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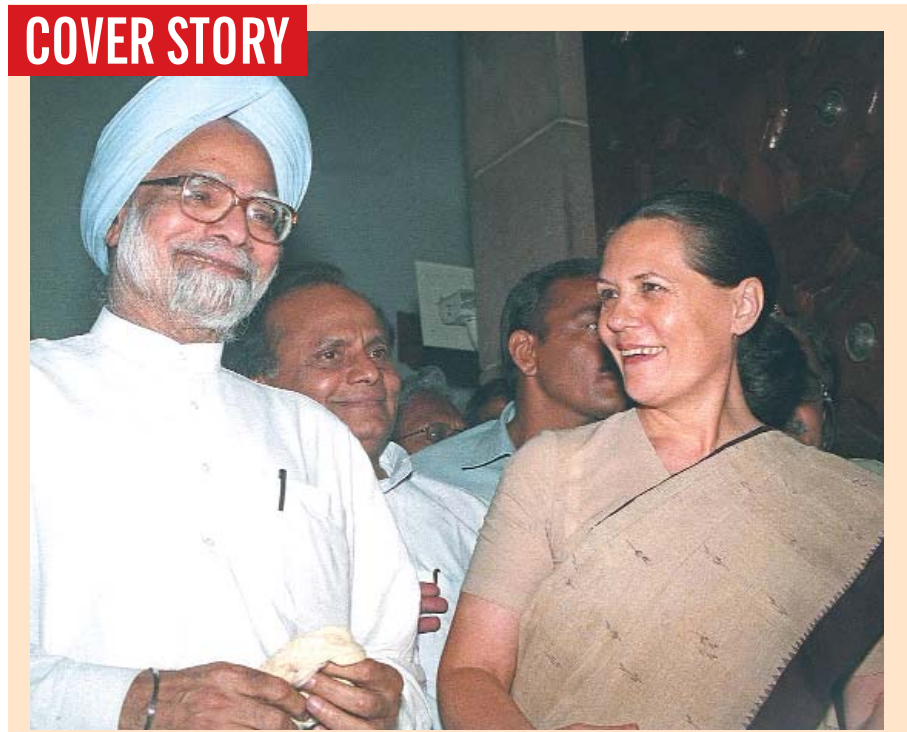
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AN AGENDA FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Mahasweta Devi, Sunita Narain, Anupam Mishra, Anil Wilson, Rajendra Singh, Suman Sahai, Jayaprakash Narayan, Ashish Kothari, Darshan Shankar, Arvind Kejriwal, Shabnam Hashmi, Ashish Sen, Ravichander, Maya Menon, Kalpana Jain, Himanshu Thakkar



COVER STORY

REAL REFORMS PLEASE

The new government's challenge is to keep up the pace of reforms and make sure they improve the life of common people in a lasting manner.

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Cover photograph: SAAB PICTURES

Civil Society

Only people matter

EVERY election comes with its quota of surprises. But this last general election ranks as an outright thriller. No one would have imagined that a limp and apparently directionless Congress would be swept to power. If there is one message that comes through it is not to take people lightly. The undoing of the BJP and its allies was their arrogance and poor governance. Having achieved some cosmetic changes for the middle class and partial economic reforms, the NDA government proceeded to behave like it had done the whole nation a favour. Its obscene India Shining advertisements had finally to be withdrawn.

An NDTV pre-election show remains etched in my mind. A clip showed Venkiah Naidu saying about Rahul Gandhi: "Politics is not a game for children". A BJP leader on the show tried to defend the statement and the spunky Nikhil Wagle, editor of Mahanagar, retorted: "If it isn't a game for children, is it then a game for old men?" Somewhere along the line the BJP had lost its connection with reality.

The new government will do well to remember that it governs a very different India. For one, it is a younger India impatient for real change. It is an India connected with the rest of the world through telecom and IT like never before. It is also an India faced with mammoth inequities. There are mounting environmental problems to contend with and any party which wants to rule the country for the next decade must above all have a solution to water shortages.

We thought it would be a good idea to ask a cross section of NGO leaders and social activists to come up with three suggestions each for a new government. You will find what they have to say in our cover story. Perhaps liberalisation should now move to the more important stage of facilitating local effort through which simpler and enduring solutions can be found to apparently intractable problems.

Among our other stories we have the Supreme Court order asking the Delhi government to regulate the fees of unaided private schools and ensure that schools, which have got land free or very cheap, keep their promise of admitting children from poor families. We spoke to Ashok Agarwal, a lawyer from Social Jurist who fought the case. Agarwal has also documented the issue for us in an article in our Perspectives section. Interestingly, while Delhi schools quibble about these orders, we have a story from Panchkula about a school which has been quietly admitting poorer children and giving them a quality education.

We interviewed PV Rajgopal of the Ekta Parishad. He is now back in Delhi as vice-president of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. We asked him about his plans to energise the GPF and as usual he had more ideas than we could put into print for you.

Our collaboration with Charkha goes a step further. We once again offer two pages of Rural Reporter. In our Offtrack section, our music correspondent, Neelkantha Gupta, talks about Shujaat Khan's brilliant album, The Rain, which was nominated for a Grammy, has sold more than one million copies in the West, but can't be found in India. Nor for that can Shujaat be found in India, but his wife was kind enough to give us some pictures of him. Watch Offtrack for more on music.

We are quite thrilled to begin a regular column by Ram Gidoomal, a businessman and a politician in Britain. Ram will offer an NRI perspective every month. He is a serious contender for the post of Mayor of London.

Ashok Khosla of Development Alternatives analyses how development can be good business, a topical subject. Every political party and economist talks about unemployment. Hopefully in the years ahead the government will ensure that India Shines through mini and small scale employment as Ashok rightly suggests.

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CAUSE & EFFECT

Schools lose, will they pay?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

SINCE 1997, Ashok Agarwal of Social Jurist has been waging legal battles to get deprived children the right to a decent education. On April 27, another major victory was won.

The Supreme Court passed orders which clearly state that the government has the authority to regulate the fees of unaided private schools.

The court also directed the Directorate of Education, New Delhi, to ensure that schools that received cheap land from the government, must comply with the terms of land allotment.

This means schools cannot hike their fees without permission from the Directorate of Education and about 25% of their seats must be for students from lower income groups.

"Profit has no place in education," says Agarwal. "Its guiding spirit should be community service. This principle flows from our Constitution and various rulings of the court."

The Delhi government has ordered the private schools to admit children from poorer homes, but most schools are in no mood to comply and some are contemplating legal action, once again.

Agarwal fought the case for the Abhibhavak Mahasangh, a forum of concerned parents. In 1997 private unaided schools hiked their fees between 40% to 400%. They claimed higher salaries had to be paid to teachers because of the recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission.

About one-third of school children in Delhi study in 1500 unaided recognised private schools. While most are middle-class, there are many from poor homes. Education doled out in several government schools is sub-standard. "We see a trend of poorer parents returning to government schools because they can't afford the high fees," says Agarwal.

The parents' protests at that time fell on deaf ears. So they organised themselves under the banner of the Mahasangh. In October 1998 the High Court accepted the plea of the parents. It said the government could intervene if fee hikes were unfair and that schools should decide these after discussions with the parents.

While fighting the case, Agarwal came across papers showing that schools were getting land at throwaway prices but they were not admitting poor children. He informed the court.

The Delhi government did try to fix the fees but the private schools ganged together and appealed to the Supreme Court against the judgment of the High Court. Their appeal has now been rejected. The court had appointed a Justice Duggal committee to examine whether the fee hike was justified. The Duggal Committee observed that out of 142 schools only two were justified in raising the fees.

"It is estimated that since 1997-98 till this year, the schools have unjustly charged excess amount to the extent of Rs 3000 crores from the hapless parents of Delhi," said Agarwal.

"The parents are entitled to get this amount back immediately."

A Gandhian revival

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IT is 4.30 in the afternoon on a hot and dusty Sunday in Delhi. PV Rajgopal is in his new office room at the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) fulfilling his new role as the vice-president of this long somnolent organisation. Rajgopal is clearly not the sleepy type and is happy to settle down to a chat over coffee. Getting him to that is in itself an achievement. Civil Society has invariably spoken to him on the move, the last time being at Borivili in Mumbai where we spent an hour together amid the pandemonium of the Land First Mela. He was a member of the GPF's governing body and has served as its general secretary. But recent years have seen him preoccupied with the Ekta Parishad, spending time out in the field, stirring up grassroots causes. He flirted with politics in the Madhya Pradesh assembly elections five months ago, supporting Digvijay Singh and the Congress. But so rough was the ride, that this time around the Ekta Parishad kept a safe distance from politicians of all hues.

Land First and the Ekta Parishad's other causes are still very important to him. But it is at the GPF that Rajgopal is helping put a whole new initiative in place. In years gone by, the GPF has played an important role in the Naga peace talks and Bangladesh's struggle for independence. Its representatives have addressed the UN General Assembly on world peace and disarmament. It was from here that the late Jayaprakash Narayan intervened and got the dacoits of Chambal to surrender.

The GPF believes that the time is right to bring back some of this activism. It can play a role in resolving conflicts in South Asia and create the space for initiators of change who may not belong to the Left or the Right. Extracts from a conversation with Rajgopal:

Why are you back at the GPF?

It has become fashionable to believe

that the country is divided between the gun and trishul, the Left and the Right. We are forever crying about the want of space for people who think differently and don't belong to either of these two ideological positions. Well you can keep on crying or you can go out and create that space for yourself. I believe that the GPF has a role in achieving this



PV Rajgopal

'We also need a group which can intervene in regional conflicts and ask the question: Hey what is going on here? From Sri Lanka to Nepal to Nagaland.'

objective. There are hundreds and thousands of social activists and groups who are looking for such support.

Secondly, there is an impression that Gandhism is dead. This is not true. There are several Gandhians making a difference every day, cooling communal passions, helping communities solve their environmental problems and so on. It goes unnoticed. It will be our endeavour to promote in the media

the successes of Sarvodaya and the Gandhian way.

Gandhi's concern for the poor, jal, jangal and jameen, his emphasis on the last man and sustainable livelihoods remains relevant today.

We also need a group which can intervene in regional conflicts and ask the question: Hey what is going on here? From Sri Lanka to Nepal to Nagaland, there is the need for such intervention.

So does this mean an end to the campaign mode and a shift to quieter lobbying?

No, not at all. I will continue with the National Campaign Committee on Land and the People's Commission on Land. We will seek to provide leadership to the young and travel from state to state for cadre building. Wherever we have gone with our yatras, so many young people come to us. These young people are a huge asset. There will also be the Jan Adesh 2007 through which the Ekta Parishad and others will serve notice on the government to

redesign its policies so that they include the poor. Twenty-five thousand people will set out from Gwalior and walk to Delhi.

2007 is a long way off. Why have you chosen Gwalior?

Because Ekta Parishad has a large base there and therefore organisationally it is a good place to begin. It will also mean cutting through Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and then into Delhi.

Like all good NGO leaders, you have been holding an endless number of meetings. What's on the cards?

The idea is to create programmes and resources and define a vision that lives up to the times. A water and peace mela is planned in October. Currently, there are 40 people at the GPF in Delhi. We spend about Rs 30 lakhs a year and just Rs 7 lakhs comes from our corpus. The rest comes from renting out the auditorium, selling books like Anupam's book on water and so on.

DEVELOPMENTOON

BY SHARAD

Amazing development, electronic goods have replaced bricks!



School with a clear conscience

Rathi A Menon
Panchkula

ELEVEN bubbly children, neatly attired in school uniform, conversed eagerly in English, a language they have recently learnt. They come from poor homes and study at the DC Model Senior Secondary School in Sector 7 of Panchkula. The school, voluntarily and quietly, admits children from low-income groups.

"Our aim is to save the intelligence in our country. We can't remove poverty single-handedly. Our mission to schools in all districts of Haryana is— if the child is intelligent and money is a problem, please send the child to us," says Bharat B Gupta, the school's principal.

While elite schools in Delhi quibble over the Delhi government's order to reserve seats for poor children, the DC Model School has adopted them without a fuss. The children are winning laurels in various competitions. One academic session has ended and they came through with flying colours.

"I stand first in my class. I got 89%" says Kavita, a student of Class 8. Saurabh and Sumit chip in. "Our results and rank have improved after coming here. Earlier we used to be in the 11th or 12th position but now we come third or fourth."

Kavita is a national certificate holder in yoga. Kamlesh and Sunil are state-level taekwondo champions while Arun and Saurabh are in the state yoga team. But the best success story is Poonam's. "Since there was not much of that different species feeling towards us, we could do what we always wanted to do. Earlier we used to watch the other children doing. Now we do." This achievement is reflected in the home.

"Now we can teach our brothers and sisters," say Julie and Tushar.

Gupta points out the school adopted a systematic approach. A letter was sent to all government schools in Panchkula saying that the DC Model School intended to adopt children from the poorest sections of society and that there would be a test. Children who passed would be admitted to the school, free of cost.

Out of 135 students who appeared for the test, only 17 were found eligible. They were given uniforms and books and provided a nutritious diet during school hours. They were put together in a separate section. "It was done to guard the children from developing any complex and to enhance their learning capacity. Initially, all subjects were taught in Hindi. Then we began to switch over slowly to English, one subject at a time," says Gupta.

The children are no longer in a separate section. "This was an experiment," Gupta remarks. "Now we know



Bharat B Gupta, principal of DC Model School (centre) with students

what should be done and how to go about it." And when the school opens a new branch near Pinjore, they will admit poorer children from the start. "That school has boarding facilities. If such a child is taken care of from the nursery stage, then his or her growth will be the same as the other children," says Gupta.

According to him there are two more schools admitting children from poorer homes.

"They have class restrictions," he says. "The Little Flower School is only up to Class 8. Students who score more than 70% are admitted here." There is also a Gurukool, but it is till Class 5. After that, the children are admitted to the DC Model School. "Since the Gurukool had taken these children from a very young age, they are now up to the mark," says Gupta.

Gupta discussed the school's policy of admitting poorer children with the parents of wealthier students. "I asked them, do you want to make your child great or good?" he says. A play was staged on the same theme. "After that we organized food for the children in slums. The girls cooked and the boys distributed it. That changed the richer children's attitude. They realised the advantages they had. This was a character-building exercise, for our motto is 'education in human values'. When

the children became willing supporters, the parents also approved," says Gupta.

The only problem was how to make the children do their home work since nobody at home would be able to help. Kiran Kaushal, volunteered. She provided the children with cycles so that they could go to her for their home work. Kiran has become more than a tutor. "She loves us like her own children," says Sumit. For Gupta, she is an excellent go-between. "She knows their innermost feelings. So if anything goes wrong, we know how to rectify it," says Gupta.

It's hard to find a difference between the poorer children and their richer classmates.

As one parent remarked after a yoga drill. "I did not know they were from slums. They looked so confident and well-groomed like my daughter or your son." Though the children have shed their inhibitions, their parents find it difficult to come for parent-teacher meetings. But Gupta has this to say, "From our side we want them to tell us what more we can do. For we feel they have obliged us by giving us a chance. School is, of course, a business but we have tried to put a little conscience into it."

Contact the school at 0172-3096458,
0172-2597545/ 2596464.

Burning Brain finds smoking ban hazy

Civil Society News
Chandigarh

BURNING Brain Society's anti-smoking wing reviewed the union government's decision to enforce legislation banning advertisement of cigarettes and regulating its consumption from May 1. Burning Brain members concluded the ban was only on paper.

Hemant Goswami, chairperson of Burning Brain Society said that implementing agencies appear to be in no mood to enforce the smoking prohibition act.

No hotel in the region, not even government ones, have put up the mandatory board at the entrance stating, "No Smoking Area - Smoking Here is an Offence." Neither have hotels designated areas as Smoking or No-Smoking, although they were supposed to do so by May 1, said Goswami. Smokers did not fear the Rs 200 fine, at all.

Several crucial sections of the original Act have been

withheld and not notified. For instance, selling cigarette within 100 yards of an educational institution has not been enforced.

Goswami pointed out when the Delhi government enacted similar legislation in 1996, it included Section 8 that prohibited the sale of cigarettes to minors and Section 9, which banned sale within a radius of 100 meters around educational institutes. When the notification was issued in January 1997 these two sections were excluded. It took around five years for these sections of the Delhi Act to see the light of day.

"If the Act was not to be notified and applied in full, then why did the government falsely pretend to be concerned about the ill-effects of smoking," asked Goswami.

Although the Act bans smoking of cigarettes or any tobacco product in public places, the definition of public places excludes all open space, which means that people can smoke in corridors and compounds of public places or in markets and parks. Technically speaking,

any place not enclosed by four walls is an open area.

Hotels with a seating capacity of 30 or more are permitted to have a smoking area for their customers. "This is against the spirit of the Act," said Goswami. "If smokers and non-smokers share the same space and roof it hardly matters whether it is a room for 30 or more because the effect of passive smoking will be there for non-smokers."

Another big area ignored in the Act is the littering of cigarette butts by smokers. "Cigarette butts are very harmful and contain many toxic chemicals," said Goswami. Over 4.5 trillion cigarettes are littered worldwide each year. Wind and rain often carry cigarette butts into waterways, where toxic chemicals in the cigarette filters leak out, threatening the quality of the water and the creatures who live in it. "Addressing this problem is as important as controlling smoking in public places," said Goswami.

For more details:
Tel: 0172-3233200, 5185600, 2700001

Turban, kirpan, some earthworms

Rathi A Menon
Anandpur Sahib

MICHEL Rudel was born in southern France, a region where grapes and almonds grew aplenty. He followed his soul to village Nupur Bedi, near Anandpur Sahib, the spiritual heart of Sikhism, to become Darshan Singh, a Sikh and an organic farmer. His 12-acre farm equipped with gobar gas, revives memories of the homespun farmer, lost in the frenetic days of the Green Revolution.

"If you run after quick results, you are sure to suffer side effects. The fertile soil of Punjab is withering away. Why? Because high-yielding varieties of seeds are being overused. The soil does not get rest. These seeds need lots of fertiliser and water. So the water table goes down," explains Darshan, stroking his salt and pepper beard. Pointing to grains of wheat spread out to dry, he says, "When we started, the initial yield of wheat used to be hardly 25 quintals. Now I get 45 quintals and our wheat is overbooked. Organic farming is like homeopathy, giving you results slowly but with an everlasting effect."

Darshan always stood out from the crowd. Even as a child he was a strict vegetarian. Later he showed a penchant for long hair and a beard. As he grew into adulthood, he frequently asked why he could not sport hair like Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed. His searching question led to clashes with the local priest. What irritated him the most, he says, were the differences between various groups practising Christianity. The orthodoxy of the church made him an atheist and a wanderer.

But a visit to India in 1976-77 changed his outlook. He got attracted to Sikhism. "I felt I received answers to all my questions from Sikhism. My faith in religion was restored." So on his second visit, this time to Mumbai in 1980, he bought a turban. He was baptised at Anandpur Sahib in 1991.

He then reflected on what he wanted to do. "I had some good friends, who were doing organic farming in Europe and I went to stay with them. That became my school. When I found that trees and plants, which got natural manure, were becoming immune to pests and yielding delicious fruit, I realised the value of organic farming." Since he had decided to farm in India, he saved money by doing odd jobs. He was a landscape gardener in Japan and a teacher in a London school.

But Darshan always stuck to his principles. After his



Darshan Singh at his farm

baptism, he returned to France. The authorities would not allow him entry unless he reverted to his old name and religion. "In France, we are not allowed to change our name as per religion," explains Darshan. In protest, he renounced his French citizenship and became a British national.

He returned to India and married Malwinder Kaur. "Everyone abroad discouraged me from settling here. But I wanted to marry a practicing Sikh, settle somewhere near Anandpur Sahib and practice organic farming."

Darshan and Malwinder acquired their farm at Kang village near Nupur Bedi after a year long search. "When we came here, the land was sandy. The previous owner cultivated mainly wheat and maize, not very successfully. When I started my organic methods, the general

been lackadaisical.

"If a few of us, who have lots of fruit trees, get together and the government sets up a processing plant, then our produce can be processed and sold," he says. Most of Darshan's produce has been sold by word of mouth.

"A sardar here, who had been told to eat organic food by his doctor after a severe heart attack, is our regular customer and marketing man. He has been putting up posters in stores and spreading information about us."

Anyone who has tasted the brown rice, wheat flour and potato from Darshan's farm, or savoured the tea, gently flavoured with jaggery, can never find the food sold in upmarket stores, worthy of a second glance.

You can contact Darshan and Manwinder at 0172-2609082 or 01887-240372

impression was, this foreign sardarji will not be able to farm without fertilisers. But Darshan was determined. "The advantage is this light soil. Heavy soil retains fertilisers and pesticides for long. But light soil washes it off."

Darshan uses farmyard manure and green leaf manure to enrich soil. Household waste is directed into the fields through underground pipes. Amazingly, there are no flies. "When you do it in layers, flies don't breed and hence there is no threat of diseases." Pink earthworms are hard at work in the manure shed. "The manure they churn out is very smooth," says Darshan.

"In Punjab, people burn the waste from the wheat harvest, destroying all the natural nutrients. No wonder all the earthworms have disappeared. Here I put the waste at the foot of plants. After the rains, the waste becomes manure. I do the same with soya bean waste."

An important problem is tackling weeds. "They are very deep-rooted and suck all nutrients. Crop rotation is the only way to keep all these irritants out." Peanuts, rice, potato, moong dal and sugarcane are some of the crops cultivated. "We became famous for our high-quality gur," says Darshan. Sugarcane, he explains, brings a lot of organic matter into the soil. He raises saplings from traditional seeds. "Where do we get desi varieties of seeds nowadays? High time we started protecting the traditional varieties."

High profile crusaders have let him down. A Dehra Dun-based organisation, led by a diva of organic farming and traditional wisdom, dilly-dallied over sending him seeds. "After some time, I gave up on them," says Darshan, simply. The government too has

India, please tell US to clean Bhopal

Civil Society News
New Delhi

INDIA has an opportunity to bring Union Carbide to book for the disaster at its plant in Bhopal, according to a release issued by Greenpeace.

On March 17, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York, USA, presented the Indian Government with a unique opportunity to hold the Polluter - Dow/Carbide responsible for the clean-up of the Bhopal gas

disaster site and its surrounding areas. In reinstating the case of Sajida Bano et al vs. Union Carbide Corporation and Warren Anderson to the Southern District Court of New York, the Court of Appeals ruled that Union Carbide could be made to undertake and bear the costs of remediation of the factory site in Bhopal. Thousands of tons of toxic wastes dumped and abandoned by Union Carbide in and around the site in Bhopal

continue to leach poisons (which include carcinogens and heavy metals) into the drinking water supply of at least 20,000 Bhopal residents while exacerbating the health impacts among the survivors .

The US Court of Appeals has said that if the Government of India or Madhya Pradesh issues a letter to Judge Keenan stating they have no objection to Union Carbide cleaning up its toxic contamination, it would enable him to take appropriate action.

The deadline for receipt of such a letter by the US Court is June 30, 2004.

Greenpeace activists are urging concerned citizens to take action and tell the Government of India and the state government of Madhya Pradesh to send this communication and ensure that justice is brought to the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy.

<http://www.greenpeaceindia.org>
Mobile Number: +91 9845535418

Jupiter, Sun, maths and fun

Deepali Gupta
Mumbai

MATHS and science may be dreaded subjects for children but Dr. Vivek Monterio makes it fun. That is precisely why he conceived Navnirmiti, to universalise maths so that every child is comfortable with the subject. "Maths is the language of science and science is the foundation of today's world. But science can be very difficult, mystifying and obscure. Plus these are subjects most children fail," he says.

Monterio and his motivated team are all set to make a difference to the young learner's mind. "We follow the Confucian principle- I hear I forget, I see I remember and I do I understand," says Kishore Jadav, an employee at Navnirmiti.

Navnirmiti was founded in 1995 as a women's co-operative after the closing of the DMV Pharmaceuticals factory. Initially, it was a means to generate a living for the women who found themselves out of work after the factory closed down. They made solar filters so people could watch the solar eclipse of 1995. From the sale of those filters they managed to raise Rs. 3 lakhs. Navnirmiti has been mostly a self-sustaining organisation.

Navnirmiti models classroom sessions for primary school children based on the Universal Active Maths



Dr. Vivek Monterio of Navnirmiti

model. Special worksheets are designed to test the children at the end of every session.

Till date Navnirmiti's programs have been implemented in five schools. "At present our priorities are the municipal and tribal schools. We go to children who do not have access to these facilities," says Monterio. The kind of teaching methods Monterio is promoting don't need ideal conditions. Only the teachers require a little training which they get in the odd 50 workshops Navnirmiti holds annually.

Apart from maths programs Monterio also runs an extensive program he calls "Sunderstanding," which means understanding the sun's phenomena. From charts that explain the heat and light rays from the sun to experiments for spotting storms on the sun, this program includes all that relates to the sun. This June, a giant sun related phenomenon is going to occur: the Transit of Venus (TOV). The Transit of Venus is rare, so rare that it was last observed 121 years ago. Yet it is scientifically significant because it can be used to measure the size and

distance of the sun from the earth.

So, this time on 8 June when the TOV occurs, Monterio has something planned for children and adults in Mumbai. Navnirmiti has printed little booklets that have a series of simple experiments lined up to measure the size of Venus, Earth, Sun and their spatial distances from each other.

Navnirmiti has made solar filters. Tested by the TISR, these filters merely cost Rs. 5 a piece. Through them you can look at the sun as if it were the moon. Children will now be able to see the spot, made by Venus (sort of an eclipse), on the sun. But that will be too tiny, and the image would be intangible. So Monterio suggests two methods to project an image onto a screen. The first is to make a telescope with a small lens and cardboard. Then focus the image on a sheet of paper placed below the telescope. The second is to project an image using a simple mirror onto a wall. Here the mirror has to be correctly angled and the further away the wall is the bigger and clearer the image of the sun will be.

Using the ratio of the size of the sun and the size of the



spot made by Venus, you can calculate the sizes and distances between the Earth and the Sun. The best part is that these experiments use inexpensive, household articles so anyone can conduct the experiments.

Navnirmiti is a non-profit organisation. Today it provides viable employment for women. They have five women working for them full time, and more are employed every time there is a big project like TOV. It has made a difference to the lives of several lakh children. It also provides employment to young people by deploying them for promotional efforts. Navnirmiti aspires to give better quality education to one and all. If you would like to order some solar filters and booklets to explore the TOV just send an e-mail to navnirmiti@yahoo.com.

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REAL REFORMS PLEASE

Reforms have shown industry and government cavorting together in perfect harmony. They have left no space for the consumer and the citizen. The Manmohan Singh government should listen not only to the mandarins of CII and FICCI, but tune into other voices as well.

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

IN the past five years, ruling politicians went to bed at each night with the fervent prayer that the stock market would keep climbing. Anyone who could charm investor sentiment was deified. The media happily conspired with them in this. It was important to sound celebratory at all costs. From squeals of delight on the Mumbai bourse, the coalition led by the Bharatiya Janata Party drew sustenance for its brand of reforms that made the rich richer and chucked at the rest of the country the option of catching up.

In the Shining India that Atal Behari Vajpayee bequeaths his successor, the stock market has touched new heights. But millions are out of job, the number of dropouts from school keeps growing, tuberculosis is rampant and AIDS casts its shadow as an epidemic, urban infrastructure is on the verge of collapse and food distribution is mired in corruption.

Reforms have made life easier for some parts of industry. They have also served the rich and middle class consumer because the varieties of goods and brands have grown. Phones are finally available in plenty, though telecom's benefits come ten years too late. Businesses in information technology and pharmaceuticals have given Indians the status of being world-beaters.

But it is difficult to hide the true face of the country. During the World Social Forum

(WSF) earlier this year Brazilian and South African friends told us that they were shocked by the poverty they saw in India. And they were in Mumbai, the financial capital of the country! What would they say if they went to Patna or Brindavan or Meerut?

If there is one lesson to be learnt from the past five years it is that the whimsical gyrations of the stock market should not be confused with the state of the economy and the well being of everyone. If it is important to track the Sensex, it is perhaps more necessary to know what is happening to the water table.

It is worth noting that no Economic Survey makes any mention of the environment. In one year, a chapter on the environment was written, but it was shoddy and subsequently dropped. It is as though the environment has nothing to do with the economy.

For all the achievements in information technology and the availability of some consumer goods, the deeper reality is that people continue to go hungry and leave their homes in the villages to flood the cities. More than one-third of Delhi consists of festering slums and the poverty and filth of Mumbai hardly allow it to qualify as a modern metropolis. It speaks volumes for India's rich and super rich that they can live amid such filth and pretend that nothing is wrong.

The water crisis has got worse. Shortages in the cities get all the attention, but the water shortages in the villages are destroying livelihoods and health and making people into environmental refugees.

Even as ministers of the previous regime waxed eloquent about opening up the economy, the agriculture sector sank into further into despair. Market reforms never

reached the farmer. Nor did solutions to falling yields and the wanton misuse of pesticides and chemical fertilisers.

Keeping a stock market ticking is a part of the business of positioning an emerging economy. A sprightly stock market sends out signals that all is well in the world of business and finance. Dr Manmohan Singh's government can be expected to do a good job of this.

Large doses of foreign direct investment will continue to be required if the Tenth Plan's target of providing nearly eight million jobs a year is to be met. The government will be striving to achieve a GDP growth rate of eight per cent and industrial growth of 10 per cent.

But industrial growth has to come with social justice and ecological balance. Big industry is also not the sole answer to the kind of joblessness that India is witnessing.

The Manmohan Singh government will, therefore, have to be nimble and innovative in the kind of solutions it looks for so that they touch the lives of ordinary people. It will have to spend less time listening to sophisticated mandarins of CII and FICCI and tune into real voices.

Unfortunately, reforms, as we have known them, have shown industry and government cavorting together in perfect harmony. They have left no space for the consumer and the citizen.

This is an age of local solutions and many of them cost nothing. Experience shows that success in governance comes not so much from squandering money but from listening, learning and passing on ownership. Be it water, forests, public transport, air pollution or education, the government's success will depend on how successfully it engages with stakeholders.

What makes a tiny panchayat in Kerala take on the might of Coca-Cola? What drives an income-tax officer to give up his job and work in a slum for the citizen's right to information? Why is it important to set up a postal service for the homeless? How do traditional water harvesting structures rescue people from drought when costly irrigation schemes fail?

The answer in each case is that people left in the lurch are forced to look for their own solutions and they come up with ones that put governments to shame.

A Union government has an important role to play in creating an atmosphere in the country in which it becomes important to involve citizens and seek real time solutions to problems. So far individual states have gone about doing this with varied results. For instance, Sheila Dikshit returned to power by involving resident welfare associations with the government in Delhi. Her Bhagidari system did not achieve much on the ground, but it gave citizens a role. Now other urban centres want to replicate Bhagidari.

There is scope for the government to show more trust in civil society. CNG for public transport is one example of an idea in the public interest which could have been implemented without going to court. Similarly, Coca-Cola and Pepsi should have been brought to book much more readily for the quality of their products. If only the government would be receptive, the issue of unwanted chemicals in the food chain could be addressed with huge benefits accruing to public health and agriculture.

We spoke to civil society leaders from across the country about what they considered to be the priorities for the new government in Delhi. Some of what they had to say is summed up below.

WATER, WATER, WATER: Everybody knows that without water you have nothing. Yet the government opts for expensive ambitious river linking projects, even as glaciers like the Gangotri are melting. Instead, individuals and communities have shown how to do it. Anna Hazare, Rajendra Singh, and village Laporla are three textbook examples. These need to be multiplied across the country along with groundwater recharge,

watershed management, control of pollution and so on. Empower citizens and communities to manage their water, provide them the financial and institutional support to make it possible. Decisions on whether a large-scale water project is really needed must come from the community.

SECULARISM: The election of the Congress and the diminishing of the BJP is if anything a clear vote against the politics of communalism. The new government needs to honour this.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION: Accountability comes primarily from the right of the citizen to know what a government is up to. A government that is not answerable to every single citizen is no government at all. When Parivartan used Delhi's right to information law to examine civic works in east Delhi, it found that of Rs 1 crore of bills paid more than Rs 76 lakhs had been defalcated. If this is so in one neighbourhood in Delhi, what must the scale of corruption be across the country? The time has come to implement a rigorous right to information law at the national level.

ENCOURAGE PRESS FREEDOM: The need for quality information in a democracy should be underlined. A free press is certain guarantee against misrule. It is the best and cheapest feedback that politicians can hope for. It is in everyone's interest to break up monopolies in the media and encourage a proliferation of small and independent mediums. Radio, for instance, should be made accessible to the community

and not business houses alone. Innumerable examples exist where illiterate women have radio stations and provide invaluable information and education to the community. Legitimise these efforts. Similarly there should be finance mechanisms for setting up small publications. The country needs thousands of publishers not the monopoly of a few who dance to the tune of advertisers.

GRASSROOTS LIBERALISATION: Unshackling big industry from cumbersome procedure is important. But liberalisation must finally be for everyone. The government must get off the back of communities, which want to manage their own resources be they water or forests. Rajinder Singh has shown how water resources can be managed in drought-hit Rajasthan and yet he lives in constant conflict with the red tape of the state government. There are many other examples in education and health which the government should help multiply. Forest policy needs to be revamped so that forests become assets for local people and not the sealed-off jagir of officers of the sarkar.

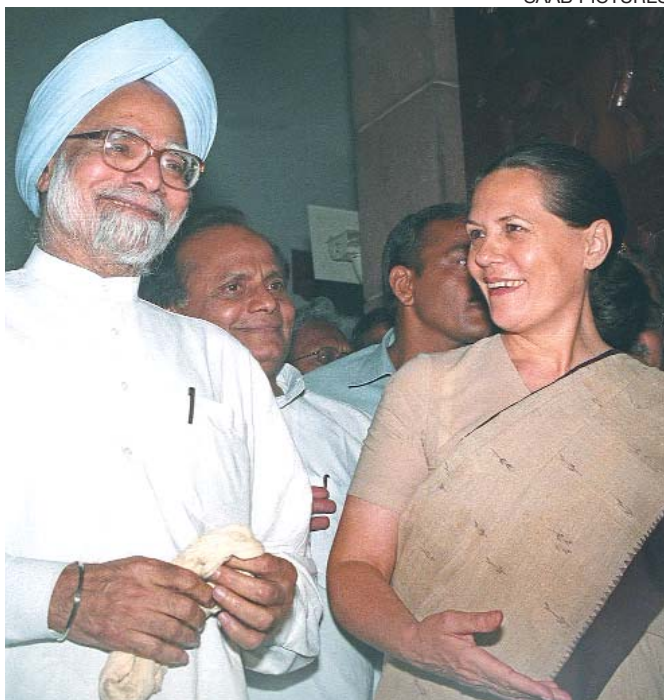
SMALL AND MINI UNITS: Finally job creation in sizable numbers will have to come from small and even mini enterprises that are ecologically sustainable. It

could be a medicinal plants business or an organic farm. At present there is no real encouragement given to these enterprises though they translate into real prosperity at levels where it is needed the most urgently.

At election time, the BJP government's India Shining advertising campaign dwelt on the middle class enjoying the goodies of liberalisation. It portrayed a retiree reading a business paper and jumping with joy because the stock market was doing well. It showed chubby children and healthy young men and women in be-happy-don't-worry mode.

The market, it seemed, was the panacea for everything. But was this kind of reform enough? It seems now for sure that it wasn't. The Shining India advertising had to be withdrawn midway. Its belated termination showed how much of a disconnect there was between the people in power and votes they were seeking.

Somewhere the common Indian had been forgotten. Reforms had not touched her life. Instead, the Congress' advertisement: Congress ka hath, aam aadmi ke saath (the Congress stands by the average person) had a much bigger impact. It was run widely in the suburban media and the results are there for all to see. Now is the time to convert a successful political slogan into successful political action.



SAAB PICTURES

Protect natural water bodies

MAHASWETA DEVI

Writer and activist, DNT RAG



Ensuring adequate drinking water and irrigation water throughout the country. The government has to work towards a permanent solution to the water scarcity problem. This includes water harvesting, careful and intelligently planned reforestation and afforestation programmes and a ban on the filling up or destruction of natural water bodies.

FOOD SECURITY: Removal of starvation by the equitable distribution of food throughout the country. Huge amounts of food grains lie rotting in warehouses while the people outside starve. This has to be stopped and arrangements made for fair food distribution to those below the poverty line. Bring the public distribution system back to life.

BLUEPRINT FOR HEALTH: Health is the third essential area, especially health care and awareness for women and children, who are most at risk. Primary health care needs to be urgently revived and taken deep into rural India where it is needed the most.

Herbal gardens for health security

DARSHAN SHANKAR

Director, Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT)



Give health security to millions of rural and urban households by providing seed capital to community based organisations to establish a self-financing network of ecosystem specific home herbal gardens and multi-lingual home healthcare websites based on knowledge and best practices derived from the Indian medical heritage.

IN SITU CONSERVATION: Medicinal plant resources known to the people of India should be conserved in situ by establishing a nationwide network of forest gene banks, with attached nurseries and seed stores managed by local communities (on the model of the 55 pioneering medicinal plant gene banks, established in peninsular India).

KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS: Conserve indigenous medical knowledge through IT powered, knowledge networks of existing centres of excellence in traditional health care, manuscript libraries, folk healers, yoga and kalaripayattu experts, all over India and support research, training and extension activities of these networks.

Put an end to communalism

ANIL WILSON

Principal, St Stephen's College, Delhi.



IF there is one single factor that threatens to rip apart the fabric of our society it is the game of good cop, bad cop played by the BJP with the minorities.

The new government needs to create a visible and viable strategy to counter the virus of communalism and get the minorities off the roller coaster ride they have been subjected to so far. It is also time to show the world that if the Indian brain is one of the best in the world, the Indian heart is no less so.

CORRUPTION: We have come to a situation where corruption is not only taken for granted but the capacity for making as much money as possible from one's position is considered to be the hallmark of prudent living! No society worth its salt can continue in this fashion and hope to survive. The new government has to show that not only is zero tolerance of corruption the flip side of good governance but also that anti-corruption is central to poverty alleviation.

WORK ETHIC: Society thrives on a cultural norm that places a moral value on doing a good job because work has intrinsic value for its own sake. Successive governments have struck at the roots of this norm through their penchant for declaring holidays at the drop of a hat. This situation is exacerbated by the strikes and bandhs that often have the effect of holding society to ransom. The new government needs to address this issue by promoting the idea of an honest day's work through action and propagation.

Give citizens information

ARVIND KEJRIWAL

Parivartan



Enact an effective Right to Information Act that has provisions like penalty on officers who do not provide information in time. The Act should also

provide for an independent appellate body where people could file appeals if they do not receive information in time or are not satisfied with the information received.

DECENTRALISE: Create institutions of self-governance in urban areas on the lines of rural panchayats by implementing the 74th amendment to the constitution. These institutions should be required to make budgets for their own areas by holding public meetings. All these budgets from across the country should be integrated to make the national budget.

EFFECTIVE LOKPAL: Pass legislation to create an effective Lokpal who would have the powers and machinery to independently investigate cases of corruption brought to its notice by the people and also award punishment to the guilty officials or politicians.

Health-care based on the Arole model

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

Loksatta



Poor health is the biggest cause of impoverishment and indebtedness in India. Low cost, effective, accessible health care with community participation is eminently feasible, as Arole proved in 400 villages with a population of 500,000 population in Jamkhed area. This is a time-tested model which needs to be replicated all over India quickly.

HIGHER EDUCATION: Our higher education is the USP of India. But in most cases (excluding a few prestigious institutions) it is on the verge of collapse. Happily students, parents and the society want improvements. A few non-monetary inputs can make a huge difference:

Selection of teachers from other universities to prevent in-breeding.

Electives system to promote academic democracy, student choice, teacher accountability and accent on humanities.

Change in examinations to promote analytical skills, application, and problem solving approach.

Other relevant changes like purposive research and development and community interaction.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION : The incentives in politics are severely distorted and huge sums of money and muscle power have become integral to electioneering. This leads to a vicious cycle of corruption and mis-governance. All major parties tend to nominate "winnable" candidates who muster these resources, and no matter who wins, the nature of the exercise of power is unaltered. Only electoral system change to PR can alter this. PR can be accomplished by a mere amendment of law (R P Act), as the Constitution (Art 81 and 82; and Art 170) allow multi-member constituencies. Models suitable for our conditions are available.

Ensure equitable use of water

SUNITA NARAIN

Director, Centre for Science and Environment



It is clear that the issue of water will determine the future of India. It is also clear that water management is more about reforming structures of governance than renaming and issuing new programmes. This agenda will require enormous institutional innovation and high-level direction and monitoring.

GROWTH WITH JOBS: The key to employment will be in building productive and sustainable livelihoods based on natural resources. The formal industrial sector has never been the provider of employment in the country and in the years to come its contribution, with scale and mechanisation, will decline even further. The service economies - outsourcing including - will grow but cannot really absorb jobseekers in a country the size of India. Shining

India's growth-without-jobs syndrome has to be broken.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH SERVICES: Government investments in these two critical areas must be substantially increased. But delivery of these services to the poorest of the poor will again require considerable institutional innovation.

Metrics driven accountability mechanism for MPs

V. RAVICHANDAR

Ideas for Governance Trust



Every MP should be made to publicly set out his or her short term goals and long term goals. These should be in terms of specific metrics. Have annual review forums. The idea is to bring in a laser like implementation focus with the elected representative

working out the mechanisms to deliver on the promises between Centre, State and local bodies.

CITIES AS SELF-RELIANT CENTERS: Plan for urban development with own finances through systemic measures in augmenting resources - in Bangalore over Rs. 400 crores infrastructure investment with no drain on state finances since 2000. The idea is to conserve government resources for investments for the rural populace and the economically challenged sections in urban areas.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: Build a forum for citizens to engage with government on a regular basis.

Send the young to school

MAYA MENON

The Teacher Foundation



The government and its departments of education will need to use innovative ways to attract out-of-school children from the streets and homes, particularly girls, into schools. Schools therefore need to become exciting places where magical things, including learning happens. While there are many committed NGOs working assiduously to get children back into schools, the drop out rate is very high.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT: One vital, corrective measure is, providing high quality, ongoing teacher development opportunities, support and monitoring. While the NCERT and its state equivalents do run training programmes, they are often ineffective in improving classroom practice. Moreover they need both professional and emotional support to

make that change permanent.

IMPROVE CURRICULUM: A good curriculum is one that is relevant to the lives of diverse young people. Improvements in the curriculum become meaningful only if they are reflected in better assessment and evaluation practices.

Make media more democratic

ASHISH SEN

VOICES

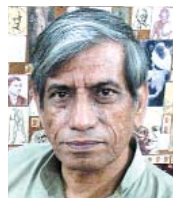
In a country of daunting diversity and contrasts the role of community media and community radio in particular, has critical significance. Community radio, which has enormous potential in terms of human development remains to be legitimised by the law of the land despite the Supreme Court Judgement of 1995 which endorsed that airwaves are public property. Work done at the ground level demonstrates that communities, especially poor communities in rural India, have effectively managed and used audio or radio for their development. Examples include Namma Dhwani in Karnataka and Pastapur Media Centre in Andhra Pradesh. They need to be viewed as legitimate producers of information, rather than passive recipients.

HELP THE DISABLED: Approximately six per cent of the country's population are people with disabilities. The Persons with Disability Act of 1995 emphasised access, education and employment as rights which are crucial for the community's empowerment. Yet, there is a marked gap between precept and practice which has handicapped the implementation of these components. A country-wide campaign is required to bridge the gap.

Forget about linking rivers

ANUPAM MISHRA

Gandhi Peace Foundation



The new government should de-link itself from the interlinking of rivers project. Before the elections neither Congress nor its allies had taken a firm stand on this issue. Instead it should focus on various traditional methods known to the voters.

COMMON PROPERTY: "Shyamlat - Deh" is a term that has been honoured since the Mughal period. But somehow it has lost its significance after independence. It is a combination of "Shamil" and "Dehat" which means common property resources. These comprise pasture land, tanks and village forests. The time has come to shift emphasis from IT to these basic amenities which will enable the country to cope with the drought. Tarun Bharat Sangh and

Gramvikas Navyuvak Mandal, Laporia have shown that by taking care of these small things they could fight with drought for six years. **THINK WATER:** It's high time that the government raised the "water level" of its programmes. The "water table" will take care of itself.

Give communities degraded land

ASHISH KOTHARI

Kalparvriksh



Putting major focus and investments into regeneration of degraded land and water-bodies (which cover more than 60% of India!)...through local species, control by local communities and with a major stress on generating employment...this could in fact be the single biggest source of employment and livelihood in India if properly planned, and would help tremendously in reviving the environment, providing appropriate development to rural areas, and taking the pressure off our cities.

WATER SECURITY: Reorienting 'development' to be centrally sensitive to environmental sustainability and local decision-making, and in particular to issues of water availability and quality, access to productive land and

biodiversity conservation. This means having to assess each of the economic sectors, especially industry, agriculture, infrastructure, energy and trade to see how they are currently destructive of the environment and of local community livelihoods and then changing them to become more sensitive to these concerns. It means ensuring water security for all, through decentralised water harvesting and other means.

CHECK MEGA PROJECTS: Preparing through a nation-wide consultative process, local to national land and water use plans that identify ecologically sensitive areas that should be off-limits to largescale 'development' projects and culturally sensitive areas where special attention can be paid towards 'alternative' development and welfare programmes. Such a plan needs to be long-term, and not easy to mess around with...it would mean for instance that identified protected areas, areas conserved by communities, water sources, coastal systems are simply not allowed for mining, big dams, urban expansion, large industry.

Provide clean drinking water

RAJENDRA SINGH

Tarun Bharat Sangh



It is the moral duty of any government to provide clean drinking water to citizens, free of cost. Selling water to citizens should not be in the reform agenda.

DON'T PRIVATISE WATER: No river should be privatised as it was attempted at some places in the past. The Congress government should pass legislation to ensure the right to water. It is time for a Water Security Act.

RESTORE COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES: Water bodies, pastures, even forts and palaces, once belonged to the community and are now under the custody of private individuals. These should be restored to the people.

Spend more on agriculture

SUMAN SAHAI

President, Gene Campaign



Devote a substantial part of the national budget to agriculture and rural livelihoods. Create income opportunities for rural and adivasi men and women based on their strengths, which are bio-resources and indigenous knowledge. This is the basis of the multi-billion dollar herbal market, which we must tap for rural development- but from the village up, not top down.

TEACH VILLAGE CHILDREN: Break the bureaucratic mindset and develop a radical and innovative approach to take education to rural India, especially for girls. Let all colleges and technical institutions take a one-year break, fan out to the villages and teach village children. No technology breakthroughs in IT or biotechnology will be agents of

development unless most of India can participate.

SUPPORT ISM: Revive the Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM) in mission mode, as the backbone of the health and veterinary care system. These effective, low cost and accessible healing practices can contribute significantly to primary health care at a time when drug prices are becoming unaffordable.

More powers for local bodies

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

South Asian Network of Dams, Rivers and People



Fifty-seven years after independence and 13 years after the passage of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment to give powers to local bodies on local issues and resources, local bodies have little effective power. If the next Union government wants to improve the lot of the Bharat that voted out the outgoing Union government, it must give effective control over resources and powers to local bodies to take decisions on local issues.

TRANSPARENCY: Even after the passage of the Right to Information Bill, there is little by way of transparency in governance. Secrecy remains the central mantra of the culture of governance. To make the RTI effective, there needs to be a credible grievance redressal and regulatory system in place at several levels so that those who do not follow

the norms are punished and citizens know where to go.

FOCUS ON WATER: The outgoing Prime Minister had made large projects, dams and the river linking programme central to the government's agenda of development. He paid the price as he had no idea what to do to provide drinking water or for alleviating and reducing the impact of drought and floods. If the new dispensation does not want to meet the same fate, it should give top priority to local systems like rain water harvesting, groundwater recharge, watershed management, allowing minimum flows in rivers, effective control of pollution and management of existing infrastructure to get optimum outputs and demand side management.

Try Modi, reopen Gujarat cases

SHABNAM HASHMI

Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (ANHAD)



Sack Narendra Modi. Try him for genocide. Reopen all 2000 cases which have been thrown out without a trial.

CLEAN UP

TEXTBOOKS: Immediately secularise all educational, research and cultural institutions. The communal text books introduced by the Sangh Parivar must be scrapped. The syllabus of Shishu Mandirs and Ekal Vidyalaya's should be monitored. The ideology of hatred must be countered on a war footing both for political cadres as well as people at large.

JOBS FOR THE YOUNG: Introduce a pro-poor economic agenda and give priority to schemes that provide employment to the youth.

PMO should monitor AIDS

KALPANA JAIN

Author Positive Lives

The Prime Minister's office should take the lead on the national AIDS control programme. The HIV/AIDS epidemic will continue to be viewed as a health problem till such time as the programme rests solely with the health ministry. To give it the required urgency, it needs to be seen as being implemented by the PM's office.

MORE FACILITIES: Build treatment, care and support facilities. With 4.58 million people living with HIV, we need adequate support systems, which are lacking.

INVEST IN HEALTH: Provide the entire package of treatment of all. If we want to be in the league of developed nations, this is the least that should be done. It's time we invest in people's health. Even with HIV, people can lead long and healthy lives, provided they get the right care.

Scholarships for working children

INDRAANI SINGH

Literacy India



The government has to do something to bring working children below the age of 18 back into school. Some of them may be earning up to Rs 2000 a month and have

lost interest in their studies because of financial pressures. A scholarship equivalent to what they earn may be a good incentive..

LESS RED TAPE: Instead of NGOs having to run around in circles for grants from the government, there should be a cell which should track genuine NGOs and support their work.

REVIVE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS: The government should take the help of NGOs for improving government schools. Instead people who want to help are treated with suspicion.

Imagine, nomads looking for land, jobs

Khursheed Wani
Srinagar

HEMMED in by Kashmiri separatists and the Indian army, the Gujjars and Bakkerwals, nomadic communities who once roamed free, are abandoning their cattle to work for daily wages. There isn't much choice. Government schemes are steeped in corruption and the nomads don't have land to farm.

"Security forces occupy most of the largest pastures, turning them out of bounds for grazing," says 50 year old Lazzat Khan. His herd of goats has dwindled from 400 to 150.

The nomads constitute about 15% of Kashmir's 10 million people. Historically, they took their flock to pristine grazing grounds in the Tulail and Gurez sectors of Kashmir and to the Zanskar region in Ladakh. Since the past ten years, these pastures are becoming out of bounds for them.

The list of forbidden areas gets longer every year. Last April, the army shut them out of their favourite grazing ground: the south Kashmir mountain range of Hill Kaka. Other high mountain pastures like Noorpore, Jamian, Gali, Godenak, Sarimastan, Girjan and Dorijan are now out of reach because of security concerns.

"We are directed to move along the roadside and never venture till the hilltops," says Gafoor Bajad.

Some leaders among the nomads are trying to draw public attention to their plight. Chowdhury Bashir Naaz, for instance says nomads should have access to pastures and Mian Altaf, a former minister has discussed the issue with the army many times.

According to one senior army officer, "Separatists armed with sophisticated weapons are present in the region. We can't leave till they are killed or chased away."

Caught in the crossfire, the nomads are resigned to their fate. They know things will not change. So they are trying to settle. Many nomads are abandoning their cattle to work as daily wagers. Since most are unlettered, their options are limited.

The government has declared both communities as Scheduled Tribes. But the government's policies and programmes do not help. The state government's social welfare department started 13 hostels for the Gujjar and Bakkerwal communities. These are in a dilapidated state. In fact, two hostels have been occupied by the army. The state government claims to have started 300 mobile schools for nomadic children, but these exist only on paper.

"The entire programme has become a big failure because of lack of vigilance and accountability," says Gujjar leader, Nizamuddin Khatana. Funds have been misappropriated and the entire scheme is steeped in scandal.

Finally, Dhari village men learn to sober up



Meena, third from left with her Mahila Mangal Dal

Katyayani Upreti
Pithoragarh

MEN addicted to the bottle are advised to stay clear of Dhari village in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand.

"No one in this village dares to drink," says Meena, the leader of a hugely successful anti-liquor campaign. "We have made the men leave it. Let them drink just once. They will be brought to their senses by our Mahila Mangal Dal."

If any man is caught drunk, a whistle is blown. The Mahila Mangal Dal hurries to the spot and pounces on him. The drunkard is soundly thrashed with bichupani, a plant which stings.

"Who would dare to drink," say Hariram and Manohar, residents of the village. "It is not the police we fear, but these women."

Just eight months ago, liquor had made life hell for the women. "Even our relatives had stopped visiting us," recalls Meena. "All you'd hear were drunken brawls, abuse, women weeping and children wailing. A home might not have food, but liquor it certainly had." Meena's husband used to drink too. She left him several times in disgust and went to her parent's home, only to return.

This tiny village had 13 illegal distilleries (bhattis). Pitambar Joshi, a retired aeronautical engineer from the army, recalls that the first bhatti was opened some ten years ago by Jogiram, who learnt the ropes in Delhi. A complaint was lodged with the police but he was subsequently released. A confident Jogiram began to believe he was above the law. Thirteen bhattis opened after that episode. "The women would work as daily wagers and their entire

earnings would be devoured by the bhattis," remarks Joshi.

In desperation, Meena accompanied by three women, went to the district magistrate's office and lodged a complaint with the Customs and Excise department. The bhattis were raided. "They caught canisters of liquor and arrested some bhatti owners," says Meena. "Other women arrived and asked why didn't we call them too.

If any man is caught drunk, a whistle is blown. The Mahila Mangal Dal hurries to the spot and pounces on him. The drunkard is soundly thrashed.

At once, about 32 of us got together."

After five days the bhatti owners were released. Meena took her group to the SDM and DM's offices and complained, once again. Surprised by their persistence, the officials advised them to form a Mahila Mangal Dal and sent two constables for their safety. The situation in the village was getting tense.

Undeterred, Meena and her group plunged into battle against the bhatti owners. "About four boys joined us. On day one we destroyed seven

canisters." A bhatti owner abused Meena and pointed a sharp weapon at her throat. "I said, alright, cut my throat. I prefer to die while doing some good," says Meena.

All the women in the group surrounded Meena and mocked the bhatti owner. "They said, cut my throat, kill me first," says Meena. "The women's courage frightened the bhatti owner and he backed off."

Meena and her group hunted down bhatti owners and drunks, day and night. The moment one of them was spotted, a whistle would be blown and the drunkard or bhatti owner would be beaten up with

bichupani. The men would run off to neighbouring villages to drink. Meena's group chased them, often travelling nearly 10 kms. "Sometimes we would get a ride. Or we'd travel on foot. Women would leave their siblings behind. We'd fine the drunkard Rs 50, if we found him."

She wrote letters to women in nearby villages, informing them about the anti-liquor movement. As a result, the campaign has spread to Bhurmani, Digtali, Majheda, Kaumaichaud and Ched region. The local MLA, Prakash Pant has got the bhattis dismantled. Today, sighting a drunkard in Dhari village has become a rare phenomenon. And all the children go to school.

Hariram agrees the women's movement has vastly improved lives.

"If only we had some employment as well," he says with a tinge of sadness.

The bhatti owners and their families are not on speaking terms with the Mahila Mangal Dal. "We took away their livelihood," explains Meena. "Their women didn't help us since they used to distil the liquor. Some educated women also kept their distance because they did not approve of our rough and ready methods."

With no money or an office, Meena is determined to continue her movement but its focus has shifted to village development. She has sent innumerable applications to government officials and met with no response. As usual, she is unfazed.

"I have conquered fear," she says. "Our brothers at Kargil fought heroically for the country. I am unafraid of battling for the rights of my village."

Widow wears red with pride

Usha Chowdhury
Barmer

KANCHA Devi attended her son's wedding in Bajad village, Bundi district, Rajasthan, with her head held high. Wrapped around it was a bright red scarf. Her family was aghast. She is, after all, a widow, they said. According to tradition, widows should wear white and remain invisible during auspicious events. Her family decided to boycott her. Kancha Devi was unperturbed. "He is my son," she said, "I have every right to be there at his wedding. So what if I'm a widow."

Kancha Devi got the courage to speak up because Ekal Nari Sangathan (ENS), a forum of single women in Rajasthan told her 15,000 women would support her.

Since 1999, ENS has been fighting for the rights of widowed and divorced women in 25 districts and 65 blocks of Rajasthan. It has identified single women in each village and formed them into committees at panchayat, block, district and state level. In this way, a network of single women has been built up.

Widowed and divorced women are educated about their rights and government schemes, laws and policies for them. They are introduced to officials, the police and voluntary groups in their area. Widows in the same village support one another. If any conflict about property, violence or pension crops up, committee members step in. If need be, they counsel the family, panchayat or caste members.

Lila, a widow from Ahor village in Jalor district, found life tough after the death of husband. She had

two daughters to marry. ENS informed her she was entitled to a grant of Rs 5000 from the government to marry each of her daughters and helped get her the money. Today both girls are married. A grateful Lila

says it would have been impossible without help from ENS.

Remarkably, ENS is making a dent in outdated social customs and caste equations. During training workshops for single women, widows are encouraged to apply mehndi, wear bangles and dress colourful. "Previously they would bring colored clothes hidden in a bag but now they wear these during panchayat meetings openly, in the village," said an ENS activist.

Single women are finally speaking up. The government is lending an ear. Since 1999, ENS has sorted out five issues with the government. The pension fund for widows has been hiked from Rs 125 to Rs 200. ENS ensured divorcees got this money too. They are trying to increase the stipend.

Education is free, not only for girls but for boys too. Widows get reservation in government jobs and priority in drought relief work. Their daughters get Rs 10,000 for their marriage, instead of Rs 5000. According to state government circulars, widows are from now on, to be called single women.

ENS made sure an order was issued to the panchayat and gram sabhas that the opinions of single women must be heard and acted on during meetings.

To get them a better income ENS sends interested widows to Kasturba Gandhi Trust in Bhilwara for a three-month training programme in tailoring, being a health worker or an anganwadi worker or running a small shop. Loans are arranged from banks. Hopefully, in future, no woman will be forced to don white and lead a secluded, helpless life, at the mercy of her family or community.



Widows in colourful clothes at a training camp

Kancha Devi got the courage to speak up because Ekal Nari Sangathan (ENS), a forum of single women in Rajasthan told her 15,000 women would support her.

'The world's woken up to tribal art'

Rachana Rana Bhattacharya
Hazaribagh

THE Sanskriti Kendra in Hazaribagh is battling against time to save tribal art from being bulldozed by the axe and the crane. Run by **Bulu Imam**, the Kendra has documented Jharkhand's tribal art and brought it international recognition.

Although Indian tribal art is catching the eye of art collectors in international art markets, it is dying in the land of its birth. Tribal heritage emanates from nooks and crannies of the jungle. But forests are being constantly destroyed by dams, mines and other development projects. The government does little by way of creative intervention.

In 1993, Imam founded the Tribal Women Artists' Co-operative (TWAC) to promote Khovar and Sohrai, village art forms derived from rock art. Ritual mural paintings are now done on paper, making them accessible to the world.

Nurtured by the Hazaribagh Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), TWAC promotes 60 artists in six villages, through exhibitions in India and abroad. The

money earned is divided among the artists. It helps run the Sanskriti Kendra and a welfare fund. Excerpts from an interview with Bulu Imam:



Bulu Imam, director of Sanskriti Kendra

What is the relevance of tribal art in today's world?

A century ago, the Victorian temperament recoiled against these mud and dung tributes to human imagination. Today, tribal art forms are much admired in the new anti-materialistic wave sweeping avant-garde circles of art. We return to the tree, the mother and to life expressed in vibrant, eternal symbols, not only subtle, but as the collective memory of our race.

Why is it so important to preserve the

tribal idiom?

I believe that a deeper study of different tribal art forms, linked with the beautiful mystical illustrations of our rock paintings in the jungle where the soul of India was born, will bring forth a genuine renaissance to the flagging spirit of Indian art.

Why do you feel Hazaribagh is so significant?

India has a long history of artistic neglect by responsible authorities. The irretrievable treasures of the Classic Pleistocene period in the Narmada Valley now sunk under dams, or of the birthplace of Ramapithecus in the Sutlej Valley under the

Govindsagar dam, or the tribal obliteration of Rarhian culture and paleo-archaeology in the Lower Damodar Valley are examples that instantly come to mind. Let us not forget that this region is culturally and archaeologically one of the richest in India. Jainism and Buddhism were born here. Brahmanism and Islam too developed.

Why is tribal culture being destroyed?

There has been a visible attempt to suppress and make extinct tribal culture. It is

even more damning because this destruction was supported by an openly anti-tribal agenda. Even the generosity of embracing the Harijan was at the cost of him giving up his identity. Ethnology refused to document tribal folk songs until Verrier Elwin did so in 1944. I believe a serious appraisal of tribal art in India is yet to begin. Since the abolition of the zamindari system in 1950 and the formation of state forest departments, the mad scramble to reap revenue by destroying forests, extracting minerals and ores began. Archaeological monuments were treated with indifference.

Is it just dams or mining projects too?

Mining? The less said the better. The biggest open-cast mine in Asia, the Rajmahal Coal Mining Project in the Sahibgunj, Godda and Pakur districts covering 3,200 sq.km have already destroyed archaeological remains of great value. In the coal mining belt of the Lower Damodar Valley in Manbhum, a vast treasure of Jain monuments, too numerous to mention were destroyed. There are records that prove this.

Stories on pages 12 and 13 have been sourced from the Charkha Development Communication Network

Reporters hound innocent Roma

Valeriu Nicolae
Brussels

ON 10 April, a German newspaper, Sächsische Zeitung from Dresden reported that a group of "Sinti and Roma" were parked with their caravans on the fairground of the eastern part of Zittau. The newspaper wrote that the city was "tolerating" their stay. Their reporter quoted the director of the Mayor's Office as saying that the Roma do not cause any disruption of public order, that they will pay for their consumption of water and electricity and that the city administration will take charge of waste removal.

On 21 April, the newspaper reported that residents adjacent to the fairground were upset about garbage left behind by the Roma. A picture of the fairground with garbage was displayed. Towards the end of the story the reporter quoted the office of public order stating that the city did remove the refuse and the Roma paid for this, in advance.

Then on 23 April, the newspaper's reporter quotes a Rom as saying that his group arrived from India (!) and that they spent several months in Europe each year. He is further quoted as saying that his group does not want to annoy anybody. Once again, the director of the Mayor's Office explains that the city administration decided to permit the Roma group to stay after carefully evaluating the security situation and police officers will monitor the camp, daily.

On 24 April the Saechsische Zeitung reported that a group of drunken youngsters attacked a Roma group who had set up their camp in Grossroehrsdorf, cutting their electricity, and that the Roma left.

On 29 April, the mayor is quoted as saying that the Roma left without paying the guarantee requested by the municipality or the electricity bill. However, he expressed confidence of recovering the money.

According to a city counsellor the youngsters were worried that the Roma might endanger their "witch fires", fears which the mayor refuted as baseless. A social democrat explained that the youngsters were mere blockheads who could not bear the presence of caravans of French "gypsies".

Roma, potential disorder and waste. This is the line of reasoning the Sächsische Zeitung constructed. In comparison, the inept and biased reporters make the young "blockheads" look, in fact, pretty good. In the end, the Roma had to go and not to India, a place they left over 1200 years ago and surely not by car!

www.erionet.org

Who will punish US?

THIS column is a Letter From Europe, yet Europe at this moment, is inextricably linked to its cousin across the Atlantic. Try covering events here and you bump into Iraq at every step. American civilisation is Eurocentric, if one may use that epithet which implies the finer achievements of humanity, to describe the American Empire.

With the onset of the invasion of Iraq, I opened a new folder on my computer under the heading "War Crimes". The last two weeks have seen a substantial increase in this crammed folder. Students of international relations learn in their course 101 that the only principle in global politics and foreign policy is national interest. Likewise, the only guiding principle in business, they are taught, is profit. Combine the two and you have the ethos for post-industrial America and Europe. Morality and ethics have space only in grand back-thumping celebrations of history, very much in the desperate style of "Mother's Day" celebrations, in a society that has bid farewell to any real sentiment for the elderly.

We wait in vain for the mainstream western media to call a spade a spade and take the coalition forces that unlawfully invaded Iraq, to task. So far we have merely seen disbelief and shock. We have heard of damage control, apologies, resignations, reprimands, court-martials and fake photographs. European sensibility is swayed by their own national interest and economic well-being and by the fact that the victims in this case, Iraqi Arab Muslims have been dehumanized through a long historical process that started after the Battle of Poitiers was won by Charles Martel in 732 A.D. In Europe memory is long and rooted. The prospect of a Muslim invasion was such that centuries later the historian Edward Gibbon wrote a famous passage about minarets rather than spires in Oxford had the Muslims won. There is no identification with the victims as there would be, say, with white Australians, New Zealanders or Zimbabweans were they in situations similar to the Iraqis or the Palestinians.

"The techniques devised in the system, called R21 - resistance to interrogation - match the crude exploitation and abuse of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib jail in

Baghdad. It was clear from discussions with US private contractors in Iraq that the prison guards were using R21 techniques," said a former British special forces officer.

He added that British and US military intelligence soldiers were trained in these techniques at the joint services interrogation centre in Ashford, Kent, now transferred to the former US base at Chicksands.

"There is a reservoir of knowledge about these interrogation techniques which is retained by former special forces soldiers who are being rehired as private contractors in Iraq. Contractors are bringing in their old friends".

It becomes evident that British collaboration has gone beyond collaboration in an unjust war. It includes crimes against humanity that stretch from Bagram in Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba to Al Ghraib in Iraq and others that are yet to surface. So, how will the British population and the European people react?

At the end of the Second World War, there were powerful victors who could design the Nuremberg trials. Today, in The Hague there is

the ICC taking the Serbs and the Croats to task for their crimes against humanity. There are enough international laws under which this band of War Criminals can be tried but who will bring Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Geoff Hoon and the rest of the gang to trial? Who will charge Tony Blair and George Bush? None, except the European and the American people.

We have a beginning. Fifty two former diplomats in the UK followed by 50 former diplomats in the US have asked their respective governments to explain their role in the Iraq War and the Palestinian issue. Even the Economist is asking for the resignation of Rumsfeld. One can only hope that this trickle will become a flood and that lurking somewhere, there still is a spark of humanism left in Europe and the US. Note that none of the great religions were born in Europe. Spirituality, a foreign concept, was imported. Materialism has once again driven it away. Europe talks of 'humanism.' Let's hope this moral concept is not limited to the borders of the new European Union but will be applied to all of humanity.

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

It's mahjong at Three Gorges

Mu Lan
Beijing

THE "dearth of industry" has become a burning topic of conversation all along the Three Gorges dam's 660 km stretch from Yichang in Hubei Province to Xianfeng in Chongqing municipality.

At first glance all seems well. The dam's reservoir has filled to 139 metres, its turbines are humming smoothly. Money poured for resettlement has boosted infrastructure. New houses, roads and bridges crisscross. But factories and assembly lines are missing.

"With the filling of the reservoir and resettlement of local residents, the number of factories has declined from 243 to 35 in Fengjie county alone. The 'dearth of industry' has become more apparent and more serious," said Fengjie party boss Liu Benrong.

With most factories closed in Fengjie, annual industrial output has dropped from \$33 million in the late 1990s to \$18 million last year. Job losses have also been substantial. In the late 1990s, Fengjie's 243 factories employed 20,000 people. Now only 8,000 residents have jobs at the relocated enterprises, Liu said.

Fengjie is not an isolated case. About 220 kms upstream in Zhongxian county only 27 out of 101 factories

are being relocated. "The factories being lost to the reservoir are like our family property, accumulated over the past 50 years, and they represent a big sacrifice by Zhongxian's 970,000 people on behalf of the Three Gorges project," said Zhongxian county governor Du Heping.

With so many factories closed, tax revenues have slumped from an annual average of \$3.6 million to \$1.2 million. Zhongxian has a population of 100,000. More than 10,000 are unemployed said Du.

A nationwide campaign to attract industry to the Three Gorges area has met a lukewarm response. Apart from the Hangzhou based Wahaha Group, which set up a successful soft-drinks plant in the reservoir area, few companies have been tempted to move in. One county that had hoped to attract a porcelain manufacturing enterprise saw the plan fall flat because of a local shortage of pottery clay and of management and technical personnel.

"It's hard to get big or successful companies from other places to invest in the reservoir region because of a weak industrial base and poor transport," says Du. "In addition to those constraints, the biggest challenge for Zhongxian is a severe shortage of management and technical expertise. It's no wonder that many good companies are reluctant to come here."

Liao used to work at a fertilizer plant in Wuzhou. Now he idles on the banks of the Yangtze.

"I'm just killing time here fishing because of the terrible situation at my factory. The government's water pollution rules are so tough that almost all the big factories in Wuzhou have been shut down. The water seems clearer now, but so many people are out of work as a result," he says.

A government worker expressed concern about the economic and social problems in the reservoir area because of factory closures. "What can the jobless do? Sell trinkets on the street? Kill time playing mahjong?" he asked.

A senior analyst based in Chongqing said, "The governments in the reservoir area attached more importance to constructing beautiful buildings than to laying a solid foundation for the development of core industries.

"At the start of the Three Gorges project, policy-makers proposed moving the affected people out, resettling them properly, and helping them to get rich gradually, which was definitely a good plan. But unfortunately, actual practice does not appear to have gone in that direction," he said.

www.threegorgesprobe.org

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

B-117, Sarvodaya Enclave (First Floor) New Delhi-110017

Requires

TRAINERS AND RESEARCHERS

NGO working in the area of good governance and Human Rights requires trainers and researchers to promote access to information internationally and advocate for its broader implementation. The successful candidates will be part of a team working on right to information issues both in India and abroad.

Candidates must have

- (a) sound understanding of international instruments for the protection of human rights,
- (b) commitment to working on a good governance, democracy, anti-corruption and right to information issues and
- (c) familiarity with the legal concepts associated with access to information is an advantage.

Qualifications and experience

Applicants must be able to demonstrate:

- Sound academic background in law, political science, journalism or other related social sciences (tertiary degree a minimum, but post-graduate qualifications preferred and/or experience in their national public service). A high proficiency in written and spoken English and Hindi (knowledge of any other Indian language would be an advantage).
- Strong analytical, interpersonal and organizational skills, initiative and adaptability.
- Ability to work independently
- Work experience in a related area and previous advocacy an advantage.
- Proficiency on Microsoft Office Systems and net research.

As a member of the RTI team, you may be required to do the following tasks

- Providing training to stakeholders on RTI concepts and laws;
- Produce writing papers and articles suitable for publication in newspapers and learned journals
- Representation and advocacy in person
- Speaking at public events
- Website development
- Organising conferences
- Undertaking primary and secondary research;
- Assisting with project management including preparation of financial statements and preparing reports.

Salary

Commensurate with qualification and experience for each vacancy.

Applications must include

- Cover letter 1 page highlighting the candidate's claim
- Curriculum Vitae of no more than 3 pages
- Two writing samples of no more than 3 pages each
- Contact details of two references including their relationship to the candidate

and send by post/courier to the SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER so as to reach him by 15 June, 2004

NOTE: Incomplete application / electronic application WILL NOT be considered. The Initiative will only be in contact with those candidates who are short-listed for interview.

Civil Society

PERSPECTIVES

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

A new era begins in India

RAM GIDOOMAL



Through NR Eyes

surprisingly, Western observers, for language reasons, take their cue from Indian observers, who are usually city-based and upper-caste and know very little of the feelings of the lower castes.

So we have the Congress Party gaining a clear lead over Mr Vajpayee's alliance, and India will not ever be quite the same again.

DIVISIONS: In a way, this election was typical of India as it looks to the Diaspora community, and indeed to many in the subcontinent. Mr Vajpayee made a calculated gamble, calling the election early, in the expectation that the considerable growth and prosperity India has been enjoying would guarantee him a comfortable victory. He was defeated by the votes of the poorer Indians, to whom the benefits of an increased GNP had not trickled down. The result demonstrated deep divisions in Indian society, divisions that in recent years have been evident in such tragic events as the Gujarat atrocities.

Many of us in the Diaspora left India decades ago, and many more of Indian descent - such as my own East Africa South Asian community - have never lived in India. But we have family memories of past divisions and sorrows, like the bitter separation that made my own family refugees from Sind in 1947.

Yet we cherish a dream in our hearts: Gandhi's great vision of a secular society, a swaraj that will bring India's people-groups, faiths, communities and castes to live alongside each other in a peaceable, mutually respecting way. And in recent years many of us have grieved to see how far from that vision our Bharatmata has departed, as religious persecution and ethnic hatred have become commonplace in many parts of India.

The last government acknowledged the role that NRIs have in Indian affairs by declaring 9 January NRI day and initiating the Bharatiya Pravasi Divas. Hopefully that trend will continue and go on to celebrate the pluralism that is at the heart of the Indian experiment.

HEALING: But we cannot celebrate if we do not also heal our wounds. And in that task NRIs can and do play an important role. Simply being a Diaspora community can be a healing opportunity: I know of many situations in Britain where Indians and Pakistanis

WHAT a different world it was just a short time ago! I had no idea, when I accepted the editor's invitation to write a regular column, that I would be writing the first one as the story of the BJP's change of fortunes developed so dramatically and unexpectedly. Indeed, just the evening before Mr Vajpayee's resignation, Sky Television rang me requesting an interview the next morning to discuss the consequences of the expected hung election. Later the same evening they rang to say that they had decided to run with quite a different breaking story, and were cancelling the India

interviews. But next morning Sky was announcing that after early results Mr Vajpayee was resigning at that very moment. An era had come to an end, and like many others Sky had been taken completely by surprise. Not

surprisingly, Western observers, for language reasons, take their cue from Indian observers, who are usually city-based and upper-caste and know very little of the feelings of the lower castes.

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HEALING: But we cannot celebrate if we do not also heal our wounds. And in that task NRIs can and do play an important role. Simply being a Diaspora community can be a healing opportunity: I know of many situations in Britain where Indians and Pakistanis

from areas of high tension in the subcontinent work side by side. On neutral ground, with common tasks to do, they arrive at a measure of understanding that can be remarkable.

The process can happen by design, too. In 2003 in London we had a successful conference involving representatives of the stakeholder communities in the Gujarat conflict. At that conference and indeed in similar gatherings in the UK and in other parts of the Diaspora, three priorities were identified.

To identify cases where civil and human rights are threatened by community conflict, and consider how local conflict resolution could be extended through India.

To analyse the causes of conflict and human rights abuse, and how to protect and institutionalise the rights of every citizen.

To seek ways to bring truth and reconciliation, and to work for justice and peace in divided communities both in India and the Diaspora.

It was a Diaspora initiative, bringing together Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The 'jaw-jaw instead of war-war' approach works best well away from the arena of conflict.

After that London conference came a conference in New Delhi earlier this year organised by the India Development Trust, which was held in association with a similar conference organised by Promise of India. I attended both and spoke at the IDT conference on 'Diaspora Civil Society Partnerships in the Social Sector'. Also as a result of the London Conference, members of the Diaspora community were invited by Indian residents present to visit India and see situations for themselves.

It was a painful conference in many ways: many angry words were said. But the results, in the UK and in India, have been far-reaching. The contribution of NRIs in the economic area is well documented. The value of successful Diaspora individuals and communities, with large disposable income and business muscle, in creating a platform to speak abroad on India's behalf is also indisputable. But the role of NRIs as facilitators of reconciliation is less well known, and ought to be better known.

SOLIDARITY: India is entering a new phase of her modern history. Watching from afar, my hope is that the Diaspora community will contribute in whatever ways we can. For example, the risk to the economy is still great. The Diaspora

must call for stability in economic policies.

But my hope is that India and the Diaspora will move forward together to what Ram Narayan Kumar has called 'A wider solidarity ... to jointly work for the realisation of India's original vision of Swaraj.' There is a major role for the Diaspora both in being part of that solidarity and also in bringing it into existence. For example, it can be a voice calling for commitment by the new government to redress human and civil rights abuses under previous regimes. That could include calling for a Truth and Reconciliation in Gujarat - something to which people from South Africa could contribute their experience: a south-to-south Diaspora diplomacy!

Whatever the immediate future, and whatever the consequences of current negotiations in the corridors of power, I am sure there is a major role for the Diaspora as we move to a new era in India's long history.

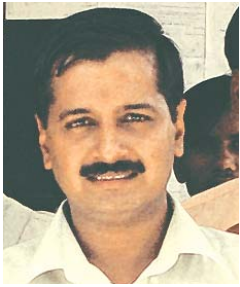
(Ram Gidoomal is a business of Indian origin settled in Britain. He belongs to the Christian People's Alliance and is a candidate for the post of Mayor of London. E-mail: ramgidoomal@blueyonder.co.uk)



SAAB Pictures

The system sponsors corruption

ARIVIND KEJRIWAL



The right to know

AN aspirant for a licence for running a Kerosene Oil Depot has to appear before a panel of senior officials of the Food Department for an interview. One friendly kerosene dealer told us that he was asked in his interview how he would run his shop with very low commissions given by the government. The kerosene dealer replied, "Jaise sab chalate hain, waise hi main bhi chala loonga (I will also run it just like everyone else)." And he got the licence.

Corruption in our country is not only an outcome of degeneration of moral values. Often, it is the result of the existence of such systems, within which one cannot operate honestly and is forced to indulge in corrupt practices. The whole world knows that there are systemic faults, which are forcing the players to indulge in large-scale corruption. Those in power also know where exactly the problem lies. Yet, no action is taken to rectify the anomalies.

The Public Distribution System is a classic case of large-scale defalcation of food supplies taking place with everyone's knowledge. A kerosene oil depot (KOD) owner gets a commission of seven paise per litre of kerosene sold. The average quota of a KOD is about 10,000 litres per month. Hence, if a KOD owner works honestly, he would get Rs 700 as commission every month! Out of this amount, he has to pay rent, salaries, electricity, phone etc. He cannot make a profit if he works honestly. But the commodity he is dealing in generates huge profits for him if he diverts it to the black market. A KOD owner is required to sell kerosene at Rs 9 per litre compared to the market price of Rs 18 per litre. Thus, he has huge incentive to divert supplies.

Not that the authorities are not aware of these anomalies. Parivartan met an erstwhile food commissioner with a complaint of black marketing against a kerosene dealer. We wanted his licence to be cancelled because this dealer would not give any kerosene to holders of ration cards and would siphon off almost the entire stock. But the sympathies of the food commissioner were with the kerosene dealer. "You should not go

A kerosene oil depot owner gets seven paise per litre of kerosene sold. The average quota is 10,000 litres per month. Hence if a kerosene depot owner works honestly, he would get only Rs 700 as commission every month!

overboard in your demands. They get such low commissions. They are forced to do all this. But I agree that everything should be done within limits." We were aghast to have to hear this argument. And do you know who has the powers to raise the commission of these dealers? It is the food commissioner himself. But still he would not do that.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has prescribed rates for each type of work it undertakes. These rates were set in 1997. Now, bids submitted to the MCD have to state how much below or above the prescribed rate they are. Using the Delhi Right to Information Act, Parivartan sought copies of contracts of all the civil works done by MCD in two resettlement colonies in East Delhi during the period 2000-2002. When we took a look at these contracts, we were surprised to learn that in most of the cases, the contractors had bid to carry out works at rates much lower than 1997 rates. This was simply impossible. If we took inflation into account, logically, a contractor should have bid for at least 20% above the scheduled rates. But it is impossible to imagine how a contractor would work at rates 40% below 1997 rates. An assistant engineer told us that in such cases the contractor and the concerned engineers know that no work would actually be carried out and the money would be shared among them.

Parivartan verified all these contracts and found that in 68 contracts worth Rs 1.3 crores, work worth Rs 70 lakhs had not been done though payments had been made. A detailed report was presented to the Chief Minister, Chief Secretary, MCD Commissioner and Delhi Police to investigate and book the culprits. When confronted by a journalist after a few months as to what action he had taken on that report, the MCD Commissioner said, "Parivartan is not aware of the ground realities. They should understand the problems of the contractors. The contractors have to under bid so much to get any work that it is almost impossible for them to do a proper work at those rates." Such a statement on camera by the Commissioner was shocking. If the MCD Commissioner cannot take steps to rectify this position then who will?

Both the officers mentioned above are known for their integrity. Yet, just look at their willingness to justify a bad system. Is it because every bureaucrat inherently becomes a status-quoist?

(Arvind Kejriwal is an officer of the Indian Revenue Service. He is on long leave from his job and runs an NGO called Parivartan.)

No one bothered about agriculture

SUMAN SAHAI

GENE Campaign conducted a small spot poll in the four states of Assam, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and UP, to see the candidates' perception of the main problems of their areas and whether agricultural development featured anywhere on the priorities of the major political parties. A total of 35 candidates from the main political parties in 12 parliamentary constituencies were questioned. These included Jorhat and Koliabor in Assam; Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Khunti in Jharkhand; Tonk, Sikar, Bhilwara, Alwar and

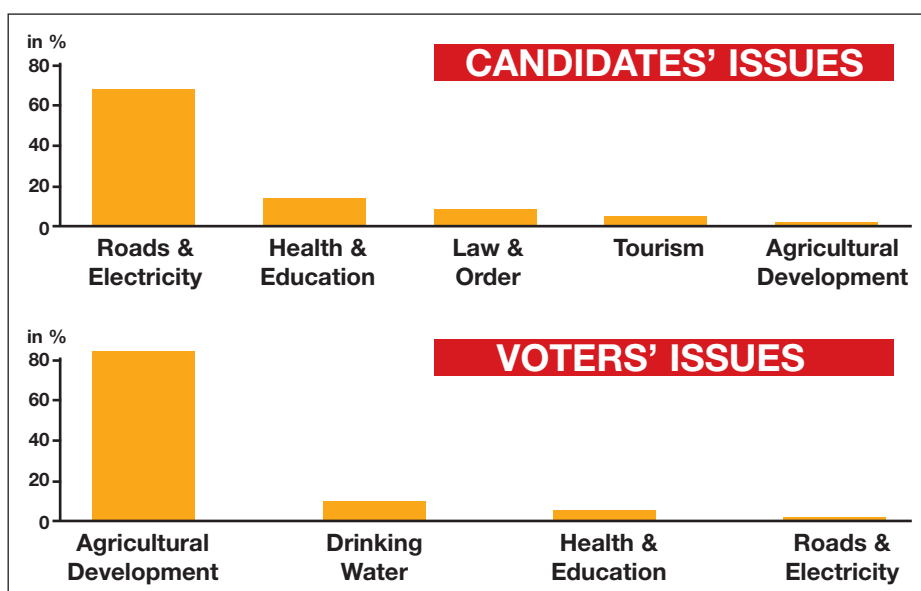
Jaipur in Rajasthan and Aonla and Shahjahanpur in UP. The candidates were asked two basic questions: What are the most important problems of your constituency and what would you address first were you to be elected?

The poll questioned 50 voters each in three to four assembly segments per parliamentary constituency. The voters in the largely rural constituencies were similarly asked what their most important problems were and what is the first thing they wanted their elected representative to do for them. The two graphs below show the mismatch between what the voters list as their chief problems and what the candidates would like to do in their constituencies, or at least what they profess they will do.

As the graph shows, agricultural development did not appear to be the principal concern of most candidates even though they were contesting from largely rural constituencies. Just two candidates of those surveyed, Amra Ram, the CPM candidate from Sikar, Rajasthan and Drupad Borgohain, the CPI candidate from Jorhat, Assam said that one of their main priorities is agriculture. Most candidates wanted to provide roads and electricity. Many wanted to promote tourism. Other responses by candidates included control of erosion (Assam) good administration, employment and 'beautification'. Many sitting MPs who were contesting the election claimed they had done everything that needed to be done and there were no problems in their constituencies. This was unsurprisingly, not echoed by the voters of their constituency.

Rural voters overwhelmingly listed agriculture development, as their major need. This category included factors like good quality seed, protection from spurious pesticides, agricultural machines and tools like threshers, markets to sell agricultural produce, better price for their produce, assured irrigation, training and extension facilities, treatment and recovery of wasteland. Drinking water was next, followed by issues in health and education. Of the main needs expressed, roads and electricity were last.

(Suman Sahai is president of Gene Campaign, New Delhi. Email - genecamp@vsnl.com)



Schools should not be businesses

ASHOK AGARWAL

THE Supreme Court judgment of April 27 in the Modern School case has far reaching implications for school education, not only in Delhi but for schools all over the country. The Supreme Court was primarily dealing with a case of rampant commercialisation of education and the exploitation of hapless parents by unaided recognised private schools in Delhi through fee hikes every year.

The Supreme Court also looked at how unaided recognised private schools were violating the terms of public land allotment. In particular, the court examined the condition of providing admission to 25% of children from weaker sections and granting them free education. This judgment is seen as a revolutionary step towards making education in private schools affordable for the common man and encouraging integration of children belonging to weaker sections in the elite schools.

It may be useful to know the background to this historic judgment. There are around 1500 unaided recognized private schools in Delhi that impart education, from lower kindergarten to Class 12, to around one million children or one-third of school children in Delhi. The majority belong to middle class and lower middle class families.

A small percentage belong to poor homes. A major reason for sending children to these schools is that the standard of education in government schools is so poor that even a poor parent does not wish to send his child to it. All government schools are not bad, though.

The private schools had been increasing fees and other charges every year, but in April 1997, these schools increased their fees between 40% and 400% on the pretext of paying higher salaries to their staff in anticipation of the Fifth Pay Commission's recommendations.

This sudden, arbitrary and exorbitant fee hike caused great distress to the hapless

The parents gathered in front of school gates, submitted representations, held meetings and demonstrations. The situation they were caught in, brought them together under the 'Delhi Abibhavak Mahasangh'. They resolved to fight against the exploitation of parents.

and unorganised parents of Delhi. They gathered in large numbers in front of school gates, submitted representations to the schools and to the government, held meetings and demonstrations. The situation they were caught in, brought them together under the common banner of the 'Delhi Abibhavak Mahasangh'. This new formation resolved to fight against the exploitation of parents.

Because of their agitation, the Delhi Government in May 1997 ordered inspection of the accounts of 16 private schools. These revealed that the schools were indulging in commercialisation of education but the government did not take any action and left the hapless parents at the mercy of the schools' greedy managements. Failing to get justice, the parents decided to raise the issue before the Delhi High Court through a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). The PIL by Delhi Abibhavak Mahasangh came up for hearing for the first time on 8 September, 1997 before a Division Bench of the High Court. The learned judges of the High Court issued notices to the Govt. of India, Govt.

of Delhi, CBSE, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and 32 unaided recognized private schools, named in the petition.

After the High Court issued notices to the respondents, the Delhi government promptly passed an order on 10 September, 1997, fixing the maximum limit of the registration fee, admission fee and caution money schools could charge. The Delhi government also directed the schools to utilise their accumulated reserves to meet the increase in salaries and if the money was found insufficient, the fees could be increased to the extent required after consultation with the representatives of parent teacher associations. The schools perceived this government order as a threat to their monopoly to loot the parents, and approached the High Court seeking quashing of the order. The High Court heard the PIL of the parents and the petitions of the schools together and finally

(Continued on page 20)



10th National Media Fellowships Programme, 2004-2005

"Giving Voice to the Unheard"

For Print and Photo Journalists

The National Foundation for India has a programme for young (upto 40 years), mid-career (5-7 years experience) and sensitive journalists, to research and publish articles / photo essays on issues of importance to ordinary Indians, their battle for a better life and to cover diverse aspects of development work viz., the working conditions of people, environment related matters and other social concerns.

The foundation offers eight fellowships of Rs. 1,00,000/- each. Women journalists from small newspapers with demonstrated capacity to publish well-researched articles/photo essays are encouraged to apply. One of the fellowships will be awarded to a photojournalist.

The last date for receipt of application is August 12, 2004.

For more information contact:

**Program Assistant, National Media Fellowships
NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR INDIA**

Core 4A, UGF, India Habitat Centre

Lodi Road, New Delhi 110 003

Phones: 91-11-24641864/65, 91-11-24648490-92

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NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND WORK

A national convention on the right to food and work will be held on 11-13 June 2004, tentatively in Bhopal. Organisations committed to the right to food and work are expected to join from all over the country. The main purpose of this convention is to share experiences of grassroots action for the right to food/work, and to plan future activities. This is also an opportunity to address the organisational issues that arise in building coordinated action for the right to food and work.

This will be an action-oriented event, with plenty of discussion groups, training workshops, cultural activities, and more. Potential issues for discussion include guaranteed employment, the public distribution system, mid-day meals, land rights, and judicial action for the right to food and work, among others.

This convention is a follow-up of earlier discussions held at the World Social Forum in Mumbai (January 2004). It is facilitated by the support group of the "right to food campaign", in collaboration with several country-wide networks such as the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS), Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA), All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR), National Campaign Committee for Rural Workers (NCCRW) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL).

The convention is being organised on a shoestring budget. All participants are expected to bear their own travel costs, and may be asked to contribute to subsistence costs, if necessary. Other costs will be met through voluntary donations with no strings attached.

If you are keen to participate, please send a line to right2food@yahoo.co.in or get in touch with any member of the "coordination team". Contact details for the coordination team, and the confirmed venue of the convention, will be circulated soon and also posted on the website of the right to food campaign (www.righttofood.com)



SAAB Pictures

A computer class in progress at Modern School, one of New Delhi's elite institutions

delivered a landmark judgment on 31 October, 1998. The High Court accepted the plea of the parents and rejected the arguments of the schools.

The High Court in the judgment concluded:

It is the obligation of the Administrator and/ or Director of Education to prevent commercialisation and exploitation in private unaided schools including schools run by minorities.

The tuition fees and other charges are required to be fixed in a validly constituted meeting giving an opportunity to the representatives of Parent Teacher Associations and Nominee of the Director of Education to place their view points.

The most significant aspect of the Supreme Court judgment is that it has finally set to rest the controversy whether the government has the authority to regulate the fees and other charges of unaided recognised private schools to prevent commercialisation of education. The Supreme Court has categorically held that the government has the authority to regulate the fees of unaided schools. The Supreme Court has gone even further. The court has directed the Director of Education to ensure that the schools to whom public land has been allotted at throwaway prices must comply with the terms of land allotment and ensure admission to students belonging to weaker sections.

No permission from the Director of Education is necessary before or after fixing tuition fee. In case, however, such fixing is found to be irrational and arbitrary, there are ample powers under the Act and Rules to issue directions to schools to rectify it before resorting to harsh measures. The question of commercialisation of education and exploitation of parents by the individual school can be authoritatively determined on thorough examination of accounts and other records of each school.

The Act and the Rules prohibit transfer of funds from the schools to the society or from one school to another.

The tuition fee cannot be fixed to recover capital expenditure to be incurred on the properties of the society.

The inspections of the schools, audit of the accounts and compliance of the provisions of the Act and the Rules by private recognized unaided schools could have prevented the present state of affairs.

The authorities/ Director of Education have failed in their obligation to get the

accounts of private recognized unaided schools audited from time to time.

The schools/societies can take voluntary donations not connected with the admission of the ward.

On the peculiar facts of these petitions there is no per se illegality in issue of the impugned circular dated 10 September 1997.

An independent statutory Committee, by amendment of law, if necessary, deserves to be constituted to go into the factual matter and adjudicate disputes which may arise in future in the matter of fixation of tuition fee and other charges.

The Government should consider extending the Act and Rules with or without modification to all schools from nursery onward.

The High Court by the same judgment also appointed a committee with Justice Santosh Duggal as chairperson to decide whether the increase of tuition fees and other charges during the period covered by the order dated 10 September, 1997 up to the beginning of the academic session in 1999 by each individual school was justified or not.

The schools appealed to the Supreme Court against this judgment of the High Court. The Supreme Court has now rejected the appeal of the schools and upheld the judgment of the High Court. It may be noted that the Delhi government pursuant to the judgment

of the High Court constituted the Justice Duggal Committee on 7 December 1998. The Justice Duggal Committee could not complete the task given to it by the High Court due to lack of cooperation by the government and the schools. Had the committee completed its task, the parents would have got their refund which is estimated to be Rs.800 crores from the schools.

However, the committee submitted its report on 31 July, 1999 to the government and made many factual observations on the devices being used by the schools to exploit the parents and made various recommendations. Interestingly, the committee observed that out of 142 schools examined, there were only two schools that were justified in hiking their fees.

The government, following the recommendations of the committee, issued order

dated 15.12.1999 prescribing among other things, the manner of calculating tuition fees and other charges under specified heads only. The schools also raised serious objections to this order before the Supreme Court and sought freedom to charge any amount without any limit from the parents in the name of quality education and expansion of education. The Supreme Court rejected this plea of the schools.

The most significant aspect of the Supreme Court judgment is that it has finally set to rest the controversy whether the government has the authority to regulate the fees and other charges of unaided recognised private schools to prevent commercialisation of education. The Supreme Court has categorically held that the government has the authority to regulate the fees of unaided schools.

The Supreme Court has gone even further. The court has directed the Director of Education to ensure that the schools to whom public land has been allotted at throwaway prices must comply with the terms of land allotment. The two significant conditions pointed out by the Supreme Court are that the school shall not

increase the rates of tuition fee without the prior sanction of the Directorate of Education and that the school shall ensure admission to students belonging to weaker sections to the extent of 25% and grant freeship to them.

It is to be seen what action the government will take against the erring schools to ensure that they roll back the fees and other charges to a just and reasonable level. The government must revive the Justice Duggal Committee by appointing another retired judge of the High Court as its chairperson to complete the task entrusted to it by the High Court since the exploited parents are eagerly awaiting their refund.

It is estimated that if the Supreme Court judgment is implemented, the present fee level will come down by 60%. It is also estimated that since 1997-98 till this year, the schools have unjustly charged an excess amount of nearly Rs.3000 crores from the hapless parents of Delhi. The parents are entitled to get this money back immediately. The ball is now in the government's court.

(The author represented the parents before the High Court and the Supreme Court)

La Marts girls win Slater at BCS this year

Rajroop Bhaduri
Shimla

SIXTEEN teams from various schools flung razor sharp arguments back and forth at the annual Dr. Samuel Slater Memorial Inter-School Invitational Debate, held at Bishop Cotton School, Shimla from 29 April to 1 May.

The teams were armed with intelligence and wit. Finally, La Martiniere School for Girls, walked away with the coveted trophy.

Every year as the winter chill wanes, Bishop Cotton prepares for its annual Slater Memorial debates. This event started in 1995, when the headmaster, Kabir Mustafi, felt it would be a good idea to host an inter-school debate so that students could exchange views and ideas in a friendly yet competitive way. He thought it best that students learn to talk rather than fight. Staff and students agreed and it was decided to name the debates in memory of the first headmaster of Bishop Cotton, Reverend Samuel Slater.

The Slater attracts interesting people from across the country who invest their time in judging the debates and making them a success. They also interact with the students. This year Jug Suraiya, the popular columnist and creator of the Dobyaman comic strip in The Times of India was the chief guest. Mr Suraiya held a workshop on creative writing and integrity in journalism.

In nine years this annual event has grown in popularity and respect. "It's the toughest and the most important debate in the debating calendar," said the team from Welham Girls' School, Dehradun. But the jousting and banter between the teams proves that the interaction is equally important. Friendships are forged, too.

"Slater is not just about debating. The level of interaction sustains all the way long after school," said Mrs. Dutta of La Martiniere Boys, Kolkata.

As soon as the teams arrived, tea was served. Everybody was in high spirits and felt refreshed after a convivial gathering with baked short bread from the school's bakery. During tea, basic instructions were given out and the draws were held for the debates. The teams, after receiving their topics, promptly got down to work.

There were 31 topics in all which included 'All evolution in music has been reactionary' for the first semi-final and 'Between our bureaucracy and the



The Slater teams. The Slater Memorial is easily the most important debate for schools in the country

judiciary, the average Indian is caught between the devil and the deep sea' for the second semi-final. For the final debate, the topic was, 'Imagination is more important than information for human progress.'

The next day, 24 debates were held. Each team had three debates to contend with. So the day was rather hectic for all the teams and the organisers. The teams showed strength of character, seriousness of thought and revealed a wealth of knowledge.

SCHOOL DIARY

Sushila Prabhudas, one of our teachers at BCS was very impressed. "They spoke astoundingly well and gave their subjects a great deal of thought, care and research. They had sharp analytical minds which immediately picked up flaws in the arguments of their opponents and tackled them with nerve," she said.

Four teams made it to the semi-finals. These were BCS-The Headmaster's Team, La Martiniere for Girls, Kolkata, La Martiniere for Boys, Kolkata and Welham Girls' School, Dehradun.

Both the La Martiniere teams from Kolkata emerged as toppers beating BCS and Welham's Girls' School in a very

closely fought competition. As the finalists prepared frenetically, the rest of the debaters and the judges were treated to lunch in town.

The final debate was a tough fight. In the end La Martiniere for Girls from Kolkata bagged the Slater trophy. Yasha Sharma from Welham Girls' School got the most promising speaker award.

The team of Cathedral and John Connon School got the courage in the face of adversity award and Chitra Chatterjee from La Martiniere For Girls was declared the best speaker of the debate.

After pleasantries and good wishes were exchanged and all the work was over, it was time to enjoy! A jam session was organised after supper. All the teams shed aside their worries to groove to the music.

"Slater really rocks," remarked someone from the Sri Ram School team, Gurgaon.

Every competition has winners and losers. This one too had its share of casualties. What was most surprising was that all the teams, the conquered and the vanquished had enormous smiles and were cheerful and friendly.

As our headmaster says, "Win with humility and lose with dignity."

(Rajroop Bahaduri is a student of Class 12 at Bishop Convent School.)

PEACEWORKS

What do you want to do in life?

Civil Society News
Kolkata

PEACEWORKS recently hosted the Jana Natya Manch (Janam) who presented their play Bolo Kya Banoge Tum for schoolchildren in Kolkata. About 15 to 17 members of Janam performed for students of 16 different schools.

The presentation at Future Hope, a boarding school for homeless boys, was an eye-opener. The responses of these boys were really sensitive and thought-provoking. Indeed they were the only audience who felt the play was unfinished and were eager to know what happened next.

Janam has asked the boys to write a sequel to the play which could be performed at a later date along with the original Bolo Kya Banoge Tum.

Janam is India's premier street theatre group.

Formed in 1973, the group has to its credit about 60 original street plays, with about 8,000 performances. Janam's street plays have been widely translated into virtually every major language of the country and some plays, like Aurat, Machine and Halla Bol have been performed in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Hong Kong, Canada and other nations.

The group survives on voluntary work and financial support from its audiences. The group does not accept corporate, governmental, or non-governmental grants or sponsorships.

Moloyashree Hashmi, Sudhanwa Deshpande, Uttam Halder, Brijender Singh Rupak Chauhan and Sandeep Khurana, came to Kolkata for the PeaceWorks programme.

Bolo Kya Banoge Tum is the story of a king and a slave. The king is the oppressor, the slave is the oppressed. The characters are stereotypical, and the

situations, at first glance, look simple. Yet, as students probed deeper and deeper, they were able to discover many layers and different viewpoints.

The story of the play had three episodes, each followed by a discussion with the audience. The discussions were conducted by Moloyashree Hashmi and after her initial set of questions, the interactive talks invariably took a new route every time, depending on the issues that the children took up and their responses. The length of the discussions was variable, but each tended to be about 15 to 20 minutes.

The children were engrossed by the riveting performance and participated spontaneously in the discussions. It was interesting to note the way they were able to link the fable to everyday life. The responses of the younger students were particularly interesting and candid.

SAY HELLO TO SHUJAAT GRAMMY KHAN

The Rain is really brilliant, but you cannot find it in India

Neelkantha Gupta

IT'S curious how, sometimes, something intrinsically Indian is difficult to come by in India, giving credence to the notion that we Indians recognise a home-grown product only after it's been given the nod by the West. Thanks to Lord Curzon, we learnt about the existence of the Taj Mahal. Had it not been for Cannes 1954, Satyajit Ray's Pather Panchali would have languished in a mouldy corner of the West Bengal Government archives. Good thing Beatle George Harrison decided to study the sitar - it took away the embarrassment from liking Indian classical music. So many feats of Indian civilisation owe their acceptance at home to the eclectic West.

The latest in this tradition is a remarkable album of music called 'The Rain', featuring delectable pieces played by Ghazal, an Indian-Iranian ensemble of three musicians: Kayhan Kalhor, Shujaat Hussain Khan, and Sandeep Das, on the kamancheh (an Iranian bowed spike fiddle), sitar and tabla respectively. People became aware of this album in India, I suspect, not because of the exquisite music, but because it got a Grammy nomination for the "Best Traditional World Music Album" - America's stamp of approval for good business done in the music world.

What made this album very special for me was Shujaat Khan - a person whom, and whose extended family, I have blindly, avowedly and unabashedly admired since my childhood. I heard Shujaat for the first time in 1969, when he was eight years old. His late father, the legendary Vilayat Khan had just concluded a memorable recital of Raga Mand Bhairav, accompanied on the tabla by the famous Samta Prasad, as the last performer of a night-long music festival in Indira Cinema in Bhowanipore, Calcutta. The audience wanted Ustadji to play Bhairavi, and he obliged, playing it in his inimitable way. All this while, as is a common practice in an Indian classical music concert, Shujaat sat beside his father on the dais with his uncle, the illustrious Imrat Khan and his sons, Nishat and Irshad.

After Vilayat Khan had put his sitar down and was getting up to take the final bow, the audience started clamouring in Bengali, "Amra Shujaat ke shunte chai; Shujaat ke bajate hobe!" (We want to listen to Shujaat; Shujaat must play for us!) Vilayat had an incredibly close and informal relationship with the Calcutta audience, and he simply had to give in to their demand. The awesome, chocolate brown, shining instrument was handed over to brother Imrat, who tuned it to Raga Yaman and gave it to

MUSIC THAT MATTERS



Shujaat, diminutive behind the great sitar. Size and age notwithstanding, Shujaat's fingers glided and flew over the fret board of this difficult instrument, producing music that only a seventh generation member of an unbroken family line of immensely talented musicians could produce. The audience exploded, ecstatic and rapturous. This is the impact the music of an eight-year-old boy had on a knowledgeable and exacting audience, and on me, a mere boy myself. Shujaat Khan's music still has the same effect on me...

'The Rain' has sold more than a million copies in the West - the sole criterion for a Grammy nomination. Earlier this year, I went from music store to music store in Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Bangalore, looking for the album. Not unsurprisingly, I couldn't find it anywhere. Either it had sold out and stores hadn't bothered to replenish their stocks, or it hadn't occurred to them to acquire it. Seeing my disappointment, my wife secretly

sat at my laptop and ordered it from Amazon.com. Within a few weeks, 'The Rain' was playing continuously at home. It was the best birthday gift I had ever got...

'The Rain' consists of three very attractive pieces: Fire, Dawn, and Eternity. Shujaat Khan and Kayhan Kalhor have sought out the common ground of their respective traditional repertoires and built their compositions around it. The commonality between the two forms is not unexpected given that much of the source of Hindustani classical music was Persia. Fire uses notes of the Asavari thaat of Hindustani classical music. To this thaat (parent scale) belong great ragas like Darbari Kanada, Adana, and Jaunpuri. The Persian answer to our Asavari thaat seems to be Nava. Dawn is based on Raga Kirwani, originally belonging to Carnatic music, but now equally popular in Hindustani classical music. The Persian mode Isfahan, much to one's pleasant surprise, corresponds to Kirwani. Finally, Eternity is woven out of the very lyrical Raga Khammaj, whose Persian equivalent is Mahur.

Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, the sarod maestro, once said that when he wanted to listen to sitar music, he always listened to Vilayat Khan. Now that our greatest sitar player is no longer with us, we have to turn to his son and legatee of the Imdad Khan gharana to experience sitar music at its best. 'The Rain' bears ample testimony to this. Shujaat's technical mastery of the sitar is of the highest order, the tone and melody is soul-stirring, and the sound of his sitar, a source of wonder. His amazing ability to emulate the human singing voice on the sitar, the gayaki ang, Vilayat Khan's gift to sitar music, is

nothing but pure magic. Kayhan Kalhor's mastery over his instrument is no less impressive. Listening to the two of them improvising on scales common to their traditions reinforces one's belief in the universality of music. The Indian and Persian styles certainly seem to have more similarities than differences.

Being a world-famous person's son, Shujaat had two options ahead of him: either to conform to the dictates of the great man and live in his shadow, or to strike out on his own, discover his real self and create his own musical style, and become an extraordinary musician in his own right. Shujaat opted for the latter, although not before mastering everything that his father had to teach him. He absorbed and internalized his formidable musical inheritance, combined it with vast talent, and emerged with a quality, standard and style so far unknown among the children of the giants of the Indian classical music world.

Clean up, siesta time is over in Goa

Colin Fernandes
Panjim

WHEN you go to Goa, what do you usually do? Hang out at the beach, catch some rays, maybe do a little gambling and then get drunk.

This time around, why don't you try visiting a spice plantation or a toddy tapper's distillery (in his kitchen) or get involved in a clean beach campaign?

The last three decades have seen rampant commercialisation of practically every tourist hotspot in this resort state and the government is looking to make a

change.

The pristine Arossim beach in Cansaulim, south Goa is an example...the resorts on the beach have to pick up after day picnickers. Although they don't expect you to join in, they do advocate a healthy respect for their own strip of beach. Lend them a helping hand.

This beach is one of the cleanest around. Select hotels, like the Heritage Village Club, one of the better three star joints, make sure to impress on each guest exactly how important the beach is. Although a public beach, the resort takes responsibility for the stretch they are on

RUCKSACK

and routinely sends its housekeeping staff out armed with brooms and pans to pick up cigarette butts and empty beer bottles. Clarence Farrel, general manager says the beach is their biggest attraction. "If we allow that to get messed up, we're not really doing good business."

The government is pitching in. Construction within 500 metres of the tide line is banned throughout Goa. Existing structures may remain, but no more will be allowed; shacks are

permitted only in pre-specified beaches.

Additionally, a local NGO with funding from the UK helps bring in and neuter stray animals especially cats and dogs. They also go around on 'snake and monkey alerts' rounding up these animals and then releasing them into the wild.

Last we heard they were in desperate need of an additional ambulance. Most resorts will have a small pamphlet about them, encouraging you to donate either time or money.

So don't just hang around. Get involved.

MEMORIES

A young Karwan in search of peace

NEHA KOHLI

IN April around 30 school and college going youngsters, between 13 and 20 years old, participated in an endeavour called *Meri Awaz Suno, Youth Aman Karwan*.

The Karwan was flagged off on April 7 and toured around 40 cities, towns and villages, covering a distance of 15,000 kilometres. Shabnam Hashmi, well-known activist with ANHAD, accompanied the children.

"We interacted with activists as well as people like Habib Tanvir in Bhopal," said Moyna, a member of Youth 4 Peace. In Jammu and Kashmir the Karwan did not conduct a press conference but interacted with the people. They spoke in schools in Lucknow, visited a Dalit basti in Nadiad and also went to a village near Jallandar in Punjab.

The overall reaction to them was positive, says Moyna. However, people were surprised to find that young people had strong opinions, especially on politics. In fact, Shabnam was often accused of instigating them!

The Karwan was attacked twice during the tour -- in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.

In Vadodra, the attack came during a press conference. Some VHP activists surrounded Shabnam and others and attacked them physically and verbally. They also tore the T-shirt of Manan, another Youth 4 Peace activist.

The Karwan faced another attack in Andhra Pradesh on the way to Vishakapatnam from Bhuvaneshvar. Their vans were forced to collide on the highway by a couple of motorcycles. Shabnam was injured in this accident and had to get stitches on her face and head. Some children were bruised rather badly.

Yet, in spite of these incidents, the spirit of the Karwan remained unbroken. It was indeed a revelation to see the antagonism that they witnessed in Vadodra, not only from the VHP but from the local media as well.

It's fiction, it's history

RITA ANAND



Romtha
Mahasweta Devi
Seagull books
Rs 250

HERE are many ways to tell a story of injustice. It's easy to overstate or understate, but then you run the risk of leaving your reader cold. To tell a tale, which touches the heart, is the forte of an accomplished raconteur who is a witness, an insider to the events she unfurls.

Mahasweta Devi's gentle satirical prose lures the reader into a world of people living on the margins, grappling with cruel diktats and meaningless social rules, foisted by a class of men with untrammelled power. Instead of revolution, there is silent submission. Society falls in line, each fearing for survival. Shadowed by death, yearning for freedom, one man tries to break away.

Romtha is such a story, written in blood. The writer delves into history, but weaves in a contemporary realism. In the twelfth century, during the reign of Lakshmansena, ruler of Gaur, the baidyas, a caste of physicians, emerged as an influential faction. The king was a fanatic promoter of Ayurveda. He bestowed land and slaves to physicians to cultivate exotic herbs. But they wanted beautiful humans to roast for medicinal oil. This too was granted. They were free to choose men sentenced to death. Such a man was called Romtha and the word was scorched across his chest.

Sharan means refuge. He was a beautiful young man, convicted for killing a woman he loved passionately. She was Gaur's most celebrated courtesan. Sharan is branded as Romtha, gifted to the physician Chandrasen. Even as he waits to die a horrible death, Sharan mourns for his dead lover. He longs to live but is forced to kill once again. Subhadra, a young widow, falls madly in love with him.

The story is set against the backdrop of Gaur's forests, rivers, lakes and social milieu. The impoverished young girls arriving in the city

with nothing to sell except themselves, the evil Gopal, chief of the guards, vested with informal authority to kill, the lovely courtesan trapped by a job she never chose, form a tapestry of real life people. Throughout, the writer shows deep empathy for women and the dilemmas they face.

Her pen does not judge. She does not say this is right or that was wrong. Instead she takes the reader through the story, telling as it happened, arriving at an obvious conclusion: true morality is called humanity.

Even today there are Romthas in our midst. The denotified tribes whom Mahasweta Devi has always identified with and spoken for. Branded by birth as criminals, living on the margins of society in free India, struggling against the might of the state, nomads and adivasis are yet to get their rightful place in India's democracy.

Although the writer says she writes about small people and their small dreams, her pen imbues them with size and the power to move the reader.

The ambience of the story and its canvas are reminiscent of the Gaur of yore. This is because the writer has an eye for historical detail. Reference to the Romtha practice is found in a book on social history by Durgacharan Sanyal.

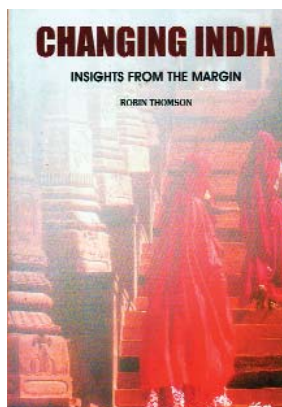
The book includes an interesting conversation the writer has with Naveen Kishore, publisher of Seagull books. In this exchange, Mahasweta Devi, gives a glimpse of how she writes and collects words and phrases, carefully culled from tribal lore or Sanskrit texts.

Like a roving reporter, her notebook includes important minutiae an academic historian might bypass: the detailed accounts of the expenses of conducting sati, utensils used by women in the old days, Marathi songs, lullabies and lines, a true encounter with a kolhati girl who tells the writer the amazing story of her life.

Although the book is a translation, the language seems to retain the flavour of the vernacular. As you dip in, the pace appears slow. But, like Mahasweta Devi's other books, you get caught in the engrossing tale.

As you turn the last page and slip the book back into your bookshelf, you feel a few lessons in life, in social history, in humanity have been passed on to you.

A nation's soul is its asset



Changing India
Insights from the Margin
Robin Thomson
BR Publishing House
Rs 150

IN this book, Robin Thomson argues religion can transform people and inspire them to help others.

He profiles the lives of Christians working for marginalised communities and analyses what motivates them. He found religion was the spark. They were inspired by

Jesus Christ and saw him as an ideal role model. They also desired to share their experiences with others

Many of the activists interviewed are well known figures in the NGO sector. For instance, Raj and Mabelle Arole, who run the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP) in Jamkhed, Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra. They are qualified doctors who spurned a comfortable lifestyle to work for the people. They taught villagers how to be responsible for their own health. In this process, the people learnt to be dignified, to work as a team and to undertake projects that would help all of them.

There is MC Mathew and his wife Anna who had a special child, Anita Susan. They started Ashirwad at the Christian Medical Hospital in Vellore to help other special children and their parents. Or Dr Iris in Malkangiri, Orissa who decided to stay on and work for the Koya and Bonda communities after her husband Paul, a veterinary doctor, passed away.

There are also individuals in urban areas. Like rock singer Ken

Gnankan, Director of ACTS in Bangalore whose spiritual search led him to take up environmental issues and start a popular programme on environment for school children. His starting point? This is God's world and we should care for it.

The author examines the spread of Christianity in the north-east and its role in fomenting militancy. He says missionaries stopped head hunting and slavery, but left tribal laws of inheritance and decision making intact. They were a steadying influence during long years of militancy, always rooting for peace and integration, writes Thomson.

The experiences of Indians in the diaspora who converted to Christianity make good reading. South Asia Concern was a meeting of minds of many Indians who genuinely sought to help society.

"When people are marginalised why not serve them?" asks Thomson. Converts say belief in Christ helped them overcome old habits and sustain new values. The writer argues conversion does not mean a change of culture, but of personal belief. It does involve conflict when marginalised converts no longer want to cower in fear before exploiters.

Historically, people have changed religions as a sign of protest or to signal to society that they think differently.

In recent years the role of religion has come under a cloud. It is misuse of belief and corruption which give religion a bad name.

Conversion itself is a democratic right. The choice of a religion, which can satisfy a personal quest for spirituality, is best left to the individual.

If a religion can help an individual become more caring and sensitive, the nation benefits, argues Thomson. Real change begins from within and a nation is as good as its people.

Thomson's point of view needs to be read, especially by people who have so far held a biased view of Christianity and conversion.

Development as good business

ASHOK KHOSLA

OUR country's economy has made enormous strides over the past couple of decades. Many of our fellow citizens live longer, healthier and more productive lives than ever before. Perhaps as many as 250 million Indians – a population comparable to that of North America or Western Europe – are now active participants in the global economy, having access to the benefits of modern science, technology and the world's production systems. From rising economic growth rates to record foreign exchange reserves, every day brings news that India is making rapid progress. Even the gods of the monsoon appear to be intent on helping us take our rightful place as a leading economic force in the community of nations.

Yet, more than 500 million of our fellow citizens exist more or less outside the "mainstream" economy, hovering perpetually in a state of stark survival or, at best, of basic subsistence. It is true that the estimates of professional economists for the number of "poor" in our country today vary from 350 million down to 180 million, depending on how they define "poverty" and how they count the numbers. However, even if we take the most generous of their definitions for the poverty line, many of these economists would find it quite difficult to live below it.

If globalisation is to benefit the poor, it can only do so where national policies are designed to redirect its forces from mass production purely for export to include also "production by the masses for the masses". Only thus can the goods and services needed by the poor be produced, and the purchasing power to access these be created.

The eradication of poverty needs very different approaches. First, of course, it needs some deep structural changes in society: grass roots democracy, land reform, access to livelihood resources and fulfillment of everyone's right to reasonable education and health care. Bringing about such change, even with a major struggle to overcome the opposition to it from the rich and powerful requires time. Bihar is the archetypal demonstration of this, but the prognosis is not much better in other states. In the meantime, it is also worth mounting an attack on poverty within the existing systems, highly resistant to change though they may be, to remove at least the most extreme forms of inequity.

To do this, technology and the marketplace must be transformed to serve the cause of what Mahatma Gandhi called *antodaya* – "putting the last first." This means that primary task of those concerned with sustainable development – public agencies, civil society and others – is together to create the conditions which generate the jobs and livelihoods that will enable the mass of people to stand on their feet, socially and financially.

Jobs in India, as in all other economies, are actually created by the small and medium (SME) sector, by the "informal" sector and – most of all – by the mini and micro enterprises that dot the countryside. Since rising productivity in agriculture means that the bulk of the 15 million livelihoods and jobs we need to put in place each year will have to be off-farm, it is these sectors that will have to take responsibility for getting our country to work.

The largest potential for livelihood creation, particularly for women and the marginalised, lies in the mini and micro enterprise. Micro enterprises, with one to five workers, and a capital investment of ten thousand rupees or less are suited to household industries that largely produce items for use in the local community. Mini enterprises, with five to fifty employees, and capital investments of several lakhs, are capable of using technology and marketing methods to reach beyond the needs of the local community and generate surpluses that enable them to grow and invest in further growth.

To be successful, micro and mini enterprises need a variety of support systems. And herein lies a fundamental contradiction.

After all, the very best in creativity and management expertise comes at a price

It is not only that the cost of creating products needed in the countryside is high. The

cost of delivering them is even more exorbitant because of inadequate infrastructure: few roads, little power and no connectivity.

But in a rural economy like that of India, the customer earns less than \$ 2 a day.

Clearly, there exists a massive disjoint between the cost of the goods and services needed by the poor and the prices they can pay for them.

One possible solution lies in bringing the costs of delivering a product or service down to the lowest possible level. The second lies in passing only its incremental costs on to the consumer. The third lies, of course, in raising the purchasing power of the customer.

The first solution is itself achieved by a combination of well-known business strategies: creating standardised products, franchising local production and delivery systems and building up high sales volumes. Within the constraints of the village economy, building up sales volume, can only be achieved by discarding conventional theories about focus on a single product line. It is the "country store" or super market that supplies an adequately broad range of goods to bring in enough customers who spend (possibly small) amounts on a sufficiently large number of items, which can cover its costs of operations and thus survive commercially. In this case, it is the "economies of variety" that substitute for the economies of scale that do not exist in a small and limited market. Such volumes do take time to build up to and the business must have staying power.

For local solutions to work, they need higher level support services: brand equity, technology and know-how, training, maintenance and marketing. These services cost money. So do all the front-end investments into research, infrastructure, startup and operationalising a business. Many of these business supports are available at little or no cost to urban industries. It is therefore justifiable to provide them for rural industries too. Consequently, the customer faces only the downstream recurring costs of production and distribution – probably the only type of subsidy that can be justified on any ground.

Both solutions need public resources for capital investments so that the incremental costs of each unit of product or service can be brought down to a level that is affordable to the buying public. This needs different time horizons, financing instruments and profitability expectations from those of today. After all, even in the US with far higher purchasing power among its consumers, rural infrastructure such as electrification was achieved with financing at 1-3%, with repayment moratoria of several years and breakeven expectations of 20 to 40 years.

And they need private sector inputs, too: operational financing, management efficiency and the ability to deliver results. In the longer run, realistic business analysis shows that even the dispersed rural market can provide commercially viable opportunities for many types of products and services.

This is why Development Alternatives and its affiliates such as TARA and TARAhaat have found it necessary to mix the public and the private, a pure anathema in conventional institutional design. The breakthrough lies in clearly separating the objectives from the strategies. In addition to commercial viability, the objectives for such an enterprise are primarily social, environmental and developmental. The strategies and methods used to achieve them, on the other hand, are purely business. And that means we need sources of capital that can accept longer time horizons for achieving profitability and possibly lower profits than are sometimes available in the market.

The Development Alternatives was recently selected for the Karl Schwab Foundation's Outstanding Social Enterprise Award for 2004.

(Ashok Khosla is director, Development Alternatives, New Delhi)



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Read us. We read you.



Suresh Sharma's mission is to rescue snakes from people. Here you see him introducing his snakes to children. *Civil Society* found him in Chandigarh.

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