

Civil Society

IN NORTH BIHAR, EMBANKMENTS CAUSE POVERTY, MIGRATION, BUT CORRUPTION KEEPS THEM IN PLACE

FLOOD BUSINESS



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COVER STORY



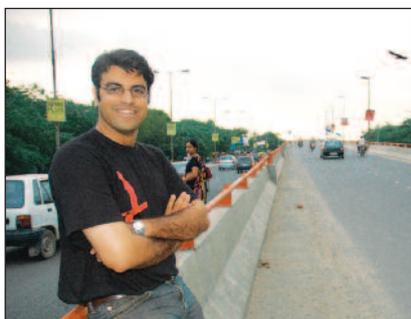
THE CURSE OF BIHAR'S EMBANKMENTS

Walls to curb rivers are causing extensive floods and turning once rich soil into sand.

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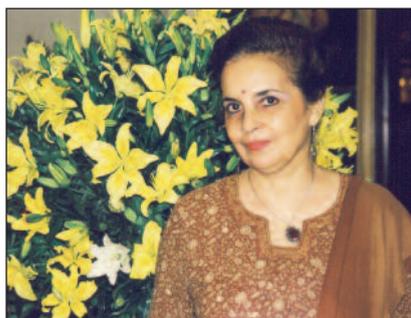
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Civil Society

A story from Bihar

It is all too common to take corruption in Bihar for granted. So, when money meant for flood relief disappears through a novel arrangement between an official and some politicians, it makes news for a while, but that is it. There is more interest in the fact that the official concerned was on Time's list of Asian heroes than in the corruption itself or the seamless industry that floods in Bihar have become.

When we decided to do the story of the embankments along Bihar's rivers, we realised that we may be bucking the trend to our own detriment. Would anyone read a cover story on Bihar? We decided to risk it and commissioned Eklavya, who has been a reliable reporter-researcher on water for a long time, to travel to Bihar to bring back in great detail the endless havoc that the embankments are causing. If nothing is being done to dismantle them, it is because repairing embankments each year has become a thriving industry. Everyone makes money out of it.

The embankments, by trapping the flow of the rivers, have turned large tracts into sandy and arid stretches. Had the rivers flowed in and out, as nature planned it, these would have been fertile lands instead. This is most certainly an old story, but a tragic one as well because it is a major reason for North Bihar's poverty and mass migration to cities. And like most old stories, it needs new solutions that grow more complex.

We also spent time this month covering the Delhi Jal Board's plans for farming out the management of its distribution system. There are lessons for all Indian cities in this development. We were the first in the media to take up the issue in our editions of June and July. From what we can gauge, there seems to be a general consensus on the need to price water to prevent its wastage. But the big question is how to go about this. There are serious questions being raised on the handing over of management contracts to international firms at the urgings of the World Bank. Are these companies going to be paid too much? Will they make water unaffordable for the common man? At the back of the mind of the Delhi resident is the experience with private distribution of electricity. Power cuts haven't gone away, billing problems continue, theft of power hasn't been controlled and tariffs are set to go up. Will privatised water distribution end up in the same hole?

A story we will be revisiting in the near future is the one on MS Swaminathan's rural knowledge hubs. It is a great idea whose time has long come. A much smaller, but very important initiative in the rural areas has also been undertaken by Philips. A van equipped and designed by the company is capable of conducting diagnostic tests like an x-ray or ECG and transmitting the findings via satellite to Apollo Hospitals. This unique effort, which involves ISRO and the DHAN Foundation, takes specialised healthcare to remote corners of the country. It shows how a company can use technology to change the lives of people.

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'Hindu names help save footage'



LAKSHMAN

Farouque Shaikh

Shailey Hingorani
New Delhi

THE Indian film industry is famous for typecasting characters. Sikhs are always taxi drivers, tribals dance weirdly in forests and Christian girls sing in clubs. As for Muslims, be sure the film will show women hidden in *burkhas* repeating *adaab* a dozen times over. The hero always has a name from the majority community.

"You can't have a saviour from the minority community because you want the biggest number of people to see your film. The audience has to empathise with the character. If they don't, your film is lost," explains Bollywood actor Farouque Shaikh.

But when a film comes laced with communal overtones it's treading on dangerous ground and its time for concerned citizens to speak up.

Shaikh recently spoke on communal propaganda in the entertainment industry at the India International Centre (IIC) in Delhi. His talk is part of a series of lectures called "The Growing Consciousness of the Other," which IIC has organised so that perceptions the two communities have of each other can be discussed frankly and openly.

"I am not an activist. The best I would grant myself is that I am a concerned citizen." Farouque Shaikh told *Civil Society* in an interview:

Why does Bollywood stereotype characters in cinema?

See, cinema is based on perception and not the truth. Filmmakers try to sell perception because it is convenient. The fact is audiences are not interested in the truth. They are more attracted to characters that are easily identifiable. So if a filmmaker tries to deviate from the character type, people take more time to register and as a result that much of footage is lost.

What effect do films with stereotypical images have on people?

Discerning audiences do notice, but it might play on the psyche of our rural audiences or floating audiences. When Indo-Pak relations were really bad and we had a government which cashed in on the animosity between the two communities, then it helped to make the kind of movies we saw during that period. But if you were to make *Gadar* today, it would definitely be a box-office disaster.

We have been seeing films on the Indo-Pak friendship theme. We noticed the hero is always from the majority community. Why?

Well, if the Pakistanis made the movie, the hero would be from their majority community because the saviour has to come from the largest section of the audience. You can't have a saviour from the minority community because you want the biggest number of people to see your film. And this trend is not restricted to movies around the Indo-Pak theme. Ninety-nine percent of our heroes are either Vinay, Rajesh, Vikram, etc.

None of our lead actors like Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan or Aamir Khan, play a Muslim character on screen. Why?

Understandably so. The largest section of the audience has to empathise with the character. If you had, let's say, Shahrukh Khan playing a Sajid Qureshi, most of the audience will probably think, where have I heard that name before?

But a Muslim or a Christian will have no prob-

lems placing a Vijay or an Ajay. They have seen an ample number around. So if the lead actor is not playing a Muslim character, the identification problem is immediately sorted out. And with identification comes empathy. If you don't empathise with the principal characters in your film, then the film is lost.

But the success of Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan and Aamir Khan means they have been accepted by Hindus. So why don't they play a Muslim character? Why aren't they offered such roles?

Ninety-five percent of filmmakers are non-Muslims. The moment they make, what is called a 'Muslim social', all the women will be wearing *burkhas* and probably saying *adaab* at the drop of a hat. Non-Muslim filmmakers are slightly less familiar with the culture of Muslims. So they have to assemble that culture. It becomes difficult for them to make such a film. On the other hand, Muslim filmmakers are reasonably familiar with the exterior resemblances of non-Muslim culture because it is all around him. So it is relatively easier for them.

Unless you create a Muslim background, you can't create a Muslim character.

But take the example of the older generation of filmmakers, like HS Ravi. They came from the pre-partition composite culture, and could read and write in Urdu. For them, to make a movie like *Mere Mehboob* was easy because they lived in that culture.

Have you ever faced discrimination because of your religious identity?

Communalism or any kind of differentiation has to be a paying commodity. If it does not pay the practitioner, he or she will not go ahead with it.

The film industry is like the racecourse. You want to back the winning horse and you don't care whether the colour of the horse is black or white.

My consideration while making a film is not whether the actor is Muslim or not, but whether he will draw in the audiences. So if the surname of the

actor is 'Khan', it really does not matter. I would not look for an actor with a Hindu surname. It wouldn't occur to me. Plus nobody has that kind of time.

Are you an actor and an activist?

No, I wouldn't say I am an activist. The best that I would grant myself is that I am a concerned citizen. What happens around me concerns me and if something unpleasant happens it disturbs me.

I truly believe that what an actor gets from society in terms of adulation, love and money,

from people he has never met, is a kind of debt that he is under. Sometimes I go to the remotest of villages and meet people I have never met before and will probably never meet again. They treat me as if I am a member of their families. It imposes a certain responsibility. If you are a rich surgeon, than you may think that at least two days in a month I should go attend to patients in a free medical camp. So if I can do something similar, it makes me happy.

"The film industry is like the racecourse. You want to back the winning horse and you don't care whether the colour of the horse is black or white."

A club for better roads in Delhi

Civil Society News

New Delhi

UDAY Gosain does 32 km one way from his home in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi to his office in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, every day. He drives his car and knows how bad the roads can get. Repairs are undertaken, but very soon the potholes are back. Contractors seem to take the government for a ride with impunity.

Gosain has set up the Delhi Roads Improvement Club (DRIC), which is a fraternity of concerned citizens who believe that roads can be fixed if users ask for accountability.

DRIC's weapon has been the right to information (RTI) law in Delhi. Under this law, the citizen is empowered to ask inconvenient questions and expect answers from the government.

Very simply this means that if you see a road that has been repaired recently go to pieces very quickly, you, as a citizen, can seek information on the contractor, the inspection reports of the superintending engineers and the money paid for the repairs. You can get a sample of the road tested in an independent laboratory as well.

Gosain's own introduction to the RTI law came when he was in Munich in Germany. He discovered Parivartan, the Delhi NGO, on the Internet, and when he returned and found that he wanted to do something to improve the roads on which he travelled every day, he turned to Parivartan for help.

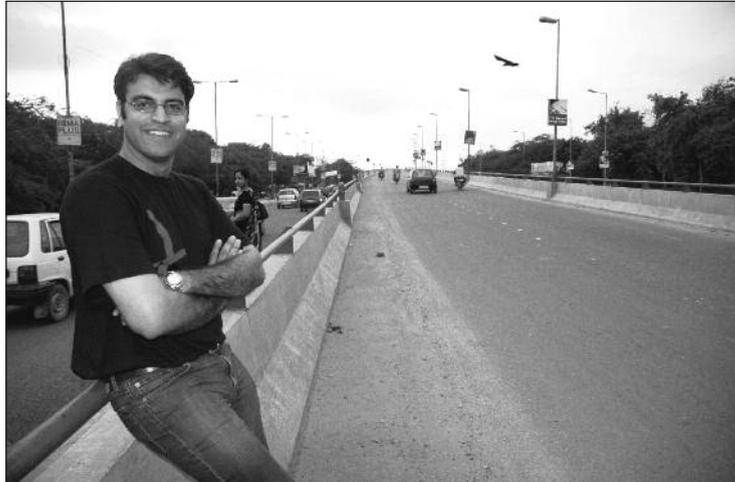
"In February, the Outer Ring Road stretch from Panchsheel Flyover to Chirag Delhi Flyover was freshly laid. Within 20 days of this, the road had started to come off (sort of slip) at several places," says Gosain. "After a couple of weeks the road was patched up, badly."

Then, Gosain noticed a pothole before the Savitri cinema hall caused by a leaking pipeline. The road was also laid afresh. After about five weeks the leakage started again, bringing back the pothole.

Parivartan helped Gosain file his RTI application.

"That little effort of going to the PWD HQ (similar to the Police HQ) at ITO was made," says Gosain. "The same afternoon, much to my surprise, I got a call from the Assistant Engineer on site, asking me about my issues and wanting to meet me. During our unofficial meeting I explained to him the idea behind wanting to know how my money is being spent and why I finally made that effort to go to ITO."

The Assistant Engineer tried to explain that the



Uday Gosain

work on the road was not yet over and only a patch-up job had been done. He said that he himself was very concerned about the condition of the road and that all Gosain really needed to have done was to approach his office.

Next came the inspection of the road and records. The officials were quite cooperative and relevant documents were shown.

Finally, after a lot of excuses the entire stretch of road was resurfaced at the cost of the contractor even though the bid was quite low.

If this application had not been filed by Gosain, it is almost certain that another job for the same stretch of road would have been given to the contractor.

"The present status is that I have received the information I asked for, it does have some discrepancies and I have filed another application asking for a sample of the road, to be verified in a private

lab," says Gosain.

"It's all up to us. If change is what we are looking for, a good place to begin is within ourselves," he says.

To join Uday Gosain's club, you can contact him at uday_gosain@yahoo.com and 98182 66471.

To use the RTI law in Delhi, all it takes is a simple Form A, (which is universal for all the departments), your questions, a fee of Rs 25 and a bit of effort to deposit the application. The application can be sent by email (the fee has to be deposited within seven days), by registered post with either non-judicial stamps affixed or a postal order or bank draft enclosed.

Here are some demands and questions that a citizen can raise in an application under the RTI law:

- Copy of measurement book (both abstract entry and record entry).
- Copy of details of estimates and a copy of the sketch.
- Request to inspect the road under Sec 2 (i) of the Delhi RTI Act. Please intimate the date, time and place when inspection can be done.
- A copy of the sample clearance report of the remade road that was issued before the payment was made.
- Request to know when and under what condition the entire road was re-laid. The road was in better condition before it was re-laid.
- Names of the executing engineer and the assistant engineer who supervised the road and certified it to be okay.
- Reasons for the road to have collapsed.
- What guarantee is provided for the work?
- What action will be taken against engineers for having passed a faulty road construction?
- What action will be taken to claim losses from the contractor and to repair the road?

Uday Gosain is a telecom engineer from the Army Institute of Technology, Pune and presently works with HCL Technologies, Noida. He volunteers for Parivartan and Asha for Education, Munich Chapter.

India ranks 9th in Class of 14

Civil Society News

New Delhi

INDIA scored a lowly 43 percent and ranked ninth out of 14 countries surveyed for their commitment to basic education, free education, quality inputs, gender equality and overall equity.

Thailand came first, followed by Malaysia and Sri Lanka. The nations assessed belong to the Asia Pacific region.

The survey was conducted by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), a coalition of development organisations, civil society networks and teachers unions in 100 countries along with the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE).

Their findings were collated into a report card and released in New Delhi by Kailash Satyarthi, International President of the Global Campaign for Education, to coincide with the G8 summit.

In India, one out of five children continues to be out of school. Two-thirds of these are girls. Uttar Pradesh has the worst enrolment rate, followed by Delhi and Bihar. More girls go to school if their teacher is a woman but only 35 percent of teachers are female. Children from SC/ST backgrounds face the most hurdles in attending school.

Infrastructure is a big drag. Only 13.7 percent of schools have separate toilets for girls. Nearly 49 percent don't have drinking water. Blackboards and furniture are missing.

Teachers and curricula too need improvement. The average teacher-student ratio is 1:47. But in Bihar and UP it is 1:94. Even after five years of schooling 40 percent of students don't achieve minimum levels of learning. Fifty percent of boys and 58 percent of girls drop out before completing elementary education.

Malaysia which came first, has universal primary

education and has made huge gains in adult literacy. It spends generously on every student and has a teacher-student ratio of 1:20.

Thailand has eliminated all user fees and ensured that women illiterates get a chance to learn. Sri Lanka has scored extremely well especially in gender equality, basic education and state action. More needs to be spent per pupil and on teacher training to further improve quality.

China came sixth but scored two As – for gender equality and quality. What is pulling China's marks down are user fees or payment for textbooks, uniforms and tuition.

Although adult illiteracy is less than five percent in China, it is still the second highest in the world in terms of the number of illiterates. But China has immense potential to top the Class of 14, according to the report.

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Indha finds niches in US, Singapore

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

ALL over Haryana, village women balance water pots on their heads. To keep those pots steady they make a round base called *Indha*. When a self-help group (SHG) of 100 rural women in village Daulatabad in Gurgaon was looking for a name they homed in on *Indha*.

This is one big load that won't weigh them down.

The SHG's name is becoming an international brand. *Indha* makes handmade products-embroidered bags, paper products and pouches – that are being snapped up by buyers in Singapore and the US.

"We started the SHG so that women could earn some money during the lean agricultural season," says Captain Indraani Singh, India's first woman Airbus pilot who runs an NGO called Literacy India in Chouma village, Gurgaon.

Literacy India runs schools for underprivileged children. Some years ago they started a *Karigari* project. They trained 200 village girls in embroidery, tailoring, art and craft, beauty culture and driving. "We realised this wasn't enough to boost their self-confidence or their entrepreneurial skills. We needed to find markets for their products," says Indraani.

They formed *Indha* in November 2004. Literacy India got 100 women from their vocational centre in Daulatabad together. The women identified products they could make easily, for which raw material was available and a brief stint of training was all that was needed.

The women said they could do block printed products, paper products, batik material, paintings, and vermi-composting. Each woman paid Rs 20 to become a member of the SHG. Exporters in Gurgaon donated leftover cloth for the women to try their hand.

An international group called League of Artisans helped them sell their products in Singapore. After that there was no looking back. Inquiries began floating in.

When Literacy India held an exhibition in Daulatabad this month, local people from Gurgaon flocked to their stalls. The women made brisk sales. Five star hotels are interested in *Indha's* shoe-racks and laundry bags. Literacy India is in talks with Fab India to strike a deal. Local farmers are buying *Indha's* vermi-compost.

Literacy India is now expanding operations to surrounding villages like Ishapur, Bachkhera and Sarai Alavardi to rope more women into the *Indha* circle. In Chouma village, they have started literacy classes along with art and craft for housemaids working in the area. The women are very excited.

Are G8's promises just phantom aid?

Tonusree Basu
New Delhi

JUST before the G8 Summit was held in Scotland, ActionAid International-India released a report, 'Real Aid', in New Delhi. John Samuel, founding member and Co-Chair of Global Call for Action Against Poverty (G-CAP) and Dr Babu Mathew, Country Director of ActionAid International-India, addressed the conference.

The report exposes the wide disparity between aid that is promised by the developed world, and the money that is, in reality, given. Aid donors are way behind the official international aid target set by the United Nations of 0.7 percent of national income. More than 60 percent of aid flows are 'phantom', that is they don't represent a real resource transfer to the recipient. In 2003, real aid was only \$27bn, or just 0.1

percent of the donor countries' combined national income.

The three-part report brings to light the concept of deflation of the value of aid. The failure to target aid at the poorest countries, runaway spending on overpriced technical assistance from international consultants, the tying of aid to purchases from firms belonging to donor countries, undermine the value of aid. Almost 90 percent of contributions from the US and France, two of the world's biggest aid donors are phantom aid.

A striking example is the tsunami catastrophe. As per figures calculated six months after the tragedy, Australia has given only seven percent of the money that it pledged.

France gave a meagre 13 percent, followed by Germany with 15 percent and Netherlands with 16 percent. The US and the European Commission (EC) have delivered just over a third of their pledge.

Call to abolish law against begging

Shailey Hingorani
New Delhi

A National Consultation on the Urban Poor was organised in New Delhi by Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan (AAA), the Indian Social Institute (ISI) and ActionAid India, on 15 and 16 July.

On the first day of the meeting, participants discussed legislation to curb beggary and vagrancy. They roundly criticised the Bombay Prevention of Beggary Act 1959 (BPBA) as being 'anti-poor'. This law makes begging in public places a crime and a punishable offence. Activists of AAA want the BPBA annulled.

"Under Clause D of the law, anybody with no visible means of subsistence wandering about can be picked up and incarcerated in a beggars home. This makes begging a 'status offence' because you are punished not for what you do but who you are," said S Muralidhar, an advocate who practices in the Supreme Court. Even street performers and small vendors are targeted under this Act.

Indu Prakash Singh, director of AAA, said the law doesn't address the socio-economic reasons for beggary.

Instead, it makes every beggar a criminal. "This Act is purely punitive," he said.

"Like all other legal texts, the BPBA lacks empathy," said Parul Sharma, director, CareHouse Foundation, Sweden. "No efforts are made to trace the reasons for begging. The act is unconstitutional from a welfare point of view too. It lends itself to punishment and not rehabilitation."

Participants also said middle-class perceptions like 'beggars like to beg' 'beggars are depraved', and 'beggars are lazy' were not true. Speakers emphasized that beggars are distressed people who are deprived and dislocated. They are victims of crime, and more than willing to be productively employed.

AAA activists said they are against organised beggary, but it should be tackled differently. Prakash suggested open-door homes, where the homeless could come and go freely, could be one solution. Some corporates, like the Taj Group, have trained the homeless and given them jobs.

"But definitely more such measures are required," said Prakash.

First institute for elected women representatives

Madhu Gurung
Bikaner

A N institute that will train and support elected women representatives (EWRs) in rural areas was inaugurated in Bikaner by Kalu Lal Gurjar, Minister of State for Panchayati Raj on 20 July. Called the Aaghaz Academy, it is the first of six institutes that will come up in India to train and support ERWs.

The Hunger Project and 60 partner NGOs in 14 states have started this institution.

The Aaghaz Academy will strengthen the leadership abilities of elected women representatives so that they can participate effectively in social, political and development processes.

The course duration is for two years. In the first year, there are 20 days of indoor structured training. In the second year, there are seven days of structured learning. Faculty from the Academy will visit participants at least three times during this period to help strengthen their leadership skills and address challenges faced by the EWR. The Academy seeks to provide participants with technical and budgeting abilities and develop

their skills at mobilisation. It will also teach EWRs functional skills and public speaking so that they acquire a positive and confident attitude.

More than a decade since former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi signed the 73rd and the 74th Amendment, giving 33 percent reservation to women at the grassroots, over a million women have formed a broad base of rural leadership. But a large number of ERWs are unable to lead. They lack community support and confidence. The Aaghaz Academy will help them acquire skills.

The NGOs who are partnering The Hunger Project in setting up the Aaghaz Academy are from Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Jammu and Kashmir. Since the past five years they have provided training and support to more than 30,000 ERWs. There are now more than 700 women facilitators across the country, who support the learning needs of these women.

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Delhi struggles with water pricing

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Delhi Jal Board (DJB) plans to outsource distribution and management of water in two zones of the Capital under a proposal sponsored by the World Bank, but a debate rages on privatisation, the pricing of water and whether private sector companies are being given too cushy a deal.

The companies short-listed include Suez, Bechtel, Saur and Vivendi. The contract will be for six years on a fixed fee, with the World Bank financing improvement of the existing water system.

Distribution under the new arrangement will begin in December in two zones and then be extended to all 21 zones in Delhi.

The challenge is to price water in such a way that usage is regulated, revenues are generated for DJB and the distribution system is refurbished. In these solutions, there are important lessons for other Indian cities, which face similar problems with municipal supply of water but privatisation is not always the best answer.

There are even bigger challenges of augmenting supply, recycling waste-water, putting Delhi's many canals to use, raising groundwater levels and reviving the Yamuna.

But for the time being everyone's focus is on the DJB's decision to outsource its distribution.

The DJB is one of the world's largest public utilities. Anything between 30 and 50 percent of available water is lost due to leakage and theft. Water supply is irregular, inadequate and its quality suspect. Residents pay low tariffs but shell out money for tankers, boosters and bottled water to make up for shortfalls.

In July, the DJB called stakeholders to a series of meetings to explain its plans for outsourcing water management. It met with opposition from NGOs. Questions have been raised on pricing, the credibility of the international companies and the huge fees to be paid to them.

Several NGOs and resident welfare associations (RWAs) fear that outsourcing distribution is merely the first step towards privatising water supply, which hasn't worked well internationally.

Delhi residents are also wary of privatisation efforts because of the problems experienced with the distribution of power being put in private hands. Supply hasn't improved, breakdowns continue, bills are inflated and amid power cuts the companies want to raise tariffs.

"The ownership, control of water supply services, infrastructure, assets, revenues and the right to set tariffs will remain with DJB," said Ashish Kundra, additional CEO of DJB.

"DJB's operating costs need to be controlled and revenues enhanced through full metering, leakage detection and upgrading the existing infrastructure," explained Rakesh Mohan, CEO, DJB.

He says the DJB cannot, on its own modernise. It has neither the money nor the expertise. The Delhi government subsidises DJB to the tune of Rs 350 crores annually. The city attracts high migration and infrastructure has been expanding chaotically.

"Water and sewerage lines are all underground. Sometimes our own people don't know the complete network. People put in new lines spoiling the hydraulic cycle and there are political compulsions," says Mohan. DJB is offering residents 24x7 water



Delhi Jal Board officials at the stakeholders' meeting

under its new plans. Mohan says rates will not be hiked but he would expect customers to pay for good services.

Currently, residents pay about Rs 192 per month. Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan, who has dug out reports on DJB's plans using Delhi's right to information law, says if World Bank recommendations are followed and the full cost of water recovered, then rates will shoot to Rs 990 per month for 200 litres of water per capita per day. For a family living in a slum the cost of water would increase from Rs 52 to Rs 200.

In fact, the price of water could go much higher because as Kejriwal says, "the DJB's cost of operations and maintenance will rise sharply and these will be passed on to consumers."

Four international consultants will be hired for Rs 6 crore per annum. If 84 experts are hired for 21 zones, the DJB will be paying Rs 126 crore per annum. This is 20 percent of its operating cost. Apart from a fixed fee, DJB will pay an annual operating budget to run the zone. The company will decide how much money it requires and no upper cap has been prescribed.

Besides the water company will receive an engineering consultancy fee. It will get bonus and incentives if it achieves more than set targets. Some of these targets leave room for the water company to reap profits.

In the selected zones, South II and South III, private operators will be responsible for water distribution, meter reading, collecting revenues, addressing consumer complaints and reducing non-revenue water (NRW) which means water lost due to leakages, theft etc, in each zone. Targets will be set by DJB after baseline surveys.

Each zone will be divided into district metering areas (DMAs). DJB will supply water to the colony at the input point. From here it will be distributed.

"If water is available at the input point in each DMA, it will be assumed that the private operator supplied water to your house even if you did not receive it," said Kejriwal. The private operator would still meet his target and earn a bonus. The water company could even divert water to a richer consumer like a hotel in the DMA willing to pay more.

The private operator will address 30 percent of complaints within five days and 90 percent within 20

days. "The time given for addressing complaints is too long. Instead, complaints that water was not available should be addressed within five hours, otherwise why should a bonus be given to the operator," said Kejriwal. There is also confusion about NRW figures, critical to the whole plan.

NGOs inquired where water for a 24x7 supply would come from. Delhi requires 810 mgd of water but only 610 mgd is available. The DJB says water supply will be augmented by equitable distribution and reduction of NRW. Currently, the NDMC area, where the super rich live, gets a princely 400 litres per capita per day while the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) areas are supplied around 110.

Officials believe metering, conservation and rain-water harvesting will increase water availability. To reduce wastage, suggestions have been made that water be priced low for essentials like bathing and drinking. The amount should be low enough for slums to pay. Anything consumed over a certain meter mark should cost more.

The DJB was hoping to get an additional 140 mgd from the Sonia Vihar Treatment plant but water from the Tehri dam is yet to arrive.

Commander Sureshwar D Sinha of Pani Morcha is pretty certain water from Tehri will not come because the dam itself is faulty.

Instead, he recommends increasing water availability exponentially in and around Delhi. Eco-friendly, low-cost solutions for treating sewage and waste-water are available. Along with water harvesting, 600 million cubic metres of water can be added to Delhi's pipeline, according to Sinha.

Water for industry, agriculture and of quality good enough for baths, can be introduced. An integrated plan that includes the tertiary water sector and traditional water harvesting systems can also clean up Delhi's stinking *nullahs*, recharge groundwater, revive the Yamuna and replenish Delhi's historic tanks.

Water, point out NGOs, is a politically sensitive issue. A handful of international water companies can hold the government to ransom if the power to shut taps on and off is vested in them. Everybody agrees something needs to be done about Delhi's ailing water sector. But the mood here is that the government should do it and the DJB must be helped to clean up its act.

Villagers map their priorities

Rakesh Agrawal
Nuapada

NEARLY 800 people converged at Sukhana Bhata village, in western Orissa's Nuapada district, for two days to draw up development plans for their villages. They were agricultural workers, small farmers, daily wagers and women. Being unlettered was not a hindrance. Using turmeric, grass, flowers and leaves, they made social and resource maps. These were then painted on village walls and drawn on big pieces of paper.

Health, education, forests, social conflicts and immunisation took priority over construction of physical assets.

"We have several problems and panchayat functionaries do not pay any attention to them. The time has come to tell them what to do," said Keeravati Tundi, a young mother.

This time officials were listening. Panchayat functionaries—the sarpanch, secretary, ward members and zila parishad members — were present. Nine villages come under this panchayat, called Alanda.

The Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (GSA) along with the Peoples' Science Institute (PSI), Dehradun and the Sahabhagi Vikas Abhiyan (SVA), a consortium of voluntary organisations in western Orissa, came together to initiate this project. The idea was to get people involved in making *palli* (village) micro-plans for their areas based on their needs by using techniques of participatory rural appraisal (PRA).

"We spent a long time with the villagers and lived with them before they were convinced that they should plan for their own development," says Basudev Munda, a GSA coordinator.

So far, 300 *palli* micro-plans have been drawn up

in western Orissa. The plans are now part of the overall district plan covering 95 villages in 12 gram panchayats with a population of 100,000. Micro-plans have official recognition because *palli* sabhas are legal institutions under Orissa's Panchayati Raj Act.



Women analyse plans for village development

The plans are first discussed at gram sabha meetings. Then in a two-day meeting, a panchayat level plan is drawn up. People, including women, throng in large numbers.

"While making our *palli* plan we realised that the most crucial issue affecting us was that the auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM) was not coming to our village and we decided to do something," says Pramila Bag of Sukhana Bhata village. They forced the government functionaries to act and soon the ANM began visiting the village regularly.

A women's self-help group in Sukhana Bhata wanted to grow fish in the village pond to increase their income, and applied for a lease. This time it

was given to them, whereas earlier, it would have most certainly gone to a richer, powerful group.

In several other villages, people have acted on their own, instead of waiting for government agencies. For example, there was no primary school in Shantipur village, Bargarh district. After a village micro-level planning process took place, people made the school building by volunteering their labour (*shramdaan*).

They also demanded that the government fill vacancies for teachers' posts and carry out a drive to immunise children. Enrollment of children in schools has increased, as a result.

There have been other spin-offs too. In some instances, people have stood up in village micro-planning meetings and told panchayat functionaries to acknowledge that they had siphoned money meant for development. During the micro-planning process in Amguda panchayat, one sarpanch admitted that he had misappropriated funds.

Villagers, the panchayat and government functionaries are now cooperating to draw up village level plans. The idea is also catching on. A sarpanch association of one block in Kalahandi district has asked the GSA team to help them make such micro plans for all their villages too.

The government is finally getting interested. Jyothi Kumar Lakda, a block development officer (BDO) participated in the gram sabha meeting of the Anadi Bahal gram panchayat that was convened to make plans. "When people themselves make plans for development, they have a higher rate of success," he says. The district magistrate of Kalahandi, Saswat Misra, has also welcomed the process. "It is a good attempt that will help the government to make plans as per peoples' needs."

Cows find fertile ground in jail

Awanish Somkuwar
Bhopal

JAIL officials and prisoners in Madhya Pradesh are warmly welcoming cows into their fold. The jail administration believes inmates should learn skills that can help them in their after-jail life. The prisoners say caring for cows is holy work, a sort of repentance for their sins. Some are learning vermi-composting, others manufacture of bio-pesticides. Most inmates have picked up basic skills for running a dairy.

"I am seriously thinking of starting one after I complete my jail term," says 36-year-old Mangilal Kurmi, a prisoner in Central Jail, Bhopal.

Promotion of dairies and cows is the Madhya Pradesh government's pet scheme. Under the *Godan Yojana* each poor family in rural areas is being given three cows. Charting milk routes and developing market spaces for milk trading are being seriously considered. The government's enthusiasm is catching on in jails, where dairies are finding a fertile ground.

"Why can't prisoners do some constructive work?" says Director-General of Jails, G P Sinha. "If rigorous imprisonment transforms into a skill-oriented enterprise, nothing like it."

Central Jail in Bhopal has the biggest cowshed. There are nearly 700 bovine animals here including

some 600 cows. "We get about 100 litres of milk, which is given to ailing prisoners and children of women prisoners," says Jail Superintendent G P Tamrakar. "Nearly 20 quintals of organic manure are prepared every month from 25 quintals of cow dung. This bio-fertiliser is used in a 30-acre farm under our jurisdiction and organically grown vegetables are cooked for jail inmates."

Mangilal Kurmi and his fellow inmates manage the *Shrikrishna Gau Shala* (cow shed). One group of about 12 people is responsible for cleanliness. A second batch of 18 arranges fodder, while another 10 inmates collect milk. The fourth group makes sure the cows are in the pink of health.

"I have learnt how to prepare vermicompost. By spending my time in jail, caring for cows, I have learnt something good," says Nafis, one of the prisoners.

Gyan Singh Bhuchar, an inmate, has recently completed a course in manufacturing Ayurvedic drugs and biopesticides. "Products like mosquito repellent sticks, *Panchagavya* and pesticides have economic potential. We take pride in doing something meaningful. This is peace-giving work," he says.

The jail administration is planning to open a *Panchagavya* drug manufacturing unit. *Panchagavya* is a combination of cow dung, milk, ghee, cow urine and curd. It is often used in Hindu

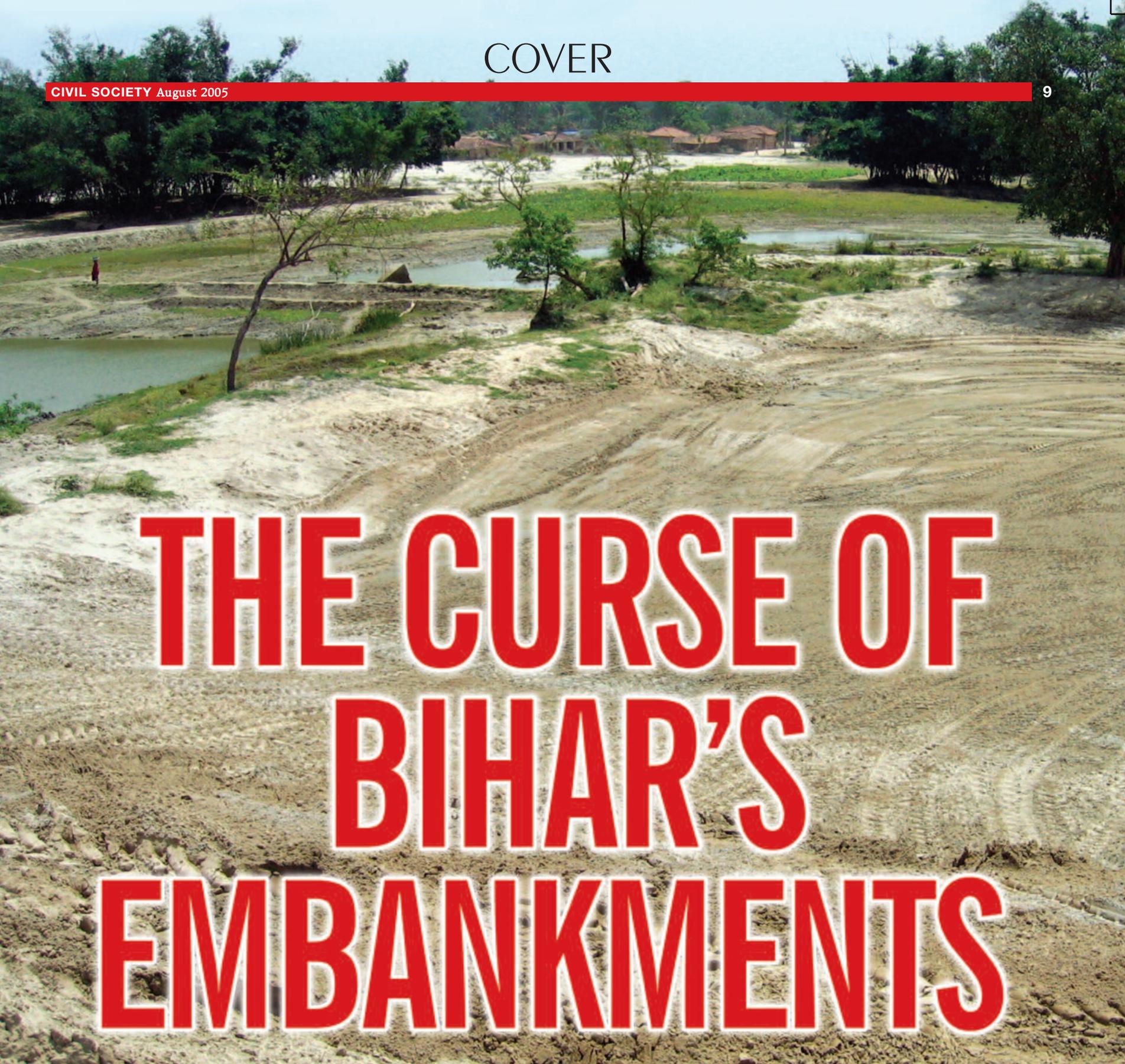
religious ceremonies called *havan* to purify the atmosphere by keeping germs away.

The jail administration has recently installed a biogas plant, which is saving them Rs 20,000 in kitchen expenses every month. Prisoners also manage the biogas plant.

Prisoners in Gwalior Central Jail run the *Surabhi Gau Shala*. They have about 25 cows which yield, on an average, 20 litres of milk per day. Organic manure is also prepared every month. A 45 cubic metre biogas plant is on the anvil. "Bio-gas saves money," agrees Gyan Singh, an inmate who occasionally cooks for the prisoners.

Officials in the Gwalior Central Jail have now sent a proposal asking the state government to provide two cows to prisoners once they complete their jail term. Some inmates want to run a small canteen near jails where food could be served to visitors.

For many prisoners caring for cows is a 'peace-giving' and 'soul-purifying' job. "Taking care of cattle is a religious act of high merit," says Shivraj, an inmate. "It is a matter of pride for us as Lord Krishna also served cows," says Motilal, who is serving a five-year sentence at Gwalior Central Jail. Some say caring for cows has made them realise the worth of selfless service.



THE CURSE OF BIHAR'S EMBANKMENTS

Walls to curb rivers are causing extensive floods and turning once rich soil into sand

Eklavya Prasad
Patna

If you travel to North Bihar, elderly villagers will tell you that in 1947 floodwaters would ravage their homes for four days. Since 2004, it takes four months for the waters to recede. The fury of floods has become an annual feature, just like a season in a calendar year.

Every July as the monsoon gathers momentum North Bihar is pushed into irreparable loss. These months are a period of uncertainty, physical and emotional turmoil and economic chaos. People die while property, village infrastructure (whatever exists) drown in water. There is political and administrative insensitivity. Relief is preferred to mitigation.

The reason for North Bihar's suffering is its embankments, built originally to keep rivers in check, but now a reason for floods and the turning of fertile land

into sandy stretches. Left to themselves the rivers would swell and recede. But now the water gets trapped because of the embankments.

The embankments have also become a business. Vast sums of money are spent on repairing and making them. Everyone has a hand in the till. The result is that the embankments, though not needed and a source of suffering for the local people, will never go away.

In 1952, Bihar had only 160 km of embankments and the flood prone area of the state was 2.5 million hectares (mh). By 2002, the embankments stretched to 3,430 km and the flood prone area of Bihar has extended to 6.88 mh. A sum total of Rs 1,327 billion has been spent till date to control floods by building embankments to rein in rivers.

Bihar is a confluence of eight major rivers – the Ghaghra, Gandak, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamala, Bhutahi Balan, Kosi and Mahananda. All these discharge into the Ganga. As per 1987 estimates, 56.5 percent of people affected



by floods belong to Bihar and about 76 per cent of these people live in North Bihar.

An embankment is an earthen wall built along the river which divides the landscape in two: riverside and countryside. The riverside is the area located within the embankments and the countryside is the region outside it. The purpose of embanking a river is to prevent river water from spilling into surrounding areas, thereby reducing the impact of floods on humans, livestock and agriculture.

The idea of adopting embankments as a flood control mechanism was derived, ironically, from the Mississippi and Hwang Ho rivers, where embankments were considered more of a liability than an asset. On getting political sanction to construct embankments in 1953, Bahadur Kanwar Sain, chairperson, and Dr K L Rao, director, Central Water Power Commission (now Central Water Commission) were sent to China, in May 1954, to study the Hwang Ho experience. It was a strange strategy. The decision to construct embankments had already been taken and experts were sent to justify it.

On January 14, 1955, the first foundation stone for controlling the most forceful river of India, the Kosi, was laid in village Bhutaha of Madhubani district. Other rivers subsequently got embanked.

Floods have only increased in fury and created more havoc. Embankments get breached and the area under flooding goes up. The trapped river discharges huge amounts of sand ruining agriculture within and around the embankment area.

Fifteen percent of North Bihar is waterlogged. "If the same percentage of population is dependent on this land, then about six to seven million people are affected by a human induced problem, whether there is a flood or not," says Dinesh Kumar Mishra, a structural engineer and convenor of the Barh Mukti Abhiyan.

Politicians, technocrats and contractors never had to confront the wrath of floods. The people were its main victims. The embankments devastated their agricultural fields forcing them to migrate to cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

Civil Society travelled 800 km in five districts of North Bihar to interact with villagers located near the Kosi, Bagmati, Kamala and Bhutahi Balan rivers. The purpose was to know how the embankments had affected their lives. We found that not everyone likes a good flood.

Homes sink in a sandy desert: "The embankment has been largely responsible for converting my village from green to brown," says Bhudhal Sada, panchayat samiti member of Sounamankhi Ghat in Khagaria's Alouli block. This village is one of 96 located on the riverside of the Bagmati embankment. It is accessible only by a slow boat. You have to walk across a fairly vast sandy stretch to reach the boat.

About 1500 people in 300 households live here. Their castes are Musahar, Baniya, Sow, Sharma and Teli.

The village looks as if it has been transplanted from western Rajasthan. The land is covered with sand. Sada says before the embankments were constructed the river used to discharge water and silt over a larger area. By restricting the flow of the river, the concentration of silt has increased on the riverside. Numerous houses have got submerged in sand. The doors of some homes look like windows.

"The cropping pattern in the region has totally changed," says Prem Kumar Verma, secretary of SAMTA, a local NGO. "Earlier *dalhan* (pulses), *tehlan* (oilseeds), paddy, chillies etc were grown. Now only maize and wheat are being cultivated." He says if the ecological impact of embankments is not checked, North Bihar will turn into a desert.

Floods and the decline of agriculture have led to high migration and an increase in child trafficking. Daughters have been sold to meet household expenses. Family members who stay back survive on loans from moneylenders to pay for food, healthcare, and social customs. The villagers pay an exorbitant rate of interest. The moneylender ill-treats those who can't pay, confiscating their property, and forcing them into labour. "The death toll among women tends to increase during the monsoon," says Sada.

Travelling from Saharsa to Khagaria we saw huge mounds of maize on the road.

An embankment is an earthen wall built along a river. It divides the landscape in two: riverside and countryside. The riverside is the area within the embankments and the countryside is the region outside it. The purpose of embanking is to prevent flooding.



An embankment under construction

We were told farmers were selling their produce to buyers from Bengal and other parts of Bihar. People had neatly piled up dried residue of the maize crop. At Bela, a village in Beldaur block of Khagaria district, people said those dry residues were *jalawan* (fuel wood). According to villagers this was an annual exercise. Villagers placed *jalawans* to delineate an area for putting up a temporary shack during floods. Locals begin planning at least three months before the monsoon.

Villages sunk in water: Despite the long hot summer, our entry to Mahishi North in Saharsa is blocked by waterlogged land. This village, located on the countryside of the Eastern Kosi embankment, has a population of 12,000. Nearly four to five km of land, adjacent to the embankment is waterlogged. Earlier runoff from fields found its way to the river through drainage channels, rivulets and tributaries. The embankment has stopped the natural flow of water.

In September 1984, the Eastern Kosi embankment breached. There was total



Village of Daiya Kharbar

devastation. "The river dislodged nearly 0.47 million people from their homes and destroyed 70,000 hectares of land," says Rajendra Jha, secretary, Koshi Seva Sadan, an NGO.

A drainage channel to remove seepage from the Eastern Kosi embankment was finally renovated by villagers of Mahishi with help from the Koshi Seva Sadan, the Centre for World Solidarity, Hyderabad and the Barh Mukti Abhiyan.

"The canal now diverts seepage water to the Harsankani adjoining Mahishi. It had got damaged after the 1984 floods. Lands adjoining the canal remained waterlogged for 16 years making thousands of hectares of land unproductive," says Jha. After the canal was renovated, the land dried up completely. Since two years people are cultivating *garma*, *adharni* and maize crops.

But in areas away from the canal, agriculture is declining. "After the embankments were made, all kinds of weeds and grasses started growing on our fields. Land productivity has gone down and we have to invest substantial time and money on *nikauni* (weeding)," says Bakhoram, a farmer.

In Mahishi, to remove weeds on one bigha of land, at least 40 labourers are deployed. Women are paid Rs 12, and men Rs 30 per day. Normally women work four hours. Each cycle of de-weeding costs Rs 480. At least two or three rounds of *nikauni* are required.

There is a drastic decline in the use of traditional varieties of seeds, since the old pattern of flooding changed. "Traditional crops always managed to stay above the water, ensuring a definite return," says 75-year-old Phodar Mandal. "Before the embankments, flood- waters would rise in phases, giving sufficient time for the crops to grow to a decent height. Now the water gushes in and traditional crops can't withstand the force of the water nor its level."

Short duration high yielding varieties have replaced traditional seeds. Farmers have to make regular investments in buying seeds, pesticides and fertilisers. Fear of crop failure haunts them. In Mahishi and other waterlogged areas, agriculture is an expensive and unpredictable investment.

The enterprising *mukhiya* of Mahishi north, Manoj Kumar Choudhary is planning to breed fish in a 10- bigha pond near a waterlogged part of his village, as an alternative means of earning an income. He has taken the land on lease from the local temple trust for eight years and will be paying Rs 25,000 annually. Choudhary believes he will be motivating other villagers to adopt a similar strategy. Fish is in great demand in North Bihar. Most of it is imported from Andhra Pradesh.

Safety is an illusion in Jhanjharpur: We travelled to Jhanjharpur in Madhubani district to talk to people living in the Kamala-Balan plain. Since 1987, embankments along the Kamala are getting ruptured regularly.

At Daiya Kharbar in Lakhnaur block, repair work was being carried out late because of political uncertainty after the Bihar State Assembly elections. This year officials decided to raise the height of the embankment by five feet, forgetting that the height can be increased only up to a certain length.

We went to take a look. We were taking photographs when a contractor came from nowhere. He told us threateningly to leave and tried to prevent us from taking pictures. After a minor altercation, he went back. Sunil Kumar Mahato of Hadheeka explained the contractor's behaviour. Earlier, he said, the embankment was made of mud and now it is being made of sand, which is plentiful.

Last year 2000-3000 acres of fertile land were covered with three to four feet of sand after a breach of the embankment took place.

The village had 10 ponds. All of them got silted. "In my village, Gunakarpur, almost 70 per cent of agricultural land has been covered by sand, which Kamala brought with her last year," says Ramkhelavan Chaupan.

In Daiya Kharbar, Gangapur, Raja Khabar, Gunakarpur, Khairi and Machaeta, sand casting is ruining agriculture. In the old days this region was famous for almonds. Farmers now grow lowly crops like wheat, *dhan* and *garma dhan*.

"During last year's flood money was given to the *mukhiya* to be distributed among villagers. All of us were given Rs 200. We were expected to sustain ourselves on that amount for the entire period," says Naresh Mandal, a landless labourer from Daiya Kharbar. Voluntary organisations had helped him, though.

Boats are the lifeline of people during floods. Shivji Yadav says his village is located in the riverside and people have to cross three river channels to reach the countryside part of the embankment. One boat ride can cost as much as Rs 400-500 per trip during the monsoon. Last year, in desperation, people pooled Rs 3,500 and bought a boat. The government's boat is lying redundant. Repeated reminders and pleas have not yielded any result.

Villagers are unanimous that the government's relief work does not benefit the poor and lacks vision. "None of the government's relief work has addressed the problems of women during floods. They are the most affected," says Raghunandan Yadav, a landless labourer from Bhakua village

In his village 510 houses were destroyed but only 65 families received government support. The rest still don't have permanent shelter. Villagers who can strike a lucrative deal with the *mukhiya* and officials corner the benefits of the Indra Awas Yojana.

"The embankment looks like a chaotic bazaar with people and livestock staying together," says Yadav. In the absence of health and sanitation facilities villagers are forced to stay in inhuman conditions for three months. The flood water is used for defecation, drinking, immersing dead humans and animals and so on.

Last year even the *sattu* (gram flour) supplied by the government was dubious. "The *sattu* packet's label had the name and address of an Agrasen Sattu Factory, Hazaribagh, Bihar. But Hazaribagh has been a part of Jharkhand since 1999," says Mishra. Either the *sattu* was four years old or the company was a fake one.

Local organisations have been requesting the district administration to equip government buildings like schools and panchayat bhawans for people during floods. They have also proposed identifying and building a safe region within the village with all basic facilities for families to shift during the floods. But nothing has been done.

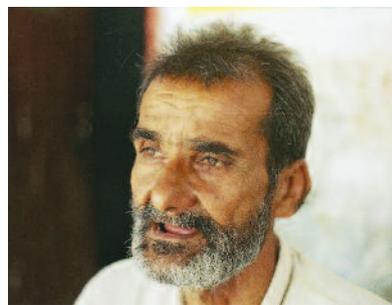
The displaced people of Kundah: Muhammad Habib Khan from Kundah village was once a practicing homeopath. He got his degree from Darbhanga Medical College. Khan came to Chandrain Punarwas 20 years ago. Back home he cultivated 21 bighas which sustained his family through the year. Khan despondently says the river is flowing over his agricultural land after the embankment was constructed.

Ali Muhammad alias Bukku was displaced from his village Sattore in Saharsa district and is staying in Chandrain Puranwas since 42 years.

There are 110 rehabilitated families living in this village. They belonged to one



Bhudhal Sada, panchayat member



Rajendra Jha of Koshi Seva Sadan

The village looks as if it has been transplanted from western Rajasthan. The land is covered with sand. Sada says before the embankments were constructed the river used to disgorge water and silt over a larger area.

of seven villages that were washed away by the Kosi after the embankment was constructed.

Rehabilitation, according to Mishra, was a non-issue. The villagers, who were confined within the embankment, were told to give up their only source of income for the larger public good.

On 2 March 1956, the Central Water Power Commission opposed paying any compensation to the affected people. They felt it might set a wrong precedent. The government kept referring to a report from the Central Water and Power Research Station, Khadakwasla, Pune that embankments will not cause much inconvenience to people. But in July 1957 flood-water was inside and outside the embankments. After a long struggle, the Bihar Vidhan Sabha was forced to assure the Assembly that the affected people would be provided:

- An equivalent area of the homestead land at a reasonable distance from the embankments, so that villagers could access their cultivable land lying within the embankments.
- Land for community services like schools and roads.
- Rehabilitation sites with tanks and wells for water.
- House building grants.
- Easy access to their farm lands by an adequate number of boats.

Khan and Bukku blame the rehabilitation procedure for their miseries. "The promises were encouraging but the implementation was highly skewed," they say. Apart from land nothing else was provided. "We were lured by government officials," says Khan.

Their home can house two families. The reality is, on an average, six to seven families are squeezed into one house. "Where else can we stay? The land allotment was done without keeping the future in mind. Today I neither have enough land nor can I purchase any because the costs are exorbitant," says Bukku. "Days are not far when fights between siblings will become a common feature to get access into the house." Families here depend entirely on money sent to them by relatives who have migrated to cities.

Mishra says in 1970, some 35,000 families continued to stay within the embankments. The government kept persuading them to leave without trying to understand why people were staying put.

"The rehabilitation sites were far from the fields making it difficult for people to cross channels of the Kosi. The boats were nowhere in sight. The sites subsequently got waterlogged making them unfit for habitation," says Mishra. State officials propagated the view that people were not moving out because they were attached to the lands of their ancestors.

Khan says officials hoodwinked the people. The villagers were determined to stay back, fearing they would lose their property. The officials assured them jobs for younger members in the family. This prompted many to leave and accept the officials' proposition. But when they reached the embankment, the reality struck them. They found hundreds of families stranded there, trying to come to terms with the calamitous change in their lives.

"We stayed on the embankments for a few months before moving to

Chandrain Punarwas," recalls Khan. Rehabilitating people was considered a one-time activity. Even today, Chandrain Punarwas does not have a health centre or a school. The government is completely apathetic. The villagers had to pool money to get a road constructed so that they could access a village road.

Trapped between two walls: The Kosi enters North Bihar at Bhimnagar in Supaul district. There are 50 to 60 revenue villages here trapped between embankments. "Out of six blocks in the district Saraigarh, Bhaptiahi, Marouna and Nirmali are entirely within the embankments. The remaining two, Kishanpur and Supaul,

are partially within the embankments. Their inhabitants have either moved to the countryside or continue to stay in the village. During the monsoon, they tend to shift to a safe region till the flood subsides," says Chandrashekhar of Gramyasheel, a local NGO that works on flood relief and disaster management.

Villagers like Saini Sada of Gheevak village who were located on the riverside have been staying on the embankment since 20 years. There are hundreds of such families. "We were left with no choice," says Sada. "We had to save our lives. At least we can provide two meals to our families by living here."

The government has not offered them any rehabilitation package. People live with the constant fear of being evicted by the government since it is considered illegal to live on the embankment. They can't relocate because they have no money to buy land and build a home.

"We have to earn on a daily basis for our survival," says Harilal Sada. "We do not have the energy or the time to chase government agencies for relief and rehabilitation benefits." The women and children look haggard and impoverished. Their huts are dilapidated. They have lost all faith in the government.

"The biggest problem they confront is their inaccessibility to panchayat schemes," says Chandrasekhar. Since families like Sada's migrated from their village of origin they are not considered eligible for any benefits doled out by the state. Their present panchayat considers them outsiders.

There are some people with financial resources in Bayriya panchayat who migrated from the riverside but have managed to acquire land for building a home in the countryside. They continue to cultivate their land within the embankment area.

There are constant disputes between villagers and government officials over disbursement of relief. Some years ago, villagers from Piprahi in Supaul block complained to the Anchal Adhikari, in-charge of relief work, that panchayat leaders were dictating terms during the distribution of benefits. The official did not pay any attention. Later, when the official visited Piprahi to execute relief work, villagers assaulted him. According to Chandrashekhar people were left with no choice.

Battling an angry river: Bihar's most controversial river is the Bhutahi Balan. It is a small and fierce river which originates in the Chure range of Nepal at an elevation of about 910 metres. The river enters Bihar near Laukha in Madhubani

The officials assured them jobs for younger members in the family. This prompted many to leave their assets behind and accept the officials' proposition. But when they reached the embankment, the reality struck them.



'North Bihar needs waterways'

Eklavya Prasad
Patna

DINESH Kumar Mishra is called 'guruji' because he is a mine of information on floods. A structural engineer from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur, he has been studying Bihar's floods for the past 20 years. He started the Barh Mukti Abhiyan, to take this knowledge to the people and get the voices of flood victims heard in the corridors of power.

What should be done about embankments?

Rivers are handling the embankments in their own natural manner. Constant breaching of embankments is an indication of the river's disapproval of human interference with its natural flow. Therefore, the river has taken upon itself to demolish these structures of devastation, free of cost. There is no need for any external measures. But this natural process needs to be understood by those responsible for implementing lopsided flood control measures in the state.

Do you have an alternative model for flood protection?

North Bihar due to its geographical location will continue to receive high rainfall and subsequent floods. There is no way out. Earlier this basic understanding was well entrenched in society and therefore people developed local flood control measures to cope. This is the reason why the area had a population density of 1000 persons per square kilometre. Life was much easier. And agricultural production was sufficient for their existence.

Earlier, muddy flood-water spread over large areas. In the process it formed deltas, brought nutritive soil, enhanced soil moisture and recharged groundwater aquifers. For accruing such benefits, people happily persevered with the seasonal inconvenience. With the embankments in place this natural process has been transformed into a disaster. The need of the hour is to reverse the process and create an environment where people benefit out of natural floods.

From which region of North Bihar should we begin and how?

Well, if normalcy has to be restored in North Bihar, an attempt should be to prevent further destruction and deterioration caused by floods.

First of all, there should be a thorough investigation and evaluation of flood control measures by involving local people. This will help to identify past failures. Secondly, without getting into issues of technical supremacy, state authorities should sincerely look at traditional practices of flood management and the traditional wisdom of people.



Dinesh Kumar Mishra

The state and a bilateral funding agency launched an awareness campaign for earthquakes, a disaster that many have not experienced here.

Thirdly, rivers in North Bihar flow from north to south with a slight tilt towards the east. The general slope is between nine inches to a mile and gets flatter as it reaches the Ganga. This is the reason why rivers in north Bihar take time to join the Ganga. The slope is not so much therefore the drainage of the river has to be improved by introducing more waterways in all the obstructions that impede the flow of the river.

Do the people want to go back to traditional ways of living with floods?

People staying on the riverside and countryside of the embankments have always indicated their preference for traditional ways of coexisting with floods. Embankments have created problems that leave no scope for local solutions. The only option is to face the wrath of floods consistently over the years. The 'real' people affected by floods have never been given a chance to voice their preferences. People indirectly linked with floods are the main proponents of embankments. Let the engineers and the politicians ask the people and they will definitely get an answer.

What should be the priorities of the administration during floods?

According to the government, relief work for a self-created disaster is the only option available. For them all other options are useless and unproductive. And today one can easily see the outcome of such relief activities.

There have been instances where the state government has addressed a disaster that has occurred only twice in 54 years. The state government along with a bilateral funding agency launched an

awareness campaign for earthquakes in Bihar, a disaster that many might not even have experienced here. But for the embankment disaster that was institutionalised in 1954 no such 'proactive' measures have ever been taken. This clearly indicates the existing priorities of the government.

The government ought to involve people in chalking out plans of managing floods. Till today the affected population has never been consulted. Therefore all efforts of the government have been futile and a waste of resources.

How can the state government be forced to be more realistic?

If one is not ready to acknowledge harsh realities then what can be done? The rivers have given sufficient indication and yet the concerned authorities continue to do what they consider best. The insensitive establishment will never hear or act on what others have to say. Last year the total loss was estimated at Rs 12,000 crores and relief work was worth Rs 200 crores. Does this make any sense? Despite such an arrogant and narrow attitude the people in north Bihar continue to survive on their own luck and their merit of dealing with floods.

district and flows for 45 km before joining the Kosi under bridge no 133 on the Darbhanga Nirmali railway line.

According to Mishra the problem started when embankments were constructed to save the Nirmali – Ghoghardiha railway line and the Ghoghardiha – Madhepur section from the onslaught of the river.

"In 1966, the flood plains of Bhutahi Balan experienced exceptional prolonged floods devastating human lives, property and livestock," says Ramesh Kumar secretary of Ghoghardiha Prakhand Swarajaya Vikas Sansthan. There were major floods between 1968 and 1971.

In 1972 government agreed to embank 33.6 km of the western bank of the river to protect parts of Laukha, Phulparas, Ghoghardiha, Jhanjharpur of Madhubani and Madhepur block of Darbhanga district. They refused to embank the eastern side because they believed the western embankment would not impact the eastern stretch.

But the western embankment flooded 54 villages on the eastern side. People

staying on both sides began to fight. Those on the eastern part wanted the embankment so they would not face flooding. But villagers on the western side wanted the eastern part to remain free so that the river could spread out during the floods.

After a prolonged confrontation between villagers, political parties, the water resources department and the district administration, the government sanctioned the construction of an embankment in the eastern side of the river in 1999. The construction of the embankment from Narahia to Nanpatty, a distance of two kilometres, has recently been completed. This year it will be put to test.

"Even before the monsoon, villages trapped between the two embankments were flooded thrice in the last six months," says Narendra Prasad Kamat of Suryayi. "The eastern embankment has restricted the original flow of Bhutahi Balan. As a result the river has started to explore new ways to flow into the Kosi. The waters inundate agricultural fields and villages, throwing thousands of lives into disarray."

Dousing a flaming Europe

It has been a busy and eventful fortnight. Unusual for this time of the year when the primary concern for most Europeans is how to get down to implementing their much pondered upon plans for the summer vacations in earnest. Schools close down by the end of June and the serious business of holidays begin.

I remember telling you, two summers ago, how in France even the local butcher or baker are gone for at least a month every summer.

This year we have had the added glory of the LIVE 8 concert (July 2) that was supposed to bring the working year to a meaningful and benign end. But alas, that was not to be! Later in the week we had the by now well-rehearsed drama of announcing the Olympic site for, not the next, but the one-after-the-next, Games (July 6) over-shadowing the G8 meeting in Scotland.

Again, despite the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar this month, the Anglo-French rivalry found its usual outlet in the sports arena. The outcome was a repeat of Trafalgar: the English won, coming from behind. Within 24 hours, four bomb blasts rocked London bringing the celebrations to a quick end. Fifty two declared dead so far with the toll expected to cross 70. It isn't going to be a quiet summer!

This last event effortlessly usurped all the others, snatching the limelight from Blair and Brown's much worked upon 'making poverty history,' itself a thing of the past, as was the Kyoto Protocol, already fatally wounded by repeated American assaults.

The world would once more be emotionally exploited and manipulated, scene by tortured scene, of ravished private lives of the innocent citizens, violated first by the bombers and then, with infinitely more cruelty, by the politicians and the media.

'Muslim terrorists', 'Islamic terrorists', 'Jihadists', and the like, echoing the millennium – long hate cry of post-crusade Europe, splashed across the continent as its 11 million Muslims hastened to condemn the tragedy, more out of concern to dissociate themselves from the heinous act of carnage in order to minimise repercussion that was most likely to follow them, than any heartfelt sympathy.

We live in the world of sound bites and TV imagery – and lately, of bloggers on the Internet. How does the brain possibly process and equate what we saw in London with all that has been happening in Afghanistan and Iraq for years? Or with Srebrenica, whose 10th anniversary we are celebrating, where 8000 Muslim men were tortured and massacred under the very nose of the Dutch Peace Keeping forces, with any equanimity.

I have yet to hear Tony Blair, George Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic or the Butcher of Sabra and Shatila, Sharon, being called Christian terrorists despite having killed over a million innocent Muslims between them. Even Karen Armstrong notes that "we rarely, if ever, called the IRA bombings "Catholic" terrorism".

Of course they "don't do body counts" when nameless innocents are killed in

nameless exotic places. All that without taking into account the greatest of them all, Hitler, who killed the killers of Christ, the Jews, to stamp out their very religion from the face of the earth.

In a world ruled by European colonialism, we, the Uncle Toms, were brainwashed to believe that fairplay was exclusively an English virtue. Where exactly has this Anglo-Saxon virtue been hiding itself in all the unfairness I have been witnessing across the globe in the wake of the Anglo-Americans march across the battlefields and the marketplaces of the world? The truth is that it never existed. History, as we know, has always been written by the victors.

Take the G8 meeting for example; not one representative from the 1.3 billion strong Muslim world, despite 70 percent of the world's petroleum coming from their nations. Not even as observers like China, India or Brazil. Talk about exclusion.

Two years ago there were conclusive reports from every European and American intelligence that Iraq was totally unconnected to any international terrorism, including Al Qaida. Today we are being repeatedly told that Iraq is not only connected but is the hotbed of terrorism. Like the child who has been constantly told he is bad and treated as though he were so, Iraq, I believe, will

eventually become such a hotbed of international terrorism. There seems to be a pattern here. Al Qaida, Taliban, Iraq... preceded by Iran, Lebanon, Libya... It is perhaps the Rumsfeld Solution.

Now that a new battlefield has been opened up in Europe, on the home ground of America's biggest ally and participant in the Afghanistan/Iraq invasion, what is to follow? Saner heads, including Blair's ex-Foreign Affairs Minister, Robin Cook advice caution, extreme caution. They not only realise but are willing to admit that much wrong has been committed in the name of fighting terror, much cause has been given to register true grievance against the Anglo-American highhandedness since 1990. To take the post-September 11 American path would be courting unprecedented disaster on a global scale.

The uncontrollable violence unleashed in Iraq could eventually spread to Europe. The military might of even the nuclear nations will be powerless to face suicide bombings should it infect the already disenfranchised Muslim minority communities across Europe.

The current climate that links terrorism with Islam and makes the individual terrorist representative of a largely peace-loving and tolerant society is pushing the envelope as it were. The London Police chief quickly recognised this fact after the bombings and publicly asked for such associative terms not to be used.

Only enlightened leadership can guide Europe out of this current chaos. Their agenda to do so must be based on fairness, compassion and the humility to admit mistakes and make apologies. Given the current crop of Europe's leaders and its history of lopsided relationships with the developing world we could well be modern day Diogenes with a searchlight. On the other hand, Gandhi and Martin Luther King were born when they were truly needed.

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

Puppets for Pakistan White Band campaign

Mahwish Shaukat and Farah Malik
Lahore

THOUGH the scheduled launch of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty's (G-CAP) White Band campaign was delayed in Pakistan due to torrential rains and thunderstorms, the campaigners more than made up with their innovative ideas towards the end of the week.

On July 5 afternoon, Maqsd mobilised young people, representatives from NGOs and employees from the public sector in one of the most densely inhabited area of Lahore, Nila Gumbat, which is near Anarkali Bazaar.

They organised a roadside exhibition displaying newspaper pictures, showing the misery of the poor, particularly women and children, due to lack

of healthcare, education facilities and employment opportunities.

A puppet show was organised. It featured a conversation between a servant (common person) and his master (government official) on the issue of high prices, low wages and the government's performance. There was also a call for 'No Excuse' this time.

Vendors, taxi drivers, students, shopkeepers, women shoppers and students put their signatures on the puppets shirts. The signatures will be compiled into a book.

Some people also skipped a meal on July 6 and contributed the money to feed the poor, who don't get two meals a day.

In Lahore, Insan Natak, which has been set up by Insan Foundation, Pakistan, staged two perform-

ances of a satirical play, *Haathi Kay Daant* (Elephant's Teeth). Written by Mushtaq and directed by Tipu, the play was staged at a public park in one of the busiest market places in Lahore, on July 6. The play was watched by about 200 people comprising children, vendors, beggars, tea-boys, balloon vendors and other passers by.

White bands were distributed, which people wore on their wrists and foreheads. Sunshades bearing Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) messages and handbills explaining the campaign were also distributed. A banner was also put up for people to sign and pledge their support to the cause.

Similar programs were relayed from Bahawalpur, Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan radio stations.

Business

BEYOND PROFIT

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

Philips goes to Theni with a van

And takes ISRO, Apollo Hospitals along

Civil Society News
Madurai

THENI district in Tamil Nadu, somewhere on the border with Kerala, hasn't known adequate primary healthcare in all these years. A doctor is hard to find and hospitals are far away. But from July, a van trundling through the area has made it possible to access some of the best medical advice in the country without stirring out of remote villages.

The van can do an X-Ray, ECG and ultrasound. The results of these tests are beamed via satellite thanks to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to the Apollo Hospital in Madurai, where specialists take a look and say what needs to be done.

The van itself has two general physicians and paramedics on board. So, a lot of mundane healthcare is also delivered. A defibrillator can be used during a cardiac emergency. The very presence of qualified doctors, who are mobile and approachable, can perhaps save lives and provide immediate attention in episodes that would normally have gone unattended.

The godsend of a van comes to Theni under a project called Disha, which has been in the works for two years. Disha is the acronym for Distance Healthcare Advancement. It is the brainchild of Philips and has been grown with enthusiasm by its managing director, K Ramachandran, who wanted the company to find new ways to meaningfully reach out and touch the lives of ordinary people.

Ramachandran as CEO has been corporate coach, fitness instructor and spiritual guide at Philips as the company has fought hard to get back into shape in recent years. He has had to reduce staff strengths, restore consumer faith in Philips products, increase profitability and build morale.

Disha is good for Philips' soul. It is a company that publishes a sustainability report and believes that its business activities must create value in ways that the community at large benefits.

As a manufacturer of medical diagnostic equipment, communications technologies and electronics for entertainment, Philips found that it was well positioned to coalesce many lines of expertise and



K Ramachandran

provide cost-effective rural healthcare by bridging distances. The van now doing its rounds in Theni is a result of this vision.

The challenge for Philips was not in telemedicine, but in creating a mobile facility that could penetrate deep into rural areas with world-class diagnostics. Currently tertiary healthcare is not available in villages. Getting to a hospital means losing a day's wages and taking someone along. There is also the

uncertainty of whether a patient from a village will get adequate attention in the alien environment of a city hospital.

Ramachandran first spoke to A Bhaskaranarayana, director, Satcom Programmes at ISRO, about the idea. He had a technological partner in no time. He then got in touch with Dr Pratap Reddy, the chairman of Apollo Hospitals, which is a frontrunner in Indian telemedicine. Dr Reddy took five minutes to say yes.

With a satellite link and a leading hospital organised, Ramachandran next needed a grassroots partner. This Philips found in the Dhan Foundation and its executive director, MP Vasimalai. Dhan's role is



Inside the van: An ultrasound test on a pregnant woman

Photographs by LAKSHMAN/Copyright CIVIL SOCIETY

LAKSHMAN



Bhaskaranarayana, Preetha Reddy, Ramachandran cut the ribbon to inaugurate the van



Prayers and rituals before the inauguration. Above extreme left is Vasimalai of the DHAN Foundation

The challenge for Philips was not in telemedicine, but in creating a mobile facility that could penetrate deep into rural areas with world-class diagnostics.

hugely important. It has been working in the Theni area and it has organised self-help groups. It has a community health insurance programme that works on the basis of micro savings.

Local access needs a local partner. People trust Dhan. Without Dhan, Philips, ISRO and Apollo would be at a loss as to where and how to intervene. Says S Balasubramanian, who is chief executive of the Dhan Foundation's Social Security Initiative: " This is a good project and it will benefit people. We have been working here and have a community health insurance scheme which provides Rs 10,000 if someone falls ill and also covers people over the age of 60."

The van has been built at a cost of Rs 1 crore. This includes the value of the time put in by professionals. Building the van from scratch, ensuring connectivity under varying conditions, transmitting data with accuracy and designing the van for the demands made on it has meant a lot of work mostly conducted by trial and error.

Design was determined by the expectations of people who would be patients. For instance, originally, there was provision for only one doctor on the van. But when it was realised that women with gynaecological problems would not want to show themselves to a male physician, the van was redesigned to provide space for two doctors.

Ramachandran put Senior General Manager R A Desai in charge of the Disha project because he had 30 years of experience in selling bulbs and electrical fittings. Few would be better than Desai at understanding rural consumers.

It was Ramachandran's idea that for Disha to work it would have to go much beyond being an act of corporate munificence. Disha would have to pay for itself. There was no better way of achieving this than treating the van's patients as customers.

It was Desai's task, therefore, to assess needs and preferences. Based on this, the project would be structured to help people and technology connect.

The big question now is how to price the services that the van provides. So

far, ISRO, Philips and Apollo have footed the bill. The goal for Philips, however, is to have a business model under which each test is paid for. It will also be necessary to fix a value for the consultancies that Apollo's medical specialists provide.

ISRO doesn't charge for its satellite links when it comes to telemedicine. In fact this is the first time it has collaborated with a corporate entity to provide such a service. Perhaps ISRO should be looking at the possibility of levying fees in the interest of making such efforts truly viable.

Only a service that can pay for itself will be sustainable. Without doubt the solution will lie in affordable insurance. But that will mean bringing another player into the model and working on premiums extremely impoverished people can pay.



Theni is a poor area which has seen little development

At Theni, where the van was inaugurated, Bhaskaranarayana, Ramachandran and Preetha Reddy, managing director of Apollo Hospitals, were in the thick of a rural event with the sun blazing. Women under a thatched roof made wailing sounds to keep evil away. Speeches, lighting of a lamp, prayers and the van was inaugurated with an ultrasound test on a pregnant woman.

Preetha Reddy posed for last-minute pictures as a Lancer waited to carry her away to Madurai where she would have to spend time with Apollo Hospital staff on Doctors' Day.

Ramachandran, formally dressed, but very soon minus shoes and socks, also posed for innumerable pictures and went off to a patch of cracked mud to be interviewed by CNBC.

Bhaskaranarayana did his bit when it came to lighting lamps and cutting ribbons, but chose to keep a *sarkari* distance. For Vasimalai, of course, this was Dhan's own turf.

What did all this mean for the people of Theni? That is a difficult question to answer. But like all folk on the fringes of the modern Indian market, they no doubt hope that the van with its satellite links will be the first stage of their belated inclusion.

600,000 villages, each a hub of knowledge

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

ABOUT 150 partner organisations from civil society groups, academia, companies and the government met in July for over three days in New Delhi, to discuss how to connect rural India. Their objective is to establish a Village Knowledge Centre (VKC) in each of India's 600,000 villages by August 2007. The project has been named Mission 2007.

Participants from civil society groups included Ashok Khosla of Development Alternatives, Mark Surman of telecentre.org, Dileep Ranjekar of the Azim Premji Foundation, Sukanya Rath of the Nasscom Foundation and Ashok Jhunjhunwala of IIT, Chennai.

Perhaps for the first time, head honchos of the IT industry shared a common platform with civil society groups. S Ramadorai, CEO of TCS, Ravi Venkatesan, chairman, Microsoft India, and Ajai Chowdhry, chairman, HCL Infosystems, were at the meeting.

Politicians too got involved. Conference sessions were chaired by Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Mani Shankar Aiyer, Union Minister for Panchayati Raj and P Chidambaram, Union Finance Minister.

Mission 2007 will require Rs 3000 crores for connectivity, another Rs 3000 crores for capacity building and Rs 500 crores for co-ordination. P Chidambaram assured the gathering that the government would find ways and means to fund the project and support it through policy.

This multi-stakeholder mission was put together by Professor M S Swaminathan in partnership with One World South Asia. Professor Swaminathan to **Civil Society** about Mission 2007.

The most interesting aspect of this mission is that so many stakeholders are working together...

Our own foundation in Chennai has a pilot project in Pondicherry. Then there is IIT Chennai's n-logue, SEWA's Mahila Hut, Ashok Khosla's Tarahaat and ITC's e-Choupal. We should create synergy between all these players, convert it to concerted action and cover all villages by August 2007, the 60th year of our independence. Information empowerment is imperative for curing evils like illiteracy, poverty and bad governance.

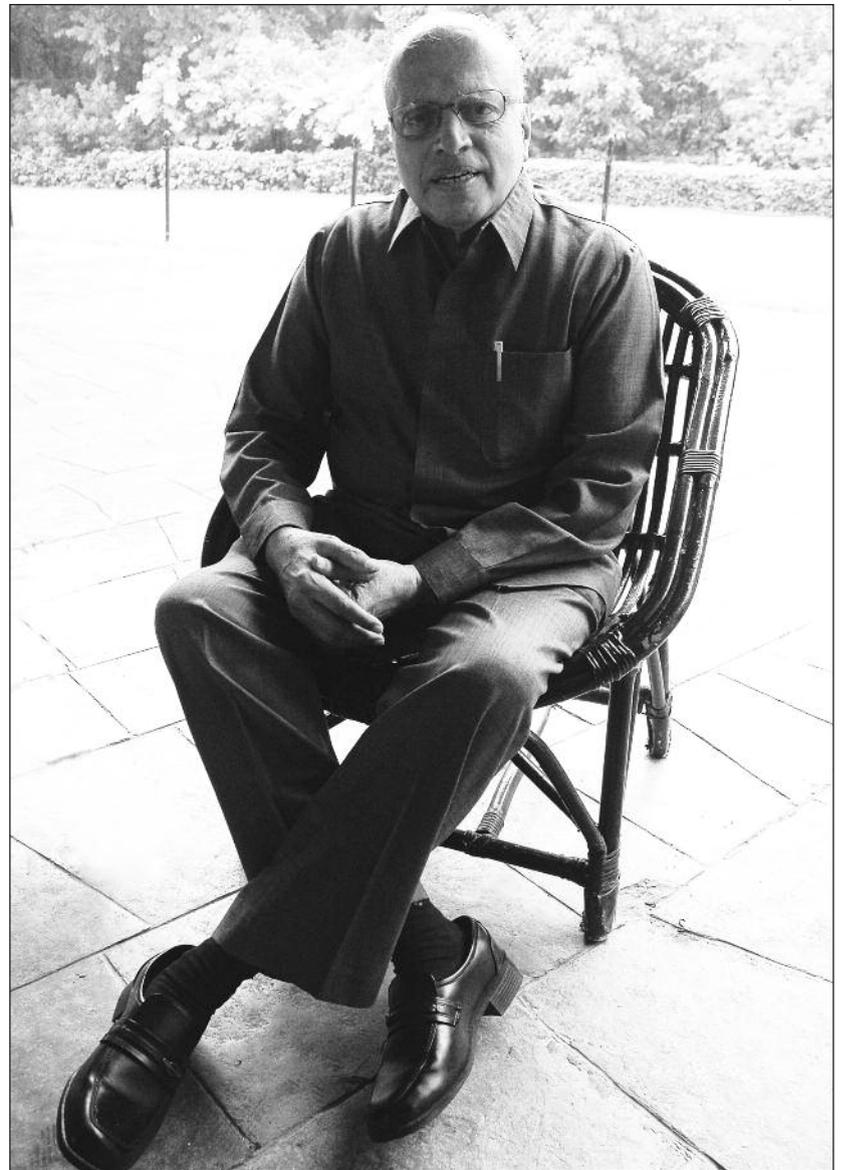
How did you get all these groups together?

We need to create Village Knowledge Centres in each village. We had a preliminary meeting in 2003 where organisations like HLL, ITC and SEWA participated and we decided to scale up with government support. BSNL has a lot of unused fiber and it can provide broadband connectivity. We had another meeting in February 2004. Nasscom Foundation's Sukanya Rath is the secretary-general of the alliance. This is a get-together of all those who are interested. Microsoft, for example, has a programme called 'Unlimited Potential' where they give grants for grassroots training and they have funded our foundation.

How will you scale this up?

At the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) we have done 10 to 12 villages. We have to scale this up to 600,000 villages. It will be a broad based alliance of rural connectivity. About 1.2 million people, which means a man and a woman in every village, will need to be trained. If we use the government infrastructure, our transaction costs will be very high. So local panchayats should have a say.

Many of our centres are housed in panchayat buildings. We have created a virtual academy called the Jamsetji Tata Virtual Academy. The fellows of this academy will be village men and women. The idea is to give them social prestige. In this conference President Kalam has felicitated about 100 of them from 15 states. They have come through several civil society organisations and can already use ICT. These women and men will in turn train others. The panchayat will provide us a building and electricity. The kiosk itself will be set on a commercial model. We have an e-literacy software from TCS that can be used and the Azim Premji



M S Swaminathan

Foundation is creating software and content for school education.

What will each of these Village Knowledge Centres offer?

Knowledge must be demand driven and user-controlled. It should be in health, education, income generation and work security. We have put information on prices of sesame, vegetables and *jowar*, online. We also have information on medical problems. Dhanikachalam, a cardiologist from the Rama Chandra Medical College talks to rural women through teleconference. You can leapfrog in several areas using technology. We have tied up with Aravind Eye hospital in Pondicherry. In fact we have got our partners involved with several hospitals like Shankar Netralaya and Jipmer. Self-help group (SHG) members producing mushrooms use the information system to see where they can sell. Farmers are creating their own websites. For example, vegetable growers in Dindigul district near Kodaikanal, who have formed SHGs, have now created a website called <http://www.oddanchatrammarket.com>. They list what is available and at what prices every day and ship vegetables by truck.

Who are the members of the academy?

I can tell you about members of the academy from our foundation. Kalaimani Rajendran from Tanjore is a farmer who knows how to grow rice with less water. Usha Rani, who can only speak in Tamil, addressed the World Information Summit in Geneva. I had to give her my overcoat because it was so cold there. Sridevi has made a whole village literate. They have grown so fast in terms of self-esteem. The government in its literature uses the word 'beneficiaries'. That is a word of patronage. There has to be mutual respect and learning.

What kind of policy support are you looking for from the government?

We need broadband connectivity. We have said there should be a new category called the rural service provider who gets free connectivity. There should be no license fee for five years. Some wireless spectrum must be freed and unlicensed for rural areas. We need to work with all the agricultural colleges and their extension services to create content. We have to work with NABARD's SHGs to dispense finance for the kiosks through the banking system.

We want the government to make knowledge connectivity a part of Bharat Nirman. If each knowledge centre has a computer and a printer, then the government can outsource its work to rural India. Why can't government land records digitisation and other work be done out of villages? All government entitlements and forms should be online.

Photographs by Sohrab Hura



Rozgar Yatra is over, now for a law

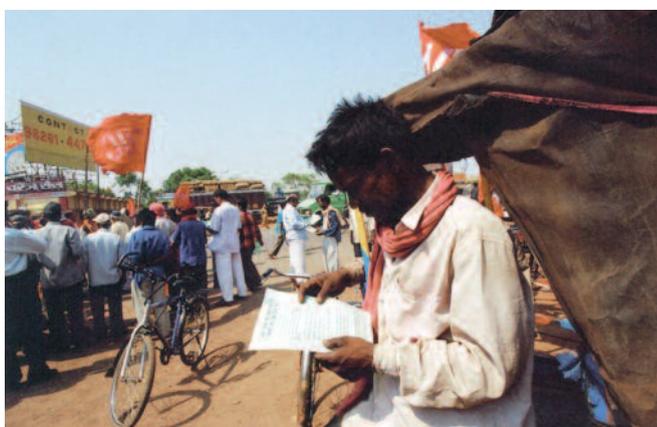
Tonusree Basu
New Delhi

AFTER 52 days of heat and dust, the Rozgar Adhikar Yatra finally arrived in New Delhi. Yatris had travelled through 10 states to create awareness and strengthen the campaign for the Employment Guarantee Act (EGA). The Yatra was flagged off from Delhi on May 13 and travelled through Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

The Yatra was organised by the Peoples' Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG), a national union of 100 workers organisations, to build pressure on the government for a full-fledged National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (EGA).

"The Yatra did succeed in what it set out to do," said Praveen Kumar, a student of Delhi University who participated in the journey. "We gathered enormous support and made people aware of their rights. Most of them had no idea of the schemes the government had started for them or even what the basic minimum daily wage was. For people in the poorest districts there is no central or state government that rules their lives. They are victims of goonda raj and corruption."

Yatris received a warm reception wherever they went. But on June 4, in Balrampur village, Surguja district, Uttar Pradesh, they were brutally attacked and lathi-charged by a squad of CRPF jawans in civilian clothes, armed with loaded AK-47s. Gangabhai, one of the Yatris, said policemen barged into the public meeting that they were addressing and misbehaved with many. Among



those hurt were National Advisory Council (NAC) member Jean Dreze, as well as activists, students and local villagers. An FIR has been filed in Ambikapur.

Yatris said the ultimate test of their success would be the passage of the EGA. The EGA is mentioned as one of the goals in the government's Common Minimum Programme and is currently under discussion by a Standing Committee of Parliament. The PAEG states that an acceptable Act should have 12 essential characteristics including the EGA being a universal guarantee applicable to all adults. It should be an unlimited and irreversible guarantee with national coverage. Minimum wages must be paid and it should have equal participation of women.

A massive show of solidarity for the adoption of an effective EGA, was organised in the form of a Jan Manch on July 2 in New Delhi.

Economist and activist Jean Dreze, who travelled for about 40 days with the Yatra, talked about insights that emerged from jan sunwais held in six districts, covered under the National Food For Work Programme (NFFWP). The NFFWP is an interim programme launched by the government in November 2004, to be phased out once the

EGA is put in place. Prof Dreze spoke of how the NFFWP is treated like an experiment by the government and has extremely weak guidelines. This encourages massive corruption and irregularities. "The credibility of this experiment depends on it being carried out in good faith, with full political backing and with the safeguards that are required for such a programme to work," said Dreze. "This we found to be lacking everywhere we went. The government is making no serious effort to implement its own guidelines."



Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

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

London is heartbroken

RAM GIDOOMAL



Through NR Eyes

EVENTS in London are moving at a rapid pace and still unfolding even as I write this column one week after the tragic events of 7/7. Over 50 people were killed and over 700 injured as a result of four bomb explosions across London on 7th July 2005 – three in underground tube stations and one on the top deck of a London Bus. All were set off during the peak morning rush hour, designed to inflict maximum damage and cause indiscriminate and tragic loss of life. As Mayor Ken Livingstone said from Singapore, (where he and others from the Olympic bid team had been celebrating after beating Paris and other world cities to secure the 2012 Olympic Games), "This was not a terrorist attack against the rich or the powerful. It was not aimed at Presidents or Prime Ministers; it was aimed at ordinary working-class Londoners. That isn't an ideology; it isn't even a perverted faith, it is mass murder." The mood across the United Kingdom and in Trafalgar Square in the capital just 24 hours before was one of celebration and joy. A quote from one newspaper reporting the Olympics triumph read: "6/7, 12.49: A moment that will leave an indelible mark on the city of London". This, in stark contrast to a headline the following day: "7/7, 08.51: In 56 horrific minutes, familiar London landmarks became a monument to mass murder"

I was appalled that someone could even think of committing such barbarous acts of violence against innocent citizens. I work in London and so do my children and my thoughts went out to those who had lost loved ones and were injured. It could so easily have been me or any of my family members.

The response of the emergency services was truly outstanding. They had rehearsed for just such a contingency and their rapid, professional and compassionate response was something to be proud of. I was struck by a comment on an Indian health website Medindia.com which said: "London's professional way of dealing with the attack has brought it praise from their grateful public...This is a lesson to countries like India where most cities have no such co-ordination action plan in place."

But with newspapers beginning to speculate on who the perpetrators of this crime might be and their motives, the fact that the explosions were timed to coincide with the beginning of the G8 meeting in Scotland meant that the familiar name of Al Qaida appeared as the key suspect in all media reports.

As a South Asian, one of my immediate concerns was the risk to race and community relations in our northern cities and across the UK generally that could follow such accusations. Would there be a backlash against Muslim and indeed Asian communities generally?



Whether we like each other or not, whether we agree with each other or not (and clearly we don't because we are all different and that is the great thing about our society) can we accept our own identity and the identity of those who are different?

I was reminded of how brittle race relations can be when my daughter returned home from a visit to the local pub on the day following the events of 9/11. She had gone with her other Asian friends and told me that when they entered the bar everyone became silent and looked at them. The bartender then said to them: "Oi, what are you doing here – you're Muslims! You're not supposed to drink."

The irony is that the friends she had gone with were all Hindu Gujaratis and my daughter is a Christian! But how do you differentiate between the religions of any South Asian? And we must remember that there are also many white and African-Caribbean Muslims – members of local communities who have converted to Islam.

So when the police announced that the prime suspects for the London bombings were four Muslim men, my worst fears were confirmed. These were Western Europe's first suicide bombers. One of them just 19 years old, all British citizens – three from families originating from Pakistan, one of Jamaican origin and all living in Northern England. The inevitable backlash gained momentum and Muslim leaders warned of mounting Islamophobia after attacks took place on mosques across the country – nearly every window of the Mazahirul Uloom mosque in Mile End Road, east London, was smashed.

Since 9/11, many have been grappling with how and why British Muslim youth – usually second or third generation – have found extremism, and, in rare cases terrorism, so compelling. The answers are not easy. Socio-economic issues are no doubt part of the problem. The race riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in Northern England were a visible sign that fear and ignorance still permeated these communities. Such environments are ripe for exploitation by extremists, be they right wing white supremacist Nationalist Parties like the British National Party or extremist Islamic fundamentalists.

An investigation that followed the race riots

(continued on page 22)

Lending a hand to the outsider

ARUN MAIRA



Let's Talk

WE have both returned to India after a few years abroad, the CEO of one of India's larger companies and I. "What is the change we see?" we asked each other the other evening. "The knocking on the window", he said. There had always been poor people on the streets, and beggars. But one could have ignored them if one chose to. Now they knock hard on the windows of cars at traffic lights, and it not easy to chase them away. The cars have changed too. Ten years back, clunky Ambassadors and Padminis chugged amongst the Marutis in the city traffic. They are gone almost. Now many new models of cars – Hyundais, Fords, Hondas, Opels, and Mitsubishis,

swarm the roads. People drive in air-conditioned comfort. And the beggars knock on the windows.

In India, as everywhere in the world today, leaders of business corporations must shoulder a greater responsibility for answering the knocking on the window. Governments are being asked to downsize themselves, to step out of running businesses, and to hand over the running of public services to private managers. Government leaders consult with business leaders more closely than before and it has even become fashionable for heads of Governments to call themselves 'CEOs', to suit the temper of our times! But prevalent models of business leadership cannot provide a sufficient response to the knocking that will get louder. Therefore, business leaders must discover new solutions that, while meeting the increasing demands of their own shareholders, also address broader social issues.

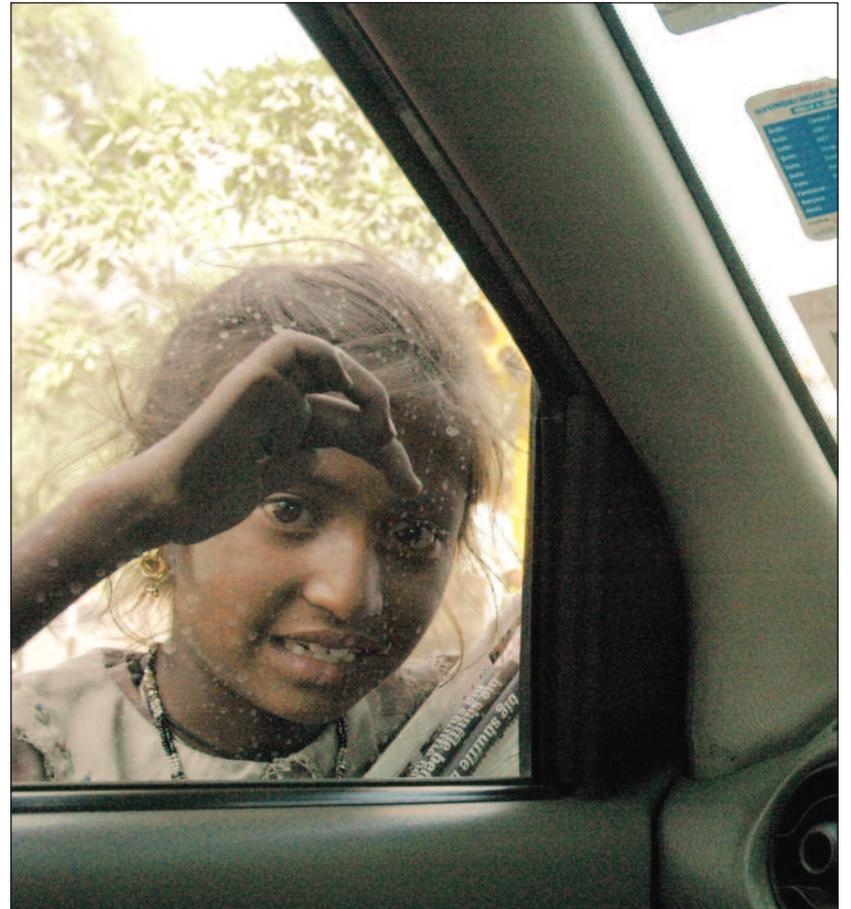
People want money to buy food, clothes, and shelter. And to buy toiletries, consumer durables, and the other good things that corporations would hope they will buy. The poor people must earn this money somehow. Putting them onto the bloated rolls of Government departments and corporations is not a sustainable solution. Even private Indian companies have to improve their productivity substantially, and many need to shed people from their rolls, not take on more. Economics wisdom says that over a period of time, the improvement of efficiencies in the public and private sectors will make the economy more vibrant, and there will be growth of incomes, trickling down to the poorer people. However the interim will be uncomfortable for CEOs. Morally uncomfortable with the knocking on the window. And strategically insecure, because it is not clear how long the political system will be able to withstand the pressure and hold its course of privatisation and down-sizing if it does not quickly produce strong evidence of the benefits of this course to the presently poor.

Business leaders can overcome their moral discomfort by providing money to social causes. Better still, they can provide the time of their managers to help community efforts. Several Indian companies are doing exemplary work of this type. However, these efforts may be insufficient to address the root cause of the problem. Which is the need for poor people to see their own incomes rise quickly along with the success of the business enterprises that the new economic policies are assisting. Therefore we need a new model of business enterprise, with new approaches to production and distribution, in which poorer people are engaged in larger numbers as free agents rather than as employees of large corporations, whereby they earn and also contribute to the growth of the corporations. This model will must address several organisational issues that confront business leaders:

- How can they engage large numbers of people with the enterprise without putting them on their payroll?
- How can they ensure these people will do their work diligently to meet the needs of the enterprise without a hierarchical edifice to co-ordinate their activities?
- How will people acquire the resources of skills and money they would need to play their roles?
- What will be the design of boundary-spanning business processes in such a networked enterprise?
- How will value created be equitably shared between the many independent participants?
- Who will set the minimum critical rules that all members of such an enterprise must abide by if it is to function coherently?

A new model for organising and governing a business enterprise

Answers to these questions are emerging. Advances in information and com-



LAKSHMAN

Business leaders must shoulder a greater responsibility for answering the knocking on the window. Governments are being asked to downsize themselves, to step out of running businesses, and to hand over the running of public services to private managers.

munication technologies along with the Internet have completely changed the way that information can be exchanged and activities co-ordinated. It is no longer necessary to have a central co-ordinator to whom all information is passed and who processes it and passes back instructions. People can co-ordinate with each other directly. Until very recently the belief was that people would need PCs to participate in such networks and therefore that poorer people in India would have to be excluded. But the continuing ferment of technologies as well as innovations in business models for providing access to people who do not own communication devices are overcoming this limitation.

Relations between the many parties in these web-like networks can function on commercial terms rather than as charity. Even the poor will honour their debts so long as the terms of the contracts are fair. Underprivileged women and children have shown themselves to be very reliable business partners. The success of the Grameen Bank in micro-lending to women is well known. Less well known is the success of a scheme of lending to street-children in Mumbai. These children, who do not even have an address, are taught a trade and then lent money to start up a micro-venture such as selling flowers. The only security the child is required to provide is a photograph and a surety from two friends, who are invariably also homeless street-children. Remarkably the recovery of these loans, to the poorest of the poor, has been over 75%!

The governance of networked enterprises of small and large businesses and the management of 20th century, monolithic and hierarchical companies require different concepts and skills. In the former, stakeholders are more dif-fused than in the latter. And the power of ownership and positional authority cannot be wielded to obtain control. The core curriculum of management edu-

(continued on next page)

Isn't DJB paying out too much?

ARVIND KEJRIWAL



The Right To Know

THE Delhi Jal Board has 21 zones. As part of a World Bank funded project, the management of each zone is being handed over to a foreign water company, which would operate and run it. As a result, it is not clear whether water would flow from taps or not, but money will certainly flow from the public's pockets to the coffers of private water companies. The contracts proposed to be signed between the water companies and DJB seem to be a financial bonanza for the companies.

Management fee: A fixed 'management fee' of about Rs 6 crores per annum would be paid for running each zone. This would go towards meeting the salaries of four experts at \$24,400 per person per month. It comes to an additional expenditure of Rs 126 crores per annum for 21 zones for employing 84 'experts'. This is almost 20 percent of the existing O & M expenditure of DJB.

Bonus and Engineering consultancy fee: In addition, the water company would be paid a bonus, if it exceeded its targets. The company would also be paid an engineering consultancy fee every year to suggest what additional steps should be taken by the DJB next year to further improve services in that zone. Despite our repeated requests, we could not obtain the figures of the bonus and engineering consultancy fee proposed to be paid.

Annual operating budget - a blank cheque?: DJB is obliged to make an annual operating budget available to the water company to run the zone. The company would decide the amount of budget. No upper cap has been prescribed. This is almost like a blank cheque. The water company could also seek upward revision any number of times during the year. Internationally, it is seen that this is the most abused clause. In Puerto Rico, the operational expenses claimed by the water company (Vivendi) went up so high that PRASA's (the counterpart of DJB in Puerto Rico) operational deficit increased from \$241.1 million in 1999 to \$685 million in 2001. The Government Development Bank had to contribute emergency funding on multiple occasions. As a result, Vivendi had to go. It was replaced by Suez, which promised to cut losses by \$250 million per annum. But as soon as they took over, they demanded



LAKSHMAN

an additional \$93 million to run the water utility citing that "economic realities were very different from initial projections". Suez also had to go within two years.

Possibility of arm-twisting by water companies: Once they sign the contract, the water companies tend to blackmail and arm-twist the governments. They repeatedly approach governments with additional demands for funds. They threaten serious adverse impact on services if the demanded amounts were not made available to them. Water being a sensitive sector, it is not politically possible for the governments to ignore their demands or to even negotiate beyond a point. The governments end up obliging them most of the time.

Is it possible to improve DJB?

Questions are being raised about the impact of the proposed project on water tariffs and whether there would be any concrete benefits flowing to the people. The DJB plans to give so much money and freedom to a water company to manage a zone. Presently, an executive engineer heads a DJB zone. Give all this to an executive engineer. Sign a performance MOU with him. Give him and his employees the management fee of Rs 6 crores (or much less than that). Give him the money and discretion to make capital investments. Give him the operating budget required. And insulate him from any interference. Give him absolute freedom to run his zone. Hold him accountable through terms and conditions specified in the MOU. He will run it at much less cost and maybe do a much better job. The DJB employees know the entire system in its minutest details. We never give the required freedom, powers and resources to our government employees and so we could never hold them accountable. The Delhi Metro is in the government sector but it is performing much better than any private sector, because Mr Sridharan enjoys the freedom and resources required to function.

Problem of governance: The present functioning of DJB leaves a lot to be desired. But it is not clear how handing over its management to private water companies would improve its functioning. It is basically a problem of governance. If a government cannot run a

water utility because of its corruption and inefficiency, then such a weak government will never be able to 'regulate', 'control' or 'enforce' the private water company to abide by the rules. A private monopoly under such a weak and corrupt government is bound to play havoc on the public. We have already seen this happening in the power sector. So, the issue is not whether the water utility is in government or private hands. The real issue is whether we have an efficient, honest and strong government. Unless we have that, we will never get good services.

(continued from previous page)

cation and practice so far has been focussed on the management of traditional business corporations. This curriculum has shaped the lenses managers use through which they distinguish the interesting opportunity from the pie-in-the-sky, because the assessment of opportunity is inevitably closely related to the know-how managers have to make certain types of things to happen.

Business leaders in India and elsewhere will need a new approach to increase the purchasing power of the poor more quickly. Not only so that the poor can afford to buy what corporations can afford to sell them. But also to answer that knocking on the window. There is no management textbook to provide us the solutions, certainly not in the richer countries, because this is a problem with greater urgency for business leaders in poorer countries such as India. The lead-

ers in India will be those who experiment and discover pathways for accelerated development and growth of their businesses by engaging more people who are eager to earn. Some solutions are already emerging, such as the 'e-choupal' model of ITC, an Indian company that is using ICT and insights into social structures in India's rural areas to create new channels for procurement of agricultural products and for selling to farmers in remote areas. The knocking on the window may be not only a warning, but also an opportunity to grow our businesses that we cannot recognise through the management lenses we are presently wearing. However, by changing some ingrained concepts of business management and by developing innovative ways of organising, we may discover new pathways into the emerging future, with profits for both corporations and presently poor people.

(Arun Maira is chairman of the Boston Consulting Group in India.)

Lots of products, nowhere to sell

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI



Reforms Report

Gopal Maheshya Das is a graduate. He is the only son of Ganesh and Sabita and has three younger sisters. Gopal is in his mid-twenties and is not keen to farm the family's small half-acre plot. His father, Ganesh, has been growing a local variety of paddy and potato on this land.

Since the family provides the agricultural inputs, Ganesh earns around Rs 25,000 annually. Cow dung is used as manure, the family puts in labour and ground water flows out if a pipe is dug a little below the soil. The family is above the poverty line (ABL) as per government records. However, Ganesh and his family are in reality below the poverty line (BPL) if one considers the international norm of a dollar a day.

Gopal is, however, keen to share the responsibility of running the family with his father. He is

a member of a self-help group (SHG) named after Shaheed Bhagat Singh. He lives in Paschim Singhi Cherra in West Tripura district. This village has a total population of 4021 people and 847 households. Of them, 377 are categorised ABL, 407 families are BPL and 96 families are classified as being even poorer. They are supported by the Antyodaya programme.

According to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) about 200 households from this village are to be pushed above the poverty line by 2015. How are we going to achieve such a target? Formation of SHGs appears to have caught the imagination of the powers that be.

Gopal's village has 26 SHGs. The Bhagat Singh SHG has 11 male members. Each saves Rs 50 a month. The money is pooled and deposited in a savings account with the Tripura Grameen Bank. In about two years, members have deposited around Rs 18,000.

The bank, in turn, has provided them credit in two instalments of Rs 6000 each. The second instalment was given only after the first was repaid fully. Members of the SHG are accorded credit at an interest rate of four percent per month. Loans are sanctioned if members of the SHG are sure that the person taking it will pay back.

The banks lend at 14 percent. The premium on interest thus earned goes into the account of the SHG. The rate, even though very high if compared to the inter-

est rates at which housing loans are offered to people in urban areas, is quite acceptable to the SHG since it is less than what local money-lenders charge.

Even the effective rate of interest charged to individual clients by commercial banks is significantly higher if one takes into account the harassment involved in fulfilling the formalities of getting a loan sanctioned. The rate moves up further if one also considers alleged corruption by loan disbursing bank officials. It should be remembered that the government still bears considerable expenses on interest subsidies on priority sector lending, even though this burden has been pared down significantly over the last 15 years.

Incidentally, the bank charges an interest rate of 14 percent on the loan sanctioned to the SHGs, even though NABARD refinances the loans at six percent. Are the banks charging a disproportionately higher interest against loans that are admittedly more secure? Are they doing so because the villagers have no access to cheaper alternatives?

Members of the Bhagat Singh SHG have received training in mushroom cultivation, fisheries and horticulture. They leased three ponds and began rearing fish. They harvested fish last year, for the first time. The catch was good but not enough to raise their standard of living. So Gopal and his group members are

planning to venture into piggery, mushroom cultivation and *Muga* rearing in the days ahead. Positive thinking, indeed.

However, here lies a catch. How far can they expand? This is the era of free and fair markets but opportunities for Gopal and his SHG are restricted. They cannot think of producing a product that does not sell locally. Neither can they think of accessing untapped markets and large scaling their operations.

We have a case in point. They are using their newly acquired skills to earn a living. Sadly they have been endowed with traditional skills by birth – they can carve handcrafted artefacts from bamboo.

Earlier, this dexterity produced household goods for daily domestic use. Alternative machine made goods produced far away are now available in their local market at a cheaper price. Handcrafted products are less in

demand locally, even though demand worldwide has been increasing.

Artisans living in villages are unable to make a decent living from their inherited skills. Gopal and his team members tried their hands at everything. They produced and hawked bamboo made products – trays, flower vases, coasters, wall hangings, table – mats – at several fairs with little success.

Instead of constantly teaching artisans this skill or that, why can't the SHG revolution empower villagers by helping them market their products aggressively? Then traditional skills will not be lost, but protected for posterity.

This is the era of free and fair markets but opportunities for Gopal and his SHG are restricted. They cannot think of producing a product that does not sell locally. Neither can they access untapped markets. They are using their newly acquired skills to earn a living. Sadly they have traditional skills - they can carve handcrafted artefacts from bamboo.

London is heartbroken

(continued from page 19)

made troubled reading for policy makers and community leaders. After visiting the riot towns and other multicultural cities, the investigator admitted that he was shocked by the 'depth of polarisation'. He found communities whose lives 'often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote meaningful interchange'. The white and minority ethnic communities were effectively leading 'parallel lives'.

So where do we go from here? The Muslim community must move beyond condemnation and fear of victimisation. Some difficult questions must be answered if extremism in our midst is to be tackled. Should segregation and its isolation from the mainstream be tolerated? How far should the secular state and its foundation of shared values be stretched to accommodate religious pluralism, when religion is twisted by extremists on all sides? In an open society where is the fine line between tolerance and cohesion and civil liberties and state interference?

The chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality Trevor Phillips said: "I

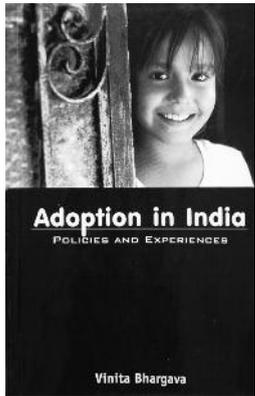
know how difficult and how hateful it is for Muslim leaders to have their motives doubted, but they need to understand that they have to bend over backwards to reassure people. That is their part of the bargain.

"The part of the bargain for people like me and the police is to stop opportunistic and idiotic people turning on Asians and Muslims who really have nothing to do with this."

This challenge is for all of us in our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. Whether we like each other or not, whether we agree with each other or not (and clearly we don't because we are all different and that is the great thing about our society) – can we accept our own identity and the identity of those who are different? Can we give each other freedom within a larger identity? Can we help those who have been so alienated to re-discover a place within our society? Nothing can excuse what a tiny minority have done. They are responsible. Yet we recognise that we have to reach out in some way to those tempted to follow their example. And we have to support their elders, the Muslim leaders, as they ask the hard questions of themselves and their communities. Because these questions actually come back to us all.

(Ram Gidoomal CBE, is Chairman, South Asian Development Partnership)

Mom, Dad and adopted child



**Adoption in India
Policies and
Experiences**
Vinita Bhargava
Rs 350
Sage Publications

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A husband and wife decide to adopt a baby. They visit an adoption agency. What happens next? We don't really know.

Adoption in India is shrouded in secrecy. The voluntary agency won't talk about where the baby came from. Few agencies are meticulous about keeping in touch with adoptive families. Legal formalities are, after all, over. But in a society influenced by caste and colour, where female sterility is regarded as the only valid reason for adoption, does an adopted baby always find a caring home?

Vinita Bhargava, Head of the Department of Child Development at Lady Irwin College, New Delhi, has broken through this silence with her book on Adoption in India. "There was no follow-up done on Indian children," she says. As chairperson of the Coordinating Voluntary Adoption Agency (CVARA) and as a founder member of the Central Adoption Research Agency (CARA) Vinita has seen adoption from close.

The good news, as her book shows, is that for all that is wrong with the system, adoption is becoming a success story. Her research of 53 adoptive families in Delhi reveals that children do find loving homes. There are couples that strive to be good parents. In many ways, the Indian family is a pillar of strength.

Attitudes are changing. More girls are being adopted. According to statistics from the Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA), only 398 children were adopted in India in 1988. By 2003, this figure rose to 1,948. States in western and southern India are taking the lead. Families who opt for adoption are generally upper middle-class.

Vinita started her research by contacting voluntary agencies engaged in adoption like the Missionaries of Charity, Udayan and Palna. She got addresses of couples who had taken children home and traced each of them.

"When I first called up parents of adopted children for my research, they refused to speak to me," she says. Vinita has a biological son and an adopted daughter. She rang up those parents again and said she'd like to speak to them as the mother of an adopted girl. "They received me with open arms," she says.

The families Vinita surveyed in Delhi were well off and sent their children to elite schools. The children she interviewed describe themselves in narratives in the third person in the book. Case his-

stories in which parents talk frankly about their experience of adoption are documented. All families don't adopt a single child. Some adopt two. Others have a biological child but decide to extend the family by adopting. Couples prefer to approach an agency, rather than take a baby from the family network. They want to feel the baby really belongs only to them.

Vinita found adoptive parents very lonely. "An adoptive parent has to continually prove to others that she is a good parent," remarked one mother. Many times they need reassurance. Vinita helped set up the Alternative Parent Networking Association (APNA), a support group for families. "The word 'adoption' is anathema to them," she remarks.

When a couple brings the baby home, they are anxious and excited. The baby is welcomed. Birthdays and ceremonies are celebrated, unless

when the child is seven and the response is not unfavourable.

"When she was seven or eight years old her mother told her she was adopted and she never felt bad about it," said one child in a narrative.

It is when children get older, into adolescence that they begin to probe their origins. This is also the time when all children face parental pressure to do well academically. Adolescence seems to be the most difficult phase. But by the time children reach late adolescence or early adulthood they make peace with themselves. There was no real search for roots.

Families who did tell their immediate network about adoption got a positive response. There were others who chose silence. It seems, from the book, those families felt more isolated. Disclosure and its effect on a child's self-worth is a difficult subject.

Adopted children formed loving relationships not only with parents but with their network. For them, family consisted of parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents including pets and household help.

"Her grandmother was her best friend," said one of the girls in her narrative.

School, friends and teachers take centre stage as children grow. "She was happy when she did a good job for her teacher and she was praised her in class. She was sad when she got a scolding for doing something wrong" said a 10-year-old.

In results from a questionnaire on self-worth, children surprisingly ranked physical appearance very high. Apart from societal pressure to look good, a child sometimes has to answer inquisitive questions like "You don't look

like your mother. Whom do you resemble? Children were concerned about doing well at sports, being socially accepted, good behaviour and they wished for academic success.

Vinita feels that there is no reason why couples from poorer families can't be good parents too. Instead they are shooed away by agencies.

"There is a big demand for adoption abroad," says Vinita. "Agencies get large donations, ranging from Rs 7 lakh per child upwards. Some actively discourage Indian couples."

In India, state intervention has encouraged more families to adopt. Guidelines issued by CARA in the 1980s told placement agencies, that they would have to place 50 percent of children in Indian families. Although more Indian parents wish to adopt, the number of children who need homes is still very large.

CARA has created Voluntary Coordinating Committees to get couples and babies together. Changes in the Juvenile Justice Act, permitting abandoned children to be adopted has also helped. Social advertising, helping parents adopt a baby from any part of India and a uniform code for adoption are steps suggested to encourage adoption.

Read this book for its new insights into adoption and the Indian family.



Vinita found adoptive parents very lonely. "An adoptive parent has to continually prove to others that she is a good parent," remarked one mother. Many times they need reassurance.

the baby is in poor health. Resistance by the larger family network breaks down. The mother gets deeply involved in caring for the baby, sometimes giving up her job. Fathers play with their children and go on excursions.

Perhaps the most sensitive issue is of disclosure. Parents have difficulty telling the child she is adopted. They don't want their little loved one to feel bad and they fear prejudice and hurtful remarks from people.

About 50 percent of the children were aware of it. Most parents gently reveal the relationship

Zarin and the listening TAP

Shuktara Lal
Kolkata

FOR more than 30 years, The Action Players (TAP) has been the only company of deaf actors in India. Their productions are always eagerly awaited. The actors are witty, thought provoking and sensitive, their body language graceful and energetic. The audience claps in sign language, creating a wonderful bond between the spectator and the non-hearing artiste.

"The actors have regular jobs," says Zarin Chaudhuri, founder of TAP. "They work from nine to five, rehearsing in the evenings and on weekends." She often co-directs her plays with her hearing impaired actors. In *The Banyan Tree* she teamed up with Sundeep Kedia, in *Heart Strings* with Gopal Bhattacharya and in *Beyond the Land of Hattamala* with Jhooma Sircar.

Chaudhuri has a post graduate degree in Speech and Drama from Trinity College in the US. When she returned to India, the acclaimed theatre group, Yatrik, offered her the role of Rosa, the deaf protagonist in Asif Currimbhoy's powerful *Goa*. Chaudhuri prepared herself by visiting the Government School for Deaf Girls in Delhi. The seeds of her relationship with the hearing-impaired were sown then.

In 1973, Dhun Adenwalla, the founder-principal of the Oral School for Deaf Children (OSDC), invited her to teach mime to his students. As she worked with them, Chaudhuri noticed the élan with which they performed. The children always depended on sign language to communicate and had extremely refined powers of observation.

A year later, her students debuted with *An Evening of Mime*. "I found that the deaf had an inner rhythm, and could be taught to work with music," she says. So in *Sense and Nonsense*, their sophomore production, Chaudhuri used music extensively.

In 1981 the actors were no longer school children. The production, *You Light Up My Life*, signalled the beginning of TAP. The group is an independent unit from its parent, the OSDC. Naturally, links between the two continue to be strong. When actors finish their schooling, they often join TAP.

In every production, Chaudhuri has tried to incorporate a new element to the repertoire of TAP. *You Light Up My Life* featured hearing artistes who would interpret the sign language used by the actors to the audience. These "narrators" were go-betweens. Their participation led to a constructive interaction



Zarin Chaudhuri



The Action Players (TAP)

with deaf artistes and their audience. This device has been a recurrent leitmotif in Chaudhuri's subsequent directorial ventures.

Chaudhuri also experimented with non-proscenium presentations in *Funny Folk* (1987), which could be staged in any open space. There were no sets, lights, props or costumes. The emphasis was solely on the performers.

She introduced TAP to modern dance in *Dancing Dolphins* (1993). Astad Deboo, the eminent exponent of modern dance, choreographed the performance. The script was inspired by Vikram Seth's *Beastly Tales*.

Chaudhuri's choice of stories is strongly local. *Patol Babu Film Star*, an adaptation of a short story by Satyajit Ray, drew huge audiences. In 1997, journalist C Y Gopinath, conducted workshops with TAP and then wrote *The Banyan Tree* for the group. The following year, TAP celebrated their silver jubilee with *Heart Strings*, which showcased Chaudhuri's staple techniques of mime, music and vocal narration.

Two of TAP's recent performances were *The Rain King's Wife*, which was based on AK Ramanujan's *Indian Folk Tales* and *Beyond the Land of Hattamala*, a translation of the play by Badal Sircar. TAP used Indian sign language for the first time in this play. The National Institute for the Hearing Handicapped, Mumbai, taught them.

TAP has extensively toured India and abroad. The artistes have visited the US thrice. During their first visit in 1986, they trained with the National

Theatre of the Deaf and participated in street plays. In 2002, they were involved in *Deaf Way II* – an International Festival of Deaf Performing and Graphic Arts at Washington DC. They have performed in Japan and Taiwan. In Japan they took part in The First International Festival of Theatre at Tokyo. TAP has toured Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Chandigarh and Jamshedpur.

Prior to a TAP production, rehearsals are intensive. The process continues for six months. In his note on *Heart Strings*, artiste Gopal Bhattacharya remarked, "My hearing impairment, if you wish to call it so, has never been a drawback."

This sums up the spirit of the members of TAP. Their ability to express with their facial muscles is exceptional. Above all, they exude self-confidence. Chaudhuri will never call a deaf person "dumb". When she was teaching mime to the students of OSDC, she noted that they were orally trained, could lip-read and speak. "Deaf persons can always speak, if taught to do so, even though their speech is not as clear as people with normal hearing ability," she says.

Even when TAP does not have a performance lined up, members meet once a week with Chaudhuri, to hone their skills. Apart from her dedication to TAP, Chaudhuri teaches speech and drama to schools in Kolkata and mime at the OSDC. "We are working on an educational programme to teach Indian sign language to small children," says the creatively inventive Zarin Chaudhuri.

WHERE
ARE WE
BEING
READ?

Civil Society is going places...

Delhi, Dhaka, Trivandrum, Tennerife, Nadia, Nagpur, Kolkata, Ghaziabad, Washington, Geneva,

Bhubaneshwar, Ladakh, Lahore, Bangalore, Mumbai, London, New York, Versailles, Dehradun,

Chandigarh, Belgaum, Dibang Valley, Shillong, Patna,

Shimla, Ahmedabad, Panjim, Hyderabad, Singapore, Porto

Alegre, Gurgaon, Jaipur, Lucknow, Surrey, Srinagar,

Manali, Pune, Peechi, Pondicherry...

DO YOUR OWN THING

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MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Jinnah was like Nehru

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

LK Advani's recent statement describing Mohammed Ali Jinnah as a secular leader has raised a storm of controversy. Advani and his Parivar have always reviled Jinnah. His statement came as a shock not only to the Sangh Parivar but also to secularists. Many people are writing to express their opinion of Jinnah. It is natural. Jinnah will remain a controversial figure in India for a long time to come.

It is difficult to guess why Advani said what he did in Karachi. Did he become sentimental in his home-town? Was he overwhelmed by the reception and hospitality he got in Pakistan? Or was he trying, as some politically aware people think, to project his image as a moderate, after his tryst with extremism? And if so, why this temptation for moderation? One theory is that he is eyeing the prime ministership of India if ever the NDA comes back to power, as Atal Behari Vajpayee is too old to occupy the prime minister's chair again.

It could also be a genuine change of heart. Advani joined the RSS when he lived in Karachi. He espoused a communal ideology based on hatred of Muslims and much more on the hatred of the Muslim League and its leaders. Ideology always creates certain simplistic beliefs and divides the world into black and white ignoring all shades in between.

Ideology comes with blinkers and makes its believer ignore complex realities. Advani, as a believer in Hindutva ideology, is no exception. But when one comes face to face with reality and experiences something contrary to the ideology one has always espoused, those beliefs can be easily shaken. It is difficult to say whether Advani changed his views genuinely in the light of his experiences in Pakistan. However, I am inclined to think there is an element of genuineness in Advani's changed view of Jinnah.

One thing is for sure. Advani did not retract his statement back home. He stuck to his guns. Usually politicians take recourse to having been misquoted by the media. He did not make any such plea. But under intense pressure from the Parivar he partly retracted saying he did not say Jinnah was secular but that Jinnah's concept of state was. No one can deny Jinnah's speech on 11 August 1947 in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. In that respect, Advani cannot be faulted. Also, it is a fact that Jinnah was described as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity by Sarojini Naidu after he helped forge the Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League in 1916. Here too Advani has read history correctly.

But the question is, did Advani not know all this before he went to Karachi? If he did, why did he keep on demonising Jinnah along with his political Parivar? Why did he make such statements only after going to Pakistan? The only possibility is that either he is now trying to project his image as a moderate or, since the RSS has demanded his resignation and he has agreed to resign from the BJP president-ship at the end of 2005, he now wishes to go down in history as a changed man.

Another important question is, how do we characterise Jinnah? Was he communal or secular? One columnist has suggested Jinnah was pseudo-communal and more westernised than an authentic Muslim. It is very difficult to honestly assess Jinnah in India. His name arouses strong emotions as he is seen as solely responsible for dividing the country. Even the Indian secularists see him as a culprit, if not communal, for dividing India.

MN Roy, a noted rationalist intellectual and activist wrote that Mohammed Ali Jinnah was a most maligned and misunderstood man. Experience made him bitter and it was largely out of spitefulness that he pursued an object, the attainment of which placed him in a very difficult position. Jinnah was not an idealist or a visionary. He was a practical man possessed of great shrewdness and more than average intelligence.

And for Pakistanis he is everything, father and founder of the nation. He is beyond any criticism. Jinnah is to Pakistanis what Mahatma Gandhi is to Indians or perhaps a combination of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru. Pakistan would not have come into existence without him. But was Jinnah solely responsible for the

creation of Pakistan? Was Pakistan more an accident of history? There is no evidence to show that Operation Pakistan was a pre-planned and long cherished dream of his.

Jinnah began as a nationalist and was an active supporter of Congress nationalism. He was liberal and was described as a Muslim Gokhale. He had joined the Congress and he went to the Muslim League on his own conditions. He brought both together through the Lucknow Pact in 1916. In Jinnah's life, 1928 was a crucial year. The Nehru Committee turned down his demand for 33 percent seats for Muslims in Parliament. It is again debatable whether his demand was justified and could be met in any political democracy. Maulana Azad himself rejected it in the AICC session when the Nehru Committee report was discussed.

The second turning point was the 1937 elections in which the Muslim League lost heavily and the Congress went back on its promise to take two League ministers in the UP cabinet. For Jinnah it was a great betrayal. It was his final break from the Congress in a way, though not the ultimate one. That break off point came in 1946 when Nehru made a statement that changes in the Cabinet Mission Plan could not be ruled out. After the 1946 elections the Congress and Muslim League had formed a composite government. One cannot say that even after passing the two-nation theory resolution Jinnah had made up his mind for a separate

state of Pakistan. All available evidence shows after that resolution of 1940, Indian unity could have been saved, if a satisfactory power-sharing arrangement had been worked out.

And how can one ignore the ignoble role of British imperialism in partitioning the country?

Partition was not only the culmination of the British divide and rule policy but also the result of a definite political design. United India would have strengthened the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union and posed a great challenge to imperialist powers both in China, which was heading towards a communist revolution, and the Middle East which was rich in oil resources.

An honest assessment of Jinnah would have to take into account various complex forces in south, south-east and west Asia. Jinnah cannot fit into any neat political category, communal or

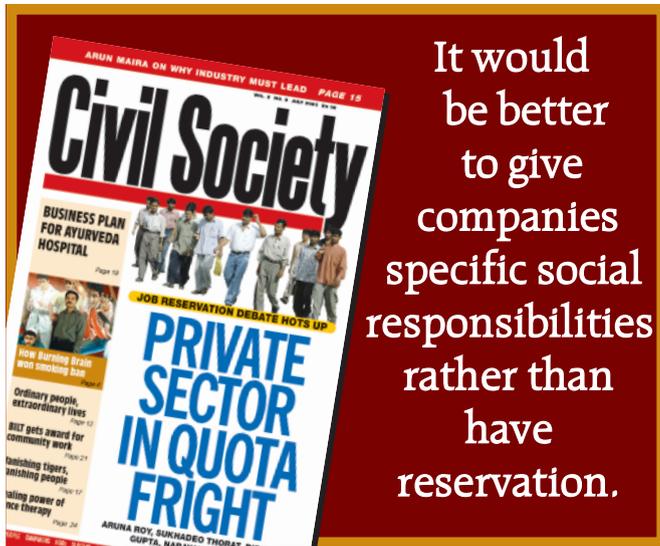
secular. He was secular in his social and personal life. He was far from being a religious fanatic as the Sangh Parivar would like to project him. He hardly ever subscribed to any religious dogmas. He was far closer to Nehru in this respect. He was struggling for Muslim and not Islamic politics. He wanted a Muslim homeland rather than an Islamic state. He was more of an advocate fighting his case than a mass leader or a visionary.

It is true the result of his politics was the partition of the country and hence he is dubbed as a communalist. Despite his two-nation theory he did not really want a separate state of Pakistan but a power-sharing arrangement which did not work out to his satisfaction. There is some evidence to show that for him partition was more of a temporary affair than a permanent division. He wanted to spend his last days in Mumbai where he had built a house for himself. He cared for it so much so that he requested Nehru not to let it out to any commoner but to a foreigner or to some royal house. This correspondence between Nehru and Jinnah is on record.

The Indian Muslims also have grievances against him. He left them in the lurch. All Muslims did not agree with his partition project. In fact only the elite Muslims of UP and Bihar fell for him. Muslim majority areas were indifferent to him and to Muslim League politics. So were poor and lower class Muslims for whom the Pakistan project brought no benefit, political or economic. The Jamiat-ul-Ulama-e-Hind was also totally opposed to the creation of Pakistan.

Jinnah will remain a highly controversial in the Indian subcontinent evoking great admiration and total condemnation. This is inevitable. There are very few who will take a balanced view of him. A critical evaluation is necessary. Perhaps more time is needed. Half a century may not be enough on history's time scale.





It would be better to give companies specific social responsibilities rather than have reservation.

Be socially responsible

The complex economic policies and social debates heralded by reservation can perhaps be replaced by simple common sense. Do they work? Quite simply, no. India has had 50 years of experience with reservation and we're certainly no closer to achieving our aims of social equality. The arguments of the private sector that quotas will kill merit and competitiveness are well founded, but the need for social action is equally acute. In the interests of both, it would be better to allocate corporates specific and direct social

responsibilities (health, education etc.) rather than have reservation in the work force.

Karan Beri

Build on strengths

In my view, let both the public and private sector do what they do best. The private sector is good at making money, while negligent in their social responsibility. The public sector is full of white elephants, but has the capacity for social development.

If the private sector initiates and drives economic growth, it is the

responsibility of the government to ensure that the effects of that growth reach the masses. Instead of hampering the engine of the economy with artificial quotas and reservations, the government should look within itself to ensure that the tax revenues thus gained are efficiently used for social uplift.

Sumved Sharma

Army wins hearts

The activities of the Indian Army in Leh scarcely dominate headlines, so I'm glad your magazine gave the topic some insight. It is

pleasing to hear of the humanitarian activities of the army as without winning the hearts and minds of the local people, there can never be lasting peace in the valley. Maybe the Indian corporates should take a lesson from the Indian army.

Karan Dewan

Let them compete

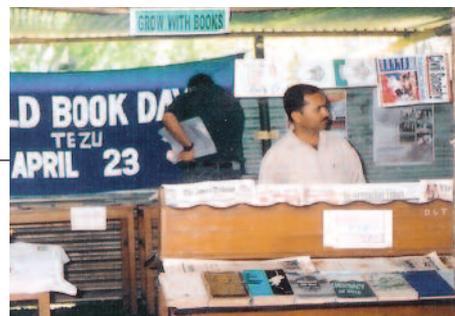
In reference to your article 'Insight', I would like to say the fact that potable water is becoming scarce is indisputable. It is equally true that government owned distribution systems are inefficient and lack funding.

Water is crucial for life. We can survive without

electricity, but not without water.

Privatisation is an answer, but as in the case of utilities, privatisation simply creates a monopoly. While a government still has to face re-election, a corporate water utility company has no such checks and balances, which is the main reason why they fail to maintain good service and low rates. Creating multiple water companies where individual homes can choose on the basis of service, quality and price would be a huge infrastructural challenge, but it's the only answer in the long run. For example, in the U.S, certain cities have multiple electricity providers who fight for individual consumers and thus keep prices down.

Bhavita Walia



Civil Society at Roing

It is always exciting to receive a fresh copy of Civil Society and we the readers at Roing have been circulating the issue among friends.

You will be glad to know that World Book Fair was celebrated at Tezu headquarters of Lohit district in Arunachal Pradesh with a

two-day book exhibition. This was jointly organised by the Vivekananda Trust, Roing and the district administration. Civil Society was also displayed there creating quite a few interested readers including the Deputy Commissioner and the District Librarian.

We thank you for the many stories on creative education you have been publishing of late. The Rickshaw Bank in Guwahati was an eye opener. Maybe Tezu town which too has hundreds of rickshaws could follow suit!

S Mundayoor

Herbs for Better Health, Roing

WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

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: Anubha or Ria 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 -110 001 Phone: 91-11-23347635 / 23363271 Website: www.mobilecreches.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-110003 Phone: 24618915, 24617531

Child Relief and You(CRY)

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

Website: www.cry.org

Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP)

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

ActionAid

ActionAid is an international development organisation which works with poor and marginalised women, men, girls and boys to eradicate poverty, injustice and inequity. You can become a part of their Karma Mitra loyalty program, which is based on the concept 'When you do good things you should get good things in return.' As a member of this program you can avail various tangible benefits.

Contact: ActionAid India C-88, South Extension - II New Delhi-110 049 Website: www.actionaidindia.org

EVENTS

India International Centre New Delhi

2 August, Auditorium 6.30 pm Looking Afresh at Muslim Women

A discussion on the first survey of Muslim women in India by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon Introduction: Zoya Hasan, professor of political science, (JNU) and Ritu Menon, publisher. Speakers: Brinda Karat, politbureau member, CPI(M) and member-elect, Rajya Sabha. Prof. Rajni Palriwala, Delhi School of Economics. Praful Bidwai: columnist. Chair: Syeda Hamid, member, Planning Commission.

8 August, Conference Room 1 6.30 pm Movement for Reform There have been efforts at reform in different sections of the Muslim community. One good example is the Bohra community of Udaipur. Speaker: Asghar Ali

Engineer, of Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism. Chair: Prof. Gulshan Dietl, JNU.

18 August, Conference Room 1 6.30 pm Integration

Muslim youth share their perspective and tell us what integration means to them. Speakers: Seeme Qasim will read poems that reflect her anguish. Imtiaz Ali, a young film maker from Mumbai will discuss his notion of identity. Mehtab, a boy who grow up in Nizamuddin Basti, will share his aspirations. Prof. Mushirul Hasan, Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia will chair the discussion.

20 August, Conference Room 1 6.30 pm Using theatre and advertising to bridge the communal divide Speaker: Alyque Padamsee, ad-guru, theatre personality and former head of Lintas, India. As a Muslim living in Mumbai,

Alyque Padamsee has seen the city change dramatically with the spreading influence of the Shiv Sena. He will provide a rare insight into the transformation of Mumbai.

29 August, Conference Room 1 6.30 pm

Women's Liberation and the Personal Law After the Shah Bano case, many perceived Muslim Personal Law as regressive. Muslim women were seen as subjugated. In reality, the Koran accords women high status. Muslim women have led movements to claim their rights. The discussion will examine the position of women in the Hindu community as well. Hindu women face gender bias, reflected in the incidence of female infanticide, dowry deaths etc. Yet the subjugation of Muslim women is a favorite weapon used by the Hindu Right. Speaker: Justice Leila Seth and Subhashini Ali of AIWDA.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Sama-Resource Group for Women and Health requires young volunteers for its 10th International Women's Health Meeting to be held from 21-25 September at The Ashok, New Delhi. Contact: Sama-Resource Group for Women and Health, G-19, IIInd Floor, Saket, New Delhi- 110017 Phone: 55637633, Email: convenor.secretariat@gmail.com Website: www.10iwhmindia.org



Jamsetji N. Tata (1839-1904)



J.R.D. Tata (1904-1993)



Naval Tata (1904-1989)

The Human Face of Industry

The year 2004 is a significant year for the Tata Group as it marks the death centenary of Jamsetji Tata, and the 100th birth anniversaries of J.R.D. Tata and Naval Tata. These are the leaders who left an indelible mark on the Tata Group, on industry and on the country. Much of their enterprise was an expression of self-belief that the country could manufacture steel, generate power and use modern technologies. From building India's first luxury hotel, to pioneering civil aviation, to taking the lead in the development of harmonious industrial relations in the country, the Tata Group has been driven by the vision of its leaders.

This vision also emphasized the importance of returning to society the wealth that was generated. Over the years, the Tata Group has funded and established schools, hospitals, community centres and institutions of higher learning. It has also extended support towards management of natural resources, livelihood and other welfare projects across India.

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