

Civil Society

New vision for North Bihar

LET THE RIVER FLOW



Inundated villages in Supaul district, Bihar



HOW RITU BIYANI FOUND HER HIGHWAY OF HOPE

Manthan Awards push ICT's frontiers once more

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NEW VISION FOR BIHAR

Ecologists say instead of trying to control the Kosi with embankments and barrages, it is better to let the river flow freely so that it can play its land-building role.

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Cover photograph: AFP

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

The Kosi's message

AMID the concern over recession and collapse of the stock market, we have lost track of a disaster that has an equally serious message for all of us. The decision of the Kosi to breach its embankments and change course by a whopping 200 plus kilometres has left some three million people homeless and thousands in need of medical care. Floods in Bihar have been an ongoing story. But a river deciding to change course so decisively has other implications.

For decades now attempts have been made to tame the Kosi with embankments in North Bihar and a barrage in the upper reaches. It hasn't worked because the Kosi carries so much silt with it as it descends from the Himalayas that embankments, a barrage and other such impediments do not stand much of a chance. They get choked and each year there have been floods of one kind or the other. People of these areas live in a watery hell. But the embankments have stayed because administrators are wary of innovating. Embankments have also become a source of income for Bihar's politicians. Huge sums are spent on repairing them and so on. (See Flood Business, *Civil Society*, August 2005).

This year, by changing course, the Kosi has delivered the message that rivers, like the rest of nature, have a calendar and clock of their own. All development needs to respect and draw upon this. The development that we see on the flood plains of rivers elsewhere in the country, including for the Commonwealth Games along the Yamuna in Delhi, similarly invites disaster.

Ecologists tell us that over hundreds of years the Kosi has always changed course. It is a land building river which deposits its silt as it moves from one location to another. The Kosi also descends with great force and carries a huge load of silt from the Himalayas. To attempt to trap it in a dam or hold on to it with embankments is to betray an absence of understanding of the river and the region. Before modern engineering solutions were attempted people in North Bihar lived with floods and drew on a water-based economy. Since they didn't challenge the Kosi and other rivers, they didn't feel threatened by them.

An independent Fact-Finding Mission that has reported on the current floods has reiterated these concerns. It has stressed the need for a new approach, particularly now that the river has moved so dramatically and the devastation is so huge. The mission has suggested that plans for a dam in Nepal be dropped because a dam will take too long to build and will easily lose its capacity to the river's silt. It has also said that instead of rebuilding embankments, the Kosi should be given time to settle on its changed course. It is necessary to create room for a river to flow and this is as good a time as any to respect the Kosi's needs.

The immediate question, however, is what to do with three million people who can't go back to their homes. Now for the government that is a challenge perhaps a little more intricate than bailing out the two wealthy gentlemen who seem to have got their numbers wrong at Jet Airways and Kingfisher.

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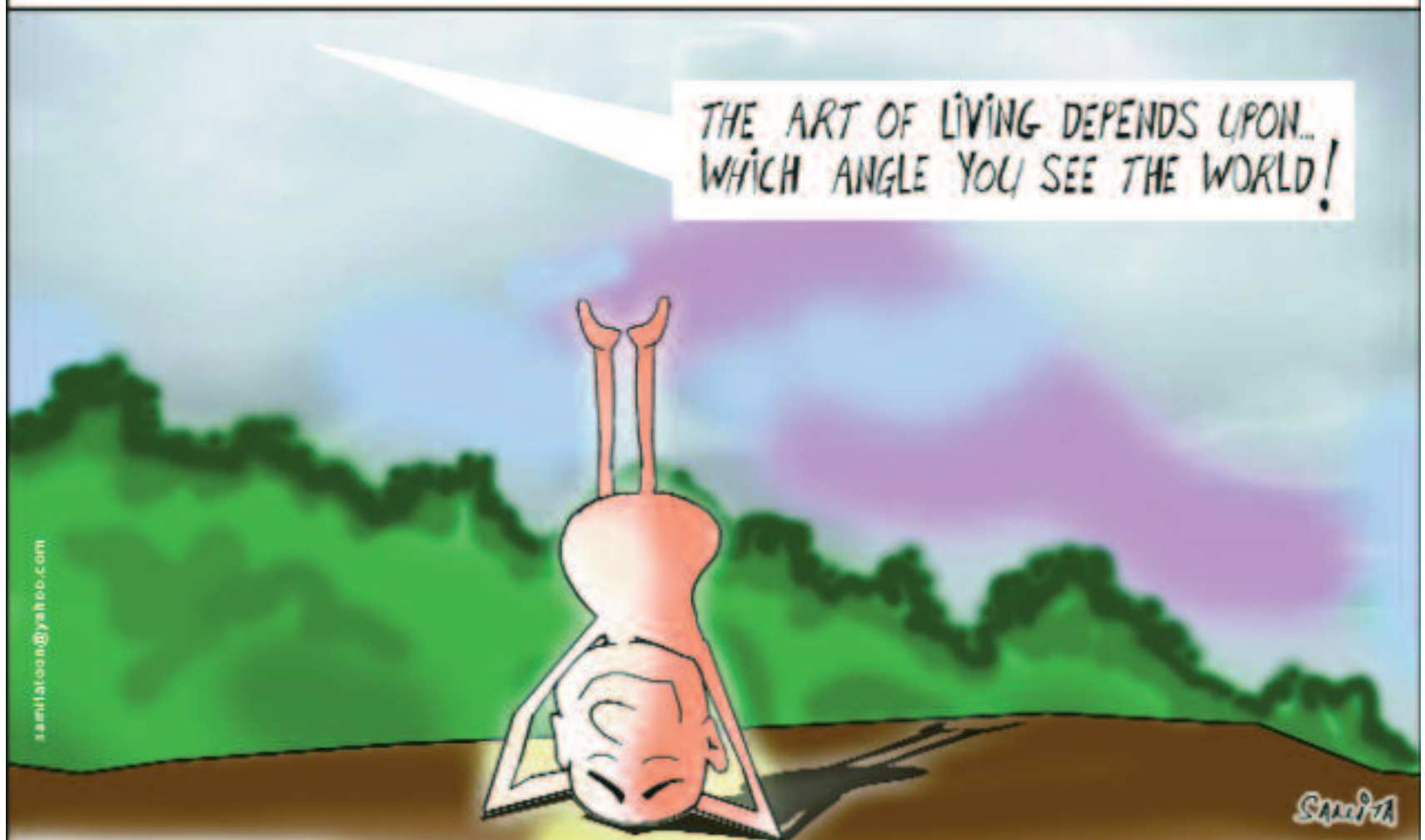
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Great stories

Your fifth anniversary issue was wonderful. The selection of photographs has impressed me particularly. The story on Gurgaon is excellent. I share the anguish of Lansinglu Rongmei and urge you to give space to inter-personal issues which generate out of rapid urbanisation in certain pockets across the country. I feel it is our duty to educate our urban brethren, too, to become more accommodative and respect each others language and culture. I am happy that the Reprint section has highlighted Shree Padre's story prominently. Let me congratulate you and your team

Dilip Chaware

We wish *Civil Society* all the very best. You have shown that it is possible to run a small media business though it is hard work. Small media is often freer and more frank than big media which has to cater to a large population and requires many advertisers to sustain it. Big media is more into entertainment. We like *Civil Society* for giving us serious information in an easy to read and entertaining manner. Serious can be fun also.

Anita, Arti and Ritu

A lot of infrastructure is being built in India which is ugly and energy intensive. Instead of blindly imitating the West we should take the lead in making state of the art buildings. By that I mean buildings which guzzle less energy and water. I suggest you publish more stories on traditional architecture and how we can modernise and use it.

Ramesh Malhotra

A piece on historic structures would have been appropriate in your annual issue. I liked KT Ravindran's views in an earlier issue about integrating our ancient architecture into the urban built environment. We have a lot of areas like the Walled City which should be redeveloped sensitively. In every other city in the world heritage areas are the most costly to live in but here we are making them into slums and throwing away a national treasure.

Dr Manjari Kaur

Gorkhaland

I read your August issue. I was pleasantly surprised to see the article 'Young Gorkhas seek growth' and 'Panchayat digs lake, saves salamander'. I will subscribe to your magazine and tell my friends and relatives about it.

Rashmi

The Gorkhaland movement has taken off again because of bad governance by the Left Front. North Bengal has no infrastructure to speak of. People are tired of corrupt officials who laze around. The education system is backward and not job oriented. Look at how dirty and dilapidated Darjeeling, the Queen of Hill Stations, is. Also, different cultures in Bengal, be it tribal or Gorkha have never got pride of place.

Manish Pradhan

I would like to say that the era of secession is over in India. Autonomy has not worked. We already have 'azadi'. Today the fight is over resources, identity and a bigger say in India's economy and social fabric. Every ethnic group wants pride of place.

Reena Mattoo

The Reva

In 'Clean, Green Car', Umesh Anand has done well to encourage readers to switch to the environment friendly Reva. But one need not go overboard praising this car as 'pollution free'.

You need electricity to run it and

obviously somewhere on the periphery of the city thermal or nuclear power plants will have to belch additional smoke to make this car run. This car just pushes the pollutants out of the city. It doesn't mitigate the ills of the planet.

Nagesh Hegde

Anil Rana

We really miss Anil Rana. He did a lot for the nation. His services were indeed required for a longer time. But we pray to God that his dreams come true one day.

Sunil Prasad

Recycling

I have been reading *Civil Society* for quite some time in my university, the Gandhigram Rural University. I read about reuse of plastics in one of your issues. Could you help me by telling me about the technology of converting plastic into useful products?

T Anantha Vijaya

Nomads

An article by Rakesh Agrawal, 'Nomads want to settle down,' was very interesting and informative. It would be a great favour to the denotified tribes community if you could permit interested people to propagate this message in all Indian languages.

Deekonda Narsingrao

Get trained in community radio

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has introduced a certificate programme on community radio in its School for Journalism and New Media Studies. The academic session will begin from January 2009. The duration of the course is six months. Anyone who has completed school till Class 12 is eligible to apply.

"This is the first course of its kind in Asia," said Professor VN Rajasekharan Pillai, Vice Chancellor, IGNOU. "The objective is media for development."

The certificate programme is meant for NGOs, Krishi Vigyan Kendras and agricultural institutions. The fee is Rs 4,000 but there are 150 scholarships. The course includes concepts and technology of community radio as well as a 10-day internship with a community radio station.

Community radio is the people's medium. It is low cost, easy to handle and you don't have to be literate. Its popularity hinges on how local it can get.

"We have a large number of people in the non-formal sector who may not be literate but have skills and contribute greatly to the economy. We want to make information available to them. Education is the key," explained Rajasekharan Pillai.

IGNOU's launch of the certificate programme

was followed by a two-day interactive conference attended by NGOs, academics and experts. The objective was to figure out content for community radio and how it could be best used to 'empower communities'.

IGNOU chose health, agriculture, education, legal literacy and social development as important topics for discussion. The government is keen to use radio to inform people about its schemes and facilities. Rajasekharan Pillai said promotion of local culture, national integration and traditional agricultural techniques were priorities. IGNOU was tying up with the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation to relay information on agriculture. Disaster management was also listed.

The Vice-Chancellor saw good employment opportunities for students who did the course. Community radio yields jobs at the grassroots. It triggers a whole lot of activity. There is the audience, the broadcaster, service provider and radio reporters.

Besides, commercial radio stations are popping up in every city and town so students would not face a job crunch. The government is likely to issue around 100 licences for community radio. To enable students to set up community radio stations, the Department of Science and Technology is being approached to give financial support for start-ups.

NGOs welcomed IGNOU's course. The sterling

A voice for Mhaswad

Civil Society News
New Delhi

BY late October, villages in Mhaswad in Satara district of Maharashtra will have a new, inspiring voice to listen to. A community radio station called Mann Deshi Tarang is being launched. With a 50 watt transmitter the radio will be heard over a 10 to 15 km range. It will cover all 12 blocks of the district and serve a rural population of around 15,000.

The Mann Deshi Mahila Sah Bank Ltd is financing Mann Deshi Tarang, its own community radio. Founded in 1997 by Chetna Sinha, this amazing bank is India's first rural financial institution to receive a cooperative licence from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Its new radio station is equipped with a sound-proof studio and a generator, says Reena Ray, who took early retirement from the State Bank of



Padma Kuber and Reena Ray

India in February this year to fulfil her dream of working for Mann Deshi where she now serves as a volunteer and counsellor.

"Our programme will be a mix of education, entertainment and communication. We are keen to put out information on agriculture, micro business, health, business incubation and facilities available to the people," she told *Civil Society* at the IGNOU meeting. Reena was accompanied by Padma Kuber, programme director.

Mhaswad is a drought-prone area. Mann Deshi boosts local entrepreneurial talent. It helps women diversify into small businesses and reduce their dependence on agriculture alone. Women here opt for vending, tailoring, production of goods like file folders, purse making and crafts. "Mann Deshi is already a brand here and supplies to retailers like Big Bazaar," said Reena.

"We will provide information on alternative methods of irrigation but our main focus is enter-

prise. We also want to enhance the social-cultural values of the region, reach the youth and penetrate villages in the interior."

The bank has a federation of nearly 2,300 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under its wing. SHG members have been trained to do the initial recording. They will, in turn, train non-SHG people in villages. Very few people have radios. The SHG federation will provide a radio set to each village. Radio announcers have been chosen from the community and the emphasis is on local voices. Short stories for broadcast have been identified.

"We will get feedback from our listeners. There will be an SMS service and a phone in service so people can get queries answered," said Reena.

The NGO was helped in every way by Anmol Goje, the director of VIT (Vidya Pratishthan Institute of Technology) in Baramati. Mann Deshi Tarang will be initially sponsored by Sidbi, the Tata Group, HSBC and the Deshpande Foundation.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



A handset has become cheaper and can come for as little as Rs 50



VN Rajasekharan Pillai

"We have a large number of people in the non-formal sector who may not be literate but have skills and contribute greatly to the economy. We want to make information available to them."

role community radio has played in providing correct information to people and boosting local culture is well known. In some cases radio has resulted in corrupt officials being removed. It has had impact. The course, the NGOs said, would help in scaling up their efforts. There was also some fear that the best students would get snapped up by commercial radio stations.

According to NGO calculations 10,000 community radio stations are needed to cover villages and hamlets in India. But they pointed out that getting a licence, despite a new policy, was difficult. They were sent from one ministry to the next and treated with unnecessary suspicion. It took two years for a reputed NGO like the Mann Deshi Mahila to get a licence.

The question of financial support also came up. According to rules, five minutes of advertising for every one hour is allowed. But there is no provision of supporting community radio stations with government advertising as is done for small print media. Only Karnataka has changed this rule.

The government would like community radio stations to tell people about its schemes, grants, NREGA. But it is not obliged to provide community radio stations with this kind of information and does not have systems to do so. For NGOs, gathering such content is costly, time-consuming and requires a team of dedicated radio reporters.

NGOs said radio content can't be so serious. It would not attract an audience. "You need to entertain people and intersperse it with serious content," said Rajendra Negi of Hemvalvani, a popular community radio programmer from Chamba in Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand. He emphasised local talent, songs and village level news.

Also community radio stations would need a lot of content if they are to broadcast 24 x 7. "Other commercial channels can use filmi songs but we can't," said one NGO representative. "What we can do is make a database of catchy folk songs from all over India and put it on the Internet so that other community radio stations can download the music whenever required." But then folk songs and local compositions could be copied and sold.

"Community radio demystifies our understanding of radio. It gives a chance for the local teacher, doctor, housewife to be heard. News at the grassroots is different. A woman announcing she has a buffalo for sale would be big news on a radio station catering to villages," said Suman Basnet, regional coordinator, World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) Asia-Pacific region. He said radio gave women a chance to be heard.

Basnet agreed that the ambit of radio needs to be widened. Licences could be extended to cooperatives and producer groups. NGOs say panchayats too should be included.

Basnet's advice was to set up community radio stations as cheaply as possible and with local financial support. An independent regulatory body was also a good idea.

NGOs were also keen that inexpensive models of radio stations be shared using locally available material to make them sound proof.

Community radio is a weapon of democracy. That's why worldwide, governments often crack down on community radio and leave the big media alone. In Nepal, during the movement for democracy, when community radio stations were ordered by the king to play only music, broadcasters sang the news.

Daya Bai gets award

Sejal Mahendru
New Delhi

VIGIL India Movement's MA Thomas National Human Rights Award was awarded to Mercy Matthew, popularly known as Daya Bai, this year. Mercy is a social activist who has devoted more than three decades of her life to fighting for the rights of tribals in Madhya Pradesh.

She looks every inch a tribal woman, behaves like a passionate activist and talks like a razor sharp lawyer. Born into a landed joint family in Kerala, Mercy bucked the family routine and set out to be a nun.

She went to a seminary in Bihar but couldn't tolerate the contradictions between her cloistered world and the one outside. Soon she jumped the wall and wandered off, finally settling in Barul, a village in central Madhya Pradesh. She has a post graduate degree in social work and is also a lawyer.

Daya Bai said that when she first came to Barul, the



Daya Bai receiving award

Gond tribals were intimidated by her. They lacked self-esteem. They had lost their culture, their language and their dignity. The powerful had injected a huge inferiority complex into the tribal psyche. They told her: "Why do you live with us? We are just monkeys of the forest."

That is why she dressed as a tribal woman, to experience what it is to live at the lowest rung of society. She said that her dress made her the subject of discrimination at public places and railway stations. Her work as an activist has been criticised and she has been accused of converting tribals to Christianity. She says she feels surprised at winning this award because she is used to being 'awarded' names like 'barking-bitch'.

The ceremony was held at CNI Bhawan in New Delhi. Daya Bai began her acceptance speech by reciting the Preamble of our Constitution. She talked about the promises that were made 58 years ago in the 'sacred book of our country, promises of justice and equality, which have remained unfulfilled till date'. She spoke about the need to educate the tribals and make them aware of their rights. Daya Bai expressed her gratitude to Vigil India Movement for honouring her with this award. She said she would like to continue working for the emancipation of the tribals and especially against trafficking of girls. The award carries a citation and a cash prize of one lakh rupees.

How Ritu Biyani found her highway

*Manthan
Awards push
ICT's frontiers
once more*

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

HERS is a journey beyond the ordinary. At 48, Ritu Biyani Joseph is a breast cancer survivor and a dental surgeon by profession. But it isn't her battle with cancer that makes her stand out. It's her incredible journey post the disease that is pure courage and true grit.

In an inspiring expedition in 2006, Ritu and her then 14-year-old daughter, Tista, drove through 30,220 km in 177 days across the four tips of India and some of the highest motorable roads in the world to conduct over 140 breast, cervix and oral cancer awareness workshops. They named their mission Project HIGH>>>WAYS. For Ritu, the project was the perfect marriage between her passion for adventure sports and her commitment to raise cancer awareness.

Through the journey, Pune-based Ritu and Tista reached out to more than 26,000 people in places almost impossible to get to, and as far off from one another as Koteswar in Kutch and Kibithu in Arunachal Pradesh. Many workshops were held under the skies or in the shade of trees with the help of translators. Over 80 per cent of these sessions were organised or planned en route as stories of her brave journey travelled from village to village. Vandana Natu, another breast cancer survivor, also travelled with them. But, Ritu drove the entire distance herself.

She even held a breast cancer awareness camp at Siachen, known as the highest battlefield in the world. And, she did 3,000 of those kilometres completely solo through which, "I could sing out loud with the windows rolled up," says she.

The mother-daughter duo innovatively used basic ICT tools such as PPT presentations, LCD projectors, community mikes and SMS to convey their message. Ritu knew she had to keep the narrative visual, not preachy. Using projectors and a photo-heavy, text-lean presentation helped her make the right impact. What's more important - Ritu and Tista introduced technology to those who did not even know they needed it, rather than waiting for them to first win the battle for access.

Their efforts have been recognised. Ritu recently received the Manthan South Asia Award 2008 for E-Content in Health. The Manthan Awards are held annually to acknowledge the best e-content practices in the South Asian region. An initiative of the Digital Empowerment Foundation, the 2008 awards, held in New Delhi from October 16-18, were aimed at encouraging usage of ICT



of hope



Ritu Biyani

Ritu even held a breast cancer awareness camp at Siachen, known as the highest battlefield in the world.

tographs of myself bald. How many people get to do that other than models? I never wore a wig or tied a scarf. I flaunted my new look."

She was physically active through the treatment - playing badminton and table tennis. This innate self-belief has been Ritu's constant companion. She joined the Indian Army after completing her Bachelor's in Dental Science from the Government Dental College and Hospital, Nagpur in 1981. Ritu served two Short Service Commission stints in the Army. When she left the forces after 10 years in 1992, she was a Captain.

A lover of the outdoors from childhood, Ritu developed a passion for adventure sports while in uniform. In fact, she has always gone where others dared not to. She was the first lady from her conservative Marwari community to join the army, the first woman paratrooper from the Dental Corps and the fourth woman paratrooper from the armed forces.

It is this tremendous training in physical and mental tolerance that helped her convert adversity into life-changing opportunity.

"Cancer brought me back to life. After leaving the army, I was a housewife and a full-time mother for eight years, and I enjoyed that. But, after my treatment finished, I thought if I have survived this, it means I have to live an even fuller life. I started my private dental practice in Pune and first did dental camps along the highways with Tista. I always liked picking up my car and driving off. The awareness programmes have given it more purpose. I keep taking week-long or 10-day road trips."

Ritu and Tista are looking ahead to Milestone 2008. That their scale has expanded is evident from their new project name, HIGH>>>WAYS Infinite. Highways Infinite will undertake campaigns on multiple health issues like AIDS, TB, tobacco and environment related diseases.

Ritu Biyani with daughter Tista and their car
Left: Creating breast cancer awareness among people in the hills

(Information and Communication Technology) for the empowerment of rural communities.

Thirty-three projects from across India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were recognised for their contribution. These winners were narrowed down from nearly 284 worthy nominations across 13 categories like Community Broadcasting, e-Business, e-Culture & Entertainment, e-Education, e-Government and e-Health amongst others.

Even amid such stiff competition, Dr Ritu's dramatic journey of survival stood out. In September 2000, doctors told Ritu she had breast cancer. Although it was detected early, her cancer still fell in the high-risk Grade 3 category. The next seven months were devoted to treatment - two surgeries and six rounds of chemotherapy.

Ritu lost all her hair but her confidence didn't budge. "I never pitied myself. I accepted the disease. Even now, I tell all cancer patients I interact with that you cannot fight the disease till you accept it. I lost my hair and enjoyed it. I took pho-

Winners of the Manthan Award

Community Broadcasting

- Dambadeniy Community Radio, Sri Lanka
- Equal Access, Nepal
- Kalanjiam Samuga Vannoli Community Radio, Tamil Nadu, India

e-Business

- Safal National Exchange Of India Limited, Karnataka, India
- ngpay, Karnataka, India

e-Culture & Entertainment

- Unnayan TV, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Youth Voice (Netbetar), Dhaka, Bangladesh
- www.kharia.in, Jharkhand, India

e-Education

- Gyandarshan, Gyanvani, IGNOU, New Delhi, India
- "Learn With Fun", Karnataka, India
- Kissan Krishideepam, Kerala, India

e- Enterprise & Livelihood

- ITSHED, Sri Lanka
- GiveIndia, India
- JEEON-IKB, Bangladesh

e-Government

- Unified Ration Card Project, Chhattisgarh, India
- VoteBD.org, Dhaka, Bangladesh

e-Health

- Web Health Centre, Tamil Nadu, India
- Integrated Digital Health Platform, Andhra Pradesh, India
- Project HIGH>>>WAYS...beyond cancer, Maharashtra, India
- We In Recover, New Delhi, India (SPECIAL MENTION)

e-Inclusion

- Arpit's Wheel, New Delhi, India
- Digital Talking Books, Sri Lanka

e-Learning

- DigitaALly, Karnataka, India
- MEIRC EduTech, Andhra Pradesh, India

e-Localisation

- Hoimonti, Bangladesh
- LIPIKAAR, Maharashtra, India
- Sea Monkey, Afghanistan

e-News

- Pratibadh (Wall Newspaper), New Delhi, India
- CGNet, Chhattisgarh, India

e-Science & Environment

- India Water Portal, Karnataka, India

m-Content

- CellBazaar, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Jurors' Distinction Award for Innovation

- IPSupermarket.com, Karnataka, India
- VoiKiosk, Delhi/Hyderabad, India

The mess over land keeps growing

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FIRST the people of Goa got together to reject the approval given to special economic zones (SEZs) in the state. Then in West Bengal, prolonged clashes resulted in a chemical hub being turfed out of Nandigram. Now in Raigad, in Maharashtra, farmers have voted in a referendum to reject Mukesh Ambani's Reliance. Finally, at Singur, the Tatas couldn't get production of their new small car going because a sizable number of local people felt they hadn't been compensated and perhaps did not want to give up their land at all.

In the short time since the SEZ policy was formulated by the Congress-led government at the Centre and pushed through as a law with little discussion in Parliament and certainly no consultation at the grassroots, disputes over land have pitted people against companies like never before.

The SEZ law's provisions are cloaked in intricacies. A rehabilitation policy meant to soften the blow of displacement is similarly lacking in clarity. The result is an atmosphere of suspicion. Industry's need for land is itself being questioned and if you ask around at the grassroots, there are fewer takers for the promises of jobs coming out of the proposed new investments.

Two new laws on land acquisition and rehabilitation have been drafted, but their provisions are hotly contested by activists. People fearful of losing their land, rightly or wrongly, believe government and industry are working in tandem to dispossess them.

Companies on the other hand believe that they are being caught in political crossfire. They also decry interventions made by activists and environmentalists and accuse them of coming in the way of industrial growth.

Just as activists and politicians have their critics, not everyone would agree with industry. Moreover, the experience worldwide has shown that there are serious dangers in corporate interests leading development initiatives. There is a growing sense that there is a need for dialogue and transparency about industry's requirements.

The root of the problem is in the absence of a democratic framework within which these issues can be decided. Not only is the revision of laws long over due, but a consultation mechanism acceptable to all is lacking.

ANTIQUATED LAW: Land acquisition continues to be governed by an antiquated colonial law passed by the British. It is under this law that the CPI(M)-led Left Front government in West Bengal acquired the Singur land.

Activists under the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) have pointed out that the proposed new law on land acquisition has serious flaws.

Activists are particularly unhappy that the concepts of "eminent domain" and "public purpose" have not been clearly spelt out. They want the rights of the community over natural resources to have primacy over the concept of public purpose.

The definition of "public purpose" has been loose. The government can acquire land in the name of "any other work vital to the State" or "any other purpose useful to the general public" or any "project

nies.

ABSENCE OF CONSULTATION: Under the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution, gram sabhas and municipalities are supposed to make their own development plans. If land is to be acquired, they have clearly to be consulted. It is up to them to decide if a project is for public purpose or not.

When the farmers of Raigad recently voted in a referendum to oppose the Reliance SEZ, they were merely belatedly exercising their constitutional right to say 'no' to a form of development that they do not see in their own interests.

RITA ANAND



relating to the generation, transmission and supply of electricity" and even "mining activities".

Activists question such a definition of "public purpose" saying it is open to abuse for private purposes.

This was precisely one of the contentious issues in Singur. The Tatas often defended their car project saying that it was in the public interest because of the local employment it would provide and the economic uplift it would usher in.

But there were few takers for this view. The principle of eminent domain can hardly be applied in favour of a company in which the liability is limited and the sole intention is to generate profits for the shareholders, it is pointed out.

For the State to compel people in the national interest to give up their land in favour of a commercial entity, which would then show this land on its books as an asset, would not only be unfair but legally untenable, it has been pointed out.

Activists want companies to deal directly with people. They do not want the government to acquire land on behalf of companies.

In its amended land acquisition law, the government has dropped the word company from the preamble, but has said that land for a "public purpose" can be acquired for a "person". And then, strangely, in the fine print of the law a person is defined as "company, association or body of individuals".

Now in the eyes of the law a company is a person. But surely in legislation on such a contentious social issue as land acquisition, the government needed to be more transparent and reassuring.

The fact that it has not been so creates room for further mistrust and makes people believe that the government is only serving the interests of compa-

In West Bengal, too, the process of consultation has been inadequate. One reason is that the Marxists have invariably had their own way. But a more important reason is that neither governments nor industry are accustomed to dealing in an even-handed way with people. When they do so, there are fewer problems. Successful examples exist in West Bengal itself.

As disparities have grown in the past decade of reforms, people worry about giving up their precious land for the promise of jobs for which they do not have the education. While the commerce ministry and companies like Reliance have repeatedly talked of tens of thousands of jobs being generated from SEZs, the fact is that there is no evidence to support these claims.

INADEQUATE REHAB: Over the years, millions of Indians have been made to give up their land for dams, power plants and factories without being adequately compensated. Many of them never received the cash compensation that was meant to be theirs. Others who got money did not know what to do with it and blew it up. These people finally became squatters in the cities.

Activists across the country have been asking for land for land. It has also been suggested that resettlement locations should be chosen in consultation with villagers who are being displaced. The rehabilitation should be endorsed by the gram sabha and completed within six months before the project starts.

With none of these issues being seriously addressed, there will be more flashpoints and industry will continue to be viewed with suspicion.

Gorkhas make a style statement

Vivek S. Ghatani.
Darjeeling

THE demand for Gorkhaland, a new state that the Gorkhas in the Darjeeling hills want carved out of West Bengal, has not died down. The first tripartite meeting between the State, the Centre and the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) was held on September 9 in New Delhi and Morcha leaders pronounced the talks a success. The second round of talks will be held in November.

"This is the beginning," said Amar Lama, one of the leaders who attended the meeting. "We have submitted a memorandum which explains why the Gorkhas need Gorkhaland. Some leaders from West Bengal said our demand is unconstitutional. The Central government leaders have, however, agreed that the demand for Gorkhaland is not anti-national and unconstitutional."

The people are now hopeful and enthusiastic. Such good news could not have come at a better time. Celebrations of Dashain, the biggest festival here begin in October.

The enthusiasm is such that the Morcha has begun a cultural effort to promote Gorkha identity. All of October, Gorkhas have been urged to wear their traditional attire. Cultural programmes are being organised across the hills.

"The cultural agitation will strengthen our demand. Gorkhaland is not only about development. It is more about the identity of Gorkhas in India. So if we put on our traditional attire, tourists coming here during this festive season will get to know about us. Moreover, cultural programmes will showcase our food and other traditions. The idea is to show that we are different from the people of Bengal," said Pardeep Pradhan, vice-president of the GJM.

Ever since the party announced its cultural agitation, tailoring outlets have been busy making the traditional attire. Jeans and T-shirts are now out. New clothes for this festive season mean only *daura-suruwal* for the men and *choubandi cholo* for the women. Normally, most youngsters here prefer to wear jeans and T-shirts.

"I have never worn the *daura suruwal*, neither did



People of Darjeeling hills marched in a rally wearing the traditional Gorkha dress

I have one. After the Morcha announced that every Gorkha should celebrate Dashain wearing their traditional attire, I immediately rushed to a shop in Darjeeling, bought the cloth for making the outfit and gave it to the tailor. I am very eager and happy to wear this dress," said Bhusan Chettri, a young man from Kalimpong, 40 km from Darjeeling.

The enthusiasm doesn't stop here. Youngsters organising Durga Puja pandals even dressed the goddess in a traditional *choubandi cholo* at some places. Durga Puja was special this year as the people here were worshipping the idol after a gap of more than three years. Their earlier leader Subash Ghisingh, GNLF chief, had forbidden people from worshipping the idol. He was of the opinion that Gorkhas were tribals and should worship nature.

Has the cultural agitation affected minority com-

munities living in the hills? The Morcha has suggested that they also wear the traditional attire. And the request has been acceded to. People from the minority community flocked to the streets dressed in the traditional attire during a rally called on October 6 to mark the beginning of the Dashain celebration.

The Morcha has repeatedly said that the party does not want to impose any dress on the people. "The people should not think that the Morcha is forcing them to wear traditional clothes. But what we want to say is that we have been wearing shirts and trousers every day though this is not our dress and has come from the West. So there is no harm in wearing our own dress just for one month. After all we must show our identity in India. We are often called foreigners though as soldiers we protect the country's borders," said Amar Lama.



Wild Goa saves frogs in danger

Rina Mukherji
Panaji (Goa)

TIGERS and elephants are always in the lime-light. But who cares about the little frog who contributes hugely to ecology? In Goa it is hunted and killed for its flesh. Although 2008 was declared the Year of the Frog, no rescue mission had taken off till Wild Goa stepped in.

Wild Goa is an informal environmental group of some 300 earnest members led by Aaron Pereira and her friend Clinton Vaz. "June to early July is mating season for frogs. This is the time when unscrupulous poachers go on a rampage every night, trapping and killing frogs in bucketfuls to cater to foreign tourists and some locals," she says.

Europe was the biggest importer of hapless frogs from India and Bangladesh. France used to buy the most frogs from India and frog exports earned India \$ 9.3 million in 1981 from that country. In 1987, India finally banned frog exports because the costs of importing pesticides outweighed earnings from frog exports.

The government realised the ecological consequences of killing the 'jumping chicken', as frogs are called locally. The little frog is a natural biological agent. When frogs begin to decline in number, water-borne diseases increase. Frogs are insectivorous. Each frog can consume an average of 200 grams of insects. Less than 50 frogs can keep a paddy field free of pests that destroy crops and carry disease. There are other plus points. Frog waste is good organic fertiliser and food for snakes. The snakes in turn eat rats that thrive in rice paddies and cause loss of precious food grains.

So killing frogs gives rise to diseases like malaria and encephalitis. Their absence helps dangerous pests grow and multiply.

Since there aren't any statistics on frogs, Wild Goa took its cue from what village elders had to say about the dwindling frog population in paddy fields. The increasing number of mosquitoes and malaria were taken as a warning signal.

In 2006, Wild Goa launched its first campaign to create awareness among people. In 2007, it led a second campaign. Unfortunately, their outreach was very limited. Wild Goa wanted to involve many more people. Still, Clinton Vaz and his volunteer group decided to treat the early campaigns as a learning experience.

They realised that an extensive citizen's initiative was needed. In April this year, Wild Goa started organising regular meetings with like-minded individuals and volunteers. Culling the best opinions expressed by individuals, the organisation got in touch with the media, the police and forest officials to launch a campaign to save frogs. Their efforts were successful. Many journalists in the print and broadcast media wrote and talked about the issue, and consequently this led to greater public awareness about the endangered frog. Posters, stickers, face-masks, T-shirts and competitions were used to get the message across. Names of officials to be contacted if there was information about any violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act were widely circulated.

Radio Indigo, a local radio station, stepped in. They ran a week-long campaign. Listeners were asked to call in and talk about frogs. Ten listeners



were selected as winners and presented Save the Frogs T-shirts and info-packs comprising of stickers, posters, and books on saving frogs. The T-shirts and info-packs were especially donated by NGOs for the campaign. A similar programme was organised by another channel, Radio Mirchi.

The volunteers got down to business. A list of 14 restaurants which served frog meat all over Goa was drawn up with the help of friends and those in the know. Meetings with forest officials followed. The Forest Department issued notices to the erring restaurants. Meanwhile, awareness campaigns were set rolling, with posters and newspaper advertisements warning people not to hunt, kill or consume frog meat. The Wild Goa volunteers formed Frog Rescue Squads with the authorities to stop poaching during the early part of the monsoon, when frogs emerge to mate. Not only did the authorities cooperate, they welcomed the initiative taken by Wild Goa. In fact, says Vaz, "a few officials said that they were glad that we were leading a

Radio Indigo ran a week long campaign to save the frog and gave prizes to listeners. (And left) Small local frog.

campaign as they often felt frustrated when higher officials remain unconcerned about the problem and did nothing."

Posters put up at prominent places informing people of the consequences of relishing frog meat had the desired effect. The fact that anyone convicted of catching, killing, serving or eating frogs could face a fine of up to Rs 25,000 and/or imprisonment up to three years worked as a successful deterrent.

Three months into the campaign, the Forest Department and the police nabbed altogether 15 persons in the act of poaching frogs. Deputy Conservator of Forests, Devendra Dalai, confirmed that "this was the first time ever that persons had been detained in Goa for poaching frogs." Of course, none of the culprits have been charged, although the poachers' vehicles, torches, bags and other material have been confiscated by the authorities despite most offenders pleading ignorance of the law.

Encouraged by the success of the campaign this time, Clinton Vaz and his volunteers in Wild Goa plan to repeat the campaign next year "with more funding promised by the Goa Forest Department and enforcement authorities."

Even the limited success that Wild Goa and the authorities have achieved will mean a lot for the hapless frogs of Goa. Their population had come down drastically thanks to people who think nothing of killing them and encroaching into their breeding grounds. Frogs are not asking for special parks and sanctuaries and fancy guards. All they need is peace and quiet so that they can serve nature the way they were biologically meant to.

LoC trade begins, apples on board

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

TRADE between people living on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir, with apples included in the first consignments, has begun. The routes chosen are the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad road and Chakkan Da Bagh-Rawalakote road.

Salamabad and Chakkan Da Bagh are the transit points for the Jammu and Kashmir side. Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) has selected Chakoti and Rawalakote. Trade is expected to bridge the gap between people living on both sides of the LoC.

The joint working group on cross LoC trade at its meeting in New Delhi on September 22 agreed that there would initially be trade on Tuesdays and Wednesdays on both routes.

There was a lot of outrage over the reported exclusion of apples from the list of items being traded. Political parties like the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the fruit growers were aghast that apples had been left out.

New Delhi kept on saying that the list for trading items was yet to be finalised. They put the ball into the Pakistani government's court. The Pakistani government on its part refuted allegations about excluding apples from the trading list.

Saifuddin Soz, Union Minister for Water Resources and Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) President, finally intervened. It was clarified that apples were on the list. He took the credit for their inclusion. The truth is a lot of hype was created over the apples for reasons best known to the people concerned.

Even the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) business chamber raised its voice over the reported exclusion of apples from the trading list. They even went to the extent of saying that cross border trade without apples was meaningless.



Kashmiri traders and politicians gathered at Aman Setu

However, when apples were put on the list, the decision was welcomed by the business chamber and there was a glow on the faces of fruit growers.

"We were worried with initial reports that the apple has been excluded but thankfully better sense has prevailed. The opening of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad route for trade has provided options through which we can market as well as sell produce to alternative markets," said Ghulam Rasool, a leading fruit grower.

Businessmen are saying they want cross border trade to be free, without restrictions. "The trade should be a full-fledged one. It should not be symbolic in nature. It should be free and that is possible only when trade is carried out on all days with

very few formalities. A beginning has been made and I hope as time passes there will be easing of restrictions," said Dr Mubeen Shah, President, Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI).

The KCCI President said that Muzaffarabad and Srinagar are the two cities of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and there should not be any restrictions in trade being carried out. "Over the years we have traded with the traders of Jammu division and there have been no restrictions there. The same should apply to trade with Muzaffarabad. The restrictions should be done away so that trade becomes free in the real sense," he added.

Political parties, both mainstream and separatist, have welcomed the decision, barring Hurriyat Conference (G) chairman Syed Ali Shah Geelani. The political parties say cross border trade is a welcome step which will help normalise relations between India and

Pakistan.

Chairman of the Hurriyat Conference (M), Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, termed this development as the first step towards the 'economic independence' of Kashmir. He also hoped that it would lead to the fulfillment of the larger demand of giving the 'right of self-determination' to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Leaders belonging to mainstream parties like the Congress, the PDP and the National Conference said trade would bring the people living on both sides of the border close to each other.

A delegation of PoK traders is currently in Kashmir. They will talk with political party leaders. The PoK traders will enjoy a Shikara ride on the Dal Lake and offer prayers at the Hazratbal shrine.

UN: Dignity for leprosy victims

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

THE United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has unanimously passed a resolution to eliminate discrimination against people affected by leprosy and their families.

When the resolution was submitted to a vote, it was co-sponsored by 58 states. Bhutan became the 59th state to adopt the resolution. It enjoins countries to:

- Create greater awareness that leprosy-related discrimination is a major violation of human rights.
- Conduct human rights education and awareness on discrimination against leprosy affected people.
- The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee has been requested to draw up guidelines to eliminate leprosy based discrimination by September 2009.

One of the prime movers of the resolution was Yohei Sasakawa who is WHO Goodwill Ambassador and the Japanese Government's Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of Leprosy Affected People. He is also chairperson of Japan's

reputed Nippon Foundation and the inspiration behind the Sasakawa India Leprosy Foundation (SILF).

The UN resolution was proposed by the Japanese government in response to an appeal by Sasakawa. The journey began in 2003 when he knocked on the doors of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to raise leprosy as a human rights issue.

Subsequently he made a number of visits to the UN Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission to lobby for change. "This was the first time that an international organisation took up the issue of discrimination and stigma associated with leprosy. I am very happy that in such a short time we were able to resolve the problem."

Around 70 percent of people affected by leprosy live in India in the states of West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Orissa. Although 11 million have been cured, their lives remain unchanged



Yohei Sasakawa

because of social discrimination. They continue to live an isolated existence in India's 700 colonies of leprosy affected people.

"There is no other disease that is as cruel as leprosy," says Sasakawa. "Families disown family members who contract the disease." He has dedicated his life to helping leprosy affected people live with dignity.

Sasakawa has organised a National Forum for people affected by leprosy. "The Forum will give them a voice to deal with the government. With the

passing of the UN resolution the government has a responsibility to see that discrimination is eliminated," he says.

Sasakawa would also like the media to play a larger role. "The media can educate not only the intellectuals but the general public about the issue of leprosy along with the medical and social aspects of the disease. Only then can leprosy affected people live with dignity and shoulder to shoulder with their more fortunate brethren."

Val kindi makes a comeback

Shree Padre
Mulakunnu (Kerala)

IN the good old days, almost every home in Kerala had a val kindi for washing hands, feet and for domestic chores. Val in Malayalam means tail and kindi, a small utensil. The val kindi is a little bronze water holder which looks like a tea pot. Its forte is that it releases only as much water as is needed when tipped over.

When piped water came along, the val kindi fell into disuse. Its role got confined to a few rituals during marriages and religious functions.

Now a government upper primary school deep in Mulakunnu in Kannur district in north Kerala has revived use of the val kindi. Since the traditional bronze vessel is clunky, the school uses a plastic look alike.

The school has enough taps and water. Yet, they use the val kindi for washing hands, their dinner plates and so on. All 16 divisions have a 'kindi leader' who distributes water from the val kindi to classmates. In summer, the school's garden is watered with a val kindi.

"Val kindi is a symbol of water conservation for us. We use it in different ways to sensitise our students and through them their parents," explains the headmaster Chandran.

The inspiration for this unique water education programme came from Palathulli (Many Drops), the rain harvesting campaign carried out by Malayala Manorama, the leading newspaper of Kerala.

Every month the school publishes a hand written wall board magazine called Neerarivu (Water Wisdom). Then there is Jalataranga, a handwritten annual issue. Apart from editorial, students take part in designing, scripting, illustrating and drawing cartoons. Their handwriting is neat. Each class has a water bulletin in which students paste interesting clippings on water.

There is also Val kindi Mahatmyam, a collection of poems on water conservation. The school has taken the initiative of inviting poems on water from all over the state. Says Chandran: "Not only budding poets, even well known poets like Chemmanam Chako and Vishnu Narayanan Namboodiri have written exclusive poems for our small venture." Initially, this compilation used to be handwritten. Now a single copy is produced with desktop publishing using slick colour photographs and nice illustrations.

The science teacher A Moideen Kunhi, is the guiding spirit behind all these water literacy programmes. "My colleagues and villagers are cooperating enthusiastically. That's why we could scale up our activities like this," he says. "See, we have about 25 activities related to water like a water library, water wisdom magazine, digging infiltration pits, planting trees, production of a water bulletin etc. Each activity is headed by a teacher and

the responsibility revolves around them." The school has 504 students and 25 teachers.

The water library has a heap of locally produced books. "Unfortunately sufficient books on water aren't available. So through students we collect useful articles published in the media, select them and paste them into a book."

The water experiment kit is another novel idea. If you see the jumble of instruments made by students inside the kits you won't be able to make out head nor tail. There are old bottles, boxes, paper

"Look, all the experiments are to kindle curiosity in our youngsters. We use the experiments to catch their attention. Once that is done, we pass on the water conservation messages. This is a strategy to make students grasp the serious messages."

Students and teachers have coined some lovely messages together. Like, "Wells are the mirrors of the water table" and "Rivers are the lifelines of land."

Moideen Kunhi has written an interesting book, Jalasootra, that describes 56 science principles on water. The book, published by a private publisher, carries important messages on water conservation too.

Libin, kindi leader of Class 7A has piped water at home. "Yet my parents have realised the importance of the val kindi. We have bought one and we have been using it." Abhijit of Class 6B had an old bronze val kindi at home. They had not abandoned its use. "We have successfully reintroduced it in our neighbor's house," he says. Due to massive deforestation, villages here have started experiencing water shortages of late.

The school's innovative water education programme has caught the attention of the education department. Manneluththu, their teachers' guide recommends the use of val kindi to illustrate judicious use of water to students. "Not only in water literacy, our school stands first in many extra-curricular activities and celebrations like Earth Day, Environment Day etc," says Balachandran, ex-president of the Parents' and Teachers' Association (PTA), with great pride.

"Although ours is a government school, we don't have a shortage of students. Private schools in the vicinity are facing a student shortage and try to tempt our students with offers of uniform and other incentives."

Balachandran feels that the village is starting to take water more seriously now. "According to our information, at least 40 houses have brought the val kindi back in use", he says.

Malayala Manorama has recognised the school's achievement by giving an award in the form of a citation and Rs

10,000 in cash. Now that they have received the prize and the news has been widely publicised will the school rest on its laurels? "This is an education that is very vital for life. There is no question of stopping it," says Moideen Kunhi.

Another school has started copying its water education programme. In far away Thiruvananthapuram, the Shri Sharadadevi Shishuvihar UP School, Valuthacaud, has 826 students. Water stress begins here in December. A team from this school visited Mulakunnu a year ago. Impressed, they successfully reintroduced the val kindi in their school too.

This school got an award from the Kerala State Biodiversity Board for its val kindi water conservation activity.

Contact: Mulakunnu UP School, Tel: (0490) 245 8222



Children of govt school in Mulakunnu create water awareness



Kindi leader giving water to classmates for washing plates

boxes, used bulbs and other stuff.

Moideen Kunhi asks his students to demonstrate each one of these. A bottle hanging by a long thread is punctured with small holes. When filled with water, it starts rotating on its axis. "This is to make students understand that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction— Newton's third law," he explains.

A used bulb, when filled with water and covered by a box with a small window, acts as a camera lens. Another one becomes a magnifying glass. A third one converts into a water wheel. "Each division has a kit like this. We organised the materials with the children. They made these kits. It's low-cost, or rather I should say, a no cost-kit."

Okay. But each instrument uses water for demos. How does that help to spread water education?



An intense game of basketball

In a troubled world, the SOS family holds

Kavita Charanji
Faridabad (Haryana)

RAMA Dutta and her children live in House 14, named Mani Deepika. Rama has an extensive family. Her girls study in Class 3, Class 4 and Class 6. One son is in a youth hostel. Two boys are working. Three daughters are married. And she is the proud grandmother of four children.

Rama's is a typical Indian home replete with pictures of national leaders, gods and goddesses pasted on the wall. A glass cupboard glints with trophies her talented children have won in various competitions.

Her family is getting ready to celebrate Diwali. They will go shop for new clothes and crackers. The drawing room will be decorated and a special Puja organised on Diwali night. For Navami, Rama had cooked delicious food and invited nine young girls and one boy to her house. They worshipped various deities and were gifted new steel plates, pencils, erasers and one rupee as a token.

Rama and her family live in the SOS Children's Village at Greenfields in Faridabad, the first to be set up in India in 1964.

Had it not been for the village, the children might have grown up without a family or a bright future. The village takes in children who have lost their natural families in around Haryana and Delhi. Children who would otherwise have remained abandoned, destitute or traumatised have found a stable and nurturing environment.

The mothers are similarly women who have been buffeted by personal problems and have nowhere else to go. They rebuild their lives at the SOS Village and as they do that they nurture the children as their own.

"We have a number of achievements to our credit," says Joygopal Podder, deputy national director, fund raising and publicity, SOS India. Since 1964, this first village of SOS has seen 465 children pass out from its portals and settle in life while 182 girls and boys have got married. Today, the youngsters

have done us proud with jobs in diverse fields such as medicine, engineering, nursing and classical dance. There many more fields where they have excelled like art, social work and teaching."

At Greenfields there are 20 family homes, with 20 mothers and 200 children. It has a beautiful and airy kindergarten, a village shop to meet day to day needs, a fully equipped dispensary, a sewing centre, community house, office area, dwellings for co-workers and a retired mothers' home.

According to Podder, the first village faced many challenges. There was an acute shortage of electricity and water, lack of good schools in the neighbourhood, no hospitals and no transport. "The challenge of involving the local community was easily overcome by their acceptance of our concern," says Podder.

Most children study at the Hermann Gmeiner School in Faridabad. The sprawling SOS village provides children with an idyllic environment. We come across ducks, an empty pond and an enclosure for rabbits and rock pigeons.

"I enjoy being at home. Apart from great food and lodging, I enjoy cricket. I hope to be a cricketer some day," says Aftab Khan, who studies at Hermann Gmeiner School.

"I have so many brothers and sisters so I never get bored or lonely. My best friends are Mummy and Anju. I enjoy playing badminton and table tennis," chirps Meera, a bright eyed youngster who studies in Class 3 at the same school as Aftab.

The more grown up Ravi, a student of mass communication (third year) at the Institute of Management Studies, Noida, also did his studies at Hermann Gmeiner School. Today he stays as a paying guest in Noida. Says the articulate young man: "I have learnt to be accommodating of other people. I enjoy being part of an extended family, particularly during festivals like Christmas and Diwali. Like other families, we tend to our younger siblings."

The village has counsellors who alleviate any trauma the children might face. "Although there are no major problems, we have to deal with their

initial trauma, academic questions, sometimes rocky adolescence and their initial trauma. However we treat them with gentleness and seek to get them to place their trust in us," says Arpana Chaturvedi, a counsellor.

In a year, says Singh, three or four workshops are held for children, in life skills, personality development and communication skills. Recently, a workshop was held to create awareness on child protection. Every year a workshop is held for teachers to make them more sensitive to the emotional needs of the children.

Ritesh Kumar Rastogi, a youth counsellor, says that after the age of 14, when boys need more space, they are shifted to Arundaya (rising of the sun) youth hostel where they stay till the age of 18. The next stage is Sopan (ladder) in Gurgaon for youth between 18 and 21 years. The third stage is Gharaonda, where boys over 21 begin jobs.

Some youngsters had come on holiday to meet their families. Among them was Anita Nagpal, a B Com student from Delhi University. She was earlier in a hostel in Bhimtal, near Nainital for four years. "The children, director and counsellors are a pillar of strength and stay with us every step of life. At any point of my life when I feel depressed or lonely, I know I can turn to them," she says.

Like a good parent, SOS shoulders the responsibility of getting the children married. Says Sanjeev Singh, village director of the Greenfields community: "We place matrimonial advertisements in the papers. We get them married here so that they will form their own communities. Furthermore, we do not hide anything about their lives. Many have got married into good families. After marriage they live like a normal family. The girls live with their in-laws. If problems crop up, we discuss the matter with the family. We involve the director, mother and counsellor."

Says Podder, "Our future plans are to reach out to more children, prepare them for tougher competition and make them responsible citizens and good human beings."



Rama Dutta and her happy family





A bus immersed in the raging waters of the Kosi

NEW VISION FOR BIHAR

Free up Kosi to make the land fertile

Civil Society News
New Delhi

In a majestic release of bottled-up fury, the Kosi has swept across half of Bihar. The river has gone back to a course it once followed many years ago, inundating roadways and farmlands and leaving an estimated three million people homeless. None of the manmade structures meant to tame the river has been of any use. Embankments have been washed away and a barrage higher up in Nepal has done little to contain the mad rush of water.

Floods in Bihar because of the Kosi have been a recurring headline. Each year as the river thunders down from the Himalayas on its way to the sea, it causes some measure of disruption. With a similar regularity, embankments meant to create artificial channels and direct the flow of the river take a beating and are reconstructed. Contractors make huge sums of money through such civil works. The flood business, funded by government relief, is on the whole worth thousands of crores of rupees. (See Flood Business in Bihar, *Civil Society*, August 2005.)

This year, however, has been very different. In changing its course, the Kosi has moved some 290 km, which is roughly the distance between Jaipur and Delhi. Its sweep is quite unfathomable for civil engineers and government bureaucrats. But ecologists are not surprised. The Kosi has simply broken free of manmade barriers and returned to its old home in the floodplains.

Ecologists are saying instead of trying to artificially control the mighty Kosi with barrages and embankments, let the river flow free. Don't make the mistake of forcing it back into its former path. Relocate people temporarily and resettle

them around the river, once its waters settle down.

They point out that over the past 250 years the Kosi has traditionally shifted its course across 160 kilometres. The reason is that the Kosi has an important task to fulfil which engineers are not allowing it to do. It has always been a land-building river serving a terrain criss-crossed by smaller rivers and water bodies. It keeps filling depressions and low lying areas with silt. Job done, it shifts to new terrain.

As the Kosi roamed free in the past, it deposited its silt more evenly, actually enriching the soil, instead of suffocating it with pile-ups. The river carries so much silt and descends from the Himalayas at such high speeds that it is unrealistic to want to tame it with dams and barrages and then use embankments to channel the flow.

Thus it is that a barrage in the upper reaches in Nepal is breached. Also, since the river has been straitjacketed by embankments, it cannot flow free and deposit its silt. So, the bed of the river has risen piled with silt. Like a road which is built higher than surrounding homes, the river too flows above the surrounding area. It has been a situation primed for disaster. And yet the embankments have stayed because in their repair and refurbishment there has been lots of money to be made by everyone.

With administrators in Bihar and in Delhi unwilling to try new approaches, people have come to accept the embankments as the best solution. There are people who live within the embankments and those who live outside them. Those within have created whole villages on charlands encroaching on the river's floodplains. They face the fury of floods every year. Those outside suffer waterlogging all the time because water does not drain into the river like it should. The embankments are the barrier and they are not serving the river, or

protecting the people.

So, it is a complex situation with all kinds of interests at work. Even as we put together this cover story people on the ground report that tensions are rising. People who can't find their homes and lands have nowhere to go. Those who are managing to go back, find that their land is covered with silt, stones and water. There is in any case nothing to go back to. It has been reclaimed by the Kosi.

BACK TO THE PAST

Environmentalists now want the government to think afresh. An independent fact-finding mission of public spirited individuals with an understanding of hydrology and the behaviour of rivers has pointed out in a report, 'Kosi Deluge', that plugging the breach at Kusaha in Nepal will not take place till March 2009. That date too is dependent on the flow of the Kosi reducing, which may not happen since floods are caused not by rain but by the flow of water from upstream. By then, anyway, a sizable number of the displaced people would have moved to other locations.

The fact-finding mission includes Dinesh Mishra, who belongs to the area, is a flood expert and has a book on the subject. He has long been against the use of embankments. The other members are members are Sudhirender Sharma, Pandurang Hegde, Gopal Krishna, Rakesh Jaiswal and Laxman Singh.

Sudhirender Sharma spoke to *Civil Society*. Very briefly, the team's suggestions for north Bihar are:

- Let the Kosi settle so that its new contours can be judged.
- Stop building embankments because they do not work.
- Building a dam in Nepal is not a solution because constructing it will take 20 years and the huge silt load will leave it choked in no time.
- Desilting the flooded areas is an impossible task. Very simply, where would you dump so much silt?

Since the Kosi has decisively changed course there is a good opportunity to apply ecologically sound practices such as allowing the river to flow freely. With the embankments gone, the Kosi can connect once again with natural drainage channels. Silt through distribution will enrich the soil. The river can thus become the driver of a water-based economy in which surpluses are put to use to intensive agriculture, instead of being allowed to reach destructive flashpoints under artificial constraints.

Previously, north Bihar knew to live with its floods. It did not try to hold its rivers in check but wove around them a life of boats and fisheries and suitable crops. Engineering solutions to tame rivers have deprived

north Bihar of the most fertile lands in the world, turning it from the cradle of civilisation to one of the poorest regions of India.

The report of the fact-finding mission points out that the use of embankments to contain the Kosi has prevented it from spreading its silt load of 92.5 million cubic metres. This in turn has resulted in raising the river bed by four metres and prevented adjoining channels from draining into the river and caused permanent waterlogging in an 8360 sq km area.

As a result, one million people in 380 villages face flood fury every year and eight million are waterlogged. The fact-finding team calls it a "permanent watery grave".

Embankments in fact have increased the area prone to flooding from 2.5 million hectares in the 1950s to 6.8 million hectares.

"In 50 years the people inside the embankments have been flooded 42 times," says Sharma. "Those within the embankments (3.4 million) are persona non grata because they are not supposed to be in there. They were supposed to be settled outside the embankments but were forced to move back in."

There is no drainage to remove accumulated water. Road, railway lines and bridges have contributed to blocking natural drainage channels. People living inside the embankments are forced to illegally breach embankments to let water flow out.

"The government wants to build a dam in Nepal. Even if they build a dam its shelf life will be maybe 37 years because of the high level of silt. And if they start desilting the 30 km stretch of embankments let me say the silt is very thick and five decades old," says Sharma. There is no place to dump such huge loads of



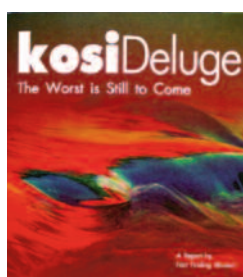
Sudhirender Sharma

LAKSHMAN ANAND



People are returning to live in abysmal circumstances

Previously, north Bihar knew to live with its floods. It did not try to hold its rivers in check but wove around them a life of boats and fisheries and suitable crops. Engineering solutions have deprived north Bihar of the most fertile lands in the world.



silt. You can't choke the Ganga with it. Already it is causing havoc further on at the Farakka barrage and is responsible for severe flooding in Malda. The problem with engineers is that they see only water and not silt.

The fact-finding mission wants the government to take a bold step: let the river flow free and don't make embankments. "Let the river organise itself. The silt it has deposited is very fertile. It will take three to four years for the floodplains to stabilise," says Sharma.

Such a decision requires long-term political vision. It is in the best interests of north Bihar. The government must accept that its engineering solutions have been the curse of north Bihar.

Embankments have been demolished in the past. In 1854 the British built 32 km of embankments along the river Damodar. They soon realised that the embankments were not controlling floods and were, in fact, destroying fertile lands. The embankments were then destroyed. In Burdwan district the British had to pay Rs 60,000 as compensation to a farmer whose lands were destroyed by 'embankment failure'.

The fact-finding mission suggests that the state could pay compensation to people when their fields and homes are submerged because of engineering works undertaken by the government. If the state is forced to pay for the havoc its engineers cause, it will be discouraged from building embankments. The report asks for embankments to be demolished in a time-bound manner. People living between embankments or on the floodplains of the Kosi where it is currently flowing can be temporarily relocated till the river has settled down.

AFP



The report of the fact-finding mission tries to explain that water not only carries physical information but picks up more subtle information as well. Ecologists will say that a river has 'memory'. It responds appropriately, something the Kosi did by breaching the weak barrage in Kusaha. "Thereafter, the river may have used its accumulated memory to stay on its past course," says the report of the fact-finding mission.

Engineers, government officials and politicians feel challenged when entering into such dialogues. They are by training oriented to the construction of dams, embankments and canals and even dream of linking rivers for surplus water to flow away from one river to the next. Globally, this is a concept that has long been discarded for more living solutions. The fact that none of its plans and all the public money spent on them have not yielded results does not seem to push the government in the direction of less conventional engineering solutions.

KOSI IS UNIQUE

Anupam Mishra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation points out that it is important to have an understanding of the geography of an Indian river that flows down a

SUDHIRENDAR SHARMA



Villages and fields continue to be under the water

AFP



The embankment. People rush for relief packets

slope as steep as the Kosi. Secondly, the Himalayas are young mountains and so both unpredictable as well as prone to having silt and rocks being carried off with the water.

Thirdly, the Kosi flows down with fierce velocity since it does not have time to slow down. It meets the Ganga after a brief, quick journey from the Himalayas.

The huge silt it carries defines the land-building role of the Kosi, says Mishra. It is an integral part of its ecology. The plains of north Bihar are a kind of highway for the Kosi and several smaller rivers which descend from the mountains and wend their way to the sea.

These rivers shift course, merge and separate as they go about their work. A river that has deposited enough silt at one location will move to another. It is necessary to take this function of the rivers seriously because only then is it possible to benefit from them.

Mishra also points out that nature's calendar may well be very different to the calendar that human beings know. Just because a river has flowed in one direction for 40 or 50 or even 100 years does not mean that it won't change course when its own clock tells it to do so.

The problem with modern engineering is that it sees its creations as being fixed in time and an end in themselves. It does not take into account the calendar that nature follows.

The embankments, says Mishra, are an unnatural impediment for the Kosi. It has taken the Kosi several decades to contend with the silt build-up in the embankments and inch its way back to Kusaha in Nepal where the breach has now occurred.

North Bihar's terrain, says Mishra, is enmeshed with rivers big and small. It is also a region in which water comes not from rains but from floods. And floods depend on what is happening in its upper reaches.

In the past, people contended with this by digging ponds and also huge tanks, sometimes over tens of kilometres to trap flood waters and reduce their impact. Over time these tanks have been built over or turned into agricultural fields.

Embankments have always been built, but very differently by the people, says Mishra. When villagers used mud for building embankments, it was to gently divert the water of the river, not to exercise control over the river itself. The river would perform its duty by depositing rich silt and filling up ponds and tanks. Embankments built of mud were meant to be put up and pulled down. They weren't permanent. When the flood waters would recede, the embankments would be broken to let the water go back into the river. The modern embankment made of concrete does not allow for this. The job of making temporary mud



Heavy flooding is a recurring nightmare for Bihar. Embankments are to blame
embankments should be given to the people and not to engineers.

NO NATIONAL VISION

There is no national vision of how the flood plains of a river should be managed. The result is that people settle on them and natural drainage channels get blocked. Nationally, India continues to be committed to a policy of the 1950s under which big dams were seen as the only solution to floods.

The world has learnt since then that dams silt up and cause serious problems for their adjoining areas. But official Indian thinking hasn't changed. It has been convenient to blame the floods caused by the Kosi on the absence of a big dam in Nepal. No one seems ready to discuss what the life of such a dam will be given the load of silt that comes down the mountain. "If the dam is supposed to store all the silt, its shelf life will be fewer than 40 years," says Himanshu Thakkar of the South Asian Network of Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP). "Our experience with multipurpose dam projects such as the proposed one, shows that such dams produce flood disasters instead of preventing them. The dam in Nepal is essentially a flood transfer proposition. Instead of the Kosi flooding, upstream areas in Nepal will flood."

The need for a vision can't be stressed enough. About 40 million hectares in the country is prone to flooding, says the report of the fact-finding team, quoting the Central Water Commission. The commission believes 32 million hectares can be protected of that 16.5 million hectares have been given a 'reasonable degree of protection'.

But not much weight is given to the statistics and forecast of the commission. In fact the National Flood Commission has said that there has been no serious assessment of the role of embankments in relation to any river in India.

The National Commission for Integrated Water Resources Development has observed that there is no universal solution to the problem of floods. What is needed is better management of flood plains with flood proofing and adequate preparation for disasters.

Yet another expert committee reported to the government that incursions into flood plains and river beds was alarming, more so because they often had the tacit approval of the government. Such trends would only increase the losses

from floods the committee pointed out.

HELL ON THE GROUND

The result of hemming in the Kosi with embankments and allowing settlements in its floodplains is there for all to see in north Bihar. Conditions are not livable and there is nothing for people to go back to. "Since the Kosi changed its course, villagers who had never been flooded now find their homes and fields under water," says Chandrashekhar of Gramyasheel, a grassroots organisation in Supaul. "Wherever the water has receded even a little, people are returning to their villages. But it is very hard for them to live there. Their homes, built with

mud and thatch, are all gone. Agricultural fields are covered with silt and gravel. There is water logging all around them. Mosquitoes buzz around since there is no drainage."

"The last crop is, of course, destroyed. But they will not be able to plant the next crop either, at least till mid-November if the water dries up. Then most of their animals are dead. For the ones who have survived there is no fodder so what will they eat?" The government will have to provide relief and relocation to people and wait for the river to settle. Shelter, food security and

water are needed on an emergency basis for a longer period of time.

Eklavya Prasad, former journalist and now an activist in north Bihar with the Megh Pyne Abhiyan, says the government must take a new look at its flood management policies. The cost of not doing so is very high. "The situation now is that people are returning home even though there is three to five feet of water in their villages. There are demonstrations for and against embankments. Groups here are not speaking in one voice against the embankments or for the Kosi. There is hesitation. It is necessary for the government to take the lead in some fresh thinking."

It is clear that Bihar needs a new vision based on creating room for the river and putting in place 'living with flood' mechanisms. It needs to build villages and infrastructure that can live with the river and its waters.

"Nobody goes to melt snow in the Himalayas when it snows. In Rajasthan we take the summer heat for granted. Similarly floods are a natural phenomenon in Bihar. We should take them for granted," says Sharma.

What is needed is better management of flood plains with flood proofing and adequate preparation for disasters. There is no universal solution for floods.

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

How Samuel got happily wired *And built a computer refurbishing unit*

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

IN Hebrew, the name Samuel means 'asked of God'. Delhi-based Virendra and Tripta Mani couldn't have chosen a more perfect name for their son.

Thirty two-year-old Samuel is truly special. He might have been born with multiple disabilities, among them the debilitating cerebral palsy, but that's done nothing to erode his spirit. He uses a wheelchair for mobility, but his thoughts aren't handicapped and his choice of words reflects the confidence and drive of any young urban Indian today.

Samuel owns and runs Neutron Computers out of a small office in South Delhi's Arjun Nagar area. His company assembles, equips and installs computer systems. Sam, as he is fondly called by friends and family, started business in November 2000 with a working capital of Rs 20,000 borrowed from his parents. He was frustrated but determined after spending close to two years looking for a job.

The first few years were rough, but Sam hung on. Slowly, clients trickled in, many of them NGOs. But, it still wasn't easy. In 2006, his parents advised him to shut shop. Thankfully, he resisted and in August 2006, Microsoft got in touch with him.

Microsoft was looking for a disabled person working in computers. Samuel's grit shone through and he soon became India's first Microsoft Authorised Refurbisher (MAR). The MAR concept is an initiative under the Jeevika Project jointly launched with FICCI and AADI (Action for Ability Development and Inclusion) to promote responsible business practices and social responsibility amongst the corporate sector.

As an MAR Samuel gets batches of old and new computers from Microsoft. He refurbishes used computers with free of cost software provided by Microsoft as part of its global philanthropy campaign to put in place a supply chain for old computers. These used computers are generally sold to NGOs and grassroots educational institutes at dis-



Samuel at his workstation

Samuel owns and runs Neutron Computers out of a small office in South Delhi. His company assembles, equips and installs computer systems. He started business in November 2000 with a working capital of Rs 20,000 borrowed from his parents.

counted prices. It is a smart way to recycle old computers to the benefit of all and reduce e-waste, a huge problem worldwide.

Neutron now has an impressive clientele - Cauvery Water Dispute Tribunal (A Ministry of Water Resources undertaking), Rehabilitation Council of India, Evangelical Fellowship of India, Bible Society of India, Business and Communication Foundation, Avana India, AADI and even NIIT.

Samuel's company has grown from a one-man team to five employees. "My work means everything to me. It's given me my biggest high. I attended Microsoft India's annual conference in Bangkok in 2007 as their partner. It was a huge moment for me when I went up on stage and saw my company's name written as a Microsoft partner."

Samuel works hard every day, often going beyond the call of duty. He confesses to having unbridled

Continued on page 22

Continued from page 21

ambition. "Friends and relatives would advise me to use the disability quota and get a government job. But I always wanted more. I want to show people that a disabled person need not make just enough money to survive. I too want to be rich and powerful."

This grit and determination has proved even the best doctors in AIIMS wrong. Samuel was born on November 13, 1976, at AIIMS, Delhi. His mother Tripta was a nurse there. She, in fact, retired as the Deputy Nursing Superintendent of AIIMS a few years back. His father, Virendra, who is now retired from his job as an accountant in an NGO, recounts the initial years.

"Doctors in AIIMS painted an extremely depressing and terrible picture. They told us he would be like a vegetable. He wouldn't even be able to ask for food. He would eat whatever he was given whenever he was given it. But Samuel destroyed those images. We are very proud of his education. We never thought he'd ever go to school. But, thanks to AADI's support, Sam finished his education without a single break."

Samuel did his initial schooling from the Spastics Society of Northern India, now known as AADI. The educators there were able to spot his above average IQ and encouraged him to take up academics. After many years at AADI, Samuel achieved a place in the mainstream. He completed his formal schooling from St Mary's School, Delhi, as a regular CBSE Board public school student. He even went on

to do a Bachelor's in Commerce from the well-known Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, Delhi University in 1999.

Later, he taught himself computer software and hardware. He continues to be an avid reader and his interest in academics is evident from his company's apt brand name.

"In physics, a neutron is the smallest particle but the most important one. I identify with that. I might be a really small entity in the order of the world, but I want to be important. Also, people can say that the company is run by a disabled person but I never want anybody to have reasons to say the company is disabled."

"In physics, a neutron is the smallest particle but the most important one. I identify with that. I might be a really small entity in the order of the world, but I want to be important."

Samuel is intensely grateful to AADI for their efforts and continues to share a deep bond with the school. He visits AADI a few times a week and enjoys interacting with students. But he isn't emotionally dependent. He does not look for support from others and is at peace with society's perceptions and estimations of him. "I have never been dependent on anybody. When you have nothing to lose, you have nothing to fear. All my struggles are my own, all my victories are my own. When people disappoint me, as it has happened in the past, I thank them for the teachings they have given me."

Earlier, Samuel believed his more 'normal' peers would help him find a job or look for business. But, that's never happened. In fact, a few years back, before becoming an MAR, he lost more than Rs12 lakh due to trusted friends. Now, he says, he knows better than to mix business with friendship!

He does maintain relationships with some people he studied with at AADI, though. But, he's no champion for differential treatment for the disabled.

"I don't want to give jobs to the disabled or create special places. That is not a big deal. I want the disabled to enter the mainstream. I have met many senior people in high positions in large companies. I am yet to see a truly disabled person in a powerful position in any company. That will be some day."

It might not happen anytime soon. But, isn't it characteristic of Samuel to set such ambitious targets? And then manage to achieve them?

Matching medicine to genes

Samita Rathor
New Delhi

A close family member was detected with cancer recently. The patient went through the entire grind of chemotherapy: hospital bills, time, energy and heartache. Then the doctors said the medicines did not work as they were not chemically configured to the patient's genetic make up. The end result was not only the loss of money but fear for the patient's life.

Drugs used for cancer treatment are extremely toxic and their side effects are inestimable. In the US alone, 20 million people need hospitalisation to recover from drug induced reactions and close to 1,00,000 people die every year. So not only does the drug not always work but it has life threatening side effects as well.

But now there seems to be a way of finding out if a particular cancer medication agrees with the patient's genetic make up.

Acton Biotech claims to have pioneered a technology where genetic analysis can help doctors choose a suitable drug for cancer patients, before they start a particular line of treatment. The company offers genetic tests to identify patients who will benefit from a cancer drug and those who will not.

"These tests have been researched, validated and the results have been audited by an external laboratory. All this has taken two years of effort by a team of experts on genetics, cancer, pathology, and pharmacology," says Sandeep Saxena, founder and CEO of Acton Biotech.

Acton Biotech is a startup in the biotech space and is the first and only laboratory in Pune which

can tell you if a cancer drug will work on you or not. This prediction is based on a genetic test of the patient. "We collect samples from all over India and analyse them in our laboratory. The tests cost about Rs 3,000 rupees," says Saxena.

According to Saxena, medicines have side effects and some people get cured while others do not. It is alright if a medicine for cough and cold does not work. But if medicine for a serious disease like cancer, does not work, it can be life threatening. So far doctors were following a "one size fits all" model as genetic tests were too expensive and not available here.

"Most patients could benefit from cancer medication but some do not. If we can identify these before giving the cancer drug, we can help patients, their families and doctors in saving money and delivering a faster and cost effective cure," says Saxena. "Currently we are offering tests to identify patients who are at great risk of developing severe toxicity from commonly used cancer drugs."

Cancer patient are different genetically. Till recently, it was impossible to read what was written in a person's genes. "Over the last 10 years, we have seen great advancements in genetics and that has dropped the cost and increased the speed of these studies," says Dr. B J Rao, Head of Molecular Biology Department, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai and scientific adviser of Acton Biotech.

According to genetics there are four types of people:

- Sixty per cent will respond positively to a drug. This is the normal population.
- Twenty-five per cent are fast metabolisers of the drug. That means the drug will get washed out of the body before it can have any positive effect.

- Another 10 per cent are slow metabolisers.

People in this category will have minor or major side effects because of accumulation of the drug, as the drug gets washed out very slowly.

- Around five per cent of the population shows undetectable or no enzyme activity and so all drugs taken by the person keep accumulating. This can cause severe side reactions.

"We are regularly challenged as some patients respond differently to drugs. Our mission is to increase the effectiveness of a drug and reduce toxicity. I have seen the concept of "personalised medicine" being used in the clinic in my practice of seven years in UK and I am very happy to know that this will now be available to Indian patients as well," says Dr Pritesh Junagade, who has recently joined Bombay Hospital as a Haemato Oncologist.

The scientific study of the genetic differences between different patients to predict the response and the toxicity profile of a drug in patients is called Pharmacogenomics.

Dr. Shyam Agarwal, Medical Oncologist, Sir Ganga Ram hospital said: "Pharmacogenomics is the new word in cancer management. It's a simple blood test that can predict if a drug will suit you or not. We are delighted with the launch of this test in India."

So what are the future plans of Acton Biotech? "Our mission is to make chemotherapy safer and effective. Gradually we will extend our services to all cancer drugs and then move on to drugs used in other diseases like Asthma, Diabetes, TB, AIDS, Cardiovascular and CNS disorders," said Sandeep Saxena. *Contact: sandeep@actonbiotech.com*

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Making green buildings work

Civil Society News
New Delhi

GREEN buildings eat, drink and spend less. Societies that worry about their resources encourage their architects and construction companies to be conservationist. India has a rich tradition of ecologically sensitive construction. The problem is that it hasn't carried into modern times. Rapidly changing urban spaces in India are teeming battlefields in which there is scant concern for the environment.

The Indian Green Buildings Congress (IGBC) has been trying to encourage a change in priorities. It faces the challenge of sensitising builders even as the backlog in infrastructure presents a huge business opportunity.

The concerns are many. Builders worry about green priorities pushing up the price of construction. There is also the absence of a supply chain. Where do all those fittings and materials that conform to ecologically sound standards come from?

There are also issues of regulation and certification. Right now we have a handful of consultants in the country. It is one thing to have codes put forward by the IGBC and quite another to have them tied into a national priority. The government needs to create incentives for green buildings all the way down to the personal houses that people build.

So the IGBC has its hands full. It needs to sensitise professionals and win support from the government. *Civil Society* spoke to **Sharukh Mistry**, whose own firm in Bangalore, Mistry Architects, is famous for its green standards, about the IGBC's priorities.

A lot of infrastructure is coming up in India mostly unsustainable. What is your organisation doing to ensure that more green buildings are made?

India started its infrastructure journey, late and so we did not have the time to look at best practices. There is a lot of catching up to be done. We did not have the luxury of time. We have just done what we needed to do as best as we could. But we are improving, slowly but surely. If you look at the first roads and flyovers and bridges we made, what we are doing now is much better. You start late and you are forced to perform and deliver.

Take Bangalore for instance. Everyone was screaming for better infrastructure. When we did the Wipro campus, there were just a few rural roads leading to it. Now there is this humungous leap forward. But time is the constraint. You have to work very fast.

What are the kind of buildings you are promoting in cities?

Presently in India, large cities are growing larger. At CII - IGBC, we would like to see a green India. Our emphasis is on developing II, III, IV tier cities, making them exciting, green, opening their arms to more young Indians, where mass transit becomes the norm rather than the exception and where all new construction is green.

Do you have guidelines or a roadmap for builders which are relevant for Indian conditions?

We have taken our ratings from the US. The codes for new construction were adapted and assimilated



Sharukh Mistry

IGBC's hope is to build more and more green knowledge technology jobs, like making green buildings, green manufacturing processes and green energy systems.

for the Indian market and includes the code for interiors. We run pilot projects and then create a new version based on our experience. The codes have to be dynamic, adaptable over time. We have to listen to voices that may not always be encouraging. It has to fit into the Indian scenario.

The idea is to address the concerns of builders who feel that green buildings are six to seven per cent more expensive. Now we have shown that the cost is no more than three per cent higher. It is also necessary to assess the impact of a green building in the long term. We want to assess the consumption of water and electricity, for instance.

What are the road blocks to achieving more green buildings? How do you plan to overcome these?

This is a very important question. Unless we get a big supportive push from the government it will not be possible to scale up and put the green buildings movement on a large platform. We look forward to the government being supportive right from the top at the national level. Green standards must be included in bylaws. Even private builders should be given incentives. I'm not suggesting subsidies because they are inefficient. But there need to be real incentives. We also need to look at our smaller cities. So far all the attention has been on the metropolitan cities.

To get a green rating a builder will have to access materials and products from manufacturers who measure up to the same standards. What has been done to bring the construction business as a whole on to one page?

We are trying to encourage it, but it has not happened in the manner we would like it to. Awareness has been created but we do not as yet have a supply chain to speak of. We are working with CII to encourage the setting up of green collar industries which would supply sustainable building materials. In the West and even among our neighbours like China, the supply of green building materials is quite phenomenal. When exhibitions are held there are thousands of vendors. Here we are struggling.

IGBC's hope is to build more and more green knowledge technology jobs – like making green buildings, green manufacturing processes, green energy all of which are the industries of the future so that we can support our growing population, and where the world wants to source ideas, innovation, craftsmanship and art, instead of unintelligible sweat.

There appears to be a shortage of consultants. What is being done about that? How many consultants do we have?

We have just about 30 consultants in India for green buildings. The reason is that they have to get their certification after going abroad and doing exams etc. We are seeking to change that by working with the design schools such as the one in Ahmedabad so that both awareness and accreditation begin at the school level.

There are said to be some 250 applications for green buildings and only 60 to 70 certified green buildings. How can you explain this?

I am not in a position to give you a number. However, at our last Congress in Mumbai, there were applications for five million square feet. So the demand is huge.

Any lessons from traditional Indian architecture? Like use of natural materials rainwater harvesting, natural air conditioning and so on?

There are no easy answers because there are several Indias that we all experience in our daily lives.

Metropolitan India is definitely moving towards technological fixes but we realise that unless we have 'an earth centred philosophy of design', our responses will be more like treating design as a veneer issue, rather than as a soul issue.

India has a huge reservoir of traditional building typologies set in different climate zones. It gets more exciting once you overlay the centuries of craftsmanship of that region. I am a firm believer that India's contribution to the green agenda should be firmly rooted, not in copying past styles, but in leapfrogging into the future using the knowledge of our past experience. Craftsmanship is one area that India can exhibit with new found vigour. Sustainability means that we understand the meaning and values of our built heritage which lies in our midst and goes unnoticed.

It is the rarity value of such old fabric which often opens the way for imaginative reuse. Today old and new can overlap, mediate and confront each other fearlessly.

Insights

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Silence is tacit consent

Need to condemn anti-Christian violence

MAXWELL PEREIRA

WHEN I recently wrote about the sinister designs of the Sangh Parivar, their declared agenda and the canards spread by the 84 per cent majority community drowning the voice of a mere two per cent Christian minority, some of my Hindu friends took offence. "Is every Hindu spreading canards against Christians?" they asked me, dubbing my remark as doing great injustice to non-extremist Hindus, who constitute the larger majority within the Hindu community.

They were disturbed by my answer: "Isn't the silence of the 84 per cent majority on the canards being spread in their name by some amidst them not construed as their voice?"

In recent weeks, voices of many Hindus have been raised in public forums – in articles, television debates etc condemning the violence against Christians perpetrated by criminals and goons who openly identify themselves under the umbrella of the Sangh Parivar. On this score very powerful declarations of how individually one is ashamed to call himself a Hindu have appeared in the printed medium (Karan Thapar's "Who is a Hindu" in the Hindustan Times, Shashi Tharoor's in the Times of India, etc). Many an agitated individual has also stopped me during my morning walk to tell me how ashamed they are to identify themselves with the religion in the name of which goons are perpetrating their heinous deeds.

On Christmas Day in 2007, gangs of fanatical elements in Kandhmal district, Orissa, had attacked churches and Christian institutions, desecrating statues and Bibles, and burning houses in Christian *bastis* in a series of pre-meditated and well-organised assaults. In the atrocities that continued for a month, 107 churches were destroyed in arson, at



Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik meets riot victims

Not only was the one man who had kept communal forces under check over the past seven months suspended, he was also conveniently removed from the scene to ensure a clear ground for Bajrang Dal goons

least six people died and thousands were rendered homeless. The declared perpetrators were none other than local Bajrang Dal units, the militant wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad under the umbrella of the total Sangh Parivar; pursuant to Swami Laxmanananda's declared agenda of wiping Christians off the face of Orissa.

Following widespread outrage from all quarters national and international over this carnage, the state government – whose benevolent protective hand over the rabid communal forces was evidently and eminently seen – reacted by suspending the then Kandhmal Superintendent of Police, replacing him with young Nikhil Kanodia – a 2003 entrant into the IPS, reputed to have controlled with an iron hand another local district infested with Hindu-Muslim communal tension. Specially selected, Kanodia was overnight sent to Kandhmal to restructure and rejuvenate effective policing in the riot-ridden district. The state govt simultaneously ordered a judicial commission to look into the causes and effects of the Kandhmal riots.

The activities of Swami Laxmanananda in the area, of inciting disharmony and communal disturbances in the Kandhmal district over the past many years, had led the Orissa police to open and maintain a police file on him which has grown fat over the years with accounts of riots caused or triggered off by him. Strangely, even while keeping violence under control, his activities were not checked by the police after the December carnage too. Instead, on the state government's direction he was provided police protection – ostensibly after receiving written threats to his life from local Maoists whose displeasure he had also incurred.

Laxmanananda and other adult members of his

ashram were murdered on August 23. The attackers identified themselves as Naxalites and left a letter at the scene of murder claiming responsibility and stating why they murdered the Swami. On the basis of the evidence of an AK-47 used in the attack and the letter left behind, Kanodia briefed the media on August 24 that a Maoist hand was indicated in the Swami's murder – a position which was soon after endorsed by the police headquarters in briefings at the state level – and reiterated in a televised interview more recently by underground Naxalite leader, Sabyasachi Panda.

This, however, did not appear to suit the Sangh Parivar in their designs and ultimate objective of targeting Christians. Praveen Togadia, the virulent head of the Bajrang Dal visited Orissa the next day on August 25 and declared it was Christians not Maoists who killed the Swami. As if in support, the BJP-led state government of Naveen Patnaik placed Kanodia under suspension, and removed him from the scene to the lines in the police headquarters at Bhubaneswar. No replacement was posted in Kandhmal over the next four days, leaving the arena open for the perpetrators and marauders to act with impunity.

Not only was the one man who had kept the communal forces under check over the past seven months ignominiously suspended, he was also conveniently removed from the scene to ensure a clear ground for Bajrang Dal goons to unleash their violence. The whole exercise smacked of criminal connivance. And yet Naveen Patnaik denies inaction and blatantly claims innocence even as his government is now openly attempting to deflect the blame from the Bajrang Dal resting it solely on the Swami's students.

The Orissa violence was followed by incidents elsewhere, mainly in the BJP ruled southern state of Karnataka, when Bajrang Dal goons struck in Mangalore and went around vandalising churches, attacking nuns, and desecrating sacred artefacts. But Mangalore was not Kandhmal. The reaction of the people at large, not only of Christians, stunned the perpetrators. The state Bajrang Dal chief who had himself gone on television to proudly boast and claim responsibility had to be axed by the BJP

leadership and faced arrest.

The Sangh Parivar say the Christians invited the attacks because of forced conversions and foreign funding. Despite categorical assurances that there cannot be forcible conversions to the Christian faith, and there exists not a single chargesheet or conviction under the highly hyped anti-conversion



A burnt house

laws enacted in many states, the canards on this score continue. The bogey is sought to be kept alive without ever sitting across the table to thrash it out once and for all. While no one in government or the Sangh Parivar leadership explains why this imbroglio cannot be nailed once and for all with a national debate, the ploy continues to be used as a plank for propaganda and more attacks.

It is common knowledge that the majority of the intelligentsia who has administered this country in the past 60 years has received education in Christian institutions in some form or the other, at some stage or the other. Have they been forced to convert? There are non-Christians who have worked and are working in Christian institutions for generations without ever converting to Christianity. If there was any force or inducement, how come they continued or still continue to benefit from their association with Christian institutions without conversion?

I spent my entire service career pleading with Christian institutions to admit the children of my non-Christian colleagues, friends and acquaintances into Christian schools and convents. Why is it

the effort of every non-Christian to seek admission not only for their children and wards, but also for those of their friends and acquaintances in a Christian school or convent? Is it because they will be converted?

Let's talk of Christian concentration in backward and tribal areas. Is it right to fault the missionaries for having ventured into such areas hitherto totally neglected by the country, its successive governments and administrators, and by the very communities who have now suddenly woken up for political vote bank reasons? Was it wrong of the missionaries to have provided succour, healthcare and educated them? Is it the fault of the missionaries that with their newfound knowledge and education, the backward classes and tribals are now being empowered enough to ward off exploitation by trader communities, land-grabbers, landlords and so on who sucked their blood for generations and hundreds of years?

If the compassion and selfless service of the missionaries and the empowerment they provided through education has attracted, motivated or induced the neglected downtrodden to embrace Christianity why should this cause such an irritating 'itch' in the majority community, or constitute such a threat to its existence as to warrant violence, arson and murder?

Yes, this is the declared agenda of the Sangh Parivar in Orissa and elsewhere. And the silence of the majority community is tantamount to tacit concurrence and approval. Unless right-minded people speak up, the tolerant secular fabric of this country is bound to be destroyed – with a lot of blood on the hands of people that otherwise consider themselves clean. And we will become a fundamentalist and rabid "Hindu"stan – hated by all, much like the terrorist-infested fundamentalist "Paki"stan.

Sixty-three million terror-battered and verifiable Pakistanis in record participation have recently signed up to a unique anti-terror campaign stating "Yeh Hum Nahin!" (This is not us) in an effort to send a strong signal that they neither believe in terrorism nor are a party to it. Do the right-minded of India find the need now to break their silence and speak up too?

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Evaluating govt services

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI

AT a time when the whole world is looking for an effective model of good governance, it was really a pleasant surprise to come across a document from South Africa entitled, *State of the Public Service Report 2008*, published by the Public Service Commission of South Africa. It was further encouraging to know that this document is being published annually since the last seven years.

The present report takes stock of the nature of transformation in public services that took place between 2004 and 2007. It looks at the key transformation priorities set for public service in 2004, assesses the progress made and identifies the challenges ahead.

Public services in South Africa are governed by nine Constitutional values and principles of public administration. They are:

- A high standard of professional ethics must be maintained.
- Efficient, economic and effective use of resources must be promoted.
- Public administration must be development oriented.
- Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.
- People's needs must be responded to and the public encouraged to participate in policy making.
- Public administration must be accountable.
- Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.
- Good human resource management and career development practices to maximize human potential, must be cultivated.
- Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management based on ability, fairness and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.

On the face of it, the principles appear to be a list of pious wishes. Moreover, had I not mentioned the name of the concerned country, the list could well have passed as a list of constitutional principles followed in India. Principle 9 reminds us of the doctrine of 'positive discrimination', popularly known as 'reservation' followed in India since independence. Principle 7 is enshrined in the Right to Information Act. Introduction of 'performance audit' of the ministries by the Finance Minister a couple of years back is a reflection of Principle 2. Principle 5 is echoed in the 73rd and 74th amendment to our Constitution, paving the way for local self-government. The Anti-corruption Act speaks of Principle 1.

The *State of the Public Service Report 2008* is a lucidly written document that charts the achievements made so far and the challenges to be overcome so that these principles take root in the democratic system of South Africa. Successes have been significant but the challenges are also no less. Let's sample a few.

In tune with Principle 1, the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Activities (Act 12 of 2004) was promulgated. India too has an anti-corruption act. But it is interesting to note the steps taken in South Africa to implement it.

- In promoting the Act among the public and to move away from technical, legal jargon a set of user-

friendly guidelines on the implementation of the Act was published to make the people aware of their responsibilities and obligations in dealing with corruption.

- A National Anti-Corruption Hotline was created in 2004 to provide a 'one-stop' mechanism for members of the public to report acts of corruption. It has turned out to be a widely used mechanism to report corruption and the level of its utilisation has been increasing steadily over the years.
- The National Anti-Corruption Forum (NACF) – a collective effort by government, business and civil society – adopted a National Anti-Corruption Programme in June 2005 to acknowledge the importance of partnership across different stakeholders in the fight against spread of corruption.
- As a matter of statutory requirements senior public officials are required to disclose their financial inter-

The principle of public participation in policy making is put into operation through Citizens Satisfaction Surveys conducted by the Public Service Commission. Four such surveys were conducted since 2004.

ests regarding, among others, shares, directorships, property and remunerated work outside the public services. The report notes that 85 per cent of senior officials disclosed their financial interests for 2005-06, significantly more than what was declared during the previous financial year (73 per cent).

Let's turn to the second principle. The trend is influenced by the ideas advanced in New Public Management (NPM) that generally promotes adoption of private sector practices like introduction of competition among service providers through term contract and a focus on output and results rather than on processes. However, enough consideration was given simultaneously to ensure that uncritical adoption of NPM does not end up pursuing narrow efficiency gains at the cost of relevant social goals.

- In 2004, nationally uniform sector-specific budget structures were implemented across all provinces to facilitate comparison of performance data among provinces.
- The departments have been encouraged to focus not just on the monetary cost of public services but on their quality and contribution towards the well-being of citizens.
- There is often a mismatch between strategic plans and their implementation. The Auditor General reviewed such alignment and found a gross mismatch in 61 per cent of the departments in 2004-05. By 2006-07, the figures came down to nine per cent and 25 per cent for national and provincial government departments, respectively.

● Reliability of performance data has also been subjected to careful scrutiny in view of the observation that different reports by a department give conflicting information on performance. A Framework for Managing Programme Performance Information has been released by the national Treasury in 2007 to ensure improvements in the quality of performance data.

Evaluation of the fourth principle related to provision of impartial, fair, equitable and unbiased public services reveals that:

- Inequality between races dropped to 41 per cent in 2006, compared to 45 per cent in 2004.
- Black households had a larger share of personal disposable income (46 per cent) than whites (40.4 per cent) in 2007.
- Good progress has been achieved in ensuring equitable access to education. Black Africans comprise more than 60 per cent of university and technology students.
- To ensure their proper functioning, important institutions supporting democracy like the Public Protector, Human Rights Commission, Public Service Commission have been made open to critical public review in 2007 by Parliament.
- Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (PAJA), 2000, was introduced to buttress the legislative instruments for entrenching fairness and impartiality. The implementation of PAJA was supported through its translation into 11 official languages and its incorporation into "The Know Your Service Rights" booklet.
- In view of the fact that only a few departments have developed service standards, PAJA compliance has still been found to be low. Only 27 per cent of the departments showed ability to meet the element of fairness in decision making and nine per cent could provide reasons for adverse decisions in 2007.

The principle of public participation in policy making is put into operation through Citizens Satisfaction Surveys conducted by the Public Service Commission. Four such surveys were conducted since 2004. The average satisfaction level was 67 per cent. However, there are variations across departments. Transport achieved 50 per cent, Correctional Services, 58 per cent, Home Affairs, 61 per cent, Housing and Social Development, 62 per cent, and Justice, 63 per cent which is below the average score. Agriculture got 79 per cent, land, 73 per cent, health, 71 per cent, police, water and education got 70 per cent which is an above average score.

Indian efforts at improving the quality of public services, is no less insignificant, at least on paper, if not in intent. Schemes and programmes initiated by the government are routinely and regularly monitored and evaluated. But the common citizen does not have any access to the findings of such exercises. One is not very sure if the findings from evaluation studies are put to any use for formulating future course of action.

A citizen has not only the right to information but also the right to statutory disclosures by the Government about the status of public service. It's time that an urgent initiative is taken to come out with a report that tracks the state of public service in India.

You can read the report at www.psc.gov.za

Raigad's writing on the wall

MANSHI ASHER

WHEN I first saw the front-page headline on the referendum for the Mahamumbai SEZ last month my heart sank. Having visited the area and interacted closely with the local communities, the Agris (farmers), Katkaris (adivasis) and Kolis (fishworkers), who have been consistent in their unyielding opposition to the Mahamumbai SEZ, and having heard enough stories about the various tactics used by the government and the company to wheedle the farmers into giving up their lands, I had no faith that the voting would not be tampered with. The leaders of the movement agreed that a referendum like this is a 'double edged sword' and, if manipulated, could go either way.

Ulka Mahajan, an activist from the area, clarified the movement's position prior to the voting: "We did not ask for the referendum. It was almost put forth as a challenge by the government and we need to prove that the movement is indeed a genuine one. We will ensure that the process is well monitored and free of corruption."

The Raigad movement, led by the local farmers (24 Gaon SEZ Virodhi Sangarsh Samiti), Jagtikikaran Virodhi Kruti Samit, Peasants and Workers Party, National Alliance for People's Movement, Janata Dal, Samajwadi Jan Parishad, Rashtra Seva Dal, and Left Progressive and Workers Unions, has used persistent agitation as a method to indicate dissent, but it has not yielded any clear announcement or action by the state government. From the point of view of the farmers this was clearly an opportunity that had to be seized.

And so on September 21, 2008, more than 6,000 farmers from 22 villages, falling in the command area of the Hetavne dam and hence demanding exclusion from the Mahamumbai SEZ project, cast their vote against the project. The referendum said a clear 'No' to the Reliance SEZ.

The final report of the voting result is yet to be submitted by the District Collector, but the people's movement (who did their counting simultaneously) has declared that almost 95 per cent of the farmers are unwilling to part with their lands for the SEZ.

Democracy finds space for action, especially when the general election is round the corner. And yet even this exercise in direct democracy has not really gone down well with many. It had Reliance running to court challenging the Maharashtra government's decision to hold the referendum in the first place.

The Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, had to make repeated statements that the referendum was unique to Raigad and that it would not be carried out for other SEZs.

So agitated was a certain Chandrabhan Prasad (Between the Extremes, The Pioneer, Sunday Op-Ed, September 28) over a comment of a Raigad farmer, Sadashiv Mhatre, who said he wouldn't sell his land even if he was given a crore, he drew conclusions such as – farmers are foolish, they are responsible for their own state and that they are incompatible with democracy.

He concludes: "What is the trajectory India should choose – the American way or those dictated by 6,199 farmers blocking the livelihoods of 60 lakhs who can enter city life". Though it may sound alarmist, my fear is that Prasad is merely echoing

and exposing the real perspective behind the 'politically correct' sounding discussions on just compensation.

A few arguments to counter Mr Prasad's perspective – Whether we like it or not we will find 'characters' like Mhatre across the length and breadth of this country who completely rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. They resist because they have seen the 'development' around them and are still waiting for their share of its benefits. Because they have seen their kith and kin and those below them in the ladder lose all they ever built in the name of

whose livelihoods are bound to be affected by this mega enclave did not vote either. The local estimate of the affected population is five lakhs. The government estimate is 50,000. The expected employment to be generated by the SEZ is merely 10,000.

I am not certain which 60 lakh people Mr Prasad refers to, but as per government figures all the 160 SEZs in Maharashtra put together will generate employment only to 10 lakh people. And let us be absolutely clear that those who will lose their livelihoods will not be the ones who will get these jobs! The farmers of Raigad are neither foolish nor blind.



While we keep a tab of the subsidies to the agriculture sector, let us not overlook the sops doled out to rich developers and business houses, most blatantly in SEZs.

this very development. There are no exact figures but several millions have been displaced for 'public purpose' and for the 'common good' of the nation. So that railways, flyovers, highways, industries and dams that would make our country more prosperous could be built.

Less than 50 per cent of them have been rehabilitated or received an alternative employment opportunity. The measly compensation amounts thrown to them were enough to buy cheap liquor and wait for their bodies to degenerate in the absence of a dignified life.

The 6,199 farmers, mind you, who voted on September 21 are only the *patta* holders from each land holding family. The other members of the family who are employed on the farm, the fishworkers, the agricultural labourers, the rice mill owners, those involved in transportation of agricultural goods – all these people, men – old and young, women and children did not vote (as part of the terms of reference on the referendum).

The farmers who are not from the 22 villages but

Mumbai has reached their backyards almost. Has it occurred to us that it may be a choice that is being exercised by the farmers because they can see what is happening to the majority of people in Mumbai?

While we keep a tab of the subsidies to the agriculture sector, let us not overlook the sops doled out to rich developers and business houses, most blatantly in the case of SEZs. How can the State and we the middle class, allow the most prosperous corporate institutions to grab all the resources forcefully, subsidised singularly for the purpose of profit and then call it 'development'?

Unfortunately, economics prefers to externalise costs rather than incur them so that profits can be maximised, what many Indian economists have phrased as the predatory growth regime. Corporates would rather set up shop where the infrastructure – the roads, the ports, the airports are easily accessible.

As one slogan from the Raigad movement aptly says: *Mere Papa ka Sapna, Public ka Maal Apna.*

Living

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

In Kolkata? Take a walk

Shuktara Lal
Kolkata

THE best way to see a city is to walk. As you loiter down streets and pavements you get to note charming details you might miss in a speedy tourist bus. You can stroll through shops, browse over books or just hang out. Calcutta Walks, a company in Kolkata, offers tourists and locals a chance to stand and stare. It offers a wide range of guided walks through the city.

The company started a year ago to put Kolkata back on the tourist map. "Outsiders have several misconceptions about the city," explains Prithvi Shah, an executive with the company. "We were very surprised to find that of the many tourists who travel to India every year, only a tiny percentage visit Kolkata. We want to market Kolkata as an equally attractive destination as other cities in India and change this trend."

Those who sign up find themselves spoiled for choice. If history attracts you, Calcutta Walks can take you through Dalhousie Square to follow the trail left behind by the British Raj. If you like cultural interfacing you can opt for 'Confluence of Cultures - Bow Barracks to Burra Bazar'. In this walk tourists get to explore Islamic, Anglo-Indian, Parsee, Marwari and Chinese settlements in the city. If you find the annual festivities of Durga Puja awesome, Calcutta Walks can take you to Kumartuli where some of the finest deities are sculpted every year.

"There are no 'guides' in our company," says Iftekhar Ahsan, a manager with Kolkata Walks. "But if you want to explore the city with us, we have trained explorers who will walk the city with you."

In keeping with this spirit of adventure, the routes of all the walks are kept flexible. "We encourage customers to suggest possible detours on any given tour. If a client wants to go down a particular lane, we will be happy to comply, even if that lane is not part of our original route," says Iftekhar.

Calcutta Walks also organises cruises down the Hooghly, past Dakshineswar, Belur Math and the Botanical Gardens. This cruise is loaded with history and as you sail down you get a feel of the river that brought the British to Calcutta and, eventually, India.

While marketing the city as an attractive tourist destination, Calcutta Walks is sensitive to local culture and concerns. Says Iftekhar: "We believe in sustaining local traditions that are being subsumed because of the predominance of a shopping mall



Tourists enjoy a refreshing coconut drink on their walk

culture." The enterprise supports fair trade practices and encourages tourists to buy crafts made by local artisans as souvenirs.

In fact, Calcutta Walks has arranged a shopping tour which bypasses boxy shopping malls and takes tourists to stores and vendors that sell products unique to West Bengal. Tours often include sampling of local cuisine. Surveys are conducted beforehand to ensure that the eateries are clean and hygienic so tourists don't fall ill.

Although Calcutta Walks is a very young enterprise it is attracting attention, admiration and customers. The company has tied up with travel agencies in other Indian cities as well as with agencies in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Switzerland. The Oberoi Grand Hotel in Kolkata is also a client. Since winter is the main tourist season, Calcutta Walks is hoping to attract many more walkers in the coming months.

Although the company caters largely to foreigners, it does not want to ignore local residents.

Explorers in the team are coming up with incentives to entice Calcuttans to their walks. Before the Pujas, Calcutta Walks offered several free walks to local residents. "We are hoping this will create a buzz," says Iftekhar.

Walkers are picked up from their homes and given a drop back as well. Snacks or lunch are included, depending on the time of the walk. If you opt to get to the starting point on your own, the charge comes down. There is also a discount for big groups.

Calcutta Walks has plans of devising more tours that will satisfy the varied interests of customers. Walks on the anvil range from a 'theatre tour' which will trace the rich performing arts heritage in the city to a 'gourmet tour' where food enthusiasts can learn about Bengal's multiple culinary styles. Going by the many walks on offer, Calcutta Walks will eventually have a walk for everyone.

For booking details and more information contact Calcutta Walks at calcuttawalks@gmail.com

Tourist agency revamps anganwadis

Susheela Nair
Varkala (Kerala)

After soaking in the sun, sea and sand at Varkala near Thiruvananthapuram we decided to end our sojourn by venturing beyond the tourist track. We took a detour to see an innovative tourism venture called Lullaby@Varkala.

This unique enterprise was started in 2005. At that time Health Action, an NGO was conducting a health survey with anganwadi teachers. Unable to pay honorarium to the teacher-volunteers, Dr CR Soman, director of Health Action, invited Chandrahasan, managing director of Kerala Travels Interserve Ltd (KLIL), a travel agency in Thiruvananthapuram, to see if he could help improve the socio-economic conditions of the anganwadi workers.

Chandrahasan was moved by the pathetic plight of the tiny tots. They were huddled in dark and dingy rooms. The 141 anganwadis in Varkala had no facilities. Chandrahasan felt it was not the anganwadi workers but the children who needed immediate attention. He decided to connect tourists, local people, NGOs and anganwadis.

"By facilitating interaction between tourists and locals and by channeling the wealth of tourism for the upliftment of children, women and economically weaker sections of society, Lullaby seeks to create a symbiotic relationship between tourism and the local people," said Chandrahasan.

Babu, coordinator of the project, ushered us into an anganwadi. We were delighted to be part of their



Anganwadi at Varkala helped by Lullaby

programme, 'Be with us, sing with us,' which provides tourists the opportunity to visit anganwadis, mingle with the children, teach them and gift them pencils and toys. The exuberant tiny tots sang nursery rhymes in English and Malayalam. To implement the programme, KILIL partnered Prochild, a voluntary organisation, government departments, the municipality, Kerala Travels, local NGOs and the people of Varkala. Funds from ProChild were mobilised which brought 141 anganwadis and over 3,200 children under its fold.

Initially, the project supplied milk, vegetables and meals on alternate days to the children. But soon with the effort of several charitable societies, NGOs and volunteer groups, the children were provided a nutritious meal every day. It was found that children were hesitant to attend school due to lack of proper clothes. They were given two sets of uni-

SUSHEELA NAIR

form and footwear. Wearing a uniform boosted their morale and improved attendance. The project reaches out to 3,400 children in 195 anganwadis from seven panchayats and one municipality. It covers an area of 87.6 square kilometers.

Benefits were not confined to anganwadis but extended to the community. Software giant Infosys installed computers in several anganwadis. These are used to teach the children and train unemployed youth and women.

Mothers of the children in the anganwadis were given training in organic farming and provided seeds and manure. Many of them now make a living by supplying organic produce to the anganwadis

and several big companies and hotels in Varkala and Thiruvananthapuram. The training imparted to women in tailoring and embroidery helped them start their own units. They make souvenir bags for tourists and stitch uniforms for the anganwadi children. Six youth have been provided cycles which they use to deliver milk to the anganwadis and newspapers to households every morning.

Enthusied by this philanthropic work, residents started supporting the project with contributions of vegetables, milk, curries and even fans. Non resident Indians also came forward with generous contributions. Rebuilding of five anganwadis, supply of more than 200 benches, electrification of more than half of the 157 anganwadis are some of the highlights of the project.

Contact: Lullaby@Varkala, Kerala Travels Interserve, Thiruvananthapuram.
Tel: 0471-3018606, 3018601

Delhi's pricey makeover

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

DELHI is building and building for the Commonwealth Games in 2010. Bulldozers and cranes are busy stamping out old structures and erecting new one. Environmentalists are ringing alarm bells but who is listening? In his recent hard hitting film, titled 'Delhi-Work in Progress', Krishnendu Bose unravels the high cost of modernisation—the felling of 100,000 trees, displacement of one million people in 10 years and the destruction of the river Yamuna's flood plains. Yamuna is an unpredictable river and has a history of flooding its banks.

"On the flood plains will arise the Manhattan of the future," says Bose. All this construction comes at a high cost. He points to the eviction of around 2,000 people from Vikaspuri slum to Bawana, 40 km away on the Haryana border.



Trees are being chopped for concrete

Many have lost their jobs. Others spend huge amounts to commute to work. The Bawana settlements are without sanitation, electricity and water. "They have been dumped in a completely wild area," says Bose.

Apart from ecological concerns, Bose points to

the politics behind such developments. "The land around the Yamuna spreads over 10,000 hectares and is being eyed by the state, real estate developers, and contractors for raking in huge monetary returns," he says.

The film features urban planners who draw pretty pictures of the future, to academics, environmentalists and activists who debate the issue of a 'world class city'. The questions raised are: What is the price we are paying by destroying the green lung of the city? With what vision is this change occurring? Who will benefit from this? Is this change inclusive?

By and large the apathetic Delhi resident is least concerned about such developments.

Bose warns about a backlash from the displaced urban poor. Transformation of the capital should be equitable, but who cares really?

The 38-minute film was shot over the last year on a budget of Rs 3 lakh, largely funded by WWF.

Contact Krishnendu at: Earthcare Films, B-91 Defence Colony, New Delhi. Ph: 24334171 Mobile: 9811843111 E-mail: earthcare1@vsnl.com.



A QUICK SELECTION FROM THE MANY BOOKS THAT TURN UP FOR REVIEW

Random shelf help



INDIAN DESIGN EDGE

Darlie Koshy
Lotus/Roli
Rs 695

This is a book dedicated to the importance of design. Was a book really required to get that message across, you might well ask. We only need to look around us to understand the role design plays in creating identities. The shoes you buy, the beer you swig, the razor you use, the hair dye you go for, the car you buy: we've known it all along that design nudges you into making those choices. It is also a well-worn theme that manufacturers in developed economies have figured out how to use design and those in emerging markets have a lot of catching up to do. But Darlie Koshy covers all this with a diligence that will make you yawn. It wouldn't have really mattered except for the fact that Koshy is the director of the National Institute of Design (NID). So, what is really happening at NID if this is the kind of stuff that is coming off the director's desk? For those who don't know, NID comes under the textiles ministry and when the director puts a book together, he makes sure that he pays his salaams to Commerce Minister Kamal Nath. Yawn....



A TIME FOR TEA

Piya Chatterjee
Zubaan
Rs 550

An overlooked book, by an academic full of creativity and insight on an industry about

which much is known and too little recorded with honesty. Tea is a civilised drink. But the inequalities on the gardens where it is grown is the burden of Pia Chatterjee's research. She goes behind the age-old labels of a woman plucking leaves from a tea bush to tell the story of post-colonial exploitation. Chatterjee depicts the world of Burra and Chhota Sahibs, who live for their polo and soccer, and retire in the evenings to the sanctity of club bars with their cigarettes and scotch. An industry built by a colonial power finally moved into another age of political freedom with the oppressive excesses of the past. The failure to create new equations has resulted in the seething discontent of the hills and the decline of industry on whose prosperity the lives of several generations were hinged. This is an important critique of labour practices on Indian plantations.



DISSONANCE AND OTHER STORIES

Jayakanthan
Rs 250
Katha

Jnanpith award. Jayakanthan writes with wry humour and empathy about the prostitute, the nomad, the untouchable and the middle class. He is familiar with the slum and at ease with the Brahmin household. Deeply sympathetic to women, Jayakanthan questions conservative Tamil society. His characters grapple difficult choices with dignity and sometimes pathos. There is Ranjitham, married to a coolie, who can't consum-

mate her marriage because she doesn't have a roof over her head. Dharmambal, whose long, uneventful marriage is shadowed by infidelity. Ammasi, retired from the army with no family, no future, suddenly finds a reason to live when he finds a young, dying woman in a railway coach. Jayakanthan's stories are engrossing. When he writes the reader realises that a situation overlooked as inconsequential is in reality an aberration. Dr KS Subramanian's translation is crisp.



WEED

Paro Anand
Rs 195
Roli Books

Umer, a Kashmiri boy, is plunged into the maelstrom of conflict when his father disappears to join the jihadis. The family is reduced to penury and treated with suspicion. His mother begins to work as a domestic help. Neither the government nor the NGOs are of any help.

Umer drops out of school to support the family. His mother, worried about his safety, doesn't let him out of her sight. One day there is news of her husband. Proud and independent, she refuses the money he sends. Her younger son leaves to go see his father. Umer goes in search of them.

The book has sadness woven in. It describes Kashmiri reality in fiction— a confused father, a mother's agony and a child's sense of loss. The reader too gets caught up in their lives. Paro Anand's descriptive language brings alive the landscape of Kashmir. With its air of mystery, the book is an easy read.

**JALYATRA**

Nitya Jacob
Rs 295
Penguin

Nitya Jacob travelled the length and breadth of India to study India's great tradition of harvesting water. His book takes us to Delhi, Tamil Nadu, the Chambal, wet Shillong, dry Shekhawati, Goa, Uttarakhand and Bundelkhand. Jacob succeeds in giving the subject a new feel. He has stories to tell and he brings us up to date on current developments. So, his book is not dull and boring and he never pontificates.

There are readable nuggets like the one on the rich seths of Shekhawat. Some of India's richest families come from here. Most abandoned their towns and villages in search of fame and fortune. A few retraced their footsteps and now finance tanks and tankas. Another chapter is about the dacoits of rugged Chambal and how they gave up robbing and kidnapping and took to harvesting water instead. Jacob is at his descriptive best here. In Meghalaya we are taken through ghostly sacred groves, jungles and caves. Jacob writes about the fate of the famed shyngiar, an intricate network of drip irrigation made of bamboo. We also go to Cherrapunji, the wettest place on earth which has a shortage of water. There is some water here, we discover. Jacob brings alive the dust and decadence of Rajasthan, the pomp and arrogance of Delhi and the desperation of Bundelkhand. He takes a wide angle view of water linking it to people, culture, environment and work. We also get to know about innovations that have taken place and how most don't measure up.

**UNSUNG**

Anita Pratap & Mahesh Bhat
Rs 295
Mahesh Bhat Publishing

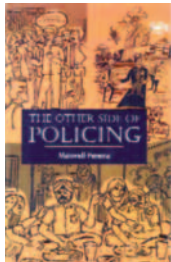
India has amazing people who dedicate their lives to improving society. With no money or backing they work out solutions to complex issues which the government merely bumbles with. For years our idealistic grassroots leaders were given scant recognition. Luckily things are changing. Most newspapers and TV channels now give space to our 'unsung' heroes. The reason is that their work and lives are inspirational and make good copy. Companies have also pitched in with sponsorships. We hope the trend continues.

Well known journalist Anita Pratap has profiled nine leaders who are well known in the NGO sector. They have worked selflessly on education, legal rights, water, wildlife, village development and saving our urban heritage.

Pratap writes sensitively. You get to read about Chewang Norphel, India's famous glacier man, George Pulikuthiyil, a priest who became an ardent defender of human rights and Hasnath Mansur, the doughty teacher who took education to Muslim women. Lakshman Singh, the famous water warrior of Laporiya in Rajasthan is also profiled. Then there is Rangaswamy Elango, a Dalit who has worked tirelessly for an egalitarian and sustainable village society. And Subhasini Mistry, the vegetable vendor who through sheer grit achieved her life's ambition of starting a hospital for the poor in Hanspukur near Kolkata.

The book has a coffee table feel. Mahesh Bhat's black and white pictures are eye catching. 'Unsung' has been sponsored by the Brigade Foundation.

The good tough cop

**THE OTHER SIDE OF POLICING**

Maxwell Pereira
Rs 325
Vitasta Publishing

A day barely passes without aspersions being cast on the credibility of the police.

There is good reason for this. Politicians have done their best to compromise people in uniform and citizens have done little to stop them. Go to the records and you will find fake encounters, false cases, bribery and corruption. It is there for anyone to see.

But is this really the story of the entire police

much the same way as a doctor looks at a patient or a judge interprets the law or an accountant pores over the books.

Policemen can be dispassionate, objective and honest and have a life that is far removed from uniform. As in any profession, there are the crazy and funny things that happen during the call of duty. Maxwell draws upon an array of anecdotes ranging from a donkey parade to the efforts of a Congress politician's wife to fabricate threats so as to get a high level of police security.

Much of the easy pace of the book comes from Maxwell's own nature. He came to the force as a man of personal means eager to do a job well and unwilling to compromise his val-

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Maxwell Pereira

force? Is everyone corrupt? Is no justice dispensed at all? Are officers all lackeys?

It is very important to read Maxwell Pereira's feisty book to get another side of the picture. The fact is that despite the odds, many officers and men have done their duty. Maxwell is one of them and his book, written after retirement, is important testimony that there are policemen who know to live with dignity as professionals. The challenge they take on as government servants is far greater than that of conscientious citizens who raise, quite correctly, issues of human rights violations. It is greater because it requires more courage to take on the government from within than outside it.

Unfortunately, the contribution of the policeman who performs his duties in the normal course and goes home gets overlooked. Such is the disenchantment with governance that in the public mind there is just one impression of the police and the bureaucracy. It is an unfortunate and incomplete picture.

Maxwell's story is that of the professional policeman. It is about the kind of person who sees his role as guardian of law and order in

ues. At the end of a hard day's work he has always been eager to socialise and enjoy his off-duty leisure. In him you will find the professional policeman and through his book he hopes he will sensitise you to discover others.

"There is often a lack of appreciation of the task performed by policemen. Perhaps it is because of the belief that the khaki he wears transforms him into a super being. One tends to forget that he is an ordinary being (who) wants to live a normal life and spend time with his family," explains Maxwell.

A visit to a police station or the quarters given to our policemen will be an eye-opener. This reviewer has always been stunned by the collapsing structures and absence of amenities and that too in the heart of Delhi. As you go out into the states it is much worse. Most people never see this squalid and neglected side of policing. Much more needs to be done to make the force perform with self-respect. Public money needs to be spent on policemen.

In the same way, officers would do well to care for the people they lead – much like Maxwell has done through an illustrious career.

The wonders of massage

DR G GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



Massage plays a notable role in Ayurveda and has several salutary effects. It prevents and corrects the aging (jara) process. It helps the person to overcome fatigue (shrama) because of routine hard work in life. It also prevents and corrects disorders caused by afflictions of the nervous system (vata).

A good Ayurveda massage promotes eyesight (dhrushti prasada) and helps in nourishment (pushti) of the body. Massage promotes longevity (ayush) of the individual and helps him or her to get sound sleep. It promotes sturdiness (dhrudatha) of the individual, tones up the tissues of the body and gives the skin a healthy colour.

Ayurveda massage is especially appropriate for ailments like insomnia, weakness of the body, vataja diseases like joint pain (excluding rheumatoid arthritis), paralysis, muscle cramps and cracked foot. For obese people, udwarthana (powder massage) is good.

Ayurveda has different types of massage for different types of ailments. There is Abhyanga (oil massage), Udwarthana (powder massage), Pada Abhyanga (foot massage) and Shiro Abhyanga (head massage).

Sneha is the term used in Ayurveda to indicate all types of fatty substances like oil, ghee etc. Sneha is derived from snih which means to be attached to, feel affectionate for, to be adhesive. If the body is properly oiled through massage then there will be smoothness, softness and stickiness of the body. It alleviates problems of the nervous system.

Each massage has its own effect on an ailment. Shiro Abhyanga (head massage) prevents and cures headache, hair fall, premature greying of hair, baldness and refraction errors of eyesight. Head massage makes hair roots very strong, in turn making hair long, soft and glossy. It promotes complexion of the face and gives the person sound sleep.

Doing a Pada abhyanga (foot massage) before going to bed is very useful. A foot massage prevents and cures dryness, numbness, roughness, fatigue and lack of sensation as well as cracking in the soles of feet. It promotes strength for walking and running and gives sturdiness to the limbs. The soles of our feet are very closely connected to the eyes and ears. Therefore, massage over the soles of the feet improves and promotes eyesight and proper functioning of the auditory organ of the ears. It also cures problems like sciatica, cramps, and contraction of ligaments, vessels and muscles of lower limbs.

The Udwarthana (powder massage) removes foul smell from the body and cures heaviness, drowsiness, itching, anorexia, excessive sweating and disfiguration of the skin. It alleviates vayu and helps in melting of kapha and fat. It produces stability of the limbs and promotes skin health and improves blood circulation. It promotes enzymes responsible for the metabolic process in skin as a result of which it promotes health, complexion of skin. An Udwarthana also removes unwanted hair from the face and body of females.

Body Abhyanga - Regular massage should be performed over the whole body to prevent diseases. It promotes positive health; it helps in rejuvenation of the individual and cures diseases. It improves blood circulation in the body and removes stiffness of various joints of the body as a result of which movement of the organs during exercise is facilitated.



E-mail: vaidya.ganga@friht.org
Dr GG is a senior physician with FRLHT, Bangalore.

PRODUCTS FROM INDUSTRIAL WASTE

Self Help, Recycling, Altering and Manufacturing Group (SHRAM) was started by Piyusha Abbhi, a young MBA. She got together a group of young women from village Batamandi in Himachal Pradesh and helped them bring out their latent talents and skills.

The idea behind starting the group was to recycle local industrial waste and generate an income for the women so that they could become financially independent. The women's group makes use of recycled material and natural fibres like palm leaves and grass to make eco-friendly products. The girls were inspired to make these products after seeing similar work being done by an NGO in Delhi working with spastic children. The group specialises in making different kinds of bags like sling bags and shopping bags. They also make attractive coasters, water proof satchels, raincoats, moodas, kits and crochet products.

For trade enquiries contact:
SHRAM, Self Help-Recycling, Altering and Manufacturing Group, Village Batamandi, Paonta Sahib Himachal Pradesh
Phone: 09318911011 Email: piyusha4@gmail.com



Death is about life

SAMITA RATHOR

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever. Mahatma Gandhi

DEATH is inevitable and a reality. There is nothing and nobody in this world who will remain here forever. Death occurs every second and we still feel death is like a saga.

Our attitude towards birth is not contradictory, so why not towards death?

We are so caught up with our lives that we reject and avoid facing the concept of death completely. Life and death are natural processes that need to be cherished. Looking after the body, mind and the spirit is our sole responsibility as humans.

From a yogic viewpoint, death is regarded as part of life. It is the rise of a new beginning. Going deeper into it brings us closer to the facts of life. Death is merely a journey not a destination. It is life beyond the Ego.

The fear of death is the cause of foremost klesas or suffering. Patanjali names the klesas as the source of suffering. Klesas are tendencies woven deep into the mind like a spider's web. They exist at a fundamental intensity and affect us both mentally and emotionally. Klesas have tremendous authority to distort perception and shape actions. The five Klesas are Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesa and Abhinivesa. If we can understand this concept then we can conquer any fear of suffering, especially death.

Maharshi Patanjali describes the meaning of Avidya as the lack of recognition between what is real and unreal in life. It is a state of spiritual ignorance, of not being aware of one's true nature. It is the root of klesa. Avidya is misperception, looking directly at something, but seeing something else. As Avidya is universal, our lives are filled with exam-

SOUL VALUE

ples. Some are harder to look at, some are easier to see. Clearly, a brain-damaged drug addict believing another fix is the answer to his problems is Avidya.

Asmita is over-identifying with stuff unimportant to our core self. Example: basing my sense of worth on the car I drive, the clothes I wear, or the size of my bank account. On a micro level I might define

Death is the rise of a new beginning. Going deeper into it brings us closer to the facts of life. Death is merely a journey not a destination. It is life beyond the Ego.

myself by the languages I speak, the yoga postures I do, the foods I eat or don't eat, or the people I count as desirable. Asmita or obsession with one's individuality gives rise to selfishness. As a result we become so attached to our personality and possessions, thinking that's all there is to life.

This gives rise to Raga or craving. Rooted in pleasure, raga is the desire to repeat something that once provided a good feeling or pleasant sensation. This includes everything from recurring desire to full blown addiction, from mild addictions to outright

obsession. In this state of ignorance we water the Dvesa by opposing thorny situations, repugnance to pain and suffering.

Somewhat opposite to Raga is Dvesa, or aversion: a negative feeling toward someone or something that once caused me discomfort. This could comprise of everything from judicious distaste to devastating phobia.

We feel a sense of false happiness and pleasure when our egos are tickled and due to this Abhinivesa arises. It is insecurity, fear of ending, of death or the strong desire for life. This fear creates its own momentum, and no one, not even the wise or the learned are spared from its pressure.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, "Birth and death are not two different states, but they are different aspects of the same state. There is as little reason to deplore the one as there is to be pleased over the other".

By meditating on death we can confront the true nature of life and death when we are still physically alive. This can lead to deeper understanding of what we really are as human beings. This is why meditation is such an important part of yoga and other spiritual practices. It introduces us to the concept of impermanence and permanence.

This part of willfully confronting death has been passed on to us by great yogis and spiritual masters. We need to make use of it and begin the study of death while we are alive. Life is like a water bubble. It can burst any time. Therefore making positive and constructive use of death by understanding its concepts is of utmost significance.

As Jiddu Krishnamurthi once pointed out: "Most of us are frightened of dying because we don't know what it means to live."

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: (011) 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. E-mail: mathewcherian@helpageindia.org

Vidya

We work with the underprivileged sections of society primarily with children and women of urban slums. Our areas of focus are education, health awareness, micro enterprise, skill training, and youth management.
Contact: Mrs Mala Goyal D-II 2442 Vasant Kunj New Delhi - 110070
Phone Nos: 41740019, 46065056, 98 101 50725
website: www.vidya-india.org

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 Rights 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

Vidya

We work with the underprivileged sections of society primarily with children and women of urban slums. Our areas of focus are education, health awareness, micro enterprise, skill training, and youth management. You can give your valuable support by donating for a good cause through sponsorships or providing school building funds or supporting any specific programmes.
Contact: Mrs Asha Mirchandani D-II 2442 Vasant Kunj, New Delhi - 110070
Phone Nos: 41740019, 46065606, 98 181 88449; website: www.vidya-india.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.
Contact: Soni Foundation Trust, F-2655 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana-122017
E-mail: kcjcodev@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 children.
Visit us: www.smilefoundationindia.org
Contact: Smile Foundation, B-4/115, 1st Floor, Safderjung Enclave, New Delhi - 29
Phone: 41354565, 41354566
info@smilefoundationindia.org

Footloose in Kerala

RITA ANAND

WE swerved around Kochi's rain drenched streets in a bumpy auto rickshaw looking for a chemist. Perhaps we just didn't know where to look for one. In other cities you can get a chemist's shop just about anywhere. Here it seemed the most difficult thing to find. Finally we got lucky and discovered one near a hospital. While we were hunting we spotted several clinics and stores dispensing Ayurveda medications.

Ayurveda seems to have married tourism here in Kerala. It looks like a booming industry. Every small hotel preens itself on having an Ayurveda spa. Services range from a head to foot massage to facials and treatments for lifestyle ailments. The price depends on the kind of hotel you stay in.

A reason for the boom is the recognition that has been bestowed by the state government. Any youngster who has passed Class 12 can apply for a certificate course recognised by the government in an Ayurveda hospital. Students study under an Ayurveda doctor and gain experience as interns in the hospital. They can then apply for jobs in spas or clinics. Starting salaries range from Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,000 plus board and lodging. Medicines are also easily available thanks to enterprising companies like the famous Arya Vaidya Pharmacy.

Demand for such services has been rising steadily. It isn't only tourists who seek out the Ayurveda spas and clinics. We are told Ayurveda has loyal local support. A whole new career has opened up for rural youngsters and many opt for it instead of migrating out of the state.

I can definitely recommend the head massage to insomniacs. Fragrant coconut oil, a gentle rub in a sparse, dim, silent room is soothingly mesmeric. You sleep soundly.

Commuting by ferry

The boat is king in coastal Kerala. A ferry ride is cheaper than a bus ride in Delhi and is strongly recommended if you want to get from one shore to the next. Jaunty little boats with flashy flags and robust names flit around happily past historic buildings, skirting islands.

The ferry is more serious and hardworking because it carries large numbers of people to work and back. To visit these parts and not understand the role water transportation plays in people's lives is a sheer waste of a journey. So even as a tourist become part of the commute and hop on.

The downside is that little has been done to develop ferry stations and ticket counters. Boat timings to

the outsider can be a bit of a mystery so you have to be patient, sit it out on that jetty because you got mixed up about a trip from Mattancherry to Ernakulam or Ernakulam to the Container Terminal. But it is worth it.

The houseboat business is the big touristy thing. On offer is a cruise through waterways in an air-conditioned houseboat fitted with a personal chef. If that sounds too elitist, there are shorter grassroots trips for three hours for Rs 500. A leisurely cruise through snaky waterways has become a 'must see' for tourists. There is also the Taj Malabar hotel's lovely evening cruise in a traditional boat down the river to the sea.

Water brings wealth and coastal Kerala is indeed

with a thud into the water. But why complain. For the birds this is a sanctuary where they visit October onwards each year. If the birds are happy, so are we.

Melting pot

Fort Kochi and Mattancherry are the two places to which backpackers head. It's easy to see why. You can get everything you need here for a song. A bed in a dormitory, great view of the river with its big Chinese fishing nets, heritage hotels, boutiques selling knick-knacks and roadside eating joints.

You can buy your fish as soon as the fishermen bring it in. There are local cooks hanging around who will cook up the fish for you straight away. If you feel nostalgic for the north go to Dal Roti, a



RITA ANAND

homely restaurant run by a family in Fort Kochi. Another interesting place is Kashi Art Café, which combines art, food and coffee. The menu is scrawled outside on a blackboard.

Jew Town in Mattancherry has been much written about. It looks like our very own Janpath with its long rows of shops. The spice shops are special. You can pick up cinnamon, star anise and natural vanilla. A shop here sells intricate embroidery done by elderly women, a tradition which is fast fading. In many ways Kochi reflects the eclectic mix of Indian identities. More people now speak Hindi. Many more girls dress in salwar-kameez. "This is our typical Kerala salwar

kameez," says a shopkeeper proudly holding up a white kurta with zigzag gold borders.

On the same street, a Jewish synagogue shares space with a sleepy police station, a shop selling Kashmiri handicrafts, another selling jewellery from Rajasthan. A lane away, a roadside eatery offers 'fish butter masala'. No, I didn't try it.

Fewer beggars

There were fewer beggars at Kochi's tourist destinations than at similar places elsewhere in the country. I counted only three beggars who were old and handicapped. In any other tourist hotspot there would have been swarms of beggars.

Perhaps it is the absence of hunger. Most people have a patch of land, a couple of trees yielding coconut, banana, guava and a small pond. You can always dip a line into the nearby stream and pluck out a fish. Ownership of land, trees and water curbs malnutrition and gets girls to school. The city-village divide is also not so stark, though in Ernakulam you will find all that you will want to hate in a mismanaged urban centre. But the fact is that in Kerala the benefits are more widely spread.



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TATA STEEL

