

# The People's Movement

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News Magazine of the National Alliance of People's Movements

THE  
PEOPLE  
AND THE  
NEW  
REGIME

## **4<sup>th</sup> Bi-Annual Convention of the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM): Timbaktu May 22-24, 2004**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Bi-annual convention of the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) was held at Timbaktu Collective (Dist. Anantpur) in Andhra Pradesh on May 22-24 and concluded with a resolve to intensify nation wide struggle for the rights of dalits, adivasis, workers, farmers, fisherpeople and women, minorities and all other marginalized sections and against Globalization, privatization and communalism-casteism. The convention called for a new alternative water, forest and land policy rejecting forthwith the Interlinking Rivers Project and all such mega-projects and anti-people development. It resolved to shape the alternative development paradigm, and appealed the government to support them. The movements call upon the new government to initiate a dialogue before formulating a new budget or five-year plan process.

The role of People's Political Front, emerging out of the NAPM with other organization and forums, has assumed importance in this background. However it was felt that there is a need to further explore the various aspects of such electoral participation and strengthen the people's movement in all aspects of socio-political intervention.

The representatives of the movements from all over India chose the national convenors for the next two years. They include Aruna Roy, Medha Patkar, Thomas Kocherry, D. Gabriele, Geetha Ramakrishnan (TN), Sandeep Pandey (UP), Sanjay M.G., Ulka Mahajan (Maharashtra), Ms. Swati Desai (Gujarat), Sister Celia (Karnataka), Sawai Singh (Rajasthan), Ali Anwar (Bihar), Rajendra Ravi (Delhi), P.Chennaiah, Charles Meesa (AP).

### **Action Plans for NAPM**

- A seminar on River Linking will be held in Ahmedabad by Manviya Technology forum and NAPM Gujarat.
- NAPM supports Indo- Pak-Bangladesh Mahamilan by Hindu Muslim friendship forum
- Indo-Pak peace march from Karachi to Delhi is being planned with NAPM.
- The interface between organized and unorganized sectors of workers will be initiated at all levels to ensure the passing of the Umbrella Legislation for unorganized labor.
- November 21: world Fisheries day, Chalo Mumbai, A rally against globalization and Communalization and for 'Quit WTO', at Shivaji Park, Dadar, Mumbai
- November 21: Birth Centenary celebrations of veteran Socialist, S.M. Joshi.
- December 3: 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bhopal Gas Tragedy, Bhopal.
- NAPM is to initiate a nationwide campaign with unemployed youth.
- NAPM will form a "National commission on communalism" through a National convention against communalism to be held at Ayodhya.
- National convention on ILR and river valley organizations is being planned to strengthen river basin peoples' plans across the country.
- National convention on urban poor will be held in Delhi at the end of 2004 to evolve a strategy against the anti-poor urban plans and eviction
- A national convention on women participating in peoples' struggles associated with NAPM will be planned soon.



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### **ADB & World Bank**

On going through some of the articles in TPM, May-June, 2004, focussing on the dubious ways of Multilateral funding organisations, I recollect close association with couple of ADB projects 10-15 years back.

Ours was an Engineering Consultancy Firm active in industrial field since 1960. Since multilateral financial institutions like World Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB), apart from other competing countries had rushed to assist the newly liberated counties like Bangladesh, our natural attraction was to register our company with WB and ADB first. In mid 1990, we got an assignment to formulate a techno-commercial project for developing 21 secondary towns, spread across Bangladesh. In spite of our best performance and economy in operation, we could feel the undercurrents of marginalisation both by ADB experts as well as local authorities, in our subsequent efforts to bid for new projects.

The modality of project conceptualisation, and preliminary appraisal and approval for final launching with funding are almost similar in WB and ADB. While the former allocates itself high value projects, the latter confines to smaller projects – spread over wider regions. While WB is dominated by American influence, ADB is controlled mostly by Japanese investments. Obviously as creditors, WB and ADB do take enough precaution and guarantees at the highest Government level, with immunities and exemptions from the local taxes and duties apart from local judicial process. This is normally not made known to the public and even to the media.

ADB's activities in India have increased many fold since 1995, however the dominance of Western Lobby has to not decreased a bit. The convenience of corrupt officials in the local Governments is adding to this dilemma. Another fallacy is noticed in the ADB's policy of late. For ADB projects even in India, when the Indian consultancy firms intend to bid on their own strength, they are persuaded to form their own consortiums and then allowed to bid.

*P.V.Kulkarni, Mumbai*

### **Growing Disease in Sisoo trees**

I am a regular subscriber of your magazine. It is very helpful for my social activities. I want to draw the attention of your readers towards the growing disease in Sisoo trees, a vital problem, which is related to the farmers. In the north Himalayan regions, especially in North Bihar districts and some districts in U.P. the trees of Sisoo (*Dulvargia Sisoo*) has dried up in large numbers. Nothing has been done to check the spreading of the disease called Sukhaini, which occurs in Sisoo trees.

With the help of East Champaran Rights Collective, a community based organisation named as 'Pariyavaran Suraksha Samiti' was formed to fight their problems.

*Azar Hussai Ansari, Motihari, Bihar*

### **Primary Health and Education**

I am very happy to read the excellent article by Anil Sadgopal, 'Globalization and Education' (TPM, May-June, 2004). There has been a systematic attempt for last few years to distort entire education policy. Primary health and education are the issues, which the NAPM must give top priority and intervene at the policy level. Let us take this opportunity soon as the new government may be more receptive, at least in its initial phase. We must demand right to quality education for every child. Primary health and education must be looked after by the state as basic responsibility and these must be shielded from all impacts of the evils of Globalization and market economy.

*Suhas Kolhekar, Pune*

# When Democracy Flows From the Barrel of a Gun

The handover of power in Iraq on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 to an interim government led by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi has raised hopes as well as plenty of apprehensions. It comes at a point where the so-called "moral high ground," which the US government claimed to be acting from, had become so visibly shaky that getting out of this quagmire as fast as possible appeared to be imperative. Passing on the buck to a severely destroyed country and parading a handcuffed Saddam Hussain to be tried for thirty years of crimes against humanity appeared like a convenient solution. There is no doubt that the invasion in Kuwait in 1990 and three decades of atrocities against the Kurdish population as well as Iraqi dissenters need to be prosecuted. But the question seems to be by whom? Is there any power holder involved whose hands are less soiled?

After not a single weapon of mass destruction has been brought to light in the war on Iraq and the connection with the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> attack also remains in the realm of foggy speculation, the financial and moral expenditure of the war has started to hit home. The horrifying human rights violations on prisoners of war in Guantanamo Base in Cuba and in different prisons in Iraq, most notorious Abu Ghraib, have led to the recognition that what was going on was not an or aberration but, to considerable extent, "standard procedure" as Brigadier General Janis Karpinski and others have acknowledged. It has been alleged that Army Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez and senior officers of the US army in Iraq were well aware of what was taking place on Tier I A in Abu Ghraib. By

"handing over power" the role of the US will become less visible, though there does not seem to be any military disengagement. We hear that on July 1, Iraq would still have 130000 foreign troops on its soil and 14 "enduring" US bases. It is highly disturbing that the ambassador to Iraq is John Negroponte, earlier US Ambassador to the UN. Negroponte was Ambassador to Honduras in the mid-eighties and was instrumental in helping the counter-revolution in Nicaragua to overthrow the Sandinistas. He is known to have closed his eyes to severe human rights violations in Central America. It is even more disturbing that the new Prime Minister Ayad Allawi is after the heart of the CIA, and is a far cry from what the UN envoy to Iraq Lakhdar Brahimi had in mind when he was looking for Iraqis with integrity and influence for the job.

Apart from the violence and the direct political manipulations, there are two major aspects, which make the constellation in Iraq extremely complicated and confusing. Both these aspects are intertwined. One aspect is no doubt the oil fields and the concept of development under globalisation, which makes oil the most hotly contested resource in the world (before we pass on to the World Bank predicted war over water). The other aspect is the politico-religious constellation, especially the Shiite uprisings, and in some places the unity of Shiites and Sunnis against the invading forces. Voices from upper echelons in the American intelligence system maintain that Ahmed Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress, for long time a favourite contact of the Americans (also a cousin of Salem Chalabi, who is the director of the war-crimes tribunal against Sadam Hussein), has been a double agent used by Shiite Iran to trigger the eager hawks in the US into the Iraq war to bring about a Shiite uprising and finally a Shiite government in Iraq. His right hand, Aras Karim Habib, a Shia Kurd, is known to have been deeply involved with Iran. We also hear the American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh being quoted that Israel is now investing in the balkanization of the region by carving out an "independent" Kurdistan in northern Iraq. The neo-conservatives in the US are said to plan to amalgamate Mosul and Kirkuk into a Kurdish zone. Kirkuk is the most important oil centre in Iraq. The common interest between US hawks and Israel is the divide and rule politics to control oilfields and prevent any Arab or Islamic unity.

The situation is dangerous and volatile. The decades old struggle of the Kurds—who are scattered across Turkey, Syria, Iraq and part of Iran—for a common identity and for nationhood has been a chronic casualty in this international power game. Likewise, the secularism of the Baath regime, which has been an antidote to sectarian struggles in the region, has lost credibility because of autocratic and dictatorial ways of exerting power.

Though many old Baathists now return as administrators and school teachers, secularism and Arab internationalism have lost credibility and support among ordinary people. They can be overwhelmed by fundamentalist sectarian contestations. The “development” of the country as well as its “security” are more and more left to private companies. Forms of democratic organization in which people can express their basic needs and fight for them have been dislodged by decades of dictatorship and a most unwarranted war led by the self-appointed guardians of democracy in Washington D.C. There is only a slim hope that weaponisation of daily life may decrease in this phase of transition and that a return to a semblance of peace may help new democratic forces to emerge.

G.D.



# Reservation for Progress

The moment the government thought of introducing some kind of measures for reservations for Dalit, Adivasis and backward classes in the private industry and services, the corporate world swung into action and created big hullabaloo. So much so that the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, the only state which passed legislation to this effect, had to water it down beyond recognition. The Central government seems to have backtracked on the issue.

The capitalists magnanimously concede that the reservations should be confined to public sector only. In reality, the backward classes have a small representation in the government sector and much smaller in the decision making capacity. Accordingly, in 1995, there were hardly 10% Dalits in class 'A' positions. Now, with the spree of privatization and globalization, the public sector is being squeezed day in and day out. If private sector is going to occupy major ground of economy – as they wish it – they also should also bear the responsibility towards the social goals.

In fact, the Indian corporates are the most regressive of the lot throughout the world. Even in the United States, the citadel of capitalism, the corporates have voluntarily implemented the policy of affirmative action, thereby absorbing the indigenous Americans, Hispanics and Blacks, as per their proportion in the population. In the 1980s, the American media realized that it had only 2% of the Blacks and other minorities. So, it has been consciously recruiting candidates from these minorities, taking special measures for training and capacity enhancing. Now, the American media has minority candidates in 8-9% of positions.

However, Indian industrialists hanker after all the concessions, incentives from the state; they want the state to provide land, infrastructure, tax concessions, export subsidies et al; but they do not wish to cooperate with the goals of the Indian state. That is atrocious and should not be tolerated at all. Often, the capitalists raise the phony issue of 'merit', as if all the candidates from the SC/ST and backward castes were buffoons and thrive only on state patronage. That

assumption is uncalled for and smacks of contempt for the people. What merit do the product of the capitation fees and management quota fellows have?

It is a pity that the Indian industries and services stand deprived of the intelligence, efforts and accomplishments of over 60-70 % of the population of this country. We have not used their capacities, skills, and creativity in the areas of arts, sports, industry, services, commerce, research and other sectors of economy and social life. Had it been so, Indian industry and commerce and other sectors would have become more capable and competitive. Indian conglomerates are ready to bow before the dictates of the World Bank or WTO, but are weary of utilizing the capacities of our own people.

The reservations in the private sector will be a positive step, not only a patronage for the sake of the Dalits and Adivasis, but also for the progress of our nation. Therefore, not only the organizations of the backward classes, but all the trade unions, students unions and people's movements need to press for the reservations in the private sector.

S.S.



# A Temporary Respite

To narrow down the analysis of the Lok Sabha election results to merely a mandate against the policies of the previous NDA government would be a bit adventurous. As even claimed by the then opposition Congress party, NDA had only pushed the cart of reforms and disinvestments ahead, which the former had set in motion a decade or so back. The only difference between the two parties is that while the BJP openly abetted communal polarisation of the society, incited and justified the communal violence, Congress remained 'secular.'

At best, this is a victory of better poll management, pre-poll alliances, and hardwork. In hindsight, a similar tactical approach and openness towards other parties by the Congress would have prevented the NDA government from forming the government in 1999.

No doubt that the policies pursued by the NDA government had a staggering effect in almost all crucial sectors – from agriculture to education. It had 'toxified' the society and tried to meddle with the foundations of a secular and democratic state.

The new coalition government would not have been any different in their economic priorities and in conceding to the conditions of the IMF-WB-WTO trio had the Left played only an insignificant role. With a historic 60+ seats in its command, however, the Left became a key player in the formation and continuance of the new government. Their better understanding about the people's issues, in comparison with other parties would prevent the government from taking any drastic anti-people steps. This is applicable not just at the Centre, but also in states like Andhra

Pradesh where the Left is in alliance with the Congress. The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Rajashekhar Reddy's statement that the state would not give in to the conditionalities of the World Bank (The New Sunday Express May 16, 2004) too is very significant in this context. One is not ignoring the fact that the policies of the Left ruled states like W.Bengal have at many times been against the interests of the toiling people like hawkers and fisher-people. However, owing to a better relationship with the working class and the poor, and being a party based on an ideology, the Left has performed better in comparison with other mainstream parties and desisted from religiously following the path of globalisation without questioning it, or blindly following the dictates of lending agencies.

Merely having a secular touch alone won't benefit the rural and the working population of this country. It needs to have a people-centric agenda. The recent budget has shown some hesitant steps towards that, but the government was quicker to allay the fears of the stock market. People with corrupt backgrounds reigning high offices is not only unethical but the performance of their duties would always be under the shadow of suspicion. There cannot be any compromise on certain Cs of our politics – Corruption, Criminalisation, Corporatisation and Communalism.

Communal forces taking a back seat in this largest democratic and pluralist nation-state of ours is a respite. Nevertheless, the civil society has to be more vigilant to keep the communal forces from trying to inflame more violence to regain their lost ground. The recent statements by the leaders of BJP and RSS point towards this possibility. The defeat of Vajpayee was also the defeat of a moderate BJP. The way he was hand-twisted when he spoke (though late) against Modi-sation is a clear indication where the BJP is heading to. Unless the new government abstains from 'soft hindutva' and the civil society is vigilant to defeat the ploy of the communal forces, the coming days could see further communal polarisation.

J.A.



Dear Readers,  
We invite your responses. Pleaes email them to <themovement@riseup.net> or post it to: The People's Movement, c/o National Alliance of People's Movements, Haji Habib Bld, A Wing, Dadar (E), Mumbai- 400 014

# The People and the New Régime

**The political atmosphere is agog with expectations as the new government by United Progressive Alliance has assumed charge in Delhi. Particularly, various organisations and groups concentrating on the issues of secularism and anti-communalism are pinning their hopes on the new rulers. Similarly, the people's movements and organisations will have to crystallise a set of comprehensive alternative policy frameworks in each sector of development and political economy. We are beginning to discuss contours of such policies from this issue. The activists, experts and organisations / movements are welcome to contribute to such a debate, which may lead to the evolution, in concrete terms, of an alternative policy for development.**

## The Elections and the People's Movements

Surendra Mohan

***It is not beyond the capacity of the people's movements to unitedly prepare a charter of the people's aspirations, in a convention to be held for this purpose. They should put it before the public and the Government.***

By raising the equity limit of private capital in airports and reducing rates of interest on small deposits, including workers' provident fund, the new Government has shown that on economic issues, it might continue the policies of the outgoing Government. The priority which the Finance Minister P. Chidambaram gave to meetings with industrialists and brokers of the Stock Exchange showed how his mind was working. He has recently met the workers' representatives, but has yet to find time to meet with agricultural workers and tribals. While the survival of the Government depends totally on the Left Parties, the latter will not be in a position to topple it, for no one is prepared for a fresh election. Nor would the Left Parties wish to be clubbed with the opposition BJP. This, then, is a big challenge before the People's Movements.

On the other hand, the BJP has triumphed in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and has registered a big advance in Karnataka where it has won 18 out of 28 seats in Parliament. In fact, in this State as also in Assam, the presence respectively of the Janata Dal (S) and the Asom Gana Parishad has effectively stalled its triumphal anti-incumbency sweep. However, the BJP has suffered major reverses in U.P. where it has been reduced to a mere ten seats from twenty five, Bihar where its seats are only five as compared to twelve and Haryana where it has retained only one out of five seats. In Delhi, Haryana, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh, it has secured one seat in each case, while in Tamilnadu, there was total rejection of the AIADMK and the BJP. It has lost seats in Orissa as well.

However, these figures do not give a true picture in several States. In U.P., for instance, the BJP's share of the vote was 22%, while that of the Congress (I) was only 12, though the latter captured 9 seats. Although the NDA, as a whole, came down to 187 seats from 304, the loss in the share of poll is less than 2%. That is, if the threat of the continuation of old economic policies still looms large, the other threat of communalism has not been checked effectively. It is, however, a credit to the votes in Gujarat that the BJP was made to lose six seats from among the 20 it had won last time.

Chidambaram was a Minister not only in the Congress(I) Governments in the late '80's and early '90's, but served as Finance Minister in the Government of the United Front. Even in his last term, he had succeeded in persuading the Government to introduce the WTO-intended amendments in the Indian Patents' Act of 1970. He also saw to it that the Insurance Regulatory Bill which sanctioned the induction of foreign capital in that sector is introduced. They were defeated then as the BJP opposed them, but when the latter assumed power these measures were passed with the



## Cover Story

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support of the Congress (I). Moreover, Chidambaram is in excellent company with Pranab Mukherji who had signed India's future to the WTO regime. The Prime Minister's dispositions are no different, if one goes by his record as Finance Minister in the Congress (I) Government. It appears that none of them has heard the political message of the election results in 1996 and 2004: that their favourite economic reforms have driven both the Congress (I) and the NDA out of power.

Whether it is the interlinking of rivers, or the control of local communities over natural resources, the old policies are bound to continue. It is a welcome development that the infamous POTA is going to be repealed, but most of those arrested under the Act will continue to be prosecuted under it. Other repressive measures will stay; for most of them had been promulgated when the Congress (I) was in power. The elections this time were more expensive, and there is little doubt that this trend will grow. As for the removal of corruption, one has to watch whether the promises made in the Common Minimum Programme will be respected.

All this means that the people's movements will have to continue their protests and agitations. Yet, the big victory that the people have scored by ousting from power a Government, which was communal to the core, has been shunted out. While the Congress (I) led United Progressive Alliance will not admit it, the people's movements like the NAPM, Azadi Bachao Andolan, Bharat Jan Andolan, Rashtriya Ekta Parishad, kisan organisations and the trade unions played an important part in mobilising public opinion against the NDA Government.

Had the Left Parties joined the Government, they could have certainly influenced its policies. Yet, they should, along with the Samajwadi Party, and more so with the people's movements, build powerful public pressures against those policies of the Government which are anti-poor. The spirit of the conventions and demonstrations held in March 21-23 and November 6 in 2001, and those on August 8 and 26, against the WTO and related policies must be revived. The trade unions have already presented their charter of demands to the Finance Minister. It is not beyond the capacity of the people's movements to unitedly prepare a charter of the people's aspirations, including the vast work force in the unorganized sector of the economy, in a convention to be held for this purpose. They should put it before the public and the Government.

All the work done by our movements has benefited those who are not fundamentally different from the old regime, barring communalism. This situation could repeat itself if the UPA's administration causes disillusionment among the people, and the people's movements decide to help the people in throwing it out. It was this realization, though a very belated one, which had led to the creation of the People's Political Front, announced in a public meeting in Mumbai on March 3, barely six weeks before the commencement of the elections. Now that there are five years available (barring early elections), this task has to be attended to

immediately. Actually, in consultation with all like-minded elements, it must start functioning in a month's time. The agenda will have to include electoral reform, which cannot be limited to state funding of elections. For, it is the real upper limit on the funding, which has to be brought down.

Unemployment, displacement of large communities, and environmental pollution have to get the prime focus in our programme of struggle. The anti-WTO programme and the issue of re-imposition of quantitative restrictions on imports and other measures to assist the farmers to secure remunerative prices shall be an integral part of this agenda.

Desaffronisation of education and provision of quality education to all children will remain in our view. Yet, the primary focus must not be diffused by making out a very big agenda.

The main objective of the Congress (I) will now shift to gaining a majority on its own in the general elections to be held after five years. This, too, will not be less dangerous, as it could bring back the dynasty and its undemocratic ambitions. Its first target is Uttar Pradesh where it deems the Samajwadi Party to be the main hurdle to its growth. While this Party has done nothing on the economic front to cheer us, its contribution, and that of the BSP, in pulling down the BJP to its dismal score of 1989, cannot be minimized. The Congress (I)'s confrontation with it can only strengthen the BJP, again. The Congress (I) believes that the BJP gained from the diminution of its strength, though the fact is that from 1969 onwards, the Lok Dal led by Charan Singh and inclusive of the bulk of the socialists had replaced the then Bharatiya Jan Sangh and later the BJP as the real challenge to the Congress Party.

*(Surendra Mohan is the editor of Janata, and a senior Socialist. Email: surendrasurendra@hotmail.com)*



# Secular Tasks of the New Government

Asghar Ali Engineer

*Minorities have high expectations from the UPA government: the reforming of the education sector, police, and a ministry for minorities to facilitate their overall development.*

The new United Progressive Alliance Government (earlier called United Secular Alliance which was more meaningful) has been welcomed by all progressive and secular forces in the country. The victory of this alliance has proved to be liberative for the minorities and the oppressed people of India. The NDA Government led by the BJP was not only communal and anti-minorities but also pro-rich and anti-poor to the extreme. Even the Amnesty International Report made public on 26<sup>th</sup> May has lambasted the Indian Government for its poor human rights records particularly in Gujarat. Now even the BJP and Shiv Sena leaders have admitted that they lost because of the Gujarat carnage.

It is for this reason that the minorities in particular have welcomed the new government, particularly so as it is backed by the Left forces whose secular credentials are unimpeachable. Thus, this government certainly inspires confidence among minorities and the poor. However, this initial confidence has not only to be sustained but also to be strengthened through proper action. The Congress has always been ideologically secular but lost its secular orientation during the last days of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and began to be dubbed as the 'B-team' of Hindutva Party BJP. The minorities began to be alienated

from the Congress until they deserted it after demolition of the Babri Masjid during the Prime Ministership of Mr. Narasimha Rao.

Once Congress lost the confidence of minorities, particularly the Muslims, it lost power at the Centre and could not regain it until it could win the Muslim confidence again. The Congress had to work hard to convince Muslims again to regain their confidence. Now let us hope the Congress will not go off the course. It will also have to take steps to inspire confidence among them. It should be seen as a party sympathetic to the problems of minorities. For that, a number of steps will have to be taken, some of which are suggested here.

## Ministry for Minorities

It would greatly inspire confidence among minorities if a ministry of minority affairs is created and some minority leader of integrity is put in charge of it. In fact, one of the Congress leaders from Maharashtra, Mr. Gurudas Kamat, has also made this suggestion. All minorities like the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains should be included under it. All put together these minorities constitute more than 20 per cent of Indian population. Indian Muslims alone are around 150 million.

The ministry can study many of the problems facing these minorities, which are of huge proportions. Today no government ministry even monitors data and indices pertaining to these minorities. The Gopal Singh Commission Report prepared during the eighties, which had painfully collected data on minorities was also put in cold storage and its recommendations were never implemented. The data was collected during early eighties and hence has become totally outdated. The Report, prepared after a lot of hard labour, was not even tabled in the Parliament. When I spoke to the then Prime Minister V.P. Singh about it in 1990 he was not even aware of its existence.

Had there been a full-fledged ministry, such reports would not have been wasted like this. It is true that there is a minorities commission but it has hardly any powers. It has often been described as a toothless tiger. Its functions under the Welfare Ministry and its budget is also controlled by this ministry. Thus the Commission is totally at the mercy of the Welfare Minister. It has hardly any priority for the ministry. Since I was on one of its sub-committees, I know its plight very well. And the NDA Government appointed a BJP man as its chairman. What sympathy such a person would ever have for minorities. The very psychological orientation of BJP members is anti-

## Cover Story

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minority. This was very much demonstrated when Mr. Trilochan Singh, the Chairman of National Minorities Commission, gave certificate to Narendra Modi Government in Gujarat when the Muslim carnage was taking place in 2002 and when the National Human Rights Commission was lambasting Mr. Narendra Modi. So much for the credentials of the NMC.

However, it may take time to take decision for setting up a ministry for minority affairs, which is also bound to generate political controversy with the BJP in opposition. Meanwhile it is suggested that the National Minorities Commission should be strengthened and should be made statutory. Today it has no statutory powers at all and its recommendations are not binding on the government. Often its reports are not even tabled in the Parliament. The NMC must be given statutory powers and its recommendations should be made binding on the government. This should be done as early as possible as it is a long standing demand.

The NMC should also be asked to gather fresh data on the pattern of the Gopal Singh High Commission and suitable recommendations should be formulated on its pattern, and these recommendations should be implemented to uplift the economic and educational status of minorities. This should be given top priority. In fact reliable data on all India pattern about minorities is not available and in the absence of such data no suitable policies can be made.

### Education

The other suggestions relate to communalisation of education. Even during earlier Congress and other regimes no serious efforts were made to de-communalise our school textbooks, particularly relating to history. The BJP campaign for Ramjanambhoomi would not have succeeded to such an extent if our history text-books had not been what they are today. The British rulers had designed our history textbooks to divide us and rule over us. These textbooks were never seriously revised and made genuinely secular so as to de-communalise our education system.

It is for this reason that you find educated middle class people who avail of these faulty textbooks much more communal than the poor illiterate masses. Our education system makes them communal and injects communal ideas into their minds. One can hardly fight communal forces if the education system is not thoroughly reformed. The education system should be devised to inculcate secular rational outlook, on one hand, and, respect for all religions, on the other. Unfortunately, the education system is producing communal bigots instead.

The text-book reform is an urgent need and should be attended to on priority basis. The Human Resources Ministry under the leadership of Arjun Singh should pay attention to this task. This will really strengthen our secular polity and would permanently checkmate communal forces from capturing power. The BJP rode to power on the basis of Ramjanambhoomi issue and this

issue in turn became so powerful because of the mind-set created by our textbooks. It is a difficult task but a first step must be taken by appointing a suitable commission, which can thoroughly examine all textbooks taught throughout India and then suggest steps to reform them. Education is a concurrent subject and, therefore, should not be difficult to devise them for whole of India. Of course regional considerations would be there and guidelines could be given for states to prepare these text-books suitably.

There is another important area, which needs urgent attention. It is the textbooks taught in the some 32 thousand RSS-run Shishu Vihars. These schools do not take grants from government, but that does not mean they should be free to teach what is totally contrary to our constitutional values. Their textbooks are highly objectionable and inject poison against minorities. We have examined these textbooks and what is written therein will never be permitted by any secular government.

Similarly, if one finds any objectionable material being taught in madrasas too, steps should be taken to remove such objectionable material from madrasa textbooks also. So far I have not found any objectionable material, but our study may not be thorough and madrasa text-books should also be thoroughly examined. No institution, public or private, should be allowed to violate the spirit of the Constitution. Thousands of students study in these private schools who grow up with hatred towards other religions because of such textbooks and thus it becomes very easy to communalise polity.

Such a step to de-communalise our textbooks will strengthen our secular foundations. Unfortunately it has remained a highly neglected area and, as a result, we have witnessed thousands of small and big riots throughout the post-

independence era culminating, of course, in the Gujarat genocide. Much of this could have been avoided if we had the courage to reform our textbooks right after independence. Now at least, after having paid a heavy price, we should not hesitate to take this much needed step on top priority.

### Non-communal Police

Another important area of reform is functioning of the police. Since police are also educated through these very

institutions, they also get easily communalised. I have seen that in the police training colleges there are no orientation lectures on secularism. The policemen handle communal riots with such communalised mind-set and, as a result, they tend to be anti-minority in their behaviour. Various inquiry commission reports, particularly the Madon Commission and Srikrishna Commission Reports on Bhivandi-Jalgaon of 1970 and of Bombay riots of 1992-93 have severely castigated the role of the police in these riots. In the Gujarat carnage of 2002, it was even worse and yet no steps are being taken to effectively de-communalise the police. The UPA Government should pay urgent attention to this problem as well. We have much to learn in this respect from the Left-Front Government in West Bengal.

*(Asghar Ai Engineer is the Director of Centre for Study of Society and Secularism. Email: csss@vsnl.com)*

# No End to Farmers' Suicides

Devinder Sharma

***The corporate powers, with the help of their breed in every political party, are bent upon corporatization of the farm sector, which needs to be resisted. Instead of cosmetic changes, fundamental revision of farm policy in India will prevent farmers from suicide.***

Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y.S.Rajasekhar Reddy is in a quandary. Since he took over as the chief minister on May 14, more than 300 farmers have committed suicide. This was the official death toll in the suicides register until June 25. Unofficially, the death toll is estimated to be much higher.

The spurt in farmer suicides, which has unfortunately failed to move the state as well as the Congress-led Coalition at the Centre, is the outcome of the utter neglect and apathy of the erstwhile Chandrababu Naidu government in Andhra, voted out after nine years in power. The situation in several other states, including the frontline agriculture states of Punjab and Haryana, and even in the left-ruled West Bengal and

Kerala is no better. What has meanwhile baffled the new government is that the spate of suicides shows no signs of ending even after it announced a series of routine package—free electricity and more credit—aimed at relieving farmer's misery.

The package also includes an ex-gratia payment of Rs 1 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased, and Rs 50,000 for a one-time settlement of the loans of indebted farmers. The erstwhile government too had started paying an ex-gratia grant of Rs 1 lakh to the affected families after suicides were initially reported in 1997-98. After giving the assistance to some 250 farmer families, the payments were stopped on the plea that such ex-gratia would prompt more farmers to take their lives.

Although the newly-elected government of Andhra Pradesh (and followed closely by Tamil Nadu) has moved in quickly by announcing free power to farmers, what is more depressing is that the governments are clueless of the reasons that force farmers to commit suicides. Nor is there any effort from the so-called distinguished agricultural scientists, economists, and social scientists to come out with proposals to put an end to this shameful blot on the country's image. The reason is obvious. No one has the political courage to point a finger at the real villain—the industrial farming model that shifts the focus to cash crops and thereby plays havoc with sustainable livelihoods.

### Naidu Model

Mr N Chandrababu Naidu was swept away by a tidal wave of angry farmers. The small and marginal farmers, in tandem with the landless labourers who

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constitute nearly 80 per cent of Andhra's 80 million people, gave their verdict: the industry-sponsored economic reforms are anti-poor. In Karnataka too, where the farmer suicide rate is equally high, the over-emphasis on technology had only alienated a large percentage of the farming populations from economic growth and development. Both the States had relied heavily on the British consultancy firm, McKinsey India Ltd., to draw the blueprint for economic reforms. In addition, McKinsey's services are also being utilised by West Bengal for re-designing its model of economic growth.

Blindly aping the World Bank model of agriculture (as suggested by McKinsey India Ltd.), Karnataka and Andhra had pumped in huge finances to push an industry-driven agriculture that has not only exacerbated the crisis leading to an environmental catastrophe but also destroyed millions of rural livelihoods. The biggest tragedy being that both the States had turned into a national capital of shame for farmers' distress, made more visible through the increasing rate of suicides in the rural areas. Making cheap credit available to these marginal farming communities, as has been announced by the Finance Minister, will not be helpful. What these poor and marginalised need immediately is income support.

In reality, Andhra as well as Karnataka were only making it smoother for the industry to move into the rural areas. A.P.'s *Vision 2020* document talked of reducing the number of farmers in the state to 40 per cent of the population, and did not have any significant programme to adequately rehabilitate the remaining 30 per cent of the farming population. The objective was to promote the commercial interests of the agribusiness companies (read foreign financial institutes and international bankers) and the IT hardware units. All benefit would have accrued to these companies in the name of farmers. In fact, these two sectors, along with biotechnology, were being heavily subsidised in the name of efficiency and infrastructure whereas the poor farmers were being divested of their only source of income – their meagre land holdings.

Andhra in reality was fast turning into a BIMARU state (an euphemism for backward states). Thousands of farmers were migrating every season looking for menial jobs in the urban centres. Mofussil newspapers in the heartland of the *cyberstate* – that's how Mr Naidu wanted the state to be called – were full of advertisements inviting people to mortgage their gold and silver belongings. Livestock deaths and the plight of dalits and other landless and marginalised no longer adorned the headlines. Farmers were asked not to produce more rice (the staple food) as the State had no place to stock it. Farmers' suicides had become so common that Mr Naidu had actually sent teams of psychiatrists to convince them against taking their own lives.

Believe it or not, daily wage workers in AP can still be hired at a price that their counterparts in Bihar would scoff at. And yet, the ignorant media despised the maverick political leader Laloo Prasad Yadav for taking his state – Bihar – to economic backwardness whereas Mr Naidu was showered by all kinds of accolades. Such was the extent and level of poverty

that AP also topped the country in the percentage of women entering prostitution and trafficking. Mr Naidu on the other hand ignored the writing on the wall and went about holding web conferences with his bureaucracy much to the chagrin of the national media, which painted him as the poster boy for economic reforms.

The Naidu model has failed. It also means failure of the McKinsey model of economic development. To talk of 'Naidu Plus,' as some economists have said, indicates the level of arrogance among a school of economic thought that refuses to see anything except the industry.

### ...In Every Party

No wonder, newspapers have already quoted the secretary general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Mr Amit Mitra as saying "economic initiatives in the IT and services sector should be extended to the rural areas and to such industries as food processing and rural industry." Unfortunately, the industry refuses to accept that it was because of its own over-indulgence that Mr Naidu paid a heavy price. In addition, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the newly emerging biotechnology industry, were the beneficiaries of the state's largesse in the name of improving agricultural productivity and enhancing rural incomes. The new government has focused on agriculture but refuses to look for the real causes behind farmers' distress. All its efforts are directed towards convincing the markets that *sensex* will not be allowed to slip any further.

The tragedy is that while the farmers have delivered their verdict, the economists and policy makers are not willing to accept it. The nation is not only clueless but does not even want to know how to resurrect agriculture and farming. This is where the

politico-economy equations have gone wrong, this is where the Indian democracy has reached superficial heights. The CII and FICCI have already ensured that their breed of economic thinkers and supporters are in each political party. The tragedy therefore is that the line between the ruling party and the opposition has blurred. Both follow the same economic prescriptions that have no connection with the ground realities. The Congress-led coalition too will easily fall into the trap of pushing for more economic reforms, and provide the same direction for the agriculture sector that Mr Naidu falsely banked upon.

The ground realities are far removed from the rhetoric and the statistics that have bred immunity against compassion. We are all

part of a global food system, which perpetuates poverty and deprivation. The food industry makes tall claims of the nutritious diet that it churns out, and millions are dying of obesity and related problems. We make tall claims of improved technology for agriculture by pushing stark realities of increasing indebtedness, growing poverty, resulting human suffering and hunger from the public glare. We are, therefore, in reality, the cause behind hunger and the resulting farmers suicides. Behaving like an Ostrich is surely not going to eclipse hunger and death from the politico-economic radar screens.

It requires policy makers, agricultural scientists, academicians and even the civil society groups to first accept the fundamental flaws that force farmers to the gallows. All it needs is determination—both political and scientific—and there is no reason why farmers distress cannot be turned into a scourge of the past. Cosmetic changes otherwise will force farmers to continue taking the fatal route by drinking pesticides.

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# The New Electricity Act

## A Serious Threat to Social Fabric

Subodh Wagle

***There is a strong case for a review of the New Electricity Act to safeguard interests of common people. Though the new government has promised to review the Act, it has to be pursued vigorously and make people understand implications of such a step.***

### Background

The new government at Delhi has many tasks on its hands. However, the unfinished agenda of the power sector reform presents some of the most unenviable tasks before it. In this short article, the focus is on the challenges created by the new Electricity Act 2003, which provides the core guidelines as well as the legal imperatives for the path this government will have to take. The discussion on the act is more opportune at this juncture, as the

Common Minimum Plan (or CMP), accepted by the new government and its outside supporters, promises a review of this act.

The new act has been highly controversial—to say the least—even before its enactment. Though there was considerable discussion on various drafts of the act, the debate remained restricted only to the policy and industry circles and the people in general or civil society organizations were never taken into confidence during the debate. The act was passed by the earlier NDA government in quite a hurry, introducing some very biased provisions in the last phase without any discussion. The Congress party—then the main opposition party—also allowed the act to pass, with the promise from the NDA government to bring in amendments at a later point of time.

Though both the major parties at the time were committed to power sector reforms, and accepted the new act as the symbol of the reforms, none have bothered to explain to people the actual impact and implications of the act for various sections of society, either before the enactment or after. Even the political parties, trade unions, and other organizations, which opposed the act failed to engage the society in a serious debate on the act.

The review of the Act promised by the new government, thus, provides a new

opportunity for these dissenting organizations to make another effort to understand the implications of the act and take their case to people.

### Distinct Features

The crucial importance of this act stems from many of its distinctions. For example, first, the new act is an omnipotent umbrella legislation, which will guide the power sector almost single-handedly. All the three previous acts stand repealed with the enactment of this act. Even the state-level acts will have to be amended in accordance with this new central act. Second, the new act brings in many fundamental, comprehensive, and near-irreversible changes in many aspects and components of the power sector, including the conceptual core, legal frameworks, the institutional and responsibility structures, and procedures for functioning. Third, as a result of such changes, the act has many, severe, and long-term implications for the interests of many sections in society and those of the society as a whole.

The fundamental change in the conceptual core of the act is a good example. In the understanding of Indian policy frameworks, electricity was conceived hitherto as an essential input for leading human life and for development. Hence, to get required electricity at an affordable price was considered as the right of every Indian citizen. The new act completely changes this implicit understanding about electricity and sees electricity as a commodity to be traded at a price dictated by the 'market' forces. This implies that those who could afford the 'market' price would buy the electricity as much as they want and those who cannot afford the price may not get the required electricity. As a rider to this, it is also accepted that, if the government finds it necessary, it can provide subsidy support to needy 'consumers', but from its own finances.

### Implications of Key Provisions

Before going to a detailed discussion of the overall impact of the act, it would be useful to have a brief look at some of its important provisions and their implications. Through its various provisions, the act enables all the state governments to 'unbundle' and privatize the state electricity boards. Though privatization is left to the discretion of the state governments, the act makes the partial unbundling mandatory by requiring the state governments to separate out the transmission and load dispatch operations from the generation and distribution operations.

The act also ends the monopoly in the distribution function. Now, it is possible that two different utilities lay two distribution networks in the same geographic area and compete to supply electricity to the same set of consumers. As far as rural areas are concerned, cooperative bodies, non-governmental organizations, local self-government bodies (i.e., Panchayat Raj institutions) like Zilla Parishads, or private 'franchisees' can undertake distribution of electricity. Similarly, 'stand-alone' (independent of the local grid) systems of generation and distribution of electricity are encouraged to

operate in rural areas.

The act creates 'escape' opportunities for the big consumers to get out of the common electricity system through three routes. First, the act not only de-licenses the 'captive' power generation but also expands its current definition, in effect opening up the floodgates for bigger consumers to set up their own plants individually or jointly. Second, the act also completely de-licenses the generation operations. So, now any person can set up a generation plant, provided it has the necessary environmental and safety-related clearances. Third, the act now allows electricity traders to buy electricity from a generating plant owned by a first utility, then transmit and distribute the electricity through the networks owned by second and third companies, and finally supply electricity to a fourth party. To make these 'escape' provisions operational in reality, the act requires—in mandatory manner—that all the transmission and distribution utilities shall give the right of passage to the electricity of any other company or consumer, without any hindrance.

The transmission (which will be in the hands of a public-owned company for some time at least) and distribution companies will surely get some 'wheeling charges' for carrying electricity for other consumers. However, these big consumers will be spared of all the 'stranded' or 'extraneous' costs, which the small and medium consumers will have to pay, because they will be captive to the local regulated utility. These 'stranded' costs would include the very high burden of the T & D losses as well as the costs of the past blunders such as the contract with private generators (or IPPs) like Enron. In addition to this 'escape' from the burden of the 'stranded costs', the big consumers 'owning' their 'captive' generation plants will also be able to totally escape from the

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burden of cross-subsidy to the poor consumers.

Some big consumers—other than the owners of the ‘captive’ plants—will be paying the special ‘cross-subsidy charge’ for some time. (It is recommended that the state regulatory commissions will reduce this cross-subsidy charge gradually.) However, these consumers will not have to bear the burden of paying for the cross-subsidy enjoyed by ‘poor’ (i.e., those getting subsidy) consumers from the entire state. This is because the Act prescribes that the big (‘escapee’) consumers will have to pay ‘cross-subsidy charge’ only to cover the ‘cross-subsidy’ burden of the consumers in the area of their distribution utility.

There are suggestions that the state-level electricity boards be broken down into many separate companies for rural and urban areas, in order to make the urban companies competitive. Considering the skewed geographic distribution of ‘big’ and ‘poor’ consumers in the urban and rural areas, the number of ‘poor’ consumers with the company operating in the urban or industrial areas is going to be limited. As a result, the ‘big’ consumers in the urban-industrial areas will have to pay very low ‘cross-subsidy charge’. On the other hand, for the companies operating in the rural areas, the number of ‘poor’ consumers will be large and the cross-subsidy burden will be heavy. However, the number of ‘big’ consumers capable of bearing this burden will be small. This will put these companies into a financial tailspin.

It is argued by many in the government that the new act still leaves space for the state governments to introduce higher ‘electricity duty’ for the ‘big’ consumers in the urban-industrial areas. It is argued further that the revenue from this extra electricity duty will be useful in offsetting the setback suffered by the ‘poor’ consumers due to withdrawal of the ‘cross-

subsidy.’ Though this is legally possible, it defies the logic of political economy. This is because the convergence of interests of two big players—viz., big private (less likely to be public-owned) companies and the big consumers—will lead to reduction in the ‘electricity duty’ as fast as possible, if it is allowed to be levied at all. In fact, similar ‘political-economy’ pressures will work on the regulatory commissions also for reduction in ‘cross-subsidy charges’ as fast as possible. It needs to be noted in this context, that these two big players, in fact, have together worked to shape the new act in order to allow the ‘big’ consumers to ‘escape’ the stranded costs and extraneous burden and go to the ‘big’ private power companies.

As these ‘big’ consumers will be able to ‘escape’, the small and medium consumers as well as the regulated monopolies serving them will have to take the entire burden of these ‘extraneous’ costs. This pro-big and anti-poor manner of sharing of the burden of these costs makes this entire act essentially regressive in nature.

### Social Fragmentation

Let us see the overall impact of the new act on the society as a whole. Our analysis indicates that the act will break down not only the electricity sector but also the entire society into the following four segments: (a) ‘big’ (industrial and commercial) consumers, (b) medium and small urban consumers, (c) medium and small rural consumers, (d) ‘non-consumers’ who are yet to get electricity for their homes or farms.

The big consumers are obviously going to get huge benefits due to this act. They will escape the inefficiencies of the present system as well as the stranded or extraneous costs, which the other consumers will continue to suffer from. They will obviously use the grid and—using their economic and political clout—will get priority treatment in accessing the grid. However, these consumers (especially those other than the ‘super-big’) will have to deal on their own with the tactics played by the big power companies, in absence of the regulators.

The second segment is of the medium and small urban consumers. The act does not mandate any privatization per se. However, because of the heavy concentration of high-consumption consumers with higher paying capabilities, these are the areas of high and guaranteed revenues and hence are immensely attractive to big private power companies. As a result, these companies will, in the near future, put immense pressure on the state governments to carve out these areas into separate companies and then privatize them. Though there is higher potential for competition in such areas and though the act allows it, the big companies will not allow the real competition to take place in practice. As a result, these consumers will effectively be the captive consumers of the private monopoly in the area.

These private monopolies are supposed to be under the control of the independent regulatory commissions. However, the current experience of



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the commissions in India (especially in Maharashtra) in regulating the private power companies does not inspire confidence that the medium and small consumers will be protected by these commissions against the profiteering of these big companies. Thus, these consumers will be at the mercy of the big private monopoly companies. Especially the small and poor consumers in urban areas will surely suffer from high tariffs as well as from the neglect and injustice at the hands of the monopolies. But, their resistance to the high tariff, neglect, and injustice will also be dealt with an iron fist by these companies through 'franchisees' having good muscle power.

The third segment will be of the medium and small rural consumers. The nature of consumers in the rural areas has typical features, which are quite opposite to those of the urban consumers. The rural consumers are geographically dispersed, have low average consumption, and have low paying capacities. As a result, these areas have not only low revenue potential but also have overstretched, overburden, and poor-quality grid. Moreover, they will have a very high burden of the cross-subsidy. In effect, the rural areas are not at all attractive for the private companies. Thus, while the urban areas will get privatized, the distribution function in these areas will either be left with the remaining public-owned, state-level power company or will be transferred to the Zilla Parishads, NGO's, or cooperative organizations. While the old, public-owned power company will be completely dispirited, very few of these new types of organizations will possess the financial, technical, and other capabilities as well as discipline required to run an electricity distribution operation. As a result, there is every danger that these utilities serving the rural consumers will be pulled into a vicious cycle of "low revenue—no scope for improvement—increased problems—lower revenue." Eventually, this might lead in many areas to bankruptcy of the utilities and cessation of (or extremely bad) service to consumers. Thus, one can see clearly that, as a logical conclusion of the Electricity Act, the future for rural consumers is bleak.

The 'non-consumers' from the fourth segment who are yet to get connection to their farms or homes will be in a worse shape. The central government is promising very high capital support to state governments and local utilities to establish supply of electricity to these consumers. But, there will be hardly any incentive for the old or new distribution utilities to serve these consumers on a continuous basis. As a result, there will be strong demands for continuous supply of consumptive subsidy from the central government for supplying power to these consumers. The central government is obviously not ready for this. In a nutshell, as a result of the new Electricity Act, these 'non-consumers' will have to wait for supply of electricity for a long time to come.

Apart from this social segmentation, the particular nature of the Indian electricity sector poses a peculiar problem. Most plants generating electricity as well as the resources used by them are located in the rural areas, whereas the revenue for the sector mainly comes from the urban-

industrial areas. The old structure of the sector somehow maintained a balance between the interests of these two areas. The new act not only destroys this balance, but also—being hugely biased in favour of the big consumers in urban-industrial areas—creates clear imbalance. As a result, this segmentation of the electricity sector as well as that of the society as a whole is bound to result in social fragmentation and social strife. This is not a hypothetical scenario. One only needs to remember that the political activists from Vidarbha region, reacting to the tariff hike for farmers in their region, had threatened to disturb the grid lines coming from the plants in their region.

### Opportunity and Responsibility

It is unfortunate that the government has failed to inform public and civil society organizations about the impact of the Electricity Act before or after enactment. However, it is more unfortunate that, despite some information from media and other organizations, the civil society organizations, especially the left parties, non-party political organizations, and federations and alliances of grassroots organizations failed to act on this very serious threat to the public interest. Though the trade unions from power sector are quite active, they do not have public credibility, which is necessary to turn their resistance into a wider struggle. Thus, the picture is considerably bleak and the only way out is to put pressure on the central government to change the act in a fundamental manner. The announcement of the new government to review the act and provision of this review in the Common Minimum Plan of the new UPA government is possibly the last opportunity to do this.

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# People's Health Charter

*A slightly edited version of the important declaration on the right to health prepared by the People's Health Campaign.*

Standing in firm opposition to a system of Globalization and market capitalism the new health charter reaffirms inalienable right to and demand for comprehensive health care that includes food security; sustainable livelihood options including secure employment opportunities; access to housing, drinking water and sanitation; and appropriate medical care for all; in sum - the right to **Health For All, Now!**

We declare health as a justiciable right and demand the provision of comprehensive health care as a fundamental constitutional right of every one of us. We assert our right to take control of our health in our own hands and for this the right to:

- A truly decentralized system of local governance vested with adequate power and responsibilities, provided with adequate finances and responsibility for local level planning.
- A sustainable system of agriculture based on the principle of *land to the tiller* – both men and women – equitable distribution of land and water, linked to a decentralized public distribution system that ensures that no one goes hungry
- Universal access to education, adequate and safe drinking water, and housing and sanitation facilities. A dignified and sustainable livelihood with a clean and sustainable environment
- A drug industry geared to producing epidemiological essential drugs at affordable cost

- A health care system which is gender sensitive and responsive to the people's needs and whose control is vested in people's hands and not based on market.

## We oppose

- the destruction of means to livelihood and appropriation, for private profit, of natural resource bases and appropriation of bio-diversity.
- the conversion of Health to the mere provision of medical facilities and care that are technology intensive, expensive, and accessible to a select few.
- the retreat by the government from the principle of providing free medical care, through reduction of public sector expenditure on medical care and introduction of user fees in public sector medical institutions, that place an unacceptable burden on the poor
- the corporatization and commercialization of medical care, state subsidies to the corporate sector in medical care, and corporate sector health insurance
- coercive population control and promotion of hazardous contraceptive technology which are directed primarily at the poor and women
- the use of patent regimes to steal traditional knowledge and to put medical technology and drugs beyond people's reach
- Institutionalization of divisive and oppressive forces in society, such as communalism, caste, patriarchy, and the violence, which led to destroying peace and fragmented solidarity.

## *In light of the above we demand that:*

1. The concept of comprehensive primary health care, as envisioned in the Alma Ata Declaration, should form the fundamental basis for formulation of all policies related to health care. The trend towards fragmentation of health delivery programmes should be reversed. National health programmes be integrated within the Primary Health Care system with decentralized planning, decision-making and implementation with the active participation of the community. The focus should be social, ecological and community based measures.
2. The primary health care institutions be placed under the direct administrative and financial control of the Panchayats and Gram Sabhas and provision of free and accessible secondary and tertiary level care be under the control of Zilla Parishads.

The essential components of primary care should be:

- Village level health care based on Village Health Workers selected by the community and supported by the Gram Sabha

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- / Panchayat and the Government health services which are given regulatory powers and adequate resource support
- Primary Health Centers and sub-centers with adequate staff and supplies for quality curative services at the center level itself with good support from referral linkages
  - A comprehensive structure for Primary Health Care in urban areas based on urban PHCs, health posts and Community Health Workers under the control of local self government such as ward committees and municipalities.
  - Enhanced content of Primary Health Care to include all measures which can be provided at the PHC level even for less common or non-communicable diseases and integrated relevant epidemiological and preventive measures
  - Surveillance centers at block level to monitor the local epidemiological situation and tertiary care with all speciality services, available in every district.
3. A comprehensive medical care programme financed by the government to the extent of at least 5% of our GNP, of which at least half be disbursed to panchayati raj institutions to finance primary level care. This be accompanied by transfer of responsibilities to PRIs to run major parts of such a programme, enhance capacities of PRIs to undertake the tasks involved.
  4. The policy of gradual privatisation of government medical institutions, through mechanisms such as introduction of user fees even for the poor, allowing private practice by Government Doctors, giving out PHCs on contract, etc. be abandoned forthwith. Failure to provide appropriate medical care by public health care institutions be made punishable by law.
  5. A comprehensive need-based human-power plan for the health sector be formulated with a much larger pool of paramedical functionaries and basic doctors, in place of the present trend towards over-production of personnel trained in super-specialities. Major portions of undergraduate medical education, nursing as well as other paramedical training be imparted in district level medical care institutions. No more new medical colleges to be opened in the private sector. No commodification of medical education. Steps to eliminate illegal private tuition by teachers in medical colleges. At least a year of compulsory rural posting for undergraduate (medical, nursing and paramedical) education be made mandatory for license to practice. Three years of rural posting after post graduation be made compulsory.
  6. The unbridled and unchecked growth of the commercial private sector be brought to a halt. Strict observance of standard guidelines for medical and surgical intervention and use of diagnostics, standard fee structure, and periodic prescription audit to be made obligatory. Legal and social mechanisms be set up to ensure observance of minimum standards by all private hospitals, nursing/maternity homes and medical laboratories. Prevalent practice of offering commissions for referral to be made punishable by law.
  7. A rational drug policy be formulated that ensures development and growth of a self-reliant industry for production of all essential drugs at affordable prices and of proper quality. The policy should, on a priority basis:
    - Ban irrational and hazardous drugs. Effective mechanisms to control the introduction of new drugs and formulations; periodic review of currently approved drugs.
    - Introduce production quotas & price ceiling for essential drugs
    - Promote compulsory use of generic names; regulate advertisements, promotion and marketing of all medications based on ethical criteria
    - Formulate guidelines for use of old and new vaccines
    - Restrict the multinational sector only to areas where they bring in new technology
    - Recommend repeal of the new patent act and bring back mechanisms that prevent creation of monopolies and promote introduction of new drugs at affordable prices
    - Promotion of the public sector in production of drugs and medical supplies, moving towards complete self-reliance in these areas.
  8. Medical Research priorities be based on morbidity and mortality profile of the country, and details regarding the
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direction, intent and focus of all research programmes be made entirely transparent. Adequate government funding for such programmes. Ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects be drawn up and implemented after an open public debate. No further experimentation, involving human subjects, be allowed without a proper and legally tenable informed consent and appropriate legal protection. All unethical research, especially in the area of contraceptive research, be stopped forthwith. Exemplary damages against the institutions involved in such anti-people, unethical and illegal practices in the past.

9. All coercive measures including incentives and disincentives for limiting family size be abolished. Concurrently, access to safe and affordable contraceptive measures be ensured which provides people, especially women, the ability to make an informed choice. All long-term, invasive, systemic hazardous contraceptive technologies such as the injectables (NET-EN, Depo-Provera, etc.), sub-dermal implants (Norplant) and anti fertility vaccines should be banned from both the public and private sector. Equal emphasis on men's responsibility for contraception. Facilities for safe abortions be provided from the primary health center level.

10. Support be provided to traditional healing systems, including local and home-based healing traditions, for systematic research and community based evaluation with a view to developing the knowledge base and use of these systems along with modern medicine.

11. Promotion of transparency and

decentralization in the decision making process, related to health care, at all levels as well as adherence to the principle of right to information. Changes in health policies to be made only after mandatory wider scientific public debate.

12. Introduction of ecological and social measures to check resurgence of communicable diseases.

13. Facilities for early detection and treatment of non-communicable diseases like diabetes, cancers, heart diseases, etc. to be available to all at appropriate levels of medical care.

14. Women-centered health initiatives that include:

- Awareness generation for social change on issues of gender and health.
- Complete maternity benefits and child care facilities to be provided in all occupations employing women, be they in the organized or unorganized sector
- Special support structures that focus on single, deserted, widowed women and minority women including those with a different sexual orientation and commercial sex workers; gender sensitive services to deal with all the health problems of women.
- Public campaign, legal and administrative action against sex selective abortions. including female feticide, infanticide and sex pre-selection.

15. Child centered health initiatives that include:

- A comprehensive child rights code, budgetary allocation for child care services
- An expanded and revitalized ICDS programme. Ensuring adequate support to working women to facilitate child care, especially breast feeding
- Comprehensive measures to prevent child abuse, sexual abuse and child prostitution
- Educational, economic and legal measures to eradicate child labour, ensure free and compulsory quality elementary education for all children.

16. Special measures relating to occupational and environmental health which focus on:

- Banning of hazardous technologies in industry and agriculture
- Worker centered monitoring of working conditions with the onus of ensuring a safe and secure workplace on the management
- Reorienting medical services for early detection of occupational disease
- Special measures to reduce the accidents and injuries in different settings.

17. The approach to mental health problems should take into account the social structure in India which makes certain sections like women more vulnerable to mental health problems. Mental Health Measures that promote a holistic model of mental health, with community support and community based management of mental health problems.
18. Measures to promote the health of the elderly by ensuring economic security, opportunities for appropriate employment, sensitive health care facilities and, when necessary, shelters. Services for the special needs of people in transit, homeless, migratory workers and temporary settlement dwellers.
19. Measures to promote the health of physically and mentally disadvantaged by focusing on the abilities rather than deficiencies. Promoting measures to integrate them in the community with special support; ensuring equitable opportunities for education, employment and special health care including rehabilitative measures. Effective restriction on industries promoting addictions and an unhealthy lifestyle, with an immediate ban on advertising, sponsorship and sale of their products to the young, and provision of services for de-addiction.
20. Effective restriction on industries that promote addictions and an unhealthy lifestyle, like tobacco, alcohol, pan masala etc., starting with an immediate ban on advertising, sponsorship and sale of their products to the young, and provision of services for de-addiction.

(Courtesy: CEHAT, Pune. Email: [cehatpun@vsnl.com](mailto:cehatpun@vsnl.com))



## In Bengal Left is Right?

Subhasis Mukhopadhyay

***A Kolkata based political activist-journalist finds out about the victory of the Left in W. Bengal and accompanied hopes and perils.***

After a lot of speculations about the change of guard in New Delhi, the 14th Lok Sabha has finally been constituted, burying for the time being the question of “foreigners” assuming the highest post of office. The Common Minimum Programme (CMP) has already been released, which appears to indicate a microscopic change in the “policy-making.”

This time Left parties appear to assume the driver’s seat. How it happens remains a question to be answered. One usually tends to forget that ordinary citizens of this country have enormous wisdom which they have proved time and again in every crucial juncture in the life cycle of this country. During the fateful years of Emergency, they have proved their resilience, culminating in ousting the tyrannical regime responsible for that miscarriage of democracy and justice. This time also they have given a clear mandate against the anti-people policies of the NDA-regime.

Now the NDA is talking about an “anti-incumbency” factor, leaving sufficient grey area for the interpretation of the term. The most credible and proven interpretation of the term is as follows: whosoever has assumed the responsibility of implementing the so-called globalisation agenda eagerly and vigorously, the ordinary, non-English speaking citizens did not hesitate to identify them with the agents of the imperialists plundering our motherland. In this context, one needs to look into the “success” of the Left parties in

retaining their citadels.

The Left parties throughout the country in general, and the states ruled by them in particular, share some striking features which appear to have stood out in the cesspool of what is so fondly named as “parliamentary democracy!” In this election, like the last two occasions, more than 50% of the aspirants to Lok Sabha were and are criminals. But none among the criminals seeking mandate from the people are from the Left parties, neither have any of them been “hawala”-implicated! This is definitely one possible reason of dispelling the anti-incumbency. The major reason appears to be the way they happen to confront the onslaught of globalisation. Like their counterparts in other states, they are not as eager and vigorous in implementing the anti-people agenda adopted by the Union government. In the states where the leftists rule, people still have a choice between evil and more evil. The left parties have been consistently

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fighting against privatisation, withdrawal of subsidy to the poor, patent amendment bill, to name a few. They are also consistently fighting for women reservation, right to information. In these scoundrel times, this minor twinkling appears to be flood lights to the people and they have no hesitation in choosing the leftists.

But behind all these hopes, the UPA from its very inception is bound to raise serious questions. One must not forget that the main partner of this Alliance declared emergency in 1975 to thwart peoples' movements for just causes. One must not forget that the present Prime Minister has ushered in the "structural adjustment programme" in this country which was eagerly pushed forward by the NDA. One must not forget that they are the ones which joined hands with the BJP to pass the patent amendment bill in both houses of the parliament, exploded the first nuclear bomb and then congratulated the BJP for their nuclearisation agenda and above all started the "Ram Janma Bhoomi

Babri Masjid controversy" by opening the gate of the disputed place and they are the ones which goofed up the Shah Bano Case. One may also go back in time and may explore their role in the partition of our country. They were the ones who refused to even pass a benign resolution for commuting the death sentences of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Chandrasekhar Azad. The list could be endless.

One also should not forget that up until now the "Leftists" of our country, as a policy, do not recognise the non-party peoples' movements against globalisation. The "green issues" consistently stay beyond their mental horizon. In the states where they are the prime-movers, they tend to implement, in their own pace, the agenda of globalisation. They also cherish Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as the panacea of all economic peril. They also tend to resolve peoples' just demands at the gun-point (recall the firing in the tea gardens in Bengal, brutal police assault in Kerala against Pepsi). They allow the siting of polluting industries by questionable multinationals and fail to banish the companies ushering in the water privatisation in its preliminary form, i.e., of polluted and poisonous bottled water. In the centre, we have strange bed-fellows aggregated by sheer compulsion. The so called opposition are opportunistic to a degree.

In this troubled time, let us keep our finger crossed and let us be watchful. The solace is, the citizens are behind us and not with them!

*(Subhashish Mukhopadhyay is with NAPM W. Bengal. Email: sm@cubmb.ernet.in)*



# Challenge in Narmada Valley

Sanjay Sangvai

By June end the television news channels were beaming the tragic stories of the residents of Harsud, the town which would be submerged this monsoon due to the Narmada (Indira) Sagar, another mega dam in the Narmada valley. The Harsud residents – young and old had to leave the town, even though they were not compensated and did not have any alternative livelihood or even the housing. The rains washed away their makeshift shelters in the new place given for resettlement.

However, Harsud was not the lone settlement deserted. Over 120 villages

affected by the NSP are to face submergence during this year's monsoon. At the same time, thousands of families affected by the Sardar Sarovar dam (SSP), Veda, Maan will be facing the waters. In Sardar Sarovar, it is the story for years together. The houses and fields of the tribal families from Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh have been inundated since 1994 onwards. Every year hundreds of families have to see their villages, farms, cattle and school wipe away with the swirling waters. Now the dam stands at 110 meters while the people even below 80 m. are not yet resettled. Over 10,000 families in the three states are threatened with submergence due to this height.

The politicians of all hues in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and even in Maharashtra have been out-and-out callous about the impending human tragedy. In fact they have expedited the large-scale destruction of human life and villages. The infamous Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi was bent upon increasing the height of the SSP by hook or crook, for a political

mileage in the elections. But, equally guilty is Digvijay Singh, the former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. Despite his media-savvy image and pretensions about secularism, Panchayat Raj, Dalit etc., Mr. Singh was singularly responsible for destitution of thousands of families as he pushed ahead the construction of Narmada Sagar, Maan, Veda dams and consented for increasing the height of SSP, knowing fully well the state of resettlement. Nay, he flaunted the provisions of the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal Award (NWDTA), refusing to adhere to land-for-land norm for resettlement and instead resorted to outright illegal act of displacing the people by doling away cash compensation. Cash compensation is not the resettlement. But Digvijay Singh went ahead in displacing people in SSP, in Maan and Veda or in Narmada Sagar, in such a vengeance that has few parallels. And we now have the irascible and ignorant Uma Bharati, making mockery of the destitution of thousands and submergence of prime land and forest of her state. And her mentor-advisor, Govindacharya, who knows well the Narmada issue – is but deafeningly silent.

The government of Maharashtra too remained the staunch supporter of Modis's antics, as the officials kept on giving nod to the increase in the height, by forging false documentary evidence of resettlement. Even when the submergence is threatening, the bureaucracy continues to be deliberately sluggish and evasive. It is the valiant struggle by the Narmada Bachao Andolan that forced the political leadership in Maharashtra to be realistic regarding the land-based resettlement of over 3000 tribal families in the state.

The people in the Narmada valley will have to keep on their struggle and they are doing it in all earnestness. They are struggling not only for their survival and rights, but for the sake of millions of the people who have already been displaced and were made destitute. They will have historical responsibility for the sake of millions of others who are struggling against unjust displacement or project, and for a sustainable and just alternative development. The Narmada struggle – for the last 19 years – has always come up with a new, creative response to the challenge. It is clear that the power-holders want to suppress the people, their valiant struggle and send a message that their destructive and unjust ways remain unchallenged. All the people's movements, groups, citizens who value democracy, justice, peace and sustainability must stand by the Andolan in this hour of crisis.



## Deeply Distressing Bonds

Himanshu Upadhyaya.

***The design error in Deep Discount Bonds was akin to Hamlet-esque “method in the madness.” SSNNL owes answers to certain haunting questions.***

Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam has announced its willingness to prepay high cost 20 year Deep Discount Bonds with a claim to save about Rs 6100 crores. SSNNL Managing Director S K Mohapatra has reportedly said, “We hope the system will allow us if we want to do something logical.” However, SSNNL would require to seek prior informed consent from bondholders to modify the rights for pre-redemption of the bonds which are exclusively with investors and it hurriedly issued notice of a meeting of bondholders on May 28 in Gandhinagar for the same purpose. On May 19, investors from Delhi and Bombay moved the Delhi High court filing a petition against SSNNL's moves towards pre-paying Deep Discount Bonds. On May 21, SSNNL said in a press release that in the wake communications it had received from Stock Exchange Board of India and Bombay Stock Exchange, it has cancelled the said meeting. While it remains to be seen as to how the

bondholders will respond to SSNNL's desire to pre-pay them nine years before the stipulated maturation period gets over, we feel presenting certain information on the issues around Deep Discount Bonds would be in public interest.

The controversial public issue of Deep Discount Bonds opened on November 01, 1993 and was to be closed on November 11, 1993. SSNNL wished to mop up Rs 300 crores from the issue and was allowed to retain 25% extra than the issue size, in the event of issue getting oversubscribed. Each Deep Discount Bonds with a promise to yield Rs 111000 (one lakh eleven thousands) after twenty years were

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issued at discounted price of Rs 3600 (three thousand six hundred). There was a tripartite agreement between SSNNL, ICICI and Govt of Gujarat. It is crucial that while an investor has an option to redeem the bonds prior to the maturation date of January 2014 in stages of 7<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> year, the borrowers (i.e. SSNNL) doesn't have the option of unilaterally pre-redeeming bonds. If an investor decides to redeem the bonds after 7<sup>th</sup> year, s/he would get Rs 12500, after 11<sup>th</sup> year, Rs 25000, and after 15<sup>th</sup> year, Rs 50000.

The issue got oversubscribed and SSNNL retained 25% over subscription. For Rs 375.00 crores mobilized through the issue, SSNNL allocated 713619 Deep Discount Bonds worth Rs 256.90 crores and 236194 Non Convertible Bonds worth Rs 118.10 crores. Non Convertible Bonds had a face value of Rs 5000 each and were redeemable after the expiry of nine years (i.e. in March 2003) at 17.5% rate of interest payable half yearly with a premium of five percent payable at the time of redemption. Just like Deep Discount Bonds, the option of pre-redeeming the bonds after five years was available only to investors not to the SSNNL.

SSNNL now wants to pre-redeem the bonds and seeks investors' consent saying that its not possible for SSNNL to keep paying the interest at rates that have now become "historical and anachronistic," as SSNNL Managing Director Mohapatra puts it. The question is precisely this: how long can SSNNL hide the fact from people that it mopped up financial resources by indulging in "indiscriminate borrowings." Concluding a scathing audit review on SSNNL's resource management, Comptroller and Auditors General of India (CAG)<sup>1</sup> (2002: 64) states: "The SSP was approved without outlining the sources of raising the funds and cost element towards borrowing. The SSNNL borrowed in an *ad hoc* manner and cash flow was not worked

out accurately... SSNNL incurred avoidable interest charges as a result of higher rate of interest and retaining huge amount of borrowed funds in short term deposits."

Again to attribute the sorry state of affairs merely to decreasing interest rates generally would amount to denying to look at what lies beneath the tip of an iceberg. It is wrong to assume that SSNNL would have issued bonds at the then prevalent rate of interest and since those rates have now become "historical and anachronistic" it is facing the problems of bearing a huge repayment obligation burden. On the contrary to this assumption, even at the time of issuing bonds, interest rates attached to bonds were higher by 2 to 4% than the prevalent rates. CAG in its report shows that compared to a similar long term bond issue floated by Small Industries Development Bank of India in February 1993, SSNNL offered on Deep Discount Bonds at 1.90 to 3.25% higher interest payments. After the controversial public issue of Deep Discount Bonds, SSNNL embarked on an unabated series of indiscriminate borrowing through private placement of bonds. These subsequent issues were also marred by similar deficiencies. For instance, while Non-Convertible Bonds in November 1993 were issued at 17.5% interest, Non-Convertible Bonds issued in February 1996 were bearing the interest rate of 18%, suggesting a 0.5% upwards swing! CAG (2002: 60) comments, "SSNNL had issued above NCBs at 18% rate of interest whereas co-arrangers of the said issue Kotak Mahindra finance Limited had specified 16.25% interest rate for a similar issue (October 1995) of Nuclear Power Corporation." Yet again, SSNNL floated bonds (April 1997) bearing an interest rate of 17%, while as noticed by CAG (2002: 60), "Industrial Finance Corporation of India, one of the merchant bankers of this issue had recommended (February 1997) fixation of rate of interest between 15.5 and 16%."

By indulging in imprudent ways of resource mobilization SSNNL had ended up paying almost Rs 2413.98 crores (i.e. 22% of the total expenditure incurred on the project as on March 31, 2001) on interest charges and servicing debt liability till March 2001. SSNNL's mounting debt liability yet to be paid stood at Rs 12282 crores on March 31, 2001. Criticizing mounting debt obligations of SSNNL, CAG (2002: 57) states, "SSNNL's average annual debt liability works out to Rs 944.77 crores. The state government had directed the SSNNL (January 1996) to create a sinking fund out of its own resources with *ad hoc* contribution of Rs 50 crores annually. The SSNNL, however, never created such a fund nor proposed any alternative arrangement for liquidating the debt liability arising out of issue of bonds. SSNNL, thus without any systematic plan for redemption of bonds went on borrowing for redemption of earlier debts, which resulted in abnormal increase in the expenditure on servicing of the debt." CAG (2002: 52) also pointed out that "the component of cost towards interest charges and debt servicing were not identified while submitting the original investment proposal to the Planning Commission. Further the revised cost estimates prepared in 1991-'92 also did not indicate expenditure likely to be incurred on account of debt servicing and interest charges." To these comments by CAG, SSNNL replied (July 2001) arguing that the expenditure on interest



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charges pertained to Interest During Construction (IDC), which is taken as a part of the project cost. However, CAG (2002: 52) was prompt to refute such an explanation saying, "since the original cost estimates had not identified the borrowings as a source of funding, the question of expenditure on interest during construction does not arise."

In September 2001, when the first pre-redemption option—available to investors exclusively—came to a head, SSNNL commenced an operation of writing letters to the bond holders with a view to persuade them to opt for early redemption. The measure met with little success and only 5.96 % of the bondholders came forward for early redemption. By such a persuasive measure, SSNNL could call back bonds worth mere Rs 15.33 crores, paying an interest of Rs 37.899 crores on that. This leaves SSNNL with a liability of paying 94.04 % of the bondholders holding bonds worth Rs 241.57 crores. To these bondholders SSNNL would need to pay interest charges of Rs 7206.84 crores (Rs 800.84 crores higher than the entire cost of SSP that was mentioned by SSNNL in the prospectus of Deep Discount Bond issue!) in the event of failing to get the consent from 75% of the bondholders for pre-redeeming the bonds. That is to say, SSNNL will have to pay Rs 7448.41 crores in January 2014 for repaying debts on Deep Discount Bonds. However, the figure quoted by SSNNL Managing Director Mohapatra in recent press releases, is Rs 7800 crores!!!

How much can SSNNL save if it gets consent from 75% bondholders for pre-redemption of bonds at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> year instead of 20<sup>th</sup> year? On the principal liability of Rs 241.57 crores, it would need to pay an interest of Rs 1436.00 crores at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> year. That is to say, it would have to pay Rs 1677.57 crores if it succeeds to pre-pay Deep Discount Bonds in the year 2004-'05. However, the figure quoted by SSNNL Managing Director Mohapatra in recent press releases is Rs 1700 crores!!! Thus, the answer to the question how much can SSNNL save by going for pre-paying Deep Discount Bonds is Rs 5770.84 crores. However, the trumpeting claims being made by SSNNL in recent press releases say that it would save Rs 6100 crores!!! As much as Rs 329.167 crores off the mark! Its high time SSNNL reconcile figures. Since, time and again SSNNL has boasted of state government guarantee to the bonds, at the end of the day, it needs to realize what is at stake here is Public Finance. Hence, SSNNL needs to stand up to the probing questions on Public Accountability.

In the annual plan of 2004-'05 for Gujarat, the state govt has allocated Rs 900 crores for SSP from allocation under the head Irrigation and Flood control. Against this allocation what is SSNNL's expenditure projection during the year 2004-'05? Given that the annual debt of SSNNL works out to Rs 944.77 crores and if SSNNL goes for pre-payment it would need Rs 1677.57 crores, the financial non viability of SSP, and its dire consequences of crowding out expenditure from other social sector—such as Public Health and Education—has become all too obvious. That's not all: the committed debt repayment of SSNNL during the year 2004-'05—something that it can't postpone if it wants to save itself from being called defaulter—amounts to Rs

388.00 crores (Rs 62.93 on principal repayment and Rs 325.07 crores on the interest charges on that). So, SSNNL ought to say that by opting for pre-paying on Deep Discount Bonds, it would spend Rs 2065.57 crores—an amount as high as 25% of the size of the annual plan of the state government—on its debt obligations arising from indiscriminate borrowings, not on extending irrigation infrastructure in Gujarat by even one hectare, or on producing even one unit of electricity. Did I hear some one say the project is being built in the Public interest and with an avowed aim to serve the "greater common good"?

On response to CAG's critical comments on non-insertion of a suitable call option that would have allowed SSNNL to unilaterally call back the bonds prior to maturation, SSNNL had replied (July 2001), "the loss pointed out in audit was *notional* since introduction of call option would mean that *the long tenure is not assured to the investors which itself would become disincentive to invest in the bond issue.*" The response suggests that the design error in Deep Discount Bonds was akin to Hamlet-esque "method in the madness." Within a span of three years SSNNL has staged a turn around dispelling its long held belief in "long tenure as an incentive to investors." Is the turn around due to the realization of magnitude of actual and not the notional loss on the maturity of the bonds in 2013-'14 or is it to foreground yet another round of indiscriminate borrowing? SSNNL owes answers to certain haunting questions.

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<sup>1</sup> CAG 2002: CAG report for Gujarat (Commercial) for the year ending March 31, 2001.



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# Linkages and Challenges

Bhopal Convention on the Right to Food and Work

Jean Drèze

***The central organisational challenge for the right to food campaign is to develop ways of working together that are both effective and consistent with our basic values - including democracy, equality and transparency. Personal observations regarding the Convention.***

The recent convention on the right to food and work (hereafter "the convention"), held in Bhopal at Gandhi Bhavan, was facilitated by the support group of the "right to food campaign," in collaboration with a dozen like-minded networks. The decision to call the convention was taken at a meeting held in Mumbai in January 2004, on the sidelines of the World Social Forum and Mumbai Resistance. A common need was felt, at that time, for an opportunity to share experiences of struggle for the right to food and work, and to explore possibilities of further action.

As it turned out, the convention was very timely, coming as it did in the wake of the 2004 parliamentary elections. With the dramatic rout of the NDA government, deeply hostile to democratic rights and responsible for gross violations of the right to food (such as the accumulation of 70 million tonnes of grain in FCI godowns at a time of widespread hunger), the air felt cleaner and there was a new sense of possibility. It would be naive to expect sweeping changes in social policy from the new government, since the real masters (the corporate sector and other privileged groups) are more or less the same. Nevertheless, there are new opportunities at this time that deserve to be pursued, such as the government's interest in an "employment guarantee act,"

expressed (in a limited form) in the Common Minimum Programme.

About 500 participants turned up from far and wide, and most of them stayed at Gandhi Bhavan itself. Rightly or wrongly, the convention started on a relatively high-profile note, with an opening plenary starring Nusrat Bano Ruhi (local organising committee), Kavita Srivastava (PUCL), Colin Gonsalvez (HRLN), Paul Divakar (NCDHR), Brinda Karat (AIDWA), M.P. Parameswaran (BGVS), Aruna Roy (MKSS), and Kuar Bhai of Jagrit Adivasi Dalit Sangathan. The speakers' brief was mainly to introduce the thematic workshops. For instance, Colin Gonsalvez spoke on legal aspects of the right to food, Paul Divakar on Dalit perspectives as well as land rights, and Aruna Roy on the connections between the right to food, the right to work and the right to information. The speeches are impossible to summarise in a few lines, especially Brinda Karat's masala-packed appeal to link the campaign with the larger struggle against sensex-driven economic policies. Beyond the details, what I retain from them is a strong sense of the interlinked nature of different aspects of the right to food, and of the willingness of activists from diverse backgrounds to join forces on this crucial issue, in spite of their differences on specific points.

The programme of the convention was built around twelve thematic workshops, held in three sessions of four parallel workshops. The themes were: (1) the right to work and livelihood; (2) the public distribution system; (3) agriculture and trade; (4) land rights and food sovereignty; (5) children's right to food; (6) Dalit perspectives; (7) perspectives of indigenous communities; (8) drought and survival; (9) women's perspectives; (10) legal action for the right to food and work; (11) marginalised people and state responsibility; and (12) right to food and right to information. Since I attended only three workshops, and since the proceedings of other workshops are not available at the time of writing, I am unable to present a full-fledged account of the discussions in this article. However, a brief account of one of the workshops I did attend may help to convey the flavour of these discussions.

I attended the workshop on "the right to work and livelihood," coordinated by Shiraz of Kashtkari Sangathan. The bulk of the discussions actually focused on the prospects for a national "Employment Guarantee Act" (EGA). Clearly, employment guarantee is only one aspect of the right to work, and the right to livelihood can be seen as an even larger notion. Aside from employment guarantee, typically offered in the form of wage labour, the right to work also encompasses other issues such as minimum wages, the need for employment-oriented economic policies, and the rights of self-employed workers. The right to livelihood, for its part, is concerned not just with labour rights but also with the dignified survival of those who are unable to work,

such as elderly widows and the chronically ill. There was broad agreement at the workshop that bringing about an Employment Guarantee Act was a burning issue at this time, but also that a sound campaign for the right to work and livelihood needs to go beyond this particular issue. Further, the Employment Guarantee Act itself should encompass, as far as possible, some of the larger livelihood issues, e.g. the rights of unorganised workers and migrants labourers.

As far as the EGA issue itself is concerned, the discussions began with presentations of Maharashtra's experience in this respect. Maharashtra passed an Employment Guarantee Act in 1977, which laid the basis of its well-known "employment guarantee scheme" (EGS). During the seventies and eighties, the scheme did relatively well, with about half a million persons (mainly women) employed on an average day, and much larger numbers during periods of drought. In the nineties, however, employment generation under EGS declined sharply, and the principle of guaranteed employment seems to have been quietly buried. Meanwhile, enormous amounts of money (about Rs 9,100 crores at the time of writing) have accumulated in Maharashtra's "employment guarantee fund," which is meant to be earmarked for EGS. The unused funds are effectively diverted for other purposes, ostensibly as a "loan" but with no assurance that they will ever be returned and utilised for the purpose of employment generation. This gradual undermining of the Employment Guarantee Act fits in a general pattern of dismantling of many social services in recent years.

On a more positive note, the Common Minimum Programme of the new government includes a commitment to "immediately enact a National Employment Guarantee Act." The proposed guarantee is limited to 100 days of employment, for one person per household, and in this respect it falls far short of the right to work in the full sense of the term. Nevertheless, there was a strong sense that a concerted effort should be made to hold the government accountable to this promise. Following on this, the participants shared ideas of possible ways to step up the campaign for an Employment Guarantee Act.

Brief reports from the workshops were presented at plenary sessions on 12 June. Some workshops were mainly of an "educational" nature, but many ended with some sort of agenda for action, or at least with a list of issues that could be taken up by the participating organisations. For instance, the workshop on "drought and survival" recommended that the so-called Famine Codes (also known as Relief Codes in some states) should be radically revised, and made legally binding. Detailed suggestions for revision were made, and if all goes well, this agenda will be followed up by interested organisations.

### The Outcome

The main recommendations were consolidated at the concluding plenary on 13 June, with a special focus on joint activities involving broad

coalitions of the participating organisations. For instance, there was unanimous agreement on the need to launch a broad-based campaign for a national Employment Guarantee Act. As a first step, a decision was taken to organise a "day of action for the right to work" on 16 October 2004 (World Food Day). In advance of this event, a draft EGA will be prepared, and discussions will be held with representatives of the new government as well as with the left parties. Similarly, the participating organisations agreed to join forces for a week to assert children's right to food, with a special emphasis on the universalisation of ICDS. This week of action is due to start on 14 November (Children's Day in India), and to culminate on 20 November (Universal Children's Day). A proposal was also made that "kala jathas" on the right to work and children's right to food should be held across the country from 16 October to 20 November 2004.

Land rights is another issue on which a strong need was felt for coordinated action. Various proposals were made at the workshop on "land rights and food sovereignty," and concrete decisions on this are likely to be taken quite soon at follow-up gatherings.

The concluding plenary also took up some crucial organisational matters, particularly the decision-making structures of the campaign in the months ahead. These matters had been discussed in some detail at two preparatory meetings held on 11 and 12 June, respectively. Unfortunately, wider discussion was relegated to the end of the closing plenary and by then little time was left for this important topic. Briefly, the plenary endorsed a proposal to constitute a provisional "steering group" for a period of one year or so. The basic role of this steering group is not to "lead" the campaign, or even to get directly involved

in organising activities, but rather to facilitate the process of mutual support among the participating organisations. Specifically, the steering group is expected to: (1) facilitate the next convention; (2) ensure the smooth flow of information within the network; (3) initiate a process of wider discussion of the organisational aspects of the campaign, and prepare a proposal on this for the next convention, and (4) possibly, take up advocacy with the central government. For the rest, the campaign is expected to continue in the informal, decentralised mode in which it has operated so far – at least for now.

No doubt, the organisational aspects of the campaign would have benefited from further discussion. Let me try to explain why I consider this as a very important issue. If one looks around at India's "social movements," and specifically at their

organisational aspects, three problems stand out. One is that there is a lot of quarrelling and factionalism within these movements, with devastating effects on their ability to have a real impact. The second is that they are largely personality-based. Indeed, leadership (formal or informal) is typically the means through which infighting is resolved or suppressed. The third issue is that the "leaders" almost invariably come from a privileged social background. However sensitive they may be to the viewpoint of the underprivileged, they cannot but carry a certain baggage associated with their own position. The bottom line is that, with few exceptions, social movements in India (or for that matter elsewhere) are far from democratic. This lack of internal democracy jars with the values we claim to stand for, and creates a deep inconsistency between means and ends.

The central organisational challenge for the right to food campaign is to develop ways of working together that are both effective and consistent with our basic values—including democracy, equality and transparency. I would like to think that this is possible, but it requires an explicit and collective engagement with this challenge. Hopefully, the next convention will be an opportunity to take up this unfinished agenda.

*(Jean Dreze teaches at the Delhi School of Economics. Email: dreze@econ.dse.org)*



# Electricity for All: Some Ways

Ravi Kuchimanchi

***While it is cheaper for the government to provide electricity to the poor, especially in villages where the grid has reached, the people's movements have a major role to play in this issue – through alternative generation, wiping out corruption, and policy change.***

While the promise of free electricity for the farmers has caused Chandrababu Naidu's ouster in Andhra Pradesh and has as well awoken Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu who has now joined the bandwagon, we must not lose sight of the fact that electricity is needed for house lighting as much as it may be desired by farmers for irrigation. Indeed it is the poorest and the most oppressed people that do not have lights or fans in their homes, while pumping water freely most

directly benefits the better-off landed farmers and depletes water-tables.

The problem of house lighting is two fold. Many remote tribal villages are not connected to the electricity grid and entire villages and tehsils are lit by flickering kerosene lamps. Here one has to not only think of extending the grid but also of investing in decentralized renewables like wind, micro-hydel and solar. The alternatives cost money and resources, and specialized NGOs have focused on setting up models like the Bilgaon Micro-Hydro Project. However there is also a second face to the problem. Even in most Indian villages where the grid has reached, the poorest households do not have electric connections. Equity in distribution can be achieved easily in these villages with no funding, if people's movements take on the issue.

### Srikakulam Experience

In a small group of villages where we are working in Srikakulam District, Andhra Pradesh, we found that indeed 20% of the houses in villages with electricity didn't have the metres and were burning oil lamps. Through informal discussion groups we examined the bills of those who had electric connections. It turned out that those with a tubelight, fan and a black and white

TV would have a bill of Rs 78 every 2 months. That is Rs 36 a month. While those that didn't have electricity burnt 3 litres of kerosene a month that they got through the Public Distribution System (PDS) for about Rs 11 a litre. That is Rs 33 a month for oil lamps. This awareness motivated the people to seek electric connections. Since the government subsidizes PDS, it pays about Rs 9/litre (as the actual cost of kerosene is Rs 20/litres) .

However, the problem was that in order to get a connection we found that the electricity board charged Rs 1500. Discussions with people ranging from the lineman to the Assistant Engineer (AE) revealed that Rs 545 out of this was legitimate and needed to be paid as Demand Drafts to the government while the remaining amount was all bribes. After putting pressure and a threat of dharna, the AE's office relented and promised to provide electricity connection and metres at Rs 545 (and at Rs 300 for SC/ST families) per house. AID-India announced a loan of Rs 345 for people living in huts without electricity and in a day we submitted the first batch of 20 applications. After some more demand for bribes when all the metres were locked up in a room by the line-man, people got the metres and switched from kerosene lamps to electric lights. The loans were repaid in 5 months by all the families. News spread to neighbouring villages and now another 50 applications for connections have been sent to the electricity board.

### Scale of the problem

People's movements with reach in the poorer sections of the villages need to take this up as the issue is not unique to the few villages of Srikakulam District. In fact, at a recent World Bank conference the Secretary, Ministry of Power, Government of India in March 2004 stated that 78 million rural households (56% of total 138 million rural households) do not have electricity, while 20% of the total 5,80,000 Indian villages are unelectrified. From this we can infer that approximately 36% (56% minus 20%) of the 138 million households, that is 25-50 million of unelectrified rural households are actually *in villages that are connected to the electricity grid*. In other words, a campaign like in Srikakulam District can help millions of poor households switch from kerosene to electric lights with no further infra-structure addition.

### Megawatts the only Problem?

Village connections are usually rated at 100-200 W, and so the poorest 25-50 million in these grid villages need only 5000 MW of electricity, 5% of India's installed capacity of 1,10,000 MW. However, ignoring such small but crucial needs that can be met even today by demand side management, we only make supply-side plans: The Central Electricity Authority has estimated the need for creating additional capacity of 1,00,000 MW by 2012. A capacity addition of 41,110 MW comprising 14,393 MW hydro, 25,417 MW thermal and 1,300 MW nuclear power has been fixed for the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07).

In fact as per the presentation to World Bank the government is aiming to electrify all villages by 2007 and aiming to reach all households only by 2012.

Shouldn't we rather reach all households in electrified villages on priority basis?

### Policy Change

While reaching all households of electrified villages through village level mobilization against corruption, we should note that in different states the electricity billing is slightly different. In Andhra Pradesh, a rural consumer has to pay for at least 20 units a month—that is if someone consumed only 10 units a month they still have to pay for 20 units—and this costs Rs 36 per month. However in states like Gujarat one has to pay only for the units one consumes—thus a rural household with a 40 W tubelight that is used for 6 hours a day will have a monthly consumption of just 7 units and a much lower bill. Thus demanding that the poor be billed for the exact units they consume rather than for a minimum slab of 20 units will not only help people and the government save considerably on kerosene expense but also will not unjustly punish those who use energy sparingly. The rich anyway are billed for the units they consume so a lower slab actually makes the poor pay for more than what they consume. Through a PIL or through mobilization on the ground, the lifting of the minimum slab should be achieved.

The electricity situation in the nation is changing fast. In many villages where people used to freely draw current by putting a hook and bribing the linemen a few rupees, they can no longer do this and have reverted to oil lamps. However, the economics of kerosene is such that it is cheaper both for the government and the poor to switch to electricity especially in villages where the grid has reached. The people's movements have a major role to play in this issue.

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# Just A Little Less Brazen:

Budget 2004-05 is no different

Prabhat Patnaik

***“Liberalization with a human face” is an impossibility. The 2004-05 budget is little of “the human face”, but a continuation, perhaps in a less brazen manner than the NDA, of “liberalization”.***

The 2004-05 budget has been hailed as being “pro-poor” and “pro-farmer”. Nothing could be further from the truth. The outlay for the department of agriculture and co-operation remains at the same level as the National Democratic Alliance’s interim budget, Rs 3014 crores. There is no additional outlay over what the interim budget had provided for the food-for-work programme; and the extension of coverage from 1.5 crore to 2 crore families under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana had also figured already in the NDA’s interim budget.

Indeed, there is a marked decline in Central plan outlay on rural employment compared to 2003-04 (revised estimate), from Rs 9,640 crore to Rs 4,590 crore. True, the outlay for 2003-04 was inflated because of “calamity”-related special expenditure, but even if we remove this special component from both years’ figures, the outlay actually decreases from Rs 4,751.25 crore to Rs 4,310 crore. For the outlay for the Department of Rural Development as a whole, again excluding the “calamity relief” component, the increase is meagre, from Rs 10,612 crore to Rs 11,437 crore

No doubt there are off-budget measures promised, such as the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund, and the doubling of credit to agriculture over three years, but

the budget itself is extraordinarily niggardly towards agriculture and rural development, contrary to the promise of the national common minimum programme.

The budget does defer to the NCMP by raising the amount of budgetary support for the plan by Rs 10,000 crore over the interim budget. Of this however a significant amount, Rs 4,910 crore according to the receipts budget, which is financed by the 2 per cent cess, should go for education. The remainder is too small to make much difference. By contrast, defence expenditure has increased by Rs 11,000 crore over the sum provided by even the interim budget of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government. Questioning the need for such an enormous jump in defence expenditure may not be de rigueur, but the contrast between the attitudes to defence and to rural development is quite striking.

Apart from its commitment to the NCMP, the budget’s macroeconomics too is questionable. The relentless pursuit of neo-liberalism, especially during the NDA years, had imposed a drastic deflation on the economy, giving rise to a combination of unutilized industrial capacity, unsold foodstocks, and increased unemployment. Boosting domestic demand through increased government expenditure, particularly rural outlays, was the obvious need of the hour. The budget not only does not raise outlays in rural India significantly, but it does not even give much boost to aggregate demand in the economy. First, the fiscal deficit is supposed to come down from 4.8 per cent of the gross domestic product in 2003-04 (RE) to 4.4 per cent in 2004-05, which is contractionary per se. Second, since a large chunk of defence expenditure would finance equipment imports, representing a demand leakage from the economy, the 27.7 per cent increase in defence expenditure, which significantly alters the composition of public expenditure, would have a further contractionary effect.

Of course, the revenue estimates of the budget are unrealistic. Income tax revenue is budgeted to rise by 26.5 per cent over the revised estimates of 2003-04, even though 14 million tax-payers are out of the tax net. Corporation tax revenue is expected to grow at an even more phenomenal rate, 40.4 per cent. These patently unrealistic estimates are sustained by the assumption that a “tidy sum” would be fetched from tax arrears, but this is rather sanguine.

If, in the likely event of a revenue shortfall, the government cuts back on expenditures to meet the fiscal deficit target, then the deflationary scourge on the economy would persist. But if the revenue shortfall gets covered by a larger fiscal deficit, then aggregate demand would receive a boost. True,

even in such a case, we would not have used the best means of boosting aggregate demand - namely, through rural development expenditure; but at least there would have been some escape from deflation.

The finance minister must therefore stick to his expenditure targets even in the event of a revenue shortfall, flouting the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, which is an absurd piece of legislation anyway. In a demand-constrained system like ours, insisting on keeping down the fiscal deficit is bad economics, apart from being socially retrograde. This is particularly so when the expenditure financed by the fiscal deficit creates demand within the public sector itself, giving rise to larger public sector profits.

A further point must be noted here. We have had huge foreign exchange inflows through foreign institutional investors, because of which the Reserve Bank of India holds foreign exchange reserves exceeding \$120 billion. The high-powered money created as a consequence has boosted bank reserves even though credit demand from quarters which the banks consider creditworthy (which unfortunately excludes the peasantry and petty producers) has been limited. To support the banks' profitability, the RBI has been putting government securities into their portfolios, reducing sharply its own holding of such securities and hence its own profitability. This has reduced the flow of rural credit, since much of the finance for rural credit through National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development comes from the RBI's profits. It is extremely urgent, therefore, that additional government securities be put into the RBI's portfolio; for the government not to do so because of the Fiscal Responsibility Act would be silly.

Capital controls are a pre-condition for any governmental activism on social objectives. The budget however has taken some steps towards increasing the role of globalized finance in our economy, such as raising the investment ceiling for FII in debt-funds from \$1 billion to \$1.75 billion, and allowing banks, including foreign banks, greater latitude in the capital market.

Likewise raising the FDI cap in telecommunications, civil aviation and insurance is thoroughly unwarranted. The government-owned insurance companies in India have far greater experience, far larger reach, far greater social commitment, far greater expertise, and a far better record of honouring claims than foreign companies. To induct the latter into the economy serves no purpose other than giving them a chunk of the lucrative Indian market. Raising the FDI cap in telecommunications hands over a strategic area to foreign investors, going beyond what even the NDA had dared to do. And raising the cap in civil aviation amounts to giving foreign companies, again quite gratuitously, a share of the profitable Indian market at a time when the global industry continues to be in crisis.

The implementation of the NCMP requires a strengthening of state government finances, which are in a crisis for no fault of theirs. While the budget does reduce interest rates on fresh Central loans to 9 per cent, it is silent on

the issue of debt write-off, which even the NDA government's Planning Commission had proposed for non-small savings debt. And the eagerness to introduce value-added tax when there has been no study whatsoever of its consequences and when the Centre's promise of full compensation to states extends only to one year, is completely unjustified.

Many, including myself, believe that "liberalization with a human face" is an impossibility; but not so the United Progressive Alliance leaders. The 2004-05 budget was an ideal opportunity for them to prove their case, but they have singularly failed to do so. What we have is little of "the human face", but a continuation, perhaps in a less brazen manner than the NDA, of "liberalization".

*(Prabhat Patnaik is professor, Centre for Economic Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi)*

Courtesy: The Telegraph



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### **Bhopal Cleanup: Unwarranted Delay**

On June 23, the Government of India, after a long suspense drama, stated that it had no objection to a U.S. Federal Court asking Union Carbide to clean up the mess in Bhopal caused due to the gas disaster in 1984. It was the culmination of three months of intensive campaigning by the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB) and Greenpeace. Three activists went on a hunger fast in Delhi demanding this NOC for nearly a week. The fact that the campaigners had to push things to such an extreme illustrates the gap in understanding between governments and activists. The former will not respond until the latter pushes the issue to an extreme. As a result, the latter become convinced that reasonable dialogue cannot work and only extreme pressure will.

# Sword on Silent Valley:

Pathrakadavu Dam in Silent Valley

Thomas Kocherry

***Kerala Government is trying to revive the Silent Valley project in a new name. The design remains the same – the loot of forest wealth. The politician-mafia nexus is trying to curb the people’s opinion mounting against the project.***

The Kerala State Electricity Board's (KSEB) proposal is to construct a 65 metre high, 275 metre long dam across

Kunthipuha river to create a reservoir for the generation of 70 MW of electricity is under fire. A rapid Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project was carried out by the Environment Resources Research Centre in Thiruvananthapuram between January and May 2003. According to the study, the dam will cause a loss of 22.16 hectares of forest. Its cost is Rs. 247.06 crore. The site of the project is a km away from the boundary of the National Park of Silent Valley and 3 kms away from the original discarded project of Silent Valley.

The cost itself was calculated in 2003. The present estimate is Rs. 447 crore. But if it does not finish within 3 years, the amount will go up to about

## High Voltage Drama at Hijacked Public Hearing!

The Public Hearing that took place on the proposed Pathrakkadavu HEP on the 21<sup>st</sup> May witnessed the complete violation of laws and procedures as prescribed in the Government guidelines (EIA Manuel). It also witnessed the violation of the right to expression and violation of human rights. Since the issue involves the impact on Silent Valley National Park, an International Heritage Site, the only remaining pristine evergreen rainforests in the entire Western Ghats, and the core area of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, every citizen of India has the responsibility to protect this area as per the Constitution of India and hence the fundamental right to voice his/her views at the public hearing on the proposed HEP. Since the issue also involves Bharathapuzha River, all the to-be-affected downstream people also have a say in this public hearing.

Actually, the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) is the agency authorized by the MoEF (Ministry of Environment and Forests) for conducting the public hearing. But, the one-sided public hearing stage show was performed together by the KSPCB, KSEB and the local political parties. The representatives of various groups seated in the Cherumkulam School were physically pushed out amidst slogans at the behest of a local member of the legislative assembly. People claiming themselves to be 'local villagers' (in a drunken state) threatened these groups, asking them to leave the place.

Kerala's famous poetess Sugatha Kumari, who was actively involved in the Save Silent Valley Campaign in the 1970s, presented her views. The crowd again charged forward amidst booing and she was not allowed to speak against the project. The District Collector reached the scene only at a time of utter humiliation to one of the prominent cultural icons of Kerala. She was not allowed to complete her presentation and was escorted outside under police protection.

Amidst the chaos, the chairman of the panel wound up the hearing after allowing a few 'pro-project' presentations again. The total time allowed for hearing was just one hour when there were 38 other representations opposing the project waiting outside. Noted scientists like Dr. V.S. Vijayan (Director, Salim Ali Centre for Conservation of Nature) and Dr. S. Sankar (Kerala Forest Research Institute) who had done studies in the Silent Valley and Mr. Indanoor Gopi, President, Bharathapuzha River Protection Council, were not allowed to speak.

What happened on June 21 cannot be called a public hearing. It amounts to gross violation of environmental laws and human rights.

(Chalakudy Puzha Samrakshana Samithi)



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Rs. 600 crore. But the loss of 22 ha and its cost cannot be calculated. And who can calculate loss of drinking water down stream, the loss of fish, biodiversity, and all that is interconnected? In 1947, Kerala had 33% forest cover. Now it is reduced to 7%. Who is responsible for this? The forest department and different political parties who ruled the state! Nobody should be allowed to destroy the forest in Kerala. We cannot trust the veracity of KSEB, because they are in total debt. How can such a group build this project? If they start at all, they will not be able to finish it, and it will become like Meenvallo project, and then it will be given to the private sector. As a result, the entire project, including the forest, will go into the hands of the private companies.

There are 14 dams on the Bharatpuzha River. And we know that Bharatpuzha has no water for nine months. Kunthipuzha is the only tributary of Bharatpuzha that has water. With the construction of Pathrakadavu, the entire Bharatpuzha will be turned into sand without any water.

A lot of road construction is proposed for the project. This is a clear hidden plan for the Forest Mafia to destroy the entire Silent Valley.

There was a public hearing on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004 in Manarkad. The Pollution Control Board conducted the public hearing. The so-called Board was termed by the High Court of Kerala as polluting agency! This public hearing was a farce. Certain political parties were trying to control the whole process. Poetess and environmentalist Smt. Sugatha Kumari was not allowed to speak at this hearing.

The Congress led so-called United Democratic Front (UDF) is supposed to be the followers of Smt. Indira Gandhi and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. Smt. Indira Gandhi rejected the Silent Valley Project, while Mr. Rajiv Gandhi inaugurated the Silent Valley National Park. How can the UDF government even think of such a project?

Twenty-five Panchayats around Pathrakadavu area rejected the project. The UDF has not learned from the last election. If the UDF supports this project, it can think about facing a 100% rout in the coming Assembly election. The people of Kerala will not allow them to proceed with the project.

A committee is formed under the leadership of Smt. Sugatha Kumari to see that this project will not take off. The NAPM is part of this committee.

*(Thomas Kocherry is a National Convenor of NAPM and is with World Forum of Fisher People. Email: thomaskocherry@rediffmail.com)*



## Tribal Rights in Andhra Pradesh Convention Organised by APVVU and Human Rights Forum (HRF) at Hyderabad

State level 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule Sadhana Committee convention was held at Hyderabad on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2004. About 300 members (tribals) from Vishakhapatnam, Vijayanagaram, Srikakulam, East Godavari, and West Godavari participated in it. All the participants hail from the tribal villages, which are not in scheduled areas.

The convention was inaugurated by S.R Shankaran, former principal secretary, GOI, while Mr. S. Jeevan Kumar, convenor of Human Rights Forum (HRF) presided over.

Mr. Shankaran explained the history and rationale of scheduled areas from British time. Mr. Ajay Kumar, convenor of 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule Sadhana Committee, described the problems faced by the tribals of non-scheduled areas in the field of education, employment and land issues.

In the 'testimonials session' Mr. Narendranath (social activist), Mr. M Kodandaram (human rights activist), Mr. P. Trinatha Rao (advocate and writer on tribal issues) and Mr. Venkateshwarlu (APVVU) acted as jury members. Seven tribals presented testimonies on various problems like education, land, social conflict, and political representation.

Ajay Kumar explained the difficulties that non-scheduled villages are facing. He talked about the apathy of the ITDA and the situation that tribal candidates faced when

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they attended interviews for jobs and how land is being transferred from the tribals at a throwaway price, as 1/70 act does not apply to these areas.

Mr. S.R Shankaran, while responding insisted that the organisations should peruse the proposal submitted to the central government. Mr. P. Trinatha Rao, advocate and writer on tribal issues pointed out many angularities in these issues. He suggested to work for implementation of Bhuria Committee recommendations and aim at tribal self-rule.

Dr. M. Kodanda Ram, human rights activist and social thinker, exhorted the participants to agitate for tribal self-rule. Mr. Narendranath, Chittoor Peasants Organisation, Fr. Thumma Antay, A.P Christian Minority Association, Mr. Uday Bhaskar, Sakshi, Mrs. Mani, APVVU, Kurnool, Mr. Chakradhar, Samalochana, M. Ravinder, Chatri, Savithri, Adivasi Aikya Vedika and Mr. Jeevan Kumar, HRF expressed their solidarity with the issue and expressed their desire to cooperate with "5<sup>th</sup> Schedule Sadhana Committee."

No political party turned up to participate in the session slotted for political parties. Mr. Premkumar from Janata dal declared that his organisation would join the movement. There were cultural programmes by groups of Tribals and local CHATRI organisation.

On next day, Dr. K. Balagopal, human rights activist and social thinker pointed out the scant respect the government has shown towards tribal rights despite legislation to protect them. He said that some more villages need to be included in the list presented by the government. All political parties and democratic organisations need to be briefed about the issue.

The convention passed the following resolutions:

- It has urged the Central Govt. to include 796 villages, which were recognised by State Govt. and forwarded to the Central Govt., to include in the 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule.
- Request the State Govt. to appoint a Senior IAS officer as a single member commission to evaluate the remaining villages which need to be included in 5<sup>th</sup> schedule.
- To demand that the political parties make a commitment on this issue.
- To organise meetings in 9 districts (Srikakulam, Vizayanagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Adilabad, Khammam, Warangal and Mahaboobnagar) with the political parties before the elections.
- To organise a South Indian level round table meeting on the issue in the month of June.
- To submit a Memorandum to the President of India, with ONE LAKH signatures collected from the tribal people living in the non-schedule villages.



## For a Global Solidarity

PGA Asian Regional and Gender Conference, Dhaka  
20-25<sup>th</sup> May 2004

**Pablo Kala**

The first PGA Asian Regional and Gender Conference was held in Dhaka Bangladesh from May 20-25, 2004. The conference hosts were the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (PGA Asia convenor) and the Bangladesh Kishani Sabha. Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) is the largest rural based peasant movement in the country, and the Kishani Sabha is the female dimension of the farmer's

community. There were about 150 delegates of different participating organizations and social movements from Asia. Conference participation saw a gender balance of 60% men to 40% women.

Many people wrote to the PGA Asia list before the conference about the need for building stronger links between movements after the conference, sharing more information and experiences, building issue-based alliances and organising joint solidarity actions and activities. Of a total of 150 delegates, 110 came from 27 Bangladesh peasant, migrant, and worker's movements. International delegates came from India (Karnataka State

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Farmers' Association, Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruthidarula Union, Bharatiya Kisan Union, Kerala State Coconut Farmers' Association, Pedestrian Pictures); Nepal (All Nepal Peasants Association, Agricultural Labourers' Association of Nepal, Nepal Milk Producers' Association, Nepal National Fishfarmers' Association, South Asia Peasants Coalition, Peasant Womens' Association, Peasant Youth Federation of Nepal, All Nepal Women's Association); Thailand (Assembly of the Poor, Thai Labour Campaign); Philippines (Sumpay Mindanao, Focus on the Global South); Vietnam (Vietnam Farmers' Union); and Malaysia (Borneo Indigenous Peoples' and Peasants Union).

The conference commenced with a memorial in honour of the late M.D. Nanjundaswamy, (formerly of Karnataka State Farmer's Association and one

2) issues and campaigns concerning (i) Decentralization on control of resources and privatisation; (ii) Labour conditions and migration in Asia; (iii) Indigenous rights; (iv) Peasant rights and food sovereignty; (v) War and militarism; and (vi) Biodiversity, biopiracy, TRIPs and the WTO.

3) the structure, coordination and communication processes of PGA Asia.

Peasants groups suggested campaign issues concerning: land/agrarian reform;

### People's Global Action

Peoples' Global Action (PGA) provides a common communication and coordination tool for movements that struggle against capitalist globalization and all forms of domination. The purpose of PGA is to provide a global forum for people's struggles to associate their efforts and share experiences and skills. However, PGA is not an organization. PGA has no members and does not have and will not have a juridical personality. No organization or person represents the PGA, nor does the PGA represent any organization or person. Rather, PGA limits itself to facilitating coordination and exchange of information between grassroots movements through conferences and various means of communication. PGA has established regional 'networks' – e.g. PGA Asia, PGA Latin America, PGA Europe, and PGA North America.

PGA has three major objectives:

1. Inspiring the greatest number of persons, movements, and organization to act against corporate domination through non-violent civil disobedience and people-oriented constructive actions.
2. Offering an instrument for co-ordination and mutual support at the global level for those resisting corporate rule and the capitalist development paradigm.
3. Giving more international projection to the struggles against economic liberalization and global capitalism.

of the founders of PGA). Each morning throughout the conference, the male and female delegates conducted separate discussion meetings concerning issues of gender relations at the conference and in delegates' daily lives (e.g. domestic violence). In the evenings, delegates were entertained by a group of local musicians and dancers performing Qauwali music, fire performances or various films about privatisation, protests in Cancun etc.

The conference was primarily organised around a series of workshops on:

1) issues concerning (i) caste, racism, sexism and social systems of discrimination ; (ii) violence against women; (iii) women's emancipation; (iv) the impact of globalisation on women and agriculture; (v) reproductive rights; and (vi) gender and trade).

food sovereignty; the WTO; pro-peasant legislation; and land occupations. These would all be included within the Campaign for Food Sovereignty and Land Rights. Women's groups suggested campaign issues concerning: land rights for women (national); against domestic and all forms of violence against women (regional); government legislation (national); reproductive rights (national); dowry (national); and emancipation of women (regional). Trade Union groups suggested campaign issues concerning strengthening the union sector especially

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in privatised industries, and protection for the unemployed. Indigenous people's groups suggested a campaign for the alliance of indigenous people against the destruction of indigenous culture. Finally, Youth groups suggested a day of action for youth across Asia to demonstrate for youth rights.

On the structure of PGA Asia, the conference decided the following:  
Asia Convenor: All Nepal Peasants Associations – ANPA (Nepal)  
Contact person: Prem Prasad Dangal  
South Asia Convener: Bharatiya Kisan Union – BKU (India)  
Contact person: Yudhvir Singh  
South East Asia Convenor: Assembly of the Poor - AoP (Thailand) was suggested but the delegates would have to go back to their network and members to inform them of PGA and would inform the network if they can take this responsibility within one month.

Contact person: Nasser Yeemahd

### Evaluation

1. The conference saw the beginning of the grass-rooting of the PGA process in Bangladesh. This was brought about by both the participation of 27 Bangladeshi organisations at the conference, and the open forum on the working of the PGA process that increased interest and excitement about the PGA process and goals.

2. The workshops on gender and the daily women's meetings contributed significantly to increasing the awareness on issues of gender; violence against women; women's rights etc. amongst women (and to a lesser extent amongst men) at the conference. As a result there were calls to action for women's rights at the conference, especially amongst Bangladeshi women, culminating on the decision to have a global day of action on International Women's Day.

3. The conference saw the expansion of the PGA process to SE Asia, with groups from Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines participating, and the hopeful convenor-ship of SE Asia being taken up by Thailand's Assembly of the Poor.

### PGA ASIA Declaration

We strongly oppose the capitalist project of neoliberal globalization which is leading to the privatization and exploitation of all common resources such as land, food, seed patents, water, utilities, etc., and increasing the marginalization of peasants, women, farmers, indigenous people, workers, and children. We will continue to resist neoliberal globalization through people's movements, and direct actions.

We will continue to work for the construction of creative grassroots alternatives to capitalism such as popular seed banks, organic farming, alternative forms of energy production that are economically and environmentally just and sustainable.

We strongly oppose the militarism of US-led imperialism—such as the war on Iraq, and the support of Israeli occupation of Palestine, and its legitimization through the war on terror. We pledge to continue to struggle for peaceful alternatives and solutions to conflict.

We condemn all forms of violence and discrimination against women: such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape, acid attacks, unequal wages and lack of property and reproductive rights. We—popular movements including men and women—will continue to struggle for women's equality and an end to all forms of discrimination and violence. We make a call across Asia for solidarity between different sectors and social movements including women's, farmers', peasants, fisher-folk, youth, indigenous, and workers movements and organizations. This solidarity will take the form of communication, exchange of information, coordination of Asia-wide actions, mutual support, and mobilization of collective resources.

We hereby establish the following campaigns:

- Food sovereignty and land rights
- Against all forms of violence and discrimination against women
- Indigenous rights
- Against mineral exploitation through mining
- Biodiversity
- For the creation of environmentally sustainable and economically and socially just alternatives to the capitalist system
- Against privatization

In addition to ongoing protests such as May Day, and International Peasants Day, we hereby make a call to action for three new initiatives during 2005:

- (i) Global days of action across Asia to protest the WTO meeting in Hong

## Obituary

Kong 2005. We will wage a day of strikes, blockades, demonstrations and other actions, linking all of the campaigns and the movements associated with them, to protest against Asian member countries of the WTO during the WTO meeting. Our slogan will be: *Protest in the countries that participate in the WTO! Shut down the WTO!* All groups can organize their own actions in their own countries during the global days of action.

(ii) A global day of action highlighting and protesting all forms of violence and discrimination against women on International Women's Day March 8<sup>th</sup> 2005.

(iii) *We will conduct two activist caravans through South Asia and South*

*East Asia in order to allow the meeting of different movements; the exchange of information; education on issues of neoliberal globalization; the conducting of rallies and demonstrations; and the visiting of places of struggle.*

*(Pablo Kala teaches at University of Glasgow and is with People's Global Action. Email: proutledge@geog.gla.ac.uk)*



# A Man of Grit & Compassion

## Damjibhai Gada

A man's life is a voyage between birth and death. Many people are born and die on this earth, however, there are very few who do such public service that they receive such an honourable and heartfelt good-bye. Looking closely at the lives of such persons, we realise that these are the people who have lived their lives for the benefit of others. Wherever they see oppression and injustice, their soul responds with grief which culminates into action. Such a man was Pradyumna Kaul.

Being a close friend of mine, I feel the deep loss. We used to talk at least once a month on the phone and when we met, we would discuss the details of his public work. He had various facets to his personality - he loved classical music and could discuss literature, art and music with depth of understanding and appreciation.

Pradyumna Kaul's family was from Srinagar, Kashmir. His family had to leave Srinagar and settled in Bombay in 1948. After completing his schooling in Bombay, he studied in Surat at the Regional College of Engineering, from where he gained the B.E. degree in Electrical Engineering. At this time, the 'Navnirman Andolan' started in Gujarat. He was a student leader at that time and took a very active part in this movement. It was whilst he was the leader of the student's union that the government of Chimanbhai Patel had to give in its resignation. His public life got a kick-start from this point. He completed

his M.B.A. from the IIM in Calcutta and even worked in a private company for a short stint.

Narmada Bachao Andolan, Enron, and the Kashmiri Pandits who had to take refuge in Jammu were his primary focus of concern and he worked for these causes unto the very end. With amazing grit and determination he went from the High Court to the Supreme Court to ensure that India was freed of the Enron menace. He was part of a group of Indians and Pakistanis who are trying to bring peace and harmony between the two countries via non-violent means.

Now, he is no longer with us. God grant his soul with eternal peace!

*(Damjibhai Gada is a social activist and is with Jan Sahayog Trust)*



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### Errata

Mr. Anil Sadgopal Vice President of Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha (BJVJ) and not with Bharat Ghyan Vigyan Samiti as mentioned in the previous issue of TPM. The error is regretted.

-- Editor

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# More Questions than Passion?

Passion of Christ  
Philip Mathew

Mel Gibson's "The Passion of Christ" has already made a profit of more than 12 times its production cost of \$30 Million in the US alone. This fact alone would make it necessary to have a critical analysis of its possible impacts upon international civil society as the movie was able to effectively penetrate large viewing circles.

So far, prominent critics have pointed out that the anti-semitic tenor of the movie, especially its impact upon the US viewers in the context of the Iraq war and US relations with Israel, is quite alarming. A recent review in *Frontline* focused on the vicious depiction of violence. Why the projection of the violent trial and murder of Jesus while avoiding his life activities? Why such open depiction of violence? Why should such a movie be produced at this point in history?

While watching the mutilation of Jesus' body, what came to mind was the violence inflicted upon the Iraqi prisoners by US-led soldiers (clippings of which are repeatedly shown in television news channels), the mutilated bodies of innocent Kashmiris, and burned bodies during Godhra, and the following Gujarat carnage as shown on TV. Over many centuries, whether by cross or fire or gun or bomb, the cost of self-assertion and political dissent in an imperialist, fundamentalist/communal context is always the same: persecution and death!

While it was disgusting to watch the mutilation of Jesus's body, what struck me was the possible impact it may have upon civil society. Already disgusted by an overdose daily diet of violent episodes in TV and print media, the depiction of crude

violence in the movie may possibly have a negative impact on the collective unconscious of the viewers. On one hand, the disgust may lead to a deadly insensitivity which leaves one a mere spectator, with little intent for empathy when faced with real violence. On the other hand, for Christian believers, the popular religious belief that the violence which Jesus underwent was a supernatural plan for their salvation, may seduce them to glorifying innocent suffering. They may inevitably fall into the trap of trying to see some divine hand when raw persecution takes place around them as happened during the Gujarat Carnage or Iraq war. The presentation of most scenes in blue, grey, red, and brown-colored dim lighting serves to influence the mind of uncritical viewers in a subtle manner.

Another point of concern is the uncritical presentation of the trial and the subsequent murder of Jesus. Maybe, a conflict with the powerful institutional Church is the last thing that should come in the way of Gibson's profit interests. The doctrine of The Passion as an atoning act of God to wash the Sin of the world may have been useful in strengthening the early Christian communities against Roman imperialist persecution. But in today's context, when the Global institutional church takes a lukewarm (or rather supportive) position on the imperialist ambitions of the US-led global capitalist militarist strategies, presenting the Passion with special focus on violence serves the imperialist interest. It would be no exaggeration to suggest that the release of this movie, when US is looking for justifying its action in Iraq and also facing general election soon, has more to it than meets the eye.

The need of the hour is to have a sharp understanding of the persecution and political murder of Jesus by Jewish vested interest groups and the imperial Roman soldiers as the consequence of his vision and activities. The Jesus movement was a challenge to the fundamentalist/racial forces of his time as well as for the local and imperial accumulators. He asserted community ownership of natural resources and advocated unconditional forgiveness of economic debts and sharing of available resources practiced at micro-level communities. He believed that the alternative world based on Truth will thus spread everywhere in a spirit of compassion and justice bringing prosperity and peace to all dwellers on earth. He had immense faith in this vision of life and hoped that his disciples would work towards building spiritual communities (not religious, ritualistic, priest-centered ones) having an egalitarian understanding about life on earth.

But when Gibson presented The Passion, separating it from the life and activities of Jesus, especially when spurious popular notions of Christ and his Passion are abound (this is open for debate), it may end up reinforcing the helplessness of the innocent sufferers of this world and justify redemptive

## Film Review

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violence like that happening in Iraq to save the world from the so-called terrorists. While the politics of Jesus of Nazareth undermined the very legitimacy of the oppressive Jewish Temple State as well as the Roman Imperial State, his political murder was de-politicized and projected as a sacrifice to redeem the world from Sin. While the Christians continue as a de-politicized community with regard to faith, looking for a salvation beyond earth, the continuing use of the Passion of the Christ for spinning money and numbing the sensitivity of the masses is atrocious.

Mel Gibson may want viewers to be under no illusion but to actually understand what Jesus of Nazareth went through. While presenting his version of Jesus' suffering, Gibson is, perceivably retelling his own gory experience of mutilation at the hands of robbers years ago in Australia. As a person who has undergone the hard stuff, though in an entirely different context, he might be seeing similarities with Jesus in this regard, especially from the aspect of forgiving the persecutors and going ahead with a positive, hope-filled frame of mind. While this is helpful at the individual level, it tends to undermine the political nature of the persecution faced by Jesus of Nazareth, which has serious implications for the socio-political activists who continue to face violent persecution at the hands of today's powerful appropriators.

While popularly Jesus Christ is perceived as a divine religious figure, historically Jesus of Nazareth was an adivasi artisan from rural Galilee who, out of historical choice, evolved as a revolutionary spiritual teacher and healer who understood spirituality beyond religion and politics beyond State power. Since the Jewish State was a theocracy, his spiritual actions were actually political and his politics of transformation challenged the centralizing, privatizing power systems of his age. His willingness to see human identity beyond the narrow frameworks of racial, ethnic and other artificial social divisions based on birth/family, wealth, education and purity-pollution notions invited the wrath of Jewish vested interests. His struggle against de-humanizing and divisive powers of his time made his death on the cross inevitable, the capital punishment given for terrorists/political activists under Roman Imperial regime.

For those activists of this age, who stand for peace with social justice,

equality and sustainability, and equitable production-distribution processes while resisting global capitalist imperialist designs and fascist/fundamentalist ideologies, the violence inflicted on Jesus as depicted in the movie is highly symbolic and is a reminder of what may be in store for those who go beyond certain limits in raising the voice of dissent.

The intention of this reflection of Mel Gibson's film was to see the possible impacts of this film upon international civil society (assuming that a good number of them view the movie). In this regard, the movie adds up to the toolkit to numb the sensitivity of international civil society who may continue to maintain silence out of fear while thousands of people are murdered and plundered in the name of bringing Peace and Development for all.

Watching the movie can be a liberative experience if seen with eyes that can perceive beyond the spurious images and cunning designs of domination and enslavement. But unfortunately, a vast majority of viewers are influenced by spurious notions of Christ and his Passion and continue to miss the mark, ever-enslaved in 'fear of violence,' and the very control that the propagators of violence want to instil upon the human mind.

*(Philip Mathew works with the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Email: philjim@rediffmail.com)*



### **Fifth WSF in Brazil**

The Fifth World Social Forum (WSF), which will be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, from January 26 to 31, 2005. One of the key features of the World Social Forum is its non-centralised format. At the WSF, any organisation can present its views, experiences and activities through Workshops and Seminars that the organisation is free to organise. Besides, as the WSF does not release a final statement, there is no hierarchy among the diverse issues discussed at the WSF. This commitment to plurality has allowed WSF to attract a diverse number of movements which are united in their opposition to neo-liberalism. In 2001, 420 self-organised activities were held. By 2004, this figure increased to around 1,200. This emphasis on the promotion of diversity will always be at the core of the WSF and will be reinforced. Thus, in WSF 2005, the free and autonomous organisation of Workshops and Seminars will continue to be a right enjoyed by everybody who takes part in the Forum.

# News Capsules

## **A new Country Assistance Strategy for India**

the World Bank has released its new draft framework document for India in late June 2004 and plans to hold public consultations and invite comments on its website. The India Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) will spell out the policies and projects the organization plans to implement in India in the coming years.

The Bank is not obliged to invite public participation in the preparation of a CAS. However, the World Bank has published the draft CAS for India. It is not clear yet, how much time the Bank will allow for consultations and feedback on the proposed strategy. The final version of the CAS will be discussed and decided upon by the World Bank Board of Directors in Washington later this year.

## **Gala Party at the World Bank**

A group calling themselves the Party Liberation Front (PLF) took over the lobby of the World Bank Headquarters in the morning of July 1, and threw a party to 'celebrate' the 60th birthday of the World Bank and the success of its global capitalist agenda. Sixty years ago finance leaders from the major world powers met in Bretton Woods, NH to establish the World Bank and IMF. Since then wealthy elites in the US and elsewhere have reaped billions of dollars from countries forced to abide by World Bank policies. The group brought with them a cake, champagne, party hats and horns, and a large card to present to Bank President James D. Wolfensohn, thanking the Bank for their excellent work in helping replace colonial rule with free-market exploitation to ensure the wealthy stay on top.

"The Bank is a wonderful institution. Since 1944, we can see that the Bank truly has helped thousands of global corporations and wealthy elites to realize their potential for profit in peace," said Matthew Kavanagh, one of the organizers with the PLF. The party organizers distributed champagne to Bank employees on their way into work, toasting the Bank's excellent record promoting global domination by corporations based in the US and other wealthy nations. Each year, the World Bank awards some 40,000 contracts to private firms. "We love the Bank," said, Rachel Moshman, another party organizer. "It may have devastated the lives of millions in the Global South, but the Bank's special brand of global capitalism has helped the wealthy and corporate few in unprecedented ways-and they get away with calling it all poverty reduction!"

The Party Liberation Front, a group of activists from Washington, DC, said they threw the party to call attention to the excellent record of the World Bank in generating profit through encouraging exploitation of people poorer than they are. The Party ended when the PLF formed a conga line to lead employees out of the Bank. Strangely, none of them followed. The PLF plans to return to the Bank in the near future, suggesting that the Bank truly does not receive enough attention for its impressive work.

## **Campaign Against Coca-Cola and Pepsi**

### **Human Chain in Plachimada**

The unprecedented Satyagraha by the men and women, in Plachimada ( Palakkad,Kerala) for over 700 days, against the Coca-Cola plant, has strongly brought forth the issues of people's right over the natural resources and opposition to the forces of Globalisation. On June 16, over 1500 people held human chain at Plachimada to reassert their resolve stop the company from operating and appropriating the resources that belong to the people. Number of organisations and activists from other parts of Kerala and India participated in this leg of agitation.



They included many legislators and members of Parliament from Kerala, Medha Patkar, Thomas Kocherry, Suresh George, Joshi Jacob and hundreds of others.

As a sequel to the Satyagraha, the Kerala government has banned the extraction of groundwater by the company till June 20 and Kerala High Court too endorsed this step. However, the June 20 deadline is illusory, as the water groundwater situation in and around Plachimada has assumed grave proportion as the company has been extracting the groundwater continually without any control, thus lowering the water table beyond redemption. If, the company is permitted again to extract the water during and after monsoon, it would permanently damage the aquifer in around area. It is now necessary to pressurize the government of Kerala to stop the water extraction by the company.

### **Two Day Dharna At Vidhan Sabha Against Pepsi And Coke**

On June 9 and 10, about a thousand people affected by Coca-Cola bottling plants in Mehdiganj, Varanasi and Sinhachawar, Ballia and Pepsi-Cola bottling plant in Sathariya, Jaunpur staged a protest at the Sardar Patel statue near Uttar Pradesh State Assembly. They were demanding the cancellation of the license of these three plants from the State government. They also demanded from the Central government that these two companies be banned from India because:

- At every place where these companies have set up their bottling plants they are drawing huge quantities of water from under the ground.
- The Kerala High Court has recently restricted the Coca-Cola plant in Plachimada from exploiting underground water resource. The sludge from these plants which was distributed among farmers in the name of fertilizer is deadly and has caused immense damage to the crop and fields adjacent to the plants.
- The Joint Parliamentary Committee has confirmed the findings of Centre for Science and Environment that both Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola contain pesticides.
- These companies have not generated any employment. They give regular employment to only about 50-70 people at each of their bottling plants and make hundred others work on daily wages

### **Notes From North East**

#### **Public Hearing on Projects in Aalo**

Concerned organizations (NGOs) and people from various corners of Arunachal Pradesh and other parts of the North East region of India raised serious objections to the way the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) is functioning in the region. The public hearing on environmental issues was held in the second week of June at the behest of the NHPC, with the Pollution Control Board (PCB), Arunachal Pradesh and the office of the Deputy Commissioner of West Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh, at the Aalo Club in Aalo, the district headquarters of West Siang in central Arunachal on the Siang Middle (Siyom) hydro-electric Project.

T. Milang (Member Secretary, Pollution Control Board, Arunachal Pradesh), chairman of the hearing panel apologised to the gathering for the serious procedural mistakes and overstepping of the established mandate of the panel. The town house of Along was packed with more than 800 people including the *gaon buras* from the affected villages in their red coats, and public eager to know more about the project and the proceedings of the hearing.

### **In the Narmada Valley**

#### **Arrest of Upper Veda dam oustees**

**About 125 people affected by the Upper Veda dam in the Narmada valley, to be built in Khargone district on the river Veda, were detained in Khargone jail on May 23, for a couple days. Both the assembled and the arrested**

men, women, and children who were protesting peacefully against the commencement of the dam construction without land-based rehabilitation were beaten with lathis, dragged, slapped and thrust into vehicles where as the others were dispersed with force. The pandal that they had erected for the barricades was demolished. The 47 women and 77 men under detention were not allowed to meet any visitors or even their lawyer in complete violation of their legal rights.

### **RBI Probe into Maheshwar dam Sought**

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) demanded a probe by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Union Finance Ministry into the alleged role of financial institutions (FIs) and banks involved in the Maheshwar Hydel Power Project in Madhya Pradesh.

“The FIs and banks have disbursed hundreds of crores of public money to the Maheshwar Project without fulfilling important pre-disbursement conditions,” NBA activist Alok Agrawal claimed at a press conference here.

“A sum of Rs 560 crore has been extended as loans whereas expenses of nearly Rs 150 crore have been verified”, he said adding, the FIs and banks should be held publicly accountable for placing this money in “jeopardy”. Agrawal also called on the RBI to initiate penal action against corporate groups guilty of multiple wilful defaults and recover dues thereof.

### **Fast Against Land Mafias in Jaunpur**

National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) and Loktantra Bachao Abhiyan activists were together struggling in Jaunpur district of Uttar Pradesh to protest against the nexus of land mafias and corrupt people to illegally take possession of the land belonging to Nazool (or govt) in Urdu Bazaar, Jaunpur, in June.

The activists decided to intensify their agitation after a struggle lasting many days, as when politicians and local administration failed to make any move forward to get the land illegally possessed by land mafias vacated and take appropriate action against those who grabbed the land against the law. Instead the very vanguards of law and order were patronizing those who violate it. Four activists went on an indefinite fast since June 15, 2004 launching ‘Bhoo-Adhikar Satyagrah’ or Land Rights Satyagrah. These include the member of state convener committee of NAPM Dwijendra Vishwatma, Nisar Ahmad Khan, Rakesh Upadhyaya and Brajesh Tewari.

The demands included release of land illegally occupied by land mafias in an unauthorized manner, and appropriate action taken against the culprits.

### **‘Media for People’ in Mumbai**

A group of young and old journalist in Mumbai launched “Media for People” a platform to promote pro-people and creditable media, at a seminar on June 7 in Mumbai. The seminar ‘Election 2004 and MEDIA ... an Introduction’ unfolded the role of media in larger context and particularly during elections 2004. The seminar witnessed the confession about the mistakes during the election and also highlighted on remedial steps. The panel of speakers included senior journalist Mr. Prabhash Joshi, Mr. Rajdeep Sardesai of *NDTV*, Mr. Kumar Ketkar editor *Loksatta*. Mr. Arun Sadhu, Mr. Sajid Rashid, Mr. Prakash Bal, Pratima Joshi and many others from the media and also from the activist groups. Mr. Nikhil Wagle, editor of Mahanagar coordinated the meeting.

The seminar was attended by 130 journalist and activist concerned with the role of media from Mumbai and outside. The efforts of Media for People were appreciated by all the delegates. They said such platform was always needed and they would look forward to get associated with its programme.

### **Allocate at Least 3% Budget for Social Security for Unorganised Sector'**

Demands UWF in Chennai

The Unorganised Workers in Tamilnadu urged the State and Central governments to make adequate budgetary allocations for workers' welfare and to work towards comprehensive social security of workers in the informal sector. Also, the workers voiced sharp protest against the central government decision to assign the task of evolving a pension scheme to the Asian Development Bank, which in turn has floated a global tender.

Unorganised Workers Federation (UWF) of in Tamilnadu in its dawn to dusk fasts near the State Guest house in Chepauk, Chennai on July 5, 6 and 8 came out with number of demands by the unorganised workers in the state. Construction workers, domestic workers, beedi workers and other sectors, with different women's organisations, put forth specific demands.

"As 65% of the Gross National Product (GNP) is created by unorganized sector labour, at least 3% of the budget must be reserved for social security of the workers", pointed out . Ms. R. Geeta, Joint Secretary of Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangh in a press conference.

The ongoing struggle demands the immediate withdrawal of the totally inadequate social security scheme introduced by the previous NDA government (See *The People's Movement*, March-April 2004) and the enactment of a comprehensive central law for over 37 crores unorganized workers to provide for regulation of employment and wages, social security like ESI, pension, maternity benefit, crèches, dispute resolution mechanism, curbing of sexual harassment at work sites. It is imperative to put the existing tripartite boards into working order and to safeguard formation of trade-wise welfare boards in the State. The welfare boards must be equipped with statutory power to curb bonded labour and child labour. Sincere steps must be taken to register employers and workers in the sector and to collect levy from every production and distribution process under a Central Act. Right to Work must be made a fundamental right under the constitution. Housing is also a high priority for unorganized sector workers.

Sharp protest was registered on the basis of a news item in 'Economic Times', that the central government has assigned the task of evolving a pension scheme to the Asian Development Bank, which in turn has floated a global tender. The tender of an Australian firm called New Wales Global has been accepted by ADB. The project cost is 10 lakh dollars (4.5 crore Rs.). The demand is to cancel this contract, since there is enough capacity in our own country to carry out this task. Finally, it was demanded that the GOI must quit WTO and reverse the policies of globalisation, liberalization, privatization, mechanization, subsidy-cut, eviction of slum and pavement dwellers and vendors and of giving land to foreign companies, as this was a clear direction indicated in the outcome of the recent elections.

### **Brutal Attack On Kailash Satyarthi**

Eminent Child Labour activist Kailash Satyarthi who was leading a group of activist and parents was brutally attacked in Colonelganj Tehsil of Gonda District in Uttar Pradesh of North India.

Acting on complaints of 11 parents and accompanied by 4 parents (two mothers and two fathers) Satyarthi approached the district administration which sent the Sub Divisional Magistrate to help in the raid in the Great Roman Circus in Colonelganj. Our reports shows that children in hundreds were being cruelly treated and exploited in this circus.

However when the raid started, the entire administration instead of facilitating our team led by Kailash Satyarthi, connived with the circus owner to offset the entire exercise. The circus owner started attacking the team with lethal weapons like knives, iron rods and even pistols. The entire team was brutally attacked.



## Resolution

You fight us  
because we fight hatred,  
while you feed on hatred and violence  
for strength.

You curse us  
because we don't give man a label  
and turn a gun barrel on him.

You condemn us  
because you can't use our blood  
in paying off your debts of greed;  
because you can't budge us  
from man's side  
where we stand to protect all life.

And you murder us  
just because we bow our heads  
before man's love and reason;  
because  
we steadfastly refuse  
to identify him  
with the wolves.

*Thich Nhat Hahn, Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist.  
Written in the 1960's during the Vietnam War.*