

Civil Society

IS DELHI MISSING THE BUS?

BRT struggles here, but look at the world

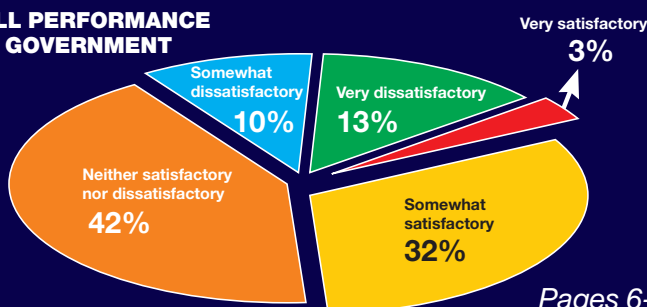


The Bus Rapid Transit system in Curitiba, Brazil

EXCLUSIVE OPINION POLL

UPA govt gets pass marks

OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT



Pages 6-9

WEST BENGAL'S SHAM RTI

Page 13

TASTY, FAT-FREE JUNGLE FOOD

Pages 12

A JUDGE IN ACTIVIST MODE

Page 25

SAVI'S DALIT ART

Page 32



COVER STORY

IS DELHI MISSING THE BUS?

Delhi's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system has had to face hurdles. One of the reasons is poor social marketing. Cities the world over are replacing cars with buses

18

UPA govt gets pass marks 6-9

Will someone please clean Bhopal? 10

Dr Binayak Sen spends a year in jail 11

Varanasi weavers wait for help 12

West Bengal's sham RTI 13

Tasty, fat-free jungle food 14

Mentaid's enterprising parents 16

Bamiyan's resolute governor 24

A judge in activist mode 25

Mumbai's housing chimera 28

America's horrible secret 34

Smoothen scars, pimples, burns 36

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Making BRT work

I have been one of the thousands of middle class motorists who have found construction of the bus rapid transit (BRT) project in Delhi a bit too much to cope with. Such is the chaos it has brought in its wake at the implementation stage that I have often wondered whether any good at all can come from the project when it is completed. In the absence of signage and traffic police, vehicles have gone helter-skelter. I have often found myself in the wrong lane and wasted precious time getting out of it.

I can therefore understand some of the anger against the BRT. But the fact is that the BRT is an idea gaining currency the world over. By dividing up urban road space so that buses are physically segregated, travel becomes quicker, safer, cheaper and less polluting. People also get the space to cycle and walk, which planners and politicians find improves the quality of life in a city, apart from making it more egalitarian.

If Indian cities are to be engines of growth and change, then to begin with they will have to be more inclusive in their services. If they don't move in this direction they will become tinderboxes of inequalities and social tension.

Delhi's problem has been that it does not have an Enrique Penalosa, the iconic Mayor of Bogota, to lead from in front. The BRT project suffers from poor social marketing. In the absence of a political vision, a good project has been left to fend for itself. The problem is one of governance. The police and the administration, councillors and MLAs, the high profile MPs from Delhi -- they all needed to be out there making things happen.

Penalosa's message is that the challenge in urban travel is more political than technical. We have to decide who our cities are meant for. If in Delhi 60 per cent of the commuters don't use cars, then we need to invest in buses, make way for cyclists and redesign our roads accordingly. It is really a no-brainer.

OPINION POLL: When the Congress-led UPA came to power, for the first time we saw a government partnering activists, NGOs and people's groups. Many of the UPA's election promises came from them and policies and legislation thereafter were drafted on their advice.

We thought it would be a good idea to assess what these groups now feel about the UPA's performance. We asked GfK MODE to undertake this exercise so as to have a representative sample from across the country and reduce subjectivity.

Clearly activists have much to be unhappy about. But the fact that the UPA gets pass marks means that this is a support base it can hope to continue to draw upon for framing its policies.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

AT THIS MOMENT AND AT THAT MOMENT I WISH
IT WAS THAT MOMENT INSTEAD OF THIS MOMENT!



Useful magazine

Educated, urban people have to struggle very hard to keep themselves updated about the many things happening around them, some of which they think they should keep track of.

What is remarkable about *Civil Society* magazine is that it provides a knowledge package which meticulously attends to modern priorities like environment, human rights, development initiatives and what creative people are doing. *Civil Society* reliably fills a critical information void for us.

Dhrubajyoti Ghosh

Future housing

Your editorial, 'The Future Housing' rightly pointed out that we need to rethink the way we build houses and apartments. We should not blindly imitate the west, but rely on the futuristic technologies your cover story has mentioned. These technologies need to be widely disseminated and promoted. Gandhi emphasized self reliance and so we should, as far as possible, grow our own water, use natural energy and recycle our own waste. No use looking to the government. It does not have any imagination or ideas on urban housing.

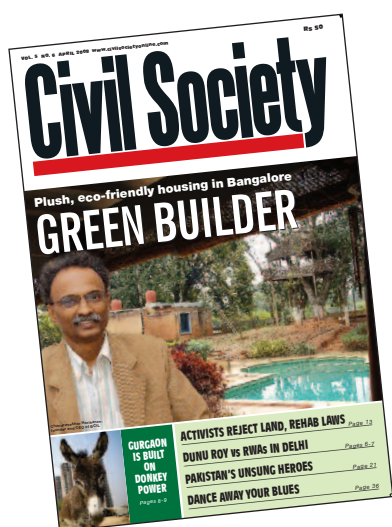
Gouri Behera

All environmentalists are opposed to high rises because of the big ecological footprint they create. But let's see the plus points. A city with high density and good public transport probably uses less energy because you don't need to drive miles into the suburbs. You don't create so much urban sprawl. Then, you save some poor farmer's land. If you consider our population, India is a land starved country. Today, we have to grow more food on less land and water, unlike the green revolution period. We have to create space in the sky.

Gayatri Venkatesh

It is very costly to live in the suburbs.

LETTERS



Gurgaon, for instance, has no public transport so you need to own a car. Strangely, you pay more for fruits and vegetables because a lot of it comes from the city's *mandi*. There seems to be a premium attached to everything. To live in comfort in the suburbs you have to be rich.

Alisha Goel

Ancient cities had high density. Houses were built close together. Inner lanes were very small. May be we should try building narrow inner roads. It will force people to walk, cycle, buy smaller cars and reduce noise. Some ancient cities, like in Rajasthan, were very artistically and sensibly built. Once again, we need to look at our own traditions for urban planning and modernize the best ones.

Ruchira Rathore

Donkey power

Your story on donkeys was superbly written and wrenched my heart. I really enjoyed reading it and I shared it with my friends. We feel very bad about the plight of the simple, humble, hard working donkey. We would

like to help. I think all construction sites should treat the donkey with due respect. The donkeys should be officially recognized as labour. In lieu of wages they should be given clean water, food and medical attention.

Kanika Garg

Your story on Gurgaon's donkeys was very interesting.

I think Gurgaon is facing a shortage of labour, so donkeys are being employed. Nothing wrong, I think it's a good thing they get jobs because it increases their value but they should be treated properly. Loads for them have to be much lighter. They should get breaks so that they can have water and relax a bit. NGOs can be appointed to check their condition, make sure they are not harmed and inflict punishment to those who violate.

Asmita Sinha

Sulabh toilets

I want to say that I am so glad that Sulabh's toilets are doing well in Kabul. They must have improved the design and management of their toilet facilities. From the pictures I can see the place is clean. Sometimes going global motivates an organisation to improve itself hugely. Sulabh has innovated several eco-friendly methods to take care of sewage. They are pioneers in this.

Ashish Gulati

Pakistan's heroes

It was really surprising to read about Mohammad Ali Shah, leader of the Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum. I had not realized that Pakistan too has an active civil society movement. The general impression here is that Pakistan had no democracy so it had no peoples' leaders. Tell us more.

Raman Iyengar

Adil Jawad has written a nice article on Mohammed Ali Shah. I enjoyed reading it. I found it heartening that the

“ If this Government were to really concentrate on meeting the objectives of what it calls its flagship programme, the NREGA, it could put rural India on the road to fundamental change and development. ”

Aruna Roy

Activist, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan

“ When the officer is penalized for not giving information asked for, the penalty is deducted from his salary. It is the penalties that can bring in transparency. Unless penalties are invoked, officers will never care to part with information. ”

Malay Bhattacharyya

Secretary, RTI Manch, West Bengal

fisher folk forum here collaborates with them. This is truly people to people contact. South Asian NGOs, who collaborate across borders can do very good work because of the rich experience they can share.

Shiraz D'Sousa

India stories

I don't much like your India stories. Too much of so called 'good news' is thrown in there. We are facing a number of crises. Agriculture is in decline, forests are degraded, poverty is rampant, villages and cities are in a mess. Then, farmers are committing suicide, the crime rate is spiraling and poverty is not going away. The bureaucracy and capitalists are raiding this country. You should expose all the scams that are taking place.

Amit Chatterji

A correction

In our story, 'Green Builder' it was wrongly stated that T-Zed apartments takes 30 per cent of water from the municipality. T-Zed takes no water from the municipality.

Editor

CIVIL SOCIETY- GfK MODE POLL

UPA govt gets pass marks

Activists weigh CMP performance

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has just about received pass marks from social sector leaders across the country in an opinion poll conducted for *Civil Society* by GfK MODE.

Asked to rate the performance of the government in the past four years, 42 per cent of the respondents

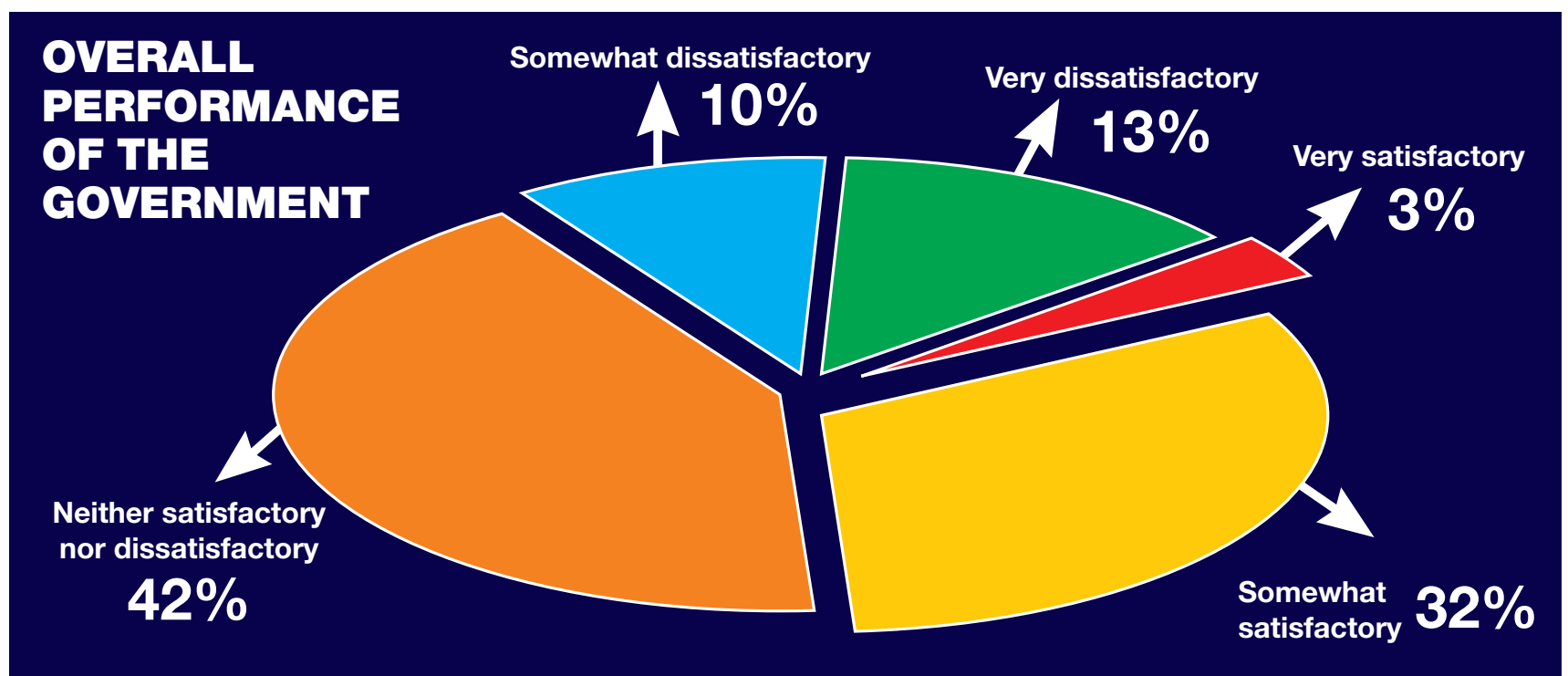
protection to minorities and forest rights.

The new government set up a National Advisory Committee (NAC) to help draft reformist legislation and sensitise the government. The NAC was headed by Sonia Gandhi, who, as chairperson of the UPA and president of the Congress, could use her unique position to win support in government for new ideas.

Four years have passed since. The UPA government faces another election next year. How do leaders of peoples' movements and NGOs assess the UPA gov-

Respondents praised the government on the laws pertaining to the Right to Information (RTI), the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and the new Forest Rights Act. All were election promises. The government has also been lauded for the National Rural Health Mission and its work in infrastructure and education.

On the government's efforts to strengthen panchayati raj institutions the results were mixed. The government scored well on strengthening gram sab-



said it was "neither satisfactory nor dissatisfied" and 32 per cent said it was "somewhat satisfactory". On the other hand 13 per cent said they were "very dissatisfied" and 10 per cent "somewhat dissatisfied".

The Congress-led UPA was swept to power on clear promises of bottom-up growth and a new deal for the common man. At that time, all around the UPA was the debris of the 'India Shining' claims of the defeated Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

If the BJP was seen as having served only the rich, the Congress wanted to stay tuned into reality and be receptive to the needs of the poor. It reached out to NGOs, people's movements and grassroots activists.

The new government drew up a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) with an agenda that contained legislation, reforms and programmes that leaders of peoples' movements and NGOs have been agitating for since several years.

The CMP promised to help the rural sector climb out of poverty by boosting employment, credit, technology, water, education, agriculture, handicrafts and forestry. It promised landmark legislation for transparency in governance, assured employment,

The poll indicates that there is a sense of the UPA not having lived up to the high expectations that it aroused when it came to power — that much more could have been done.

ernment? *Civil Society* conducted this poll to find out.

The poll indicates that there is a sense of the UPA not having lived up to the high expectations that it aroused when it came to power — that much more could have been done. But for a government that has tried, perhaps for the first time in India's history, to see activists as partners and include their concerns and demands in a common minimum programme (CMP), the findings of our opinion poll aren't entirely negative.

has, holding regular elections and women's empowerment. Ensuring the flow of funds to panchayats was rated low. The government got bad scores for micro-finance.

Similarly the government has been appreciated for running a non-communal secular administration, restoring balance in school text-books, retaining its position and keeping the BJP out in the past four years.

But there are nevertheless several serious concerns. Inflation, the non-availability of food through fair price shops, farmer suicides, special economic zones (SEZs) and corruption are some of the issues on which the government is criticised. It is felt that the UPA could have done more for the common man and for implementing the provisions of the CMP.

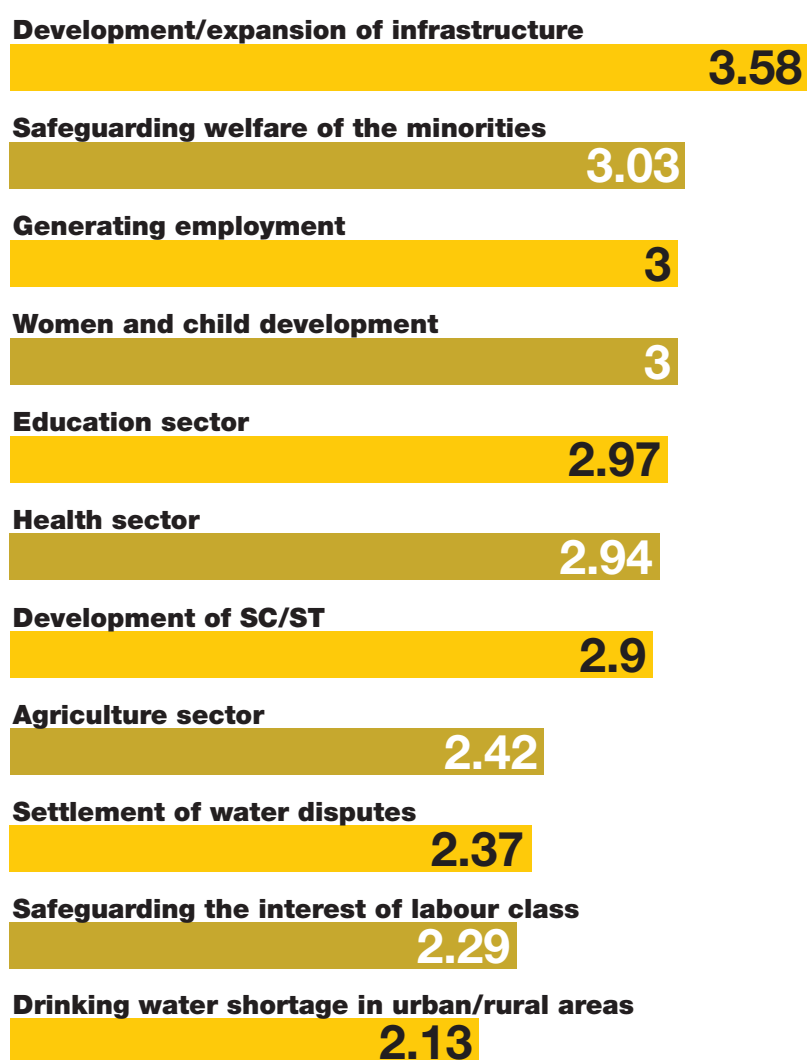
The government gets the biggest big black mark on account of water. The majority of the respondents felt that the UPA's performance was either dissatisfactory or somewhat dissatisfactory in providing drinking water, rainwater harvesting and tank renovation and resolving water disputes.

The government is seen as having not done enough for rural infrastructure, especially school infrastructure or for ensuring better prices for farm-



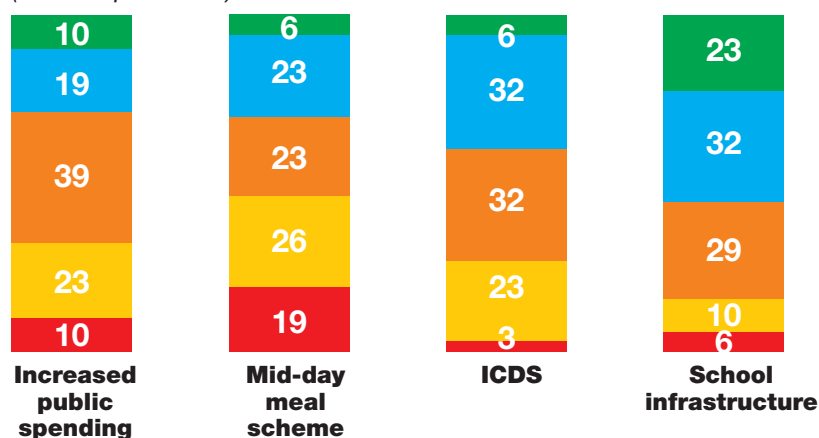
Performance across sectors

(Mean scores)



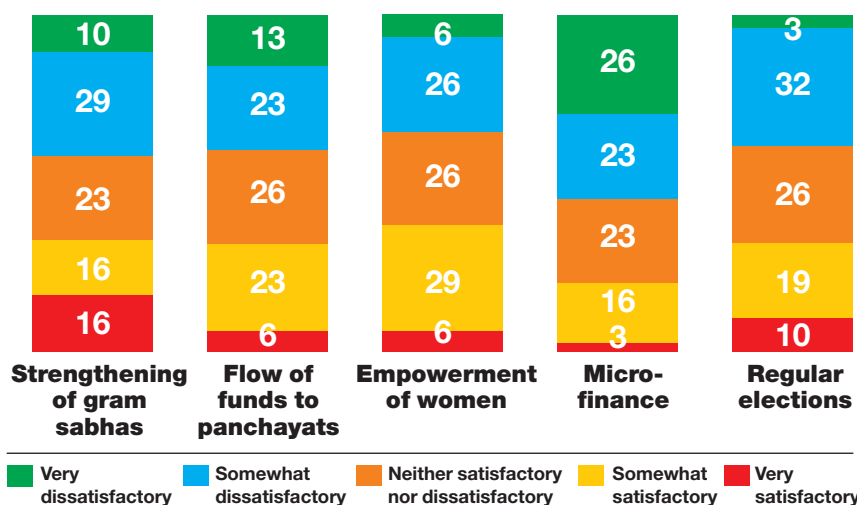
Education sector

(% of respondents)



Panchayati Raj sector

(% of respondents)



Very dissatisfactory Somewhat dissatisfactory Neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory Somewhat satisfactory Very satisfactory

ers and creating rural demand through livelihoods in handicrafts and other forms of allied employment in the rural sector.

With regard to labour, the government is also seen as not having done enough to protect its interests. On the whole, both rural and urban, the UPA's efforts at generating employment are regarded as inadequate.

RTI is clearly seen as a landmark. Ninety per cent of the respondents said it was a very important piece of legislation. On implementation, 71 per cent of the respondents found it to be "somewhat successful" and 23 per cent "very successful". It was felt only in some cases that RTI had brought transparency in government.

The National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi was meant to be an important mechanism for translating social sector concerns into policy and government action. The arrangement seemed to work well initially with significant legislation on RTI and employment guarantee in rural areas being drafted by activists and owned by the ruling alliance. So also the legislation on forest rights and the rural healthcare mission.

Fifty five per cent of the respondents said that the NAC was somewhat useful, 19 per cent felt it was very useful and 23 per cent that it was not of any real use.

There was a clear effort by the UPA to make the private sector more accountable and inclusive.

Unlike earlier governments, the Congress and its allies saw NGOs and peoples movements as partners in development. It drafted, for the first time, a policy for the voluntary sector which sought to make it easier for NGOs to register and get funding.

Though it resulted in some controversy with some NGOs believing they should not do the government's work and become its contractors, the policy was more sympathetic to the NGO sector than the earlier BJP-led NDA alliance which sought to curb the activity of NGOs by limiting funding.

But can a single election victory transform the entire Indian establishment? How radical can a coalition at the Centre in India ever hope to be when health, education, land rights and forests remain in the domain of the states? How much of change in national priorities can a government bring in a single tenure?

Caught up in the challenges of pumping up growth, pampering a resurgent private sector, integrating with the world and bringing in foreign investment, the UPA was often seen as doing less than it should have for the poor and the social sector causes that it had espoused on its journey to power.

A particularly unpopular decision was the handling over of large tracts of land to industry for special economic zones (SEZs). Even within industry, SEZs were perceived as being little more than real estate scams that would take people off the land and usher in a new class of corporate zamindars.

There was also concern over the slow implementation of RTI and repeated attempts from within the government to weaken the legislation. Similarly, rural employment guarantee received little administrative support on the ground and there were complaints that the government was not giving it enough money.

Apart from the survey conducted by GfK MODE, *Civil Society* spoke to a large number of social sector leaders across the country to find out what they felt about the UPA government's performance. Here are a few of the responses and they bear out the findings of the poll.

Aruna Roy of the MKSS and a significant member of the NAC perhaps sums up the common criticism of the UPA when she says: "Economic growth with a

'RTI and NREGA

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ARUNA Roy was a member of the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi. As an activist of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, (MKSS), a grassroots network of people working in villages of Rajasthan, Roy has spent years campaigning against corruption by advocating a right to information law. She has also fought for the right to work and fair wages. Her successful implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and Right to Information law in Rajasthan has made it a model for other states. She spoke to *Civil Society* about her assessment of the UPA government.

What have been the main achievements of the UPA government?

The National Common Minimum Programme of the UPA government made a number of important commitments to the people. It began to put these into place quite enthusiastically, but with time the capacity to follow through seemed to be lacking. This got even worse at the level of implementation.

The promulgation of the Right to Information Act (RTI) and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) are perhaps the most important achievements of this government. There were other important legislations that go to the credit of the UPA, like the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

However, the RTI Act was not just an improvement on the earlier toothless un-notified version passed by Parliament in 2003, but ended up being one of the best RTI legislations in the world. Subsequently, despite bureaucratic reluctance to implement this law, just the legal and moral space

created by this legislation has helped unleash the creative energies of people from all classes and groups all over the country.

The legislation has started to change the relationship of the citizen with the government, and promises to grow in significance and impact. Most importantly, while the issues raised by the RTI are often controversial, there is almost no reasoned argument against the law itself. The RTI law will possibly prove to be one of the most important measures that help us face reality, and use ethics and reasoned debate as a basis for democratic decision making.

The NREGA is of great significance not just to India, but across the world. This is one of the most significant entitlements provided by the government flying in the face of neo-liberal policies that rely exclusively on the market for all solutions. It has also changed the development rights of the rural poor giving them legal entitlement for the first time.

However, unlike the RTI this legislation is far

The RTI Act was not just an improvement on the earlier toothless un-notified version passed by Parliament in 2003, but ended up being one of the best RTI legislations in the world.



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human face" is what the UPA talks of. Often, however, economic growth seems to come at the cost of human development. The contradictory forces at work in the UPA seem to have been its main shortcoming."

Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh feels the UPA has not done anything to distinguish itself from other governments in respect of sustainable development. "India committed itself 10 years back to a path of sustainable development, but as yet there are no moves towards this. Several countries have set themselves targets to achieve this, including indicators and criteria to help them figure out if they are getting there or not. India has done none of this," says Kothari.

Kanchi Kohli, also of Kalpavriksh adds: "I think one of the most significant achievements of the government has been the enactment of the RTI Act, which has despite its loopholes, opened the door towards ensuring transparency. Through this citizens in every sector are able to access critical information which should be a pre-requisite to democratic governance." Kohli also finds the final go ahead for licences for community radio significant. "This too despite its limitations has the scope of freedom of speech and expression which is very relevant to a diverse country like India."

Working in the deserts of Rajasthan on water

are of great significance'



Aruna Roy and Jean Dreze

too tentative, and is only a first step in establishing the right to work. Worse still is the lack of political and bureaucratic will in implementing the law. With people from the privileged class responsible for implementation, there is a strong bias against the law in all mainstream circles. The narrow advantage of it fetching votes will ensure that it continues to live, but the question is, in what form?

The situation with Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 is another case of trying to give

legal recognition to one of the most exploited and marginalised groups in the country, but ending up with weak and even confusing legislative provisions, which will make implementation very difficult.

What have been the main shortcomings of the UPA government?

"Economic growth with a human face," is what the UPA talks of. But often, economic growth seems to come at the cost of human development. The contradictory forces at work in the UPA seem to have

been its main shortcoming. As a result of the control and influence exercised by market fundamentalists within government, especially in the finance ministry, many social sector measures ended up getting only half-baked support. Also, the government pays lip service to the programmes, but spends its time and energy on the growth related sectors. This has led to very poor implementation in these programmes, while SEZs have got licences and clearances with lightening speed. These have, in fact, increased conflict within Indian society, and given us a taste of the same "shine" as the previous government.

What is the one programme you would like the government to concentrate on?

The former Prime Minister, VP Singh, while campaigning for the RTI and NREGA laws wryly remarked: "*Ek me man nahin hain, aur ek mein money nahin!*" (One programme does not have motivation, and the other has no money). It is a statement that says this government needs to show more commitment to its own creations.

If this government were to really concentrate on meeting the objectives of what it calls its flagship programme, the NREGA, it could put rural India on the road to fundamental change and development. While the NREGA is just one small step in the direction of economic security for the rural poor, it is a comprehensive enough programme to affect the way development programmes as a whole are implemented in India.

It also offers enough of a stake to ordinary people to get together to demand its proper implementation. Entitlements in the law are as significant as popular mobilisation and a stronger voice for the rural worker. The RTI and NREGA are two laws that could change the status of the most marginalised communities in India.

issues, Farhad Contractor mourns the lack of coordination between the Centre and the states. He believes there is little clarity on the question of loans to farmers being waived. In his opinion schemes like the Indira Gandhi Canal have little to do with development and are merely money making schemes.

Contractor hails the rural employment guarantee scheme being launched in Jaisalmer and the fact that the government managed to keep oil and gas prices stable. He wishes the UPA had done more to support the revival of traditional water systems and focused on drinking water, which he considers a fundamental right.

Reducing infant and maternal mortality is one of the most critical issues facing India today. Dr Arun Gupta belongs to the Breastfeeding Network of India (BPNI). He welcomes the National Rural Health Mission, but wonders what results it will throw up after two years.

Dr Gupta welcomes NREGA but he says it is interfering with breastfeeding and can adversely affect women working on site. He believes that the UPA could have acted more decisively in the matter of child health. "The Government of India should apply new growth standards for children under five. These have been given by WHO and a national consensus has evolved to adopt these. Achieving

The UPA govt could have done more to support the revival of traditional water harvesting systems and focused on drinking water.



these standards should be viewed as the health and nutrition rights of infants and young children. The community worker (Asha) should see which child is deviating from these standards going up or down. That should be reflected in national data."

Anil Rana, director of the Janhit Foundation does outstanding work with farmers in western UP. His organisation looks for solutions to water shortages and problems of pollution. Rana says the UPA has tried to fulfil its promises, but not enough has been done.

He gives the example of NREGA and says that it has been reduced to merely an employment scheme when could have been used to create rural assets. "Farmers continue to commit suicide and die of starvation in the Bundelkhand region. Let us be honest to ourselves. This will affect the food security in future. Waving off loans merely will not work. The solution lies elsewhere."

Himanshu Thakkar of the South Asia Network on Dams Rivers and People regrets that the government has been wedded to big projects in water. It moved towards privatisation through the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission. It raised the height of the Narmada dam and did not adopt the rehabilitation and resettlement policy drafted by the NAC for displaced people.

Bhopal continues to die

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ONCE again, survivors of the Bhopal gas tragedy walked 800 km from Bhopal to Delhi's protest street at Jantar Mantar. They sat on the pavement under a fluttering shamiana as policemen strolled past, eyeing them warily.

"They tell us where to sit, what the decibel sound of our protest should be, they control everything and this is Indian democracy for you," said Nityanand Jayaraman, tireless campaigner for the Bhopal cause with bitterness in his voice.

Two years ago, survivors had walked to Delhi in protest. Their demands to the Prime Minister were simple: drinking water, cleaning up of Union

with its stockpile of lethal chemicals polluting soil, air and leaching into groundwater. "Dig as deep as you want," says Jabbar Khan. "All you will get is water laced with chemicals." This is the water that survivors drink and die, slowly and painfully.

The Bhopal gas tragedy dates back to December 2, 1984, when the Union Carbide factory leaked 27 tonnes of the deadly gas methyl isocyanate. Around half a million people were exposed to the gas. Twenty thousand people have died to date and a huge number continue to suffer.

The world's most dangerous chemicals, about 5,000 tons of the stuff, are still to be found at the Union Carbide factory. There is trichlorobenzene, dichloromethane, chloroform, lead, mercury, zinc, chromium, copper. In 1999, groundwater and well-

They went into the factory premises without any protective clothing.

The court set up a task force to assess the magnitude of the waste. The task force's technical subcommittee said Dow should clean-up and upheld the 'polluter pays' principle. If Dow didn't do it, then the waste could be incinerated.

So in May 2005, the Union ministry for chemicals and fertilisers asked Dow in the court to pay Rs 100 crore as advance for a clean-up. Dow replied that the land now belongs to the state government, so it should clean it up.

The court, in July last year, ordered 345 metric tonnes of the waste to be sent to Ankleshwar in Gujarat to be incinerated by Bharuch Environ Infrastructure Ltd, a private company that claimed it had the facilities to handle it. Another 40 tonnes were to be disposed of at a landfill at Pithampur in Indore.

The Bhopal Group of Information and Action and other survivor groups pointed out to the court that burning the toxic waste could trigger another gas tragedy in Ankleshwar, already a toxic hotspot. In Pithampur it would leach into groundwater.

"We did not want the people of Ankleshwar to suffer like us," says Jabbar Khan. GTZ, a German entity, meanwhile found that the Ankleshwar facility was not equipped to handle the waste. Ankleshwar residents protested and formed the Ankleshwar Bachao Andolan. The Gujarat government then refused to permit incineration.

The peoples' fears were proved right. On April 4, the Ankleshwar facility caught fire triggering a massive toxic inferno. Timely rain and wind saved people. Imagine if Union Carbide's toxic waste had been sent there.

Last July, the Tata group offered to bring companies together to set up a fund to clean up Bhopal, independent of ongoing proceedings in the court. The government appeared interested. The offer was turned down by survivor groups since it did not comply with the 'polluter pays' principle and the Tatas withdrew their offer.

The government could read the rules to Dow Chemical but it seems confused about its priorities. Dow Chemical wants to make huge investments. But such investments will come at the cost of people's land and health. The Maharashtra government happily gifted the company 40 hectares of grazing land at Shendi, a village near Pune, for an R&D centre. Even an environment impact assessment wasn't done say activists and villagers are now protesting. The company, it is believed, can use 20 chemicals there, listed as hazardous.

Activists allege that in February 2007 the company was caught bribing agricultural ministry officials to get three of its toxic pesticides registered.

The chemical giant then convinced the government to approve the sale of Union Carbide technology to Reliance Industries, although a 1992 court order directs the government to confiscate all of Union Carbide's assets in India.

The Bhopal Group for Information and Action is demanding that the registration of Dow's pesticides and its sale of Union Carbide technology be revoked.

"We are now asking for a commission with dedicated funds and authority," says Sarangi. "Earlier the committee was dependent on the state government which doesn't see the gas tragedy as a problem." Bhopal activists say the government will need to invest Rs 2,000 crores with an annual budget of Rs 100 crores for the commission to do all its work.



Union Carbide continues to pollute and people continue to die

Carbide's toxic waste, legal action against Dow Chemical and rehabilitation schemes.

The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, at that time suggested a committee to oversee rehabilitation and a clean-up. Bhopalis went home, reassured. A committee was formed, as promised. It multiplied into four subcommittees, on health, environment, social support and livelihood. They met a few times, says Satinath Sarangi, key leader of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action. But the committees did nothing.

"Yes, some of us are getting clean piped water," said Devaki Bai. "That is those who can pay. The user charges are Rs 150 per month. There are additional charges for installation. We have unpaid bills from Rs 7,000 to Rs 10,000. Now who can pay that?"

The women say they are being supplied dirty water in tankers. "I am still depending on my contaminated well," said Jabbar Khan. He has five children. His daughter is 20 year's old but she looks 11.

Twenty three years after the Bhopal gas tragedy, the worst in history, people continue to die and babies are born with birth defects. "There is a rising trend of congenital deformities among children," says Sarangi. People suffer from cancers, respiratory disorders, blindness, stomach ailments, gynecological difficulties. And the hospital for gas victims, does not give free treatment to children anymore, says Leela Bai.

The reason for this ongoing tragedy is the abandoned Union Carbide factory. It is still standing

water testing near the site of the accident revealed mercury at six million times higher than expected. "We suspect contamination has spread beyond 2.5 km to 3 km," says Sarangi.

Who should clean this site? An American multinational, Dow Chemical took over Union Carbide in 2001. But it claims it is not responsible for the company's liabilities. Dow says it will pay for cleaning the Bhopal site only if "it is freed of all legal liabilities including criminal liability on charges of culpable homicide."

Survivors rightly don't agree. They say the only option is for Dow to pack its waste in airtight containers and take it for safe disposal to the US or Europe. There are precedents. In March 2003, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board ordered Hindustan Lever Ltd. to export 286 tonnes of its mercury-contaminated waste from its thermometer factory in Kodaikanal to an overseas facility which Unilever did.

Besides, India does not have the facilities to clean such toxic waste. Attempts by the government to do so have proved dangerous. One such endeavour might have caused another Bhopal.

The Jabalpur High Court, which is hearing the case for a clean up in response to a PIL filed in 2004, has tried in its own way, to get rid of Union Carbide's toxic legacy. The court's view was that removal of waste rather than fixing of responsibility was the more urgent task. The first attempt ended in failure. Two workers died, say survivors.

Dr Binayak Sen spends a year in jail

But where is the proof against him?

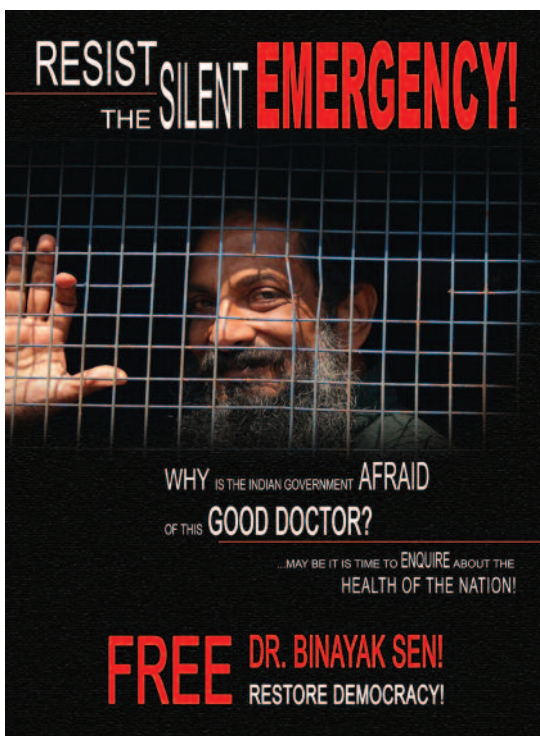
Satya Sivaraman
New Delhi

MAY 14 will mark one full year since Dr Binayak Sen was arrested by the Chhattisgarh government and jailed on false charges of aiding the underground Maoist movement.

Dr Sen is known to be a public spirited paediatrician who has treated poor children in the jungles of Chhattisgarh. He has been internationally recognized for his humanitarian work and commitment to civil liberties.

The charges under which Dr Sen has been held under sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and also the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005, include being a member of an unlawful association, a terrorist gang or organization, giving it support or soliciting contributions for it.

So far, the state government has been unable to substantiate the charges. Even the name and details of the so-called 'terrorist gang' Dr Sen is accused of being a part of are not mentioned. Much of the prosecution's case seems to rest upon evidence in the form of some letters seized from Piyush Guha, an alleged Maoist, which the police claim were passed on to him by Dr Sen on behalf of Narayan Sanyal, a Maoist leader currently in Raipur Central Jail.



Poster demanding the release of Dr Sen

Dr Sen was treating the ageing Sanyal for various ailments for several months under the supervision of prison authorities. For several years now Chhattisgarh, one of the poorest states in India, has witnessed a virtual civil war between the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) and private militias armed by the state with both sides accused of serious human rights violations.

"Dr Sen's arrest is clearly an attempt to intimidate

PUCL and other democratic voices that have been speaking out against human rights violations in Chhattisgarh," said a statement soon after his detention, signed by renowned intellectuals and activists including Noam Chomsky, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, Arundhati Roy, Prabhat Patnaik, Ashok Mitra, Habib Tanvir, and Rajendra Yadav.

An alumnus of the Christian Medical College and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Dr Sen has been honoured for his work as the national vice-president of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL). In December 2007, the Indian Academy of Social Sciences conferred on him the R R Keithan Gold Medal, as an "indefatigable defender of human rights and Gandhian social activist of rare courage and dedication". Currently, he has been nominated for the Jonathan Mann Award 2008, the highest international award for health professionals excelling in human rights activities.

Since his arrest, members of civil liberties groups, medical professionals in India and abroad, artists, journalists and Dr Sen's well-wishers all over the world have appealed to both the Chhattisgarh and the Indian government to withdraw the ridiculous charges and release him immediately. Their appeals have fallen on deaf ears, with the Supreme Court dismissing Dr Sen's application for bail without offering any explanation at all.

Even as the trial against Dr Sen is set to commence on April 30, health and human rights activists are now campaigning for Dr Sen's release through a series of activities ranging from holding Free Binayak Sen Medical Camps around the country to public lectures highlighting the threat to Indian democracy.

Farmers invent new check dam

Shree Padre
Kasargod

KATTAS are traditional temporary check dams constructed by arecanut farmers of coastal Karnataka and Kasargod district of Kerala. These dams, built with stone and soil, have to be constructed every year. Though expensive and labour intensive, *kattas* are the farmers' lifeline.

But after experiments farmers have now invented *katta* check dams that can be built cheaply and very quickly.

Kattas are important for farmers. They provide water for irrigation for farms on both sides of the check dam and also sub soil moisture. The water level in nearby water bodies increases as long as there is water in the *katta*. Even wells in the nearby hills at heights ranging from 50 to 200 feet and at a distance of one to two kilometres get indirect benefits. Their water level doesn't recede fast.

Though *kattas* are constructed by sharing costs and with people's participation, of late this cooperation has been diminishing. Due to labour shortage, arrival of bore wells, thousands of *kattas* are not being constructed. The skill of making them is also dying.

To save labour, farmers have made innovations. One is sand bag checkdam. Plastic bags are filled with sand and stacked in a methodical way, putting soil in between two layers of sandbags. It



Check dam made with sand in plastic bags

has many advantages when compared to the stone and soil *katta*.

Getting fresh soil every year is another problem. So one farmer tried replacing the soil layer (to cut off water seepage) by silpaulin plastic sheet. It is a success and has spread to four more *kattas* since the last five years. To save labour, another farmer bid goodbye to plastic bags and just heaped the sand, wrapping it in an ordinary inexpensive plastic sheet.

In the past three years, eight *kattas* have been constructed this way. The new methods save 40 per cent labour. Along with the savings on empty sandbags the cost reduction would be around 50 per cent.

These technologies have wider application.



Check dam with sand in plastic sheet

Though temporary, such check dams work very well. Dr Varanashi Krishnamoorthy's *katta* conserves 2,250 litres of water. The farmers suggest that such check dams be built across rivers like Netravathi that supply drinking water to Mangalore city. There is already one cement check dam that isn't sufficient. There is talk of a second concrete check dam.

In Maharashtra, *kattas* popularised by an NGO called Vanarai Trust are called Vanarai bandharas. In the last 20 years, according to them, 20 lakh *katta* check-dams have been built all over the state. Recently even the state government has recognised their importance and is encouraging farmers to build *kattas* under the NREGS.

Photos: SHREE PADRE

Varanasi weavers wait for help

Bharat Dogra
Varanasi

ABOUT a decade ago, Gaurakalan Lakhram village outside Varanasi city had over 100 functioning handlooms. Today there are barely half a dozen left. Many skilled handloom weavers are being forced to take up what they call "mota kaam" or work as construction labour and rickshaw-pullers for which they earn more money.

Although the Benarasi silk saree is famous, handloom weavers are passing through a serious livelihood crisis. Benaras silk weaving used to provide a livelihood to about 700,000 people, but this has been reduced to about 2,50,000 as weavers migrate and look for other work.

On an average, a weaver earns only Rs 50 to 60 a day. These days there is no guarantee that he will earn even this paltry amount. Caught in this crisis and deeply in debt, many weavers have committed suicide, sold their blood or even their own children for money.

Shivyatan is one lucky weaver who has continued to get work. In his house four looms are still functioning, partly because he is linked to a voluntary organization, the Human Welfare Association (HWA). The association has been trying to organise self-help groups of handloom silk weavers.

"After working so hard you get such a meager amount for the beautiful saree you have woven that you cannot survive," says Nagru, a handloom weaver. His loom is silent. Munna is still working but earns just Rs 50 a day, that too when work is available.

Varanasi's Hasanpura area was once one of the world's busiest handloom centres. Today the roar of powerlooms has replaced the hum of handlooms. Mukhtaar Ahmed Ansari, a proud skilled weaver, now sells ice-cream.

Muhammed Harun's family has been in weaving for several generations. Their looms are in a shed outside their house. His father, Haji Waliullah, said nearly 60 per cent of weavers have been forced to leave their highly skilled work. "Even when weavers are working on a big export order, there is a tendency to give them only Rs 50 to Rs 60 a day," he said. Waliullah is being assisted by his old and ailing wife, Mehrunnisa, because there is no younger assistant available.

In Nati Imla Weavers' (Bunkar) Colony we meet Inaul Haq, a weaver who had to stop working when he became seriously ill. His wife incurred debts to



Weavers hold up a Benarasi silk sari

arrange for his treatment and to feed three small children, but their problems have only increased.

At a public hearing organised by HWA on April 8 in Benaras the dying art of weaving was discussed. The work of the weavers is being supported by a London-based funding organisation called Find Your Feet. Weavers from four districts including Varanasi, Mirzapur, Bhadohi, and Chandauli were present.

Dr Rajnikant, director of Human Welfare Association, said that the condition of silk handloom weavers was fast deteriorating and around 6,000 weavers had been forced to migrate in a single year to cities like Surat, Mumbai, and Kolkata. One reason for this, he said, was the WTO trade regime under which imports of silk cloth have increased.

Another threat was from powerlooms. Their owners produced cheap products helped by computers which copied designs. The government has not carried out a proper survey to get an estimate of how many looms and weavers still survive. Available statistics do not reflect the real crisis.

There was a time when women could take up zardozi embroidery work but this too has been

taken away with indiscriminate mechanisation, particularly Chinese machines, referred to as Chinese Dragons by Dr Rajnikant.

Hazi Ishtiyar Ahmed said that the government was promoting a new cluster scheme whereas the existing traditional cluster, including weaver-master and weaver-trader, should be continued and respected. "Most weavers don't even know about the existence of five or six silk yarn banks in Varanasi. Sometimes impractical schemes upset the traditional system in such a way that the weaver does not benefit from the new scheme yet he cannot go back to the old support system. So he is neither here nor there," he said.

Aminuddin, a weaver from Nakhigat challenged this view. He said that the weaver who is the real artisan is exploited and given very low rates under the traditional system.

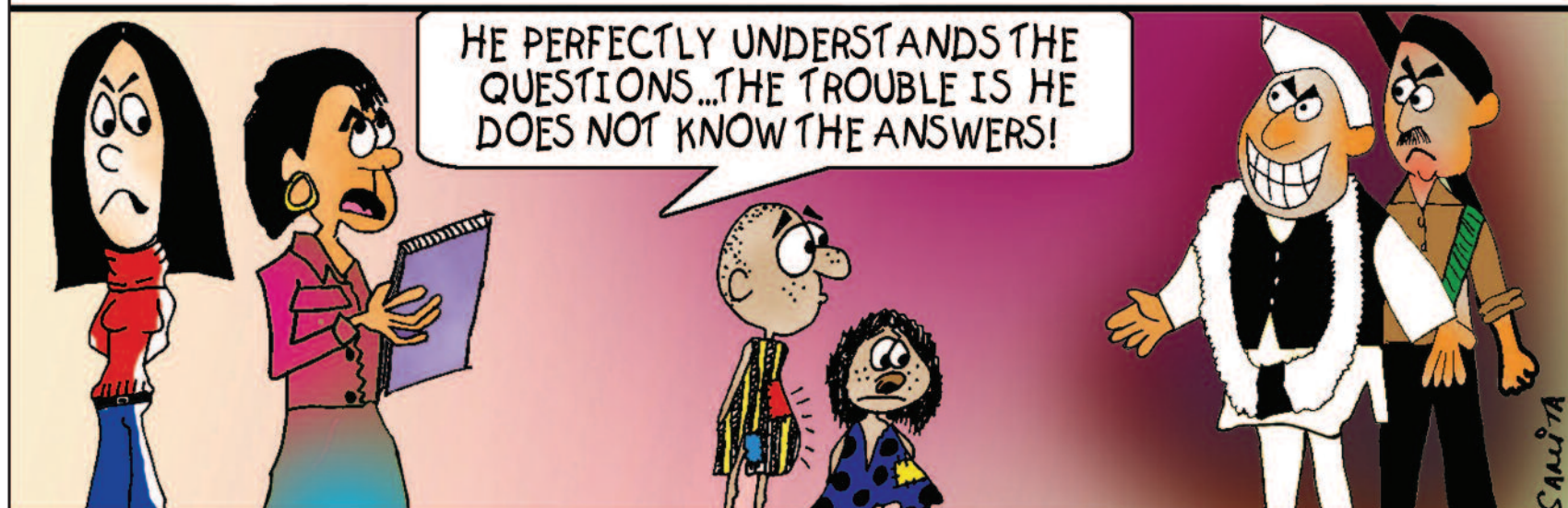
Mohammad Sharif Ansari wanted new cooperatives to be set up which would benefit the real weavers. He said rich exporters and traders corner all the benefits. So-called experts and visiting senior officials do not even understand who the real weaver is. They meet traders and exporters in the name of meeting weavers and listen to their views. He said that just as in agriculture there are traders, landlords and farmers, similarly in weaving there is a hierarchy consisting of master weavers, trader weavers and actual weavers.

Ainul Haq, a handloom weaver, came with his small children to the public hearing to tell his story. In the absence of social security, weavers and their families suffer greatly due to illness. He, too, was seriously ill. Even when the media reported his illness and grants were approved by the government, formalities like doctors preparing estimates of the money needed for his medical treatment could not be completed.

Jaya Jaitly, an expert on traditional crafts and artisans, said although khadi became an integral part of the freedom struggle, government policies have not helped handloom weavers. However, demand for handloom products certainly exists and it has to be linked directly to weavers. The key words for the government are 'cluster' 'value-added' and 'exports'. But due to the over-emphasis on exports, some small-scale weavers working independently would be left out of government schemes which promote exports. The scheme to mark or certify handloom products could leave out the small scale independent weaver also, especially if a big fee has to be paid for certification.

Samita's World

by Samita Rathor



'In West Bengal RTI is a sham'

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

THE Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 is a landmark legislation under which any ordinary citizen can file an application and ask for information from the government. The department has to provide it within 30 days otherwise the officer concerned can be hauled up by an appellate authority and fined.

While many states have marched ahead with this Act, West Bengal is sadly lagging behind. Ruled for over three decades by the Left Front, the West Bengal government has yet to open itself up for inspection by the people. Those who ask for information are harassed and intimidated and made to run around in circles by government servants.

In desperation, NGOs in West Bengal have now come together and formed an RTI Manch to fight West Bengal's reluctant *babus* and politicians. In an interview with *Civil Society*, Malay Bhattacharyya, secretary of the RTI Manch, spoke of West Bengal's dismal RTI record.

How would you rate West Bengal's implementation of the Right to Information Act?

The RTI Act is not working here at all. Government departments would rather withhold information. Government servants are so used to a system of secrecy that they cannot accept a new regime of transparency and accountability.

Maybe that's because West Bengal had a late start. After all, RTI Rules were drawn up only in 2006.

What do you mean? When the RTI Act was passed by the Centre, it was to be in force all over the country. Yet, none of the government officers here was trained in using the Act. The Administrative Training Institute held just two training programmes, one for a day and another for half a day.

Most government departments do not even know about this Act. State public information officers (SPIOs) have not been appointed in most departments. Even if they have been appointed in some departments, there is no appellate authority you can go to if your request for information has not been answered within 30 days.

The junior-most officers are made SPIOs. Going by the way a government hierarchy functions, can you ever expect a junior officer to get information pertaining to the job done by a senior officer?

There ought to have been 10 State Information Commissioners. Instead, there is just one. The most important clause in the Act is the penalisation of officers who refuse to give the information asked for. But so far, the State Information Commissioner has imposed only two penalties and given compensation once. In my opinion, compensations are totally against the spirit of the Act.

Why do you say so?

When a man is compensated for the harassment he has undergone in getting the information, the money is paid out of the state exchequer. This means, I get paid from my own money which I have paid to the state as tax. But when the officer is penalized for not giving the information asked for, the penalty is deducted from his salary. It is the penalties that can bring in transparency. Unless



BHASKAR MULLICK

Malay Bhattacharyya, secretary RTI Manch

penalties are invoked, officers will never care to part with information. It is only the fear of being penalised that can get officers to behave themselves.

How are requests for information entertained?

Most officers stonewall you with questions. They demand to know why you are asking for the information, and then refuse to part with it. Sometimes, they politely decline your request in writing. Or else, send the police across to your home to threaten you

RTI Act is not working here at all. Govt servants are so used to a system of secrecy that they cannot accept a new regime of transparency.

with false cases. This has happened in many small towns and rural areas. Anyone daring to seek information is harassed and hounded by the authorities.

You are talking only of villages and small towns. What about Kolkata?

Alright. Take the Kolkata police. Letters written to the SPIO were returned unanswered with the stamp, 'addressee unknown' embossed across the envelope until a month ago. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation has an SPIO. But there is no appellate authority. In the rare case that information is parted with, it is often the wrong information.

In the department that has appointed a public

information officer, the section that receives applications for information is supposed to forward them to the relevant officers. But those officers don't know about the existence of the receiving section.

This is the situation in practically every government department here. Even the National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS), which by its definition is a public body, has no public information officer.

But the state government claims that nearly 80 per cent of RTI applications have been answered.

You can also interpret this to mean that there are no problems here! Well, the truth is not many can undergo the tedious procedures required to make an application. In the first place, you have to pay the application charges through court fee stamps. These stamps are not readily available. Even if they are, they are sold in black. Stamps worth Rs 10 are sold for Rs 15. They are only available at the district headquarters. So, if a man has to make an application, he must spend another Rs 50-60 on travel apart from paying the court fee.

Honestly, I feel the state government is not at all keen to bring in

transparency. Or else, it would, at the very least, make stamps available through post offices. Money could also be accepted through postal orders.

What about the disposal of cases once they come up for hearing?

As per information available on its website, the State Information Commission has had 45 hearings from 2006 to 2008. This works out to just 2.3 hearings a month. You can imagine what work they could be doing. Compare this with Maharashtra where 288 applications were disposed of in a single week. In Arunachal Pradesh, in 16 out of 23 cases, penalties were imposed by the local State Information Commission. Consequently, since the last two years, no complaints have been filed. In Uttar Pradesh, too, the State Information Commission is far more proactive. No case is closed unless the information is given to the complainant. I would say, West Bengal has turned the RTI Act into a mockery.

Can you think of a way out?

I consider the Bihar model ideal. The Bihar government has set up call centres to receive complaints under the RTI Act. The caller can ring up from any public booth, and his voice will be recorded as a complaint. Of course, the price of such a call is much more than the normal Rs 2.00. The court fees are added to the call charges. The system is working beautifully. The problem of paying court fees is also done away with.

What do you suggest we do?

Under the RTI Act, the State Information Commissioner can be replaced by the Governor by someone more efficient on the basis of a letter sent to him by members of the public as per provisions of sub-section (3) of the RTI Act. We are calling upon everyone to write to the Governor in this regard.

Tasty, fat-free jungle food

Anitha Pailoor
Malnad (Karnataka)

BHAVYA, Sharada, Kiran, Kavya and Ganesh listened intently as PS Venkatarama Daithota, a traditional Ayurvedic physician, guided them through a forest explaining the medicinal properties of plants. The children, who study in Class 6 at Kalave School near Sirsi in Uttara Kannada, were pleased to know that their favourite wild fruits were very nutritious. Daithota, fondly called 'the walking encyclopedia on herbs' identified 110 edible varieties in half an acre of forest.

But it was the sumptuous lunch which bowled the children over. Leaves, roots and shoots they had seen in the forest had been turned magically into a mouth watering meal. There were traditional dishes like tamblu, katne, mandana appehuli, appehuli, gojju, palya, kadubu and chutney, which had been cooked using coconut as a base.

Delicious food doesn't grow only on farms but in natural forests too. There is nutrition hidden in the jungle but you have to know how to identify it.

A two-day workshop explaining it all was organised by Sirsi's Suvarna Sahyadri's Environment Education Programme and Amma Prathisthana.



A spread of wholesome forest food



Chutney in a leaf



Leaves, roots and shoots from the jungle



Venkatarama Daithota sharing his traditional knowledge of plants and herbs with schoolchildren

Venkatarama Daithota and Jayalakshmi Daithota guided about 100 participants.

Uttara Kannada has a rich tradition of cooking food from the forest. The three districts of Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada and Shimoga have similar food habits. In Malnad, people are blessed with natural kitchen gardens in the form of the forest. This love for 'forest food' is not just for its medicinal properties but for its distinctly delicious taste and appearance.

"Since generations women here have been able to obtain food from the forest," said Shivananda Kalave, a development journalist who had arranged the workshop. "We knew the entire flora in our vicinity and its application. But as the purpose of food got limited to just 'filling the stomach', this knowledge of forest based food degenerated. The objective of the workshop is to share the knowledge

we have about native food habits and revive it."

As natural forests gave way to mono-cultivation of acacia and teak in the last century, food habits changed. Tomatoes and potatoes began to appear on the plate with rice. But tamblu, the health drink of Malnad, retained its importance. Tamblu can be made with leaves and forest species ranging from kokum to drumstick flower and brahmi.

Jayalakshmi Daithota has not cooked vegetables sold in the market since the last 15 years. She has made the nearby forest her vegetable garden. Jayalakshmi has inherited traditional knowledge about such foods. She helps people keep disease at bay by telling them how to practice healthy eating habits. "Proper knowledge of using these natural vitamin tablets in our food will keep us healthy and happy," she says.

As participants discussed edible varieties available

in the forest, tasty herbal drinks and forest-based food were passed around. As many as 60 dishes were prepared, including the highly nutritious bamboo rice. This rare dish becomes available once in 40 years when the bamboo flowers. The story goes that people in drought prone regions of North Karnataka came to Malnad to fetch this rice and survived on it when rain was scarce and crops had failed.

Participants listed around 40 types of tamblu and fifty panakas (juices) which they have used. The list didn't include cultivated forest species. Children were astonished to find out that the varieties they consider as useless wild plants play a greater role in keeping them healthy.

Krishna Hegde, a pioneering hotelier in Bangalore, interacted with participants and felt that rich natural forest food could attract tourists without ruining our natural and cultural heritage. "Health conscious city dwellers are searching for nutritious food low on calories. This is the time to build the 'slow food' movement in the state with native diversities," he said.

A morning walk with Venkatarama Daithota shed new light on our surroundings. He identified at least one plant per step and explained its properties. He said there should be a favourable environment for wild species to prosper naturally. He feared that if forest plants were cultivated as crops they might lose their original properties.

Veda Hegde, a resident of Neernalli village, said the workshop had taught her to use her surroundings as a vegetable garden. People still know how to make tamblu, but the knowledge behind it was fading away. Food preparations also changed as taste began to acquire more importance than health.

Modernisation has changed the way we cook. A tender leaf at our doorstep becomes acceptable only when it is converted into a packaged product with a label saying it is nutritious. It is the fresh leaf that retains nutrition, not its cardboard version.

Government officials, forest officials and political leaders who had joined the workshop felt the immediate necessity is to preserve bio-diversity and human health. Traditional knowledge, hidden in the rural kitchen, was shared and documented. Women eagerly noted down long forgotten recipes to experiment with at home.

Pranadhika battles child abuse

Shuktara Lal
Kolkata

FIVE years ago, Pranadhika Sinha started an organisation called Elaan to fight child sexual abuse. Her motive was personal. Sexually abused as a child, Pranadhika felt by helping others she would heal herself too.

Pranadhika is now 22 and her group has gone from strength to strength. Elaan has become a support group for anyone who has been subjected to child sexual abuse and incest. It organises events and interactive sessions to generate awareness and has members between the ages of 18 to 35.

"Many Indians have faced some kind of sexual abuse in their lives," says Pranadhika. "Those who have been sexually abused along with their families may not want to talk about it. A veil of secrecy surrounds child sexual abuse and incest. It is virtually a taboo subject."

There is no law in India that addresses such crimes. Mostly, Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with rape, is referenced. The need to create a separate law for sexual abuse of minors and incest is an area Elaan focuses on.

But misconceptions abound. "There are people who will deny the very existence of child sexual abuse," points out Pranadhika. Another misconception is that girls are more susceptible to sexual abuse. Pranadhika differs, "Boys are equally, if not more, prone to such abuse"

Elaan also corrects assumptions about the identity of a child abuser. "Both men and women are equally capable of sexually abusing children. An abuser

could be a male or female relative, friend of the family, domestic help, teacher—the role played by an adult in a child's life does not exempt him or her from being a possible abuser," emphasizes Pranadhika.

To spread awareness, Elaan uses different forms of communication. "We choose our medium of communication on the basis of who our audience is. If we hold interactive discussions where the spoken word is given importance, we also use the performing arts to raise awareness. Of late, we have been organising musical programmes that attract the youth. Social networking sites like Facebook and Orkut are also popular in building awareness among young people," says Pranadhika.

A recent feather in Elaan's cap is the opening of a resource centre on child sexual abuse. Members of Elaan have collected over 200 books, articles, films, and educational CDs that can be consulted by anyone concerned about the issue.

For the Elaan team, engaging with individuals who have faced sexual abuse as children is a critical aspect of its work. Pranadhika runs an in-house peer-counselling course which members of Elaan have to take in order to counsel persons who have been violated. Pranadhika observes: "As someone who was sexually abused as a child, I was often given the impression by the people I spoke to that I was to blame. Victims of child sexual abuse or



Pranadhika Sinha

incest frequently blame themselves, so it is imperative for the counsellor to continually stress the fact that they did not ask for it."

Individuals with a history of child sexual abuse or incest contact Elaan in various ways. "People often get in touch with us by email possibly because of the anonymity the Internet offers. We then, in turn, counsel through e-mails," remarks Pranadhika.

Counselling sessions take place over the phone as well, if the individual so chooses.

The medium of counselling is entirely the individual's choice. At an advanced stage, Pranadhika has counselled individuals face-to-face and spoken to their family members as well—that is, if the individual in question and his or her family desired this.

Pranadhika hopes to extend Elaan's reach to crèches and schools. "I would like to host workshops in educational institutions with parents and teachers to talk about how essential it is to pay attention to child safety because there is no age barrier to abuse," she says. She also wants to extend Elaan's services from Kolkata to the districts of West Bengal.

For the time being, however, Pranadhika has a lot to be proud of. After all, Elaan is, in her own words, "technically the only NGO in the country which fights child sexual abuse."

To contact Elaan, visit their website at www.elaan.wordpress.com or email them at elaanspeak@yahoo.co.in.

'We will implement forest rights'

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

SOME of India's most significant laws on social justice and environment can be traced to the doughty **Avdhash Kaushal**, chairperson of the Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK), Dehradun, in the hill state of Uttarakhand.

Kaushal has pioneered environmental litigation in India. The famous lime stone quarry case, India's first environment case, was filed by him in the Supreme Court in 1983. It led to the closure of 101 mines in Dehradun's fragile hills and spread awareness about forest protection.

Most of all Kaushal's name is indelibly linked with the Van Gujjars, a Muslim nomadic community, whose rights he has fought for many years.

Kaushal's recent achievement is in getting the Uttarakhand government to give 50 per cent reservations to women in panchayats. He is now trying to implement the new Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Right to Forests) Act in the state. He spoke to *Civil Society*:

How are you implementing the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Right to Forests) Act in Uttarakhand?

We organized a workshop on the new legislation with policymakers and stake-holders on March 30. Earlier, too, we have worked hard to secure the rights of forest dependent communities,

especially the Van Gujjars, living in the foothills of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, in the Rajaji National Park. After we lobbied intensely, the state government agreed in principle to implement the Act after framing its Rules. Uttarakhand will then be amongst the first few states along with Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat where forest dependant people will get relief.

What is the importance of the Act for Uttarakhand?

Uttarakhand has about 65 per cent land under forests and more than 70 per cent of its population is dependent on forests. The state has seven tribal communities.

They take fuelwood, fodder and food from forests, but do not destroy them. Forests are in good healthy condition not because of forest officials, but because of the people. Unfortunately, land is scarce and laws like the Wildlife Protection Act have worked against these people, so now if the Forest Rights Act is implemented properly, it will restore some of the people's lost rights.

How will the Forest Rights Act help pastoralists and nomads?

It will help in restoring their endangered rights and motivate them to do their duties to protect and save forests.

Wildlife enthusiasts worry that the endangered

tiger population will be further threatened once this Act is implemented.

Tigers can be saved by the people who are living in close proximity and in symbiosis with wildlife since centuries, not by massive forest and wildlife bureaucracy. The notion that people and wildlife cannot exist together is bunkum. In the name of protecting wildlife, the wildlife lobby gets what it wants, that is, huge amounts of money and foreign funding. I would say a massive wildlife scam is supporting this notion. This Act will not destroy wildlife, it will help save it.

What about the Taungiya community?

It will restore their rights and will be helpful in making their habitations legally recognised revenue villages. They will not be harassed by forest department officials. Taungiyas just collect some non timber forest produce and leave forests intact.

What about rights of women?

The economy of Uttarakhand is in very bad shape. Its per capita income is much less than the national average. We have a massive debt of Rs 15,000 crores, obtained from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Women are the backbone of Uttarakhand's economy. Now, with our efforts, there will be 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats and women's voices will be heard.

Mentaid's enterprising parents

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

WHEN Shukla Bhaduri's daughter, Aparna, was diagnosed as autistic she admitted her daughter to a special school called Reach. Bhaduri soon made friends with other parents. One special friend was Iona Kundu, whose son, Tarun, has Down's Syndrome.

Like any regular school, Reach was open during the week. But parents felt their children needed some activity to keep them occupied during weekends. So they formed a small informal group to organise outings for their children.

The parents would meet and discuss parenting problems while the children played, supervised by young volunteers. But lack of space compelled parents to look around for a bigger meeting place.

Iona Kundu's contacts at Loreto House came handy, and the parents started meeting at the school every Sunday. By then, the group had ceased to function as part of Reach and had become a separate entity calling itself the Association for the Development of the Mentally Handicapped (Mentaid). It was registered in 1986. Last December, on World Disability Day, Mentaid Association was adjudged the Best Parents' Association by the Women and Child Welfare Department of the Government of West Bengal.

The search for space at that time took parents to St Xavier's High School. Two project rooms and a playground were put at Mentaid's disposal. While the children played indoor and outdoor games, the parents would meet in a project room. Volunteers from the Rotaract Club of Calcutta Midtown supervised the children while they played. The children learnt group dancing and making handicrafts. Discussions and workshops were also arranged.

Realising that children who are mentally challenged learn repetitive jobs easily, this group of par-



Children play, learn and earn at Mentaid

BHASKAR MULLICK

ents thought why not teach the children some vocational skills? Around this time, Apeejay High School offered the use of its staff room to Mentaid every Saturday. The parents managed to procure some used printing blocks from a printing unit at Bidhan Sarani in Central Kolkata, while a well-wisher offered to arrange supplies of cloth from a textile mill. Another parent arranged for printing ink and the group started its very first vocational training venture in block printing at the Apeejay premises in 1989-90.

The first few items were children's handkerchiefs. Commercial considerations had not set in yet. Iona Kundu says: "It was the first time we were successfully getting our children exposed to a skill."

In 1993, the parents pooled resources and helped by friends and well-wishers set up the Mentaid Centre at Behala. Unlike ordinary special schools, the Mentaid Centre is run by parents who guide teachers and often take part in teaching their children.

Iona Kundu is the director, Shukla Bhaduri secretary, and Satyendranath Mukherjee, treasurer of the association. Mothers like Manju Verma and Chitra Mukherjee have done bridge courses in special edu-

units where they work and earn a small income.

The choice of a vocation depends on the child's extent of disability and how early the intervention has been. For instance, children who are severely disabled first get familiar with social skills in the Living-Learning Unit, where they learn how to sit in neat rows, table manners, sweep the floor, stack their bags and shoes and greet people. Then, they start learning to draw, read and write and eventually move on to cooking, peeling and other skills.

Students learn to embroider and make table mat sets, baby sets, and towels, grind spices, rice powder and pakora mixes, print greeting and visiting cards. They also cook the meals they are given every afternoon under supervision. All cleaning, peeling, and arranging is done by the students themselves.

The baby sets, table mats and towels are mostly sold through stores like The Good Companions, while the masalas and mixes are sold in the neighbourhood. Greeting cards and visiting cards are made against orders placed by corporate houses and individuals. Since the orders are steady, each student gets paid a basic salary along with an additional productivity-linked incentive.

Tortuous summer in Bundelkhand

Bharat Dogra
Bundelkhand (UP)

THIS year's summer will be a tortuous one for the Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh. Hunger and thirst can lead to many deaths. Despite an improvement in government efforts to tackle the four-year-old drought, the situation is bad. Inequalities, feudal oppression, ecological ruin and corruption have aggravated the problems created by a serious drought.

In Atraaruaaf village of Mahoba district, drought has brought extreme distress to both Dalits and upper castes. Thirty-year-old Paramlal, a Dalit, died after prolonged hunger and tension caused by accumulated debt. Several times he had pleaded for help, but this landless family of six did not get any relief, said Paramlal's widow Ladkunwar.

At the other end of the caste divide is a Thakur family in which two brothers have committed suicide in quick succession. Chandrapal Singh and

Krishnapal Singh had been deeply upset by repeated crop losses, accumulating debt and inability to meet basic family needs. Their neat, well-built house with a beautiful plant in their courtyard reminded one of the better days this family must have seen.

Their two young widows Saroj and Sheela now face the difficult task of bringing up their six children alone. Fighting back tears, Saroj said, "They have gone, but we can't turn back from these responsibilities." Said Sheela: "In our (Thakur) family we cannot just go and do *majdoori* (labour), so we have started doing sewing. The government has not given us any help yet."

As we approach Jigni village, in Raath tehsil of Hamirpur district, all we can see is a vast stretch of barren, dismal fields with sad cows searching vainly for a blade of grass. A young farmer, Narendra Pratap says, "In a normal year these fields would have been full of greenery. But this year there is no moisture in

the soil. The rain gods have failed us and we have no irrigation. Earlier the *kharif* (summer) crop was lost completely leaving us deeper in debt."

When women heard that we had come to ask about drought-related distress they came out in large numbers to talk. They said even sick and disabled men have been forced to migrate, hunger exists in the homes of once prosperous farmers and daughters' marriages have not taken place for several years.

Most people are living on staple cereals with salt and chutney. Use of pulses, vegetables and milk has declined sharply. People can't even afford dry *roti* and salt. As many as seven people have died of starvation in Nahri village of Banda district alone.

Villagers said in the last five years the weather has changed adversely affecting farmers and farming. Rainfall has decreased, rain tends to be concentrated in a smaller number of days and untimely rain is ruining crops. The survival of several villagers is seriously threatened.





Paris



Jakarta



Seoul

IS DELHI MISSING THE BUS?

Minus social marketing, BRT suffers here. But look how the world is taking to buses.



Bogota has made almost a complete transition to buses for public transport

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

A PROJECT meant to carve out a bus corridor and give pedestrians and cyclists designated space on a 16 km stretch of road in Delhi has resulted in outbursts of anger and acrimony by middle class car owners.

Called the bus rapid transit system or the BRT, the project is aimed at making it easier to move around in Delhi, where traffic is unruly. In the absence of public transport, the number of personal two-wheelers and cars has kept on increasing, making it difficult now to drive and park.

The BRT has been adopted in cities worldwide because it is cheaper than a metro railway, uses road space in a socially equitable manner, reduces door-to-door travel time, brings down pollution levels and provides an incentive to shift from personal to public transport.

The BRT and physically segregated busways have changed the way people travel in Mexico, Curitiba, Paris, Nice, Jakarta, Bogota, Quito, Seoul, Taipei and several other cities. BRTs for Manhattan and London are on the drawing board

because of this experience.

International experts, high-power committees and providers of infrastructure finance have over the years vetted the Delhi project and found merit in it. After the first stretch from Ambedkar Nagar to Delhi Gate, five other corridors are planned.

Roads account for 21 per cent of Delhi's total area, which is high by international standards. An estimated 60 per cent of the motorised commuting trips are made by mass transit, the majority being by bus. But buses represent less than one per cent of the total motorised vehicles. Cars and two-wheelers represent 90 per cent of the motorised vehicles.

It is common knowledge that several thousand people die or get injured in road accidents every year. They are mostly pedestrians or cyclists for whom there is no space on the roads though an estimated 40 per cent of Delhi's citizens walk or cycle to work.

A BRT that ushers in low-floor buses in a central stream, creates space for pedestrians and cyclists and gives cars a separate corridor clearly seems to be an answer to Delhi's traffic problems.



London



Tehran



But for the past six months or so a campaign in the media, prompted by vocal middle class resident welfare associations in south Delhi, has sought to condemn the BRT and have it shelved. The campaign has also personally targeted Dinesh Mohan and Geetam Tiwari, transportation planners at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), who have been responsible for designing the project.

One reason clearly is that the middle class and rich in Delhi are hesitant to acknowledge the rights of poorer people who come to the city and provide services in the unorganised sector. A bus system, cycle lanes and so on give them a new legitimacy. BRT is more than just a transportation project: it is a reorientation of the city's priorities.

Another reason for the outcry is the complete absence of social marketing of the BRT concept as being world class. No attempt seems to have been made to win people over to the BRT idea. In the absence of signage and traffic police, motorists have not understood how to use the new configurations that have emerged, as it were, from nowhere on an important artery.

For months together now, while work has been in progress between Ambedkar Nagar and Delhi Gate, motorists have found themselves caught in a confusing maze of new lanes. Buses, as is their style in the Capital, have done

pretty much as they please. The result has been excruciating traffic jams with vehicles looking for escape routes through nearby residential colonies.

Ask a south Delhi motorist about the BRT and the response will invariably be very negative. To the average person no good can possibly come out of such chaos. The project seems to be in just too much of a mess.

THE GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

Interestingly, BRTs the world over have run into opposition at the project implementation stage. Getting a BRT going has invariably been difficult and even painful. The proponents of the system have had to face public anger. Politicians and administrators have had to work at street level to assuage feelings and solve real time problems of usage.

In Bogota, the iconic former Mayor, Enrique Penalosa, made the use of roads a political issue, finally leading to a referendum in which people brought in a bus system, chose to make roads traffic-free during certain hours and so on.

Penalosa says that in the developing world, improving transportation is a political and economic challenge. It requires creating greater equity in cities and making services more inclusive.

"Urban transport is a political rather than a technical issue. The technical aspects are simple," says Penalosa.

In the absence of similar leadership people in Delhi have not been able to redefine their city. Caught up in the chaos that accompanies a project in the making, Delhi's middle class has not had an opportunity to understand what a public transport system under the BRT can do to make commuting safer, cleaner and more efficient.

MOHAN'S MERCEDES

As academicians, Mohan and Tiwari have been handicapped in presenting their case. They have countered criticism of the BRT with the charge that the rich and middle class, particularly those in the media, don't care how the majority travel. This may not be incorrect, but their response has only served to make the criticism more strident and even personal.

Much, for instance, has been made of Mohan owning a Mercedes and turning up in it at a cycle rally at a BRT location. It is true Mohan owns a Mercedes, but it is ancient, was bought second hand and can hardly be categorised as a gleaming set of wheels owned by a man about town. It is also a fact that Mohan has cycled and walked three km to work at IIT for decades, though given his professional standing he could quite legitimately be very wealthy.

Just how acrimonious matters have got can be judged from a hilarious email Mohan received from a reporter. It went like this:

"Dear Professor Mohan:

Is it true that you participated in the symbolic trial run on the cycle track at the BRT corridor on Sunday 13th April '2008?

Is it also true that you, a votary of public transport, came for the trial in a Mercedes Benz car instead of a DTC or a Blueline bus?

If owning a car that too a Mercedes Benz is thought to be a necessity by you, why have you peddled the contaminated idea of pedal power to Delhi Government?

You would also appreciate that it is very unusual for an IIT professor to own a Mercedes Benz. We would be grateful if you clarify the ownership of the vehicle? If you own it, what was the source of funds for buying the vehicle?

This mail is being sent to you as you refused to reply the same queries to mediapersons in Delhi Secretariat on Tuesday 15th April 2008."

NOT TWO PLANNERS ALONE

It is hardly fair to target Mohan and Tiwari. Ownership of the BRT needs to be traced to successive governments, a policy on sustainable transport and evaluation by the Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation (IDFC).

Implementation of the project is being done by RITES. The management of the BRT comes under a joint venture between the Delhi government and IDFC.



Chaos and confusion while descending from the Moolchand flyover in Delhi

This company has only recently come into existence and is yet to settle down to managing the project. It also hasn't been given the sweeping powers that have been bestowed on the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC).

The BRT for Delhi has been checked out and approved of by international experts: Alan Hoffman, founder/principal the Mission Group, San Diego, California; Prof Hermann Knoflachner of the Technical University of Vienna; Lee Sims, director of the IBI Group in Toronto.

These experts attended a government workshop on the project in 2005. They examined design details and visited the entire corridor.

The concept of a BRT for Delhi dates back to 2002 when the Delhi Transport Corporation held an international workshop attended by several foreign and Indian experts and Penaloza himself to share his experience in Bogota.

The decision to have a BRT was announced at that workshop, which was organised in collaboration with the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) and IDFC. Thereafter, a committee on sustainable transport was set up and recommended at the end of 2002 that BRT be introduced on five corridors in Delhi. The first corridor is the current one, which begins at Ambedkar Nagar and goes to Delhi Gate and then the Inter-



The first trial run of the Delhi BRT on April 20

State Bus Terminal (ISBT).

It was only after this rather detailed groundwork and collective decision-making that IIT and RITES were given the responsibility of designing and implementing the system.

RECENT CRITICISM

"Thus far everyone in government and even in the media was all praise for buses. In fact we would be repeatedly asked when the project was going to be implemented," says Tiwari in the seventh floor office of the Transport Research and Injury Prevention Programme (TRIPP) which is led by Mohan at the IIT in Delhi.

"The criticism has been only in the past few months and it shows a complete disdain for the facts. It is not true that work on the BRT is causing deaths. If you look at the records the number of deaths on that stretch has actually

gone down," she says.

When a BRT is put in place, the number of deaths from accidents actually goes down, she points out, because pedestrians and cyclists are taken off the road and buses and cars have their own channels.

Mohan argues that once a project in the public interest has been thought through and it has been decided to implement it, it is important for everyone to go along and make it work, particularly when it is something as difficult to implement as a change in road usage.

The traffic police in Delhi have been conspicuous by their absence at the BRT location. Tiwari and Mohan say that several attempts to brief the police have only elicited the response that the space for cars is being reduced. There seems to be no attempt to understand a better urban transportation model.

BETTER THAN METRO

The BRT comes at a mere fraction of the cost of a Metro Railway. It is also faster from door to door because studies show that people in Indian cities tend to make shorter trips. The Delhi Metro with a network of about 60 km accounts for just about two per cent of the local commuter trips.



Interestingly, BRTs the world over have run into opposition at the project implementation stage. Getting a BRT going has invariably been difficult and even painful. The proponents of the system have had to face public anger. Politicians and administrators have had to work at street level to assuage feelings and solve real time problems of usage.



Geetam Tiwari



Dinesh Mohan

Mohan says the original feasibility of the Delhi Metro was based on 3.1 million passengers using it by 2005. "The system is actually operating at 0.6 million passengers per day at the end of 2007," he says.

This apart, the Delhi Metro has done nothing to reduce surface congestion and air pollution, which were both avowed goals.

The BRT not only meets these urban challenges, it serves the largest number of people. For instance, the young and the old who cannot be expected to be driving cars, need a system by which they can move safely from point to point over short distances. They need space on the road to walk and cycle. They, as do women, could do with better street lighting. The design of the BRT provides for all this.

But despite all these benefits, few people in Delhi know what the BRT can do for improving their lives and a great many others are hoping that it fails.

As final trials begin and the stage is set for a launch on May 1, chances are that the BRT will run smack into further opposition. In the absence of coordinated efforts by agencies responsible for governing Delhi and citizens' groups, the BRT could even collapse because of the many hurdles associated with its implementation.

But then what is the solution? The Metro, for all the hype around it, is too costly and amasses debt. Studies show that it doesn't meet the commuter needs of Delhi.

Traffic as it exists today is so chaotic that if new systems are not put in place traffic jams are going to only get worse and moving around in the city is going to be even more difficult over the years.

It is recorded that despite the switch to CNG and the creation of the Metro, pollution levels resulting from the rampant use of personal transport, are continuing to rise. Delhi ranks as one of the unhealthy

cities in the world with cancer and asthma directly linked to pollutants in the air.

Finally, no city can hope to flourish unless it provides services required by the majority of its inhabitants. In Delhi, the truth is that the majority live in slums and serve in the unorganised sector. Attempts have been made to push them out, but the reality is that they will go nowhere because the city is where people come to earn a living. It is no different in cities anywhere else in the world and Delhi's future depends on calmly redefining its civic priorities.

An efficient and inclusive transport is just one of the many things that Delhi will have to achieve if it seriously wants to be considered a world class city. And as the world turns to buses, the question is whether Delhi can any longer afford to miss the bus.

Cars, buses, people and the cities we want

ENRIQUE PENALOSA

WE cannot talk about urban transport until we know what type of a city we want. And to talk about the city we want is to talk about the way we want to live. Do we want to create a city for children and the elderly, and therefore for every other human being, or a city for automobiles? The important questions are not about engineering, but about ways to live. A premise of the new city is that we want society to be as egalitarian as possible. For this purpose, quality of life distribution is more important than income distribution. The equality that really matters is that relevant to a child: Access to adequate nutrition, recreation, education, sports facilities, green spaces and a living environment as free of motor vehicles as possible. The city should have abundant cultural offerings; public spaces with people; low levels of noise and air pollution; short travel times.

Urban transport is a political rather than a technical issue. The technical aspects are simple. The difficult decisions relate to who is going to benefit from the models adopted. Do we dare create a transport model different from that in the so-called advanced world cities? Do we dare create a transport system giving priority to the needs of the poor majority rather than the automobile owning minority? Are we trying to find the most efficient, economical way to move a city's population, as cleanly and comfortably as possible? Or are we just trying to minimize the upper classes' traffic jams?

The new city should have a high population density, in any case of more than 120 inhabitants per hectare (12,000 inhabitants per square kilometer). We want cities to have a high population density, for reasons as the following:

- Low cost high-frequency transit systems.
- Shorter transport times.
- Mobility for non-drivers such as the poor, children and the old.
- Abundance of people in public pedestrian spaces.
- Rich cultural offering.
- Efficient land use
- Lower expenditures on road construction and maintenance. (If Bogotá had Atlanta's density, it would occupy an area almost 20 times as large as it occupies today, and its road network would also be that much longer)

For reasons such as the above, practically all urban experts in the world coincide in the desirability of density. Now, **UNRESTRICTED CAR USE INEVITABLY BREEDS SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT.** First it brings about traffic jams. Traffic jams in turn create enormous pressure to invest in more, bigger, road infrastructure; which in turn stimulates suburban development.

The above occurs regardless of availability of mass transit. Paris is the best example of growing car use and suburbanization despite a beautiful city and top quality public transport. It is important to understand why people go to the suburbs, so as to provide that in cities. Ironically, it seems that one of the main attractions of suburbia is a relatively car-free environment, for children to play and ride bicycles safely. Greenery and green spaces also pull people to the suburbs. The new city can provide ample exclusively pedestrian streets and green spaces. Contrary to what is supposed often, a high density city need not have very high buildings: Five-story buildings can easily yield high population densities.

TRANSMILENIO

The single project that we implemented that most contributed to improve quality of life and gave citizens confidence in a better future was a bus-based transit system we called TransMilenio. Starting from zero, inspired by the Curitiba system, we were able to design, build the infrastructure, create the private partners that would operate it, get out the thousands of buses that previously operated there, and put the system in operation in three years. Today the incipient system accounts for more than 630,000 daily trips and the main line is carrying more than 40,000 passengers per hour, more than many rail systems. TransMilenio users are saving on average 223 hours annually; 9% of them used to go to work by car. We should have TransMilenio moving more than 80% of the city's population by 2015.

Although the system is bus based, its operation is more similar to that of a rail based system. Articulated buses operate on exclusive busways, using one or two lanes in each direction. Passengers board the buses only at stations. They buy a ticket when they enter the station, or in stores outside. In this way, when

the bus arrives and opens its two doors simultaneously with the station doors, a hundred passengers can go out and a hundred may walk in in seconds. The bus floor is at the same level of that of the station, making entering and exiting the bus a rapid and safe operation, as well as making the buses fully accessible to the handicapped. The drivers, devoid of any incentive to pick up passengers off the stations do not do it. But it would be difficult to do it even if they tried, because doors are 1,5 meters off the ground.

TransMilenio uses articulated 165 passenger buses with clean diesel engines that comply with Euro Two environmental standards. Contractual arrangements guarantee that buses are extremely clean, well lighted, and are changed before they are in less than perfect shape. Drivers wear uniforms and have to undergo training programs. While some buses stop at all stations, others operate express routes stopping at only a few. Passengers can change from a local to an express bus with the same ticket; as they can also change from a bus on one route to another on a different one without any extra cost. Feeder buses not on exclusive lanes but sharing streets with the rest of traffic give people in marginal neighborhoods access to the system. TransMilenio buses run in the middle of avenues and not on the sides, so that vehicles entering and exiting drive-



ways, or delivery vehicles, do not become obstacles. Also, in this way one station is required in each place, instead of one in each direction. Passengers through handicapped-friendly pedestrian bridges access most stations. Although TransMilenio is the fastest means today to move about Bogotá, it could be made even faster at a low cost, building underpasses for the buses at busy intersections. This can easily be done at any time in the future. There is nothing technically complex about TransMilenio. The issue is whether a city is ready to get cars off several lanes in its main arteries, in order to assign them exclusively to articulated buses. If the common good is to prevail over the private interest, it is very clear that it must be done.

The main advantage of TransMilenio over rail systems is its low cost. Our public investments were US \$ 5 million per kilometre. Even this cost is high, because we chose not only to build a transit artery, but to improve dramatically the public pedestrian space around it, with sidewalks, plazas, trees and the like, so as to improve the city quality of life and to attract more users to the system. Operating costs are also low. While almost all rail systems in the world require operational subsidies, at US \$ 0.40 per passenger, TransMilenio private operators do not only cover costs but also make a profit.

Often Third World upper classes insist on rail systems because they oppose bus-systems use of space they rather have for their private cars. Generally they prefer subways not because they would like to use them which mostly they do not where they exist, but simply because they imagine that putting the poor underground traffic problems will go away. Rail or bus based, surface transport systems are more humane. It is much nicer to travel looking at buildings, people, trees, stores, than to travel underground like a rodent. When rail systems are chosen in Third World cities limited funds only permit building a couple of lines that rarely serve more than 15% of daily trips. Buses serve the rest of public transport trips. In all Third World cities, the majority of public transport is bus based.

An extract from a presentation made by Enrique Penalosa, former Mayor of Bogotá, at Berkeley



Worldview

LATITUDE MATTERS

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

Bamiyan's resolute governor

Aunohita Mojumdar
Kabul

HABIBA Sarobi, 50, walks into the room wearing a white scarf over her head and clothes in quiet colours. Perhaps dressing down is her way of finding space in Afghanistan's male-dominated society. She is, after all, Afghanistan's only woman governor of a province.

Sarobi was one of the first woman ministers to become Minister of Women's Affairs in President Hamid Karzai's cabinet for two and a half years before she was nominated as governor of Bamiyan province in March 2005.

Sarobi does not come from an elite, rich or political family. She was born into a middle class family in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. The 1978 coup by the Soviet supported government took place after she enrolled in Kabul University. The coup was followed by the invasion of Soviet troops. The university was the focal point of the resistance which would later crystallise into the Mujahideen. Sarobi's political education was in this milieu.

After a scholarship enabled her to study haematology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi, she worked as a pharmacist in Kabul until the Taliban entered the city in 1996.

"All the women stayed at home," she recalls. "I was not an exception but it was difficult to be without a job. After a while I couldn't bear it. I took my children and went to Pakistan." In Peshawar she was temporarily a single parent as her husband stayed behind to look after the rest of the family and their home. She started working with the Afghan refugee population. "I started a teacher's training programme in the camp. Later, I became active with human rights and women's rights, holding workshops."

At this time Sarobi also ran an underground school for girls in Kabul, continuing this work until 2001, when the events of September 11 and the American invasion allowed her to return. Participating in the first *loya jirga*, she was subsequently handpicked by Karzai as his first minister.

Sarobi has no illusions that her time in the ministry or even the removal of the Taliban has dramatically improved the status of women in Afghanistan. "I can only be what I am because of the support of my family and because my husband believes in rights for women," she explains. "Success and strength can be milestones for women. But families can be the greatest obstacles in ultra conservative Afghanistan. No woman can succeed without family support."

Though women occupy 28 per cent of seats in Afghanistan's Parliament, thanks to a reservation system introduced largely under western pressure, Sarobi believes the veneer of support for women's rights runs thin. "It is mainly showcasing for the international community. Many members are very opposed to women's rights. This same Parliament tried to pass a law requiring women in positions of power to require a *mehram* or escort when travelling abroad. We need women in decision-making positions and not just in symbolic roles."

Sarobi believes the only way to bring about fundamental change is through education. "In the years of war people could not get an education. The current generation has grown up with extremism and fundamentalism. We need education to change that," she says.



Habiba Sarobi

Sarobi is the governor of the Bamiyan province. Located in the central highlands, the Hazarajat area, the province is largely populated by the Hazara community. Of Mongoloid origin, the Hazaras are distinct in their features and belong to the minority Shia community. They have faced systematic discrimination at the hands of other ethnic groups. During the Taliban regime the Bamiyan province saw some horrific massacres as the Taliban took out their ire against those they considered 'infidels' within the faith. They blockaded the area and forced people into starvation. The Hazarajat area held out longer than Kabul, falling to the Taliban only in 1998, even though fighting continued resulting finally in the destruction of the famous Buddha monuments.

While that single act put Bamiyan on the world atlas, the long neglect of the province has not seen a reversal. The area, with its difficult geography remains one of the most economically deprived. The infrastructure needed for it to even take advantage of aid programmes or build on poverty alleviation schemes has not been put in place and Sarobi has one response when asked about the priorities of her area: "We need roads, roads, and roads."

As a minority community the people of Bamiyan have demonstrated a greater faith and stake in institutions of democracy than other parts of the country as surveys have revealed. But most aid money is being diverted to insecure provinces. "Peace facilitates progress. We have peace and no narcotics. Why doesn't the international community take care by helping us?" asks Sarobi.

A UNESCO heritage site, the Bamiyan valley is spectacular and replete with historical sites. "If I succeed here, it will be a signal of success for women in Afghanistan. I see change. Now the mullahs bring their wives and daughters to meet me when I go to their houses," says Sarobi with hope in her eyes.

A judge in activist mode

Adil Jawad Khan
Karachi

THE light of democracy in Pakistan was ignited by the lawyers' movement. They led a spirited resistance to uphold the honour of the judiciary. The lawyers faced police, teargas and prison. Their agitation snowballed and gathered momentum with citizens and civil society groups joining in. The lawyer's black coat became a symbol of protest and a harbinger of change.

Now democracy has been restored. The new Prime Minister, Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, in his first order released all sacked judges who had been detained in their homes. The new government has also announced the restoration of all dislodged judges within 30 days of the formation of the federal cabinet.

The lawyers are hopeful that their movement will come to its logical end. Leaders of the lawyers' movement have become heroes. Among them is Justice Rasheed A Rizvi who traces his antecedents to Mumbai and its film industry.

Justice Rizvi is president of the Sindh High Court Bar Association and chairman of the executive committee of the Pakistan Bar Council. Established under the Constitution, the Pakistan Bar Council is a prestigious apex body of all Bar Associations in Pakistan. The associations have democratic traditions, electing their president every year and giving lawyers a chance to be leaders.

"We knew that the lawyers alone would not be capable of bringing about a revolution. We were just struggling to educate the masses that the military should go back to the barracks. But for this to happen, everyone had to come out for the restoration of democracy," says Rizvi.

Justice Rizvi was appointed as a judge in 1993 and he served in a banking court. In 1995, he became a judge in the Sindh High Court. He was among those judges who refused to take a fresh oath under the first Provincial Constitution Order (PCO) imposed by General Pervez Musharraf after he ousted the Nawaz Sharif government in October 1999.

Rizvi said that in 2000 the Musharraf regime had said it would route out corruption and bring about economic growth. "That might have impressed judges and convinced them to take oath even under the PCO," remarks Rizvi. "Judges are not politically oriented as most of them don't have a political background."

When the Generals, uncomfortable with the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry probing into the disappearance of Pakistanis and privatisation of a steel mill, asked him to resign, he refused. On March 9, he was suspended by President Musharraf and a reference was filed against him in the Supreme Judicial Council.

The Chief Justice's refusal to resign was unprecedented. Every regime in Pakistan has treated the judiciary with scant respect. But this time, things turned out different.

Members of the executive committee of the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) decided to protest against the unjust suspension of the Chief Justice. Rizvi was a member of the PBC committee which consisted of Aitzaz Ahsan, Ali Ahmed Kurd, Qazi Anwer and Tariq Mehmood and other lawyers.

They launched their movement on March 12. Next day, people were shocked to see the Chief Justice being manhandled by police officials on all the private television channels.

"That was the turning point," says Rizvi. "The people thought that if the Chief Justice could be manhandled like that, what justice could they expect in this country?"

On the request of the executive committee, the Chief Justice addressed bar councils all over Pakistan - in Abbottabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Sukkur and Hyderabad. Every time, thousands of people came out in support. The 80,000 strong lawyer's community got mobilised.

Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry was not let out of Karachi airport on his arrival on May 12, last year as clashes between pro- and anti-Musharraf groups claimed 42 lives. Karachi has been a flashpoint between lawyers and supporters of President Musharraf. Being a stronghold of the pro-Musharraf party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, the resistance to the lawyers' movement was the most here as compared to other parts of the country.

The lawyers clashed with the police, picketed, marched to Islamabad. On July 20, the full bench of the Supreme Court restored Iftikhar Chaudhry as Chief Justice of Pakistan. The antagonism now deepened. On November 3, President Musharraf imposed emergency rule and compelled some judges to take a fresh oath



Justice Rizvi and right: file pictures of the lawyers' protests



Justice Rizvi says without the help of the print and electronic media and civil society organisations, the lawyers' movement might not have succeeded. Students also played a small, dynamic role.

under the Provisional Constitutional Order. Sixty-five judges, including Iftikhar Chaudhry, were removed and put under house arrest. More than 4,000 lawyers were arrested and cases registered against them, including that of terrorism.

The lawyers restarted their agitation. Rizvi led the movement in the southern Sindh province and he was arrested. He is acknowledged as a daring lawyer who led in the worst circumstances without any security whatsoever.

Says Rizvi: "For the first time in the history of 61 years of this country, the middle-class took to the streets. Even retired army officers staged a protest on Feb 5 in Islamabad." He said it was unprecedented for retired army officers to stage such a demonstration.

Justice Rizvi says without the help of the print and electronic media and civil society organisations, the lawyers' movement might not have succeeded.

Students also played a small, dynamic role. Rizvi recalls that when he was young he took part in student politics.

He was an active member of the National Student Federation (NSF) in the University of Karachi, where he got his post-graduate degree in economics. While studying in Islamia Law College, Karachi, he was elected as president of the college union. In those days, students had played key roles in every movement against military dictators, from General Ayub Khan to General Zia-ul-Haq.

"That was why General Zia-ul-Haq decided to culminate the nursery of real politicians. Now only retired military officials, bureaucrats and landlords have the opportunity to become politicians," he says.

Justice Rizvi understood the value of struggle from his father, Bapu Rafiq Rizvi, a famous film director of the pre-partition era. Bapu produced a film, *Haqeeqat*, in favour of India's independence in 1942-43. But the British banned the film. After the movie was banned, Bapu had to struggle for a long time. In 1957, the family migrated to Lahore and later settled in Karachi. Bapu directed some successful films here, among them *Bedari*, *Wah Re Zamanay*, *Ishq-e-Habib*, *Phir Subha hogi* and *Do Ustad*.

Justice Rizvi studied in Mumbai and Karachi. He joined the legal profession in 1973 after getting his law degree from Karachi. In 1976, he enrolled as an advocate of the Sindh High Court. In 1981, he was elected as general secretary of the Karachi Bar Association for the term of one year.

"We just want to educate the masses about their rights and we will continue with our struggle without coming into politics," says Rizvi. The objectives of the lawyers' movement are clear: an independent judiciary and a socialist, democratic Pakistan. The lawyers have emerged as Pakistan's biggest advocates of democracy and the rule of law.

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PAKISTAN'S UNSUNG HEROES

The global power bubble

THERE are days when I wake up in the morning and dread the thought of confronting the front pages of newspapers and being consistently reminded of a world that is unravelling at an ever faster rate. Stepping into the real world provides no relief- unless we choose to play the ostrich and seclude ourselves inside some tourism ad-like bubble. Globalization has made sure that you can run (in Nike shoes if you will) but you can't hide. It has robbed us of that bliss of ignorance and forced upon us the folly of knowledge. The saga of Adam's expulsion from paradise continues...

The sub-prime related crisis is not merely a local American phenomenon to be studied from a distance; nor is the food crisis in Vietnam, the Philippines and Bangladesh; or the immigration question in the UK and a myriad other crises big and small scattered across the globe. They are all inter-twined, creating a thicker and thicker cord that is gradually strangling humanity.

Yet, on closer look, we find the common threads running through all of it. The least mysterious of these is greed. Humanity's greed knows no bound. Avarice was once universally deemed a vice. Today it is extolled! Modern language sees it standing shoulder to shoulder with curiosity, ambition, inspiration, even as a source of positive motivation. Gordon Gekko, the principal character in the film 'Wall Street' played flawlessly by Michael Douglas, speaks for our times when he says,

"Greed- for lack of a better word- is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms- greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge- has marked the upward surge of mankind".

Modern man has actually created a complete system where we can (and do) feed off one another's greed and 'prosper'. In this pyramid, unless you win I cannot win, unless you are greedy and consume more and more, I cannot feed my greed and prosper. Worse still, once you have entered this system there is no exit. Here, what you cannot cure, you not only endure but endorse.

Hence you'll find no critics of this scheme. We are all a part of it. Have you ever heard anyone propose the reduction of consumption per se? So afraid were the Americans of how the 9/11 tragedy would affect this economic scheme that on September 12, President Bush proclaimed continued spending on the part of Americans an act of patriotism.

The other common thread that glares at us across humanity, is peculiarly pyramidal too. It is the hierarchy of power - a constant companion through all of man's journey, from our primitive past to the present.

The only difference is that all the scattered social and power hierarchies are now merging into mega pyramids of global proportions.

The ability of entire societies to leap across vast expanses of continents and reorder life in another country has changed vastly in its modus operandi from the days of colonialism. Response time can almost be measured in real time, be

it in stock markets or fashion markets, computer viruses or biological ones, commodity prices or real estate prices.

We have created a system of transferring and readjusting our position in local hierarchies to global ones. Rather confusing when on a day-to-day basis you don't know who you answer to in the global scheme of things. Being privy to the goings-on of large companies, I regularly witness confused managers who have no clue as to who will be giving them direction at work next week or the one after. Companies are often bought and sold before the reorganisation

process of one takeover is complete. As a language trainer, I often comfort them with the knowledge that 'English' will continue to be a common factor no matter what the nationality of their future masters.

In such a reality our political concept of 'nationhood' has to be redefined. Population and the laws governing them, rights of citizens, immigrants, national institutions, and many other elements governing politics usually function within a given territory. This fundamental concept of territoriality is seriously in question.

The transnational corporate system that now controls and provides mankind most of its basic needs is close to transcending all territorial limitations. Ditto for the global financial and financial markets systems. World bodies such as the UN and its various agencies get member states to obey its mandates, designed by and in the interests of the powerful elite states. More and more of our dual existence is moving out of the 'national' sphere into a 'global' one. The little pyramids are merging into a mega pyramid.

The myth of the power of the people, as in 'democracies' is itself coming apart. The belief that we the people elect our leaders sustains us against the all-powerful system that we have created and whose prisoners we have become. The equation between peoples' representatives and the principal employment providers (corporate business) has become an uneasy and questionable one. It is hard to discern who represents whom.

To cite a few examples: the world (specially the underdeveloped nations) have been told that the European Agricultural Subsidy was to protect and preserve the small farmers. In reality, it has been found that 80 per cent of the subsidy goes to 20 per cent of the recipients. It was recently disclosed that the largest recipients were large companies and land-owning aristocrats like Nestle, Unilever and the

Queen of England. The Dutch EU agricultural minister, Cees Veerman, didn't even disclose his own subsidy earnings till he was discovered in the list. Go figure!

In France and Germany they don't publish the list. Ex-Prime Minister of the UK, Tony Blair now works for J P Morgan (a six figure salary for four days of work a year). Schroeder, ex-Chancellor of Germany works as advisor for Gazprom (similar deal), Berlusconi re-re-elected Prime Minister (owns half of Italy)... Even Jonathan Swift couldn't have dreamt up a dystopia like the one we now live in.

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LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

The equation between peoples' representatives and corporate business has become an uneasy and questionable one. It is hard to discern who represents whom.

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Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

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

Mumbai's housing chimera

SIMPREET SINGH

THE government of Maharashtra proposes to build eight lakh dwelling units for lower and middle income groups over the next three years. It said so during its Budget session. But this declaration is merely wishful thinking and sheer populism. Since Maharashtra will face general elections next year, such populism is not unexpected. All the political parties, irrespective of their take on the obnoxious issue of 'outsiders', have been making the same false promises.

Included in the list of political parties, is the Shiv Sena. The party has forgotten the promise made by Bal Thackeray before the elections of 1995 of providing eight lakh houses to 40 lakh slum dwellers of Mumbai. The official figure of houses constructed till today, in this period of 12 long years, is 80,000 houses only. Because of misplaced policies, the number of those forced to stay in slum areas has meanwhile crossed 60 lakh.

To construct these houses special and exclusive authorities were created like MHADA and SRA. How successful they have been can be judged from the latest Economy Survey Report of Maharashtra for the year 2007-08. The report exposes the shocking fact that between 2006-07, MHADA constructed only 90 houses for the Economic Weaker Sections (EWS). And then look at some startling figures: 110 lakh people are forced to stay in slums in Maharashtra of which 60 lakh alone are in Mumbai. So if one assumes that the government is going to continue making homes at the same snail's pace it will take around 8,000 years to construct those promised dwelling units!

Last year the government had celebrated the fact that it had become the first state to have a housing policy of its own. But the state has failed miserably to carry out its duties and fulfil its obligations towards its citizens, especially the poor. The state's housing policy is more about repeating the follies it had earlier been engaged in. The policy provides for more and more reliance on the private sector for creation of additional housing stock. As a result, there is now a concomitant increase in the shortage of housing stock. This is as true for the whole country as much as for Mumbai.

As per the Report of the Expert Group of the Planning Commission on Housing, the shortage faced in the housing sector is to the tune of 24.7 million units and 99 per cent of this pertains to



Housing is becoming unaffordable for the poor and the middle class. The real estate sector may be growing but so are the numbers of the homeless.

Economic Weaker Sections. It is interesting to note that according to the National Habitat and Housing Policy of 1997, this shortage was of 22 million units and, prior to it during the period 1992-93, it was only 20.4 million units, as per the National Housing Policy, 1994.

One can observe that instead of decreasing, the shortage has been growing and growing. A bird's eye view of policies and programmes related to housing and urban development introduced during this period mark a clear trend of growing reliance on the private sector for generation of housing stock. The result is that the numbers of those facing shortages of formal housing has been increasing. Housing is becoming unaffordable not only for the poorer sections

of society but even for the middle class. The real estate sector may be growing by leaps and bounds but so are the numbers of the homeless.

Growing property prices are acting as a major deterrent to affordability of land and houses in urban areas. Land, under market forces, is subjected to such unprecedented speculation that purchasing a house today is beyond the reach of the middle class. The price of land has sky rocketed to such heights that recently a plot of less than 2 acres was sold at the rate of Rs 821 crores at the Bandra Kurla Complex.

(Continued on page 31)

Is the court clearing Vedanta?

ASHISH KOTHARI AND KANCHI KOHLI

THE Supreme Court's judgement on mining bauxite in the Niyamgiri Hills of Orissa is a classic case of providing an escape route to a legal defaulter. Delivered on November 23, 2007, amidst stunned silence in the Chief Justice's court, it displays several flaws. Overtly it disallows forest clearance to an industrial house that has violated the law both in spirit and practice, but hidden behind the strictures is a neat solution for the company to get clearance! Unless the Court realises its folly, serious injustice will be done to a sensitive adivasi community and to the environment.

In 2004, Vedanta Alumina Ltd (VAL) obtained environment clearance to run an alumina refinery in Kalahandi district of Orissa. The refinery was critically linked to the mining of bauxite in the Niyamgiri Hills. VAL had started construction of the refinery without procuring clearances for the mining. It did not then mention that the refinery could not run unless it also mined bauxite as the raw material. This anomaly was exposed by three petitioners, R.Sreedhar, Biswajit Mohanty and Prafulla Samantara, in a complaint to the Central Empowered Committee (a monitoring body set up under directions of the Supreme Court's Godavaraman forest case bench). The petitioners pointed out that the mining proposed in the Niyamgiri Hills was likely to have devastating impacts on forests, wildlife, and on the extremely vulnerable Dongria Kondh adivasi community.

Niyamgiri houses rich biodiversity, including tiger, leopard, sloth bear, pangolin, giant squirrels, and mouse deer. It is part of an elephant migration corridor, and home to over 300 plants species. These hills are also the birth place of hundreds of streams which feed two large rivers, the Vamsadhara and Nagavalli, providing drinking and irrigation water to millions of people in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Finally, the region harbours Dongria Kondh adivasis (a primitive tribal group), who are supposed to have constitutional safeguards against such uprooting. The forests that VAL wants to mine contain sacred groves that are crucial for the Dongria Kondh's cultural and spiritual sustenance. For them it is equivalent to proposing mining under a temple or a mosque.

The very first sentence of the Court's November judgement is factually incorrect. It states that "M/s Vedanta Aluminium Ltd. (formerly known as "Vedanta Alumina Ltd.") filed an application seeking clearance of the proposal for use of 723.343 ha of land (including 58.943 ha of reserve forest land) in Lanjigarh Tehsil of Kalahandi District for setting up Alumina Refinery. The matter has been pending since 6.3.04." In actuality, it was citizens who filed a case showing the company's violations.

The judgement goes on to make further such statements. Over the last three years, petitioners, researchers, and the Centrally Empowered Committee (CEC) have pointed out the serious nature of violations indulged in by VAL. The petitioners had said that the company wrongly delinked the mining from the refinery when originally seeking clearance (and getting it from the Ministry of Environment and Forests), and then sought to obtain clearance for mining saying it was necessary for the refinery! The CEC in its final report explicitly recommended to the Court, that clearance not be given. And yet, contradicting its own monitoring committee's recommendations, the Court's judgement states: "It is not in dispute that in this case mining of bauxite deposits is required to take place on the top of Niyamgiri hills. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has given an environment clearance for Alumina Refinery Project."

At first glance it would appear that the November judgement has denied VAL

clearance to mine. But scratch the surface, and it's a different story. Just a few days before judgement day, the newspapers had splashed a report that the Norwegian Council of Ethics (NCE) had passed severe strictures against Vedanta, based on which the Norwegian government excluded the company from the investment portfolio of its Global Pension Fund. The report pointed to several unethical practices of VAL and its subsidiary Sterlite Industries India Limited (SIIL) in whose name the initial environmental clearance was granted. SIIL was found guilty of irresponsible handling of hazardous waste, illegal production expansion, and repeated and severe violations of a series of environmental requirements in its other operations within India.

Ironically, the Court chose to respond to this criticism from a foreign body,

having previously ignored the advice and pleas of Indian citizens and experts including the CEC. The judgement states, referring to the NCE's report: "We do not wish to express any opinion on the correctness of the said Report. However, we cannot take the risk of handing over an important asset into the hands of the company unless we are satisfied about its credibility."

Incredibly, though, in the same judgement the Court offers a way out to VAL. It allows SIIL and Orissa Mining Corporation (OMC) Limited to appeal for clearance of the project, by assuring the Court of a "rehabilitation package". This includes:

- State of Orissa to float a Special Purposes Vehicle (SPV) for scheduled area development of Lanjigarh Project with State of Orissa, OMC Limited and M/s SIIL as stakeholders.

- M/s SIIL will need to deposit 5 per cent of its annual profits before tax and interest from Lanjigarh mining project or Rs 10 crores, whichever is higher, for Scheduled Area Development with the said SPV.

- M/s SIIL shall pay Net Present Value (economic value of the forest being diverted) of Rs 55 crores, Rs 50.53 crores towards Wildlife Management Plan around Lanjigarh mine, and Rs 12.20 crores towards tribal development.

- There are 16 specific suggestions by the Orissa State Government which include demarcation of lease area; identification of area for compensatory afforestation; rehabilitation; phased reclamation of mined area; specific and comprehensive plans for wildlife management and development of tribals and so on.

It is astounding that while disallowing the parent group's plea, the Court has opened up the possibility of its subsidiary SIIL getting the same clearance! Was the Court merely trying to save its face by not granting direct clearance, but not offend VAL at the same time?

Moving quickly, SIIL moved the Court on December

14, last year, accepting all the conditions laid down in the judgment.

In the meanwhile, a review petition has been filed by a citizen, Sidhartha Nayak. Nayak and his lawyers, earlier moved the court independently on the grounds of the impact mining would have on the Dongria Kondh tribals. On October 5, 2007, this case was merged with the ongoing arguments before the Godavarman (forest) bench.

Nayak's plea is that the issue being referred to is not that of the refinery, but of the 672 hectares being sought for mining. The impacts of this activity have not been duly considered and argued.

Whatever the fate of this case, it has exposed the shallowness with which the court has looked at environmental and social issues. It has given easy escape routes to an alleged violator.



These hills are the birth place of hundreds of streams which feed two large rivers, the Vamsadhara and Nagavalli, providing drinking and irrigation water to millions of people in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

The truth about the food crisis

BHARAT DOGRA

A HUGE food shortage looms over the globe. With it naturally comes the threat of hunger and malnutrition with the 'bottom billion' of the world's population being the worst affected. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon recently warned that the prices of basic foods - wheat, corn, rice - are at record highs, up 50 per cent or more in the past six months. Global food stocks are at historic lows. Food riots have erupted from West Africa to South Asia. In countries where dependence on food imports is high, he said, people are rising to protest against the high costs of food. "The UN World Food Programme (WFP) is seeing families that previously could afford a diverse, nutritious diet dropping to one staple and cutting their meals from three to two to one a day," Ban Ki-moon has said.

Josette Sheeran, executive director of the WFP, said in February that her organisation is having problems in raising an extra \$500 million to cover the rising cost of the food that it now provides to about 73 million people. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) said in February that it had been forced to cut about \$120 million from future aid programmes to pay for current commitments.

The crisis stems from the free market strategies that have been applied to food. How specious and ill-researched these strategies are is evident from the current situation. The WFP said in October 2007 that the colossal food surpluses of the 1960s and 1970s in the developed countries are a thing of the past. But less than a year later Sheeran tells us that next year world grain stocks are expected to fall to their lowest level in two decades.

Till some years back most developing countries firmly believed strongly in production of enough staple foods to at least meet their own needs. The concept of food sovereignty was firmly embedded in these countries. But some developed countries and international institutions propagated highly distorted views that these countries should pursue their so-called 'comparative advantage' to produce export crops while they can import their staple foods. This highly distorted view has already proved disastrous for several developing countries and they have become increasingly dependent on imports of their staple foods.

According to data compiled by the World Bank net cereal imports by developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are projected to increase to 265 million tons in 2030 from 85 million tons in 2000. Many countries have declining domestic production per capita of food staples. Low foreign exchange availability often limits their capacity to import.

What is no less disturbing and has become increasingly evident in recent months is that the world's granaries on which many developing countries were supposed to depend for imports are themselves full of gaping holes.

The way forward is a reversal of free market strategies because they have clearly failed and have put large numbers of people on the planet at risk. The opportunities in agriculture are huge if strategists were to refocus themselves.

There is absolutely no need for India to panic. The potential of India's agriculture is massive. We only have to implement genuinely farmer-friendly, ecologically-protective and equality based policies to realise this enormous potential. Promoting self-reliance should be key words, both at the national and village level.

Briefly, the following ten-point programme can help India to feed its people satisfactorily while also protecting environment.

- A radical programme of land-redistribution to make available considerably more land to the poor.
- Water conservation and giving adequate share of water to poor peasants.

- Increasing green cover particularly those trees and shrubs which provide food and fodder, promoting a harmonious relationship between forests and people.
- Giving more emphasis in agricultural development to poor and backward areas.

- Promoting organic farming as well as farming based on local resources, helping intensive chemical use areas switch over to sustainable and environment friendly practices.

- Promoting direct linkages between farmers and consumers, particularly to get a better price for healthier organic food, improving public distribution system and ensuring access to food by most vulnerable groups.

- A better and more effective role for women in the food security system.

- Promoting a 'food first' approach while deciding crop priorities.

- Improving overall development policies and priorities to favour rural areas and agriculture.

- Protecting the interests of food and food security from WTO-led globalisation.



Learning from past mistakes, developing countries must now take firm measures to produce adequate food for their needs, now and in the long-run, using ecologically safe methods which protect soil and biodiversity.

While it is easy to blame global warming for the food crisis, ecologically degrading practices have also contributed significantly to shortages. A senior agronomist, Rene Dumont, has clearly stated: "Much of the extraordinary increase in (farm) production recorded between 1950 and 1984 was achieved by depleting farm resources."

Commenting on the illusory surpluses provided by ecologically and socially disruptive practices in the USA, Wendell Berry has written, "The supermarkets are at present crammed with food, and the productivity of American agriculture is at present enormous. But this is a productivity based on the ruin both of the producers and of the sources of production. City people are not worried about this, apparently, only because they do not know anything about farming. People who know about farming, who know what the farmland requires to remain productive, are worried."

Due to ecological degradation, the early success of the Green Revolution in several developing countries like India was followed by stagnation (or even decline) of production, even as expenses on even-increasing chemical inputs multiplied.

Particularly linked to the degradation of land and heavy use of agri-chemicals is a steady decline in the quality of food. Wendell Berry truly captured the contradictions of the modern food system in one sentence when he said, "it is one of the miracles of science and hygiene that the germs that used to be in our food have been replaced by poisons."

Threat to food-security has increased further due to the rapid spread of genetically modified crops or GMOs in some countries, particularly food exporting countries like the USA, despite the serious threats GMOs pose to the safety of

food and farming system. In May 2000 scientists from 79 countries signed an open letter to express their serious concern about the hazards GMOs pose to environment, food security, human and animal health. This statement of world's scientists was presented to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Nairobi in year 2000. GMOs are a part of the problem not the solution.

Learning from past mistakes, developing countries must now take firm measures to produce adequate food for their needs, now and in the long-run, using ecologically safe methods which protect soil and biodiversity (including traditional varieties of crops). The highest priority should be accorded to this objective as food is the most basic of all needs. Hazardous technologies like GMOs should be kept out of farm and food systems, and the emphasis should be on producing healthy and plentiful food using the creative contributions of millions of small peasants.

Debt waiver vs crop insurance

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI

I have known Anil for quite a long time. He looks after guests in a moderately posh hotel in Darjeeling since the past four years. A native of Dinhat in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal, Anil passed his Higher Secondary examination in 2000. The only son of his parents- his elder sister is married and his younger sister lives with his parents- Anil earns a 'princely' salary of Rs 800 per month plus two meals and breakfast. His duties begin at 6 am and end at 12 pm.

If the hotel is full of tourists who wish to see sunrise at Tiger Hill, Anil's day begins from 3.30 am. Well, he gets some rest for a couple of hours before or after lunch on rotation. He has a bed in the hotel to retire to at night. He also receives tips from guests for carrying their luggage up and down as they check in and check out. Taxi drivers pick up guests to take them for sight seeing and hotels in return earn some 'commissions' from the taxi drivers. Being an employee of the hotel, Anil has a legitimate claim on part of that booty as well.

Anil's father owns around 1.5 hectares of cultivable land. He owned more land earlier, but it had to be sold to pay for his daughter's marriage. About a fourth of that land is devoted to cultivation of tobacco. Alternatively, potatoes and other winter vegetables could have been cultivated.

Anil's preference for tobacco is partly influenced by lack of family labour - potatoes and vegetables are relatively more labour intensive than tobacco. And tobacco prices have been increasing every year. From about Rs 1,200 per quintal in 1998, the price has gone up to Rs 5,000.

Anil sent Rs 4,500 from his savings to take care of the cost of cultivation that includes chemical fertilisers, pesticides and wages for labourers. He was confident of generating a surplus of anything in excess of Rs 15,000 by selling tobacco leaves as and when they are harvested.

But all hell broke loose last week when a severe hailstorm damaged the entire crop. Anil sees no hope of realising anything in excess of Rs 1,000 from the damaged leaves that remain on the field. Prices will be lower - no more than Rs 500 a quintal and the yield will be truncated to one quintal as against the expected yield of four quintals. Anil's hard-earned savings for the year - almost equal to his annual salary - vanished with the hailstorm!

You can locate Anil's father anywhere. His predicament is not an exception but a rule. Obviously, he is not as shattered financially and mentally as his counterparts in Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and even Madhya Pradesh who had no other alternative but to take their lives. Incidentally, data collated from the National Crime Records Bureau reveals that the farmer suicide rate per one lakh population is, contrary to the present perception, much higher in Chhattisgarh.

Data for five states between 2001 and 2006 shows that in Chhattisgarh the farmer suicide rate was 6.49 per cent in 2006, the highest. Madhya Pradesh had the lowest at 2.45 per cent.

Anil's father, fortunately, has been able to maintain some safety nets to protect him from such a gruesome fate. First, he still gives priority to cultivation of food for home consumption. Secondly, he depends on his son's remittances and not at all on credit for investments to cultivate cash crops. His decision to cultivate tobacco has helped him generate some surplus in earlier years, and

that money could be used to get his second daughter married without selling any land. He could buy a pump set of his own to irrigate his crops round the year.

Now that the tobacco crop failed miserably, what will he do in the coming days? Will Anil be confident enough to send some money to grow tobacco next year? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. What if there is a hailstorm next year? Can Anil and his family withstand such negative returns to investments made out of his year's hardship living faraway from his near and dear ones for consecutive years? Surely not.

Can Anil, with his present income and his age- he is already in his late twenties- dream of setting up a family of his own? No one knows for sure. Anil's name is registered with the employment exchange since the last 10 years and incidentally, he belongs to the scheduled caste.

Should he still expect to get a better job in the near future that helps him earn enough to take care of his family members and leave agriculture for ever? One is not very sure.

The last budget made a provision of Rs 60,000 crores to write off the debts of farmers all over the country. The decision earned kudos and brickbats simultaneously. Some wondered if the share of debts is more with the usurious private money-lenders than with the relatively benign commercial and cooperative banks. Cooperative banks are apprehensive of their assets vanishing in thin air in no time.

The measure appears to be a necessity that will only provide short-term succour to debt-ridden farmers. What if the crop fails next year due to natural calamities? What if the farmers fail to realise remunerative prices for their products due to artificial depression of prices immediately after harvest?

Perhaps a long term solution lies in developing a robust insurance mechanism that protects farmers from the frailties of nature and markets.

Several efforts have been made in designing some insurance packages for farmers. They have all failed. The insurance packages are not robust enough to take care of the 'opportunistic behaviour' of those involved in the transactions - farmers, insurance agents, insurance surveyors and politicians. It is well-known that a state-sponsored crop insurance scheme introduced in Gujarat a few years ago saw the claim payment outgo to be substantially higher than the premium collected for almost all the years the scheme was in operation. The recent steep hike in medical insurance premium is also partly linked to the increasing number of false claims, the rest being attributed to inefficient and even unethical fund management by the insurance companies.

A sound crop-insurance system and not an inducement to the farmers to look for livelihoods off their farm land is the need of the hour. Short-term supports in the form of loan-waivers may also backfire in the long run. Some successful but sporadic experiences taken up at micro levels by profit-making enterprises as well as civil society organisations in the country convince us about the effectiveness and feasibility of such insurance systems.

Can the crops grown by Anil's father be effectively insured from the risks posed by nature and the market? A positive answer will definitely be an incentive to Anil to leave Darjeeling and lead a better life with his family in his ancestral village.

Mumbai's housing chimera

(Continued from page 29)

This is one reason why there has been no generation of affordable housing stock. A recent study by the rating agency Crisil found that in the past four years Mumbai saw nearly a fourfold jump in residential real estate prices in certain areas. "The residential real estate price increases in Mumbai have been of the order of 50 per cent and 300 per cent over the last three years, varying area wise," the report says. The report also points out that most available housing is targeted at higher-income households, rendering it unaffordable for 56 per cent of the population with an annual household income below Rs 2 lakh. "Though most households in this category aspire to buy a house, residential real estate for this category is largely unavailable. Only 3 per cent of the total households have annual incomes above Rs 20 lakh. Money from abroad, increased disposable income, huge upgrades in salaries over the past few years, a bullish stock market, companies shifting to cost-to-company structures in salaries have contributed to the upward trend in commercial and residential real estate prices."

Amidst all this there are scams in the housing sector, the list of which are becoming endless. The encroachments by the influential, operating as a nexus between builders-politicians-bureaucrats are not only ignored, but are for-

malised and legalised. The most shocking is the case of Hiranandani Gardens, where 230 acres was handed over to private land holders/developers on an 80-year lease at the abysmal rate of 40 paise per acre. The lease agreement provided for exemptions from the provisions of the Urban Land Ceiling Act. In return, the leasers including the sub-lease were bound to undertake development of the land as per the provisions of the Powai Area Development Scheme. This was to consist of the construction of flats/apartments, 50 per cent of which were not to exceed the size of 40 square meters and the remaining 50 per cent, not exceeding 80 square meters. It is a known fact that Hiranandani Gardens, as it stands today, consists of 42 residential and 23 commercial buildings with no flat less than 1800 square feet, which exceeds up to 4925 square feet as per the information available on their website and brochures. Further the price quoted by them for a flat of 2125 square feet is in the tune of Rs 4 crores!

The state is, therefore, not only failing to carry out its obligations stipulated under the Constitution of India and various laws and legislations, it is today hand in glove with law breakers and encroachers to bulldoze and violate the rights of the working class and slum dwellers. Amidst all this comes the promise of constructing eight lakh houses in the next three years. If one goes by the present rate of building houses, it is 90 houses per year. So in the best of circumstances constructing eight lakh houses will take 8,000 years!

Reviewer

THE FINE PRINT

Get behind the scenes. Books, films, theatre, street plays, posters, music, art shows. The one place to track creative people across the country.

Savi's Dalit art



Savi Sawarkar

Madhu Gurung
New Delhi

WALK up two flights of wooden stairs to Savi Sawarkar's room at the Delhi College of Art where he teaches photography. Savi's large, sunlit room is littered with paint, photos and huge canvases, some finished and some unfinished. He looks benign, has an easy smile. Yet you can sense his clairvoyant eyes don't miss a thing.

Savi digs into his Dalit roots to create stark images he calls iconography. Each painting speaks his language. Those images force you to open your mind to the harsh reality of untouchability and centuries of oppression. Savi hopes, he says, to start a 'revolution' that will bring recognition to his stylised art form.

Savi grew up in Nagpur and recalls his childhood: "Dark and filled with humiliation for being a Dalit," he says. He relates incidents which haunt him after all these years.

One day his sister, a student of Class 7, excitedly told him that her class was going to do a lesson on Dr Ambedkar. But her teacher announced at that class that the lesson was not important so they were to skip it. When his disappointed sister questioned the teacher, she was brutally beaten. Savi says after this his sister told their father she no longer wanted to study. She hated school and completed her graduation with difficulty. Savi loves his sister deeply.

His images force you to open your mind to the harsh reality of untouchability and oppression. Savi hopes to bring recognition to his stylised art form.

"It's all nostalgia but I consciously store such memories as my treasures since they give me a lot of strength and impetus in my work," says Savi.

After finishing school, Savi wanted to learn art and enrolled at the Delhi College of Art, graduating in 1982. "I questioned a lot of what was taught. In college we were taught Bharat Muni's 'Nav Ras' but when I asked why there was no mention of 'Shant Ras' the professor said that was taught by Buddha and was of no importance."

Ambedkar and Buddha were icons Savi had grown up learning about. Cavalier attitudes, like the professor's, motivated him to infuse mainstream art with Dalit sensibilities.

Savi went on to do his Masters in Art from Baroda. Two years later he decided to strike out on his own to paint things that touched him deeply. He spent time in Sondhatti, close to Belgaum in Maharashtra, to study the age-old Devadasi tradition where young girls were married to temple gods and sexually exploited by temple priests. They were then sold to the red light areas in Mumbai, Pune, Goa.

"I translated all the images I had seen into my work. That was the time I started my own style, iconography. Since then it has been my signature style-- stylized figure and paint highlighting non-Brahmin aesthetics."

He did a lot of research on the Peshwa era creating a series of images on the status and discrimination of Dalits during that period. One, in ochre yellow, shows a Dalit carrying an earthen pot around his neck. "It was believed that even if a drop of a Dalit's saliva touched the earth it would get polluted. Besides the earthen pot, Dalits were forced to carry a stick with bells so people knew they were approaching and tied a broom behind their waist to wipe away their footsteps. The Dalit's very existence was a curse."

Such rancor, that is almost autobiographical, is translated into Savi's paintings. Rebuke, hurt, anger and gnawing silence are imprinted in his images. It leaves the onlooker indignant and uncomfortable. Maybe the impact is deliberate but Savi has not veered from his style ever, only enhanced his work with different perceptions.

You can trace the genesis of Savi's art to his family history. His grandfather worked as a labourer at a granary and his grandmother at a road construction site. They believed the only way out of poverty and deprivation was education. Despite extreme hardship, they educated their son, Haribhai.

To pay for his books, Haribhai worked as a postman and ran a small souvenir shop. A British professor took him

(Continued on page 34)



Jana Natya Manch performs on the streets of Delhi

A return to Safdar Hashmi's streets

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE street is a grand stage for an actor. It has miles of space, natural lighting, a box office audience and a script with no boundaries. Powerful and passionate, the actor speaks the language of protest and slams home his message. Street theatre has impact.

And so April 12 is a red letter day for all street theatre aficionados. It is celebrated every year as National Street Theatre Day in memory of Safdar Hashmi, the guru of street theatre. A charismatic playwright and director, his birthday falls on this day.

Hashmi, a devoted member of the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI-M) was murdered on January 1, 1989, when he was staging his play, *Halla Bol*, with his troupe, the Jana Natya Manch in Jhandapur, Sahibabad, on the eastern fringes of Delhi. Hashmi was crusading for the rights of workers in this industrial region. A seven-day strike had taken place supported by Centre of Indian Trade Unions, (CITU), affiliated to the CPI (M). Hashmi was beaten brutally to death by goons.

There was a burst of anger and outrage against his gruesome murder. The Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (Sahmat) was born then consisting of writers, artistes and intellectuals. Since that fateful year, Sahmat has faithfully upheld the values of secularism, rallying against exploitation and discrimination.

This year Sahmat organized street plays and a street photography exhibition called *City Lights*. Everybody was asked to bring along a picture that showed the fight for survival in the city by marginalized sections of society. The pictures were exhibited outside Sahmat's office later in the evening.

An intersection at Rafi Marg was chosen as the venue for the street theatre performances. As traffic thundered past, Jan Sanskriti, a Malayali troupe staged a play on workers' rights -- the audience was told about how architectural wonders like the Taj Mahal were built by the sweat and blood of workers. Clad in

black and white, the actors were rhythmic and expressive.

Then, Jana Natya Manch staged two plays. The first was about an oily *seth* who cheated and robbed his way to riches. The second was about his 'cool' son who modernised his father's cruel empire. He ran BPOs and call centres and was ruthless. The plays were funny, sarcastic and entertaining.

Into this circle of street performers stepped Sitaram Yechury, MP politburo member of the CPI (M). He recalled his friendship with Safdar Hashmi, his loyal devotion to the ideology of communism and his passionate espousal of labour rights.

Yechury spoke about the wide gap between the rich and poor where around 30 per cent of India's wealth was in the hands of a clutch of industrial houses.

The urban poor find themselves battling against middle class aspirations for world class cities. Slums are demolished, vendors and rickshaw pullers told to disappear from roads and pavements. Workers get fobbed off with meager earnings under contract arrangements. Inflation and price rise make it hard to get two square meals.

These issues are being taken up by the CPI (M) in Delhi. On April 24 and 25, CITU is leading a strike demanding that monthly earnings for labour should be fixed at not less than Rs 8,500 per month. This figure has been reached by calculating the cost of living for a family: average calorie intake, rent, education and so on. CITU is also

upholding the rights of hawkers, vendors, rickshaw pullers, domestic workers and *anganwadi* workers.

The CPI (M) is clearly in election mode. The party appears to be making an attempt to capture votes in Delhi, a region not considered its stronghold despite the support it enjoys among artists and intellectuals.

Politics aside, Sahmat's *lal salaam* to Safdar Hashmi and the street theatre movement ended with poetry, Premchand, and a touch of nostalgia. The original members of Hashmi's troupe, Jana Natya Manch, staged extracts from *Halla Bol*, a street play that is now a classic.



America's horrible secret

Civil Society News
New Delhi

NOTHING perhaps has damaged the image of Americans as much as Abu Ghraib. Before the war in Iraq there was still sympathy for America and its war on terror. Not many mourned the demise of the Taliban regime. Those were early days. The media, in a nationalist mood, were happy to go along with whatever the US administration said.

But when pictures of young soldiers from the US Army torturing hapless prisoners at the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq were splashed on TV, the Internet and newspapers, sympathy for America's war on terror began to evaporate quickly.

The whole world saw prisoners with hoods over their heads, prisoners balanced on boxes with electric wires, prisoners shackled in stress positions, prisoners facing fierce military dogs, prisoners with no clothes on, prisoners with hands tied to iron bars, mouths stuffed with cloth.

The US administration was quick to condemn the abuse and torture. President Bush said it was very cruel and disgraceful and the work of just a small number of soldiers. This was an aberration, we were told, so sorry.

But news also began trickling in about innocent people being kidnapped in their own country and ferreted to prisons and tortured because somebody thought they were terrorists. Survivors of 'rendition' who got out told their stories to the media in graphic detail.

Jameel Jaffer and Amrit Singh's brave book, *The Administration of Torture: A Documentary Record from Washington to Abu Ghraib and Beyond*, clearly proves that torture of detained prisoners was pervasive in US detention centres in Iraq, Afghanistan and the infamous Guantanamo 'Gitmo' Bay.

Military personnel did it because torture was part of US policy. It had the blessings of America's most powerful people in the highest rungs of the defence, military and intelligence circle establishments.

It was the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and its partners that filed applications under the Freedom of Information Act, asking for information about how people detained on charges of being terrorists were being treated. A lawsuit was filed in New York to enforce this request. Several thousand documents were subsequently released.

Amrit Singh is a staff attorney with ACLU's Immigrant Rights Projects. Jameel Jaffer is a litigator for ACLU and director of ACLU's National Security Project. This book is an important historical record for it reproduces authentic documents which consist of interrogation directives, FBI e-mails, autopsy reports, and investigative files. There is a lucid analysis of what these documents tell us.

The documents show that in every American prison for prisoners detained on terror charges, torture and abuse were commonplace. Such methods were taken from a programme called SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape) which had been designed by the US military to help soldiers captured by the enemy withstand interrogation. Military personnel voluntarily joined this programme to toughen themselves.

In 2002, when prisoners from Afghanistan arrived at Guantanamo Bay, US interrogators felt their intelligence gathering methods were not yielding any results, and stronger methods were needed. SERE techniques were recommended and the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency (JPRA) who trained soldiers in such methods began to then train interrogators at Gitmo.

It appears the first prisoner on whom these methods were tried was Mohammed al Qahtani, suspected of having knowledge of the 9/11 attacks. He was subjected to torture till he broke down physically and psychologically—24-hour interrogation for 48 days, four hours off with lights on and sounds blaring, apart from repeated humiliation.

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and the Defence Department authorised the use of these techniques. In reality, torture methods went much beyond SERE techniques resulting in death.

At that time the definition of torture by the US administration was the Bybee Memorandum which Deputy Assistant Attorney General John Yoo quoted and which today human rights groups recognise as the nadir of barbarism. It says: "Abuse does not rise to the level of torture under US law unless it inflicts pain equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function or even death."

From Guantanamo Bay, US torture methods were exported to prisons in

Afghanistan and Iraq, either directly or indirectly. Even when military personnel requested guidance, things were kept vague. Interrogators from Guantanamo (Tiger Teams) went to train those in Abu Ghraib. The Defence Department knew everything. It had 62 allegations and 26 were related to prisoner deaths.

How effective was this torture? FBI personnel doubted if the information extracted through torture was reliable and would stand in a court of law. Some feared judges presiding over war crimes prosecution would throw out such confessions. FBI agents also said it would make it difficult for them to get accurate information from prisoners based on rapport methods.

As the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) learned when it gained access to the prisons, many of the prisoners in Iraq had no connection with terrorism or the insurgency. According to one ICRC report, coalition military intelligence estimated that 70 to 90 per cent of prisoners detained in Iraq 'had been arrested by mistake.' "Eighty-five to 90 per cent of detainees were of either no intelligence value or were of value but innocent and therefore should not have remained in captivity" stated a sergeant assigned to the Detainee Assessment Board which screened detainees for release at Abu Ghraib.

The US is a signatory to several agreements which do not allow the use of torture on prisoners. But prisoners were not given prisoner of war status under the Geneva Convention because of the refusal of the US administration to accept that the 'war on terror' is a war. So while conventional methods of war were used, all the prisoners captured, men, women and children, were simply treated as hardened, maniacal criminals.

Of what use is scientific achievement if the US with all the technology at its command can't track down terrorists and has to resort to medieval barbarism?



Amrit Singh



Jameel Jaffer

Savi's Dalit art

(Continued from page 32)

under his wings and at 22 years of age, Haribhai Sawarkar became the first Dalit graduate in Kanpur. He then worked for the railways. "Baba always said 'satya sadi lada' which in Marathi means 'fight for truth'. He would tell my sister and me don't ever allow anybody to humiliate you. If you do, you are a slave. My grandmother also deeply influenced me. She was illiterate, but a master storyteller. She would tell me stories of Ambedkar. He was her hero. Every anecdote about him was my grandmother's way of telling me antidotes to problems."

Savi agrees everything he saw and heard impacted him. "It taught me perseverance. Things were not easy. Wherever I sent my work I was never selected. I never got any space to exhibit my work. My friends, who could have helped by giving me space when they held combined shows, marginalised me from main-

stream art. I was an outcaste in contemporary Indian art. I have not sold a single work of mine. I know when you are swimming against the current you have to strive. When life was at its bleakest I got a scholarship from the Mexican government. The only other Indian who got it before me was Satish Gujral."

The scholarship was from 1999 to 2003 and gave him the break he was looking for. Studying under Lopez Carmona who had worked with three well known masters, Deigo Riveria, Orosco and Sekero, Savi learnt mural painting at the Unnam University in Mexico. He learnt Spanish, Italian and Mexican techniques of art and it was a period he says of "tremendous learning and growth".

In his persevering style, Savi recently held an exhibition at Ravinder Bhawan, Lalit Kala Academy, showcasing 150 paintings all on Dalit iconography. Each image is a powerful reminder of a social divide whose lines have still not blurred. "I know what I have created, I am still not completely happy with it. Art is a big ocean. I can't conclude my work. I want to create my own art form, own my own studio and do more research on pictorial art. As for now, I use my art as a weapon to bring about a revolution that will change people's mindset."

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.

Rescuing the land of Krishna

Kavita Charanji
Vrindavan

VISITORS to Vrindavan and the fabled land of Lord Krishna, called Braj Bhoomi, are often taken aback by its ramshackle, dirty condition. It has dried up ancient water bodies or kunds, denuded forests and lots of garbage. It also has a dreaded mining mafia running around with dynamite, digging holes and blowing up sacred hills.

"Poor city planning has left Vrindavan with neither *vrinda* (tulsi) nor *van* (forest)," goes an old saying.

Thankfully, restoration work is in progress on 5,000 sq km of Braj Bhoomi. It will cover the states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan. The work is being carried out by the Braj Foundation, a Delhi based non-profit. The foundation plans to restore and revive the kunds, green the forests and regenerate the Braj hills into pasture land.

"As Braj lies in the Delhi-Agra-Jaipur Golden Triangle, it is a buzzing eco-tourism destination. In fact, Braj draws 50 million tourists annually, while the Taj Mahal gets two million visitors a year," says Vineet Narain, the foundation's CEO.

Drive down to Vrindavan and on the way you can see the foundation's work in progress. At Chameli van in Bhulwana village, Hodal, next to the Anjani Kund (named after Lord Hanuman's mother) the *kachcha* road is full of fertile soil from de-silting operations. There are noisy earth movers and tractors cleaning up the kund.

"After de-silting is done we will repair the ghats. The kund will fill up during the monsoons and the water table will go up," said Rajneesh Kapur, communications officer of the foundation. According to Kapur, work will be over by June this year and the project would have been completed in just six months.

The silt is deposited in the nearby Chameli forest by tractors. Next to the kund is a Hanuman temple. Says Murari Das, the temple's priest: "Because of a large population in this area, there is an acute scarcity of water. Once the kund is restored, six villages and a population of one lakh will be the gainers. Also, holy men and pilgrims will visit the kund at festival times."

Ram Singh Tomar, gram panchayat member of Bhulwana village, describes the community's close link with the environment. "There are about 1,000 *nilgais* in Chameli forest along with deer, *mandi* (a local goat) and rabbits. They will all benefit from the kund and forest."

After leaving Bhulwana we hit the highway again. Nine kms from Vrindavan on the Delhi-Agra highway is the small town of Chaumaha, named after Lord Brahma, the creator who is believed to have four heads that look in all directions at the same time. On the way we see the Chandrasarovar kund. A woman trudges along the dusty path to the kund, laden with fodder. We stop to talk. "Earlier this was a *kachcha* area," she says. "Since the kund has been restored, the villagers and animals are getting sufficient water." She tells us an ancient story of Chandrasarovar. Apparently Chandrama (the moon) created this kund for Lord Brahma to take a holy dip.

We examine the Garud Govinda Kund, which is also being restored by the foundation, and then stop at Brahma Kund, near Rangnathji temple in Vrindavan. This kund, in the heart of Vrindavan, was being used as a garbage dump by the local municipality. Braj had to fence off the kund to prevent dumping. But the district administration is now actively helping the foundation remove encroachments and issues clearances to go ahead with its restora-



Vrishbanu Kund

tion efforts.

Narain pointed out that 15 attempts were made in the past -three by district collectors-to revive the Brahma Kund. With rampant encroachments, there was no place to bring in earth movers. "We had to partly demolish some houses and a temple wall to bring these in. This site is visited by thousands of people everyday and yet the authorities were unable to protect this heritage. So filthy garbage was thrown in, the sight of which was repulsive," he said.

Now, the Brahma Kund is to be a 'synthesis of environment consciousness with culture and spirituality.' It will be fashioned as an eight-petal lotus flower with a fountain and a deity of Lord Brahma in the centre. Plans are to make it into a beautiful destination for tourists and pilgrims. Stone work is to start along with carving. In time, visitors will be able to tune into pre-recorded commentaries on the kund.

Plans are to make the Brahma Kund into a beautiful destination for tourists and pilgrims. Stone work is to start along with carving. In time, visitors will be able to tune into pre-recorded commentaries.

The kund is being restored by Braj Foundation with financial assistance from Ajay Piramal, chairman of the Nicholas Piramal group, Mumbai. The foundation has so far restored 33 kunds despite hurdles such as delay in getting clearances or resistance by those who have encroached upon kunds. In other villages, efforts are on to move rural residents to other areas in the village if they are in too close proximity to the kund.

The community has been mobilised by building up a core group of 'Braj Rakshak Dal.' Narain explains, "The Brak

(Continued on next page)

Smoothen scars, pimples, burns

GREEN CURES

Ask Dr GG



Dr GG Gangadharan is one of India's best known Ayurvedic physicians. Currently, he is deputy director of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in Bangalore. In this column, Dr GG, as he is popularly known, answers queries from readers seeking effective alternative remedies.

I am a 28-year-old schoolteacher living in Kolkata. About a month ago, while I was cooking, a pan with hot oil slipped on my hand burning it fairly severely. After bandaging and applying ointments, it has now recovered. But the skin on my hand, especially around my thumb, is severely discoloured. Is there

any Ayurvedic method I can use to help my burnt skin recover its original colour and texture?

It is very difficult to get the natural colour of the skin after a deep burn. But I have come across two ointments, which have worked well with constant and continuous use for two months or so. Please try to get this.

- Agnidahashamana Thailam, which is available at Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, Coimbatore. They have a branch in Kolkata. If they don't have stock, then call their factory (0491-2566222).

- Another medicine is Agnijith. It is a cream developed by a school teacher for this condition which is extensively used for burn scars. Apply it regularly on that part. This can be made available by courier. Please call Parameswaran Nair. Phone: 0466 2254251, 2254822, 9447924590. He will send it.

Please tell me if there is any Ayurvedic skin treatment for surgical scars? I broke my arm a year ago. The doctor had to operate to put in a steel hook. But the operation has left an ugly long red scar on my right forearm. I am a 25-year-old female journalist

For surgical scars, you can try the same ointment explained above

I am a 14-year-old school girl. My skin has suddenly broken into a rash of pimples on both sides of my cheeks. Some of these pimples grow big and get filled with pus. Please tell me how to deal with these pimples so that

they don't leave any scars on my face

Please stop taking any oily and deep fried items, pickles, curds and baked items. Avoid taking sprouted items also. All these cause this condition. This is for prevention. For treating pimples, please wash your face everyday with water boiled with one handful of chopped and crushed neem bark. After that apply on that part lemon juice mixed with turmeric. Keep it on for some time and then wash it.

Then at night apply powder of red sandalwood mixed with un-boiled milk. Do this for 2-3 months. Take internally 30 ml of Saribadyasavam twice a day after food. Generally this will help to remove the pimples completely and improve your skin texture.

I am due to get married shortly. My skin is quite dark, but since I have been going out in the sun quite often, the skin on my face and hands has become even darker. I want to look fairer for my wedding which is scheduled for next month. Is there an Ayurvedic paste I can apply to look fairer?

People say dark is beautiful. However, since you want to be fairer try the following methods. Clean your face everyday with water boiled with a handful of fresh neem leaves and one pinch of turmeric. After drying your face apply red sandalwood powder mixed with un-boiled milk. Once or twice a week apply the cream of milk (which comes on the top when milk is boiled and kept for sometime), mixed with coriander seeds powder into a paste. You can apply this.

Whenever you go out apply Kumkumadi Thailam so that it makes a thin coat on the face. Try to keep Kumkumadi Thailam 10-15 hours a day. This helps a lot in making the skin fairer. Also for 14 days in the morning instil three drops of Kumkumadi thailam in each nostril in a lying down position and inhale deeply so that it comes to the throat and then spit it out. This helps not only to make the skin fairer, but also stops hair fall and premature greying. Stop taking any fried items and fermented food.

Every time I shave my face, I find I have nicks and cuts. The reason is that with age my hands tend to shake a little. Should I get this problem examined? I am 52-year's old and hypertensive. Also, please suggest a gentle cream to deal with the cuts on my face after I finish shaving

Since you are 52, it is unlikely you have neurologically related tremors. It can also be due to many tensions which are not released. In this condition if you do some deep breathing exercises and yoga practices it can be helpful. For your scar on the face apply Jathyadi Gritham which is like a paste. After half an hour you can wipe it off with cotton.

E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frlht.org

Rescuing the land of Krishna

(Continued from previous page)

Rakshak Dal is basically an organisation of local Brajwasis and devotees to protect their environmental heritage. Once our work is complete, vested interests might just come in and encroach upon the kunds, pollute them or cut down jungles. Or it might become a dumping ground once again. So what is called for is a fighting zeal among the locals so that they can protect their forests and water bodies."

Narain recalls that two Braj Rakshak volunteers fighting for the protection of the hills were blown off by dynamite placed by the mining mafia in the hill areas. He himself has aroused their ire and faced what he calls 'a brutal attack' on December 6, 2006. Around 200 goons of the mining mafia attacked his car with lathis and severely damaged it in Kaman Tehsil of Bharatpur District. When his driver increased speed he was chased for over 32 km by the mining goons in a car with gunshots being fired at him till he crossed the Uttar Pradesh border.

Besides restoration, an extensive survey of all the 1,000 kunds of Braj is underway. So far 370 kunds have been surveyed by the technical team of Braj Foundation, headed by Raghav Mittal, project co-ordinator of the foundation and young alumni of IIT-Kharagpur. Ground water studies are being carried out by a team from IIT Roorkee and for the first time there is a satellite map of all the kunds in the region. Areas where there is water in the kunds are green while the rest of Braj looks like a desert.

The foundation plans to revive 137 sacred groves

Ground water studies are being carried out by a team from IIT Roorkee and for the first time there is a satellite map of all the kunds in the region.



which are connected with Lord Krishna. "Unfortunately only three forests survived, out of which one called Gaharavan in Barsana (Radha's native village) was revived by us last year," said Narain. Surveys of 48 prominent groves of Braj have already been done with assistance from BAIF Pune.

The Braj Foundation is a blueprint for conservation through its close tie-ups with major corporate houses, particularly Kamal Morarka of the Gannon Dunkerley group, Mumbai, who is also the foundation's chairman, along with IOC, NTPC, Union Bank of India and the Mafatlal group.

www.vineetnarain.net
www.brajfoundation.org



INTERESTING SHOWCASE

Helpage India stocks products made by several NGOs and showcases them at a store at its offices in New Delhi. There are bags in attractive styles and mats for the floor in different sizes. The mats are made such that they can be folded easily and stored away. Some of them come in carry bags.

Since the products come from different sources, you will find here a variety. There are kurtas, key chains, vases, neem pencils, trinkets and necklaces.

Helpage India provides services to elderly, aged people who are ill, destitute and have nowhere to go. It tries to bring sunshine into their lives.

Visit the store at C-14 Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi-110016. Phone: 011-41688955/56. E-mail: headoffice@helpageindia.org



Exercise your mind and body

Samita Rathor
New Delhi

ACCORDING to Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, *Sthiram Sukham Asanam*, the asana is a body posture and state of being in which one is firm, composed and relaxed. The incorporation of asanas with other types of physical exercise greatly helps in minimising ailments that may or could occur over a period of time due to laborious exercise.

Exercise increases the strength and stamina of the muscles. Yoga, on the other hand, affects the body and the mind. The physical, mental and spiritual level of existence is changed from a negative to a positive way.

There are many contemporary body culture methods which build up muscles through motorised movements and workouts. Asanas or yogic physical exercises are designed to develop not only the body but also expand the mental and spiritual faculties.

Exercise is essential for physical and emotional well-being. If it isn't done properly, exercise can actually have an unfavorable effect. The main difference is that, unlike yoga, in physical culture the emphasis is on the violent movement of muscles which produces large quantities of lactic acid in the muscle fibers causing exhaustion.

The difference between ordinary physical exercise and asanas are many.

- In asanas the respiration rate falls, whereas in exercise it increases. Generally, physical exercises are done very quickly and with a lot of heavy breathing, therefore the respiratory system is forced to work much harder.
- In asanas the metabolic rate decreases whereas with exercise it increases.
- In asanas the muscles receive minimum nutrition and oxygen and the internal organs receive more. In physical exercise, it is the muscles that receive the most nutrition and oxygen at the cost of the other organs. Large muscles are developed by most types of physical exercise. These bigger muscles require greater nutrition and supply of blood.
- Less oxygen consumption is required while doing asanas whereas in physical exercise it is increased.
- The blood pressure and heart rate while doing asanas goes down whereas in exercise it increases.
- Asanas help to harmonise the endocrinal secretions, balancing the emotions



and giving a positive attitude to life.

● Physical exercise tends to overwork the joints and can often be a catalyst in triggering rheumatism and stiffness later in life. The opposite is the case with asanas.

● When practicing yoga, vigor and control play separate roles to achieve a perfect balance in every part of the body and the mind. After such motivating exercise, a sense of freshness follows. Many forms of exercise require physical strength and endurance and can lead to a feeling of fatigue after 30 minutes of practice. An athlete's strong lung capacity is achieved by hard and forceful usage, which is not helpful to preserving the health of the lungs.

● Most types of physical exercise require the body to make fast, forceful movements. They have repeated actions, which often lead to tension and fatigue. Yogic asanas, on the other hand, involve movements which bring stability and energy to the body, the senses, the mind and the consciousness.

● Many exercises improve energy levels by boosting nerve function, but ultimately this exhausts the cellular reserves and the endocrine glands.

● Asanas encourage flexibility and the capacity to adapt to the environment and to change. If done correctly, asanas also develop stamina.

● Yoga practitioners need less food than people practicing physical exercise.

● Asanas are done slowly with relaxation and awareness. This encourages coordination between the body systems and the mind, unlike physical exercises.

● Physical exercise tends to build up toxins in the body, whereas asanas eliminate them. Blood pressure and pulse are increased. Ultimately, the heart is overworked.

● In yoga, the brain is quieted. The senses are stilled generating a calm feeling of well-being.

● Asanas develop inner awareness; exercises just have a physical feel - good factor.

In yoga, the brain and body unite and are in sync with each other. Energy is evenly balanced between the two. No other

form of exercise so completely involves the mind and spirit with the body resulting in overall well-being. Other forms of exercise address only particular parts of the body. Yoga gives not only a physical but also a mental workout which is so essential in today's supersonic pace of existence.

Any form of exercise should be done under the supervision and guidance of a qualified teacher or instructor.

samitarathor@gmail.com

WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

CanSupport India

Kanak Durga Basti Vikas Kendra, Sector 12, R.K. Puram, Near DPS School, New Delhi-22
Tel: 26102851, 26102859, 26102869
E-mail: cansup_india@hotmail.com

Rahi

Rahi is a support centre for urban middle class women suffering from the trauma of incest. It provides information, individual support, group support and referrals. Through workshops and peer educators they help survivors and spread awareness.
Contact: H-49 A, Second floor, Kalkaji, New Delhi-3
Phone: 26227647

Association for India's Development (AID) – Delhi Chapter

AID works for the environment, children, women's issues, education, and health. They also undertake fund raising.
Contact: Anuj Grover B-121, MIG Flats, Phase-IV, Ashok Vihar Delhi-110052
Phone: 9818248459
E-mail: anuj.grover@gmail.com

Youthreach

A volunteer team at Youthreach helps to match your skills and interests with the needs of their partner organisations. This exchange is monitored and facilitated from beginning to end by the volunteer team. The team also partners other non-profit organisations that are working with children, women and the environment.

Contact: Preeti or Priyanjana at 11 Community Centre, Saket, New Delhi - 110 017
Phone/Fax: (01 1) 2653 3520/25/30
Email : yrd@youthreachindia.org

Deepalaya

They work with economically, socially deprived, physically and mentally challenged children. They believe in helping children become self reliant and lead a healthy life. Deepalaya works on education, health, skill training and income enhancement.

Contact: Deepalaya 46, Institutional Area, D Block Janakpuri, New Delhi - 110 058
Phone: 25548263, 25590347
Website: www.deepalaya.org

Mobile Crèches

Mobile Crèches pioneered intervention into the lives of migrant construction workers by introducing the mobile crèche where working parents can leave their children. They work in the following areas: health, education, community outreach, networking and advocacy, resource mobilisation and communication. You can volunteer by filling out a simple form online.
Contact: DIZ Area, Raja Bazaar, Sector IV New Delhi -110001
Phone: 91-11-23347635 / 23363271
Website: www.mobilecreches.org

The Arpana Trust

Arpana is a charitable, religious and spiritual organisation headquartered in Karnal, Haryana. They work with rural communities in Himachal Pradesh and with slum dwellers in Delhi. Arpana is

well known for its work on health. They have helped organise women into self-help groups. These SHGs make beautiful and intricate items which are marketed by Arpana.

For more details: Arpana Community Centre, NS-5, Munirka Marg Street F/9, Next to MTNL, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-57.
Phone: (Office) 26151136 and (Resi) 26154964

HelpAge India

HelpAge India needs volunteers from doctors to lay people in all our locations. Older people love to talk to younger people and need emotional support.

We require volunteers in Delhi and Chennai to survey older people staying alone in homes, who could use our Helpline for senior citizens. If you wish to volunteer please email Pawan Solanki, manager at pawan.s@helpageindia.org or write to Vikas, volunteer coordinator, HelpAge India.

iVolunteer

iVolunteer is a non-profit promoting volunteerism since 2001. We have a presence in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore. We welcome individuals who wish to volunteer. We assess organisations that need volunteers. We match the skills of volunteers with the right organisation so that both benefit.
Contact: Jamal or Seema, D-134, East of Kailash, New Delhi-65, Phone: 01126217460
E-mail: delhi@ivolunteer.org.in

WHERE TO DONATE

Indian Red Cross Society

The society provides relief, hospital services, maternity and child welfare, family welfare, nursing and community services.
Contact: Red Cross Bhavan, Golf Links, New Delhi-3
Phone: 24618915, 24617531

Child Relief and You (CRY)

CRY, a premier child rights organisation, believes that every child is entitled to survival, protection, development and participation. You can sponsor a child's education, healthcare, or a health worker and a teacher.
Website: www.cry.org

Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP)

CASP enhances the capacities of children, families and communities through participation and advocacy leading to sustainable development and empowerment. You can help by sponsoring underprivileged child/children from any work area where CASP implements its programmes. These include building old-age homes, projects relating to AIDS etc.
Website: www.caspindia.org

HelpAge India

HelpAge India is involved in the care of the poor and disadvantaged elderly in 55 locations across the country. They organise primary health care at village and slum level through 53 mobile medical vans, care of the destitute elderly through Adopt a Gran programme with 222 voluntary agencies, Helplines and income generation for the elderly. Their recent programmes are in the tsunami affected regions and in Kashmir for the rehabilitation of the elderly affected by the earthquake disaster. HelpAge serves more than a million elderly in India. If you wish to donate or adopt a granny,

please donate online on our site www.helpageindia.org or send an email to helpage@nde.vsnl.net.in
Address: HelpAge India, C-14 Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi-110016
Chief Executive: Mathew Cherian - mathew.cherian@helpageindia.org

Bharatiya Academy

The Eco Development Foundation and the Soni Foundation Trust have set up the Bharatiya Academy which runs a school for underprivileged children and for children of defence employees serving on the border who are victims of violence and war. The school is located in Tashipur, Roorkee, Hardwar district and has 115 children on its rolls. The school requires money for buildings and sponsors for the children. Temporary buildings have been made by the Bengal Sappers regiment. Teachers are also required.
Contact: Soni Foundation Trust, F-2655 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana-122017
E-mail: kjcecodev@rediffmail.com
Phone: 0124-2360422

Smile Foundation

A national development agency with offices in New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore & Kolkata, is well known for its work with over one lakh children & youth through various projects with focus on Education, Health & Empowerment across 15 states of India. You can give your valuable support for our various programmes like - Twin e-Learning, Smile on Wheels, Individual Support Programme, Swabhimani, etc.
Visit us : www.smilefoundationindia.org
Contact : Smile Foundation, B-4/115, 1st Floor, Safderjung Enclave, New Delhi - 29
Phone: 41354565, 41354566
info@smilefoundationindia.org



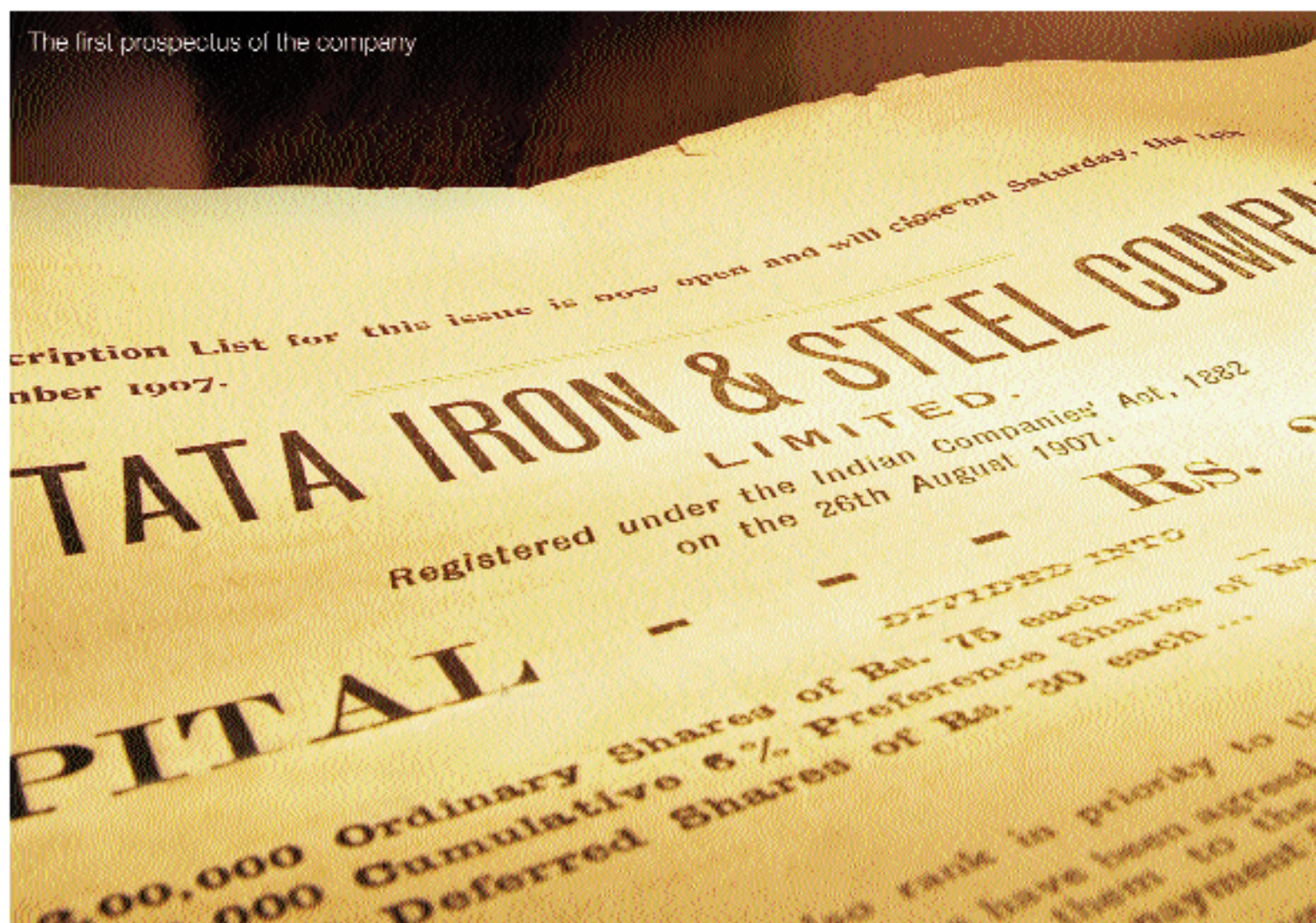
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of values as enduring as the steel we make

26th August, 1907 was a momentous day in the history of our nation. It marked not just the formation of our company, The Tata Iron & Steel Company Limited, now Tata Steel, but the birth of the Indian Steel Industry. Since then, never losing sight of the values propounded by our Founder Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, we continue to create wealth and well-being for the communities and the nations where we operate. Making business a tool to improve the quality of life, we follow the highest standard of corporate governance, delighting customers, reinforcing the trust all stakeholders repose on us, filling every member of the Tata Steel Family with pride.

On our hundredth year, we continue to enhance India's stature on the global stage and look forward to enriching more lives across more communities for another hundred years and more.

The first prospectus of the company



TATA STEEL



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