance staff.

"I am really happy. We had not planned to engage them in repair and maintenance work which is quite difficult. But they are so efficient and diligent that they have become formidable factors in the power department," says BM Verma, chairman and managing director of the UPC.

He says that the idea first came to him during his early 'frustrating' journey to Uttarkashi in 2006. "We went to start a 33 KV substation. The locals and the panchayats were really unhappy and disgruntled: their electricity bills never reached them, breakdowns would go unchecked, the reading of meters was wrong, defects in the lines were never repaired."

Men employed by the UPC were invariably habitual drinkers who found it difficult to stay away from alcohol even during the day. Naturally, they were lazy and would look for ways of shirking work.

Women have often taken the lead in Uttarakhand. They have, for instance, taken up cudgels against alcoholism. They have also been in



the forefront during environmental campaigns to save forests.

Razia Begum, a jobless widow, was the first to work for the UPC. She was trained to read and document meters and distribute electricity bills for just Rs 6 for every connection. Razia quickly began earning between Rs 2,000 and Rs

2,500 for just two weeks of work, a big change from having nothing. She showed the way. Other women, first reluctant, facing snide male remarks, unsure of themselves, gradually stepped into male territory. "No problem," says Pushpa Chauhan of Uttarkashi. "I am a fast learner."

They are all fast learners. Now women are actually climbing electricity poles, fixing line-faults, checking faulty meters, repairing domestic defects, maintaining transformers. Besides, they don't have to work all day long. Bills are distributed in remote villages once in 60 days. Two weeks of work fetches Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,500. Not bad for a part-time beginner's job, really.

## Scheme needs village help

problems. Even the 'competent authority' was confused about measurements, sometimes assessing work collectively and at other times individually. Much time was wasted in figuring out whether a hole dug in the ground should be 15 feet or 16 feet. The poor worker would end up getting only Rs 35 instead of the statutory minimum wage. An activist from Chhattisgarh suggested the panchayat itself endorse the work. Barefoot engineers could be employed to submit reports to the zilla panchayat instead of waiting endlessly for the 'competent authority' to turn up.

The district administration seemed at sea. It decided the type of work to be taken up instead of the gram sabha. In Himachal and Uttarakhand, women wanted roads but the administration gave priority to other works. In UP and Rajasthan, villagers wanted water harvesting structures but here

now the administration insisted they all make roads. In Chhattisgarh, the administration spent 18 per cent of money on growing *jatropha* and only three per cent on tanks, complained one campaigner. In some areas district officials would launch the programme with much fanfare during the harvesting season when labour was busiest, so hardly anyone would turn up.

Workers were not confident of being paid. Women in UP were paid less than men. Departments that had to clear money ignored the panchayat's requests. Campaigners said banks should directly give money to workers. Biometric smart cards are an option. This would circumvent the problem of fake muster rolls too. In Tamil Nadu the banks were insisting on a minimum balance of Rs 50 for opening accounts. There were also complaints about facilities not being provided

at work sites, machines and contractors being used and less number of days being given for work.

But awareness is being created. Some infrastructure has been built in villages and the district administration is a little more careful about its image. NGOs and villagers are getting organised.

Wherever there is a village group aware of the scheme, people have got their entitlements. In Baheradol village of Duddhi block, Sonbhadra district, UP, when 130 villagers were paid only Rs 23 instead of Rs 58, a local group the Bhumi Haqdar Morcha got the workers paid through the panchayat secretary. The muster roll was found to be fake.

The CASA campaign has created networks. The Madhya Pradesh one, for instance, was very active. It went to some 18 districts, found 19 lacunae in implementation and informed the government. It has been asked to socially monitor the NREGS.

Disha, an NGO in Ahmedabad has helped form the National Rural Employment Grantee Workers Union, the first registered trade union to voice the grievances of NREGA workers employed in Gujarat.

Much will depend on how much the government invests in panchayats and gram sabhas.

# Bodhshalas bridge the learning

**Amit Sengupta**  
Jaipur

VILLAGE education in Rajasthan has been undergoing a transformation through a community approach to learning. The Bodh Shiksha Samiti has been setting up Bodhshalas and also working with government schools.

The Bodh Shiksha Samiti was set up in 1987. It has bonded with government schools of four districts in the state: Jodhpur, Ajmer, Jaipur and Bharatpur next to Deeg. Its motto is: "To participate in the formation of an egalitarian, progressive and enlightened society by contributing in the evolution of a system of equitable and quality education and development for all children."

The Samiti's work in Alwar is significant because the Thanagazi and Umren areas are extremely poor and inaccessible. Located close to the forest range of the Sariska Wildlife Sanctuary, amid the hard rocky terrain of the Aravallis, livelihood here is basically dependant on agriculture and cattle rearing. The population comprises Dalits, tribals, nomadic communities like the Banjaras, Nats, Lohars, Bawariyas, other backward castes, as well as Meo Muslims.

The Bodh Shiksha Samiti currently works in 52 urban and educationally deprived localities of Jaipur and 43 panchayats of Thanagazi and Umren blocks of Alwar. Its Bodhshalas (Community Resource Schools) operate in seven locations in Jaipur and 40 locations in Thanagazi and Umren blocks. Its outreach programme touches 200 mainstream government schools, in several slum clusters of Jaipur and in Alwar district. It provides them "pedagogic and managerial support directly and indirectly by providing them resource teachers and academic support".

The story of the Samiti and its Bodhshalas was related by their stoic stalwart Yogendraji at the 'National Seminar on Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Universalisation of Quality School Education' held in Jaipur in the first week of April.

The seminar was organised by the Aga Khan Foundation, which is seeking to promote and protect quality school education in the most deprived sections of the country.

The Aga Khan Foundation supports many groups like the Bodh Shiksha Samiti. Said Dayaram, senior programme officer: "Most often we delude ourselves by statistics, examinations, grades and white papers. The real quality of school education must transform the social psychology of children and their community. It should also transform history and society at the micro level. This is no less a creative revolution." Dayaram has been a key person in this initiative for several years.

Said Yogendraji, "We can't eternally wait for the revolution. It has to happen every day. We have to

be constantly working with the people, so that they can define their own destinies. And what better way than to work for school education?"

That is why panchayats are important. Education has to be integrated with home, community, gender justice, social and political empowerment and people's direct participation in local governance and nation-building. If the child has to go to school,

'Bodh' and the Society for All Round Development (SARD).

"It was initially impossible. It took great efforts of all concerned to convince the people and get the children around: the schools were located far away, there were no transport facilities, girls were not allowed, the dropout rate was high, plus the poverty and backwardness of the region was a big obsta-



**The Bodh Samiti helped with teacher training and villagers collected money. Months later, 200 children from the private school returned to the govt school at Govdi. The dropout rate fell.**

then the parents should also be intellectually empowered. Most crucially, the men and women who control the panchayats need to be sensitised.

Said veteran sarpanch Yadhuvir Singh of Deeg, located in the backward Mewat region of Rajasthan, "We spend money to fight panchayati elections, but this is not a business to make money, we are not going to make more money to compensate for the money we spent. This is social service, community work, nation-building. We are not driven by self-interest or political greed."

No wonder, despite owing allegiance to various political parties like the BJP and Congress, the panchayat leaders in Mewat have been unanimous in ushering quality school education with the help of

cle," said Jawahar Singh, ex-pradhan of the panchayat in the Mewat region. "But once we were convinced, it was like a slow miracle becoming a dream come true."

Said Surjan Singh of Alwar, "What are the challenges? There is total lack of awareness among pradhans, sarpanches, locals. There is no 'bhagidari'. Women's representatives are still way behind in terms of leadership; the caste factor is still an obstacle. It took almost six to eight months to even convince people that education is critical for the holistic development of the child. The very thought that community schools could be established in partnership with Bodh, did not go down well with the local community. They were doubtful about the

# divide

role of the NGOs. They would argue that you people are out here to make money and then will slip away. In retrospect I can say that our convictions about what we were doing and our ability to patiently build trust helped these communities to change their opinion and encouraged us to move forward."

Describing the 'Jan Pahal' programme, activist Shubhra said, "The bottom-up approach is an excellent example. Gradually, all panchayat representatives came up and said that this is the kind of collective initiative that they would want. This was small, but in a big scale."

Indeed, the Govdi village experiment since 2001 is an eye-opener, and should teach a few lessons to the bloated bureaucrats who make or unmake blind policies. The sarpanch of Govdi, Rameshwar, happened to visit the Indauk village Bodhshala next to the Sariska sanctuary and was deeply impressed with the way the kids were actually enjoying the fruits of education. "So why not Govdi also," he asked.

The government school in his village was in decay; only 60 children were left, over 150 children had joined a private school. Hence, with parents, community leaders and panchayati raj institutions, the Govdi experiment started. The people created a playground using 200 tractor-loads of mud. The Bodh Samiti helped with teacher-training workshops, the locals collected money, there were renewed initiatives within the community. Months later, 200 children from the private school returned.

The classroom environment improved and so did attendance. The dropout rate fell. For the first time there was 100 per cent enrolment in the government school of Govdi.

The district administration was witness to the success story, and so was the local MLA. More than 5,000 villagers from Govdi and its neighbourhood celebrated its success. The word spread. The story is now getting repeated, like an action-replay in slow and fast motion, in village after village. This was creative symbiosis between a sensitive administration, proactive panchayats and a deeply committed civil society group.

But there are deep-rooted, visible and invisible problems. Said veteran pradhan in the Alwar district, Suryadeb Barat, "We are lameduck panchayats with no powers. My wife was also a pradhan, but she had no powers. They don't provide funds or resources. The local administration makes you wait for hours, refuses to cooperate, makes simple things difficult. You ask for a jeep and they say it is being used for a 'national programme'. Later you see the local development officer riding that jeep."

"How can there be quality in school education when poverty, hunger and injustice marks every dimension of life in the villages of the poor?" asked Barat. "Panchayati Raj has no power, no truth, no quality. It's the Aga Khan Foundation which has come to our rescue, but isn't it a shame that our own governments have betrayed us."

"The State is like a lazy elephant. And the NGOs are like rabbits, jumping at it, pushing it. But the NGOs can't pull the huge wooden logs. You will have to live with the State and push the elephant," said former chief secretary, Rajasthan, ML Mehta.

Yogendraji's solution is simple: "Why be dependent on the State? Let civil society create its own creative, liberating institutions. Our own worlds of enlightenment, justice, equality and freedom. Let us transform this world. That's my fundamental right and yours and we must have it."

# The ethics of business

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THE Human Rights Assembly organised by Amnesty International in early April in Delhi, with volunteers from across the country participating, entered the difficult terrain of human rights violations and democratic rights. The discussion revolved around mass disappearances of individuals in 'troubled' spots like the north-east and Kashmir, the 'terror' of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act in the north-east ostensibly to fight 'terror', the discrimination in terms of justice to the vast majority of the poor and innocent victims of State atrocities and the general immunity being enjoyed by the police and security forces even as they wage a virtual war against people in several pockets of the country.

Combine this with starvation deaths and farmer suicides, gender inequality and injustice, malnutrition and migration, and a stark absence of labour rights especially in the vast informal sector, and the dismal picture seems utterly hopeless. As Sukumar Murlidharan, senior journalist, pointed out, "The right to life is a fundamental right. But what about the right to food, or the right to work, or the right to social security and safety nets in the informal sector?"

Murlidharan said that now for the millions of marginalised working class people, *roti, kapda aur makaan* is not the only criteria of development, it is also clean drinking water, dignified shelter, education, consumer durables, clothing, food, entertainment, health. "If the working class are used as only cheap and exploited wage labourers by the corporates, and not as productive consumers or buyers, are you not trying to buy growth using poverty as an advantage? This will not work and it will lead to multiple social conflicts."

One crucial dimension of the panel discussions revolved around the current debate on neo-liberal globalisation and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). "The corporatisation of society and the denial of human rights go hand in hand," said lawyer Prashant Bhushan. "This is a truth as witnessed in Nandigram, Kalinganagar and Kashipur." Others pointed out that mass displacement due to forcible acquisition of land by the State to help big business and multinationals set up profit-making shops is a complete denial of fundamental rights and the people at the lowest rung of our rural society are direct victims, such as Dalits, tribals, minorities and women.

In a revealing narrative, Nityanand Jayaraman, member of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB), pointed out how the Indian state and the notorious multinational Union Carbide (along with Dow Chemicals which took over Carbide) have treated thousands of victims and survivors of the Bhopal gas tragedy with utter contempt. Last year, after 23 years of struggle and no relief, not even clean drinking water, the victims marched all the way from Bhopal to Delhi. They went on a fast. They met the prime minister. Apart from water, the other demands included removal of the toxic waste around

the factory site, medical relief, employment etc. These demands were accepted, though Dow Chemicals has steadfastly refused to clean up the toxic muck. "How come the Indian State goes all out to protect the interests of foreign companies while the Indian people suffer in what was the worst chemical disaster in the world," asked Jayaraman.

Indeed, even these demands, accepted by the prime minister's office, were not implemented by the BJP-led state government. So the victims again went on a 'right to life' fast last month in March in Bhopal. After 14 days, the state government agreed to fill the vacant posts in the hospitals meant for the gas-affected people and to improve the quality of medicines and facilities for investigations there. Doctors and specialists at the gas relief hospital will now be contracted for five years in place of the current practice of two years. The

“ How come the Indian State goes all out to protect the interests of foreign companies while the Indian people suffer in what was the worst chemical disaster in the world, asked Jayaraman of the ICJB. ”

government has agreed to vacate the 152 workshops in the Special Industrial Area within three months to establish employment-generating industries within a year. The government agreed to provide all information on the soil and ground water contamination in and around the Union Carbide factory and to build a wall around the factory to protect children and cattle from the hazardous materials therein. For provision of safe water in the communities in the vicinity of the abandoned factory, 50 additional tanks will be provided within a month's time.

Sanjay Gupta, Vice President, EXL Services, begged to differ with the general tone of the debate on CSR. He said while Jayaraman and Bhushan might be right, he still thinks that a section of the industry is involved in an active debate over the concept of CSR, which has been widely proved to be meaningful as in the success stories of ITC's e-chaupals, the various non-profit institutions run by the Tatas, and similar social enterprises by other big companies. "There is a need to do much more, and be more sensitive, but surely, the corporates are not completely devoid of ethics or conscience. And it is not only for image-making that they enter the social sector. They genuinely believe in CSR because human resources and quality and growth should work in tandem, not as oppositional forces."

# 'Microfinance is just band-aid'

**Rakesh Agarwal**  
New Delhi

**P**ROVIDING microfinance to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is being seen as the best route out of poverty by a multitude of institutions. States, NGOs, banks, corporations and microfinance institutions are all involved in lending to groups of rural women. Microfinance, they all say, is empowering rural women, economically, socially and politically.

Is it so? Nirantar, a Delhi-based group has studied SHGs and come up with startling findings. The NGO says that instead of empowering poor women SHGs and micro-finance are making them weak and dependent.

India has nearly seven million SHGs. More than 90 per cent comprise only women. The Nirantar survey examined what impact SHGs have on their lives. It researched 2,750 SHGs from 16 states. About 1,650 had been formed by government programmes while 1,100 were created by NGOs.

Nirantar carefully researched the processes that take place within SHGs like capacity-building, literacy and the group's relationship with power structures. It was found that women who were literate were more likely to become group leaders. They monopolised training and other learning opportunities and got larger loans for themselves. The rest of the group got left behind. Just 39 per cent of women SHG members are literate.

The amount of credit provided to women was too meagre for them to start substantive businesses. Promotion of collective enterprise and capacity building was missing. Many women were using the money for mere survival. SHGs are also paying high interest rates (between 24 per cent and 48 per cent) for loans. The chief beneficiaries of SHGs are not the poorest. Around 27 per cent of Dalits were members of SHGs, 16 per cent were tribals and just three per cent were Muslims.

The Nirantar study is important because it comes at a time when the government is all set to enact the Microfinance Sector Development and Refinancing Bill. *Civil Society* spoke to Jaya Sharma and Subha Laxmi Nundi of Nirantar.

## **What is the main problem with microfinance?**

Microfinance has become a ploy of policymakers to shun the social responsibility of poverty alleviation. Our survey clearly shows that less than 58 per

cent of groups formed under government programmes received any credit, while over 90 per cent have deposited their savings. So, the main objective of the programme – forming SHGs to help the poorest, gets defeated.

## **What about membership of SHGs?**

Our survey shows that most Dalits, Adivasis and minorities are not getting any benefits. Most women of these SHGs are OBCs.

“The loan provided was too meagre for SHGs to start substantive businesses. Promotion of collective enterprise and capacity building was missing.”

## **Does the linkage of SHGs with banks link them to the market?**

That is a very farfetched idea. The very term linkage is exploitative. One, they have to cough up a very high interest rate – starting from 24 per cent per annum and the repayment schedule is very tight. It has also reduced the interlinking between members. So, credit with reasonable terms and interlinking with both the bank and members is needed.

## **What should be the role of the stakeholders?**

Every institution – the government, banks, NGOs and the market has benefited from SHGs. The banks now have a huge amount of money at their disposal. According to one estimate, about 15 million women are saving, albeit small amounts regularly. Several NGOs are running programmes with huge funds, and the market is gaining as major MNCs and malls are eyeing the country's vast rural market.

## **How have SHGs not helped women?**

Our survey shows that 61 per cent of SHG members were non-literate; this included those 28 per

cent who could only sign. Surprisingly, 39 per cent, which is the literacy rate of women in SHGs, cuts a sorry figure in front of the national literacy rate for rural women, which is 47 per cent. So, the first task of these institutions should be to make women literate. Then, their capacity building is a must as 47 per cent of the groups formed under government programmes had not received any training for the last two years. Also, only six per cent of the groups formed under government programmes had received inputs on gender issues, and only 19 per cent on income generation and livelihoods.

## **What would you say about their tie-ups with panchayats?**

Less than 50 per cent of the groups studied in the survey had any kind of alliance with panchayats. It is thus evident that the groups had very little opportunity to form tie-ups with this important forum of governance and power.

From the groups which had formed alliances with panchayats, SHG members from only eight per cent of the groups attended gram sabha meetings.

## **What about their access to resources?**

Their access to resources is weak. Only microfinance cannot be an answer to it. A worker in our Anandi survey aptly put it, "Microfinance is like band-aid, while the wound is much deeper."

## **Isn't economic empowerment leading to social empowerment?**

That is the point we are making. There is no link between the two, and it is a false assumption that economic empowerment of women will lead to their social empowerment, so the government conveniently says that it makes microfinance available to women, but it is up to them to make the best use of it. While about 64 per cent of government-sponsored groups have not taken up any social issue, only 11 per cent have taken up crime against women.

## **What are the key problems with the proposed bill?**

First, instead of NABARD being the regulatory body, an autonomous body with representation from women, NGOs and NABARD should be constituted. Secondly, interest rates must be lowered. There should be a cap. Thirdly, an autonomous committee sponsored by the Central Government with a crisis fund should be established.

# Gram sabha in every village

**Rakesh Agrawal**  
New Delhi

**T**HE National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) is continuing its campaign to achieve a meaningful Forest Rights Bill. It is lobbying to get appropriate Rules framed to the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, so that people benefit. The forum has established a Rules Committee. It held a meeting for the eastern region (Orissa, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh) in Ranchi.

Subsequently, a state-level meeting on the rules was held in Hyderabad. The regional meeting for the south is yet to be held. For the northern region, the meeting will be held end of April.

Secondly, the NFFPFW has begun empowering gram sabhas since they will be the primary institution implementing the new law. Land reclamation was also carried out in Madhya Pradesh and UP by NFFPFW's groups.

NFFPFW is spreading the word that every village should have a gram sabha and that all committees formed by the forest department must be wound up. It has submitted a memorandum to forest officials at the range and district levels across the country asking them to: Amend the new Act incorporating JPC recommendations, frame effective rules, provide status quo on evictions, withdraw all cases on people, and repeal all committees in forest areas.

The NFFPFW campaign was launched in Uttarakhand by forming gram sabhas in every village. Representatives of the forum's constituent

groups held meetings and submitted memorandums to forest officials.

A meeting was organised in Barbara reserve forest area of Banpur, Orissa, by representatives of the Orissa Jan Sangathan Manch (OJSM). A memorandum was submitted to the state government seeking its support for the Act's implementation. A letter was also given to 32 DFOs in the state regarding formation of gram sabhas along with a copy of the gazette of the Forest Rights Act.

A meeting of about 2500-3000 people, mostly women, was organised in Madro village in Tayothar tehsil of Reva district in MP to mark the parinirvan divas (the day of demise) of Savitribai Phule on March 10. It was decided to re-claim the gram sabha land which is with the forest department.

A cycle rally was taken out in the Duars region of North Bengal. In UP, a meeting was organised at Ramgarh Kon near the Jharkhand border. About 600 women shouted slogans for the reclamation of their lands, implementation of the Forest Rights Act, and formation of gram sabhas.







A CPIML rally in New Delhi denounces SEZ.

# THE SEZ HOT POTATO

## Battles over land get bigger, more bitter

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

**A**CROSS India word of the Congress-led UPA government's Special Economic Zone (SEZ) policy has spread like wildfire. Rural folk in Punjab, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal are worried about the taking over of agricultural land and coastal areas for industrial enclaves. Nandigram, in West Bengal, where women and children died to keep out a chemical hub, is fresh in the popular mind. There are intimations of similar confrontations elsewhere in the country.

The SEZ policy was framed in discussion with industry and pushed through as an Act. There was no attempt at wider consultation. The Congress now finds it has on its hands a political hot potato, which it can neither hold nor chuck. At election time the Congress pledged itself to economic reforms with concern for the *aam aadmi* or common man. Ridicule was heaped on the BJP for representing only the rich. The Congress faces much the same charge.

Industry on the other hand is seen as being driven by greed. There is a breakdown of trust and industry leaders are being compared with zamindars of the past. People don't want to give up their land because their experience is that they finally get nothing and end up among the ranks of the homeless in urban areas. Even powerful companies are finding few takers for their offers.

The Indian economy needs large doses of investment. It will have to come from private sources. The question is how to be inclusive not only in the end result but also in the process. For growth strategies to succeed, people have to be involved with them.

A good part of the blame must rest with the UPA government. At first it was

in bed with NGOs and now it is being seen as infatuated with industry. In government it does not pay to be a serial lover.

An SEZ is an expanse of land owned by a corporate entity. It enjoys the status of being a foreign territory as far as trade, taxes and tariffs are concerned. The SEZ is exempt from paying customs duty, income tax, sales tax and service tax. Altogether 237 SEZs have been approved by the central government. Some 83 have been notified. Ultimately, it is said, India will have 500 SEZs that will together be equivalent to the size of the National Capital Region.

Faced with protests, the UPA government put a freeze on SEZs. On April 5, the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGOM) headed by Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee lifted the freeze, but limited the size of an SEZ to 5,000 hectares from the earlier limit of 10,000 hectares. The EGOM also said that the government should not acquire land for the SEZs. Industry should deal directly with farmers.

The UPA's Common Minimum Programme (CMP) had promised it would protect the interests of farmers, fisher folk, tribals and labour. It would help them consolidate their insecure livelihoods and graduate to more stable platforms in an emerging economy. Growth would be bottom up. It would involve self-governance and respect for everyone's right to resources such as land and water. Consultation at all levels was a key promise.

The SEZ policy runs contrary to all this and seems to jettison the opportunity to seriously build on the momentum of economic growth that has been achieved in the past two years.

With the SEZ policy the support the Congress and the Left enjoyed from activist groups has not just evaporated but turned into dislike and deep suspicion. People refusing to give up their land don't believe that SEZs will

deliver jobs and development. At the very least they expected to be consulted. Instead, the government went ahead with SEZs without putting a rehabilitation policy for evicted people in place.

The result is that people's movements are on the streets once again protesting against the government's wave of 'development terrorism'. From March 19 to April 15, the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) and its partners held a series of protests at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. There were public hearings, *dharnas* and processions. Called Sangharsh 2007, activists from over 150 organisations took part. They wanted to know what happened to the UPA government's promises.

"The government is simply shirking its responsibilities and handing it over to industry," said Medha Patkar, voice for the disenfranchised and leader of NAPM, which has been at the forefront of the agitation against SEZs. Sangharsh 2007 voiced opposition to forced displacement caused by SEZs, industrial projects and urban evictions, privatisation of water, natural resources and services. It asked for protection for farmers, fisher folk, landless labour and agricultural workers. A comprehensive policy was sought for unorganised workers and for protecting hawkers, the largest working group after farmers and agricultural labour. Activists asked for the extension of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to all districts for 365 days.

The chief concern is the displacement SEZs will cause to enrich a few companies by giving them prime land. The SEZ policy is seen as creating a new class of zamindars. The only difference is that family ownership is being replaced by corporate ownership. The Maha Mumbai SEZ, for instance, could be the size of Chandigarh. The question is whether entire cities should be brought under companies where the liability is limited. Why should promoters and shareholders be allowed to take over from government? A company is not elected by the people. It is only accountable to its shareholders. Is it right to create corporate city states?

The supporters of SEZs argue that SEZs will attract investments in billions of dollars and with them will come faster urbanisation and economic growth. However, the investments that are being sought are unlikely to create employment that can replace traditional livelihoods. A good many of the SEZs are for software companies. Will the IT sector employ farmers, fisher folk and labour? It is also being asked why companies need so much agricultural land.

Many interesting details are glossed over. For instance, SEZs will be on prime land, along coasts and adjacent to cities. In West Bengal, for instance, the entire coast up from Nandigram was being given away. Similarly in Raigad in Maharashtra, Reliance gets to control land all the way to the coast in an elaborate and hugely valuable (in real estate terms) extension to Mumbai.

Industry is quick to point out that at stake are 1,750 sq km, or much less than one per cent of Indian farm land. But industry has a huge ecological footprint. Activist groups say one million people will be displaced and lose livelihoods. Can industry rehabilitate all those families? It has no history or experience of doing so. In the past five decades people have given up holdings for projects and factories and have been left more impoverished. Since 1950, some 40 million people have lost their land.

Reliance has managed to make huge land acquisitions in Haryana. But in Maharashtra there no takers for its offer though it says that people will not lose their homes. People in Raigad or Karla in Maharashtra don't trust industry or the government.

Prasad Bagwe came a long way to Jantar Mantar to be a part of the NAPM's protest. He is a farmer from Karla and faces eviction for the multi-product SEZ being set up by the Mahindras. "Reliance approached the state government precisely because they could not get land. Farmers did not want to sell," says Bagwe. "See, Union Commerce Minister Kamal Nath sent a report saying our lands are uncultivated. Actually Raigad is the rice bowl of Maharashtra. Farmers cultivate at least two to three times a year. A whole economy will be uprooted: agricultural labour, rice mills, transporters, *mandis*. Fishermen along the coast will lose their livelihood. The stretch from Mumbai to Pune is dotted with tourist sites and young people earn a living out of it. The truth is agriculture gives the most jobs."

On paper Reliance says the SEZ won't displace any residents and village homes will remain intact. Bagwe seriously questions this. "They will have to do land-filling before starting construction. That itself will make village homes lower than the surrounding area of the SEZ. We will be completely waterlogged. Secondly, the SEZ will have a wall around it 40 to 50 feet high. We will need ID

cards to get in and out of our own homes. If relatives want to visit we have to inform the SEZ authorities in advance. The village will become a jail. The independence we are used to will go."

India's golden coastline will be under the SEZs from Gujarat to West Bengal. Amendments to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification of 1991 permit SEZs to be located in ecologically sensitive coastal areas and 'no development zones'.

"First we had a golden corridor from south to north Gujarat of chemical plants. Now we have a silver corridor all along the coast of Gujarat of petrochemicals, caustic soda, cement factories and so on," says Rajni Bhai, editor of *Bhumi Putra*, Ahmedabad.

The Union ministry of commerce and the state governments are deliberately misleading when they say there are no disputes and conflicts over land acquisition in the already notified and approved SEZs, says NAPM. In the Kakinada SEZ in Andhra Pradesh, resistance has resulted in the acquisition to just 300 of the 10,000 hectares that are being sought. It will displace 100,000 people. Around 50,000 fisher folk in three blocks are protesting. The Brandix Apparel SEZ in Vishakapatnam is also being opposed by the fisher folk. So is the Mundra SEZ of Kutch. The farmers of Mann village in Pune braved bullets and lathis to prevent their land being handed over to Infosys.



Swami Agnivesh, Medha Patkar in the background and protesters

**With the SEZ policy the support the Congress enjoyed from activist groups has not just evaporated but turned into dislike and suspicion. People refusing to give up their land don't believe that SEZs will deliver jobs and development**

Once SEZs are created, the rules by which they are governed will make them fiefdoms in private hands. They will be deemed foreign territories. Labour and environmental laws will not apply to them. There will be issues of entry, exit and residence. They will get priority in access to water and will undoubtedly draw on their hinterland's resources. They will pay no taxes.

"We are not opposed to industrialisation," says Patkar. "But industry includes agriculture, horticulture, cottage industry and fishing. The private sector provides jobless growth. The unorganised sector is where the majority earn a living. Food production should be left to farmers and fisher folk." NAPM and its partners point out there should be a realistic assessment of how much employment the SEZs will really provide and for whom.

Patkar says the origins of the SEZ policy can be traced to the US-India CEO Forum. Consisting of select CEOs from both countries, the Forum identified six major areas of cooperation which they believed would have the biggest impact on economic cooperation.

Under physical infrastructure development is mentioned the setting up of SEZs to cater to domestic and export markets with world class infrastructure, integrated real estate, power and transport, single window clearance, flexible internationally competitive laws.

The slight changes in the SEZ policy have left activists cold. The National Council for Advocacy Studies (NCAS) and NAPM have looked closely at ground realities. They make the following points against SEZs:

① The SEZ policy violates the Indian Constitution. It is the panchayat which decides the amount of land to be retained for agriculture and it is a



# 'We just don't want to sell'

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

**P**RASAD Bagwe sits on the pavement at Jantar Mantar clutching a thick notebook. All around him the protest meeting organised by the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) is on in full swing. A young woman is describing how bulldozers rammed into her flimsy shack in Mumbai. Where should she go? Nobody has an answer. Activists scurry to and fro. A few journalists stroll in. Two policemen look on suspiciously.

Bagwe is keen to talk. There is anxiety on his face as he opens his notebook. He is a farmer from Karla in Maharashtra. He has come all the way from his village near Pune, he says, to protest against the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) coming up in Maharashtra. His land will be acquired for an SEZ being put up by Mahindra and Mahindra. Nearby, farmers in Raigad will lose their land to the gigantic Reliance Maha Mumbai SEZ of 10,000 hectares in partnership with the state government. Bagwe's group, the Ekvira Lamin Bachao Andolan Katla, and the Raigad farmers SEZ Virodhi Samiti don't want to sell their land. They don't want to listen to promises of jobs and money. They just don't want to sell, he repeats.

"Reliance approached the state government precisely because they could not get land. Farmers did not want to sell their land," he says.

"See, Union Commerce Minister Kamal Nath sent a report saying our lands



Prasad Bagwe

are uncultivated. Actually Raigad is the rice bowl of Maharashtra. We cultivate at least two to three times a year. A whole economy will be uprooted: agricultural labour, rice mills, transporters, traders, mandis. Fishermen along the coast will lose their livelihood. The stretch from Mumbai to Pune is dotted with tourist sites and young people earn a living out of it. The truth is *kisan rozgar* gives the most jobs."

But on paper the Reliance rehabilitation offer looks good. For one, the company says it won't displace any residents and village homes will remain intact. Bagwe seriously questions this. "They will have to do land-filling before starting construction. That itself will make village homes lower than the surrounding area of the SEZ. We will be completely water logged. Secondly the SEZ will have a wall around it 40 to 50 feet high. We will need ID cards to get in and out of our

own homes. If relatives want to visit we have to inform the SEZ authorities in advance. The village will become a jail. The independence we are used to will go."

Bagwe alleges that the companies, after having failed to convince farmers to sell their land, are intimidating them. "They have hired local people as agents paying them salaries ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 25,000," he says. They tell us, look we are offering you Rs 5 lakh or Rs 10 lakh per acre. Take it for your own good. Otherwise the government will walk in and give you a pittance. The agents snoop on village meetings, collect information about

constitutional body. The 73rd Amendment gives each village panchayat the right to make its development plan. This is to be integrated into a district level plan done by the district level committee. Kerala is the only state where district level committees are functioning. The Kerala Panchayat Act, 1994, endows panchayats to function as institutions of self-governance.

The Supreme Court ruled in a case concerning panchayat elections in 2003 that while "states cannot be permitted to withhold election of panchayats ... any legislative device of the government, which comes into direct conflict with the mandatory provisions of the Constitution (in this instance, Article 243 E), such device is ultra vires of the Constitution." So the company's plans for an SEZ will have to be approved by the village panchayat. Plachimada in Palakkad district used this authority. Its 15-member Perumatty Grama Panchayat decided on April 7, 2003, not to renew the license to Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Ltd, an Indian arm of Coca-Cola, since it said the company was causing a shortage of drinking water by overexploiting groundwater.

② The status of deemed foreign territories given to SEZs challenges the sovereign status of India. It undermines the constitutional right to freedom and liberty. The SEZs will be declared as Industrial Township Areas that will function as self-governing autonomous bodies. A Development Commissioner, appointed by the government, will be in charge of the SEZ. The developer can tax the people inside the SEZ for essential services. Internal security will be the responsibility of the SEZ.

Neither the panchayats nor the municipal corporation will have jurisdiction over them. High walls will be built. Permission from the Development Commissioner will be needed to enter. Instead of strengthening panchayats and urban governance institutions under the 73rd and 74th the Amendments the government is undermining their authority.

③ In reality there is no ceiling on the amount of land companies can buy. In Karla in Maharashtra the companies are buying land even outside the SEZ notified area. Entire districts are being bought. Indigent farmers will be left at the mercy of companies in league with government officials. "The mafia will walk in and harass farmers just like they do in cities to remove slum-dwellers," says Simpreet Singh of Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan. He is an activist with NAPM.

④ The SEZ Act does not mention rehabilitation or resettlement for the people it displaces. Industry has no obligation to provide rehabilitation. Rehabilitation will not be the responsibility of the State either. How will the government persuade the developer of an SEZ to carry out rehabilitation? Even if industry wants to do rehabilitation, it will have to carry out massive literacy and training programmes, and overturn an entire culture and mindset based on agriculture. Where has industry managed to do this, is the question NAPM and other groups are asking.

A draft national rehabilitation policy drawn up by people's movements and NGOs was submitted to the National Advisory Council (NAC), approved and then passed on to the government. But the government is silent on that draft. Instead, a weak draft by the rural development ministry is doing the rounds. It promises livelihood only when a public authority is acquiring the land. The draft talks of 'providing employment subject to the availability of vacancies and eligibility of the affected persons for the employment'.

More people depend on land for work or for grazing than actually own it. Research shows the living standards of displaced people worsens. Compensation is discussed only for those who own land titles. Giving one job to each family, as the government now says, is unfair. In rural areas, every family member's labour counts. Would an urban middle class family like to



farmers and pass it on to the companies so that they can use it against the farmer. We have company agents and *sarkari* agents crawling all over."

The SEZ will take at least three years to develop but the farmer will be immediately dispossessed. How will he live? Training is being offered to one person in every family but no family lives on the salary of a single son.

"As farmers we are bosses," he says. "We don't want to become servants. Agriculture is a job guarantee industry. It has no shelf life. But there is no guarantee of success in industry. Companies come and go. Banks go bust. They make profits and losses. They wind up too. Can the government guarantee success? If they can't they should not go in for this kind of wholesale industrialisation. If business ventures fail the farmer never gets his land back."

Scrutinising his notebook Bagwe points out how much the farming community has declined, anyways. The reason is that the price of crops has not increased whereas the cost of inputs for agriculture have gone up exponentially, he says, as he calculates the price of diesel vis-a-vis the price of a quintal of wheat.

"If the farmer dies then India's food security will be threatened," he explains. "As it is, the government imported 25 lakh tonnes of wheat last year from an American agent. They bought it at Rs 920 per quintal. But we were paid only Rs 750 per quintal when our wheat is of better quality than American imported wheat."

There is no trust among the people of industry or the government. "We have no example of displaced people actually getting jobs and rehabilitation packages," says Bagwe. Mostly, money released by the government for farmers is siphoned off by corrupt officials. "National interest is no longer valid for us," he says. "Will the government give away land in Kashmir to anyone? But here, multinationals are being given our land. SEZs will only increase poverty. It will not help farmers, fisher folk or labour in any way. We realise this. So we don't even want to discuss rehabilitation packages."



**India's golden coastline will be under SEZs. Amendments to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) permit SEZs in ecologically sensitive coastal areas and 'no development zones'.**

depend on the income of one son alone?

⑤ The SEZ policy now says that 50 per cent of land in the SEZ will be for industry. The rest can very well be diverted into real estate. Legally the other 50 per cent can be used for shops, restaurants, clubs, swimming pools, fancy homes and entertainment. "Communities and agriculture will be destroyed for real estate and non-development activities. This is unproductive use of land," says Patkar.

⑥ Besides, nothing has been said about the new labour legislation. Under Section 50 (8) of the SEZ Act state governments are abdicating their responsibility by labour. More than 10 states have amended their state laws and legislation from Minimum Wages Act to Industrial Disputes Act to declare all activities undertaken by SEZs as public utility services, making strikes illegal. A law for rights to the unorganised sector has been discussed and framed and presented to the government, yet, there is silence on it. Nobody will be allowed into an SEZ without permission to see the condition of the workers. They will be invisible to the world. The condition of women workers in garment factories for export is well known. All the powers of the Labour Commissioner will be delegated to the Development Commissioner of the SEZ. Nobody will be able to check human rights abuses. Special courts will be set up that will hear cases pertaining to an SEZ.

⑦ The State will lose money by way of taxes. Companies will not have to pay a range of taxes like sales tax, excise, octroi, VAT, *mandi* tax and turnover tax. They do not have to pay stamp duty or registration fees. The central government has offered developers 100 per cent income tax exemption for 10 years, 50 per cent for five years. There are no export or import duties either. The commerce ministry says India will attract investments worth Rs 100,000 crores. But an internal assessment of the finance ministry reveals that the country will lose about Rs 90,000 crores in direct and indirect taxes over the next four years. Not only will the SEZs not pay taxes, the government has promised to spend public money in providing infrastructure like roads, water supply and power for them.

⑧ Every project in India has to undergo an environment impact assessment which includes public hearings. The SEZ has been let off lightly. It has a single window clearance. The role of pollution control boards is fuzzy. There are no public hearings prior to clearing an SEZ. There is a special condition that SEZs with 'homogenous industries' do not have to take a prior environment clearance; these could include chemical, pharma or petrochemical industries. Everybody knows pollution travels for miles around. What is the guarantee that the SEZs will not pollute or recklessly use water or destroy surrounding farmland?

Besides, Amendments to the CRZ Notification, 1991, permit SEZs to be located in ecologically sensitive coastal areas and 'no development zones'.

⑨ The food security of India will be threatened. Worldwide food prices are rising as more and more farmers are taken off the land for industry or biofuels. Last year the government had to import wheat. Vast numbers of agricultural holdings in India have become liabilities over the years. They are too small to be remunerative or have been ravaged and become unproductive by a Green Revolution type of chemical farming. Water availability is a serious problem. As farmers have sunk into debt, they have lurched from crisis to crisis. Instead of addressing the agricultural crisis to protect India's food security, the government's answer is the SEZ.

With the coastal belt being given away to the SEZs, fishing communities will become history. Instead, large trawlers by multinationals will exploit the sea. Ironically, the SEZ is permitted to undertake pisciculture, horticulture, floriculture etc. This is nothing but taking away the livelihood of small farmers and fisher-folk and passing it on to big industry.

Critics of the UPA government say SEZs are a short-cut taken because of the absence of political will to see through the more complex realities of structural reforms. SEZs needlessly give away taxes that should flow to the exchequer. Foreign investment would have rolled in anyway and there is no need for such sweeping concessions.

# Hawkers take up position in Delhi

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**K**OLKATA'S street hawkers have their banner fluttering in Delhi. To figure out why, you have to first catch up with the bustling Shaktiman Ghosh.

Ghosh is general secretary of the Street Hawkers' Federation of India and has been lobbying for years to get a better deal for people who sell their wares on the pavements of our cities. His latest move has been to open an office for the Federation at Lalita Park in Lakshmi Nagar in east Delhi. Hawkers, he says, have to get better organised so as to be able to influence central policies and stake their claim to a rightful place in the economy.

In the first week of April, among festoons and marigold garlands, packets of sweets and banners with the Federation's College Street address in Kolkata, the Lakshmi Nagar office was inaugurated. Medha Patkar cut the ribbon. The hawkers are a constituent of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) of which Medha is a key leader.

Ghosh says the hawkers feel particularly challenged by the Congress-led UPA government's decision to permit large retail ventures. Chain stores will forever change the business of retail by working up and down the supply chain. Through huge volumes and preferential purchase agreements they will be able to make short work of solitary vendors who earn a living on the streets.

Even more worrisome is the prospect that the governments will now crack down on hawkers with greater harshness. They already face harassment and eviction in all Indian cities. Where they survive they are compelled to pay bribes to the local mafia and the police. Big retail chains will not only hurt their businesses, but also strengthen the view that urban areas have to be cleaned up and the bustling presence of hawkers has to be replaced by swank malls and hyper stores.

Ghosh claims that the Federation represents



Shaktiman Ghosh (centre) with his colleagues

10 million hawkers across India. They are a vital component of the unorganised sector and account for a good chunk of the informal economy. Retail chains, says Ghosh, will take away the livelihoods of these street

people. Even more significantly, it will affect farmers and other suppliers, who may initially be happy with the higher prices that are being offered but will be finally squeezed into submission by large corporate entities.

A Delhi office will enable Ghosh to spend 10 days in the capital every month to get the Federation's point across. Big deals in retail have already been sealed, but Ghosh hopes to be able to put a foot in the door and win some concessions for hawkers.

**Ghosh says the hawkers feel particularly challenged by the Congress-led UPA government's decision to permit large retail ventures.**



Medha Patkar

## Jagatsinghpur

Amit Sengupta  
New Delhi

**A**FTER Kashipur and Kalinganagar in mineral rich Orissa, Jagatsinghpur is becoming the latest battleground of the corporates and the State versus the original inhabitants of the land. Indeed, Flashpoint Posco might mark another rupture in the democratic fabric of neo-liberal India in the days to come.

South Korean steel giant, Posco, brought in by the Naveen Patnaik led BJD-BJP government, has massive plans for creating a mining, processing and exporting hub in remote rural areas of Jagatsinghpur in Orissa. Valued at \$12 billion, the deal is being proudly presented as India's largest foreign investment to date. It's another matter that this huge multinational project could spell ecological havoc, displace over 20,000 villagers, as activists point out, and affect more than 4,000 acres of agricultural and forest land.

No wonder local people have barricaded the area, blocked crucial arteries and are sitting on permanent protest against forcible land acquisition. "The memories of Kalinganagar are fresh. But we will not give way, come what may," they say. The situation has currently become tense because a huge posse of para military forces has been posted nearby and locals fear that a forcible land survey leading to their permanent displacement is bound to follow. This, despite the chief minister's pledge that a 'humane method' will be followed. But after the police brutalities in Kashipur, Kalinganagar and Nandigram, no one is ready to believe any politician or government functionary.

Last month there were clashes between police and villagers opposed to

# Mumbai slums, Chhattisgarh water

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**M**EDHA Patkar and fellow activists spent five days in Tihar jail for leading a peaceful protest to the Planning Commission on World Water Day. That hardly frightened NAPM's partners. They took to the streets with renewed gusto dodging traffic, teeming crowds and worried cops. Their demands were etched on placards and banners. Foremost was that the government withdraw all cases against Medha and her group.

Apart from Shaktiman Ghosh of the National Hawkers' Federation, there was Gautam Bandopadhyaya of the Nadi Ghati Morcha. He



Gautam Bandopadhyaya



Simpreet Singh and Nasreen Bano

explains in detail the battle between companies and people over rivers in Chhattisgarh. The corporate sector is acquiring exclusive access to rivers. The most famous case is of the Sheonath river now owned by Radial Water Ltd. The state government has entered into strange agreements by which it pays the company if it does not use the water it 'supplies'. He says eight rivers are now in the control of industrial houses and the community has no riparian rights.

Instead water users' associations are being set up and their powers conflict with the gram sabha. No environment impact assessment is done for rivers and basin management is extremely poor. "Of course we need new legislation in this country. It is a fact that the Congress-led UPA has been active in bringing in new laws. But everything is being done for industry and a market that big interests control. The priority has shifted from drinking water and agriculture to industry."

Nasreen Banu was evicted from her slum in Mumbai. She went to live near Azad Maidan and was thrown out of there as well. She says: "We pay so much for water, electricity and rent to the mafia and a whole lot of government functionaries. Why doesn't the government take the money from us directly and give us legitimacy." Nasreen belongs among the invisible urban poor. "We get nothing. But industry gets prime mill land for a song. We can pay much more than industry per square foot, but the government will not give it to us for a roof. Instead it wants

shopping malls." Nasreen represents seething anonymous anger on the streets of Mumbai and many other cities.

"We are asking for a decentralised and democratic planning process for cities and for basic services for the urban poor," said Simpreet Singh of Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan and an activist with NAPM. "We do not want foreign agencies to plan our cities. Look, the corporate mafia is at work in Dharavi. They only want the land. The urban poor who use the space for livelihood will be hard hit. A people's Dharavi plan has been submitted and the government should look at it." Simpreet was also protesting against the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission which he fears will end up displacing more of the urban poor.

**"Industry gets prime mill land for a song. We can pay much more but the government will not give it to us for a roof," said Nasreen.**

## resists takeover by Posco

the proposed port and steel plant. For almost two years the state government has not been able to acquire private land at the gram panchayats of Dinkia, Gadakujang and Nuagaon since villagers have erected barricades blocking entry.

Although the state government is legally bound to hold an environmental impact meeting, the public hearing held on April 15, ostensibly to quickly pave the way for Posco to set up shop, was organised 25 kilometres away from the planned site. This meant that farmers and villagers facing displacement could not participate. "If the government had any decency it would have declared this hearing null and void," said ActionAid programme manager Madhumita Ray, based in Bhubaneswar, who was at the hearing. "The meeting was held too far for many affected people to take part, in direct contravention of environmental impact assessment guidelines," she said. Predictably, hardly a few members from the eight directly affected villages could come and state their point of view.

Even ecologists have raised concerns. The proposed port near Paradeep in the district of Jagatsinghpur "would play havoc with the Gahirmatha marine sanctuary, protected forests and the migratory path of endangered Olive Ridley turtles," says environmentalist Biswajit Mohanty. Plus, the indigenous ecology will be ravaged.

Meanwhile, *The Telegraph* reported that the

Central government and Orissa government have asked Korean steelmaker Posco to negotiate with the displaced populace for the acquisition of private land while agreeing to work mutually for early resolution of the problems facing the steel project in Jagatsinghpur. "At a meeting that lasted for over 90 minutes in Delhi, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) discussed with Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Chief Secretary Ajit Tripathy, Steel and Mines secretary LN Gupta and 12 other Union secretaries the problems regarding land acquisition, which has become the biggest stumbling block for the South Korean company," said the Kolkata-based paper.

In Bhubaneswar and elsewhere there have been protests against Posco and the state government. In Delhi, several meetings held in protest against the Nandigram killing joined in solidarity with the protests in Orissa. "Let's not shift our eyes from Posco," warned Medha Patkar. "We want to create a national platform and campaign against SEZs and forcible displacement," said Bhaskar Nandy, politbureau member of the CPI(ML-PCC), based in Jalpaiguri, whose party is actively working with the protestors in Nandigram and Singur. "A nation wide conference followed by a big rally is being organised in Kolkata in June. This will be a platform for all parties, villagers, affected people, individuals and groups. The main thing is that Nandigram has shown us the way and there are rebellions spreading everywhere. This is as clear as sunlight," said Nandy.

**Jagatsinghpur is becoming the latest battleground of the corporates and the State versus the original inhabitants of the land. Flashpoint Posco might mark another rupture in the democratic fabric.**

# Business

## BEYOND PROFIT

**Rethink money with us. What should the entrepreneur of the future be like? How can you get rich and still serve society? Do causes need bottom lines?**

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Hilmi Quraishi

## The mobile AIDS game

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
New Delhi

**S**UBHI and Hilmi Quraishi are brothers who run an e-learning company called ZMQ Software. Named after the initials of their father, the company has a 27-member team and had a turnover of about Rs 7 crore this year. The Quraishis can now afford new offices at Manesar, a city on the Delhi-Jaipur Highway. They are busy moving their offices from Pitampura in Delhi to Manesar. Meanwhile, all meetings are being held in cafes. The Quraishis arrive at the United Coffee House in Connaught Place and Hilmi, the chief learning technology officer, is sporting a fine bead badge. It is white and has a red ribbon.

The bead ribbon was made in Kibera, a slum with a population of three million in Nairobi where he has just spent three days. Around 75 per cent of Nairobi lives in slums. Nearly 60 per cent are infected with HIV. ZMQ has built

a football game and a quiz into which are woven messages about HIV/AIDS. "We tested our games there. When they first played the game, they had vague knowledge. At the end of three days, after playing the game repeatedly, 40 per cent of the people had got 80 per cent of the message," says Hilmi.

Hilmi and Subhi have spent three years experimenting with the dissemination of social messages through gaming. The company's business is producing e-learning material and 80 per cent of their turnover comes from this source. They create well researched e-learning material for five universities across the world: University of Texas Arlington, Aligarh Muslim University, Malaysian University, Institute of Mauritius and University of Doha in Qatar.

The Quraishis, however, are convinced that mobile phones are the technology of the future. "A rickshawallah has one. He uses it as a radio and a TV. This will be the medium through which people will access most infotainment and education. Personal computers will become a development platform," says Subhi Quraishi, the CEO of ZMQ. The company spends a lot of time building



gaming and content for mobiles even though their current revenue from this source is less than a crore.

The Quraishis do not spend any money in marketing their services. Instead they spend 20 per cent of all their net profits in their non-profit initiative called www.house-of-learning.org. The idea is to develop state-of-the-art gaming and content on Indian themes and for social marketing across the world. "This idea of giving back comes from our father who was a socialist by thought," explains Hilmi. "He was a professor in Delhi University and an expert in West Asian studies. Our mother has also retired from Delhi University. She is a sociologist turned political scientist and is an expert on Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda. She can speak Swahili," he points out. The Quraishi family traces its origin back to 400 years in Delhi; their grandfather taught in the Madarsa Husseinia.

The Quraishis first started developing content on AIDS in 2004. The brothers were reading an article written by Nelson Mandela in 2003. They realised the grimness of the situation and the effect of HIV/AIDs on the economies of African countries. "We read that corporates in South Africa did not face up to AIDS initially, and suffered later because their employees could not deliver due to illness. We then realised to our alarm that India has 5.3 million infected people, and our economy could be affected drastically if companies did not come forward and put in an effort to prevent the spread," explains Subhi.

ZMQ then did a small pilot project along with CARE. It made a short film called 'Save your village' with a game and distributed it to some schools in Uttar Pradesh. They were not happy with the outcome. They felt that working with partners at the conception stage hindered them. The partners did not understand gaming and wanted linear content.

So the Quraishis went ahead and developed four games under an initiative called freedomfromhiv.in. They took a year to research and develop. Hilmi did all the initial research on the content himself. Their content was validated by UNAIDs and NACO. "I run an e-forum. We put them on to experts based on their need. For example, If they want expertise on pediatric HIV, I know exactly whom to contact," says Mohammed Rafique of UNAIDs.

There was also a mobile version of the games. The four mobile games targeted different mindsets and psychology of mobile users. The first game was Safety Cricket. The second was Ribbon Chase, an arcade game where the player is the red ribbon and he has to deliver messages to different cities in the world, while the HIV virus is chasing him. This was targeted at focused gamers. The third game was an easy-to-manoeuvre game. Dove, the traditional symbol of peace and love, flies from village to village, collects condoms and red ribbons, and distributes them to villagers according to their specific needs and demands. The fourth game was a quiz in the format of *Kaun Banega Crorepati*.

The mobile version of the games was given away to mobile content aggregators across the world free of cost. Reliance put it up in its R-World portal free of cost. It also did not charge for downloads or communications cost. Since it was free of cost, the mobile operators did not give ZMQ statistics on downloads, but the brothers from the informal information collected from the operators estimate that there are nine million downloads across the world. However, they did not do any study on the learning impact of these games.

"We were the first operator in India and possibly the world to attempt the

inclusion of social messages. We appreciated ZMQ's effort and we put it up for free. We have 170 million customers and we have to reach that last guy there. This is on our charter and the HIV/AIDs games were a good experiment," says Krishna Dhruba, business development and marketing head of Value-Added Services at Reliance Infocom. The telecom company had earlier also hosted Mobile Mahatma, an interactive film and a game on Mahatma Gandhi launched by ZMQ on the eve of Gandhi Jayanti in 2005. "They had recreated the scene at the Sabarmati Ashram and we carried the game and created publicity. The download of both these games was average. Social messaging has to become a lot more sophisticated," he adds.

After that effort ZMQ worked with the John Hopkins Research Centre in Mumbai to create games for the youth in Maharashtra. The centre has distributed the games very well but the impact has not been measured. ZMQ also collected all the creative material developed by children as part of a programme run by non-profit PLAN and developed games based on those characters.

Now the software company is a step further. They are developing games for Africa using football as the theme. Their second product will be modeled on Bantumi, a game similar to checkers popular in East Africa. They are now going to work in six African countries including Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia along with the Dutch non-profit Hivos. Hivos is funding and helping them capture backend data on how many times the games were played by each player and their knowledge before and after playing the game. So this time they will measure the impact of the games.

ZMQ got noticed for all these innovations by the Global Business Council (GBC) on HIV/AIDs awareness. GBC is a council with 220 large corporate members including the Tatas and Ranbaxy from India. GBC and the German development agency GTZ have now funded them to develop a monitoring and evaluation tool. A part of this will be an e-learning tool for corporate managers to understand the problems and issues around HIV/AIDs. "If a large corporate like the Indian Railways wants to get its management team to understand how the spread of HIV/AIDs could affect its employees and what measures they should undertake in different parts of the country, this could help. In some places they may need an information centre and in yet another place they may have to set up treatment centres," says Subhi.

They are also building a tool which is being piloted in Delhi and Kenya for health centres to monitor patients with chronic illness. It will first be used for AIDs and then for all chronic ailments.

While the brothers have spent nearly Rs 50 lakh, including manpower resources from the company, this is not the only social initiative that they are working on. They are convinced that the mobile phone will become a medium for learning in the future and are proactively developing content and working on distribution.

In 2004, ZMQ decided to develop content on Gandhi. "He was the most powerful personality of our time globally. His methods are universal and could be used in situations like Iraq. In a physical war, the bully wins. In a mind game, the rules are different," says Subhi. Now they are working with the Khemka Foundation to give away this content to schools as part of their leadership development programme. "This is their first year. They will develop content on other Indian leaders," says Subhi.

## In Ribbon Chase the player is the red ribbon and he has to deliver messages to different cities while the HIV virus is chasing him.

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# Jobs for untaught youth, last chance

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
New Delhi

**T**HOUGH several service sectors like tourism, retail, healthcare, hospitality and BPO are booming in India, they cannot find trained staff. The vocational training system has not kept up. On the other hand, a huge number of children and youth in the country coming from marginal and underprivileged backgrounds have no means of entering the new economy. The Hyderabad-based CAP Foundation has come up with a programme called "Ek Mouka" to bridge the gap.

It has placed 45,000 young people across the country so far. The target is to place 300,000 children within the next three years. It takes the trust Rs 3,500 to Rs 5,500 and three months to train a youth who may not have gone to school or may have dropped out in primary school. The core module consists of reading, writing, numeracy, computers, English, customer relations and entrepreneurship. At the end of three months, the trainee who is in the age group of 18 to 35, is encouraged to do a field-based assignment which includes a job survey. The trainee comes back after having identified a role for herself. CAP then trains her in specific verticals. The trust has identified 140 job profiles in 10 verticals. At the end of the training, the trainee finds at least one job for herself.

The trust has a team led by Nalini Gangadharan, chairperson, CAP Foundation. She had in her previous assignment helped set up the Livelihoods Business School Programme at Dr Reddy's Foundation. *Civil Society* spoke to Gangadharan about how this programme runs.

## **How do you identify a sector in the industry? How do you then match that to the target population in the work force?**

We have to identify gaps before they show up in the market. This is a complex process. We work on secondary data. We talk to top corporate, medium-sized players, banks, trade councils, professional bodies, outlets and dealers in any industry.

In early 2000, we identified that there would be a huge shortage of nurses by 2002-2003. All the 15-20 bed hospitals were converting to 50-80 bed hospitals. The nursing council came down saying anyone who was not qualified with either a degree or a diploma in nursing could not be employed. So we trained bedside patient attendants who could administer medication and bathe patients.

We held a focus group with the nursing homes association. We also found that hospital beds are only profitable if other services are used. So we created a cadre of home health care nurses. They are common today, but we had to work out a lot of issues like security, medical standards and attachment to a local hospital. We create a whole eco-system.

We create a ready-to-work workforce in 10 sectors including tourism, customer relations and retailing, healthcare, home needs, hospitality, automobile, telecom, call centers and other occupational courses like tailors, florists, plumbers and consumer goods repair. They have borrowed money and have to start work from day one. They do not have resources for training.

A Mercedes showroom picked up two girls from our centres for customer rela-

tions. The next two sectors we have now identified are logistics (ports and cargo) and fashion and accessories. We are going to run a pilot for a large Delhi-based BPO company where we will combine our training module with their training for voice-based services. They will pay for the training.

Corporates are realising what you call a degree is not worth much. Lakshmi, our student, was hired by Ion Exchange to sell its water purifier worth Rs 2 lakh, door-to-door. She recorded the highest sales among all their salesmen. She was their Chairman's Club awardee and was flown to their convention to Goa. She also got to explain her strategy at a management school. Kiran, another of our students was photographer Arvind Chenji's assistant; he is now a photographer and has bought equipment worth Rs 15 lakh.

## **Are you also training people in home services like house cleaning and plumbing?**

Mark my words. Two years from now you will have no maids. They will all belong to a housekeeping company which will cover you 24/7 in three shifts. I get 24/7 help from a company in Hyderabad. They will know how to work with household gadgets, they will have identity cards and they will get PF, ESI, and gratuity. We train housekeepers for companies which provide the service. We do not deal with individual customers.

## **What happens after a trainee gets a job?**

What we are doing is creating an aspirational platform. Three months into our programme, our trainees know that they have to invest in their education. Our record is that 80 per cent of our alumni pursue higher studies; 96 per cent of these pass the Class 10 board exams after going through an accelerated learning programme.

Andhra Pradesh's record is that less than 60 per cent of students clear Class 10. The formal system hates us for this feat. Our first job is just to make trainees feel "I'm worth it" and draw them into the economy. We find computers and knowledge of English does the job. Then we have continuous learning resources, alumni clubs and business mentors.

## **Who is your target workforce?**

We work with 85 NGO partners. We work in 10 states with the departments of youth services, urban development, police and women and child welfare. We also work with specific groups like traffic victims, children in conflict with law, someone who could have got into extremist movements and street chil-

dren. But they are anonymous.

## **How is CAP organised?**

We have 48 centres in 10 states. We have four different domains – community mobilisation, business mentor networking, the learning domain and a team which creates stakeholders and investors. Our curriculum is based on self learning, peer learning and experiential learning.

## **Who are your investors?**

Our stakeholders and investors team mobilises resources. The investors include corporates like Moser Baer, Lucent and Microsoft. There are bilateral agencies like ILO and USAID. Some corporates invest as part of their corporate social responsibility. Some like Moser Baer in Greater Noida want to invest in the community that it belongs to. We are also working with several corporates which are getting land for SEZs in Karnataka, Orissa, Noida, Gurgaon, Chattisgarh and Maharashtra.

## **Have you measured the impact of your programme on any one community? Can you describe the whole process?**

Take the tsunami reconstruction project in Nagapattinam that Pepsi funded. We got one crore from them. We went in with this idea that we would teach them how to make fish pickle and so on. But they were so devastated that they did not want to be dependent on the sea. They have no fixed working hours. They go to work at dawn and come back before the sun sets. They have very strict norms. One community does not talk to another. The boys don't talk to the girls. They don't go too far to work. We had to change the entire group.

Reconstruction has changed the landscape of Nagapattinam. We worked with 900 kids for nine months and several corporates including finance companies like ICICI, Citi, also telecom companies like Reliance. We spent Rs 1 crore and Rs 2.3 crore came into the 900 families in nine months.



Nalini Gangadharan

LAKSHMAN ANAND

# Worldview

## LATITUDE MATTERS

**Everyone owns a shrinking planet. People count more than governments. Track change before it becomes news.**

## Sri Lanka's green tsunami village

*Its perfect, yet former fisher folk grapple with unemployment*

**Severine Fumoux**

Damniyamgama (Kalutara dist), Sri Lanka

IN 2004, in the aftermath of the tsunami, Sarvodaya, a well-known NGO in the island, started reconstruction rushing to the rescue of survivors. It carefully managed its flow of funds and focused on reinforcing partnerships with the government and external agencies. The NGO was keen to carry out a long-term development plan.

For nearly 50 years, Sarvodaya has worked for community development including economic and social self-reliance. Their programmes are based on their values: hard work, peace and non-violence. This Buddhist-Gandhian philosophy has granted them international recognition.

Photos: SEVERINE FUMOUX

The Lagoswatta village in Kalutara, on the south-west coast of Sri Lanka, is one such model of participatory development. Damniyamgama is an eco-friendly village born out of Sarvodaya's grassroots expertise.

According to the NGO's philosophy, houses should be built after the personalities and awareness of their residents is developed. Sarvodaya links house building to rebuilding connections with nature and living in harmony with the environment.

Construction work started on April 4, 2005 on five acres of hilly terrain granted by the government amidst rubber tree plantations five km away from the sea. This unique model adhered to international guidelines for eco-houses defined by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) after the

Continued on page 28



# Iranian warmth versus hospitality

As the political planet spins on its axis, it becomes increasingly interesting to study the jetsam and flotsam it spews out with unerring regularity. The patterns of their flight paths can be predicted like the debris from a disintegrating spacecraft and one could make a science of it were one to collect all the political detritus scattered across the human habitats and discover the underlying algorithms.

Take for example the British soldiers recently detained in Iran – and later released. The reason for their capture has been debated by the opposite sides, as expected, but the interesting part of the unfolding saga was how the rest of the world, led by the media, assumed their expected roles and positions. The truth is always the first victim in any political conflict – and was no exception in this case. Our tribal psyche, incapable of objectivity, could barely paint a thin veneer of 'reasoning' on an otherwise parochial stand. We all seemed to have a point of view, predetermined by our individual and collective histories, and went about creating evidence by selectively cherry-picking from a vast array of 'facts'.

That the influential segment of world media with global reach originates in the Eurocentric world and thereby represents and defends its position should not be a surprise to anyone. That it constantly claims to represent the world is a travesty. What may come as a surprise to most readers, but is clearly not, is that except for a handful of scholars, university students and a few people of conscience, no one really challenges the lies we are fed. It was best exemplified by Tom Fenton, a well known CBS journalist interviewed on Al Jazeera's English TV channel, when asked why even after the most horrific killing spree on the Virginia Tech campus American media never mentioned the real culprit – the American Gun Law, or the lack of it. Caught off guard, he stammered, "Media here takes its position from the government".

It is this small minority of individuals like the Abolitionists, the anti-war activists, human rights activists, etc., who eventually stir a community's conscience so that 200 years after the event we see the political leadership apologising for a nation's misdeeds (ie Slave trade in the case of the UK while at the exact same moment, committing misdeeds of a similar moral nature; for which

they will probably apologise years later). However, if we look at the world, not as a democratically flattened horizon but a hierarchical pyramid of power, then, of course it is a small minority of nations and within them, a small minority of power brokers who rule the world many times over.

Take international law for example. Who creates it, who changes or modifies it, who implements and enforces it? One marvels at the impunity with which mainstream western media bandies the word 'international' or 'world', defying logic, when in fact they are simply describing the powers that be. The 'international' consensus against Iran is a good case in point. If anything, the majority of the world's population, who have themselves been at one time or another, a victim of the ruling powers, be it locally or globally, always instinctively supports the underdog, and vicariously take pleasure when the powerful have their nose tweaked, as in the case of the UK, in their recent naval detainees stand-off with Iran.

Predictably, global players quickly positioned themselves along 'party' lines, never questioning why the British soldiers were in those waters in the first place. The fact that they were invaders in an illegal war in Iraq has no place in the reasoning of the EU's threatening posture towards Iran, similar to their position in the nuclear stand-off, where even according to the IEAE (a UN Agency dominated by, guess who...?) Iran has done nothing in contradiction of the treaty it is a signatory to.

True to its traditions of hospitality to foreigners, the British soldiers were treated by the Iranians (as in all the previous cases) with hospitality – in stark contrast to Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, rendition flights and a myriad other disclosed and undisclosed examples of Western 'hospitality' to anyone they suspect of threatening their supremacy. The simple fact that perpetrators of western 'hospitality' have gone to great lengths to hide these facts whereas Iran publicly displayed the detainees, whatever the political motives (much to the chagrin of the Blair Government) should tell the common man some simple home truths.

It is always a core set of beliefs that propels a civilisation. With the onset of the colonial period five centuries or so ago, the major shift for European civili-

## LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

## Sri Lanka's green tsunami village

Continued from page 27

tsunami occurred. An Austrian village twinned with Damniyamgama and provided the funding for house construction.

The 55 houses are state-of-the-art architectural marvels designed by renowned Sri Lankan architect Chandana Edirisooriya. Each house has basic amenities and excellent ventilation. Apart from using local eco-friendly materials, the village relies heavily on green technology. Water comes from wells or rain-harvesting tanks. A subterranean system takes care of waste water. Recycling and composting are promoted. Each roof has small solar panels that provide enough electricity for small appliances.

The government has built a road to access the village and is now running a bus on this route. It has put up poles to provide additional electricity. There are signs in multiple languages to indicate directions to the village temple, nursery school, playground, library, telecentre (IT room) and the main community centre, which has been funded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJSDC).

The village might sound like an eco-resort by the Red Sea, but it is the result of a long process to create sustainable livelihoods. First, Sarvodaya educated the 245 future residents of the village (selected from three government-run tsunami relief camps) about forming a new community. The youth was later trained to maintain the technological utilities, and eventually run the IT telecentre. Then, a Sarvodaya society – the main empowerment tool of the NGO – was formed and a president and secretary appointed. The eco-village has so far fostered a cooperative lifestyle.

But challenges remain. "The biggest problem is unemployment, especially for women", admits the president of the village society. Most of the residents were fish traders before the tsunami. For a while, Sarvodaya paid the villagers

daily wages to build their future houses. Later, former fish merchants were given bicycles or mopeds to resume trading fish from nearby villages. Some villages continue to work in the construction business. Sarvodaya had conducted a skills assessment in order to provide adequate training to the unemployed, including women.

Sarvodaya's ultimate goal is to empower this village so that residents can become self-sufficient and pay for their own services. Villagers continue to experiment with revenue generation ideas like renting out their community centre for training programmes to other groups or running grocery stores. They are in the process of acquiring village land from the government. Eventually, common ownership of the village should generate efficient decision-making.



**The 55 houses are state-of-the-art architectural marvels. Each has basic amenities, excellent ventilation and is eco friendly.**

# from the West

sation was from Christianity to commerce. Over time, not only did commerce grow its own set of deep-rooted beliefs, it fully replaced or largely modified the faith based ones. The functional aspect of this is most clearly seen in law-making. Laws have always revolved around the central core of property and ownership. What has changed is the moral compass that guides law-making. We shouldn't be fooled at the lip service paid to the upliftment of the down-trodden when in fact they are seen merely as a market for businesses. If this sounds cynical, it isn't. Even a cursory survey of modern societies shows us that while businesses are booming, social services are in decline everywhere.

The logic of this is embedded in the structure of globalised democracies today. The elected leaders promise the economic upliftment of the people and the only means available to do so is to turn them over to the businesses to generate economic wealth. The simple equation of the trickle down effect as economic benefit for disadvantaged doesn't seem to work in the globalised setting where businesses can shift base (directly or through stock exchanges) to optimise their cost advantage. The disadvantaged obviously don't have that option to move base and optimise their opportunities on a global basis. And even if they did, what about those at the unemployable level, who would continue to form the disenfranchised base of the hierarchy of power?

France, now at the brink of giving its five year mandate to the 'right' presidential candidate, faces that very question. Should they jump on the global bandwagon and restructure their highly socialised way of life to follow the USA and the UK model by increasingly abandoning a lifestyle the French had come to take for granted (I hesitated briefly here before using the past perfect); or should they, in the face of the rest of the world, carry on in a tradition that has not only given them great economic success in the past but also a rich lifestyle, where family, culture, leisure and developing the individual- not just as a unit of production and a numbered consumer but as a human being, took precedence over a lifestyle full of stress and the other attendant evils that have accompanied the American 'success' story. If recent trends are any indication, then that question has already been answered by default. The French have not been immune to the global virus and have, like Germany last year, already started restructuring their model. No doubt they will choose the man who professes to honour that.

Sarvodaya's divisional coordinator, Nandasana Liyanage, is in constant dialogue with the village society members. For him, the way forward is more support and cooperation with other NGOs and UN agencies to better address the villagers' evolving needs. UNICEF is already running a Social Protection Network Programme in the village for local tsunami-affected children. The village facilities could turn into a valuable local resource and a promotion ground for sustainable living. Ideally, it could be used as a world-class research centre for eco-village development.

A year after the village's inauguration on March 29, 2006, Sarvodaya still closely monitors its activities. Sarvodaya workers are carrying out an audit on how green technologies are incorporated in daily activities. "The village is a pilot. Since many variables are there for recycling and other technologies, we are still testing the model", says executive director Dr Vinya S Ariyaratne.

The model has successfully shown government accountability and collaboration at multiple levels between agencies and field experts. Sarvodaya has trained its staff on sustainable living adapting its 5 R's programme (Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Re-awakening) to the long-term needs of the tsunami survivors. It has tested its Village Development Scheme. Social cohesion is not taken for granted but all the ethnic minorities live in peace and harmony here.

So far, there is no mention of the village's expansion. However, seven other eco-villages are being built. The model is being tried out in the tsunami-affected parts of the Eastern Province, with 800 eco-houses already built. The goal is to build a total of 1,200 houses, provided development workers and locals can maintain a clear vision in building and monitoring the villages despite the daily hardship of the civil war.

In reality, Damniyangama is not the first attempt of its kind for Sarvodaya, which is part of the Global Eco-village Network, a global confederation coordinating eco-village projects. Sarvodaya can boast of 11,000 sustainable villages that follow the criteria of ecological designs or permaculture among others. The Lagoswatta village takes the concept of the eco-village a step further: it is a model of unity where the community revolves around empathy and goodness towards a communal vision in harmony with nature.

"On top of a recovery model, this is a successful model of integrated community rebuilding and a landmark in our work", says Ariyaratne. Nowhere else is that sense of fulfillment more visible than on the residents' glowing faces when asked if they are happy where they live now.

## Nepal gets a network for HIV positive women

**Sangita Khadka**  
Kathmandu

**P**URNIMA (name changed) has a message for HIV positive women. "Learn to demand your rights," she says. "Do not let yourself become a victim of society with its misconceptions that HIV positive women are bad. You can be a change agent if you have a strong will to live and save others."

Neat rooms with beds for thirteen, a small kitchen, a cosy dining room and a spacious complex to give privacy to crisis patients – this has become Purnima's work which she enjoys immensely.

Recalling her trauma of being infected by her own husband and undergoing a series of humiliations from her family and society, Purnima had to take shelter in a rehabilitation home in Kathmandu. "When my husband and me started falling sick we discovered that both of us were HIV positive. My in-laws doubted me instead of their son. My husband did not even bother to find me when I left my house in search of support."

Purnima was lucky to find other women in the rehabilitation centre who had the same desire – to live. Together they formed a small support group to start supporting other HIV positive women. Life was not easy. Women were in desperate need of help but would not come out in the open. This small support group tried to do everything possible and finally, in May 2004, registered themselves as an NGO called Sneh Samaj.

To date, Sneh Samaj has given support to 280 women which includes counselling at home and in the centre, facilitating medical checkups for HIV positive women and providing emergency crisis services to women. They have a network to bring in HIV positive women from remote areas who often lose their chance of survival either due to ignorance or because they choose to remain hidden because of stigma and discrimination. Purnima confirms that most cases she has received are women who got HIV because they were trafficked or the virus was transmitted through their husbands.

The NGO has received support from UNDP Management Support, National HIV/AIDS Programme, DFID and Family Health International/USAID. Besides the capital Kathmandu, it has branches in other parts of the country such as Makawanpur, Pokhara, Chitwan, Accham and Butwal.

For future expansion of her noble work, Purnima would like HIV positive women to be provided with some kind of training for developing income generating skills or even computer training. She wants to focus on those most in need of assistance – women who have children. "We need enough funds to reach all the needy women", she says.

Purnima may be HIV positive herself but now her dreams are set, her vision is clear and she hopes that the world for HIV positive women will become better with understanding, care and support from society.

Contact: Sangita Khadka, UNDP Nepal Development Communications Officer, 00-977-1-5523200/1077

**Sneh Samaj has given support to 280 women which includes counselling at home and in the centre, facilitating medical checkups and providing emergency services.**

# Perspectives

## CATCHING TRENDS

**Have an idea?  
Perhaps a lost  
cause? Tell your  
story or just  
express an  
honest opinion  
in these pages.**

## Rural surgeons are the future

DR JK BANERJEE

**S**Ocial prosperity of the common man, good health and education facilities should be the criteria for the economic growth of the nation. Pats on our back by the World Bank or the IMF should be thrown into the gutter. We have to redefine our own norms of economic growth. Western cultural slavery has made our people greedy and individualistic. Unless we hark back to Gandhian philosophy and economics, our country is doomed to remain 'developing'.

Gandhian philosophy is not against industrial or modern scientific growth. It is against the greed associated with this growth. The Alternate Nobel Prize instituted by Sweden has for its theme the Mahatma's saying: "In this world there is enough for everybody's need but not for everybody's greed".

The Association of Rural Surgeons of India (ARSI) was formed in 1992 to take definite steps in this direction voluntarily. The founder members included stalwarts like Dr Balu Sankaran, Dr NH Antia and rural surgeons like Dr RD Prabhu of Shimoga in Karnataka, Dr RR Tongaonkar of Dondaicha in Maharashtra and Dr Sitanath De of Jhargram in West Bengal. These surgeons were determined to bring about a change.

They were later joined by many others from across the country. Surveys were made of their working conditions. And the First National Conference of Rural Surgery was held at Sevagram in Wardha at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences. It was hosted by the Late Dr Sushila Nayar, who was herself an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Through the conference it was revealed to city-bred surgeons how, with limited resources, the rural surgeons were giving villages services that were equivalent in quality to those available in urban centres. More importantly, they were at a price that the rural population could afford.

Today, the ARSI has a website, [arsi-india.org](http://arsi-india.org), and a newsletter going to 400 members of our association and also to rural surgeons in other developing countries, especially in Africa. Rural surgeons are called for scientific conferences abroad because resources are scarce worldwide. The developed world is becoming increasingly keen to learn from the Indian rural surgeon.

Establishing rural surgery as a specialty in our country has been an uphill struggle. Way back in 1986, the Association of Surgeons of India formed a rural health care committee with Dr RD Prabhu as its convener to go into the working conditions of surgeons in small towns and rural areas. A survey was done and 140 surgeons responded. These surgeons had different specialties, including lifesaving caesarian sections. All of them were involved in teambuilding, training health workers and nursing staff from among local young people and running small hospitals where government facilities were scarce or did not exist.

Although they were trained only as surgeons in the universities, out of societal needs they were training themselves to perform multi-specialty surgeries and manage a hospital. They also generated employment by training local people who were invariably from poor communities.

According to these surgeons, 'rural surgery' had to become a separate specialty to meet the needs of people. But, unfortunately, when these rural surgeons asked

the Association of Surgeons of India, their big brother, for this right they were laughed at by the professorial mafia. In the national conference of surgeons' associations in Hyderabad in 1992, the rural doctors asked the professors who should decide on a specialty. Should a specialty be decided by our western teachers or the needs of our people? There was no reply. But rural surgery was not to be granted specialty status.



There was no alternative for the rural surgeons but to walk out and form their own Association of Rural Surgeons of India. Seven surgeons held the first meeting of this association in March 1993 at Shimoga. And the first national conference of rural surgery was held at Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences at Sevagram in 1993.

The rejection by the Association of Surgeons of India turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Many practising rural surgeons, who never bothered to attend the conferences of the Association of Surgeons because they were uncomfortable with its five star ambience, joined the rural surgeons' association. Our networking increased. Wonderful innovations started coming to light, mostly to cut down costs. Cheaper suture materials, cheaper sterilising procedures, cheaper operation theatre maintenance and so on. Of course all this was being done without compromising quality.

Rural surgeons charged their patients small fees, but since the numbers were big they managed to earn a decent living. Of course they were not of the greedy type. Society gave them enormous love and respect. They all earned enough money to own a car, a house and educate their

children in good schools. This association now gave them a platform to satisfy their scientific and academic desires as well as to network with like-minded doctors across the country.

With the news of this bold step of the Indian rural surgeon spreading across the surgical world, several surgeons from the West started supporting our move. Prof Stig Bengmark of Lund University in Sweden, Prof Wilfried Lorenz, Dr Thomas Moch, Dr Gabriel Holoch and members of the German Society of Tropical Surgery (DTC), Dr Peter Smith of Holland, Prof David Mulder of Canada and so on. The Association of Surgeons of East Africa became our joint signatory. Surgeons from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria started attending our conferences.

Finally, the International Federation of Rural Surgery was born with Dr Prabhu of India as its first president at the first international conference of rural surgery held in Ujjain in 2005. The concept of rural surgery, which in other words is limited resources surgery, had come to stay across the world.

Today, five billion of the six billion people of the world cannot afford access to modern medical and surgical care. The specialty of rural surgery promises to bridge this shameful gap in the 21st century by evolving appropriate care and management systems across the world. The rural surgeon professes to use technology as a slave for service to humanity rather than becoming a slave of technology himself.

Way back in 1995, the rural surgeons approached the Medical Council of India

**Continued on page 32**

# India's green architect

SIDDHARTHA MITRA

LAWRENCE Wilfred Baker, better known as Laurie Baker, passed away in Thiruvananthapuram on April 1, aged 90. He lived a uniquely Indian life: thinking and practicing an architecture that leaves behind an unmatched impression on India's culture.

Ideas of economy in materials and means of construction, and architectural practices with a direct and urgent concern for people and environment have found widespread acceptance today. This is an outcome of the radically different way that Bakerji conceived architecture compared to the professional mainstream.

Conventional architecture is a somewhat esoteric profession practiced from drawing boards of offices, removed from the hustle and bustle of the site and its groups of artisans, as well as the wider cultural milieu of society. Laurie Baker believed and demonstrated in 60 years of a prolific and intense professional life in India that architecture can be a truly innovative cultural act relating to all people, at the same time addressing critical ecological issues purposefully. This is the reason why his funeral was a public event in Kerala.

Born in Birmingham in 1917, Bakerji graduated from Birmingham School of Architecture in 1937. This coincided with the outbreak of the Second World War and he enlisted with 'Friends Ambulance Unit' and served as a medical worker, first tending to war victims in China and Burma, and then to leprosy patients in Burma. On his way back to England to recuperate after a health failure from physical hardships, he stopped in Mumbai, where he met Mahatma Gandhi.



Laurie Baker

Gandhiji recognised the idealism in the young man and invited him to return to India and work with India's poor. Gandhiji's frugality, his unambiguous identification with the dispossessed and the down-to-earth solutions for their and the country's problems instantly appealed to Baker, whose rigorous Quaker upbringing had already oriented him towards austere simplicity.

Quakers are a Christian religious sect which practices the presence of God in all creation. The Quaker ideal precludes any pretension or ostentation, and places a high premium on honest labour and diligent elegant craftsmanship in all work as an offering to God.

To Bakerji, Gandhiji's prescriptions of the small scale, of sensitive and economical use of resources and the focus on use of local skills to solve local problems corresponded with his Quaker beliefs, which were to form the basis for his path-breaking architectural work.

Laurie Baker returned to India to work as a builder-architect-engineer for a missionary organisation working for the leprosy-afflicted. In the remote project sites he visited, he was confronted with not only new design problems of renovation and repair of hospitals for poor patients, but also the completely unfamiliar materials and methods of construction of rural India. Thus, Bakerji began the journey of discovering and validating the needs and skills of the common Indian people.

After a few years of work in the then United Provinces, in 1948 he married an Indian doctor, Elizabeth Jacob, who was also working with leprosy patients, and settled down for the next 15 years in the hill district of Pithoragarh. Here, working with rural communities, Bakerji came to appreciate and understand the requirements and processes of an appropriate architecture for ordinary people with limited means. In this way, applying his newly acquired traditional knowledge and innovating with his more contemporary skills, Baker started to fashion a far more rooted and relevant model of architectural practice than followed by the rest of the profession.

In 1963, the Baker couple moved to Kerala, first to a village and later to Thiruvananthapuram, where he resumed his practice in a different physical and cultural environment. His concerns – absolute rejection of wasteful use of



money and natural resources, adoption of all means to effect maximum economy, a deep regard for traditional skills and knowledge; and the creative ability to address all these with an aesthetically vibrant response - all this started to find full expression here. Beginning with model units of the cheapest possible dwellings for the economically disadvantaged, Bakerji's projects covered residences for all classes of people, churches, institutions and housing.

Bakerji's means of architectural practice were just as different from convention as his ends. His own hand-drawn sketches, plans and detailed drawings served as a mode of communication to the client, the statutory authority or the artisan on site as the occasion demanded! Elaborate drawings were avoided as many layout and construction decisions when taken at site produced the desired results. Architectural assistants assumed the role of site supervisors, learning nuances of the craft hands-on at the site.

Bakerji's commitment to alternative methods of architecture to meet the needs of the homeless and campaign for a sustainable approach towards environment was not only demonstrated explicitly in his work, it was also expressed through his many writings and even hand-drawn manuals. His 'courage of conviction' (his own words) was so great that it had the power to 'convert' a great number of people! A number of his construction innovations are now in wide use, parts of a shared lexicon of building techniques, saving money for the individual, and natural resource for the country and the world. It is in this sense that he has been described as "not a man, a movement": for many, he became a point of reference, much more than an architect or activist.

By late 1970s he began to receive recognition as the pioneer of the 'cost-effective, environment-conscious, culturally appropriate' architecture of India. He was on the governing bodies of Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO), the National Institute of Design (NID) and many others. He also received honours such as the Padmashri from the Government of India.

In 1985, following an initiative taken by C Achuta Menon, ex-CM of Kerala, a group of like-minded people formed a non-profit organisation, Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development (COSTFORD), to support and propagate his philosophy and systems of architecture. In Bakerji's absence, Costford and other similar groups and individuals will strive to preserve his legacy.

# Bengal leads in hunger

MILINDO CHAKRAVARTI

**R**ECENTLY, Anuradha Talwar, advisor to the Supreme Court regarding a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on hunger, submitted her report to the chief secretary, government of West Bengal. Her report confirmed two deaths: that of Shankar Gosain (18) in Ramjhora Tea Garden of Jalpaiguri district on March 5, and Sarkinath Tirkey, 35 – a wage labourer in the same tea garden, a few days later. Cause of death: hunger.

Ramjhora is one of the 16-odd tea gardens in Jalpaiguri which was closed or abandoned and remains so till date. About 15,000 workers were rendered jobless. The owners of the gardens claim that operating the gardens is no more economical, even though tea prices have risen. The 'difficulties' faced by the management have been an 'acceptable' excuse to default not only on the payment of gratuities and provident fund dues to the retiring workers, but also that of regular wages to the existing ones, before closing or abandoning the gardens. There have been more than a thousand deaths in these tea gardens so far. State officials are quick to clarify that the deaths are due to illness and not to malnutrition and hunger!

About 20 out of every 1,000 rural households in India do not get adequate food for a few months in a year (seasonal hunger). Another four out of 1,000 such households remain hungry throughout the year (chronic hunger). A survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in 2004-05 and published recently reveals that India is not 'shining' so much.

In the social groups, seasonal hunger is the most prevalent among the STs (37 out of every 1,000 rural tribal households) while chronic hunger is the highest among the SCs (seven out of every 1,000 rural Dalit households). The incidence of both seasonal and chronic poverty among those falling under general castes is higher than that among OBCs. While 10 out of 1,000 rural OBC households suffer from seasonal hunger, and two are victims of chronic hunger, the corresponding figures for households belonging to the residual category (those falling outside the STs, SCs and OBCs) are 19 and six respectively.

Consider occupational differentials. The prevalence of seasonal hunger is the highest among agricultural labourers (51 out of every 1,000 agricultural labourer households). Non-agricultural labourer households suffer the most from chronic hunger (nine out of 1,000). Land-owning self-employed households are the least affected.

The locational differences are much more glaring. As many as 108 rural households out of every 1,000 in West Bengal suffer from seasonal hunger, while 13 are victims of chronic hunger. States closer to West Bengal are Orissa (48 out of 1,000 face seasonal hunger and 13 out of 1,000 suffer from chronic hunger), Chhattisgarh, Kerala, and Bihar. Although the incidence of seasonal hunger is comparatively low in Assam (17 out of 1,000), it records the highest incidence of chronic hunger (36 out of 1,000).

Let us attempt a comparison. The incidence of hunger in rural India obviously declined between 1993-94 and 2004-05, even though the rate of decline in seasonal hunger was perceptible between 1993-94 and 1999-2000. The decline in the incidence of chronic hunger has been much rapid between 1999-2000 and 2004-05.

The data for 1993-94 does not provide the break-up of hunger in terms of social and occupational classes. So we can compare only between the estimates available for 1999-2000 and 2004-05. Across occupational classes, the incidence of seasonal hunger increased for the rural agricultural labourer households (from 49 per 1,000 to 51 per thousand) with the rest recording a considerable decline. Chronic hunger declined across all occupational classes.

The results are encouraging as we compare the change in the status of hunger

among the marginalised social groups and the OBCs. There has, however, been a marginal increase in seasonal hunger among the rural households falling under the residual category (from 18 per 1000 to 19 per 1000).

In 2004-05, 17 out of 1,000 rural households in India did not get two square meals a day for a period of one to three months. Five out of 1,000 households suffered for almost the whole year. During 1999-2000, the corresponding figures were 22 and 7 respectively. However, the period of time when the incidence of seasonal hunger was perceptibly higher had shifted. While in 1983-84 and 1999-2000, a larger number of rural households faced hunger during the months of August and September, a higher incidence of hunger was recorded during the months of January and February in 2004-05.

The survey data for 2004-05 also informs us about the incidence of hunger among the rural households brought under the targeted public distribution system (TPDS) – namely, the Antodaya Scheme and those issued the BPL (below poverty line) card. Incidence of hunger is more among those under the ambit of the TPDS.

Are the marginalised sections better off in rural West Bengal compared to their counterparts in the country? The answer is no. Incidence of seasonal hunger increased among the tribal and Dalit households between 1999-2000 and 2004-05. It also increased among those belonging to the residual class. Only those

belonging to the OBCs recorded some improvement. Meanwhile, chronic hunger increased among the OBCs, while a considerable decline occurred among the rest of the social classes.

The incidence of hunger – both seasonal and chronic – among the Dalits and tribals is estimated to be the highest in West Bengal. While breaking up the rural households in terms of occupational categories, we find that the incidence of seasonal hunger among agricultural labourers increased between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 (from 150 to 233 per 1,000). Non-agricultural labourer households (from 44 to 89 per 1000), and the

self-employed in agriculture also met with the same fate. The self-employed section involved in non-agricultural activities experienced a marginal improvement in the hunger profile.

From an overall perspective, the hunger profile improved marginally compared to that obtained in 1993-94. In 1993-94, 111 out of 1,000 rural households faced seasonal hunger. The incidence of chronic hunger was 30 out of 1,000. The situation improved appreciably in 1999-2000 with the corresponding figures being 81 and 23. The trend reversed in 2004-05 with 106 out of 1,000 rural households facing seasonal hunger again. The incidence of chronic hunger appears to be moving southward though!

The TPDS could have played a positive role in reducing the incidence of hunger if implemented in letter and spirit. A study by Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission conducted in 2004 revealed that those eligible to receive the benefits from TPDS were not identified – exclusion error to the tune of 31.74 per cent – and thus refused the scheme's benefit, with a high leakage taking place through ghost ration cards.

The state government along with the party in power has been working on strengthening future prospects on a strong agriculture base developed over the last 30 years. Recently, 14 residents of Nandigram in East Midnapur were killed in police firing. They were protesting the takeover of their agricultural land by the state; a chemical hub is being planned on their land.

Which of these two is a greater crime committed by the government of West Bengal: killing its citizens by using bullets, or failing to prevent the starvation deaths of its people?

*E-mail: milindo62@gmail.com*

**The incidence of hunger both seasonal and chronic among Dalits and tribals is estimated to be the highest in West Bengal.**

## Rural surgeons are the future

Continued from page 30

to institute a post-graduate course in rural surgery. The request was turned down. Then Prof NH Antia took the lead in negotiating with the Indira Gandhi National Open University to start a course on rural surgery through distance learning. Prof Balu Sankaran supported the move. Five years were spent in the design and implementation of the course.

In 2005 however came the biggest breakthrough. The National Rural Health Mission came as a beam of light. The National Board of Examinations (NBE) of the ministry of health approached us to help them in designing and starting a post-graduate course in rural surgery. We are thankful to Prof Rajasekaran, Prof

Shyamprasad and Prof AK Sood of this board for taking this step. This is a three-year course after the basic degree of MBBS. Training will be imparted partly in rural hospitals and partly in nodal (multidisciplinary) hospitals.

Twelve hospitals have been selected for the course across the country. And admission will be on the basis of the aptitude of the young doctor which will be judged through an interview only. At the end of the course, the doctor will be able to perform all the functions that a rural surgeon does today. He will be able to choose technologies that people can afford. And it will be possible for him to introduce modern sophisticated technology gradually in a cost effective way.

Ninety-five per cent of all the health and medical care problems of any given community at any point of time do not require the skill of a super-specialist. A rural surgeon reduces the super-specialist's load of general care problems.

*E-mail: dali\_f23@yahoo.com*



# Living

## BODY & SOUL

**Be different, look within. There is always more to life. Reach out to alternatives. Heritage, eco-tourism, green cures, traditional foods, buy from NGOs, spiritual talk, organic counter, where to donate, where to volunteer, web watch.**

## Fly a little with TC

**Samita Rathor**  
New Delhi

I consider myself a Buddhist. Interdependence is one of the salient components of Buddhist philosophy and it has greatly influenced my life. I cannot function in this world without other people. If there are no seekers, there will be no providers. I am thankful to all those who have given me an opportunity to provide."

These are words spoken with compassion and humility by Tenzin Chogyal (TC to everyone), a Tibetan Buddhist working monk.

TC is a successful entrepreneur. He has been part of movies with Brad Pitt and worked with Jean-Jacques Annaud, Heinrich Harrer and Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

TC is also an expert in the architectural construction of sand mandalas and a producer of shows on Buddhism and philosophical issues for German and Swiss TV. He organises exclusive chartered flights for people coming from the US, Europe, Sri Lanka to see Dharamsala. TC runs spiritual Buddhist tours for his international and domestic patrons.

He is also a restaurateur.

At five feet TC stands tall with his extraordinary awareness of surroundings. Just back from a Buddhist pilgrimage with a group of 20 Europeans, Tenzin smiles and in a reflective manner speaks in one breath:

"We went to Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sarnath, Ajanta and Ellora caves, Nagarjunakonda and Nagarjuna Sagar, Amravati, Tibetan monasteries, Kushinagar, Vaisali, Lumbini and Sravasti. Indian people who have not encountered the magnificence of these places are really missing something in life. We are off again with a larger group this time to more Buddhist pilgrimage sites."

TC was born in Shimla in 1964. His parents like thousands of others escaped from Tibet in 1959. Eight years young and he was put in the Hunsur monastery in south India. His parents did not know much about the outside world. So with all good intentions they considered the monastery the best environment for his development.

In the 70's unlike the current scenario, the monasteries had no modern educational facilities. For a child, studying scriptures and working in the fields were the only options. TC had never seen a classroom in his life. The only form of education known to him was the *guru-shishya parampara*. Soon with the help of his teachers and friends he picked up English. Very few Tibetans in those days could speak the language and Tenzin took the initiative since that was the only other way of communication with the outside world.

As he grew up he got involved with raising funds for the monasteries. Tenzin explains, "We were the first group of Tibetans who were invited internationally to exhibit Tibet's sacred art of mandala construction. The idea was to evoke interest in a 2,500 year old Tibetan tradition and culture to



Buddhist monks design a mandala

raise funds primarily for our monasteries."

At that moment TC realised how uncomfortable it made him feel asking people for money. At the same time based on his travel experiences, he realised how much the human race respected the endangered Buddhist cultural heritage and he was glad to help preserve it. "I have never been able to leave India because culture is so strong and fascinating here. Buddhism originated in India. I was serious about showcasing Buddhist culture to humankind. I know how much it is cherished. I do not want it to fade away from the world. In that way I am encouraged to toil on it."

His interest in promoting the cultural wealth of India to the rest of the world grew. TC thought deeply and then started Clear Path Tours in 1992.

"I saw it as a valuable resource," says TC. "Rather than do something without deep significance, I felt that providing groups with an opportunity to experience this culture would be more relevant. I got very good response and people were very happy after experiencing these pilgrimages. This convinced me further, making me more hopeful to take further tours. I want people to have a better quality of life through these pilgrimages and become better human beings. This is what the world needs today." Looking a little meditative he continues, "Politically it's tough for the Tibetans. In the meantime if we lose our culture, I don't see the point of getting the land. Land is everywhere; it's the same. Tibet is only good to have when the culture remains."

TC's love for India makes him describe the country as a



TC with Hollywood hero, Brad Pitt

Continued on page 34

## GREEN CURES

### Ask Dr GG



I am 24 years old and I work as a sales executive. I do a lot of field work. As a result I have to travel great distances. I get very bad prickly heat. I have tried many prickly heat powders but they have no effect. Please tell me what I should do.

*Avinash Jaiswal, New Delhi*

Buy Mushta root (*Cyperus esculentus*), Nimba bark (*Azadirachta indica*) and Kushtha bark (*Costus speciosus*) from the raw drug market in Delhi. Take one handful of each. Boil in one litre of water, filter and add to your bath water. Bathe with this water. Or you can place this herbal water in your bath tub and immerse yourself in it for 10 – 15 minutes.

If you have time and patience, buy khas khas powder (*Vetiveria zizanioides*) and mix it with Mustha powder (*Cyperus esculentus*). Make a very fine powder out of it, like talcum powder and keep it on your dressing table. Apply on your body especially on sweaty areas. If you do this regularly you will forget that you had such a problem.

But this needs a little bit of preparation, because none of the items are available ready-made in the market.

I am a 28 year old call centre employee. My problem is body odour. It gets worse in summer. Although I bathe twice a day, I still don't smell good. I have tried many imported deodorants but they make my skin itch. Do you know of any natural method of controlling body odour?

*Anita Trivedi, Gurgaon*

Body odour is due to excess fat in the body. Go for a walk every morning to burn fat. Take a purgative once a month for 12 months regularly. You can use Avipathi Choornam which is available in any ayurvedic shop. Take 20 gm of this choorna with hot milk in the morning on an empty stomach. Follow by drinking a lot of warm water at a regular interval till your bowel is clean. This is a natural way of reducing fat.

Don't take any preparation made from urad dal like idli, vada etc.

Apply every day a paste made from red sandal wood powder mixed with vetiver powder. This will keep you odour free. You have to follow all these three processes concurrently.

I am 21 years old and I am applying for my first job in an airline. I want to

be part of the cabin crew. The problem is I have pimples on my face. My friends have told me that my chances of getting this job are not good because of my complexion. Please help me with some advice.

*Devinder Singh, Panipat*

Pimples are a sign of youth and strength. But if it is a threat to your new job, follow the advice given below:

Apply on your face, fine powder made from neem bark mixed with fresh lemon juice. Slowly massage the paste on your face everyday in the morning for five minutes and then remove it with warm water. Make sure that your eyes are closed while doing this, so that the medicine does not irritate your eyes.

Apply at night a powder by the name of Lavanya available at Delhi's Arva Vaidya Pharmacy shop (tel. no. 25785687) mixed with unboiled milk on your face. Do it for two weeks.

Don't take deep fried food or fermented food like wine and bakery items. Don't have curd either. Take lots of butter milk, steam cooked vegetables and fruits.

This will not only remove your pimples, but give shape and strength to your complexion and to you.

I am 32 years old and I work for a grassroots NGO. I do a lot of field work so I go out in the sun quite often. My skin gets dark, blotchy and dry because of sun burn. I have tried many new face creams which claim to protect skin but these have not helped me. Please help.

*Sangeeta Bakshi, Jaipur*



*Azadirachta indica*

People who are over exposed to sunlight should undergo a daily oil massage. The best oil for this is Nalpamaradi oil mixed with Eladi oil. The oils are available in Ayurvedic shops in Delhi. Oil should be applied profusely to the body. Do a light massage. While having a bath, don't remove the oil with soap. Use green gram powder or besan (gram flour) powder. This will protect the body from the sun.

People who are exposed to the sun everyday should take at least one tablespoon of pure cow's ghee in their diet with hot food followed by warm water, so that the digestion is complete. Never go out in the sun without covering your head and feet. These are the two portions of the body, which radiate heat to the internal organs the most. So protect these parts always. When you are under the sun take plenty of water, more than your body actually requires. This is to help the skin maintain proper density which will prevent undue effect of the sun's heat on the body.

Normally Indian skin is made by nature such that ordinary exposure to sunlight will not affect the body. The above instructions are for people who are exposed to sun more often.

*Dr G G Gangadharan is a Joint Director at FRLHT, Bangalore. E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frlht.org*

## Fly a little with TC

Continued from page 33

'Live Life'. He feels that India is a cultural and spiritual live wire. His guided pilgrimages are only a means of preserving this heritage.

"We started Clear Path Tours more than a decade ago and have extended hospitality to thousands of pilgrims and tourists who have visited India in groups ranging from 10 to 500 people. We have been sought after because we go the extra mile. We make their stay and travel in India, a memorable experience. We don't treat our patrons as just tourists but guests to our home and country. Care is taken in every minute detail to ensure total comfort. We don't just show them the monuments around India, we narrate history, mythology, and folk tales... we make their trip to India, meaningful. Today you can study Buddhism in universities all over the world. But the truth is Buddhism was born in India and hearing is different from feeling and touching."

Tenzin offers two different tours to his patrons. One is *Footsteps of the Buddha*, a unique, guided tour to the famous places of Buddhist pilgrimage. It aims to create within the traveller an atmosphere of peace, tranquility and a sense of connectedness with fellow beings and environments, precisely the essence of the Buddha's teachings. The second, *A Tribute to Nagarjuna*, is a tour with a Tibetan monk to important but little known places of Buddhist pilgrimage in southern India. It combines the ancient Buddhist sites in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh with Tibetan monasteries and temples in Karnataka.

The patrons are accompanied by an English speaking Tibetan monk, who

gives guided tours to all the sacred places and also organises the logistics. Meditation and puja at the main sites are led by the guided monk. A lecture on the basics of Mahayana Buddhism and meditation by a learned Tibetan master in a Tibetan monastery in south India are a unique part of the tour. Good hotel accommodation, clean and hygienic food at an economical price is another highlight of the tour.

"The current generation is the future of the country," says TC. He provides international students, who are interested in living and working in the monasteries and villages, a direct feel of not only Buddhist but also Indian culture. Just being in India learning and living with the bare minimum is a unique experience for these students, says TC.

TC is also a painter, with a keen interest in Indian art and culture. He loves driving long distance, enjoys theatre and meeting free and open minded people. In Bodhgaya, he produced a film on the Life of Buddha. It was scripted and directed by Bubbles Sabarwal and Lushen Dubey. Tucked away in the outer circle of Connaught Place, his restaurant Tibet Kitchen serves up Tibetan cuisine.

The sacred art of sand Mandala construction is his favourite. "It is an art of impermanence, like everything else in life," he explains. TC has taken part in creating an intricate five feet mandala, internationally.

Tenzin, in his effortless, direct tone summarises his objective. "I follow my dreams. Yes, sometimes I know it can be risky business. I have no backing or support, but I am confident."

And what does Clear Path mean to him? "It's simple, if you want to travel you need a path and my path is that of logic and simplicity. Logic and simplicity provide clarity. Clarity makes us positive. A positive cause produces positive results. If we are positive then we are happy and internal happiness can provide a clear path for all the future travels of our lifetime."

# Making tiffin light and right

**D**OCTORS and nutritionists are watching with horror the expanding Indian waistline. There was a time when a bigger middle was accepted resignedly as a natural corollary to prosperity and ageing. Not so any more. Indian children are growing in breadth. Metabolic diseases like diabetes are striking the young. Research shows that such diseases now begin 10 years earlier than they used to.

The Indian diet is loaded with calories. Combine that with a sedentary lifestyle of watching TV or fiddling with a PC and you have a recipe for disaster. The Diabetes Foundation of India which has been fanning across schools to educate children, parents and teachers on a healthy lifestyle has produced a range of posters and educative material. We present their mix of nutritious recipes so that your child can eat right, stay light and be bright.

## Frozen fruit delight

### Ingredients

**Toned milk:** 1 glass (250 ml)

**Rice flour:** 10 gm (2 tsp)

**Sugar:** 10 gm

**Apple:** 20 gm

**Pear:** 20 gm

**Pineapple:** 20 gm

**Pomegranate:** 40 gm

**Orange:** 20 gm

**Method:** Boil milk with rice flour. Simmer for five minutes. Add 2 tsp of sugar and allow to cool. Add half tea-

spoon of vanilla essence. Dice apple, pineapple, pear, pomegranate and orange. Add the fruits to the milk mixture. Place dessert in the refrigerator and serve chilled.

## Grilled corn kebabs

### Ingredients

**Corn:** 40 gm

**Cabbage:** 20 gm

**Potato:** 70 gm

**Carrot:** 20 gm

**Oil:** 1 tsp

**Method:** Steam corn and



finely diced carrots. Allow to cool. Grate cabbage and mash the boiled potatoes. Mix all the ingredients after adding salt and pepper. Divide the mixture into small balls of uniform size. Put kebabs on greased skewer over sticks and grill in a pre heated oven of 175 degrees for 10 minutes. Serve hot with mint cucumber chutney.

## Brown bread upma

### Ingredients

**Brown bread:** 25 gm (1 pc)

**Peas:** 20 gm

**Capsicum:** 20 gm

**Beans:** 20 gm

**Carrot:** 20 gm

**Oil:** 1 tsp

**Method:** Finely chop the vegetables like carrot, beans,

capsicum and shelled peas.

Splutter mustard seeds and curry leaves in 1 tsp of refined oil. Add the vegetables and sauté.

Grind fresh brown bread in grinder and mix it with the sautéed vegetables. Cook for a while and then squeeze fresh lemon juice. Serve hot.

## Brown bread sandwich

### Ingredients

**Brown bread:** 60 gm (2 pcs)

**Capsicum:** 20 gm

**Cucumber:** 20 gm

**Carrot:** 20 gm

**Curd:** 40 gm

**Method:** Grate cucumber, carrot and capsicum. Mix it with curd. Add salt and pepper and make it a smooth paste. Cut whole wheat/ brown bread in circular rounds. Spread the vegetable paste evenly on both rounds and seal the edges with water. Grill in a preheated oven at 150 degrees for 10 minutes or on a non-stick tawa for five minutes. Serve hot.

## Vegetable cheela

### Ingredients

**Besan:** 30 gm

**Curd:** 20 gm

**Cabbage:** 20 gm

**Carrot:** 15 gm

**Oil:** 1 tsp

**Method:** Mix besan with curd to form a batter of dropping consistency. Keep aside and allow to ferment for 2 hours. Grate carrot and cabbage. Add these to the fermented batter along with salt and pepper. Prepare cheela on a non-stick tawa like a pancake. Serve hot with chutney.

## Tofu tikka

### Ingredients

**Tofu:** 80 gm

**Capsicum:** 20 gm

**Tomato:** 20 gm

**Toned curd:** 50 gm

**Turmeric:** ½ tsp

**Black cardamom powder:** ½ tsp

**Method:** Mix curd with salt, black pepper, cardamom powder and coriander powder. Keep aside. Cut tofu, tomato and capsicum into cubes or different shapes and mix the pieces with the curd mixture. Allow to marinate for half an hour. Put these marinated cubes into a greased skewer and grill in a preheated oven at 175 C for 15 minutes. Serve hot with chutney.

Diabetes Foundation (India).  
Ph.: 011-41759672

## SHOPPING MALL

**B**uy these beautiful eco-friendly products handcrafted by two self-help groups: the Thendral Magalir Kootamaipu (TMK) and the Kanamalai Integrated Tribal Women Development Society (KIDS). There are table mats, tea trays, fruit baskets, paper bins, lunch bags and lots more all deftly woven by tribal and scheduled caste women of Padavedu, a remote village in the Thiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu.

**Lunch Bag:** ▶  
Rs 250

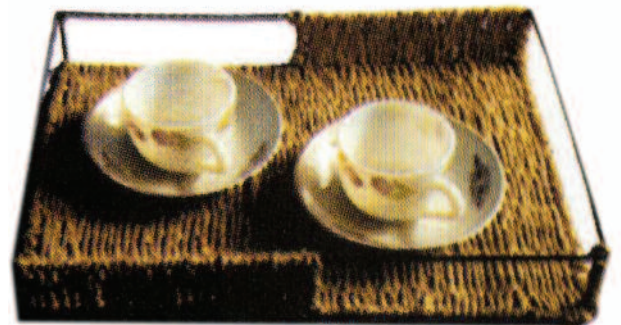


▶ **Set of Boxes:** Rs 350



▶ **Laundry Basket:**  
Rs 450

▶ **Tea Tray:** Rs 155



▶ **Fruit Basket:**  
Rs 130



▶ **Table Mat:** Rs 65



The two SHGs are being given all support by the Srinivasan Services Trust, set up by Sundaram Clayton Ltd and TVS Motor Company Ltd.

**Contact:** TVS Site Office, Opposite Indian Bank Padavedu, Thiruvannamalai district, Tamil Nadu 606 905

Ph: 04181 248279/248246

E-mail: sst@scl.co.in sponvaithy@yahoo.co.in

Website: www.tvssst.org



## SOUL VALUE

# Silence is music for the soul

Samita Rathor  
New Delhi

SILENCE is not so much a lack of sound but a nurturing of inner tranquility. This inner tranquility of mind is a very essential prerequisite for any individual's quest into a spiritual journey of the self.

Silence is a fence around wisdom. A silent mind, free from the perpetual assault of thoughts and thought patterns, is a goal as well as an important step in spiritual development. Inner silence is understood to bring one in contact with the divine or the ultimate reality of this moment. All religious traditions imply the importance of being calm and tranquil in mind and spirit for a transformation and spiritual growth to occur.

How many times have you listened to chanting and realised that you were transported to a place beyond space and time, beyond thinking and feeling, beyond joy and sorrow – a journey into the sublime? Silence can be evoked through listening to our sacred chants and scriptures.

"To share vedic chants is to share an experience of silence through listening, a process of healing, and a link with nature, the deeper self and the divine", says Shri TKV Desikachar, renowned teacher and guide and founder of the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram.

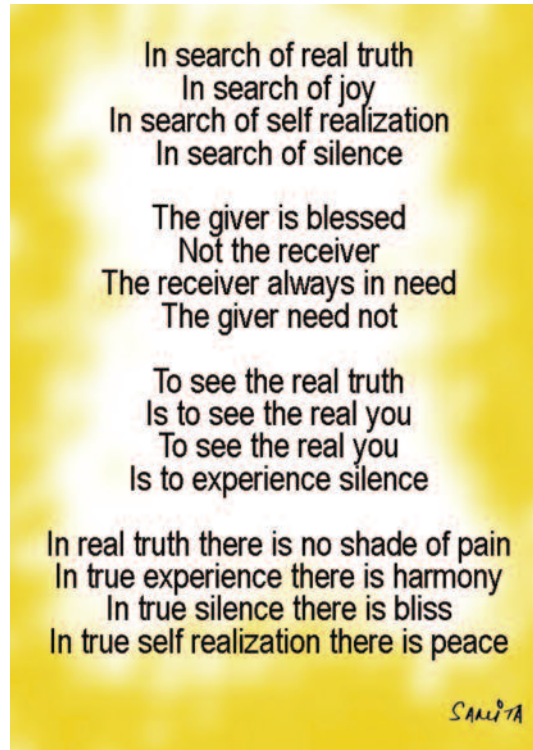
The conventional dictionary connotation says, 'silence' is a relative or total lack of sound. The word silence is derived from the Latin word 'Silens', meaning to be still, quiet, or at rest. Speech, or shabda as it is known in Sanskrit, is an expression of prana shakti or pranic force. We waste a lot of energy in speech. If we examine what we speak through the day, we will realise that very little speech is actually constructive. The more we speak the more pranic energy we lose; the less we speak the more pranic energy we conserve.

There are times when you must have felt exhausted after talking for a long time. This happens due to the loss of pranic energy. So if we can conserve our speech, we can preserve the pranic energy. Precision in speech not only helps us conserve energy but also gives more supremacy. It can make us more focused and concentrated.

Silence is also important when we eat. It helps us to preserve pranic energy and direct the same to fulfill the digestive functions properly. If you can practice absolute silence while eating, your digestion will improve. If you do not talk during meals, observe how well your digestive system functions.

Then go back to your regular habit of chatting and see how your system is affected. Try it and see the difference!

Silence and reflection cause no dejection. Silence helps us to reflect and come closer to our real selves. Obviously, it could reflect many different psychic states and qualities of feeling. It might support a state of harmony, disparity, happiness, discontentment, resentment, or serenity. The silence



could be a sign of wisdom and compassion; or it might indicate emptiness and complete lack of effect. Being silent could also be scary for some who are constantly using noise as a magnet around them due to fear of coming close to the truth about themselves. "Silence is the true friend that never betrays," says Confucius.

Maintaining even an outer silence – keeping our mouths shut – is more difficult than we might imagine. Much more difficult is maintaining an inner silence – the absence of thought. Just try not to think about anything for a minute! To those who would seek a spiritual path, there is one requirement that for many is daunting and turns them away. That requirement is silence. The capacity to sit quietly, to avoid the distraction of the TV, laptop or the cell phone is becoming a rare ability. Perhaps we get easily bored. Or perhaps we are afraid.

The truth is when we are silent we don't always become serene. Sometimes old hurtful memories emerge. Sometimes we are faced with grief we've been avoiding. Or perhaps we become aware of those dark corners of ourselves that we don't like to admit. Yet such confrontations are an integral facet of a spiritual journey. They tend not to show themselves until we are quiet. Noise lets us ignore our most difficult struggle and our most precious possession: our true and profound 'Self'. Very often, it is painful to face one's true inner core. It is hard to be absolutely honest with oneself. We fool ourselves, and the noise and distractions of life help us in this effort. Constant external stimuli and occurrences allow us to avoid dealing with our inner being.

Genuine spiritual heights can only be attained through introspection, which only comes through the medium of silence.

At the same time the 'sound of silence' is not always terrifying. Perhaps it may help one to tap a new level of creativity. Perhaps it will deepen an understanding. Or perhaps it will simply build bridges with nature. All extremely rare commodities, difficult to buy in the shopping malls.

According to Sri Ramana Maharshi: Mouna (silence) is the best and the most potent diksha (initiation). Silent initiation changes the hearts of all. Silence is ever speaking. It is a perennial flow of language, which is interrupted by speaking. Silence is said to be exposition; it is so potent.

For vocal speech, the organs of speech are necessary and they precede speech. But the other speech lies even beyond thought. Silence is the true upadesa (teachings). This silence is not the absence of sound. It is not even the absence of thought. It is the blossoming of our strong inner will. It is that dynamic quality which characterises true meditation - the very act of facing ourselves, accepting the silence. The seeker who meditates is a divine warrior who faces suffering, ignorance and darkness and tries to establish the kingdom of wisdom - light. And with perseverance, we reach the depths of our being, our true self. When we meditate, what we actually do is enter into a vacant, calm, still, silent mind. We go deep within and approach our true existence, which is our soul. Meditation is that listening, attentively and in silence, to the voice of the Absolute within us. There is a special way to listen to the voice of God, and that is to meditate in silence. Then there is no tomorrow, there is no such thing even as today. It is all now. The eternal Now is the only reality.

WHERE  
ARE WE  
BEING  
READ?

## Civil Society is going places...

Delhi, Dhaka, Trivandrum, Tennerife, Nadia, Nagpur, Kolkata, Ghaziabad, Washington, Geneva, Bhubaneshwar, Ladakh, Paris, Bangalore, Mumbai, Meerut, London, New York, Versailles, Dehradun, Chandigarh, Belgaum, Dibang Valley, Shillong, Patna, Shimla, Ahmedabad, Panjim, Hyderabad, Singapore, Porto Alegre, Gurgaon, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Lucknow, Surrey, Srinagar, Manali, Pune, Peechi, Pondicherry...

**Civil Society**

READ US. WE READ YOU

■■■ committed to effective giving

CAF

**Readers who want to volunteer with or donate to the NGOs listed on these pages can get in touch with Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). Please fill up the form at the end of the list. All NGOs have been validated by CAF. So go ahead and choose your cause.**

### Action for Autism

**Focus:** Supporting the rights of people with autism and multiple disabilities.

Action for Autism works nationally. It has a range of activities and programmes:

- Diagnosis and assessment of children with autism.
- Education through a specialised school for children with autism called Open Door.
- Recognising the lack of trained professionals to teach children with autism and to cater to the increasing demand for its services, AFA started its own Teacher Training Programme, which has today become a one-year diploma in Special Education DSE-ASD under the Rehabilitation Council of India.
- Family and parent skill-building through counselling, early intervention, home management and mother & child programs as well as parent-support groups.
- Training of parents and professionals through training workshops.
- Resource provision through AFA's resource centre, the AFA journal, Autism Network and website.
- Advocacy and awareness.

#### Funding needed for:

Sponsoring children: Annual cost per child for the mother-child programme is Rs 5,500. This amount sponsors one child, annually.  
Cost of a professional therapist: Rs 5,000.

### Animal India Trust

**Focus:** Medical care for the street and stray canine population of Delhi.

Animal India Trust was established in March 2002 to help improve the lives of street animals and to promote public awareness of rabies in New Delhi. Its focus is:

- To neuter and provide rabies and vaccination programs.
- Provide assistance to injured or sick animals found on the streets.
- Free medical treatment to pets of economically disadvantaged people.
- Placement of orphaned street puppies in loving homes.

#### Funding needed for:

Sterilisation of stray dogs: Rs 800.00 per dog.  
Anti-rabies vaccination of stray dogs: Rs 150 per dog.

### Astha

**Focus:** Providing services to children/persons with disabilities and

their families with special focus on communities.

Astha was started in 1993. The rights of individuals with disabilities have been at the core of Astha's belief and work ethics. Astha's aim is to:

- Maximise awareness about the issue.
- Increase the accessibility of people with disability in society.
- Integrate children with disability into the mainstream.

#### Funding needed for:

Sponsor a child with special needs.

It costs just Rs 12,000 per annum. This will cover physiotherapy, speech therapy, special educator, art and craft. Or sponsor an event:

One event costs Rs 5,000. This may be for annual picnic/festival celebrations/Sports Day.

### Ritinjali

**Focus:** Education and community development.

Ritinjali was started in 1996 with the aim of working in the field of education and community development.

- Their aim is to provide holistic education towards nurturing empowered, responsible citizens who will be capable of providing not only for themselves but also contributing actively to their local communities through enterprise, self awareness and self induced social responsibility.

#### Funding needed for:

• Education for slum children: Annual cost per child : Rs.6,300 to support education material, one meal a day, entertainment and healthcare.

### Tihar Jail, New Delhi

Ritinjali provides counselling, rehabilitation and legal representation services to juvenile inmates aged 16 to 21. You can volunteer for legal assistance, counseling and advocacy programs .

### Ritinjali's Second Chance School, Mahipalpur, New Delhi

A school for youth who did not get the first chance. You can volunteer for youth mentoring, vocational training, placement, employment programs and entrepreneurship programs.

### Sahara House

**Focus:** Support for the Chemical and Alcohol Dependent and HIV/AIDS Infected/Affected Individuals.

Sahara means support, and since 1978, Sahara House has been a refuge, spearheading the provision of effective treatment to drug users, alcoholics, the mentally challenged and those infected/affected by HIV/AIDS.

This residential care facility focuses on counselling with sessions covering detoxification, medical attention, physical education, self-development, financial and household management.

Other programme areas include:

- Drug awareness and prevention through its street theatre group.
- Income generation opportunities to its beneficiaries.
- A pre and post-kindergarten school in Sahara House for destitute and deprived children.

#### Funding needed for:

Drug Rehabilitation Programme: Cost per client per month: Rs.4, 290 which will take care of drug de-addiction, food supplies, psycho-social support.

HIV/AIDS Treatment Care & Support Programme:

Cost per bed per day: Rs 475 which will take care of food, medicines, referral, diagnostic cost, medical support, supplies, linen etc.

Individual donors can give any amount they wish. The money can be used by the home to buy dry rations, medicines, computers and for a water cooler at the men's rehabilitation centre.

### Vidyarambam Trust, Chennai

**Focus:** Education for underprivileged children.

Vidyarambam Trust, established in 2002, is a non-profit organisation with a mission to provide basic literacy to children in the age group 3-5 in the villages of Tamil Nadu.

The main objectives of the organisation are:

- To provide primary education for underprivileged children irrespective of their caste, creed and religion.
- To run educational institutions, acquire and run existing educational institutions through any media and not for the purpose of profit.
- To provide for endowment lectures, fellowships or chairs in any educational institution to encourage, develop and promote study in any field of medical science.
- To establish and assist institutions for the purpose of imparting education of a general or technical nature like arts, science, engineering, medical, sidda, ayurvedic, homeopathy, unani.

#### Funding needed for:

• Pre- primary education: This programme addresses the basic educational needs of economically underprivileged children in the age group of 3 to 5 years to enable them to get into mainstream schooling with ease. • The method of teaching has been evolved by experts in early childhood education adopting playway methods. The children enjoy learning and would never be averse to education thereafter.

• Remedial courses: The students studying from Class 2 to Class 6 do lack basic knowledge of language and skills of simple arithmetic. • Such children are identified by conducting a pre-test. Simple ways are employed in a remedial course, the duration of which is four months, to develop the skill of rapid reading and basic arithmetic. • Evaluations are made by a post-test and 90 percent of the students reach the desired level.

- Volunteering is very useful in conducting pre-tests and post-tests to gauge the skill levels of children enrolled in the remedial course.
- Volunteers are needed to conduct community surveys to find out areas where these programs will be required to be executed.

### Sivasri Charitable Trust, Bangalore

**Focus:** To evolve a sustainable and replicable model for an effective and decentralised public school system based on good management practices.

Sivasri Charitable Trust is a registered charitable trust with

Sikshana as its unique effort. It aims to improve learning levels in the public education system at primary level.

Sikshana's core focus is to provide:

- Additional classrooms where space is critical.
- Personal computers and multimedia content.
- An improved environment in existing classrooms including midday meals, power, water supply, sanitation, additional teachers wherever required, teaching aids, notebooks etc.
- Incentives for students to excel through prizes and scholarships.
- Re-orientation and re-training for staff.
- Quantified targets and performance measures at each stage and in each school.
- A strong library movement.

Working in collaboration with the government, Sikshana believes that any meaningful effort needs to be effected from within the system by using its strengths and overcoming its weaknesses. It is within this paradigm that Sikshana aims to evolve a sustainable and replicable model for an effective and decentralised public school system based on good management practices.

#### Funding needed for:

• Scholarships: We need support for the Sikshana programme in 31 of our 46 schools- estimated to cost Rs 167,400 annually at the rate of Rs 5,400 per school per annum. Though Sikshana is focused on primary schools, it has a component under which three meritorious children passing out of each school are supported through high school with scholarships of Rs 150 per month in order to ensure that they do not drop out because of economic compulsions. This step has also helped in creating a strong desire to perform and excel among students.

• Educational Tour: We would like to get support for this activity to cover all 46 schools and benefit 1,840 kids. The cost is assessed at Rs 4,60,000. Since Sikshana is essentially a motivational effort, a critical component is the educational tour that we sponsor in each school every year. Under this, we send all Students in Class 5 or Class 7 on a one day outing to a place of educational interest. Typically, this costs Rs 10,000 per school, which includes Rs 5,000 for transport and Rs 5,000 for food and incidental expenses. If the donor can provide a bus in the city, this cost can be pruned to Rs 5,000.

Volunteers, preferably with a botany, zoology and geology background are required for field trips. The objective is to study nature and environment, a key element of Sikshana. Our cluster of schools in Kanakapura is in the midst of impressive biodiversity. We need volunteers who can accompany the students on these day long trips and sensitise them. If the interested volunteers can also identify persons well versed in botany, zoology and/ or geology to join them on the trips, they will be even more productive for the participants. • • •

• Website and journal: We need volunteers who can help us improve the format and presentation of our website. This can also be extended to editing and printing of our house journal, *Sikshana Vaahini*. An interesting aspect is that a major part of the work can be managed from the

volunteer's place of work. •

## The Society for Door Step School, Mumbai

**Focus:** Education for underprivileged children.

The Society for the Door Step School is a non-profit organisation with a mission to impact reading and writing skills of children who are not able to attend school. It does so by following the non-formal education system. It has served more than 8,000 children annually with literacy programmes at over 40 sites in Mumbai and Pune.

Location: Mumbai

### Funding needed for:

- Sponsoring students: Sponsorship and other supportive measures offered by Door Step School have so far been concentrated on students of Class 1 to Class 4. • Its experience, gained through direct work with students, is that after completion of primary education the next stumbling block is the upper secondary or senior school, i.e. Class 8 to Class 10 and Class 12. Some seem to manage on their own but there are many who are struggling. This results in their dropping out of school despite their potential and inclination to continue. Door Step is seeking sponsorship to enable them to complete at least their schooling.

Sustaining them within the educational system not only furthers their interest for obvious reasons but also significantly prevents the under-18 from joining the ranks of child labour and continuing their education, which in turn improves their prospects for the future substantially. Educational sponsorship for these students through need based assistance is therefore essential.

- Sponsoring students of secondary school: approximately Rs 5,000 to Rs 6,000 per child.
- Repair and reconstruction of

## TRUE STORY

### Wag Tail

**At around three weeks of age, Jemima, a pup, was brought to the Animal India Trust (AIT) clinic. The vet at the clinic thought the most humane thing to do would be to euthanise her.**

**Pups of this age rarely survive the rigours of life at the clinic since they are unable to build immunity against diseases brought in by adult dogs. However, the vet could not bring herself to perform the deed.**

**The very next day one of AIT's volunteers, Mandy, came to the clinic and decided to foster the pup until a home could be found. It did not take long! Mandy told**

**her friend Beeya about the pup and Beeya straightaway decided that if no one else would adopt Jemima then she would take the pup to her horse riding school to be looked after by the horses. Beeya was introduced to Jemima. The two became inseparable and Beeya decided to try and persuade her husband that having a pet dog would be a good idea.**

**Beeya's husband was not very receptive initially even threatening to move out if the pup moved into the house. But Jemima's soulful eyes did the trick and soon won over the reticent husband. Now all three are a family and dog and master sleep in each other's arms.**

community based class rooms: Door Step School conducts classes in urban slum communities where it works offering a variety of age and level appropriate educational programmes. For this it uses space offered by the community, sometimes free and sometimes rented. In some cases, it has built structures on plots offered to us by the communities. These need to be repaired at intervals of 2-3 years due to the environment and wear and tear.

Repair and reconstruction of community based class rooms: approximately Rs 6,00,000

- Teaching maths, science and English: Students in secondary and higher secondary schools face a lot of difficulty in handling these subjects. • If volunteers could offer their time once or twice a week it would be very beneficial.
- Mentoring: This can be linked to any of our programmes or it can be offered to young persons seeking employment. Offering a chance to

spend time with the mentor on his or her office premises, observing and learning from interaction, the way tasks are handled, using or brushing up computer skills would give young people confidence and enable them to present themselves effectively. Some areas for mentoring are: personality development, English speaking, etiquette, presenting themselves, preparing for interviews, creative thinking, yoga and sports.

### Naandi Foundation, Hyderabad

**Focus:** Eradication of poverty through public-private convergence.

Naandi Foundation, based in Hyderabad, has been impacting the lives of the marginalised through innovative social alliances and entrepreneurship and promoting thought leadership on development issues by building a critical mass of media, academia, polity, corporates, communities and individuals for

solving problems.

Location: Hyderabad

### Funding needed for:

- Project Nanhi Kali: Only three out of every 10 girls that enrol in school in India complete Class 10. The rest drop out because their families cannot afford to keep them in school. This is the status of girl children in India. Sometimes it's the cost of a book or a pencil that leads to a girl child dropping out. And a girl out of school is more at risk of being exploited, overworked or married off early. Nanhi Kali is fighting to keep the girl child in school.

To begin a movement that assures every girl children her right to education and a life with dignity, Naandi Foundation together with the K C Mahindra Education Trust is jointly managing a project called Nanhi Kali. This is a special project that provides education and other material support to underprivileged girl children in government schools who are at the risk of dropping out from school.

The Nanhi Kali project supports the education of girl children through sponsorships. Naandi Foundation has already reached out to over 20,000 girls. The transformation process of girl child education has begun and now there is no looking back.

- Education: Assist Naandi's Education Activists who conduct academic support classes and academic performance assessments through monthly tests/evaluations at schools. This brings third party involvement in the assessment process.
- Girl children: Orient girls during special cluster meetings where tips on health and hygiene would be given by volunteers. Requirement here is for women volunteers. The volunteers would be provided training on the topics they would address during the health and hygiene meetings.

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Full information on CAF and other charity matters may be found on our - website: [www.cafonline.org](http://www.cafonline.org)

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