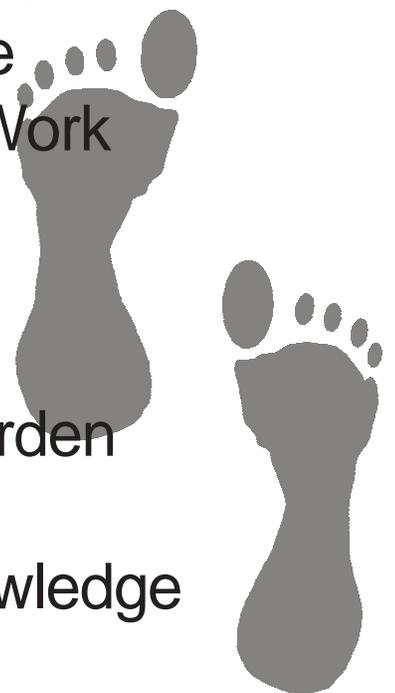


The People's Movement

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News Magazine of the National Alliance of People's Movements

- ◆ Beyond Gender Budgeting
- ◆ Budget of, by and for the People
- ◆ Tsunamis and a Secure Future
- ◆ Fundamental Right To Strike Work
- ◆ Hoping Against Hope
- ◆ Dr Singh, Water Plus Light
- ◆ A Major Effort Against War
- ◆ Neighbours' Fear, Owner's Burden
- ◆ A Very 'IFFI' Business Indeed
- ◆ Protecting the Indigenous Knowledge



National Convention On Development, Displacement And Rehabilitation

People's Declaration

We, the people affected by developmental projects — including dams, mines, sanctuaries and national parks, tourism projects, urban infrastructure, industries and others, social activists, support organisations, academics, researchers and others, gathered here in Delhi on November 30 and December 1, 2004 for a National Convention on Development, Displacement and Rehabilitation,

Believing in, and committed to, a rights-based, people-centred approach to development,

Affirming the principles of justice, equality, democracy, and sustainability,

Opposing ethnic discrimination and the unjust treatment of, and burden placed on, marginalised populations, in particular adivasis, dalits, and women by the prevalent development paradigm dominated by the state, corporates and global lenders,

Recognizing the distinctive but often neglected contributions of these peoples,

Asserting the Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles and other basic features of the Indian Constitution,

Noting Government of India's international legal obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Labour Organization's Convention 107, among other international conventions, and

Upholding the pluralist, secular nature of the Indian polity,

Believe and assert that:

There certainly is an alternative to the prevalent model of development that causes displacement, deprivation, and destitution in the guise of the 'greater common good.'

The choice of technology for development must be one that generates more livelihood opportunities; is least destructive of natural resources and least displacing of people; enables fulfilment of basic needs; ensures equitable distribution of benefits; and supports sustainable use of natural resources. Such technologies must be approved, facilitated and prioritized. This must be done with full information given to affected people.

The Government of India and each state must urgently initiate a wide social consultation involving various sections of the population, especially the disadvantaged sections, through mass-based, active peoples' organizations, to work out and declare a sectoral policy with a clear vision, purpose and objectives, modus operandi, and process. This should be in keeping with the values of the Constitution,

respecting special national policies and international covenants, protecting the poor and disadvantaged, including dalits, adivasis, women, peasants, informal sector workers, manual labourers and fisher people.

The interpretation of the principle of eminent domain, on which the laws enabling displacement of people and appropriation of common property resources is based, is unacceptable.

For every project, the government concerned must publicly justify the 'public interest' sought to be served by the proposed project or activity, prior to clearance by the concerned authority and consent by the affected community, and this should be legally challengeable. This should be applicable to every public and private agency.

In every sector and project/plan, the clear objective should be to minimize displacement. All options and alternatives for a project must be assessed, and the non-displacing or least-displacing option must be chosen. Eviction and deprivation of adivasis should be avoided to the maximum, in the spirit of Schedule V of the Constitution. All attempts to amend Schedule V that would weaken the rights of tribals should be stalled.

In no case — rural or urban — should displacement or evictions be forced or involuntary. In case of a project affecting dalits and tribals, no displacement should be permitted without concurrence of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

No project should be finalized or considered a fait accompli unless each of the affected communities is fully informed of the social, environmental and economic costs and benefits of a project/plan, and its consent is sought through gram sabhas in rural areas and ward sabhas in urban areas with a participatory process involving all communities and families, paying special attention to issues of class, caste and gender. Detailed legal rules and resolutions must be worked out for each sector, government and private agency, in the spirit of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments, and the PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996/97, aiming at tribal self-rule.

After evaluating all options, if displacement is found inevitable in a certain project, it must be kept to the minimum, and it must be ensured that all affected people are properly rehabilitated, ensuring that they are not worse off than they were before displacement, and that the process of rehabilitation is humane, just, transparent and participatory to the maximum extent.

(Continued on back inside cover)

Contents

Open Space 4

Editorial Comment

A Small Step... 5

Of Tsunami, Corporates, NRIs and the People 5

Can We Learn from Disaster? 7

Cover Story

Beyond Gender Budgeting

D. Gabriele 9

Budget of, by, and for the People

David Lewit 11

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Analysis

Tsunamis and a Secure Future

John Kurien 13

Law

Fundamental Right To Strike Work

Rajindar Sachar 15

North East

Hoping Against Hope

Nava Thakuria 17

Current Issues

Dr Singh, Water Plus Light

Bunker Roy 19

Peace & Justice

A Major Effort Against War 21

South Asia

Neighbours' Fear, Owner's Burden

Sudhir Vombatkere 22

Culture

A Very 'IFFI' Business Indeed

Aires Rodrigues 23

Campaign

Protecting the Indigenous Knowledge of Communities

Suman Sahai 25

Column

Past For Future

Surendra Mohan 27

Global Watch

Thomas Kocherry 28

Obituary

Extraordinary Friend of People:

Ajit Narayan Bose

Subhasish Mukhopadhyay 29

Review

High on Films

K.S.Sudeep 31

Report

Not Fish, but Fishing...

Maju Varghese 33

Outcome of Delhi Meet 35

News Clippings 37

□ Apropos TPM November-December, 2004 issue.

You end the editorial 'The Myth of CSR' by saying "only a strong state" can insist on responsibility from corporations. I agree with the sense in which you wrote it (that a responsible government is required) but the phrase "strong state" also evokes an image of a strong centralized power structure, which is also something that we have been struggling against. Perhaps we should say "strong state and effective public institutions with impeccable commitment to human rights and nature..." Let me share some thoughts on this issue so that you see where I am coming from - it's not meant to nitpick on a particular phrase in your editorial.

I feel that one of the ways the whole LPG regime has gained legitimacy is by starting with a widely felt and accepted truth - that the government has largely failed the citizens (through corruption, inefficiency, red-tapism, license raj, exploitation, power-brokerism, so on). I believe most people would agree with this view of government or "the state". But what WE say is that the government should be made more accountable to people, more decentralized, that people should have better control over natural resources, better protection of rights, so on. However, the LPG proponents start from the same basic premise and argue for 'liberalization' and privatization as a panacea - in other words, since 'the state' is inefficient and corrupt therefore 'private' is good.

I think we should break the logic of equating anything 'public' with the 'failed state'. We should say that the failures of 'the state' have been because it has not been properly accountable to the

citizens and it has not been truly 'public'. It has been left for too long as a matter between 'the state' and the corporations. In fact, that is one of the chief failures of Bhopal - why should 'the state' in Delhi be the sole negotiator with Union Carbide? It should be pitched as a matter between the citizens or the 'public' and the corporations.

This process of building properly accountable, decentralized, truly public institutions and mechanisms has been the main challenge of democracy - it takes several decades and is in a sense a perpetual process. In fact, the movements and classes which are now opposing globalization are the same ones which have been working/agitating for such public accountability. The struggle against WTO and globalization is just another phase in this process.

Meanwhile, those who are pushing globalization were the same ones who exploited the earlier regime or knew how to get through its loopholes, and in general contributed to what they now call the 'failed state'. They can't now use that premise to dismantle 'public' altogether and make everything private.

Kiran Kumar Vissa
Maryland, USA

□ The Nov-Dec, 2004 issue of TPM's editorial comment (and other articles also) discusses state in connection with social and environmental friendly responsibilities of corporations and a strong state against weak state is advocated. It is important to go through the discussions about the State that took place in 1842 when young Karl Marx enters as a liberal democratic journalist (particularly refusing himself to be communist). He was writing for the traditional

rights of poor people on dead forest wood, which was being denied by new laws in the interest of private property, something we are having now in India.

Originally, Hegelian himself, finds that Hegelian concept of ideal-rational state which should represent the people's interests as a communal collectivity, rather than narrow selfish interests of *parts of society*, and later through peasants' struggle and restrictive tariff's studies he finds the real class nature of state and develops the theory of origin of state. It is my humble request to go through this whole discussions, give some space in TPM and enrich our movement.

So it is not the weak or strong state but class nature of state will have to be changed. Today, the state is rather strong with all its brutality. Can't wish for stronger.

Maya Valecha,
Vadodara.

□ Editor's note:

There are many issues involved, particularly when we simply put the issue as 'people' versus 'the state.' The corporate powers and World Bank etc. are also increasingly insisting on diminishing role of the state and nation-state, particularly in the Third World. They wish to directly deal with water users associations (WUAs), consumers association etc. without the intermediary 'state.' While the American or other imperialist states are becoming stronger, the same powers insist on the shrinking state in the Third World. Do we need an Indian state as a bulwark against global imperialism? If so what kind of 'state' and 'nation' do we envision protecting and strengthening the people's power? TPM welcomes further dialogue on such important issues



A Small Step....

The People's Movement is entering into its second year.

The first year of this version of the news magazine of National Alliance of People's Movements (the earlier being NAPM Bulletin) was encouraging and discouraging, both.

While the appreciation of our readers and well wishers were encouraging, the fact that we couldn't reach to a large number of people was discouraging. But we take it as a challenge for the next year.

Some pointed out the need to print 'lighter' articles and carry photographs, some helped to change and gradually improve the design.

NAPM convenors took interest in helping us with their inputs in the content and subscriptions, from time to time. But we have a long way to go, to make this

magazine equally relevant to both NAPM constituents and readers in general.

A vibrant and creative support group in Mumbai, who helped us in the designing, editing and administrative matters, made the task of bringing out the magazine more enjoyable.

As we enter the second year, we realise that we need to live up to the expectations of an activist community as well as the general public, who support the cause of the people's movements.

We encourage you to send in your comments, criticisms and suggestions so that we can contribute better.

We do not want to sound formal by saying thanks. Instead we say, *zindabad*.

JA



Of Tsunami, Corporates, NRIs and the People

As the year 2004 wore out, the tsunami tragedy justifiably caught everybody's attention. The Central government and almost all the state governments, along with newspapers, corporate houses, big and small NGOs and the people's organisations - all are engrossed in the post-tragedy relief work. The people's organisations have an untold commitment for such causes and an honest approach. But they have a negligible financial and administrative infrastructure and their strength is already consumed by whatever limited struggle they have been waging for years. Despite serious limitations, they have been extending themselves at the time of such a calamity.

On the other hand, the corporate houses, along with the film stars, cricketwallahs and political parties etc., have enormous financial power, larger than life image, media

and personnel network and infrastructure power. Very easily any of these individual or organisation like CII of FICCI can shell off millions of rupees, can 'adopt' villages and all that. And, such relief work consists only a tiny part of their other massive enterprises and for most of them their work is done once they announce big amounts or express shock or sympathy, which anyway makes a good copy for the corporate media. The story of some of the NGO empires is no different. Anil Ambani has announced Rs. 10 million, Reliance company Rs. 50 m. and the Coca-Cola Company has declared Rs. 20 million for the Prime Minister's Tsunami Relief Fund. These are peanuts in the entire Rs. 4030 million fund collected by the first week of January. But that can buy additional credibility and access for the companies in the corridors of powers, which the

people's movements and smaller NGOs can never imagine to get.

In the end, it is the State, with its rickety administration, the smaller NGOs or people's organisations – often maligned and ridiculed by the corporate media – who are there to do the donkey-work – not the corporate bosses or celebrities. While the people's movements are seized up with the relief and rehabilitation, the corporate powers are up to something else. They see this as another brand-spreading, concession-getting, marketing opportunity for their junk goods, as we have seen thousands of bottled water crates are being pushed in the affected areas. No doubt, people need safe drinking water, but it is responsibility of the state which it has willingly abandoned, like other works. The responsibility by the state and others is now converted into charity by donors. One can anticipate what lies in future.

By creating much hype in the name of aid, with easier access and added credibility, these powers push their own agenda. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Non-Resident Indians Day), on January 8-9 could not have come at a better time. Every minister, secretary or political party or its leader is fawning on them. The editors and cub reporters of corporate newspapers like 'The Indian Express,' 'The Times of India,' and TVs like 'Zee' and 'Aaj Tak' are squealing ecstatically. The Prime Minister conferred the dual citizenship on this tiny minority and our poet-scientist President praised them with moist eyes. The NRIs have been given the citizenship in the same Mumbai where barely three weeks back over 50,000 houses were demolished and 2 lakh people of this country were made destitute in a systematic and cruel manner, with the help of armed police. The Maharashtra Chief Minister, the stylish Vilasrao Deshmukh, has no trace of shame when he seeks the NRIs to come and stay in Maharashtra, while he had just finished the job of force out 2 lakh Indian citizens from their homes in Mumbai.

Number of national conventions were held in New Delhi in November-December 2004, about the Policy on Development, displacement and rehabilitation, about the tribal rights and identity, rights of workers, forest-dwellers, national convention on inter-linking of rivers, biodiversity convention etc. All of them have provided concrete policy-suggestions, drafts, and inputs and hard data on important issues related

with the people and nation. But hardly any minister has taken note of them on his/her own, very few political parties paid even tentative attention. No member of Planning Commission had time to interact with the organizations, people who had all the way converged in Delhi. This is the collapse of Indian democracy.

And now these NRIs and the Indian government are to decide about the fate of the nation. The corporate powers have already put the cost-tag of their participation. The NRIs and corporates will be getting the Coastal Zone Regulation (CRZ) removed to 'encourage' export oriented prawn-culture, tourism, would get government open the sea and sea-coast, would get Land reforms Act quashed, to get large chunks of lands for mining, export oriented corporate agriculture. They are eyeing for license to set up esoteric IITs, five-star schools, five-star universities, health industry... And the rulers are more than willing to oblige them. The corporate media is acting as the agent-watchdog, so that the government does not favour 'populist' demands.

The movements and NGOs are kept out of the remotest bounds of these power-centers. They are expected to do the manual work along with soon to be fired government workers, while these corporate powers are busy with policy making and changing sitting with the *babus* and *netas*. All that the organisations and activists are left is to react belatedly, to oppose the decisions that are already taken.

The people's movements and activist must not allow the vested interest to take such an undue advantage of the tragedy. Along with participating in the relief and rehabilitation work, making it just and complete, they should raise and assert the policy issues like strict implementation of CRZ, getting rid of prawn farms, corporate tourism plans. We must insist on implementation of Land reforms and urban land ceiling laws, reclaim the rights of fisher people. We should monitor the acts of governments and corporate powers, reinforce their own issues of common people's rights. We have to be watchful about the designs of these vested interests in collusion with the government and at the same time put forth the issues of the right to life and resources of common people.

SS



Can We Learn from Disaster?

The tsunami which swept the coasts of the Indian ocean and wrought havoc among the fishing population and other workers along the shore, has brought with it enormous trauma and heartbreak. At the same time, it has brought out many social contradictions, which need to be understood if future long term reconstruction is to be successful.

Before the government institutions and the NGO sector swung into action, many ordinary people, neighbourhood groups, workers, youth associations, places of worship and hospitals extended immediate help. Many of these managed to reach the affected people, comfort the traumatized and the bereaved, give shelter, provide medicines, recover bodies and feed the hungry. This was a genuine upsurge of solidarity and goodwill. Such initiatives need to be carried forward in the long term reconstruction work.

Once the “official” relief work reached, the co-ordination between departments, between central and state government, was lacking in many places and people’s participation was not taken care of. On the contrary, the worst affected people were too shell-shocked to queue up for relief or even to eat, while others took advantage of aid pouring in. The media sensationalized the loss of life and depicted people as destitute and desperate victims, not as survivors entitled to have a future. This triggered more relief in the form of old clothes or perishable food stuffs and enhanced the chaos. Long term rehabilitation needs to be done involving local people’s organizations, especially women and gram sabhas, assessing the livelihood needs of all the people concerned.

It is crucial to remember that the right to life and livelihood of the coastal population has been violated severely since the eighties, when prawn farms were strongly encouraged by government incentives, which has affected agriculture and fisheries adversely. Before the tsunami hit, there were already severe floods in the Cauvery Delta in October/November 2004 during the north east monsoon, after the area had suffered protracted droughts during summer. The prawn farms had been depleting the water resources in times of water scarcity and were blocking the outflow of water during the rains. The tsunami has devastated many

prawn farms. This is the time to review the environmental impact and legality in the light of the Supreme Court judgement of 1997, instead of going in for compensation and reconstruction of these illicit money spinners. The desalination of soils necessitated by the tsunami should include rehabilitation of lands degraded by intensive aquaculture.

Many environmental organizations have untiringly pointed out that the violation and watering down of the CRZ legislation has contributed enormously to the loss of life, housing and means of livelihood in the present situation. Wherever mangroves were intact, like in Killai (Cuddalore Dt.) or in the Muttupettai lagoon (Thiruvavur Dt.), the losses have been less. Wherever shelter belt plantations of casuarina trees had matured, e.g. in the area between Kodiampalayam and Vedaranyam, casualties and material damage were limited. However, the removal of sand dunes for “beautification” of the beach or for the “benefit” of shrimp industries, has made people’s settlements much more vulnerable.

All along, fisher people have had to compete with the tourism industry. In some places it appears that the government is not unhappy if fishing population gets evicted, as “nature” has now done what the government desired to do all along. In this context, the argument of John Kurien in the present issue is very relevant: Stop violations of the CRZ by tourism establishments and industries and provide housing for fisher people respecting the 500 m distance from the high tide line. Broad involvement of people in reforestation of mangroves and protection belts could be much more promising than the plan of the Tamilnadu government to build a continuous wall all along the coast. This is also the time to oppose afresh all further construction of nuclear plants and the disastrous government plan of the Seythu Samuthiram project, which would ruin the marine life and fisheries in the region in irreparable ways. If the tsunami helps us to wake up from the madness of such destructive development plans, it would have some meaning.

It is also necessary to understand how religious and caste factors operated in the tsunami relief. In the initial spontaneous relief efforts, people came forward

without regard to religious and caste lines. This is very heartening. Later, when relief was extended on a large scale by government and NGOs predominantly to fishing communities, there was a feeling that Dalits, tribals and backward communities were discriminated against. Dalits were in the forefront of handling dead bodies. Women have found it difficult to access relief, as they were not involved in distribution. Loss of productive equipment needs to be compensated even where water has not entered the houses. Reconstructing livelihoods in mutual cooperation is the need of the hour. Poverty of Dalit and tribal communities, of rural women and unorganized sector workers is an endemic disaster which needs to be addressed long term.

It is heartening to note that attempts communalize the disaster did not succeed. The theory that this was a punishment for the arrest of the seer of

Kanchipuram Jayendra Saraswati, did not find many takers. (In the past, the Orissa cyclone had been taken by fundamentalist Christians to be a “punishment” for the murder of Graham Staines and his young sons.) Religious institutions extended indiscriminate and generous support.

If we could learn to transform spontaneous compassion into long term solidarity and learn to respect forces of nature and peoples’ livelihood needs, reconstruction could lead to a more livable future. The decision of the Indian government to refuse international aid may be good in terms of national sovereignty and avoiding interference of foreign powers. However, if it is chiefly meant to serve the purpose of appearing as a main player in the race of global “development,” this may aggravate the coastal problems more than solving them.

GD



NAPM Appeal

Donate Generously For The Tsunami Affected People!

All of us are deeply moved and shaken by the tsunami tragedy. Although tsunami has hit only 4-5 countries it has disturbed the entire globe. Figure of affected persons is increasing every day. Amidst this monumental human suffering, we hope that you will join hands with us to extend support to these shattered lives. These people need all the monetary, material and emotional support to reconstruct their lives not only now but especially over the coming months.

“Maharashtra Machchimar Kriti Samiti” and “National Fishworkers Forum” the constituents of “National Alliance of Peoples’ Movements” have started work in the tsunami affected coastal areas of India. Thomas Kocherry and others from the National Fishworkers Forum, as well as different NAPM constituent

organisations are already involved in the relief operations since the time of tragedy.

Another team from NAPM, including Medha Patkar spent almost a week in Tamilnadu for relief and rehabilitation of tsunami affected since the first week of January. The team consisted of medical doctors, trained social workers and activists.

NAPM appeals to all sensitive citizens to extend their helping hand to the people worst affected by tsunami. NAPM further call upon volunteers to come forward and help in the long-term rehabilitation of the people. Please send your names, giving details about your background, earlier experience, area of expertise, physical fitness, possible time period and other relevant information.

Please enrol your names and send donations by cheques or DD in favour of **Narmada Nav Nirman Abhiyan** to NAPM National Office, Haji Habib Bldg., A wing, First Floor, Naigaon Cross Road, Dadar(East), MUMBAI 400014. Tel. No. 022- 24150529 (Alimbhai).

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Sanjay M. G.
National Co-coordinator - NAPM



Beyond Gender Budgeting

A gender sensitive planning and laws, with in-built gender budgeting are necessary for a new eco-socialism based on equality and freedom.

D.Gabriele

Gender budgeting has become a fashionable term in the present day discourse on the economy. However, it is important to keep in mind that women by themselves are not a “sector,” but are divided into classes and castes and are further divided by the religion specific personal laws. Besides, it is very contestable whether attempts at “women’s empowerment” or “mainstreaming” can have lasting beneficial effects in a globalising economy, which leads to more and more withdrawal of the state from social responsibility, abolition of public sector employment, destruction of agriculture through green revolution techniques and rising indebtedness of peasants, free import of agricultural goods, destruction of workplaces through mechanization in agriculture, construction labour, weaving etc. It is today acknowledged that poor and lower middle class women have been hardest hit by LPG policies, since over a decade. Gender budgeting therefore often amounts to an attempt to introduce women specific programmes or at least pro-women programmes in an adverse situation, where the general trend deprives women of workplaces and access to natural resources like land, water and forest.

Dismantling Security

The truly distressing aspect of the first UPA budget in 2004 consisted in the fact that it was nearly a verbatim copy of the Jaswant Singh interim budget of Feb 2004. The NDA government had left 300 crores of funds unutilised which had been allocated for poor women and children in the 2002-03 budget. This led to a cut of 200 crores in the interim budget. The Chidambaram budget of 2004 upheld this reduction in the funds allocated to the Human Resource Development ministry. This led to drastic cuts in the allocation for Integrated Child Development Schemes (ICDS) for the rural poor. The ICDS anganwadi scheme could cover only 23 million children, while altogether about 60

million children in fact need such services. Without child-care facilities, women’s work participation and elder sisters’ school enrolment are badly affected.

Thus this trend is badly in need of reversal. Women welfare schemes had an allocation of only 175 crores in the UPA budget of 2004, 37 crores less than in the NDA interim budget. This cannot be justified by lack of funds. For rather inexplicable reasons, the defense budget had been jacked up from 60,000 crores to 77,000 crores. This means that somehow the priorities have gone wrong.

Some crucial areas that more severely affect women are food security, employment and social security in the informal sector, health and general rise in violence. In all these fields it is not only the money allocation as such but the policy perspectives, which are of supreme importance. For example, as far as food security goes, it was Mr. Chidambaram who first introduced the concept of targeting in 1997, which has led to considerable dismantling of the Public Distribution System (PDS). While the CMP endorsed the need to universalize the PDS, the last budget aimed at targeted food stamp schemes as a pilot project – an approach that has already proven to be a disaster in Andhra Pradesh. It is women who suffer most from ration cuts, as they have to stand in queues, have to make ends meet and chronically get less to eat anyway. Women need a perspective change here as well as an allocation of funds.

The other policy issue of crucial importance is the formulation of the Employment Guarantee Act (EGA) which was promised in the CMP, but the campaign for which has run into considerable trouble due to the effort by the government to water down successive versions to levels of meaningless dilution. The CMP of the UPA government very prominently promised immediate enactment of an EGA, which would provide at least 100 days of employment annually on asset-creating public work programmes at legal minimum wages for at least one able bodied person in every

rural, urban, poor and lower middle class household. Failure to provide employment within 15 days would entitle the person who seeks work to a dole at half the legal minimum wage. Experiences in Maharashtra have shown that women have benefited from the employment guarantee scheme (EGS) in that state over many years. It was hoped that a generalized law could reverse some of the negative effects of globalisation on agriculture, environment and rural employment.

Whither Employment

In the mean time the Finance Ministry and the Planning Commission have drafted an act which provides only for a narrowly targeted scheme, covering only BPL households moving from district to district in entirely arbitrary ways, paying any wage for any duration of time, putting a major burden on the state government. The scheme can be withdrawn anywhere, anytime as the central government pleases. It therefore does not provide a guarantee at all. By definition it excludes all households which are supposed not to be “below poverty line (BPL).” It is not also reliably linked at least to rural minimum wages like the food for work programme or the Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) nor to the All India Price Consumer Index for agricultural and rural works (CPI-AL). The definition of the work that can be done has also been narrowed down so that the panchayats may find it difficult to formulate suitable schemes. Women as well as older people may find themselves unable to do the kind of heavy earth moving works to which the new definitions are confined.

Women’s organizations have pointed out that the definition of a household is very wide on the base of a common ration card or common kitchen. There are no safeguards in the scheme against exclusion of women who are most affected by the decline in rural employment over recent years. The Act should ensure that at least 40% of workers employed in any block are women. Otherwise, a large number of women may be shoved on to the dole, which now the state government is supposed to provide. If the Act is passed in the present form, it could spread a regime of targeted wage flexibility in other government programmes, which despite the pressures of WB and IMF has not been accepted so far in India.

This adverse trend regarding the EGA also has a negative effect on the campaign to bring about full social protection for workers in the informal sector by formulating an umbrella legislation. While the attempts of the UPA government are considerably more promising than the toothless scheme that the NDA government tried to offer, there is an attempt to bring all informal sector workers under a centralized welfare board. However, in order to do justice to different sub-sectors, decentralization of labour boards is a must. Finance should be mobilized, as planned earlier, by putting a 2 paise cess per litre of petrol and diesel. Funds need to be made available for training programmes to enable women to competently participate in panchayats and gram sabhas, as well as in the labour boards of the informal sector.

In health, attention has to be given to women’s morbidity and mortality which is closely connected with the above mentioned problems of destruction of food security and work places and resulting migration. Instead the trend of targeted birth control has re-emerged over recent years, which poses further risks to women’s health. Again, meaningful budgetary allocations would require a rethinking on policies. The 1.37 lakhs rural sub-centres in India providing primary health care need sufficient funds and personnel to provide accessible low cost health care instead of being mostly used for targeted family planning.

In the present climate of commodification of natural resources, basic services and human relationships, fragmentation of the social fabric, displacement and violence are on the rise. It appears crucial in the present situation for women’s movements and organizations of workers in the informal sector, as well as small peasants, agricultural labourers, dalits, adivasis, displaced people and the tribals in the North-East, to join hands with struggles for peace and disarmament in order to reduce military spending and violence in society and clear the way for the development process which puts access to work, food and livelihood resources for the mass of people as a high priority. A political process towards a feminist eco-socialism needs to be built up, which consciously overcomes caste and communal divides, unites workers and peasants and gives a common focus to the aspirations for transformation in different sectoral struggles.



Budget of, by, and for the People

The Latin American city became the most liveable city due to the direct participation of thousands of people in budget and planning.

David Lewit

How would you like to distribute 200 million dollars to your fellow citizens? That's the amount of money the city of Porto Alegre spends in an average year for construction and services—money not committed to fixed expenses like debt service and pensions.

Fifty thousand residents of Porto Alegre—poor and middle class, women and men, leftist and centrist—now take part in the participatory budgeting process for this city of a million and a half people, and the numbers involved have grown each year since its start in 1989.

Then, only 75 percent of homes had running water. Today 99 percent have treated water and 85 percent have piped sewage. In seven years, housing assistance jumped from 1,700 families to 29,000. In 12 years, the number of public schools increased from 29 to 86, and literacy has reached 98 percent. Each year the bulk of new street-paving projects has gone to the poorer, outlying districts. In addition to these achievements, corruption, which before was the rule, has virtually disappeared. Democracy is thriving as citizens gain competence in talking with the mayor, specialists in agencies, and fellow citizens of different means.

The participatory budgeting cycle starts in January of each year with dozens of assemblies across the city designed to ensure the system operates with maximum participation and friendly interaction. One study shows that poor people, less well-educated people, and black people are not inhibited in attending and speaking up, even though racial discrimination is strong in Brazil.

One experienced participant described the dynamic as follows: "The most important thing is that more and more people come. Those who come for the first time

are welcome. We let them make demands during technical meetings—they can speak their mind and their anxieties. We have patience for it because we were like that once. And if a person has an issue, we set up a meeting for him, and create a commission to accompany him. You have the responsibility of not abandoning him. That is the most important thing."

Power and learning

Each February there is instruction from city specialists in technical and system aspects of city budgeting.

Regular folks learn fast because what they are learning empowers them to change conditions that limit or extend their lives. This is perhaps an extension of the teachings of Paolo Freire, the Brazilian educator who enabled peasants to quickly learn to read by making use of materials about power, landlords, and politics, and by a learning process of liberation as well as deliberation.

In March there are plenary assemblies in each of the city's 16 districts as well as assemblies dealing with such areas as transportation, health, education, sports, and economic development. These large meetings—with participation that can reach over 1,000—elect delegates to represent specific neighbourhoods. The mayor and staff attend to respond to citizen concerns.

In subsequent months these delegates meet weekly or biweekly in each district to acquaint themselves with the technical criteria involved in requesting a project be brought to a district and to deliberate about the district's needs. Representatives from the city's departments participate according to their specialities. These intermediary meetings come to a close when, at a second regional plenary, regional delegates prioritise the district's demands and elect councillors to serve on the Municipal Council of the Budget.

The council is a 42-member forum of representatives of all the districts and thematic meetings. Its main

function is to reconcile the demands of each district with available resources, and to propose and approve an overall municipal budget. The resulting budget is binding—the city council can suggest changes but not require them. The budget is submitted to the mayor who may veto it and remand it to the Municipal Council of the Budget, but this has never happened. If there are residual problems, the council works out changes, returning to their neighbourhoods for feedback.

The internet provides an ongoing vehicle for involvement in participatory budgeting, which the city now extends to city planning features like land use and long-term major investments. The city posts progress reports, budget updates, and a calendar of all meetings.

An important by-product of the participatory budgeting process is a burgeoning of civic activity. As participatory budgeting developed, the numbers of political, cultural, and neighborhood groups has doubled, especially in poorer districts where results of self-generated new city expenditures are remarkable. People in wealthier districts also like what's going on. The value of their properties in poorer districts is rising. A new city "energy of accomplishment" spawned a campaign to get property owners to pay their taxes, and it worked.

A liveable city

Porto Alegre is one of the most liveable cities in Brazil. The experiment has spread to more than 100 cities in Brazil and also to Montevideo, Uruguay and Córdoba, Argentina. Here are the words of participant Luis Carlos Pereira about the changes he's seen in his neighbourhood. Before participatory budgeting, "there was no sewer, school, health clinic, or transportation. Now, a reservoir has been built with 6 million litres of water, the streets have been paved, and a school opened."

Eloah dos Santos Alves, a white-haired woman from the Leste region of the city, says "I have participated in the participatory budgeting process since 1989. In general, 85 percent of the needs have been met. We have a recycling warehouse, schools, day cares, and medical clinics. And I would like to let everyone know that I have never been treated differently for not being part of the PT"—the Workers' Party, whose candidate, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was elected president of Brazil on October 27, 2002.

(David Lewit is co-chair of the Alliance for Democracy campaign on Corporate Globalization & Positive Alternatives, USA. Courtesy: Yes magazine. <http://www.futurenet.org>)



The World Social Forum

The World Social Forum for 2005 will be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil between January 26 -31. The World Social Forum has emerged as an important space for dialogue between civil society actors dedicated to alternative globalisation and the idea that "another world is possible". The last Forum in Mumbai, India in January this year was attended by 80,000 people from over 130 countries and 2,660 organisations. Further information on the initial preparatory process for the 2005 event is on the website <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>. NAPM would take part in the WSF 2005.

5th Intercontinental Youth Camp of the WSF

During the World Social Forum 2005 the 5th Intercontinental Youth Camp (IYC) will take place in Parque Harmonia, Porto Alegre. Situated in at the heart of the WSF landscape, the camp will map the alternatives throughout the camp focusing on self-management, horizontality, diversity and creative resistance, experimenting and proposing alternatives that oppose capitalist and neoliberal hegemony. The Youth Camp opens its doors on the 24th January to around 25,000 people from around the world. One challenge of IYC 2005 is to enable the building of new networks of different struggles seeking articulation from local to global levels with the capacity to influence the consequences and causes of global political spheres and also it will be crucial to collect information on all the different practices experimented in the camp for exchange on an international level and to spread the ideas.

Tsunamis and a Secure Future

Can the devastation and death of thousands be attributed solely to the natural calamity? Are not some of state and civil society's neglect of sustainable long term solutions equally to blame for the large loss of life?

John Kurien

The post-Christmas tsunami has wrecked havoc in vast parts of the coastal areas of developing countries bordering the Indian Ocean. No one was able to predict this silent subterranean killer which was looming in the oceans. Unlike mighty waves of a 'perfect storm,' tsunami waves are not noticeable and are by no means dramatic in the sea because their intervals range from 10 minutes to one hour. Their wave-lengths are large, sometimes several hundred kilometres, occurring when an earthquake or volcanic eruption releases tremendous energy in the ocean floor. This energy does not dissipate even as the waves travel through the ocean at great speeds covering long distances. As tsunami waves reach the shallower water near the shore, friction with the continental shelf slows the front of the wave. Then the trailing waves pile onto the waves in front of them, like a rug crumpled against a wall. This makes the wave rise up to 30 feet before hitting the shore. Although greatly slowed, a tsunami still bursts onto land at high speeds, with enough momentum to flatten buildings and trees and to carry boats from the shore miles inland. Their onslaught on land comes without wind or rain or other conventional storm or cyclone warnings. They strike with great stealth and surprise.

It is however, not to nature alone that we attribute the devastation and death of thousands of fisherfolk and coastal dwellers. Are not state and civil society's neglect of sustainable long term solutions also to blame for the large loss of life? Whenever coastal communities are affected by natural calamities such as sea ingress, tidal waves and cyclones, most often it is members of the affected communities themselves who take the first initiatives to respond to the crisis. They work wonders with their limited means. Several non-governmental agencies also play very crucial roles in mitigating the intensity of post-disaster traumas. The first reaction of the political establishment is to take the

easy route of announcing liberal ex-gratia payments from public funds and then get political mileage by handing out relief material. The corruption related to disaster relief is too familiar to be recounted here. While the disaster is fresh in the public mind the media pay great attention and highlight the human tragedy. Often they also take the initiative to raise funds for relief. The public readily responds, trusting that such funds actually reach the affected people. However, soon we all move on. Those affected by the tragedy are left to solve their problems. Months and years after earthquakes, cyclones and floods, all the help which was promised at the height of the tragedy is yet to come down the pipeline! This cycle is repeated when the next disaster strikes. And in a country as vast as ours there is no dearth of natural disasters. Disasters are big business too.

By recent records the tsunamis seem to have a 60-year cycle in the Bay of Bengal region (1881, 1941, and now 2004). The last one was triggered by an earthquake in the sea in June 1941 which destroyed parts of the Cellular Jail in the Andamans. According to the Amateur Seismic Centre, that tsunami, as per journalistic sources, was witnessed along the eastern coast of India and nearly 5,000 people were killed by it. Sixty years is quite a long cycle compared to that of cyclones, floods and the rest, which are almost an annual feature. Still, ecologically sound measures may serve as a means to mitigate disastrous effects of such natural events. Therefore, I believe it is worth asking some questions.

Could thousands of lives have been saved if proper Coastal Regulation Zone plans had been implemented without pleading for numerous exemptions? If all fisherfolk were given housing sites on the landward side of coastal roads would not the death toll have been less? If the many long term coastal zone rehabilitation plans — which include reviving natural barriers such as mangroves, wind breaker trees, sea safety signalling systems, community disaster training and so forth —

had been in place, would the damage and the death toll have been reduced? If the communities and the coastal panchayat had been given the prime responsibility as well as the finances and material resources for safety, rescue and disaster management, would the response time to the crisis have been more rapid and the damage greatly mitigated? The priority of the moment is certainly to attend to the immediate and urgent needs of the many thousands whose lives have been shattered in an unexpected moment. But we should give thought to the important long-term issues raised above.

Beyond CRZ

The issue of housing for fisherfolk should be given the highest priority from the long-term perspective. Fisherfolk will continue to live by the sea. However, this is no excuse for restricting their habitations to the shore area closest to the coastal survey stones. The CRZ requirements for a free zone of 200 – 500 metres from the high tide line should be scrupulously enforced. The argument of many states is that there is no land available on the landward side of coastal roads to provide housing sites for fishing communities. This normally just means that this land is currently in the hands of private individuals or government and have to be put to more productive use than housing for poor fisherfolk! This alibi must be exposed. Committed efforts must be taken to acquire such lands and organise the total rebuilding of new fishing villages. Coastal densities are high. But this is only largely true only within the first 500 metres from the high tide line. Beyond that there is a sharp fall in density. This is indicative of the differences in the property rights on the respective lands.

The fisherfolk and their organisations also are to blame for accepting this status quo. They are merely pushing for exemptions in the CRZ notification to permit buildings in the present villages which lie so near the sea. Asking government to acquire private and state property for fisherfolk housing is perceived to be too radical. No political party wishes to make such demands for fear of upsetting the more powerful interests who normally own the lands close to the shore. However, this is the only long-term solution for preventing the sea from eating fisherfolk houses – as a result of tidal waves, cyclones or the rare tsunami. Evidence from the recent tragedy amply proves the point. The death toll of fisherfolk in Tamilnadu has

been indirectly proportional to the distance of their housing sites from the high tide line. The closer they lived to it the higher the number dead.

Coupled with this proposition is the need to revive on a war footing the setting up of appropriate natural protection measures such as mangroves, casaurina plantations, beach grass etc. to reduce the impact of nature's fury. These measures need to be undertaken with the participation of the communities. The aftermath of this current tragedy is an opportune moment to initiate such joint efforts between state authorities and communities. States like Andhra Pradesh once had a Shore Area Authority under which such efforts were planned. In Kerala plans for a participatory Coastal Area Development Authority remains in report form. Revival of such spatially focused bodies may be appropriate.

Early Warning

Another long term measure for which much lip service has been paid relate to sea safety signalling systems and community training for disaster mitigation. With the rapid increase in the technology used by fisherfolk such as GPS and cell phones, the possibility for taking up state initiatives for sea safety communication installations is much easier than even a decade ago. This will help in the fishing occupation and for sea safety and rescue. The development of human capacity for disaster management and mitigation also warrants top priority. Youth of the fishing communities should form a sea safety corps. With suitable training and perhaps a uniform, they will earn the social recognition to play a critical role in the time of need. Youth from the fishing communities are more naturally equipped to relate to the vagaries of the sea. Most of them will know how to swim. Many of them have much traditional knowledge passed down to them with regard to advance messages given by Nature for calamities in the offing. With this latest devastation, they also now have an understanding of the behaviour of tsunamis. Again, TV reports from the worst hit regions of Tamilnadu show that in villages where some sort of disaster training had been given, the community was much better organised to handle the crisis. The many stories of fishermen, who at great risks to themselves, rescued tourists in Kanyakumari and Vellankani, much before state police and other rescue forces appeared, is again proof of the selflessness of the poor even in times of tragedy.

(Continued on page 22)

Fundamental Right To Strike Work

Necessary to Remove Rule 7

The Central government can straightaway repeal Rule 7 of Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964 and thus remove a bitter fight with labour. It is not necessary to engage in any tortuous long drawn fight of constitutional amendment.

Rajindar Sachar

Once again a justifiable campaign has hardened against the judgement of Supreme Court (2003) which has held that there is no fundamental or statutory provisions empowering the employees to go on strike. Some members of Parliament are in desperation suggesting the amendment of the Constitution for this purpose. But some facts need to be clarified to put the debate on the right track.

The 2003 judgement was given in the context of a strike by employees of the Tamilnadu government. The observations therein are relevant to the right of Government employees only – it has no relevance to the right of private sector employees to go on strike.

The real villain is Central Government, which by Rule 7 of Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964 mandates that no Government servant shall resort to or in any way abet any form of strike.

Various state governments have copied the above Central Rule. On the literal interpretation of the rule the view of the Supreme Court cannot be faulted. This interpretation has been continuing since 1962. Many Trade Unionists were dismissed from service under this rule, but still it remained on the rule book, notwithstanding that in the interval and even now many Central Governments apparently sympathetic to the labour and even supported by Left forces have been in power. This rule is not consistent with Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which India has ratified, and which recognises the right to join trade unions for the protection of his or her interests and prohibits any restriction being placed other than which are necessary in the interest of national security, public order. In a properly balanced collective bargaining situation, the

Trade Unions' right to strike is vital and necessary ingredient. Strikes will continue to occur – this prohibitive measure against public employees is not the answer.

Courts in U.S.A. accept that labour possesses a right to participate in a primary strike, where the workers' complaints have reference to wages, hours or other conditions of employment.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its conventions No. 87, 98, 154 and 151 has accepted these rights. Convention No. 151 which is exclusively meant for the public service, has specifically mandated that public employees shall have, as other workers, the civil and political rights which are essential for the normal exercise of freedom of association, subject only to the obligation arising from their status and the nature of function.

The instrument of collective bargaining by the members of Union extends to Union members' concerted refusal to work overtime during negotiations for renewal of expired collective bargaining agreement. Thus a transportation strike was held legal in USA by the court observing "there was not absolute right to strike at common law but there was a common law right to strike in the sense that a peaceful strike was recognized by the common law as lawful concerted activity and therefore legal if employed for a lawful object. Employees who peacefully struck for a lawful object were not liable to their employer even though the strike shut him down, bankrupted him, or put him out of business, and even though it also caused enormous and irreparable damage to hundreds of thousands of innocent persons not involved in the strike".

Some US courts have even given the right to strike a constitutional status when neither the Thirteenth nor

the Fourteenth Amendment confers an absolute right to strike, but it has nevertheless held that the right to strike is property within the Fourteenth Amendment and therefore cannot be taken without due process of law. It has also been held that a state may not constitutionally forbid lawful strikes for lawful purposes although what is a lawful strike and what is a lawful purpose are presumably subject to reasonable legislative definition.

The legality of a strike for a proper object has been recognized in the United States for almost a century. A State cannot forbid a peaceful strike against an employer. In USA even the much criticized National Labour Act recognizes the right of Labour Organisation to go for collective bargaining and thus recognize the right of such employees refusal to work and if an employer interferes or constraints the exercise of that right by the employee it is considered an unfair labour practice.

In India though there may not be a fundamental right to strike (so long as earlier decisions of Supreme Court stand,) it is not correct to say that workers have no statutory right to strike. As a matter of fact the whole scheme and spirit of Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 would show that it recognizes strikes as a weapon in the armoury of labour in the process of collective bargaining. The Act does not purport to take away the right to strike. As a matter of fact, this right has been implicitly recognized by the Act, though by legislation it may be circumscribed on considerations of national security or public order.

It may be noted that the 2003 judgement purports to rely on an earlier judgement of the Supreme Court (1998) upholding the Kerala High Court judgement holding that bandh is unconstitutional (this proposition with respect being juridically fallacious and subject to consideration by a larger Bench) has however itself accepted *that a case for bandh is obviously distinct*

and different from the case for a general strike or the call for hartal (emphasis supplied). Thus neither of these judgements prohibit the right of workmen to go on strike subject to the procedure laid down in Industrial Disputes Act. There is therefore much misunderstanding when it is said that right to strike has been negated by the Supreme Court.

The true position is that the Supreme Court has only reiterated what is contained in Rule 7 of Central Rules that Govt. employees have no right to strike – an interpretation obviously flowing from the wording of Service Rule itself.

Although I am feeling indignant at the interpretation in the Supreme Court judgement may be valid, one wishes that the Trade Unionists would at the same time express their ire at the real guilty party i.e., the Central Govt. which even in face of such mass resentment by labour has not still chosen to delete Rule 7 (which is the real mischief maker) they may find their task easier and could possibly get a quicker result.

Of course, this is dependent on the political commitment and labour friendly attitude of the UPA Govt. A sympathetic administration can straightaway repeal Rule 7 and thus remove a bitter fight with labour and also give it a feeling of participation in the reconstruction of the nation. The answer therefore for protection of the right to strike has to be given by Central Govt. – it is not necessary to engage in any tortuous long drawn fight of constitutional amendment. Of course, the judgement regarding bandh may hopefully be reconsidered by the Supreme Court itself; or the political parties may call the bandh as general hartal and thus negate in practice the effect of the judgement.

(Rajinder Sachar is noted jurist, former judge of Delhi High Court, and President of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL). Email: rsachar1@vsnl.net)



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Editor

Hoping Against Hope

Memoir of a Chin refugee in Mizoram

Nava Thakuria

When Aye Win (name changed) crossed the international boarder to reach Mizoram on a cold winter evening, his only intention was to get rid of the military informers. With a small bag in hand, Aye Win left his birthplace Thantlang town of the Chin province in Northwest Burma and fled to Champhai in the bordering Indian state of Mizoram. The military personnel of Burma chased Aye Win, as he was one of the active participants of the democracy movement there. A student leader by repute, Aye Win could relax in Mizoram, as the military rulers of Burma couldn't reach him. Moreover, the Chin and Mizo are very similar in physical appearance, linguistic accent and religious identities. Hence Aye Win had some good time with little bit security, though he missed his parents and brother and sisters in Chin state. Soon the 30 years old lad got engaged in the struggle of survival as an unskilled daily wage earner in Champhai areas. Later he moved to the capital city Aizawl in search of a better life.

But all was not fine for Aye Win. Come July 2003, everything turned sour. On July 17, a minor Mizo girl was allegedly molested by a Burmese wanderer. This changed the atmosphere and an influential Mizo youth group launched a violent campaign against the Burmese living in Mizoram. 1000 Chin refugees were deported from Aizawl within the next few weeks. "But I have no option other than staying in India, because military rulers (in Burma) are waiting for me with a death sentence," said Aye Win.

Aye Win is one of the 50,000 Burmese Chin refugees in Mizoram who are fighting a survival struggle. They have been fleeing in different groups from their homeland to Mizoram since the 1988 uprising against the dictators in Rangoon. The military regime, popularly known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) had launched repressive actions against the democratic activists. Even the SPDC, predominantly Buddhist, started religious persecution

of the mostly Christian Chin ethnic minorities. The pro-democracy movement resulted in a landslide victory for the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi in the last general election in 1990, but the military junta refused to hand over the power to the elected representatives. Rather they continued oppressive actions against the pro-democracy activists. Most of the Chin refugees crossed the border to escape the carnage. For them, Mizoram was an ideal choice, as the Chin and Mizo enjoy distinctive similarities in culture, tradition, religion, food habits, though they are literally divided by a political boundary.

With Aye Win many others left Aizawl with the threatening of Young Mizo Association (YMA) after the sensational rape case. YMA simply decided to 'clean up' the state form Burmese refugees. The activists of YMA started haunting and assaulting the Chin refugees with 'Quit Mizoram' notice. Local police were mute spectators to the incidents, where at least 7000 Burmese including 4,300 women and children were targeted for repatriation to Burma. Many times, the state police arrested the Burmese as foreigners and illegal intruders. Over a hundred Chin families reportedly left Aizawl to take shelter in the jungles of border areas. They lived with all the difficulties, with no drinking water, sanitation or health care and not to speak about the risk to their children. Unable to cope up with the situation, some of them even returned to Burma to face the military rulers.

Unfortunately the government of India is yet to recognise the Chin refugees in Mizoram. At the same time, they are being denied the international legal protections under the Convention Concerning the Status of Refugees, as the central Government is still reluctant to allow the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to visit Mizoram with other states in the Northeast. In fact, the UNHCR has certified the refugee status for nearly 200 Burmese who came to New Delhi to apply in person till date. Hence the thousands of Chins in Mizoram are exposed to all kinds of uncertainties and frustrations.

The YMA president Mr. Lianzuala however clarified that they had no hatred to Chin people. “They (Chin) are like our brothers. But some bad people are with them, who are involved in anti-social activities like drug smuggling, vandalism and even incidence of rape. You cannot allow this kind of activities to continue even by your brothers,” said Mr. Lianzuala. In truth, the Mizos are apprehensive about their future with the presence of half a lakh Chin refugees in a state of not more than nine lakh population. Mr. Lianzuala of course admitted that YMA didn’t have a policy on Burmese issues till now. He was also sympathetic to the suffering of the Christian Burmese people due to military suppression. “The military rule in Burma is leading to the violation of rights and suffering of the common people. Mizos feel the pain for the Burmese inside and outside Burma,” added Mr Lianzuala.

Human right bodies worldwide condemned the atrocities on Burmese refugees by YMA. The international body Human Rights Watch has demanded the safety and security of the Chin people in Mizoram. They have also urged the government in New Delhi to allow UNHCR to access Northeast including Mizoram.

However Indian government has no refugee policy. It deals with the issue using the Foreigners Act that hardly makes any distinction between the illegal immigrants and refugees. The director of the Asian Centre for Human Rights, Suhas Chakma argued that the government agencies must take action against the crime (the incident of rape) and punish the culprit under relevant provisions of Indian Penal Code. “But YMA has no jurisdiction or legal power to force repatriation of the Chin refugees without due process of law,” added Mr Chakma. Mr Chakma, who originally hails from Tripura, also argued that such actions by the private bodies were not in accordance

with the procedure established by the law under Article 21 of Indian Constitution.

Even Dr. Laltluangliana Khiangte, who teaches in Mizoram University admitted that the initiative of YMA was harmful to the bright image of the youth organization. Revealing that the Mizos still have tremendous love to Chin people, Dr Khiangte also added, “It is found, many Burmese refugees are involved in crime and other anti-social activities. But I strongly believe that a democratic government in Rangoon would only help mitigating all these kinds of problem, caused due to the military misrule in Burma.”

Narrating the implication of the military rule in Burma, the editor of the pro-democracy news portal Mizzima News, Soe Myint argued that India should continue supporting the democracy movement in Burma for its own benefit. “The enormous human rights violations under the military regime in Burma have many direct or indirect negative impact on Indian side, particularly in Northeast,” he added, while expressing disappointment over the policy shift in the relationship of Indian government to Burma after 1993. He hoped that the civil society in India would come forward to initiate pressure on the policy makers in Delhi to redefine the strategy to Rangoon concerning its own security aspect.

Amidst all troubles, Aye Win, who has recently returned to Aizawl from hiding in border areas, firmly believes that he could return to his hometown as soon as democracy is restored in Burma. With a smile of hope in his face, Aye Win added, “I could meet my family members and start a new life there. Later may be, I will prefer to migrate to Rangoon for a better life forever.”

(Nava Thakuria is a Guwahati based journalist and activist. Email: navathakuria@rediffmail.com).



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Dr Singh, Water Plus Light

Bunker Roy

Dear Prime Minister:

I have lived and worked with poor rural families earning less than Rs 40 a day for the last 34 years. In Tilonia, Rajasthan, we began the first Barefoot College only for the rural poor, where we try to keep the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi alive. From this village, I have seen so many governments come in with a bang. They make rash promises and pretend to know the rural realities just because they have won an election. And they leave with a whimper. How is it that these so-called intelligent people do not know what the rural poor really wanted from governments? It seems so obvious. Food, water, light, housing: basic minimum needs.

We have a vast government machinery that can be focused to providing these. We do not need any new committees and steering groups, only to prepare yet more plans. Remember what the late Raj Krishna said when he was shown the Approach Paper of the Seventh Plan in the '80s: "It's the Seventh Approach to the same Plan." These Plans are full of jargon, so utterly boring, so out of touch with reality. When the rural poor are dying of hunger, when all we can offer them are promises on pieces of paper, then we have a serious problem.

This is where your government's credibility is put to the test. No more statistics and committees deciding on poverty lines, please. No more speeches in mystified language. We have so many generals in the development world – full of bluster, rife with strategies – and so few jawans. The Doers are the ordinary, gutsy people who are ready to fight discrimination, injustice, corruption, communalism on the frontline. These are the people you should support. They have engineered the million mutinies occurring every day in India's 600,000 villages, over the non-issue of rations card or the non-availability of drinking water or corruption in development projects.

There are so many struggling with the rural poor who are prepared to work with you. Why? Because you are a reluctant politician who has found himself in a

unique position to make a difference on the ground. You have their support. These very people have tested and proven low-cost community based ideas and methods that have made an impact. They have made mistakes, but they have also made progress. Now you need to bring these innovators and warriors together and scale their efforts up to cover more villages.

When we were a part of Sam Pitroda's Technology Missions in the 1980s, we fought tooth and nail against government water engineers forcing expensive technology solutions on villages. Drinking water cannot be regarded as a technical problem: it is always a social and ethical problem of distribution, wastage, lack of involvement and ownership by local communities. Government engineers wanted communities to be dependent on them. They do not think over-exploitation of groundwater is a crime. Today, in spite of crores being spent, thousands of village schools and dispensaries have no drinking water. Traditional open wells have dried up because deep tube wells have sucked the water out of the ground to feed cities at the cost of villages. The only solution they could come up with was to install more hand pumps, going deeper for groundwater, installing more and more piped water supply schemes. We calculated that with the cost of one drilling rig it was possible to collect 12 million litres of rainwater in 200 schools and give employment to over 1,000 people in the rural areas for four months just before the rains.

The choice was clear but do engineers listen? Your government must initiate a massive rooftop rainwater harvesting campaign in rural schools and dispensaries and make sure every school has a 50-100,000 litre rainwater-harvesting tank along with toilets for girls. If the government is interested in more children attending school, if it wants to revitalise Panchayat raj institutions, if it wishes to respect village skills and leave it to the communities to construct these tanks themselves, then this is the only way.

If the drinking water scenario is a disaster because of the neglect, ignorance and short-sighted policies of engineers, then the way the state electricity boards are providing power to villages is a monumental catastrophe. For the last 10 years, Parliament has been

fed with fudged data on electrified villages. Only the engineers have benefitted. It has come to such a stage that the certificates of sarpanches are overruled by engineers. What's so technical about declaring a village with no electricity amazes me.

After putting some pressure on my friend Montek Ahluwalia (then a member, now deputy chairman of the Planning Commission), a Planning Commission Group was set up to study the extensive use of non-conventional decentralised energy systems, like wind and bio-mass, on a massive scale to cover the remaining non-electrified villages. This forced the power ministry to change its definition of a non-electrified village. By the new definition, over 100,000 "electrified" villages were added to the infamous non-existent list of villages that still remain in total darkness.

A "barefoot" approach to solar electrification of villages without power, by training illiterate, unemployed rural residents, can create over 100,000 jobs in one year. Selected by the panchayats, answerable to the panchayats, over 200 remote mountain villages (Ladakh, Sikkim), tribal areas (MP,

Assam, Bihar) have been electrified, thus making them technically and financially self sufficient. By decentralising it to the household level, they have for over five years maintained these solar units to provide lighting for three hours. But do you think the bureaucrats in the ministry of non-conventional energy sources are enthusiastic about this approach? They do not even want to acknowledge the word "barefoot!" Two new and simple ideas of providing drinking water and lighting that are tested on the ground: roof top rainwater harvesting and solar electrification. Both use local skills and are community managed and owned; generated jobs and improved the quality of life.

This is what the rural poor want from this government for a start. Drinking water and lighting. So simple. The funds required is a pittance compared to the colossal amount wasted so far. Don't leave it to engineers and experts. Take it out of their hands. Leave it to the poor communities who could have the capacity and competence to do it themselves. Remember Julius Nyerere's observation: "People cannot be developed. They develop themselves."

(Courtesy: Indian Express)



Basic Flaws In The National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill 2004 (NREGB 2004) The full draft of the Cabinet version of the EGA is available online at www.righttofoodindia.org.

1. No time-bound extension to the whole of India: NREGB 2004 states that the employment guarantee shall apply "in such rural area and for such period as may be notified by the Central Government". In effect, the Bill guarantees 100 days of employment to every poor rural household but it does not guarantee when and where this will apply.

2. Targeting: Only "poor households" are entitled to guaranteed employment or the unemployment allowance. Poor households are defined as those "below the poverty line"; in practice this is likely to mean households with a "BPL card". This defeats the basic principle of the act - universal entitlement and "self selection".

3. No minimum wage: NREGB 2004 says, "Notwithstanding anything contained in the Minimum Wages Act 1948, the Central Government may, by notification, specify the wage rate for the purposes of this Act". This gives the government further opportunities to undermine the Employment Guarantee Programme at any time by setting the wage rate at an arbitrarily low level.

4. Sidelining of Panchayati Raj Institutions: The National Advisory Council (NAC) draft gave a central role to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the planning and monitoring of the Employment Guarantee Programme. In NREGB 2004, the role of PRIs has been considerably diluted. The role of Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas has also been reduced.

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A Major Effort Against War

The Anti-War Assembly held in Hyderabad from December 17 to December 19, 2004, was a significant event in the global resistance to the brutal occupation of Iraq and the apartheid conditions in Israel. More than 20 international and 400 Indian delegates participated in the Assembly, passed a resolution, an action programme, and ended with a rally and a public meeting. Prakash Karat, Medha Patkar, Sudhakar Reddy, Surendra Mohan, Bashiruddin Babukhan, a number of international delegates and others addressed the public meeting on the 19.

The Assembly had been initiated by more than 40 mass and movement organisations in the country. The Hyderabad Anti-War Assembly saw the coming together of major Anti-War coalitions from Europe and the US, various groups in the struggle against occupation and apartheid in West Asia with leading Indian anti-war activists. It was inspiring to have in Hyderabad so many of the activists who are a part of the global resistance, such as Jaber Wishas and Jamal Hassouneh from Palestine. Jaber has spent 17 years in Israeli jails; Jamal is an activist from the Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, which is fighting against the Wall that is being built by Israel to annex parts of the West Bank. Walden Bello is one of the leading spirits of the World Social Forum and has been active in the anti-WTO and the global anti war movement. Joseph Gerson is a leading figure in the US Anti-War movement and a part of the United for Peace and Justice, a coalition of more than 800 local and national groups throughout the United States. Chris Nineham is a key organiser of the Stop the War coalition in the UK, which had organised the mammoth protests there. Fabio Alberti, Italy, is president of an organisation called "A Bridge to Baghdad" set up to promote solidarity with the Iraq population hit by the UN/US economic sanctions and campaign for its lifting. He has been involved in the Italian anti-war movement since the 1980s. Nimalka Fernando, from Sri Lanka, is a women's rights activist and the president of the International Movement against all forms of Discrimination and Racism. Jun Chisaka, is the secretary general of the Japan Peace Committee, which has been actively campaigning against nuclear weapons, in the involvement of Japan in the Iraq war and oppose the US military bases in Japan and elsewhere.

It was not easy for some of them to come; they may face problems when they go back. But all the international delegates were keen to connect with the Indian anti-war movement.

The resolution detailed the attacks on the Iraqi people have killed more than 100,000 in the last 20 months, with 6,000-10,000 dying in the current Falluja offensive alone. It also discussed the complete loss of all democratic rights that is being faced by the Palestinians. The Palestinian people, already under occupation, are now also being dispossessed of their land and water, with walls, barbed wire and Jewish settlements crisscrossing the Palestinian national territory.

The Plenary of the Assembly gave the background to the War and Occupation of Iraq and the conditions of the Palestinian population in Israel and the Occupied territories. Walden Bello, Jaber Habashi, Aijaz Ahmed, Nandita Haksar, Chris Nineham and others. There were then parallel sessions where detailed discussions took place on various aspects of the current War, its root causes, other issues in South Asia, etc. There were also plenaries in the evening on 17 and 18 to chalk out these action programs. The key element in the action programme was the call for massive demonstrations on March 19 and 20 (on the second anniversary of the invasion of Iraq) and build state and regional movements with this in view.

The Assembly drew up an action programme that will help to build the Indian Anti-War movement and also strengthen the global solidarity movement. Parliamentarians, women's groups, trade unions, and lawyers groups are planning solidarity visits to Palestine. The Assembly decided to raise relief and medical supplies for Palestine and Iraq, through campaigns and conventions in various states and cities. It also set up groups to study the dangerous military relationship that is being forged between India, Israel and the US, which is still continuing under the current regime. The Assembly ended with a call to intensify the global struggle against War, particularly in the occupying countries.

(Courtesy: *People's Democracy* January 2005)



Neighbours' Fear, Owner's Burden

India's River-Linking Embarrassment

Sudhir Vombatkere

An international conference on Regional Cooperation on Transboundary Rivers (ICRCTR) in the specific context of India's interlinking of rivers (ILR) project was held in Dhaka on 17-19 December 2004 by a group of NGOs of Bangladesh. Of the foreign delegates, the largest group was from India and the next largest was from Nepal. While all Bangladeshi and Nepali delegates spoke sharply against the ILR project, some Indian delegates – notably Mr. B.G.Vergheese, a Member of ILR Task Force (TF) – spoke in favour of ILR though only in terms of the benefits that it would give to India, and trivializing its possible effects on India's riparian neighbours. Indian critics of ILR were embarrassed as they were viewed as speaking in support of Bangladesh and Nepal. The Indian High Commission at Dhaka was also embarrassed enough to cause the High Commissioner to seek and obtain a time slot in the closing session to formally re-state India's official stance on ILR, and call for regional cooperation (the aim of the conference) rather than queering the pitch with India-bashing. She also stated that only the peninsular components of ILR and not the Himalayan components that might impact on riparian neighbours were being taken up now.

Many Bangladeshi speakers concentrated their arguments on the damage that they believe Farakka barrage has caused to Bangladesh without even providing design benefits to India at Kolkata, and by extension claimed that ILR would be detrimental to their riparian interests. The Indian High Commissioner pointed out that the assured outflows from Farakka have invariably been provided, while Bangladesh has itself proposed high dams in upper riparian areas so as to augment lean season flows into Bangladesh. It is noteworthy that the detailed criticism of ILR was not from the governments of Bangladesh or Nepal but from members of civil society groups. B.G.Vergheese and later Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri unequivocally stated that ILR is a concept and not a project, and that Bangladesh and other riparian

neighbours will be kept informed and consulted at the appropriate time.

While this assurance may or may not have allayed the apprehensions of India's riparian neighbours, it changes the parameters of the debate in the Indian context. The principal benefit claimed by proponents of ILR is relieving flood and drought by mass transfer of water and apart from Mahanadi, which ILR TF calls a "surplus basin" – people of the Mahanadi basin however dispute this – there are no surplus basins in peninsular India. Claiming that flood and drought will be relieved by ILR and at the same time stating that the Himalayan links will not be taken up indicates a serious flaw in the logic of ILR.

Indian delegates presented how canals can remove merely 2 to 4 % of floodwater in Ganga or Brahmaputra and cannot provide significant flood relief. At the same time the concern of Bihari people and downstream Bangladeshis is that while canals cannot relieve flood, diversion of water during the lean season will constitute a reduction of water availability to the tune of nearly 20%.

India's riparian neighbours are apprehensive that India will go ahead with the ILR project to the detriment of their riparian interests. Uncomfortably aware that the balance of power in South Asia is heavily in India's favour, they insist that the riparian issues thrown up by ILR need to be discussed multi-laterally and not bi-laterally as has been done in the past, or that ILR be scrapped.

ILR TF treats the links proposed on Ken, Betwa, Parbati, Kalisindh and Chambal as peninsular links, but they are tributaries of Jamuna and hence of Ganga. The peninsular links from upper Godavari and from Krishna (Almatti and Srisailem) to Pennar and on to Cauvery, originate in areas that are themselves drought-prone and there is no question of flood relief. The technical and economic logic and feasibility of these links cry for honest reappraisal.

(Continued on page 22)

A Very 'IFFI' Business Indeed

Goa Government machinery was engrossed in IFFI. Most of the administration had come to a standstill. Will it be an annual trauma that will be forced on Goans?

Aires Rodrigues

The 35th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) is over. It was held in Goa. To some it was a triumph to others it was a travesty. Some politicians and their contractor chums have feasted over the quick dividends they have amassed and are still feasting by furthering the hurriedly executed works for IFFI. However the people of Campal and the densely populated Miramar area are still recovering from the 11 day nightmare and ordeal they have had to undergo as a result of the noisy and chaotic IFFI which was held in their vicinity.

A film festival has to be serious and businesslike. What we have seen was organised chaos and a noisy mela. The people of that area for have patiently and peacefully endured the pain. Anywhere else in India the organizers of such a show would have had to run for cover. Goa was chosen as the venue for the 2004 IFFI on political considerations. Therefore almost everything was focused at Panaji to allow Goa's Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar some political mileage in his constituency. One surmises that Assembly elections may be round the corner!

The Government instead of focussing on prioritizing good roads, uninterrupted power supply, adequate water supply and a decent health care for the local people chose to drain over Rs 120 crores to fete the film industry, which is already one of the richest. So obsessed has been our Chief Minister with IFFI.

Sham Festival?

It would have been appropriate that the IFFI idea should have been discussed within the Goa Legislative Assembly. Besides there should have been consensus within all political parties and leading NGOs. What was the need to steamroll such a mega project? A delay by a year or two would not have been disastrous. Nobody is against IFFI per se. What is and was

rightly objected to was the manner in which the idea of IFFI was bulldozed. No transparency and no consultation whatsoever. Nobody was involved. It was a one-man show. The Government should have come out with a white paper outlining the ways in which IFFI would be beneficial to Goa and Goans. A particular section of Goa's majority community has definitely made hay in the name of the IFFI bonanza. They have had the last laugh ever since Parrikar became the Chief Minister and ensured that his community makes the best of it.

The film world wants Goa as the permanent venue for IFFI. The guests were all treated like royals at the taxpayer's expense. They had the best of everything and will look forward to even more luxuries next year. The organisers have been boasting about the thousands of registered delegates. However, most registered delegates were locals some of who had nothing to do with films but assembled as loyal BJP workers to ensure that the show goes on. Most of the activities of the 11-day show had nothing to do with a film festival. Any and all entertainment under the sun was served on the menu. With even a Kite festival loosely tagged to the tail end of the film festival.

Standstill

The whole Government machinery was engrossed in IFFI. In fact most of the administration had come to a standstill. Will it be an annual trauma that will be forced on Goans? Chief Minister should apologize to the people of Panaji and its surrounding areas for the grave 11-day inconvenience caused to the residents due to the mismanagement in holding the IFFI. What will happen to the luxury cars and special buses bought for IFFI? All the public is told is that there is a plan to build another multiplex - this time with a 2000 seat capacity, for the next IFFI. It would be appropriate to increase the number of life saving ventilators at the Intensive Care Unit of Goa's Medical College from 6 to at least 16.

Goa is faced with rising crimes. Sizeable numbers of victims are women and children. Goa 's Director General of Police Mr. Amod Kanth was unceremoniously shunted out of Goa on the eve of IFFI for not agreeing to Chief minister's plan to block traffic on one of Panaji's busiest roads for ten days for IFFI. The Chief Minister even dared to close the Aldona bridge and have an IFFI party on it for the delegates. Is the Chief Minister aware that the Delhi High court had strongly reprimanded the Delhi police for having closed a Delhi road for just a few hours to facilitate a motorcade of VIP's?

Goans also have a right to know as to how much of the tax-payers money has actually gone into this event which has lacked transparency and merits an inquiry into the alleged financial and other irregularities connected to the IFFI works. And there is also concern that the IFFI works, which have been hurriedly executed, are bound to be substandard. Some of the works are still incomplete and will probably get no attention till the next festival.



(Aires Rodrigues is a lawyer and human rights activist in Goa. Email: airesrod@sancharnet.in)

Continued from page 20

By not placing information in the public domain and by engaging in what is suspected to be official double-speak, the proponents of ILR can only be painting themselves into a corner.

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Continued from page 12

Finally, disaster management must follow the subsidiarity principle. The level at which the main focus should lie would ideally be the Panchayats. A disaster management fund and the material resources to undertake rescue should be maintained in the Panchayat and operated with the discretion of a chief functionary. Information on relief should flow upwards from the coastal areas to the district collectors who may in turn take the responsibility for co-ordination in the case of disasters which are widespread. Fishing is among the riskiest occupations in the world. In Kerala State, over the last decade the accident death toll was one fisherman every four days. This loss is covered by insurance schemes of state welfare funds. However, there is a need to conceive a fishery disaster insurance scheme, which will cover loss of life and property as a result of a collective natural disaster, which are also more common for those who depend on the sea. The premium for this can be paid fully by the government.

While the efforts for urgent relief to the tsunami victims should be given the highest priority, to pay inadequate attention to the long-term needs would be a great failing on the part of state and civil society. The coastal communities may be benumbed by the extent of their current tragedy, but this is also the time when they will be most open to think of a more secure future for themselves.

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Protests in Maharashtra

Organizations affiliated to the Shoshit Jan Andolan (SJA) in the Konkan region held a two-day meeting in Raigad on the issue of employment guarantee and migrant labour. This was followed by a larger meeting on 27 December, 2004 in Pune where groups from Marathwada and Pune (including the Lal Nishan Party) participated. All these groups have decided to join forces and revive the Kiman Vetan Rojgar Hami Samanvai Samiti. A range of activities have been planned by these groups. This includes lobbying, e.g. meeting the EGS minister regarding the lowered rates on EGS works and meeting MPs and MLAs between 15-25 January, 2005) and protests. In an attempt to remind the administration of their existence, hundreds are expected to "spill over" on to the roads in various districts on 4 January over the issue of applicants not having got work (or the unemployment benefit) since they applied on November 17, 2004.

Protecting the Indigenous Knowledge of Communities

The new government is also insisting on passing the new Patents Act, as a part of the WTO package. Among other things, the new patent regime will encourage biopiracy of Indigenous knowledge.

Suman Sahai

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) has been used for centuries by indigenous and local communities and has been the mainstay of their existence especially in the key sectors of food and health. Western science has recently begun looking at IK as a source of new drugs specially since the cost of putting new drugs on the market is becoming very high. The growing phenomenon of biopiracy shows the somewhat hypocritical attitude of western science to IK. Scavenging it on the one hand and claiming patents on all kinds of products derived from IK (e.g. turmeric, ayahuasca, neem) while refusing to acknowledge its economic value and ownership.

Despite the growing recognition of IK as a valuable source of knowledge, western intellectual property laws continue to treat it as a component of 'public domain,' freely available for use by anybody. Moreover, in some cases, diverse forms of IK have been appropriated under intellectual property rights by researchers and commercial enterprises, without any compensation to the knowledge's creators or possessors.

IK means much more than understanding various plants but whole ecological processes. For example, the use and continuous improvement of farmers' varieties (landraces) is essential in many agricultural systems. In many countries, seed supply fundamentally relies on the decentralized, local system of seed production which operates on the basis of the diffusion of the best seed available within a community and local farmers ensure that their community is supplied with planting material. The knowledge of farmers about crop varieties and their special characteristics has been central to the development of new plant varieties and for global food security.

International fora such as the United Nations and World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) have begun to recognise the importance of IK. In 1981, UNESCO adopted the WIPO-UNESCO Model Law on Folklore; in 1992 the Convention on Biological Diversity specifically addressed the issue (article 8(j)). In 2000, WIPO established an Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Indigenous Knowledge and Folklore.

Misappropriation of IK

A large number of patents have been granted on genetic resources and knowledge obtained from developing countries, without the consent of the possessors of the resources and knowledge. There has been extensive documentation of IPR being sought over resources "as they are", without further improvement (e.g., US patent No. 5,304,718 on quinoa granted to researchers of the Colorado State University; US Plant patent No. 5,751 on ayahuasca, a sacred and medicinal plant of the Amazon) and on products based on plant materials and knowledge developed and used by local/indigenous communities, such as the cases of the neem tree, kava, barbasco, endod and turmeric, among others.

Many of these patents have been revoked by the competent national authorities. Thus, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) from India asked for a re-examination of the US patent No. 5,401,5041 granted for the wound healing properties of turmeric. The US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) revoked this patent after ascertaining that there was no novelty, the innovation having been used in India for centuries. In early 2000 the patent granted to W.R. Grace Company and US Department of Agriculture on neem (EPO patent No. 436257) was also revoked by the European Patent Office on the

grounds of its use having been known in India. The most important use of the neem tree is that of biopesticide. In this respect, neem has more than 60 valuable compounds, which also includes the widely used azadirachtin A (aza A). According to Grace, azadirachtin was being destroyed during traditional processing. This is highly inaccurate. The extracts were indeed subject to degradation but this did not amount to any wastage since farmers put such extracts to use as and when required. The problem of stabilisation arose only when it needed to be commercially packaged for a long time. In 1992, Grace applied for a patent on the principle that the process they supposedly invented paved the way for additional extraction in the form of water soluble neem extract and hence is an add-on rather than a substitute to the current neem industry in India. In short, the processes are supposedly novel and an advance on the Indian techniques. However, this perceived novelty exists mainly due to ignorance of the West. A re-examination request for the patent on Basmati rice lines and grains (US Patent No. 5,663,484) granted by the USPTO was also made by the CSIR and Rice Tec the patent applicant choose to withdraw 15 out of its 20 claims.

International conventions and treaties dealing with IK are characterized by the fact that they are not binding. Every clause that deals with benefit sharing is contested and rejected. ILO Convention No. 169 which says a lot about legal standards for indigenous rights fails to protect the IPR of indigenous people. Whereas the UN Declaration on the rights of IP recognizes the rights and aspirations of the IP, it will be a non-binding document, which can not be legally enforced. In the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, developed nations have successfully blocked an international recognition of Farmers Rights. They also contest any notion of paying for the use of traditional germplasm in a benefit sharing arrangement. The CBD which has attempted to push through the interests of IP, has been thwarted by the American refusal to ratify it and accept its conditions.

Hence the present status is that IK has not been granted the status of property. As a result the knowledge is free for anyone to use. Non-recognition of IK as property results in the denial of any rights with respect to it, as recognised in the modern intellectual property rights (IPRs) systems. The real problem lies in the fact that IK is being used rampantly in so called 'inventions,' specially biotechnological

'inventions,' and consequently IPRs are being acquired on them by way of patent grants. This phenomenon is popularly referred to as "biopiracy". The consequence is that the holders of IK do not get any share in the profit made from the commercial exploitation of the patented products that is based on their knowledge.

Second, once a patent is granted even the holders of IK are barred from using their knowledge to make products and commercially exploit them. This injustice leads to a situation where the rightful owners of the knowledge could end up paying to the patent holder for access to the patented product, which is based on their knowledge. This situation clearly needs to change.

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Food Health Bribery

Monsanto, the world's biggest producer of GM crops was fined US\$ 1.5 million for bribing at least 140 Indonesian government officials and their family members between 1997 and 2002.

After strong protests from farmers, as well as from the environmental minister, Monsanto got approval to grow Bollgard Bt cotton in the South Sulawesi province. 40 tonnes of GM seeds were flown into from South Africa under military protection. Only after 2 growing seasons with farmers protests, burning fields and harvest failures Monsanto pulled out of Bt cotton in Indonesia.

The experiences match those of farmers in India where Bollgard is still grown, and Thailand which banned Bt cotton in 2000. Monsanto is now trying to introduce Bt cotton into West Africa.

Moving Towards Social Democracy

Even if the United Progressive Alliance Government has moved only gradually towards the fulfillment of the National Common Minimum programme, its victories in Haryana, Bihar and Jharkhand are guaranteed. In Haryana, the strong anti-incumbency vote will see the Congress (I) through with comfortable majority. This is also the case with Jharkhand as well, where an added factor is the sympathy generated for Shibu Soren, the chief of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, owing to the prosecution launched against him by the NDA's State Government after reviving a 30 year old case.

The scenario in Bihar has got confused owing to the split among the partners in the Alliance, and utter lack of cohesion among secular forces. Firstly, the quarrel was between the Railway Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav and the

Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers, Ram Vilas Paswan. Then,

the Congress (I) decided to pitch its demands too high and asked for one third of the total seats in the State Assembly. It is now understood that the Lok Jan Shakti Party led by Paswan and the Congress (I) have struck a deal, as according to Paswan, his Party would contest 68 seats, leaving the rest to the Congress (I). Nevertheless, such is the mercurial politics of the State that it is difficult to accept this settlement as final.

However, apart from the UPA, the other secular forces in the field include the Samajwadi Party. Then, the CPI (ML) has its presence in certain pockets in the State. The BSP is putting up a large number of candidates. Moreover, half a dozen seats might see candidates from Samajwadi Jan Parishad.

If, however, the differences between the partners of the NDA and other forces of secularism get rooted within the alliance as mini-struggles for power, then the UPA will become fragile. Although a simplistic assessment assumes that a break by any regional satrap from it could be mastered by roping in the BSP, such risks cannot be taken, for the simple reason that it might initiate a trend. Next time, presumably, the AIADMK renders support. In such cases, one must see what will be the reaction of other

partners or supporters. It would have been in the fitness of the things if the leader of the UPA, Sonia Gandhi, had insisted on the Lok Jan Shakti Party and the RJD that they resolve their differences. If the calculation of the Congress (I) is that the rift between them could ultimately destroy both and create conditions in which it becomes the only secular alternative, then, it is necessary to warn it against such shortsighted strategies.

It must not be forgotten that the NDA rode to power under the leadership of the BJP mainly because the Congress (I) pulled the rug from under the feet of the United Front led by the Janata Dal leaders H. D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral in 1997, twice. The message that the regional constituents of the UF got was that if

they were to be part of a ruling combination, then they could not depend on the Congress (I) at all. If that message gets

across again, it will be picked up not only by the cornered ally, but a whole spectrum of them.

Differences in policies can be negotiated to find a balance, but those that relate to power have a different logic. The Congress (I), in its hurry to recreate the conditions that existed before 1989, could make the blunder of its life, if it fails to check those ambitions. In U.P., it is resorting to those tactics. If it repeats them in Bihar, then it will only overturn its own apple cart. Some people tell it that the masses in these two northern States are thirsting to see it return to power. It could just be wishful thinking, and in any case, election results do not support this assumption. As for the claim that the two States are its traditional support areas, it should remember that it lost power in them in 1967, 1977, 1989 and always thereafter. This was not the case, for example, in Karnataka or Andhra Pradesh where it lost power in 1983 onwards, but returned to it in 1989.

If the ideals of the freedom struggle, that is, secularism, social justice, decentralisation of power and pro-people economic policies are the pole star of all secular parties, as they swear by them, then a solid phalanx based on a firm alliance must be built up. It must bring together national and regional parties

(Continued on page 28)

PAST FOR FUTURE

Surendra Mohan

Democracy of Chaves and Bush

Venezuelan President Hugo Chaves at the time of the USA President Bush attacking Afghanistan remarked, "One could not fight terrorism with terrorism." This angered Bush. But the truth remains. The US Ambassador asked Chaves to rectify the statement. Recently recalling the US ambassador's comment "As for our position," Chaves thundered before an audience of artists and intellectuals from around the world, "we did not rectify it but ratified it. We condemn 9/11 and Madrid Train bombing, but also the bombing of cities like Fallujah and the assassination of children and innocent people. The anti-terror war on terrorism of the US and UK is simply terrorism. Justice is the only road to peace."

Today there are very few leaders in the World who can speak the truth. Hugo Chaves is one of them. He survived to come out from the CIA's stage-managed coup. He again won the referendum. Bush and Co talks of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq. But what kind of democracy Bush is talking about? Saddam is under trial for killing the opponents. What is Bush doing? If Saddam has to be tried Bush also should be tried for killing innocent people. He keeps doing it to establish democracy!!!! Bush wants to establish Democracy after killing thousands of innocent children and women. He is making a mockery of Democracy. His Democracy is meant for all those who support his stand, including all those who have a share in the plundering of oil that belongs to all the people of Iraq. Bush has made the Criminal Jurisprudence dictum upside down. The old dictum was 'Even if 99% accused escape, one innocent should not be punished.' The new dictum of Bush is 'Even if 99% innocent are killed, one accused could be caught is great'. Mahatma Gandhi already said, 'Means should be correct to justify the end.' We

GLOBAL WATCH

Thomas Kocherry

need more and more leaders like Hugo Chaves to stand up to Truth and Justice. But one has to pay the price for it.

For Chaves, it is the social programmes that are basic to Justice, road to Peace in the World. He invests on people in education, health and food. This is his basis to democracy and the best defence against the terrorism of Bush.

At the graduation ceremony of adult literacy programme in Venezuela on which several million dollars are being spent., he handed out certificates and chatted with the graduates. Many of the men and women were in the 60s and 70s and had just learnt how to read and write.

Some people commented why Chaves you spent money for educating the old and the illiterate. How are they going to be productive? Chaves responded to this, "My answer is that before we build express highways, airports and harbours we have to build the sovereign people who can live with dignity. They are the guardians of democracy. People are more important than creating wealth through Globalisation".

Yes we need leaders like Chaves in the world to build true democracy, justice and peace. Everybody in the World is equal. If this is true we need to invest on people first. If people are more important than everything else, what kind of UN do we have? The five countries of the Security Council having veto powers, based on what? The people who talk about democracy cannot bring India into the Security Council with Veto Power? Money and weapons are more powerful than people????



“I would define globalisation as the freedom for my group of companies to invest where it wants, when it wants, to produce what it wants, to buy and sell where it wants, and support the fewest restrictions possible coming from labour laws and social conventions.”

Percy Barnevik, President of the ABB Industrial Group, quoted by Gerard Greenfield of the Canadian Auto Workers, "The Success of Being Dangerous."

Extraordinary Friend of People:

Ajit Narayan Bose

Subhasish Mukhopadhyay

The permanent invitee, member of editorial board of both English Bulletin as well as Bengali Bulletin of NAPM, an avid supporter of the cause of weaker section of the society, Dr Ajit Narayan Bose, whom the NAPM family very fondly called Ajitda, has passed away at 7 pm on 28th November, 2004. He was suffering from multiple complications, but that did not dampen his spirit for fighting.

Ajitda was born in Barisal, now in Bangladesh on 10th February, 1927. At the very early days, he was associated with our freedom struggle in many ways. In his late school days he came in contact with a small pro-labour group, The Labour Party, and was active in organising the workers against the atrocities of the British as well as gentries supporting the British rule in India. During the war days, he was very active in the then communist politics and arrested against serious charges by the rules of Independent India. He came out of jail in 1951 and subsequently obtained his MA in Economics. He was a brilliant student with a lot of original ideas about resource utilisation and village development.

He was a founder and a key person in organising the Government Employees in Bengal and single-handedly founded the largest confederation of organisations of Government employees in Bengal.

In conventional terms, he was not a mean achiever. He was a very senior government official in various capacities. He was the CEO of the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation and had taken certain cardinal pro-people decision, which many of us still remember with great reverence. He was engaged in a major works of capacity building and utilisation of the industries of Bengal at that time when he was invited abroad. In a remarkably short time, he collated his findings, which impressed none other than the Nobel Prize winning economist, Prof Jan Tinbergen.

He obtained his Ph.D under him and came to India to assume many more responsible positions.

During the First phase of United Front regime in Bengal, he was a member of the Jute Commission and spearheaded the study of the affairs of the Jute Industry in Bengal and authored its report. He has been made the member of the State Planning Commission and was entrusted to look after the comprehensive area development programme. With his original style of work, he redefined the goal of many Government programme and went far beyond the mandate of the programme. He organised self-help groups when these concepts had not taken root among the activists, he organised rural micro-credit with enormous flexibility to suit the village artisan, but the government had suddenly called off the programme, fearing its overwhelming success.

His interest was swinging between the labour issues and village development issues and he was ever trying to bridge them together. He has written numerous articles, both in Bengali and in English in semi-technical to peoples' journals.

He had produced a very important monograph in Bengali entitled "The Politics and Economics of West Bengal," which is running its second edition.

He has also produced on behalf of NAPM, a very important booklet showing the real face of India after 50 years of independence, both in Bengali as well as in English which was used as a campaign material in our subsequent movements.

After his retirement, he was invited to spearhead the newly founded Rural Development Centre of Indian Institute of Science, Khargpur, where he initiated the very important programme of drawing village and district level planning by the villages themselves, to which he was associated till his demise. He has produced many village level able planners who are ordinary folks and played an instrumental role in

banishing eco-destructing social forestry from the arid districts of Bengal.

From nineties onwards, he was very much interested in peoples' movements and a contact was established with movements like Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and others. During the difficult days of NBA, he has thrown all his weights behind this movement. He joined hand with Medha Patkar in every juncture and had taken an active role in the formative days of NAPM. He attended the Sewagram Conference and helped to shape the Pledge and 10 point programme of NAPM

He has taken a lead in editing the English Bulletin from Calcutta for 3 years before the friends from Bangalore had been entrusted to run it.

He was a leading intellectual who devoted his life, career and economic worth towards the well-being of the masses and continuously changed his positions in conformity with the reality of our country.

With his death, our country and we in NAPM and NBA lost a friend, philosopher and guide and a good human being. Good bye Ajitda.

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*We, at 'the People's Movement' salute to the fond memory of Ajit-da, our first editor. We have lost an unassuming master in the frail body and soft voice. He was the founder-editor of the 'NAPM Bulletin' from Kolkata, the previous avatar of this newsmagazine. He made the **Bulletin** a source of information, analysis and wider political discourse. Apart from succinct comments, coming out from his long experience and absorption in such issues, the Bulletin had one or two page of very key statistics regarding various aspects of the economy, which would tell their own story, requiring no comment. Despite being a man of a vast experience and erudition, he never flaunted all this. He was an organisational person, striving for shaping a new consciousness and movement. He has been an invaluable part of our march for the new politics. You will always be with us, Comrade.*

- Editors, Colleagues.



(Continued from page 25)

without internal squabbles for power. This is one thing that they must learn from those espousing Hindutva. The BJP accommodated its allies for full five years. It succeeded eminently in providing stability. Yet, when it grew over-ambitious, as in 2003, and decided to jettison some partners of the NDA, it was badly mauled. This is such a recent lesson that it should not be forgotten under any temptation.

On the other hand, the Congress (I) and the Samajwadi Party must now reassess their relationship, as, indeed, the latter and the RJD, the major regional party in Bihar. Mulayam Singh Yadav must have realised that his Party's base has failed to expand in the general elections in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra where elections were held in 2003 and 2004. His forays in Bihar in the parliamentary general elections last year and the State Assembly elections in 2001 had shown similar results. Delhi and Rajasthan came out with larger disappointments. With this background, any thought that U.P. alone can put him in the Prime Ministerial chair is highly wishful, though it is time that he or someone else from among the down-trodden communities occupies that august office. It is therefore prudent for the Samajwadi Party to concentrate on U.P., and for the Congress (I) to reconcile itself to the same.

The Congress (I) has returned to power after eight years; and its banishment from power was its own refusal to see the changing reality. It is that the regional aspirations of the people alienated by over-centralisation of power and the desire for social equality thwarted by a hierarchical system have altered political equations, almost irretrievably. Centralisation of political power, particularly from 1971 had given rise to several regional parties, while some like the DMK had emerged owing to cultural factors. On the other hand, the rise of the RJD, the Samajwadi Party, the Janata Dal (U), the Lok Jan Shakti Party, the BSP, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the Samanata Dal and the Gondwana Samiti are expressions of the politicisation of those social groups which were not part of our power structure at any level for hundreds of years. They can hardly be wished away.

It has been argued rightly that a positive process of social ambience would contain and gradually abridge

(Continued on page 30)

High on Films

K.S.Sudeep

A Film Fest on Masculinities, Sexuality and Gender-Based Violence was organized jointly by Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), Vikalp and Lok Vangmay Griha in the first week of December.

MAVA has been active since 1993 in addressing the issue of gender-based violence. The first of its kind in India, they emphasize the role of men in overcoming gender oppression and inequality in a patriarchal society. Vikalp is much younger, it took birth as an initiative of filmmakers who came together when many films were rejected at Mumbai International Film Festival for documentaries and short films earlier last year. They screened documentary and short fiction films rejected by the festival due to their anti-establishment content, along with films that were withdrawn from MIFF in protest. This MAVA-Vikalp fest relived those days in many ways—the same old third floor of the Bhupesh Gupta Bhavan, the casual air, the mattresses and pillows on the floor, the black curtains. Thankfully, it wasn't as hot.

Among the films at the fest were Anand Patwardhan's "Pita, Putr aur Dharmyudh" (Father, Son and Holy War), Rahul Roy's "Majma" and "Jahaan Chaar Yaar Mil Jaaye" (Where Four Friends Meet), Nicaraguan film "Macho," "Ye Hui Naa Mardon Wali Baat" (Now That's More Like a Man) by Pakistani Directors Farjad Nabi and Mazhar Zaidi, Nasreen-O-Nasreen by Pallavi Das and Amar Kanwar's "King of Dreams" along with a couple of films by K.C. and S.I.E.S. College Mass Media students.

The introductions to the films could have been better, and some of the post-film discussions were embarrassing. But there was a great deal of enthusiasm among students, especially for the student films. Students responded very positively to films like "My Friend Su," and one wished there was someone around to put the politics into perspective.

Interestingly, there was an evident lack of focus in the selection of films, though it was not too bad once you got used to it. For example "Nasreen-O-Nasreen"

sounded like a warning for women to be aware of the kind of oppression and violence in married life. The film was successful in portraying the strength in sharing and it gave a hope of life outside domestic violence. In contrast, "King of Dreams" was about the fantasies that a man has in his lifetime about sexual union and how often these dreams substituted the act itself. In its poetic narrative, the film tries to find where exactly did love fit into this scheme. "My Friend Su" is about a guy who felt outwardly as a male but had an inner feeling that he's really a female. The film revolves around Su's siblings, the society, and his subconscious reactions towards his family members in his childhood. He dreams to be with a man. But one wonders how an amateurish docudrama like "Shattered Dreams" made it to the list.

The city colleges literally took over the festival, students constituting a major chunk of the audience. Big gaps between films on day one and two left some anxious that the momentum would be lost, but it did not seem to matter too much to the students who continued sitting on the comfortable mattresses and carried on their unfinished conversations between films. The MAVA people, the volunteers (again mostly college students), the wada-pavwala all seemed to have had a grand time. I am not sure if the same could be said about the audience, especially those who went with huge expectations. With MAVA joining hands with Vikalp for the first time, they can not be blamed for expecting too much either.

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“The exploitation of the poor can be extinguished not by effecting the destruction of a few millionaires but by removing the ignorance of the poor and teaching them to non-cooperate with the exploiters.”

M. K. Gandhi

(Continued from page 28)

these discriminatory factors. While the spread of education, growth in the Gross Domestic Product, expansion of the infrastructure and policies of positive affirmation for social uplift have helped, their progress has been slow. On the other hand, several negative factors have impeded it much more than expected. The result is the intensification of regional movements in certain areas and the heightening of social tensions on a large scale. Economic disparities have encouraged the emergence of not only extra-parliamentary and non-party movements but also those prone to acts of violence. It needs to be stressed that economic and social factors intermingle a lot in conditions of social inequalities and economic disparities.

The UPA, fortunately, started as a coalition of a mainstream party, which had initiated and led the process of social ambience and experienced its tardiness as well, and some regional parties like the DMK and parties committed to social justice as the PMK, the RJD and the JMM. It enjoyed the strong support of the four Left Parties, which have emphasised economic equality and justice, balanced regional economic growth, federalism, pluralism and the fullest respect of the civil liberties of the people. A better combination was inconceivable, given the stark realities existing in India. The Common Minimum Programme drawn up by the UPA was therefore hailed by all progressive sections.

Unfortunately, the Government has hesitated in several instances to implement the CMP, faithfully. The POTA was removed, but in a manner that it is being used with retrospective effect. In Gujarat, those arrested under this Act, all of them Muslims barring a Sikh, are being tried under it. This is a throw-back to the discontinuance of TADA as in its case also, those detained under the Act, are being prosecuted under it, though the Act became non-existent a decade ago. Moreover, several draconian provisions of the POTA were incorporated under other already existing Laws.

The dilution of the Employment Guarantee Act has been another disappointment. The Government is averse to committing even 1.7% of the GDP for the removal of unemployment. On the other hand, globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation are reducing the number of the already employed and

further avenues of employment. The Prime Minister has initiated a welcome dialogue with the corporate private sector for implementing reservation policy in recruitment in the sector, the gradual weakening of small-scale industry is hitting the socially and educationally deprived sections, in particular; for, they are either cultivators or artisans. The rates of interest that the primary sector, that is, the kisans and small industry, have to pay is 12% and it is compound interest, while the secondary and the tertiary sectors of large industry and services pay a simple interest of 6%. The Patents Amendment Ordinance, when enacted by Parliament shall impinge upon agriculture, small industry and Medicare and other services adversely. Commerce Minister Kamal Nath said recently that the MNCs would be entering retail trade. Why then should the Commerce Ministry have special cell for market promotion and where shall the entrepreneurs assisted by CAPART, KVIC, DRDA and etc. sell their products when even the retail trade is dominated by the goods of the MNCs, commanding superior marketing techniques and huge advertisement expenditure?

This, then, is the time when all pro-people groups, wherever they are, assert, collectively and severally. Not only the Left, the Samajwadi Party and the BSP which are outside the UPA Government, but Congress MPs themselves and those in such pro-poor groups as the DMK, MDMK, RJD and PMK should start putting pressure to stop the juggernaut of the so-called economic reforms that only crushes the poor. Dialogues among the partners of the UPA, the supporting parties, the non-party groups, the trade unions and the organisations of the kisans and the agricultural workers must get going.

The Congress (I) President who is also the chairperson of the UPA and the National Advisory Committee of the UPA has special responsibility to clearly pronounce on her party's vision. Is it pro market or pro people? Is it pro poor or pro rich? Not in words, but in actions. The Left must also make bold to share with the people whether it will remain satisfied with wordy duels with concerned Ministers like P. Chidambaram, and fight shy of facing the traumatised poor for fear of the return of a communal-fascist regime? The civil society has a duty to confront all partners and supporters of the UPA to ensure that they speak out their minds clearly.



Not Fish but Fishing...

Report of the visit to tsunami affected areas of Tamilnadu

Maju Varghese

On December 26, 2004 a huge tsunami hit the South Asian countries bringing in much death and devastation. In India thousands of people lost their lives, houses and entire life savings. The civil society in the country responded to the crisis with open hands and hearts.

National Alliance of People's Movements also responded to this human crisis. From the first day, the fish workers organisations, agricultural labours and unorganised workers union like the National Fishworkers Forum, APVVU and unorganised workers federation involved themselves in the rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts. A support team consisting of doctors, nurses, social workers, and activists was formed to support the local organisations that were working in the affected areas. This team got in touch with Ms. Geeta Ramakrishnan of the Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat and National convenor of the NAPM and started our journey to Tamilnadu on January 6th, 2005.

The first destination was Killai in Cuddalore district where the destruction has been quite extensive. The local people in the area who were fighting the destructive prawn farms and got arrested several times invited us in their region. Killai is largely a fishing village and nearness to the sea and river Killai provided them the livelihood. A large mangrove forest known as Pichavaram, a declared tourist centre, existed in a 4000 acres area and that has protected the village from the destruction while three adjacent villages were destroyed. It is said that about 4448 streams originate from these mangroves.

The geographical location of Killai was such that it is between the mangrove forest and river, and hence the strength of tsunami was less when it hit Killai. Many people who were from Killai village earlier and still having links with the village had migrated to the coast ahead of the mangrove forest years ago and it was these people who got badly affected. There were about

55 deaths in 3 adjoining places viz, Pillamedu, Chinnavayal and Kannaki Nagar and also 5 deaths in the nearby Irula village of MGR Nagar.

On the first day of our visit to Killai, we found that the relief had already reached most of the families. Some relief groups were throwing biscuits to the people from inside the van and the people were unhappy at the way relief was being distributed. Our first attempt with the people was to install a functioning system to distribute relief. We held a meeting with the people that night itself and talked about relief being distributed in a systematic manner.

The arrival of the national team also brought in much needed attention to the village. As the villagers had clashed with the police earlier on the issue of prawn farms and the police sceptical of the villagers the first task was to build links between people and the administration. The District Forest Officer who was in charge of rehabilitation of the area came the next day and held meeting with the people who were determined to discuss all their issues. We insisted that all the issues including the discussions on rehabilitation planning should be with the full participation of the community. The issue of missing people was also discussed in this meeting along with the livelihood issues of the people. The entire fishing community in the area was affected as there was no fishing after the tsunami waves and the demand was for livelihood support to people including those with houses not destroyed. Although the Tamilnadu government had accepted this in principle, no relief was granted to them till we reached Killai, nor were their lists finalised.

As one team was engaged in these policy level issues, the doctors and the medical professionals went to the community and helped the people with their medical problems. The social workers interacted with the different category of people allowing them to talk and ventilate giving a patient hearing to all their issues. The work was not in watertight compartments and many a times there was complete overlapping with medical professionals taking the counselling and otherwise

helping and advocacy roles. There was so much to listen, since people, women, children and the aged were full of pain and agony.

One major issue, which came to focus, was that of the tribal villages who fish in the river and were affected both with human loss and loss of livelihood. While the Killai fishermen village was getting relief from different sources, the relief, which was reaching the Irula tribe villages, was negligible. A petition was sent to the District Collector bringing this out. The official response was good and the Collector and the relief commissioner visited the village the very next day.

We along with the relief, rehabilitation and livelihood issues took up the case of prawn farms, which are functioning in the area. After the meeting with the Collector, it was promised that all the illegal farms will be closed down and govt will initiate a process of withdrawal of cases logged during the agitation.

The government was subletting its responsibility for long term rehabilitation to NGO's by letting them 'adopt' villages. Many NGO's took the responsibility of rebuilding the houses but sadly in most cases we could find that there was lack of participatory planning or even consultation with the affected communities. For example, in Killai village, the people did not know who was given the responsibility of rebuilding their houses until we intervened. We raised these issues in the NGO meeting and stressed the need for participatory planning and the involvement of the local community in matters relating to their rehabilitation.

Our approach was to live with the community, help them in processes of gaining their rights related to rehabilitation rather than doling out relief. One major issue the people shared with us was the need for boats and nets. This is the long-term rehabilitation, which need to be taken along with housing so that the livelihood is sustained. The team gave whatever we collected in rebuilding of boats and nets as our contribution in their struggle to get back to life.

After Killai, the team related with the Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation (HRFDL) and visited dalit *bastis*, which was by and large neglected by the government and many from the NGO community. We were told that many dalit villages were left out in the enumeration itself and their names does not figure in any of the government lists. We visited Kesavapalayam

a dalit village and could see the reality for ourselves when we found that contrary to the huge relief which have come in Killai and other fishermen areas, this area has got very less relief. The temporary shelters constructed for them was not enclosed from four sides and it looked as good as a cattle shed.

Government was also building a temporary shelter in the old village quite contrary to the wishes of the people. The people did not want to live in the same area as that has become a burial ground and wanted to shift to a near by place. The Government was forced to stop the construction of the temporary shelter as a result of this.

The next destination was to Mulemanjore panchayat where a village where 75 families of the ancient tribe of Kattunaikans were living along with 13 dalit families. Here also we found the same situation of relief reaching late and also the care, which is usually found in other places, was also not seen. HRFDL has brought to our attention that many dalits who lost their lives were not given immediate compensation. The need for a package for non-fishermen whose livelihood has been affected also became a major demand. We also raised the demand of one hectare of land for landless agricultural labourers (in the name of women) as part of the long-term rehabilitation package.

The team also visited octogenarian Sarvodaya leaders, Jaganathji and Krishnamalji at LAFTI and interacted with them on the livelihood issues of landless agricultural labourers and farmers. They pointed out how prawn farming in the area resulted in flooding in October-November, which was still continuing in January. We also visited the basket-making site run by Krishnammalji, which was providing alternate employment to the affected women in the area.

The team on its way back interacted with fishermen communities affected by the tsunami in the Marine Drive area in Chennai. The meeting in Chennai highlighted the need for coordinated efforts as that in Nagapattanam and Cudalore districts.

The team members included Medha Patkar, Geeta Ramakrishnan, Dr. Pallavi Raut, Dr. Revati Joshi, Sheetal Chavan, Rakesh, Ram Sajeevan, Rohan, Geeta Balakrishnan, Vinesh Jayaraj and Maju Varghese.

(Maju Varghese works with Initiative, Mumbai. Email: maju@riseup.net)



Outcome of Delhi Meet

While the Union government had expressed its commitment for the interlinking of rivers in the Supreme Court, the people's movements, environmental and irrigation experts, economists and prominent social and political activists made a scathing criticism of the much flaunted project and unequivocally rejected the idea and instead called for a multi-pronged, low cost, environmentally sustainable and decentralized options. The organizations have declared of forming the all-India and South Asian Solidarity for sharing and caring the rivers that run through the countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

In a resolution adopted at the end of the two-day national convention on the Interlinking or the Rivers Project, on Friday (December 3), the organizations and experts exposed the hollowness of claims regarding the project and its adverse impacts on country's economy, communities, environment and political-social fabric. They made it clear that the ILR's claim regarding flood control and drought proofing are illusory and its technology and economics are 'flawed'. Accordingly, the project would result in loss of the habitat and livelihood of rural, tribal and marginalized sections of the country; it would also be the first step in the direction of the privatisation and corporatisation of water, taking away community control. The speakers accused that the national-multinational capital is interested in appropriating the means of livelihood and resources of the people, and the ILR is one such step.

Instead they asked the government to make a realistic assessment of the potential of decentralized and participatory rainwater harvesting, least cost schemes and achieve optimum benefits out of already and ongoing projects, by reviewing them.

The organizations have decided to meet the Prime Minister and President regarding this matter and also to seek clarifications from all the political parties on this issue, along with ting the issue in the rural, urban and tribal communities. The organizations are already organizing the river valley people and to initiate mass movement on this issue. .

Large Scale Opposition

It was clear that the organizations and peoples from the North East states are firmly opposing any move to tinker with the waters of Brahmaputra, the Orissa organizations have refused that there was any surplus water in Hirakud and instead narrated the devastations caused by the Damodar Valley and others large dam projects. Activists and researchers from Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and other states decried the project. But the most severe indictment came from the organizations in Bihar, who debunked the tradition of embankments and the Farakka barrage for the worsening the flood situation in the state.

Ms. Hasna, the IUCN expert from Bangladesh made it a passionate plea for desisting from the project in the interest of millions of farmers and villagers in her country and India. She put forth the idea of the South Asian solidarity for sharing the river waters for the prosperity and good relations. Bangladesh is the first country to protest against the ILR with India government.

Apart from accentuating the interstate and international problems, the ILR was found to be against the interests of the people - particularly the tribal, peasants, urban and rural poor. Dr. B.D. Sharma, former commissioner for SC/ST, came heavily upon such an anti-people and impractical project and suspected that all seem to be a conspiracy to snatch the rights and resources from the hands of common people in this country.

Spilling the Beans

Former Union Secretary for Water Resources, Ramaswamy Iyer wondered whether the ILR is a concept or a project. He pointed out that the ILR is not a part of any budget, Five-Year Plan and it will drain all resources, energy and attention of the nation with no commensurate benefit. He wondered why the present government is not acting on its promise to review the project and making an about turn by committing the government for the project in the Supreme Court. Mr. Iyer and every speaker criticized the government and

officialdom of crass non-transparent attitude and unwillingness to share any information.

In the inauguration session on Thursday (Dec. 2), the former Union Minister for Agriculture and the former member of Planning Commission, Mr. Som Pal made some plain talk on this issue. He revealed that the Planning Commission has prepared a plan of completing the ongoing dams, watershed development and other measures, costing about Rs. 1, 38,000 crores. However, the union government did not take up that citing the reason of lack of finances. "Then how come, all of a sudden a mere concept, without any analysis or feasibility surveys and costing more than Rs. 5,60,000 crores becomes an all-time favourite scheme for the government?" he asked. He made it clear that there is no surplus water in the rivers slated to be interlinked, except that in Brahmaputra. And the Brahmaputra waters can be diverted either through the Bangladesh, which is geo-politically impossible of through the 'chicken neck' area from Siliguri - which again is too narrow and falls within the seismic zone. According to him the Task Force on the ILR was created to analyse the project and not to support and justify it.

Medha Patkar, the National Convenor of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), took objection to the observation of earlier statements of the President of India, which has been influenced on all fronts of governance.

With the people's movements declaring its intent, the ball is in now the court of the government.



Condemn Violence at Coca-Cola Protest in Mehdiganj

Over 500 community residents from Mehdiganj and surrounding villages marched towards the gates of Coca-Cola's bottling plant in Mehdiganj on January 6, 2005. Protesters marched with their mouths covered by black ribbons and their hands tied to specifically bring attention to the non-violent nature of the community-led campaign and to protest the violence directed at the demonstrators on November 24, 2004.

Demonstration on EGS

Parliament Street wore an unusual look on December 21, adorned as it was with thousands of banners demanding the immediate adoption of a full-fledged Employment Guarantee Act. The banners came from all over the country - virtually every district. They bore the signatures of over one lakh people, united in demanding an effective employment guarantee, as a fundamental requirement for the right to live with dignity.

This striking display happened to coincide with the introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill 2004 (NREGB 2004) in Parliament. However, even as the Bill was tabled in Parliament, speaker after speaker in Parliament Street denounced it as a travesty of the original project. The initial draft has been diluted to the extent of being fundamentally at odds with the basic principles of an employment guarantee, aside from violating the promise made in the Common Minimum Programme.

The speakers at Parliament Street included Swami Agnivesh (Bandhua Mukti Morcha), Jayati Ghosh (Jawaharlal Nehru University), Surendra Mohan (veteran socialist), Kuldip Nayyar (eminent journalist), Aruna Roy (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan), among others. The participants represented more than 100 different organizations committed to the right to work, which came together for this purpose under the banner of People's Action for the Employment Guarantee Act.

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❑ Niyogi Murder: Supreme Injustice

The Supreme Court in its wisdom on Jan.20, 2005 acquitted five industrialists in the murder of Shankar Guha Niyogi, for it found their motive to murder insufficient to incriminate them. It is affirmation of the previous High Court verdict that such gentlemen of the upper class could not possibly be party to Niyogi's murder. So, the sixth accused, a low caste man, Paltan Mallah, was awarded life long prison.

Founder of the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM), Niyogi had toured the Bhilai-Raipur industrial belt in the 1970s and 80s, exhorting labourers to demand better pay and living conditions from employers. He was murdered, on the night of September 27, 1991, allegedly at the behest of the promoters of Simplex Industries.

But, the ways of the Supreme Court are amazing. This travesty of justice is not mitigated by the life term given to a Mallah, a low class, low caste decoy, the perfect scapegoat in a hierarchical society based on injustice and immorality.

❑ Coca Cola Protest

Communities affected by Coca-Cola's indiscriminate practices in India will greet the multinational company in the new year with a large protest on January 6, 2005 in Mehdiganj, near the holy city of Varanasi.

Marchers are calling for the revocation of Coca-Cola's license to operate because of severe hardships created for

communities as a result of water shortages and pollution created by the Coca-Cola company. The march comes after a series of defeats for the Coca-Cola company across India, through orders by the courts and various government agencies.

Over 1,500 people participated in a march and rally against Coca-Cola on November 24, 2004 in Mehdiganj, near the holy city of Varanasi. 350 people were detained after a violent attack by police on the peaceful protesters.

Protesters will wear black ribbons across their mouths and tie their hands to specifically bring attention to the non-violent nature of the community-led campaign, and to protest the outrageous charges that have been brought against some of the marchers in the November protest. In an attempt to slow down the formidable campaign, some key leaders have been charged with serious charges including attempted arson.

"The trumped up charges, brought by the police, is an attempt to silence and discredit the strong community movement to hold Coca-Cola accountable," said Nandlal Master of Lok Samiti and the National Alliance of People's Movements, a key organizer of the rally and also one of the leaders charged with serious criminal offenses. "Coca-Cola commits crimes and no action is taken, and we speak out for our lives and livelihoods, and we are declared illegal. We will now come with our mouths shut and hands tied and still show our strength and commitment, and also show that non-violence is an integral part of the movement," continued Nandlal Master. Past

protests against Coca-Cola in Mehdiganj have included several prominent Gandhians, and many will also participate in the January 6 action.

Coca-Cola has become the target of numerous communities across India who are demanding that Coca-Cola shut down its bottling facility because of water shortages and pollution. The single largest Coca-Cola bottling facility in India, in Plachimada, Kerala, remains shut down because the local village council (*panchayat*) is refusing to issue it a license to operate. In Rajasthan, the high court has ruled that Coca-Cola must print the level of pesticides on the label of all its products in the state.

The Mehdiganj protest is setting the tone for a disastrous year ahead for Coca-Cola in India. Another community march and rally is planned against Coca-Cola in Kerala, India on January 14, 2005.

"The collusion between Coca-Cola and the government is too close for comfort," said Amit Srivastava of the India Resource Center, a group that works with local groups in India to coordinate the campaign internationally. "We will take this issue to national and international audiences, not only to expose, but to break the destructive relationship." The international campaign to hold Coca-Cola accountable has also joined forces with the Colombian trade union, Sinaltrainal. Coca-Cola is charged with complicity in the murder, torture and intimidation of trade union organizers at its bottling facilities in Colombia.

□ Water for People Movement in Pakistan

On December 16, 2004 more than fifty civil society organizations, academia, journalists and other concerned citizen gathered in Lahore, Pakistan for consultation on drinking water issues in Pakistan, especially the threat of water privatisation. The workshop was jointly organized by Action Aid Pakistan, South Asia Partnership Pakistan and Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

Lahore Statement

We the representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations, human rights groups, academia, media other civil society groups and concerned citizens from all parts of Pakistan and belong to all walks of life, gathered in Lahore on December 16, 2004 to deliberate on the people's right to water.

We are in agreement that water is a human right and it has been recognized in various international instruments.

We also recognize that the issue of water – its quality, its quantity, and its ensured availability to all people regardless of income or social status is one of the most pressing challenges facing the Pakistan today.

The provision of safe drinking water to population never gained a momentum and remained at low priority and under financed. The cost of unsafe drinking water to individual as well as society has never been calculated.

The overall governance crisis in Pakistan and declining quality of

institutional performance are internal factors causing the poor status of water services delivery. However the role of international financiers cannot be ignored here.

The policy instruments used by IFIs have not helped countries to improve basic social services, rather these institutions created a vicious cycle of debt. The structural adjustment loans for policy reforms, massive devaluations and economic policies starved developing countries from financial resources to invest in human development. The global trade policies, economic reforms agenda promoted by World Bank and IMF, siphoned off the precious resources from developing countries which otherwise would have been used in human development programs.

Inadequate access to water forms a central core of people's poverty. It has an effect on their basic needs, health, food security and basic livelihoods of the poor. Improving access of poor people to water will potentially make a major contribution towards poverty reduction. Several of the millennium development goals are directly linked to safe drinking water. But it seems lack of political commitment at both national and global level to meet these goals.

The governments, multi-lateral banks, and corporations have tried to respond the water scarcity challenge in a way, which threatens historical entitlements of poor. Rather than facilitating easy accessibility of water to all, the corporate water model aims to put price tag and earn benefits. The

poor conceive water as basic fundamental right; the corporations think water as blue gold to earn benefits, the multi-lateral banks visualize water sector as a high ground for secure investment, consultants and lobbying groups dream for high profile water jobs. The international financial institutions are facilitating the penetration of corporations in water sector.

We demand that::

- State has an obligation under international law to respect, protect and fulfill the water rights of citizens.
- The state should ensure that every citizen of Pakistan without any discrimination have equal access to minimum quantity of safe drinking water to enjoy the right to life
- Government of Pakistan should protect this right by policy formulation and appropriate enforcement mechanism
- Private sector governed by corporate greed will not be the solution and global experience of water privatization has demonstrated the failure of private companies.
- Water should be managed as a public good under public domain
- All the government policies and program related to public interest should be debated in public
- Informed citizenry can play an effective role in development, all the information related to water sector strategies, agreements with IFIs should be make available to all the citizens



(Continued from front inside cover)

'Affected people' should be defined as all the individuals, families and communities that are either physically displaced from their homes, or whose livelihood activities in formal or informal sectors or access to private and/or community resources is adversely affected by the project and related works.

Unless former displaced people are fully rehabilitated, no new projects should be sanctioned in any unit of planning such as river valley, tehsil or city.

Land reform for equitable redistribution and recognition of common property rights over natural resources should form an integral part of any development plan.

The planning process must begin with full benchmark surveys of families and their private and public/community resources, with a time-frame of at least one year prior to the survey and two years prior to acquisition. Investigations regarding these must be undertaken to estimate all impacts of the project and related works on livelihoods, incomes, health, social matrix, natural environs, and equity/inequity in development.

There should be an Auditor General to review the ownership and distribution of natural resources including land and forests, and present regular audits before the people and the government.

Prior to any acquisition of land in rural or tribal areas, all land rights must be settled through a special drive ending before land acquisition commences. Prior to acquisition in an urban or semi-urban area, a zonal plan and a city/town plan updating all records of habitats, houses, amenities, livelihoods must be prepared and taken as a basis for granting due rights and replacement, if necessary.

In all cases, the policy of land-for-land should apply to all project-affected landholders losing more than 25% of their landholding or those who are left with less than 5 acres to make it a minimum 5 acres holding. A special effort must be made to provide land to all peasants, landless families, and especially to all tribal families. In the case of a medium or major irrigation project, land should be purchased/acquired from farmers in the benefited areas. This land should be allotted according to the principle of rehabilitation as public purpose.

Alternative livelihoods must be ensured for all project-affected non-agriculturalists and urban poor, including traders, artisans, hawkers, and providers of other services in the affected area. Similarly, for urban displaced persons too, alternative livelihoods must be ensured and until this is done, all schemes applicable to the urban poor must be made available to them.

Land for housing of urban poor should be provided near their workplaces. Industrial and urban land ceiling laws should be formulated to prevent concentration of land.

Compensation for any property should be based on replacement value at actual market prices.

Compensation must be for lost property and for lost livelihoods or opportunities. Common property resources must also be replaced or compensated.

The community (as defined by the affected people themselves), not individuals or families, should be the basic unit for resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R).

No physical displacement of any families should take place until one year or more after providing the basic means and resources for social and economic rehabilitation.

The process of selecting R&R sites as well as agricultural land for rehabilitation must be done along with the consent of the project-affected families (PAFs).

PAFs must have the first right to, and be granted an appropriate share in, the benefits arising out of the project, including livelihood opportunities, irrigation water, power, fisheries, etc.

It must be ensured that no individual family is displaced more than once within two decades, on account of any developmental project or land acquisition for public purpose.

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (amended in 1984), a remnant of the colonial era- must be abolished and replaced by a National Enactment, which defines all development parameters, indicators, processes of planning, the least-cost technological option, along with the objective of minimising displacement and ensuring just rehabilitation of people whose lands are acquired. In addition, the National Forest Act of 1927 must also be abolished and replaced with another law that ensures peoples' rights over their resources.

The National Rehabilitation Policy must be reformulated, keeping in mind all these principles, and this must lead to the formation of the National Rehabilitation Act. These must be applicable to both publicly and privately owned development projects.

Special Commissions on Displacement and Rehabilitation should be constituted both at national and state levels with judicial powers in certain cases, and quasi-judicial powers in others. In due course of time, these should be made constitutional authorities. These bodies must approve the rehabilitation plan for all projects causing displacement; the state commissions to approve in the case of state-level projects and the national commission in case of inter-state projects. Each commission should have an in-built grievance redressal mechanism.

We reject the economics of gigantism and instead prefer small, local and decentralized projects.

We challenge neo-liberal economic globalisation, privatization and increasing commercialization, as propagated by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation among others, which leads to alienation of people from their rights and resources. Instead, we advocate a pro-people economy and society as our aim and struggle is to build a non-violent, communitarian and inter-dependent social order, which ensures the security and well-being of all.



dear white fella
coupla things you sould know
when i born, i black
when i grow up, i black
when i go in sun, i black
when i cold, i black
when i scared, i black
you white fella
when you born, you pink
when you grow up, you white
when you go in sun, you red
when you scared, you yellow
when you sick, you green
and when you die, you grey
and you got the cheek
to call me coloured

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